TOKYO FLÂNEUR

A Study Of Urban Experience In Narrative

MASTER’S THESIS

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This master’s thesis, titled *Tokyo Flâneur: A Study Of Urban Experience In Narrative*, is a written exploration of urban issues, composed metaphorically into a three-act story structure. It is an empirical, intellectual study, in which the author’s observations, contemplations and interpretations aim to produce a vivid, dramatic presentation of the city: how the city is experienced by citizens, and how that experience is understood and shared with others through narrative means.

The research strategy applied in the study is three-fold. It is a combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and narratology. The author examines urban phenomena through a variety of materials, such as urban research and literature, prose and artworks, conversations with citizens and academics, and personal observations made in urban environments, especially in Japan during a one-year study exchange. The analysis of findings is presented as a conceptual three-act story, which illustrates the author’s understanding of the city and the formation of urban experience from an individual’s point of view. The thesis also includes short pieces written in a more creative, freeform narrative, to convey the author’s personal impressions of the city of Tokyo.
The thesis concludes with review and critique, reflecting upon the use of chosen research methods, the thesis as a process, and the overall results of analysis and presentation. As a final note, the author shares a personal vision for endorsing a culture of flânerie and urban narrative in everyday life in the city.

KEYWORDS

city, flâneur, narrative, Tokyo, urban experience, urban planning
The thing, that attracts us to the city, is the chance encounter. It’s the knowledge that you’ll be able to start here, end up there, and go back there, but that something unexpected will happen along the way; that you’ll make a discovery. That, in a way, is the magic of cities.

Sir Norman Foster
(Hustwit 2011)
Floating Tokyo

Fallen Cities

Integrity Of The Narrative

The Open Thread

REVIEW

Notes On The Study Script

The Creative Process

Evaluation Of Performance

The Ambition Of Tokyo Flâneur

EPILOGUE

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CREDITS
There is a compelling presence about the city.

When you open the door,
and leave the comfort of your home behind,
you put yourself at the mercy of
the unpredictable currents of urban flow.
You may have a direction and destination in mind,
but do not fool yourself into thinking
that you are in control of your journey.

The city takes you by your feet and leads you —
the streets you walk, the trains you ride,
even the strangers who surround you guide you on.

This poses no cause for concern however,
quite the contrary.
How wonderful it is to be swept along
by the pedestrian tide!
It may only become a source of anxiety
if you insist to struggle against it.

But why struggle?
The city invites you to go with the flow.
It invites you to set your gear on footloose,
and see what marvellous discoveries lie ahead.

And indeed, the possibilities are endless.
Each turn, each entrance and exit
is a gateway to new beginnings,
opportunities and encounters.
No choice is a wrong one,
only as unexpected as it is novel.

The city beats a constant pulse of
fleeting chances, ever changing, ever emerging.
To seize them,
to be inspired by them,
is the bliss of urban life.

Each passing scene is an invitation to a story —
an invitation presented by the city,
and delivered by surprise.

However the story then plays out is narrated by you.
The city as an intellectual concept provides an inexhaustible supply of fascinating subjects for academic study. So much in fact that, to narrow down the topics for one master’s thesis is quite a daunting task. There is no universal hierarchy of priorities to be identified within the variety of urban research; each contribution has its relevance in time and context. I have set out to choose such a subject for contemplation which would seem globally relevant in the here and now, and one that would also motivate myself both personally and professionally. I have not have had to look far for personal inspiration, but the pursuit to turn it into a meaningful contribution to the society at large is the challenge of this thesis.

The initial spark for this study was ignited when I first came across the concept of the flâneur. Ironically, as in the spirit of flânerie itself, I can no longer recall how I actually ended up discovering it. Whether a chance encounter or not, it immediately struck me as something mysterious and fantastic, synonymous to a lifestyle of a footloose urban adventurer. Resonating with my own personal aspirations, I knew I had to investigate it further.

In the character of the flâneur I have found the approach to urban research which has engaged me the most: the observer and
actor in one, walking around the city as if it were a book to be read, or a symphony to be heard. Exploring the city for the experience itself, getting purposefully lost and discovering something new and unexpected is the philosophy that I have taken to practice. I have learned more about the city on idle walks than ever before in any academic environment. I have seen urban life as it happens in the here and now, in the fleeting fragment of time. So I have become to realize that, when you manage to get a glimpse of the fragile beauty of the city, it leaves a lasting impression within you. And it is there, deep within the hearts of citizens, where the city truly flourishes.

The thoughts and ideas discussed in this thesis are meant to be universally applicable to any city in the world. However, in the context of this particular research, the city in the focus of the study is Tokyo, the capital of Japan. The majority of the research for this thesis has been conducted in Tokyo and its neighbouring prefectures, namely Chiba, in the course of twelve months from September 2011 to September 2012. Being an exchange student at Chiba University, in the Department of Urban Environment Systems in the School of Engineering, I have been able to explore various urban environments in Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa, and also make short visits to Nagasaki and Nikko. I have previously been to the cities of Hiroshima, Okayama and Kyoto as well, which gives me some qualifications to compare Japanese urban environments on a national level.

The focus of this thesis is not, however, on the differences of cities per se, but on the nature and formation of the urban experience itself. How a city is experienced, intellectually and emo-
ationally, is, just as any other human experience, a very personal, individual matter. It is always an interaction of the environment, sensory perceptions, and the individual’s own personal history and psychology. This thesis is an expedition to the city, to explore the relationship between city and citizen. It is in part a personal journey of reflection, but more than that it aims to inspire citizens to examine the meanings that their city holds to them. The perceptions and views of two individual citizens are of equal importance — every citizen holds a piece of the impossible urban puzzle. This study portrays my own personal experiences. What does your image of the city look like?

Despite the uniqueness of every piece in the puzzle, my attempt is to provide guidance for answering that question above. How indeed to interpret and understand the complex human experience of the urban environment? I have chosen to approach this research question through the means of narrative; how we formulate our impressions and experiences of the city in words and images, how we then interpret these stories, and what their impact is on our understanding of the city, and thus on the future planning and designing of it.

To acknowledge that the urban experience is by default unique to every citizen, it is challenging to consider how urban planning practices should take into account people’s views and feelings in city development projects. Urban planning worldwide has had a long history of hard, top-down practice, but especially since the 1960s more and more participatory processes have been introduced, and in recent years there has been encouraging progress in sophisticated experiential data collection methods. I discuss these
challenges and trends alongside the three-act narrative, explaining how the various perspectives to the city have influenced, and have been influenced by, the work of academics and professionals in the urban planning field. The purpose of the three-act story is to provide a conceptual model for mapping out the different elements and factors which compose the urban experience, thus making it somewhat easier for planners and citizens alike to examine the relevant variables through an organized, narrative method.

The research study of this thesis has its own interconnected elements as well. On the one hand, the thesis is composed of my personal observations and interpretations of urban phenomena, and on the other hand, it discusses the research, works and studies of various scholars, designers, planners, activists and writers, not only in Tokyo or Japan but worldwide. The concept of flâneur, a man who wanders the city streets in order to simply experience the urban space, is in the centre of this research. It is this role of the flâneur that I immersed myself into when I was walking in the hundreds of different locations in Tokyo, without a destination or a specific agenda, without any need to be somewhere or do something other than to simply be present in the moment, eyes and ears open. The idea of flânerie, as I demonstrate in this thesis, is key in the formation of urban experience, and moreover, in understanding it. This is also the reason for choosing Tokyo Flâneur as the main title for this thesis, and the more descriptive A Study Of Urban Experience In Narrative as the subtitle.

As the research relies heavily on my own personal experiences and observations, and those of other individuals, such as creative writers, I have adopted phenomenology as the central research
strategy. Since a notable aspect in the concept of flânerie is the act of narration, or storytelling, I also refer to the narrative research field, especially in the case of analyzing written descriptions of the city by authors such as Haruki Murakami and Italo Calvino. My personal interpretations are naturally present throughout the thesis, however it should be noted that the thesis also includes short creative entries, which I have typographically separated from the rest of the text, though the intent has been to weave them in contextually. In these creative writings I have attempted to capture the feelings and emotions of the experience in a way that I could not relay in the more research-based text. These are the impressions conceived in the role of the flâneur, which in fact is one form of an urban narrator.

The arrangement of this thesis follows a narrative, or perhaps narratives, of its own. I begin the thesis by elaborating first the research mission and methodologies: what phenomenology, hermeneutics and narrative research are, and how they are applied in this thesis. In the next chapter I enter the domain of the modern city, to map out the macro framework for the study. Questions such as, “What are the big challenges of today’s urban world?” and “What are the roles of sustainability and citizen involvement?” set the overall landscape for the topics of contemplation.

The city emerging into the focus of attention, Tokyo, is the central stage where the issues at hand take their practical form. Action in the city is perceived from the citizen’s point of view, which is portrayed by the strolling observer, the flâneur. In the fourth chapter about the citizen, I introduce this concept of the flâneur as the actor-narrator: how he has originated, what implications of
him there have been on urban studies, design and storytelling, and how I have understood and used this personification of an urban dweller specifically.

The fifth chapter initiates the three-act story, which is all about the forming and understanding of urban experience — a complex combination of physical activity, intellectual processing, and narrative presentation. The first act focuses on the physicality: the act of walking and observing, making sensory perceptions, and experiencing the city in various dimensions of space and time. The second act depicts the internal world: how perceptions form into impressions, how the flâneur organizes his thoughts and maintains a balance of mind in the midst of urban chaos. And finally, in the third act the perceptions and impressions are translated into narrative representations of the city, and shared with other citizens and urban planners in mutual dialogue.

I conclude the thesis with a review of research methods and the creative process, and perform an overall evaluation. I also make some suggestions for applying the three-act narrative model, mostly for a personal benefit of any citizen in any city. The ending of *Tokyo Flâneur* holds a vision, or a hope, for how this information could be used meaningfully, in order to co-create more livable and enjoyable urban environments within cities. Having provided examples and ideas for action, the key role of the narrator is finally trusted upon the reader. This story has an open ending, a means to prompt citizens to express their own voice in the city.

Even this thesis is a collection of perspectives, spoken out in different voices. My personal voice as a global citizen and a keen observer of the Japanese society engages in dialogue with my pro-
fessional side, a student with academic ambition regarding urban research. Then there are of course discussions with the various professionals I have included in this work, who all elaborate on some aspects of urbanism, participatory planning, storytelling, or, in the grand scheme of things, the shared way of life. Also, as I noted before, I have included short creative entries in this thesis: writings, which were composed while immersed in the role of the flâneur, and which thus have an entirely different voice of their own. In a sense, this book is a combined effort, merged together from the stories of others and mine, to create a narrative representation of shared ideas.

My sincere hope is that this thesis would encourage readers to return to the city with heightened senses, and find a connection. The whole field of urban planning needs more citizen involvement — there is nothing more valuable to the development of cities than the experiences and knowledge of the people inhabiting them. This thesis is by no means exclusive to the ones invested in planning or designing cities. This is for all the people living in them, to help discover and nurture a deeper relationship with the city, our extended home.
Fig. 1.1 Staircase to the unknown. Photograph by author (2012).
The wonder of random encounters and emerging stories in a metropolis of millions of strangers. Never knowing, what surprises and adventures the rising sun has planned for the day.

The flâneur embraces the unpredictability of urban life.

An invitation to jump into the current of seemingly random events unfolding in the fabric of capital. An acquaintance today introduces a friend in the future. A friend tomorrow shows the flâneur how to ride ever higher waves on the tides of urban flow.

The flâneur never knows who these strangers are until he meets them, and even then he cannot recognize the main characters from the extras in his life.

Only the city can unfold the meanings to the flâneur, and the flâneur can only learn to see and follow them through observation and presence.

Adventure happens, when the exploring drifter faces novelty with innocent curiosity.

The city is the flâneur’s reward.
Just as any theatre play needs a playscript, so does this thesis require one as well, especially since the three-act story structure is used to present the findings. This script is quite different, however. In this study script only the intellectual, scholarly parameters are defined, according to which the ‘drama’ is then composed. It is the framework, the setting, or the backdrop, if you will, for the narrative and informative contents. Indeed the script frames this thesis into the proper academic context, describing the methods by which the narrative outline is developed. The frame is not tightly fixed, though, for the view on this study is more kaleidoscopic than static.
Although this thesis is structured into three dramatic acts, it has not been a strict prerequisite to compose the study script according to the acts. Still, the sociological orientations to which this thesis subscribes are three-fold. In the following paragraphs I explain in closer detail the established research strategies followed in this thesis process: the actual methods of inquiry (data collection), as well as the intellectual, academic framework and the reasoning behind the creative interpretation (analysis). To summarize the study script, this thesis is fundamentally qualitative, empirical research, which combines phenomenological, hermeneutical and narrative research strategies in the gathering and production of information. For the analysis and interpretation of collected material hermeneutical phenomenology and narrative analysis methods have been utilized. All the various methods and strategies have been used together, in parallel or as a hybrid, during the whole research process, in a manner that closely relates to the function of each of the three acts (Fig. 2.1).

The Intellectual Framework

Since the beginning it has been clear that this thesis falls into the category of qualitative, empirical research. I have not set out to gather data from hundreds of citizens, or even use such existing, measurable statistics in any major role. The purpose is to dive deep into the personal, inner experiences of the urban. This obvious subjectivity does raise the question of validity and applicability
of the research in a broader academic domain. It is not, however, controversial to conduct research, where the researcher acknowledges the impact of their own psychology and worldview on the process, and reflects upon the implications of subjective interpretation of relatively objective data. In some cases, the freedom to include personal contemplations can in fact produce more food for thought for the reader — provided of course that it is presented as such, and not disguised as scientific truth.

The research strategy called phenomenology is about studying phenomena through the inner experience: what a person perceives and feels when observing the environment with their senses. One definition, used by the University of Jyväskylä, explains that phenomenology enables the researcher to “explore experi-

Fig. 2.1 Research strategies. I. Empirical, II. Qualitative, III. Phenomenological, IV. Hermeneutical, and V. Narrative studies. Illustration by author (2015).
ences and sensory perception (different to abstract perceptions) of researched phenomenon, and the formation of understanding based on these experiences and perceptions” (Lähdesmäki et al. 2010). Additionally, it is essential to the strategy not to have prefixed hypotheses in the beginning, and instead “approach the phenomenon without having any a priori assumptions, definitions or theoretical frameworks” (ibid.). In phenomenology I have recognized the core approach to my research, however it does not apply to all aspects of the process.

Another strategy that I have applied, which becomes particularly visible in this thesis in the context of Tokyo and the Japanese society, is hermeneutic research. “Hermeneutic research emphasizes subjective interpretations in the research of meanings of texts, art, culture, social phenomena and thinking. Thus, the strategy forms an opposite to those research strategies which stress objectivity and independence from interpretations in the formation of knowledge” (ibid.). Phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches have much in common, and they are often used as conjunctive strategies, as I have done in this thesis. Hermeneutical phenomenology is a school of thought that stresses the interpretive nature of human awareness. Scholars such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur have influenced this movement extensively. Heidegger states that, “all description is always already interpretation” (van Manen 2011). He also appreciates art and poetry “as expressive works for interpreting the nature of truth, language, thinking, dwelling, and being” (ibid.).

The third strategy, called narratology, or narrative research, only applies to the parts of the thesis where written stories are in-
volved. There are fragments from novels and short stories, as well as creative pieces that I have written myself whilst exploring the city of Tokyo. The purpose of adding these elements of prose is to “explore the meanings of human action and phenomena constructed in narratives,” by focusing “on the types of stories told about the researched phenomenon and on the type of story in culture and society which presents the phenomenon” (Lähdesmäki et al. 2010). I have mainly utilized the principles of narrative research in the process of creative interpretation (analysis), on which I elaborate after the following section on the methods of inquiry (data collection).

Methods Of Inquiry

Categorization of the methods of inquiry presented here is based on the data collection method map published online by the University of Jyväskylä (Lähdesmäki et al. 2010). Following the map, the information inquired for this research can be roughly divided into two categories: existing materials and self-produced materials. The existing materials are mostly gathered from various archives and library collections, such as academic studies and articles, publications, and online video and information banks. The self-produced materials, however, are the result of observation and documentation on the field, thus providing a variety of notes, journal entries, sketches, photographs, video clips and audio recordings.

Then there are two types of forms, stories and interviews
(or rather, conversations), which apply to both the existing and self-produced materials. The existing stories include novels, short stories and films, while the self-produced narratives are a mixed form of prose and poetry, based on my personal experiences and impressions. The interviews in the existing materials are naturally past, recorded conversations between other people, but in the self-produced materials there are also notes from lectures which I have personally attended, as well as some documentations of rather informal talks with friends, students and scholars. Also the images in this thesis fall into both categories, the existing and the self-produced. They are, however, a part of the whole narrative content together with the texts, and are thus treated as ‘stories’ as well.

The methods of inquiry described above have not been emphasized equally in the research process. The most relevant and frequented materials are the field notes based on observations, the personal, creative pieces, literary references on flânerie (or other similar concepts), and various imaginary stories set in Tokyo or Japan, which can be found in published novels and short stories.

**Creative Interpretation**

The main strategies for this study — phenomenology, hermeneutics and narrative research — are in the centre of the analysis process, as well. The mindset for the creative interpretation is similar to the overall orientation in this research: “Phenomenological analysis is a broad and loose name for various types of analysis
based on the phenomenological orientation of the philosophy of science. These orientations lay emphasis on experiences, interpretations and bodily sensations” (Lähdesmäki et al. 2010).

Hermeneutical analysis focuses on the act of interpreting the inquired information. Interpretation can be quite subjective, however it is not arbitrary. The aim is to “elicit an in-depth understanding of meanings of, for example: human practices, culture, works of art and texts. Understanding is produced through systematic interpretation processes. -- Interpretation of details affects the interpretation of the entire phenomenon; reviews of these interpretations produce a deepening understanding of the phenomenon” (ibid.). Phenomenological and hermeneutical analyses are often used together, and, as previously introduced, hermeneutical phenomenology is the combination of these two approaches that is the most central research framework in this whole thesis.

Concerning the effort to understand the object of study, there is an interesting notion about the relationship between subjectivity and empathy made by Myron Orleans, Professor of Sociology at California State University, Fullerton, in his article on phenomenology: “Phenomenological tools include the use of introspective and Verstehen [lit. to understand, transl. by author] methods to offer a detailed description of how consciousness itself operates (Hitzler and Keller 1989). Introspection requires the phenomenologist to use his or her own subjective process as a resource for study, while Verstehen requires an empathic effort to move into the mind of the other (Helle 1991; Truzzi 1974)” (Orleans 2001).

This aspect of empathy is key particularly in the narrative re-
search field, and again many common denominators can be recognized between the different analysis methods. Narrative analysis is used when the object of examination has a story-like structure. Knowing narrative theory will enable the researcher to “categorize the phenomenon in terms of structure, concepts, terms and points of views” (Lähdesmäki et al. 2010). Applying narrative analysis to this research has, in part, the aim of providing “generalisations of thinking, actions, meanings and attitudes related to the phenomenon” (ibid.), which again contribute to the story-like structure formed in this thesis.

The amount of information in any given research only increases during the analysis process, when interconnections and categorizations are identified. To make sense of the massive entity of ‘urban experience,’ I have started to pursue an organized model, or a roadmap, to present the findings and interpretations in a meaningful manner. This is why I have also taken a look at an approach called grounded theory. “The aim of the method is to produce theories and conceptual models through exploring empirical data on a topic, which has not yet been analyzed or theorized. Grounded theory as a method is suitable for various kinds of qualitative data” (ibid.).

In the process of developing the three-act story structure for this study, I have had a great variety of different types of materials and sources, and so grounded theory has seemed especially appealing as an analysis method. It enables the researcher to “conceptualize the phenomenon, [and] formulate connections between the data and the concepts” (ibid.). Although the three-act story structure is a kind of conceptual presentation of the research find-
ings, I do not argue that I am applying the principles of grounded theory as such, but rather a combination of other methods, namely hermeneutics and narrative analysis, which may or may not, in the end, resemble the idea of grounded theory.
The city and all its power lines —
 a constant visual reminder of
the consequences of urbanization.

Profusion of interconnections has turned interaction trivial.

