

This article examines the historical efforts by architects to redesign Tokyo's Miyashita Park and the opposing interventions by homeless art activists who challenge hegemonic frameworks of public space.

Beyond public: architects, activists, and the design of *akichi* at Tokyo's Miyashita Park

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Peppered with galleries, ateliers, and upscale designer boutiques, Tokyo's Shibuya ward is often described as a commercial haven for Japan's urban fashionistas and style-conscious visitors. Within it, a narrow park sits atop a 1960s parking structure that was once a refuge for nearly one hundred homeless city residents until most were forcibly removed in 2010 by city officials. Dozens of blue tarp tents, umbrellas, weathered shoes, and cherished belongings were discarded, and the people who had lived there were fenced out indefinitely.¹ Although this striking contrast of urban socioeconomic disparity is one that characterises many cities across the globe, the juxtapositions in Shibuya have been made increasingly visible by strong cohorts of unrelenting activists who have ignited decades of discourse and scholarly debate about individual rights to cities, as well as the role and agency of architects in the designing of public spaces. This article combines participant observations of art activists, semi-structured and oral history interviews of homeless residents in Tokyo, as well as historical analysis, to examine these tensions as they have played out at Miyashita Park in Shibuya, including how perpetual redesigns of the park by architects and urban planners tasked with 're-activating' the park in the 1960s, 2000s, and again in the late 2010s, have been vehemently opposed. More specifically, the article examines how a vocal group of art activists organised in opposition to the park's most recent redesign efforts sponsored by Nike and the idea that such a public-private partnership could produce an inclusive public space. Instead, the activists worked to problematise the appropriateness of terms such as 'public' altogether. Through art installations, writing, impromptu concerts, sporting events, and protests that engaged with the politics of their own bodies, the activists turned to alternative genealogies and definitions of 'public' as a way to connect more particularly to Japanese urban form and to resist hegemonic and imported concepts of 'public' as reproduced and reinforced by architects often without challenge. By drawing on alternative terms, such as *akichi*, meaning 'open land', the activists argue for a different sense of spatial inclusivity than

the supposedly universal democratic ideals associated with designs for public spaces in Tokyo.

While at first glance, the work of the activists operated peripherally to architectural discourse, this article reveals how the spatial, material, and corporeal practices of the activists aligned with the discourse of radical Japanese architects of the 1960s and 1970s, including Arata Isozaki and Teiji Ito, who critiqued imposing and monumental structures that framed ceremonious public spaces and plazas during the 1960s under the guise of modernisation. When viewed together, both the contemporary activists and politically engaged architects of the 1960s leveraged spontaneity, informality, and their own bodies as a means to critique hegemonic frameworks of public space and the imposed order – such as the rhetoric of inclusivity/exclusivity carried with it – that appeared inherent to architecture. By challenging routinised processes of design and the seemingly inescapable triangulation of clients, designers, and contractors, the art activists challenged architects to think beyond and outside of such structures. They reveal how the disruption of codified transactional relationships, property ownership structures, and the historical tendencies of modernist architects to impose formal order might illuminate alternative ways that contemporary architects, as service professionals, can act upon their ethical responsibility to contribute more equitably to cities by considering not only a broader range of actors, but also a broader range of consequences and impacts.

Activism and *akichi*

Miyashita Park was once a sprawling green space along the Shibuya River, when it was first reserved as an open commons during the 1930s, and it served primarily as an *akichi*, or 'open land', for everyday use [1].² The space was built up and transformed into a parking structure purportedly to 'activate' the space in anticipation of the 1964 Olympics. Changing economic conditions over the course of the next several decades, from bubble to bust, meant that the park on top of the lot gradually became both a home and refuge for approximately one hundred



1 Miyashita Park in its earliest version as an open space for everyday use, pictured here in 1951.



2 Aerial photo of Miyashita Park outside of Shibuya Station, 2012.

3 Artists in Residence (A.I.R.) activists at Miyashita Park with their Miyashita San puppet, as they protest the decision to redesign the park, 2010.

marginalised city residents. Architects were tasked to redesign the park with funding from both Nike and the Shibuya ward government in an effort to transform the space in the 2000s. Park residents were forcibly removed and their community was replaced with a fenced-off pay-to-play sports facility complete with a skateboarding park, new futsal courts, and rock-climbing walls [2].

From Tokyo to Paris to New York to Los Angeles, Miyashita Park's history is one that is shared by many public spaces across the globe. In downtown Los Angeles, for example, the 1870s public square once reserved as an urban commons, Pershing Square, similarly witnessed decades of revisions and redesigns. At the turn of the twentieth century, the land was organised into a formal Beaux-Arts square, complete with symmetrical pathways and fountains, and it came to be known as a space for marginalised city residents after the Second World War. Like at Miyashita Park, complaints by local business during the 1950s resulted in a subterranean parking garage as well as a fenced-off lawn that confined the public by discouraging the gathering of crowds. In anticipation of the 1984 Olympics, proposals for the square attempted to redevelop and 'reclaim' the space, and by 1991, Pershing Square was radically transformed with a permanent amphitheater, a shallow hardscaped pond, and a 120-foot tall purple campanile.³ Much like Miyashita Park, the explicit role of designers was politically charged: the designers of Pershing Square attempted to sweep clean the indigent, homeless, marginalised, and most vulnerable residents of the city.

At Miyashita Park, however, the collective voice of activists has, in the face of evictions and state-sponsored violence, advocated for a radical rethinking of urban design and for more politically attuned responses by the designers who were commissioned to imagine new or existing public



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spaces. For Miyashita's most recent iteration, designed by the noted Tokyo-based architecture firm Atelier Bow-Wow in 2008, architects were hired to negotiate with Tokyo's Shibuya ward, which owned the land, as well as Nike Japan, which was the financial backer to the park's rebuilding and renaming.⁴ During the design and construction phases, a cohort of protesters named 'The Coalition to Protect Miyashita Park from becoming Nike Park' stood in opposition to Atelier Bow-Wow, and the effort to redesign and rename the park.

