

INTRODUCTION TO “CITY AS LANDSCAPE” (1970) BY MATSUDA MASAO (1933–2020)

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Even before Matsuda Masao passed away in March of 2020, amid an unfolding global pandemic, there had been a resurgence of interest in Matsuda’s thinking and in landscape theory (or *fūkei-ron*) more broadly. In part, this interest speaks to the need to locate alterities within an expansion of the global imaginaries and aesthetic genealogies of the radical left. This has become an even more urgent task, in light of the ceaselessly destructive consolidations of neoliberal and state capital in the half century since Matsuda’s essay “City as Landscape” (1970) first appeared. This introduction will attempt to outline that essay’s contributions to the development of landscape theory *then*, as well as how it might offer us vital means to expand and deepen the exchanges worldwide among diverse moments and media of radical critique *now*.

Matsuda was born in 1933 in Taipei, during the period of Japanese colonial rule of Taiwan (1895–1945), and he joined the Japanese Communist Party in 1950, while still in high school. After a period of active participation in the party’s radical factions, leading up to the nationwide political struggle over the revision of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan in 1960, Matsuda worked as an editor for a variety of publishers before commencing a prolific writing career as a critic and activist in the late 1960s.¹ While

1 The revision of the mutual security treaty, known as the Anpo treaty, a contraction of the

Matsuda is recognized for his prominent role in radical film criticism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is worth noting, if only briefly, the diverse scope of his writings. In addition to the 1971 collection of writings related to landscape theory, *The Extinction of Landscape* (*Fūkei no shimestu*), Matsuda's other publications from this period include *The Circuit of Terror* (*Teroru no kairo*, 1969), a collection of writings on the political tactics of radical Third World thinkers such as Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon; *Roses and the Nameless* (*Bara to mumeisha: Matsuda Masao eiga ronshū*, 1970) and *Shoot the Daydream* (*Hakuchūmu o ute*, 1972), two collections of writings on diverse film cultures from around the world; and *Media of Impossibility* (*Fukanōsei no media*), a 1973 collection of essays on the politics of media. Moreover, when we consider Matsuda's role as editor of the journal *Film Criticism* (*Eiga hihyō*) from 1970 to 1973, we find a stunning array of critiques, themes, and radical modes of thought assembled through his editorial work. Taken together, such texts render a consistent thread that spans his critical praxis; if film played a prominent role in Matsuda's writings, it must be regarded as only a part of his pursuit of ever-changing potentials for transformative politics—in other words, revolution.²

The essay "City as Landscape," recently translated into English for the first time, was originally published in 1970 in the leftist general-interest monthly *Contemporary Eye* (*Gendai no me*), in a special issue dedicated to "the structure of the city" (*toshi no kōzō*). Along with essays on such diverse topics as ideological critique of the modern city, the myth of city governance, pollution, and the restructuring of the modern family, the immediate context of Matsuda's essay was the expansion of leftist discourse on the city as an important front in the battle against state power and capital.³

Japanese *Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku*, occasioned the largest mass mobilization of political opposition in the early postwar period. Notably, this protest movement catalyzed many of the radical new left thinkers, artists, and activists who were active throughout the 1960s and thereafter. For excellent studies of this crucial historical moment, see Nick Kapur's *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018) or Wesley Sasaki-Uemura's *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protest in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

- 2 For a thorough exploration of the political dimensions of Matsuda's writings, see Go Hirasawa's Japanese commentary on *The Extinction of Landscape* found in the revised and expanded reprint edition, "Kaisetsu: fūkei-ron no genzai" *Fūkei no Shimetsu* (Tokyo: Kōshisha, 2013), 319–341.
- 3 For a discussion of a related set of leftist urban counter-discourses, see the chapter "Landscape Vocabularies: *For a Language to Come* and the Geopolitics of Reading" in my

Tracking the conceptual itineraries of “City as Landscape” reveals an effort to shift the political terrain in which this struggle was to be waged. Rather than regarding the city as merely an entirely legible symptom, situation, or condition of capitalist state power, we find Matsuda making sensible an expanded, archipelagic scale of displaced bodies and material processes, a structuring of desire and mediation, and diffuse forms of power.⁴ Matsuda’s notion of landscape is therefore not an aesthetic form derived from the fixed intervals between a representation and its viewer, but instead names a political process that emerges through an embodied drifting within the circulatory flux of an urban expanse.⁵ Thus, Matsuda’s essay traces an impermeable constellation of power in need of dramatically changed political imaginaries, perhaps even of novel kinds of desiring subjects, capable of materializing latent potentials of radical transformation throughout an all-encompassing—yet incomplete—totality of forces.

