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Thinking from the Yamanote: space, place and mobility in Tokyo's past and present

MARK PENDLETON and JAMIE COATES

Abstract: Tokyo's Yamanote train line has been at the centre of Japan's modernisation project and continues to define socio-spatial relations within the city today. Within this special issue of *Japan Forum*, we trace the contours of the Yamanote line, exploring its role as a form of mobility that creates temporalities, spaces and boundaries, and the modes of intimacy and estrangement such dynamics produce. The papers within this special issue were developed out of discussions held at the Chicago AAS conference 2015. That year marked the 130th anniversary of the line's initial opening and the ninetieth anniversary of the completion of the loop. A focus on the Yamanote line provided us with fruitful reflections on migration and marginalisation, the way space is imagined and represented in the city, and how everyday life is both disciplined and disrupted. These reflections are included throughout the contributions within this special issue as they relate to Japan; however, they also attest to the continued importance of Japan as a site to reflect on broader socio-historical questions. As we show in this special issue, thinking from the Yamanote line not only allows us to think about Tokyo or Japan, but also affords attention to wider questions relevant to urban life more generally.

Keywords: Tokyo, mobility, urban, history, transit, space

Tackey and Tsubasa, a Johnny and Associates boy band duo, released their sixteenth single, *Love's labyrinth – counter-clockwise on the Yamanote (Ai no meiro – Yamanote Uchimawari)* in 2015, their second Yamanote themed track after 2011's *Yamanote Sotomawari (Clockwise on the Yamanote)*. While the earlier of these name-checked every train station on the loop while loosely tracking a search for love, the latter tells the story of a presumably male protagonist stuck in an interminable loop as he circles Tokyo's downtown Yamanote loop line – dubbed a 'love labyrinth' (*ai no meiro*) in both the song's title and lyrics. The song evokes something of the emotional topology of Japan's largest city, albeit through

romantic clichés. Each station prompts memories of lost love for the young protagonist – walking towards a summer fireworks display, catching a reflection of his lover's face in a window. Ultimately, as the stations rush past – Shibuya, Ebisu, Meguro, Gotanda – he recognises that there is no end to the forward propulsion of both the train and of life, while searching for a way out of this circular trap of longing and nostalgia. Circling the Yamanote represents the connection and disconnection of young love or, as lyricists Nakagawa Reiji and Hibino Hirofumi write, of 'hearts passing by'.

While it might seem flippant to start a special issue on 'Thinking from the Yamanote' with one of the least musically or lyrically profound J-Pop artists in popular circulation today, *Love's Labyrinth* captures something of the themes we examine. In contrast to much existing scholarship on Tokyo, we are interested here in exploring people's relationships to the city precisely through their connections to mobility – and motion is at the heart of Tackey and Tsubasa's surprisingly upbeat song of heartbreak and abandonment.

Studies of Tokyo have often focused on atomised spaces such as Shibuya (Morris 2010), Ginza (Ginoza 2006, Okamoto 2009), or Roppongi (Cybriwsky et al. 2011), or on the city as a whole, often in terms of representation (Waley 2006a, Sand 2013) or economic development (Sassen 1991, Jacobs 2005, Sorensen 2005). Academic interest has swung between the 'micro-textures' of Tokyo's urban localities – the 'local institutions, shared values of community, and a sense of communal identity [that are] impart[ed] to neighborhoods' (Bestor 1989, p. 9; see also Dore 1958), and more macro conceptualisations of Tokyo as a megalopolis or as part of global trends (see for example Waley 2007 or Sassen 1991). Neither of these are wrong, but are partial in their focus on either the micro or macro at the expense of the means by which people move between the two. To think about Tokyo from the perspective of movement, we suggest, allows us to connect the unique qualities of individual spaces to wider dynamics in the city, while also providing a means for us to interrogate the processes that generate the city's wider imagination.

