The Formation of Global Art Cities and Spatial Barriers: The Case of Tokyo

Introduction: Global Art Cities

A rising number of studies address the role of global art cities, both in the process of globalisation and within the global art world (see Ooi, 2017 for a recent overview). However, the majority of these studies focus on Western Europe and North America; typical examples include cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, and New York, and any more wide-ranging research tends to rely on data from Western sources. To date, only a few studies have addressed the global dimension of art cities beyond the Western hemisphere, and still fewer have collected data in a systematic way (see Morgner, 2013; Perl, 2005; While, 2003).

The research presented here relates to Tokyo, a well-known example in the research on global cities. The objective is to advance existing understandings of Tokyo as a global city from a rather neglected perspective of the arts,¹ and to address more general questions about the making and unmaking of global cities. In particular, the paper asks why some cities are likely to unfold on a global dimension while others do not. Although these three aims and questions are interrelated, the main research question focuses on the making and unmaking of global cities by addressing urban clusters, a central explanatory concept in global city research. As discussed in more detail later, the cluster concept suggests that these cities unlock their global potential through a unique concentration of skills, information and creative exchange. Global city research has sought to explain Tokyo's global economic success by theorising the city within this framework.

To address these questions, the paper's first three subsections revisit some key concepts in the global city literature. Paying particular attention to the structures that enable the rise of global cities and how global cities are defined, the paper also clarifies Tokyo's position in this context. The conceptual review is followed by a range of methodological considerations that include qualitative and quantitative research methods such as cultural and spatial mapping, interviews, ethnographic observations and visual analysis. After the methodological section, a brief analysis of some paradoxical findings suggests that some of the key structures

¹ There is a growing interest in Japan in creative or cultural cities, for instance, Osaka City University founded the Graduate School for Creative Cities. Other examples, include Kanazawa city, which founded Kanazawa Creative City Council and Yokohama created a bureau for promoting Creative City Yokohama (see Sasaki 2010). Interestingly, Tokyo is not one of the prime examples in that research and policy debate.

required to make a city “global” are missing in Tokyo as a global art city. To resolve this paradox, the narrative takes a short detour to revisit the notion of economic concentration and production, introducing a more spatial emphasis. Based on this revised framework, the paper confirms the role of space and urban materiality in influencing and intervening in artistic activities and their productive potential and international visibility.

Tokyo as a Global City

Tokyo features as a prime example in the research on metropolitan cities, large-scale urban areas, and global cities (There was a surge of publications in the 1990s and early 2000s, see Kim and Hill, 2000; Knox, 1995; Machimura, 1992; Miyamoto, 1993; Rimmer, 1986; Sassen, 2001; Sorensen, 2005; Timberlake and Smith, 2001; Zhou and Godfrey, 1999; Taylor *et al.*, 1999, see in particular, Waley, 2007 and Gottfried 2017 for a summary. More recent publications seem to focus on more the implications of Tokyo’s global status, for instance, on policies Fujita 2011 and Jacobs 2011, housing Kadi and Ronald 2014, urban decline Cybriwsky 2011 and in particular neoliberalism Maruyama 2010, Park *et al.* 2012, Ueno 2010). In terms of its size, economic power, and skyscrapers, Tokyo seems to fit some obvious criteria. However, its global city dimension tends only to be discussed in an economic context, to the neglect of other areas such as politics, science, or arts and culture—for instance, Tokyo as ‘the centre of transnational corporate headquarters’ (Knox, 1995: i) or as a ‘major financial and business center’ (Sassen, 2005: 37). This focus on the economic dimension seems well grounded in the existing research on world and global cities. In the 1960s, the term *global* or *world city* appeared for the first time in a wider scientific context; and Tokyo was already cited as a key example.

In this context, world cities are centres of trade, traffic, and information. Later studies increasingly emphasized that world cities owe their status not simply to their economic size or population but to their integration into the world economy (for an overview, see Friedman and Goetz, 1982). A city achieves dominance when its financial market is primarily global in scope, when it represents a national economy within the world economy, and when it extends across a multinational region. In this context, according to Friedman and Goertz (1982: 319), ‘The world cities are the control centres of the global economy.’ This understanding of world cities is shared, in many respects, by such prominent authors as Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells and the (LA School of Urbanism; Mike Davis, Mike Dear, Allan Scott, Ed Soja and Michael Storper), and others, mainly in the context of globalisation and therefore employing

the term *global city*. For example, Saskia Sassen (1991) noted that global cities are world centres because of their professional and financial importance in directing the global flow of money; as prime examples, she cites New York, London, and Tokyo.

In the case of Tokyo, the neglect of other global dimensions might, however, be justified. As Takashi Machimura (1992: 1) noted, 'Tokyo is a purely economic world centre,' and it has not developed as a political centre or as a global art city. This raises the question of why other world cities such as New York and London have become global centres also for politics, arts, media and not only economics. Can theories of the global city also account for the unmaking of these global dimensions?

Theoretical Considerations: What Makes a Global City Global?

To address these issues, we may consider two key theories: John Friedman's 'The World City Hypothesis' (1986) and Saskia Sassen's *The Global City*, first published in 1991 (revised edition 2001).

Friedman (1986) defined the world city in terms of four dimensions:

1. base points in the spatial organization and articulation of production and markets;
2. major sites for the concentration and accumulation of international capital;
3. centres of corporate headquarters, international finance, global transport and communications, and high level business services; and
4. points of destination for both domestic and international migrants.

Sassen's *The Global City* (2001) also characterized such cities in four ways:

1. as key locations for finance and specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic services;
2. as sites of production and innovation in leading industries;
3. as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy;
4. as markets for the products and innovations produced.