The metropolitan man has since time long past
abandoned the pursuit of genuine relationship
with the hidden and the buried — the wilderness.

What was once nature’s realm is now ruled by human agenda.
And yet, the urban adventurer, the flâneur, thrives.

The flâneur feeds from human endeavour,
 the works of curious minds
fuelled with passion and perseverance.
Though admiring the achievements of development,
he cannot escape the distressing dilemma.

Have we created the urban world at the cost of
losing something true about ourselves,
something of essential nature?

I seek signs of such loss in the façades of buildings,
the monuments, streaming streets, quiet discussions.
In a fleeting moment a thousand questions,  
and answers none.

I turn to the citizens,  
my fellow actors sharing this anonymous city stage.  
The troubled crowd provides clues.

Their faces capture a look of perpetual perplexity.

Eyes wander upon the same view time and again,  
a constant frown revealing  
that nothing is understood, despite all the efforts.

Hands grab tools of distraction  
to relieve consciousness from the haunting puzzle of reality.  
Clenching the excuse, they howl in silence.

I still cannot fathom what it is we might have lost,  
but the eyes of strangers have revealed another truth.

In them I have found fundamental longing, kin to my own.

I realize I am not the only one looking.
3
After the script has been written and approved, the creative process of designing the stage, or the set, may begin. In film production location scouting is often required. In the case of this thesis, the main stage is ‘the modern city’ — that is, the city more as a concept rather than any one specific geographically defined area. Since the main focus is on Tokyo, however, attention is naturally paid most to this city over others. Yet it should be noted that many of the urban phenomena discussed here do apply to numerous cities worldwide, so we have at hand a truly global set, where various nationalities can find elements to which they relate.
In this chapter I portray the city through historical accounts, changes in urban planning policies, and the environmental, economical and social challenges that the urban life is faced with today. I begin with a brief history, starting from the 19th century, which brings to light a multitude of factors that have affected urban development in western countries, as well as Japan. Then I take a look at the trends and troubles in the 21st century, focusing on the sustainability movement and citizens’ involvement in urban planning and design processes. Finally, I conclude the chapter with introduction to some specific features of Japanese urban planning, studying in particular how the Japanese understand the concept of building cities.

**A Brief History Of The Modern City**

The birth of the modern city was made possible by the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, kicking off in Great Britain. The vast resources of coal were first utilized as a source of energy in England, resulting in the revolutionary invention of the steam engine. Consequently, this enabled more efficient production of goods in factories, industrializing the whole nation in a couple of decades. Another major change was the building of railroads, which radically altered the transportation in both trade and travel (Black 2012). London was the first ‘megacity’ of its time, reaching a population of 2.3 million by the year 1850, being “the most populous metropolitan centre in the world” (Brown 2004). Other
central cities in Europe and North America, such as Paris, New York and Berlin, did not, however, fall far behind in the modern urban development.

Japan, on the other hand, had kept its borders closed to foreign countries for centuries, with the exception of Nagasaki, where the Dutch had the exclusive right to conduct business and research. In 1854, however, with the arrival of the American Captain Perry and his fleet, Japan was persuaded to open its harbours to foreign affairs. The transition from an isolated, homogenous nation to a rapidly westernizing, commercializing country, was by no means smooth. A decade later a destructive civil war broke out, and the nation was divided between imperialists and supporters of the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate. The war ended in 1868, resulting in the Meiji Restoration, which declared Emperor Meiji the true ruler of the nation. In this occasion, the capital Edo was renamed as Tokyo (Kirsi 2013).

Upon entering the 20th century, many cities in Europe and on the east coast of America were fast on their way to become the urbanized, modern cities, as we know them today. Railroads and metro lines were continuously built and extended, first high-rise buildings emerged to shape the skyline, electrification and telecommunications enabled faster service delivery, and so on. The modern city provided more opportunities than ever for business, academia and entertainment, but the changes were not welcomed by everyone. American author and philosopher Henry David Thoreau criticized the industrializing city as early as in the mid-19th century, and spoke strongly for environmentalist values, and nature as a much better living environment than the urban
(Thoreau 2007). In the early 20th century, German sociologist Georg Simmel wrote an influential essay on the effects of the metropolis on mental life (Simmel 2010). Countless studies and research around the modern city have been conducted ever since, but urban development across the world has inevitably been pushed forward in increasing speed and volume.

When horse-drawn carriages were eventually replaced by the automobile, this marked another major shift in urban planning. Now the attention was not so much on railroads but roads. In the aftermath of the First and Second World War, when damaged cities across Europe and Asia were facing years of restoration, it was more than clear that the private car had come to stay, and so the urban landscape changed forever. Especially in New York, ‘master builder’ Robert Moses favoured rapid building of highway networks over public transit, many times at the cost of entire neighbourhoods. In the latter part of the 19th century, Baron Haussmann had made a similar decision, when he had several old buildings torn down in the centre of Paris, to make way for outrageously wide avenues that spread like a fan across the city.

In the 1960s, with the exponential rise of various social movements worldwide, such as the student demonstrations in Paris and Tokyo, and the Martin Luther King phenomenon in the United States, the urban planning scene also received its public counter-voices. In 1961, one of the most influential books on urban planning to this day was published. It was *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, by American-Canadian writer and activist Jane Jacobs. She criticized heavily the American urban planning policy of the 1950s, and became the face of Greenwich Village in New
York, when she opposed the developers’ plans, including Moses’s, to redesign the neighbourhood at the cost of local livelihood and culture. Her example has encouraged communities to speak out and protect their living environment from destructive top-down renewal plans. In Japan, the New City Planning Law was accepted in 1968, in which a historical new element was added. The law was the first in the country’s history, where citizen participation was made a requirement for urban planning and design processes. The term used in Japanese is machizukuri, and it is discussed more in the latter part of this chapter.

In the 1970s the world was hit by the oil crisis, which consequently led to a broader energy crisis in 1979. When the book *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome, was
published in 1972, it raised a roar of discussion and fuelled the sustainability movement into the mainstream. Following the social awareness of the 1960s, the urban planning scene geared even more towards a more sustainable way of designing cities. The famous Danish architect Jan Gehl wrote about the importance of studying social interaction and activity in the urban environment in his book *Life Between Buildings*, first published in Danish in 1971. Since then he has been one of the most influential endorsers of pedestrian- and cyclist-oriented urban design. Another notable publication of the decade was *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Alexander et al. 1977). The authors speak for, among other things, community livability, and offer pattern language as a tool for people to design and improve their own houses and neighbourhoods, with or without professional designers.

To further promote people-friendly urban design, a movement called New Urbanism was initiated in the United States in the early 1980s. Ecological and environmental thinking had gained root in urban planning even before the famous Brundtland Report, or *Our Common Future*, was published in 1987, where the term ‘sustainable development’ was officially defined. The rapid economic growth in most western countries, and especially in Japan, probably made it possible for various urban design projects to be initiated and implemented, as funding was more available. Emerging new technology also provided novel ways to imagine and design possible urban futures.

Since the Internet Age, urban planning processes have become much more open and diversified, at least if compared to the days of Robert Moses. Digital tools, mobile phones and applica-
tions, real-time sharing of ideas and images across the globe, have all enabled more discussion and participation among various citizen groups. Individualism and the fragmented nature of contemporary society do, on the other hand, pose challenges for fair and democratic planning. A cacophony of voices demanding millions of different things must be overwhelming for any developer or designer. However, therein lies the key building block for the 21st century city: the social capital.

Urban Trends In The 21st Century

As we have well entered the new millennium, so have we also entered into an era of an incredible number of global challenges and crises — some of them old, some of them brand new. The dawn of this century has marked a rise in internationally spread terrorism, military interventions and manhunt, but also citizen-driven riots and protests against old reigns have abounded, especially so in the Arab world. There have been short periods of collective sympathy in the aftermaths of massive natural disasters, and we have even seen somewhat of a renaissance in environmental awareness and sustainability education. The ‘earth agenda’ has unfortunately been mostly buried somewhere under the mountains of debt since the economical crisis took over the attention in global politics. In the 2000s, we still have several unresolved issues concerning democracy and social wellbeing, the state of the environment, not to mention the future of our economic systems. These types of wick-
ed problems are in the core of the sustainability discourse, which ironically seems to have toned down at what might be the most crucial time in its history. Has the whole movement regressed from watchdog to underdog?

During the last decade or so, we have indeed been delighted by beautiful and inspiring talks about sustainability and change. However, the global condition today suggests that we may have been looking one way while our feet were walking another. Is it any wonder that we keep stumbling on the same obstacles time and again, if our sense of direction and course of action do not align? The sustainability movement has been aiming to set that alignment right, and push us towards a more responsible direction in all circles of development: the environmental, the social,
and the economical. These three spheres are sometimes visually presented as a 3-nested-dependencies model, where one is within another, which is again within another: the environment enclosing the social, and the social enclosing the economical (Willard 2010; Fig. 3.2). In recent years, the ‘bubble’ of capitalist economy has somehow managed to flip this presentation around, and devour the other two spheres surrounding it. How we have ended up with this new setup is a question that surely deserves reflection. Solving the following problem of how to proceed from the current state of affairs then requires both serious contemplation and social creativity.

It is crucial to take note that the stage for all of these global performances is the urban environment — the city. The domain of political power, the driver of economy, the forum of social interaction; it is and has always been the city. In the 2000s, almost simultaneously as the global population reached its all-time high of seven billion, humankind has crossed the point where more than half of the people inhabit urban environment, as opposed to the rural. The trend of urbanization still continues worldwide, and we can expect the various wicked problems to accumulate and intensify especially in the biggest socio-cultural hotspots — the megacities. How the leaders and communities in these cities respond and react to the challenges of this new century will undoubtedly impact the course of our shared global future.
Citizens In Action

The city, particularly the megacity, is a culmination point of both social and environmental extremes. We can see the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor, manifesting as suburban sprawl on one end and slums on the other. We have collectively created these strange, bustling spheres of life and culture, where we become so immersed in mundane daily activities that we fail to realize their implications to the rest of the world. A vast majority of the world’s ecological footprint is generated in cities. To meet the consumption demand of millions and millions of inhabitants, forests are cut down, the earth is mined, oil is drilled, fishing and meat production are over-practiced, goods are transported in excessive volumes, and much of the resulting waste is mishandled. The average citizen does not see the consequences of his daily life in the city, simply because most of the action to produce everyday supplies takes place elsewhere. This does not, however, mean that the average citizen is ignorant — quite the opposite.

One of the merits of the 21st century sustainability discourse has been, and still is, the raised awareness of the systems and processes of mass consumption, and the limitations of natural resources and capacities. Research has been conducted, information has been spread and adopted, and as a result, citizens themselves have become more active, and begun to alter their personal lifestyles and consumption habits. Incremental change has taken place, although relatively slow and modest in the global scale. Still, an open flow of information, even to the point of transparency, has
become somewhat of a value in itself. Just as there is more pressure now on corporations and economic institutions to shed light into their businesses, the same principle of openness and interaction is expected increasingly of politicians and leaders as well.

While people have become more aware of environmental and social issues globally, the notion of individual responsibility has also gained more ground. It is clear by now that wicked problems such as climate change cannot be solved or even battled with governmental decision-making only. Citizen cooperation, initiative and innovation, too, are vital. In order to assume joint responsibility for common problems, adapting personal lifestyles and taking action in local communities is essential. Even the smallest of deeds have proven to create ripple effect, especially with the help
of social media. Timebanking, downshifting and degrowth are a couple of examples of movements and ideologies towards a more sustainable way of life. Sharing ideas, inspiring others and revitalizing the community spirit have been other merits of the sustainability discourse and its related phenomena. Today’s metropolitan citizen is not an ignorant, obedient dweller in an urban vivarium, but an information-seeking, or rather, information-demanding, creative individual, with a personal voice and the means to use it.

Co-Creating The Urban Agenda

Although citizens occasionally portray magnificent unity and power against oppressing governments and dictatorships, the daily reality in most countries seldom resembles that of an ideal democracy. Cities inhabit a wide variety of citizens with infinitely diverse views and opinions. The city never has a voice, but instead a multitude of voices. Similarly, there is not one problematic issue called ‘the city,’ but a complex interplay of conflicting interests taking place in the shared urban space. Quoting James Donald, Reader in Media Studies at Sussex University, “The city is not a problem that can be solved. It is the eternal, impossible question of how we strangers can live together” (Donald 1997, 182). The challenge, therefore, is how to compose a symphony out of the voices of millions of strangers, so as not to be deafened by an ear-piercing ruckus. There is no one right answer, but it certainly is in the best interest of every single individual to pursue meaningful coexistence with others. Though the global problems we face
today seem to suggest that we as communities of the humankind lack a common sense of aligned direction and action, we do have some useful guidelines that can help us.

The physical environment of any city, consisting of both natural and manmade elements, captures the histories, past visions and endeavours of its former and current residents. We as citizens can learn from our previous attempts and mistakes by observing the structures surrounding us. Then we have the life of the here and now, with our fellow citizens. Every form of interaction with another citizen improves our understanding of the conditions of urban life, and provides new perspectives to the fundamental question of how to live pleasant lives together. Better yet, communication can open ways to build and shape the environment for the purpose of better serving common agendas. This is what all urban planning and design practices should be based on: mutual interest to engage in and act upon genuine dialogue. However, the everyday reality of urban management globally is still dominated by top-down governance, leaving little room, or even opportunity, for actual citizen involvement.

The old-fashioned, one-sided approach to city planning is of no hope in providing solutions to the problems of massive scale in the 21st century. As urbanization continues, and cities are expected to expand more rapidly than ever, especially in Asia, novel ways of managing the urban domain are in great demand. Megacities of today and tomorrow are beyond the control of a few centralized units of dedicated professionals and leaders. Even with all the best and sincerest intentions, a handful of citizens cannot build and manage a city of millions — and a city needs constant atten-
tion and care. Urban communities worldwide have also started to wake up to the realization that authorities are simply unable to cater to their changing needs, and that citizens themselves must take action as well.

Various sustainability initiatives have managed to engage people across the globe, regardless of geographical or cultural boundaries. Some of the rapidly spread movements in recent years have been, for example, the Carrotmob, WWF Earth Hour, and Occupy Wall Street. Common agenda brings creative minds together, and local actors can now recognize their impact on the bigger picture. Similar collaboration mentality and flat organization is required in the field of urban planning, which still relies heavily on hierarchical processes. Participatory urban planning aims to do just that, however, it should be vitalized and supported much more vigorously by the authorities.

It is a shame how much citizen skill and potential is constantly left untapped because of bureaucracy, administration, and lack of political will. In the world of business, on the other hand, there are numerous examples of crowdsourcing, with successful results. The whole Facebook phenomenon, for example, owes its existence to the users, who create and maintain all the buzz. There is no excuse not to utilize and benefit from those same principles in the planning and building of our shared urban habitat.
There are many names for urban development processes, in which citizens are involved and considered as valuable contributors to planning and decision-making. Participatory (urban) planning is perhaps the most widely used and acknowledged term, which depending on context may span community development, community-based planning, collaborative planning, and even social innovation. The terms used in the English language mostly seem to emphasize the aspect of cooperation and social interaction. The object of planning itself is rather curiously almost always omitted from such terms. More attention is paid to the nature of the process than the actual context of doing. In a way, it is as if the processes are defined in such a convenient manner that they become transferrable from one context to another. And indeed, there is not just participatory urban planning, but for example participatory economics and participatory justice. There is absolutely nothing wrong with having these terms, however it does raise a question. Which is truly more relevant: the act of participating, or the act for the benefit of which participation takes place?

Histories and practices of participatory urban planning can be found across the globe, not just in the English-speaking world. In east, Japan has its own unique ways of involving citizens in urban development. However, the term that describes the action in Japanese is not ‘participatory planning.’ The word is machizukuri, and the simplest translation of it would be ‘the making of town’ (or
city). Community engagement and collaboration are implicit in the way of machizukuri, and thus need not be underlined within the term. The philosophy of it is quite charming: the town is, in fact, always built together, since it is by its very nature a collective product. Indeed, why do we even have separate terms for urban planning and participatory urban planning? Should they not be, by default, one and the same?

Considering the mainstream urban management policies of western authorities, it is of course no wonder that various terms insisting on citizen participation have been coined. As previously explained, top-down urban orchestration has some serious limitations, and therefore it is quite justified to emphasize movement towards community-based approaches. Stressing participation
also in the language that is used works in its own right to attract attention by making the common aim clearly visible to the public.

There is an interesting paradox, though, in the relationship between citizen involvement and authoritarian governance. Whichever is dominant at a given time creates a demand for the other. In the case of Japan, which throughout its history has been built relying on strict hierarchical systems, the ethos of community and collective responsibility balance out conflicting forces. Urban management, which has traditionally been rather authoritarian and bureaucratic, has brought to light the ideas of machizukuri, of building together. Then again, when officials lack leadership skills or decisiveness, or the authorities remain absent for too long a time, citizens may interpret it as neglect. After Junichiro Koizumi, who left office in September 2006, Japan has seen a total of seven different prime ministers, the first six of them only keeping their office for about one year. Today, endeavours to improve the difficult economic situation of the country, and to recover still from the disaster of March 2011, while simultaneously pursuing sustainable political resolve, display perspectives from both of these ends.

Japan provides more than plenty of interesting subjects for urban study, and machizukuri is only one aspect in the vast reservoir. The densely populated nation, built on islands in a seismically active region, has faced and overcome dire challenges in the past, but unfortunately the global issues of the 21st century also affect the Japanese contemporary way of life. The country will meet radical demographic and economic changes in the coming decades: aging population, low birth rate, huge national debt, shrink-
ing labour force and low immigration are only few of the factors to impact the future of Japan. Current issues with nuclear power, energy supply, restoration of disaster-struck areas and political conflicts with neighbouring countries, namely China, add even more pressure to both central and local governments throughout the land.

The historical accounts, societal crises, vigorous development and recent, dramatic turns of events; these are all very good reasons to pay attention to Japan, and study its ways of urban planning and design. Without a doubt, we can be inspired by the philosophies and the drive of the Japanese people, by their architectural and cultural traditions, as well as by the modern, sometimes peculiar products of ambitious creativity. It is futile, though, to expect to find any secret formula to successful city planning, even in Japan, but any explorer of these topics will surely make some exciting discoveries in the process. Those interested in the making of cities should be able to learn a lesson or two from Japan.

Faced with a myriad of said urban challenges and troubles, and individual explorer may quite easily feel overwhelmed. For this reason, I would like to point out one more important feature of machizukuri, and that is machiaruki. In the beginning of any machizukuri process, it is vital for the participants to know the urban area in question. And how do they come to know it? By walking. Machiaruki literally means ‘town walk,’ or ‘walking around town.’ It is calm walking, during which the person is consciously observing the urban environment. He takes mental notes, or perhaps even writes them down, and in the case of the Japanese, most likely takes pictures as well. The Japanese understand that, to know
the city is to walk it — to experience it firsthand. This is precisely what the following chapters will elaborate further, introducing the western counterpart for machiaruki, which, of course, is flânerie.
The purpose of the stage is to provide space and structures for the cast to act out the story. In the city, the obvious actor is the citizen. This narrative indeed focuses on the citizen, but more specifically the flâneur, which is the designated role. The flâneur actually has a double casting: he is both the actor and the narrator in this story. He walks the city streets and observes, interacting with the environment and the people around him. He then creates the narrative from his experience, using words and images, or some other forms of communication. He has all the artistic freedom — spontaneity and improvisation are in fact his only guidelines on the stage.
Strange city, strange people.

And I, the lone flâneur, observing them all from a distance,
both detached from the crowd,
and yet immersing in it.
A strange interaction that takes place
on a mysterious, hidden level,
that only a god-like creature could see.

I drink in the city with every glimpse, every step, every breath.
I walk the streets to own them.

Sometimes, when I drift along in the crowd,
powerless and ignorant of its winding course,
I think I catch looks in my way.
Random gazes that suddenly collide with mine,
creating imaginary sparks in the air.

An instant, burned into a transient memory,
though not brief enough
to avoid the attacks of my urban cynicism.

I may have passed the line of sight of a stranger,
but it takes more than mere presence to be seen.
A metropolitan crowd is the best place to render oneself invisible.

