

Softcover: UK

# What was Tokyo before it became the future?

The second installment in David Peace's Tokyo trilogy centers on a notorious 1948 bank heist

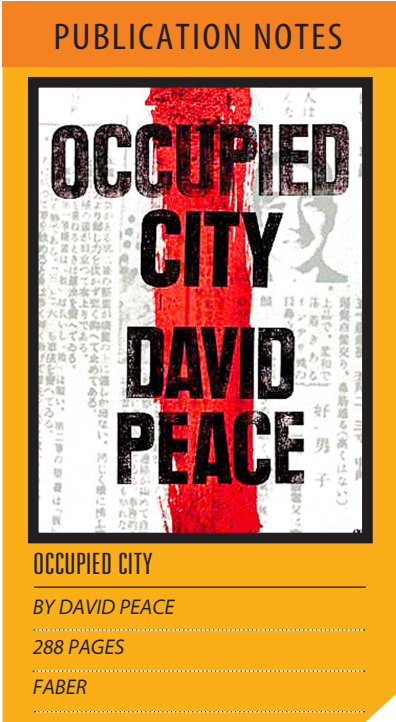
BY JAMES PURDON  
THE OBSERVER, LONDON

neon city. An urban catwalk of bizarre fashions and manga pixies with eyes like dinner plates. Tokyo: stamping ground of Godzilla, land of flat-pack commuters. A cultural fracture in Ozu's *Tokyo Story*; a postmodern glitch in fiction by David Mitchell and William Gibson; a 24-hour high-tech dream-work. But what was Tokyo before it became the future? That question runs through *Occupied City*, the second part of a projected novel trilogy, and David Peace's sequence is heading towards an unsettling conclusion: that the dream was built — or rebuilt — on a nightmarish substrate of postwar brutality.

*Tokyo Year Zero* — set in 1946 — was the Year of the Dog: scavenger, pack animal, beast in the house. A series of young women was sexually assaulted and strangled, while a corrupt police force was caught between an abject population and a thriving organized crime syndicate. Dog ate dog and developed a taste for it, in this shattered city, to which Peace brought the grit-flecked eye he had trained on 1970s Yorkshire. Some things, like the unleavening gallows humor of the Red Riding quartet, didn't quite translate, but *Year Zero* was a gripping performance: crime fiction as grime fiction, propelled by a kind of experimentation so unusual in the genre that one sharp critic promptly dubbed it "avant-noir."

Now, in 1948, the Year of the Rat is about to arrive. Verminous, solitary, a vector of disease, the Rat rules a Tokyo occupied twice over, by the army of US General Douglas MacArthur and by the unquiet ghosts of murder victims. We begin with the facts. Dressed as a government medical officer, a man walks into a downtown branch of the Teikoku bank. Warning against an outbreak of dysentery, he explains that he has been sent to inoculate the bank's staff, who then willingly drink the poison he pours into their teacups. Sixteen drink. Twelve suffer a wretched, painful death.

With the structure of the book, Peace pays homage to the conflicting narratives of Akutagawa's short story *In a Grove* and to Kurosawa's filmed version, *Rashomon*. "This city is a seance," declares one character and so is the novel, split between 12 ghosts in a distribution of narrative that, surprisingly, makes *Occupied City* a tighter read, with greater momentum, than its predecessor. Toning down the hammering repetitions and bewildering first-person confusions of *Tokyo Year Zero* has made for a more accommodating book, though at times characters are reduced to mere conduits for hearsay and supposition. In *Occupied City*, the military scientist and the detective, the killer and the victim are all swept along in the



flow of contaminated data through a contaminated polis. A residue of myth and conspiracy theory still clings to the Teigin incident, as the Japanese call the Teikoku bank murders, and painter Sadamichi Hirasawa spent almost 40 years on death row after recanting a doubtful confession. Some — and David Peace is of this number — proclaim Hirasawa's innocence, believing that the method of poisoning points to the involvement of Unit 731, Japan's covert wartime chemical and biological weapons division. Military-industrial conspiracy; police cover-up.

No room here for chance, for the lone wolf, or the rat. That may well be the point, but this apophenia, the hyper-associative thinking that fuels Peace's imagination, is such that its wilder flights can sound like a paranoid riff on Forster: only connect ... everything. This means of plotting is an acquired taste, in part because it demands considerable effort to grasp its unity even as it fosters the suspicion that there may be no unity to grasp. Take *Occupied City's* most arduous and conspicuously experimental section, where typography alone distinguishes three competing narrative voices: the point at which this offbeat polyphony becomes wearing will depend on your tolerance for the visual contrivance.

