



The spatialisation of desire in a Japanese gay district through signage

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Abstract

Shinjuku Ni-chōme (an area in central Tokyo) contains the highest concentration of queer establishments in the world, with some estimates suggesting that there are approximately 300 gay male bars within its confines. Each of these bars targets a specific subset of the Japanese gay community, with bars coming to be associated with semiotic structures indexing certain subjectivities (known as Types). Through an ethnographic study of the district, I argue that signage plays a crucial role in differentiating Ni-chōme from the surrounding cityscape, creating a queer space. Furthermore, drawing upon the emerging discipline of Linguistic Landscaping, I analyse how signage can be read as “mapping” particular Types onto areas in Ni-chōme. I suggest that eroticised images of men, Japanese scripts, colour and language choice all act as queer semiotics that gay men visiting the district utilise to determine the Type of a bar. Finally, I discuss how this process of mapping normalises certain identity categories whilst marginalising others and how one particular identity category based in heteronormative understandings of masculinity has come to dominate the district, pushing other “niche” identity categories to the fringes of Ni-chōme.

Keywords

Queer space; linguistic landscaping; Japanese gay culture; social stratification; signage



Introduction

Recent years have seen growing interest in Japan's queer communities within both Japanese mainstream media and global queer media (Sunagawa, 2015a). This renewed interest in Japan's diverse queer cultures has perhaps been sparked by the awarding of the 2020 Summer Olympic Games to the city of Tokyo, as well as increasing rates of explicitly LGBT travel to Japan from around the world (Baudinette, 2016; Paquin, 2014). Nowhere is this more visible than in Tokyo's gay district of Shinjuku Ni-chōme, a space which has acted as Japan's premier gay district since the late 1950s (Suganuma, 2011, 345), and that is now becoming increasingly internationalised and affected by the discursive flow of ideas from global queer culture (Sunagawa, 2015a). However, despite the increasingly globalised nature of Japan's gay sub-culture, and Shinjuku Ni-chōme in particular, there has been a distinct dearth of critical research into how the space is structured and utilised, particularly within English language scholarship.¹ This article, forming part of a broader special issue investigating the role of semiotics in the formation of queer cultures and spaces around the globe, seeks to address this lack of research. In so doing, I follow Chiang and Wong (2016) in contributing to the on-going process of diversifying and decolonising the geography of sexuality through the inclusion of "queer and Asian" systems of knowledge whilst also acknowledging, where relevant, the impact of discourses deriving from global queer culture.

As Japan's most prominent "gay town" (*gei no machi*), Shinjuku Ni-chōme is said to have the highest concentration of gay establishments in the world, with Abe (2010) estimating that there are approximately 300 gay bars within the neighbourhood despite its relatively small area of 400m². Located in central Tokyo and nestled between Yasukuni-dōri to the north and Shinjuku-gyōen Park to the south (see Figure 1), Ni-chōme (as the district is affectionately known) has come to be understood as Japan's most important gay district by both the Japanese mainstream media and sub-cultural gay male media (Suganuma, 2011, 345). Ni-chōme is predominantly a space for gay men, with lesbian women being relatively uncommon although there are a handful of lesbian bars located in a small laneway on the southern periphery of the district (see Maree, 2016).

¹ However, see Shikano (2015) and Sunagawa (2015a, 2015b) for excellent, emerging work in Japanese.



Figure 1. Shinjuku Ni-chōme, highlighted in red, within Shinjuku Ward (map data ©2016 Google, ZENRIN, used under fair use license).

As noted above, there is a lack of research into the district from the perspective of the geography of sexuality. However, one notable exception to this trend is the gay activist Dennis Altman (2013), who recounts his experiences visiting the district during the early 2000s in his memoirs to further develop his ideas concerning “global queering.”² Altman writes that Ni-chōme appeared to him to be “the closest to a recognisable gay district that one can find in Japan” (2013, 135), reflecting that the signage utilised throughout Ni-chōme differed greatly to the signage with which he was familiar and that he had seen in “gay districts” such as Oxford Street in Sydney and the Castro in San Francisco. Altman makes explicit reference to the absence of rainbow flags (a supposed universal symbol of the gay rights movement) and to the fact that the names of the bars make no reference to Western gay counter-cultural symbols such as the Wizard of Oz (Altman, 2013, 136), signs which Wright suggests are common in gay districts throughout America and the world (1999, 173). Indeed, Altman stresses the apparently arbitrary nature of the signage, particularly its use of English (2013, 135). As part of his global queering thesis, Altman draws upon this vignette in order to demonstrate how Japanese modes of gayness differ greatly to those existing in Europe and North America, arguing that Japanese gay culture is unique and relatively resilient in

² Elaborated more fully in Altman (2001), the theory of “global queering” refers to the increasing homogenization of gay sub-cultures throughout the world due to their adoption of Euro-American models of gay identity and community. Altman (2001, 2013) draws upon Japan as a counter-argument to his overall thesis but, as I discuss below, his use of Japan is somewhat (and perhaps unintentionally) problematic. See Sunagawa (2015b) for an excellent critique of Altman’s work on Japan.

rejecting global queer culture and its related semiotic systems. Whilst this is a project with which I am sympathetic, to claim that there are very few “recognisable gay signs” and that the English names of bars “make no apparent sense” is to unintentionally misrepresent the complex queer semiotic devices which circulate throughout Ni-chōme that identify bars not only as gay spaces but also as targeting particular audiences. Furthermore, Altman regrettably elides the fact that Japan’s gay sub-culture is indeed highly influenced by and receptive to global trends in gay culture, particularly the unfortunate trend of marginalising those individuals who are unwilling or unable to meet norms of desirability based in heteronormative notions of masculinity (see Moriyama, 2012).

The aim of this article is twofold. Firstly, it critically examines how Ni-chōme’s supposedly “arbitrary” signage is strategically utilised by the owners of bars in Ni-chōme to create a broader sense of “queer space” whilst also appealing to specific groups of gay men as potential patrons. In so doing, the article also elucidates how the spatialisation of desire in Ni-chōme through “queer semiotics” follows increasingly globalising trends in queer culture which privilege heteronormative forms of masculinity as desirable (see Hubbard, 2011; Puar, 2007). Drawing upon extensive fieldwork and interviews with Japanese gay men who frequent Ni-chōme, coupled with analyses of the particular semiotic devices utilised in the signage of Ni-chōme, I examine how stereotypical identity categories known as Types (*taipu*) have come to be “mapped” onto the district. I especially focus on how three particular Types, the *kawaii-kei* (Cute Type), the *gaten-kei* (the “Labourer” or, more idiomatically, “Working-Class” Type) and the *ikanimo-kei* (the “Obviously Gay” Type), are indexed within this signage through various semiotic strategies. By drawing upon the emerging discipline of Linguistic Landscaping (LL), I then examine how the *ikanimo-kei* has come to dominate Ni-chōme, marginalising other identity categories. The niching of these other identities, I argue, is mapped onto the district, as the *ikanimo-kei* bars dominate Ni-chōme’s central thoroughfare whereas *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* bars are relegated to the periphery of the district. I begin, however, by briefly summarising previous research into Ni-chōme and Typing so as to situate my analyses within their broader theoretical context.