The public-private partnership between Nike and the ward government to redesign the park follows a global trend in urban development that reinforces particular definitions of public space and the 'public' itself. In his study of the protests at People's Park in Berkeley, California in 1991, geographer Don Mitchell draws on Henri Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city⁵ to show how the entrenchment of private capital and regimes of property ownership exclude homeless people and political dissidents from conceptions of 'the public' and urban public space.⁶ While rights are usually associated with private property, Lefebvre argued that the city did not simply exist because of the agglomeration of property or buildings, but that urban space is produced through the participation of everyone in it. In this view, the appropriation of public spaces of housing and the ability to inhabit the city, as well as to play, create, and imagine, are all fundamental elements of the right to the city, which at its core is a collective project of struggle against dominant bourgeois interests in eliminating difference. In Mitchell's analysis of Berkeley, the University of California and the city government proposed to redesign the 'underutilised' park with sports facilities and increased security to allow for greater 'public' access. In contrast, Mitchell cites homeless park residents who describe it as a refuge and valuable space for interactions precisely because they are not mediated by the state. By asserting their right to inhabit the park, they exercise their right to the city and challenge dominant ideas of what and who belongs to a 'public'.

Among the dozens of protestors asserting their right to inhabit Miyashita Park were two particularly visible art activists, Misako Ichimura and Tetsuo Ogawa. Not only did Ichimura and Ogawa reject the evictions and efforts to redesign the park as a public space, but they also rejected the social, political, and economic structure of the private home.⁷ They argued that truly open, unrestricted, and inclusive spaces like *akichi* that exist outside of a binary of public and private fall short when they are 'designed' as public spaces. Both Ichimura and Ogawa referred to themselves as Artists in Residence (A.I.R.), and they worked, lived, and hosted events in the park in a protest that made their lives and labour as artists visible. In another creative action, they constructed a tall puppet that served as an avatar of Miyashita Park to take with them to various protest sites, including to an event where Atelier Bow-Wow and other architects were being honoured.⁸ They assembled the puppet using an assemblage of materials including a

blue tarp, which was notable for its prevalence in many homeless shelters. It represented the body of the park as a distinguished dissenter [3].

The spatial and material practices of Ichimura and Ogawa, as well as the terms they used to describe the limitations of public spaces across the city, can be read in parallel with the former tactics of radical Japanese architects. Two in particular, Arata Isozaki and Teiji Ito, argued that spontaneity and informality helped to maintain a critical position in architecture, since they operated against authoritarian visions of inclusion, permanence, and technocratic propositions that were seen as imposed from a Western model of modernity. The homeless art activists likewise revealed the inadequacy of hegemonic concepts of 'public' to describe the contested histories and characteristics of Japanese urban space. Rather than viewing urban design as a process through which one could achieve an ideal of protection and inclusion, the activists argued that public space is mediated by the uneven distribution of power and authority. The feedback and frictions between material authoritarianism from above, and lived, artistic spontaneity from below, served as a way to challenge routinised social, political, and technological practices, as well as the structures of power and land ownership that govern urban design processes. In place of 'public space', they use the term *akichi*, or 'open land' to describe the spaces occupied by people that were often left out of theoretical and design-based negotiations. By using the term *akichi*, the number of sites otherwise included in definitions of 'public space' could be widely expanded. The use of the term specifically called attention to sites in the city whose uses were not prescribed by economics, class, or property ownership; in other words, its use highlighted interstitial or contested spaces in the city that could serve as canvases upon which one could produce critical discourse about architecture and the city.

'Public' spaces in modern and premodern Japan

It was not until the twentieth century that the Western concepts of 'public' became prevalent in Japan. Until the period of rapid modernisation known as the Meiji Restoration started in 1868, the word 'public' (*kou*, or *ooyake*) referred to official authority or administrative governance, which is a nuance that holds strong even in its use at the present moment. This premodern construction stood in contrast to what Jürgen Habermas described as the 'public sphere' in his 1962 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas argued that the public was both a discursive and physical realm of collective assembling – a concept that wholly depended upon a person's simultaneous access to privacy and freedom in their daily life.⁹ In order for a public sphere to be produced, he argued, a person's individual freedoms needed to be distinct from official state structures and roles, allowing them to decidedly and freely assemble, organise, and communicate with others. In Japan, leading postwar political theorist Masao Maruyama outlined a similar concept of 'public', arguing that Japan lacked such a 'public sphere' because people's



4 An early seventeenth-century screen print depicting a festival at the Sumiyoshi Shrine, with kumano bikuni nuns performing *etoki* in *kugai*.

identities were synonymous with the nation and empire and thus could not be viewed as bonafide individuals.¹⁰ Maruyama argued that there were relatively few spaces – both discursive and physical – that operated outside of the state in Japan, and thus any burgeoning sense of democracy after its defeat in the Second World War, was crippled.¹¹ For Maruyama, the ‘public’ in Japan was centred not on freely associating individuals, but instead on administratively defined and constrained imperial subjects.¹²

