Intensity and Identity of the place: the role of public-private interface in Nezu, Tokyo

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1. Introduction

Identity of the place represents an important quality, distinguishing a location as a *place*. It largely affects the cultural, social, historical and economic aspects of place. It is usually associated with different kinds of heritage and persistence in time. The duration of the identity of a place can vary, from very long and persistent relationships with a tradition, to a transitory identity associated with change. This paper focuses on specific situation in which that duration is long, and identity of the place is based on a changing and non-static tradition. The objective is to analyse places in which the built environment is in constant change and there are no preserved monuments that can serve as a reference or link with the past but the identity of the place is still preserved. These places are challenging both qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting and analysing data[1].

The aim of the paper is to propose method in order to address complexity and particular issues arising from the relationship between identity of the place and its built environment. It uses a case study of Nezu, an inner precinct in Tokyo as an example showing high levels of change in its built environment and at the same time, invariability of its identity. The paper is divided in three sections. Firstly, number of concepts deriving from assemblage theory which are creating possibilities and methods to analyse and think places in their complexity are introduced. Secondly the identity of the place in Nezu is defined and the character of *shitamachi* is examined. Finally, the method and results are explained followed with conclusions.

keywords: public-private interface, identity, intensity, difference, assemblage

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[1] This research represents a part of larger project 'Measuring the non-measurable' which addresses the issues of both the non-measurable ("textual") and measurable ("numerical") manifestations of the urban.

2. An approach –main concepts of assemblage theory

Assemblage theory largely derives from Deleuze's philosophy, further developed by Delanda, and introduced in many different fields as addition to already existing theories (Brenner et al., 2011). In recent urban studies it is applied as supplementary conceptual tool for understanding the cities and places as multiple objects, through connections between elements, and the processes rather than the stable states (Dovey, 2010; Farias, 2010; McFarlane, 2011; Waghorn, 2011). This paper stresses the notions of intensity, relationships, and multiplicity as presented in assemblage theory that contribute to the identity of place. It presents an approach for understanding the relationships of identity of the place and its built environment without only focusing on the urban and architectural preservation and conservation.

One important contribution of assemblage theory applied in place theory is definition of the identity based on *multiplicity* instead of *essence*. The identity is not given all at once, but it is defined progressively. Identity therefore implies in the same time duration and alteration, sameness and change (Deleuze, 1991: 32). Furthermore, assemblage theory also gives possibilities to define identity based upon the material world (therefore built environment of the place) and not only as transcendental category (Delanda, 2002: 42). In that sense the definitions from assemblage theory offer a ground for understanding the relationships between the change in built environment and preservation of identity of the place.

Assemblage theory introduced in a place theory defines all places as assemblages where identity of the place is emerging when we observe assemblage as a whole (Dovey, 2010: 17). Furthermore, identity is rising from the interactions of social and physical elements of the assemblage and is not reducible to subjective experiences. It is based on the relationships between different elements of an assemblage.

The relationships between elements rather than elements themselves are producing and evoking the identity of an assemblage. Deleuze (1994) explains the identity through process of individualization. The essential element in that process is intensity. Furthermore, every identity of an entity is intensive acknowledging in itself the difference in intensities (ibid: 246). The morphogenetic processes which characterize any entity and therefore place are defined in assemblage as a product of differences in intensities. Delanda (2005:81) explains that *intensive differences are productive.* In order to understand the identity of the place relationships between elements should be observed as differences which produce various intensities and

possibilities for emergence of the identity. In that sense difference in intensities of distinct characteristics of physical structure of the place becomes important for the identity to emerge. Namely, differences in degree of certain characteristic are contributing to the perception of the place, creating the intensity between elements of built environment as well as intensities in relation human-built environment. However, each place is specific and each place will have its own relationships and intensities. In order to define what relationships matter for the identity of the particular place, the case study is introduced.

3. Identity of the place in Nezu

Nezu is located in central area of Tokyo and belongs to Bunkyo ward, one of the main 23 wards of Tokyo. As part of YaNeSen area (consisting of three precincts: Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi) it basis its identity on unusual situation for Tokyo. It is one of the places that still keeps its distinct character that is considered to be a direct descendant of old Edo (1600-1868, former Tokyo). It is dominated with small, low rise, high-density residential fabric (Waley, 1991; Radović, 2008). Nezu represents a precinct in Tokyo where the urban character remains deeply connected with urban forms and practices from the past. Contemporary identity of Nezu is defined through its links with the past-Shitamachi character. However, its built landscape shows flexibility and change, with no buildings preserved from Edo period (Muminovic et al. 2013). In Paul Waley's words, this area has managed to *struck a happy balance between craving for the future and basking in the past* (1991: 191).