Shinjuku Ni-chōme as Queer Space

Through his critical discourse analysis of one mainstream and two sub-cultural texts discussing Ni-chōme, Suganuma (2011) examines how Ni-chōme is utilised as a discursive trope in the production of knowledge concerning public space and public values in Japan. Suganuma convincingly argues that the mainstream text, a Japanese late-night television exposé of Ni-chōme’s sex entertainment industry, ultimately “relegates [Ni-chōme] to a realm of perversity and non-conventionality which implicitly constructs the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm” through focusing on the supposed selfish, narcissistic and ultimately non-reproductive nature of pleasure in Ni-chōme (2011, 346). On the

other hand, Suganuma's analyses of the two gay texts, a guidebook to Ni-chōme and a gay activist's memoirs, elucidates how Ni-chōme can be utilised to criticise such heteronormative values. Suganuma highlights that the guidebook and memoir both present Ni-chōme as a space which has been reappropriated by sexual minorities to create a safe space which broadly affirms gay identity. For Suganuma, gay men in Ni-chōme are thus "queering" public space so as to produce spaces where same-sex desire may be considered "normal" (2011, 353).

Ni-chōme is thus typical of what many scholars working within the geography of sexuality have termed "queer space" (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Dacanay, 2011; Hubbard, 2001). Queer, as Zebracki and Milani (2014) highlighted in the call for papers underlying this special issue, "is not just a subject of study but is also a critical academic disposition" that seeks to subvert normative understandings of the nexus between space, gender and sexuality. Queer space, then, represents the liminal space which emerges through social processes that challenge the default, heteronormative nature of urban space (Dacanay, 2011, 101). In his investigation of gay saunas in Bangkok, Dacanay importantly notes that queer spaces may be either explicitly produced by self-identified queer individuals and subsequently understood as queer by mainstream society or implicitly marked and hidden through a semiotics which only members of queer communities are ostensibly able to read (2011, 101-2). Throughout this article, my analysis of signage demonstrates that Ni-chōme functions as both an explicit and implicit queer space.

Bell and Valentine highlight that queer space is produced "through the unsanctioned use and subversion" of public space by sexual minorities, who are often excluded from full participation in the public sphere (1995, 18). The public sphere, Hubbard states, privileges heteronormative sexualities through patriarchal social structures (2001, 67), with sexual minority groups' subversion of public space representing a key denial of the legitimacy of these social structures. Suganuma, through his critical reading of the two gay texts, persuasively argues that Ni-chōme does indeed provide a site from which "to challenge the structures that configure non-normative sexualities as perverted" (2011, 348). Ni-chōme, Suganuma suggests, is thus also representative of what Berlant and Warner (1998, 563) have termed "queer counter-public space" because the district represents a visible platform from which sexual minorities can challenge the social systems which implicitly mark homosexuality as deviant, perverse and dangerous to public morality (Suganuma, 2011, 348).

Suganuma ultimately understands Ni-chōme as a queer space which affirms gay identity, although he does caution that "there are diverse interpretations of the space according to numerous points of view" (2011, 357). Suganuma recognises, following Bell and Binnie (2004), that queer spaces are often fraught and contentious and that they are not always uniformly accepting of all modes of queer experience. As Dacanay rightly points out, queer space "[is] structured not only by temporal and spatial factors but [is] also mediated by... cultural discourses related

to class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” (2011, 100). Indeed, factors such as class, gender and ethnicity play a crucial role in informal exclusion within Ni-chōme, with Baudinette (2016) highlighting that gay men who do not meet stereotypical ideals of desirable gay masculinity are becoming marginalised within the district. Baudinette (2016) especially notes that certain groups of gay men in Ni-chōme are facing discrimination due to their ethnic backgrounds and gendered identities. McLelland has also argued similarly, suggesting that for some gay men Ni-chōme has become a superficial “marketplace” that inherently promotes division and exclusion (2000, 202).

Ni-chōme, Typing and the marketplace of desire

As queer spaces have developed into important sites of consumption, Bell and Binnie note that they are also increasingly marginalising individuals who do not fit comfortably within wider, sub-cultural understandings of queer identity produced through the global gay marketplace (2004, 1810). Indeed, Bell and Binnie (2004), Phelan (2001) and Hubbard (2011) have all convincingly argued that the gradual neo-liberalisation of urban queer space, and its concomitant processes of exclusion, has limited the emancipatory potential of queer spaces to create platforms for community formation. Importantly, pioneering work by Hubbard (2011), Massad (2002) and Puar (2007) has noted that global queer culture, dominated by discourses originating in Euro-America, is increasingly privileging heteronormative, middle-class expressions of gay masculinity at the expense of the expression of ethnic and gendered diversity.

Ni-chōme is no exception to these broader global trends, with the district becoming increasingly neo-liberalised as it more fully enters into the global circuits of economic and symbolic capital produced by the so-called “pink” economy (Sunagawa, 2015a, 101). The district has become a marketplace, constituted by gay bars, pornography shops and brothels, devoted to the buying and selling of gay men’s desires (Morimura, 2008, 156). Ni-chōme is increasingly being dominated by various gay media companies which circulate pornography and promote a specific gay lifestyle based in discourses of youth, heteronormative masculinity and constant partying (McLelland, 2000, 144). These media, produced within and circulated throughout Ni-chōme, play an important role in turning gay desire into a commodity, hence alienating gay men from their desires through new forms of commodity fetishism which equate the realisation of sexual desire with patterns of consumption (see Sunagawa, 2015a, 103).

Indeed, through his insightful analysis of Japanese gay magazine texts, Moriyama notes that the Japanese gay sub-culture is being steadily influenced by trends in global gay culture, principally disseminated via American sources such as pornography and gay news websites which promote such consumerist values (2012, 160; see also Saganuma, 2012, 155-156). Moriyama (2012) argues that due to the influence of such global gay media, gay lifestyles in Japan have been increasingly reified into patterns of consumer behaviour, with identity coming to be

located in the clothes one wears, the bars and clubs one visits and the music to which one listens. This has led to the limited physical space in Ni-chōme becoming stratified into sub-districts catering to specific audiences as gay businesses seek to cater to certain markets to increase their profits (see also Shikano, 2015). Moriyama (2012, 159) thus argues that, due to this stratification, it is problematic to view Ni-chōme as some sort of gay utopia wherein all gay subjectivities are accepted and validated. In fact Moriyama (2012), as well as Baudinette (2016), argues that certain desires are being explicitly marginalised as they have become too niche to generate a profit for Japanese gay cultural industries, which include the bars of Ni-chōme.

The consumption-based identity categories that Moriyama (2012) discusses have become coded into a semiotic system known as Typing (*taipu*). Typing refers to the alignment of one's subjectivity to a stereotypical identity category based upon ideas of an idealised body type and modes of consumption (Moriyama, 2012, 170). Examples of Types include the aforementioned *kawaii-kei* (Cute Type), *gaten-kei* (Working-Class Type) and *ikanimo-kei* (Obviously Gay Type). As a system of identity categorisation, Typing is complex because it can be used to not only describe one's own identity (that is, identifying directly as a particular Type), but it is also used to categorise the identity of one's desired other (that is, identifying as desiring a particular Type). Typing ultimately represents a discursive system where physical appearance and consumer behaviours index particular identity categories. Although individuals have the agency to reject Typing (see McLelland, 2000, 171-173), to reject the system is to accept its discursive reality to some extent. Thus, even those who refuse to ascribe themselves a Type are conscious of the semiotic clues which are utilised to index Typing in Ni-chōme.

