

CITY AS LANDSCAPE

MASAO MATSUDA

It was a strange festival. Naturally there was a miniature shrine and a festival float to create a garish atmosphere. A party led by the priest, with children swarming around it, was walking in a procession toward the groves in the shrine, which was slightly higher, in the middle of the small local city. As we were filming these proceedings we couldn't help but to laugh. The small annual mid-summer ceremony was moving gracefully along, despite our nefarious laughter, though minus the tourists usually seen at this type of local city festival.

The reason for our laughter was that the festival procession was modeled after the *daimyo gyoretsu*, a reenactment of a feudal lord's procession, with men proceeding solemnly in step, thrusting feathered-spears high into the air. "Down on your knees, down on your knees." shouted the guide, attended by people carrying *fubako* letter boxes and *nagamochi* lacquer trunks, followed by majestic-looking samurai horsemen wearing *hakama*. In short, it was everything that one would imagine when hearing the words *daimyo gyoretsu*, just like a painting. Given a closer look, there was also a group of men that couldn't be anything but court officials in costumes. As I've said, there was, in fact, everything—from a Shinto priest standing on the sidewalk performing purification rituals, to a miniature shrine, a float, flutes and taiko drums—all the stereotypes of a "festival" that we had become familiar with since childhood through images or movies. All that was missing was the "excitement" that a "festival" should have been accompanied by.

The festival took place at Abashiri City, in the extreme north of Hokkaido, bordering on the Sea of Okhotsk. Why was there a feudal lord's procession at the Abashiri shrine? That this simple and basic question was the cause of our laughter I don't need to reemphasize. This region, where the remains and relics of the Okhotsk potters, early settlers of the region, were discovered, was inhabited by the Ainu from the Edo-Ainu period about four hundred years ago. There could have been traffic from mainland Japan coming and going, in the process of political administration by bakufu, the central government, due to economic control by the Matsumae clan, as well as militaristic necessities in the late Edo period. However, since it was after the county office of Abashiri Village was founded in 1880 (Meiji 13) that a large number of Japanese started to travel there, and four years later an elementary school and a temple were to be established, naturally the foundation of the Shinto shrine would have been later than that.

Based on these historical specificities, should we attribute the fact that the illusory feudal lord's procession suddenly appeared at a festival in this extreme Northern city, where a feudal lord's procession had never taken place, to the strong sense of commonality that lingered as a remnant in the memories of the original colonizers? Here, quoting a prototype of a simple indigenous Ainu festival described in *Short History of Abashiri*, I can describe the rival accounts of the native folklore and the colonizer's folklore as an object for investigation:

“The first visitors who bring a sign of spring to this region are seals arriving, carried on the drifting ice. The hunting of the seals, carried out by wading through the ice fields, was enough to satisfy the adventurous spirit of natural men. When the time came, the people in the village rowed their boats to Boshi Iwa, placed an altar on the island to decorate a wooden wand, and the family’s patriarch prayed to the coast for the fish harvest... Boshi Iwa became a sacred site to connect the life of the Ainu with the gods, and people called this island Chiba Shiri, and worshipped it.”

It is sufficient to say that the festival ritual held in Abashiri bore absolutely no relationship to the description above, and in fact, it was in every sense the worst kind of imitation of the festivals that were preserved in the cities of the mainland. Today the sacred place Chiba Shiri, which is only remembered as the origin of the word Abashiri, is nothing but a bizarrely shaped rock. And furthermore, as is plainly pointed out in my earlier description of the absence of tourists at the Abashiri Shrine festival, it is rare to find anyone who shows interest in the methods of festivals imported directly from the mainland. Young tourists who visit Abashiri in summer go on pilgrimages rather to the Abashiri Prison, in the exact opposite direction from the Abashiri Shrine. Am I the only person who reads keen sarcasm toward the *daimyo gyoretsu* in the fact that today, the ‘holy land’ in Abashiri, is the so-called Abashiri Bangaichi, i.e. Abashiri Prison, and the god who is enshrined therein is in fact a film actor?