In order to define the elements of built environment which are contributing to identity of place an analysis of different narratives of Yanesen and Nezu was conducted. The research shows that most dominant concepts in its description are: traditional (buildings, atmosphere, crafts and products in more than 65% of the all texts), continuity (46%), unique (58%), smallness (50%) peaceful (46%), as well as Japanese everyday life, neighbourhood, closeness, slow, commoner's houses, Shitamachi character, Edo residential atmosphere, heritage, old, hidden, famous people and so forth[2]. The narratives are describing (and perhaps creating) the character of Nezu related to its past, more specifically to Edo period and its particular part-Shitamachi or Low City.

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[2] Analysis conducted during the August-December 2012 based on the texts from touristic guides, magazines and on-line blogs.

Shitamachi represents complex and fluid concept (Waley, 2002). However, one of the important aspects of built environment in Shitamachi was the specific relationship between public and private spaces[3]. Due to the very high densities of this area (Seidensticker, 1984: 9), relationships between the private sphere of the house and public sphere were distinctive and important for character of Shitamachi. Shelton (1999:66-87) explains that the size and structure of the spaces between the private realm of the house and public realm of the street in Shitamachi created soft boundaries that are particularly vibrant spaces contributing to its character. Furthermore, public-private interfaces are emphasized as fluid spaces, which are changing according to the scale (neighbourhood, street, house) (e.g. Daniels, 2008; Nakajima, 1996; Ozaki, 2002; 2006) and are contributing to specific character of Tokyo (Kitayama et al. 2010). In addition, Jinnai (1995: 44-48) highlights the importance of the structure and size of public-private interface for the preservation of character of some neighbourhoods in Tokyo. Public-private interfaces in Japanese urban landscapes where defined as *soft boundaries* that have contributed to the consolidation of the identity of old towns (Nakagawa, 2006:54).

In general it could be argued that public-private interface has great impact on character of the place. Norberg-Schulz emphasized that boundary between outside and inside in architecture is strongly defining the character of the place (1980: 14-5). Habraken (1998: 168) highlights that the essence of *the urban* lies in the way the margin between private and public is negotiated. Boundaries between public and private realms of the city are representing materialization of society and its culture as well as intrinsic element in process of creating the character of the city (Madanipour, 2003: 59-60).

For all those reasons we propose the analysis of the public-private interface as vital element of built environment for understanding of identity of place in Nezu. Furthermore, public-private interface represents relationship between two spheres of the city and according to assemblage theory is important for the definition of identity based on the relationships of the place as assemblage.

As one of the essential element of Shitamachi character, public-private interface can be understood as zones of intensities, not only between two different spheres of the city, public and private, but through differences in their characteristics.

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[3] he public and private in Japanese context represent a complex concept. Namely, the cultural difference in understanding of this concept can be seen in the fact that in Japanese language there is no direct equivalent to the twofold of public and private.

Namely, if the identity of Nezu can be observed through public-private interfaces then according to assemblage theory we should be able to observe necessary and important differences in its quality. Tensions between different public-private interfaces generate intensity as part of each personal encounter with Nezu and are part of its identity. But the question is how public-private interface contributes to that distinct identity of Nezu?

4. Method

In order to assess the question introduced in this paper methodology derives from assemblage theory and the particularity of the case study of Nezu. Following the assemblage theory the identity of the place emerges from the relationships between different elements that constitute the place. The analysis of the identity of place in Nezu has shown that the way public and private spheres of the city are connected plays crucial role for that identity. Consequently, public-private interfaces are defined as spaces in which that difference between public and private is manifested in space.

The analysis is focused on everyday life and thus does not include the landmark structures of Nezu-its temples and shrines. For the purpose of this analysis the three streets in Nezu were selected (Figure 1.). Those three streets represent the core of Nezu, with smallest rate of change and all of them have different character in the sense of use of the space and their physical characteristics[4]. The usage stretches from mix of commercial and residential to only residential parts of the streets. Three streets also have different width and comprise different typologies of the houses.

