LITERARY PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY
OF EDO/TOKYO & AMSTERDAM

End-Report for the Japan Foundation of the research done by Tjebbe van Tijen in the cadre of the Medium Term Visitors' Program in Commemoration with the Okinawa/Kyushu Summit 2000 from 2/10/2000 to 28/2/2001, extended (on own costs) to 28/3/2001

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This report describes the six different types of activities I have pursued during my half year stay in Japan:

1. discovering the morphology and many city-scapes of Tokyo;
2. searching and selecting quotations from (translated) Japanese literature with concise and expressive descriptions of moods evoked by specific areas and realms of Edo/Tokyo;
3. developing mapping principles as navigation instruments through these literary time, space and mood descriptions;
4. developing visualisation principles to relate the present to the past on the basis of photography and computer-graphics;
5. making contacts for future development of the project (website for public participation in the searching and selection of quotations, finding further research opportunities and facilities, finding potential collaborators who could make and continue the Japanese version of the project);
6. exchange ideas with people in related fields (social geography, urban.anthropology, historical cartography, inter-action design, sonology/soundscapes, bibliography, literature, visual arts, database technology, digital mapping).

What is there concretely after six months of work in Tokyo?

- Four hundred quotations, 'psych-geographic' descriptions, of the area now called Tokyo, Musashino Plain a millennium before that, and Edo until one and a half century ago. Fifty thousand words by a hundred different writers, taken from one and a half hundred different sources, organized in a series of several related databases (full bibliographical descriptions, authors, quotations, maps, emblematic photographs, topographical names, glossaries, notes , classification terms). This quantity is only to give sufficient examples to set rules how to make a large collection of psycho-geographic quotations. The number of quotes is below 10% of the actual number of quotes needed to be able to experience and display the complexity of the Edo/Tokyo area through several centuries. This is a task that is far beyond my capabilities and endurance. From the beginning public participation in the research (through the internet and public libraries) has been thought of; it will be only through such a modern process of sharing of knowledge that the project can be realized. (see Appendix II for the texts of the first example quotes)

- A bibliographical research database with almost seven hundred titles with linkages to the national academic library system of Japan NACSIS.

- A list of almost two hundred authors/titles which still need to be checked, read, for possible descriptive passages on Edo/Tokyo. (see Appendix I)

- A series of digital sketches that establish the basic principles for the time/space mapping system and an inventory of available actual paper and digital maps of Tokyo.

- A first concept for mapping moods as expressed in literary texts, based on color and light changes as observed by the author and his created subjects (season, part of day, weather, artificial lights, reflections, light movement, etc.).

Literary-Psycho-geography, origin of idea

As my subject may sound unfamiliar and makes one wonder why a Dutchman wants to discover and compare the psychology of two cities so wide apart and so different as Edo/Tokyo and Amsterdam, I will start to describe in some detail the origin and development of the actual research project.

The project of literary psycho-geography developed over many years and relates to my double profession (multi-media artist &librarian/curator) and my long term engagement with citizens actions. It started twenty five years ago in Amsterdam, being involved in debates and citizens actions related to urban renewal of parts of the inner city of Amsterdam. That debate centered on differences of opinion about renewal plans, especially about the building of new transport infrastructure (highways and underground railways) cutting straight through parts of the old center of Amsterdam and the replacement of houses by big offices and the like. The debate had several levels: - the preservation of the historical townscape; - the loss of cheap housing in the inner town; - the breaking up of local communities that for a great part were going to be forced out of their homes and shops. In this process, that took two decades, a strong citizens movement arose, and major confrontations with the official politics of those days occurred. The debate expanded, from local to city wide, and became even an issue on a national level. It resulted in a chance in public opinion, which led to a fundamental change in the urban politics of the city of Amsterdam.