Although differing in their vocabulary, both authors defined the uniqueness of global cities in terms of the high concentration or clustering of economic activities. As these clusters provide networks of like-minded people and socially shared knowledge, a diverse pool of skills and labour, a competitive atmosphere, and a large consumer market, such cities prove more

successful internationally by virtue of their competitive advantage (see Clark, 2003; Porter, 2000; Saxenian, 1996; Storper & Scott 2009). The combination of these features in networks of specialised and complementary producers and their associated labour markets and infrastructure generates a copious flow of positive externalities, dominating the external social environment. These ideas of clustering and surplus have also been discussed in the context of creative cities, highlighting the role of face-to-face interactions, knowledge spillovers, and urban diversity (Florida, 2002; Tallman et al., 2004; Scott, 2006). It could therefore be argued that a global art city is defined by its unique concentration of diverse artistic activities, leading to a productive surplus that influences the art world in a broader global context. Many studies have addressed the unique concentration of diverse artistic activities in New York, London and, more recently, Berlin (While, 2003; Currid 2007; Hellmanzik, 2010; Bille, 2012; Ooi, 2017). Further research on global collections of art, art festivals and art publications seems to indicate that the artistic practices that emerge in these cities matter beyond their immediate locality (Drucker, 1994; Carroll, 2007; Von Bennigsen et al., 2009; Crane, 2009; Bader & Scharenberg, 2010; Morgner, 2017).

It seems plausible to apply this idea of concentration to other non-economic dimensions; in particular, it seems reasonable to ask whether Tokyo's non-status as a global art city² might relate to a lack of concentration of artistic activities that enable production of art beyond the city. In the present context, "artistic activities" refers to an art world understanding of art, tracing the production of works exhibited and presented in places like art galleries, theatres and live music venues—in other words, places in which the meaning of objects and performances is seen in terms of their artistic merit. This meaning is distinct from understandings in more popular cultural areas related to entertainment, lifestyle and economic consumption, such as shopping areas, red-light districts or night clubs, where the meaning of objects and performances relates to the vernacular and its links to the everyday.³ Such concentrations of more popular activities can also be found in other cities, some of which have successfully transformed themselves into global entertainment and party destinations (e.g., Amsterdam, Barcelona, Cancun). While it is not unlikely that popular

² It is important not to turn this into a mechanistic argument. This paper offers no historical explanation of why such features have not developed in Tokyo; for outstanding work in this area, see Favell (2011, 2014).

³ It is important to state that this distinction is not based on a high versus low culture stereotype, nor that these realms are mutually exclusive; Pop Art serves as a good example. The difference between the two should be seen in the context of the network of meanings produced, leading to different labels, symbolisms and practices (see Albertsen & Bülent 2007).

clusters and art clusters may inhabit similar geographical areas, the research reported here concerns artistic clusters and the meaning produced in an art world context.

A number of well-known art critics and art professionals have suggested that Tokyo possesses no such concentration of artistic activities.⁴ For instance, as Ashley Rawlings wrote in *The Guardian* (2012: n.p.), 'Tokyo's edgy art scene is scattered across the city.' Similarly, in *Tokyo Art Beat*, William Andrews (2010: n.p.) observed that 'It is immediate to any visitor or resident interested in going to see an exhibition that Tokyo does not have a single gallery area to the extent of, say, New York.' In *Time Out Tokyo*, Rebecca Milner (2010: n.p.) noted that 'Tokyo boasts no cohesive art district.' These views seem to lend support to the suspicion that Tokyo is a global city only in economic terms; because it lacks any concentration of diverse artistic activities, it is unable to create output or attract art activities at an international level. However, as shown in the later part of this paper, a geo-cultural mapping of artistic activities provides evidence that runs counter to the observations of these art critics. This is not to suggest that they got it wrong, but it will be argued that the notion of concentration is too simplistic to account for the formation of artistic clusters.⁵

Methodology

The main data for this study were collected between 2012 and 2014, when the author lived in Hakusan, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, mainly in Sumida-ku or chasing floating venues and artists around the city. The research developed in two intersecting stages. First, a considerable number of comprehensive art directories were collected and entered into a database to geolocate Tokyo's art scene. This included collecting local guides and brochures and collating information from different websites, as well as researching venues and artists by visiting them (which proved highly enjoyable). Out of the 2462 venues initially collected, 2331 have been located using a geolocation tool provided online by Google. Five percent of the data could not be located due to incorrect addresses, issues of the software with Japanese

⁴ This is not to say that there is no urban dynamic in this field (Birmingham 2007). Other art critics and journalists have pointed to small pockets of three to five art venues in the same building (Birmingham 2017), but these pockets do not have yet led to the formation of an artistic milieu, which will be further explored in this paper.

⁵ Tokyo does not feature in the scholarly literature in this area (Carroll, 2007; Crane, 2009; Hellmanzik, 2010; Bille, 2012; Ooi, 2017; Morgner, 2017). Additionally, important art critics and art magazines fail to list Tokyo as a global art city. For instance, the Artsy survey (Artsy Editors, 2015) on the most influential art cities in 2015 does not mention Tokyo. The same applies to art critics' overviews of the world's most creative cities (Wood, 2017) or lists of the world's best cities for arts and culture (Modak, 2017). While Tokyo is not listed, New York, Berlin and London usually appear as the top three.

characters or because they were located outside of Tokyo's metropolitan area. The results of the geolocation process have been exported to QGIS (open source GIS software). In order to improve the readability of the maps, a simple indicator has been created. A grid of one-kilometre wide squares has been superimposed on the map. In each square, the number of cultural venues has been counted. The result indicates a density expressed per square kilometre (see Fig 1 – map with all cultural venues). The maps distinguishing theatres, live music venues, and art galleries have been built on the same way.