Paradoxically, the starting point for this drift within and through the “city as landscape” is not the glimmering metropolis of Tokyo but the town of Abashiri, at the northern limits of the Japanese archipelago. There we learn how a local festival restages the vestiges of Japanese settler colonialism and the dispossession of the indigenous Ainu people from their lands, rendering a hollow stereotype of mainland festivals, ostensibly for the consumption of mainland tourists.⁶ However, Matsuda was not drawn to the remote periphery from a desire to confront only the ongoing actualities of the “internal colonization” of the

book *Residual Futures: The Urban Ecologies of Literary and Visual Media of 1960s and 1970s Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

- 4 Matsuda sought to differentiate his notion of landscape from *jōkyō*, the knowable set of conditions or situations that determine an appropriate course of political action.
- 5 As Rei Terada has insightfully noted, “Instead of only explaining the perduring phenomenon of landscape by reference to a causal process behind it, the film presents landscape as the matrix able to attach there-ness to those processes, making their understanding (not the processes themselves) not only sensorily experienceable but think-able at all.” Rei Terada, “Repletion: Masao Adachi’s Totality,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 24, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2016): 24.
- 6 The modern Abashiri shrine accompanied settlers from central Japan, who had colonized and dispossessed the indigenous Ainu people of their lands throughout the history of the Japanese empire (1868–present), following prior waves of incursion and displacement of the Ainu people from their lands during the Edo period (1603–1868). See Ann-Elise Lewallen’s ethnographic study of the ongoing efforts to revive Ainu indigenous practices in *The Fabric of Indigeneity: Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016).

archipelago. Rather, he and his companions encountered this spectacle by chance during their pursuit of Nagayama Norio's "homeland."

Nagayama, the teenage serial killer at the heart of the development of Matsuda's notion of landscape, was the subject of the collaborative documentary film *A.K.A. Serial Killer (Ryakushō: Renzoku shasatsuma, 1969)*.⁷ This film was an unconventional project in a number of ways, but primarily in the sense that it did not seek to reproduce a fixed set of determinant "conditions" with the intention of illustrating an impoverished background that had "caused" Nagayama to turn to violence. Instead, the collaborative documentary sought to discover Nagayama's "homeland" only through depiction of the scenery that would have enveloped Nagayama from birth to the moment of his arrest in 1968. However, what the filmmakers found as they were stalking Matsuda's every move through the Japanese archipelago and beyond was that, not only was Nagayama's "homeland" nowhere to be found, but every place they went had seemingly been depleted of the vibrant local differences and specific conditions they had anticipated.

What's more, in the film's wandering pursuit of Nagayama's trajectory through his traversals of Tokyo and the urbanized centers of the archipelago, Matsuda and the filmmaking collective confront a landscape evacuated of transformative potentials; for displaced youth like Nagayama, the cities had become merely the patterned urban conduits of their ceaseless centripetal and centrifugal flux.⁸ For Matsuda, the filmmaking process provoked a political reorientation needed to grapple

7 The film was a collaborative production that involved Matsuda, filmmaker Adachi Masao (b. 1939), screenwriter Sasaki Mamoru (1936–2006), and music critics Aikura Hisato (1931–2015) and Hiraoka Masaaki (1941–2009), as well as a crew. It was completed in 1969 but was never widely distributed at the time. For a detailed analysis of this film's role in the development of Matsuda's landscape theory, see the chapter "Diagramming the Landscape: Power and the Fukeiron Discourse" in Yuriko Furuhashi, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 115–48.