Consenting to this slightly condescending, yet quite reasonable logic, I continue to stroll the side of the pavement, dodging those blindly wandering glances.

For indeed, a crowd is one coalesced of ones, an entity of its own, where a single submits to the plural. And so, in the city a face of one is always the face of many — anonymous and repetitive.

Fortunately, the urban flow does not follow logic as much as impulse. Thus there are those rare moments too, when colliding glances actually do pierce one another, and a gateway to a shared story emerges.

To attract the eyes is yet easy, I have learned.

But to enter the encounter, and to be truly seen, is the adventure that I seek.
The broad theme of this thesis, which includes urban narrative, is urban experience. Since it is a widely used term, and can be understood in many ways, I have chosen to approach it from the narrative point of view. This makes the walking, observing citizen — the flâneur — a most interesting character. In the following paragraphs I open the concept of the flâneur through its historical context, originating from poetry and prose, and then go on to examine its different portrayals in urban studies and otherwise. I also introduce the philosophy and attitudes associated with the flâneur, which is vital in understanding the motivation and need to explore the city, and to engage in narrative discourse about it. I end the chapter with discussion regarding the potential role that citizens worldwide could play in planning and designing the shared urban environment.

**The Man Of The Crowd**

The word *flâneur* is French, and its English translation could be something like stroller, saunterer, lounger, or urban wanderer, depending on chosen emphasis. Basically it refers to a person (*le flâneur* is male, *la flâneuse* is female), who roves the city streets without any specific destination to arrive to, or agenda to accomplish. Because of this, the pace of walking is rather slow, enabling concentrated observation of the surrounding urban environment, people and events. This act of strolling and observing is called flânerie.
The flâneur is by definition a keen observer of the urban environment, but he does not only observe intellectually; he also feels the atmosphere through his senses, calling back memories while simultaneously creating new ones. For this reason the flâneur provides a fascinating ‘role model’ for the study of personal urban experience. In addition, an essential element in flânerie is the act of interpreting one’s own perceptions, which often manifests into stories, words and images, which can then be shared with others. I therefore refer to the flâneur not only as an actor, but also as an urban narrator.

The history of the flâneur as a distinct urban figure dates back to 19th century France, namely Paris. It was particularly the famous poet Charles Baudelaire, who was so fascinated by the character that he analyzed it in great detail, and referred to it also in his poems. Baudelaire was, however, much inspired to this by the work of the iconic American writer and poet, Edgar Allan Poe, as is evident in the question he asks his readers in one of his texts: “Do you remember a picture (for indeed it is a picture!) written by the most powerful pen of this age and entitled *The Man of the Crowd*?” (Baudelaire 2010). The said short story, written by Poe in 1840, could very well be considered to be the first narrative depiction of the flâneur.

And here, long, amid the momently increasing confusion, did I persist in my pursuit of the stranger. But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn
walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. “The old man,” I said at length, “is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds.

_The Man of the Crowd_, a short story by Edgar Allan Poe (1840)
(Poe 2000, 129)

In the story, the narrator observes the crowds passing by on a bustling street in London, when the appearance of one man catches his attention, so much so that he is compelled to follow him around the city. Here it is the narrator who is actually making all the notions and interpretations of the urban environment, yet the object of his interest is the character, who is called “the man of the crowd.” This has resulted in some confusion as to who the flâneur in the story actually is. For Baudelaire, it is the narrator: “Baudelaire clearly associates the flâneur with the act of seeing not with the person seen” (Rignall 2004, 21). And yet, he has also seen it fit to describe the flâneur as ‘a man of the crowd’ in his text _The Painter of Modern Life:_

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird’s, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world, such are some of the minor pleasures of those independent, intense and impartial spirits, who do not lend themselves easily to linguistic definitions. The observer is a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes. The lover of life makes the whole world into his family ——
Thus the lover of universal life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity. He, the lover of life, may also be compared to a mirror as vast as this crowd: to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life. It is an ego athirst for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting.

(Baudelaire 2010)

One alternative way to read *The Man of the Crowd*, and my personal favourite, is to consider the narrator and the stranger as two different sides of the same man, the flâneur. The narrator sees something extremely fascinating, but at the same time horrifying, in the man who “refuses to be alone.” The noticing of this character triggers in him the urge to leave the coffee-house, where he had been sitting alone, watching the crowd from a distance, to step outside, into the crowd, and wander through the night in an aimless pursuit.

The story does provide multiple possibilities for interpretation, and it certainly inspired Baudelaire to examine the figure of the flâneur more closely. Another great mind, who has had a major influence on our understanding and interpretation of the flâneur, is the German scholar and author Walter Benjamin. He wrote many essays on Baudelaire during the years 1938–1940, in which he analyzes the idea of the flâneur further.

The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him
the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. —

Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the flâneur abandons himself in the crowd. ‘The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes. For him alone, all is open; if certain places seem closed to him, it is because in his view they are not worth inspecting.’

(Blum 1983: 37, 55)

Alla Ivanchikova, Assistant Professor of World Literature at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, goes even further, and describes the flâneur’s dual role as both actor and narrator through spirituality: “The flaneur’s love for the city is in his turn also ‘spiritualized’ and ‘pure’ — his strolling is an aimless game that renounces the busy pace of purpose-oriented action. The flaneur is a lover of the city who spiritualizes its filth and dirt, its fleeting impressions and shocks into poetry and thought” (Ivanchikova 2007, 72).

Referring to the writings of both Baudelaire and Benjamin, Ivanchikova also makes her interpretations of one of the most crucial characteristics of the flâneur: the paradox of empathetic presence and reserved detachment. “— the flaneur’s understanding of his own position, his relation to his own identity, entails a specific relation between self and others — his sovereign ‘I’ and the rest, the crowd. Despite the joy of immersion into the crowd, he keeps his distance and establishes himself as a disinterested observer of
Fig. 4.1 Parisian dandy in the 19th century.
Illustration in Petit Courrier des Dames (1830).
others and objects. — the flaneur of modernism is perceptive, and can understand others primarily because he understands himself” (ibid.).

These aspects of empathy and understanding are almost similar to the central ideas in phenomenology. It could be argued that the flâneur is a kind of phenomenological observer, who studies the city through his own experience, and by relating to the experiences of others. This is one reason why the flâneur has become an ever more popular example in urban research. It provides a role for in-depth study of urban experience and narrative, both on a personal level and on the level of the masses. Across time, this role has been portrayed in various ways, resulting in a mosaic of ‘faces’ depicting the flâneur.

A Portrait Gallery

Baudelaire himself strongly associates the flâneur with the dandy: a gallant, middle-class gentleman with plenty of money and time on his hands to leisurely stroll down the city streets (Fig. 4.1). Highly intellectual, and possessing a deep appreciation for all things beautiful, the dandy does portray such features that would suit the flâneur. One thing that Baudelaire underlines, is the nature of distancing oneself from others: “— the word ‘dandy’ implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of all the moral mechanisms of this world; but, from another aspect, the dandy aspires to cold detachment — The dandy is blasé, or affects
to be, as a matter of policy and class attitude” (Baudelaire 2010).

The image of the dandy that Baudelaire presents is a combination of romantic ideals, pursuit of originality, and aristocratic self-esteem. Many people might define dandy as a fashionable but arrogant man, who enjoys to be seen and admired by others. According to Baudelaire, this is a rather superficial interpretation: “— the dandy does not aspire to wealth as an object in itself; an open bank credit could suit him just as well; he leaves that squalid passion to vulgar mortals. Contrary to what a lot of thoughtless people seem to believe, dandyism is not even an excessive delight in clothes and material elegance. For the perfect dandy, these things are no more than the symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind” (Baudelaire 2010).

The dandy has since Baudelaire’s time developed into various contemporary stereotypes of the metropolitan man: the yuppie, the metrosexual, the hipster, to name but a few examples. The things they all have in common is that they are in a profession that pays well, they invest in their physical appearance by exercising and grooming, and they all aim to create an original lifestyle through which they express something about their own personality. They are most certainly big city dwellers, but whether they have anything to do with flânerie or not, is a question altogether different.

If dandy was the epitome of the urban man in the 19th century Paris, then in today’s Tokyo the equivalent must be the salary man. This Japanese term (sararii-man) has been coined to describe the stereotypical white-collar worker, whom one is unable to miss in any of Japan’s biggest cities. Typically he is a middle-aged man
with black hair, white shirt, black suit, black shoes, and black brief-case, or backpack. They work long hours and commute in trains, crowding them especially in the morning and again late in the evening. Because their work in the office is never ending and quite stressful, they often go for drinks at night with their colleagues to unwind. Thus, the salary man spends a vast majority of his time in the city, and not at home, where his family awaits.

The salary man has many characteristics in common with the flâneur. He is both a man of the crowd, as well as a detached singularity, pursuing his own interests. The power of the salary man is, however, in the masses; together the men of similar attire and behaviour form a unity, a shared image of the hard-working Japanese family man. The flâneur, on the other hand, could never become
a social stereotype. He is far too individual and solemn, and his power lies precisely in the singularity — in the personal experience and the uniqueness of expression.

An interesting thesis entitled *The Flâneur: An Updated Urban Experience* by Gabrielle Sallé-Osselin examines the figure of the flâneur in comparison with today’s active and self-expressing citizens, such as skaters, city hackers, geocachers and graffiti artists (Sallé-Osselin 2012, 61–62). These actors are often defined by their individuality and creative output, much like the flâneur. The fundamental difference, however, between these characters and the flâneur is the aspect of participation. Skaters and city hackers utilize the physical environment in their activities, geocachers leave traces for others to discover, and graffiti artists use the city as
The black-and-white salary man.
The post-war soldier of the corporate world.

The silent, perpetually tired,
but relentlessly persevering man
in the modern uniform
occupies trains, streets and fast food joints.
His preoccupied mind gives the absent appearance
to his otherwise organized form.

But don’t let the form fool you.
Inside the designed shell is a sentimental, distracted mind
with hopes and dreams;
visions of the future that keep his resolve
even in the face of another late night meeting,
even in the face of not seeing his loved ones again before bedtime.

These visions are all but futile —
they are the fuel that keeps the country’s men and women running.
It is fundamentally human to save a moment in the now
to gain interest for the prospects of the next generation.

It is a chosen ethic, not a sacrifice.

The salary man knows,
and commits himself to the race.
an art platform for self-expression and narrative content.

The flâneur, as discussed previously, is a lone, detached urban wanderer, and does not intend to leave a visible imprint of himself on the city, but rather observes the environment, makes interpretations and contemplates on them. The narrative output of the flâneur usually takes place afterwards, and not publicly on the spot. The purpose of this distinction is simply to emphasize the importance of quiet observation and interpretation of the urban experience itself that is in the heart of the concept of flânerie, more so than any other form of interaction with the city and its citizens. The examples given by Sallé-Osselin of citizens actively engaging with the environment are still relevant, since they greatly contribute to the narrative of the city. Perhaps they are not so much derivatives of the flâneur, but actors and narrators on the urban stage nevertheless.

The Role Of The Citizen

Whether a dandy, a salary man or a flâneur, each citizen has a role to play in the great urban theatre. Some have a more active role, such as in urban planning or politics, and others take a more observing role as a narrator, such as in research or journalism. The key notion is still the same: each contribution counts in the big picture. I would personally like to challenge the mindset of many, where the individual is thought to have very little power, if any, to actually change things. This is a very discouraging idea, and even
destructive, since it can make a citizen more cynical and indifferent towards action.

Throughout history we have seen many individuals kick off movements towards social and political change in the urban domain. Take for example Henry David Thoreau, George Orwell, Rosa Parks, Jane Jacobs, Jan Gehl, Harvey Milk, Erin Brockovich, or Liu Xiaobo, who has even been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Not everyone has to strive to be like Jane Jacobs or Jan Gehl to improve the future of their city, but already this short list of names confirms the fact that individuals do possess power, there are passionate drivers of change amongst us, and progress does happen when these individuals decide to act.

In the previous chapter I have discussed at length the importance of citizen participation and engagement in political decision-making, including that of urban planning. As I have understood from various arguments made by scholars, architects and urban developers, real comments and feedback from citizens concerning plans and designs for their city would be truly appreciated. All urban projects should of course include preliminary research, where the needs and wants of the stakeholder citizens would be surveyed. Unfortunately, the reality is that the budgets allocated seldom can afford a proper study, and therefore plans are carried out with limited knowledge. Planners and designers have no desire to build things that are of little or no use, or meet the needs of the users poorly. Because of the scarcity of financial resources, and in some cases lack of political will, planners must rely on proactive citizens to voice out for themselves, how they would prefer their neighbourhood to be developed.
There are many ways one can engage in urban decision-making processes. For example, there are public hearings, seminars, events and lectures concerning future designs for the city, there are surveys and discussion forums online to take part in, and even by writing to a local newspaper or other media can help raise awareness of a specific issue. If these methods seem too demanding or tedious, there is always the immediate neighbourhood and community where citizens can exchange thoughts and ideas in a more relaxed, informal manner. Just talking to fellow dwellers around the block can develop into a shared vision or a hands-on local project.

Even still, if one feels that such community activities take too much time and effort, simple everyday decisions made by individual citizens are something that also affect the city. The commodities we choose to buy, the food we eat, the ways of transportation we use, the energy sources of electricity and heating in our households, the management of our waste, the amount of water we consume — and the list goes on and on. A responsible citizen considers the implications of various everyday choices, and does not undermine their potential impact on the grand scheme. There hardly is any excuse not to contribute to the improvement of shared living space, when opportunities to do so are frequent and easy enough for anyone to seize at any time.

There are of course times when all of us feel the need for a little motivation and encouragement to make lifestyle changes. Even if we understand, intellectually, a situation that requires our attention, we might still think that it is not relevant enough in our own, personal lives. We lack a certain sense of relationship; we know it
is important, but we do not feel it is important to us. This is where flânerie can become a useful approach. There are many aspects in flânerie that individuals can utilize to their advantage, when trying to understand their personal relationship with the general urban environment, and, of course, with other citizens.

The first step, although it may seem counter-intuitive at first, would be to establish a reasonable distance. In the previous paragraphs it has been explained that, the flâneur can observe the city productively because he takes a step back from the immediate self, meaning that, he does not have an agenda to accomplish with his actions — he simply observes. To proceed with an attitude of curiosity, without judgement, can take the citizen to places not yet visited, to see different sides of the city. Exploring the urban environment outside of one’s own comfort zone is essential in forming a more versatile, and probably more accurate, image of the city.

Another aspect is to perceive other individual citizens as a crowd, or a very broad community. What are the things that unite them, and what are the things that divide them? What do they do that works, and what do they do that does not seem to work? When observing others the key is empathy, as previously noted in the writings of Benjamin and Ivanchikova. In simple terms, empathy is the ability to put oneself in another person’s shoes. This metaphor quite fits the walking observer. And so it is with empathy that a curious and nonjudgmental attitude is the way to a better understanding of another person’s worldview.

We often tend to observe our environment from our highly personal point of view, which is tinted with a heavy overlay of values and motives, needs and wants. Looking at the world with
this default mode is as if one was walking around wearing mental sunglasses. Flânerie provides a way to distance oneself from the surroundings, and also from the ramblings of the conscious mind, by immersing in the present moment, the here and now. It is an act most empathetic towards fellow urban dwellers as well. By taking up the role of the flâneur, any citizen will surely experience the city in an entirely new light. The result is still their own, personal experience, and yet, not quite the same. For when an actor changes from one role to another, so, too, does the narrative change — especially the narrative that people repeat to themselves.
I have no recollection of the first encounter with the city.

Like a silent intruder
I entered the urban space through darkness.
Blinded by the flickering dance of neon and shadow,
I could not tell my way.

I must have awed at the skyscrapers,
those majestic guardians of territory,
twinkling against the black void above.
Yet I have no memory of this.

Even come the morning and the sun,
when the city was first revealed to me naked and bare,
I still cannot say what caught my mind’s eye.

Perhaps the sheer size of the metropolis
and the sudden surge of stimuli truly did blind me.
Or perhaps I was not mentally prepared for the impact,
and simply hovered on the edge of perception.
After some time, however,
I awoke to a realization that changed everything.

Having wandered the streets,
in and out of crowds,
I had gained consciousness of the presence of the city.

What is more, I had, though without intent,
irreversibly included myself within its sphere.
Now, there was no longer Tokyo without me,
and no me without Tokyo.

Suddenly it seemed that,
so it had indeed always been,
and will always be.

No beginning is necessary to define,
and no ending is possible to imagine.

We have merged, the city and I.
5
In the traditional three-act story structure, the purpose of the first act is to establish the setup. It is where the background and the setting of the story are presented, main characters are introduced, and the key event that kicks the plot into motion occurs. In many cases that event includes, or is in itself, an important encounter between two or more characters. In this narrative, the story begins when the flâneur sets off into the city, and, as such, has encounters with the urban environment and other citizens. These experiences change the flâneur’s perceptions and feelings of the city, which can lead to quite unsettling consequences.
Fig. 5.1 A man of the screen in New York. Photograph by Dennis Stock (1954).
Fig. 5.2 A man of the street in New York. Photograph by author (2014).
Now that the stage (the city) and the main actor (the flâneur) have been introduced in the previous chapters, it is time to begin the play of the urban narrative. In this first act, the flâneur goes for a long, meandering stroll in the city. As he walks, he observes the environment with a keen eye, making various sensory perceptions of the surroundings and crowds of people. These perceptions form into memories and impressions, but those will be the topic of closer study in the second act. In this chapter I examine the different dimensions in which we perceive and experience our environment: horizontality, verticality, perspective, temporality, and luminosity. Each of these dimensions has its own unique features that affect the way our mind interprets any given sensory data. But first, before commencing the spatial and temporal exploration of the city, a few words on the act of walking itself are in order.

In Praise Of Walking

Walking is not only a healthy form of everyday exercise, but also the most natural way of moving from one location to another. When distances are reasonable, we hardly give walking any thought — we simply move our feet and go. This automation actually makes it possible to free our mind for other things, such as conscious observation of the environment, contemplation of events (past, present, or future), or even other activities altogether, like reading a map or texting a message. This would not be possible, or at least it would be much more risky, while riding a bike or driving a car.
Whatever the pace of walking, there is always a certain rhythm to it. In a large crowd people tend to pace themselves according to others, for the obvious, sensible reason of avoiding unnecessary friction. In the busy streets of big cities it is also courteous to keep a fast and steady pace, so that those in a hurry need not to frequently stop and circle around other people. However, if surrounded by natural environment, with trees, grass and water, most of us like to slow down, relax, and simply enjoy the beautiful landscape. The way we walk is indeed influenced by the circumstances, the surroundings, and the behaviour of other people around us.

Several writers, artists and other professionals, whose work involves a lot of creative thinking, have remarked that walking helps them to process and clarify their thoughts, resulting in new, unexpected ideas. The following quotes from famous authors and philosophers illustrate quite brilliantly the meaningfulness of walking in their lives and work. Personally I have found these words very inspiring, and especially appropriate from the flâneur’s point of view as well.

Above all, do not lose your desire to walk: every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness; I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it.

A letter by Søren Kierkegaard to his niece Henriette (1847)  
(Kierkegaard 1989, 69)

My vicinity affords many good walks, and though I have walked almost every day for so many years, and sometimes for several days together, I have not yet exhausted them. An absolutely new prospect
is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon. Two or three hours’ walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect ever to see.

Walking, an essay by Henry David Thoreau (1861)
(Thoreau 2007, 13)

As the foxhunter hunts in order to preserve the breed of foxes, and the golfer plays in order that open spaces may be preserved from the builders, so when the desire comes upon us to go street rambling the pencil does for a pretext, and getting up we say: “Really I must buy a pencil,” as if under cover of this excuse we could indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter — rambling the streets of London.

Street Haunting: A London Adventure, an essay by Virginia Woolf (1930)
(Woolf 2015)

I could conceive of no simpler or surer way of carrying out my plan than by keeping a faithful record of my solitary walks and the reveries that fill them when I let my mind wander quite freely and my ideas follow their own course unhindered and untroubled. These hours of solitude and meditation are the only time of the day when I am completely myself, without distraction or hindrance, and when I can truly say that I am what nature intended me to be.

