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Un/Wrapping Shibuya: Place, Media, and Punctualization

Brian Morris[1]

Abstract

This article discusses cultural studies approaches to the role of media and communication technologies in the constitution of place. The discussion emerges out of the author's ongoing study of the Shibuya district of Tokyo. Known for its trendsetting youth cultures and as a site of conspicuous consumption, Shibuya is also marked by an unusually intense proliferation of screen technologies, from the large scale (such as television screens embedded in building structures) to the miniature (individual mobile telephone screens). An examination of the articulation of these ubiquitous media technologies with a range of human and institutional actors in Shibuya provides broader insights into contemporary spatial practices and formations. It is argued that a combination of Law's notion of "punctualization," drawn from actor-network theory, and Hendy's social anthropological concept of "un/wrapping" provides a generative framework for conceptualizing and describing the processual production and experience of Shibuya's mediated place identity.

Keywords

cultural studies and place, Shibuya, wrapping and unwrapping, punctualization, urban cultures, ubiquitous media

Introduction

Cities are increasingly marked by an intensified integration of media and communication technologies within urban space, which sets up theoretical and practical challenges for cultural and media studies researchers concerned with adequately rendering and analyzing contemporary culture in place. This article argues that cultural and media studies researchers might productively use the insights of actor-network approaches that so far have been more assiduously employed in cognate fields such as cultural geography to describe and analyze these increasingly pervasive types of urban environments.[1] First and foremost, an actor-network theory approach can provide a useful antidote to overly Heideggerian-influenced accounts of place, which are framed primarily through connotations of dwelling and fixity. Place, as Kevin Hetherington (1997) has argued, might be more usefully conceptualized as a combination of what he terms *mobile effects*, a

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"non-representation that is mobilized through the placing of things in complex relation to one another and the agency/power effects that are performed by those arrangements" (p. 187). Equally important within such an approach is a definition of "things" (or social actors) that includes media and other technologies, as well as individuals, texts, and institutions, each with different potentialities and means of transforming and re-presenting urban space and time and its power geometries (Massey & Thrift, 2003). Such an understanding of place framed in these terms might also be useful in avoiding some of the unhelpful binary impulses implied in Augé's (1995) influential work on place, which analytically separates anthropological place (characterized as the local, familiar, organic, and occupied) from supermodern "nonplaces" (marked by transit, circulation, and concentrated textual mediation).

Actor-network theory supplies a helpful term, *punctualization*, to describe the representational effect by which a particular placement of things becomes consolidated under the sign of a communicable place identity. Punctualization refers to the mechanism by which agglomerations of actors, relations, institutions, and objects come to be concealed from view, to provide the appearance of unity and readability (Law, 1992). In defining the term, Michael Law cites the useful example of a television set, which most of the time is

> a single and coherent object with relatively few apparent parts. On the other hand when it breaks down, for that same user—and still more for the repair person—it rapidly turns into a network of electronic components and human interventions. (1992, p. 4)

Urban places might usefully be conceptualized in a similar manner. Place identities such as "New York," "Beijing," or "Shinjuku" all too often rhetorically operate, in a range of narratives from news stories to academic analyses, as taken-for-granted, unified entities that are the product of historical sedimentations of versions of themselves. They are often deployed as if they were coherent actors rather than heterogeneous assemblages of visible and invisible actor networks whose relations need to be repeatedly performed in order to produce the effect of place. A mode of analysis that elaborates the *process* of punctualization offers a nuanced form of place description in which the organic continuities and contingent interventions of various actors might be attended to.

Un/Wrapping Shibuya

In July 2005, I moved from Melbourne to Tokyo, where I lived for 7 months during a period of research leave. One urban site I found myself drawn to time and again was the Shibuya area, one of the more (in)famous of Tokyo's various urban nodes (Figure 1). That fame, particularly at the level of global cinematic representations,[2] is largely due to the area's signature image of its spectacular scramble crossing (which are actually a number of intersecting pedestrian crossings used simultaneously) and the mega-sized television screens that front the buildings surrounding it. Shibuya is also famous for its crowds of trendsetting, *keitai* (mobile telephone)-toting youth, as well as fashion-conscious youth subcultures, who have in various highly visible ways claimed the area as their home over the past 30 or more years.

Shibuya is located in the southwest pocket of central city Tokyo on the traditionally affluent western high ground, the *yamanote* of Edo times. Although Tokyo lacks a "downtown" in the western sense, it does contain within itself a number of extraordinarily dense and thriving satellite feeder "cities" such as Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Ikebukuro, many of which are located on the central JR (Japan Rail) Yamanote loop line. These places function as important sites for a range of urban activities, particularly shopping, eating and drinking, and entertainment. For a huge number of Tokyo's sizeable population they are also a crucial nodal point connecting the spaces of work,

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Figure 1. Shibuya—aerial view and *Centre Gai*
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leisure, and home; as such they are sites of rapid in- and out-flows of bodies of commuters and visitors (Shibuya is ranked second after Shinjuku as the busiest commuter rail station in the world).