Urban rail transit systems have long served as a popular way to link questions of movement and urban life to the experiences and transformations of modernity (see Augé [1986] 2002, Judt 2010, Fraser and Spalding 2012). Historical approaches to rail transit systems have tended to take industry-focused and infrastructural approaches, which although helpful to understanding, privilege the structures of these systems over the patterns of mobility that both produce and are produced by them (Fraser and Spalding 2012). Marc Augé's *In the Metro* (2002[1986]) stands as an early turn away from this 'cartographic' perspective within Anglo-European theorisations of urban transit systems. Walking through the Parisian Metro, Augé showed how the quotidian and experiential qualities of (super)modernity are embodied in urban transit mobilities. Building on early works such as Augé, a 'mobility paradigm' in much of the social sciences and humanities (Sheller and Urry 2006, Adey et al. 2014), has seen a growth in

interest in phenomenological and interpretive approaches to rail mobilities. Mobility, and its many figurations, has come to act as a 'concept-metaphor', whose ambiguous nature as both quality and sign, inspires conceptual innovation (see Moore 2004, Salazar 2017). With a few exceptions (see Grunow 2012, Shimoda 2012), discussions of mobility in Japan have been largely ignored by Anglo-European theorists. This belies the significance of cities such as Tokyo, home to some of the largest multi-system networks of trains, subways and mono-rails, in a city that has grown to become one of the world's most populous metropolises. In contrast, much of the excellent scholarship on rail systems and urban experience in Japanese Studies has yet to engage directly with the 'mobility paradigm'. As several authors demonstrate in this special issue, this is partly because Japanese theorists provided compelling conceptual approaches that although resembling developments in Euro-American scholarship, in many ways preceded them (see Jinnai 1988). The aim of this issue is to think from the Yamanote in ways that exceed a cartographic perspective through a focus on mobility and experience. At the same time, the papers included in this issue demonstrate the diversity of insights possible through this single concept-metaphor, and the importance of Japan – and particularly Tokyo – for our conceptualisation of mobility.

Tokyo is a city that has long been associated with movement. At one end of the main transportation artery of the Tokugawa period – the Tōkaidō road – the old city of Edo was home to the military and political elite of the premodern period, as well as the start (or end) of many premodern processes of domestic mobility (see Nenzi 2008). Movements within Edo reflected social distinctions and patterns within the city – a central governmental hub with encircling grids for different social groups at the time. The Yamanote line's name, for example, comes from the highland areas to the west of Edo's centre, which was occupied by enclaves of noble families at the time. The traces of these movements and configurations were also carried into the Meiji period. The governing centre became the imperial palace, which even today encourages the city to develop as encircling mobilities around what some have controversially characterised as an 'empty' centre (see Barthes 1982). The Meiji move of the formal capital from Kyoto to the newly named Tokyo alongside the consolidation of a newly modern conceptualisation of the nation also prompted a further movement of the city to the centre of the national imaginary, a place it has maintained throughout Japan's many changes over the past 150 years.

As a result, Tokyo has been one of the major sites outside of the Anglo-European context where modernity and modernisation have been reflected upon, with Edward Seidensticker describing it as the 'world's greatest city' (Seidensticker et al. 2011). Yet Tokyo has been in a state of constant mobility itself, moving from its Edo heart around Nihonbashi and Kyōbashi in what Seidensticker (1983) called the 'low city' (*shitamachi*) to the east, in an ever westward pull from the Meiji onwards, into the 'high city' (*yamanote*) of Marunouchi and

then ultimately beyond to the new developments of Shinjuku and Shibuya. By the end of the Meiji, the erosion of the Low City's cultural centrality to the city was complete, and largely continues to this day despite recent developments around the Sky Tree complex. As Seidensticker (1983, p. 251) noted some decades ago, 'The High City gets higher and higher. The Low City is still the warmer and more approachable of the two, but the days of its cultural eminence are gone.'

While there is a past to Tokyo's position in the story of national mobility, the city also reflects Japan's potential movements into the future, its various urban developments acting at different moments as litmus tests for social change in general, from Tange Kenzō's never-quite realised 1960s' Tokyo Megalopolis grand plan for a futuristic city of connection and movement across the natural landscape (see Adriasola 2015) to more recent fantasies of an Olympic-inspired, post-2020 revived city, pushing further out into Tokyo Bay. Tokyo has also been, and continues to be, the major site of both domestic and international migration in Japan and is predicted to be the only city in Japan still with a growing population by 2020 (Nishioka et al. 2011). Large-scale movements of people are the source of this growth.