Reveries of the Solitary Walker, a collection of essays by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782)
(Rousseau 1992, 12)

One of the renowned experts in the topic of walking in the urban space is the Danish architect Jan Gehl. In his book Life Between Buildings he makes a key observation of a particular incen-
tive to walk in the city: the purpose of presence. “Walking is first and foremost a type of transportation, a way to get around, but it also provides an informal and uncomplicated possibility for being present in the public environment. — The act of walking is often a necessary act but can also merely be an excuse for being present — ‘I will just walk by’” (Gehl 2011, 133).

The aspect of presence is fundamental to flânerie. Conscious observation and intellectual processing of perceptions is not possible, if one is not concentrated and fully present in the moment — in the here and now. The other side of presence, the purpose of being seen by others, is not so much an objective for the flâneur, as he prefers to go incognito, to disappear into the crowd. He is more present in the mind than in the body, but his physical presence has the important task of translating the urban reality into images, thoughts and feelings through the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. With the ability to utilize all of his senses, the flâneur can achieve a holistic experience of the city in all possible dimensions.

Experiencing The City In Space And Time

If the city is always a spectacle for itself, viewed from high on a terrace, a tower, a hilltop, a vantage point (a high point that is the elsewhere where the urban reveals itself), it is not because the spectator perceives a picture that is outside reality, but because her glance is consolidating. It is the very form of the urban, revealed. Everything that occurs within the urban reality does so as if everything that con-
When the flâneur wanders the city streets, observing and contemplating, his experience is structured by the same spatial and temporal dimensions in which the city is perceived. He moves along horizontal levels, occasionally descending or ascending to different vertical points, and consequently changing the perspective from which he looks at the surrounding environment. Not only so, but his mind keeps a record of those perceptions, creating a collage of impressions and memories, which constitute an overall experience of the city.

To understand our perceptions of the city, we should be aware of the basic rules of perception. How is it that we observe the environment around us? This is by no means advanced science; the matter in question here has to do with the physical and sensory limitations of human beings, as well as with our intellectual capacity to conceptualize phenomena in logical terms and representations.

In *The Urban Revolution*, which is widely considered a foundational critique and investigation of the urban society, Henri Lefebvre examines the city through various conceptual levels and dimensions. He discusses, for instance, global, mixed and private levels, and their socio-economic and political implications (Lefebvre 2003). For the purpose of this thesis, a rather simplified ap-
approach to the basic dimensions in which people observe their environment is sufficient, and thus for a more detailed study I would recommend turning to other works, such as the one by Lefebvre.

The most common practice in examining our physical environment is to identify three dimensions: width, height, and depth. Though in nature a very different type of dimension, we also talk about a fourth one: time. We cannot actually perceive time, instead what we perceive and interpret through the concept of time, is movement. As we wait in the red lights, we can see cars passing by, people walking the streets, screens displaying advertisements, and so on. This we interpret as the passing of time, since things constantly move and change in our environment. I also take the opportunity to introduce a controversial fifth dimension: light. Light is mostly perceived temporally, as a natural occurrence in different times of the day. However, I make some arguments as to why in the urban environment light has such a key role that it should be noted, if not as a separate dimension, at least as a specific feature that significantly affects our perception of the city.

The purpose of this section is to conceptualize the city through these five dimensions: width, height, depth, time, and light. Or, as I call them: horizontality, verticality, perspective, temporality, and luminosity. The conceptualizations presented here form the basis for examining the different ways in which citizens perceive the city, and illustrate how the characteristics of these dimensions manifest, both in the living environment and in the social narrative and discourse between people.
Horizontality

In our broad sweep, the city looks like a single gigantic creature — or more like a single collective entity created by many intertwining organisms. Countless arteries stretch to the ends of it elusive body, circulation a continuous supply of fresh blood cells, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new consumables and collecting the old, sending out new contradictions and collecting the old. To the rhythm of its pulsing, all parts of the body flicker and flare up and squirm. Midnight is approaching, and while the peak of activity has passed, the basal metabolism that maintains life continues undiminished, producing the basso continuo of the city’s moan, a monotonous sound that neither rises nor falls but is pregnant with foreboding.

(Murakami 2008, 3–4)

In the beginning of the novel *After Dark*, author Haruki Murakami describes the appearance of the city of Tokyo as a large, horizontal urban plane. He perceives it as a kind of flat, organic fabric, with networks of systems producing and delivering the stuff of the city. A simple tool with similar representation of the city is familiar to all citizens: the map. The basic function of an urban map is to provide a view of the city’s interconnected layout, dividing it into areas, or zones, with specific information that serves the user. The most common usage of maps concerns wayfinding: how to get from one point in the city to another. Maps are also used to identify features of the city for comparison, indicating data such as local population densities, characteristic landmarks, or the rela-
Fig. 5.3 Glowing arteries of Tokyo.

Photograph by author (2005).
tion of built structures to green areas.

The horizontal dimension is one of geographical and man-made systems, in parallel with the surface of the land. Networks of transportation or energy supply, topographical features, or information that is presented in terms of locality, such as demographic distributions within a city, are examples of such systems. Horizontal examination gives us the opportunity to create various levels, or layers, of information about the city, and other dimensions enable us to explore their vertical relations, grand schemes or specific details by changing perspective, and to compare changes in different periods of time, as well as in different conditions of lighting.

In urban planning, horizontality provides a general overview of the city. Master plans are projected on a ‘flat city,’ with focus on the big picture, sometimes at the expense of livability in human scale. Famous examples of grandiose master planning include Baron Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, which began in the mid-1800s, resulting in the long, wide streets and boulevards convenient for controlling traffic and supporting the operations of the police and army. Now those boulevards have been occupied by cars, and indeed the automobile industry has greatly influenced urban planning in the 20th century. In New York in the 1960s, Jane Jacobs successfully protested this type of top-down dominance over the city, contributing to the coming age of community and neighbourhood engagement and participatory planning. Her famous exhortation to keep “eyes on the street,” from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), is a powerful statement directed at urban planners, developers, and big political players housing the city’s ivory towers.
Verticality

The megacities of the world, such as Tokyo, Hong Kong and New York, reach high into the skies with their many skyscrapers and towers. These buildings are often well-known landmarks, and act as ‘calling cards’ for promotion of city. However, the vertical dimension is not limited to physical structures. There is a clear verticality, or hierarchy, in the social cultures that manifest in the urban realm. On the top are the most powerful economic players — the same ones who have made the building of those high-rise structures possible. Far below them is the ‘common ground,’ or the podium, where most urban cultures meet and create the public arena. Even below that level is the underground, both in its literal and figurative meaning.

Lefebvre makes an interesting notion of verticality in *The Urban Revolution*: “Now, there is also an elsewhere, the non-place that has no place and seeks a place of its own. Verticality, a height erected anywhere on a horizontal plane, can become the dimension of elsewhereness, a place characterized by the presence-absence: of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional half-real, of sublime thought. Similarly, subterranean depth is a reversed verticality” (Lefebvre 2003, 38). There may even be a connection between Lefebvre’s idea of elsewhereness and the phenomenon perceived by citizens as ‘living in a bubble,’ being estranged from other cultural realities or conditions. This is often associated with politicians and people of wealth and power, who are unable to relate to the daily life of an average urban dweller.
The owner of the urban airspace is the owner of the city.

Land is what is sold and bought; it is what is regulated, its ownerships distributed, plans are designed, buildings and roads built upon it. Yet everything in the city rises vertically at the same time as it spreads horizontally.

Who regulates the airspace and its dominance in the city? Where are the limits, the borders, of the vertical city?

The ones with power to build the highest of domains own exclusive rights to the view over the city. Private ownership of the view of the public suggests that the city itself can be owned. The beholder examines, follows, analyzes, and even controls the city in ways the people under his eye cannot. The higher the beholder stands, the greater the gap in shared ownership.

Those in power can choose to expand the vertical city with little regard to the street. And those who can afford to conquer the airspace, automatically conquer the streets as well. They create a new city skyline, which can be, and must be, observed even from the lowest of standing points. That is the essence of verticality — to stand out from the mass.
The pedestrians have no power over the vertical, they simply succumb to it. They may not have access to the breathtaking view it offers on the top, but they are forced to include the scrapers in their everyday cityscape. They may even be bound to live in their shade.

Despite the contrast between horizontal and vertical, the builders of today’s ivory towers argue that they are building new landmarks for a shared purpose. A monstrous monument stands tall and mighty, a testament to the city’s grandeur. And it is there for the people, for the shared identity as an object of collective pride?

Can this kind of identity truly be forced upon — like a beam of light from the lighthouse, revealing the colours of the city to its citizens who are stumbling in the dark?

The masters of airspace must have forgotten that it is indeed their high walls that cast the long shadows over their beloved city. Will they be able to justify the use of the vertical, and more importantly, will they share access to it?

Or will the horizontal effect overpower the vertical, drawing permanent shadows on the people’s path?
Fig. 5.4 Vertigo at Guggenheim New York. Photograph by author (2014).
As it can be seen, the city consists of layers of levels, which possess various socio-cultural and economic functions. In the chapter The City As The Stage I referred to the 3-nested-dependencies model of sustainability: the environmental, the social, and the economical. In the city we can see these layers in the urban structural form. The base is the surface of the earth (or the subterranean), which defines the conditions for building and developing the manmade environment. Above the ground, humans live and interact in cultures, where the economic domain quite literally rises on top of the rest. This is a rather intuitive way of looking at the vertical manifestation of the city, growing from the ground up.

In the modern world the direction of management is often the exact opposite, as I also noted on the spheres of sustainability turning inside out. Though physically the city emerges on the ground level first, the management and decision-making usually takes place on top, and plans and designs are projected top-down (such as in the examples of Haussmann and Moses). The economy is the main driver, since it is the necessary system for generating resources in any urban project, in one way or another. But there are other players in the hierarchy as well, including politics, influential institutions, and the rule of law. Complicated bureaucracy is the result of excessive embracement of top-down governance in favour of control and order, which can be experienced in various organizations from education to business. Without doubt, citizens are socially oriented to think in hierarchical terms even through the use of language. Are we not encouraged to pursue ‘higher education,’ or climb the ‘corporate ladder?’

There is something deeply psychological in the human de-
sire to build high, vertical structures. It is a human ambition, and probably has been since the beginning of time, to reach for the skies, and even all the way to outer space. Some visionary architects and planners have created utopian models for entire sky cities. In 1925, Le Corbusier presented his infamous *Plan Voisin*, in which he suggested a large area of central Paris to be flattened in order to make space for modern, sixty-story buildings, a new housing solution for the fast-growing city. This plan was not executed, but it still inspired many others to follow a similar line of thought. In the 1960s, an influential architectural movement called Metabolism gained ground in Japan, especially in Tokyo. A group of renowned Japanese architects, such as Kenzo Tange and Kiyonori Kikutake, created massive design plans for Tokyo, one of the famous ones being *A Plan for Tokyo 1960*. The plan was to build a huge floating marine city on the Tokyo Bay, to provide an alternative solution to the housing needs of the expanding capital. The designs were never realized as such, though several manmade islands with high-rise buildings have been constructed on the bay since the presentation of the original plan.

In terms of the physical urban structure, vertical building makes sense economically in areas where the price of land is high. But in recent years, architects and planners have created solutions where the usual glass and steel towers have been modified in favour of a more ‘down to earth’ approach. Green roofs, vertical gardens and increased use of natural, sustainable materials connect the different environmental layers vertically, making a kind of gradient effect in the vertical urban fabric. Relating to the sustainability agenda, social structures have also started to shift from
top-down hierarchies to flat organizations and grassroots movements. The interdependent connections in horizontal and vertical dimensions in the city are incredibly complex, but we can try to make better sense of them by changing our points of view, or in other words, perspectives.

**Perspective**

The giant digital screens fastened to the sides of buildings fall silent as midnight approaches, but loudspeakers on storefronts keep pumping out exaggerated hip-hop bass lines. A large game center crammed with young people; wild electronic sounds; a group of college students spilling out from a bar; teenage girls with brilliant bleached hair, healthy legs thrusting out from micromini skirts; dark-suited men racing across diagonal crosswalks for the last trains to the suburbs. Even at this hour, the karaoke club pitchmen keep shouting for customers.

(Murakami 2008, 4)

The novel *After Dark* begins with the description of Tokyo “through the eyes of a high-flying night bird” (Murakami 2008, 3). The scene where the city takes a resemblance of a giant entity of intertwining organisms is only possible to perceive through such a perspective, where the viewer is high above the city, looking down. Whether on top of a skyscraper or in a helicopter, a citizen can access such a viewpoint, though for most of us it is a rather rare treat. Most of the time citizens stay on the ground, on the street, where the city appears quite different; much more intense,
vivid and detailed, such as in the excerpt above.

The street level is traditionally perceived as common ground. It is the level on which citizens perform most of their daily activities, and where most urban cultures mix together. The street is also the platform for two distinctly different perspectives: one of the car driver, and another of the pedestrian. Cars and other vehicles with wheels take up much more space than people, and cities have been planned for years to serve the automobile. Particularly since the 1960’s, however, urban planning has shifted to stress planning and design in human scale. More attention has been paid to the development of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, public areas with opportunities for social interaction, and the aesthetics of façades facing the streets.

One of the most dedicated spokespeople for human scale planning is Jan Gehl. Life Between Buildings has been a foundational contribution to pedestrian-oriented urban planning, much in the tradition of Jane Jacobs. The 1960s and 1970s marked a clear paradigm shift in the thinking of urban space and planning, moving away from the top-down and rough, more into the direction of bottom-up and soft planning. In Japan this thought was somewhat written in the law with the City Planning Act of 1968, the aim of which was to empower local governments and municipalities to make more independent decisions regarding their urban space. This act has also made the practice of machizukuri (town making) popular in neighbourhoods and communities around the nation.

Though the city is first and foremost a space for human cultures and interaction, there are still multiple other scales of size to be recognized: those of houses, cars, trains, and skyscrapers, not
Fig. 5.5 View right below the Tokyo Sky Tree. Photograph by author (2012).

forgetting those even smaller than us. When I was walking around a quiet neighbourhood in Tokyo with my friend Kazuaki Kumagai, I explained to him some of the ideas concerning urban scale, and pointed at a few structures as examples of specific scales. A rather unpleasant fence running along the side of the road was an unfortunate manifestation of design in terms of the car. A nice little park with swings and a sandbox was clearly in human scale, and more specifically in the scale fit for little children. As buildings in Japan tend to have very narrow gaps between them, instead of being attached wall to wall, I gestured at one of them and made a joke to my friend that it was an example of design in *neko scale* — neko being the Japanese word for cat. Since cats are extremely popular pets in Japan, and street cats also wander in the vicinity of
private houses, people often place water bottles around their garden as ‘walls’ to prevent cats from ruining their flowers and plants; a simple, yet quite creative example of thinking in neko scale.

Naturally, all types of scales can be imagined within the city, without them being in any way calculated ones. It is an interesting topic of discussion, however, as Kazuaki and I discovered. He started wondering about kokoro no scale, meaning the ‘scale of the heart.’ His idea was that, spaces where casual and spontaneous human interaction is encouraged by the surrounding environment serve in creating positive neighbourhood and community spirit, and thus improve the overall emotional wellbeing of the citizens. This is a beautiful thought, which I believe is in some manner embedded in the principles of human scale planning and design.

*Temporality*

Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. At times even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices’ accent, and also the features of the faces; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place. It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old post cards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one.

*Invisible Cities*, a novel by Italo Calvino (1972)
(Calvino 2013, 30–31)
The history, or histories, of cities are of some interest to their citizens, since the present always raises questions about what was before, and why something is the way it is, how the city has come to be what it is today. Citizens can perceive the passing of time in the urban form, styles of design, and in the evidence of decay. Growth and infrastructure, architectural trends and signs of deterioration all tell stories about various phases of the city. For the flâneur, one of the fascinating things about the urban environment is identifying different temporal layers, and investigating or speculating on the events that may or may not have taken place in those spaces. Books and guides with maps have been written specifically for the purpose of enjoying cultural or historical walks in the city, to visit, study and compare locations by their temporal identity. In Japan such walking guides seem to be quite popular, and recent publications include titles such as *Chizu to tanoshimu Tokyo rekishi sanpo* (2012) (“Enjoying historical strolls in Tokyo with maps,” transl. by author) by Masahiro Takeuchi, and *Tokyo konjaku aruku chizu-cho* (2010) (“Handbook of walking maps in past and present Tokyo,” transl. by author) by Etsuo Iguchi and Makoto Ikuta.

In his novel *Invisible Cities*, author Italo Calvino makes insightful observations, albeit fictional, on urban phenomena, life and culture, and the very nature of the city. The fragment of the novel quoted above concerns Maurilia, an imaginary city created by the narrator of the story. He differentiates the past of the city as a series of wholly different cities altogether, not comprising of one history of the same city that rises on the same location and under the same name in the present. Not only that, but the history
as it was, and people’s impressions of history are seen as separate matters as well. How we perceive the past of a given city creates in our minds an image of a city that is in fact independent in form. It is a new entity, reflecting our current state of affairs and flavour of nostalgia. It is partly personal, but connects to the broader, social consciousness. Shared histories and events are projected onto the image of a past, giving it an essence that was not there at the time, but which we now insist can be identified. In one post card, we claim, is captured a visual piece of the youth of our city.

Perhaps we desire to see our city age and mature with us, to give us the illusion of safety in continuum; that of all things changing and fleeting by, at least the city, in some form, is constant, and lasting. And yet, it is precisely the city itself that can only be recog-
nized in transience. No instant in the city repeats itself, nor does it have a memory of its own. It is the collection of impressions that citizens hold in their mind that manifests into a collective sense of the city’s past, present, and future. However, these impressions affect our actions and pursuits, which again shape the course of our urban life, resulting yet again in new views of the city. Thus the city, both in the physical reality and in our imagination, remains forever elusive, dodging the very concept of constancy. Narrative can therefore be seen as a way of bringing order and coherence to the random and separate, of building bridges between people and events.

The dimension of time is challenging to understand in terms of how it affects our perception of the urban environment, since it is not a clear, physical dimension, in which we could easily move along the axes of width, height and depth. To this day, we do not have means to travel in time, to visit the past or the future. We do, however, have memories and recollections of the past, and we can learn about it by studying various histories. We have some means to scientifically estimate future events, for example in the field of meteorology, but in general such means are seriously limited.

Temporality is the elusive, most abstract dimension, which we perceive through movement in space, and the changes in the physical reality as a result. In the typical western concept, time is often presented as linear: events can be identified on a continuous straight line in a chronological order. This is supported by the aforementioned realization that we can neither go back to the past, nor skip time and teleport into some distant point in the future. In this sense, we are always on a track — coming from one place and
moving towards someplace else.

However, in some other cultures time is perceived as circular, or cyclical. This on the other hand is supported by the idea of the ‘circle of life;’ the seasons that always follow one another, and the natural continuum of birth, life and death. Another argument for cyclicity can be found in the shapes of planets and orbits. Since our whole planetary system is based on revolving movement, would it not make perfect sense to apply that analogy to the concept of time itself?

So, in a manner of speaking, we can understand time at least in these two ways. On one hand, we are always stuck in the present moment, and cannot return to the past or travel into the future. On the other hand, there is a certain structure, logic and order in which events tend to take place, and even repeat themselves to some extent; spring does not follow summer, until after autumn and winter, for example. Therefore, we could integrate these two ways of looking at time into a visual presentation of the spiral. The spiral is circular, but each of its points is always unique, occurring at a given location only once, no matter how many times one circles around the centre.

Also, the spiral becomes larger as it evolves. With each round it gravitates to the path of the previous, towards the centre, while keeping a self-regulated distance, which increases the further the spiral develops. In his famous essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, written in 1903, the early sociologist Georg Simmel describes the growth of economic, personal and intellectual relations in the city as a geometrical progression, which sounds very much like the spiral: “Every dynamic extension becomes a preparation not only
for a similar extension but rather for a larger one, and from every thread which is spun out of it there continue, growing as out of themselves, an endless number of others” (Simmel 2010, 108). In fact, within one spiral chain of events, internal events also create their own spirals, or ‘spin-offs.’ This particular principle can even be seen in the form of the galaxy, where one enormous spiral entity spreads out into millions and millions of extensions.