This mapping also included interviews with about 40 artists and professionals (this included emerging and established artists and art professionals across all mediums with the breakdown of the interviewees' occupations and field of artistic activities as follows: Five artists working in dance and theatre, three artists working fashion, six musicians, two architects, seven mix-media and visual artists, four gallery directors, three curators, five theatre and music directors, two art journalists and two art critics) using either a snowball technique to find new interviewees or exploring new sites, venues, and openings to recruit people from outside the author's existing network (see Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). The collected data were cross-referenced using Google's geo-location service, which facilitated understanding of the spatial distribution of art venues around Tokyo. The final stage was more ethnographic in nature, as the author shadowed a small sample of artists (12) working in different media and genres to explore different urban artistic practices.

Tokyo: No Artistic Cluster?

The above-mentioned art critics and professionals claimed that Tokyo has no concentration of artistic activities: that art venues were apparently dispersed around the city, with no obvious clustering of such spaces in a particular locality. However, quantitative data collected by the author seem to challenge this understanding.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Based on leaflets, web-based directories, and interviews, it was possible to gain some tentative insight into the clustering of artistic activities across three different settings: experimental and live music venues, art galleries, and private and public theatre spaces (see Fig 1). As these spaces are in constant flux and there may also be some private spaces, it seems unlikely that all such spaces were identified. For instance, nearly 700 art galleries were

recorded, which is a good indication of the reliability of the data, as other established art capitals like Paris or New York have similar numbers. Data on public theatre spaces were available through governmental statistics and are therefore also likely to be fairly accurate.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 shows the distribution of nearly 700 experimental and live music venues (*raibuhauusu*) across Tokyo, clearly showing patterns of spatial distribution. About 40% of these venues are clustered around two main areas: Shinjuku (in the north-western corner of downtown Tokyo) and Shibuya (on the south-western edge of downtown Tokyo) with some smaller clusters in Shimokitazawa (south-west of Shibuya). While the majority of music venues are in downtown Tokyo, there is also a range of mini-clusters near main JR line stations, for instance around Kichijoji, which is quite specific to Tokyo.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution of Tokyo art galleries, with two or perhaps three noticeable clusters: Ginza, Omotesando, and Roppongi. Ginza is Tokyo's glamorous shopping district and is also home to a large number of more established galleries. Omotesando houses more mid-career galleries, and Roppongi has a growing number of more experimental galleries established since the opening of the Mori Art Museum and The National Art Center Tokyo. Between them, these three areas house nearly 60% of Tokyo's galleries; the division into experimental and established galleries follows patterns found in other major art capitals.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4 reveals similar patterns of clustering for private and public theatres, concentrated mainly in Shinjuku, Ginza, and Shibuya. There are some overlaps with the above clusters, which seems to confirm a tendency for art venues to locate in these areas; a combined map of all three types of venue would show that many are in close proximity. In light of the statements by art experts and professionals claiming that there is no concentration of art activities in Tokyo, these findings come as something of a surprise. Many of the interviewees confirmed this overall view that Tokyo has no dedicated art district, and the author was

constantly referred to other areas of the city where they believed such clustering might occur. Furthermore, Tokyo's municipal government has not bought into global narratives to promote the arts and thereby to enhance the visibility to its local art scene (Morgner 2018). Based on this apparent disparity between quantitative data and qualitative observations, it seems necessary to find an explanation that can resolve this tension.

The Concept of Clustering: Agglomeration versus Milieu

The idea of industrial clusters has a long history in economic theory and has been applied in the context of global cities. As one of the main authors elaborating a cluster theory, Porter (1990: 157) defined an industrial cluster as 'geographically concentrated.' A wide range of summaries offering further definitions have employed a similar vocabulary in referring to local markets (Karlsson, 2008), location quotients (Bergman and Feser, 2000), cluster as synonymous with region (Cruz and Teixeira, 2010), local industrial specialization (Martin and Sunley, 2003), or simply spatial concentration (Gordon and McCann, 2000) or concentration (Maskell and Kebir, 2006).

All of these definitions seem to share an understanding of clustering as proximity of a population of similar things or people. This positioning or close co-occurrence is mostly supported by a quantitative approach that considers the number of people or things within a defined area as compared to other similar areas. Based on this formula, some areas are seen to form clusters while others lack such density. In fulfilling the criteria mentioned above, as the statistical data suggest that Tokyo should have artistic clusters. However, the qualitative data seem in sharp contrast to those findings, as the experts and professionals claim that no such art district exists. To resolve this conflict, it is necessary to refine the term *cluster* and to distinguish between agglomerations and milieus (Storper's work 2013 on local contexts has made similar suggestions and so has the earlier work by Clark 1994 on urban innovations). In the present context, an agglomeration can be defined as a quantitative concentration of similar people or things within a particular locality (Figure 5).

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

In contrast, the cluster will be considered here as milieu. The following conceptual formulation of a city's milieu was inspired by Durkheim's version, in which the term is often translated as *environment* (Durkheim, 1965: 113; Durkheim, 1982: 116). However, Durkheim

did not refer to *l'environnement*, and while the translation might appear a minor issue, the term *milieu* is much closer to Durkheim's concept and to the semantic tradition (Spitzer, 1942). The term also connotes 'in the middle' (*au milieu* in French), implying that one element is related to two others and is both defined and directed by this position. This notion of *milieu* shares similarities with the network theory of White (1992: 65), in which 'Identities come to perceive the likelihood of impacts to other identities in some string of ties and stories. The social result is called a network.' A network or milieu in this sense is not simply defined in terms of linkages or interconnections but as originating from 'interacting control struggles' (1992: 150) or a 'triggering of identities' (1992: 6). In other words, unlike classical conceptions of network, this is not just a form of observing or being linked to other parts of a network but entails co-production. The idea is that the formation of identities (where an identity is understood as a stabilized profile, configuration, or role) activates control searches by other identities, which have their own impetus to control other parts. The linking, then, is not like pearls on a chain but occurs because '[e]ach control effort presupposes and works in terms of other identities' (White, 1992: 6).

