Modernity, space and national representation at the Tokyo Olympics 1964

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Abstract: The 1964 Tokyo Olympics acted as a rite of passage for post-war Japan, symbolizing the modernization of the city and the country. This was reflected by the space and architecture of the venues. Urban development of Olympic cities has been scrutinized recently but the symbolic implications have been touched upon only in passing, most especially in Tokyo’s case. This article will show how symbolic layers of architecture and space aimed at linking history and modernity while bypassing the highly problematic legacy of ultra-nationalism and World War II. An important hub for transmitting this message was the Meiji Shrine dedicated to the first emperor of modern Japan. The hallmark building of the 1964 Games, Kenzo Tange’s National Gymnasium, interacted with the shrine by way of an architectonic axis connecting them. This contrasted with the different spatial styles evident at the 1960 Olympics in Rome and 1972 Olympics in Munich, which testified to their different relationships to the national past. While developing infrastructure such as canalization and traffic was very important for Tokyo, symbolic revitalization of the city’s fabric was equally crucial.

Since their revival by Count de Coubertin at the end of the nineteenth century, the Olympic Games have served as a symbol of modernity. It has often been pointed out that the Olympics offer newborn nations a clear path to international recognition as modern states: first joining the International Olympic Committee (IOC), then sending a delegation to the Olympics, eventually winning medals and finally hosting the Olympics themselves. Post-war Japan was less newborn than reborn, but was nonetheless in the position of having to prove its modernity. Japan’s first attempt at establishing itself among the ranks of the industrialized nations had ended in ultra-nationalist disaster, and after the war, sports were seen as a way for the country to regain its legitimacy. Unfortunately, Japan was barred from sending a delegation to the 1948 London Olympics on account of its role in World War II. This was all the more bitter due to the ironic fact that Tokyo had been scheduled to host the (ultimately cancelled) Olympics.
just eight years previously. It was not long, however, before Japan had shed its Olympic pariah status, and in 1964 the Games finally came to Tokyo. With the Olympics meant to serve as Japan’s rite of passage from wartime notoriety and post-war poverty into the nation’s dawning era as an economic powerhouse, the question of modernity was central in 1964. The capital Tokyo was to showcase the progress Japan had made during the 19 years since the end of World War II and therefore underwent impressive transformations. The remaking of the urban fabric included substantial improvements in infrastructure and also helped fundamentally to modernize the city. But this modernization has also played an important role in supporting the rite of passage as a credible narrative of the Games – not only for the Japanese but also a world-wide audience.

Conceptions and demonstrations of modernity comprise only one side of the Olympic coin. The invocation of historical symbolism is an equally intrinsic part of the Games, as can be seen in the very conception of the modern Games as a resurrection of the ancient Greek festival. In 1964, ‘Japanese history’ meant much more than simply references to antiquity; the shadow of the immensely significant history which had taken place just two decades prior was inevitably cast over the Tokyo Games – a fact which could not be ignored by the organizers. This was especially the case as it was a major aim of the conservatives in power to cast the emperor, the Shôwa tennô, in a peaceful aura as Japan’s head of state. This was no simple task, considering the role he had played in Japanese politics since his ascendance to the throne in 1926. Tokyo was the ideal place to invoke once again the power of the Shôwa tennô as a herald of progress yet also to connect him to the history of his family. The capital had only recently been moved from the old imperial city Kyôto to Tokyo in 1868, thus making it the centre of modern Japan. At the 1964 Olympics, architecture and space served symbolic ends as well as ameliorating the city’s infrastructure. The objectives were therefore twofold: proving Japan’s modernity and reconciling history. The buildings for the Games were the main tokens of modernity, along with masterpieces of technical development such as the Shinkansen bullet-train. Their placement within the urban map was a key to connecting modernity and history and to altering the meaning of this

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4 Juridically, the tennô did not act as head of state when speaking the opening formula, as this might have caused counter-reactions by the socialists or communists. He was simply acting as patron of the Olympic Games. But this subtle differentiation was most likely not understood by the audience in Japan or worldwide, who surely were affirmed that the tennô actually was the head of state when watching the opening ceremony. See Tagsold, ‘The Tokyo Olympics as a token’, 116.
connection after World War II, which was a precondition for turning the Games into a success.

