Notion and appearance of home and nature in Tokyo street gardens

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Chapter one
Introduction
1.1 Background of the research

Tokyo is a Still City: post-growth both physically, demographically and economically.\textsuperscript{1} This stillness is a situation that, according to the predictions of the Club of Rome (1972), will come to be everywhere in the world. We can’t keep on growing forever, there has to be a limitation to growth.\textsuperscript{2} Tokyo is one of the first places in the world to have reached this state. For this reason the city is an interesting testing and research ground for studies on the future of urbanity.

My interest lies mostly in nature and sense of belonging. I’m curious what it means to be so far from nature, in an endless city where almost every neighbourhood looks alike, the architecture is generic and there are few spatial characteristics. How do people belong, and feel at home?
I have a hunch that the greenery in the city plays a part in this sense of belonging. When I visited Tokyo in October 2012 I was captured by the many gardens people keep in front of their houses, sometimes taking over half the street. Green space in Tokyo is close to home, meticulously taken care of, and representative of something that is absent in a metropolis: nature. There are more ‘semi-private’ informal gardens than there is public greenery in the city. It is interesting to see how these gardens are situated on the border between the private and the public space. They are privately owned but anyone can enjoy them. The gardens connect the notion of home and belonging to the notion of nature. Researching these green structures is an opportunity to touch upon the division and interconnectedness of public-private in Japan and the sacred and profane aspects of nature. They are also a chance to look at the use and appearance of the street in Tokyo. Most gardens are situated in alleyways or narrow streets that just about fit a small car. The main public for the plants are consequently pedestrians and cyclists. The character of the gardens is very fluid, modular and nonchalant. Plants are almost always kept in containers and a permanent yard is not created. Plants are sometimes taken good care of,
Fig. 1.1 Informal Tokyo street garden in Sumida-ku
sometimes not. In this way the character of the gardens is very different from the public greenery in the city, which has a culture of meticulous trimming and shaping of plants and other garden features, for example in the Zen garden or the parks that contain the remnants of old Edo gardens.

The concept of home is interesting in this context as a sense of belonging, of feeling at home in the city, creating your own comfort zone and boundaries. In this regard the idea goes far beyond the actual house. In Japanese culture the home is just as much in the street, the neighbourhood etc. It’s doesn’t attach itself to property, or monuments. It’s more fluent and temporal, has more to do with a feeling, and a way of behaving and interacting (or not) with the environment. They say the Japanese ‘read the air’.³

Of course I will also study the physical qualities of the houses, in front of which the gardens can be found, but this is more in relation to the urban fabric (the space around the house - the plot - the void) and the facade of the house, of which can be said it’s actually part of the street, and not of the house. The interior is of less importance for this thesis. The street is where it all happens. This is where the gardens are located, and the people taking care of them. The street in this case is a small street in a residential neighbourhood, with a lot of pedestrians (public transport is very popular in Tokyo), some cyclists (more and more), and an occasional car. It’s a public space, where urban life takes place. I will research the street as a meaningful and functional space. Nature is the natural world, everything that’s not constructed. This thesis will among others try to show the relation between nature and its constructed counter halve: the garden.
Fig. 1.2 and 1.3 - Pictures of informal Tokyo street gardens
1.2 State of the art

While studying the history of Tokyo I will focus on the urban structure, the plot, the shaping of the streets that we know today and the occurrence and types of greenery in the city. I will also research the historic relationship of the city with the underlying topography, and the division between the high and low city.

The most important source for everyone concerned with the history of the city of Tokyo is Jinnai Hidenobu’s *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology* (1995). In this book Jinnai explores Tokyo by foot, armed with old maps of the city. He describes the way the city was shaped and lived in during Tokugawa, Meiji and the time after. The focus lies on the first period, when Tokyo was still called Edo. His research makes clear the presence of natural features and early city configurations in present-day Tokyo, and warns for the destruction of these features. The book is filled with detailed and well-funded facts, but at the same time has a sentimental tone to it, which clearly shows Jinnai’s own preferences. He views modernity as threat for good city life. Despite the colored view Jinnai offers on the city, his book is a great source for a detailed description of, especially the early, development of the city of Tokyo.

To get a more rounded view I will use a few different sources written from different perspectives. In *The Making of Urban Japan: Cities and Planning from Edo to the Twenty-First Century* (2004) Andre Sorensen approaches the city from a technical urban engineering point of view, and discusses the modern and contemporary history of Japanese urban planning. It paints a portrait of Japan as a late starter capitalist nation and the effects of this on the urban development from 1886 (after the Tokugawa period) until today. The book shows how development was valued above regulation during the period of rapid economic
growth that Japan went through. The book offers a western view (as a successful urban development early capitalist) on the ‘failed’ case of Japan.

Edward Seidenstickers *Tokyo Rising: The City since the Great Earthquake* (1991) uses a very different approach. It is an anecdotal telling of Tokyo, representing Japan. The book is understandable if you know the city of Tokyo, but because of its fragmented and prosaic form is difficult to understand if you have never visited the city. The anecdotes are the strength of the book, in which places are treated as characters in a story. The book offers facts about the modernization of Tokyo and Japan after the Kanto Earthquake in 1923.

Arie Graaflands’ *The Socius of Architecture: Amsterdam, Tokyo, New York* (2000) is a great source for discussion of the contemporary configuration of the urban fabric. Graafland analyses the city of Tokyo using philosophical concepts, from a postmodern point of view.

In the chapter about the home I will focus on the division and interconnectedness of the western concepts of public and private space and how applicable they are in Japan, the concept of belonging/dwelling in a Japanese megalopolis, and the use and character of the home and the street. For this I will use a range of sources on different aspects of the Japanese home.

To speak of being at home on a high abstraction level I will use Joris Berkhout’s essay *The Mythic Field*. (2013) In this essay Berkhout explores the intangible field of rituals in Tokyo. He calls this the mythic field, a term he borrows from Roland Barthes. ‘The connotations are properly called ‘myths’, for they are the representations which a social class, the bourgeoisie, ‘has and makes us have of the relations between man and the world’.’ The mythic field is an important part of the atmosphere in the city, and according to Berkhout one of the factors that make people feel at home in the city. This mythic field he believes is omnipresent
in Japanese society, more so than it is in other societies, where rituals and manners play a less prominent role in public space. On a more down-to-earth level *Tokyo. Die Strasse als gelebter raum* (2010) discusses the characteristics of Tokyo streets.\(^{10}\) It covers the streets on every level, from big shopping streets and highways to the small alleyways that are of more importance to this study. As the title suggests the book focuses on the configuration of the street and the way in which it is used by the inhabitants of Tokyo. This makes it a perfect source for this research, as I am trying to uncover the way in which public and private space is used to feel at home in the city.

In *The Japanese House* (2010) Inge Daniels discusses the materiality of the Japanese home.\(^{11}\) She covers traditional architecture, rituals and gender division of tasks and spaces, and extends her research into the present with casestudies she performed among families in Kyoto. This unearths some interesting aspects, mainly about the enormous changes that occurred in the way the home is used since Tokugawa. A similar conclusion is reached in *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation* (2011) by Richard Ronald.\(^ {12}\) This book addresses the changing traditions of the Japanese household and home in the light of contemporary social, economic and urban developments.

Particularly in the West raving texts have been written about the simplicity and beauty of Japanese home architecture. Especially the modernist movement celebrated the aesthetic ideal of the Japanese house. Ironically these texts were written in the 1930s when in Japan this aesthetic had been gradually replaced by western influences and modern home improvements.\(^ {13}\) Bruno Taut is an example of a noted Western architect lamenting the decline of the traditional Japanese house. He wrote the book *Houses and people of Japan* (1938)\(^ {14}\) in which he offers an insight into everyday life in a Japanese home, but also delivers a conservative treaty for traditional values and good taste. In his opinion the regular Japanese house of that time was not up to par. Traditional interior mixed
with western stuff was a sign of poor taste. Taut praised the simplicity of form and empty interiors of the traditional Japanese house. For the remainder of the 20th century this stereotype of the traditional house was here to stay, both in the west and in Japan.\textsuperscript{15}

I’ve steered clear of these sources about the home because they do not correspond with the reality of the time they claim to portray, and it is my goal to paint a as true to life picture of being at home in Tokyo as possible. The aesthetic of the home does not play a large role in this. However I will use some of the Japanese texts on Japanese aesthetic (which are also closely related to the appearance of the Japanese home) at the end of the chapter on nature in Japan. The reason for this is that in Japanese thought on nature, (aesthetically) idealized nature plays a large and interesting role.

On the subject of nature and aesthetic an abundance of texts is written from a romantic western view, portraying the mystical beauty of Japanese nature and aesthetics. I will not be using these sources. Instead I’ve tried to find a basic description of the concept of nature in Japan This combined with the many Japanese texts on nature, which are also highly idealized, gives an image of how the prevalent conception of Japanese nature is formed. To oppose or criticize this ‘myth’, as he calls it, is Aike Rots.

As the first basic source I will use Puck Brecher’s \textit{An investigation of Japan’s relationship to nature and environment} (2000), a book that treats the Japanese idea of and the appearance of nature as a formative notion in Japanese history and culture.\textsuperscript{16} It discusses the role of nature in Japanese religion and history, as well as Japan’s environmental problems. Brecher touches upon the strange contradictions in the Japanese relationship with nature, but doesn’t completely uncover them. However the book is a great source as it compiles a broad range of information in a very readable publication that is written in a tone as neutral as possible. Brecher clearly shows (alleged) differences between the eastern and
western traditions, and successfully avoids an orientalist perspective whilst doing so. Another nuanced source is found in a collection of essays edited and largely produced by Kalland and Asquith: *Japanese Images of Nature.* The 14 papers that comprise the publication have varied approaches to the subject at hand. The main viewpoint of the book is revisionist: it offers a reinterpretation of historical ideas on nature in Japan.

Aike Rots’ PHD dissertation *Forests of the Gods: Shinto, Nature, and Sacred Space in contemporary Japan* (2014) is an examination of the development of the ‘Shinto environmentalist paradigm: a paradigm that propagates an intimate relationship between the people of and nature in Japan.’ This paradigm, Rots argues, rests on three pillars: ‘notions of ‘the Japanese experience of nature’ that were developed as part of the modern nation-building project since the Meiji period; existing notions of Shinto as the primordial, indigenous ritual tradition of ‘the Japanese’; and the global association between religion and environmental issues.’ For this research the first pillar is of most interest. Rots clearly lays bare the myth of the intimate relationship with nature the Japanese are thought to have, and shows how this idea is very much alive and repeated up until today in the west as well as in Japan. He is adamant that this myth needs to be exposed, and goes about this quite vehemently. This results in an interesting discussion of the way in which the Japanese are taught to relate to nature as a concept, an ideal, and how this differs from reality. For this reason *Forests of the Gods* is of great value for this research.

To get a feel for the ‘myth’ of Japanese nature I use three classic sources on Japanese aesthetic, some very serious, some ironic, treating it as a myth to go along with…

One of the most well-know texts on Japan is Roland Barthes’ *Empire of Signs* (1983). Many a westerner who visits the country reads the book to get a feel
for the Japanese culture. It consists of 26 short chapters dealing with different aspects of Japan: food, haiku, chopsticks, the eyelid etc. It is written in an associative manner and seems to be a meditation on the culture, society, art and iconography of the country. However, Barthes points out that he is not analyzing the actual country of Japan. The country he describes is largely mythical and fictional. Barthes did visit Japan, and his observations are grounded in reality. But Empire of Signs is in fact an examination of western thought on Japan, and assumes a viewpoint embedded in western thinking: that of sign systems, omnipresent in the western world. In Japanese culture Barthes finds a thought experiment of a system of emptiness, where signs have no meaning. Because the book is so influential, and not everyone who reads it is aware of its liberal way of treating reality, it is a great source of the image that exists of Japanese culture and aesthetic in the west.

A book on Japanese aesthetic that is influential both in the East and West is the *Book of Tea* (1906) by Okakura: a classic occidental work, directed towards a western audience. The book is a great example of the *Nihonjinron* discourse during the nation building of Japan in the Meiji era. It emphasizes the existence of a typical Japanese spirituality that is different from the rest of the world, and in particular from the west. From this viewpoint the work describes rituals connected to the role of tea in Japanese culture and the sensibilities and sense of aesthetic that are such an important part of this tradition.

A very special case is that of Tanezaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* (1933). Originally this essay was treated as a serious orientalist aesthetic treatise. Over time it has come to be seen more as a parody on the Book of Tea and the orientalist/occidentalist discourse it represents. The weight given in the text to ‘the superiority of the Japanese toilet’ is one of the reasons readers believe the text to be meant in a satirical way. Still it is hard to say that Tanezaki is completely insincere as he advocates a number of things from the essay in his
later work. Regardless, the text shows how the Japanese identity is formed from within the country, and through parody magnifies the sensibility associated with this identity.

One researcher in particular studies the street gardens in Tokyo: Marieluise Jonas. Her research focuses on the practice and tradition of informal use of space in dense urban conditions. She has made detailed studies of the location and shape of the street gardens in Tokyo. I have made a similar study and will use her experiences to draw my conclusions from this. Apart from this Jonas has carried out interviews with residents, a valuable source of information for this research, as unfortunately a lack of time and money kept me from conducting interviews myself. Where Jonas’s research focuses on private use of public space, my research focuses on the concepts at work behind the occurrence of the gardens. As we will see in the chapter on home (chapter 3) the privatization of the street by its inhabitants is an important part of this, as it is a symptom of the way the Tokyoites relate to being at home in the city.
1.3 Research questions

Central Research Question
What is the relationship between the informal stoop gardens in modern Tokyo and the notion and appearance of both ‘nature’ and ‘home’ in Japanese and Tokyo culture?

Sub questions
- What are the headlines of the urban history of Tokyo?
- What is the notion and appearance of street and home in Japan and Tokyo?
- What is the notion and appearance of nature in Japan and Tokyo?
- What are the objective characteristics of the potted gardens?
- What is the function of the potted gardens?
- What is the meaning of the potted gardens?
1.4 Sources and methods

The first part of the thesis (the first three sub questions) will be based primarily on literature study.

The second part consists of an in depth analysis of the form, function and meaning of the informal stoop gardens in two Tokyo neighbourhoods in the low city. Historically Tokyo has been clearly divided into the high and the low city. Because they are so different in history, inhabitants, topography and character I think it is more useful to focus on one of the two, instead of comparing them. In the second chapter, about Tokyo's urban history, I will speak about the city as a whole, because both parts do intertwine and are dependent on each other. One would not exist without the other.

To learn about the meaning of the gardens at first I had planned to interview inhabitants of Tokyo about their garden. When I asked around about how to approach this, I was told by multiple people that it would be impossible to do in the short time and on the small budget that I had. They warned me about shyness in the inhabitants and reluctance to talk to a westerner. To pull it off I would need to spend a long time in Tokyo and arrange for an interpreter for a long period of time. Unfortunately I did not have the time or the money to go through with it. Therefor I will use the research of Marieluise Jonas instead. I will also map the function and form of the gardens through fieldwork that will result in photographs, maps, drawings and descriptions.

I will choose the two neighbourhoods and take a slice out of the urban fabric in these locations (200x200m). These slices will be of a residential neighbourhood with small streets and at least one larger road (with car traffic and amenities). In these areas I will research the relationship of the gardens present with the façade of the house, the location of the plants, the number of plants, the number of houses with plants in front of them, the upkeep of the gardens, the type of plants,
the location of the neighbourhood in the city, the types and amount of houses, the relation between the width of the street and the amount and location of the plants. I will write descriptions of the case studies, take pictures and make maps and drawings to analyse the gardens and make them insightful.
http://stillcity.org/

Meadows, *The Limits to Growth*


Jinnai, *Tokyo: A Social Geography*

Sorensen, *The making of urban Japan*

Seidensticker, *Tokyo Rising: The City since the Great Earthquake*

Graafland, *The socius of architecture*

Berkhout, *The Mythic Field*

http://www.selectedworks.co.uk/EmpireDesSignes.html (24 juli 2014)

Krusche, *Tokyo. Die Strasse als gelebter raum*

Daniels, *The Japanese House*

Ronald, *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*

Daniels, *The Japanese House, 1-3*

Taut, *Houses and people of Japan*

Daniels, *The Japanese House, 1-3*

Brecher, *An investigation of Japan’s relationship to nature and environment*

Kalland, *Japanese Images of Nature*

Rots, *Forests of the Gods*

Rots, *Forests of the Gods, 3*

Barthes, *Empire of Signs*

Okakura, *The Book of Tea*

Tanezaki, *In Praise of Shadows*


Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo & Potscape. Gaertnern*
PART ONE
CONTEXT AND
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Chapter two
The urban history of Tokyo
2.1 Introduction

In *Tokyo: A Social Geography* Jinnai Hidenobu writes: ‘*Principles of European cities can be articulated rather explicitly. Not so in Japan. The essence remains invisible if the basic spatial structure, with its organic ties to nature and the universe, is not understood.*’ Therefore, before we dive into the parts of the city of Tokyo, it is wise to look at the city as a whole, and how it originated. This chapter tells the story of the urban history of Tokyo since 1603, in the context of historic events that influenced the shape of the city. Before 1603 Tokyo (then named Edo) was a small fishing village, not relevant to the current physical appearance of Tokyo. After the first subchapter on The Tokugawa or Edo period (1603-1868) I will continue with Tokyo during the Empire of Japan before the Pacific War (1868-1940). The Empire of Japan consists of three consecutive periods, all named after the emperor who ruled at the time. From 1868 to 1912 this was emperor Meiji, from 1912 to 1926 emperor Taisho, and from 1926 to 1989 Showa. The last part of Showa is after the Pacific War and will be part of the third subchapter, about Tokyo in the period after the war. (Fig. 2.1)

The case studies in the second part of this thesis focus on the low city of Tokyo. In this historical overview of the history I will, however, research the city as a whole. The high and low city are as we will see, albeit very different, dependent on and in close relationship to each other.
Fig. 2.1 - A timeline of the history of Tokyo. The column on the right shows the names of the different periods as used by the Japanese. The middle column shows the names of the different periods as known around the world. The left column shows important events that took place.
2.2 Tokyo/Edo during Tokugawa (1603-1868)

Before we start with the urban structure of Tokyo when it was still called Edo, it is important to understand the society in which the city developed, especially for the European reader, to whom the political system is often unknown.

Tokyo was originally known as Edo and took shape in the Tokugawa period between 1603 and 1868. Originally it was a fishing village that was first fortified by the Edo clan in the late twelfth century. In 1590, Tokugawa Ieyasu made Edo his base and when he became shogun in 1603, the town became the centre of his nationwide military government. During the subsequent Tokugawa period, Edo grew into one of the largest cities in the world with a population topping one million by the 18th century. This was possible because the Tokugawa period was a peaceful and stable period, with an unbroken line of fifteen shoguns and no threats from outside the country: Japan was closed off from the rest of the world. During the Tokugawa period, effective power rested with the Tokugawa Shogun, not the emperor in Kyoto, even though the former owed his position to the latter. The title of Shogun in Japan meant a military leader equivalent to a general. The establishment of the shogunate (or Bakufu) at the end of the twelfth century saw the beginning of Samurai control of Japan for 700 years. In this period, the Shoguns were the de facto rulers of Japan even though the Emperor nominally appointed them. European explorers compared the Emperor’s role to that of the pope, and the Shoguns to that of the king. The political system had some feudal elements with lesser territorial lords pledging their allegiance to greater ones. Close ties of loyalty between Samurai and their subordinates reinforced the hierarchy that held this system of government together. The Daimyo were the powerful territorial lords who ruled most of the country from their vast, hereditary land holdings. Subordinate only to the Shogun, Daimyo were the most powerful feudal rulers. The Shogun and Daimyo had a group of warriors, Samurai, beneath them. There were different ranks, ranging from the highest (Hatamoto) to the lowest.

This scale was very visible in the lay of the houses and the size of the plots of the respectable classes. The Shogun seated in Edo castle, at the tip of the
Fig. 2.2 - Map of the high city and low city of modern day Tokyo, with the location of the settlement of Edo.
Fig. 2.3 - Map of the location of Edo within the modern-day JR Yamanote Line
Musashino plateau. The years of shogunate became known as the Edo period, the Tokugawa period or pre-modern (Kinsei). In this text I will use the term Tokugawa to denote the period between 1603 and 1868, to avoid confusion of place (Edo) and time (also Edo, but alternatively Tokugawa). The structure of the city worked out during early Tokugawa still serves as the basic stratum for contemporary Tokyo. The high city of Edo was called Yamanote, the low city Shitamashi. Yamanote was located almost completely within todays JR Yamanote trainline, on the Musashino plateau, overlooking Tokyo Bay. Shitamashi was located on reclaimed delta land of the Sumida and Arakawa rivers at the bottom of the plateau. (Fig. 2.2 & 2.3) The topography of these parts differed greatly. The high city dealt with mountainous terrain, with mountain ranges and the accompanying valleys stretching in western direction. In the flat low city the many rivers determined the shape of the city.