As discussed here, then, the artistic milieu is not a simple matter of artists who know each other or have common linkages, as these forms of an association can also be described as an agglomeration. Instead, the linkages between artists define each other and thereby shape a social order, and the term *milieu* (or *network*) embodies this reflexive co-production.⁶ In considering art clusters, this study is concerned with how these are shaped internally (structural dimension), and with how artists relate and so define each other (symbolic dimension). For this reason, Durkheim's *milieu* is the more appropriate term, marked by an interactive approach characterized by the construction and interpretation of meaning. These interactions have a spatial dimension, in that they require a space in which to occur (see Figure 6).

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

When many artists live and work together or in close proximity, frequent interactions are inevitable, becoming a daily occurrence and so evolving easily. These encounters become so

⁶ In this paper, these considerations are mainly used to improve the concept of networks, but this notion could also be used in its original context that is of economic sociology and therefore being applied to Tokyo's art market (see Favell 2015).

routine that the mere perception of other artists triggers interactions (Currid 2007). Referring to the countryside, one artist noted that ‘there aren’t any artists around [...] you have to call people up [...] in New York, you just step out on the street’ (Rosenberg and Fliegel, 1979: 18). As a consequence of this intensity, interactions become orientated towards *each other*, occurring in the middle of or with reference to other interactions with other artists. This inner networking and interlinking of creative practices is repeatedly mentioned in research on Berlin (Vogt, 2002), New York (Simpson, 1981) and London (Pratt, 2009).

Spatial Barriers

The present empirical research suggests that certain spatial barriers make such interconnectedness and cross-referencing of interactions unlikely in Tokyo. Among other possible factors, the spatial dimension seems to play a crucial role, but this is often overlooked in discussions of global cities. The present research identifies three spatial barriers that may hinder milieu formation: 1) urban location (underground, hidden); 2) urban symbolism (consumption); and 3) urban density and urban atmosphere (memory).

Urban Location as Spatial Barrier

(1) It is interesting to note that most of the research on subcultures defines the *sub* dimension from a purely social perspective (see Gelder, 2005); here, it refers to a marginal social status or a violation of specific social codes, or to a more Marxist notion of *mainstream versus suppressed ideas*. Only a few studies have made explicit use of the accompanying spatial connotation (see Borden, 2001; Sheridan, 2007) as in submarine or subway, referring to a location that is underground, or perhaps more precisely to a social location that is hidden or tucked away—for instance, most of London’s punk music venues in the 1980s were in basements or abandoned buildings (Savage, 2005). This spatial aspect and its implications for the formation of subcultures has been noted only loosely, principally as a merely symbolic feature (Hebdige, 1979). However, contemporary research on spatial consumption, material culture, and space and meaning-making (Löw, 2016; Tilley and Keane, 2013; Psarra, 2009) acknowledges that space is not neutral, as in a container that is simply filled; rather, space can itself have an actant quality in a network of different agents (Latour, 2005: 71): ‘anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has not figuration yet, an actant.’ In other words, the location of a space is not only an actant quality

but also impacts on such social networks. The actant quality is perhaps most obvious; the notion of a subculture and its intentional quality—to be different or critical—may be reinforced through a spatial location that embodies that meaning, or through the gritty and ugly quality of the space and its integration into the meaning-making of the actual subculture. The social network impact does not need to be formative (in the sense of creating broader social meanings), but impact as something that makes a difference can also be a limiting quality. The empirical research seems to identify underground and hidden spaces (including spaces on the sixth floor of buildings, to which one have to access by an obscure lift).

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

The two signs (Figure 7, left) reflect a typical experience in locating an important music venue and theatre venue in Tokyo, pointing to the venue's location in the basement of a building—that is, underground.⁷ Both venues were located in a residential or office building, with very little visible indication of their presence there, other than a small sign. Anyone walking by those buildings would hardly notice that they house two of the most experimental art venues in Tokyo; they invite no foot traffic and make no active intervention in the surrounding space. For instance, the experimental theatre and music space Plan B (Figure 7) is located in a residential area of Western Tokyo, right next to a supermarket. The shop owner had never heard of Plan B despite working in the vicinity for more than 15 years. Access to the experimental theatre space is via backdoor underground entrance, with a motor garage in the ground floor building, which makes its existence obscure to outsiders. The music critic Ian F. Martin (2016: 29) described a similar experience following his arrival in Tokyo:

It was only after spending time in Japan [the author referred to punk music in the UK and US in the previous paragraph] that the word 'underground' took on particular meaning [...] due to the literally subterranean nature of so many venues.

This notion of the *under-the-ground* is even exploited by some venues to reflect their subcultural status.⁸ For instance, the livehouse 20.000 volt is advertised in the weekly

⁷ Japanese also includes the term *angura* (*underground*), which is more closely linked to the notion of alternative artistic statements, as in underground literature or film.

⁸ An illicit quality particularly characterized the many hardcore venues visited by the author. However, there was very little noticeable violence or illegal use of drugs at these places. The relatively safe nature of the

entertainment magazine *Pia* as the sacred place of underground (chika) music (Milioto, 2009: 34).