The topography of Shibuya is shaped by a basin that descends from the western and also northern higher ground of Harajuku and Yoyogi park. More broadly, the area is physically defined by a number of human constructed material and symbolic boundaries. For instance, running eastwest to the south of the station is the formidable "brick wall" of the elevated metropolitan expressway, whereas the northern boundary of Shibuya is partly defined by the massive NHK television broadcasting complex. The research conducted in association with this article focuses primarily on the area radiating out to the north and west of the JR Yamanote line stop from the conjoined complex of the busy Shibuya railway stations. Although Shibuya-ku, one of the 23 wards that make up central Tokyo, covers a broader area (and includes other well-known and culturally differentiated urban areas such as Harajuku), the symbolic and popular understanding of "Shibuya," as manifest in this tourist map (see Figure 2), is focused on this dense concentration of consumption-based, private and public activities radiating out from the area's transportation core. The spatial organization of Shibuya generally matches the standardized urban morphology found in a range of similar Japanese city districts. This consists of a central railway station acting as a hub to clusters of retail areas, amusement quarters, business office blocks, a love hotel area, and then a peripheral belt of residential apartment housing. In many cases the large corporations owning and running the railway lines have also developed major retail complexes that are physically part of the station complex, often with a flagship department store as a hub. Shibuya is an exemplary instance of this specific Japanese capitalist urban form. The area has long been associated with the Tokyu Corporation (Seidensticker, 1991), which began as a real estate developer in 1918 (as Den-en Toshi Co.). Over time Tokyu has expanded its interests to include not just rail lines but also what it refers to in its publicity material as the "Urban Life Support Business" (Tokyu, n.d.), an umbrella term covering a massive assortment of department stores, travel agencies, grocery stores, hotels, airline investment, golf businesses, and so on. Although Shibuya is overwhelmingly known for the high-end consumption activities it offers—leading Tokyo department stores (such as the Tokyu-owned "109" (*Ichimarukyu*), up-market designer outlets, boutique stores (in the compact "Spain-zaka" lane), restaurants and bars, music shops, and clubs—it also has other associations and functions as a place. For example, although it does not have an industrial history, Shibuya has more recently become known as a center of postindustrial production through being home to the second largest concentration of Web and multimedia businesses in Tokyo (Arai et al., 2004; Large, 2000) and is known colloquially as "Bit valley" (a play on the meaning of Shibuya's name, "bitter valley"). Notwithstanding these varied urban functions and associations, Shibuya is perhaps most usefully understood as a contemporary manifestation of the Japanese historical urban form of the *sakariba*, literally a "place where many people come together" (but more specifically referring to an uplifting place of crowds and excitement; Linhardt, 1998; Yoshimi, 2001). *Sakariba* can be understood as sites where older ritual forms of festivity and commercial activity have been recast in a modern consumerist guise.

In considering how to write about Shibuya, it is useful to briefly note the broader character of extant academic literature on Tokyo as a whole. On the one hand, the size of Tokyo and its continuing global economic importance—despite the recession that followed on from the 1980s bubble economy—has guaranteed it an important place within the big picture literature on world cities and globalization (e.g., Sassen, 2001). At the same time, a distinct strain of writing has also provided a contrasting and complimentary *micro*-analysis of urban experience in Tokyo. A number of writers, for instance, have provided richly detailed descriptions of the city (e.g., Cybriwsky, 1998; Richie, 1999) that analyze the cultural specificities of the lived, daily experiences it offers.

Within scholarship attuned to this more intimate perspective, three broad approaches can be identified as being germane to my study. The first is from Japanese cultural studies scholars

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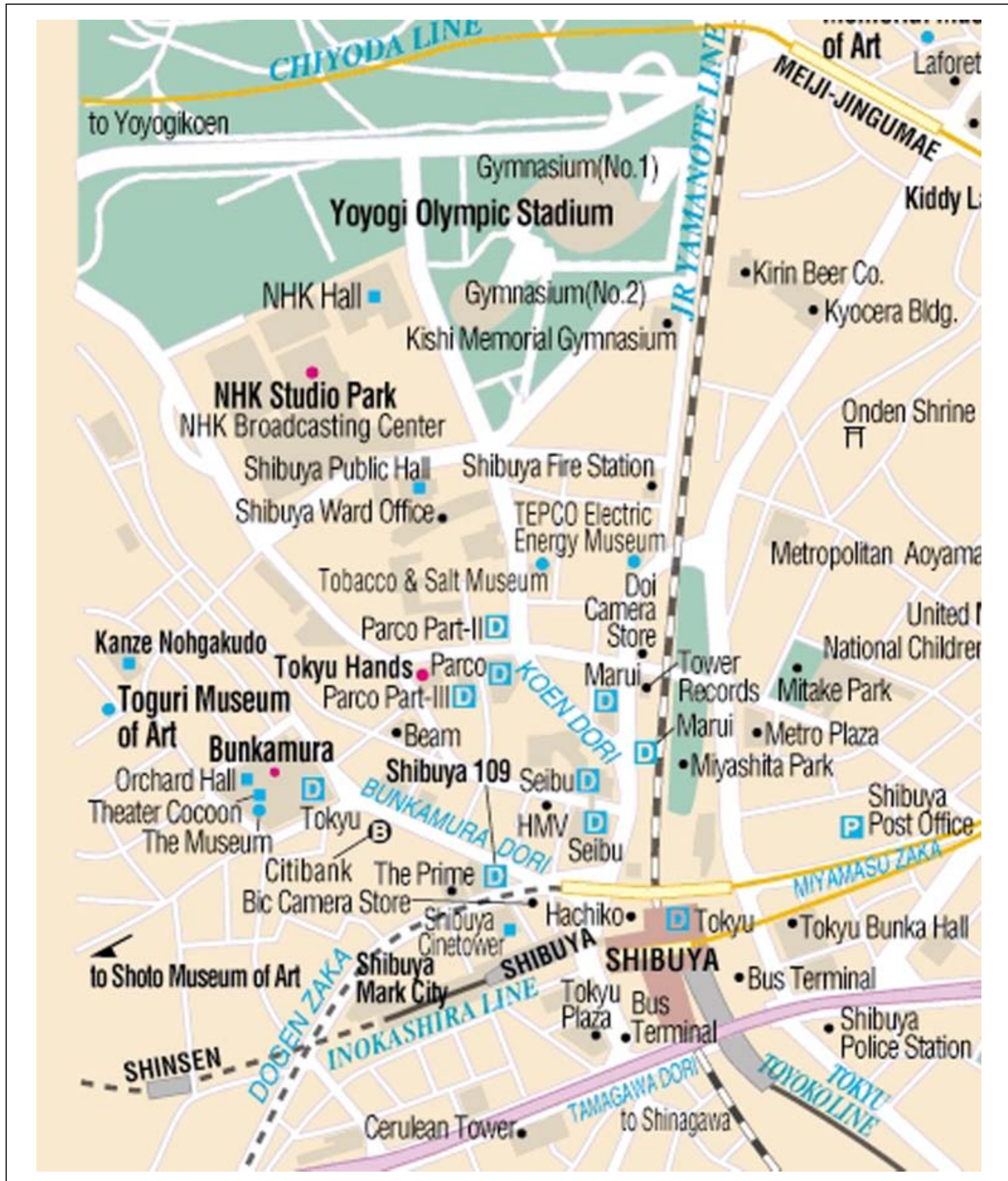