Although urban development spawned by sports mega-events such as the Olympics have been increasingly scrutinized in the last decade, the symbolic realms of architecture and urban layout have often been treated only in passing. Since Olympic Games have turned into highly merchandized events, keywords such as ‘place promotion’ and ‘managing spectacle’ seem to be most appropriate in describing the stakes for urban planners. But urban planners before the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games had different notions. This was especially the case in cities such as Tokyo, where symbolic politics and the burdens of history called for image management not simply in order to enhance marketing opportunities but to reconstruct national identities.

In order to fill this gap and add to the theoretical discussion about urban development and Olympics from a different angle, the main task of this article is to analyse the historical topography of the Olympic areas and the question of how the venues were placed within it. Secondly, the interaction of space, architecture, history and modernity will be examined. It will be useful to consider analogous cases in order better to follow these symbolic layers. Japan was not alone among the defeated states of World War II in attempting to use sports as a means of reconciliation. The other two ‘Axis powers’ – Italy and Germany – also played host to the Olympics within the three decades following the end of the war. Rome, Tokyo and Munich faced some very similar problems in dealing with modernity, history and space in the context of the Olympics. This was not only because of World War II, but also more especially because of the fulfilled albeit problematic Olympic promise of 1936 and the broken promises of 1940 and 1944, when Japan and Italy were supposed to host the Games. Finally, the restructuring of Tokyo had lasting effects which were not all in line with what had been originally planned.

Re-placing history

The location of the Tokyo Olympics was historical in many ways, which put the Games in a meaningful spatial context but also greatly reshaped the space itself. The majority of the most visible and important Olympic facilities – including the main stadium, the Olympic Village and the National Gymnasium where the swimming events were held – were set up in Shibuya and Shinjuku. These 2 of Tokyo’s 23 inner-city wards lie in the western portion of the city, near the Imperial Palace. The sports facilities

5 These keywords were taken from J. Gold and M. Gold (eds.), *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning and the World’s Games, 1896–2012* (London, 2007).
were newly built whereas the Olympic Village made use of already existing structures.\(^6\)

The area was dominated by one landmark, the Meiji Shrine, surrounded by a small park. This shintōist shrine is dedicated to Emperor Meiji, the leader of Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century. The proximity of the shrine was not accidental, though there were practical reasons for the choice of Shibuya and Shinjuku as well. The shrine was built a few years after the Meiji tennō’s death. During his rule (1868–1912) he had led the country into modernity after a 200-year period during which the ruling shoguns had strictly controlled and limited Japanese contact with the West. As shintō had been reformed as a state religion centred on the tennō in the role of the nation’s father, it was logical that he should be enshrined following his death, and that the shrine should become both a religious and a nationalist symbol.\(^7\) The Meiji tennō was nurtured as a symbol for the beginning of modernization and industrialization in Japan during his reign, leading to the formation of a middle class in the 1920s. Since its construction, millions of Tokyoites have gathered at the Meiji Shrine to celebrate the dawning of each new year.

The outer precinct, about one kilometre away from the main Meiji Shrine itself and not directly connected to it, has been dedicated to sports since the 1920s. The Meiji Shrine Athletic Stadium was built there, and a biennial national sports day was celebrated beginning in 1924, under the patronage of the tennō.\(^8\) Sports and modernity went hand in hand in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, the most important symbols of this having been the stadium and the sports days which took place there. Japan’s best athletes met at the Meiji Stadium to prove that the country was not to be put to shame by the West but had reached equal levels of performance. In doing so, the sportsmen honoured the late Meiji tennō. As the interior minister put it in 1924 during his opening speech of the first Meiji Shrine Sports Day:

Formerly the people were full of military spirit and the quintessence of it expressed itself as the bushidō [way of the samurai], and it ruled the minds of the national citizens for a long time. At the same time the holy Meiji-Emperor was enshrined, along with the international relations new sport festivities were created, and these are internationally showing great development. At this time we have to learn of the others’ strong points and drop our weaknesses and unite all together. I believe we have to learn from new leaders.\(^9\)

\(^6\) Some of the other main facilities, like the Komazawa Stadium in Setagaya, were set up in other wards of Tokyo because the Shinjuku/Shibuya area did not provide enough space for all venues. Still most major events like the opening and closing ceremony of the Games took place in Shinjuku or Shibuya.


\(^8\) K. Irie, ‘Kindai no tennō-sei to meijijingukyōgitaikai’ (The modern Tenno-system and the Meiji Shrine Sports Days), in K. Yanō (ed.), *Undōkai to nihon kindai* (Sports Days and Modern Japan) (Tokyo, 1999), 157–98.