High City

The high city was a lush garden city home to the rulers of Japan. Here Daimyo establishments were built on protruding uplands, independent island-like hills. The peasant land underneath was developed into commoners’ settlements. This is how the city was shaped in a scattered way, depending on the locations of the most beautiful natural environment for grand residences. This scattered urban growth was accompanied by another process: linear urban expansion. Main ridge roads were laid out that functioned as axis along which Daimyo; warrior and commoner establishments were erected. On old valley roads peasant settlements gave way to commoners, as the city grew larger. The high city was established through a combination of planned and natural urban growth that followed the topography of the Musahino plateau and the mountain ridges to the west of it. (fig. 2.9)

The inhabitants of the high city were the Shogun in Edo castle, the Daimyo in their grand residences, the Hatamoto in their smaller residences, lower samurai in warrior housing, and the commoners, in the so called ‘low city in the high city’ filled with row houses close together.
Fig. 2.4 - Diagram of Daimyo residential lots
Fig. 2.5 - Diagram of group residence
Fig. 2.6 (top) - Daimyo residence
Fig. 2.7 (left) - Lay-out of a Hatamoto residence
Fig. 2.8 (right) - Lay-out of a group residence module
**Daimyo**

The *Sankin kotai* system ordered all Daimyo to keep primary residence in Edo. They took up most of the favourable locations in the high city. They built their houses on the south side of highland ridge roads. In this way, the front of the house faced the road and the back opened up to the garden that lay on the south of the property. These areas knew vast garden settings unimaginable in a western city. (fig. 2.4)\(^{13}\) The Daimyo built their houses in such a way that they would be considered rural palaces in Europe. But this was the centre of Edo, the centre of Japan, city life. Daimyo establishments often had large grounds with multiple roads running through it, several buildings, which caused it to take on the character of a small neighbourhood. (fig. 2.6) The Japanese warrior class that they were part of took no part in urban activities, as aristocrats in Europe would have. On the contrary: they retreated and worked in their grand garden residences in natural solitude, in the urban centre of Japan. This attitude continues to inform the sensibilities of present day Japanese, who aspire to live in an independent house with a garden, however cramped it might be.\(^{14}\)

**Samurai**

Land use in the Samurai district (*Bukechi*) was virtually entirely residential. The district extended to about 5 km from Edo castle to the south, west and north.\(^{15}\) The middle and lower ranking officers in the Samurai class were the Hatamoto. Their neighbourhoods had a beautifully planned character. They consisted of straight roads with aligned plots on both sides. According to Jinnai these neighbourhoods represented the essence of urban neighbourhoods in a castle town. (fig. 2.7)\(^{16}\)

The hierarchy of Samurai was concentrically arranged in Edo. The higher ranks lived closest to the castle, the lowest warriors furthest away. (fig. 2.11) The Hatamoto had their residences on a relatively flat area near the castle. European cities have a centripetal structure by erecting tall structures with symbolic significance, and enveloiping it in a wall. Japanese cities have a centrifugal tendency: they define and locate themselves in relation to their broad natural setting and topography, taking features that loom in the distance as landmarks.
Clockwise from top left:

Fig. 2.9 - Map of the segregated residential areas in Edo
Fig. 2.10 - Map of Edo in 1844-1848
Fig. 2.11 - Schematic representation of the centrifugal structure of Edo
This way of urban thinking resulted in diffusive expansion and urban sprawl. Seventy per cent of the city consisted of low ranking warriors establishments: common housing units (*kumiyashiki*) on land borrowed from shogunal government.

Unlike those of their superiors lower ranking warriors’ houses were built indifferent to their directional orientation. At the centre of each housing site ran a street that neatly divided it in twenty to thirty lots of equal dimensions. (fig. 2.5) The lower warriors districts were a uniform and planned miniature version of Hatamoto districts. They had the character of military barracks. No commoners were allowed in and wooden gates closed of the central street. They were closed and independent quarters, where plots were fashioned as small daimyo
residencies. (fig. 2.8) A wooden fence marked the border, and the approach road and front yard indicated the inhabitant’s status.  

An average house had the dimensions that are the rough equivalent of a modern day salary workers home (50 to 75 square-meter). Nowadays the building material has changed to concrete and most buildings have two stories, but the basic configuration remains. The lowest Samurai lived in small houses in leftover areas in between the larger houses. In early Tokugawa the plots were still relatively large, 400 to 800 square yards. The high city was a rural area with vegetation and open spaces, which meant lower ranking warriors also had the space for large backyards with a small landscape (hill miniature) and a vegetable patch.
The low city within the high city

In the high city there also were some commoner districts in the valleys, alongside waterways on peasant grounds that were swallowed up by the urban sprawl. This development occurred mid-Tokugawa when the Great Meireki fire accelerated the urban growth. The fire destroyed sixty to seventy per cent of Edo in 1657. The rebuilding of Edo took two years, in which funds were available for everyone to rebuild their house. The Edo castle was destroyed as well, and its reconstruction was left to be completed last. The city was reorganized to leave more open space as fire breakers, especially around the castle, and streets were widened. Almost all valley settlements developed during this period and took shape spontaneously along curving valley roads on narrow strips of land before the cliffs rose up.23
Low city

Commoner’s alleys

Edo’s Low city was home to the commoners (machichi) of the Tokugawa era. The Low city made up thirty per cent of Edo. It consisted of bustling districts with all kinds of different trades. The area knew high population densities. In the 18th century 13 square kilometres had 500,000 inhabitants, with 58,000 inhabitants per square kilometre in the densest areas. Houses were built close together, one storey high. In the middle of each block there was an open space used for stalling garbage, for cleaning, and other domestic activities. (fig. 2.14) As Edo grew the
Fig. 2.14 - Courtyard of block in the Low City
Fig. 2.15 - The location of Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba in relation to Edo
open spaces were often filled in as well, leaving only small alleys to reach houses in the middle of a block. In the low city we find the alternative way of urban life to setting up grand residence: setting up shop. Commoners set up shops as imposingly as possible on a busy street. These shops were designed for appearance: the façade changed with the trends, while the building underneath remained the same simple and plain house.

High wooden gates separated neighbourhoods from each other. The gates closed at night, to ensure a tight reign on the commoner population. This was integral to the establishment of feudal order under the shogunal regime, but also produced a spatial unity within a confined area, binding residents of each block into a coherent social organisation. As a result, the view down a street was interrupted by the gates. Besides the major thoroughfares and roads the low city’s infrastructure consisted of narrow alleyways, lined with row houses. Alleyways existed everywhere between plots, and were used to reach the houses in the back. At the end of these backstreets you would find an Inari fox god shrine in a small open space, important for its spiritual meaning, and the room for some necessary sunlight and ventilation.

Alleyways were the stages for public life in Edo. The backstreet was all the open space they had in these densely populated areas, as the houses had no backyards. They became the place to keep potted plants, to let children play, to make a fire to cook on, and they also functioned as a common toilet as well. (fig. 2.14)

During the Tokugawa period transportation relied almost entirely on water transport, which lead to a great emphasis on economic activity in the low city, close to the water. Waterfront warehouses were one of the first buildings in Edo to be fabricated out of mortar and stonework, to prevent their collapse in case of one of the many fires that troubled Edo. They held great economic value, but also great aesthetic value to the Japanese. The canals were rhythmically lined with
the industrial buildings. When you moved outside of the commercial areas the waterfront became wide and open.28

**Bridges and Squares**

The low city was home to many markets and squares. Squares were usually located at the foot of a bridge. One such example was Nihonbashi Bridge. From the bridge you had a great view of the city, the castle and mount Fuji, which drew many people. At the foot of Nihonbashi Bridge a public square was formed. The character of Japanese squares is very different from European ones. There are no symbols of municipal government, no imposing facades of the wealthy and powerful, as they are tucked away in their residences in the High City. However, there were notice boards with messages from government at the foot of the bridge, a place that was also used for communication in the other direction, by means of satirical verse. The squares of the low city were looked upon as place outside of normal social divisions: they were free spaces. This character gave rise to amusement centres and other sorts of entertainment in these locations.29

During Edo there were two contrary vectors of consciousness at work in urban space: commoners were establishing shop and Daimyo were establishing a grand residence. In western cities these two intertwined and were visible in the same urban space, but in Japan the principles of organizing space in the warriors high city differed completely from those in the commoners low city.

**Whole City: a sense of scale**

Apart from the differences between the high and the low city explained in the previous paragraphs, there are also aspects of the city that encompass this division, and are relevant for both Yamanote and Shitamachi. In this paragraph I will explore some of these aspects, most importantly the sense of scale found in
the city of Edo.

**Sense of scale**

Edo was developed in relation to grand natural surroundings. Mount Fuji and Tsukuba, looming far in the distance, maintained a great presence in the city dwellers’ consciousness both as geographical orientations and as repositories of symbolic meanings. (fig. 2.15) The Japanese regarded and worshipped their mountains as the enshrined spirits of gods. In imagery of Edo these natural settings also play a large role. (fig. 2.16) In Japan cities had a fluid border, not a wall around them. During early Edo the high city was still adorned with natural abundance. In Europe, within city walls, one is cut off from nature, surrounded by artificially created urban space. In Japanese cities, the urban interior and the expansive natural landscape outside often interact on close and intimate terms. Since antiquity, Tokyo has had a number of ingenious mechanisms built into its urban environment that make possible a dialogue between human beings and the spaces they inhabit. The high city for instance knew many panoramas.

Classic Japanese urban planning uses north-south and east-west axes which correspond with the four gods. In Edo this technique was used to determine the location of the gates to the castle and of the main temples, but the urban planning in the low city deviated widely from this. One reason for this is the topography: urban planning tried to follow the lay of the land. The other reason is the location of the natural surroundings. Urban avenues were orientated towards Mount Fuji or Mount Tsukuba and tide-viewing hills (*shiomi-zaka*) were built into the city to be able to overlook Tokyo Bay. There was no spatial centre in the urban planning, but instead a centrifugal structure. The view served as a rest point. These two visions merged to determine the urban fabric of the low city.

Beside it’s role as a centre of economic activity and residential life, Edo transcended functionality and utility: it was a richly symbolic world consisting
chiefly of natural elements such as forest land and water, crowned with human activities. Symbols and threads of meaning (often linked to natural features) were integrated in everyday life and everyday surroundings. The organization of Edo was conceived on a scale that encompassed both its immediate surrounding topography and its wider natural environment. Distant vistas were decisively important elements in the urban planning, and made for a spectacular sense of scale.  

Edo’s interior spaces were completely different. Divided into a network of multi-layered units whose scale was more refined and more human as they grew closer to the daily lives of its inhabitants, they had a complicated spatial arrangement. This complex structure was necessary first of all for the defence of the castle town, the seat of shogunal government. City space was partitioned both functionally and visually. There were several concentric moats circling the castle, and in the streets right-angled corners and staggered rectangular strips of land were intended to cut off the flow of traffic. Beside the strategic function, this lay-out was cause for the principle of separate and independent living for residents, and the distinct ways of life for various city districts that accompany it, particularly in the low city. In the delta area canals and moats constructed primarily for defensive purposes formed island like divisions. Instead of the European plaza with it’s political character, Edo was sprinkled with numerous minute backstreet open spaces. These micro-spaces escaped the eye of the Shogun, and relied on self-government. They were a foundation of stable society, through the consolidation of innumerable communities at the lower end of society: Japanese society reflected in urban form.

Edo was all about the distant and the close-up. It took into account the city as a whole (grand scale) and city life (small scale). This may sound logical, and seems to be the case in all cities, but if you think about European urban planning it is mostly about architecture working together with the urban fabric. This means that it is mainly concerned with a limited scale, somewhere in between the grand and the small. Edo is about the city working together with nature, and the human
activity in the city. It does not concern itself so much with the relation between architecture and the urban fabric. It works on a much higher and on a much smaller level. In the next chapter we will look deeper into the differences between European and Japanese urban planning as Western influences occur in Japan.

**Sacred Green Space**

In the West, an insistence on water and green space has been a feature of city planning since the beginning of the 19th century. In Japan such ideas have come to attract attention only recently. But in contrast to the West, Japanese cities have from the outset contained or been in close proximity to water and greenery. The development of Edo, one of the few cities in the world of the seventeenth century with a population of more than a million, is quite inconceivable without water and green space. We need then to take up the question of the water and green space in a context separate from that of modern city planning in the west: we need to be aware that these elements were intimately linked to the formation of ‘place’ as a topos in Japanese cities and regions, and that they were deeply related to human life and culture there. Japanese urban spaces have been organized with an intimate relationship to nature and topography, and the residents’ perception of their physical base enriched their image of the city.36

Temple and shrine areas (*jisjachi*) made up fifteen per cent of Edo. At temples Buddhism is practised, at shrines Shintoism.37 Most people in Japan practise both faiths. Before the western notion of the man-made park became common in Japan, the temple and shrine gardens fulfilled this function. They provided people with access to large public spaces filled with plants and mature trees and were places for large crowds to congregate, for festivals to be held. (fig. 2.17) The commoner districts beneath tended to develop into bustling centres of popular amusement and commerce. They differed from western parks in that they were symbolic of the sacred places in the mountains, and were therefore primarily of religious significance. Western parks are secular, and a symbol of the man made pastoral landscape. The temple and shrine gardens were privately taken care off. The gardens were private, religious space. As the city grew in the next centuries, and the building of temples and shrines could not keep up, a shortage of green space occurred.38 Since then the environment of these religious places has
changed radically. Nowadays temples and shrines are often surrounded by high-rise and busy streets.\textsuperscript{39}

The placement of the sacred places was very important in Edo. There were three great protective temples: Sensoji in Asakusa, Toeisan Kan’eiji in Ueno and Zōjoji in Shiba. They were situated according to Taoist precepts, to insure a good flow of \textit{chi}, positive energy, especially around the castle. Ueno was the demon’s gate and Shiba protected the southwestern quarter. Other religious spaces were created on outskirts of the city or fringes in the city. Removed from daily life and situated in places carefully chosen for their sacred, otherworldly image.\textsuperscript{40} The city was surrounded with temples and shrines. In Europe the city broke through city walls to grow, it had a hard shell. In Edo the temples made for a soft shell around the city. Temples and shrines were moved with the expansion of the city. Their distribution within the city of Edo did not simply give physical form to the metropolitan areas. It also intimately tied to people’s image of the city, and helped to form a structure of meaning. Edo was structured according to meaning. The Japanese liked to play a game: Meisho-sugoroku, parcheesi of noted places. The city was conceived as a single cosmos whose famous places were tied together by threads of symbolic meaning. Japanese cities were developed as accumulations of topoi with expressions of memory and meaning and the residents always strove to create an environment imbued with the personality of place.\textsuperscript{41} The location of the temples and shrines on the edge of the city and their function as a public park gave rise to urban growth and amusement centres near the sacred places. This tradition of amusement on the edge of the city was still visible in the 1980s, when American style amusement parks were built at the end of the train lines, all around the border of Tokyo. After the Great Meireki Fire (1657) the temples were placed along major highways in large temple districts at the edge of suburban areas.\textsuperscript{42} You can still see such a district in modern day Yanaka, were some streets are lined with only temples.
Fig. 2.18 - Map of Tokyo (1891)
The end of Edo

By the eighteenth century the problems and contradictions of the shogunal system came to surface. Edo was in the midst of development and sprawl without the clear plans of the earlier stage of Tokugawa. The residences from this period show no trace of planning and were on less favourable sites. The city became more and more crowded. The Tokugawa shogunate lasted until 1867, when Tokugawa Yohinobu resigned as shogun and abdicated his authority to Emperor Meiji. Edo's name was changed to Tokyo when it became the imperial capital in 1868.43
2.3 Tokyo before the Pacific War

In 1876 the Tokugawa era ended. Japan’s self-imposed isolation from the world and technological stagnation produced internal stresses, poverty among samurai, heavy taxation on peasantry, and increasing wealth among merchants. There was unrest in the country and threat from overseas. The country had a shock of renewed contact with the west. In 1853 Commodore Perry sailed from America to Japan in his ‘black ships’ and urged Japan to open up to the west. The immediate source of the following Meiji restoration was the victory of the rebellious south-western provinces Satsuma, Choshu and Tosa over the Bakufu forces. But the change should be understood in a larger context, summed up in the Japanese phrase ‘troubles at home, dangers from abroad' (naiyu gaikan).

After the Tokugawa period emperor Meiji rose to power: the chain of events that followed is known as the Meiji restoration. The restoration brought fundamental changes to all aspects of Japanese society, after three centuries of Tokugawa social and political order. The old class system was abolished, and the Japanese now had guaranteed freedom of residence, occupation and religion. The feudal era was closed of, and instead a modern highly centralized organisation set in place. During the Meiji restoration the people of Japan were taught a sense of nationalism through centralization, education and enlightenment, to replace their identification with feudal leaders with that of a people of one country. There was little struggle and violence in the process of gaining consensus on the need for centralization and sacrifices to reach national prosperity and strength. The motive for all this was national self-protection, and a fear of loss of sovereignty to the western powers. Exposure to the western military power and industrial technology quickly persuaded the Meiji elite of the superiority of western science and the need to learn from the west. Civilization and enlightenment became an important part of the restoration. Members of former daimyo families remained prominent in government and society, and in some cases continue to remain prominent to the present day. Tokyo made the
shift from political centre of the Bakufu system to the capital of a modern state. Japan opened up towards the west, and wanted to learn in order to become equal to the great powers in the world. The military and industrial capacity of the country was developed. But there was a much wider range of western influence.\textsuperscript{47}

**The Meiji restoration: Modernization through imitation of the West (1870–1900)**

**New population**
The Meiji restoration meant the loss of the daimyo and Hatamoto population. First this was cause for devastation and exhaustion of the city, but before long the aristocrats and capitalists: the new power of Meiji, moved in to establish their own mansions. Tokyo changed its function and meaning to suit the new age. The Meiji reconstruction was a ‘soft’ reconstruction.\textsuperscript{48} Tokyo inherited castle town Edo with mainly undisturbed residential areas. Shogunal retainer establishments became the homes of aristocrats, high government officials and the bourgeoisie. Daimyo establishments were reverted to the central government and converted into public facilities, or turned into residencies for Kyoto court nobles or high officials. Or the former owners returned, now with a new aristocratic title.\textsuperscript{49} Lower class warrior’s homes were now home to the salaried workers of the middle class. Commoner’s quarters became commercial districts where merchants and artisans sold their goods. Factory workers and low wage white-collar workers made their home in the back streets. At the entrance to the alley a wooden wicket was placed - clearly demarcating the public (street) from the semi-public (alley). The physical framework of neighbourhoods and the lot divisions remained undisturbed, and often there was also a direct continuity in cultural norms.\textsuperscript{50}

**Western influences**
Japanese scholars went abroad for research and foreign advisors were employed in Japan. The Japanese picked and chose the best of Europe in different areas of development: expertise from Britain for its industrial, rail and naval development, Prussia for its military development, France for its
centralized police and America for its agricultural development. Western thought that fitted well with existing Japanese values successfully took root, while others did not survive. Ambition, hard work, value of education and utility of science did stick. The liberal western tradition of natural rights of humans, the freedom of the individual and rights of women, did not.51

Meiji city planners saw Paris as their great example. They admired the magnificent boulevards and public structures in the city that had recently been renovated by Haussmann. Japanese cities seemed inadequate compared to European urban planning. They were behind in road paving and broadening. New streets were fashioned after European examples. As an effort to transform the pre modern castle town into a modern capital the curved and box shaped streets gave way to a new road system that ensured smooth flow of traffic between in and outside of the city. The wooden gates/partitions that were so typical of Edo were torn down.52

Tokyo was the place to impress western visitors. This is where they arrived when they visited the country. In 1872 a fire destroyed Ginza, a neighbourhood close to the castle that was very visible on arrival in Tokyo. At this time it was possible to make fast decisions due to lack of bureaucracy and...
the absence of a settled government. There was no city planning law yet, and no ministry. A small group of military leaders was in control. They decided to widen the streets in Ginza, and replace the old wooden buildings with brick buildings. (fig. 2.19) Ginza also knew the first instance of sidewalks in Japan. The project was dubbed Ginza brick town (Ginza Renga Gai) and was designed by Thomas Waters, an English engineer. He implemented gas lighting, roadside trees and European flavour into the neighbourhood. The inspiration for Ginza Brick Town was Regent Street in London.53

Larger problems of the whole urban area were tackled in a different way. In 1888 the first city planning law was created: the Tokyo City Improvement Ordinance (Tokyo Shiku Kaisei Jorei) (TCIO). Tokyo was already such a large city during Tokugawa, and with the termination of the residence system and departure of the daimyo had lost a great deal of its population, and much of its economic base. It did not regain its population of the 1850s until about 1890, and did not expand much beyond its Edo boundaries for yet another 15 years. This meant there was no need for planning for Tokyo’s urban expansion. The focus of the TCIO was on the improvement of the existing built up area.54

In Europe facades of mansions in urban areas were proudly facing public squares. They had no gates or private gardens, like those in the countryside. In Edo warriors had established grand residences surrounded by a private garden, a tradition that was continued during Meiji, and caused a non-urban image to European eyes.55

After the Meiji restoration the Japanese started building towers. They were taking in western culture first by imitating parts, later (during Taisho) focused on the whole. It was a moderate, self-motivated process of change. The focus during Meiji was mainly on the building, not on the ground. Towers were built as a symbol of enlightenment, and became important landmarks. The waterside was a favourite place to build these buildings, because there was more space, which made for a bigger impact. Western and Japanese style were combined in the eclectic architecture, but still the facades had gates around them.56

The perspective of the city changed. In Edo vistas there were no buildings that stood out within the complex environment of canals, bays, hills, groves
Fig. 2.21 - Map of the destruction caused by the Kanto quake
Fig. 2.22 - Picture of Sumida Park when it was just opened
and mountains. It was a unified world in which buildings were just one part of the harmonious whole. During Meiji buildings became landmarks, an alternative to shrines, temples, and the bay and river front. Architecture itself became the object of affection, and important in visual representations, and drew the attention away from the context. (fig. 2.20) In Europe, however, this contextualization was there, architecture and urban fabric had formed a close relationship since the renaissance. The Japanese appropriated only the buildings at first. During Taisho and Showa more attention was paid to the urban fabric.57

The changes made during Meiji have not radically denied Edo. Narrow streets have been widened but on a whole the new city was developed on top of the old structure. The individual lots changed greatly in function, but less so in form.58 The structure of the city remained the same during Meiji, until Taisho, with clear signs of modernization to come.