According to McLelland (2000, 124), Typing developed in the Japanese gay media as a method of targeting niche audiences based upon their desire for a certain "Type" of man. In this way, Typing is not unique to Japan's gay sub-culture, as similar systems of categorisation may be found throughout the world. Another important feature of Typing is its reliance upon normative understandings of gendered performance, with Types being understood as either "masculine" (*otokorashii*) or "effeminate" (*onnarashii*) (McLelland, 2000, 125). All facets of the Japanese gay community are governed by Typing, with Sunagawa (2015b) demonstrating through his longitudinal ethnography of the district that by targeting specific Types, gay bars ultimately construct separate "micro-spaces" where identifying as that Type becomes normative. Participation in Ni-chōme, then, relies upon an individual's ability to read semiotic clues that indicate to which particular Types a bar caters. As such, Ni-chōme conforms to Weightman's argument that gay bars draw upon symbolism that "reflect certain characteristics of [a] gay community... [that] can be truly known only from within" (1980, 9).

Research Methods and Linguistic Landscaping

In this study, I draw upon an ethnography of Ni-chōme and its media conducted throughout 2013, as well as interviews with approximately 50 Japanese gay men who were either patrons or staff members/owners of gay bars, to better understand how these informal “Typed” spaces become manifested throughout Ni-chōme via its signage. I particularly focused my attention on bars which service an exclusively Japanese clientele rather than bars which specifically cater to foreigners and their admirers. This decision was mostly pragmatic, since “Japanese only” spaces were more likely to be explicitly labelled as catering to specific Types than spaces welcoming of foreigners.³ I asked the 50 informants about their attitudes towards Ni-chōme as a “gay space/town” (*gei machi*) and their attitudes towards its signage to determine what role signage plays in producing queer space. I then conducted semiotic analyses of signage in the streets of the district that had been informed by my interviews with bar owners to understand which semiotic devices were utilised to index the *kawaii-kei*, *gaten-kei* and *ikanimo-kei*. My corpus of signage includes both permanent and impermanent signage; 182 bar signs and 188 event flyers that I collected in July 2013. Finally, drawing upon my fieldwork in the district, I investigate how the mapping of Types through signage reveals which Types are normative, and which are niche.

To collect and interpret the data, I drew upon the emerging subfield of sociolinguistics known as Linguistic Landscaping (LL). LL investigates the language appearing on “public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, 25). Focussing specifically on signage, LL studies explore what Scollon and Scollon (2003, 12) term geosemiotics; “an integrative view of [the] multiple semiotic systems which together form the meanings which we call place.” In particular, I draw upon Blommaert’s (2013) synthesis of LL research methodologies and the discipline of social semiotics.

Blommaert (2013, 41-44) provides a theoretical framework for an ethnographic study of signage that is sensitive to semiotic theories, suggesting that researchers must account for the *multimodality* and *emplacement* of signage, the role signage plays in the *demarcation* of space and how signs draw upon *visual repertoires* with which users of social space are familiar. *Multimodality* refers to how “text supports, emphasises or repeats information contained in the non-textual, visual sign and vice versa” (Blommaert, 2013, 41). By paying attention to the

³ As I have written elsewhere, Ni-chōme is strongly stratified by racialized desire, with White and Japanese men being privileged as desirable vis-à-vis undesirable East and Southeast Asian others (see Baudinette, 2016). However, my ethnography revealed that beyond explicit signage welcoming foreigners, usually written in English, there were no other semiotic strategies utilised to mark spaces as foreigner-friendly. As such, I have not included discussion of these bars within this article, but recognise the necessity of conducting further research into the spatialisation of racialized desire in Japan’s queer spaces.

multimodality of signage, researchers can move beyond a simplistic approach that focusses exclusively on language. *Emplacement* refers to how the meaning of a sign is mediated by, and specific to, the location within which a sign has been deliberately placed (Blommaert, 2013, 43). Importantly, Blommaert (2013, 53) argues that the permanence of certain signs, and the impermanence of others (such as event-related flyers or temporary signage), affects the interpretation of the semiotic information contained within a sign. *Demarcation* refers to how signs stratify space into what Blommaert terms “micro-spaces” where “particular rules and codes operate in relation to specific audiences” (2013, 43). Finally, Blommaert reminds researchers that signs draw upon a specific *visual repertoire* and that the “ability to decode and act on the explicit and implicit codes used and deployed in signs” is related to one’s membership in the community which a sign targets (2013, 44). Thus, in Ni-chōme, the multimodal symbols used on signage to produce queer space and index specific Types represent a *visual repertoire* that is comprehensible to the Japanese gay community.

Signage, male bodies and the creation of queer space

According to interviews with my informants, rather than rainbow flags and the gay bars’ permanent signage, it was the emergence of impermanent advertising boards known as *kanban* and flyers for gay events that produces queer space in Ni-chōme.⁴ My ethnographic fieldwork in the district revealed that the permanent signage of Ni-chōme’s gay bars very rarely contained little more than the name of the bar stylistically displayed in one of four Japanese scripts on a coloured background (see Figure 2, below, for examples). On the other hand, impermanent signage commonly depicted images of men in various stages of undress, with many of these images deriving from promotional material produced by gay pornography companies. Thus the men were often depicted on the impermanent signage in highly eroticised poses. Although, as I will discuss in the following section, permanent signage does function to index specific Types, they are not necessarily understood as indexing queer space per se. It is perhaps for this reason that Altman (2013, 135) found them to be rather arbitrary.

The *kanban* and event flyers typically become visible in Ni-chōme between noon and 5pm and remain visible until approximately 3am. During the morning, from 5am until noon, only the permanent signs for the bars can typically be seen. Even though some of the gay bars in Ni-chōme do stay open into the morning, the neighbourhood is relatively deserted at this time. Gay men are very rarely present in the district. For Japanese gay men, there is little about Ni-chōme that “feels gay” (*gei no kanji*) in the morning, and the neighbourhood is practically

⁴ I note here that during a visit to the district in July 2016, I did notice rainbow flags are now being prominently displayed outside some bars (mostly those which welcome foreigners). This demonstrates that the use of global queer symbols is continuing to penetrate and influence how queer space is produced within Ni-chōme.

indistinguishable from the other districts of Shinjuku. Many of my informants explained that during the morning, Ni-chōme formed part of what they termed the “normal world” (*futsū no sekai*) as opposed to “the gay world” (*gei no sekai*). Japanese gay men typically utilise “normal” (*futsū*) when they wish to euphemistically refer to wider heteronormative society (Lunsing, 2002, 58). However, rather than suggesting that the gay community is somehow “abnormal”, describing heteronormative society as “normal” seeks to construct wider society as somehow boring or uneventful compared to the gay community, which is exciting and unique (Moriyama, 2011, 119). It is important to note, however, that from the perspective of wider society gay men are still understood as abnormal and that this causes feelings of unease (McLelland, 2000). During the daylight morning hours, Ni-chōme is not necessarily viewed by my informants as a space in itself, but rather as a corridor to heteronormative places such as workplaces, schools or homes. The so-called “normal people” (*futsū no kata*) who inhabit the “normal world” pass through the district without interacting with the space in any meaningful way, with Ni-chōme’s permanent signage appearing similar to other signage found throughout Tokyo.