Figure 2. Detail from free tourist map of Shibuya
Source: Tokyo Convention Visitors Bureau, www.tcvb.or.jp.

interested in the cultural transformation of areas such as Shibuya and its relation to the historical ebb and flow of similar, often competing, areas of entertainment and consumption such as Shinjuku and Ginza (see, e.g., Yoshimi, 2001). The second body of work has been concerned with the ongoing "rediscovery" and promotion of an "authentic" traditional past within the present urban environment. This has rediscovered older Edo within contemporary Tokyo—particular through a resurgence in official and popular interest in *shitamachi* (or "low city") culture, associated with areas such as Asakusa, and which is usually set in opposition to the consumer good life of Yamanote

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("high city") areas such as Shibuya (for critical accounts, see Jinnai, 1995; Waley, 2006). Third, there are some quite diverse recent studies that gesture toward a promising understanding of Tokyo places as being constituted by diverse networks and spatially dispersed arrays of actors. Examples of these range from Bestor's (2004) rich ethnographic account of Tokyo's famous Tsukiji fish market to a number of recent studies of Tokyo-based mobile technology users (Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005; Konomi & Sezaki, 2010). These latter studies are particularly valuable in directing attention to analyses of the geographically dispersed time-space operations that actor networks comprised of users and communication technologies bring to bear on places.

My research on Shibuya has benefited from these three strands of critical work on Tokyo in terms of their focus on the particularities of Japanese urbanity, the role of multiple social actors in shaping place, and the relationship between the historical and newly emergent forms of cultural technologies that organize urban experience. However, none of the aforementioned studies has focused on the growing role of the differently scaled and differently "capable" (in terms of operations on space and time) media technologies that shape Tokyo's distinct urbanscapes as well as inhabitants' experiences of it. A symptomatic instance of this increasingly familiar and global urban scenario can be experienced in the plaza-like area outside of the Shibuya railway station complex (*ekimae*) where thumbing through the messages on your mobile, while standing next to the area's intimate and nationally famous human-scaled statue of the loyal dog, Hachikō, you are also often strongly aware of being physically enveloped by the multiple cinema screen–scale images dancing across the surrounding canyon of building surfaces. This experience is sensorily amplified by noisy soundtracks that are themselves frequently challenged by the ear-splitting sound systems of a number of vehicles temporarily passing through that range from the giant mobile light boxes on large truck rigs advertising J-pop stars and their latest release to the black armored sound trucks of various right wing groups emitting nationalist diatribes.

How, then, might we more closely describe that process by which the identity of "Shibuya" becomes reified as a punctualization effect available for mobilization by different actors? My argument here is that Joy Hendry's *Wrapping Culture* (1993) provides a useful framework for analytically describing the ways in which place identity and its experience is constituted via various complex layers of urban form and technology and cultural practices, both historical and emergent. Whereas Hendry begins her book with an examination of the significance of present wrapping and presentation in Japanese culture, her primary aim is to mobilize the trope of wrapping/unwrapping as a frame for analyzing broader relations between language, bodies, spaces, and temporalities in Japan (also see Ben-Ari, Moeran, & Valentine, 1990). The value of her work for analyzing urban culture has two crucial dimensions. First, her concept of unwrapping is not underwritten by an assumption that Japanese culture can simply be read off the surface of the object examined, nor does she seem to assume that her analysis is accessing some "real" Japan encrusted beneath the sedimented layers of modernity. Instead, like the notion of punctualization, Hendry puts forward the persuasive argument that a study of wrapping and unwrapping helps disentangle us from a problematic focus on the search for an underlying essence in our object of study by focusing instead on the different modes of social interaction, ritual, and everyday experience that contribute to an imagined (or, indeed, represented) wholeness. As she notes,

> [There is a] problem in our Western propensity to want always to be unwrapping, deconstructing, seeing the objects at the centre of things. Bognar, too, comments about Japanese cities that "if we try to lift the veils wrapping them in endlessly juxtaposed layers, surprisingly . . . [they] become 'empty'" (1985:67). Undoubtedly, what we need to do, is to learn to value the wrapping, as well as the wrapped, and seek the meaning they together convey. (Hendry, 1993, p. 109)

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Second, her work has a general applicability to cultural practices *beyond* those found in Japan: although her empirical materials may be Japanese she is not arguing that her analytic is identifying some essential Japanese trait: un/wrapping can usefully describe social processes as they occur in other cultures. More broadly, the concept of un/wrapping provides a means of elaborating the plasticity of contemporary urban environments while still accounting for the persistence and historical transformation of sedimented meanings and related cultural practices.

This analytical frame also directs us toward an understanding of place that includes layers of historical and present day meanings as well as practices and modes of institutional organization. Furthermore, it highlights the materiality of the practices of un/wrapping used in the city itself—from the screen-clad buildings to the complex style codes performed by the various youth subcultures inhabiting its streets. Rather than assuming or seeking an "authentic" explanation of a Shibuya experience beneath these layers—behind the "façade" of modernity—such an approach posits that these various surfaces and screens are active participants in the urban experience of this area. Un/wrapping, drawing on Hendry's anthropological concerns, is about producing a thick description of urban place that involves accounting for the relationships that bind visible and spectacular technologies with hidden networks. Un/wrapping assists in operationalizing the theoretical concept of punctualization by making visible the latter's effect, that is, the production of a specific place, "Shibuya."

As a means of narrativizing recent un/wrappings of Shibuya, the following sections are focused around three media technologies, namely, large screen advertising, *keitai* technologies, and print media, central to its punctualization.

Advertising and Big Screen Architecture

To walk around Shibuya as a foreign visitor is to encounter an urbanscape at once familiar and unfamiliar. Globally branded cafes, fast food businesses, and retail stores such as Starbucks and HMV appear with as much frequency as the ubiquitous *depato* or department store chains that are a cornerstone of the modern, Japanese urban consumer economy. Other elements of the urban fabric and its spatial organization more obviously mark out the area's "Japanese-ness": the *omote* (front) of wider avenues and *ura* (back) of walking scale laneways; a central pedestrian-scaled shopping street (*gai*); a large love hotel district; the semipermanent, blue tarpaulin-covered dwellings of the "homeless" in public Miyashita park; pachinko parlors; the presence of shrines; and so on. What is perhaps most remarkable about this Japanese urban space at a visual level is the sheer density and variety of textual material, usually commercially oriented, inscribed on all available surfaces (Figure 3).