Taisho and Showa: The Kanto earthquake and the Japanese interpretation of the West (1912-1940)

Japan had established itself as a military power in the first Sino-Japanese (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), gaining a colony in Taiwan, Manchuria and control over the Korean peninsula. They fought in the First World War on the side of Britain. This war generated great industrialization in Japan, and the focus on industry and economy grew ever stronger. Japan was not so far behind the late European industrial developers at that moment in history.59

The industrialization fostered an influx of population to the cities and the formation of the working class and the masses in general. A new democratic way of thinking came into being. The emperor Taisho was weak of health, which caused the power to move from the elder statesmen to the National Diet, whose members were democratically chosen.60
Urban growth and the emergence of Contemporary Urban Life

Rapid advance of urbanisation brought urban density, inferior housing areas and economic and housing distress. People speculated with the jump in land prices. Tokyo was suffering from worsening housing conditions and increasing densities in poor areas, that started to resemble slums. This gave rise to protests, political awareness and a growth of the middle class in the Taisho era. A group of experts and city administrators were trying to overcome these problems. In 1919 the City Planning and Urban Buildings Laws were created. At this time Tokyo was experiencing rapid urban and industrial growth, which had to be regulated. The CPUBL worked with a land zoning system. The goal was to shape urban growth with planned growth in the urban fringe and redevelopment of existing city areas. Plans were made on the basis of a great belief in spatial determinism.

During the twenties the economic growth caused a boom in consumption, giving popularity to the word culture. Japan saw the emergence of contemporary urban life. Concerns about city and region from the general public and professionals regarded urban functionality and practicality, but besides this also urban beauty and comfort: social livelihood. Art, film, music, fashion, automobiles, cosmetics were up and coming in the city. This also marked the beginning of billboard architecture in Tokyo, very visible then and now. The technical vocabulary of today’s city planning appeared in the twenties.

Tokyo transformed from a city focused on water into a city of land during the Taisho period. Human activity used to be focused on the waterfront. Next to the Daimyo residences in the High city the waterfronts in the low city were most loved for their superb natural environment, teahouses and restaurants, but also warehouses and docks. But with the economic growth more and more factories were built on the waterside, and the water grew polluted. Many waterways were filled in, which had a great impact on the character of the city. Still the waterfront remained an important part of the low city, and the remaining canals didn’t completely lose their character. Beside the disappearance of many of the waterways the low city changed drastically as a result of large-scale urban renovations: ward boundaries were redrawn, and lot demarcations adjusted.
Most important in the urban planning was the traffic flow and fire prevention. Backstreets completely disappeared from the centre of the city. Rikshas were replaced by cars, which made good roads increasingly important. Tokyo’s transformation to a city of land took place with the development of the railroad, but ironically many important stations were built along the water, such as Shinbashi.  

**The Kanto earthquake**

In 1923 Tokyo was hit by the Kanto earthquake. Almost all dense commoners areas were destroyed by fire, and of the low city almost nothing remained. The high city was better off, with a few large fires. However, 44 per cent of the urban area of Tokyo was destroyed, and 73.8 per cent of households affected. (fig. 2.21) 140,000 people were killed or missing. Kanto devastated the low city and wiped the Edo charm from the area along the water and the urban spaces and entertainment centres went in decline. The earthquake was both a drama and a golden opportunity to restructure Tokyo into a modern city.

Water transport remained important. Some canals that were too shallow were filled in, but the trend leaned towards expansion and improvement of the canals. Waterbuses were implemented: public transport over water. The waterways still played a powerful role in the urban environment, but a different role and with a different meaning. The canals and their waterfronts were westernized. They were no longer a natural phenomenon encompassing human existence with intimate ties to cosmology, as the inhabitants of Edo saw them. They were no longer delights of ludic space. Now the canals were an object of beauty, a thing to be looked at. Waterside space was re-evaluated, inspired by European and American city thinking. The waterside was used to create a new kind of urban beauty and attractive urban space. On the Sumida river a park was laid out, Sumida Park, with a boulevard running along the river lined with cherry blossom trees. (fig. 2.22)

Part of the earthquake recovery program was the increase of good livelihood in the city. The creation of parks on the watersides was part of this as was the planting of trees lining streets and plazas. On a smaller residential scale vest
pocket parks were an important tool and goal. They were created at 52 locations in the low city, often next to elementary schools. They effectively secured open space in heavily built-up areas and could function as emergency evacuation centres or an extension of the playground. Between thirty and forty per cent of the space was reserved for planted areas and flowers, ten per cent for a children’s playground, and the rest functioned as a plaza and communal place for events. The vest pocket park was an idea from the United States and should be equipped with facilities for education, recreation and social intercourse and used in development of citizens political conscience and urban spirit. This idea is exemplary for the idealistic atmosphere of thought in the period of the Taisho democracy. Common yards for local residents and private gardens were seen less and less. With the vest pocket parks traditional collective space was replaced by modern designed collective space. The modernist city planning entailed a fundamental rejection of the past during this time.67

The backstreet spaces of the low city were home to the most ordinary people until the Kanto earthquake. After the quake they were considered an unsanitary fire hazard. Lot adjustments were carried out for disaster prevention: narrow streets were widened, new ones laid out, row houses and rear alleys removed, under protests from dwellers. The elimination of ‘interior space’ forced the everyday life onto the main avenues of the low city. Residents laundry and potted plants were put out in the street, which caused for a unique low city atmosphere. Dwellers privatised the open space in this way, which researchers also call ‘alleyization’.68

With the evolution of a city of water to a city of land during Taisho and Showa the open spaces at crossroads became the new faces of the city. These intersections became popular places to experiment with architecture. There was a shift of focus from designing just the building to also taking into account the surroundings. Lots were more and more related to the entire street, designed as a whole. The Japanese started to focus on the bigger picture in architectural planning. European examples were used in a compressed/condensed form. After the Kanto earthquake streets were widened and some street corners cut off, so the intersections became octagonal open spaces in the urban fabric. Radial and diagonal lines were introduced in Tokyo for the creation of urban beauty in
the European tradition. But they were only used on the small scale of the plot or street corner, not in the manner of the great Haussmann breakthroughs.\textsuperscript{69} The speed and scale of traffic changed from pedestrians to rikshas to horse cars and then cars. Bridges, intersections and train station plazas were mobile, fluid, open spaces. They were no traditional western central stage for urban life. The idea of the western plaza was very much alive after the Kanto earthquake, as a means of ‘nation building’ but the envisioned plazas remained traffic squares. Department stores with ‘flashy’ architecture began to move into the central part of the city (in Marunouchi and Ginza).\textsuperscript{70} Residents moved from the centre of the city to the western suburbs, among others influenced by Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City. This exodus to suburbia caused the city centre to hollow out.\textsuperscript{71}

**The legacy of Meiji, Taisho and Showa**

During Meiji, Taisho and Showa Tokyo modelled itself on western cities. It was a process of imitative trial and error, interpretations and reinterpretations. Western urban planning methods and architectural principles were gradually incorporated into the sturdily composed context of Edo, producing the cityscapes and spaces of Tokyo. Jinnai warns us: ‘If we use the modern cities of the west as our criteria for judging modern Tokyo, we will never be able to lay hold of its distinctive features or its charm.’\textsuperscript{72} Still he is ruthless in his judgement of modern Tokyo: The distant and the close-up view have left, and there is only midrange now. There are no details in architecture, it is just flashiness, uniform without complexity.\textsuperscript{73} On the other hand Arie Graafland writes that the fundamental nature of the city didn’t change. Tokyo was and is still a collection of parts with no centre: a mosaic, a kaleidoscope. There was no remodelling that ignored the terrain or the existing urban structure. Individual places became little worlds in which modernization was performed, and an accumulation of individuals or groups’ activities made the city. New values were pursued within the confinement of individual lots. Locality is the magic word in Tokyo. And urban life still takes place in the backstreet, not in the squares or on the boulevards.\textsuperscript{74}
From the top:

Fig. 2.23 - Aerial picture of the Tokyo bombings
Fig. 2.24 - Map of the damage done by the Tokyo bombings
Fig. 2.25 - Tokyo after the bombings of spring 1945. Looking north with Sumida River on the right.
During the first half of the Showa period Japan was militarising quickly. The parliamentary government of Taisho was not rooted deep enough to withstand the economic and political pressures of the thirties. In 1926 the new emperor came to reign and the Showa period begun. The nationalism that had been very useful to keep the country together after the fall of the Tokugawa Bakuhans developed further into an ultra nationalism. During Showa Japan moved into political totalitarianism and eventually fascism. In 1937 Japan invaded China and in the Second World War (or Pacific War as the Japanese call it) Japan allied with Germany and Italy. After many wins, the Japanese were halted, and America began its ‘Island Hopping’. In 1945 the bombings of Tokyo began.\textsuperscript{75}
2.4 Tokyo after the Pacific War

In the spring of 1945 America bombed Tokyo in a series of air raids. The night of March 9th the worst destruction took place. Almost the entire area of the four wards east of Sumida River was wiped out, and 70 to 80 thousand people died. On April 4th half of the old high city was destroyed, and in May the empirical palace was destroyed. The Americans made more than four thousand flights over Tokyo. The bombings resulted in the destruction of 40 per cent of the city, covering 16,000 hectares and 770,000 homes, leaving no one unaffected. (fig.2.23-2.25)  

In May 1945 the Germans surrendered. Early in August came the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Russia invaded Manchuria and Korea. On August 15, for the first time ever, the Japanese emperor made a radio broadcast, in which he announced the acceptance of the Potsdam declaration. General Douglas MacArthur set up headquarters in Tokyo and the official occupation of Tokyo began on September 8th. 

The destruction was the foundation on which modern Tokyo was built, both on the surface, and below it. This destruction was nothing new to Tokyo. Natural disasters had levelled the city before. Physical destructions did not spell the end of Tokyo’s role as a metropolis. The loss of built structures through a natural disaster or warfare can mean the loss of people and the loss of accumulated resources and reserves. This does not mean, however, that a city need necessarily to be rebuilt from scratch and on a new pattern. Instead it is rebuilt and repaired. The skeleton of the city still remained.

Reconstruction and rapid economic growth

After the destruction roads, railways and electricity networks were restored, exactly replicating the infrastructure that was there before. Only when this was done, streets were widened and straightened and new networks of subways and utilities were installed in response to the increases in population and the rapidly expanding economy in the fifties and sixties. Not much is old in Tokyo, but the street pattern is.
A reconstruction plan for Tokyo was made by Ishikawa Hideaki. The aim of this plan was the development of Tokyo as a political, economic and cultural centre. It focused on the restriction of growth and was strongly coloured by idealism. The plan entailed a radical restructuring of the metropolitan area; the bombings were an opportunity to push the greenbelt and green corridors deep into the central city area. Tokyo would be subdivided into specialized sub cities with populations of 200,000 to 300,000. These sub cities would be surrounded by greenery in the shape of radial parkways, greenbelts and green corridors, forming 43 per cent of the city area. In the inner city as parks and broad boulevards, on the urban fringe as farmlands. Ishikawa planned to keep the population on the 3.5 million of 45, not allowing it to grow back to the 6.5 million of 1940. For this reason a satellite town was planned on the Kanto plain.80

The destroyed city was seen as a chance to start afresh, to start from first principles, and a new opportunity to construct the ideal city. There was a fear of overgrown metropolitan areas (like in Europe). The Ishikawa plan was not implemented for different reasons,. Firstly there was a shortage of funds. The land that needed to be purchased for green structures made for a staggering sum.81 Secondly the population grew; a lot of newcomers came to the city. And lastly the GHQ (general headquarters) of the allied forces did not find it suitable, and only allowed to fill in burned out areas. There was no space for general guidelines for a master plan for Tokyo.82

The idealism of the plan and the reaction of the allied forces lead to the failure of its implementation. Of the 20,000 hectares of land readjustment that was planned in the end only 1,652 was carried out.83 The reconstruction after the war was weak in comparison with that after the Kanto earthquake. Tokyo was rebuilt in an ad hoc manner, with only small areas configured according to the master plan.84

The old Edo Daimyo residences had been used as military facilities in the Pacific War, and afterwards were converted to public use or hotels. This contributed to the creation of a green environment in the centre of Tokyo, with public parks.85 The core of the city remained home to the most dominant (economic) forces.
Fig. 2.26 - Googlemaps screenshot of Nihonbashi seen from the air. The elevated highways almost entirely cover the water beneath.

Fig. 2.27 - Googlemaps screenshot of Nihonbashi from the ground.
There was a prevalence of the business and trade sector in the area, especially in Marunouchi: the central business district. Another important party were governmental organisations and embassies. During the centralized growth of Japan’s economy following the Pacific War, many large firms moved their headquarters from cities such as Osaka and Kyoto to Tokyo, in an attempt to take advantage of better access to the government. It was a period focused on functionality and economy, with little attention for the cultural history of the city. The city centre hollowed out, with only businesses left there.

In the 1950s and 1960s rapid economic growth was the top priority of the government. All resources were put behind this strategy and companies were granted a lot of freedom to reach this goal. The expanding economy raised everyone’s standard of living. Japan went through a period of rapid urbanization. The population and productive capacity concentrated in the great metropolitan regions of the pacific coast, and peripheral areas depopulated. This is how the Pacific belt or Tokaido megalopolis was formed. Industries here were already established before the war and the shift from agricultural to industrial society had already started: 38 per cent of the population lived in urban areas. Post war industrialization however, dwarfs pre war. The 1950 Korean War, from which Japan gained massive profits, fuelled this process. Production reached and passed pre-war levels quickly, and a period of economic prosperity begun.

Most important in urban planning in the fifties was the industrial use. Living conditions were deemed less important. A maximum amount of resources was used for industrial development, and the living environment was dependent on what was leftover. Urban development policies focused primarily on infrastructure. Housing supply was left to the private sector. With this little happening form the government the informal construction of houses and the black market filled in the empty spaces and made room for the rapid return of the population to the area. Only five years after the end of the war the population had grown from 2,780,000 to 5,390,000, almost doubling in size. Before the expansion into the suburbs, population growth occurred in the 23 inner wards where apartment buildings were built. In the west growth followed the train lines.
Fig. 2.28 - The Palace gardens in the city centre of Tokyo. During the bubble economy these grounds were worth 350 times more than the same amount of land in Manhattan.

Fig. 2.29 - Image of Mount Fuji on high-rise that blocks the view of Mount Fuji.
This period was the prelude to several decades of Tokyo’s suburbanization. The outer circles of the city more and more absorbed the increased population.\textsuperscript{90}

In sum, while Tokyo was rebuilt surprisingly quickly after the war, and once again became a densely populated, vital and important city, it is clear that reconstruction did not take place following a carefully thought out plan. The city was mainly rebuilt by private property owners, which lead to visual chaos in the contemporary huge city. In the fifties people drew to the city, in the sixties this caused urban sprawl and massive suburbanisation.\textsuperscript{91}

Shortly after the end of the occupation Tokyo was selected to host the summer Olympics in 1964. This was a chance to build much needed infrastructure. Expressways, monorail, subways were built. The rapid growth of the fifties had caused great congestion in central Tokyo, where few of the planned roads after the war had been built, and the infrastructure relied on that built after the quake in the twenties. In 1962 the subway expanded form 3 to 8 lines.\textsuperscript{92} Shibuya, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro developed into important centres as stations on the Yamanote loop of the subway. From here the city branched (and still branches) out.\textsuperscript{93}

An inner city elevated expressway system of 31,7 km was realised for the Olympics. Because of a lack of space and high land prices they were often built above canals, and forever changed Tokyo’s relationship with its roots in water transport. Large parts of the canal network were filled in. What might have been one of Tokyo’s greatest assets was transformed in dark noisy bits of water. Even at Nihonbashi, which was the centre of the old Edo, from which all distances were measured, and which was constructed with a view of the castle with mount Fuji behind it. (fig. 2.26 & 2.27) The planning was focused on economy and technology and had no eye for the historic urban fabric.\textsuperscript{94}

Because the rapid economic and industrial growth was focussed on an area the size of one per cent of the nation a hyper-dense community formed, not
found anywhere else in the world. The tempo of social and economic change was greater here than anywhere else. This soon gave rise to environmental problems: urban deterioration, environmental pollution, stagnant agriculture and spiritual frustration amidst material affluence. In the seventies a beginning was made in solving these environmental problems. There was a growth of citizens’ movements, and growing protests. It was an optimistic time with more attention to improvement of the urban environment and respect for citizens from progressive local governments. Rapid growth came to a halt with changing exchange rates and soaring oil prices. The fixed exchange rate of the dollar with other currencies that was implemented after the war was stopped. The yen had been worth very little, to help encourage built the economy. That had succeeded so was no longer necessary. Japan was in a more insecure position again, because of its dependence on import of raw materials and foreign markets for economic health. In 1970 Japan was the second largest economy in the world, after the US. More growth would not have been possible either way, because it would cost too much energy. The desire for more growth did however start the building of nuclear power plants, and more space for industrial development was made by landfills. So planning was still determined by the rapid economic growth, as earlier plans were constantly outperformed. There was no effective system for securing land for public use, such as parks and roads.

Improved building technology had made it possible to built higher high rise that was earthquake proof. Before 1968 the height limit was 30 meters, 10 meters in residential areas. This rule was abolished entirely. Now the height was determined by the width of street and slant plane restrictions. But it allowed for much greater building heights. Consequently protests occurred for sunshine rights. Japanese houses are almost always oriented to face the south and blocking of sunlight means a huge drop in the quality of life. Many cases were won against builders and the government. The seventies as a whole knew a more active involvement of civil society actors in processes of urban change.
The bubble economy and the lost decade(s)

In the eighties Japan was experiencing a steady economic growth, greater than other countries at that time. Industries shifted from the old grow sectors of heavy and chemical industries to new growth sectors of precision machinery, electronics, automobiles and finance. Tokyo was one of the financial capitals in the world. The Japanese economy changed from one that was internally focussed to one that was linked into the global capital and finance markets. Tokyo became one of the command and control centres of the world economy, and one of the top three of global cities, along with New York and London. Tokyo cemented its dominance in all areas of national life: government, corporate decision-making, finance capital, international trade, education and media production.

In urban planning this period is characterised by deregulation and greater freedom for urban projects. Urban development answered to the free market, and was based on a pro-business ideology. Inner city reconstruction was a priority, making areas fire and earthquake proof by creating disaster prevention zones and pocket parks. There was more and more room for input from residents and the focus was on local planning and local environmental improvement. Zoning regulations were loosened to allow more intense development, which made increasingly bigger building volumes possible. The land prices made a staggering climb and there was great confidence in the economy’s invincibility. This resulted in some excessive buildings and bigger than life plans.

In 1990 the bubble burst. Japan was thrown into a deep economic crisis, giving the decade from 1991 to 2001 the title of the ‘lost decade’. For city planning this had diverse impacts. There was little money for projects and increasing pressure for better quality of life in urban areas. The period saw a growth of voluntary activity, non-profit, non-governmental organizations and citizens movements directed at environmental improvement. So-called Machizukuri projects gave citizens a role in urban development with people focused (not economy focused) goals, aiming for improved quality of life in urban residential environments. As city growth slowed down, a call was heard for the return of dwelling in the city. The bubble left vacant city lots and unfinished expensive buildings. The building of high-rise condominiums became possible again in the city. Down town
developments occurred as land prices dropped and new housing units were affordable again. Following the economy focused urban development preceding this period the nineties knew a more citizen oriented city development.

On the urban fringe new towns were built, and suburbia kept on growing. These new urban land developments always started with the clearance of all vegetation and the creation of level plots. All natural features of the place were destroyed.\textsuperscript{104}

**Present-day Tokyo**

Right now Tokyo is the most populous city in the world, and arguably the largest. With Tokyo, the modern metropolis seems to have reached its sprawl-size maximum. The average commute time, with public transport, in Tokyo is approximately two hours. As a consequence, the number of individual movements through Tokyo is overwhelming. Shinjuku-eki, the world’s busiest train station, accommodates an excess of 3.5 million travellers per day. Tokyo's modern urban texture is not directly interwoven with the remnants of humble origins or an even more glorious past. There are few architectural reminders that can evoke historical sentimentalism. Through countless upheavals of war, calamity and development in overdrive, the city’s skyline changes all the time. The average age of a building in Tokyo is 26 years.\textsuperscript{105} Because of increasingly high inheritance taxes it has become nearly impossible to keep a large lot in a good neighbourhood. Plots are often subdivided, resulting in increasingly smaller houses, or sold to real estate companies, who tend to build apartment buildings in its place. Either way, existing structures are torn down.