Allow me to briefly describe the purpose of our trip to shoot the film during which we ran into this quasi-festival in Abashiri by chance. In the second half of 1969, I was shooting a documentary film, along with a small number of friends, which followed the footsteps of a teenager. This film, on which we had just barely completed work and were now taking a break from, was in fact about the <serial killer> Norio Nagayama. This is made clear with its structure of one hour and twenty-six minutes of film footage shown between the opening intertitles, <Last fall four murders were committed in four cities with the same gun/This spring a nineteen-year-old teenager was arrested/He was called a serial killer> and the closing intertitles, <In the fall of 1968 four murders were committed in four cities with the same gun/In the spring of 1969 a nineteen-year-old teenager was arrested/He was called a serial killer>. Abashiri is the town where Norio Nagayama was born and spent his childhood.

This text does not aim to discuss our film directly, rather it is based on the four months of my own experience of having travelled through different cities in Hokkaido Tohoku, Kanto, Tokai, and Kinki in order to experience for ourselves the oscillating path that Norio Nagayama had taken. I must comment next on my impressions of the area of Itayanagi-cho, Kita-Tsugaru-gun, Aomori-shi, where Norio Nagayama, who was born “outside” of the Abashiri Yobito area in the outskirts of Abashiri, moved with his family at the age of five. I

could not help but see this small rural town as a surrogate of Abashiri. In other words, the unique local character was extremely eroded, and we discovered instead a homogenized landscape which can only be called a copy of the central city. Whether it was the colonized city Abashiri or the indigenous town of Itayanagi or ultimately the metropolitan city of Tokyo, they all looked almost identical to our eyes.

And somehow, this experience of anticlimax after trying to discover the distant cause of his crime within the dark climate of the north seems to be common to other people as well. For example, a TV reporter notes on this small town with a population of 23,000 as follows: "Upon the arrest of Norio Nagayama, newspapers and TV reporters gathering scholars, writers and critics, tried to quickly fabricate an image of him... Among these literati, the one who stood out as being the most persuasive was the statement by Mr. T, a poet and the leader of an underground theater group, who came from the same Aomori, and had gone through similar circumstances. He regarded Norio Nagayama as an urban gypsy, drifting through the urban desert of Tokyo, saying that what had made him have his nightmarish murderous intent was <the desolate and forlorn sky of the northern country>... On the contrary, however, the sky of Itayanagi was stunningly bright. Mount Iwaki was shining silvery-white against smog-free, bright blue sky." (*Dokumentari Seishun*)

This documentary writer, after remarking frankly that his image of <the desolate north> had been shattered, provided various data about the riches of the town. I already mentioned that we, having visited this town three months later than he did—that is, in summer instead of spring—shared this impression. Perhaps this poet, "Mr. T" from Aomori (a.k.a. Shuji Terayama), would reject it as the ad hoc idea of carefree tourists. Sure enough, we, who had not experienced the mid-winter of Tsugaru, didn't have the impression of a <desolate north>. It could be said however that our eyes, as those of tourists, could be inversely paired against those of the quasi-intellectuals from rural areas, who can only think in terms of stereotypical dichotomies between center=fertile; and rural=desolate. Now it is only a homogenized landscape that exists, in the city as well as in rural areas, in the center as well as in the periphery, in <Tokyo> as well as in the <homeland>. Suppose we saw apple orchards extensively continuing in Tsugaru Plain, it would never be seen as a lush green forest, but merely as something stained with white spots from the spraying of pesticides associated with our grey capital. Evidently <the desolate and forlorn sky> is also the name for our smoggy sky.