At the centre of all these modern movements stands Tokyo's transit system. The development of mass transportation systems along with Japan's Meiji industrialisation process in the late nineteenth century marked Japan's entry into the 'modern' era, and each addition to its expansive linkages and loops have signified Tokyo's place as a 'modern' city (Grunow 2012). The history of the Yamanote epitomises how various separate lines of movement become entangled, forming phenomenologically and symbolically powerful loops and linkages. Loop lines, such as those in London and Paris, were only introduced after widespread developments of destination-oriented lines and their terminus stations (Galviz 2013). The Yamanote is no exception. It did not start as a loop line, but rather as a series of privately run cargo lines. Conceived as a means to connect the Tōkaidō line, which roughly followed the route of the historic Tōkaidō road west from old Edo, to the Tōhoku line running north-east of the capital, the original planned route was to connect Shinagawa in the southwest of the city to agricultural lands in the northwest, starting with parallel *Nihon Tetsudō* lines running from Akabane to Ueno and Shinagawa in the 1880s. In its production, new urban centres along the western side of Tokyo were created, such as the founding of Ikebukuro in 1903 (see Coates, this issue) along with the major business and shopping districts of Shinjuku and Shibuya. By 1925, the loop was completed with the opening of the leg between Akihabara and Tabata stations in the east. Subsequently, trains on other major lines such as the Tōhoku or Chūō, were re-routed or stopped at the Yamanote's boundaries, creating the loop, while also opening up spaces to the west for further connectivity to the heart of the city.

The Yamanote was created by the planners of the new modern city. And yet its historic adjustment also shows how such plans are never truly completed or

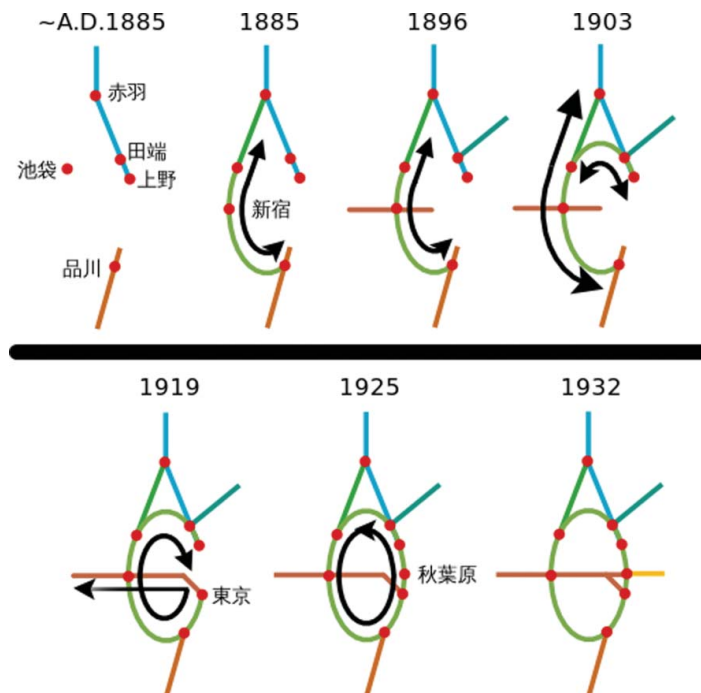


Figure 1 The construction of the Yamanote Line and (current) JR lines, from Mixtures 2009

perfected. We have included a map here as a starting point (Figure 1), understanding maps as capturing a representation of a particular moment, much like a photograph, while also limiting our understanding of what is outside of the frame. This problem of representability and its silences cannot be fully resolved, but it can be improved by thinking from different objects, qualities and concepts. In this sense, we contrast thinking from the Yamanote with thinking from maps of the Yamanote. The history of the Yamanote's linkages and loops continues today, suggesting ceaseless development in relation to wider processes of becoming and mobility in the city.