The method consists of measuring, mapping and classifying different public-private interfaces, therefore different relationships between public and private. Public-private interface is defined as the space between the private zone of the house and public zone of the street. For the purpose of this paper three different elements of interface are identified: 1. zone at the border of the private, 2. the space between the house and the street and 3. zone at the border of the public (Figure 2.). First zone is analysed through the visual permeability of the facade. The second space is analysed through typologies of public-private interfaces based on the position of the house on the plot and its entrance. The third space is analysed with presence of different ephemeral elements (plants, bicycles, shoes, toys and other personal belongings).

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[4] Based on the analysis of maps of this area from 1888 to 2003 which is part of larger project conducted within author's PhD.
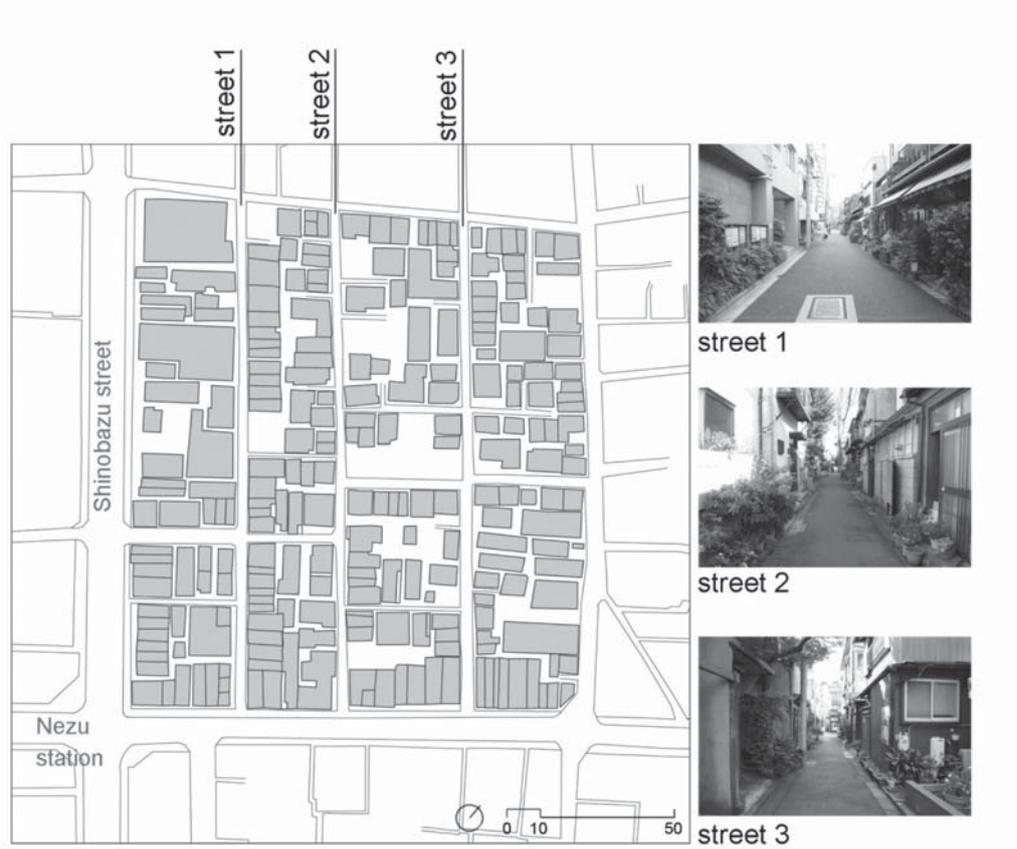
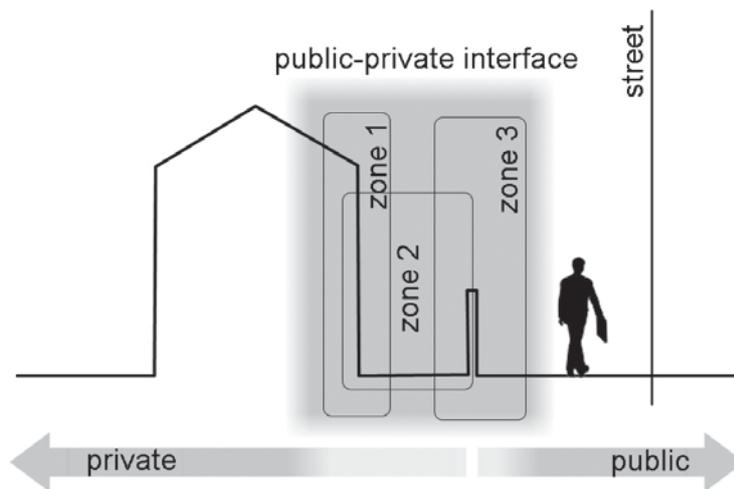Figure 1: The map of selected area for the analysis and three streets in Nezu