The postwar occupation of Japan by the US highlighted the spatial binaries underlying dominant understandings of modernity, and spurred vigorous conceptual debates. Maruyama argued that the governance structures of imperial

power that limited any ‘public’ in Japan had also infringed on the philosophical origins of Japanese architecture and urban form, which were historically based on principles of spatial ordering and on protecting freedoms once associated with nature. In his *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, published in 1972, he argued that architecture in Japan was historically defined by two contrasting concepts: *sakui* (invention) and *jinen* (nature).¹³ While *sakui* implied a ‘will to construction’, *jinen* implied a sense of ‘self-becoming’.¹⁴ Whereas Maruyama located both of these as authentically Japanese concepts, architects such as Arata Isozaki interpreted the terms *sakui* and *jinen* as ‘Western structure’ and ‘Japanese space’. In other words, *sakui* (artifice) was associated with Western ideas, while *jinen* (nature) was associated with Japanese ideas. Isozaki argued that this particular demarcation appeared in Ryuichi Hamaguchi’s 1944, *The Problem of Style in Japan’s National Architecture*, in which Hamaguchi pushed against the Hegelian tendencies of Western architectural historians to taxonomise and classify buildings, such as those put forth by Heinrich Wölfflin about style. Instead, Hamaguchi argued that

a 'style' appropriate for Japan could not be reduced to physical characteristics. Unlike the formalist foundations of Western architectural history, which he claimed were 'constructive and objective', architectural production in Japan was 'spatial and performative [*koi-teki*]' and as such, less 'architectural' according to formalist tradition.¹⁵ Thus for Isozaki, a Japanese practice of architecture was one that attempted to disrupt the uneven authority of Western power.

The homeless activists residing at Miyashita Park during the 2000s used a historically situated concept, *akichi*, to challenge the dominant ideals associated with 'public' space and that were embedded in the proposed redesign of Miyashita Park as Nike Park. As Carl Cassegård explains, their understanding of *akichi* can be understood in relationship to the principles of *jinen* – operating against both Western associations with *sakui* and administratively defined 'publics' – by instead echoing an even older medieval Zen Buddhist concept of *kugai*, which historian Yoshihiko Amino has described as physical sites of asylum. Rather than public spaces, these were residual urban commons that did not belong to a particular person, institution, or association.¹⁶ *Kugai* was used to describe both physical sites, such as temples, shrines, markets, riverbanks, and roadways, as well as the marginalised people who occupied them, including transient artisans, holy men, and entertainers.¹⁷ Such sites and people represented the Buddhist idea of *muen*, or lacking karmic and secular ties, suggesting that *kugai* were disconnected from social or communal obligations of property ownership and that the spaces they occupied functioned as sites of refuge from secular laws and authority.¹⁸ Landscapes of *kugai* were commonly depicted in seventeenth-century screen prints, such as those depicting Kumano bikuni nuns performing *etoki*, or image deciphering, when they would share stories about Buddhist principles and historical events by using visual references [4]. Therefore, the use of the term *akichi* by the activists reflected a desire to maintain un-designed, un-owned, and un-designated urban spaces, but also a particular commitment to marginalised, or otherwise excluded groups of people, that once may have been associated with the historical landscapes of *kugai*.

Housing, architectural apace, and postwar possibility

As the political economy of Japan shifted its centre to Tokyo (Edo) during the Edo period (1603–1867) and as the population began to surge, the landscapes of *kugai* were increasingly administratively defined in tune with shifts in the definition of 'public space'. The word *kugai* took on explicitly derogatory meanings – used not only to describe spaces and people that were affixed to sites of urban refuge, but also the actions of those whom were suffering, starving, or poor. This shift also held architectural implications, since the rapid influx of merchants to Edo resulted in the construction of many tenement houses, as well as an important shift in thought about public space that was increasingly defined by these economic and resulting social relations. These

tenement houses were designed as walled-in blocks with bathhouses and trash disposals located in open common areas within them, including shared alleyways that were maintained by all residents.

The alleyways and common areas functioned as a new kind of interstitial urban public space, signalling a shift in thought about the public sphere that was based not on *muen* and the mobility of *kugai*, but on the direct feedback between the physical boundaries of urban residences and the activities of collective maintenance within them. Japanese historians Tanya Hidaka and Mamoru Tanaka have described the entire neighbourhood unit – including both interior and interstitial exterior spaces – rather than simply the boundary of the tenement building, as a 'residence'.¹⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, social, political, and economic norms continued to shift rapidly, and the urgency to modernise alongside Western colonial powers during the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) was coupled with further consolidations of state power that positioned Tokyo as a prominent global metropolis. The results of such thinking were important precedents for the interventions of contemporary homeless activists who also viewed the gaps and interstitial spaces – including those between individual houses or civic buildings – as *akichi*, or interiorised spaces of occupation and possibility.²⁰

After the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 destroyed much of the existing built environment, architects and planners were engaged in active discussions about restorations and preparing for future urban growth, including the construction of more formal urban plazas and city squares.²¹ By the late 1950s, postwar capitalist development led to immense economic growth, population increases, and new public housing agencies and construction projects, such as subsidised *danchi*, or public housing complexes that housed a rapidly growing urban middle class. This new form of housing, which was commonly comprised of standardised units with two rooms and a kitchen/dining area, were affordable and notably smaller than traditional Japanese homes in which multiple generations lived under the same roof. Now, the nuclear family had emerged as the modern urban social unit, and in order to live a modern life, one was expected to rid the ways of the past in anticipation of the new forms of celebrated individuality.