History in Tokyo can be found in the ground, the map of the city. Modern Tokyo has preserved its historical memory amid many changes in its parts, and the city as a result seems to lack overall logical structure. The European way of arranging a city since the Meiji restoration did not result in nice places in Japan. In Tokyo the power still seems to lie in the disorderly, the thriving small spaces.\textsuperscript{106} The sense of scale that was so important in the Tokugawa era is lost due to the built of high-rise and elevated highways and railways. Gradually
Mount Fuji and the tides in Tokyo Bay have disappeared from the urban scenery. (fig. 2.29) Historic vistas and greenery have been lost over time.\textsuperscript{107} Tokyo is a collection of places, a kaleidoscope of neighbourhoods that have great self-reliance since Edo, and up to this day.
3. http://www.hokusaionline.co.uk/code/edo_period_history.html
11. Idem, 16.
12. Idem, 22.
18. Idem, 49.
27. Idem, 62.
28. Idem, 74-76.
29. Idem, 78.
31. Idem, 56.
32. Idem, 120.
33 Idem, 122.
34 Graafland, *The socius of architecture*, 122.
buddhist-religious-medley/#.U9IuYYCSxVo
40 Idem, 86.
41 Idem, 15-18.
42 Idem, 18.
43 Idem, 59.
44 http://www.humanities360.com/index.php/causes-and-consequences-of-
the-meiji-restoration-in-japan-26359/
45 http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/373305/Meiji-Restoration
47 http://www.humanities360.com/index.php/causes-and-consequences-of-
the-meiji-restoration-in-japan-26359/
49 Idem, 33-34.
56 Idem, 165.
57 Idem, 140-142.
58 Idem, 21.
60 Idem, 93.
64 Idem, 67.
65 Idem, 174.
66 Idem, 185.
67 Idem, 199.
68 Idem, 129.
69 Idem, 192.
70 Idem, 148-158.
71 Idem, 197.
72 Idem, 39.
73 Idem, 39.
74 Graafland, *The socius of architecture*, 159.
75 http://www.shikokuhenrotrail.com/japanhistory/showahistory.html
76 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 50.
77 Seidensticker, *Tokyo Rising: The City since the Great Earthquake*, 145-146.
78 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 50-51.
79 Seidensticker, *Tokyo Rising: The City since the Great Earthquake*, 148-149.
80 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 53.
82 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 53.
83 Idem, 54.
86 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 51.
89 Idem, 184.
90 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 54.
91 Idem, 56.
93 Hein, *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945*, 52.
95 Idem, 198.
96 Idem, 214.
97 Idem, 225.
98 Idem, 227-231.
99 Idem, 255.
100 Sassen, *The Global City*.
102 Idem, 273-277.
103 Idem, 289-300.
104 Idem, 326-329.
106 Graafland, *The socius of architecture*, 133.
Chapter three
Home
Notions of home in Japan
3.1 Home in Tokyo

Home in the Japanese city

As we have seen in the previous chapter Tokyo has a history of regenerating after disasters. The city has been rebuild in an effective and unofficial way. The average lifespan of a building in Tokyo is 26 years. This means that Tokyo changes constantly, but according to many scholars not in such a matter that the atmosphere is lost. One could say Tokyo is host to the paradoxical phenomenon of renewing the ancient.¹

Joris Berkhout explores this intangible quality of the city in his essay *The mythic field* (2013), which I will discuss in this paragraph. Berkhout emphasizes the lack of an apparent structure and frame of reference in the urban fabric of Tokyo. The city is made of many parts, but is not a whole. The lack of hierarchy makes the city confusing and difficult to understand. He claims that the structure of Tokyo is not to be found in its physical form, but in another layer, ‘imperceptible but powerful’, which defines the city. This layer is based on symbolic meaning: ‘a mythic field, providing coherence to a fractured and ever changing urban landscape.’ The elements that make up this layer are symbolic: traditions and rituals, local foods, signs of konbini’s and shops, as well as the omnipresent vending machines. Other examples are the changing of the seasons and the distant mountains that were once visible from the city now mainly present as symbols in the mind of the Tokyoites. Berkhout goes on to discuss the value Japanese culture puts on traditions and rituals over built structures. Communal identity is not formed by buildings or urbanism, and instead monumentality is to be found in dynamic processes, forming a symbolic layer covering the city. This mythic field reinforces the identity of the Tokyoites as people categorize themselves and their surroundings based on it, ‘and it is this layer that makes Japanese space undeniably Japanese.'² The presence of the mythic field means that, despite a lack of urban structure and an ever-changing
An example of this attitude is found in the account of Augustin Berque of the shrine at Ise, which is rebuilt every twenty years. Berque writes: ‘[…] at Ise, we are in the presence not of a ‘finite object,’ but of an ‘infinite process’ (at least in theory); and this is merely another way of saying that what constitutes the heritage here is as much the subject (the participants in the rite) as it is the object (the temple).’ Another example is the tradition of erecting grand statues for kings and rulers in Europe. In Japan rulers did not have something build for them, but instead attempted to become a part of the mythic field. If they were successful they positioned themselves beyond time and matter. This dichotomy is also one of the subjects of Fumihiko Maki’s collection of essays: Nurturing Dreams. He distinguishes between cultures that built towers (Europe) and those who did not (Japan). He claims that in tower building societies it is common to define a center. In Japan no clear center exists. In its place is the concept of okusei (inwardness). This is the basis for the formation of space. ‘Important or treasured things tend to be kept hidden and are certainly not being showcased, which results in a ‘philosophy of inner space’. ‘
Fig. 3.2 - Stills from Tokyo Story

Look how big Tokyo is.

If we get lost.

We'd never find each other again.
Home in the megalopolis

The lack of a center is one of the causes for the dissociated and fragmented nature of Tokyo. Add to this the sheer size of the city and the vastness of the subway network that leaves you at a loss to your location in the city, and it becomes clear that Tokyo is a city that can easily make you feel lost. A big part of life takes place underground. Shinjuku train station processes 3.5 million travellers a day, making it the world’s busiest station. In the vicinity of the larger subway stations there are vast networks of underground streets, often lined with shops and restaurants. Meanwhile urban development overruns history, leaving few orientation marks in the urban fabric. What systems are at work to make people feel at home in a dense and dynamic megalopolis like Tokyo?

It is argued that the decentralized nature of the city provides for the city’s strength: the small scale. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Tokyo has always been decentralized in its character. During Edo the city was compartmentalized at night by closing the wooden gates separating neighborhoods and closing of important routes. Still today, small-scale residential areas have an autonomous character. They are vernacular in their architecture and home to low rise, detached homes, restaurants, shrines and temples. Neighbourhoods often resemble villages, in a physical and metaphysical sense. Tokyo’s 23 inner wards (ku) are divided into districts (machi), which are divided into units about the size of a city block (chome). Where western cities are structured by linear streets, in Japan cities consist of areas. The machi are the neighborhoods, and the chome home to an everyday community of familiar faces. Streets rarely have a name, whereas ku, machi and chome have always had a name. One of the important characteristics that make up the distinctive urban fabric of neighborhoods in Tokyo is the egg and shell pattern. This entails that low-rise residential areas (egg) are surrounded by a shell of high-rise buildings facing the larger streets on the edge of the chome. (fig. 3.3) These larger buildings protect the residential area from traffic and noise. This way Tokyo is, despite the more than 3 million cars registered in the city, a city of pedestrians. In the security offered by the egg and shell pattern
autonomous neighborhoods have a chance to bloom. They seem to form an indestructible fabric among the expressways and high-rises, where small streets are lined with bicycles, potted gardens and unsupervised umbrellas. However, the high land prices in Tokyo increase the pressure on this old urban fabric.\textsuperscript{12}

The small scale of neighborhoods is also one of the reasons Tokyo is one of the safest places in the world. In Japan crime levels are considerably lower than in other industrialized countries.\textsuperscript{13} The infrastructure is laid out in such a way that on every big intersection you can find a small \textit{koban} (police box) The omnipresence of \textit{konbini}'s (convenience stores) that are designated safe havens is another way of keeping the street safe. Apart from being a shop, they function as a crisis and community center, where everyone gathers in case of emergency. Women are advised to go into a \textit{konbini} when they think they are being followed.\textsuperscript{14}
3.2 Home and the house

Uchi and soto

An important duality in Japanese culture is *uchi* versus *soto*. These terms meaning inside and outside, are used in creating a sense of self, based on the community. The stress is on the word ‘us’ (*uchi*) in stead of the word ‘others’ (*soto*), and less so about the individual versus the rest of the world. *Uchi* connotes not the individual, but the closest group around the individual, the community. The key inside (*uchi*) group is the family. The word *uchi* is also transferred to broader groups, like neighbours, schoolmates, colleagues, and even national subjects. Individual security is derived from these groups, through identification with and subjugation to the interests and authority of members of one’s *uchi*.

Ozaki and Lewis explain the importance of the dichotomy: ‘The distinction between the inside and the outside is particular salient to Japanese people as it relates not only to physical spaces, but also to psychosocial values. That is, the inside is associated with purity, cleanliness, safety and intimacy (inside the group as well as inside a physical space), and the outside is associated with impurity, dirt, danger, and strangeness.’

The traditional Japanese house

Apart from the societal meaning of the word *uchi*, it also signifies the home itself. In the house you find physical markers of the *uchi-soto* dichotomy. The concepts show in the shape of boundaries to regulate the distinction between the two, and prescribe social rituals and the organization of space. Ozaki and Lewis go so far as to claim that spatial boundaries ‘are concrete manifestations of social classifications, which are internalized by people and experienced phenomenologically’. According to them this order is distinct from other
societies. In any case, traditional Japanese architecture consists of a transitory unit, where every unit serves a bridge between the foreground and the deeper interior.

The most obvious example is the genkan. (fig. 3.5) The genkan is an entrance vestibule, the first space you enter when you step through the front door. When you enter a Japanese home, you are expected to take off your shoes. The genkan is a spatial translation of the ritual of making sure dirt is not transported from outside to inside. Boundaries between outside and inside are apparent in European societies as well, in the shape of an entrance hall, to hang your coat, and possibly take off your shoes. However, in the Japanese house this hierarchy between inside and outside is expressed architecturally. The genkan is situated a step lower than the floors of the rest of the house. Nakagawa says that the continued significance of the genkan expresses a 'connectedness of the livingspace with nature, rather than to separate them like western entrances do.' This reflects a different consciousness of the home and spatial relations.

To get a feel for, and a clearer image of, the transitional spaces of the traditional Japanese house I will name a few examples. At the entrance a sill is fitted along the edge of the wooden raised floor, the agarikamachi. Nakagawa explains that this functions as a kekkai, a marker fixing the bounds of a sacred place, a locus of meaning. The ground floor is slightly elevated above street level (fig. 3.4). In the traditional home furniture is mobile, modular and fluid. Where in Europe walls divide different rooms, in the Japanese house partitions are more nuanced. Spaces are separated and defined by removable sliding doors and screens. These reed blinds (yoshizu) and sliding screens (fusuma and shoji) are moved and removed when the seasons change and the routines of life shift during the year. Different materials are used for the screens, varying in density and translucency. In this way it is possible to show the different levels of interconnectedness between spaces. Nakagawa tells of the ritual of opening a fusuma: 'Before opening a fusuma one announces ones presence, kneels alongside and places one hand on the screen; when one has opened the door a few inches, one moves the other hand to the edge of the frame and draws the door gently back. This way of opening a fusuma reflects an aesthetic of daily life, for one senses the presence of someone in the room beyond and adopts a more
formal posture accordingly.24

Japanese homes traditionally have no central corridor, which means you have to pass through other rooms to reach your destination. Scholars argue this caused a perception of the Japanese self as inseparable from the larger family unit.25 In the Japanese household everything is prescribed: how you enter the house, how you enter the room and where you sleep. In the traditional house there is little room for the family: the largest part of the house is reserved for entertaining. The male household entertains the guests in the southern part of the house, with a view on the garden. The darker northern part is home to the family.26

The modern Japanese house

During Meiji (1868-1912) systems and values of Tokugawa were replaced by and supplemented with new ones. The concept of the family for instance, was reinvented. In the period before, the terms ‘family’ and ‘household’ were very closely related to servants, concubines, apprentices etc. as part of the household.27 Now, the key objective was to replace the traditional patriarchal family unit (ie), that was based on filial piety, by a new type of family that is based on western concepts, such as conjugal love and the private individual.28

During Meiji the home was redefined as an intimate space set apart from society and focused on parents and children.29 The Japanese family, and with it the home, became more private. The conjugal family was most valued, and the extended family became of less importance. The conjugal family was given form as a nuclear family, with the mother as domestic manager and the father with the legal rights.30 With the reinvention of the family domestic spaces underwent a transformation. The demarcations in the home became more pronounced, clearly separating private family space from entertaining space. Before Meiji it was uncommon to eat together: the father as head of the household would eat first, then the children and lastly the mother. With the influence from the West it became an ideal to eat together as a family.
Fig. 3.4 (previous page) - Traditional interior of a Japanese home

Fig. 3.5 - Modern-day genkan
Another result was the growing popularity of western style rooms, which were combined with Japanese style rooms in the same house. In line with the trend to incorporate English terms into the Japanese language, living quarters were called *ribingu rumu* or *famiri rumu*.\(^{31}\)

After World War II the ideal post war home was formulated based on the idea of a happy family: It consisted of a living-dining-kitchen area (LDK) that served as a communal space where the family should socialize. The home evolved from tatami-based to chair-based, and guest-centered to family-centered.\(^{32}\) Personal privacy became common and accordingly personal spaces were designed. Each family member should have a private space, and these spaces should be separated by walls. Traditionally children slept with their mother, but intergenerational co-sleeping was now thought of as antithetical to the modern customs. In the ideal home this didn’t happen anymore, in reality the bedrooms were often used as a home office or fathers room instead, and children still slept in their mothers room. Tatami rooms were, and are, also still incorporated in the house, which makes for a mix of traditional and modern elements.\(^{33}\) Words for being at home or at ease (*yutori suru*) are still linked to sitting on the floor. Examples are: being lost in thought (*botto suru*) and settling down, making one’s home or to relax (*ochitsuku*).\(^{34}\)

From the 1950s onwards apartment complexes were built in Tokyo (*danchi*). These smaller homes were an addition to the large number of detached houses. Nowadays many detached houses are replaced by condominiums, but even today most homes in Tokyo are detached.\(^{35}\) Since the lost decades the types of households have differentiated. Homes are now designed not only for families, but also for couples, bachelors or families with a parasite-single. Recently developers have started catering to the single working woman as well. It is uncommon in Japan to live with non-family. The idea of a share house is gaining ground, but still thought of as strange. This means that there are a lot of very small individual homes in Tokyo. This individualization of space leads to an increasing sensitivity of privacy.\(^{36}\) With the continuing fragmentation of plots,
due to the inheritance taxes on ground, and the building setback regulation that allows building on 100% of a plot, neighborhoods are very dense with barely any open space.\textsuperscript{37}

The small homes and apartments are supported by Tokyo’s impeccable infrastructure. Here again the \textit{konbini} plays the star role. In the \textit{konbini} you can do everything you would normally do in your living room or study. You can make a copy, get money, pay your bills, buy underwear, and get food. With a documentation system in place in every \textit{konbini}, documenting the behavior of the customers, it caters perfectly to the urban dwellers around it (fig. 3.9).\textsuperscript{38}

Whereas in the traditional home entertaining was one of the most important functions, the Japanese home nowadays is a sheltered place, where visitors are rarely received. Social activities with friends or family take place outside of the home, in public spaces.\textsuperscript{39} Traditionally plots had a very private outlook on the front of the house, with gates and fences, and an open back onto the garden. With plot sizes getting increasingly smaller, the fortification previously offered by the fences has been integrated into the façade itself. Many homes have steel doors and window shutters. The Tokyo home has become a very private place.\textsuperscript{40}

Daniels emphasizes that privacy as understood in western culture is different from the Japanese \textit{uchi} and \textit{soto} dichotomy: ‘\textit{In studies about the euro-american home, the creation of domestic boundaries is commonly associated with a need for privacy. However privacy is an ill-defined concept, historically linked with the supposing alienating consequences of Western modernity. It generally pertains to the need to protect the individual self from others and from outside, harmful influences in a personal space. Although the idea of the private individual and privacy has become well established in post war Japan, what it means to be private in Japanese context needs to be investigated within the light of native notions of the self.’\textsuperscript{41}
The space around the house

Great value is attached to the space around the house within the plot. If there is enough space, families have a walled garden around the house. The enclosure gives a sense of safety and intimacy. Even in speculative building projects companies are reluctant to built homes with shared walls, which results in rows of detached houses with very small gaps or voids in between. The garden was considered a key component of the pre-modern elite home. Nowadays plots are usually too small to keep a garden, and people instead grow some plants in pots in front of their house. If there is any space left on the plot, the car is considered to be more important than a garden. Parking in the road is illegal and the Japanese are only allowed to own a car if they can provide a private parking spot. This has caused the car to take up space on the plot where normally either the house or the garden would be.
HARUKA (23) MOVED BACK HOME AFTER THE 3/11 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI. SHE DECIDED TO GIVE UP HER EXPENSIVE APARTMENT IN THE CENTRE OF TOKYO TO TAKE CARE OF HER AGING PARENTS.

THIS IS THE HOUSE OF THE YOKOKAWA FAMILY.

25 YEARS AGO IT STOOD AMONG THE RICE FIELDS, 30 KILOMETERS (18 MILES) FROM CENTRAL TOKYO. TODAY KOSHIGAYA (THE NAME OF THE SUBWAY STATION) IS PART OF GREATER TOKYO, A CITY OF 34 MILLION PEOPLE.

THIS IS HARUKA'S ROOM. SHE SPEAKS ENGLISH AND TRANSLATES EVERYTHING FOR ME.

IT LOOKS LIKE A BOYS' ROOM, HARUKA SAYS. "WHY? BECAUSE IT'S SO SOBERLY.'

I KNOW HIM FROM BACK IN THE DAYS," FOR REAL! SAYS HARUKA.

FOR LUNCH I EAT NADOT (ROTIEN BEANS), IT TASTES LIKE MOULDY CHEESE... NICE? ME: NO!

I AM THE FIRST FOREIGNER EVER HERE. NEIGHBOURS AND FAMILY COME TO SAY HELLO AND SHAKE MY HANDS. A LITTLE BOY STARTS CRYING WHEN HE SEES ME.

THE FRIDGE IS CHOCK-FULL OF FOOD. I ONLY RECOGNIZE THE EGGS.

THE KITCHEN.

THE NEIGHBOUR AND AIKO ASK ME HOW YOU CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DEUS COFFEE SHOP AND A NORMAL COFFEE SHOP IN THE NETHERLANDS. THIS IS SOMETHING YOU SMELL...

DROPPING RACK THERE IS NO DISHWASHER.

AS A FISHERMAN'S GIRLS IN HOLLAND VILLAGE, AN AMUSEMENT PARK IN NAGASAKI, IT WENT BANKRUPT.

"I LOVE CHEESE" MAGAZINE FROM AIKO.

"AS A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO PLAY THE PIANO."

PRINTS OF MY DRAWINGS, I BROUGHT AS EXAMPLES.
**Family Consists of:**
- Aiko (59), and daughters
- Ruka (29), Nagisa (22)
- and father Isamu (60)

**The House is Made of Wood with a Thin Layer of Wood (Berr)**

- **Bedroom of Aiko**
  - White slip in plastic
  - Air-mover
  - Clock
  - Travel guide of Peru (she travels with friends)
  - Blankets
  - First floor
  - Made in China

**Translucent Curtain**
- Aiko's mattress leans against the wall.
- Buttons of the toilet
- In the toilet I find these
- There's a 30 kilo bag of rice in the hall
- Litter in the small room
- Giant cats in the

**There is an air-conditioner**
- There's a flower in the toilet bowl too.
- Water saviet (quite nice)
- There's a flower in the toilet shelf too.

**Sony Stereo Cardboard Box**
- Big kimono cabinet in slipcover with the family crest on it. This was the dowry.

**Nagisa's busy desk**
- Is covered with pink post-its for appointments she has with her (girl) friends.
- There are no box names on them yet.

**Origami Stars**
- Made for Aiko's friend who is in the Netherlands.

**There's a 30 kilo bag of rice in the hall**
- Litter in the small room
- Giant cats in the

**Aiko's room is filled with colourful girl things.**
- She works part-time at Starbucks. That's nice, because she can talk with friends.

**Father Isamu works with a telecom company.**
- He wakes at 5 in the morning and comes home at half past seven in the evening.
- His hobby is hiking in the mountains. He's often gone.

**Fathers Bedroom**
- Bags for binoculars
- Very traditional
- Made of rice thatch, with styrofoam filling (the modern ones)
- A tatami mat represented the space a Samurai needed to display all his belongings.

**The Size of Houses is Still Measured in Tatami Mats (90 x 175 cm)**

**The Shoji (rice paper) Screens are Renewed Every Spring.**

**The Average Life Span of a Japanese House is 30 Years**

- Electrically heated carpet.
- Ironed white shirts
- Low sci-fi couches

**Aiko's Room**
- Made in plastic
- Fitted sheet
- Tatami mats
- Travel guide of Peru (she travels with friends)

**Nagisa's Room is Filled with Colourful Girl Things.**
- She works part-time at Starbucks. That's nice, because she can talk with friends.

**Father Isamu Works with a Telecom Company.**
- He wakes at 5 in the morning and comes home at half past seven in the evening.
- His hobby is hiking in the mountains. He's often gone.

**Nagisa's Busy Desk**
- Is covered with pink post-its for appointments she has with her (girl) friends.
- There are no box names on them yet.

**Origami Stars**
- Made for Aiko's friend who is in the Netherlands.

**There's a 30 kilo bag of rice in the hall**
- Litter in the small room
- Giant cats in the
Fig. 3.7 - Vending machine in a Tokyo street

Fig. 3.8 - Salarymen at lunch, separated from the street by a mere rope curtain

Fig. 3.9 - A Konbini
3.3 Home and the street

The old living streets of Tokyo, the small roji, are very lively and contained. The space of the street is appropriated for personal use, as if it were a garden. The street is used intensely for all manner of outdoor activities. The configuration of the street shows its use: there are vending machines and noticeboards for the neighborhood. (fig. 3.7) There is no street furniture, statues or other typically western street decoration. The narrow streets leave little space for any objects. In the shotengai, the slightly broader main shopping street of the neighborhood, the street is often decorated with seasonal props hanging from the lantern poles, and there’s a soundtrack playing from boxes strung up every few meters. In the residential streets space is smaller and more contained.

Krusche and Roost argue that the roji’s show a typically Japanese approach to the street. They claim that the division between public and private is not usable in this context, and that the roji has lent this different approach to space a material shape. You could say the roji is the first transitional space between the outside (soto) and the inside (uchi). Equally the larger streets in Tokyo increasingly use the ground floor of a building as a passage to that which lies behind, above or underneath, extending their space into the building, and onto the plot. Bars, restaurants, love hotels etc. are rarely situated on the ground floor, but rather in the basement or on the second or third floor of a building. The first floor is used as a passing through space, and the stairwell as a prolonging of the street. Besides the street, public open space in Tokyo tends to be considered an amenity rather than a necessity. The main reason for the creation of open space is disaster prevention, in case of earthquakes and fires.

In line with the earlier explanation of the division of the city into areas rather than streets, the street is conceptually seen as two sidewalks from opposite building blocks. In many cases they have nothing to do with each other. This is most strongly the case with the omnipresent streets that have taken the place of old rivers and canals. The street is a negative space, a result of the shape of the building block. The street is created in Tokyo, and less so designed.
In 1986 the Street Observation Society was formed. The society was a group of young Tokyoites concerned with street observation science: the observation of Tokyo streets at the level of everyday life. The emphasis was on personal discovery of elements of the street found during walks through the city. These discoveries were grouped in tongue in cheek classifications. Plants in pots for example fell in the category of the botanical garden. The categories formed an imaginary system for the city forgoing the planners and architects. The discoveries of the group showed that an anonymous mass of Tokyo's inhabitants shaped and preserved the streets. All elements they categorized had intent: people had constructed and preserved them.