Figure 2. Examples of permanent signage in Ni-chōme (photo taken by author, July 2013).

According to interviews conducted with the owners of gay bars, Ni-chōme's permanent signage is deliberately designed so as not to explicitly reference the gay community due to a concern that permanently displaying such signage (that would likely contain images of semi-naked men) may cause *meiwaku* (discourtesy, annoyance) to heteronormative society. Avoiding *meiwaku* is an important feature of Japanese society, where *meiwaku* may be viewed as a subtle form of normative control that enforces social behaviours deemed appropriate by Japanese society at large (Plourde, 2014, 84; Abe, 2014, 99). Lunsing (2002, 61) has suggested that, like many gay communities globally, much of the Japanese gay culture is concerned with not offending the wider society within which it is embedded and that fear of being "uncovered" (*bareru*) has lent a sense of precariousness to gay districts such as Ni-chōme. This appears to be true of the morning, when signage explicitly referencing gay space is rarely visible. But after the "normal people" have left the district, impermanent signage containing highly explicit depictions of naked men become very common. According to one informant, Ni-chōme "opens up" as a gay space when the *kanban* and flyers become visible. This suggests that although the owners of bars in Ni-chōme are cautious not to cause *meiwaku* to "normal society" in the morning when "normal people" are typically present in the district, from noon until late evening impermanent signage is deliberately utilised to reappropriate Ni-chōme as a queer space. Drawing upon the idea of *emplacement* and *demarcation*, the impermanence of the signage suggests that Ni-chōme's status as a queer space is contingent on the emergence of *kanban* and event flyers and that Ni-chōme exists as a queer space only when explicitly gay signage, coupled with the physical presence of gay men, dominates the district.

The pornographic nature of the images on impermanent signage plays an important role in queering space in Ni-chōme. Heterosexual pornographic imagery, particularly eroticised images of women, is commonly displayed on signage throughout public urban spaces in Japan, and consumption of heterosexual pornography (by men) in public spaces such as trains, bookstores and even restaurants is likewise fairly common (Bornoff, 1994, 570). Magazine stores and convenience stores often prominently display heterosexual pornographic magazines, and although they are usually labelled as "forbidden to minors" (*miseinen kinshi*), the magazines can be browsed at leisure inside shops as there is often no shrink-wrapping. It is important to note that whilst consumption of heterosexual pornography is still considered unusual and "perverted" (*hentai*) by many (see Hambleton, 2016), eroticised images of naked women are ultimately a common feature of the Japanese cityscape.

Thus, the deliberate use of eroticised images of men in the impermanent signage of Ni-chōme is highly atypical within Japan's cityscape, and it is almost unheard of to see images of even semi-naked men outside gay districts in Japan

except in rare exceptions such as signage for fashion labels (Monden, 2014). The use of naked men in signage, then, represents a queering of the heteronormative cityscape by the owners of gay businesses. For the patrons of the bars whom I interviewed, it was the presence of these eroticised images that ultimately differentiated Ni-chōme from the heteronormative cityscape and bar owners explained during interviews that they deliberately utilised such images in their advertisements as a tactic to promote a sense of queer space. Pornographic images of men thus act as a semiotic system that not only indexes queer space, but also produces it through a reappropriation of the cityscape that challenges social norms concerning the appropriateness of depicting eroticised male imagery in public. It is important to remember, though, that this only occurs during times when heterosexuals supposedly do not visit Ni-chōme.

Of course, the chief purpose of the *kanban* and event flyers is not necessarily to produce queer space but instead to advertise various services and products aimed at a gay clientele. Although bar owners explained to me that they utilised images of naked men on their flyers and *kanban* as a way to explicitly advertise their bars as gay spaces, impermanent signage also signals that Ni-chōme is a space where sexual desires may be satisfied through purchasing pornographic films, visiting brothels and participating in the “scene” at bars. The event flyers in particular explicitly encourage consumption through the promotion of parties in bars; as such, the signage in Ni-chōme functions similarly to that found in gay neighbourhoods around the world such as, for example, Christopher Street in New York’s West Village (Berlant and Warner, 1998). In both Ni-chōme and Christopher Street, the strategic use of signage depicting eroticised images of men to sell services to queer populations has the interesting secondary effect of commoditising gay desire whilst also queering the cityscape. The important difference between the two districts is that within Ni-chōme there is a conscious effort on behalf of bar owners to queer space, whereas Berlant and Warner suggest that the queering of space in Christopher Street was largely unintentional (1998, 551). In both districts, the commoditisation of desire has ultimately led to the marginalisation of certain gay identities, as will be discussed more thoroughly below.

My ethnography has thus revealed that, much like in gay districts the world over, impermanent signage plays a crucial role in structuring Ni-chōme as a marketplace where gay subjectivities are reduced to patterns of consumer behaviour. Because of this, impermanent signage is explicitly stratified by Type so as to attract specific clientele to the bars (in order to increase profits by creating niche markets and attracting individuals who align themselves with certain consumer behaviours) (see Shikano, 2015). On the impermanent signage, the physiques of the male models act as a semiotic code that indexes the Types to which the bars cater.

The body as a semiotic resource on impermanent signage

Although physical appearance is an important aspect which defines a Type, physique appeared to be more often understood by my informants as a semiotic marker which indexes a Type's particular gendered performance, personality and associated patterns of consumption. Thus, it is of no surprise that the physical appearances of the men depicted on *kanban* and event flyers are consciously utilised by the designers of these impermanent signs to index particular Types. In this section, I examine how men's bodies are utilised as semiotics to identify a bar as catering to a particular Type. Although a plethora of Types are visible in Ni-chōme, I focus upon the *kawaii-kei*, *gaten-kei* and *ikanimo-kei* as these three Types are the most frequently depicted in the district's signage.⁵

The names for these Types derive from the gay argot which developed in Ni-chōme during the 1970s (Long, 1996; McLelland, 2000, 125). The *kawaii-kei* (Cute Type) is utilised to refer to a younger man in his 20s who is understood as appearing somewhat effeminate, who participates in activities which are normatively understood as feminine (such as eating sweets and cooking) and who often speaks in a camp manner (Shikano, 2015, 86). Due to the linkages made between the *kawaii-kei* and femininity, relatively androgynous physiques are seen as indexing this Type. As such, thin, smooth and youthful bodies are typically utilised to index this Type on *kanban* and event flyers. The term *gaten-kei* (Working-Class Type) derives from the Japanese slang term *gaten* which refers to the bulky, muscular bodies of working-class labourers from the early modern period of Japanese history (Shikano, 2015, 85). *Gaten-kei* are typically understood as older men (aged between 30 and 50) who work in one of the traditionally working-class industries of Japan. Importantly, the *gaten-kei* is intimately linked to normative understandings of Japaneseness and hyper-masculinity, and there is a tendency for *gaten-kei* to be depicted in traditional Japanese clothing on *kanban* and flyers (Mackintosh, 2010, 109). Although the term *gaten* literally refers to the muscular bodies of labourers, it is larger, slightly muscular yet chubby (a physique known as *gatchimuchi*; see Shikano, 2015, 85) bodies that are utilised to index this Type on impermanent signage. Both *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* derive their names from adjectives which describe the physicality of a man, and although the Types are understood as indexing more than this physicality, it is no surprise that “cute” physiques reference *kawaii-kei* and “rugged” physiques index *gaten-kei*.