In order to reconcile postwar urban growth and reconstruction, Japanese architects such as Kunio Maekawa and Kenzo Tange joined parallel European discussions, including the eighth meeting of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM 8) in 1951, which was named the 'Heart of the City: Towards the Humanization of Urban Life'. The resulting modernism that arrived in Japan was largely divided along two lines: the first one was based on CIAM-inspired techno-utopian beliefs, including proposals for massive and systematically reproducible urban structures, such as those that framed vast and ceremonious plazas epitomised most clearly by Kenzo Tange and the Metabolists; while the second was a neo-historicist position based

on a desire to draw directly on the particularities of Japanese urban form. The former group recognised the organic, irregular growth of the city, and they centred their designs on the imaginary figure of the modern individual – one who could be housed in sterile, technologically motivated, and mass-produced units. The latter group envisioned a future city that drew on the uniqueness of historical Japanese thought and urban form, especially including the variegated, ad-hoc figure-ground relationships of urban areas.²²

While both groups seemed to embrace narratives of spontaneity and situate themselves in relation to the West, they took oppositional approaches to envisioning urban space and everyday life. Isozaki was one of the champions of the historicist camp, and he argued that CIAM's theories of rational technocratic urbanism clashed sharply with the processes and fabric of Japanese urbanism, since, unlike Western postwar modernism, where formal plazas were imagined to be the heart and livelihood of cities, the elements of Japanese cities that constituted 'public' spaces were those that were informal event-spaces most commonly associated with residual or interstitial urban sites. Moreover, since Japanese cities were strained by postwar overpopulation, Isozaki argued that there was only 'stopgap space' remaining from which to produce collective, so-called 'public' life.²³

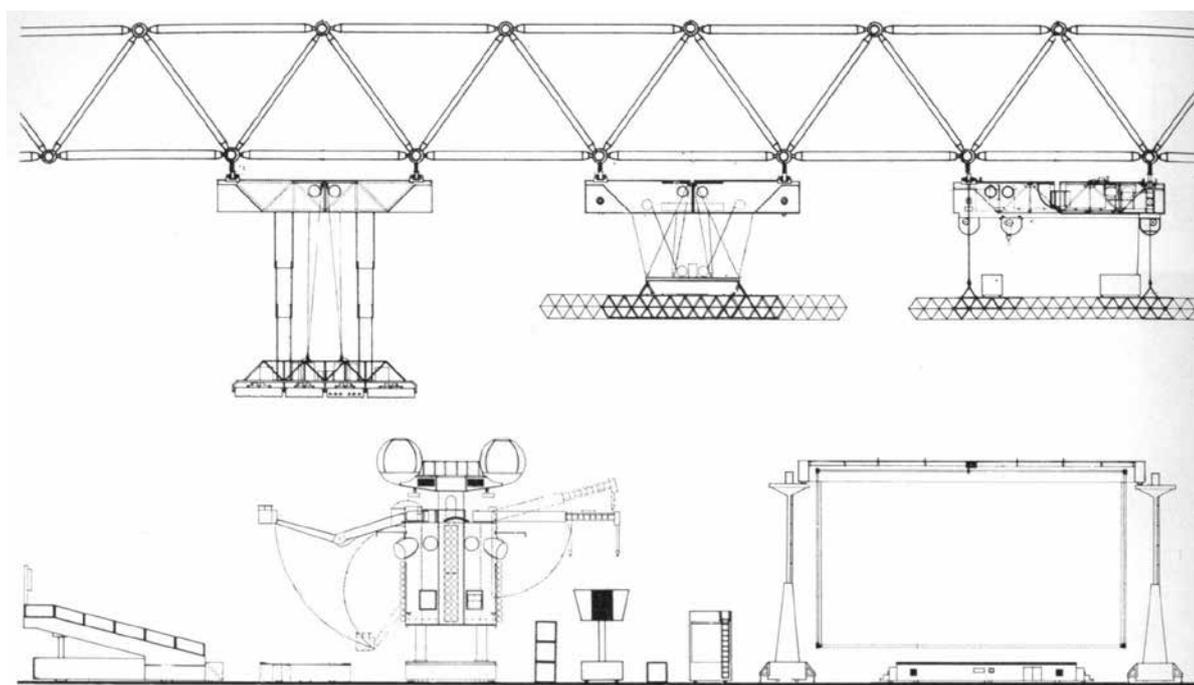
By the 1960s, Isozaki began to distance himself from the ideas put forth by the Metabolists, claiming that they 'sell their ideas to the authorities, to the Japanese government and the establishment to get more work'.²⁴ While his position rendered him as an outsider among many Japanese architects, it also helped to define him as a radical more broadly due to his writings and affiliations, and he developed close working and intellectual relationships with political activists, writers, and filmmakers in Japan. In particular, he participated in a Japanese research

group that was influenced by Hamaguchi's distinction between 'constructive' Western ideals and 'spatial/performative Japanese space-making', and the group collectively attempted to define which urban conditions were indeed specific to Japanese cities.²⁵ Yet the group found that the existing words for 'public' space were insufficient – especially since the term *kugai* had evolved too far away from its origins. Isozaki, along with other architects, including Teiji Ito, published a collection of essays in 1963 titled 'Urban Space in Japan' in the journal *Architecture Culture (Kenchiku bunka)*, to reflect on this particular lack of clarity and meaning.

In one of the most widely referenced essays, they adopted the term *kawai*, which was translated into English as 'activity space' and in so doing, they suppressed the formalist qualities and tendencies often affixed to public space and architectural modes of delineation [5]. More importantly, however, the group hoped to capture both the physical and social ideas that underpinned the concept and rendered it historically specific to Japan's urban fabric. In particular, they aimed to detach it architecturally from formal urban typologies and programmes that had collapsed definitions of 'public' over decades. They did so by refocusing the term on interstitial, event-based spaces. Isozaki argued that the spaces for festivals, communal events, and rituals were temporary and amorphous, and that activity spaces were 'impossible to mark [...] on any map; they are just vague areas. That is to say, Japanese cities did not have plazas – but rather *kawai*'.²⁶ Activity space, Ito described, 'is a space defined by urban activities, but is not a distinct zone or street which is geographically and physically defined [...] By definition, a *kawai* space has no physical core [...] Any facility in a *kawai* cannot have a dominative functional part and has no singular value in its existence'.²⁷ Although the term 'activity space' was not necessarily sensitive to marginalised populations



5 'Activity Space', as depicted in *Kenchiku bunka (Architecture Culture)*, 1963.