Donald Richie has characterized the Tokyo street in terms of its forms of promiscuous display: "[h]oardings bellow, flags and banners yell, neon points and *kanji* grabs" (1999, p. 37). Even in Edo times, the center street (*gai*) was marked as a place of display by the *kishi* and *bana* (doorway banners) of various merchants. This tradition continues in contemporary Tokyo, proposes Richie, whether it be in the form of "facade-high neon or a mile-long laser" or the piles of silicon chips out on the "sidewalk—like exotic nuts—in Akihabara" (p. 54). Richie's claims here to the uniqueness of the Japanese city street may seem tenuous at one level if we think of the semiotic richness of any modern city, until, perhaps, you also consider the extended verticality of "the street" in places such as Shibuya. Here the businesses that in many Western cities would usually be confined to the ground level or first floor at most (thus working to organize the gaze and spatial perception of the passerby in a specific way) are instead densely spread up through five or more stories as well as often extending underground. The spatial reach of the Japanese city street expands downwards and upwards to include those shops, eating places, bars, and businesses located anywhere

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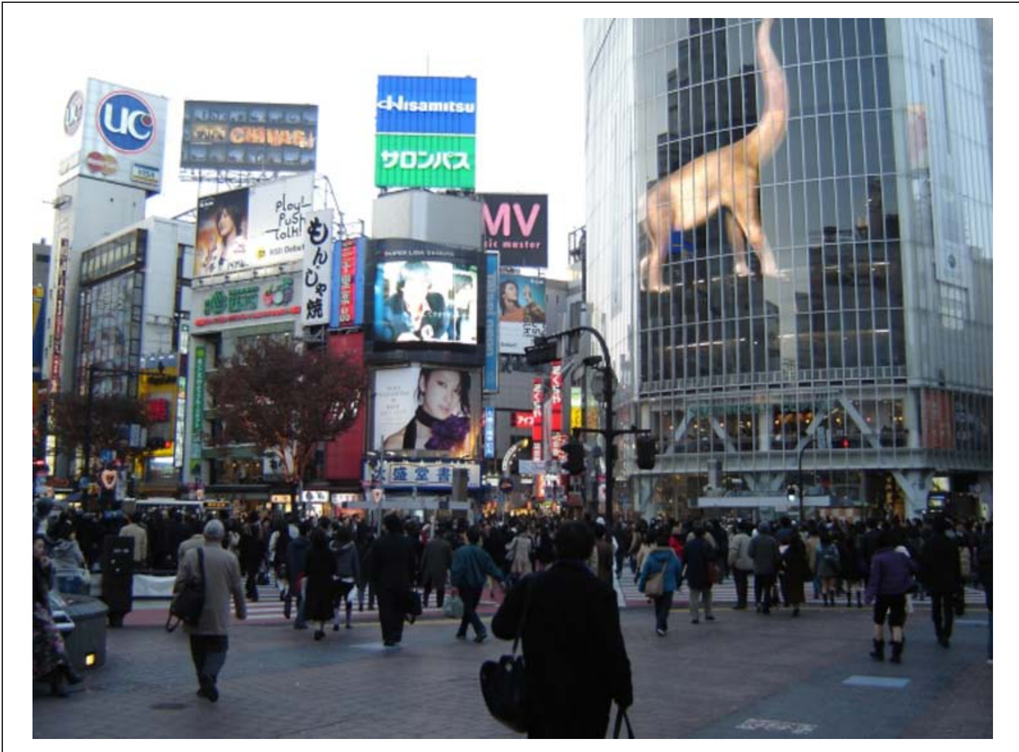

Figure 3. Hachikō crossing
Source: Author.

within this vertical range. This has crucial consequences for advertising signage, which colonizes every available space in order to maximize the chances of customers finding or choosing a particular establishment to patronize.

Although numerous Tokyo city spaces are marked by this dense level of advertising—Shinjuku's well-known neon iconography being a case in point—Shibuya, as Shunya Yoshimi (2001) has argued, has a special relationship to the advertising industry. Shibuya effectively became known as a fashionable place in the 1970s via institutional advertising strategies promoting its vanguard position in terms of trendy consumption. Although Shibuya had been an important railway transport junction since the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, it did not emerge as a major urban gathering place, or *sakariba*, until the 1970s,[3] when it started to be seen as one of the most stylish places in Tokyo, especially for youth (Yoshimi, 2001). Following on from major redevelopments in the area for the 1968 Olympics, the two rival department store complexes that commercially dominate Shibuya, Tokyu and Seibu/Parco, attempted to enhance the area's general image "by turning its streets and architectural spaces into a fashionable consumer stage, showcased in architectural design, posters, television commercials, and magazines," a strategy that was subsequently emulated in other areas of Tokyo and Japan (Wakabayashi, 2005, p. 305).

From the mid-1990s an important shift occurred with the growing incorporation of advertising into the actual physical form of Shibuya. That is, the institutional inscription of a specific *image* of Shibuya in the popular media became supplemented by another kind of material inscription witnessed in the increasing prominence of advertising technologies in the street, with large display screens integrated into the architectural skin of buildings, such as the Tokyu-owned Q-Front,

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which faces on to Hachikō's and the *ekimae*. Through the interventions of these advertising institutions and technologies, the city becomes an "information-archive-space" (Wakabayashi, 2005, p. 306) marked by the symbolic and physical saturation of the built environment with advertising artifacts. As Krstic (1997) observes, these screens differ from billboards in terms of their transformation of the existing sense of "dimensional containment" of urban space, specifically through their ability to embody time.

