Tokyo: Towards a Digital City
UC Irvine Tokyo Travel-Study
Instructor: Jonathan M. Hall
Anthropology 129, Comp Lit 142, Sociology 149

Course Description:

With a population estimated at 39 million people, Tokyo is the largest megalopolis on our planet. It is an imperial and governmental seat, a cultural and economic capital, a regional hub and what is labeled an "alpha-plus global city." We first equip ourselves with tools of urban analysis, paying attention to demographics, infrastructure, as well as the cultural reading of local sub- and counter cultures. Then, we spend the month as urban anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural critics exploring the city's formation, its uneven development, and its headlong trajectory into a digital future.

This course pays special attention to the genealogy of Tokyo as an information- and digital metropolis, and to this end, we consider the emergence of the Japanese "information society" of the 1970s, the transformation of commodity entrepôts such as Shibuya and Shinjuku in the 1980s, the rising importance of Tokyo within late-century cyberpunk, and the dominance of digital and cybernetic cultures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Intersecting topics also examined include the history of Tokyo through architecture and photography, mobile electronic culture, homelessness and political resistance, otaku subcultures, and the city as network. Students are assigned to ongoing "urban field projects." There is one mandatory class fieldtrip to the NTT InterCommunication Center.
Readings:
Readings for this class are available online. Students are invited through their registered email addresses to join a website for the class prepared with course readings, online forums, and additional research resources necessary for the urban field projects.

Grading:
20% Urban Field Project #1
   (Group Project)
20% Urban Field Project #2
   (Individual Paper)
20% Urban Field Project #3
   (Group Project)
20% Units 1-2 Examination
20% Final Examination

Special Note on Urban Field Projects:
The three urban field projects for this course comprise the lion’s share of the student’s grade. The successive projects are designed as opportunities for the student to work either individually or collaboratively to fashion and refine hypotheses about Tokyo’s built, networked, and human environments with special attention to their digital components. Effective project development and management, the ability to distinguish and then verbally describe complex social phenomena, and group skills in rhetorically persuasive presentation are emphasized. For the first field project, students analyze cultural and sociological dimensions of land use in one of the following districts: Shitamachi, Roppongi, Ginza, Shibuya, Shinjuku East, and Shinjuku West. For the second project, students work individually to analyze a behavior or set of behaviors identifiable in an assigned dimension of the digital city. For the final project, students select their own field of research and develop creative analyses of contemporary social phenomena of the digitally networked city. Previous analyses have included research on “otaku” or “nerd” culture, gaming arcades, mobile novels, “Goth-loli” fashion, salary-man culture, mobile phone culture, e-money, hikikomori (social withdrawal), love hotels, public libraries, and new forms of social networking. Group presentations have taken the form of powerpoint presentations, skits, short movies, and even a fashion demonstration/lecture. The presentation of these materials is a fascinating, richly enjoyable summation of our month in the megalopolis.
UNIT ONE: GENEALOGY

Lecture One: Malls We May Have Come From
Using examples from urban and suburban California environments as well as global cities other than Tokyo, we consider methodologies for the analysis of human-built environments, their relation to natural and social landscapes, and the forms of human interaction they nurture.
Reading:

Lecture Two: Edo and Early Modern Infrastructure

In this lecture, we examine the emergence of Edo, now Tokyo, as a seat of shogunal power in the Tokugawa period with attention to the city’s infrastructural and land use patterns.
Reading:

Lecture Three: Tokyo-ology
We continue our examination of Kon Wajiro’s “Tokyo-ology” by considering Western, modern architecture, fashion, and design until the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake.
Reading:
Lecture Four: City of Production and Loss
We consider postwar Tokyo as a productive city and as a site of tremenously uneven development. We look especially at the conditions of day-laborers and the semi-employed. We compare the local histories of Shinjuku and San'ya.
Reading:

Lecture Five: Modes of Urban Reportage
To the sociological and demographic tools we have acquired, we add new tools of urban recording: photography, film, and performance. How can we use these tools?

Reading:
No specific reading is assigned for today and tomorrow as you will be preparing your presentations. Use the extra time to catch up on any readings you may have missed.

Lecture Six: Urban Field Project #1 Presentations
Each field project group is responsible for a 10-minute presentation on the district they've been assigned:

Shitamachi
Roppongi
Ginza
Shibuya
Shinjuku East
Shinjuku West
UNIT TWO:
INFO-URBIS

Class Seven: Information as Social Order
How did information emerge as not simply a commodity but as a touchstone for profit and growth in 1970s Japan? What utopian ideal and governmental realities lay behind the fashioning of the newly inaugurated information economy?
Reading:

Lecture Eight: Shibuya's New Commercial Model
The turn towards an information economy also shifted models for consumption-based capitalism. How did the spaces of consumption take on new roles in the 1970s and 1980s? What marked the rise of Shibuya and Harajuku as commercial centers?
Reading:
Class Nine: Cultures of the Information Era
In this lecture, we consider stylistic manifestations of joho shakai. We look at architecture and commodity design, but the bulk of our analysis is dedicated to an examination of the international success of the Yellow Magic Orchestra and to selected successors of the YMO sound tradition. Formed in 1978, YMO’s electro-pop sounds combined the corporate and governmental mandates about the new information society into an ironic, highly popular musical product.

No Reading:
Urban Field Project #2
Paper DUE TODAY

Class Ten: Units One and Two Exam + Cities of Communication
Following the first half of today’s class, which is set aside for our midterm exam on Units One and Two, we consider e-money, e-culture, and mobile subcultures.

Reading:
• Scott D. Mainwaring, Wendy March, and Bill Maurer, “From meiwaku to tokushita! Lessons for digital money design from Japan,” CHI 2008, Florence, Italy.
UNIT THREE:
SIGNAL TO NOISE, NOISE AS MEANING

still from Otomo Katsuhiro, Akira

Class Eleven: Tokyo and Dystopic Resistance
Tokyo has emerged as the epitomic megalopolis of cyberpunk fiction and film. We trace the genealogy of the cybernetic and dystopic Neo-Tokyo.

Reading:

Class Twelve: Uprising in the Megalopolis: Signal to Noise
In today's class, we consider such questions as the relation of information to its mode of delivery and the ratio of signal to noise. We use these questions as jumping boards to interrogate the rise of noise culture in both sound and performing arts. In particular, we consider the importance of sound/noise to visual and acoustic artists Otomo Yoshihide, dubtype, and merzbow.

Reading:
Class Thirteen: Spaces of Control/ Dispossession & Image
Considering the work of Kawai Masayuki, on the one hand, and anti-corporate activists on the other, we look at counter-cultures of information.

Reading:

Class Fourteen: Exuberant Tokyo!: Experiments in the Post-Digital
Our class today takes place at the InterCommunication Center run by Higashi NTT (Nippon Telephone and Telegraph East). We consider such thinkers and practitioners as John Maeda and Maywa Denki in their imagination of post-digital futures.

Reading:
John Maeda, Post Digital (Tokyo: NTT InterCommunication Center, 2001) pp TBA.
Maywa Denki, The Nonsense Machines (NTT InterCommunication Center, 2004) pp TBA.
Class Fifteen: Urban Field Project #3 Presentations
Today we begin to take note of what we have accomplished this month. We enjoy presentations from Urban Field Project #3.

Class Sixteen: Final Exam
Concluding Lecture: From Tokyo, Looking to Shanghai
How does our month's research here in Tokyo suggest models for future research in other locales? Taking the example of Shanghai, we address what new formation our research model must accommodate.
Reading:
Review all readings for today's exam.

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