For architectural historian Jinnai Hidenobu (1992), navigating the historical development of the contemporary urban metropolis necessitated following a similar trajectory, starting from the *shitamachi*, moving westward through the Yamanote, the new towns of Shinjuku and Shibuya and ultimately to the suburbs that stretch out beyond the reach of the loop line. Yet Jinnai also saw alternative avenues into the cityscape, exploring the 'borderlands' of the waterfront (Adriasola 2015) and the ways in which the mostly concreted waterways of old Edo still structure the landscape of the city. Jinnai (1995, pp. 4–6) argued for an understanding of the city through what he termed a 'continuous' history that evolves from Edo-period topographically-grounded urban plans through the Meiji introduction of a "loose" modernization [which] was carried out by superimposing

Western elements onto the legacy of Edo' and finally in the late Taisho and early Showa eras with the introduction of modernist appeals to democracy, urban life and people-centred planning. In this, Jinnai is responding to the work of people such as Ogi Shinzō (1991), who reconceptualised Edo and Tokyo not 'as separate entities... [but argued for] a single perspective emphasizing the continuities between them' (Jinnai 1995, p. 218).

Just recently, a new Yamanote line station has been announced in anticipation of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games (Japan Times 2016). The station is to be designed by Kuma Kengo, the architect appointed to design the new national stadium as a replacement for the late Zaha Hadid's rejected and highly controversial original design. As with the previous Tokyo Olympics in 1964, when the launch of the new *shinkansen* fast train symbolised the re-emergence of the new modern state from the war (Hood 2006), trains have long functioned alongside these global events as a means of presenting a vision of a modern, global Japan to the outside world. Trains function as a key tool in a narrative of developmental progress. As Hiraku Shimoda (2012, p. 285) has argued in reflecting on a later advertisement for Japanese train technology, 'Trains ... are made to express a powerful faith in technology, the persistent pursuit of material progress, the state of Japan's national self-esteem across the postwar continuum, and the urge to keep pushing Japan towards its historical destiny.'

In Tokyo, the transit system also very concretely structures the ways its inhabitants move through the city, with commutes following the lines of rails and roads and most pedestrian movements intersecting with these stations and the shopping districts that connect them. Movement around the city is mixed modal – with typical commuters walking, riding bikes or catching buses to their nearest station, from where they traverse the city in commutes of up to two hours (see Hankins, in this issue). The train functions as one key means by which people move from home to work and to the social spaces of the city. It also connects the commuter to larger systems of advertising, telecommunications, broadcast media and more, which structure the commuting experience through hand-held devices, suspended advertisements, and live TV broadcasts on some trains. Consequently, to think from movement allows us to travel between macro and everyday scales, as well as historical and contemporary experiences.

Thinking from Tokyo's transit system has already been a common, albeit less interrogated, starting point for many studies, particularly in Japanese. Writer and social critic Azuma Hiroki and sociologist Kitada Akihiro, for example, start their 2007 ruminations on Tokyo's spatial organisation from the many lines that they see as dividing the city (Azuma and Kitada 2007). Personal explorations of Tokyo's stations in turn lead them to broader reflections on questions of urban life, postmodernity, nationalism and history. Their approach was in many ways the impetus for the bringing together of this collection of articles. As they emphasise, Tokyo is not somewhere merely to 'think about', but also a place to 'think from' (Azuma and Kitada 2007, p. 7), both in terms of Tokyo's centrality to the

Japanese nation, but also its position within global capitalism; thinking from Tokyo serves as a useful starting point for considering wider political or social concerns.

Taking inspiration from Azuma and Kitada's turn of phrase, this special issue explores how 'thinking from' Tokyo's transit systems elicits unique insights into the urban textures of Japan, while raising questions that speak to issues beyond Japan's borders. To focus our discussion, we invited contributors to write about Tokyo's major loop line. As outlined above, the Yamanote train line, which circles the downtown heart of the city and connects all major station hubs, has been at the centre of Japan's modernisation project and continues to structure spatial and mobile relations within the city today. Tokyo residents may not ride on the Yamanote on any given day, but it would be a relatively rare occurrence for many to bypass it entirely. Commuters will regularly pass within close proximity to one of its twenty-nine stations, whether transferring at Shinjuku or Ueno on the way to work, or socialising at Shibuya or Ikebukuro. In 2010, an estimated 3.68 million riders used the Yamanote per day, falling somewhere between the figures for the entire London Underground network and the New York City subway system.