While this was a modern, open nationalism, a much more dangerous form of ultra-nationalism was gaining momentum and would come to run rampant during these sport days in the 1930s. This led to a diminution of the Western influence seen earlier; invented traditions like the bushidō, which the interior minister alluded to in 1924, were also emphasized, quite ironically, in the name of the late emperor Meiji.\(^{10}\)

In the early 1930s, when it was not yet clear who would emerge as winner of the struggle between a more open, benign nationalism and the ultra-nationalism which ultimately led to World War II, the city of Tokyo began a campaign to host the Olympic Games. This bid succeeded in 1936, shortly before the start of the Berlin Games. The plan was for the Games to be staged in a rebuilt Meiji Shrine Athletic Stadium surrounded by many more sporting structures. However, these plans led to a bitter reaction on the side of Japanese ultra-nationalists, who feared for the sanctity of the shrine in the face of the foreign masses who would crowd around it and felt that the Games should be staged in another area of the city.\(^{11}\) Japanese ultra-nationalist circles were doubtful of the symbolic benefits to be gained by hosting the Games. Ultimately, when years of smouldering tension finally gave way to full-fledged war with the Chinese in 1937, the 1940 Olympics were handed back over to the IOC because of reluctance in military circles to use the nation’s spare resources on sports instead of war. Instead, the mythical enthronement of the first emperor, Jimmu, 2,600 years earlier, was celebrated that year in Tokyo in a fashion reminiscent of an Olympic celebration but adapted in various ways to fit the ideological needs of the ultra-nationalist military. The East Asian Sports Meeting, staged at the Meiji Shrine Athletic Stadium as part of the festivities, failed to capture the interest of the masses.\(^{12}\)

It was in 1957, on the occasion of hosting the Asian Games to be held one year later, that the old stadium was torn down to make room for the new national stadium, which was to serve as the stage of the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. The other two most famous venues – the National Gymnasium and the Annex of the National Gymnasium, both designed by Kenzo Tange – were built much closer to the Meiji Shrine, itself next to the Olympic Village. The grounds and buildings of the Village had an interesting history. Until 1958, the area had been called Washington Heights and was used as a military area by the US forces. The local organizing committee, the city government and the national government had all worked to persuade the US forces to return the area back to Japanese control so that the youth of


the world could be housed in the small wooden barracks. But the area’s military history reached even further back: before 1945, the grounds had been the Japanese Imperial Army barracks. The first ever airplane takeoff from Japanese soil took place there in 1910, and the Shōwa emperor (1926–89) himself used the grounds in the 1930s and early 1940s to inspect troops who were about to be sent to battlefields all over Asia. A few years later the whole complex was utterly destroyed as a consequence of the war waged and lost by the ultra-nationalists.

Looking at the grounds occupied by the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, one can see that the Games both replaced history and were themselves placed in a historical context by their closeness to the Meiji Shrine. There were many layers of history, though, with different meanings, which make this geographical palimpsest interesting. The revival of the outer precinct continued the sports tradition of the 1920s, which at the time could be seen as a sign of modernity; the pre-war tradition was to be resumed following the dark years of war between 1931 and 1945. But the grounds were also a symbol of ultra-nationalism, which had interpreted sports for the masses through the lens of bushidō. The return of Washington Heights meant coming to terms with recent history and symbolically ending occupation in the capital – that the American military base had been a home of Japanese militarism until 1945 was more or less ignored in 1964. All this shows that the relationship between history and the 1964 Olympics was very complex. The Games were not simply about denying or forgetting the past; they were as much about finding the right track to fulfilling the promises of modernity which had been lost from sight during the ultra-nationalist era.

Tokyo’s spatial construction was interrupted and rewritten by the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century, and the areas where the Olympics took place had a history of less than a hundred years. Despite this, these areas were heavily laden with different meanings. Western journalists had problems understanding these layers of meaning and quite often relied on describing the city as a mixture of tradition and modernity. But within Japan, these layers were legible and telling. These symbolic meanings escape a wider audience, most especially for non-Western hosts of the Olympics, since knowledge about the non-Western cities tends to be superficial. Tokyo, Mexico City and Seoul have been dealt with infrequently and the impact of the Games for the notion of history and modernity is only touched on the surface. Beijing’s Games are probably the only exception as they were judged as highly political and were well analysed.13

13 While Mexico City and Seoul have been scarcely touched upon in various books and papers regarding space and architecture, Beijing has been so well documented that listing all references would extend to writing a bibliography. One of the most insightful accounts is given by S. Brownell, Beijing’s Games: What the Olympics Mean to China (Lanham, 2008), 97–128. For a rare account of Mexico City see M. Barke, ‘Mexico City 1968’, in Gold and Gold (eds.), Olympic Cities, 183–96.
Modernity, the event and the city