Figure 2: The public-private interface diagram

5. Results
5.1 Assessment of visual permeability

Visual permeability is defined as level of visual openness of the street facade to the public space. It defines the degree of visual connectedness between public space of the street and private space of the house, observed from the public. Furthermore, visual permeability illuminates the sense of privatness and publicness of the streets and contributes to the general character of the street. The total number of 215 facades were mapped and represented at the 156 buildings. In the cases in which one building is facing more than one street, visual permeability was calculated as the average between all the facades and presented at the level of the house.

The elements considered for visual permeability are: size, position, material of the openings as well as the size of the facade. The visual permeability was calculated based on the geometrical characteristics of the opening (size and position) and its qualitative characteristics (material). For that purpose the correction indexes were defined based on the position of opening (for the first floor correction index was 1; for the second was 0.5; and for the third and fourth was 0.3). The materials of the openings were classified into three groups, based on their transparency. The correction indexes were: for the transparent correction index was 1; for the translucent was 0.5; and for the opaque was 0.3. The formula is based on the sum of area of all openings on the facade multiplied with their correction indexes and divided with the area of whole facade.

The calculated visual permeability was mapped using the ArcGIS 10 software and classes of different levels of permeability were defined statistically, using the method of natural brakes. Five classes of levels of visual permeability were found.

5.2 Typological assessment

Typologies of the public-private interfaces are defined based on the structure and the size of their space as well as on the main characteristics of their usage. The first criterion for creation of typology is the division on the collective and single family houses. This division implies different connection between each private space of the house or apartment to the public sphere of the street. Namely, apartments have indirect connection between their entrance and the public sphere conceived through semi-public space. Single family houses usually do not contain the semi-public space between their entrance and public realm.

The second criterion for the creation of typology is related to the structure of the public-private space. Based on that collective family houses have developed two different types and singe family houses have four types (Figure 3.). The structure of the public-private space is related to the position of the house on the plot and the position of the entrance to the private space of the house or the apartment, more specifically the way in which public and private are connected. The main characteristics of each type are:

Type I has the smallest space of interface. The access to the house is directly from the street. Type II has the boundary space between public and private less than 1m in width. The entrance to the house is facing the street. However, the entrance to the house it is not directly from the street but from the front yard. Type III has a set back from the street more than 1m. In this case the interface acquires different functions (garden, parking lot etc.). The entrance to the house is separated from the street; however it is visible from the street. In the type IV ground level is not used for the living. It is usually used for parking and has entrance to the house. This type is separating the private space of the house and public space of the street through relocation of the living-private space which is located at the second floor. In the type V boundary between public and private space of each apartment is stretched as semi-public space. However, this space is located outside of the building and there is still a visual contact between door of each apartment and the street. Type VI has semi-public space located inside the building, acquiring the characteristic of private sphere and disconnecting each entrance to the apartment from the public space of the street. These buildings tend to be high-rise buildings with commercial usage on the ground level.

In order to represent the characteristics and qualities that different types of the public-private interface create in the street the analysis is based on the relationships between the types. Namely, the relationships between the types of the interfaces on the both sides of the streets were mapped (Figure 3. on the right). This shows the diversity of the character in each segment of the street. Type I and II represent the smallest interface, therefore the most direct contact between public and private spaces is generated when they are mirrored on both sides on the street (shown with the darkest shade of the grey, figure 3.). The opposite case, the most indirect contact between public and private spaces is found when type V and VI are