One good reason to tolerate it is that the novels Peace produces are uncommonly serious about the nature of the tissues that bind together history, rumor, politics, psychology, community and fiction. At their best, they develop a kind of literary forensics, exhuming histories of violence to probe the necrotized organs of the societies in which that violence erupts. The result is occasionally messy, the evidence often dubious, but Peace wields the scalpel like no one else.



The Asus Eee Keyboard is a full-sized desktop keyboard with a built-in PC.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ASUS

## CAN A RETURN TO 1980s-STYLE WEDGE DESIGN WORK IN 2009?

Putting an entire computer into a keyboard works well because the machine becomes a cross between a laptop and an ordinary PC. It has the advantage over the laptop that it is more ergonomic and easy to use and in most cases will be more powerful. Over the PC it has the advantage of portability and convenience. It can be thrown into a backpack and brought to a friend's house or hotel very easily, so long as there is a monitor to plug into or an HDTV to wirelessly link with once you get there.

The idea is a resurgence of the so-called "wedge" computers of the 1980s and 1990s. Back during the Atari vs Commodore era both companies released multiple computers which were essentially PCs in keyboard cases very similar to the Eee Keyboard. That the idea is not new should have prompted Asus to do its research correctly. Those who used these machines for years realized the disadvantages over time: difficult to expand or upgrade; fixing is problematic due to custom parts; and over-heating can be an issue.

The Eee Keyboard has not yet been released so it is hard to say whether it will suffer from the same problems, but given its specifications users should not be needing to worry about upgrading for a few years at least. The machine has some excellent features, such as built-in WiFi, Bluetooth, microphone, speakers and a 5-inch touchscreen color display with a resolution of 800x480 pixels (the display sits in the space the number pad occupies in an ordinary keyboard). Couple this with 16 gigabytes to 32 gigabytes of storage on an internal solid-state drive (SSD), a 1.6-gigahertz Atom CPU, 1 gigabyte of RAM and a unique ability to be able to stream content direct to your HD television — and the Eee Keyboard is clearly an exciting revamp of an aging idea.

The resolution of the on-board display is quite exciting since it is high enough to use for browsing the Web, checking e-mails and writing documents. While the display is still small and low-resolution compared to a desktop monitor, it is higher-resolution than the iPhone's screen, which has been embraced by millions. The potential is for the touchscreen to act as two things: a back-up screen when no monitor or TV is available, and an ever-changing virtual interface. When Asus ditched the number pad to make room for the display, it didn't really ditch it at all — now you can have a touchscreen number pad, as well as a touchscreen calculator, gaming pad, Internet browser, currency converter, etc. The screenshots from Asus indicate that it has managed to do all of this and more, meaning the addition of a touchscreen could stand out as a truly innovative step.

Another great feature is that the Eee Keyboard can wirelessly stream content to your HDTV, allowing it to become a monitor for the computer. This means you can sit on your sofa without worrying about wires (aside from an external power

supply — the computer's 1880mAh battery provides an estimated one hour and forty minutes of run time) and use it as you would an ordinary PC, while playing all of your movies and MP3s through your home entertainment system. (Asus will also market a less expensive, non-wireless Eee Keyboard with an HDMI port.)

Although Asus has not yet announced a price for the Eee Keyboard, it will hopefully be similar to that of the Eee PC. Early indicators of this are the specifications of the hardware (which are quite low compared to desktop systems) and the operating system. The device runs Windows XP with no mention of Windows Vista or Windows 7 on Asus's press releases. Given its size and specifications, the Eee Keyboard makes an ideal living room PC, as well as a more ergonomic alternative to the slew of netbooks available. If the price is in line with this market then it has the potential to become a big seller.

— GARETH MURFIN, CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

## A NONVIOLENT, ADAPTABLE WAY TO BLOW THINGS UP

If you want a big video picture and you don't have the bucks for a large screen, BenQ hopes you'll consider its Joybee GP1 mini projector. The US\$500, 635g hand-held projector uses a 20,000-hour LED lamp for illumination and includes a USB port. Put your media on a thumb drive and you can leave your laptop at home.