These large screens are now central to the experience of Shibuya because of their proximity to the railway station and their materiality produces a monumental media-architecture threshold that dwarves and supplants the existing traditional entrance arch marking the start of *Centre Gai*. Partly the screens function to affectively amplify a sense of excitement about the urban territory being entered and the sense of expectation that might accompany entry into the labyrinthine spaces of Shibuya in which one can easily become lost—a practice that itself might constitute a playful temporary unwrapping of the subjectivity of the visitor.[4] Although the screens constantly attempt at one level to communicate advertising and other promotional information to the passerby, they just as often appear to be ignored or registered with a distracted level of interest. The scale and prominence of the screens does enable a degree of authority and insistence in their address—they are certainly at the more visible and foregrounded end of a continuum of what Anna McCarthy (2001) refers to as an increasingly pervasive phenomenon of "ambient television." Although not always successful in gaining the attention of distracted passerby, the screens do nevertheless interpellate the disparate crowds waiting at the crossing as a potential collective (at the very least they are a fundamental part of being in Shibuya as a distinct and nationally known urban place).

While these display screens are integral to Shibuya's urban distinctive character they paradoxically also function as a technology that unwraps that place by insistently pumping out images of multiple other places within Japan, from around the globe, and from the fantasy worlds of advertising. These screens can be understood as a key Shibuya "actor" whose role is to produce a mediated spatiality, what Margaret Morse (1998) has identified in terms of increasingly prevalent postmodern "everyday" environments. As she argues, "[t]he late twentieth century has witnessed the growing dominance of a differently constituted kind of space, a *nonspace* of both experience and representation, an *elsewhere* which inhabits the everyday." A walk through Hachikō Crossing—jostled by dense crowds and surrounded by large screen advertising—provokes an experience of distraction in which the self drifts between a *here* of Shibuya and a series of rapidly changing virtual *elsewheres*.[5] These screens are technologies that function to simulate Shibuya as always "on," as a special place characterized by excitement and possibility whether it be for young people, tourists, or those passing through between work and home. Yet even these screens cannot completely and consistently maintain the fiction of such a unified imagining of Shibuya for other temporalities and actors, such as the train system with its rhythms of commuting times and the presence of particular social groups at different times of the day, effectively modulates the texture of Shibuya. At other times, such as in the early morning otherwise invisible actors become momentarily visible; for instance, teams of service workers, scavenging crows, and piles of rubbish dominate the otherwise deserted *Centre Gai* and alert us to the mundane and micro-level activities and cycles of repair and maintenance that are just as intrinsic to the sustained fiction of this place.

Intimate Urban Place

Although television-building screens present a spectacular example of the wrapping and unwrapping of Shibuya, more small-scale and everyday media technologies are equally crucial to its experience as a particular place. One immediate instance of these technologies at work can be observed in the vicinity of Hachikō's statue (Figure 4), Shibuya's most iconic landmark and central

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Figure 4. Hachikō
Source: Author.

to its experiential geography. The popular myth surrounding this dog tells how during the Taisho era of the 1920s he loyally waited at the station for his master to return. Even when his master had died the dog reputedly continued to wait there for 11 years after. In terms of scale the Hachikō statue is a truly incidental feature in the context of the vast crowds and giant building-screens that overshadow Shibuya's scramble crossing.[6] Despite its comparatively modest size, Hachikō's statue continues to function as a handy meeting point for those getting together in Shibuya, forming a pivotal point of stillness in an area marked by perpetual flows. In his seminal urban planning work, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) characterized monuments such as this as unique nodes in city space—vital landmarks that enabled the cognitive mapping of urban space by inhabitants. Henri Lefebvre (1991) argued for the function of such monuments as sites of "intensity" in urban space, points of capture for certain relations of power and their associated social meanings. Hachikō became a national celebrity in the 1932 when Tokyo newspapers publicized his story and he arguably became a propaganda vehicle for nationalist values of loyalty in relation to the Japanese war with China at the time. Yet that original inscription of meaning has undergone a series of transformations from ideological tool to popular wayfaring marker. Whether the focused intensity referred to by Lefebvre is registered or "practiced" by the passerby is less certain. To sit by Hachikō's statue is to witness a range of urban practices that include meetings, tourist pilgrimages, and crowd watching: activities that transform an old mythic (national) narrative into a range of more intimate and everyday experiences. It is a moment when the imaginary, personalized, and the concrete fuse together.

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The contemporary everyday practices that wrap themselves around this landmark are increasingly mediated by the small screen of mobile telephone (*keitai*) technology (cf. Rheingold, 2002). Rather than simply displacing the use of known landmarks such as Hachikō as meeting places, the *keitai* is most frequently used, as Ito and Okabe (2005) note from their ethnographic studies, to micro-coordinate rendezvous at mutually familiar urban places: a series of to-ing and fro-ing text messages typically presages the actual meeting. A landmark such as Hachikō's statue is no longer a unitary urban marker as characterized by Lynch, but one node in what Ito and Okabe describe as a "technosocial" situation; a framing that is site specific but that also incorporates other places and different social networks via an electronic mode of connectivity. Such technologies would appear to electronically augment our experiences of urban space. More vitally, these technologies are agents in the production of a new conceptual form, "a hybrid space . . . created by the merging of borders between physical and digital spaces, because of the use of mobile technologies as social devices" (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 265). As de Souza e Silva goes on to observe, although the initial concept of cyberspace applied in relation to the Internet tended to imply a disconnection of physical and digital spaces, the mobile phone challenges our thinking on this matter through its "embed[ding] of the Internet in public spaces" (p. 273).[7] Its ontological consequences are significant and are worth distinguishing from the aforementioned split between a "here" and virtual "there" engendered by the giant television screens. The mobile telephone would appear to go much further in becoming the visible locus of a distinctive "mixed reality." As Galloway (2004) notes, in a related discussion of the rise of ubiquitous computing in everyday city life, such a mixed reality needs to be rethought "as shifting intensities or flows of the virtual and the actual, rather than as points on a continuum between the virtual and the real" (p. 402).

At another level of intimacy and very pragmatic materiality, the *keitai* has been deployed as a much more practical kind of prop to deal with the here and now consequences of the proximity of strangers. One feature of Japanese urban life is a wide range of commercial solicitations at the street level. These range from the "tissue *kubari*" (individuals employed to hand out packets of tissues wrapped in advertising), to restaurant and karaoke workers sent outside to drum up business, to the "talent scouts" who lurk at busy intersections or street corners and try to persuade young women to take up work in Japanese hostess bars or other areas of the sex industry (and who are more prevalent in areas of the city popular with youth). Often the tactics of the usually male talent scouts are spatially aggressive in that they will crowd in on their "target," or even step directly into her path, all the time engaging in a low-key but persistent and obvious nagging. Simulated mobile telephone conversations become a way for those harassed to deflect unwanted attention or, equally, as I witnessed recently, a tactic by which a scout might "legitimize" his presence in an area (in this case the talent scout—in-between approaching young women walking by—faked a telephone call for about 4 hours at the same street intersection).

