Transformation of the Philosophy of City Walking

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1. Introduction

In February, I had four days to stroll the streets of Bangkok. I was coming back to Bangkok for a short stay in April, so instead of visiting the more usual places, I was avoiding the touristy districts in search of lodging. There were lots of stations along the elevated BTS line where I had never been before, so I was visiting residential districts where I had never set foot. Bangkok is wonderfully calm and peaceful. I visited Manila a number of times during its remarkable economic growth, but Bangkok had a very different feel about it, none of the strained tension in the atmosphere that one experiences in other places.

I used to visit cities in the U.S. and in Europe, but over these past five or six years city walking has really taken root here in Asia. I really got into it, and found myself roaming the back streets of cities with map in hand. One discovery after another, though of course, countries are all different. Exploring a city at street level to see what one might find, while contemplating what one discovers. This is my preferred way of touring a city.

I have long been interested in cities, more particularly in the bawdy vulgar spaces one finds on narrow streets and alleyways. Although they are gradually disappearing from cities around the world—and from Japan's cities as well—these sorts of leftover spaces that exude a disordered, confused atmosphere still exist, and are a constant font of some sort of activity or movement. One could say that these disordered, confused urban spaces have played some sort of incubation role. These places have always been confined to actual real places, actual cities, but now we are seeing the emergence of virtual cities on the Internet.

Times change, and inevitably people behave differently to accommodate those changes. A mere twenty years ago the Internet was scarcely known, and the same could be said for mobile phones. People back then would be astounded to see how the information environment has evolved today. We have seen a new development in city walking with the release of the location-based game *Pokémon GO* in 2016. Providing convergence between the real and the virtual, *Pokémon GO* became a global phenomenon by exploiting augmented reality (AR) technology.

As a collaborative venture between Niantic and the Pokémon Company, *Pokémon GO* is a GPS location-based, augmented-reality mobile game for smartphones based on popular Pokémon characters and the mobile game *Ingress*. Players use GPS features on their phones to locate, capture, train, exchange, and battle virtual pocket monster characters on the screen as if they were in the same real-world location as the player. *Pokémon GO* is free-to-play, but also supports in-app purchases of additional in-game items. Here in Japan, *Pokémon GO* has tie-ups with Aeon Group and a host of other partners.

One can appreciate from the emergence of *Pokémon GO* that a new mode of city walking has developed out of old conventional city strolling in a real city. Here I will provide a chronological timeline showing some of the new threads of city walking now emerging from the conventional practice of exploring cities on foot.

2. Philosophy of City Walking

In my book "Back Streets Create Culture: Transformation of Narrow Streets and Neighborhoods" published in 2012, I observed that "the growth of cities is not necessarily a virtue," and eulogized the appeal and significance of back streets and alleyways that so often disappear during urban renewal projects. Of course I did my homework, and wore out several pairs of shoes exploring cities on foot. I limited myself to domestic cities, so I walked the length and breadth of Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Sapporo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima and other cities several times over. This was at the beginning of my preoccupation with *content tourism*, and before that I was very interested in *theories of place*.

Theories of place are theoretical attempts to identify people with places or spaces, and can be traced back to Aristotle's "Physics." There is a well-known interpretation of Aristotle by Henri-Louis Bergson, but Bergson defines place as a container-like boundary that holds an object, and objects must occupy some particular place. As human beings became conscious of sanctified sites and hallowed ground, we find that certain tracts of land have a unique "spirit of place" (genius loci). Hiroyuki Suzuki (1990) eloquently described genius loci in terms of historical background and ambience of various sites.

Exploring the way humans recognize place using perspectives of history, anthropology, and other disciplines, geographer Y.F. Tuan (1992) carved out a new discipline called *phenomenological geography or place theory*. By conducting a structural analysis of love of place, his position had an enormous impact on everything from thinking, philosophy, and psychology to environmental theory. Edward Relph claims that, in this modern era of pervasive mass production and commercialism, we would expect the significance and diverse environmental compatibility of place to be largely lost, and replaced by rampant *pseudo places* dominated by *placelessness*. While focusing on the characteristics of modern placelessness—Disneyfied, museumised, futurist—Relph nevertheless does not reject *placelessness* out of hand.

There has been a good deal of discussion around the notion

of place, but today no discussion of place can ignore virtual space. Virtual space is set up in opposition to real space. A community organized in virtual space is obviously very different from a group in real space, but information is shuttled back and forth in a timely and appropriate manner. Japanese tend to prefer anonymity, so forging face-to-face relationships in virtual space can be difficult. Forging individual bonds of trust in virtual space is decidedly different from forging such bonds in real space, yet one cannot talk about society without including virtual space.

Much like close relationships with other people, places are also critically important—even essential—for most of us. When we find ourselves in such places, we are very much under the influence of the place. As living breathing entities that exist in reality, human beings cannot exist apart from the places they inhabit. Throughout their lives, humans always exist somewhere, they live in relation to specific places.

Wajiro Kon, renowned as the father of *modernology*, a branch of sociology which studied the changes in cityscape in the prewar years, later joined forces with the Roadway Observation Society (ROJO Society) in the context of this theory of place. The primary emphasis in on observation, but this too is a form of city walking to explore layers of the city's urban fabric often drawing upon Edo kirie-zu, detailed woodblock print maps of Edo era districts. Behind this boom is the popular NHK TV program *Bura-tamori*, in which TV personality Tamori walks through towns while talking about the history and culture of the areas he visits. This highlights another aspect of city walking by enabling strollers to envision the activities of people who lived in the places visited. My interest in content tourism also derives from the envisioned activities of times past.