⁵ Other Types that I encountered included, for example, *debu-kei* (Fatty Type), *ōkami-kei* (Wolf Type, referring to thin and hairy men roughly over the age of 40 to 50) and *onē-kei* (Elder Sister Type, referring to men who cross dress or behave in a flamboyant, camp manner). However, there were far fewer bars catering to these Types than to the *kawaii-kei*, *gaten-kei* and *ikanimo-kei*. Men who identified with less common Types were thus more likely to negotiate entry into bars that did not explicitly cater to them, as discussed below. Another important kind of bar which is regrettably beyond the scope of this article is the *gai-sen* (foreigner specialty) bar (see, however, Baudinette, 2016 for an in-depth discussion of these bars).

Unlike *kawaii* and *gaten*, the term *ikanimo* does not explicitly describe the physicality of a Type. The term *ikanimo* literally means “obvious” or “recognisable” and thus the meaning of *ikanimo-kei* is the “obviously gay Type” or “someone who is recognisably gay” (Morimura, 2008, 156). However, this “obviousness” does not derive from the heteronormative understandings of gay identity that circulate throughout Japan where gay men are typically understood as effeminate (McLelland, 2000, 45). Instead, *ikanimo-kei* refers to a Type whose lifestyle is promoted through gay media as the most desirable in the Japanese gay culture at a specific time. As the *ikanimo-kei* is thus temporally defined, what constitutes an *ikanimo-kei* changes, although this change is gradual and often subtle. At the time of my fieldwork, an *ikanimo-kei* was understood as a young man in his 20s who wears brand name clothing (particularly from such labels as Abercrombie and Fitch and Calvin Klein), parties every night in Ni-chōme and acts in a heteronormatively masculine way (Moriyama, 2012, 170).

The *ikanimo-kei* is indexed by an athletic, gym-toned body that is complemented by short hair and a beard, and is understood as being similar to an idealised “straight man” (*nonke*) in appearance and gendered performance (Moriyama, 2012, 170-171). The *ikanimo-kei* body differs to that of a *gaten-kei* as a *gaten-kei*'s muscularity is expected to be accompanied by a certain level of chubbiness. The *ikanimo-kei* body, on the other hand, is derived from gym-training and is lither and more “sculpted”. The *ikanimo-kei* body is thus sculpted by choice and by aesthetic discipline whereas the *gaten-kei* body is understood as deriving naturally from labour (Shikano, 2015, 85). According to an informant, an *ikanimo-kei* is expected to have washboard abs and a highly developed chest whereas a *gaten-kei* may have heavily muscular arms and broad shoulders but also, typically, a small beer belly (which indexes the lack of aesthetic discipline).

It is clear from the above discussion that these three Types have much in common with stereotypical identity categories (such as “twink,” “bear” and “jock”) which are circulated throughout global queer culture and which have their origins in North American gay culture.⁶ In his historical investigation of the development of Japanese gay slang, Long (1996) suggests that Typing has indeed been influenced by North American gay identity categories to a certain extent. This is particularly true of the *ikanimo-kei*, which quite obviously draws upon the globalising trends identified by Altman (2001), Hubbard (2011) and Puar (2007) which privilege heteronormative masculinity and gay party culture. The *ikanimo-kei* thus appears similar to the “straight-acting jock” valorised, for example, in North American gay pornography (Burger, 1995). With its focus on “working-class” masculinity, the *gaten-kei* was likewise influenced by the so-called “gay clone” culture of 1970s New York, investigated by Levine (1998), which was also based in expressions of masculinity deriving from working-class culture. However,

⁶ For in-depth discussions of the definition and genesis of the terms “twink,” “bear” and “jock” in North American gay culture, see Burger (1995).

Long (1996) also importantly reminds scholars that Japanese Types and North American gay identity categories are not necessarily equivalent, and that Japanese ideologies of gender and sexuality have played a more crucial role in the development of Typing (particularly in naming practices). Thus, the *gaten-kei* is not equivalent to the gay “bear” sub-culture despite their superficial similarity, since *gaten-kei* represents a merging of the 1970s gay clone sub-culture with Japanese notions of traditional masculinity deriving from working-class culture and from historical notions of *bushidō* (the way of the samurai) (Mackintosh, 2010, 109). Furthermore, the *kawaii-kei* does not derive from the global “twink” sub-culture but instead has emerged from the intersections between Japanese gay culture and Japanese women’s culture, such as women’s comics which focus upon the so-called *bishōnen* (beautiful young men) (McLelland, 2000, 57).

The importance of physique to the indexing of Types cannot be overstressed, as my interviews with bar patrons revealed that they would read the physicality of a man as a semiotic marker for his Type not only with regards to the images on signage but also in instances of face-to-face communication. Furthermore, as Types are also understood as gendered identities, physicality is likewise understood as indexing a particular gendered identity. Japanese gay men are so adept at reading these bodily semiotics that event flyers typically only deploy an eroticised image of a man whose physicality aligns with the advertised bar’s Type to convey the bar’s targeted clientele to the reader. It is exceptionally rare for a bar to explicitly signal this information through the use of the name of a Type in its advertising copy, as it is understood by the owners of most bars that their audiences are proficient in reading this bodily semiotics.⁷ Thus, physicality represents an important aspect of the *visual repertoire* utilised in Ni-chōme. On permanent signage, however, where explicit depictions of bodies are absent due to a desire not to cause *meiwaku*, men need to rely on more subtle, implicit semiotic clues to determine a bar’s Type.

Indexing Typing through script, colour and language choice

Interviews with bar owners revealed that although the names of bars were typically somewhat arbitrary, chosen for aesthetic purposes rather than to convey the bar’s Type to its potential clientele, the use of colour, script and language on the signage was highly strategic. These three semiotic modes were utilised to index the Type of clientele a bar targeted by matching normative Japanese understandings of the use of colour, script and language in advertising to the gendered and age-based identities that are attached to specific Types. The signage, thus, draws upon *multimodality* in order to convey its message, with these modes

⁷ One exception to this rule, as I have indicated above, is the *gai-sen* bars, where signage in English explicitly welcomes foreigners. The lesbian bars in Ni-chōme also deploy explicit language to mark their spaces as women only (see Maree, 2016).

forming part of the *visual repertoire* that is not just specific to the Japanese gay sub-culture, but that also derives from common, mainstream advertising tactics.