Within this special issue, we explore the contours of the Yamanote line, connecting its role as a spatial and transit-based boundary, to the relationships of connectivity and separation it produces. The articles presented in this special issue were originally developed out of papers presented at the annual Association for Asian Studies Conference in Chicago in March 2015. The year 2015 marked the 130th anniversary of the line's initial opening and the ninetieth anniversary of the completion of the loop. Consequently, the panel discussions and the papers included in this special issue afford a timely opportunity to reflect on Tokyo, its history of transit systems, and the Yamanote's central role as a hub for movement within Japan.

Alternative approaches to the city have also traced the cultural representation of particular spaces. In a previous *Japan Forum* special issue, edited by Angela Yiu, textual examples and historical data are used to connect individual experiences of particular spaces to images of the city as a whole (Yiu 2006b). The issue explored literary explorations of the 'new' post-Edo suburbs of Tokyo (Yiu 2006a); the ways in which the representation and production of light in Tokyo places it in specific historical temporalities (Mizuta 2006); efforts to present the city as 'cool' on a global scale (Waley 2006b); and youth experiences of an increasingly contradictory city as presented in literary descriptions of place (Freedman 2006). These examples show that alongside its geographic qualities exists a 'Tokyo of the mind, an idea (or many ideas), a phenomenon and a world city that begs interpretation' (Yiu 2006b, p. 291). This 'Tokyo of the mind' is also suggested in other scholars' work on the image of Tokyo, such as in Daisuke Miyao's exploration of how Tokyo's shift to modernity is visually portrayed in Ozu Yasujiro's *Sono yo no tsuma* (*That Night's Wife* 1930) (Miyao 2014).

Similarly, in a collection on emotional geographies of Tokyo, editor Vera Mackie (2011, p. 300) argues that cultural representations of the city can reveal much about the politics of space – ‘who has access to particular spaces, how these spaces are used, and the associated meanings and emotions.’

In extant scholarship on Tokyo, however, there is a tension between focusing on overarching narratives of Tokyo's modernisation, and narrower analyses of particular spaces and the city as an imagined form. We suggest that a particular logic has been prevalent within this previous work. To think from Tokyo is often to think in ways that fluctuate between detailed particularities and general representations. These fluctuations are indeed a part of how the city is experienced in itself and are important as part of the imagined scales of the city. At the same time, there are other points that warrant attention. We believe an emphasis on movements, such as those embodied in transit systems, afford a way to think from the meso-scales and liminalities of the city. Rather than merely seeing movement as a mediator between spaces, it also draws attention to the ways in which these mobile meso-scales and liminalities produce space, both historically and experientially. Moving beyond the literary and geographical approaches more common in existing scholarship on Tokyo, this issue includes ethnographic, historical, cinematic, and artistic explorations of Tokyo's major loop line.

The widespread interest in Tokyo has often left its central loop line as a hidden actor within sociocultural, political, and historical analyses. The Yamanote does not only reflect or signify modernisation and urbanisation, but it also actively reconstitutes these processes in everyday life. To think from the Yamanote is thus a methodological innovation as much as a conceptual one. It positions the question of mobility at the centre of how Tokyo developed as a place, and the ways the dialectic between emplacement and mobility structure the lives of people. As Iyotani Toshio has argued, mobility often precedes imaginaries of place, space and nation (Iyotani 2007). It is the encounter of difference afforded through movement that instantiates comparisons between origin and encounter. According to Iyotani, imaginaries such as the *furusato* (or idealised hometown) and national ethnicity followed the historical expansion of movement, first within Japan and then in encounters with the rest of the world. Iyotani's insights reflect other scholars' interest in the question of mobility, such as Tim Ingold who has argued that space is constituted by lines of movement that produce tangled meshworks of emplacement (Ingold 2007; also see Jamie Coates, this issue). Arguing against the concept of origin and destination, Ingold emphasises that places are better understood as loops and knots (see also Mark Pendleton, this issue). The history of the Yamanote line, and the ways various scholars have reflected on transit systems in Japan more generally, substantiate the claims of Iyotani and Ingold. Many spaces within Tokyo today, particularly those in the western half of the city, did not historically precede the Yamanote line, but were the direct product of its development.