We thus were unable to find the <homeland> that may have nurtured Norio Nagayama, either on the Okhotsk Coast or on the Tohoku Plain. Indeed, all we saw was a miniature <Tokyo>. We can even identify a small slum located at the corner of Itayanagi where Norio Nagayama had lived during his elementary school days with any number of locations in

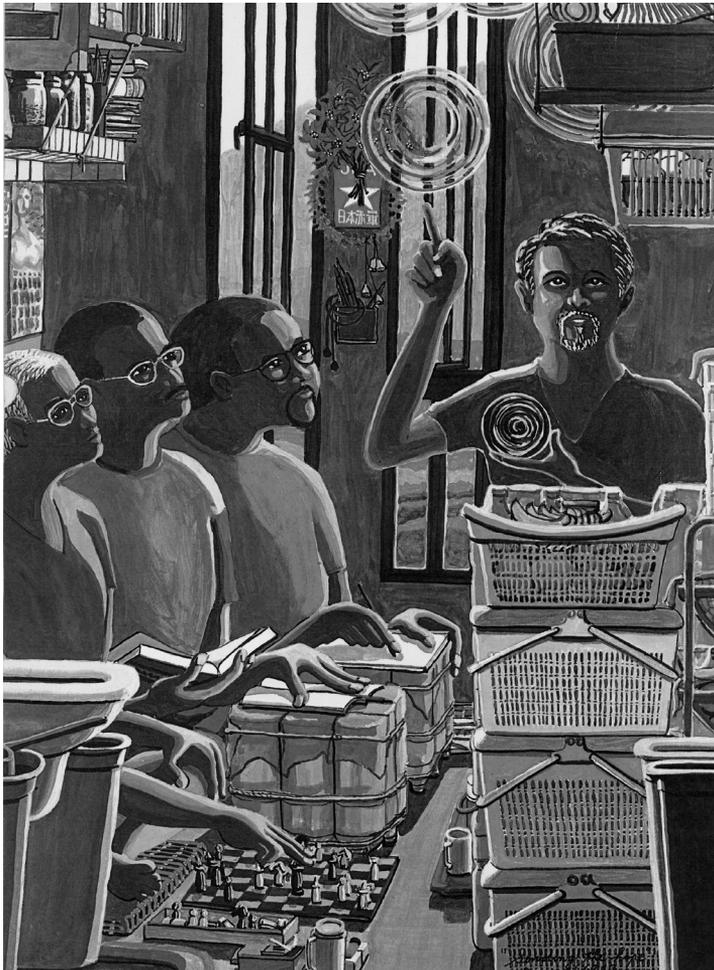
Tokyo. We must confirm that the dichotomy of <Tokyo> versus <homeland>, which was the premise at the time when Gan Tanigawa expressed, “Do not go to Tokyo, create your homeland” at the end of the sixties, is no longer commensurable. The fast growth of our monopoly seems to increasingly expose directions for homogenization on a daily basis using the entire Japanese Archipelago as a single megalopolis.

It is clear that explaining the situation in which the local youth population—even including Norio Nagayama as a typical instance—has been concentrated in the city exclusively based on the nature of a capitalist economy, will make us fall into the net of objectivism. If it were the case, would they ditch their <homeland> and come to <Tokyo> in response to Shuji Terayama’s *lede no susume* (In praise of running away from home)? Perhaps the true answer lies where the pearls of wisdom of both Gan Tanigawa and Shuji Terayama are sublimated. In other words, a countless number of Nagayamas must be trying to go to <Tokyo> and create their <homelands> there. It is precisely in <Tokyo> that something primordial that they seek can be found, because their own <homeland> has in fact been merely an imitation of <Tokyo>. Thus, their zealous gaze toward <Tokyo> can’t help but highlight their true <homeland> in the domain of invisibility. The journey to <Tokyo> thus becomes a trip to the primordial world for themselves. Without having even a single moment to rest, they continue their journey, which is the complete opposite of the ethnographers who go on their journey in search of our past origins in the present day, either to the middle of nowhere, or on remote islands.