Following this metaphor, we can see the city also evolve spirally: it grows around the edges, building upon the existing structures from the centre outwards. Suburban sprawl and the spreading of slum areas, for example, develop in this manner. Cities can also reveal a certain pattern of growth; in times of economic success, the city is built in faster speed and volume than during recession. And these are by their nature very cyclical events, much like seasons, although not as regular. To think of time through this spiral presentation is of course only one way of conceptualizing it, and not by any means unproblematic. To quote Lefebvre, “−− there is a spatial element that must be accounted for — grid or radial-concentric. However, such an arrangement does not become obvious unless we turn our attention to circulation, unless we restrict the urban problematic to the problems of circulation. The invention of new forms (X-shaped, spiral, helical, concave, etc.) is merely a simplistic solution to the urban problematic” (Lefebvre 2003, 116). Although Lefebvre refers to the urban form rather than the concept of time in his text, he does recognize time through the observation of movement: “−− the essential aspect of the urban phenomenon is its centrality, but a centrality that is understood in conjunction with the dialectical movement that creates or de-
The fact that any point can become central is the meaning of urban space-time” (ibid.).

Along this line of thinking, we can also recognize some fundamental differences in western and Japanese urban design. In western tradition, cities have usually been built around a specific landmark, such as a cathedral or a castle, thus stressing the idea of spectacle in the city. The focus is on the magnificent centre of the city, the heart, which is often emphasized by a wide, open area, a plaza or a park (Kitahara 2012). The city then naturally develops around this core, much in a spiral manner. The dynamic around the centre is created by either centrifugal or centripetal movement, which means moving away from, or moving towards the centre, respectively. The latter one can be seen in the shrinking of some cities, or as the increasing densification of populous urban centres.

In contrast, Japanese cities usually have several centres scattered around the whole urban area. Tokyo is an example of such design; although the impressive Imperial Palace marks a clear spectacle point on the map, the bustling urban life takes place elsewhere, in various districts. This type of city form can be called episodic — the city consists of what might be called nodes of spaces with area-specific activity and identity (ibid.). One could speculate that, among the drivers of such design is the acknowledged importance of specific events in the local history, and the rise of demand to create specified areas to meet specified needs. Such design is not always planned, but might actually develop spontaneously, like an organic process. As Lefebvre points out, any point in the urban can become central. The episodic nodes, or spheres, can
thus be seen as internal spirals within the major entity, revolving around themselves more or less independently.

*Luminosity*

Light is not generally considered a dimension itself, but is mostly associated with time; the changes in luminosity in the natural world are affected by the position of the planet in relation to the sun and the moon, and locally by climate conditions. These are therefore temporal phenomena, and something that humans cannot really change by design. In the modern city, however, electricity has enabled people to create innumerable applications of artificial light, which is not dependant on temporality. Cities can be lit 24/7, both outside and indoors, and it is these various differences in the degree and type of luminosity that have shaped our experiences and impressions of the urban environment.

The amount of artificial light correlates with the density of the city. The more people there are, the more lit are the streets and buildings. It is easy to recognize places with bubbling urban life by examining luminosity. For example, satellite images taken at night clearly indicate which areas in the world are urbanized, populous, and lively, despite the time of day (Fig. 5.7). WWF has for some years now been organizing an annual campaign called Earth Hour, in which cities worldwide turn off their lighting for one hour. The lights are not of course switched off completely, but only in some famous landmarks and participating buildings. Still, the sudden change in luminosity, in places where people are most used to see-
ting light, can create a rather eerie effect. It can almost feel like an apocalyptic moment when the Eiffel Tower or the Sydney Opera House is engulfed in darkness. Modern urban dwellers have learned to associate light with life so strongly that a city without light is perceived as a city without people — a ghost town.

Light has many other purposes, too, besides mere illumination. It signals to people which way to go, where to find accommodation, food, entertainment or transportation, and, perhaps most importantly, where it is safe to be. Places with little or no light, especially during the night, are intuitively avoided, because they are perceived potentially dangerous. Places with lots of light, on the other hand, draw people within their sphere, as it is more likely to find crowds in those places, and where there are crowds, there is also more security.

New York has been famously called ‘the city that never sleeps.’ The city is constantly in a state of action: shops and restaurants are open, bars and clubs bustle with music and dance, there are people on the streets, cars and taxis driving by. Whether it is 3 PM or 3 AM, the city is alive and running. When non-New Yorkers think of New York, one of the most common images in their mind is the fully lit Times Square, with all its neon signs and billboards. Artificial light, especially neon light, is a powerful tool for the economy. Advertising and marketing never sleep, either; even when shops are closed, the windows and signs are still well lit, so that whatever the time of day, consumers are kept aware of their presence. But light can be used in a more subtle way, too.

Darkness is usually associated with something ‘shady,’ some fishy business that is better conducted in an environment where
the most curious pairs of eyes cannot see. Many big cities around the world have, or have had, certain red-light districts. Bars, speakeasies and gambling joints often have dim lighting for a reason, even on a sunny day. Popular underground establishments and subcultures enjoy a slightly obscure atmosphere, and their success is based on the absence of light, not the presence of it.

Author Haruki Murakami explores the colourful nightlife of Tokyo in his novel *After Dark*. Luminosity plays an important role in the way he describes the city and its people. Had he chosen to write a novel called ‘After Dawn,’ his portrayal of Tokyo would have been dramatically different. This all goes to show that, whether natural or artificial light, luminosity affects our perception of urban space, and even time. Personally, I am tempted to
call luminosity the fifth dimension of urban reality.

Navigating Through Perceptions

When the flâneur first steps into the city, he encounters an urban milieu filled with novel stimuli that draw his attention; all the colours, lights, sounds, moving objects and people appear and disappear around him in a nervous, irregular pulse. He is constantly bombarded with sensory signals, which in the beginning make the city such a thrilling and exciting place for discovery. This is the phenomenon that invites people to visit new cities and places — the tourist is like an urban explorer who feeds on the experiences the city has to offer, and wants to get as many of them as possible with the limited time he has to spend.

The tourist is not like the flâneur, however. He is more of a badaud, meaning that he is “curious; he is astonished by everything he sees; he believes everything he hears, and he shows his contentment or his surprise by his open, gaping mouth,” as is defined in the Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle (1867) (Great Universal Dictionary of the 19th Century). The typical tourist rushes from one place to another, from one sight to the next, in a tireless effort to ‘gather’ the experiences classified as ‘must-see’ by other tourists and badauds. The tourist therefore has an agenda: to make the visit successful, which is measured by the amount and quality of things experienced. The badaud is happiest when he has his mouth open in awe. But what about the flâneur?
The flâneur is, as witnessed before, a curious and keen observer of the urban environment as well. Because of his detachment, however, he is not as easily shocked or astonished by surrounding events as the tourist or the badaud. This does not mean that the events have no effect on him emotionally or intellectually. The more he sees, the more he experiences, the more he is exposed to random and puzzling phenomena. Impressions of the city start to form in his mind, but they are still a collection of fragments, like a collage of mismatched images that do not seem to make a sensible whole. He strives to understand, what the city is, and why it is the way it is, but the overflowing bank of data makes him increasingly anxious, even desperate. There is so much information that he hardly knows where to begin to make sense of it.

In order to swim across the chaotic sea of perceptions and images, the flâneur not only has to find a way to navigate through the urban currents, but also has to keep himself afloat; if he surrenders to chaos, despair and apathy, all is lost for him. He becomes cynical and indifferent — he becomes blasé.

There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé outlook. It is at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts and from which it seems to us the intensification of metropolitan intellectuality seems to be derived. — stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form. — The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions of things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived, as is the case of mental dullness, but rather that the meaning
and the value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homo-genous, flat and grey colour with no one of them worthy of being preferred to another.

(Simmel 2010, 105)

Walking the same streets over and over again, seeing the same shops, signs, façades and traffic lights for the hundredth time, inevitably ‘numbs’ the senses from perceiving all the familiar information every time. The mind is thus freed to wander away from the physical present to process other issues. In big cities it is not uncommon to see people fiddling with their mobile phones while walking on the street, and yet their feet know when to dodge obstacles, to step down stairs, or to turn at the right corner. This kind of urban absent-mindedness and negligence has even become a subject of parody and ridicule in media, particularly films. In the movie Last Action Hero (1993) the main villain shoots a complete stranger on the street in New York. He then cries out, “Hello? I’ve just shot somebody, I did it on purpose!” There are some people around and cars driving by, but nothing happens. He shouts again, “I said, I’ve just murdered someone and I want to confess!” The only response he gets is an irritated demand from the distance: “Hey shut up down there!”

The blasé attitude is probably not as blatant in real life, even in New York, but urban alienation and indifference is undeniably a phenomenon one encounters more and more frequently in metropolises around the globe. It can serve as a defence mechanism for the individual, yet on larger scale it hardly improves the well-
being and communal spirit of the citizen population. To prevent oneself from becoming too blasé, one must learn to cope with the sudden and random events in the city, the seemingly chaotic and disorderly environment that changes in rapid shifts before our very eyes. This is the struggle in which the flâneur finds himself in the next act.
Sometimes, it seems,
Tokyo is like a traumatized war veteran,
suffering from manic depression in the post-war chaos
of flimsy politics and economic power battle.

In the manic high it rises to the sky, lits the space with neon
and bustles 24/7 in the schizophrenic network jungle of
trains, subways and cars —
both underground and a hundred feet above.

Then, when it’s squirming in the depths of depression,
nothing seems to move, or rather, everything circles around aimlessly,
without purpose or direction.

Salary men slouch in quiet trains in a burnout coma,
some seek momentary joy in cheap izakayas and escorts,
teens escape study and controlling parents to game centres,
numbing their brain from the demands of the world.

Even the girls in Harajuku squat in full costume and make-up,
yet their faces are too heavy and bored to deliver excitement.
Exhausted by constant stimuli and pressure to entertain, even oneself, the friendly smile surrenders to the baggage under their eyes.

Another day past, another one ahead — will the city be recharged, or remain laconic?

Who will get up in the morning with new ideas, who will be slapped in the face with same old, same old? Who will look at the city, and see reflections of themselves in the crowd? Who will lean against a fellow passenger in the train, who will get squashed?

The trauma of the veteran city will never vanish, but it need not be relived. There is cure for such a state, but will the city take it?

Or will it linger, praying for a quick fix in the next manic attack?
The second act in the three-act story structure is the one of confrontation; the protagonist faces the people or things with whom he finds himself in conflict. The flâneur has explored the city, perceiving it from various dimensional points of view. He has been overwhelmed by the amount and diversity of urban stimuli, and will be taken over by stress and anxiety if he does not find a way to bring order into the chaos that stirs his mind. And not only that, but he has discovered plenty of discord between individuals and groups within the city. Now the flâneur must also situate himself in relation with the urban crowd: where does he stand?
Fig. 6.1 The Scream. Painting by Edvard Munch (1893).
The flâneur has now walked around the city, becoming aware of the urban environment and phenomena in spatial and temporal terms. As he has made it his task to consciously observe the surroundings, he has perceived many more things and events than someone who is just trying to get from A to B as fast as possible. So many, in fact, that the flood of information has overwhelmed and confused the lone flâneur. In this act the flâneur attempts to collect and organize his thoughts, and arrive at impressions that he can analyze and articulate in a broader context. First, I elaborate on the psychology of attention and mental processing of perceptions. These both subconscious and conscious functions result in the formation of mental maps and images, types of representations of one’s experiences in and of the city. I then proceed to further illustrate the meanings of the ‘image of the city,’ and how people’s views can manifest in a myriad of different ways. Opposing views may lead to conflict, but acknowledging them is key to the narrative outcome, which the flâneur discovers in the final act.

In Search Of Purpose And Order

The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, which made possible the modern development of cities, happened in such rapid shifts and leaps that the human mind could not always keep up with the pace, and that is the reason why so many felt confused by the changes, and criticized, even feared them. Henry David Thoreau and the Romantics fled the growing trend of urbaniza-
tion into the nature, ‘back’ to the calm, slow rhythm of life that had been known as the status quo for centuries before. Indeed, modernity has shaped our way of life in less than two centuries from that of fundamentally rural existence to an urbanized, highly technological and automated global system. Considering the evolution of man, two centuries is hardly enough time for the psyche to adjust to the massive changes in our civilization.

To find oneself suddenly surrounded by millions of strangers, crowds streaming along the streets like rivers, cars speeding by, emergency sirens and machines on construction sites making horrible noise, stench rising from the sewers and towering buildings blocking the sun, it is no wonder that anxiety creeps in, and a sudden urge to flee somewhere quiet and tranquil takes hold. Those who have nevertheless decided to stay in a bustling city environment have developed certain coping mechanisms, to protect their minds from overloading with nervous stimuli and stress. Simmel explains that, “the metropolitan type — which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications — creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness” (Simmel 2010, 104).

This kind of “protective organ” is necessary for the modern urban dweller, but in it lies the threat of blasé, if taken to the extreme. It can be regarded as a mental filter that only lets through information which is considered essential and relevant; firstly, to function in the physical environment so as not to bring harm to
oneself or others, and secondly, to bring to attention such things and events which the individual finds specifically interesting from his unique, personal point of view. The flâneur can roam the city freely, observing phenomena of particular interest precisely because his mind is working for him. He does not have to consciously worry about each step and turn, because through sensory perceptions his brain controls his movements automatically. Although his eyes can see a huge amount of visual data at once, his attention is drawn to notice only a fraction of that data, according to a certain hierarchy of relevance mapped out in his mind, which continuously builds upon past and present experiences. There are several theories in psychology, which explain these phenomena, but here I look at one of them a little bit closer — the one called attenuation theory.

**Attenuation Theory**

Psychologist Anne Treisman, currently working in the Department of Psychology at Princeton University, conducted a series of studies in the 1960s around the topic of selective attention, which have since then become quite influential in the field of cognitive psychology. Her findings resulted in the creation of attenuation theory, a model that explains why unattended stimuli sometimes enter the consciousness, to draw attention away from that which had been observed towards the suddenly emerged, unexpected information (Treisman & Gelade 1980).

Treisman’s theory suggests that, when concentrated observa-
tion directs our attention to certain external stimuli, any unattended stimuli are still sensed, but they are remarkably attenuated by a mental filter. The research experiments focused on audition, so the content of the stimuli used in these studies was mostly speech. During the experiment it could thus be examined, what kind of words would pass through the filter, and were consciously perceived by the participant. Words with a low threshold, suggesting greater importance, are passed through, and then processed in a hierarchical analysis. This hierarchy is composed from the individual’s subjective set of priorities, often related to identity, interests, social connections, profession, or living environment (ibid.).

One of the most common phenomena, probably familiar to everybody, is the event when you suddenly hear your own name pop up in a conversation, although you had not previously paid any attention to it, being too busy chatting with a friend. This sudden, unattended stimulus passes through the mental filter and the hierarchical analysis process because your name is on top of the list of relevant words — it is, after all, in the core of your whole identity. Depending on one’s occupation, hobbies and cultural background, words such as ‘architect,’ ‘tennis,’ ‘Helsinki’ or ‘sushi’ may be of significance, and affect the ability to perceive their occurrence more frequently than by someone who is a basketball-playing politician living in Washington DC.

As I mentioned, attenuation theory is built upon the perception of auditory stimuli. I would however argue that the mental hierarchy of words and concepts affects other sensory perceptions as well. When walking around town, we tend to notice places and objects that are meaningful to us, whether it be a sushi restaurant,
a comic book store or a game centre. Our interests guide our attention, and by paying attention to certain things our minds make a note of it, and, next time, make us notice them almost ‘by accident.’ Experiences and places leave traces in the memory, and the more often they are frequented, the more likely they remain high in the mental hierarchy.

The hierarchy of interests and meanings can be illustrated as a kind of mindmap (Fig. 6.2). It is vital to note, however, that the order of importance is not static; words and objects are prioritized according to urgency, need, frequency of use, and so on. Just as one’s interests change in the course of time, so does the ‘mental mindmap;’ what we perceive affects the mindmap, and the mindmap affects what we perceive. In this manner, our minds keep
track of events, organizing them into customized indexes that refer us to perceive relevant stimuli, without continuous exertion of the consciousness.

**Mental Maps And Patterns**

One cause of stress for many urban dwellers is the hectic lifestyle of being constantly on the move; going to work, attending meetings, having takeaway lunch, running errands, picking up kids, doing exercise, socializing with friends, and so on. In order to manage our time and money, we have learned to use tools like journey planners to find the fastest and most cost-effective ways to go from A to B. If the public transit system is reliable, we know by the minute how long any given commute takes, and while still on the train or bus we can search for our next target on our mobile phones. And when certain areas of the city become familiar, we learn the best routes and shortcuts to avoid wasting energy when moving around on foot. We create our own maps in our minds, the kind of maps that save us time, money, and energy, because they serve our specific everyday needs.

The mental maps that we make of cities are composed practically, according to the patterns in our lives; the reoccurring events, routines and habits that we have internalized. But there is another aspect to the creation of maps from patterns, and that includes the patterns that we perceive in the form and shape of the city itself. Kevin Lynch has studied this topic in his classic work *The Image of the City*, which was first published in 1960, and has since then
become a cornerstone for urban research concerned with the psychological interpretation of urban experience. Lynch explains that in the book he concentrates “especially on one particular visual quality: the apparent clarity or ‘legibility’ of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern. Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern” (Lynch 1960, 2–3).

Amidst all the hassle and bustle of the modern city, it is certainly easier to navigate one’s way through if the urban space itself is structured and built in a coherent, comprehensible manner. The grid system serves this purpose; with almost no trouble at all, we can count the blocks as we walk along the street, and turn at the right corner without hesitation. Manhattan makes it even easier for us, as we know that all the streets along the north–south axis are called ‘avenues,’ and the ones along the west–east axis are ‘streets.’ The numbers run in a chronological order, so it is almost impossible to get lost. This type of highly logical navigation would not work in a city like Tokyo, where most streets, even today, have no name. Instead, buildings have names, and so you navigate according to buildings and not streets. Still, whether you dwell in New York or Tokyo, you learn to create a mental map of the spaces around you by the patterns that they form and repeat. Only the elements and components of those patterns differ from city to city.
In *The Image of the City* Lynch explores the title theme through case studies of Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles. These cities have different histories, structures, and visual appeal, and thus also different identities. But what makes up the identity, or identities, of a given city? If people all perceive the environment and create their own, unique mental maps from their individual standpoints, how is it that we can still talk about an identity of the city as a whole? Lynch argues for the mainstream: “Each individual creates and bears his own image, but there seems to be substantial agreements among members of the same group. It is these group images, exhibiting consensus among significant numbers, that interest city planners who aspire to model an environment that will be used by many people” (Lynch 1960, 7). The fact that a city, however broad, is spatially limited and thus ‘frameable,’ and that the people living within that frame are bound to share the same infrastructure, as well as economic, social, and political cultures, the individual images overlap each other in so many instances that the shared elements compose an entity that has enough qualities to be defined as the identity of the city.

The city identity shared by permanent residents can often differ a great deal from the image held by random visitors and tourists. The attitudes of blasé and badaud may have something to do with this; residents have already ‘been there and done that,’ whereas a tourist remains excited because he sees everything for
the first time. But the residents have also had more time to create and fine-tune their images on a much wider spectrum, and have become less susceptible to the urban spectacle. The spectacle is what is sold — the intriguing narrative identity that draws new crowds to the city.

The image of the city entails multiple meanings and concepts. It can mean a more or less visually constructed mental image or map of the city in the mind of an individual; it can mean a shared identity of the city among its residents; and it can also mean a collectively composed narrative identity, much like a corporate image, or the image of a celebrity. The purpose of the latter is to draw attention to, and to spark curiosity towards the city. Pekka V. Virtanen, Doctor of Science (Technology), has explored this type of image extensively in his book *Kaupungin imago* (“The city image,” transl. by author). What makes Paris Paris? This is one of his opening questions. Virtanen lists a few well-known characteristics associated with Paris: art, love, fashion, gastronomy, and a certain degree of lightheartedness (Virtanen 1999, 5; transl. by author). Simply by imagining these words and what they represent, we can create quite an appealing image of Paris in our minds. But how much of that image is ‘the real Paris?’ “There is a strong interaction between the mental image and ‘the real,’ visual image,” Virtanen explains (Virtanen 1999, 10). “Once travellers have seen the Eiffel Tower, they have themselves taken photographs of it, or purchased postcards depicting the landmark. Thus a certain coherent understanding of the cityscape has spread among others as well, and so, too, the desire to travel there in person to enjoy the same experience” (ibid.).