When the future development of a city or a rural area is debated, when there are new plans that will change the land- or city scape, plans with a great impact on the people living, visiting or using such areas, there are mostly two opposing visions, one pointing at needed improvements and gains in the future, the other referring to the past and what will be lost. There are some times happy marriages between these two elements, but more often the debate leads to a kind of divorce, with a widening gap between opposing views, and a tendency in both 'camps' to take a more extreme position.

Which past? Whose past?

In such debates the past is often mentioned, not only the spacial properties of buildings, roads and other urban elements, but also the atmosphere of a certain area, underlaying elements of local history and culture. This is what led to the idea of 'literary psycho-geography'. These public debates made me wonder and I started to ask questions: which past? whose past?

One can remember one's own history, also talk with older people, but then, when one wants to go back further in time, one will need to read, because that is about the only way to know how previous generations experienced their living environment. What to read to get to know the past of a city, or a certain part of the city? There are the official books of a town's history that attempt objectivying experiences from the past. Such texts are often too general and often convey a single truth, a uniform way of looking at things, while, on the contrary, a town or city is a place of many different phenomena with many different people all having their own way of seeing things, their own interpretations.

I started to wonder how people over many different generations, living in the same part of town, in the same area, had been experiencing their living environment in their time. Not to lament things lost, or to generate a feeling of nostalgia, but as basic material for understanding the present, as a prerequisite to develop a vision for the future.

Understanding the past to shape the future

I started reading, mostly novels and short stories, but also poetry and theater plays, in which in any way, however brief or vague, the part of the inner city affected by the proposed plans, was mentioned or described. My search was especially for quotations in which a unity of time, space and mood had been put to words in an expressive language. At first I limited myself to the part of the inner city where I was living, later my interest expanded to the whole of Amsterdam and other (mainly) European cities.

In that process of reading into the past and trying to recognize something left over in the present, I started to systemize my notes and developed a first system to make those quotations function as separate elements, make them comparable, arranging them in different orders, discovering similarities, making new associations. At first this was a big card file system with cut out photocopied texts, handwritten classifications and little photographs. Many years later, in the middle of the eighties, it became a computer database system, which, at first, could only carry textual information. That system gave a glimpse of further reaching possibilities and the idea was triggered to develop a system that would allow to wander through time, space and mood, to encounter all those different experiences of the town, over years, decades, centuries.

Inspiration from situationist movement

As an artist in the mid sixties, I had been in contact with a political and artistic movement called 'situationist international', a loose grouping of artists and intellectuals from different countries that had developed a criticism of what they labeled 'the society of the spectacle'. Their criticism was also directed at the rationalization of the modern city, the utilitarian plans with their division of functions of the city into separate areas for work, sleep and recreation: the city as a living and working machine. The 'situationists' were sensitive to the diversity of atmospheres that still existed in many parts of the city of Paris and rejected the coldness and the isolated and atomized way of life in the new sleeping towns, the new suburbs. They were looking for methods to re-introduce poetry in the daily living environment, they advocated the 'creation of situations' (that's where their name derives from), temporal creative events where daily life, art and politics would fuse.

From that critical position the situationists developed a method to discover the attractions and diversity of neighborhoods, that had not yet fell victim to the utilitarian modernization process. One of these areas were 'Les Halles' in Paris, a most complex and attractive area in the fifties and sixties, with a big lively food market right in the old center (demolished to make place for deep underground shopping centers and the Centre George Pompidou in the seventies). Other town areas explored by members of this radical art movement were located in Venice, London and Amsterdam. The 'situationists' would wander through such attractive quarters and neighborhoods, let themselves drift by impulse and tried to describe their experiences in experimental forms of mapping, that would, instead of objectivying space, visualize personal experience of space and mark the different atmospheres encountered. These driftings and mappings were to be used as playful tools for developing strategies to re-introduce poetry in the city-landscape. The 'situationists' baptized their method 'psycho-geography'. It was an experimental method of surveying and 'reading' the urban landscape, based on an older tradition of preceding artistic movements like the French and Belgian 'surrealists' and 'lettrists' with absurdistic pilgrimages and writers from the 19th century like Baudelaire, De Quincy and Dickens with their explorations and depictions of the city atmospheres of London and Paris.