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in ways that the terms *kugai* or *akichi* were interpreted by the art activists, it signalled their attention to the spatial quality of everyday social relations in the city beyond formal spaces and structures.

Unlike Maruyama's frustration with Japan's inability to achieve a public sphere independent of Western ideals, Ito and Isozaki presented a favourable reading of Japanese publics by maintaining a definition rooted in urban particularity. They argued for interstitial spaces in which spontaneity, irregularity, and tradition thrived, rather than in formally designed, planned, or authoritative alternatives. This friction played out vividly at the 1970 Osaka World Exposition, where Kenzo Tange's Big Roof space frame covered the central space as a representation of state power and industrial advancement. It framed the 'Festival Plaza' as the mega-structural Metabolist centrepiece of the Expo, which hovered ceremoniously over a massive plaza below and represented the empty logics of technocratic rationale. In contrast, however, Isozaki's contribution reflected a blatant opposition to the central message of the Expo. Isozaki designed two human-like demonstration robots, 'Deme' and 'Deku', who raised their massive arms and legs according to the whims of their operators and rolled slowly and freely beneath the space frame. The names, 'Deme' ('pop eyes') and 'Deku' ('an incompetent person') were intended to be lighthearted anthropomorphisms that reflected the unsophisticated technological possibilities of the era.²⁸ He argued that robots were acting as hosts for, and constructors of the plaza, while performing a symbolic protest of the immense frame and its implied conformity. The robots produced and drew attention to the activities and the performative space in which they occupied (*kaiwai*) – rather than the structure above that attempted to define and contain them [6]. Both robots scurried beneath the roof:

6 Drawing of robots 'Deku' and 'Deme' at the '70 Expo beneath Kenzo Tange's Big Room Space frame.

'Deku' was the so-called controller and 'Deme' the performer, and each had two technical rooms on their heads. One room was designated for the collection of data and its processing, while the other was for receiving instructions about how to act according to the whims and desires of the operator.

In essence, Isozaki tried to materialise the actions, freedoms, and spontaneity associated with activism and *kaiwai* by providing a model of techno-political dissent, but his critique was limited by the setting of the World Expo. Despite the rhetoric of spontaneity and critique, the robots operated primarily at the level of symbolism and in the service of spectacle. While their size and technological capability produced a grand narrative of postwar optimism, critics have argued that they were merely performers who imposed upon the otherwise corporatist powers in order to produce a national spectacle.²⁹ Moreover, critics including Sawaragi Noi have argued that events at a national scale like the World Expo, the Olympics, or even the Great Kanto Earthquake align in many ways with the discourses of spontaneity and disruption in themselves. He uses these examples to show how spontaneity can also be harnessed by the state and the dominant public to expel unwanted people or nonconforming elements, such as when rumors that Koreans were preparing to revolt by poisoning wells and carrying bombs after the earthquake in 1923 led to the mass murder of more than six thousand Koreans in Tokyo at the hands of soldiers, police, and vigilante groups.

Yet while these voices of radical critique manifested during the 1960s and 1970s, consumerism and stock market speculation resulted

in renewed focus on individuality throughout the 1970s. This was typified by new types of hyper-individualistic domestic architecture that not only redefined the urban fabric, but also set the bar for basic access to housing that was increasingly out-of-reach for many. By the mid-1970s, construction of *danchi* public housing for affordable urban and suburban living slowed to a halt, and they were replaced with even smaller single-room units in the middle of the city, which were best suited for individuals with atomised, mobile lifestyles imagined by the Metabolists. This period of high consumerism, real estate, and stock market speculation produced an economic bubble that crested during the late 1980s, and then burst. The decades of economic stagnation and a deteriorating social safety net led to a surge of people who found themselves suddenly or gradually without a home, who looked to open public space in which to maintain their lives, leading some to Miyashita Park in Shibuya.

For the homeless art activists protesting the redevelopment of Miyashita Park, it was the particular characteristics of interstitial urban spaces themselves *as well as* the informal possibilities of activity within them for marginalised people, such as *kugai*, which guided their practice, rather than a discourse of spontaneity alone. In addition, rather than relying on an analytical binary of Japan versus the West, they point to the rise of a global capitalist system that feeds on the constant dispossession of poor people around the world. By leveraging their knowledge of locally specific histories and terminologies, as well as a transnational critique of capitalist urban development, the art activists perhaps represented a third kind of camp – one that operated next to the historicists to which Isozaki belonged, as well as in opposition to the modernist techno-utopianisms of the Metabolists. In this third position, they at once maintained a sensitivity to informal and interstitial spaces in the city, the marginalised populations and their right to occupy them, as well as the role of spontaneous actions to illuminate and maintain such open-endedness. They argued that the role of the architect was not only to provide formal coherence to cities and individual lives, but echoing the views of Isozaki, also to challenge imposed order, power, and regulation by engaging with the politics of the body in order to imagine new possibilities for collective assembling, as well as critical architectural discourse.

Miyashita Park

As commercial high-rises began to emerge around the park during the middle of the twentieth century, Miyashita – like many other parks – was increasingly viewed as ‘underutilised’ by city officials. As part of a nearly three billion US dollar development effort to prepare for the 1964 Olympics, Miyashita was developed from a green space with Shibuya River running alongside it into a utilitarian parking structure with a concrete open space on top [7].³⁰ Over the next fifty years, incentives to build up and commercialise the surrounding area continued to



7 Miyashita Park after it was reconfigured into a parking structure for the 1964 Olympics.

bring in development projects and money to the Shibuya ward. However, the economic bubble meant that an increasing number of people could no longer afford to live in the city with its inflated housing prices, which led to a spike in homelessness. Some began to use the park as a place to keep their belongings, to rest at night, and to spend time during the day. Yet because, or perhaps despite of, the park's growing reputation as a densely packed site for homeless living, it was again viewed by the city as needing to be ‘refreshed’ and ‘activated’.