ACT II
Fig. 6.3 A demon over Paris.
Photograph by author (2006).
Virtanen defines a clear image as something based on uniqueness and distinctiveness, qualities that differentiate the city from others (Virtanen 1999, 11). These often include symbols and landmarks, but they can also be events, people or specific industries. The great old cities like Paris, London and Rome certainly have their powerful images, but nowadays there are more fast-growing new cities, which are still looking for, or actively constructing their narrative identities; “it is considered a part of the city’s marketing,” Virtanen says (ibid.). He stresses that the image cannot be founded on marketing alone, but that it “must be based on actual circumstances” (ibid.). This has to do with what I call *integrity of the narrative*, which I discuss in the latter part of the next chapter.

As the example of the photographs and postcards of the Eiffel Tower suggests, the image of the city is not confined within the borders of the physical city, but spreads outside into the global world, where it can take on new shapes and meanings. In a way, the city’s frame can enclose the physical reality, but not the socio-psychological experience of it. Sometimes the attraction of the image becomes so strong that even parts of the physical city are recreated elsewhere, to bring the experience that much closer. Tokyo is one of the forerunners in such efforts; not only have they replicated the Eiffel Tower and named it Tokyo Tower, but they have also built a miniature version of the Statue of Liberty on Odaiba, an artificial island in Tokyo Bay.

Tokyo is definitely a fascinating city in its own right, and its recreations of foreign landmarks are merely an amusing curiosity among the innumerable attractions and cultures that make the city ever so inspiring. The magnitude and buzz of the megacity
draws visitors from all over the world, and provides its citizens an unlimited source of novel stimuli. We can see the impact of Japanese popular culture in the west, but especially the street cultures in Tokyo are a continuous object of interest for the youth and various creative professionals. Of course, the economic potentials of this phenomenon have been recognized as well. In an attempt to boost the economy and increase cultural promotion, well-known fashion districts of Tokyo, such as Harajuku and Ginza, have been planned to be exported overseas by creating shopping areas that exhibit their distinctive characteristics (Westlake 2012). Although the districts all do have their unique features, especially in terms of street culture, a pursuit to capture the essence of an entire city section sounds rather bold. Surely no one expects it to be an exact copy of the real thing, but to claim the identity of one does raise some questions. Who have the authority to define the nature and identity of a district, or a whole city for that matter? And who have the right to label and sell something that is, in reality, public space?

Conflicts Of Culture

There is a difference between an attempt to project a collectively shared identity of a place into another space, and an attempt to interpret a perceived identity through art and design. The case of the overseas shopping areas seems to fall to the former, whereas the latter is a more common reaction to inspiration. People who have
Fig. 6.4 Popular shopping street in Harajuku. Photograph by author (2008).
explored the streets of Tokyo perceive the city in a great variety of manners, each from their own personal and cultural standpoints. Yet it is clear, from the multitude of images, songs, written work and cinema, that the city does evoke such emotional experiences that we are almost compelled to communicate our impressions to fellow citizens.

Interpretations of the city that manifest through narrative expression can reveal to us the types of cultural, social and psychological differences between individuals and groups. Sometimes the results are subtle variances, other times shockingly surprising. Especially the experiences of local residents and random travellers often display an obvious contrast; residents have more knowledge and understanding of their surroundings than first-time visitors. From these cultural conflicts we can learn more about the city, and how people actually experience the urban environment. In the following paragraphs I highlight some real-life examples of cultural collisions, from amusing trivialities to more serious psychological symptoms.

There was one time that I had an interesting discussion with an elderly Japanese lady, who attended lessons in traditional Japanese dance (nihon buyo in Japanese) under the same teacher as I did. As she was getting ready for her lesson, we engaged in a casual conversation. She spoke very fluent English, and, as it turned out, she had lived in Europe for some time. When I told her that I studied urban planning, she began to express her discontent with the Japanese city. They were too mixed, too random, too messy in their design, she complained. There was not enough coherence or continuity, or any sensitivity to local context. “Architects just do
what they want,” she said. I found it easy to agree with her arguments, however I pointed out that in my opinion the apparent lack of coherence and ‘neatness’ also makes the cities very interesting for exploration. “Yes, it’s very interesting,” she puffed. “It’s too interesting!”

Unfortunately our discussion was cut short. I would have gladly heard more, since she struck me as a woman of strong ideas. (I wonder if it had anything to do with the fact that she was a cousin to Yoko Ono.) I started thinking about the things she had voiced, and especially the value of coherence in urban space. I had once had a similar conversation with an elderly Japanese man, named Hirokuni Uesaki, who had also travelled much abroad in his day. He had wondered why I wanted to learn about Japanese urban planning, since European cities are so much more “beautiful.” He used the Japanese word *kirei*, which can be translated as beautiful, pretty, neat, or clean. He, too, thought quite strongly that the Japanese city is messy, confusing, and lacks consistency in plan and design. The opposite was apparently true in the many European cities that he had visited.

Throughout my time in Japan I have noticed that the Japanese have great interest in European countries and cultures — particularly the great old ones like France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. Many young people tend to go to America to study, particularly to study English, but when it comes to holiday and recreation, they seem to opt for Europe. I will make a bold claim and say that of all the cities outside of Japan, Paris is the most popular one among the Japanese. So many times in Japan I have seen, far more than of any other city, books, magazines, TV shows, fashion
Indeed the people here are different,
the atmosphere is different.

It makes you realize how little you know your own countrymen.
The formula of their life is not compatible with yours —
the structure looks the same, but the functions are alien.

You stretch your mind’s arm to grasp something familiar,
yet like an illusion it slips through your fingers.

What is this air of distance between us —
why won’t the attempt to connect succeed here?
Why do we always face an invisible wall,
even before a smile,
between a handshake and a bow?

Do our ideas and thoughts really differ so?

What is that absent look on your face —
staring through nothing, into more nothing?
Are you looking back or forth, I cannot tell.

Your feet are taking you somewhere your eyes cannot see.
items, gifts and stationery, interior decorations, not to mention sweets and other delicacies, all celebrating the beauty and wonder of Paris, the romantic Paris. Two of my closest Japanese friends have studied and lived in Paris, and recently I met an acquaintance who had also done so, and another one who was planning to go. Even I myself cannot escape the French charm — Paris is conceptually embedded in the very title of this thesis.

There is, however, a dark side to this fascination among the Japanese, and it has a suitable name: Paris syndrome. It is a psychological disorder, which can be described as an extreme form of culture shock. The person affected experiences such a violent conflict between his pre-voyage impressions and images of Paris and the reality where he finds himself that his mind cannot rationally process the discrepancies. Instead, they manifest in him through confusing and intolerable symptoms, such as anxiety, delusions, feelings of persecution, derealization, dizziness, and even hallucinations. The Japanese are culturally the most susceptible group to experience Paris syndrome. It is precisely because of the idealized image of Paris that is exhibited in Japanese media and products; the image is only a fantasy, and no actual city in the world could ever live up to such high expectations. Also, the Japanese culture and society differ in so many ways from the French that, even if the language was not a problem (which it usually is), the daily interactions and social manners could easily overwhelm an inexperienced traveller. Unfortunately, Paris is often the first place outside of Asia that the Japanese tourist wants to visit. The odds of being inflicted by Paris syndrome are approximately 300,000 to 1 for the Japanese, so luckily there is more than a fair chance that a
trip to the city of love will not end in disaster (Menick 2010).

One of the appeals of the French capital, from the Japanese point of view, seems to be the aesthetic consistency in the urban fabric; most of the inner city still maintains its physical design and feel of centuries past. Compared to the Japanese city, Paris displays much more of its history in one corner café overlooking the river Seine than a whole neighbourhood in downtown Tokyo. The Japan of such old times exists mostly in memory, evoked at times when passing an ancient temple or a well-preserved bookstore in the depths of a back-alley, a true rarity in itself. It is no wonder, then, that the Japanese find Paris, and other old European cities like London, Amsterdam, Vienna — not to mention Rome — so inviting and alluring in their historical grandeur. There they can see great architecture and culture, preserved and cherished even in the modern day. Contemporary urban design, too, seems to melt in better than in Japanese cities, where one design clashes with another, regardless if they share the same wall or not.

It is quite understandable why the elderly lady, who resides in Shibuya of all places, directed some blame towards the creations of architects themselves. Indeed the buildings and structures in typical Japanese urban landscape seem to be designed so independently, almost in complete disregard of one another, that one does wonder if the planners could make all the arbitrary choices they wanted. Yet the practice of design and construction, I am told, is extremely restricted. Professor Shin Aiba from the Tokyo Metropolitan University, architect by education, once repined about the many rules and regulations architects and designers face even in relatively small-scale housing projects. He was particularly
annoyed by the obsession with slanted roofs. In order to assure sufficient conditions for sunlight and wind flow, cities regulate the heights, angles, and shapes of buildings to a frustrating degree. More often than not, architects are in fact forced to compromise rather than be allowed to “do what they want.”

While there is a great deal of scrutiny over detail, the overall look and feel of the Japanese city still appears as chaotic and mismatched. The Japanese are known to be quite fast and skillful in producing results wherever they direct their concentrated attention. The problem, however, is that the object of attention itself is not so much a broader picture, but rather a specific piece of interest at a time. Alex Kerr refers to a remark made by the Japanese architect Sei Takeyama, when he laments on the destruction of Japan’s natural landscape, and speculates that one reason for the nation’s disregard for potentially harmful consequences may lie in “the ability of the Japanese to narrow their focus” (Kerr 1996, 50). Kerr continues to elaborate on the issue by describing how the audience of his talk at the Junior Chamber of Commerce had failed to notice the existence of “over sixty giant utility pylons towering over the surrounding mountains,” and were genuinely shocked by Kerr’s sudden ‘revelation’ (Kerr 1996, 51). This is a beautiful case example of collective cognitive blindness due to cultural bias, which is probably a much more common phenomenon than we realize.
The Question That Repeats Itself

In the previous section I demonstrated through some examples how people with different worldviews and cultural backgrounds can find themselves struggling in the urban reality. When opposing views or realities clash together, it can result in mutual enlightenment, or a conflict that deepens over time. We have all, in one way or another, witnessed conflicts and problems in urban environments that complicate the daily life and existence of millions of individuals. Since the problems that we acknowledge as problems are perceived from various points of view, they always differ in nature depending on who is examining the issue in question. A situation in a neighbourhood community might be problematic to its people, but not necessarily in such a way that it would invite the attention of the city planning department. Yet, the community may lack the power or resources to change their own living environment, and thus end up consenting to the present circumstances, however undesirable they may be. In the long run, problems identified but left unattended can develop into ‘bogeys,’ causing obstruction and hindrance to the flow of everyday life.

In the process of problem solving, the first necessary step is to actually acknowledge the problem. How problems are identified and experienced depends on the viewpoint of the perceiver. A problem of one is not necessarily a problem of many, and vice versa. This is why the next step, the definition of the nature and scope of the problem, is vital. Without definition, approaching the
problem with potential solutions is extremely difficult, if not even pointless. In defining what the actual problem is, what the causes and consequences of it are, asking relevant questions is the key to understanding the issue. What seems to be the problem? How is this problem experienced? Where and when does it occur? Who are affected by the problem? Why and how has this problem emerged? And, probably the most challenging question of all, what kind of action should be taken to solve the issue at hand?

Through such processes of asking questions, discussing them, searching for clues about the origin of the problem, and thinking of ways to tackle the issue, people can begin to create change in their own living environment and improve their quality of life. However, to develop any urban environment does not require the approach of problem solving. As James Donald put it, the city is not a problem; “it is the eternal, impossible question of how we strangers can live together” (Donald 1997, 182). The city in itself is a question. Is this how we want to live? Is this type of housing satisfactory to us? Are these streets taking us where we want to go? Are the parks inviting us? Do the buildings offer us the services we need? These questions are not questions only for the urban planners or academics to ponder on. These are vital questions concerning the lives of citizens — you and me, in the city. It is both the right and the responsibility of each urban individual to ask themselves, as well as others, these questions.

Though the question of the city is “eternal” and “impossible,” it is a question that needs to be asked again and again. As time flies by, people come and go, and the urban fabric renews itself, answers to the question also vary. We must ask ourselves again,
reflect on our answers, and learn. As the answers change, the approaches to problems change, and the solutions also change. Without re-examining the questions, we get lost in our own environment. We lose sensibility to what we see and feel, how we experience the city. We become distanced by our ignorance, and that is when only the problems emerge before us, since we merely confront questions when they are forced upon us. To solve a problem, questions must be asked. Could it be, however, that by asking questions and broadening our consciousness of the city, we might in fact prevent problems?

By asking ourselves questions concerning the urban environment, we are not only increasing our awareness of the city, but we are also participating in it. We are acknowledging what is happening around us, and responding to it. We are already making changes in our manner of thought by subjecting it to novel stimuli. We are exploring our own minds, but also the ‘mind,’ or the ‘way,’ of the city. The practice of asking questions is never futile, and always interesting. Even though the questions remain eternal, we can still discover versatile, colourful answers over and over again. Even as the journey to explore the many sides of the city takes its twists and turns, we can always navigate our way just by asking.

As we struggle our way through urban chaos, it may be difficult to accept that there is no single, universal conclusion waiting for us at the end. No citizen, planner or designer can ever provide a definite answer to the question of how to live in a city with millions of strangers. The trick is that we cannot know the answers, but we can experience them. The city is a constantly shifting and changing, living process; the reality of it is not something we know
for a fact, but that which we acknowledge as our experience of it. By articulating and sharing our experience with others we can begin to see a bigger picture. Different narratives coming together, even though not all pieces ever join seamlessly, form a unique, organic play of one great urban story.
I walk the streets to own them.

I am an urban nomad with the spirit and grit of a poet.
   I live carelessly,
   with no dream for tomorrow,
   and no regret for the past.

I visit shrines and temples to remember my youth.
   I enjoy the smells and tastes of restaurants,
      they feed my hungry mind.
   I rest on a park bench,
      next to an old man and a teenage couple.

I strive to stay curious about everything and everyone,
   to be kind and patient,
   to give time and always be ready to receive it.

I write stories about people, for people,
   by making friends with all walks of life,
by inviting strangers to my street and sharing new stories.

I love art and life, living and breathing urbanity
   and the spectrum of encounters
      every day and every night.
I love gazing at sunrise, sunset and full moon,  
with a light and open heart.

I love looking into a stranger’s eyes and feeling kinship  
in the bustle of an anonymous street.

Offering a hand and being touched.  
Smiling, and hearing soft words.

Brushing against an arm in a rush-hour train,  
and not being evaded.  
Providing a shoulder for a tired student to lean on.

Seeing the faces of the city, and cherishing each one.

This city — my city — is the home of my life.

There it has always been, without me and in me,  
but now, in this moment,  
joined together as one.

For I am Tokyo.
7
In the third and final act the events and conflicts of the previous acts are drawn together and amplified, until a climactic resolution bursts the narrative bubble. The flâneur has arrived at the last turning point of his urban exploration, with many mixed thoughts and feelings. To make sense of what he has experienced, he gathers the notes from his memory and composes them into a meaningful whole. He will realize that some things have more narrative power than others, and that certain experiences speak to him at so high a volume that they cannot be dismissed. The flâneur thus recreates the city as a story — an echo of his footsteps imprinting the streets.
In the first and second acts the flâneur has strolled around the city, exploring and observing, and has thus become more and more aware of the complexity and impact of urban form, information and action. In this final act the flâneur endeavours to translate his impressions into narrative form, a task which requires conscious selection and crafting of acquired material. I set out to examine how one arrives at a certain expressive presentation of the city by analyzing works of art, as well as urban utopias and dystopias as social and political commentaries. Narratives can be very powerful, since they tend to speak on both emotional and intellectual levels. This raises the important question of responsibility, or integrity of the narrative, which I discuss in the latter part of this chapter. The flâneur must also consider his motives for his narrative recreation. How the story is expressed affects its reception and further reflections in the public dialogue.

Imitation In Expression

Faced with a nonstop flood of random and sudden stimuli, the city may seem chaotic and disorderly; it takes time to process the experiences and make connections between countless incidents, which at first glance appear completely unrelated. A person’s feelings and emotions also change from one moment to another: frustration with mundane and trivial messages, stress in the morning traffic, afternoon fatigue, excitement and disappointment — from burnout to boreout, from badaud to blasé.
Most urban dwellers may find order in routines and schedules, but lack of new and unexpected events can cause dissatisfaction just as a hectic and unorganized lifestyle can create anxiety. Though most people would agree that harmony and balance are desirable states of existence, the benefits of chaos are perhaps not quite acknowledged. Writer-photographer Kyoichi Tsuzuki credits the anarchist thinker Sakae Osugi for the quote, “beauty is to be found in disarray” (Tsuzuki 1999, 22). This was a key idea in his vision of the essence of Japanese aesthetics, which he proclaimed around the beginning of the 20th century. Tsuzuki himself celebrates cramped, chaotic living quarters exhibited in the hundreds of photographs that he has taken in real apartments all over Tokyo.

Behind Osugi’s statement there may lie the notion that chaotic conditions can actually be fruitful for creativity: to find something ‘out of place’ that shakes the maps and patterns of the mind. Beauty is one quality that attracts our attention to the unexpected and the unknown. I would argue that we recognize beauty when an experience manages to both touch us emotionally, and inspire us intellectually. The perceived beauty is ultimately expressed through a narrative presentation, which gives the abstract manifestation form in language and art. In Plato’s terms, the objects in physical reality are imitations of their original ideas, their abstract ‘blueprints.’ Works of art are in turn imitations of said reality, thus being imitations of imitations. When we experience the urban environment, we are already creating an imitation of it in our minds, because, as explained in the previous chapter, our perceptions are directed by and processed through our mental wiring. A narrative
interpretation of our experience then becomes yet another imitation.

Despite any sceptical associations raised by the word ‘imitation,’ it does not diminish the value or significance of a narrative expression. In fact, a narrative can reveal such truths and make us ask such questions that a mere recording of events cannot. In the city context narratives have been used in marketing, to promote certain plans and designs, or even to manipulate the behaviour of citizens. It is therefore vital to recognize the motives and viewpoints of the narrators.

Whatever narrative conclusion or interpretation one expresses, a narrative always remains open-ended; a story or a piece of art is only a slice of a much broader whole. Where one story ends, another one begins, and every narrative changes when the narrator does. In essence, a story is like a window, revealing only what can be seen through the frame. The audience makes the decision whether or not they want to see more of what is out there, and if they choose to engage, a dialogue ensues. This chapter ends with contemplations on that dialogue, what it means for the urban community, and how anyone in a city anywhere on the globe can participate in the open narrative. In the following analysis of two city paintings I suggest that there has been a silent, almost hidden, dialogue between them, which only whispers to the beholder through suspicious visual clues.
Two Portraits Of The Modern City

To illustrate how impressions of the city can manifest in artistic expression, I compare two paintings done in the early years of urban modernization. The first one is a famous Paris scene, painted by the impressionist Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) in 1877, titled *Paris Street, Rainy Day* (Fig. 7.1). The second is by the German expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), called *Street, Dresden* (1908) (Fig. 7.2). The impressionist and expressionist styles are like the two sides of the same coin; while in impressionism the emphasis is on capturing a fleeting moment of reality in paint, as it is perceived by the artist, in expressionism the idea is to portray how the painter himself experiences the scene, accentuating his own inner feelings and thoughts. Visual differences are often quite obvious: impressionist paintings are fair and foggy, expressionist ones an explosion of colour on canvas.

