FOREWORD

A Walker in the City:

Maeda Ai and the Mapping of Urban Space

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In a life that passed too quickly and ended too abruptly, Maeda Ai was able to live the time of his life more fully and imaginatively than most of us who have been granted the span allotted to us. For those who knew him in what now seems to have been a momentary meeting the effect of his swift passage through our lives has far exceeded the event of an encounter. Many of us in the 1960s and 1970s interested in pursuing the study of Japan's culture, literature, and history, found in Maeda's writings an interpretative propaedeutic far richer and more complex than the simplistic exercises area studies promoted as forms of training—usually little more than extended language study informed by indefensible claims of cultural transparency. In the Japanese scholarly world the interpretative templates were no more helpful. As a result, Maeda occupied an ambiguous position, often reinforced by a disciplined self-marginalization between mindless empiricism, shared by both Marxists and non-Marxists alike, and approaches driven by outrageous conceits of exceptionalism based on the irreducible authority of cultural (read as ethnic) authenticity that not even the most masterful acquisition of language proficiency by a foreigner could ever hope to match.

Maeda was not simply devoted to understanding the spectacle of Japan's capitalist modernization since the nineteenth century; he was also a committed modernist convinced that the singular transformation brought Japan into the world as readily as it brought the world into Japan. This meant that despite, or better yet, because of the necessity of recognizing the inheritance of a specific culture of reference as it mingled with the new, he was able to recognize how much Japan had changed and how the nature of change, as already forecast by the philosopher Tosaka Jun in the 1930s, "linked Japan to a

wider world.” As the essays in this collection show, time and again, Maeda’s work was devoted to demonstrating how the great transformation was simply part of what Frederic Jameson has called a “singular modernity,” making Japan’s inflection interchangeable with modernizing experiences found elsewhere throughout the globe and thus as accessible as any other instance of the modern to seekers of the meaning of modernity. When I first met Maeda back in the 1970s and described my interest in Tokugawa nativism and thinkers such as Hirata Atsutane, perhaps the most intellectually obdurate exceptionalist thinkers Japan has produced, his response was to protest that he “was allergic to such people” and what they stood for.

Maeda Ai was formed in an intellectual and political culture marked by the immediate postwar years, when he attended university and began his teaching career. These years witnessed the incendiary mass mobilizations from 1960 on that expressed dissatisfaction with Japan’s dependent relationship to the United States (now that the military occupation had officially ended). It was inflamed by the new U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Pact, the singular failure of social democratic discourse and its subsequent darkening in the lengthening shadow of a one-party “democracy” supported by the United States, and the explosion of a student movement and its radicalization prompted by both the state’s effort to “manage” universities and the recognition that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was becoming a global event. In Japan during the decade of the 1960s and early 1970s, most universities were either periodically closed or campuses and buildings were sporadically seized and occupied on an unscheduled basis by student groups. Frequent confrontations on the streets between students and riot police often defined the educational culture of the times and resembled, in pace and rhythm, carefully orchestrated scenes seemingly inspired by cinematic medieval horse operas (*chanbara*).

If the conjuncture provided the background noise to Maeda’s formation (in an ironic gesture he once confessed to me in a Chicago bar to his own “political cowardice”), the movement of events simply reinforced his perception that the site of modernity and its consequential discords had always been the city—the large urban concentrations that signified for him the moment Japan, with other industrializing societies, changed the received human ecology between countryside and city, provoked by the massive migrations of peasantry into the new urban industrial workplace. It was this fact that constituted for Maeda the singularity of modernity, inasmuch as it manifests the fateful and inevitable alteration of the space-time relationship by privileging the former over the latter and thus necessitated the identification of a new chronotope. With Maeda this privileging of space signaled the importance of the modern city—the massive urban complexes that reached deeply

into the surrounding countryside, according to the folklorist Yanagita Kunio, and demanded its sacrifice—transmuted into the space of culture. Yet it is interesting to notice how the city, the expanded urban space, not only incorporated time by ontologizing the present but also absorbed the countryside itself, in his view lost its claim to autonomy promised by an older division of labor between town and country. Concern for the maintenance of the division between city and countryside appeared precisely at the moment the new metropolitan cities embarked on their expansion and colonization of space and when they projected a “universal” self-image of modernity that excluded any other alternative.

Maeda saw the emergence of this new urban space both as the subject of cultural analysis and as the occasion for working a new and appropriate interpretative strategy capable of bringing together history, urban geography and planning, ethnography, material culture, and literature into what now appears as a cultural studies “before the letter.”