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

All these spaces are to be found in downtown Tokyo's central areas (see Figures 2, 3, and 4) rather than in abandoned warehouses or spaces far from the centre. As noted above, many of these spaces are in underground locations and therefore hidden. However, there is a second type of space, tucked away from Tokyo's bustling streets and shopping areas. Found in back alleys or small side streets with virtually no public traffic, these spaces are commonly referred to as *yokochō*. Their spatial location often derives from Tokyo's post-war reconstruction, in which office buildings, shopping malls, and main streets formed a kind of circular structure, creating a 'wall' of buildings with various smaller and often older structures (temples, old baths, and wooden houses) behind them (see Figure 7). These 'walls' ringfence the buildings behind them, creating social 'islands' that are difficult to penetrate and often remain unknown to those who live and work in these buildings, or who regularly frequent central Tokyo, including art lovers trying to find them: 'Even determined art lovers, driven by word-of-mouth recommendations and armed with a map, can still find themselves standing right in front of their target and yet totally unable to see it' (Rawlings and Mod, 2010: viii). Remaining largely hidden from the urban life of the city, these are known only to insiders⁹.

The underground or hidden nature of these spaces impacts on their social networks by limiting mutual visibility and knowledge of their existence. From a network perspective, this hiddenness engenders sparse connections and an artistic milieu that is only loosely integrated. The knowledge gap in turn is not simply a problem of emerging artists who do not yet know the art world; rather, it can be seen as a lack of brokerage that inhibits access to these spaces and their integration in a wider artistic milieu, with no central forum or network structure to unite them. This lack of brokerage was noted by one interviewed art professional (Mike Kubeck, manager of SuperDeluxe 2015): 'There were always little spaces doing something,

Japanese underground may explain why it does not create a strong gender bias as reported by Lloyd (2006) in his study of Wicker Park, and why many hardcore bands are mixed or all-female (see Toth, 2008).

⁹ The focus in this paper is largely on the artists and producers. Kelly (2004) provides an excellent account of the more consumerist side, its vibrancy and creativity.

but there was little crossover between them.’ Following Burt (2005), Bourdieu’s conception of social capital can be extended in relation to this lack of brokers; as social capital is scarce, structural holes remain between agglomerations of spaces, which in turn means that variations within these agglomerations are not shared, and challenging ideas are not easily delivered to a wider audience. According to Burt (2005: 63), ‘People with connections across structural holes have early access to diverse, often contradictory, information and interpretations, which gives them a competitive advantage in seeing and developing good ideas.’ The lack of brokerage means that ideas or practices that might be mundane in one space cannot spawn creativity in another where they would be new and valued. Additionally, good ideas and practices are unlikely to gain much momentum, instead remaining undiscovered by art professionals operating outside of these milieus. In sum, despite the proximity of these spaces, their hidden and invisible status fails to generate crossover, so undermining the formation of ties and the integration of spaces into a milieu where ideas and practices can be shared. The lower frequency of exchange inhibits stimulation, creative opportunities, and access to new information.

Urban Symbolism and Practices of Consumption as Spatial Barriers

(2) As mentioned above, most of the research on Tokyo as a global city highlights its global role as an economic world centre (e.g., 1992; Miyamoto, 1993; Knox, 1995; Sassen, 2005). This economic narrative is based mainly on the structural dimension of the global city—for instance, its ability to control the global flow of financial products and access to them. Characterizing Tokyo as a major site of economic production (e.g., computers and electronics), the structural dimension also encompasses how Tokyo’s economy is shaped by a kind of hegemonic culture, driven by a strong sense of labour and economic competition. Recent research in the field of urban studies has questioned this sole focus on structural imperatives, introducing the more symbolic dimension of urban imaginaries (Çınar and Bender, 2007) to address how urban space is conceived and how a city is imagined as a city, with regard to symbolic representation and place-making. Beyond infrastructure and production, this approach encompasses various facets of consumption such as shopping malls, international tourism, advertisements, and spectacular architecture (Clarke, 1997; Mansvelt, 2008; Pike, 2009; Young and Lever, 1997). In line with earlier research (e.g., Clammer, 1997; Francks, 2009; Francks and Hunter, 2012; Machimura 1998; Tobin, 1992; Stillerman, 2015) and research by the author, suggest that the urban imagination of Tokyo as

a global economic city employs a symbolic narrative of cosmopolitan consumption, where *cosmopolitan* extends beyond a shared economic relationship with different nations to refer to a tension or blending between Tokyo's regional urban cultures and imported goods and ideas from abroad:

It is the dialectical relationship between these two cultural forces—the unifying tendencies of a common consumer culture with its often internationalizing elements on the one hand, and the varieties of indigenous urban cultures with their regional characteristics on the other—that provides the fuel for much of the dynamics of urban everyday life. (Clammer, 1997: 30)

This urban dynamic is reflected in the structural dimension of consumer life—in the money and time spent, but also (and perhaps even more importantly), in the symbolic role of Tokyo's architecture in representing this local and international branding of consumerism. The World Shopping Capitals survey (Centre for Retail Research, 2011) reports some intriguing figures, indicating that Tokyo outranks other Western rivals with spending patterns that are often 33 to 50 per cent higher. For instance, in the category Non-Food Sales 2010, Tokyo's total sales volume of €72.49 billion exceeds the figure for both New York and Paris (about €55 billion) by some 25 per cent. Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Singapore record less than half of Tokyo's sales volume, and these figures are virtually the same for all sales (including food), as well as for online sales. More important than these structural features of the global city, however, is Tokyo's symbolic self-presentation.

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

Figure 9 shows how advertising, shopping, and architecture intersect in Tokyo to create an almost entirely new city surface—a self-image that brands the place in terms of a symbolism of cosmopolitan consumption. As noted in the following statements, it is the urban dominance of this symbolism that impacts on Tokyo's art world.