Gustave Caillebotte portrays Paris as a quiet and well-composed modern city, much like a mirror of its bourgeois and civilized urban dwellers. On a rainy day the streets are likely less crowded than usual, but the perspective allows us to see that they are wide and spacious, and completely devoid of any unattractive clutter, which Paris is well known to have had its fair share of in the late 19th century. Still, Caillebotte delivers us this impressionist masterpiece as a clear indication of his loving fondness for the city, which may very well be experienced as such only on a slightly rainy Sunday afternoon, on a stroll down the streets without a care in the world.
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, however, has quite the opposite way of portraying urban street life. He is one of the masters of expressionism, and his depiction of Dresden in 1908 is in crude contrast with Caillebotte’s Paris. Kirchner’s Dresden is swarming with people, crowded masses merging into a sea of alien form and colour. The whole area is closely surrounded, leaving only some vacant space in the middle of the street, which would surely not remain vacant for long. Kirchner has even opted for an extremely tight framing, which emphasizes even further the claustrophobic pressure of the image.

What is perhaps most striking in Kirchner’s work is that, despite its obvious differences with Caillebotte’s painting, there are actually unexpected similarities as well. The composition, for one,
is nearly identical: leave out the crowds in the background, and you are left with six key characters who are positioned in parallel with the eight characters in Caillebotte’s work. The three people on the right, in particular, are suspiciously calculated in their arrangement. The Parisian couple is replaced by two women, possibly prostitutes, as Kirchner is known to have depicted them in many of his works. The woman on the right is in fact lifting her skirt in the most provocative way, whereas the lady in Paris is probably just concerned about keeping the hem from dipping in puddles.

The grey, sophisticated umbrellas are nowhere to be seen in Dresden, but instead the women wear huge, flamboyant hats with flowers and feathers, which still manage to create similar round,
hovering shapes above people’s heads as in Caillebotte’s image. But the fair colouring and almost fragile form of the umbrella resembles something of a bird, perhaps a pigeon, or a cloud, supporting the general airy, floaty feel that emanates from the tranquil Paris scene. Kirchner’s hats, by contrast, have dark, murky colours, and seem more like a heavy burden to their owners than an extravagant form of self-expression. The wide, black brim around the woman’s head, who stands on the right, brings to mind a reverse halo — a suffocating air of inevitable doom.

There is something eerie, even ghoulish, about the characters in Kirchner’s work. Their faces are painted sickly yellow and green, almost as if their skin had begun to rot in all the pollution and filth. Their eyes are mere black holes, staring straight out at the audience, drawing, or rather luring them into the picture, into the same claustrophobic nightmare of urban struggle. Their hands and arms, too, are in awkward, somehow twisted angles, completely different from the relaxed, natural postures of Caillebotte’s Parisians. The folk of Dresden seem almost mindless, or tragically possessed — fiendish creatures that are not quite aware of themselves or the surrounding reality.

One more meticulous feature in Kirchner’s painting is the man on the right edge of the canvas, only half revealed. In Caillebotte’s picture, there is a gentleman, also only half-visible, carrying an umbrella and facing the couple he is about to pass by on the street. We cannot really see anything of the man, and there is very little need to — he is simply another Sunday stroller. But Kirchner’s man is different. He faces the viewer of the painting directly, smirking like a murderer without conscience. The brim of his hat
casts a slight shadow over his eye, but we can see all too clearly the beastly gleam under his brow. This could very well be the most devilish depiction in art of an alienated but ceaselessly ambitious metropolitan man.

What is interesting about the creation of the Dresden painting is that, although first finished in 1908, Kirchner returned to work on it in 1919 — one year after the First World War. Could the horrors of death and the despair of defeat have influenced Kirchner’s changes to the original work? Which ever the case, the image is obviously a restless and disturbing interpretation of modern urban life. It seems to warn us of the dangerous consequences that overwhelming strangeness, fast changes and increasing anonymity can have on people. Compared to Kirchner’s presentation, Caillebotte’s Paris looks like a naive, bourgeois daydream, not exhibiting even the faintest idea of what anxieties and turmoil loomed ahead, only a generation away.

In the Second World War, Paris saw its fall under the occupation of the Germans, who undoubtedly benefited from the long and wide, open boulevards, courtesy of Baron Haussmann. After all, their purpose was to make it easier for authorities to manage and control crowds, not to provide nice streets to stroll down on a rainy day. Towards the end of the war, the British and American forces bombed Dresden, killing approximately 25,000 citizens, mostly civilians. The entire historic city centre was desolated in the attack, although parts of it were eventually reconstructed. Unfortunately, Paris and Dresden were only two of the hundreds of towns and cities damaged by the wars. Memories of the massive urban destruction in the 20th century have not by any means
vanished with restoration efforts. They resurface time and again through countless narratives of dystopian futures, apocalyptic visions and global catastrophes.

**Utopian Daydreams, Dystopian Nightmares**

The city is constantly re-envisioned and recreated by urban planners and designers, architects, construction companies and by several other developers. Most plans focus on the needs recognized in the present, and anticipated in the near future. But occasionally they also present visions for the city much further in time. They express a narrative of what the ideal city would look like, if almost anything was possible in terms of design and technology. Futuristic utopias today present dizzying skyscrapers, with green roofs and vertical gardens, clean and clear air, self-sustaining communities and smart systems of energy and resource supply. They are dreams of an urban world, where climate change is no longer a problem, social issues like poverty have been eradicated, and people enjoy general equality and freedom of self-expression.

It is usually urban planners and architects, who envision these positive urban utopias, and understandably so. They can hint at political decision makers what kind of action to pursue, in order to support the best possible outcome imagined. Utopias thus serve as motivational images, encouraging sustainable progress. The flipside of utopia is dystopia: what could happen, if bad decisions are made, and major errors are not corrected in time. Urban pro-
professionals rarely enjoy presenting negative visions of the future, but writers, artists and filmmakers have always loved to experiment with tragic fates. Dystopias can indicate more clearly, where the potentially crucial turning points are, and direct our attention to those problematic issues sooner rather than later.

Utopias and dystopias are usually time-sensitive to the period in which they were created. The space-time hype of the 1960s seems quite silly today, but some visions hold their credibility through decades. Visions may be forgotten, only to resurface again at a point of societal and ideological change. All these urban daydreams and nightmares can offer us something valuable to learn. In the following paragraphs I introduce a few historical plans, old and new proposals, as well as examples of ‘rain and ruin’ in the popular culture.

Eden On Earth

One of the pioneers in socially sustainable town planning was Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), who is famous for his Garden City plans (Fig. 7.3). Rather than visioning a physical form for the dream city, he was more interested in the social processes. Peter Hall describes the garden city models as “vehicles for a progressive reconstruction of capitalist society into an infinity of co-operative commonwealths” (Hall 1988, 87). The garden cities were not some idyllic country villages, but “conurbations with hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people” (ibid.).

Howard published his Garden City visions in 1898 under the
As the title suggests, his thoughts were grounded in participatory community-planning, which was a radically different approach to urban planning in his day. Hall explains the key ideas of the Garden City as follows:

The garden city would have a fixed limit — Howard suggested 32,000 people, living on 1,000 acres of land, about one and a half times the historical medieval London. It would be surrounded by a much larger area of permanent green belt — containing not merely farms, but also all kinds of urban institutions, like reformatories and convalescent homes, that could benefit from a rural location. As more and more people moved out, the garden city would reach its limit; then, another would be started a short distance away. Thus, over time, there would develop a vast planned agglomeration, extending almost without limit; within it, each garden city would offer a wide range of jobs and services, but each would also be connected to the others by a rapid transit system — thus giving all the economic and social opportunities of the giant city. Howard called this polycentric vision Social City.

(Hall 1988, 93)

After the publication and quite a few realized cases around Europe and America, many other visionaries and planners have built upon the same model, especially using the idea of individual ‘nodes’ within a larger radial design. The emphasis has perhaps shifted from the social to the environmentally sustainable, since smaller centres are more effectively managed, and can even be self-sustained, and a transit system circling through them is also easier to execute. In recent years, there have been major projects initiated in China, to create entire green cities, or eco-cities. Howard’s
influence can be seen in their designs: several rings connected together by rail, a lot of green areas, and everything put together in a polycentric and cyclical manner. The utopia of the Garden City is hyper-modernized and spiced up with state-of-the-art cleantech and smart systems — and becoming urban reality in Tianjin and Chengdu, and dozens of other cities.

A project more focused on Howard’s ideas of social equality and cooperation would be The Venus Project, initiated in 1995 by Jacque Fresco. It is concerned with creating an alternative model to capitalism, called resource-based economy. Both environmental and social sustainability are in the core of The Venus Project, while economy is harnessed simply to provide a system for manufacturing and distributing supplies, instead of making profit (Fresco 2007). The project’s Circular City design (Fig. 7.4) has a striking resemblance to Garden City, and with its social approach and anti-capitalist attitude, even Ebenezer Howard himself would probably endorse this particular utopia.

**Floating Tokyo**

In the late 1950s, a group of Japanese architects came together to envision the future of the Japanese city. They founded a movement called Metabolism, where each member would propose their own plans and designs in the spirit of the joint cause. The reason for the biological term ‘metabolism’ was that they believed “design and technology should be a denotation of human vitality,” and that they are “trying to encourage active metabolic development of
Fig. 7.3 Garden City model explained.

Diagram by Ebenezer Howard (1902).
Fig. 7.4 Model of Circular City.
our society through our proposals” (Kikutake et al. 1960, 5).

Their plans were nothing short of ambitious and imaginative; the scale of most designs was outrageous considering the resources and construction competence of the time. One of the leading figures, architect Kiyonori Kikutake, proposed a plan titled Marine City (Fig. 7.5). It was to be a floating urban space at sea, a unit of community. It would not be anchored to a specific place but remain free to be cruised off anywhere. As if such marine cities were not enough, Kikutake took his plan even further, and created Unabara, the Ocean City. Rather than house a community, it would become “an industrial city for a population of 500,000” (Kikutake et al. 1960, 26). A control tower would rise up to 500 metres above sea level, and include an artificial sun on top to illuminate the entire city. Submarines and jet planes would be used for transportation (ibid., 27). Kenzo Tange, one of the most renowned Japanese architects, had a similar marine design in 1960. His plan for Tokyo consisted of a floating structural entity across Tokyo Bay, connecting the opposite shores with a transit network and housing quarters. Neither Kikutake’s nor Tange’s utopian plans ever made it to construction phase.

Despite the fascination that the members shared for extravagant megastructures, the fundamental ideology behind their plans is sincere and quite admirable. Kikutake writes in regard to his Marine City that, “We do not suggest a proposal of the future city. The state of confusion and paralysis in metropolitan cities and the inconsistency and lack of systematic city planning is forcing us to make this proposal. — What we wish to find in this proposal is not the static relation of growing city with suffocated human but
the sympathizing correspondence of the new space with human” (Kikutake et al. 1960, 10). Obviously the megastructure was introduced as a solution for the rapidly increasing population in Tokyo, while attempting to maintain an empathetic human-centred approach to design.

**Fallen Cities**

Dystopias and end-of-the-world scenarios are recurring themes in literature and film, especially in the popular culture. There is a similar attraction to dystopian images as there is to utopian ones; because we can never see into the future, it remains a mystery, stuff for the imagination. We all have dreams we would love to see...
come true, and we also have fears that we hope to never have to witness in reality. Utopias and dystopias are what-if narratives that can guide us as individuals and urban dwellers.

I have recognized three types of urban dystopias in cultural narratives. The first one illustrates major societal changes: a new class system, radically different groups, where a certain party usually has overwhelming power over others. An early example is Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* (1927), where the working class slaves off under the city, and the leaders pull the strings in high-rise office buildings. George Orwell’s novel *1984* (1949) is a much-cited depiction of a big-brother society, and still very timely today.

The second type is the transformed city dystopia: a city has been struck with a sudden and violent event, destroying the old living environment, and forced people to find alternative habitat. In the film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), the citizens of New York witness the coming of a new Ice Age, as a raging blizzard covers the city in snow. *Waterworld* (1995) depicts life at sea, after the globe has been devoured by a massive deluge. I cannot help but wonder if Kikutake and Tange saw the possibility of a disastrous tsunami or flood wash over Japan when they created their plans.

The third type is the most drastic one. A complete destruction falls upon mankind, leaving the few survivors at the mercy of nature, beasts, and other humans. In his novel *The Road* (2006) Cormac McCarthy writes about a world where people are reduced to hunters and scavengers, and where all civilization is virtually gone. The back-to-wilderness scenario brings out the worst in people, which is all too convincingly portrayed in the TV series *The Walking Dead*. One could probably still live a decent life in
Lang’s metropolis, but if cities are infested with zombies then it is another story.

Much of the fictional dystopian imagery is unfortunately inspired by actual events, such as the devastation caused by the First and Second World War. But urban decay is very much a real phenomenon as well. The bankruptcy of Detroit, the eerie, deserted ghettos of Baltimore, the ghost city of Pripyat near Chernobyl — collateral and irreversible events can scar any city for life. These three examples are especially illuminating, since they reveal the significance of the 3-nested-dependencies model of sustainability, which was introduced in the second chapter. If one of the spheres of sustainability collapses, it affects the other two, and thus the whole. Economic imbalance has been the problem in Detroit, social inequity in Baltimore, and environmental hazard in Pripyat. Anything from segregation to a natural disaster can eventually become the tipping point for urban downfall.

During my stay in Japan I visited Hirokuni Uesaki in the city of Kisarazu in Chiba prefecture, his hometown. There he introduced to me a certain housing area: an impressive complex of multi-story houses, rising up like a miniature city within the city. They all looked the same; dull post-war design, built cheaply. The original demand for this quick addition in housing was due to a big steel factory in the harbour, where Uesaki himself worked for several years. Many employers moved in from surrounding areas, and settled into the complex. As years passed, however, employers moved again elsewhere, or found other jobs. Now, most of the apartments in the blocks are empty. When we drove around the place, it appeared almost like a ghost town, though I must confess
that my impression was likely influenced by the fact that it was raining at the time. Rain has the peculiar quality of accentuating ruin.

Nevertheless, I was reminded of the fate of Hashima, or Gunkanjima, Battleship Island, off the coast of Nagasaki. It used to be the most densely inhabited area in all of Japan in the early 20th century, until suddenly all residents mass-emigrated after the shutting down of a coal mine which had been the livelihood of the whole island community. All that remains of Hashima today are the decayed, and still decaying, buildings, and a small group of former residents who share their stories by providing tours to the strictly limited grounds (Fig. 7.6). When I visited the island myself, and stood in a small crowd in front of the grim, grumbling
concrete ruins, the tour guide ominously asked, “Is this the future of Japan?” As much as one hates to admit it, in some parts of the world it is in fact becoming the present.

**Integrity Of The Narrative**

It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter of 1915–1916 the spirit of London collapsed, the city, in some way, perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. The integrity of London collapsed, and the genuine debasement began, the unspeakable baseness of the press and the public voice, the reign of that bloated ignominy, John Bull.

No man who has really consciously lived through this can believe again absolutely in democracy. No man who has heard reiterated in thousands of tones from all the common people, during the crucial years of the war, “I believe in John Bull. Give me John Bull,” can ever believe that in any crisis a people can govern itself, or is ever fit to govern itself. ---

The well-bred, really cultured classes were on the whole passive resisters. They shirked their duty. It is the business of people who really know better to fight tooth and nail to keep up a standard, to hold control of authority. Laisser-aller is as guilty as the actual, stinking mongrelism it gives place to.

*Kangaroo*, a novel by D. H. Lawrence (1923)

(Lawrence 2002, 216–217)

In the above excerpt from D. H. Lawrence’s semi-autobiographical novel *Kangaroo*, he touches upon the very question of narrative responsibility. John Bull is the national personification
of Great Britain, particularly England, who is often portrayed as a stout, middle-aged man with a jollier attitude than Uncle Sam. Lawrence seems to despise the national character, or rather the blind patriotic worship of it. John Bull is a bubble where people project their hopes and beliefs, and yet it is under no one’s control; it is a narrative representation of the narrator’s ideas, who is always a different person with different thoughts. There is no constant — there is no John Bull.

Every narrator has a motive. If it becomes obvious in the narrative, the audience can easily either subscribe to it, or reject it. The dangerous narratives are the ones where the motive is so cleverly hidden that the audience cannot recognize it in the story. They may be tricked to support something that sounds harmless, but ultimately benefits the narrator at their expense. Marketing and advertising, political propaganda, lobbying, sponsored media — there are more or less concealed agendas behind various narratives we are exposed to on a daily basis. The city is an open forum for stories, but what about stories about the city, or urban planning?

In a letter to the editor, published in *Helsingin Sanomat* on June 3, 2013, architect Aaro Artto criticizes the stiff and slow processes of urban planning, and defends the role of the architect. Previously, Teppo Moisio had, according to Artto, suggested in a column that, “[urban] plans have been conceived as projects managed by architects, the motive of which is to boost the planner’s own ego” (Artto 2013; transl. by author). Artto denies this, and says that it is the construction companies and other developers, who decide what is built and when. They are the ones who pay the costs, after
all. City officials can accept or reject a plan, however it is usually in their interest to support business investments. “All zoning plans proceed only through political decision-making. And behind the political decision-making are, of course, powerful players and lobbyists” (ibid.).

Urban planning should by its very nature be a collaborative process between various professionals and citizens. Still, the political and economical play that takes place behind the scenes creates distrust and feelings of helplessness among urban communities. Businessmen try to sell their view of the city to planners and residents, but if there is suspicion about ulterior motives, or the image is simply too alien, people will voice out their opposition.

Antti Blåfield writes in an editor’s column a year later that, “decision-makers only listen to decision-makers” (Blåfield 2014; transl. by author). He has observed different urban planning projects in the city of Helsinki, and finds the communication attempts with citizens absurd. “The public hearing in Paloheinä was pure theatre. The officials with wry smiles presenting the plan were deaf to the views expressed by local residents. Their minds were already set” (ibid.). The residents sent out 60 letters, to no avail. Blåfield concludes that, “leading politicians will rather place their trust in officials than in local knowledge and experience. — The word of the public servant is enough. Expertise in people’s own living environment is not necessary” (ibid.).

Obviously, Blåfield’s last statement is the direct opposite of what is direly needed in today’s urban planning processes. Jane Jacobs was the spokesperson of the people of Greenwich Village in the 1960s, putting her foot down on plans to disrupt the com-
community life. Her quote, “eyes on the street,” reminds us, and hopefully officials, planners and builders as well, that the lifeblood of the city is in the flow of people, and not in construction. I would add to the quote an important notion of the significance of narrative: keep your eyes on the street, and your ears on the story. How is the city portrayed by different groups and individuals? Do the stories sound credible, attractive, motivational, or rather imposed, artificial, one-sided?

The city is both what is projected, and where or on whom it is projected. Urban narrative discusses the city from multiple different perspectives and points of view, and the impact it has on the audience changes the way the city is, and will be, in the future. The city both inspires its narrative, and then eventually becomes it. This is precisely why integrity is so important; its presence or absence will manifest in the urban environment. Ungrounded or distorted narratives can create distrust and lead to bad decisions on false pretences. Responsible and reflective narratives, on the other hand, encourage dialogue and collaboration. The key is to understand the present, most commonly accepted images, and build on them, not around them.

In some cases, strongly adopted impressions can overpower, or even prevent, conflicting perceptions. This is what happens when one becomes blind to giant utility pylons, or designs residential areas that rely on a single economic source. Narrow focus and distractions allow impressions to be conceived in an instant, but knowledge and understanding accumulate through patient observation and perception. It is not easy to distinguish between the two, since interpretation always takes place in the experience.
The politicians are producers,
architects and planners are set makers,
and the citizens are actors.
Some general rules apply, but day in and day out,
the city is a neverending improvised play.

And the director?
There of course is none,
although the closest equivalent could be seen
in the collective consciousness, the narrative identity
that the actors relate to.

A mere sense of the city is what directs them.

Still, there are more than enough of whisperers:
signs, ads, blockages, all trying to tell the actor what to do,
where to go, as if they had forgotten their mission, lost their lines.
Some indeed believe they have,
and confused in the crowd of strangers,
they listen to the whisperers instead of their kin,
who might know better.

The politicians are all too keen
to produce more whispers in every street corner,
to pollute the air with invisible agenda.

But the city is clever.
It has other means of attraction —
the stories of its people.
However, one can become aware of one’s own conceptions and presuppositions, particularly by subjecting oneself to novel circumstances. In the context of the city, this could mean exploring unfamiliar places, encountering fellow citizens, and attending public events.