Although Maeda saw his own method as topographical (and even topological, hinting at mathematical rigor and scientific precision), in keeping with the spatial privilege modernity accords to the city, his primary instrument of analysis was the text of literature produced within the space of the city and that constituted its inscription. Texts needed deciphering as well as reading, and here Maeda turned to the model of the map, the principal template for representing space as such. The map supplied the coordinates organizing space that could provide an optic through which to look at literary texts and ways they signified the cityspace of their production. In this regard, Maeda’s earlier work on late Tokugawa fictions, *gesaku*, already disclosed an interest in the city, albeit a premodern Edo that would become Tokyo, and how it supplied the space for literary production and the market of a reading public. It is hardly surprising that this work concentrated on examining writers imbedded in Edo life (Bakin) and its transition to Tokyo in the early Meiji period (Narushima Ryūhoku). But what these fictions and subsequent literary nonliterary texts offered were maps detailing specific spaces and sites, whether the “utopia” of Meiji prisons, the quarters of lower-class Tokyo reported by Yokoyama Gennosuke, or the Shanghai Bund in the late 1920s envisaged by Yokomitsu Riichi. Maeda looked upon literary texts as maps capable of yielding knowledge of a location and delineating the details of organization of streets and sites that filled and shaped the interiority of a city space to make it recognizably a place. But reading as a form of mapping required a committed observer of the scene itself, an urban ethnographer willing to walk the streets of the city and faithfully record, like the great urban ethnographer of Tokyo streets of the 1920s Kon Wajirō, the passing montage.

More than anything else, Maeda was a walker in the city, any and all cities, even though Tokyo was the place he loved most and knew best, a careful observer of its infinite and often overlooked ordinary details that revealed all but forgotten remnants of different histories coexisting in the modern present yet capable of recalling other moments. As much as he was a scholar of literature he was a reporter of urban sites, always maintaining a slight distance from them, like Kon and indeed all those Japanese writers he tracked down who traveled to and wrote from foreign cities. In his principal book, *Toshi kukan no naka no bungaku* (Literature as cityspace), Maeda frequently focused on narratives whose authors were implicated in specific cityspaces: Ōgai's Berlin; Yokomitsu's Shanghai, the quintessential colonial city before the war, with its dangerous mix of foreign imperialists and subject peoples; Higuchi Ichiyō's late Meiji Tokyo, still vibrant with the rhythms of its Edo past mixing with the new in the neighborhood of her late nineteenth-century childhood; and Kafū's historically completed Paris, contrasted to a Tokyo "under reconstruction." As a good geographer and explorer, Maeda would walk these cities and acquire firsthand knowledge of the specific locations that structured stories and novels, always seeking to follow the traces of authors who had come before him to make the space of the city the subject of their texts. When he was in Chicago as a visiting professor he walked its streets tirelessly in search of traces of Japan and went to Kalamazoo to fulfill one stop in Kafū's only American itinerary. An indefatigable traveler, perhaps satisfying one of the unfulfilled ambitions of Tokugawa eccentrics (who were prohibited from traveling abroad) and their desire for difference, Maeda went to Berlin, Shanghai, Paris, and indeed anywhere the writer had preceded him. His most complex map and greatest mastery was the city of Tokyo, which over the years he had carefully deciphered for its multiple and mixed pasts and still surviving signs of other temporalities, however slight and insignificant, now concealed by the massive materiality of the modern city. I remember an exhausting walking tour of parts of Tokyo Maeda had mapped out, especially remaining traces from its Edo past, and that still housed the faintest traces of a forgotten history that he identified and that still bespoke its memory. I even tried once to recuperate this mazelike tour, looking for a restaurant that apparently had originated in the late Edo or early Meiji period, but failed miserably. Maeda recognized how much Tokyo had changed since its modern beginnings, how much the signs of mixed temporalities had been all but destroyed by the succession of earthquake, World War II bombings, and the senseless desecration inflicted by the Olympics and entrepreneurial developers, how important it was to keep vigil on the remains and survivals of earlier times. It was, in fact, this immense sensitivity to the minute reminders of the city's pasts, made in-

distinct by the image of an endlessly present space, that disclosed how Maeda envisioned the relationship between time and space demanded by modernity, industrialization, and urbanization. And it was precisely this approach that guided him as he sought to read texts for inscription of cityspace.

Maeda was no ordinary flâneur, however. His earlier studies on the verbal fictions of Edo in the late Tokugawa period acquainted him with a kind of premodern urban ethnography, where authors were always looking in on a scene, seeking to “penetrate the hole,” as it was put, as well as the whole, in order to grasp its topos, voyeurs, peeping toms, recording things that colonized space, conduct, but always at a distance. Their purpose was to get behind (*ura*) the surface (*omote*) to make proper judgments concerning the style or lack of it in the subjects under observation. In a sense, this talent reflected “taste,” “discernment,” to constitute a culture of *furyū*, as it is often called, whose principal figures were eccentrics like Hiraga Gennai, marked by their desire for difference (defamiliarizing and even exoticizing everyday life), centered in the city life of merchant quarters. In this regard, Maeda resembled Roland Barthes, on whose method he wrote an informed essay, and shared with him a passion for the ordinary that is habitually overlooked but invariably capable of emitting cultural meanings. Maeda’s walking, his incessant threading through the byways of a text’s space, following its coordinates to grasp the totality, like Edogawa Rampo’s amateur detective Akechi, ultimately fused a premodern ethnography practiced by the eccentric with a modern awareness of how the space of the city has come to constitute the central subject of modern literature.

The essays selected for translation in this volume offer the English reader a first glimpse of this complex but modernist vision, its interpretative accessibility, to those who can claim no special knowledge of Japan but only an interest in the experience of modernity and the ways Maeda went about implementing it. But they also constitute what Claude Roy, referring to the interwar years in France, once described as “a remembrance of things to come” that has now appropriately become our own inheritance.