‘I do not want my gallery on these streets. The gallery is a place for discussion and relaxation.’ (Junko Shimada (owner of Gallery Side 2), 2014)

‘We cannot compete or fight with the shopping malls. We have to hide from their competition and aggressiveness but provide a place of safety.’
(Mike Kubeck (Manager of SuperDeluxe), 2014)

‘The theatre is a sanctuary, it a place that shelters culture.’ (Shingo Kimura (Director of Store House), 2014)

Tokyo’s urban dynamic and lifestyle as defined by shopping, advertising, and entertainment is not openly challenged by the arts. Unlike the many artists in Western cities who actively protest against gentrification or openly voice strong criticism of commerce and consumption (see Cameron and Coaffee, 2005; Naegler, 2012; Zukin, 2011), Tokyo’s art scene has developed a different narrative on the role of artistic places in the city. Instead of confrontation, they offer a kind of retreat or sanctuary (see Greve, 2011).

In Tokyo, the sense of sanctuary unfolds through three different qualities. First, the art space provides an in-between space. The French geographer and japanologist Augustin Berque (1982 and 2004), proposed to describe this conception of space in Japan through the term *Ma*. *In-between* means that a place is not defined or regulated by the symbolism that rules the world outside. There is a certain element of the casual in how people dress and behave in such places, in how they talk and in how they approach strangers. The ethnographic data supports this observation; strangeness is welcomed, and there is a strong sense of social equality or mutual exchange.

Secondly, these places exhibit a strongly non-utilitarian set-up, in that actions are not necessarily driven by maximisation of benefits. On the contrary, an enveloping atmosphere of *asobi* (playfulness) seems to inhabit these spaces, and most of the interviewees confirmed their experimental or laboratory-like nature. While these spaces clearly require an income to exist,¹⁰ their position in the city was not seen to relate to places of consumption or profit but instead embodied a sense of reflection and relaxation.¹¹

Finally, by their location in buildings or areas of Tokyo that are considered less desirable or are somehow excluded from the urban fabric, these spaces offer a kind of shielding quality. Some of the galleries in central Tokyo are in big department stores but could not be accessed through the store itself. Instead, one had to find some back door into some backyard, perhaps climbing some fire stairs before opening the doors to another part of the building. In short, these spaces were truly hidden, as if the gentrifying trends of modern consumption were unable to locate and eradicate them.

¹⁰ It was noticeable that entry to the theatres or the cost of drinks in such places was considerable cheaper than in nearby bars and clubs.

¹¹ In his study of artists in New York City, Cole (1987) reported that they moved to escape local pressures or to follow the city’s cultural trends. This relates to the wider and perhaps more recent debate on mental wellbeing in the art world and creative industries.

The configuration of art spaces as sanctuaries versus an urban dynamic of economic consumption creates a division between these worlds that is both social and spatial. The sanctuaries are not easily penetrated and are really only known to insiders or to those looking for such places. They do not openly challenge the symbolic realm of the city by trying to impose their own configuration but remain more or less invisible. Only a few of the galleries and art theatres are well known, and these often have a higher profile abroad than in Tokyo itself. These spaces have found a social niche in which they can exist; on the other hand, they have not developed a strong presence that might constitute a more recognized art district.

Material Culture and Spatial Barriers

(3) The third issue that is presented in this paper, relates to the role of urban density and urban atmosphere in Tokyo—not only in factual terms but also from a symbolic perspective on the active making and unmaking of spaces and buildings. Jacobs and Merriman (2011, 2017) have defined built material culture as ‘part of the on-going (re)design of the world,’ requiring us to think of buildings as fluid entities in the making (Göbel, 2014). This section of the paper will demonstrate how certain spatial and architectural conditions lead to an unmaking of buildings and spaces as artistic laboratories. In particular, two such conditions will be highlighted: the role of space in artistic expression (density and smallness) and in artistic creativity (atmosphere and public space).

Research on the rise of global art cities like New York, London, or Berlin points to the importance of unused spaces, open spaces, and big spaces (Morgner, 2015) as part of an artistic imaginary that links artistic freedom of expression to an ‘unlimited’ space—open to ideas without limiting (and perhaps even enforcing) thinking in bigger or more radical terms. Although (or perhaps because) Tokyo is the biggest city in the world,¹² Radović and Boontharm (2012) have described its use of space as *Small Tokyo*. They argued that this smallness has two aspects: a positive sense of community, greater sustainability, and layering of functions, but also a cramped, compartmentalized, lack of individual space as against space for others. It is important to note that this experience of urban density and small space is a general and historical condition in Japan (see Fiévé and Waley, 2003; Karan and Stapleton, 1998). This vast smallness is not only problematic because of a lack of space, or because open space is not valued; despite the inwardness (*oku*) often associated with

¹² Milioto (2009) suggests that Tokyo’s size creates a reliance on the train system. As there are no nightlines, this limits the operation of music venues after midnight.

Japanese culture, there is a clear aesthetic appreciation of open fields, the untouched, the hidden, and the wilderness (*harappa* or *no*) (Richie, 2007).

The vast smallness of space is linked to another phenomenon: the non-use of void space (Jonas and Rahmann, 2014). The recent statistical survey *Kurashi to Tokei 2016* (Statistics Division, Bureau of General Affairs 2016) found that only about two per cent of Tokyo's vast urban landscape remains unused, and only about four per cent is classified as open space (parks, gardens, and plazas)—a mere three square meters per person—while about 12 per cent of Tokyo's municipality is covered by roads. However, this survey refers to the total area of Tokyo as a municipality. Data collected by the Bureau of Urban Development (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2016) reveals a similar figure for Tokyo's 23 wards, and unused land accounts for just 1.7% of the area inside the JR Yamanote Line. In contrast, residents of Berlin enjoy 30 square meters of open space per person, and in New York, the figure is 27 square meters per person (Naito, 2012: 21). In Tokyo, a range of legal and planning restrictions prohibits the development of unused spaces; for instance, Japan's property tax system means that property owners pay a much higher tax bill when their land is not built on or when a building is unused. Some of the architects interviewed here hinted that buildings are therefore 'renovated' over long periods as a means of avoiding such taxation. Furthermore, Japan has no national policy for empty homes (*akiya*) other than demolition, and even that is a relatively recent development (see Brasor and Tsubuku, 2016).