I adapted the situationist idea of 'psycho-geography' to the circumstances of the urban debates in Amsterdam and the need to better understand the past, to be able to formulate plans for the future in which the new would adapt itself to the old, and the old would accommodate the new, wandering and drifting not only through the actual city-space but also through its multi layered past, I called it 'Literary Psycho-Geography'.

Definition of literary psycho-geography

Psycho-geography is the art that tries to record and understand the influence of the outer environment on the human mind and vice versa. *Literary psycho-geography* is the expression of this phenomena in literature, whereby literature is taken in its widest possible sense: any writing that manages to capture the influence of a particular part of a city or landscape on the human mind, or a person's projection of inner feelings or moods onto the outer environment. Well versed literary texts, poetry, novels or theater plays, but also popular fiction, comic books, journalistic writing, songs, films, official reports and advertisement slogans, all these can have fragments or passages that capture 'psycho-geographic moments' in descriptive text. All these scattered text fragments, when put together, will make it possible to 'read' the life story of the (city) landscape, to 'map' it's changes of atmosphere and mood. Books make this liaison with the past possible, they are an interface to learn about a town. This relation can also be reversed: learning about books and their authors by drifting through the city landscape.

The city writing itself

In 1977 I made the first exhibition on the subject in which a selections of quotations from a wide variety of books on one particular area (the former Jewish Ghetto of Amsterdam) was displayed together with contemporary images and indications of locations. In that year the first theoretical article was published 'Een aanzet tot een literaire psycho-geografie van de Amsterdamse Jodenbuurt' (an attempt at making a literary psycho-geography of the Jewish Quarters of Amsterdam). By comparing the writings of several different writers on the same area, the conclusion was that certain cityscapes were exerting such a strong influence that they were almost 'writing themselves' in the minds of people and would surface in comparable ways in the writings of authors with different styles, from different periods and different backgrounds.

New possibilities using computers

In the mid-eighties, with the advent of the personal computer, new possibilities came into sight to combine text and image and sound in one digital format, allowing for the first time the multiple and fast combination of series of dramatized 'psycho-geographic' quotations taken from a wide variety of sources. In that period I started to work again with the Australian artist Jeffrey Shaw, with whom I worked together in the sixties, and we started to discuss the possibilities of making an interactive computer-based system for the literary-psycho geography.

In 1986 a first series of computer graphics with collages that would be inspired by literary quotations was produced in the context of a big exhibition on urban plans for a big part of the inner city of Amsterdam and the revitalization of old harbor areas (in collaboration with Jeffrey Shaw). In this stage the element of sound was added to the project, whereby the literary text fragments (quotations) were dramatized, read by actors with added related sound environments ('soundscapes' made in collaboration with the sonologist and ethno-musicologist Fred Gales). A series of psycho-geographic boat tours with readings of literary texts accompanied by soundscapes was also organized in this period, reviving memories of the city and linking them to the actual debate on how to formulate the guiding concepts for the actual urban renewal process in that area. In a later stage this boat tour was adapted for a non-Dutch speaking audience, with the text translated and narrated life in English for an international audience of urban historians who could in this way get an intimate and personalized view of two centuries of the Amsterdam inner town within a two hour boat fare.

Studies of other cities

In the beginning of the nineties two studies were made together with Jeffrey Shaw for a possible adaption of the idea of literary psycho-geography of the German town Karlsruhe and the French town Marseille. In the end there were not enough financial resources to realize these plans, but it helped to widen the scope of the research. In 1991, together with Jeffrey Shaw, a second essay on literary psycho-geography was published, which carried several references to more universal aspects of the relation between cities and literature:

Cities are not only scenes for plots of novels. The diversity in rooms, houses, streets, buildings, areas, the multiplicity of atmospheres and impressions, the simultaneity of individual lives, make cities at the same time models for the structure of novels. In various novels cities, from backgrounds become protagonists. People and their lives become mere decor.The revolutionary growth of the printing press pushes the number of writers, books and readers up. At the same time cities grow and change.