It was not the Olympic Stadium that was the most important landmark of modernity at the Olympics 1964. This stadium was conventional, generating little comment among the architectural community, though of course it generated little critique either. It was the Yoyogi National Gymnasium, where the swimming events were hosted, which stood out among the Olympic venues, most of all for the daring curves of its roof. In designing the gymnasium, Kenzo Tange played the same role for the Tokyo Olympics as had been played in Rome 1960 by Pier Luigi Nervi and in Munich 1972 by Günther Behnisch, designing hallmarks of modernity recognized around the world: the Palazzo dello Sport in Rome and the Olympiastadion in Munich, which had an especially breathtaking roof.

The choice of Tange to design the National Gymnasium created an interesting connection to the distant past. His first major achievement as an architect was the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, built in the 1950s. This museum is a rectangular building reminiscent of the classical modernism of Corbusier or van der Rohe. Not all of Tange’s designs in Hiroshima were rectangular, however: the Memorial Cenotaph, also a curved structure like the gymnasium, is the spiritual centre of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. The souls of the atomic bomb’s victims are enshrined under it, and it is the focus of each year’s memorial events on 6 August. Thus, the gymnasium served as a bridge between the Olympics and Hiroshima. This connection was again reinforced by the organizers with the selection of Sakai Yorinoshi, born on 6 August 1945 just 70 kilometres from the centre of the blast, as the final runner of the Olympic torch relay.\(^{14}\)

In addition to its implicit links to Hiroshima, the National Gymnasium was conspicuously linked to the Meiji Shrine and thus to the alleged roots of Japanese modernity that were such a focus of the Tokyo Games. The gymnasium was built in such a way as to allow an imagined line of sight from the resting place of the Meiji tennô’s kami\(^{15}\) at the centre of the shrine, passing through the shrine’s gates to meet the centre of the gymnasium a few hundred metres to the south. This direct line, broken only by the trees surrounding the Meiji Shrine, firmly connected the two and gave a sense that the post-war modernity represented by the National Gymnasium was a continuation of the pre-war modernist tradition. At the same time, the unsullied post-war modernity of the gymnasium reflected back upon the Meiji Shrine, dispersing doubts that the emperor was anything but a charismatic leader or that he was in fact the source of the Japanese

\(^{14}\) Tagsold, ‘The Tokyo Olympics as a token’, 125.
\(^{15}\) Kami is often translated as ‘god’. But this would evoke false connotations, especially when speaking of a living tennô, who is also a kami, as a ‘living god’. A kami is a kind of divine ancestor, whose benevolence is important for shaping presence. In the case of tennô, as spiritual head of shintô religion and – from the mid-nineteenth century to 1945 – Father of the Nation, they are already kami alive.
ultra-nationalism that had led to a path of destruction and defeat. In that sense, William H. CoADrake’s judgment of Tange’s design, that the ‘forms grew from the need to . . . come to terms with national tradition’\textsuperscript{16} takes on new meaning.

It was not only the venues of the Games themselves that served as symbols of Japanese modernity in 1964; the entire city of Tokyo had been transformed in the years before the Olympics. Highways, the bullet-train Shinkansen and the monorail connecting the inner city with the airport comprised dramatic improvements in the city’s infrastructure. Modern buildings such as the NHK broadcasting centre in Shibuya sprang up close to the Olympic venues. The canalization systems were renewed from their state of disrepair and partial disfunctionality. The Tokyo Olympics were thus a typical example of how mega-events serve as a ‘trigger for large-scale urban improvements’ since the 1960 Games in Rome, as Chalkley and Essex have pointed out.\textsuperscript{17} Urban planners used the Games to improve the infrastructure of Tokyo, something badly needed due to the hasty reconstruction after 1945 and the enormous growth of the city during the rapid industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s. Several critics have recently commented on Olympic cities’ efforts to bring their infrastructure up to date.\textsuperscript{18} The reworking of the urban fabric in the context of mega-events in the last 50 years was nowhere as intense as in Tokyo, but generally the city fits well with the patterns analysed. What these critics tend to omit, however, is the symbolic level of the improvements. For instance the renewing of the canalization took on a more general meaning. The drastic improvement of hygiene standards and the revitalization of Tokyo’s main river Sumida – which had emitted quite a strong odour before – was also an important ritual of self-purification, according to Tetsuo Sakurai.\textsuperscript{19} Even functional improvements of the city were translated as coming to terms with Japan’s recent history.