located on the both sides of the streets (shown with the lightest shade of the grey, figure 3). The first contributes to the private character of the street and the later to the public. Other variations are represented on the figure 3.
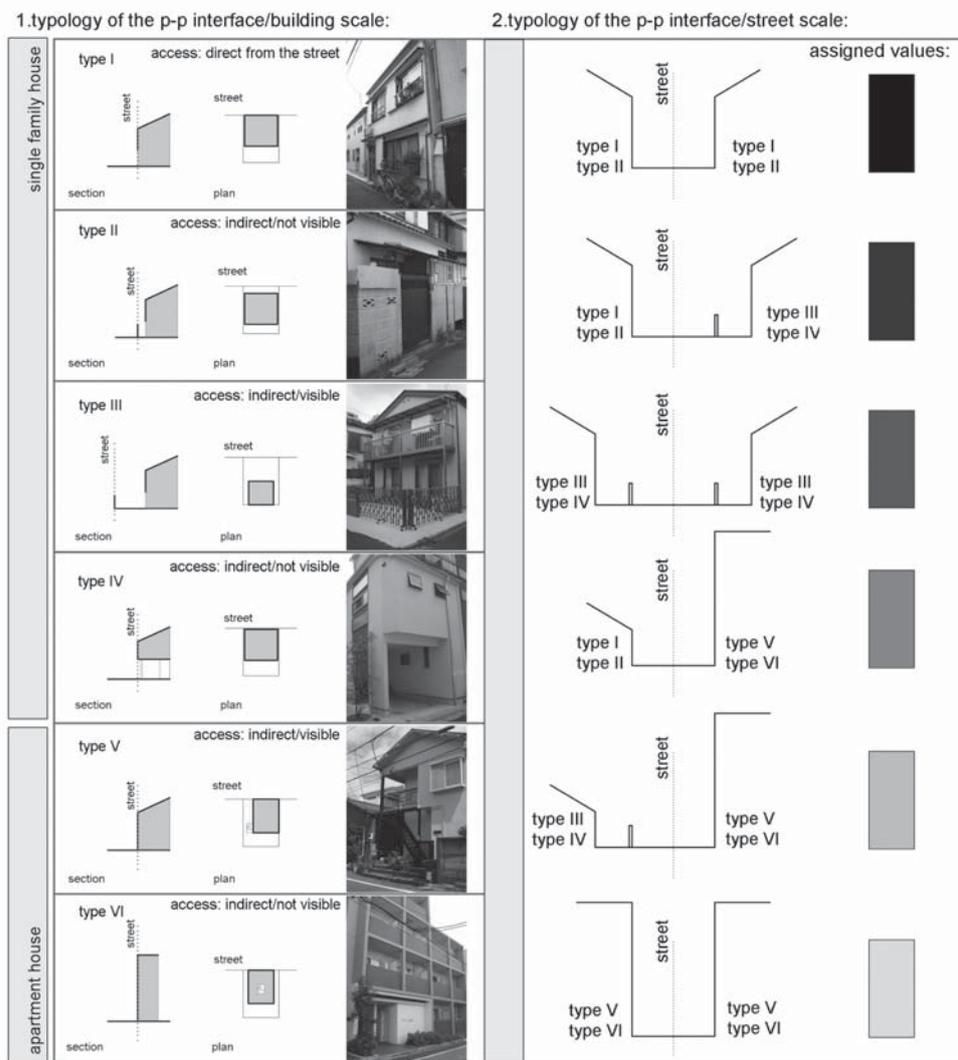

Figure 3: Typology of public-private interface (left) and typology of the street section (right)
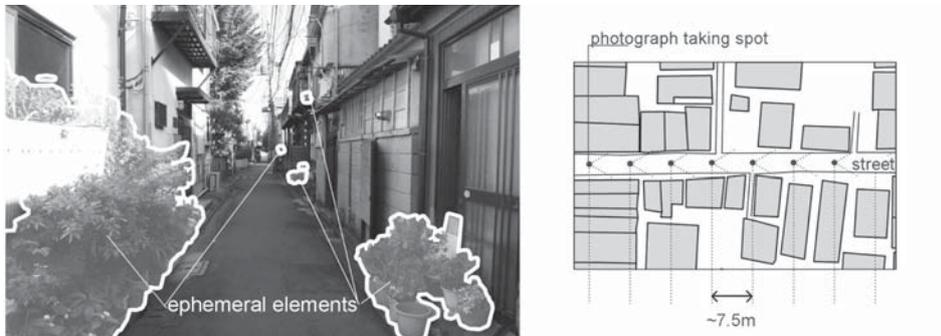
Figure 4: The data collection and quantification of ephemeral elements

5.3 Assessment of ephemeral elements

In order to analyse the third zone of public-private interface oriented to-wards public space personal ephemeral objects were mapped and quantified. For that purpose sequential photographs of the street were taken every 7.5 m along the street. Objects were traced and quantified in terms of the area that they obtain in the photograph (Figure 4.). The area was measured in number of pixels per photo using the Adobe Photoshop program. Based on all data five classes of different ratios of quantity of elements were created. Namely, the highest value of the ratio of ephemeral elements was 34% and the lowest 0. The classes were generated based on the distribution of different ratios (lower than 5%, from 5 to 10%, from 10 to 15%, from 15-20% and higher than 20%).