Novels relate the changes cities go through, revive what can no longer be lived. Their descriptions are often only fragments of the composite wholes cities are with their many different parts. The narrative component tries to offer a view of the whole by connecting the fragments among them. But no novel can ever present all possible visions. There are ever more separate descriptions. Cities no longer are single books but multiplicities of books. Who is able to read all of them? Cities initially purporting to be unities dissolve into multiplicities. They are like trunks of trees disappearing under their foliages.

As seasons rotate leaves wither, fall, are swept away by the winds, become compost in libraries. Conditionally existing images of time and space, scattered over innumerable book case. Every book a unity consisting of a multiplicity of relatively independent parts. Pages, like wrongly addressed letters, wait for brazen readers of their contents. Quotations squirming like earthworms cut to pieces. Guided by passages in books describing cities readers create their own spaces. Prescriptions on how to understand novels flutter in the wind. Imposed interpretations do not hold. Every core of understanding is a shell for further interpretations. As long as cities live and grow writers and readers continue to polish their facets.

1995 first visit to Japan

Four years later I visited Japan for the first time in my life, being invited to give a lecture at a symposium at Keio University with the theme 'The Future of the Book of the Future'. It was during that visit that I was first emerged into the vast city-scape of Tokyo and it made me wonder...
As many people have experienced, at first sight this town seems to have no history at all, but one soon learns that this a biased viewpoint. Certainly there a re very few buildings from past epochs, but with sometraining stgructures of the past can clearly be recognized.

1998 concept for actual research project

I immediately got interested to see if the idea of 'literary psycho-geography' could also be adapted to this huge and complex city. In 1998 the first concept, basis for the later proposal to the Japan Foundation was written in which the idea was developed of comparing two cities at the opposite sides of the globe , cities that are also each other opposite in size and character:

Tokyo and Amsterdam. Contrasting cities, the one a macro-polis, possibly the largest city of the world, the other a mini-polis, a world village. There are some similarities: both cities are a little over half millennium in age, both are harbour cities at the seaside with a history linked to rivers, waterways and reclaiming of land, but that is a feature that, logically, many big cities in the world have in common. The differences are much more obvious: the contrast between the vast amount of remainders of different periods of the past in Amsterdam and the apparent lack of it in Tokyo. Though that is nothing more than a strong first impression, as each landscape, each city have hidden layers of their past and one needs time to learn to read them in the present. There is the famous half moon shaped girdle of the 17th and 18th century canals in Amsterdam as it's most prominent feature. Tokyo has retained it's basic structure of spiralling out quarters from the central shogunate castle of early Edo times in its modern city layout. Amsterdam is full of tangible objects of the past, in Tokyo the past is often only there in the names of quarters and neighbourhoods, bridges, covered waterways, railway stations, bus stops and modern buildings. There is no way to compare the level of destruction of natural and man made disasters that befell Tokyo and Amsterdam. Floods, earthquakes, fire storms and aerial bombardments have erased big parts of the city of Tokyo repeatedly. Amsterdam has experiences only in its early times some fires and only a few floods with any impact and has been spared a bombardment during the second world war. There have been what is called a 'bombardment from within ' during the so called Hunger Winter of 1945 when there was not sufficient fuel left during a cold winter and the emptied houses of the deported Jewish inhabitants have been ravaged for fire wood and many were demolished in this process, but this does compare in no way to the hardships experienced by the plagued population of Tokyo. A milder climate, repeated destruction and the constant fear of another major earthquake, have also led to a tradition of a more temporary kind of buildings and road structures than the ones we see in a town like Amsterdam. Changes in the cityscape are much more dynamic in Tokyo than in Amsterdam. It will be interesting to see if and how, over a long period of time, these differences are expressed in local literature and other depictions of these two cities.