Figure 3, below, presents a subset of my corpus of 182 permanent signs utilised to advertise bars in Ni-chōme. The signs in Figure 3 were located next to the elevator of a large building situated in the very centre of the district. Overall, there are 14 signs in Figure 3, 11 of which advertise bars with English names and 3 of which utilise a mix of Japanese and English. I visited each of these bars to ascertain their Type and to talk to their owners about the strategies used on their signage to convey the bar's Type. *GLITTER*, *Castle* and *Boys pub Dash* catered to *kawaii-kei*, *Bar Kono buta yarō* (yellow with a cartoon pig) catered to *gaten-kei* and the 10 other bars broadly targeted *ikanimo-kei*. As can be seen, the signs very rarely contain pictures of men (*Castle* is an exception, however the men actually appear on a flyer which has been pasted on to the permanent sign) and typically display the name of the bar in one of four Japanese scripts on a coloured or black background.



Figure 3. Permanent signs for bars in Ni-chōme (Photography by the author, taken July 2013).

According to bar owners, the colour of the background is an important semiotic marker for a bar's Type. *Ikanimo-kei* bars typically deployed black or dark background colours, which supposedly index the “cool” (*kūru*) nature of the Type, whereas bright colours such as yellow and pink which are understood as somewhat effeminate are typically used to index *kawaii-kei*. White backgrounds were utilised neutrally, with other semiotic modes then being used to index a bar's Type. Much like *ikanimo-kei*, *gaten-kei* bars were also typically indexed by darker colours, although black seemed to be utilised more commonly with *ikanimo-kei* bars than *gaten-kei* bars (which typically deployed blue). Colour, however, appears to be the least useful mode for conveying Type, as ultimately some bar owners choose colours for aesthetic purposes as discussed below (also, bar patrons expressed to

me during interviews that often colour was “too difficult” to read as Typed, occasionally leading to misinterpretation of a bar’s Type).

After colour, choice of script was an important mode that gay men would read as indicating a bar’s Type. Indeed, interviews with bar patrons revealed that many of them principally relied upon this semiotic code when trying to ascertain a bar’s Type. The Japanese language can be represented in one of four scripts: the cursive *hiragana* and angular *katakana* (syllabic, phonetic scripts), *kanji* (Chinese characters) and *rōmaji* (the Roman alphabet). Due to the historical usage of these scripts, each has developed particular gendered connotations with *hiragana* understood as particularly feminine, *katakana* and *kanji* as masculine and *rōmaji* as somewhat gender neutral (see Robertson, 2015; Yoda, 2000). Thus, usage of *hiragana* typically indicates *kawaii-kei* bars, whereas *katakana* and *rōmaji* are typically utilised for *ikanimo-kei* bars. *Kanji* are mostly utilised for *gaten-kei* bars due to their normative links to masculinity, and also due to their linkage with ideas of “Japaneseness” (as the *gaten-kei* is strongly associated with the discursive idea of traditional Japan, as discussed above). *Rōmaji* can also be utilised to index a *kawaii-kei* bar when the lettering is cursive, particularly in cases where the lettering utilises one of the *kawaii-kei* colours. This is the case in Figure 3 above, where *GLITTER* and *Boys pub Dash* utilise this semiotic tactic to index their status as *kawaii-kei* bars. Finally, language choice indexes Typing. English is commonly utilised in Japan to advertise cool, trendy products and thus is also utilised in Ni-chōme to mark bars as catering to *ikanimo-kei* and, sometimes, *kawaii-kei*. Japanese language, then, is mostly utilised to index *gaten-kei* bars, although this is typically only the case when the bar’s name is presented in *kanji*. The sample presented in Figure 3 mostly conforms to these trends: *ikanimo-kei* bars utilise dark colours and English and *kawaii-kei* bars use soft colours and cursive scripts.

However, the case of the bar with the sign displaying a pig presented in Figure 3 above complicates this analysis. This bar, called *Bar Kono buta yarō*, could perhaps be understood as catering to a *kawaii-kei* clientele as it uses soft colours and a relatively cute image of a pink pig as a mascot. But for speakers of Japanese this is clearly not a *kawaii-kei* establishment. The name of the bar, “*Kono buta yarō*” translates figuratively into an expression such as “This pig bastard” or “You fucking pig”. It is the roughness of this vocabulary that truly indexes the Type to which the bar caters; the working-class *gaten-kei*. The owner of this bar explained that his choice to use yellow as the background was more for aesthetic, rather than semiotic, purposes and suggested that even though normative uses of colour, script and language exist, they can be subverted. Furthermore, his example demonstrates that, occasionally, the name of a bar is not arbitrary and that the meaning of a bar’s name can sometimes convey the Type of a bar. This is, however, not particularly common and most *gaten-kei* bars in Ni-chōme do indeed utilise Japanese names so as to evoke the so-called inherent Japaneseness of this particular Type.

Interviews with bar patrons revealed that those who identified directly as being one of the three Types investigated in this article typically had no problem reading these semiotic tactics (except, perhaps, for colour). Furthermore, they indicated that once they became accustomed to finding bars which catered to their personally identified Type, they quickly internalised these semiotic systems. On the other hand, those who did not identify as *kawaii-kei*, *gaten-kei*, or *ikanimo-kei* expressed during interviews that they often found the signage confusing, and recounted numerous instances of entering bars only to be refused service due to their “incorrect” Type.⁸ The interviews seem to reveal that patrons who find bars which are supportive of their self-identities are more likely to develop knowledge of the *visual repertoires* utilised to index Typing than those who did not feel especially welcome. As I will discuss in the following section, patrons developed a number of strategies to negotiate their entrance into gay bars which did not ostensibly “match” their own Type, with some men choosing to ignore Typing altogether.

From the discussion in this section, it is clear that Typing is implicitly present in the permanent signage, just as it is explicitly present in the flyers circulating throughout Ni-chōme. In the final section, I draw upon my analysis of these two kinds of signage to argue that the normative desirability of the *ikanimo-kei* is physically mapped onto the district and briefly discuss how gay men negotiate this spatialisation of desire in Ni-chōme.

Domination of the district by the *ikanimo-kei*

“[H]omosexuality is managed rather differently in Japan... [with] the pornography for Japanese homosexual men [being] striking in that the gym-sculpted bodies so important in the west are absent. [Instead] slim, younger men appear to be the norm...” (Altman, 2013, 136).

The above quote is a continuation of Altman’s (2013) impression of Ni-chōme that was discussed in the article’s introduction. Drawing upon his experiences in Ni-chōme (which were apparently restricted to one bar named *Jahnnys*), Altman (2013, 136) argues that rather than highly muscular, hyper-masculine gay men, it is instead “softer” and “androgynous” bodies that appear to be normatively desirable in the Japanese gay sub-culture. Altman (2013) thus positions Japanese gay culture as ultimately different to global queer culture. Altman provides neither quantitative nor qualitative data to support this claim and it is possible that his experiences in Ni-chōme may not necessarily be representative due to a selective reading of the space influenced by his local guides. Indeed, Altman’s assertion that “gym-sculpted bodies... are absent” from

⁸ This is not an uncommon practice in Ni-chōme, where the limited physical space in bars (typically most bars can only serve up to ten clients) leads to bar owners actively policing which patrons may visit their bars, often rejecting those who do not match the bar’s Type (see Baudinette, 2016; McLelland, 2000, 144-145).

