



Title	What ‘Mobility’ Means to Us?
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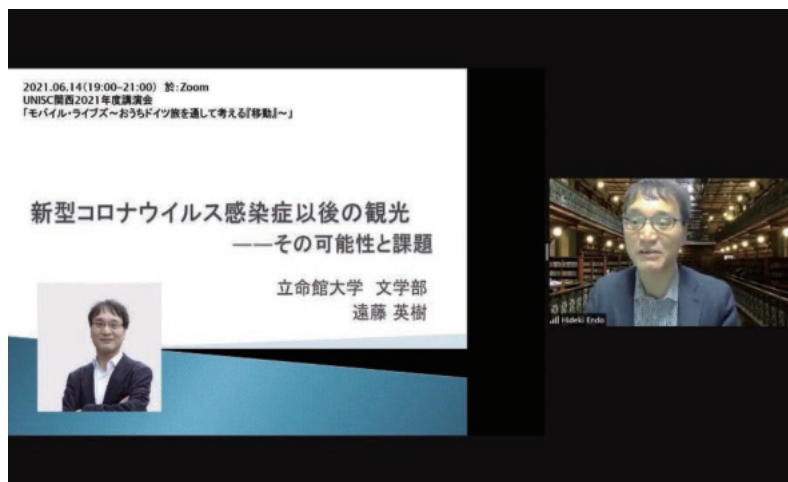
Kairi NIIHIRO

Abstract: COVID-19 has resulted us to remote work, online class, and virtual tours. These activities are examples of ‘Mobile Lives’. In this paper, the author introduces sociologic concept and explains the feature of ‘mobility’ using his university life.

Introduction

In my presentation in March, I talked about how UNISC, the UN NGO to which I belong, changed its activities from face-to-face to online due to the Corona disaster, and how the organization is planning a lecture in cooperation with JTB, a Japanese tourism company, about a new service offered by tourism companies, virtual tours, as a unique online activity. I also introduced that the organization was planning to hold a lecture in cooperation with JTB. Three months later, we held the lecture. The title of the lecture was "Mobile Lives". This is a concept named by the sociologists Elliott and Urry. This concept is useful in describing the lives of people today. Through the virtual tour, I hoped that people would be able to learn about our lives as we "move" between the real world and the Internet world, and the different aspects of our lives. The following photos were taken at that time.





On the day of the lecture, about 100 participants gathered. The lecture was divided into two parts, the first part of which was a virtual tour to Frankfurt, Germany with the cooperation of JTB. At the start of the tour, a guide was waiting for us at the site, and she took us around the old city of Frankfurt via live broadcast. The participants spent 45 minutes answering the quiz questions prepared for them. In the second part of the lecture, three lecturers gave presentations on the virtual tour, and the participants were able to deepen their understanding of the academic and business aspects of the tour.

Now, I would like to go back to my previous presentation. In my previous presentation, I explained some of the features of the virtual tour. For example, I mentioned that you cannot touch what you see on the screen and that you feel as if you are moving even though your body does not move. After COVID-19, we can expect to continue to live mobile lives and gain experiences mainly through the Internet. We will move into virtual space. I ended my previous presentation by pointing out that we are all moving from place to place, door to door, without experiencing the process.

Discussion

Today, I will present the results of my further research on the concept of "mobile lives," which is also the title of our lecture in June. The following is a quote from the book "Media Culture Theory" co-authored by Hideki Endo, who participated as a presenter in our lecture.

Modern society is a world in which people, things, information, and knowledge seem to be in constant movement. ...According to a 2010 report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the world's out-migrant population was 191 million in 2005, and 214 million in 2009. The report predicts that by 2050, the number will reach 405 million. (Journal of Media Culture, pp.14-15)

Endo says that this situation of modern society is characterized by "mobility," which is a consequence of "desembedding". This concept of "desembedding" was proposed by the sociologist Ansony Giddens. According to Giddens, "Whereas

people in traditional societies were embedded in local situations, modern socialites have pulled away from local situations" (p.15). Modern society is no longer conceivable without "migration," including tourism and travel, and continues to produce a large number of tourists which J. Bollock called "leisure migration". In light of the above, Endo will introduce J. Urry's concept of the "Mobilities Paradigm". The main points of this concept are as follows.

1) Social relations are not formed by being fixed in a certain place. They are constantly being formed through "mobility"

2) Such "mobility" involves (1) physicality, mainly for work and pleasure. It is formed from the "restructuring of time and space" through the development of means of transportation such as airplanes and automobiles, which allow people to travel farther while shortening their time. (2) In addition to the movement of people, there is the movement of goods such as souvenirs. (3) Imaginary images are created using various media such as tourist information magazines and television. (4) In the case of virtual travel using the Internet and other media, geographical and social distances are transcended. (5) Telephones, fax machines, cell phones, etc. enable us to travel for communication.

3) Mobility with physicality encompasses social issues such as gender and ethnicity, leading to a reconsideration of state sovereignty and governance in modern society.

4) Mobility involves not only people but also things. Therefore, it is important to consider not only people but also things. Social relations cannot be considered in isolation from things and nature. Therefore, there is a need to question affordances, which means the relationship between people and things.

5) The more diverse and meaningful society becomes, the more "mobility" that circulates people, things, information, and knowledge appears as a necessity. At the same time, it is the non-moving platforms such as roads, stations, airports, and ports that make such "mobility" possible.