Short overview of activities: October 2000 - March 2001

1- discovering the morphology and many city-scapes of Tokyo
2- searching and selecting quotations about Edo/Tokyo

These two activities were very much interwoven. Riding the city on my bicycle and reading the city sitting on a chair or mostly on the tatami mat of my ryokan.

The selection of quotations has been one of my main activities in the period of my stay in Japan, as these short expressive texts are at the core of the project. One could say, as it concerns translated Japanese literature only and literary and other expressive writings in European languages accessible to me (French, German, English, Italian and Dutch), that this reading could well have been done outside of Japan. This is only partly true, as there are far more texts translated from the Japanese in language as accessible to me in private collections and academic libraries in the Netherlands. Also my reading of these texts was limited by my still superficial knowledge of the city-scape of Tokyo (having been there, in total, only three months over a period of four years, in the period 1995-1999. So in the beginning my ability to localize places mentioned or indirectly indicated was very limited. Intense reading on the one hand and frequent driftings and purposely getting lost, through and in all parts of the city made me slowly a bit more aware. These two processes of reading, reading the city in texts and reading the texts back into the actual experiences structure of the city were mutual supportive.

I did start my research in the Netherlands using the libraries of the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden (the last one being specialized in Japanese language and culture). Before writing my application to the Japan Foundation, I had done bibliographical research to find references to literary texts that might have 'psycho-geographic' descriptions of time, place and mood of Edo>Tokyo. By using mainly secondary sources: anthologies and overviews of Japanese literature, specific studies of certain groups of writers, styles, historical periods, a first database with references to specific authors and titles was made.

Of course the reader writes the text, not just the writer, how else can the text be read? It must be re-produced again and again, only in the process of reading it is alive... and a text can have many lives, lives far beyond the control of the writer, the critiques, the translators, the educators, and others who , often with the best intentions, try to fix what can not be fixed...

Searching for psycho-geographic descriptions within a text, is a special experience, a special way of handling text... The agile eye will look over a sea of words, focus here and there, at the watch out for any occurrence where the topos, the land or city scape will surface, often as a swimmer between the waves... there are certain words, and thus images of words which will halt the eye for a moment, that little tip could be just the beginning or the end of a passage that might be worthwhile quoting...

There are certain crude methods to navigate a text... the opening of a novel, a chapter, or a closing of such a separate sector of a book, that is to say for a certain type of text, which will have a structure not just unique of its own, but much more as yet another example of a certain genre.. So there are actors and actions and they need to be set in some space, the most conventual being that the space is nothing more than the backdrop for the actors performing their subsequent activities and interactions.

This report is not the place to give a full description of the method and rules for quoting, it will need several different examples to explain the method. This formalization of the process of literary psycho-geography will be ready at the end of April and will be published on the website of Tokyo-Geidai.

A great help was the nice collection of the International House of Japan library in Roppongi, which has its books directly available to the user from the shelves, and also has a very liberal lending policy for its members. The main part of my choices were made in this library and through this library that supplied me with books from other japanese libraries through the Inter Library Loan System.

Appendix 2 gives a list of titles and authors signaled, but for which I could not yet find the time to check them for possible quotations (almost 200 references).

3- developing mapping principles for navigation

From early on Tokyo fascinated me because of the importance of the use of maps and the wide variety of maps used for all kind of specific purposes. This is not only the case for the actual way of using the town, with its shifting functions and locations, but can also be observed in Edo times. Already in the beginning of my research I decided to try to develop a mapping system that could use and display this cartographic richness. The following illustration shows the main principles:


Circular photographs (often using a fisheye lense) are made of sport, areas, places mentioned in literature and these elements can shrink and grow, from mere dots (pinballs) to crystal glass baals that reflect part of the surroundings. These 'pinpoints' are connecting time-layers of different maps.