All three variables (visual permeability, typology of public-private interface and presence of ephemeral objects) are assembled in order to compare and define different characters of the street, based on differences in public-private interface.

5.4 Diagnosis

The results from visual permeability showed that there were five classes of facades, ranging from very low values of Vp (not permeable facade) to very high values (very open facade). In order to define the general sense of permeability along the three streets the average values were calculated based on the both sides of the street. The number and sizes of classes varies in all streets and shows different levels of visual openness of the facade. The first street is the most visually permeable and has largest number of classes showing high levels of diversity. The third street is the least permeable, having only one part of the street that belongs to class of highest values of Vp (Figure 5.).
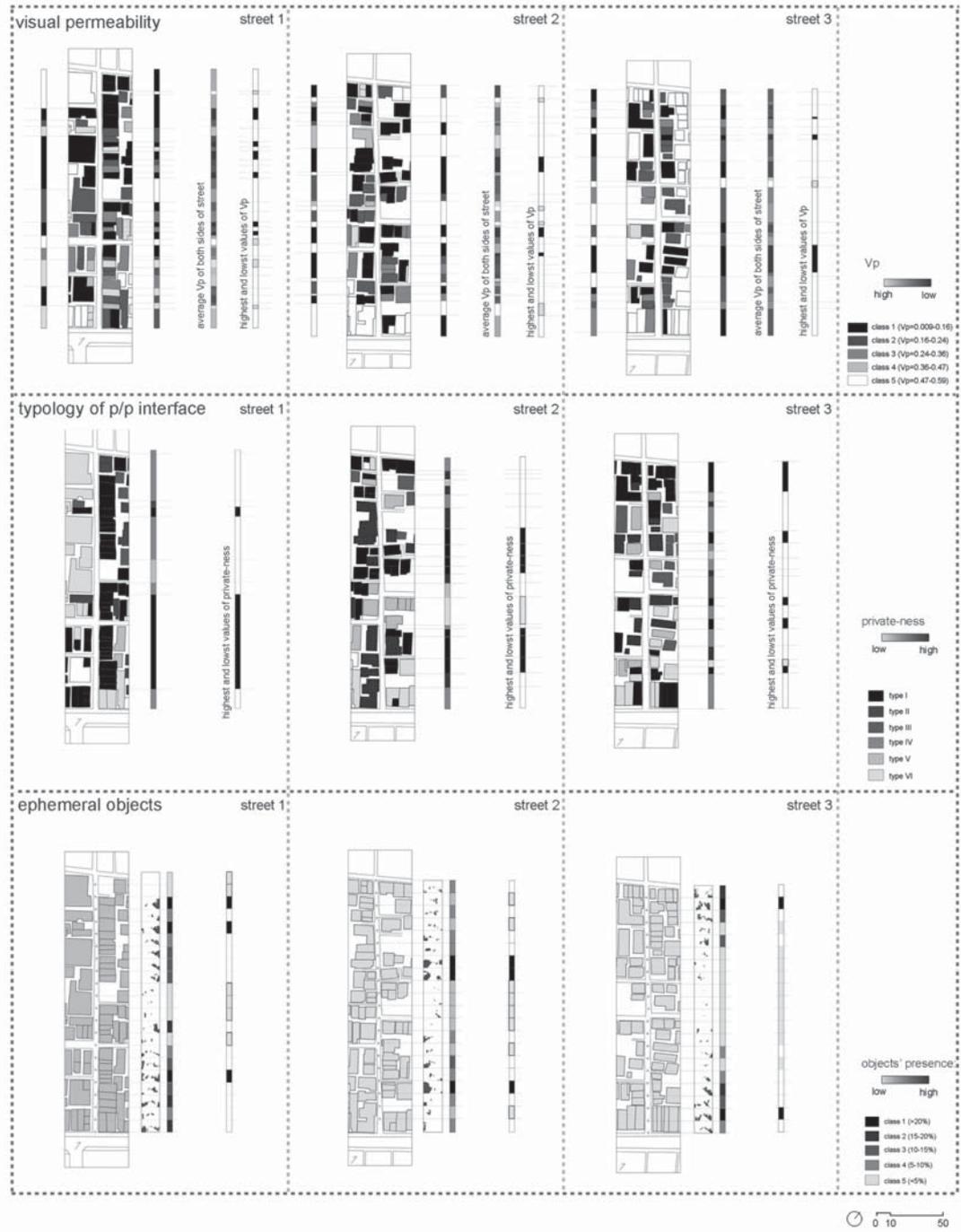
Figure 5: The results of different values of visual permeability, public-private interface and ephemeral objects represented along the three selected streets
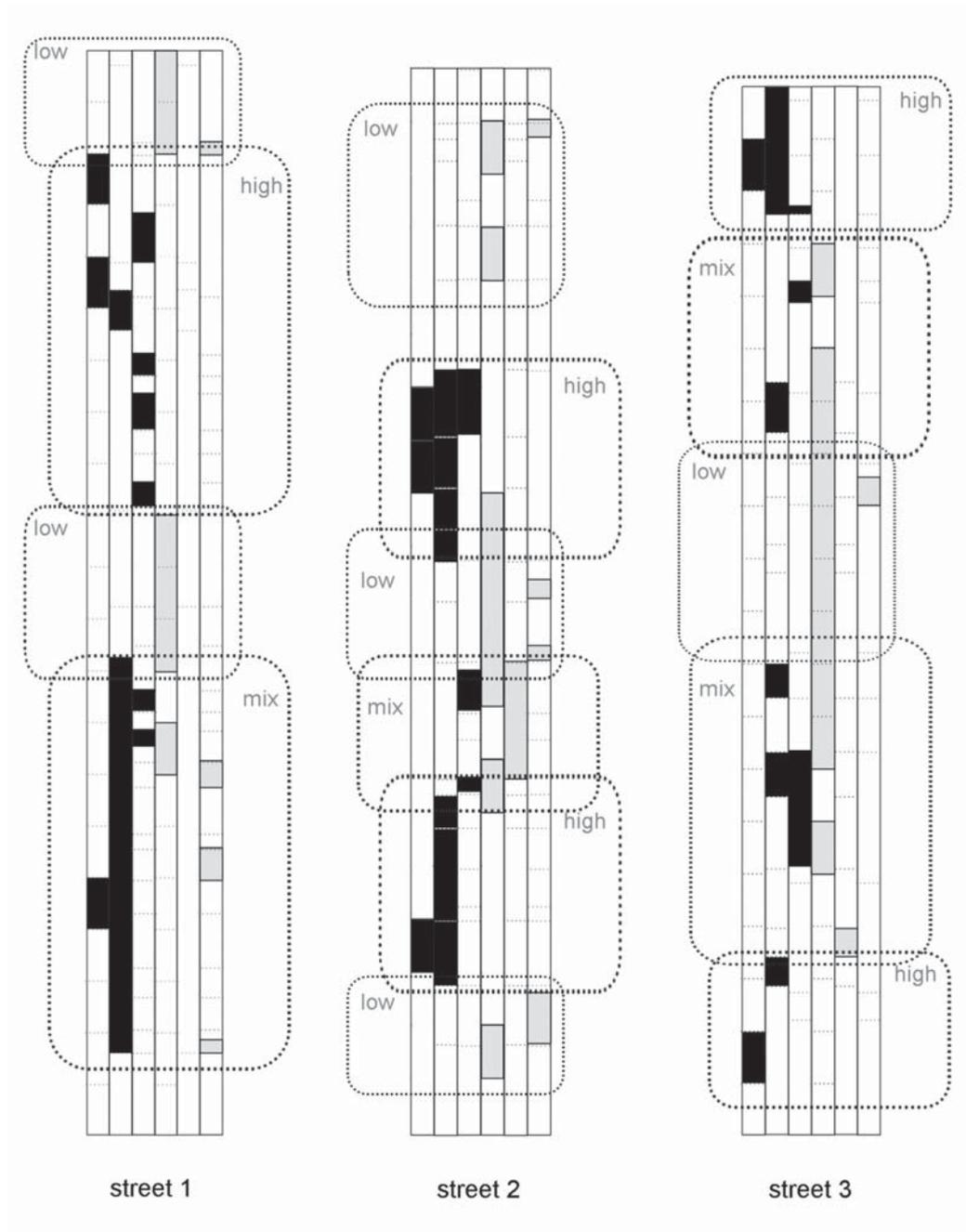
Figure 6: The distribution of highest and lowest values at all three zones along the three streets