“pornography for homosexual men” appears unlikely, as Mackintosh (2010, 10-11) has persuasively demonstrated that depictions of hyper-masculine men have remained a trope of Japanese gay media since at least the 1970s. Altman seems to have conflated the normative tendency for media produced for heterosexual men and women (particularly fashion magazines) to depict young men as somewhat androgynous to the homosexual sphere (see Monden, 2014, 33). Through an analysis of my corpus of signage, I argue instead that the gym-sculpted *ikanimo-kei* is presented as normative and that this normativity is revealed through signage to be mapped onto Ni-chōme. In so doing, I demonstrate how the spatialisation of desire in Ni-chōme is indeed strongly influenced by trends in global queer culture.

Analysing the prevalence of particular Types on event flyers reveals how certain Types are considered normative in Ni-chōme, as the flyers primarily aim to attract business to bars and it can be reliably assumed that the Type which is most frequently targeted represents the largest market and those with less prevalence are somewhat marginalised. To determine which Types each flyer targeted, I drew upon the *visual repertoire* outlined above and confirmed my reading through interviewing the owners of bars. As can be seen in Table 1 below, 56.9% (107/188) of the flyers circulating throughout the district promote businesses catering to the *ikanimo-kei* (56.9% of the flyers), followed by 23.4% (44/188) for the *kawaii-kei* and 12.2% (23/188) for the *gaten-kei*. 5.3% (10/188) of the flyers targeted other Types which do not represent the focus of this article, and it was unclear which Type 2.2% (4/188) of the flyers were targeting as these flyers contained no images of men, nor did they present any meaningful advertising copy.⁹ Although the *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* were still highly prevalent, flyers targeting the *ikanimo-kei* represented approximately half of the corpus. From this preliminary quantitative analysis, it appears that rather than slim, androgynous bodies (that is, the *kawaii-kei*), it is rather muscular bodies (including both the *gaten-kei* and *ikanimo-kei*) that are more normative in Ni-chōme. The gym-sculpted body of the *ikanimo-kei* is particularly prevalent, and dominates impermanent signage.

TYPE (BODY)	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
<i>Ikanimo-kei</i>	107	56.9%
<i>Kawaii-kei</i>	44	23.4%
<i>Gaten-kei</i>	23	12.2%
Other Type	10	5.3%

⁹ Interestingly, only one of the flyers in my corpus depicted a non-Japanese man, with most foreigner-friendly bars producing advertising which featured Japanese *ikanimo-kei* models. A more thorough and up-to-date investigation of racialized desire on Japanese gay event flyers would be an interesting project for future research.

Type unclear	4	2.2%
TOTAL	188	100%

Table 1. Prevalence of Types on event flyers in Ni-chōme.

Rather than just the quantitatively large number of flyers for the *ikanimo-kei* circulating throughout the district, the normativity of this Type and the marginalisation of the *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* are also evidenced spatially by the domination of bars catering to *ikanimo-kei* in Ni-chōme. According to my ethnography, bars which cater to *gaten-kei* and *kawaii-kei* are typically found in poorly-lit back alleys towards the periphery of the neighbourhood (although *kawaii-kei* bars tend to be located closer to main roads than *gaten-kei* bars), whereas *ikanimo-kei* bars are found on Ni-chōme's main roads (see Figure 4). Indeed, the largest bars, all of which are located in the centre of the district, all cater to *ikanimo-kei*. A large number of *gaten-kei* bars can be found clustered in a particular section of the district known as Shin-chidori gai (New Street of 1000 Birds) which, despite the prefix “*shin*” meaning new, is an old rundown tenement in the north-west periphery of Ni-chōme. *Kawaii-kei* bars are mostly scattered to the east of the district, although some can be found on the main thoroughfare of Naka-dōri (Central Street). The relegation of *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* bars to the figurative and literal shadows and the domination of the centre of the district by *ikanimo-kei* represents the stratification of space into niche markets. Japanese gay men are aware of the creation of Typed spaces in Ni-chōme, with many explaining that the neighbourhood is “divided” (*kubetsu sareta*) into “areas” (*eriya*) where particular Types are more common, with the “centre” (*chūshin*) of the district being dominated by *ikanimo-kei*.

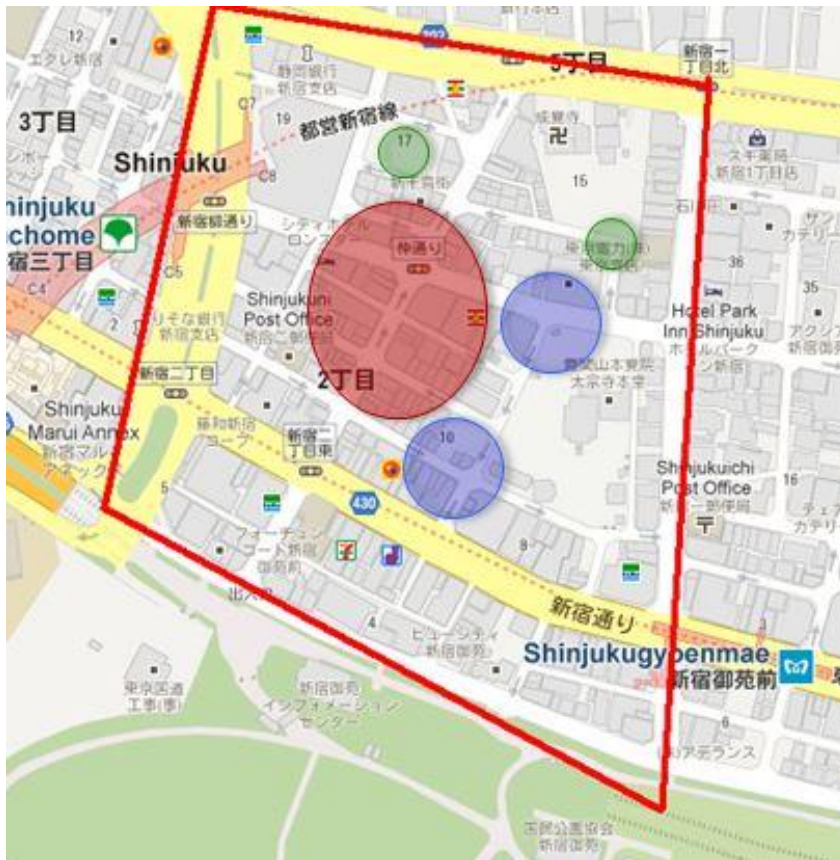


Figure 4. A rough depiction of the spatialisation of Typing in Ni-chōme. Red areas represent spaces where *ikanimo-kei* bars dominate, blue is for *kawaii-kei* and green for *gaten-kei* (Map data ©2016 Google Maps, ZENRIN, used under fair use license).