Completely different kind of maps, some with, others without scale, can be combined by pointing to the same location on both maps and connecting them visualy as if a large and long pinpoint was pushed through them.
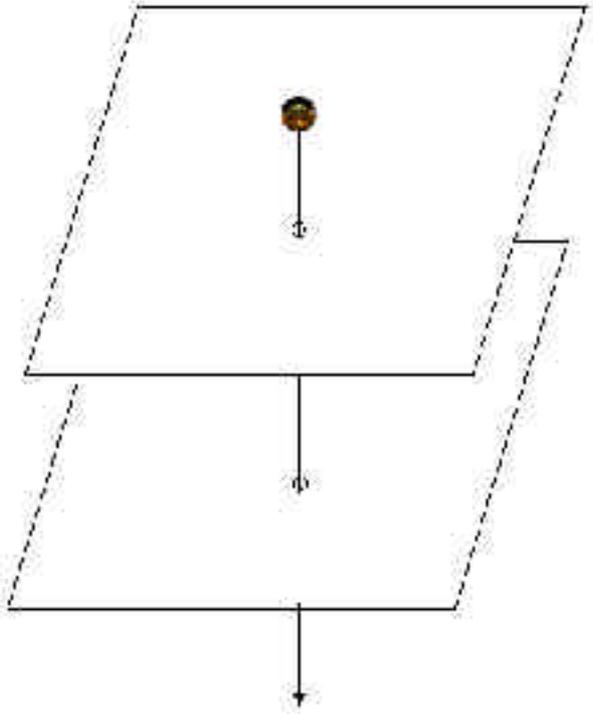
Again the same map principle in a more schematic representation. These are only conceptual designs, and much more time and investment is needed to actualy to be able to realize it.
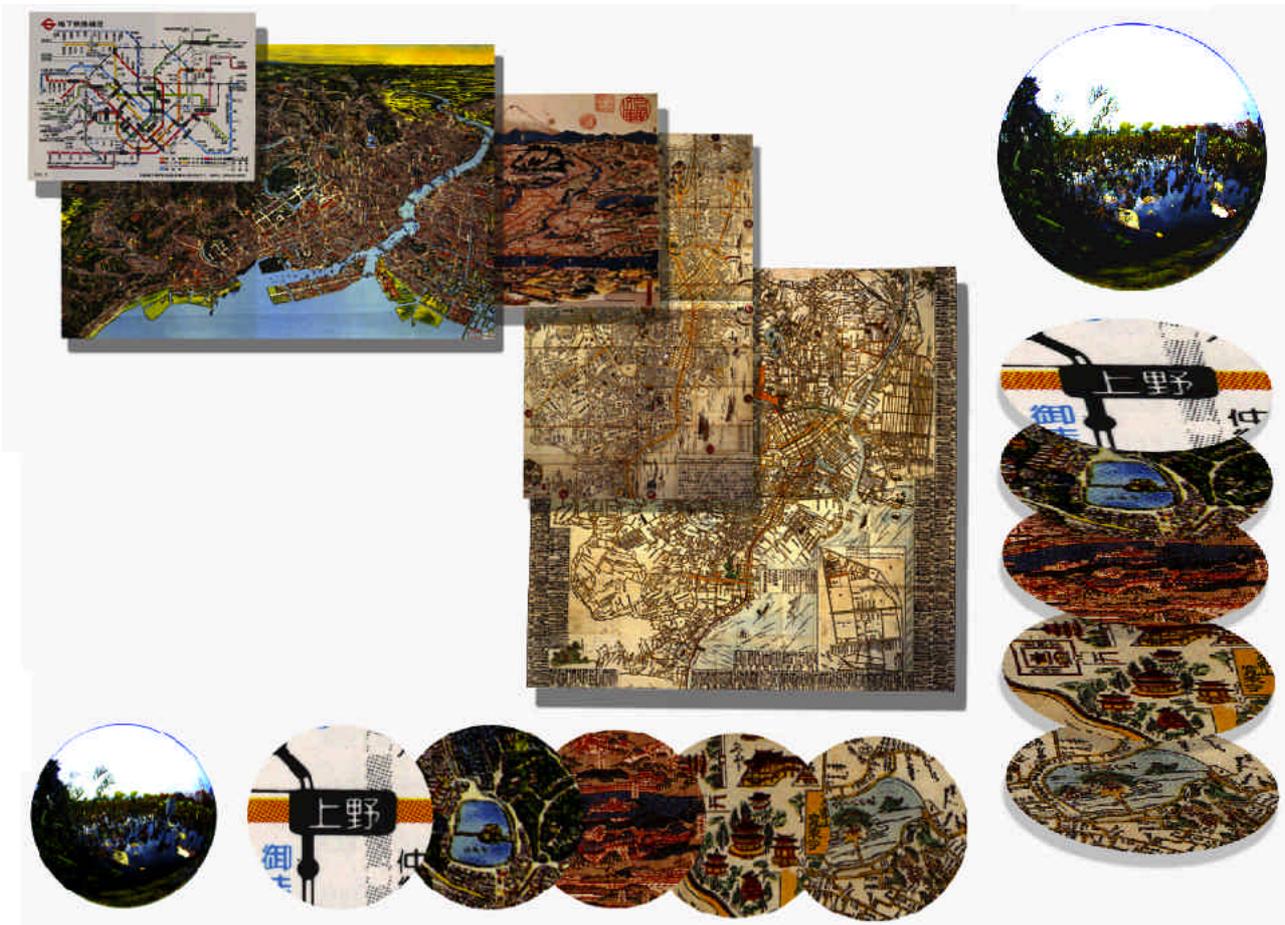
This is another example of the same principle whereby circular slices of different maps, all representing the same area (in this case Ueono Station) are cut out of the original maps and form touchable 'button's that will call up a map of a related place and time.