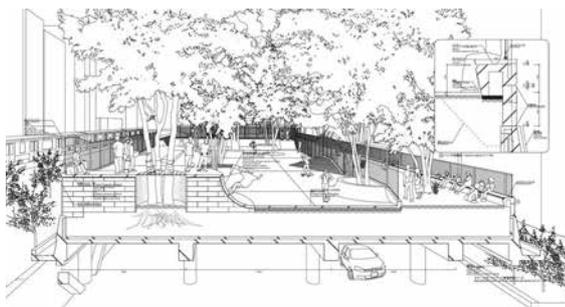
Interviews with Atelier Bow-Wow, including one published in the MIT architecture journal *Thresholds*, describe Miyashita Park as underutilised and those occupying the space as ‘illegal’ and ‘cramped’. They argued: ‘[...] Miyashita Park, one of the few green spots in Tokyo’s Shibuya Ward, occupies the rooftop of a 1960s low-rise parking structure within this urban sub-centre that combines business, commerce, and leisure [...] this tree-covered expanse had long been underutilised due to poor upkeep and crowding by a large number of illegally camped homeless persons.’³¹ After ‘receiving numerous requests from local residents and local sports organisations’ to renovate the park in the early 2000s, a 5.6 million US dollar renovation proposed by Atelier Bow-Wow began to move forward. By 2004, there were over one hundred people living in the park, but by 2009, there were only around thirty, due to a series of relocation efforts by the city.³²

Atelier Bow-Wow’s co-principal, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, described the design as an attempt to

create a new kind of 'public' park by drawing on the historical lineage of activity and event space. He argued that the quality of public space depended on 'the people's participation. If all the participants are just a customer', he claimed, 'it is not a real public space [...] They don't have any responsibilities to maintain the space.'³³ However, the promise of a new design from the start was based on the premise that homeless living was an illegitimate – even 'illegal' – means by which to use public space, and thus the design rhetoric revealed an inherent contradiction. While they attempted to draw on the discourse of *kawaii* in the design, the design process – as well as the architects – betrayed the consideration of it as a lived 'activity space' by rejecting and ignoring the transient and permanent residents who were the primary occupants of the park. Instead of engaging the lived realities of park residents, the architects upheld an approach that Isozaki, Ito, and others had been critical of for decades. Isozaki, for example, argued that the modern architect as envisioned by CIAM was charged with 're-accommodating the anonymous displaced denizen of the already overcrowded metropolis [...] constructing cubicles-high-rise cages detached from the ground.'³⁴ In this view, the uncaged park residents living on the ground were antithetical to these anonymous individuals living detached above it, and according to the logic of Atelier Bow-Wow, beyond the scope of

architectural concern. Instead, they needed to be expelled from the park in order for new architectural possibility to enter.

While international news headlines condemned the ways that the new Nike-sponsored park displaced the homeless residents and activists, Atelier Bow-Wow argued that they took on the difficult task of bringing together the opposing opinions of city officials and Nike Japan in order to attempt to design a new kind of 'activity' space – quite literally drawing on the language of their activist predecessors.



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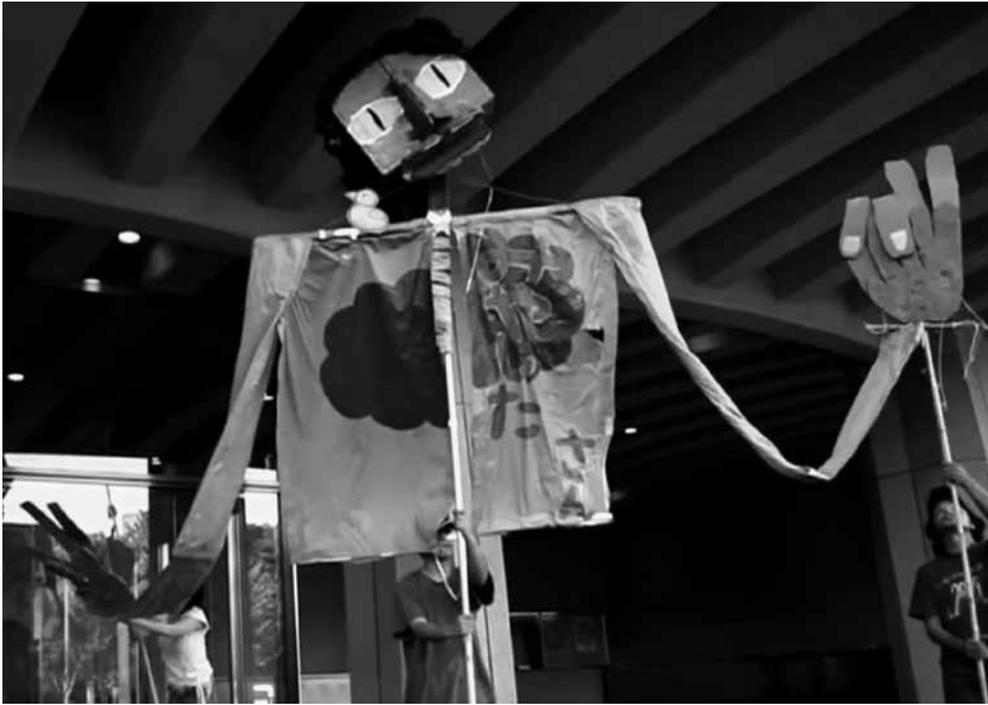
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8, 9 Atelier Bow-Wow's redesign of Nike-sponsored Miyashita Park, which was turned into a pay-to-play sports facility above the existing parking structure.