The Yamanote's development has not only produced spaces within the city, but also mediated Tokyo's citizens' exposure to capitalism and modernisation. As Saskia Sassen has argued, Tokyo's place as a 'global city' is largely structured by global flows of capital and its government's willingness to subject its urban spaces and inhabitants to the logics of these flows of capital (Sassen 1991). Tokyo's 'commuter hell' (*tsūkin jigoku*) remains perhaps the most striking image of trains in Japan today, and suggests the ways in which the imperatives of capital relate to everyday people's movements. The crush of early morning trains, its passengers face to armpit as the train conductors attempt to squeeze a few more people on board, is now a common image of Japanese commuter life throughout the world. It is also a lived reality, which as Tsung-yi Michelle Huang (2004, p. 75) says, to call it 'a human version of a sardine can is indeed an understatement'. The images and experience of commuter trains reflects the ways in which Tokyo's human mobility, as a form of labour, relates to the capitalist structuring of the city today (Waley 2007). Borrowing from Lefebvre, Huang (2004, 65) states that such commuter systems have served to produce Tokyo as an 'abstract space, a space that reduces everything to serve flexible accumulation'.

Trains have been explicitly connected to the wider political-economy of Tokyo as well as playing a central role in sociocultural changes across the twentieth century. As Hiraku Shimoda suggests, trains serve as 'cultural vessels that can be freighted with just about any content and meaning, which makes them a useful site for producing culture' (Shimoda 2012, p. 264). In producing culture, commuters have changed people's relationship to space, as well as their relationship to one another. Peter Eckersall (2011, pp. 337–338) argues that stations also act as liminal spaces because of their relationship to the commuter:

As a mega-space for suburban workers entering Tokyo, [Shinjuku station] was a medium for the exchange of bodies; workers pass through this liminal space crossing the threshold from urban domestic 'bed towns' to the city where they resume company activities and services for the state. [The station] was (and remains), a space of transit for the ideology of postwar suburban values (Eckersall 2011, pp. 337).

In a broader historical analysis, Alisa Freedman has similarly shown how popular and literary representations of trains and their encounters reflected both 'the mass regimentation of Japanese society and its detrimental psychological effect' (Freedman 2011, p. 8) and served as a site where societal roles, particularly those of gender, were transformed and reiterated in the postwar era (Freedman 2011). James Fujii also notes 'railways dramatically redefined the way time and space were experienced by urban Japanese [...] serv[ing] not only the instrumental function of transportation, but also as a Lefebvrian space of cultural production.' (Fujii 1999, p. 108). According to Fujii's analysis of literary representations of train encounters, early transit systems not only served to mobilise labour, but also to produce new forms of commodified intimacy. The separation of work,

commute and domicile also commodified women in public as harassable and desirable strangers. Figures on the train, as desirable or threatening strangers have thus become a potent symbol of everyday life in Japan. In particular, figures such as the *chikan* (groper) act as constant reminders of the threatening unknown other: 'On a crowded commuter train, personal space collapses. It is body forced against body. And it is in that environment that the *chikan* goes to work' (Thornbury 2014, p. 52).

Commuter trains therefore signify the wider political economy of Tokyo, they reshape spatial perceptions of the city, and they function as an important site of cultural production. In particular, trains serve as an important site where cultural logics of intimacy and estrangement have been renegotiated in Japan. These intimacies, whether an encounter with other people on trains or encounters with particular spaces, evince the train as a form of movement that produces space; a space that is in movement; and a primary site of encounter.

For this issue, we invited two kinds of submissions. On the one hand we have contributions that focus on the local sites and spaces around the Yamanote (Jamie Coates, Joseph Hankins, Suzanne Mooney). While these necessarily concern themselves with specific locations, they demonstrate the ways in which differing mobilities that relate to the Yamanote have produced these specific spaces. Jamie Coates explores how Tokyo's second busiest station, Ikebukuro, is a product of the Yamanote's development. Its position in the northwest corner of the Yamanote and the way this position relates to other mobilities and spaces within the city help us understand why Ikebukuro has often been seen as an ambiguous place. At times seen as dangerous, and a common site for migrants and 'misfits', Ikebukuro has been imagined as a 'borderland' within the city. While transit lines produce bordering effects as much as linkages, to remain detached from these mobilities is also of consequence. Hankins maps the mobilities that have shaped the so-called 'buraku' communities in Tokyo. The development of Tokyo's transit system, and the ways this development has disciplined travellers within the city, produced connections between the modernisation of citizens' behaviour, the rise of the figure of 'stranger' within the metropolis and widespread patterns of exclusion that in many senses created the 'buraku' as they are known today. While Coates and Hankins discuss the ways in which the mobilities of the Yamanote connect to the production of space, Mooney shows how experiences of walking through structures surrounding the Yamanote line produce other kinds of places. Utilising an approach embedded in art practice, Mooney provides a visual exploration of how the spaces under the Yamanote's tracks act as a form of 'constructed underground', producing a diverse range of social interactions and cultural innovation. These three authors' papers suggest the ways in which specific sites and interactions with the Yamanote are linked to wider movements and broader questions of neoliberalism, urban development and exclusion.