The city’s appearance changed rapidly and was used as a background for the Olympic torch relay and the marathon so as to allow the world to appreciate the astounding rebirth of Japan’s capital – just two decades after its almost complete destruction. Since the Tokyo Olympics were the first to be broadcast live via satellite worldwide, the marathon was an excellent chance to show the world this city’s new face. Far more than individual landmark buildings, the route of the marathon showed the extent of change which had taken place in preparation for the Games. It followed the newly built Kōshū kaidō Highway through the city, its asphalt surface a powerful symbol of modernity in an age when pictures of the new Highway 1 could


\textsuperscript{17} Chalkley and Essex, ‘Urban development’, 374.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.; Liao and Pitts, ‘A brief historical review’.

make it to the front page of Tokyo guidebooks. Or, as the official report formulated this overall task: ‘By far the greatest project which the Tokyo Metropolitan Government was required to handle was under the heading of road and highways.’

Space, history and axes of the former axis powers

The marathon route in Tokyo shows a basic difference in the approach which had been taken in Rome regarding the use of space and history to represent the cities. In Rome, the route led past ancient buildings from the days of empire. The use of these ruins to emphasize the theme of antiquity extended far beyond the marathon; the gymnastic events were held at Baths of Caracalla, and wrestling took place at the Basilica di Massenzio. According to the official report, ‘certain monuments were also used for the purpose of giving the Rome Games a more particular Roman character’. Where the Tokyo Games found their Japanese character in the modernity of the venues, the Roman Games seemed to express their Roman identity only by using ancient imagery. Munich, the third city staging Olympic Games in countries formerly belonging to the so-called ‘Axis powers’ took an approach similar to Tokyo in using modern elements as background for the sporting events. This dichotomy in the use of history has been strongly emphasized for the Italian and German Games by Eva Modrey in her somewhat misleading if nevertheless highly interesting essay. The entanglement of history and modernity, however, was more complicated in all three cases. As an example the (lack of) use of architectonical axes at the Games of the former Axis powers is a telling metaphor.

Rome’s venues offered two urban axes. One long stretch connected the Foro Italico, at the time of its construction called the Foro Mussolini, with the Palazzo dello Sport at the other end. Nervi’s modern masterpiece, in a sense mirroring the Yoyogi National Gymnasium, was built directly on the site which had been used to stage E 42, Mussolini’s EXPO 1942, cancelled because of World War II. This terrain as well as the Foro Mussolini...
should have also served as the location of the 1944 Games. The former E 42 area offered the second more representative axis leading straight to Nervi’s Palazzo as a newly added centre-piece, thereby placing it in a historically problematic context. Tokyo’s struggle with the past was more subtle than Rome’s, as can be seen in the most important axis of the Olympic architecture. The axis linking the Meiji Shrine and the National Gymnasium was subtle but with powerful symbolic undertones. The Meiji tennō and his shrine served as anchor for the Tange’s hall. This again accentuated his role as the father of Japan’s first period of modernity, a tradition that had only to be continued to unmake the heritage of ultranationalism. Anyone curious about who the Meiji emperor had been and what historical role he had played could visit the remarkably sympathetic portrayal of his life at the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery, located next to the Olympic Stadium. The symbolism connecting the emperor to modernity served to white-wash the imperial family, the Meiji tennō and most of all his grandson the Shôwa tennō, rather than to tackle historical responsibilities. It also underlined Tokyo’s role as the modern, imperial capital of Japan. Since moving the capital from Kyôto to Tokyo in 1868, the city had been rapidly transformed under the auspices of the new emperor Meiji. History seemingly repeated itself en route to 1964 under the reign of his grandson, the Shôwa tennō. The whole city was decorated with chrysanthemums, the symbolic flower of the imperial family and not of the state itself; this deepened the (false) impression that the imperial family played a central role in the staging of the Games.

The planners in Munich were the only ones among the three cities to avoid any architectural axis in the layout of the terrain, as these were deemed typical of dictatorships like the Nazi regime. Axes were replaced by a spatial openness in the inner city, stressed by the planting of lime trees, which also lined Munich’s central boulevards. It is tempting to compare the efforts in Munich to those in Rome and Tokyo: Germany had come to terms with its recent past while Japan was still struggling with it and Rome simply ignored it. But Berlin’s Games in 1936 still acted partially as a model for Munich as a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’, despite the fact that the messages conveyed contradicted the ideologies of 1936. Munich’s spatial concept was more attuned to history, even though a fundamental and broad discussion of Berlin’s legacy had to wait several years longer. It could be read as a renunciation of Berlin while replacing the need for a strong axis with a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’.