Tokyo residential streets are shielded and small in size. There is virtually no public green space, but the neighborhoods are safe, livable and know the spirit of neighborliness. Jonas describes the everyday life in the neighborhoods as such: ‘In this atmosphere, village-like situations such as fathers in pyjamas shopping for forgotten items for dinner, kids playing in the street or grannies on their way to the local sento bathhouse carrying a washbowl can frequently be observed.’

3.4 Conclusion

The concept of home in Tokyo is closely related to the small-scale of the urban fabric and the concept of the mythic field. The Japanese house has changed over time from a place to welcome guests into, to a very private place. Consequently, the small residential streets have gained a semi-private character, arguably extending the feeling of being at home further outside of the house.
2. Berkhout, *Mythic Field*.
5. Berkhout, *Mythic Field*.
11. Idem.
14. [http://www.tofugu.com/2012/02/03/japanese-convenience-stores/](http://www.tofugu.com/2012/02/03/japanese-convenience-stores/)
36 Idem, 190.
37 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*.
40 Idem, 55.
41 Idem, 75.
46 Graafland, *The socius of architecture*, 137.
47 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*.
50 Fujimori, *Tokyo rojo hakubutsushi*.
51 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*. 
Chapter four

Nature

Notions of nature in Japan
4.1 Introduction

In order to make clear the Japanese attitude towards nature, I will use the western view on nature to oppose it. By showing the differences between the two both positions will become more explicit. I will start off with the definition and main vocabulary of nature in the West and in Japan. After this I will continue with the basic ideas of nature in Christianity, Shinto and Buddhism and the traditional thoughts on nature with the development of science and during the last centuries. Here ends the comparison with the West. The second subchapter is about the myth of the love of nature of the Japanese and the role that it has played in the creation of the Japanese self and the Japanese nation. This myth has recently been reinterpreted in the environmental lobby, both in the East and the West. But, as I will discuss, Japan has a problematic relationship with the environment. Nature in Japan extends far beyond the environment, even into the realm of the artificial. The third subchapter will show this artificial nature that is said to be most appreciated by the Japanese. Here I will discuss the representation of nature in different art forms, Japanese aesthetic, popular culture and garden design.
4.2 Traditional discourse on nature in Japan and the West

Language and definition

The English word ‘nature’ is derived from the Latin *natura* that means ‘birth’ or ‘origin’. In Europe nature is traditionally defined as the diametrically opposite of culture and society. The natural is conceived as the antithesis of the constructed.¹ Kate Soper summarizes it as such: *‘those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary condition of every human practice’.*² This means that nature is seen as the material world ‘out there’, a world that predates and exists independently from human culture. It is considered both a source of life, and a potential danger to humankind.³ One of the core characteristics of this idea of nature as a *sui generis* category, is that it denies its own historicity. Aike Rots puts it as follows: *‘Nature is conceptualized not only as pre-discursive, but also as a universal; i.e., not contingent upon space or time. Paradoxically, this understanding of nature is itself a historical construction, established and reified in the course of the European history of thought; however, as the construction of nature as a universal and non-discursive given was successful, this historicity has come to be concealed.’*⁴
In modern-day Japan, there are two words that may be translated as *nature*: *shizen* and *tennen*. These terms overlap, but they have slightly different nuances: *Tennen* tends to be used to refer to more concrete objects, as in *tennen shigen* (natural resources) whereas *shizen* (from/by way of itself) refers more to the abstract forces as in *shizenho* (natural law) and *shizen no chikara* (forces of nature). In Japan nature is not viewed as opposite of culture. Instead it is seen as oscillating between two extremes (fig. 4.1). On the one side of the spectrum there is raw or uncooked nature, on the other side lies cooked or wrapped nature. This scale is another example of the *uchi* and *soto* dichotomy: cooked nature belongs to the inside realm, raw nature to the outside world. In the West all nature is categorized as outside, in Japan this is not the case. The Japanese have no clear-cut distinction between nature and culture; artifice and nature are not opposed. As there is no clear difference between nature created by a God and artifice created by human beings, in a sense nature is everything around us. Divine beings can be in everything.

The story of creation and religious thought on nature

In the Christian tradition, man is created according to God’s image, elevated above the rest of creation: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ There are two ways of Christian religious thought on the role of humankind in relation to nature. On the one hand there is the Benedictine tradition that states that humans are placed above nature, and for this reason shouldered a responsibility for the natural world. Man is God’s chosen species and is trusted with a steward function. On the other hand is the Franciscan tradition that is less eager to affirm God-given human privilege. Humans are seen as one part of a God created universe where his presence in all things guarantees to all a degree of spiritual equality. Therefore the natural world is celebrated for its reflection of God, not for any beliefs in its intrinsic value or importance. The Franciscan tradition doesn’t feel a significant responsibility for preserving nature. For neither of the two traditions is nature a very important consideration in the quest for finding salvation, and its value outside of this quest
is its availability for human exploitation. Because God shows himself in His creation human beings can get to know God by experiencing it. Nature is a part of this creation.

The Shinto story of creation differs from the Christian tale. The sibling deities Izanagi and Izanami created the islands, the natural features and divinities of Japan, but not its human inhabitants. Humans and other animals sprang out of the natural processes that govern the world. This means that humanity and culture stem from nature and all people and all things are connected to the earth. Kokoro (heart/mind) permeates all objects. The self is submerged in the natural world, and nature cannot be objectified. Everyone and everything can be endowed with kami (spirits), and this possibility cements the oneness of all nature’s components. Shinto animism cannot tolerate any dualism between humans, animals, plants and other natural forces. To summarize: western thinking is characterized by duality where Japanese thinking is founded on non-duality.

In the traditions of Shinto the welfare of the dead heavily influenced the lives of the living. Every town had an ujigami, originally meaning the ghost of the first patriarchal ancestor of the uji (clan/family), later the deity of the town or city district. All community members (ujiko) were expected to pay their respects to the ujigami regularly at the shrine. The ujigami was a centerpiece for the community and individuals had a lifetime responsibility of maintaining a strong relationship with it. The Japanese individual was closely linked to a number of deities. As ujiko, as a child of its own bloodline, it was responsible for the continuing appeasement of the ancestral spirits. As a human being in the natural world it was subject to the blessings and cruelties of the deities existing in the surrounding natural elements. Boundaries between the living and ethereal worlds were thin and clouded. Ancestors and ujigami were once mortals, now separated only by death. According to Puck this tenuous line between mortal and God preserved a closeness with the natural world, and inherent in this closeness a perceived mysteriousness in the world.

In the 6th century Buddhism was introduced to Japan. Where Shinto did not
attempt to answer many spiritual questions, and was content with identifying
different elements and their relationships, Buddhism wanted to give meaning
to life. One of the topics to explain the meaning of life was the meaning of
death. According to Buddhism to die was to be reborn, not wander the earth
eendlessly as a ghost, as Shinto stated. The Japanese came to see the human
being as a cogwheel in the gears of nature. Nature is a cycle of death and
rebirth, interspersed with periods of disembodied spirituality or godliness.\textsuperscript{12} The
individual, therefore, is nature itself, interchangeable with a mountain, a bird
or a cloud. Any consideration of one is a reflection onto the other. To think of
religion is to think of nature, and vice versa. The animism of Shinto is not part
of Buddhism, which means that plants cannot become deities. However, Shinto
understandings were still incorporated in Buddhism in Japan, and non-duality
was an important one. There were different opinions on whether plants could be
deities, and the presence of \textit{kokoro} in plants is a recurring theme of debate in
Japanese Buddhism.\textsuperscript{13}

As the Buddhists wanted to gain believers, they didn’t take a hard stand in this
discussion. Shinto non-dualism was remarkably well suited to the Buddhist
concept of enlightenment, the essence of which was oneness with all. The
idea that all becomes Buddha and Buddha becomes all is remarkably close
to the Shinto myths of god possession, where humans or other creatures are
inhabited by a \textit{kami}.\textsuperscript{14} In Buddhism \textit{dharma}, the cosmic law and order, or nature
of Buddhism, is the divine seed inherent in all creatures endowing them with the
capacity to obtain Buddhahood.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{quote}
\textquote{When a single Buddha attains the way,}
\textquote{And contemplates the Dharma-realm}
\textquote{The grasses, the trees and the land}
\textquote{All becomes Buddha}\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

The natural world is full of spiritual and divine entities that are linked to, and
constantly interacting with, human life. The Buddhist understanding of life
as suffering is extended to include all things in the animal, plant and mineral
Fig. 4.2 - A circuit drawing by Howard Odum, representing the ecosystem of Southern Sweden
worlds, requiring an essentially universal compassion. In this sense, nature must necessarily be respected as sacred, worshipped, and preserved. The nature of Buddhist enlightenment is characterized by a joining with all things without distinction between the one and the whole. This relationship uncovers an ultimate truth about humans as inseparable from their environment, intrinsically implying that feelings of respect or love that we feel for anything are reflections on all of nature.\textsuperscript{17}

**Industrialization and traditional thought on nature**

In the West the religious connection to the natural world dissipated as dependence on it dissolved by scientific knowledge and people’s interest in it turned to commercial profit. Nature’s purpose came to lie in its utility to people who enjoy spiritual freedom from the slavery of its physical laws.\textsuperscript{18} With the rise of science in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century everything that was close to the natural world was condemned as inhuman, and guarded against. The poor and dirty were immoral, and without spirit. As industrialization progressed in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century the appreciation for rural landscapes grew. More and more people lived in cities, and nature became scarcer or even absent in the direct living environment. This absence of nature made the heart grow fonder. Explorers brought back exotic plant and species from world travels, which ignited an interest in natural history. A sensibility for nature as being therapeutic and necessary for true living, knowledge and spirituality, came into fashion in the Romantic period. The notion of nature as vital for people’s spiritual well-being became a founding concept for future thought and research. In 1854 Thoreau’s *Walden* exemplified this romantic view of nature: “*The earth I tread on is not a dead mass, it is a body, has a spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influences of its spirit, and to whatever particle of that spirit is in me.*”\textsuperscript{19} With the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* five years later thought on nature shifted. The text denied the presence of God as a necessary element of all creation and change, which meant that humans were only a small piece in a balance of relationships, more complex than they had originally known. This gave way to a change from the idea of a Christian humanity in opposition to nature towards a scientific humanity rooted in it.\textsuperscript{20}
Japanese culture is seen by both Japanese and foreign scholars as nature loving and rich in time-honored ‘naturalness’.\textsuperscript{21} The Japanese are said to have a humility towards the natural world, and maintain lifestyles of non-interference. Both Japanese and western scholars believe that the Japanese identity and self have their base in nature. In the Meiji period (1868-1912) internationalization led to new conceptualizations of a natural order based on the European concept of an objectified, material nature.\textsuperscript{22} Scholars blame the western influence for destroying the Japanese harmony with nature. The Japanese were in a frenzy to catch up with industrialization, and superiority over the earth gave science and technology a license to destroy it. The sense of smallness before nature thought to be so typical of the Japanese was moved to the background and replaced by a longing for progress. Modernity brought new levels of consciousness about nature. The concept of dualism was introduced to the general public, and co-existed with the old animistic and non-dual thought about nature. Shinto and Buddhism proved flexible in the new age. Since the late 60s there is consideration of the human being and nature as two opposable entities. According to many scholars the western idea of nature is more and more embraced, largely aligning Japanese and western nature consciousness.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1935 Sir Arthur Tansley introduced the concept of the ecosystem: the idea of nature as a web of relationships sustained by a flow of energy between them. The earth was understood as a system, scientifically explained without theistic or divine interference. Human beings became purely biological creatures, rooted in the animal realm. The way of thinking about the world in terms of systems was further developed during the 50s and 60s by Jay Forrester and Howard and Eugene Odum. Inspired by the rise of computers they believed that systems operate through feedback loops. Every action we take feeds into the system and has consequences for our future in ways we cannot see. But the computers could. This way of thinking was dubbed cybernetics and had great impact on the thought on nature and all other aspects of life. Howard Odum researched nature by simplifying it in cybernetic networks. He drew out ecosystems as electrical circuits, and built them (fig. 4.2). His brother published the influential
Taking it one step further James Lovelock introduced the Gaia hypothesis in the 1960s. According to this theory all organic and inorganic elements of the earth are one self-regulating system or one organism. This system always seeks to find equilibrium; when disturbed it tries to get back to a balanced state. The balance of this system is perfected, and maintained by its organic components as to best preserve life on earth. This is a holistic view of nature, where all natural components exert influence and control upon their relationship with all other components. The Gaia theory is still popular, but also criticized. In *All Watched over by machines of loving grace part two: the use and abuse of ecological concepts*, Richard Curtis makes clear that the self-regulating ecosystem was already proven false by ecologists in the 1970s. With the help of research of moose and wolves population in an area over the course of several years Daniel Botkin found there was only change and fluctuation, no stable balance. According to him nature is unpredictable, and always changing. There is no balanced state. Regardless people still hold on tightly to the idea of balance in nature.

The idea of nature as always in flux that developed during the 70s is remarkably close to the traditional Japanese concept of *mono no aware*, which literally means a “pathos” (*aware*) of “things” (*mono*). *Mono no aware* is about the awareness of impermanence, and the link between this impermanence and beauty. The most well known example of this is the traditional love of cherry blossoms. Every year crowds of people go out and picnic under the cherry trees when they bloom. The cherry blossoms are valued above the apple and pear, because of their transience: the blossoms usually begin to fall within a week after their first appearance. *Mono no aware* celebrates the change and impermanence found in nature.
4.3 The myth of Japanese love of nature

As explained in the previous paragraph both Japanese and western scholarly and popular discourse suggests a unique Japanese way of relating to nature and consideration of Japanese culture as nature-loving. According to this discourse the Japanese live in harmony with nature, have a profound love for it and a great appreciation of natural beauty. This is a commonly held view that has been developed and repeated for centuries. Nature and Japanese culture are said to be closely related and typical Japanese art forms such as haiku poetry, the tea ceremony and garden architecture are considered proof of this intimate connection. The Japanese are said to have a strong awareness of the changing of the seasons and the impermanence of natural beauty.

The Myth

As Aike Rots points out several scholars have argued that ‘this imagery is idealized, essentialist, and not necessarily in accordance with reality … However, as they continue to be reproduced in popular texts, mass media and advertisements, they have become naturalized to a large extent.’ It appears that images of nature have played a central role in the construction of nationhood in Japan. Morris-Suzuki for example writes about the evolvement of different ways of understanding the natural environment over time, which created vocabulary and imagery that have been central to modern constructions of what it means to be Japanese. Julia Thomas makes a similar point in her study of the notion of nature in pre-modern and modern Japanese political thought. She claims that the intellectual and political leadership of Japan repeatedly and consciously reconfigured the concept of nature. In this process it changed from that which Japan had to investigate to arrive at true political forms, to that which Japan is, the truth of itself.

It can be concluded that representations of nature played a large part in shaping the Japanese nation and the Japanese self. Japanese culture is viewed as a
product of the awareness of the natural world. The importance of harmony in society is considered to be derived from the traditionally harmonious relationship with nature. The love of nature is presented as the nature of the Japanese.\textsuperscript{33}

This myth of Japanese love of nature is most clearly visible in the orientalist constructions of Japanese culture in the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when Japan tried to find its identity vis-à-vis the Western nations.\textsuperscript{34} Japanese intellectuals adopted European notions of nationhood and imperialist ideology and combined this with a reemployment of orientalist stereotypes. The orientalist imagery was re-appropriated: characteristics that were meant to suggest the weakness of Eastern people were redefined as strengths. Asian culture was deemed superior to western culture spiritually, artistically and morally. Westerners had supposedly become alienated from nature, whereas the Japanese had stayed true to their close relation with it. Artistic and literary expressions were proof of this typically Japanese closeness to nature.\textsuperscript{35} As Haga Yaichi writes: ‘The Japanese are directly connected to nature and this attitude comes directly from nature itself, which in Japan is particularly benign.’\textsuperscript{36} With the text \textit{Art, Life and Nature in Japan} (1933) Anesaki writes another cultural-essentialist celebration of Japanese love of nature: ‘\textit{In many countries nature is thought of as necessarily wild and bold, in contrast to human refinement. According to that conception, life consists in the combat against nature, or in the conquest of it. But the Japanese lives too close to nature to antagonize her, the benignant mother of mankind. Just as art has permeated every corner of life in Japan, so Japanese art always derives its model and inspiration from nature. … Benignant friendliness is the most striking feature of land and atmosphere in the Japanese archipelago.}’\textsuperscript{37} As Aike Rots points out, it is important to note that when this work was written Japan had just invaded Manchuria, and Meiji-period industrialization had already resulted in large-scale environmental pollution, raising questions about the meaning of this alleged love of nature.\textsuperscript{38}

A few years later Watsuji Tetsuro wrote Fūdo (1935), in which he further explored the interrelatedness between natural landscape and the culture and society of the people who live there.\textsuperscript{39} He presented the natural environment as a principle
means to understand the self that cannot be conceived as separate from human life, culture or history, and determines and shapes reality.\textsuperscript{40} According to Watsuji Japan had a unique climate, combining the unpredictability of typhoons and monsoonal floods with the regularity of the seasons. He believed this had created a complex sensitivity to nature, clearly expressed in the arts, which he argued involved an empathic coming together of the human spirit and nature.\textsuperscript{41}

After World War II the discourse continued with the growing popularity of Zen in the West. D.T. Suzuki wrote \textit{Zen and Japanese culture}, in which he romanticizes the eastern way of relating to nature and condemning the moral and cultural degradation of modern Japan caused by the import of western ideas. Well-known Buddhist scholar Nakamura Hajime stated that: ‘This sentiment for nature, which contributed to the sympathetic heart of the Japanese people and their love of order in communal life, may be due partly to the influence of the land and climate and to early attainment of settled agricultural civilization. … The mild climate, the variety of scenery, rich flora, and sea products, and absence of beasts of prey - these combined contributed greatly to the development of a peace-loving and docile disposition and to an ability to establish order and attain solidarity.’\textsuperscript{42}

By the 1980s the myth of Japanese love of nature had become a well-established truth, supported by many important scholars. Recently these notions have been reinterpreted in the context of environmental problems.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Japan’s problematic relationship with the environment}

After the tragic events following the Tohoku earthquake in 2011, the Japanese were forced to reconsider their relation with nature (fig. 4.3). Still, the myth of Japanese love of nature was, and is, used globally in the context of environmental issues.

In 1967 Lynn White Jr. wrote the famous article: \textit{The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis}, which is influential until today. He claims that culturally
defined attitudes towards nature are directly linked with environmental issues. According to White the eminent ecological crisis is the result of a western way of relating to nature, in which it is seen as subordinate to man. He believes that the eastern view of nature and man as interdependent would have resulted in some sort of ecological equilibrium, preventing ecological destruction. This idea of a positive influence of eastern holism on ecological balance has been argued often.

However, the idea of ecological equilibrium as part of holism is a western idea that is imposed on Japan, as previously explained. In the west holism is associated with balance, in Japan oneness is associated with parts, change and process. Kalland points out that when nature is seen as a cyclical process, with death and decay as integral parts, the importance of conservation practices are easily downplayed: 'it has been argued that when nature is seen as immanently divine, as it allegedly is in Japan, this leads to a 'love of nature’ relationship (...). But the close relationship between people and spirit also enable people to entice spirits to move from their abodes in order to utilize the locations in question for other purposes. (...). Spirit can also be persuaded to move into shrines so that their old abodes, in nature, can be appropriated. (...). Human beings are considered to become indebted to nature when exploiting it, but can ‘repay’ harm that has been inflicted upon nature, animate or inanimate, through, for instance, memorial rites.' Aike Rots explains that when there is no longer an ontological distinction between what is human-made and what is not, natural landscapes can be seen as something not inherently different from human constructions. 'In Lefebvorean terms, the destruction of natural space is legitimized and concealed by the production of new spaces that are configured as natural.' Thus, in the Japanese appreciation for impermanence and change as exemplified by the concept of mono no aware lies danger. When nature is viewed as a process natural objects have little value in themselves and are situational and contextual. It appears that the Japanese value the idea of nature above the manifestation of nature itself. In the period before Meiji there were several occasions of large-scale deforestation and of depletion of other natural recourses. There is a discrepancy between ideal and reality.
Fig. 4.4 - An ikebana composition
Aike Rots believes that the notion of perpetual ecological harmony may well reflect artistic celebrations and representations of nature, but it does not correspond to actual reality. According to him the quantity of nature is not very important to the Japanese, and neither is invisible, far away nature. Instead, the Japanese incorporated nature into their culture. Nature and culture are closely linked, but on the terms of culture. Nature is brought into everyday life, in advertising, popular culture, art, etc. The wilderness ‘out there’ is a far cry from this type of nature and very different from it. The concept of nature in Japan is much broader than it is in the West, as it is oscillating between two extremes: raw and cooked. It seems that the love of nature in the broad Japanese sense of the word has become a truth, cleverly constructed in the history of the archipelago. And this love of nature was and is mostly practiced close to home, in the safe realm of the *uchi*.
4.4 Nature and artifice

The love of nature in Japan is quite different from the love of nature in the west. You could even say a big part of the nature the Japanese love is not considered to be nature in the west. ‘Contextualization allows for multiple concepts of nature to exist: wild and threatening, or in its most cultivated form with a garden, a dwarfed tree, or a softdrink in a vending machine’ (fig. 4.5).49

Kellert notes that the Japanese place ‘greatest emphasis on the experience and the enjoyment of nature in very controlled, confined and highly idealized circumstances.’ He quotes a scholar who said that the Japanese like ‘to go to the edge of the forest, to view nature from across the river, to see natural beauty from a mountaintop, but rarely to enter into or immerse oneself in wildness or the ecological understanding of natural settings.’ 50 Kalland emphasizes this and adds that there is a lack of sublime objects in Japanese appreciation of nature. The wild and grandiose is not what is most cherished; instead attention is paid to the small, gentle and intimate aspects of nature, which are praised in literature and visual arts. Beauty is admired, not strength. ‘Not the typhoon but the beautiful morning after. … The smooth changes of the seasons, the subtle passage of time.’ 51 Nature is idealized by taming or cooking it through literature, fine arts, etc.. In this form nature becomes lovable and is most appreciated.52 The fact that this is different from nature as the physical surroundings is so common sensical to Japanese it doesn’t deserve comment.53 This doesn’t change the fact that it is also considered nature. An appropriation or translation of nature in the shape of a bonsai, ikebana (flower arrangement), an image, flavors or rituals is still nature (fig. 4.4).