The results based on the typology of public-private interface show six classes. The results are shown on the level of each building and along the street combing the values from both sides of the street. The first street is the least diverse in terms of presence of different classes and their sizes. The third street exhibits the most diversity. The sizes of classes in all streets are longer and the diversity lower compared with the visual permeability distribution of classes (Figure 5).

The range of presence of ephemeral personal belongings on the street showed existence of five classes. All three streets show different values of number and size of the objects. The first street exhibits the highest number of classes and therefore the highest values of diversity. The third street shows the lowest values of the diversity and tendency of clustering along the street. Namely in the middle part of the street there are the lowest values of the presence of personal belongings (Figure 5).

For the purpose of assembling all elements of public-private interface only highest and lowest values were selected in all variables. The highest values of all variables are contributing to the creation of highly private sense of the street (the facade of the house is visually closed, the space between the house and the street is minimal and there are numerous personal belongings present at the street). The lowest values of all variables are showing the opposite, where the street is having highly public character. The spatial distribution of the highest and lowest values shows that they tend to cluster along the streets creating alternate zones of high and low intensities of public or private (Figure 6.). There are fifteen different zones present in all three streets. Mixing values are present in only four zones along all three streets. The first street shows the longest zones and therefore the lowest in number, compared with two other streets. The first street has very long zones of high values and small zones of low values of variables. In the second and third street the zones are similar in their size.

6. Conclusions

The spatial distributions of extreme values that describe the public-private interfaces are defining different intensities in the character of public and private. The highest intensity of the privatness is produced by relationships between highest values. Furthermore, those values exhibited the tendency to cluster in space creating zones of high intensity of privateness along the streets. At the same time, zones with lowest values also tend to cluster along the street. The interrelationship between the two zones contributes to the diversity of the character of the place.

Those zones of low and high values are producing the dynamics in experiencing the place by creating discrete rhythm of publicness and privetness. The combination of discrete characters along the streets creates discontinuities and different degrees of intensity enriching the experience. Tension is created between zones but intensity appears through experience.

When walking along the analysed streets it is possible to experience the diversity of the character as a set of multiple surprises. There is a sequence of change between senses of private and public spaces. These changes intensify the experience and therefore stay in the mental image of the place as representation of Nezu. Shitamachi is linked with private spaces inside a neighbourhood, with ordinary and everyday life. The intensity of experiencing all these characteristics in Nezu provokes the re-emergence of that Shitamachi character. Therefore, although there are no buildings preserved from the past, the intensive connection between people and physical setting of the place and its specific elements related to small and closeness and domestic create possibility for identity of Shitamachi to persist.

The analysis had shown that for the identity of the place in Nezu not only the character of the private and specific relationships between the house and the streets matter. The opposite character of public plays important role as part of the place as assemblage. Furthermore, in the relationships between different degrees of private and public that distinctive identity of Nezu and Shitamachi emerges within the change of its built environment.

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Abstract

In urban design and urban research, it is necessary to strive not to lose sight of the complexity of the urban, which tends to get one of its fullest reflections exactly at public-private interface. In order to do so, it is important to maintain awareness that public-private interface is a spatio-temporal category, that express the complexity of place and its character.

This paper focuses on the spaces defined by transition between public and private produced along ordinary practices of everyday life. The research explores the ways in which public-private interface (re) creates the identity of one concrete place. Nezu is, arguably, an outstanding precinct of Tokyo. Nezu shows remarkable resilience and manages to embrace change, while keeping an atmosphere which is broadly considered as directly descendant from that of old Edo (former Tokyo) shitamachi. Distinctive features of public-private interface in Nezu seem to be an important ingredient in formation of that evolving, but firmly anchored identity of Nezu. That is why this paper addresses the question how exactly do public-private interfaces contribute to the shitamachi character of Nezu.

The paper opens with discussion on the relationships between identity of the place and public-private interface within the concepts of intensity, difference and assemblage. It briefly presents the principal method of inquiry, based on assemblage theory, which links material and social elements of place, explores them by focusing at relationships between elements, and defines differences in intensities as crucial for the emergence of identity. The analysis focuses on everyday life, and thus does not include landmark structures of Nezu. The paper presents three ordinary streets of Nezu which have experienced the lowest level of physical change since Edo era. The analysis is based on detailed mapping and quantification of various elements that make public-private interface, using the methods of photographic survey, visual permeability and typological analysis of public-private interface.

The results show that the heterogeneity and discontinuity of interfaces constitute an important feature of those streetscapes. Although not a single building in those streets dates back to Edo era, the kind and the intensity of experience of those places, proportions, certain aspects of materiality create familiar tensions between public-private interfaces, opening the possibility for the emergence of an identity which resonates with the widespread mental images of shitamachi. Thus – in the core of Nezu, Edo re-emerges.