4- developing visualisation to relate the present to the past

As there is often the direct visual relation between the townscape of the present and the past has disappeared, I did choose for a form of enstrangement to make photographic pictures in the present that will be a guide to the same spot in the past. The distorting effect of a fish eye lense and also the use of tele-lense pictures has been tested in a collection of over a thousand digital pictures. These are just a few examples. The visual effect relates to an old Western tradition of looking in a so called 'Claude Glass' to a landscape, a concenser mirror with optical glasses that would color the view (over one's back) of the landscape. The name of that device point back to the 17th century landscape painter Claude Loraine who was very popular in Europe for his soft tones and ability to depict the complexity of light. I choose to call these pictures and their function in the navigation process, 'emblematic' pointers.

A stagnant wind, reeking of sewage, raked the surface of Shinobazu Pond.

loneliness began to spread across its surface.

What was to become of me? Just to think about that was enough to leave me shuddering and too distraught to sit still, so I left my Hongo apartment dragging a walking stick and headed for Ueno Park. It was an evening in mid-September. My white yukata was already out of season, and I felt horribly conspicuous, as I glowed in the dark, and so full of sorrow I no longer wanted to live. A stagnant wind, reeking of sewage, raked the surface of Shinobazu Pond. The lotuses growing there had begun to decay, their grisly carcasses entrapped between bent, elongated stalks, and the idiot faces of people streaming by in the evening cool wore etched with such total exhaustion that one might have thought the end of the world was at hand.

He stared at the surface of the pond. The reflection of many trees seemed to reach the bottom, and down deeper than the trees, the blue sky. No longer was he thinking of streetcars, or Tokyo, or Japan; a sense of something far-off and remote had come to take their place. The feeling had lasted but a moment, when loneliness began to spread across its surface like a veil of clouds.