Something artificial can also be seen as nature. Nature is symbolic rather than realistic. According to Puck affinity to nature is expressed as a tradition of stealing aspects of nature and creating an art form around them. Immersion in nature, or a desire of understanding it is of no importance in this context.54
It shouldn’t come as a surprise than that the difference between conceptions of nature and notions of the environment is substantial: the first are concerned with particular symbolic images and places, while the latter are based on an imagination of nature as a single, global realm. Combined with rapid population expansion and industrialization that cause people to be increasingly further distanced from empirical nature, this provokes the average person to see nature to an increasing extent in and through art.

Nature in Japanese art and popular culture

The experience of nature in Japan is expressed in arts that are closely related to the practice of the tea ceremony. In *The Book of Tea* (1906) Okakura Kakuzo discusses the practice. He claims tea ‘grew to be an excuse for the worship of purity and refinement, a sacred function at which the host and guest joined to produce for that occasion the utmost beatitude of the mundane.’ ‘It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life. … Those who cannot feel the littleness of great things in themselves are apt to overlook the greatness of little things in others.’ The art of tea requires an intuitive, mystical awareness of the present, and is therefore fundamentally irrational and experience-oriented; hence, ‘Westerners’ might not be able to fully grasp it, as ‘unfortunately the Western attitude is unfavorable to the understanding of the East’.

The quintessential aspect of Japanese aesthetic is called *wabi-sabi*. It is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. Characteristics of the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic include asymmetry, simplicity, austerity, modesty, intimacy and appreciation of the ingenuous characteristics of natural objects and processes. *Wabi-sabi* is found in many art forms that are related to the tea ceremony, like *ikebana*, the art of flower arranging, and *haiku* poetry. Roland Barthes writes about *haiku* in Empire of Signs: ‘*The haiku never describes: its art is counter-descriptive, to the degree that*
Fig. 4.5 - Stills from the 2014 commercial of Zima, made by flower artist Azuma Makoto. The video exemplifies the Japanese aesthetic appreciation of nature.
Fig. 4.6 - Videostill from My neighbor Totoro
each state of the thing is immediately, stubbornly, victoriously converted into a fragile essence of appearance …

The winter wind blows,
The cats’ eyes
Blink

Barthes calls the haiku a vision without commentary. According to him this vision is entirely privative; ‘what is abolished is not meaning but any notion of finality.’

‘It’s that, it’s thus, says the haiku, it’s so. Or better still: so! it says, with a touch so instantaneous and so brief (…) that even the copula would seem excessive… with a movement so immediate (so stripped of any mediation: that of knowledge, of nomination, or even of possession) that what is designated is the very inanity of any classification of the object…

Full moon
And on the matting
The shadow of a pine tree

In Praise of Shadows (1933) by Tanizaki Jun’ichiro is one of the most well known essays on the subject of traditional Japanese aesthetics. It contains many examples of wabi-sabi and the intuitive sensitivity for beauty named earlier. For instance in Tanizaki’s description of paper: ‘Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives of no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree.’ This sensitivity is not only reserved for tangible things, but also for (daily) rituals: ‘Whenever I sit with a bowl of soup before me, listening to the murmur that penetrates like the far-off shrill of a an insect, lost in contemplation of flavors to come, I feel as if I were being drawn into a trance. The experience must be something like that of the tea master who, at the sound of the kettle, is taken from himself as if upon the sigh of the wind in the legendary pines of Onoe.’ A similar anecdote about the kettle is found in The Book of Tea: ‘The kettle sings well, for pieces of iron are so arranged in
Fig 4.7 and 4.8 - Packaging decorated with images of landscapes
Fig. 4.9 - Poster combining the high-tech Shinkansen with cherryblossoms
Fig. 4.10 - Garden with shakkei at the Adachi Museum of Arts in Yasugi
Fig. 4.11 - Kyufurukawa in Tokyo, a garden inspired by the gardens of Versailles
the bottom as to produce a peculiar melody in which one may hear the echoes of a cataract muffled by clouds, of a distant sea breaking among the rocks, a rainstorm sweeping through a bamboo forest, or of the soughing of pines on some faraway hill. It is striking how these experiences of beauty are often compared to specific natural phenomena and express a sense of mono no aware.

But the influence of nature on Japanese culture is not limited to the traditional arts. Kalland and Asquith describe the diverse implementations of natural metaphors in Japanese culture as such: ‘To whomever the essence of Japan is presented – tourists, artists, businessmen or students – in some form or other the packaging will more likely than not include an allusion to nature. (fig. 4.7 & 4.8) This may be seasonal, such as a spray of plum blossoms, blue irises, red maple leaves, snow monkeys or a frosty landscape, or it may appear in the presentation of a garden, tiny but rich in symbolic expression, in a dwarfed tree (bonsai), or in a traditional house, with elegantly simple lines made entirely of natural products, which melds into the natural surroundings. Even images of high-tech products such as the shinkansen (bullet train), computers or musical toilet rolls are often embellished or softened somewhere with a spray of seasonal foliage.’ (fig. 4.9)

Equally, nature (and especially divine nature) plays a role in popular culture, like manga, anime and mass media. Exemplary of this are the films of Miyazaki Hayao, a director known across the world. Miyazaki is one of Japan’s most successful artists and leader of Studio Ghibli, and has significantly affected the public imagination. Numerous films of his deal with themes like spirits and deities, and notions of nature, pollution, and environmental destruction. Many of his films are also set in traditional Japanese landscapes. Miyazaki’s best-known film is Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi), a story about a girl who wanders into the spirit realm, a world located in a grand traditional bathhouse. Two other films, Nausicaa of the valley of the wind (Kaze no tani no Naushika) and Princess Mononoke (Mononoke-hime) deal very clearly with the themes of pollution and environmental destruction, and their heroines triumph over these with the help of nature deities. Lastly, My neighbor Totoro (Tonari
no Totoro) is the story of a friendly spirit that lives in a small forest next to the new home of the main character, the young girl Mei (fig. 4.6). The term Totoro is reportedly used by Japanese landscape planners to refer to traditional Japanese landscapes, in which inhabitants actively interact with and give shape to their natural surroundings. All of Miyazaki’s films contain representations of traditional Japanese landscapes, homes and rituals.

**Nature in Japanese gardens**

The garden is a cultural version of the natural surroundings, with an aesthetic and/or spiritual function. It is a mediation between the aspects of the soto of nature in the raw, and the safety of the uchi world of social and cultural life. Traditionally you find gardens within a temple or house compound. Here they are often completely hidden from the outside world that they represent. Gardens can be perceived as a wrapping of (natural) space. Gardens are conceptually inside, but physically outside. Joy describes it as such: ‘(Gardens) are a piece of outside enclosed or wrapped up by layers of inside.’

One of the words commonly used for home is katei. In kanji the word combines the character for house and the character for garden. The garden is considered an integral part of the home. Traditionally the Japanese garden is hidden from the public. It is to be viewed from inside the house, with the best view from the guests seat. It is important that there is an enclosure around it; this is one of the most persistent features of its form. It borrows this from the prototype for the Japanese garden, the niwa: a cleared space, sacred and purified for the reception of deities. The niwa is often covered in moss or pebbles, and enclosed with a rope, or bamboo fence. It is a place for communication with the spiritual world.

Other features of the traditional Japanese garden are a pond and island and shakkei: borrowed scenery, or in other words, the view. Shakkei draws the outside into the garden (fig. 4.10).
In the Heian period (11th century) the first extant document about gardening was written: *Sakuteiki*, the manual of garden construction. The first principle of garden construction is: ‘*According to the lay of the land, and depending upon the aspect of the water landscape, you should design each part of the garden tastefully, recalling your memories of how nature presented itself for each feature.*’74

The four principles guiding the gardener are:
- *shōtoku no sansui* (natural mountain river) intend to create in the likeness of nature;
- *kohan ni shitagau* (follow the lakeshore) planning in accordance with the site topography;
- *suchigaete* (irregular numerical value) designing with asymmetrical elements;
- *fuzei* (appearance; air) capturing and presenting the ambiance.

The document also discusses the dry landscape of stones (*karesansui*) (fig. 4.12). In these contemplative gardens of Zen-Buddhism impressions are created through the use of stones. They are built to represent more than the features of a real landscape, instead they are intended to recall a painting of the landscape, and carry deeper meaning in the way the stones are positioned.

During Tokugawa other reasons for creating a garden came into fashion. Before supernatural reasons had always dominated. Now the garden became a place of leisure, to stroll around in. With the opening to the West, garden design implemented new western concepts, such as lawns (fig. 4.11).75 The traditional Japanese garden is meant to be looked at from a distance, preferably from the house. These types of gardens still exist, but nowadays gardens are usually more about doing instead of viewing. Since most plots are too small for a garden, gardening (*gardeningu*) comes down to growing some plants in pots. Home centers (*homu senta*) profit of the widespread craving for private green space and actively encourage people to put plants everywhere.76 In either case the Japanese garden is characterized by a wrapping up of the world/nature for cultural appreciation. In its naked form it is simply outside.
Fig. 4.12 (previous page) - A karesansui at the Suiho-in temple in Kyoto
Fig. 4.13 - A bonsai
Fig. 4.14 (next page) - A pruned tree in Hamarikyuteien in Tokyo
One way of wrapping up nature is by grooming her. Japanese gardens are meticulously groomed and pruned (fig. 4.14). To the western eye this can seem quite extreme and artificial. To the Japanese it is a way of letting the true beauty of nature shine brighter. 'It allows for a more natural, and at the same time, more ideal beauty to emerge. By removing what is perceived as offensive elements of nature, certain aspects are enhanced by bringing them to the foreground and thereby reveal ‘a line which nature itself created and then obscured in its own plentitude.'

Thus idealized nature is seen to be the true nature, and the garden is where this ideal is found. It is not only a model of nature, but also a model for nature. Ideal nature is a model for us to emulate. ‘Our peasants have learned
to arrange flowers, our meanest laborer to offer his salutation to the rocks and waters. Historically higher class women would teach the future leaders of Japan the way of nature by learning flower arranging or tea ceremony: passing on the obedience, calmness, perseverance and malleability that ideal nature taught.

**Miniature aesthetic**

In the garden at the Katsura detached palace in Kyoto three completely different landscapes are combined in three hectares of land. From the teahouse the garden looks like a seascape, from the shokatei like a hidden valley deep in the mountains and from the bay window like a plain of rice fields. The garden represents the totality of the Japanese landscape in a condensed or miniaturized form. Equally, the meisho of Edo, famous places often representing Japanese nature, were miniature versions of natural landscapes. In Tokyo gardens such as Koishikawa korakuen, (the oldest in Tokyo, dating from 1629), scenic spots of the countryside were replicated so lords didn't have to travel home. Gardens were used as microcosms of Japan's view of the world. Miniatures are the transformation of wild nature into an idealized shape. Roland Barthes claims that 'the miniature does not derive from its dimension but from a kind of precision which the thing observes in delimiting itself, stopping, finishing.' In these miniatures the wabi-sabi aesthetic is clearly present: in garden construction (and bonsai and ikebana) (fig. 4.13) the desired aesthetic is a balancing of opposing forces, accentuating each other. 'No beauty without ugliness, no peace without confusion.'

When Japan opened up to the world in the second half of the 19th century, the tradition of making miniatures and representations of particular places and landscapes was extended to foreign places. Theme parks were built representing locations such as a Dutch town or an American village. This way the Japanese could enjoy it, even if it was not really present as an object (it is a copy), but as a symbolic representation. This is the way in which Japanese deal with nature as well: they appreciate it most in confined, safe, representations. O-Young Lee
described is as such: ‘Japanese pull with their metaphorical rope mountains and sea into their tiny gardens and further into their houses.’

4.5 Conclusion

The love of nature in Japan is a well-constructed myth, and part of the nation building during Meiji. It can be argued that this myth has become a truth, and of great importance to the Japanese self. The nature the myth speaks of has little to nothing to do with the physical environment. Instead the nature that is most appreciated is the so-called ‘cooked’ nature, on the uchi side of the spectrum. This means that the idea of nature is closely linked to smallness, symbolism and traditional Japanese aesthetics.
1 Puck, *An investigation of Japan’s relationship to nature and environment*, 45.
5 Idem.
7 Genesis 1:28.
8 Puck, *An investigation of Japan’s relationship to nature and environment*, 51.
12 Idem, 59.
13 Idem, 60-62.
14 Idem, 62.
15 Idem, 61.
16 Chuingyo, *Antarabhava Sutra*.
18 Idem, 46-47.
19 Idem, 52-53.
20 Idem, 53-55.
21 Idem, 72.
22 Idem., 70.
23 Idem, 66.
24 Curtis, *All watched over by machines of loving grace*.
26 Curtis, *All watched over by machines of loving grace*.
27 Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.
29 Shirane, *Japan and the culture of the four seasons*.
34 Idem., 109.
35 Idem., 110.
36 Idem., 109-110.
45 Idem, 118.
47 Idem, 124.
50 Kellert, *The Value of Life: Biological Diversity And Human Society*.
56 Colligan-Taylor, *The emergence of environmental literature in Japan*, 24
62 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 77.
63 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 82.
64 Idem, 83.
65 Idem, 82.
67 Idem, 27.
72 Idem, 86.
73 Idem, 89.
76 Daniels, *The Japanese house*, 56.
82 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 43.
PART TWO
CASE STUDIES
Chapter five
Higashi Komagata and Yanaka
5.1 Introduction

Study areas
For my case studies I have selected two neighbourhoods in the low city of Tokyo. These are Higashi Komagata in Sumida-ku, a traditional worker district, and Yanaka, an artisan and temple district. They were selected because of their residential neighbourhoods with small streets and the presence of at least one larger road (with car traffic and amenities). The focus will be on the relationship of gardens and homes and on the differences between various types and sizes of streets. By following these criteria it will be easier to compare the areas with each other. For my case studies I was looking for two different types of neighbourhoods to be able to get a good image of shitamachi, and to make a comparison between the two different urban structures at work in the low city. I did not pick the neighbourhoods specifically for the extraordinary number of gardens, since gardens can be found anywhere in the low city. However, Yanaka is known and admired for its gardens.

Both neighbourhoods are situated in the old part of the low city, northeast of the imperial palace [fig. 5.1]. Higashi Komagata is situated on the flat planes east of Sumida River. Yanaka lies in a sloping area north of Ueno park. Higashi Komagata is a very old part of Tokyo, developed during early Edo. It was destroyed in the Second World War and has a renewed street pattern. Yanaka was developed as a temple district on the edge of the city during late Edo. After the temples were built, houses and shops soon followed, and the thus formed street pattern still exists today. Yanaka is one of the few neighbourhoods in the low city that escaped the bombings of World War II. As a result a relatively large amount of old buildings and streets still exist.

Research questions
As already pointed out in chapter 1, the central question to be answered in this thesis is: ‘What is the relationship between the informal stoop gardens in Tokyo and the notion and appearance of both ‘nature’ and ‘home’? This chapter will cover four research questions:
Fig. 5.1 - Location of the two case studies on a satellite photo of Tokyo (the park in the bottom left is the empirical gardens, the center of the city)
- what are the objective characteristics of the potted gardens?
- what is the function of the potted gardens?
- what is the influence of the shape of the urban fabric on the characteristics
  and function of the potted gardens and what are the differences between the
  gardens in the two casestudies?
- what are the reasons inhabitants of Tokyo keep gardens?

The five themes that emerge from these questions are the following:

1. the characteristics of the gardens (location in neighbourhood, size, abundance, location in relation to the building etc.);

2. the functions of the gardens;

3. the traditional lay-out of a Japanese neighbourhood (Yanaka);

4. the modernized lay-out of a Japanese neighbourhood (Higashi Komagata);

5. the reasons why inhabitants of Tokyo keep gardens.

**Methods**

In order to find the answers to these research questions I took a 200 by 200 meter slice out of the urban fabric in both neighbourhoods. These fragments include one large street with traffic passing through. During the fieldwork I quickly came to a division of the gardens in various categories:

1. The type of building where the garden is situated
   - home
   - shop/company

2. The size and composition of the garden
   - small garden: one solitary plant/A few plants
   - larger garden: an abundance of plants (in this research more than 5
3. The type of street where the garden is located
   - main road
   - shopping street
   - street with sidewalks
   - residential street
   - alleyway

4. The placement of the garden in relation to the building and street
   - plants tightly fit against facade
   - plants in door opening, on threshold, permeating the home
   - plants in front of facade, permeating the street (usually on a small pedestal)
   - plants on other side of sidewalk or self created sidewalk

After an introduction to each neighbourhood the main research in both areas will focus on the first two categories: the type of building where the garden is situated and the size of the garden. This will result in a map of the gardens in both neighbourhoods, their size, and the type of building they belong to. The maps will also give a good impression of the way the gardens are distributed across the urban fabric.

After this general study of both neighbourhoods, I will dive deeper into the details of the gardens with five examples. I'll zoom in on the third and fourth category: The type of street where the garden is located, and the place of the garden in relation to the building and the street. I chose various locations, ranging from the main road in the neighbourhood where a lot of car traffic passes through each day to the small alleyway, where walking is the way to go.

The last part consists of stories about owners and their gardens. As I was unable to conduct interviews with inhabitants myself, I based this part on the work of Marieluise Jonas. As explained in chapter 1 Jonas’ research focuses on the practice and tradition of informal use of space in dense urban conditions. She has made detailed studies of the location and shape of the street gardens in Tokyo, and has conducted interviews with garden owners.¹
Fig. 5.2 - the precise area of the neighbourhood used in this case study
5.2 Case study 1: Higashi Komagata, Sumida-ku

General characteristics
Higashi Komagata [fig. 5.2] is an old worker district of Tokyo developed during early Edo. It's located in close proximity to Sumida River, with Sumida Park laid out along the water [fig. 5.3-5.4]. Across the water lies bustling Asakusa, crowded with tourists, shops and entertainment, all built around the historic temple grounds that are prominent in every Tokyo travel guide. A little to the north of Higashi Komagata is the Tokyo Skytree: Tokyo’s enormous broadcasting tower and favourite spot to look at the city from above [fig. 5.5]. With these crowd pleasers in its vicinity, Higashi Komagata is a notably quieter place. The neighbourhood is mainly residential, with a couple of companies, such as a car repair shop and some indistinct garages. There is only one konbini (convenience store) in the neighbourhood, and one liquor store, and apart from those there are no amenities close by. There are many shops within easy reach
Fig. 5.3 & 5.4 - Sumida river
Fig. 5.5 - Tokyo Skytree, as seen from the case study area
Fig. 5.6 - The streets of Higashi Komagata
just across the water in Asakusa. This part of Higashi Komagata has one pocket park, right across from the kombini and the school. If you had to pinpoint a center of the neighbourhood, this would be it. The neighbourhood is quite generic, with its indistinct buildings and straight grid pattern.²

The neighbourhood was completely deserted during the days I conducted my research (24/28 October 2013). It seems most inhabitants were out at work or stay indoors. During my research the weather was pretty dreary, with grey skies and occasional rainfall. I didn’t see anyone take care of his or her plants, but the weather might be a good explanation for this.³

**Streets, public space and greenery**

Higashi Komagata was destroyed in World War II and consequently has a renewed street pattern, dominated by straight lines and relatively wide streets [fig. 5.6]. There is little topography that determines the shape of the area. It’s located on the flatlands east of Sumida River.

As the streets were reshaped relatively recently, the neighbourhood has a lot of elevated sidewalks, mainly on the main road and largest street [fig. 5.6 d&h]. This is traditionally uncommon in Japan, but has been implemented more and more since the Meiji period. My research area is easily divided into two parts, separated by the main road running through the middle (most clearly visible in
Fig. 5.7 - map of the location of the gardens in the area
fig. 5.2). On the eastside of this road the streets form a solid grid, on the west side the streets are parallel to the Sumida River, which is only one block away to the west. This last area has a slightly smaller scale, without sidewalks, and with a few more nooks and crannies [fig. 5.6 e&g]. Still the urban fabric comes across as pretty straightforward. As everywhere in Tokyo the wires are above ground, carried by poles lining the streets. Buildings in Higashi Komagata are two to four stories high, with a few exceptions that are up to six stories high. The taller buildings are situated on the larger streets. From multiple streets you have a view of Tokyo Skytree, and the high-rise buildings on the bank of Sumida River [fig. 5.5].