Print Media Panic, Youth Actor Networks, Fashion, and Technology

Upstairs in the McDonalds in Shibuya's *Centre Gai* (see Figure 1), a meeting takes place. Approximately 20 "gals" (or *gyaru*), standing out due to their intensely tanned faces and exaggerated makeup, have commandeered a number of adjacent tables and are in the midst of what appears to be a smoothly run committee meeting. These *gyaru* are the genealogical descendants (often a post-School incarnation) of the *kogal/ kogyaru*, the iconic schoolgirl figure in short skirted uniform with puffy white socks or legwarmers around her ankles that has now become a globally recognizable Japanese stereotype (Figure 5). One key activity of these "Gal circles" (*gyaru-sa*) is to organize different outings and events ranging from traditional cherry blossom viewings to dance parties featuring "Para Para" dancing choreographed to trance and Eurobeat tracks (with the *gyaru* buying

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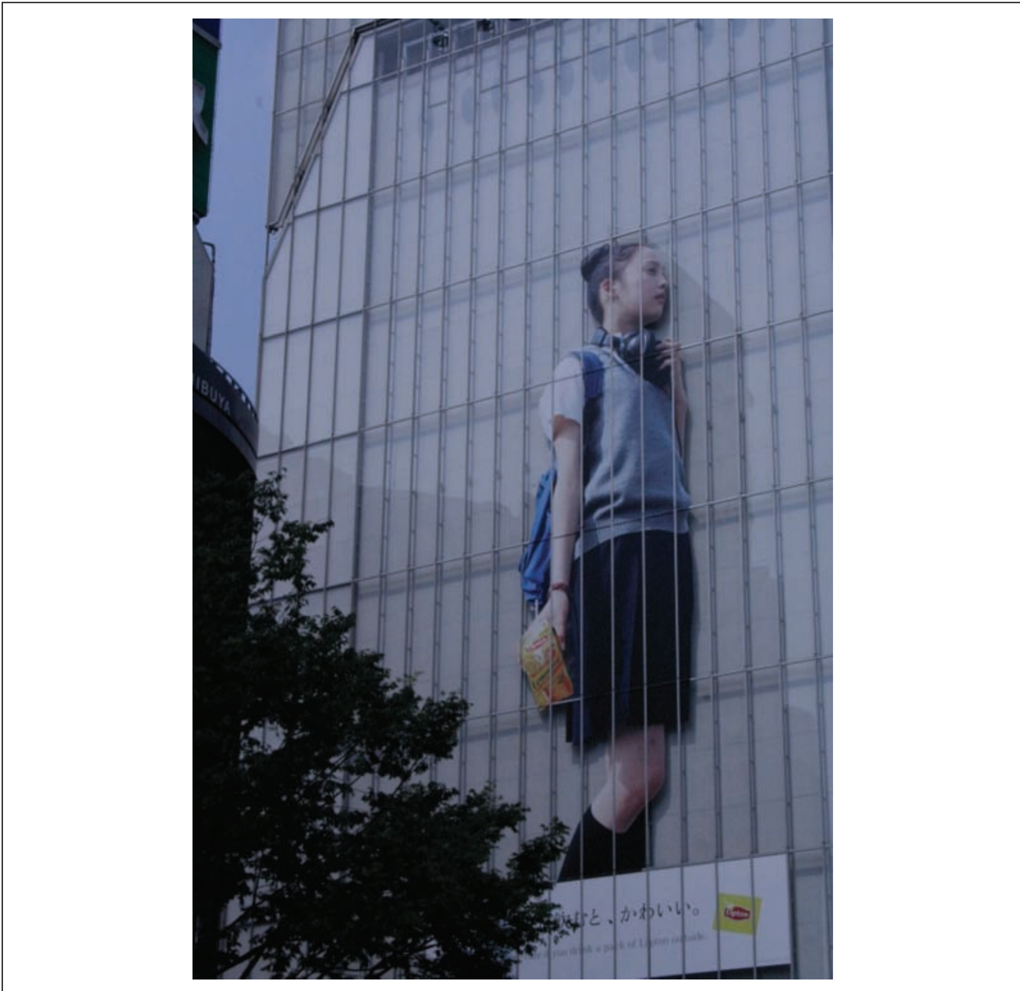

Figure 5. *Kogal* as mediatized urban identity
Source: Author.

the music materials and instructional dance move DVDs at the nearby giant HMV and Tower Record stores). The scene in McDonalds is one glimpse of an extensive youth-based network that although highly visible at this moment in this particular place is largely enabled and active via otherwise invisible networks, in this case "Internet message boards only accessible via cell phone" (Macias, 2006, p. 3).

Shibuya has been the locus of an ongoing anxiety about groups of youths such as these and their "place" in the Japanese city. Perhaps the most intense of media debates/moral panics in the last decade has revolved around the phenomenon euphemistically referred to as *enjo kousai* (compensated dating) in which young women (sometimes schoolgirls) are paid by typically older men to engage in activities ranging from Karaoke singing through to sex. The phenomenon is popularly understood as being driven by the consumer desires of luxury brand–hungry *kogyaru*, young women mainly distinguished by their bleached hair, short miniskirts (often part of school uniforms) with loose socks, their tactical use of pager technology then and *keitai* now, and their practice of taking lots of *puri-kura* (sticker photos from a booth; see Matsuda, 2005). At the level

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Figure 6. Billboard in Shibuya: narratives of technology mediation and power involving *kogyaru* (school girls) and *oyagi* (fathers/older men)
Source: Author.