You can connect a camcorder, DVD player, TV, video game console or — using a dock that costs extra — iPod to the Joybee. But if you want to watch videos, you must convert your files into the AVI format, using the included Mac and Windows software.

The company claims that the projector can create an image up to 80 inches in diameter, but even in a dimly lighted room, the weak light output meant that I had to put the unit quite close to the wall to see a bright-enough image.

You probably won't want to rely on this projector for your PowerPoint presentations, but as a low-cost way to get a big picture in a dark room, it could do the trick.

— ERIC A. TAUB, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

## UNDERWATER PHOTOS?

You don't have to buy a waterproof camera to go deep. Instead, you can get a watertight casing for many brands of point-and-shoot models.

I tested a Marine Pack MPK-WE made for the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W290 (the Marine Pack is also compatible with other Cyber-shot DSC models). If you don't have a Sony, similar casings are available for other brands of cameras.

The Marine Pack was engineered for divers and allows the Cyber-shot to be used at depths as low as 40m. You can also use the casing at the pool or beach, but it's a pretty bulky package compared with waterproof cameras.

The Cyber-shot clamps into the casing with a reassuring snap. The housing has large buttons that correspond exactly to the buttons on the back of the Cyber-shot. The shutter release button on top is so large you can't miss it.

Listed at US\$200, the Marine Pack isn't cheap. But it's a great help if you are a diver who wants to capture coral reefs, barracuda, angel fish and whatever other critters may be down there.

— RIK FAIRLIE, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

## A PRACTICAL WEBCAM THAT SHARPENS THE PICTURE FOR YOU

The webcam is an accessory that tends to get lost in a computer's great scheme of things. Because of dicey video quality or complex "quick setup" guides, not all PC owners take advantage of it.

Logitech's new offering, though, offers an enticement few other webcams have: high-quality images.

The Logitech Webcam Pro 9000, which at US\$100 sits at the top of a new collection of seven webcams, employs Carl Zeiss optics. These are the same kind used in most of Sony's Cyber-shot digital cameras, ones that sharpen the picture even in close-ups (and what's a webcam about if not close-ups?).

Another component of the Pro 9000 that makes it a standout is a 2-megapixel sensor, which Logitech says translates into 720p high-definition video.

This combination takes the webcam out of the hook-me-up-for-US\$9.95 realm of a neat toy and makes it a usable PC (or Mac) peripheral.

It's designed for desktop monitors, but will clip onto portable screens as well.

— STEPHEN WILLIAMS, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



From above: The Marine Pack MPK-WE waterproof camera housing for the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W290; Logitech's Webcam Pro 9000; and the BenQ Joybee GP1 pico projector.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Hardcover: US

# Trading with the enemy: the paradox of economic integration

Scott Kastner argues that if cross-strait trade liberalization continues apace, future Taiwanese presidents may be less inclined, or able, to risk offending China

BY J. MICHAEL COLE  
STAFF REPORTER

It would be difficult to overstate the importance and timeliness of Scott Kastner's *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence Across the Taiwan Strait and Beyond*, which seeks to explain why, despite hostile political relations between Taipei and Beijing, economic ties have not only persisted, but accelerated.

Kastner, an assistant professor in the department of government and politics at the University of Maryland, goes far beyond the general, albeit contested, view that increased trade between two states reduces the likelihood of armed conflict. Rather, he argues that the more important question is when conflict affects trade. His main hypothesis is that national leaderships that are more accountable to "internationalist economic interests" are less likely to act in ways that threaten economic stability.

To make his case, Kastner looks at three protracted hostile political relationships, or dyads — Taiwan-China, India-Pakistan and South-North Korea — with emphasis on the Taiwan Strait. What follows is a fascinating exploration of the

cross-strait paradox, whereby despite serious political conflict, trade between the two sides from the 1980s on has accelerated.