10 Artists in Residence Misako Ichimura and Ogawa Tetsuo invited artists and community members to continue to use the park for creative actions in protest of the redevelopment, May 2010.



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11 A video captures 'Miyashita San' waving her arms at the entrance to the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo in 2010.

Despite the eviction of the park residents, Tsukamoto claimed that the redesign considered them, because some of them were relocated by the city to small makeshift structures built within a strip of land below the park, where vehicles pass by and park, and toxic exhaust fumes stagnate.³⁵ The art activists and other homeless advocates shared their objections and concerns about the design and process with Atelier Bow-Wow quite directly, but they failed to incorporate any of their concerns. The resulting park featured a pay-to-play skateboarding park, climbing walls, a futsal court, and locked gates at night. Atelier Bow-Wow argued that the park was more inclusive to the public than the homeless tent city that preceded it [8, 9].

During the negotiations about the redesign, two of the leading homeless activists, Tetsuo Ogawa and Misako Ichimura, set up camp as 'Artists in Residence' in the park – acting as hosts and instigators of the space – to make sculptures and paintings, cook, write, host concerts, parties, and play soccer as a way to produce events according to the whims and desires of park residents instead of as directed by the official park administration [10]. They constructed a towering puppet out of metal poles, cardboard, and scraps of blue tarp and named it 'Miyashita-san'. The blue puppet with glaring yellow eyes became a symbolic face of the park, which marched through the city with the activists to their sit-ins and social events, as well as to an exhibition titled, 'Where is Architecture? Seven Installations by Japanese Architects' at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo. Atelier Bow-Wow was featured in the exhibition with an installation named 'Rendez-vous', which consisted of bamboo animals on the museum's front lawn that claimed to represent themes of spontaneity within the confines of the museum.³⁶ The activists stood outside of the exhibition with the puppet unsteadily waving its

arms, asking over a megaphone: 'Atelier Bow-Wow "Where is architecture?"'.

With the puppet wobbling side-to-side, the performance correlated with Isozaki's robots at the 1970 Expo, and the puppets served as larger-than-life bodies that demand attention and forced one to consider the values of architects and the ambition of their practices [11]. For the activists, Atelier Bow-Wow's celebrated embrace of discourses of spontaneity and interstitial space alongside their embrace of the state and funding from a large multinational corporation to evict park residents meant they had evacuated architecture from that space rather than incorporating it. Ogawa argued that Miyashita Park was valuable specifically because it was one of the few open spaces left in the city, suggesting that 'culture and art are born out of wastelands'.³⁷ As such, he and Ichimura argue that public spaces like Miyashita – like the historical *kugai* – are valuable precisely because they lack an imposed authority, which permits an eternally spontaneous way of living that promotes thinking, critiquing, and the reformatting of ideas.³⁸

Tokyo's preparations for the 2020 Olympics is evidence again of the perpetual redefining of the landscape of the city, including Miyashita Park. Although less than a decade since the most recent renovation by Atelier Bow-Wow, the Shibuya Ward government approved yet another redesign of the park in December of 2015, to be completed in time for the 2020 Olympics. This time, the park was re-envisioned as a three-storey structure with a seventeen-storey hotel on one end to accommodate visitors for pay.³⁹ Ichimura and Ogawa have continued to live in a nearby public park and to maintain spaces around the city where communities such as the homeless are able to gather, live, produce art, and continue to contest dominant currents of urban development –

ultimately cultivating alternative forms of public space.⁴⁰ While Miyashita and other areas of the city were systematically shut down for another round of renovations, Ichimura and Ogawa, alongside other park residents and supporters, have continued to stake their claim to the public space by calling on architects – like those from the 1960s – to understand the urgency of the situation and stand by their side. They work with other homeless residents of the city to practice imaginative, creative, and pragmatic resistance, including hosting karaoke parties, sports events, and film screenings for their communities, as well as measures directly confronting government agencies for acts such as improper permitting, or denying full community engagement. Their everyday lived interventions continue to rescript urban public spaces – not as ones governed by the state, capital, or by Western ideologies, but as sites of potentiality – with marginalised people at the centre of their narrative.

Conclusion

By living, working, and playing in *akichi*, the homeless art activists formerly residing at Miyashita Park have drawn from both the practices of art activism as well as urban and architectural history to look beyond the limitations of various conceptions of ‘public’, and in so doing, they problematised the often codified and apolitical processes of design. The efforts of the ‘Artists in Residence’ to challenge the redesign of Miyashita Park align with critiques of ‘the public’

that were mobilised by architects in Japan in the late 1960s and 1970s. Rather than imagining activists and architects as divergent categories of actors, these debates highlight the important role that architects have as activists – each with social and political commitments – and the role that political activists might have as contributors to architectural and urban discourse through their art and housing interventions. Both architects and activists engage with material forms in ways that hold significant urban consequences, and their work reveals layers of contested urban history, projects narratives of urban inequality, and it renders the underlying and often unintended ramifications of democratic urbanism visible. While the architect may use nationally sponsored platforms, such as a World Expo, to demonstrate or publicly perform such critiques, the homeless art activists glean from the excess of a global consumer society to resist authoritarianism in everyday life. Together, however, they both interrogate the publicness of urban space and the way people live in the city. Against the backdrop of historical debates about the public sphere, architectural propositions like those by Isozaki and the urban interventions of Ichimura and Ogawa emphasise critical perspectives on urban design, which draw attention to the interactions that create public space. As both a product and producer of cultural politics, architects hold a charged role: they can involve or evade the state, include or evict certain residents, and engage with or disregard history.

