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Repositioning Akihabara: Networks and Antagonisms

The recent redevelopment of Akihabara has witnessed not only a skyline of new buildings but also a renewed emphasis on connecting Tokyo's electric town with other metropolitan areas. Unsurprisingly, the ultimate aim of such networks is to create further economic value, whether in linking Akihabara to Japan's knowledge economy (via Ibaraki's science development area of Tsukuba) or to Tokyo spaces renowned for shopping or tourism.

Some of the tensions in this model are visible in the resulting conflicts between government, business and local universities. Using the work of Slavoj Žižek, however, I also suggest that there is an antagonism in trying to reposition Akihabara as a place for general 'consumers' or 'tourists' and the area's long-standing association with 'otaku' (particularly when such an identity is positioned as representative of excessive desire). In this regard I also consider how such conflicts surfaced in media responses to the crimes of Katō Tomohiro.