of the body and fashion it might be argued that these *kogyaru* practice their own un/wrapping of the standardized school uniform through recodings of its original, decorous meanings.[8] The *kogyaru* combination of short skirts and oversized baggy white socks/leggings also clearly participates within a broader sexualization of young women prevalent in a number of Japanese popular cultural forms (Figure 6). Although the exaggerated makeup and outfits of the *kogyaru* refigure the schoolgirl image, the "uniform" can also operate as a marker of outsider status, a way of symbolically expressing a refusal of entry into normative adulthood and to some degree throwing into question the expectations of dominant understandings of Japanese femininity.[9]

Similarly, the *ganguro* ("black face") subculture—one of a number of related girl-driven subcultures traceable back to the 1960s (Kinsella, 2005), which was strongly associated with Shibuya and its *Centre Gai* during the late 1990s and to a lesser extent today—became a topic of condemnation in the self-consciously masculine press at the time (see Macias, 2007). Rather than seeing this distinctive look as the marker of a valid subcultural style, the *ganguro* image (and related incarnations such as *yamamba* [witches]) was generally characterized by this press as an affront to the taste of their male readers with those sporting the style being disparaged in racially marked, colonial forms of discourse: "Professor Kashima Explores the Heisei [1989-] Jungle in Search of Uncharted Regions of Everyday Life 3: 'Platform Boot Witches' No Longer the Lead in Shibuya" (cited in Kinsella, 2005, p. 146). For a number of critics (see Black, 2009; Kinsella, 2005), this media discussion articulated with wider anxieties concerning the intersections of national identity, race, and femininity. Why, the print media seemed to collectively ask, did Japanese girls not want to look Japanese? In contrast to the mainstream press, street fashion magazines mediated the

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relation between youth and "cool" urban locations such as *Centre-Gai* in Shibuya or *Amerika-Mura* in Osaka in quite a different way. As Cameron (2000) has argued, these magazines juxtapose fashion commodities and actual urban spaces in order to produce "a mode of visual consumption which transposed from the symbolic mediated space of the 'street' to the lived streets." As Cameron notes, the notion of street fashion witnesses actual places such as *Centre Gai* becoming a crucial resource for youth wishing to perform and authenticate their taste dispositions. But in the process the commodities take on a heightened prominence and agency in terms of their colonization of the street—these fashions are not simply neutral resources deployed by human actors but instead they "have appropriated a space in which the people who wear them have been backgrounded" (Cameron, 2000, p.180).

More broadly, Shibuya figured prominently in a range of mainstream press panic narratives about youth and particularly young women. As a youth-centered consumer-oriented space, Shibuya was frequently positioned in these media discourses both as a literal location where this "problem" was concentrated as well as a metonym for broader social anxieties about contemporary Japanese life. Of significance here was the way in which the rise of ubiquitous technologies from pagers to mobile phones figured in these institutional discourses of panic. For example, in the late 1990s, widespread media attention was being given to early technology adopters such as the group of young men and women known as *jibetarians* (a hybrid combination of the Japanese word *jibeta* for "the ground" and the English suffix arian; see Matsuda, 2005). Closely associated with areas such as Shibuya, *jibetarians* were identified by their "signature practice of squatting or sitting on curbs or in a corner of a shopping street" (Matsuda, 2005, p. 26) and associated with inconsiderate use of *keitai* in public. As Matsuda notes, it was the "bad manners" of this group that underpinned the criticisms appearing in local media. Media coverage of this group focused on the ways in which they broke the rules of social etiquette in terms of their uses of public space and communication technologies: "*jibertarian* . . . not only sit on the street but eat and drink there" (p. 26) and "can't distinguish [between] public and private" (p. 26). This problem continues to be reiterated in dominant media discourse. A television program screened in February 2008, for example, followed the exploits of the Shibuya *Centre Gai* Patrol, a uniformed volunteer nonpolice group that, sometimes accompanied by German Shepherd dogs, traverse Shibuya and harass perceived troublemakers, which includes youth simply sitting or standing in the street.[10] Dominant media discourses, in other words, provide evidence of attempts to wrap and contain the symbolic threat of urban youth cultures whose meanings undermine the heterogeneity of the dominant social and urban order.[11] At the same time, as the billboard pictured in Figure 5 playfully acknowledges, the power relations between the social groups central to media discourses of Shibuya (the *kogyaru* and *oyaji* [father/older men figures] symbolized here by Darth Vader) are complex. For as Fujimoto (2005) traces, it was the *kogyaru* who were central in fashioning the now paradigmatic use of *keitai* as a technology actively producing—in conjunction with its users—new urban selves and forms of social belonging.

At one level the intensity of that wider dominant social gaze on this particular group of urban youth gestures toward a broader anxiety about the emergence of symptomatic "good" and "bad" iterations of enterprising neoliberal subjects within a Japanese context. The dilemmas associated with these emergent subjectivities have been most imaginatively explored in the narrative of Harada Masato's film, *Bounce Kogals* (1997), which focuses on the coming-of-age journey of Lisa, a 16-year-old schoolgirl from Sendai who has stopped in Tokyo, and the Shibuya district in particular, on her way to New York. Robbed of her savings, Lisa is drawn into risky activities as well as friendships with a group of entrepreneurial, *keitai* and stun gun–toting, local *kogyaru* who are involved to different degrees in aspects of the compensated dating and sex trade. The film charts and celebrates the efficacy of the friendships among young women in contrast to a decline of confidence in traditional institutions such as family, while at the same time positioning these bonding processes as being framed by commodity-driven desires and uneven power relationships

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in which Lisa and her friends attempts to fend off various talent scouts, drug dealers, dodgy clients with unusual sexual fetishes, and an increasingly agitated organized crime (*yakuza*) boss whose business territory is being cut into by the *kogals*. Lisa, the audience understands, has precisely come to this part of Tokyo because of her own knowledge of its sensationalized national reputation as not only a center of cutting edge youth culture marked by a certain kind of "girl power" but also as simply a place where a desperate schoolgirl might make some money, in her case through selling her used underwear and uniform at a fetish shop.

Conclusion

Ben Highmore (2005) has argued that the predominant rationale for many studies of urban cultures in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly those conducted by urban and social planners, was a concern with the idea of making the city legible, driven by a desire to control the heterogeneity of the social. Such an orientation underwent a broad range of criticisms in the 20th century. Trying to articulate a different approach for urban cultural studies today, Highmore suggests in his study of cinema and the city that "the study of urban cultures could declare its object to be the social anxiety caused by the city's perceived illegibility," with the aim of making "legible the effects and affects of illegibility" (p. 7).