Notes

1. The term ‘homeless’ (*homuresu*) is used in this article in lieu of alternatives, such as ‘unhoused’, ‘homefree’, or ‘rough sleeper’, because the residents and activists most often used the term ‘homeless’ to describe themselves. For more on the particularities of the modern Japanese house, see: Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, and Bourgeois Culture 1880–1930* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).
2. For a historical overview of this term in relationship to Miyashita Park, see: Carl Cassegård, ‘Public Space in Recent Japanese Political Thought and Activism: From the Rivers and Lakes to Miyashita Park’, *Japanese Studies*, 31 (2011), 405–22.
3. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee, *Urban Design Downtown: Poetics and Politics of Form* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 158–76.
4. Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Norihito Nakatani, ‘The Existence of the Architect and the Role of the Historian at the Turning Point’, 10+1 (10 December 2011).
5. Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).
6. Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).
7. In Japanese, the home, or *ie*, implies both the physical structure as well as the patriarchal family structure.
8. Nikepolitics, Meeting with Atelier Bow Wow (2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-xlhYCFQWY>> [accessed 30 September 2016].
9. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. T. Burger with F. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).
10. For a more detailed discussion of these theoretical frameworks, see: Cassegård, ‘Public Space in Recent Japanese Political Thought and Activism’.
11. Andrew E. Barshay, ‘Imagining Democracy in Postwar Japan: Reflections on Maruyama Masao and Modernism’, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 18:2 (1992), 365–406.
12. The word *Kou* originally implied ‘great residence’, and during late premodern Japan it took on the meaning of ‘the master’. It was only with the Meiji Era modernisation after 1868 that the Western understanding of ‘public’ began to influence Japanese scholarship. For more, see: Kaori Hayashi, ‘“The Public” in Japan’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:2–3 (May 2006), 615–16.
13. Maruyama defines the term *sakui* as ‘invention’, though as a concrete noun, he argues that it closely resembles the word ‘artifact’, though it does not carry the pejorative connotations of ‘artificial’ in English and is often translated as ‘creation’. See Masao Maruyama, *Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (1952; repr. New York: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 191.
14. Isozaki points out that it was only after the war that the binary opposition (*sakui/jinen*) became a core problematic for Japanese architecture. See Arata Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
15. Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, p. 24.
16. Yoshihiko Amino, ‘Medieval Japanese Constructions of Peace and Liberty: Muen, Kugai, and Raku’, *The International Journal of Asian Studies*, 4:1 (2007), 3–14.

17. Cassegård, 'Public Space in Recent Japanese Political Thought and Activism'.
18. Takeshi Hanada, 'The Japanese "Public Sphere": The Kugai', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:2-3 (2006), 612-14.
19. Tanya Hidaka and Mamoru Tanaka, 'Japanese Public Space as Defined by Event', in *Public Places in Asia Pacific Cities*, ed. by P. Miao (Berlin: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 107-18 (p. 109).
20. See, for example: Richard Alan Smith, 'Crowding in the City: The Japanese Solution', *Landscape*, 19:1 (July 1971), 2-10.
21. Jordan Sand, *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 28.
22. Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, p. 63.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
24. Hajime Yatsuka, 'Architecture in the Urban Desert: A Critical Introduction to Japanese Architecture after Modernism', in *Oppositions Reader: Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture, 1973-1984*, ed. by K. Michael Hayes (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 258.
25. Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, p. 66.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
27. Teiji Ito, 'Principles of Space Order', *Kenchiku bunka*, 206 (December 1963), 68.
28. Yuji Stone, *Japanese Robot Culture: Performance, Imagination and Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 68-9.
29. On Noi's critique of Expo '70 itself, see: Sawaragi Noi, *Senso to banpaku [World Wars and World Fairs]* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 2005). For a counter-argument to Noi's critique, see: Carl Cassegård, 'Japan's Lost Decade and Its Two Recoveries: On Sawaragi Noi, Japanese Neo-Pop and Anti-War Activism', in *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture*, ed. by Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 39-59.
30. Brian Chalkley and Stephen Essex, 'Urban Development through Hosting International Events: A History of the Olympic Games', *Planning Perspectives*, 14:4 (1999), 369-94.
31. Casey Goodwin, 'Park as Philanthropy: Bow Wow's Redevelopment at Miyashita Koen', *Thresholds*, 40 (2012), 92.
32. City of Shibuya, 'Refurbishing of Miyashita Park at Shibuya City', <https://www.city.shibuya.tokyo.jp/eng/miyashita_park.html> [accessed 13 January 2017].
33. Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu in Mason White, 'Atelier Bow-Wow: Tokyo Anatomy', *Archinect* (2007) <<http://archinect.com/features/article/56468>> [accessed 29 May 2014].
34. Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, p. 60.
35. Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu in Mason White, 'Atelier Bow-Wow: Tokyo Anatomy'.
36. Nikepolitics, Meeting with Atelier Bow Wow (2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-xlhYcFQWY>> [accessed 30 September 2016].
37. Tetsuo Ogawa, in discussion with authors, 23 March 2014.
38. Tetsuo Ogawa, 'Motto akichi o! Miyashita kôen ga naiki kôen ni' ['More empty land! Miyashita Park will become Niki Park'], *Impaction*, 170 (August 2009).
39. 'Shibuya no miyamotokôen, shôgyô shisetsu to hoteru shinsetsu e kugi - kai de kaketsu', *Asahishinbun dejitaru* <<http://www.asahi.com/articles/ASHD8oNXSHD7UTILo68.html>> [accessed 30 December 2015].
40. Ichimura and Ogawa also worked with residents of Kasumigaoka danchi, a public housing complex across the street from Meiji Park, both of which were being torn down for the construction of the new Olympic Stadium. In addition to people who lived in the park for decades, residents of the low-income housing were evicted. Most were elderly, including one man who was evicted by the Olympics committees for a second time, having first been forced out of his home in advance of the 1964 Games.

Illustration credits

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