The smallness of void spaces¹³ in urban areas like Tokyo appears to have a detrimental effect on their use. Jonas and Rahmann (2013) documented various unused sites across Tokyo, in contrast to New York or Berlin, have not been occupied by artists or other creatives.¹⁴ On the contrary, most of these small spaces remain invisible, hidden behind walls or fences. There is also a strong tendency to clean up these sites so that they appear to be in use or to be part of the social web—in other words, there is an urban practice of unmaking unused spaces into open space. The preciousness and unavailability of artistic space was mentioned in many of the discussions and interviews.

'My studio is my bedroom. I could not afford extra space in Tokyo.' (Fashion artist living and working in Sumida)

¹³ The notion of void is inspired by Atelier Bow Wow's theory, which is called void metabolism (see Tsukamoto 2002).

¹⁴ For instance, Morgner (2014) reported that artists moving from Manhattan to Brooklyn in NYC were attracted by the openness and unlimited potential of the space.

‘We have to move all around Tokyo to find some space to practice before it is closed down.’ (Artist met in a café in Sumida)

‘You can’t do any installations or performance because there is no space.’
(Performance artist living and working in Sumida)

The smallness of spaces prevents their transformation into spaces of possibility for further artistic exploration. Space intervenes in the artistic freedom of expression based on unlimited imagination or expression of possibilities, constrained by an urban imaginary that entails a restrictive conception of space.

Many other scholars have noted that artistic practice is a highly uncertain practice. University degrees and other professional certificates scarcely define that practice; with no established criteria to define successful works of art, no set career pattern that can be easily followed, employment and the generation of income remain temporary in nature (Corrado and Boari, 2007; Lahire, 2007; Menger, 2014; Strauss, 1970; Wilson, 2009). As Morgner (2015) has argued, the artistic milieu therefore develops as a kind of coping mechanism; the uncertainty of artistic practice is managed in a setting of mutual reinforcement and support, and in an atmosphere that reinforces notions of creativity and creative behaviour. Urban ruins and their potential for re-use form part of such a narrative of artistic atmosphere-making (see Göbel 2014). Urban ruins are buildings with a history inscribed in their architecture, graffiti, and former occupants. There is something deeply cultural and symbolic about them. The integration of these resources in artistic practice have almost become an element of artistic folklore, as for instance in the illegal occupation of former warehouses, the secret sleeping rooms, or the lack of access to showers and toilets. Artistic creativity unfolds and creative spaces are shaped through a building’s rawness. The existence of such urban ruins requires a type of urban transformation that preserves older buildings while also enabling new patterns of usage. Cities that are overly historical or monumental carry a cultural history that can become baggage, as models from the past are too dominant and so limit urban creativity (see Morgner, 2016). Tokyo seems to lie at the other extreme, as its material condition seems almost bereft of meaning.

[Insert Figure 10 about here]

Figure 10 presents an overview of building age in London and Tokyo. While London offers a solid mix of older and newer buildings, Tokyo (almost four times bigger than London) seems

to have emerged only in the later twentieth century. As Roman Cybriwsky (2005: 218) describes it, ‘No other city in the world ... is so new in built environment and so completely lacking in old neighbourhoods and historic buildings.’ In Tokyo, a majority of new buildings are designed for a construction and demolition cycle of thirty to forty years (Brasor and Tsubuku, 2014), which means that even the existing mishmash of ordinary buildings cannot develop any sense of a particular heritage because they are soon to be replaced. The construction of these buildings is not driven by architectural uniqueness or design but largely by the available space and money. In a 2014 interview, architects at the Tokyo-based firm Klein Dytham Architecture reflected on their experiences of living and working in Tokyo since 1991. Their view was that most of the large-scale housing in central Tokyo is built by five construction companies (Shimizu Corporation, Takenaka Corporation, Kajima Corporation, Obayashi Corporation, and Taisei Corporation) on the basis of a catalogue-type resource that refers to models in terms of space and price. It is therefore no surprise that most buildings look similar and have no distinctive features or cultural agenda unless they are major landmarks like the Mori Tower. This standardization and constant newness unmakes Tokyo’s material culture of spaces in which an artistic atmosphere might flourish. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that a subtle art scene (and perhaps Tokyo’s sole small clustering of artists) is to be found in Sumida-ku (North-Eastern Tokyo), near to the central Tokyo (about 3 km from Tokyo Station and Ginza). Historically, the Western part of Tokyo attracted Japan’s royalty, and it remains the city’s wealthier region. The North-East of the city was the main point of arrival for poorer Japanese who came to Tokyo from the north, and it remains the poorer part of the city today (see Kingston, 2010). The area was highly vulnerable to firebombing in World War II, as most buildings were constructed from wood and bamboo, like low-tier terraced rental houses (*nagaya*), coffee shops (*kissaten*) and public baths (*sentō*), with many small factories located within the area. (It should be noted that the Sumida ward was formed in 1947 as a merger of the Honjo and Mukojima wards). A number of old houses remain in the area, but many of the former low-tier terraced rental houses (*nagaya*) have been replaced with wooden rental apartments known as *moku-chin apaato* (see Mansfield, 2016: 167 and Figure 11).