Observation and experience shape previous impressions through a learning process, usually resulting in some kind of discovery or idea. Sharing of that discovery would be to acknowledge that previous impressions were perhaps insufficient or false, and that again might call for assuming responsibility for actions based on them. However, if not shared among communities, professionals and individuals, general knowledge and understanding of the urban condition are seriously restricted, and thus subject to influence by those with a fixed agenda — often economic or political. The next section introduces some new methods by which citizens, planners and officials can engage in genuine dialogue by sharing their thoughts and findings with each other.

**The Open Thread**

Urban planning has come a long way since the days of Baron Haussmann and Ebenezer Howard. Participatory planning has more or less become the norm, although major projects are still managed top-down rather than bottom-up. Grassroots initiatives and neighbourhood associations have diversified the field with small-scale, local changes, but limited resources and access pre-
vent broader collaboration. Only in the last two decades, with the aid of the Digital Revolution, have individuals and groups been able to share ideas and case examples with citizens all around the world, encouraging urban communities to take more active control of their living environments.

The Internet and social media have enabled discussion and information sharing related to city planning on a whole new level. We can compare plans and designs between different cities, and talk with citizens living in those cities directly, to hear how they experience the changes. We can also contact city planning officials in our own cities, ask questions, and deliver the responses to our peers. Communication lines now spread in all possible directions, weaving an infinitely complex narrative fabric from the billions of threads held out by urban individuals.

Slowly, but inevitably, professionals and academics in the field of urban planning have also begun to apply various digital tools in order to gather location-based information from residents, to create new forums for design evaluation and development. A team of researchers at Aalto University, led by Professor Marketta Kyttä, have studied methods in which experiential data from citizens can be effectively accumulated and categorized, to provide guidelines for future planning. Understanding how inhabitants themselves perceive their environment, both the positive and the negative aspects, has gained ground in domestic and international debate on human-centred planning practices. Kyttä’s team developed a browser-based platform with a sophisticated, user-friendly graphic interface, and named it softGIS, for soft geographic information system methodology. From spring 2011 to autumn 2012, I was
an assistant member in the study, which was also conducted in co-operation with professors and researchers from the University of Tokyo, Tokyo Metropolitan University, as well as Chiba University.

The idea of the softGIS application is simple. Users, i.e. citizens, can add graphic symbols and draw routes on an interactive map of their city, to indicate e.g. where they live, what route they take to go to work, which places they enjoy in their spare time, and how they feel about their environment. The data is collected and analyzed from hundreds of inputs, and presented in various graphs and diagrams to identify a variety of denominators. The findings are then handed over to relative planners and officials, if possible. That is at least the end goal, to deliver the acquired information to interested parties, who would take it into serious consideration in ongoing and future plans.

In a paper on softGIS, Maarit Kahila and Marketta Kyttä write: “Our aim is to build a bridge between the residents, researchers and urban planners by promoting the participation and collaboration of citizens with the help of softGIS-methods. These methods promote the sharing of the residents’ experiences and behaviour concerning their living environment” (Kahila & Kyttä 2010, 15). Utilizing the speed, capacity and accuracy of digital tools could revolutionize urban planning processes. Traditional methods, such as posting written announcements of new plans and organizing formal public hearings, are not only outdated and inefficient, but hopelessly one-sided — more monologue than dialogue.

One fundamental problematic in participatory planning, and also in the case of softGIS, is the question of motivation: why
should an individual citizen take the time and effort to speak his mind? There are thousands, probably millions of voices in the air, all describing a uniquely different image of the city. It is a pure impossibility for planners to hear each and every one of them, and to take them equally into account in practice. But what if citizens did not express their views out of a sense of involvement in planning, and instead did it because it is fun?

Imagine if residents engaged in a free simulation play of urban creation: a shared Sim City experience, where everyone would build on the same environment. Individuals could bring in their personal suggestions, and all the while see how others have envisioned the city (Fig. 7.8). How many schools would there be? What kind of housing solutions, services and public spaces? How
much of the land would be covered by roads, and how much by parks? The citizens would decide, together, and reflect in real time what works and what does not. But rather than take it too seriously, it would serve as a fun way to experiment on urban planning and design. It might even inspire some to study their cities more carefully, become more active in the dialogue. And if planners and designers would take a look at such a virtual co-creation, they would acquire more information in one glance than in the hours spent browsing through piles of surveys.

The city is an open forum, and so is the Internet. Conversation threads can be opened and closed, and opened again. There is no limit to the extent to which they can develop. And such is the nature of urban narrative; it builds on previous events, evolves
and transforms in the hands of citizens. The city itself is always in a state of flux. Change is inevitable, but we can decide how changes manifest in our environment. We are all actors on the great urban stage. However the story plays out is narrated by us — as long as we participate.
A new definition of family,
born in the city of millions of lonely dwellers,
urban vagabonds without a home or ties to hold them still.

What is the meaning of family to them?

A network of friends, classmates and colleagues?
Or a whole army of idle strangers by the train station,
coffee shop queue, escalator and elevator, ascending and descending
the unholy layers of department store hell.

There is a vague sense of kinship between citizens who,
for a brief moment, share the public space.
They share an arena, a stage, in a play that no one spectates,
but where everyone acts.

There is no director, it is a collage of random improvisations.
The actor frets on the stage, trying to interact with his fellows,
who seem blindly preoccupied with their own mindless wandering.
Only in a few rare moments
the actor manages to establish a connection,
and suddenly a story unveils itself.

The actors are relieved —
there is still hope for the play to have a purpose.
When the actor departs the stage, and fades back into white noise, he ponders on his affairs with the ghost community of urban cast.

They share something very important, but something that cannot be comprehended by society.
Their ties to each other are like air; random, fleeting, and intangible.
Yet they exist.

At a time of crisis, the actors share a direction, random becomes organized, absence becomes presence. It is as if the actors were woken from a deep slumber, and regained their sense of the plot.

They become more than a community of strangers — they establish a deeper sense of belonging and purpose.

It is similar to a family living under one roof. They respect each other as individuals, but at the same time, assume responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole.

The actor does not recognize his family members on the street, but on some mysterious level, they acknowledge each other in the ultimate urban story.
The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate the various dimensions in which the city is perceived, and present a conceptual model of the process of understanding not only the city, but also the urban experience of the individual, and the act of sharing it with others through narrative. I have illustrated five dimensions of the city, the role of the citizen in perceiving and observing them, the three narratives acts that compose of physical, intellectual, and narrative experiences, and, finally, some implications of the dialogue on those experiences in shaping and making of the city.

I began the thesis with a broad overlook of the global urban scene today, particularly in terms of sustainability. In order to fully comprehend the status and impact of cities, one needs to look at the big picture worldwide; how cities are still growing and expanding, and the world population is more and more centred in these dense agglomerations on the planet. The urban phenomenon has serious affects on the environment, local and global economies, not to mention social systems. To study the fundamental elements of the city, which are applicable to any urban location in the world, and the process of personal and collective experience of them, is, in my view, one of the most important tasks, not only
for the sustainability agenda, but also for the improvement of the general conditions and competences of the citizens themselves.

Though I have acknowledged the value of these urban studies, and have been well motivated to participate in such activities, I have also had to face my own limitations in contributing to the cause. My academic background has not provided an expert level of support in terms of knowledge or experience around the field of urban planning or research. I have only just started to grasp some of the major movements and theories, and the whole process of making this thesis has been a new exploration and learning experience for me. In the beginning I noted on how the field of urban studies is so vast that, to merely scratch the surface of some part of it hardly feels like a major accomplishment. That said, there would always be something more to examine, something more to discover, should one simply keep on looking. This in mind, in the following paragraphs I take a closer look at some of the critical points in this thesis, reflect on my choices of methods and materials, and give an overall evaluation of the whole thesis process and its outcome. Finally, I conclude the review with a vision for *Tokyo Flâneur*: an open invitation to discuss the possibilities of the future.

**Notes On The Study Script**

When I embarked on the expedition to write this thesis, I had a very blurry vision of what I wanted to achieve. Instead, I had a
clearer vision of what I wanted to do, where and how. The city I wanted to explore was Tokyo, and I was well on my way to go there. Next, I knew I wanted to immerse myself in the urban experience, as in the spirit of the flâneur. Somewhere in the back of my head I had just a faint feeling that I would discover something exciting, something worth investigating, there within the city, on the street or on the top of a skyscraper.

I did indeed make some fantastic discoveries — quite a few, in fact. At some point it dawned on me that, while I had my hands full with material — books, notes, pictures, stories — I still was not sure what to do with all of it. Everything seemed relevant in some aspect, but I was in desperate need to focus my aim. I had not managed to define any one specific problem to be solved by my research, and neither did I have any inspiring hypotheses to test out by analyzing the acquired data. I struggled with this scripting problem for a long time, and it was not until much later, after I had returned to Finland, that I came to a relieving realization. The research I had been conducting was not the traditional type of research that I thought it should be, but a combination, or a fusion, of a set of established strategies and methods.

I have attempted to position this thesis research into the wider academic framework of various research strategies, methodologies and schools of thought. I must admit, however, that my qualifications to assess the specific qualities of each research strategy and the validity of my research process in relation to them are quite limited, simply due to lack of sufficient research experience. Thus my research is definitely vulnerable to scrutiny and criticism by experts of these respective fields, and especially by those scholars
who stress objectivity over subjectivity in the researcher’s work.

I must especially make an observation about the grounded theory. The analysis method has some very strict, established rules, which I cannot completely subscribe to having complied with during this process. For example, the researcher should refrain from actions such as pre-research literature review, taping interviews and talking about a theory before it is written, all of which I have, in fact, not refrained from. There is, however, a parallel method to grounded theory, though in many ways different. It is called engaged theory. With some reservation, I can identify that the four levels of analysis in this specific theory — the levels being empirical, conjunctural, integrational and categorical — do apply to the analysis process that I have done for this research. Engaged theory has not, however, been a conscious choice of method, as have the other approaches described in The Study Script chapter.

Though I must humbly acknowledge these above-mentioned limitations concerning my choices of research strategies and methods, it should be noted that a subjective approach to an academic research is indeed a valid choice, and as this is mainly a study of the process of urban experience, a very individual and psychological phenomenon, such a choice would seem quite reasonable.

**The Creative Process**

This whole thesis process has been an exploration, a quest, to discover and understand what exactly is ‘urban experience.’ I began
this project with the mindset that I would put myself in the role of the flâneur, to experience the urban environment through keen observation, slow pace and attention to details, and keeping an eye on the events and stories that would unravel in the process. This part came to me quite naturally, and I was inspired in many occasions to write my thoughts and feelings in my notebooks. It was the phase of organizing and analyzing the massive amount of seemingly unrelated data that was the most difficult one, and perhaps the one where my lack of sufficient experience of academic research and urban studies proved to be a weakness.

The year I spent as an exchange student at Chiba University was crucial for the making of this thesis, as it was in that time period that I explored the city of Tokyo and its neighbouring cities firsthand. During that time, however, I faced many challenges concerning theoretical research and analysis. My skills in the Japanese language were, and still are, at beginner’s level — nowhere near advanced enough to read literature in Japanese. English literature on my thesis topics did not exactly lie around, though some good titles were available. Nevertheless, I was mostly dependant on online sources, and the discussions I had personally with a few professors. Guidance for my most burning problem — how to find, and crystallize the focus — was something that I unfortunately missed. I knew that I was standing in front of a royal bank of academic experience and knowledge, but I was too confused about the direction of my study to seek and ask for the right kind of information. This mismatch of opportunity defined most of my research efforts in Japan.

After returning to Finland I was pleased to find so many rel-
evant titles in English in local libraries. Also, for the first time in twelve months, I could consult books about writing a thesis, in Finnish. This was much less of an effort than searching for help online. Slowly but gradually the material I had collected started to make sense, and I could draw connections and find similarities between different aspects. I created several mindmaps of topics, sources, and even gathered the references into a chronological order on a timeline to get a historical perspective. After this, in correspondence with the phases in grounded theory and engaged theory, I began to categorize contents and formulated a matrix model of various combinations and interrelationships of world-views, purposes of narrative, forms of narrative, and audiences. I have not included that matrix in this final thesis, but it did spark the analysis of the urban dimensions, as well as the descriptions of narrative discourse.

**Evaluation Of Performance**

The results of the research process presented in this thesis are mainly threefold. First there is the general framing of the city within the global context, focusing on sustainability issues and participatory urban planning. Secondly, the citizen is portrayed as an experiencing individual, or the flâneur. And finally, there is the three-act story structure, which illustrates the interplay of events through which an individual forms his holistic experiential image of the city. Together these examinations and conceptualizations
form a broader system of operation, where perception and observation of the city inspires narrative discourse, which again, when acted out in various communities, brings about creative action that modifies the perceived urban sphere itself. To borrow the illustration of the spiral, used in describing the urban dimension of time, this system works in a similar fashion, creating nodes of change that evolve (revolve) upon each other, iterating the process over and over again.

The ideas and thoughts that I present through these various metaphors are by no means extraordinary or first of their kind, but I do believe that they have not been linked together into a systemic presentation like this before. It is quite obvious that the city, just as any physical space, is perceived in three dimensions, and adding the dimensions of time and luminosity is not new, either. However, I developed the dimensional representation for the purpose of organizing complex urban phenomena into easily comprehensible sections; to provide an approach to the non-physical qualities of the city, such as economic vitality or social layering, through their physical manifestations. Again, by providing this approach to the city, it serves as a kind of mirror for reflecting the various elements, or spheres, in which the citizen experiences the city.

The most essential product of the process is however the narrative composition using the three-act story structure, in which the individual engages in three types of activity, which all together affect and shape his overall experience of the city. The dimensions of the city elaborate on the first act of physical activity, where the citizen wanders the streets, open to sensory perceptions. The second and third acts, intellectual processing and narrative dialogue,
do not necessarily require physical presence in the urban space to
be examined. They are not explorations done by using the feet, but by engaging the mind.

Cities are always built and developed whether or not any ur-
ban narrative is actually appreciated, but the argument I wanted
to state with this thesis is that participatory planning and design,
where well-thought and well-communicated narrative is exercised,
lead to much more effective and successful results, for all parties
involved. The three-act story that I have presented here taps into
the question of ‘well-thought and well-communicated’ narrative;
it demonstrates the elements and phases essential to understand-
ing the city and urban experience. The story can be used as a kind
of map, if you will, for analyzing one’s own urban worldview, and
to share and expand it further.

In the light of the aim and purpose I had in mind for this the-
sis when I started the research, I feel I have managed to create a
rather holistic presentation, which can even be used as a tool for
the study of urban experience. I do not dismiss the fact that even
though the story seems to possess internal consistency, the po-
tential gaps and errors in my analysis would reveal themselves in
the case of attempting to apply it in practice, for example in a par-
ticipatory urban planning project. How applicable is the three-act
story in practice is a question I cannot provide an answer to at this
point, since no such testing has been conducted. Perhaps its only
use is in intellectual evaluation by the structured conceptualiza-
tions, in which case it could still prove to be useful in broadening
the understanding of the phenomena of urban experience, espe-
cially for individual citizens interested in the topic.
Should I have prolonged the research process and investigated these themes further, I would have liked to expand the portion of the impact of narrative. I mentioned previously a matrix of different purposes and forms of narrative, which I would have liked to develop into a complimentary ‘encore’ to the story. This time I had to however omit that part, since the matrix is still at a very elementary level without a clear coherence of thought. Other aspects I would be keen on studying further are the fields of phenomenology and hermeneutic research, since through this thesis process those research strategies, together with narrative theory, have raised my curiosity greatly. In the next, and final section of this thesis I present my views and hopes for the future, inspired by this project.

The Ambition Of Tokyo Flâneur

At the end of the Introduction, I wrote, “My sincere hope is that this thesis would encourage readers to return to the city with heightened senses, and find a connection.” I certainly hope that, upon reading this thesis, some questions, thoughts and ideas have emerged, and also that some guidance for processing them further have been provided.

I have been invested in this project for such a long time that I am most eager to surrender it from my hands, and hear what kind of the reception it gets from professionals in the field of urban studies, not to mention citizens. I want to hear discussion about
the topics of this thesis; I want to see people from different backgrounds coming together to share their stories about the city. I want to see perspectives bent and warped; I want to hear about events from previous times, and speculations about the future. I want to see urban cultures and street democracy elevated, sustainability rooted, and urban air space declared public space. And that which I cannot see or hear for myself, I want to see and hear through someone else’s story.

We, the citizens, need the urban narrative in our everyday lives. It is like the glue that keeps individuals in communities, or attaches a fragment of a story into a bigger picture of identity. It is the organic drama we all observe and produce in the city, as actors in one majestic set. What happens on the one side, affects another — what happens to one fellow citizen, affects the other.

This thesis has been a humble pursuit to convince you that your experience of the city is important. Whether you live in Tokyo, Helsinki, or some other city, I hope you will take this story with you the next time you walk the city streets. I encourage you to think on it, on your own impressions, and to engage in conversations to share your points of view. I invite you to share this vision of Tokyo Flâneur of a global culture of active flânerie and lively urban narrative.

The thread is open.
Fig. 8.1 A paper trail of wishes in the snow.
Photograph by author (2012).
When it suddenly snows out of the blue,
and those fair white sparkles dance in the air,
I see the metaphor of the city before me.

Caught up in an invisible turbulence and flow,
the flakes make their way,
gliding and twirling in random directions,
until finally landing,
some on trees, some on roofs, most on the street,
and some lucky ones
upon the head of a stranger.

Aren’t we all caught up in an invisible current,
thrown around wherever, whenever,
still trying to maintain
our individual sense of direction and goal?

Or simply getting more lost as the currents become relentless.

One man on the street is a stranger to another,
in this village of millions of pilgrims.
And yet, each fragile snowflake in the white noise is unique, and no path of descent is the same.

In this utter randomness there seems to be a flicker of purpose.

Why are they not all the same, repeating the same pattern? Why is there so much differentiation, when the whole still appears as one?

All I can say is, it certainly makes the phenomenon so much more mesmerizing. And the stories to follow never end.

This makes the flâneur curious and excited in the face of tomorrow, but the narrator in him feels anxious.

How to choose the right stories, the good ones?

The urban flow never seizes, and never waits.
Stories flow past like flakes in the sky —
you catch one with your eyes,
but then a sudden wind blows and you lose it forever.

Another one is easy to grab, yet you cannot help but wonder,
“What happened to the lost one?”

What if it was the one, the most important piece,
and I let it slip through my fingers?
To look for it now would be futile —
there is no rewinding of the flow.

Yet the thoughts flash in the mind of the narrator.

Stories that might have been,
stories moulded from desperation and regret —
the encounter not encountered, the eternal mystery,
emerged from a mere fleeting impression
and unidentified emotion.

How to choose the stories, the right ones?

As I ponder, millions of unique sparks have shined before my eyes.
As I keep pining, they keep flowing.

If the hardest lesson for the flâneur
is to feel what he sees,
then the hardest lesson for the narrator
is to let go of what he feels.

The stories told, whatever they may be, live forever.
But a story untold, unrevealed, and forever lost,
is the gravest thing of all.

The narrator’s fear — to lose the story —
is the fear of failing his role in the city.

There is no cure for the narrator’s perpetual anxiety,
other than narration itself.
Wherever, whenever —
in the city, through the eyes of the flâneur,
capturing impressions that only appear for a second,
and then vanish.

To testify lives and moments in the city,
to understand, even just a little,
and to connect with one another.

The path may be random,
but it is still wise to trust it takes us where we must go.

Whether we find ourselves descending down the streets,
or, if luck should have it,
elevated by a stranger’s welcome.
Articles & Essays


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**Filmography**


**Lectures**


**Prose**


This thesis would not have been possible without the many generous contributions from academic professionals, researchers, fellow students, friends and acquaintances, both in Finland and in Japan. First and foremost I want to thank my thesis supervisor Kirsi Niinimäki for all the valuable advice and feedback that she has provided during this entire process. I have also been much encouraged and supported in several occasions by Tiina Laurila, Director of Master’s Degree Programme in Creative Sustainability.

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I drink in the city with every glimpse, every step, every breath.
I walk the streets to own them.