Two examples of emblematic pictures with the text they refer to. The left one is a text by Dazai of Shinbazu Pond, the right one the famous text of Soseki on the pond at Tokyo University.

5- making contacts for future development of the project

Website for public participation in the searching and selection of quotations, finding further research opportunities and facilities. I have spoken with a group of people that have set up a cultural information website called 'real.tokyo' and we did speak about possible later particiaption of this group in my work.

My affiliated institute Tokyo Geidai, by way of professor FUJIHATA Masaki has expressed interest to see if the continuation of my reserach might be in the future in some way be accomodated by them.

I did speak several timesw with one of the references for my project professor JINNAI Hidenobu of Hosei University on possible relations with academic and art institutions in Japan.

Finding potential collaborators who could make and continue the Japanese version of the project. Of course I did meet and did speak with many people on my project during my stay which has helped to develop a circuit of possible collaborators and people interested to advice and help also in the future. These are not only Japanese people but also people from other nationalities who have specialized in Japanese language and culture. One of my enthusiastic supporters in this respect has been the Dutch japanologist Maaike Ono Boots.

There have been contacts with the cultural attache of the Dutch embassy who has expressed an interest to support possible future activities which would involve a comparison between Amsterdam and Tokyo.

In the Netherlands I have had several times contacts with the Stimulation Fund for Architectural and Urban Research, a semi-government body. They are very positive about this project and I will present them in the coming monthes the result of my studies in Japan and will apply for support for the Amsterdam part of the study. Als the Municipal Amsterdam Historical Museum, is one of the institutions who have expressed interest.

6- exchange ideas with people in related fields

The project has a multi-disciplinary character and is based on the collaboration with specialists from different fields: social geography, urban.anthropology, historical cartography, inter-action design, sonology/soundscapes, bibliography, literature, visual arts, database technology, digital mapping.

During my stay in Japan I have had regular contact in the first place with FUJIHATA Masaki, professor of the multi-media department of Tokyo Geidai, that was my host during these monthes. I have had technical support and the pleasure of exchanging ideas and debating concepts.

Also there have been a close relation with JINNAI Hidenobu, as his vision and analysis of Edo/Tokyo is very close to my own observations.

On the bibliographical level I have had great support from KOIDE Izumi librarian of the International House of Japan and her staff. I have been a heavy user of all their facilities.

On the issue of mapping I have had a few meetings with the geographer MORITA Takashi of Hosei university, who has been willing to listen to me, testing my ideas.

Another map specialist HAGA Hiraku, editor of Kashiwashibo Publishing house that specializes in historical maps, has been most helpful. He brought me in contact with one prominent map collector of the Edo period YAMASHITA Kazumasa, who will be supporting the porject in the next stages by supplying photographic material of his collection for digitazation.

Last to mention is TORIGOE Keiko a specialist in the history and use of sound, who has expressed great interest in my project and with who I hope to collaborate on the issue of historical 'soundscapes' later on.

Tokyo 30/3/2001 = Tjebbe van Tijen

Appendix I
list of 200 titles still to be checked for quotations, several hundred quotations more could be found

Appendix II

389 quotations on Edo/Tokyo in chronological orderfrom pre-Edo to post-Tokyo = 1000 years

The main source for my research, the shelves with translated Japanese literature in the library of the International House of Japan in Roppongi

This is still a version in a production stage and needs to be corrected and checked, that work will take one or two extra weeks. In some cases the author names and titles of Japanese texts are given in Kanji and Kana, this information is taken from the NACSIS database and 'parsed' form that date automatiucaly. However the NACSIS data is in many cases irregular, so the resulted 'calculation' can be sometimes wrong or irregular. When next year the Japanese MARC system will be brought on-line for the general public, it will be much easier to solve this technical problem. Also the data supplied in translated works from the Japanese is ofetn not there or incomplete. These are problems that are beyond the scope of this project.