Whereas Highmore's focus on cinema here is generative, cultural studies scholars also need to extend their analysis beyond the repertoire of circulating city *representations* to consider the suite of media and cultural technologies pertinent to the *lived* experience of places like Shibuya. Such a move recognizes that new communication technologies such as mobile telephones are for many users either usurping or radically remediating older forms such as cinema and their role in the constitution of urban experience and place. Hendry's notion of wrapping provides a useful framework through which the distinctions used to classify urban communication technologies—such as new/old, mass/personal, static/mobile—might be rethought more in terms of their relation to increasingly coarticulated cinematic, televisual, and mobile technologies.

Un/wrapping also offers a lens through which to capture the socially and technologically mediated nature of place and its "punctualization"—focusing on the shifting potentialities and the processes of becoming that constitute urban experience rather than holding on to the notion of a fixed, essential urbanity. It provides a starting point from which to examine contemporary city places such as Shibuya in terms relevant to the concerns of cultural studies, that is, as sites of "both cultural imaginaries and lived cultural experiences" (Healy, 2003, p. 55). Thus, Shibuya is a space whose concrete "actuality" as place is thoroughly embedded—wrapped as it were—in built and imagined forms and technologies, which are in turn tied to and produced by complex networks of social actors. Here I want to gesture then toward a mode of spatial analysis that foregrounds the layered, processual, and emergent nature of city space through focusing on the role of media while drawing on both the notions of punctualization and un/wrapping.

The three sketches of networks of social, technological, and geographical relations in Shibuya remind us that place as a physical location is articulated to and produced through numerous networks of actors, both visible and invisible. To adopt the language of ANT, place itself needs to be rethought as a shifting assemblage of actor networks that settle at and flow through any particular set of geographical coordinates, subject to moments of punctualization and flight. Crucial to this assemblage are ubiquitous technologies that themselves function as important actors in shaping social space. Studying Shibuya in particular reminds us that these range in scale and degrees of visibility from media forms insistently clamoring for collective attention (such as advertising banners and giant televisions-cum-building); to the miniature, intimate, and barely visible (the *keitai* screen); and those such as the gal circle message boards that because of mass media attention find themselves "hiding in the light."[12]

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Notes

1. The relationship between cultural geography and cultural studies is the subject of a recent brief article by Dunn (2006), himself a geographer. He makes the useful point that place should not be seen as "simply as the bounds of a case study" (p. 425), whatever your disciplinary training and allegiance.
2. Shibuya features prominently, for example, in *Lost in Translation* (2003; Directed by Sofia Coppola) and *Babel* (2006; Directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu).
3. Yoshimi (2001) notes comparative surveys between 1954 and 1979 showing increased lengths of time spent in Shibuya arguably because of the rise of window-shopping as an activity there.
4. Thanks to Shin'ichi Konomi (University of Tokyo) for reminding me of Shibuya's significance as a place of playful exploration. In a forthcoming article, coauthored with Kaoru Sezaki, they discuss the results of a small qualitative study of Shibuya users that, among other findings, notes the pleasures a number of regular visitors experience in terms of "getting lost."
5. As Scott McQuire (2006) has argued, these screens can be read as the latest phase in a 150-year-old process in which the terrain of the modern city and its attendant notions of public and private space and interaction have been refigured through the increasing mediatization of the city. Occasionally, at Shibuya, the insistent flows of image and sound that usually consist of rapid, jump cut mixes of advertising shift to narcissistic images of the crowd at the crossing—a cosmopolitan (in a global citizen-consumer sense) "public" reflected back to itself. Beyond this—for the moment at least—the Shibuya screens seem to offer little in the way of "producing new forms of public relationships" explored by McQuire (2006, p. 13) in his discussion of artistic projects using this particular technology. This debate is further complicated in the Japanese context because of culturally specific notions of the public and private that recast understandings of urban space (see Jinnai, 1995).
6. On first going to Shibuya it took me a few visits to find the famous statue; first, I mistook the Akita reliefs on the wall of the station as being the famous object referred to in my guidebooks and, second, the density of the crowds made it easy to miss him!
7. Japan has consistently maintained high adoption rates of Internet-capable mobiles since the introduction of the i-mode Internet service in 1999 by NTT DoCoMo (Ito, 2005).
8. Thanks to David Slater for this particular suggestion/observation. In Japan, the vast majority of high school students still wear school uniforms. See (Macias and Evers 2007) for a potted history of the origins of the *kogyaru* uniform and its adaptations.
9. At the same time the uniform has also become a fetish as evidenced by a market for second-hand "collectors" and its availability in some chain variety goods stores.
10. The Shibuya Centre Gai Patrol has its own Web site at http://center-gai.jp/activity01.asp. Clips from the mentioned program can be found on the blog "Japan Probe," http://www.japanprobe.com/?p=3861, and YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoyVy_VYirI. Shibuya is also home to a chapter of the Guardian Angels Japan (based on the original New York organization) who are regularly seen patrolling the area (see http://www.guardianangels.or.jp/eng/).
11. Existing in conjunction with such practices are popular and/or subcultural attempts to tactically resignify everyday urban places through the media resources made available in a consumption-based society. Shibuya-specific examples discussed elsewhere range from the practices derived from *purikura*

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(coin-operated miniature photos (see Miller, 2005) to the rave demo protests that have taken place in Shibuya's Miyashita Park (see Hayashi & McKnight, 2005).

12. This is, of course, Dick Hebdige's (1989) evocative phrase, from his book of the same name, used to describe youth/youth subcultures and there media "presence" only where they are perceived to be a social problem.

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Online Resources

Shibuya City Office: http://www.city.shibuya.tokyo.jp/eng/index.html
Live camera feed—Koen-dori, Shibuya: http://www.koen-dori.com/townmap/
"Abusive Shibuya Center-Gai Patrol [1]"—Television show clip: http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=PoyVy_VYirI
"Gal-cir"—Television show clip: http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=o6oW0XzmIL0; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoyVy_VYirI

Bio

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