[Insert Figure 11 about here]

Home to many craftsmen, the working class area is in decline, and many businesses have closed over the years (Pontsioen, 2012). The old houses have fallen empty, and a number of

artists have moved to the area over the last decade. However, these artists did not simply move to the area because of the low rents, good infrastructure, or easy access to the city. Many of my conversations with artists who had moved to the area indicated a search for an atmosphere that would support their artistic practice.

‘I want to find my identity here.’ (Shengqun, musician)

‘It would be my death not to work as an artist.’ (Yozo San, fine art photographer)

‘I was looking for something real.’ (Hisaki, designer)

The material culture inherent in these buildings was again transformed; the bath houses and former craftsmen’s shops have now become small-scale art galleries, retro bars or creative businesses. Although a number of small festivals were organized to enhance the area’s visibility, the situation remains difficult. The city has invested heavily in upgrading the overall infrastructure, including the construction of the controversial Skytree (built by a consortium led by Tobu Railway), which has accelerated the gentrification process and the construction of new apartment blocks. A range of cultural policies have been enacted to “protect” the local atmosphere, with support for some local art projects (see Oikawa, 2014). A number of government offices related to cultural policy formulation and promotion have also been opened in the area; for instance, the (SIPC Office) Cultural Promotion Division was founded in 2006, and the Sumida City Office is an official supporter of the Creative Tokyo Proposal (see Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), undated).

In summary, the vast smallness of Tokyo’s material culture can be said to hinder the re-use of unused spaces, and newness and standardisation seem to prevent the emergence of an atmosphere in which artistic practices and identity can flourish.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper opened with the observation that research on global art cities has not meaningfully addressed non-Western examples and has tended to focus on global economic or financial cities. In this context, Tokyo is a prime example of a global economic city that has not to date been studied as a global art city. To examine this argument, the discussion explored concepts commonly used to explain why a city becomes a global city. A range of authors have stressed the unique clustering of economic services and production that enables these cities to become

control centres and hubs of the global economy. This raised the question of why Tokyo does not appear on the global art map, as it seems to lack the clustering of artistic activities found for instance in New York or Berlin—a view supported by a range of Tokyo art professionals. However, a detailed mapping of the city’s artistic venues (galleries, live music, and theatres) revealed the existence of such concentrations. These findings led to the more conceptual differentiation of clusters into *agglomerations* and *milieus*. While agglomerations are largely defined as concentrations of social activities, with little interlinking between them, milieus are shaped by interlinking networks of mutual engagement, symbolic transformation of the area, and integration into a wider infrastructure. Qualitative research (in this case, ethnography and in-depth interviews) was used to explore why agglomerations may not develop into milieus in Tokyo, or why milieu development remains fragile. Focusing on the role of space (density, architecture, symbolic representation, and material culture), the paper identified three obstacles that may hinder milieu formation: the hidden nature of art venues, the symbolic dominance of consumption and subsequent self-definition of art spaces as sanctuaries, and the unmaking of Tokyo’s material culture as a basis for artistic creativity and practice.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge that the empirical findings presented here do not tell the whole story (see Favell 2010). It is reasonable to assume that other intervening factors include the fact that contemporary art is less appreciated in Japan, for instance, Junko Shimada (owner of Gallery Side 2, 2014: n.p.) stated: ‘There is no market for conceptual art in Tokyo. I can only sell these artists at international art fairs.’ Or, the music critique Ian F. Martin (2014: n.p.) observed that there is only limited public support: ‘A population of about 1 million is needed to support a single dedicated punk venue.’ Morgner (2018) could show in his review of cultural industry policies that there are only few governmental incentives that support the arts.

The upcoming Olympic Games have prompted more support for local art projects across Japan, including funding for some projects in Tokyo, but it is too soon to judge any impact of such initiatives. It is notable that this funding is not associated with any wider urban policy linking art activities with the historic preservation of buildings. Nor do cultural activities feature in the future planning of the city—for instance, the shrinking of Tokyo from 2030 and the growing number of empty buildings is not linked to possible creative exploration (see Sorensen, 2002). Nevertheless, there are also important lessons to be learned from Tokyo. Many Western cities have openly adopted policies that almost aggressively integrate cultural

planning, as in the creation of cultural quarters or cultural zoning. However, these initiatives seem to have accelerated gentrification, which displaces the local art scene and threatens overall creative potential (for a recent overview, see Grodach et al., 2016). Instead of full visibility, artists in Tokyo have developed a very different survival strategy, withdrawing the arts from the surface of the city and going largely underground. The vibrant and challenging artistic activities that have emerged in this hidden world remain almost unknown to the world outside; Tokyo's art scene is like a protest movement in private.

Previous research on global cities has proposed that their global status relates to their capacity to cluster knowledge and infrastructure. However, this seems overly simplistic; an exclusively quantitative approach overlooks how co-location of activities in a given field may form a cluster of knowledge, expertise and infrastructure that can elevate innovation. As one example, Saskia Sassen's (1991) highly influential publication on the global city (emphasis on city) dedicates a single page to the material cultures of the cities discussed in her book. This seems in stark contrast to the public imagination of cities that particularly defines the urban in terms of architecture, concentration of buildings, and lack of access to nature. This paper emphasizes the symbolic representation of the global city as another important aspect of urban configuration. The notion of control centre does not properly address the performative dimension in meaning-making, authenticity of urban lifestyle, and the communicative quality of architecture. Finally, it is suggested that practices of consumption may reflect on a city's self-description as global. Understanding the global city as a centre of production imagines it less as a hub than as a site for dissemination and distribution, with underlying notions of cultural imperialism. Patterns of consumption and their embedding into urban imaginaries position the global city much more as an in-between state that entangles global developments. Beyond its contribution to cultural sociology, the present paper also contends that the role of space and material culture should be taken more seriously in the context of global city research.

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