In this context, when Shuji Terayama—a proponent of “in praise of running away from home,” presenting himself seemingly as a sympathizer of Nagayama’s wandering—quotes his own clever aphorism, “When one is abandoned by history, one references geography,” he ends up being oblivious to the fact that he has been outwitted by the “history-based thinking” that he himself denounces. *As a result, what Terayama does, as seen in his writings on Norio Nagayama—which were included in his books *Boku ga senso ni iku toki* (When I Go to War) or *Kofuku-ron* (On Happiness)—is only to indicate Nagayama’s lack of “strength of thought,” “imagination,” as well as “dramatic imagination.” Terayama

* Translator’s Note:

According to Terayama, there were two types of people, one “history-type” and the other “geography-type.” The “history-type” remains at one place investigating one’s life through repetition and accumulation; “geography-type” on the other hand, tests life through migration, changing one’s base and seeking encounters. He argues that traditionally the Japanese in the “closed-country edict” of souls, used to be “history-type” honoring aspects of repetitions, as characterized by a cycle of four seasons, so Terayama hoped to break free from such “historicism,” and live and question traveling geographically and dialogically



Drawing by
Adachi Masao
(Rounieh Prison,
Beirut, 1999).

fails to extend his own thought to the reality of Nagayama, and of all Nagayamas as the nameless masses of the underclass, whose “historical” stability could be created only through “geographical” wandering. He argues, “We are too tied up with too many *Jokyo-ron* (writings on situation) to distinguish whether an act is heroic or criminal.” However, I believe it is absolutely unproductive and empty to preach “the restoration of imagination” in a tone recommending the promotion of virtue, to people who have nothing to do with “circumstances” or “situation,” but are dependent only upon the “power to act,” rather than the “power of thought” as a springboard.

Presenting a choice between “history” and “geography” is indeed a history-based way of thinking that has already been inscribed in the interiority of the person presenting it. It is also true that those who favor this type of thinking tend to immediately switch to a geography-based way of thinking. In other words, they place a blank map of Japan based on the “imagination” that is already conceived in their mind in which they walk in the footsteps that Nagayama had taken and pretend that they understood something. And if Nagayama’s journey, being initially <a journey to something primordial>, is connected to the stops along his migration in the external world, the map of Japan that appears in his internal world may, as we imagined before, have a completely different appearance from what it looks like in reality, with an extremely bizarre shape.

Here, just in case, let us follow the trajectory of Nagayama’s wanderings, dividing it into periods, which were also to become our itineraries.

The outskirts of Abashiri city–Downtown Abashiri city–Itayanagi–(running away from home) Hiromae–Aomori–Hakodate–Itayanagi–(running away from home) Yamagata–Fukushima–Itayanagi–(Move to Tokyo for collective employment)

Tokyo/Shibuya–(quit job/illegal migration) Yokohama–Nagoya–Hong Kong–Yokohama–Oyama–(employed) Utsunomiya–(thereafter moved from one place to another) Osaka–Moriguchi–Tokyo/Haneda–Kawasaki–Yokosuka–Kawasaki–tokyo/Yodobashi and Higashi Nakano–Ikebukuro–Sugamo–Odawara–Aatami–Nagoya–Osaka–Kobe–(illegal migration) Yokohama–Tokyo/Nerima–Nishiogikubo and Higashi Nakano–Itayanagi–Tokyo–Nagano

Yokosuka–Tokyo/Ikebukuro–(thereafter moved from one place to another)–Shiba–Kyoto–Yokohama–Tokyo/Ikebukuro–Hakodate–Otaru–Sapporo–Hakodate–Nagoya–Yokohama–Tokyo/Shinjuku and Nakano–Yokohama–Tokyo/Harajuku

Each period of wandering has its respective time span—fifteen years for the first period, three and a half years for the second, and six months for the third. One can easily notice that each

period correlates to the three phases of his growth, living, and crime, indicating an expansion of space and fluctuation of time which are inversely proportional to each other incrementally. Japan for Nagayama may have been a strangely distorted, non-Euclidean space. And whether it be nevertheless or precisely for this reason, in following the trajectories of Norio Nagayama across the country over four months, all views of rural and remote regions reflected a homogenized landscape to our eyes, as those who had reenacted the journey.

The journey to search for <homeland> as something primordial that has been lost, thus, always marks the end as we discover similar landscapes no matter how far we go. In his recent essay, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, Suehiro Tanemura points out “the reverse perspective, with which to view scenery as if an unfamiliar town were the town of your birth, or vice versa,” (*Toshi*, First Issue). So perhaps in Japan it is only through the homogenization of landscape that the irreconcilable distortion of time and space existing between “unfamiliar town” and “town of your birth” becomes visible. And via this distortion landscape is no longer commensurate with ‘nature’ or ‘climate’ in that it can be irreversibly and abruptly excised, through the collision of the natural and the artificial. It is for this reason, as I have previously asserted in my book *Bara to mumeisha* (A rose and the nameless one), that Norio Nagayama in his endless <journey to the primordial> “must have fired the bullets to cut through the landscape.”