A further point is important when comparing the urban planning for the Olympics in 1960, 1964 and 1972. The pressure on West German organizers had a completely different quality than that felt by their Italian or Japanese forerunners. Both Rome and Tokyo were finally hosting Olympics that

had been promised to them decades earlier, and were thereby fulfilling a modern dream. But Munich had to be constantly cautious about possible critical historical interpretations. If Munich’s organizers ever forgot this responsibility, East German critics dubbing ‘72 two times 36’ would doubtless have reminded them of Germany’s burdens of history. 27 Italy and Japan had no such Olympic experience to remind them of what was at stake. The concept of the Olympiapark as a modern, open and thereby democratic space was the reaction to this situation, as Kay Schiller and Christopher Young have shown. 28

Modernity after the end of modernity

The showcasing of Tokyo’s modernity in the 1964 Olympic Games had some surprising consequences in the long run. Researchers have largely neglected these long-ranging changes to urban development incited by mega-events, according to H. Hiller. 29 The staging of the Olympic Games and its major changes in the symbolic structure of the city caused unforeseen spatial effects. As Henri Lefebvre’s theory of special analysis points out, space is a matter of conception and perception, but space is also occupied by humans and lived in. 30 In Tokyo’s case, this meant that a different modernity began to take hold of the Olympic spaces after the event itself had come to a close. Harajuku, a district in the Shibuya ward, spent the next three decades as a stage for Japan’s youth subculture. The district’s station served the Olympic Village and Tange’s National Gymnasium during the Games as well as the south side of the Meiji Shrine. Following NHK’s erection of the Olympic Media Centre, other television concerns established bases of operations there as well, drawing stylish shops and bars after them. 31 Beginning during the Olympics, the so-called Harajuku Tribe started to form; this was first because of the international flair of the Olympic location – filled as it was with athletes, officials and journalists from all over the world – and in later years it continued because of the fancy shops and the chance of being ‘discovered’ by the area’s many media companies. Starting in the 1970s, one could see Japan’s youth striving for fame every weekend next to the JR Harajuku Station on the south side of the former Olympic Village, which had been transformed

30 H. Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Malden, 1994), 38–41.
into a park following the closing of the Games. The area’s roads were closed to traffic on Sundays, opening the streets to the Harajuku Tribe. The phenomenon of bands giving spontaneous, free concerts on improvised stages increased still further the popularity of the area. Retro rock and roll was performed next to punk or folk, all of it followed by crowds of ardent fans numbering in their thousands. Later came grunge and cosplay – a youth subculture distinguished by its adherents’ manga- and anime-based costumes. But the initial rockabilly style never went completely out of fashion and was always a typical sight of Harajuku. Tokyo was never more unruly and creative on a regular basis than in Harajuku; that is, until the scene was cut back by the reopening of the streets on Sundays in the 1990s. These days the remnants of the Harajuku tribe gather on the pedestrian overpass between Harajuku Station and Yoyogi Park as well as on pavements in the area.

By the waning days of the Harajuku street parties, politics had turned against the sort of carnivalesque counter-culture which they had represented. Ishihara Shintarō, Tokyo’s mayor since 1999, is a highly popular far-right conservative who would like to educate Japan’s youth according to a much more old-fashioned standard, for example requiring the singing of the national anthem and the raising of the national flag in Tokyo’s schools, against the outspoken protest of many teachers. Harajuku’s wild zone of creativity exactly between the Meiji Shrine and the Olympic monuments south of it was certainly not in line with his hopes for the youth of the twenty-first century. Instead he tried to assemble the youth of the world again in the more rigid ceremonial frame of the Olympics by bringing the Games back to Tokyo in 2016. If the bid had been successful, the Olympics would have had a new main stadium, but some of the venues of 1964 would have been re-used in order to revive the glory of those Games, as was celebrated in various publications and in advertisements for sports institutions in the context of the bid. Kenzo Tange’s National Gymnasium, once the peak of modernity, is now a place of remembrance of how modernity revived the national half a century ago. However, Tokyo will try again to be elected for the Games in 2020 and the National Gymnasium will once more be a centre-piece of this bid.

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32 Shintarō Ishihara started as a novelist before turning to politics in the late 1960s. As a hawk in international affairs he advocated a Japanese boycott of the Beijing Olympics 2008.