(ibid., pp. 16-17)

About(1)

It is said that forming social relations does not mean being fixed in a certain kind of relation, but is formed in "mobility" incessantly. And "mobility" includes what is introduced in (2).

About (2)

As you can see, "mobility" includes people, things, information, and radio waves. And various kinds of 'mobility' bring about changes in our daily lives. For example, let's say we change from trains to airplanes to get to our destination faster. This will not only shorten the travel time but also change the view from the window and make it possible to transport things that could not be transported before. Also, with the spread of laptops and smartphones, our luggage becomes lighter and we can get a lot of information instantly.

Using the concept of "mobility," we can see the reality of today's globalization. In "Global Complexity," Urry says that modern society is like a hologram, in which the whole play a kind of systemic effect that cannot be reduced to its parts. But on the other hand, the parts also hint at the nature of the whole. In other words, what emerges when we take a macroscopic view of local action with an awareness of the

global is what Urry calls the “attractor of glocalization”. In other words, globalization is shaped by glocal mobilities.

About(3)

As an example of gender, I would like to mention women-only trains. Originally, these trains were set up to prevent molestation in the cars.

Another example of ethnicity is the issue of refugees. I don't intend to go into this point too much this time.

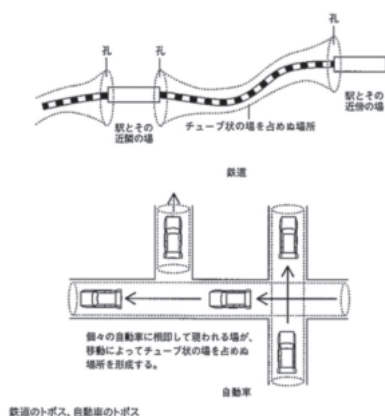
About(4)

This is a very important point. It is easy to think that we can be connected to the rest of the world with a smartphone, but in reality, no virtual space can exist without devices that transmit and receive radio waves, or without rare metals. Even virtual space is very materialistic. Just as a train needs a station, so does a communication device need a station. This point is also related to point (5).

About (5)

In his book "The Transformation of Time and Place," sociologist Mikio Wakabayashi calls railroad tracks, highways, and telephone lines as "tubes" through which objects move. They are places that are constantly moving, and they cannot stay in the same place for even a moment, so in a sense, they are unstable spaces. For this reason, the author calls the "tube" a “placeless place”. And for a "placeless place" to exist, it is essential that an immovable place (station) connects the tubes. A station is a facility for getting on and off the train, in other words, for accessing a placeless place. Throughout the history of modernity, "stations have been constructed as places where people, goods, and information travel from one place to another, and where they have a specific function as arrival "gates" or "entrances" and thus symbolic meaning" (ibid., p.73).

From "The Transformation of Time and Place



From “The Transformation of Time and Place”

However, this is not only true of train stations, highways, and the cars that drive on them. In modern society, not only transportation media but also the many pores that open up around us, mediated by electronic and electronic information media,

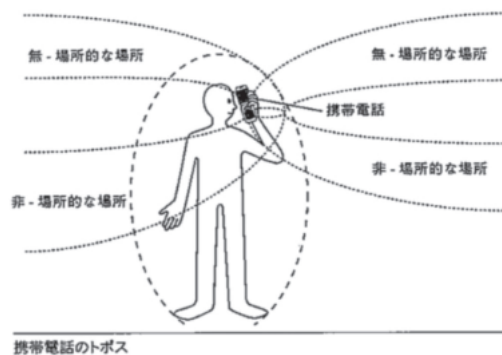
make the place-based structure of society more complex and porous, creating a more layered world of mediated landscapes.

In addition, when we are on the phone, we create a field that is qualitatively different from its surroundings, even though there are no physical barriers. At this time, the caller enters the virtual in a real and practical way. The inability of others to intervene with the person speaking on the phone means that the person speaking is physically here, but not socially here and somewhere else.

What about these virtual places in the case of cell phones? Mobile media, such as cell phones, make it possible to carry around the very personal and private tubes and pores that landlines made possible. Such media are "windows" that lead to virtual places and open up mediated landscapes. Therefore, Wakabayashi says

A potential environment that can be called up, and a terminal for carrying the landscape with us. It is in our pockets, in our bags. (Ibid.)

From "The Transformation of Time and Place"



From "The Transformation of Time and Place"

Furthermore, since each of us uses a computer (station) to hold meetings in the Zoom room, our laptops are also "windows". Thus, the fact that mobile devices are portable terminals becomes important to the author. For example, no matter how widespread the Internet becomes, if it is based only on materiality and immobility (stationarity), then virtual space can only be a side effect of real space, no matter how far it develops.

Conclusion

Lastly, I would like you to read the following quote.

Migration, travel, and other forms of "mobility" are topos (places) where the characteristics (figures) of modern society sharply emerge. "There are many characteristics of modern society that become apparent only when we look at them through the window of "mobility". These include social categories such as

"reality/fiction," "home/away," "global/local," and "work/play. In the past, these social divisions have been maintained as solid and unshakable. However, in the present age, they are beginning to be questioned. The transcendence of social categories also emerges in the phenomenon of "mobility". (Media Culture Theory, p.17)

Although "mobility" is very specific, it hints at the whole of contemporary society. In the same way, I think that the phenomenon of "virtual tour" in some sense represents the Corona disaster and the society of the 2020s itself.

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