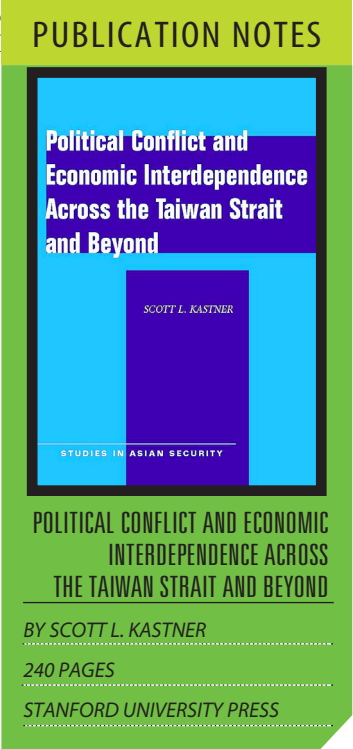
While prior to the mid-1980s economic interaction between Taiwan and China was extremely limited, democratization in Taiwan, added to a revaluation of the New Taiwan dollar that made domestic manufacturing less competitive, brought gradual changes in Taipei's policies on investment in China. Democratization meant that the authorities became more accountable to the people and could no longer ignore business associations, or the "internationalist economic interests," which gained clout as the size of the businesses investing in China grew. As liberalization intensified, the cost to the national leadership of ignoring those interests, or of preventing their expansion, increased.

This process went relatively smoothly, until the nature of the commercial links began having what Kastner calls "negative security externalities" for Taiwan. Arguments for caution included fears that investment in China helped it modernize, or that Taiwanese operating in China could be used

for blackmail by Beijing, or held hostage. Furthermore, as trade intensified, Taiwan became increasingly dependent on China, which by the early 2000s surpassed the US as Taiwan's primary trade partner.

Those security externalities forced the Taiwanese leadership to perform a balancing act between safeguarding political interests (e.g., sovereignty) and remaining accountable to business interests that not only called for further cross-strait trade liberalization, but also increasingly clamored for stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Taipei was therefore compelled to adopt a two-track approach to economic ties with China, one that clearly separated trade from politics. For Beijing, however, the growing cross-strait economic relationship had few negative externalities; it realized, in fact, that economic integration could be a crucial component of its ambition to annex Taiwan. To this end, in times of crisis it has sought to reassure Taiwanese businesses operating in China — including, with a few exceptions, "green" ones — that their interests are safe. As it stands to gain economically and politically from



it sends to Taipei to express displeasure when the Taiwanese leadership appears to threaten the "status quo" so that Taiwanese business will not be scared off. Still, given the authoritarian nature of its government, in

extreme cases Beijing is at greater liberty to act, even when its decisions risk undermining local governments that benefit from Taiwanese investment.

Kastner nevertheless shows that despite becoming increasingly beholden to business interests, Taiwanese leaders can slow the pace of integration when the domestic political conditions are right. As such, both Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) during his second term and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) during the 2004 elections were able to tap into sovereignty and protectionist constituencies to retain their grip on power, which had a cooling effect on cross-strait liberalization.

Still, one conclusion that can be drawn from Kastner's book is that even when pro-independence administrations are in power, and even in times of high political tension across the Taiwan Strait, liberalization will proceed. Furthermore, as Kastner rightly points out, leaders and their coalitions can have very different interpretations of the negative security externalities involved in trading with China, as President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has shown.

The author remains ambiva-

lent about the impact of trade on conflict, concluding that its constraining (higher costs of war making it less likely) and trans-formative (reconciliation through increased contact) effects appear to have been marginal. Despite two decades of economic integration, for example, Taiwanese support for the "status quo" has remained constant. Ironically, international economic interests and China's dependence on global markets may also have limited its ability to send threatening signals to Taipei, as doing so risks alarming international investors. Taipei, Kastner writes, may have been aware of this, which could account for risk-taking on the question of sovereignty. One constraining factor that Kastner oddly leaves out, however, is the security guarantees the US has extended to Taiwan.

Kastner concludes on a note of cautious optimism about the pacifying potential of economic liberalization in the Taiwan Strait. Still, he argues that if economic integration continues to accelerate — which the proposed economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA), added to growing Chinese investment in Taiwan, would

certainly do — future Taiwanese presidents may be less inclined, or able, to undermine stability for political reasons. This would indicate that we can expect more "centrist" government coalitions that are more accountable to business internationalists to be voted into office. The ramifications for the future of Taiwan as a distinct political entity, while serious, are not addressed by Kastner, who throughout his book remains commendably neutral, if not clinical, about his political preferences regarding the question of Taiwanese independence.

Given the idiosyncratic nature of the Taiwan Strait conflict, added to the unique nature of the political systems in Taipei and Beijing, it would be imprudent to generalize the findings by applying them to other conflicts (something Kastner admits himself). This said, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence Across the Taiwan Strait* is arguably one of the most important works of political science theory written about the Taiwan Strait in recent years and makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of political decision-making.