There is one vest park in the research area. When I was there multiple people used it even though it was a grey, rainy day. A woman was reading a book, and two teenage boys hung around the swings. An old man was sweeping and emptying the trashcans. The park is the only public space that’s made for lingering in the neighbourhood. Close by, on the banks of Sumida River there is also space to sit and relax, but this location is mostly used by people walking their dog or exercising.
### Higashi Komagata

222 buildings  
178 homes  
44 companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Own Kind (Home/Company)</th>
<th>Percentage of All Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home with large garden</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home with small garden</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home without garden</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company with large garden</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company with small garden</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company without garden</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company with large garden</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company with small garden</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company without garden</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 5.8 - Table of the division of gardens between homes and companies*
Gardens
In Higashi Komagata 70 percent of all homes have a street garden [fig. 5.7]. A little less than half of these homes have a larger garden. Of the companies only 27 percent have a garden, and less than 2 percent of these companies have a large garden. This means that in Higashi Komagata gardens are clearly linked to homes. Homes have a garden almost three times as often as companies do. Because Higashi Komagata has more homes (178) than companies (44) the percentage of buildings that have a garden is higher than you might expect: 62 percent. 26 percent of all buildings have a large garden [fig. 5.8]. There are a few homeowners who go all out and have huge gardens, two of which are part of the examples in the second part of this chapter. Another house has a walled backyard that looks like an ornamental Japanese garden, and keeps seedlings outside the house on the street. They’re lined on the edge of the road in rectangular containers. It looks like a public nursery [fig. 5.9 d&e]. Another home that stands out has plants in and outside of a small garage. The plants are piled inside, as if they’re waiting for a good spot outside [fig. 5.9 h]. Apart from these highlights most gardeners stick to an average number of flowerpots, making for a similarity in the gardens that mirrors the lack of diversity in the neighbourhood well.6
Fig. 5.9 - Examples of gardens in Higashi Komagata
Fig. 5.10 - map of the homes in Higashi Komagata

Fig. 5.11 - map of the companies in Higashi Komagata
Fig. 5.12 - map of the homes and companies in Higashi Komagata
Fig. 5.13 - the area of the neighbourhood used in this casestudy and its surroundings
5.3 Case study 2: Yanaka

General characteristics
Yanaka [fig. 5.13] is a traditional neighbourhood, famous for its large concentration of temples, small shops and wooden houses that were miraculously preserved from the fires of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and destruction of World War II. Following an urban renewal plan after the Meireki Fire (1657), temples in the neighbouring Kanda district were moved to the then rural Yanaka area and neighboring Ueno. With the relocation of the temples, the carpenters and other artisans who worked on them also moved in. Yanaka became an area inhabited by artisans and visited by people coming to see their family graves. Nowadays tourists who look for the old Edo within modern megalopolis Tokyo frequent the neighbourhood. Yanaka is a lively neighbourhood, with a lot of quaint shops and café’s. It is situated very close to Ueno Park, one of Tokyo’s largest parks that is used intensively by both inhabitants of the city and tourists. The area between my
Fig. 5.14 & 5.15 - Buddhist cemetery bordering the case study area
Fig. 5.16 - Temple with surrounding garden on the edge of the case study area
Fig. 5.17 - Streets in Yanaka
research area and the park is covered in temples and Buddhist burial grounds with streets lined with cherryblossom trees [fig. 5.14-5.16]. The small-scale old worldly character that you find in this area is in sharp contrast with the neighbourhoods on the other side of the train tracks east, such as Nippori.8

When I did my research in Yanaka (19/23 October 2013) there were a lot of people in the streets, mostly near the shops, but also in the backstreets. The neighbourhood is welcoming to foreigners, as they form an important part of the income for the companies in the area. There were several tourists walking around with a camera, so I could easily blend in. However, the lion share of the people in the streets were locals. Yanaka also has a large population of elderly Tokyoites.9

**Streets, public space and greenery**

Yanaka has winding streets with few straight lines, lined with low buildings, three floors maximum in the backstreets (which form the largest part of the area) and a few condominiums on the main road [fig. 5.17]. The heart of the neighbourhood is Yanaka Ginza, a famous shopping street (shotengai) well known for the many cats that consider this their home [fig. 5.17 a]. This is a fine example of the character and image of the neighbourhood: it has a small scale with a friendly atmosphere. When you are in Yanaka you feel like you are in a small town and not in the modern city of Tokyo.10
Fig. 5.18 - map of the location of the gardens in the area
The streets have a clear hierarchy:
- the main road is the widest and features sidewalks [fig. 5.17 g];
- parallel to this road is a shopping street wide enough to accommodate cars [fig. 5.17 e];
- the shotengai is a bit narrower, with room for cyclists and pedestrians [fig. 5.17 a];
- the residential streets are narrow, with only a few spaces wide enough for cars to pass through [fig. 5.17 b,d&h];
- the narrow alleyways, where you can just about cycle, but people usually walk [fig. 5.17 c&f].

There are a lot of alleyways in the area and some small courtyards inside building blocks. Aside from the main road there are hardly any cars to be found. In this neighbourhood pedestrians rule the streets, alternated with an occasional cyclist. Streets are narrow and the shotengai and the slightly larger shopping street it opens up to are very crowded. Yanaka is a good example of Jinnai’s theory of how with the disappearance of Nagaya rowhouses after the Kanto earthquake the daily life that took place in the Nagaya now took to the streets. “The elimination of ‘interior’ spaces, however, forced the sights and smells of everyday life, hitherto confined to the back streets, out onto the main avenues of the low city. ...street re-planning resulted in the privatisation, or “alleyisation,” of the main streets. This privatised open space displays the vibrant, living feelings of the low city”. Streets in Yanaka feel like an interior: life takes place on the street. Even on the dreary days when I did my research there were a lot of people in the street, and a lot of people who greeted me and talked to me.
**Yanaka**

309 buildings  
194 homes  
115 companies

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<td>company with large garden</td>
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*Fig. 5.19 - Table of the division of gardens between homes and companies*
Gardens

In Yanaka 74 percent of homes have a garden, of which 43 percent are large. 69 percent of companies have a garden. 25 percent of these are large. 72 percent of all buildings have a garden. 26 percent of all buildings have a large garden. In Yanaka companies have gardens almost as often as homes do. Homes however more often have large gardens [fig.5.18-5.19]. Companies in this neighbourhood are mainly shops, restaurants, café’s and hairdressers, with a few plants positioned at their entrance [fig. 5.20 h,j&k]. Many of the companies have living quarters behind or above it as well. It was usually hard to tell if this was the case or not, so I chose to look at the use of the space the garden was in front of, since this is the space it most closely relates to. Therefore shops that may have homes above it count as companies in this research.

The shops in Yanaka are a fine example of how the street enters the building, as the floor is often on the same level and made of the same material as the street or stoop. Behind the counter is the slightly elevated private space, with a tatami or carpeted floor, where the owner walks on slippers. Meanwhile the plants make for an extension of the semi private space of the shop into the street. This makes the transition between inside and outside very fluent.

When I walked around in Yanaka I saw plants everywhere. Every street has multiple houses with large gardens and the narrow streets and alleyways are filled with plants[fig. 5.20]. The neighbourhood gives a very green impression.13
Fig. 5.20 - Examples of gardens in Yanaka
Fig. 5.21 - map of the homes in Yanaka

Fig. 5.22 - map of the companies in Yanaka
Fig. 5.23 - map of the homes and companies in Yanaka
5.4 Examples of the streets where the gardens are located

In this part of the chapter the focus will lie on the types of streets where the gardens are located, and attention will be paid to the place of the garden in relation to the building and the street. I chose various locations in Higashi Komagata and Yanaka, ranging from the main road in the neighbourhood where a lot of car traffic passes through each day, to the small alleyway, where walking is the way to go [fig. 5.24]. In total I will look into five examples, ordered from big to small scale:

A. main road (Higashi Komagata);
B. street with sidewalks (Higashi Komagata);
C. shoppingstreet (Yanaka);
D. residential street (Higashi Komagata);
E. alleyway (Yanaka).

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*Fig. 5.24 - the location of the examples on the maps of Higashi Komagata and Yanaka*
Fig. 5.24 - the location of the examples on the maps of Higashi Komagata and Yanaka.
Main road
Higashi-Komagata
Fig. 5.25 - map of the main road in Higashi Komagata
With its four lanes, the main road running through Higashi Komagata is wider than the buildings on it are high [fig. 5.25]. On the edge of the sidewalk on both sides there stands a tree that serves as a perfect place to build a garden around. Multiple pots have been placed around the trees and alongside the edge of the sidewalk next to it [fig. 5.26-5.28]. On the eastern sidewalk there is also a garden situated back-to-back with the house across from the tree. Here plants are lined up neatly on a podium of concrete blocks [fig. 5.30 & 5.33].

Around one of the gardens a row of water bottles is placed [fig. 5.31]. This is to prevent cats from going in the gardens. It's a technique that is also used at temples and shrines, where the water bottles are placed in front of the building to prevent cats from entering. On the west side of the street there’s a collection of flowerpots on the porch in front of the house. This space is very clearly part of the building (it’s positioned within the plot, and the first floor extends over it). The pots don’t extent onto the sidewalk, but stop precisely at the border of the plot [fig. 5.29].

14
Street with sidewalks
Higashi-Komagata
Fig. 5.35 - Map of the street with sidewalks in Higashi Komagata
In the street with sidewalks in Higashi Komagata the two sides of the street differ greatly [fig. 5.35]. On the west side of the street the sidewalks have fences: ideal places to group pots around [fig. 5.36]. There is a bitter melon growing on a framework attached to one of them. In this street almost all plants are situated on the sidewalk, next to the fences [fig. 5.39, 5.41 & 5.43]. A few plants are situated in front of the façade [fig. 5.40]. On the opposite side of the street are some businesses, one with a house attached. Here a few plants are positioned back-to-back with the façade, but the sidewalk here looks positively desolate in comparison to the other side [fig. 5.37 & 5.44]. This sidewalk has no fences, and is used more intensively by small lorry’s entering and exiting the garages that open up on to it.\textsuperscript{15}
Shopping street
Yanaka
Fig. 5.45 - Map of the shopping street in Yanaka
The shopping street in Yanaka is crowded with people passing through, and people doing their daily shopping at the vegetable and fish shop [fig. 5.45]. The street has no divisions between different uses. Mainly cyclists and pedestrians use it, but cars pass through regularly as well. Shops use the side of the street to present their goods [fig. 5.46 & 5.48]. There are lines on the street that in some way function as a border for a sidewalk, although this is used very loosely. There is a small elevation that separates the plot from the street. Plants are often situated on this elevation or bordering it on the street [fig. 5.51 & 5.54].

Gardens are mainly placed on the border between two shops, or on both sides of the entrance to the shop [fig. 5.50-5.53]. On the west side of the street one homeowner created a collection of pots on the corner of the plot, just outside the garage [fig. 5.47 & 5.54]. The gardens are small, one to five plants, with an average size of three. The plants are relatively small as well.16
Fig. 5.47

Fig. 5.46

Fig. 5.48
Fig. 5.49-5.51
Residential street
Higashi-Komagata
Fig. 5.55 - Map of the residential street in Higashi Komagata
This residential intersection in Higashi is home to some very enthusiastic gardeners [fig. 5.55]. In the northwest corner the house is completely lined with plants, three rows wide, some growing as tall as the first floor [fig. 5.57 & 5.59-5.61]. Plants are situated close to the house, and hanging from the façade. There are a lot of blooming plants, and the garden is clearly well taken care of. This home is the only one where I saw the owner of the garden, a woman in her forties or fifties.

The house in the northeast corner has a small private yard with a few small potted plants. But the majority of the garden is outside the plot, lining the fence on the west side and the façade on the south side [fig. 5.62-5.64]. Next to the fence the pots are placed on small pedestals. One plant has outgrown its pot completely and grown into a flowering bush. Bordering the façade the garden is again three rows strong, but not as tall and neatly maintained as its neighbour. There are different elevations and pedestals for the pots, which makes for a seemingly well thought out composition. Next to the garden is a higher elevation with a few more pots placed on it, next to what seems to be the front door to the property, but is blocked of by boxes on the inside.

The home in the southeast corner has a large private parking space in front of the house, which is bordered of from one side of the street by rows of plants in relatively small pots [fig. 5.56 & 5.58]. This garden is very monotonous: there are a lot of similar plants in similarly sized pots, none flowering, and not very well managed. The sheer size of the garden and some of the plants however make the garden very impressive. The southwestern corner of the intersection is occupied by a condominium, with a small flowerbed on its corner [fig. 5.57].¹⁷
Alleyway Yanaka
The alley in Yanaka feels like a hallway in a shared apartment [fig. 5.65]. Apart from numerous plants, it’s lined with bicycles, trash bins, laundry, crates, and many other things. Because of the narrowness you only see the ground floor of the buildings, it’s dark and there’s no overview. Upon entering the alley from the eastside there aren’t that many gardens. A few houses keep a small collection of plants tightly fit against the façade, the only place to put them without obstructing the walkway [fig. 5.66]. Further along the gardens grow in size and numbers. In the narrowest part of the alley all plants are back to back with the buildings, either on the ground, on concrete pedestals or in dilapidated flowerbeds [fig. 5.67-5.70]. Some buildings have a very shallow open shed in front of the home, where a multitude of things is stored. In the front or just inside of these sheds are a few pots [fig. 5.71].

On the west side the alley grows a bit wider. Here the gardens extend
more into the street, and grow wilder [fig. 5.72 & 5.73]. Most
gardens in the alley look kind of run down, with broken pots
and plants overgrowing the asphalt. There are no flowering
plants to be found.¹⁸
5.5 Results

The characteristics of the gardens
Most gardens in the two case study areas belong to a home. Large gardens almost always belong to a home. When companies have a garden, it usually only consists of a few plants. Companies with gardens are usually shops, where the owners often live behind or above their shop, so although the plants are in front of the company, there is someone living there. Buildings that are only used as working space rarely have a garden. Larger streets tend to be home to less gardens, just as smaller streets tend to be home to more.

Most gardens are situated against the façade of the building. If there’s room in front of the house, gardens are sometimes extended into this space. In case there is a sidewalk gardens are extended on or moved across the sidewalk, making for small islands of green on the edge of the sidewalk. In almost all of these cases there is an object to group plants around: such as a tree planted by government, a fence, an electricity pole. Pots are positioned on the ground, but equally often on pedestals, usually made of concrete. There are some, but not many hanging plants. Many garden owners have designed a podium with different elevations in front of their house, so the plants closest to the façade are situated about a meter higher than those nearest to the street.

Plants vary greatly in size, contrary to the pots they grow in. Most plants are around 30 to 50 cm tall, but very small plants and taller ones are also abundant. The size is of course limited to some extend by the size of their container. The tall plants are either bushes or climbing plants. In some gardens the pots have completely disappeared: the plants have burst out of and overgrown them. You can still find some pieces of pots among them. In well taken care of gardens you find a lot of flowering plants, in poorly maintained cases only greenery.

Things that caught my attention in both neighbourhoods were the hoses hanging from
Fig. 5.74 - A garden with a rainwater reservoir in the form of a tea kettle
windows, as well as watering cans, pots, and other tools to take care of the garden [fig. 5.69]. Everything needed to take care of the garden is often right there in it. Some owners built ingenious systems to catch rainwater and transport it to the plants [fig. 5.74]. Gnomes and other sculptures are a rare sight; most gardens consist only of plants.

This chapter makes clear that gardens are clearly linked to homes. Most gardens are located in front of homes, and large gardens are almost always located at a home. The companies that do have gardens are often shops, which in some cases have a combined living-working function.

**The functions of the gardens**
Except for their beauty, plants are used in various ways:

- to form a border between two buildings;
- to form a border between a parking space and the street;
- to form a border between the house and the street, like a green wall;
- to appropriate a little more space from the street as part of the shop, or to park a bike;
- as a friendly reminder: to discourage people from putting trash or a bike somewhere;
- to give a friendly, welcoming appearance;
- to slow down traffic by narrowing the street;
- to direct people to follow a certain route, to point out the entrance of a building.

Homes and shops use gardens in a different way. Homes more often have large gardens, which can function as a wall between the home and the street. Homeowners often use plants to form a border. Shop owners don’t want to form a wall in front of the building, they want the opposite: to invite people to come in. They position a few plants on both sides of the entrance to give a welcoming and friendly appearance. This is also the case with homes of course. The other functions of the gardens are true for both
homes and companies.

According to Jonas the most obvious function of the gardens is to enjoy the changing of the seasons, to work creatively and to beautify one’s living environment. She also distinguishes the function of the garden as a way of increasing privacy and as a friendly reminder.\(^{19}\)

**The difference between gardens in a neighbourhood with a traditional lay-out and a modernized lay-out**

The obvious difference between the two case studies is the structure of the urban fabric. In Higashi the streets are generic and monotonous, and slightly wider than the streets in Yanaka. There is no livelihood in the neighbourhood because of the lack of shops and café’s. Life in Higashi takes place outside of the neighbourhood, at work, or inside the home. In Yanaka life happens on the street. The small-scale streets lined with quaint shops offer a great place to leisurely walk around, and the streets feel like an interior. There are a lot of elderly inhabitants who take strolls in the neighbourhood.

But does the renewing of urban fabric in Higashi Komagata make a difference to the amount of gardens? When you look at the numbers it really doesn’t. The difference is minimal, especially when you only look at homes. In numbers Yanaka is not that much greener than Higashi Komagata, but the neighbourhood does on first impression seem to have more gardens.

An important difference between Yanaka and Higashi Komagata is the transition from public to private. In Yanaka there is an undefined area on the border between the house and the street. In shops this undefined area even enters the building. In Higashi there are more sidewalks, a modern addition to Tokyo streets. This makes boundaries and lines clearer, but may take away from the possibility to permit
yourself more undefined spaces to appropriate for your garden. On the other side, sidewalks do offer the opportunity to reach out further into the street, on the other side of the sidewalk.

In Higashi Komagata gardens are clearly linked to homes, as companies have far less, and often smaller, gardens. In Yanaka this difference is much smaller as only a slightly bigger percentage of homes has a garden. The large gardens in the neighbourhood however do belong to homes, and are rarely found in front of companies. The companies in Yanaka are mostly shops, which often keep a small garden.

The reasons why inhabitants of Tokyo keep a garden

Jonas researched the case study of Tsukishima, a neighborhood in the low city of Tokyo. She spoke to several residents about their gardens.

One of the residents Jonas interviewed is Mrs. O. She has lived in a small house in one of Tsukishima’s alleys for the last 50 years. In the morning she takes care of her plants. When Jonas approached her to ask some questions about the potted garden, she was amused that she would care about something so unimportant. Jonas asked her why she is keeping the pots. “Because everybody does,” is her answer, and, after some thought, because her mother did so, too. “From childhood on, I liked plants and we always had some,” she says. The most important plant in her garden is a plant that she brought back home from Kyushu, one of Japan’s southern Islands. “It is not very beautiful, but I brought it from Kumamoto!” “Sometimes I buy a new one, one with beautiful blossoms, like the clematis I got the week before.” On some occasions pots vanish, or are damaged, but it is not a big problem.

“We’ve had the garden since my childhood, I grew up here, my parents loved plants, too”, another resident explained. Her garden was filled with small details: thriving morning glory seeds, tiny ceramics with grass and moss arrangements, lava rocks from Mount Fuji and a beer can planter from Okinawa. “I love to make small things for my garden”. The primroses that she cultivates from her own seeds are the
most cherished things in her garden. “These are difficult plants! But I love their blossoms.”21 When asked about the location of the gardens in her alley she concurred that: “Yes I think that the alley has become a public garden”.22

“Yes, the flowers are important to me, especially the momiji (Japanese maple) seedling which I found one day while taking a walk on the waterfront. It was only 15 cm tall, now it is almost 1.5 m.” a local restaurant owner told Jonas. She has had to reduce the garden’s size for practical reasons: she needed the space for parking bicycles and does unfortunately not have enough time to keep a proper garden. She waters her plants every morning, and in summer also in the evenings. “I watch the seasons go by with my momiji, it is my joy to care for it in the garden,” she explains. When she takes a walk in the neighbourhood, and chats with the neighbours she’s known since 1984 when she moved to Tsukishima she does not talk about flowers: “There are more important things.”23

“I miss green and I want to make the city more beautiful” said 80-year-old Mrs. E. Her garden covers about one third of the walkway in front of her house and consists of “too many plants”. “Do you think it is a problem that your garden covers public land?” Jonas asks. “Yes maybe, but there is enough space under the tree, and of course my garden is for everyone!”. “Are your plants not stolen?” “No, not really, sometimes they get knocked over, but that’s not a problem.”24

“It is important for me that my customers feel good” the owner of a dry cleaning shop told Jonas. “I am happy when people stop to watch my flowers” he continued to describe his efforts to beautify his community. The reason he keeps his garden is to improve the well-being (kimochi) of his customers and passerby. When people feel kimochi by viewing his flowers, the shopowners' kimochi increases as well.25

Family O. lives in one of Yanaka’s narrow alleys (commonly not wider than 2.5m). “There have been quite a lot of accidents here in the curve” explains Mr.
O. “That’s why we have started to put out our plants. … And since our garden has become this big, we have seen less accidents.”

Jonas’ main conclusion after conducting these interviews is the following: ‘In conversation with residents it became clear that, aside from reasons derived from culture, tradition or the present cityscape, the main reason for keeping a flowerpot garden is simply personal fulfillment in caring for plants, working with one’s own hands and creating living, thriving, blossoming compositions of plants to enjoy, show and share.’ The owners of the gardens often don’t consider the plants to be very important but do enjoy them enormously. The gardens seem to be underestimated. They are not a topic of conversation, since there are more important things.
5.6 Discussion

The meaning of the street gardens
With respect to the interview results, I wonder if the answers of the owners of the gardens were completely truthful, in the sense that they might have answered politely and modestly: stating that the garden (their work) was not a big deal, when they may in fact believe it is. Based on the polite way most Japanese express themselves towards strangers, and the enthusiastic manner in which the owners showed all aspects of the gardens when asked about it, it seems quite likely to me, but I can only guess. The gardens are viewed as a low budget make shift version of the real thing; a less than ideal solution for the lack of natural environment in Tokyo. Jonas explains the lack of conversation and thought about the gardens as follows: ‘The naturalness of flowerpots makes it difficult to argue for a deeper meaning. But the simple, and often mentioned, cheap green space provides both recreation and privacy. It is also a way to express oneself creatively.’ All but one of the persons interviewed (total 16 persons) stated that their garden was absolutely private. However, these private gardens are, according to the majority of the interviewed persons, for the public.

