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Christoph Brumann, Evelyn Schulz, eds. *Urban Spaces in Japan: Cultural and Social Perspectives.* London: Routledge, 2012. xiv + 226 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-69545-9; ISBN 978-0-203-12007-1.

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For decades Japanese architecture and urban development has presented a field of study that is as inspiring as it is complicated. Many interpretations of occurring phenomena, especially those from art historians and architects, tend to utilize arcane features of Japanese-ness to bridge gaps of understanding, thus continuing a myth of an all-embracing Japanese otherness.

Brumann and Schulz make a considerable contribution to putting a stop to the further propagation of this myth by broadening the methodical approach regarding the field of urban space research. The ten essays assembled in their volume are dedicated to encountering social space in Japan through means of analyzing written and physical representations, observing behavioral interaction, and examining the reflection of spatial experience by the people.

Part of the discussion revolves around the role of civil society in contemporary planning debates or is inspired by demographic decline and the impending end of urban growth in Japan, which signifies, as André Sorensen puts it, that "Japan is, in effect, carrying out a grand socio-economic experiment, and is venturing into truly unknown territory" (p. 206). As a result, the body of essays is bracketed by two papers addressing the shrinking cities. The first, Winfried Flüchter's "Urbanisation, City and City System in Japan between Development and Shrinking," is subtitled "Coping with Shrinking Cities in Times of Demographic Change" and appears to miss the point. The essay basically pours statistical data into text form, and amidst the numbers, the feeble discussion of causes and possible resolution statements is lost. In contrast, André Sorensen's "Shinking Cities and Liveability in Japan: Emerging Relationships and Challenges" is right on target. In his work, he outlines population development and migration during the latter half of the twentieth century as well as the legal and economic obstacles to a general change in the understanding of urban space. Sorensen presents possible strategies based on liveability that could increase the population in towns or cities suffering from loss of population or an aging population. While environmental keywords like "nature," "clean air," or "clean water" are used to promote remote or local areas for re-migration from the metropolitan areas or secondary residences, the liveability issues are quite different in metropolitan suburbs. Sorenson discusses the construction-based economy and its resistance to change, as well as the potential for a redirection towards renaturation or recultivation, which would partially counteract economic decline as well as address environmental issues like water management.

Alongside the imminent population decrease and its unpredictable social and economic consequences, the role of civil society in urban space discourses serves as the dominant feature (or at least the subtext) in some of the other essays. Carolin Funck, Tsutomu Kawada, and Yoshimichi Yui focus on "Citizen Participation and Urban Development in Japan and Germany: Issues and Problems." They discuss the role of civil society and governance within a democratic state, and discern the different traditions of urban planning and administration in Japan. Fitting the book's methodical approach with its conscious inclusion of subjectivity, the examples chosen demonstrate certain approaches to civic participation, be it in Berlin or Kobe, Tomonoura or Freiburg.

Christoph Brumann contributes an extended example with the essay, "Re-uniting a Divided City: Highrises, Conflict and Urban Space in Central Kyoto." He sketches the debates regarding changes in built environment against the background of economic interests, local decision-making power, building law, private house-ownership, tourism, and livability issues. Disputes about townscape have taken place since at least the 1960s but have rarely stopped or even changed construction projects. In contrast, the year 2007 signified change: The so called manshon frenzy–the mushrooming of high-rise apartment buildings–nearly stopped, giving way to a

new approach and the recognition that public space and townscape are common property and worthy of protection. The essay retraces the key decisions parties concerned and even looks some years ahead.

Another case study delivered by Christian Dimmer explores the limits of creating public space. Titled "Reimaging Public Space," the essay explores "the vicissitudes of Japan's privately owned public spaces (POPS)," a spatial twilight zone originated by margins in building law regulations. The initial part explores the potential meanings of "public space" as related to "civil society" or "authority" for example; the second part sketches the development of POPS as well as the shifts in design, evaluating its position in the contemporary context of an increasing connection between work and leisure in Japan.

A further topic closely related to the abovementioned essays on civil society is "Who Cares about the Past in Today's Tokyo?" Paul Waley explores the layers of memory and history, national and local identity, heritage and modernization in Tokyo–or especially not in Tokyo, as "history has a place somewhere else" (p. 162). He correlates cultural heritage preservation and tourism as well as Tokyo's desired image as a global city, and he unravels why it is left to civil society organizations to care for neglected places of historical interest.

Evelyn Schulz's "Walking the City: Spatial and Temporal Configurations of the Urban Spectator in Writings on Tokyo" is yet another source of information regarding the complex fabric of urban space. Based on the *flāneur* in the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin as a means of exploring the time stratum, the study analyzes the spatial mapping of Tokyo in the writing of Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), Kimura Shōhachi (1893-1958), and Kobayashi Nobuhiko (b. 1932). The focus is on the diachronic character of observations, on the process of (de)constructing the "authentic" Edo versus the "modern" Tokyo. The "aesthetization of local, indigenous urbanity" (p. 195) by idealizing the back alleys called *roji* links the literary stroller to the global discourses regarding urban planning pro and contra modernity.

The people in Ingrid Kargl-Getreuer's study, "Gendered Modes of Approaching Public Space," don't walk, rather they take the train, providing yet another point of view towards a comprehensive understanding of social space. The reasoning about the methodology is thorough as far as spatial theory is concerned, but the plain binary gender system applied is surprisingly not treated as an issue of interest. Still–as the study shows–the role of public transportation as a central chore in daily life and as an important element of modern city planning deserves attention not only in regard to its smooth operations, but also for its role in the maintenance of social order in public space.

The two remaining articles discuss the establishment and stabilization of social order, but at different levels of society. Katja Schmidtpott looks at "Indifferent Communities: Neighbourhood Associations, Class and Community in Pre-war Tokyo" and disproves a myth. She makes the argument that community as a decisive feature of neighborhood associations is nothing more than an advertising slogan spread over a hierarchically structured administrative unit with heterogenic social structure, with high fluctuation and mostly passive participation. This essay invites scrutiny of the prevailing understanding of belonging in the fast-growing–or shrinking–cities of modern Japan.

"The Colonial Appropriation of Public Space: Architecture and City Planning in Japanese-dominated Manchuria" is the topic of Anke Scherer's essay. This interesting example added to the ongoing worldwide research shows how, based on the existing railroad infrastructure, settlements and cities were developed corresponding to the European models of urban planning and modernity.

To summarize, there are some shortcomings. Contrary to what was initially indicated, the interdisciplinary approach mentioned doesn't include researchers closer to physical space and its creation. Having such could have avoided some of the vagueness of spatial practice in Japan being observed but remaining isolated in this volume. There are global discourses and counterdiscourses on urban modernity and tradition that already provide an appropriate framework to integrate modern non-Western phenomena, too. The focus on immaterial space might even explain why the illustrations are so poor in print and size that they are of no use. Apart from this it would have been helpful to find an essay, or at least a section of the introduction, dedicated to citizenship and belonging.

The book doesn't provide straight facts about urban space in Japan; in this sense the title is misleading, but it provides layer upon layer of observations as to what the social level of urban space in Japan might mean in its entirety, thus considerably enhancing knowledge and understanding of Japanese urban life.

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