Our other contributions start from the loop itself to think about how the physical organisation of the Yamanote and its cultural and social representation can

be connected to the lived experiences of mobility in the city. Jennifer Coates explores the allegorical role the Yamanote has played on film, serving as a means to capture Tokyo as a landscape and position figures of class and race within this landscape. Through an analysis of the Yamanote's role in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Café Lumière* (*Kōhi jikō*, Shōchiku 2005) and Hanadō Junji's *26 Years Diary* (*Anata o wasurenai*, Sony Pictures, 2007), Coates suggests that the Yamanote allows filmic explorations of outsider subjectivities in Tokyo, while positioning their subjectivities inside the city. Through situating these two films within a wider history of filmic uses of trains in Japan, Coates also shows how the train signifies transformative capacities. The loop-like qualities of the Yamanote ensure that these transformations are not always the product of simple lines of causality but rather can result from circulatory contemplations within film. In her ethnographic study of handheld devices, Keiko Nishimura explores similar themes of estrangement and belonging on the Yamanote. The Yamanote has not only produced places, but its carriages also serve as places within themselves. Nishimura shows how these places are increasingly enmeshed with digital worlds, particularly those related to mobile-gaming devices. Focusing on 'surechigai' technology on Nintendo DS devices, Nishimura shows how the Yamanote's role as a site of intimacy and estrangement is renegotiated in digital life today, a theme reflective of Tackey and Tsubasa's lyrical notion of 'hearts passing by' as the loop is looped. Finally, whereas Coates and Nishimura discuss the Yamanote's role in channelling representations and experiences of mobile estrangement in the city, Mark Pendleton's paper explores how outsiders, activists and art practitioners have staged interventions that disrupt the everyday flows and meaning of the Yamanote. Arguing that these interventions not only relate to the Yamanote's present experiential qualities, but wider themes of the everyday, history and Japan's future, Pendleton shows how thinking from the Yamanote has afforded some to think through, or at least temporarily disrupt, the 'impasse' of Japan's precarious economic, social and demographic changes that started in the 1990s.

While the two sets of papers are oriented from these different invited starting points – of either sites or the loop itself – readers may also find additional pathways through the collection. Readers may find it easier to pick up themes of urban history (Coates, Hankins, Mooney, Pendleton); contemporary belonging, estrangement and identity (Coates, Hankins, Mooney, Nishimura, Pendleton); representation and visual culture (Mooney, Coates, Pendleton) or technologies of interaction and exclusion, as structured by the transportation systems (Hankins, Nishimura). As with the urban commuters in Tokyo, who will only very rarely, if at all, sit and loop the entirety of the Yamanote, so we expect readers to intersect the line in various places, plotting their own pathways through the urban site of Tokyo as represented in these articles.

The papers in this collection therefore bridge the somewhat artificial (in our view) distinction between the local and the general, as well as the empirical and theoretical. To think from the Yamanote is to think past established categories

used to define space, experience and culture within Japan, while also paying close attention to the historical and sociocultural specificities of the contexts we study. This is an example of how a mobility perspective relates to the study of Japan, and how the study of Japan remains an important lens through which we imagine wider conceptual concerns within the arts, social sciences and humanities. This special issue extends the established critique of Japan as a bounded or culturally homogeneous space by providing an approach that explores movement and difference within Japan's largest city. From a perspective that emphasises the interactional and space-forming qualities of mobility, rather than the purely cartographic, we are also able to show how established scholarship on the city can simultaneously be integrated and destabilised.

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