Many gardens feature memorabilia from vacations, such as rocks or cans used as planters, and plants and seeds that the owner brought back from a trip to another part of the country. But also walks closer to home are a source of the plants in the gardens. The garden can be considered a place of collected meaning and memory. Aside from to this there are also a lot of seasonal plants residents buy in the local home and garden shop, with no memory attached to them.

Most of the interviewees have lived in the same neighborhood and house for a long time. Tradition appears to be one of the main reasons why they started a garden. According to Jonas: ‘Most owners do not even question
why they have a garden: they have either always had plants, some through family or neighbourhood traditions, some because they moved to the city from rural areas a long time ago or some simply because everybody has one. The current lifestyles in Japan offer few options for younger generations: the majority leads a nomadic life. People rarely use their small homes for more than sleeping. Tokyoites face long commuting and working overtime. Most of their activities take place outside of the home: they go out to eat, out to do laundry, etc. This causes a detachment from home and neighbourhood. The areas with flowerpots offer contrasting lifestyles, with older inhabitants who often have lived in the same house for decades. The gardens are a clear expression of the residents’ attachment to their neighbourhood. Despite the hectic lifestyles of the average Tokyoite, these old inner city quarters are becoming increasingly more popular with younger Japanese.

Attention for the gardens
There is not a lot of attention for the potted gardens in academic studies. The only way they appear is as an element of the roji setting. The rojis are still an important source of inspiration for Japanese thought on the city. Yukio Nishimura wrote a study about this, with a role for the potted plants, called Roji kara no machizukuri (2006), machizukuri emerging from roji. Machizukuri literally means ‘city or town making’. In fact it denotes the participatory planning processes that supplement the traditional toshikeikaku (top down city planning). Jonas argues that people who care strongly about their immediate environment are likely to get involved with larger issues, such as local politics or volunteer work in the neighbourhood, too. Most of the residents she interviewed were organized in a neighbourhood-based group like a chonai: a neighbourhood council that organizes watch groups and informs residents about activities in the neighbourhood. Jonas views the gardens as a creative commitment to community and an act of small-scale appropriation.

The government does not pay much attention to the gardens either. The gardens are illegal, or unofficial but tolerated. They are overlooked and disregarded as a ubiquitous element of ordinary life. Even though the gardens are a Japanese cultural asset found in any Japanese city. City government does view the potted gardens as a potential in sustainable city planning, battling city climate problems such as heat islands and
poor air quality. “The flower pot gardens are simply the last individual green besides regular private gardens and rooftops which can be considered to improve city climate” states the Taito ward city government. Yet an official strategy remains nowhere to be seen.\textsuperscript{37}
1 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo & Potscape. Japanese gardens revisited*

2 Fieldwork by author (24-28 October 2013)

3 Idem.

4 Idem.

5 Idem.

6 Idem.


8 Fieldwork by author (19-23 October 2013)

9 Idem.

10 Idem.


12 Fieldwork by author (19-23 October 2013)

13 Idem.

14 Fieldwork by author (24-28 October 2013)

15 Idem.

16 Fieldwork by author (19-23 October 2013)

17 Fieldwork by author (24-28 October 2013)

18 Fieldwork by author (19-23 October 2013)

19 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 20

20 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 26

21 Idem


23 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 27

24 Jonas, *Potscape. Japanese gardens revisited*, 1

25 Idem, 4-5

26 Idem, 4

27 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 27

28 Idem, 28

29 Idem, 27


31 Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 27

32 Idem, 29
33  Nishimura, *Roji kara no machizukuri*
34  Jonas, *Private use of public open space in Tokyo*, 28
35  Idem, 20
36  Idem, 18
PART THREE
SYNTHESIS
AND
CONCLUSIONS
6.1 Introduction

To find out what the relation is between the street gardens and the concepts of home and nature in Japan, I will, firstly, relate my findings from the case studies (chapter 5) to the described urban history of Tokyo (chapter 2), in order to give a clear understanding of the spatial and historical context in which the street gardens originated and developed. Secondly, I will analyse the results from the case study with the reconstructed Japanese attitudes towards home (chapter 3) and nature (chapter 4).

6.2 Tokyo street gardens and its relation to the urban history of Tokyo

During Tokugawa (1603-1868) the idea of owning an independent home with a garden originated in the high city.1 The high city was home to the samurai who all owned a garden. The daimyo lived in rural palaces with large grounds, the lower ranking warriors in housing complexes with a detached house on a plot with enough space for a garden.2 In the densely populated low city there was no such space: none of the homes had a private garden. Instead there was an open space in the middle of the block that was used for all manner of outside activities and household chores, and was home to a small shrine. The backstreets that led to the open space where the stages for public life in Edo. This is where fires were made to cook on, children played and potted plants were kept.3 Marieluise Jonas sees these semi-private open spaces as an origin of the streetgardens.4

If you look at Edo on a larger scale you see the concepts at work in the planning of the urban fabric. The traditional rules of chi, commonly used when building a Japanese city, were used for the immediate surroundings of the castle, but not in the structure of the rest of the city. This structure was based on the character of Edo as a castle town, where fortification was needed, and on the underlying topography and natural surroundings. The city had a centrifugal structure, and the natural features that were visible from the city were used as a way of orientation and finding ones way. Roads were deliberately laid-out in the direction of landmarks, such as Mount Fuji: to profit of the view. Places in the countryside
such as Mount Fuji had a great presence in the inhabitants’ consciousness, both as geographical orientation and as a place with symbolic meaning. The city had a spectacular sense of scale. The interior spaces of Edo were completely different. Divided into a network of multi-layered units whose scale was more refined and more human as they grew closer to the daily lives of its inhabitants, they had a complicated spatial arrangement. This complex structure was necessary for the defense of the castle town.

During Tokugawa Japanese cities were developed as accumulations of topoi with expressions of memory and meaning. Reference points with symbolic meaning organized the city. In the consecutive Meiji period (1868-1912) little changed in the physical appearance of Tokyo. Roads were straightened to improve the flow of traffic and partitions between neighbourhoods torn down, as they were no longer needed. Apart from this, the urban structure remained the same. However, the image of the city and what it meant to be Japanese did change. With the disappearance of the feudal system the people of Japan had to be united in a nation. During this process of nation building many things changed for the Japanese. Western influences took root and occidental responses to the orientalist view of the West played a large role in the shaping of the Japanese self. This is the period when the myth of the Japanese love of nature first started being told.

After the Kanto earthquake (1923) the backstreets completely disappeared from the center of the city. Part of the earthquake recovery program was the increase of good livelihood in the city. On a residential scale vest pocket parks were an important tool for this. Traditional collective space was replaced by modern designed collective space. The elimination of ‘interior space’ forced the everyday life onto the main avenues of the low city. Residents’ laundry and potted plants were put out in the street, and dwellers privatized the open space: a process later dubbed ‘alleyization’.

During the rebuilding of Tokyo after the Pacific War urban development was
focused on industrialization. All resources were used to improve this, and housing was left to the private sector. High-rises were built, blocking the view of natural features such as Mount Fuji. The result was visual chaos with no underlying vision on the city. It was a period of rapid economic growth resulting in a hyper dense community. Growth beat planning and there was no time to save space for green and good living environments. There was a big draw to the city, which caused urban sprawl, pushing Tokyo to its physical limits. During the bubble economy further deregulation and greater freedom for urban projects dictated the urban planning. Urban development answered to the free market, and was based on a pro-business ideology. When the bubble burst the sentiment changed, and more attention was paid to quality of life in the city. The period saw a growth of voluntary activity, non-profit, non-governmental organizations and citizens movements directed at environmental improvement.\textsuperscript{12} As city growth slowed down, a call was heard for the return of dwelling in the city. Downtown developments took place in older neighbourhoods. Following the economy focused urban development preceding this period the nineties knew a more citizen oriented city development.

Nowadays the big scale has disappeared from Tokyo, but the small scale has stayed and is the city’s biggest strength. As long as this small scale remains, Tokyo is the perfect place to appropriate space for the creation of street gardens. With the growing appreciation for bottom up projects both in the West and in Japan, they could even start to play a bigger role in the urban fabric and thought about the city.
6.3 Tokyo street gardens and the home

The physical way in which the megalopolis of Tokyo has been organized is in parts, that means areas. Where in the West streets structure cities, in Japan cities consist of areas. The city is decentralized in small-scale parts. Because of the egg and shell structure, and the resulting low-traffic enclosed places behind the main streets, autonomous neighbourhoods have a chance to flourish. These neighbourhoods are the perfect confined location for the street gardens. They are found in the smaller streets where pedestrians and cyclists move through the city.

Berkhout discusses the way in which the city is configured as a collection of places connected by threads of meaning when he speaks of the mythic field, which provides stability and coherence in the fluid urban landscape of Tokyo. The symbolic elements that make up the layer are both physical and intangible: local foods, signs of konbini’s and shops, the omnipresent vending machines, but also traditions and rituals, the changing of the seasons and the distant mountains. The elements of the mythic field are temporal and defined by actions rather than objects. This sentiment also surfaces in Berque’s description of the temple of Ise: ‘[…] at Ise, we are in the presence not of a ‘finite object,’ but of an ‘infinite process’ (at least in theory); and this is merely another way of saying that what constitutes the heritage here is as much the subject (the participants in the rite) as it is the object (the temple).’

You could argue that the street gardens are also more about the action of gardening than about the garden as an object. Tools are lying around in the garden: it is a place to be worked in, not only to be looked at. The taking care of the garden is a ritual, a tradition commonly adopted from ancestors. In this sense the gardens qualify as a part of the mythic field. In the interviews the owners didn’t give a lot of weight to the gardens as objects. Perhaps the gardening is of more importance, as it entails daily motions in the public space: a way of appropriating it, and feeling at home in the street and neighbourhood. In this way the action is also important (or even more so than the result), and plays a part
in feeling at home in one’s environment. The act of enriching one’s environment and the environment of others in the vicinity is a clear sign of making home.

One of the key concepts when speaking of the home in Tokyo is the duality of *uchi* versus *soto*. These terms (literally meaning inside and outside) are used in creating a sense of self, based on the community. The concepts show in the shape of boundaries to regulate the distinction between the two, and prescribe social rituals and the organization of space.\(^\text{15}\) The concepts are visible in traditional and contemporary housing design in Japan. The garden traditionally is part of *uchi*. The potted gardens can also be seen as an extension of the *uchi* into the *soto* of the street.

In the traditional house (during Tokugawa) the largest part of the house was reserved for entertaining. The male household entertained the guests with a view of the garden. The garden functioned as a decor piece. The *uchi* at this time seems to have a less private character than later on (during Meiji), when the focus was on the smallest possible *uchi* with the conjugal family. During Meiji the home was redefined as an intimate space set apart from society and focused on parents and children.\(^\text{16}\) The Japanese family, and with it the home, became more private.\(^\text{17}\) The garden lost its function as a decor piece.

As the home nowadays is very private the garden functions as an extra barrier and demarks the border between the home and the street. The garden can also be conceived as transitional space. Increasingly there are a lot of very small individual homes in Tokyo. This individualization of space leads to a growing sensitivity of privacy.\(^\text{18}\) The city is very dense with barely any open space. Nowadays plots are usually too small to keep a garden and people instead grow some plants in pots in front of their house. The high city tradition of keeping an enclosed garden slowly disappeared from the city and was often replaced with a form of garden that is reminiscent of the low city: the street garden in front of the house.
Uchi seems to have turned out to be both more private, as the home is only used by its inhabitant, but also more public, as many functions that traditionally took place inside the safe realm of the home have now been moved outside, into the street and konbini. Social activities with friends or family take place outside of the home, in public spaces. The neighbourhood can be described as more uchi then soto. Krusche and Roost argue that the small residential street is the first transitional space between the outside (soto) and the inside (uchi). They are very lively and contained. The space of the street is appropriated for personal use, such as keeping a garden. The street is used intensely for all manner of outdoor activities. Tokyo residential streets are shielded and small in size. There is virtually no public green space, but the neighborhoods are safe, livable and know the spirit of neighborliness.

During my research in Yanaka I recognized this low city atmosphere named so often in texts about the low city and its small streets. The street is lively and home to many gardens. However, in Higashi Komagata, where there is no trace of a low city atmosphere, there are almost as many gardens as in Yanaka. In Higashi the street feels like soto, in Yanaka as uchi. The potted plants are only one aspect of the atmosphere they are so often linked to, and this low city charm is not necessary for the presence of gardens. In more modern looking, less charming neighbourhoods gardens are equally omnipresent. I wouldn’t be surprised if these neighbourhoods still have the potential to be classified as uchi, it is merely less obvious, but all the ingredients are there: neighbourhood noticeboards, a local shop, a feeling of safety, etc. I just wouldn’t describe the street as lively. This can be seen as proof that the street gardens have spread out over the city, escaping their roots that lie in the small and contained low city streets.

The street gardens are situated in transitional space between uchi and soto. They are part of the uchi, which has arguably been extended into the street by appropriating it. In this way, they form a border around the very private Japanese house, but also paradoxically blur the line between public and private. The
gardens play a part in the mythic field, and are symbolic of other places and memories.
6.4 Tokyo street gardens and nature

Occidental representations of nature played a large part in shaping the Japanese nation and the Japanese self during Meiji. The love of nature is presented as the nature of the Japanese.\(^{21}\) Even if it doesn’t stroke with reality, the idea remains and is present today that the Japanese identity and culture is closely linked to nature. I would argue Japanese thought towards nature is closely related to the appropriation of nature in the culture and the appreciation of natural beauty. Nature and culture are closely linked, but on the terms of culture. Nature is brought into everyday life, in advertising, popular culture, art and through contextualization even the artificial can represent and be nature. The nature that is most cherished is so-called ‘cooked nature’, mostly practiced close to home, in the safe realm of the *uchi*. The potted gardens are an example of the contextualization and wrapping or cooking of nature: they are a cultural version of the natural surroundings, with an aesthetic and/or spiritual function. It is a mediation between the aspects of the *soto* of nature in the raw, and the safety of the *uchi* world of social and cultural life. Simply stated: gardens are conceptually inside, but physically outside.

One of the aspects the Japanese admire most in nature is the concept of *mono no aware*: the awareness of impermanence and the relationship between impermanence and beauty.\(^{22}\) This clearly showed in the interviews with garden owners: multiple people pointed out that they enjoyed experiencing the changing of the seasons in their garden, a classic expression of *mono no aware*. Along the same lines lies the concept of *wabi sabi*, the quintessential aspect of Japanese aesthetic. It is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete, a beauty of things modest and humble. On the other hand the Japanese love a kind of nature that is very controlled and contained. They have an enjoyment of nature in highly idealized circumstances, in which they show the small, gentle and intimate aspects. Nature is appreciated as symbolic rather than realistic.\(^{23}\)

This confined way of enjoying nature is mirrored in the way in which in Edo gardens were filled with replications of scenic spots of the countryside so lords
didn’t have to travel home. Miniatures are the transformation of wild nature into an idealized shape. This concept can be translated to the street gardens, which apart from their small-scale representation of nature can also be seen as a locus of meaning and memory. The gardens contain plants and memorabilia from other locations in Japan, and are in this way used as a place of memory, or a place symbolic of another place.

Tokyoites are increasingly further distanced from raw nature, which means that the average person to an increasing extent sees nature in and through representations in art, popular culture of another cultural translation, such as a garden. When you no longer have a view of Mount Fuji, you can still look at the rocks in your garden you brought back home from its slopes and can still encounter its image on a candy wrapper. This way the mountain stays with you, even if it disappeared from sight. The same is true for less iconic nature.

The traditional Japanese garden had a few key characteristics. One of these was the enclosure, an important feature of its form. When the garden is enclosed, it has the character of a contained idealized object. This idealized, culturally appropriated nature is seen by the Japanese to be the true nature, and the traditional garden is where this ideal is found. It is not only a model of nature, but also a model for nature.

With the move of the gardens from within the plot to outside, onto the street, gardens have become less idealized, and more temporal. The concepts of mono no aware (the pathos of things) and wabi sabi (the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete) are clearly represented in the gardens but the ideal of simplicity of form as true nature is not so much, even though it is supposed to be one of the results of cooking nature. The ideal form of nature shown by taking away unnecessary complications that is important in the traditional Japanese garden does not play a big role in the potted gardens. The street gardens however are an appreciation of the small and gentle, which is also a part of cooked nature. The street gardens are impermanent, incomplete and often modest and humble, in true wabi sabi style. The plants are in pots, and for that reason are modular.
Jonas discusses the less idealized character of the gardens as well. She notes that it can be argued that the lack of natural environment in Tokyo produces these structures as a less-than-ideal solution. They seem like a ‘low budget makeshift version’ of the real thing. ‘The idealized image of garden which continues to exist - particularly in Japan it seems- does not include these informal, close-to-reality solutions that truly enrich Japanese cities.’ I would agree with her analysis, but would like to add that I believe the street gardens do fit with the wrapping of nature so typical of the Japanese view of nature, and also embody important Japanese aesthetic concepts appreciated in all art forms and nature.
1. Idem., 48-49.
10. Idem, 129.
Chapter seven
Conclusion
The basis for the Tokyo street gardens is found both in the high city, where the desire to have a home with a garden was born, and in the low city, where the open spaces in the middle of building blocks were used as a semi-private collective place for (among other things) potted gardens. Edo was developed in close relation to its natural surroundings. Representations of natural places were important in the shaping of meaning and structure and were always present in the consciousness of Edo’s inhabitants. These references formed a web of meaningful places. In the era’s that followed the sense of scale that was so typical of Edo disappeared, but the small scale of the low city stayed and developed itself to be one of the biggest strengths of the city up to this day. The street gardens are historically linked to this kaleidoscopic urban fabric of parts. From Meiji onward more western influences entered the country and the Japanese increasingly adopted a more private way of home making. Traditional collective space was replaced by designed collective space. The elimination of ‘interior space’ forced the everyday life onto the main avenues of the low city. Residents’ laundry and potted plants were put out in the street, and dwellers privatized the open space. These types of spaces are still possible today due to the egg and shell structures in the urban fabric of Tokyo. This organizational structure offers a sheltered and confined location for the gardens. It creates an urban space that invites appropriation of the street. Apart from a traditional aspect of low city life, this appropriation of the street is a result of high density and contemporary individualization in the city. Because many Tokyoites are forced to live in small houses many activities are moved to the street and the konbini on the corner. The relation between gardens and the house has shifted. Where first it was a thing to be looked at from the safe realm of the uchi, nowadays the garden is located in a transitional space between the uchi and soto. It is considered to be uchi, as the garden owners Jonas interviewed stated. But it is meant for the public, and located in public space. How public, or rather how soto, this space is, is to be considered. You could argue that the small streets are part of a broader type of uchi, and do not count as soto. In this case the garden is on the border of the small and very private type of uchi of the home, and the more open, semi-public, uchi of the small streets. In any case, the gardens are seen as uchi, not soto.
The high city tradition of keeping an enclosed garden slowly disappeared from the city with the increasing density of the urban fabric during Meiji and the consecutive decades. In relation to the home, the function of the traditional garden as a decor piece dissipated. In relation to the concept of nature, the form of the enclosed garden as an ideal of and for nature is not reflected in the street gardens. The street garden is linked to the small streets of the low city and stands in a low city tradition, but has gradually taken over the whole city. Informal gardens flourish just as easily in new urban fabric. The street gardens have spread out over the city, escaping their roots that lie in the small and contained low city streets.

The street gardens are a product of the myth of the love of nature in Japan. They are one of the many ways in which the Japanese create a cultural representation of nature and contextualize and ‘cook’ nature. The street gardens embody important aspects of traditional thought on nature and aesthetics, most notably the concepts of *mono no aware* and *wabi sabi*. The gardens celebrate the gentle and small, which the Japanese so appreciate in nature. In this respect they fit the Japanese image of nature. The gardens are a cultural version of the natural surroundings, with an aesthetic and/or spiritual function. ‘Japanese pull with their metaphorical rope mountains and sea into their tiny gardens and further into their houses.’ The concept of miniature aesthetic can also be translated to the street gardens, which apart from their small-scale representation of nature can also be seen as a locus of meaning and memory. The gardens contain plants and objects representing other places, and are in this way used as a place of memory. As the raw nature has completely disappeared and there are no views on surrounding natural elements of Tokyo, this function of the gardens as a symbol and representation of nature has become increasingly more important, as inhabitants of the city are further removed from nature than ever.
As mentioned earlier, the enclosed garden as an ideal of and for nature is not reflected in the street gardens: the idea of grooming nature to let the true nature shine through focuses on the garden as an object, something to be looked at and admired for its simple perfection. The street gardens seem to be just as much about the process as they are about the result. One indication of this is the fact that the people who look at the potted gardens are the public, the passerby. The owner is in the garden, not looking at it from a distance. You cannot see the garden very well from the house since it is usually situated bordering the façade. It is safe to say that the garden is not just there as an object to be looked at, since the gardener cannot see it from his or her home. The gardens and the act of gardening are part of the mythic field, an important concept that makes people feel at home in the city. The gardening entails daily motions in the public space: a way of appropriating it, and feeling at home in the street and neighbourhood. In this way the action is also important (or even more so than the result), and plays a part in feeling at home in one’s environment. The act of enriching one’s environment and the environment of others in the vicinity is a clear sign of making home.

In conclusion the Tokyo street gardens stand in a long tradition of small-scale spaces in the city and of Japanese ideas on nature and home.

1 Kalland and Asquith, *Japanese Images of Nature*, 16.
EPILOGUE
THE PLANT UNIFORM
The uniform is inherent in Japanese culture, but its meaning has changed. The colour of our collar does not form our identity. Choose your plants wisely.

The plantuniform is a uniform for life.

Tokyo is an endless city. The sense of home surpasses the walls of the house. To feel at home in the endless city we need to be at ease.

The plantuniform gives us breathing space.

The sidewalks of residential Tokyo know many gardens. They form the border between the house and the public space. But we can also bring them along.

The plantuniform protects us everywhere.

In the city nature is distant, but when we wear plants it is omnipresent. A walking ecosystem in a concrete jungle. Our garments evolve and so do we.

The plantuniform will outgrow us when we die.
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