Shooting the documentary on Norio Nagayama, our foremost objective was to strengthen our perspective as to how Japan, as landscape, could possibly be captured. Our specific time and space would invariably differ from the trajectory of Norio Nagayama, even as we adhered to the same itinerary. And if a single element is to be extracted from the time and space between us, it indeed is the landscape: Yes, it is landscape that is picture-perfect, like a painting or a large mural in a traditional Japanese bathhouse. We may have been following the reverse cycle of what Benjamin had described as an aphorism in praise of French photographer Atget:

“It has quite justly been said of him that he photographed landscape like scenes of crime. The scene of crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, ...” (“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”)

We, contrary to Atget, filmed the scenes of the crimes as landscape. Even though, according to Benjamin, it should be expected that “in the crowd, the city was now landscape, now a room” (“Arcades Project”), our camera eye at last only captured the “city as landscape,” but was unable to reach “city as room,” possibly because it was neither the “circumstances” nor “situation” (terms the intelligentsia were so fond of), but rather landscape that had surrounded, confronted and antagonized Nagayama, and that in order for us to grasp him

materially from the outside, landscape was to be our only option. But let us not waste time in digression. It will suffice to stress that through landscape, we attempted to aim for his, or our own <invisible homeland>.

Now at the end of our journey, we arrive at Tokyo, to which Nagayama returned repeatedly—this obscene megalopolis, an archetype of <homeland> for those wandering lower-class masses from remote areas. Was there that primordial ‘excitement’ in our capital that had disappeared even from the <festival> of that local city? Of course there was not. We won’t likely be able to forget that hollow parade named <Shinjuku Festival> which had passed through the streets of Shinjuku on a fall day at the end of October. A few days earlier, a festival procession led by the fife and drum corps of a certain religious organization was passing by. It was the exact imitation, believe it or not, of a television talk show scene, without the least difference. How sad it was for the original one to imitate the <shadow> of the media that it had delivered itself! And as was appropriate to this completely empty place, looking as if it had been transformed into a dead city under martial law, with nobody except for the uniforms of riot police and civilian clothes of the vigilante standing out, it was no longer a landscape even, but the funeral of the landscape. “Be quiet! a funeral procession is passing by you. Tilt the binarity of your kneecaps towards the earth and sing a song from beyond the grave.” (Lautréamont)

The lower-class masses trying to realize their <homeland> in <Tokyo>, through their initial energy that had been accelerated in the seeking of something even more primordial now know no bounds. Having enough of the fictitious festival, and as the betrayal of <Tokyo> is gradually becoming evident, the people set out on an endless <journey> to find the excitement of a genuine festival, in the sense that Lefebvre referenced about the Paris Commune, saying, “the <festive> style is the style proper to the Commune.” Meanwhile, among the texts on urbanism written by experts I had skimmed through to write this essay, the only text that never ceased to stimulate me was Kaoru Mizuki’s fierce critique of Goro Hani, in which he describes the primordial form of this <journey> as follows:

“.....they effortlessly become free from their family or local authorities. But how transparent and precarious that freedom is. They begin to make a living floating in the Megalopolis, but can we even call that living? The thoughtlessness and incompetence of comparing the flow of these people at the bottom of the social hierarchy with a Greek city’s agora, or with the Renaissance city-states [apparently built on the freedom and equality of the citizens] becomes apparent when one imagines the overwhelming pain of their wandering. Could the Nihon University student movement be thought of as the rebellion of those poor young people who had abandoned their homeland against the mega-city of Tokyo? Sons of lesser traders and manufacturers with no destinations in local smaller cities cannot survive without endlessly continuing their revolt.” (*Revolution and Utopia*)