However, these Typed “areas” are not immediately observable via permanent signage, since Typing is encoded implicitly on these signs through the use of *multimodal* semiotics. The usefulness of an LL approach sensitive to *emplacement* and *demarcation* becomes apparent, allowing the *multimodality* of the signage to be understood as implicitly producing Typed space. Drawing upon these ideas, the plethora of English language signage that Altman (2013, 135) described as arbitrary is thus an indication that the majority of bars in Ni-chōme most likely cater to either *ikanimo-kei* or *kawaii-kei* for, as discussed above, use of English language on permanent signage typically indexes that a bar caters to either of these two Types.

An awareness of the use of colour and script reveals that most of these bars in fact target *ikanimo-kei* as the majority of signage found in central Ni-chōme typically utilises dark colours (particularly black and dark blue) and either the angular *katakana* script or *rōmaji*, which index *ikanimo-kei* bars. Thus, these signs *demarcate* the centre of Ni-chōme as a space for *ikanimo-kei*. This process of *demarcation* also serves to reinforce the semiotics of the signage, with the

emplacement of these signs in spaces normatively understood as *ikanimo-kei* reinforcing the notion that dark colours, *katakana* and use of English index *ikanimo-kei*. Ultimately, this reveals the somewhat circular logic of Typing as a semiotic system and it problematizes the use of semiotics on permanent signage discussed above. Do dark colours and particular scripts inherently index *ikanimo-kei* and hence produce *ikanimo-kei* space or does *ikanimo-kei* space condition these semiotic modes to be read as markers of this particular Type? It seems that the answer to this question is that both statements are correct. Overall, the ubiquity of semiotic modes which ostensibly index the *ikanimo-kei* within the centre of Ni-chōme is indicative of this Type's normativity within the district.

The niching of *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* is also able to be read through the permanent signage. *Gaten-kei*, out of the three Types upon which this article focusses, is perhaps the most marginalised Type.¹⁰ As revealed above, *gaten-kei* bars are indexed primarily through the use of *kanji* on signage, evoking the Type's supposed inherent "Japaneseness." Signage which utilise *kanji* is incredibly rare in central Ni-chōme and is most commonly found in Shin Chidori-gai and other peripheral sites. The use of *kanji* was considered "uncool" (*dasai*) by many Japanese gay men in their 20s (who identified as *ikanimo-kei*) whom I interviewed, and seeing a sign covered in *kanji* was often considered justification to not visit a bar. The linkages made between *kanji*, *gaten-kei* and "uncoolness" and the physical avoidance of spaces where *kanji* was commonly utilised on signage reveals the niche nature of the *gaten-kei*. As for the *kawaii-kei*, although bright and colourful signs featuring *hiragana* or English were sometimes visible in central areas (as evidenced by Figure 3 above), they are somewhat more common just outside the centre. This reveals an interesting aspect of the *kawaii-kei*, namely that although this identity is somewhat niche, it is still more acceptable than the *gaten-kei*. Gay men whom I interviewed revealed that although *kawaii-kei* were certainly not considered as attractive as *ikanimo-kei*, the *kawaii-kei* were placed higher than *gaten-kei* on a hierarchy of desire.

This hierarchy of desire, I argue, is visible in the spatial stratification of Ni-chōme, both in the relative prevalence of *ikanimo-kei*, *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei* in impermanent signage and through the creation of Typed space in the district which marginalise *kawaii-kei* and *gaten-kei*. Ultimately, it is clear that Japan's gay subculture does indeed valorise gym-sculpted, hyper-masculine bodies, following globalising trends in queer culture which privilege heteronormative masculinity (Hubbard, 2011; Puar, 2007).

It is important to note, however, that the patrons who visit these bars do not necessarily subscribe to such a value system and that many men I interviewed rejected Typing and the stratification of Ni-chōme via this hierarchy of desire as

¹⁰ Other Types not discussed in this article due to space limitations, such as the *debu-kei* (Fatty Type) face even heavier marginalisation than the *gaten-kei*. Some Types (such as the *oyaji-kei*, or "Old Geezer Type") do not even have dedicated bars.

outdated and reductive. This was particularly common amongst those men who did not personally identify as either *ikanimo-kei*, *kawaii-kei* or *gaten-kei* but who did desire these three Types as potential romantic partners. According to interviews with such men, explicitly highlighting their desire for these Types as partners allowed them entry into Typed spaces and provided them with a level of agency to participate in Ni-chōme's sub-culture. Whilst more research into such strategies appears to be necessary, it is important to note here that the spatialisation of desire in Ni-chōme via Typing is not totalising and that individuals' subjective experiences and desires can deconstruct and problematise the politics of desire found within the district. As such, for some men the existence of Typed signage is ostensibly ignored as they do not accept the legitimacy of Typing in general. Instead, these men negotiate their entry into bars through other means, often seeking to find spaces which are not explicitly Typed.¹¹ Nonetheless, at the level of discourse, the hierarchy of Typing which privileges *ikanimo-kei* plays a crucial role in how Ni-chōme is organised, motivating the owners of bars to strategically and consciously produce signage that explicitly indexes Types in an attempt to attract specific clienteles and thus increase their profits.

Concluding discussion

Through an ethnographic investigation of the permanent and impermanent signage utilised in Shinjuku Ni-chōme, this article has revealed the complex semiotic role signage plays in producing queer space. I have discussed how eroticised images of men on impermanent signage produce queer space and how the display of this signage is contingent on the avoidance of causing *meiwaku* to heteronormative society. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates how *multimodal* semiotic systems are utilised to index particular identity categories known as Types onto permanent signage, and how analysis of this signage demonstrates that Ni-chōme is stratified into various market-driven sub-districts which cater to these Types. Ultimately, this analysis suggests that the normativity of the *ikanimo-kei* manifests spatially through the domination of signage implicitly indexing this Type throughout the district, demonstrating how the spatialisation of desire in Shinjuku Ni-chōme appears to be conforming to global trends in queer culture which privilege heteronormative masculinity.

The geography of sexuality still has much that it can draw upon from queer semiotics and Linguistic Landscaping, and this paper provides a preliminary step in developing a queer theory of the relationships between semiotics, space and sexuality. Importantly, this paper has demonstrated how such an approach appears useful in the study of queer spaces which are situated outside the Euro-American

¹¹ Whilst more research into these strategies appears necessary, I note here that some men who reject Typing instead visit *gai-sen* bars, since foreigner-friendly spaces welcome a broader range of Japanese clientele (as long as they express an ostensible interest in foreign men) (see Baudinette, 2016).

contexts which queer studies as a discipline has tended to approach as somehow representing the “mainstream” (Chiang and Wong, 2016). Clearly, much work is still to be done to finesse a queer semiotic approach to Linguistic Landscaping, and more research is required to investigate the productive relationships between semiotic systems and space to determine whether signage produces queer space or whether signage becomes queered through its positioning within always already queer spaces. A tentative answer to this important question, deriving from the findings of this research, is that both statements are true. Nevertheless, the case study of Ni-chōme presented within this article demonstrates that a non-reductive analysis of signage which is sensitive to a culture’s semiotic systems may reveal the subtle and complex ways these semiotic systems circulate knowledge about sexuality and gender throughout space.

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