8 In addition to Walter Benjamin and the francophone thinkers Frantz Fanon, Henri Lefebvre, and Régis Debray, Matsuda's thinking for this essay draws heavily on an essay by the little-known writer Mizuki Kaoru, who critiqued the reformist Marxist-humanism of Hani Gorō (1901–83). Mizuki questioned the idealized notion of the renaissance city that Hani celebrated as a model for autonomous self-governance in his bestselling work *The Logic of the City (Toshi no ronri)* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1969). Moreover, Mizuki engaged with poet Kuroda Kio's (1926–84) criticisms of both Terayama Shūji (1935–83), who celebrated rural youth fleeing their village homes to the city, and Tanigawa Gan (1923–95), who celebrated flocking to the periphery to create the "homeland" anew. Kuroda's critique highlighted the ambivalent plight of both depopulated rural communities and the youth who

with Nagayama's perpetual wandering condition arising from the dual dispossession of a "homeland" *and* betrayal by the hollowed-out husk of a "refuge" that Tokyo had become. As he details in "City as Landscape," Matsuda's point is that by retracing the teen's confrontation with the city as a landscape, the filmmaking process makes sensible the doubly dispossessed flows of precarious and exploited youth as an indeterminant constellation of desiring subjects who seek transformative potentials in an "invisible homeland," a virtuality immanent to this landscape.

The existing imaginary of the modernist left, rooted in an oppositional, schematic binary pairing of "Tokyo" versus "homeland," or center versus periphery more broadly, is wholly leveled within this landscape, rendering this imaginary's former generative potentiality acutely limited. However, the purported equivalence of Tokyo with Japan's innumerable "homelands" does not apply to the empirical, social-historical surface of reality; Matsuda's notion of landscape is not simply that urban/rural and center/periphery dualities have become *literally* equivalent. Differences abound even in today's world, after decades of infrastructural development and the homogenizing cultural forces of deepened media saturation. Matsuda's essay instead draws our attention to the ways in which the homogeneity of landscape can be confronted through an embodied process of attunement to the ubiquity of the patterns and flows specific to an urban expanse that has subsumed these dualistic imaginaries.

Matsuda further tracks the diverse dimensions of what we might call the political *affects* of this uniform landscape in the essays collected in *The Extinction of Landscape*. The disparate essays that fluidly elaborate Matsuda's process-based theory of landscape are notably attuned to the movements of laboring bodies to and from centers and peripheries; to the modulations of the rhythms and inflections of diurnal, weekly, and annual cycles of work and leisure; to the vast infrastructural developments that accelerate some segments of networked flow differently from others; to explosive growth in the material processes of production and in the consumption of goods; and to the multi-sensorial prolifera-

fled them, for both the collectives and the runaway youths were all the more deprived of any means of self-sufficiency in the "drama of drifting" ("rurō no geki") that informed both Terayama's and Tanigawa's modernist literary imaginaries. Mizuki Kaoru, "When Hani Gorō Became Governor of Tokyo: On the Futurism of a Highfalutin Corpse" ("Hani Gorō ga tochiji ni natta toki: Ee kakkō no shitai no mirai-ron"), in *Kakumei to yūtopia: Erīto jūhachinin no shisō hihan* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1969), 171–89.

tions of images, sounds, feelings, and tastes that overflow—even as they bring into existence new forms of mediation—existing geographic and cultural dispositions, boundaries, and thresholds. As a result, Matsuda not only makes sensible how the all-encompassing urban landscape materializes the totalizing forces of state power and capital, he also reveals the vague contours of the ceaseless proliferation of emergent and desiring subjects who seek out manifold invisible revolutionary “homelands,” each irreducible to any existing political formation.

Even today, “City as Landscape” invites us to search for that virtuality that confronts us only as an impossibility: to (re)locate the boundless sensibilities of political transformation within the endless pursuit of an “invisible homeland.” Matsuda’s essay thus serves as an important contribution to the expansion of the global imaginaries and aesthetic genealogies of the radical left, allowing us to render sensible myriad transformative potentials within our confrontations with a uniform landscape—one that envelops not only the Japanese archipelago, but the planet itself.

For an English translation
of Masao Matsuda’s excerpt
“City as Landscape,”
please scan the QR code
or visit the link below.



https://www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/Documents/Matsuda-City-as-Landscape.pdf