“Poor young people who abandoned their homeland” try to realize their true homeland “in the rebellion against the mega-city Tokyo.” What is so remarkable about Kaoru Mizuki’s urban theory is that instead of perceiving a city as a historical and present given, he positions it within a specific process of movements from generation to maturity, and ultimately to extinction. Mizuki also takes Takaaki Yoshimoto’s thought-provoking argument, “Why can a city remain to be a city?” one step further, as if to retort, “when will a city become extinct?” The extinction of the city! Isn’t this precisely the words that can be uttered only by those who rigorously reject the illusion that the nameless masses wander making a false ascension based on quasi-binary oppositions between local and center, rural and city, or frontier and capital, and thus acquire a penetrating view to directly face the reality that their journey to the ‘primordial’ means nothing but simply moving sideways from lower-class to lower-class, from the social bottom to the social bottom, and from slum to slum?

At that moment, the city no longer registers as ‘landscape,’ instead takes on wholly the attributes of a ‘room.’

Here I recall, by happy chance, that Régis Debray had bitterly called cities “livable purgatories.” Of course he carefully limited this statement to “those in the Caribbean... compared to the urban agglomerations of Asia or even of Europe.” However, with that in mind let us listen to a little more of what Debray says:

“...any man, even a comrade, who spends his life in a city is unwittingly bourgeois in comparison with a guerrilla. He cannot know the material effort involved in eating, sleeping, moving from one place to another – briefly, in surviving. Not to have any means of subsistence except what you yourself can produce, with your own hands, starting from nature in the raw. The city-dweller lives as a consumer... Life is for all – unequally given, but given nonetheless.

It exists in the shops in the form of finished products.....It is said that we are immersed in the social, and prolonged immersion debilitates. Nothing like getting out to realize to what extent these lukewarm incubators make one infantile and bourgeois.” (*Revolution in the Revolution?*)

As opposed to a <city> as implied in the quote above, Régis Debray positions a true homeland for guerrilla fighters in the <mountains>. Those who can laugh at this declaratively affirmative proposition-like urbanism issued from the Third World as dogmatic and metaphysical, are fortunate. We are living in the transformative period in which all of Japan is also about to be turned into a gigantic city. We no longer have <mountains> to which we should go back. Despite this, however, in a long lasting battle where we occupy, deconstruct, and transform

our city into common space for revolution, if we wish to live as guerilla fighters, we must raise mountains for ourselves high in the midst of "livable purgatories." We, who live in Japan, anti-revolutionary <home country> bearing the original sins of the expropriations and massacre of the Third World, must turn this place where we are forced to live, into a purgatory in the true sense of the term: as a purifier of our souls.

As various proponents of <future> and their epigones are whole-heartedly praising, the long-term investment that is forecast for the last twenty years of the 20th century, is said to be a cumulative amount of 500 trillion yen. When considering the total capital that was dropped on the archipelago by Japanese capitalism, whose GNP has gone up to third place in the world, was accumulated to be 30 - 50 trillion yen, there is no doubt that an investment of ten times that amount over the next twenty years will increasingly facilitate the Japan's megalopolisation. And we must listen to the arrogant offensive of this monopoly, not as signaling the takeoff of Japanese imperialism, but rather as its death knell. We were already able to follow the footsteps of the nameless masses, drifting from one city to another searching for their <invisible homeland>, among the homogenizing landscape. They never "lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they <are> the truth" (Frantz Fanon). Perhaps for the first time we are facing a transformative period in which our lower-class proletariat are forming a new class. Occupying cities in an ontological mode of wandering, now slowly rising up, as the gravediggers of capitalism.

The <invisible homeland>, in an attempt at a genuine festival, will gradually rise. "What is required is a fortuitous gap created by chance. As long as there is only a "gap," perhaps human beings may start something. With human desires colliding, we humans live in chaos." This condition, expounded by Kaoru Mizuki, inevitably must come.

What is required is not to preach "the resurrection of the dramatic imagination" to the lower-class masses. We ourselves must set out on a journey crossing the landscape into the midst of battle, where we realize ourselves as truth.

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