In the growing literature on city walking, I am particularly taken by a book written by Kiyokazu Washida, a philosopher and prolific author: "Kyoto Normal Temperature: Philosopher's Guide to the City" (2007) (see Figure 1). Quite literally, the book describes a philosopher's stroll through Kyoto. First, we are taken on a tour of the old Kyoto metro bus service route 206 (now discontinued) that used to circumvent the city. Leaving Kyoto Station, the bus heads east on Shichijo-dori, then turns north on Higashi-oji. The bus passes Gion, Okazaki, Hyakumanben, and Takano on its way to Shimogamo via Kitayama-dori. The bus now crosses the city to Murasakino in the west, and turns south on Sembon-dori. Finally, the bus closes the loop by returning to Kyoto Station by way of Shimabara and Nishi-Honganji temple.

"Morally questionable activities are pushed to the edge of the city. And once they reach Yasaka Shrine, they are already pressed against the foothills with no where to go. With no where to go, these dubious activities steal furtively back into the city, but Kyoto pushes them back again toward the edge. These morally dubious activities occupy the interstices between city and country, between Gion and the city proper where they lead a glittering existence— which is to say, drab and stagnating" (p. 67).

Parts of any city are definitely disordered and confused. Washida employs the term *morally questionable* for what is more

■ Figure 1: "Kyoto normal temperature: philosopher's guide to the city," by Kiyokazu Washida, Kodansha, 2013.

generally referred to in urban theory as the *entertainment district*. And his notion of *edge* is oddly familiar. While not all cities have this *edge-like* aspect, most do have an entertainment district, and Kyoto in particular does have an *edge*.

Jane Jacobs (2010) defined four conditions for city diversity that produce lively cities: (1) first, districts and as many subdivisions as possible must serve more than one primary function, (2) second, city blocks should be short to increase options for walking further than a block and turning corners, (3) third, buildings should be of varying ages and the scale of building in the mixture should be similar, and (4) forth, there should be a dense concentration of people. Note that all four of these conditions are necessary to generate urban diversity. I think that Jacob's argument undergirds many of Washida's observations.

"The notion that Kyoto is an *ancient capital* is of course a complete fabrication. Certainly, there are a few old building here and there, restrained in style and desolate. But, Kyotoites are unusual in that they like *seasonal goods* and *new things*" (p. 136).

One should not view Kyoto through the old stereotypical lens as an ancient capital. Indeed, Kyoto's streets are crowded with stylish cafés and hotels, and many of Japan's leading companies are located in Kyoto including Nintendo, Wacoal, Kyocera, Omron, Rohm Semiconductor, and many others. This is another dimension of Kyoto. Again, the charm and appeal of city walking

is the sense of discovery and acquisition of knowledge about a place. Looking for the old in the new and the new in the old on the back streets of Kyoto heightens the appeal of city walking.

But Washida's book goes beyond merely offering impressions and historical details of the author's meanderings through Kyoto, for the story is clearly told through the eyes of a philosopher.

"And it's not because Washida is brilliant and capable of writing a book—rather, it is because the book is readable and totally absorbing!" This accolade by Professor Kuwahara is a clear sign that the tired old prevailing views of Kyoto have been overturned" (p. 121).

The reader is thus led to ponder different things even as he is guided on a pleasurable tour of the cityscape. An interesting aspect of city walking is the way we are inspired to think as we contemplate the landscape. We find many examples of this in Washida's book. He reveals the importance of placing ourselves in a totally different context or environment. Consider our enjoyment at being inspired by a round of visits to places far from our usual haunts, even to strange foreign lands.

"Events carved into memory can be painful, as we churn over heartrending events in our minds. And as we process these events, we realize that this really touches the very core of our existence. Even *stories* that are firmly lodged in our memories can undergo a process of reweaving in a totally different direction. This can be a risky business, for memories can sometimes be replaced by an overly clever *rationalization* in an unguarded moment" (p. 253).

While presenting itself as a city walking guidebook for Kyoto, the discussion expands in all directions in a most fruitful way. Washida's book, "Kyoto Normal Temperature: Philosopher's Guide to the City," had an enormous impact on my own personal feeling toward the philosophy of city strolling. This is a book that I will take up and read again when the words begin to fade.

3. Content Tourism and AR City Walking

It is no coincidence that I was working for a record company when I first began exploring content tourism. Therefore, I routinely began my research with a local song, not an animated film. This led to a study of *literary tourism*. The goal of the first literary town tour was to identify the Iruka Hotel or the Dolphin Hotel (*iruka* is dolphin in Japanese) that figures in two of Haruki Murakami's novels: "A Wild Sheep Chase" and "Dance, Dance, Dance."

In "A Wild Sheep Chase," the unnamed narrator while at the Dolphin Hotel in Sapporo learns clues about a mysterious sheep, and eventually has a fateful encounter with *Sheep Man*. In the second half of the book, the protagonist and his girlfriend, who possesses magically seductive and supernaturally perceptive ears, travel to the north from Tokyo to Sapporo by plane. They get coffee at a coffee shop, go to a movie theater, then take a stroll in the evening, and go into a restaurant that they had noticed earlier.

To get to the Dolphin Hotel from the movie theater, you cross three streets to the west then go down one street to the south. The hotel is described as small and rather innocuous. Apparently, there is no actual Dolphin Hotel, but if it did exist, it would be situated along the short stretch between Minami Sanjo-dori and Susukino Street. The depiction of the neighborhood closely resembles the jumble of multi-tenant buildings at this location. "A Wild Sheep Chase" was published in 1982, so of course the author would be describing Sapporo before 1982. However, Murakami's sequel, "Dance, Dance, Dance," mentions the date March 1983 at the very beginning of the book, so there is clearly a gap of several years. We would also note that the Iruka Hotel is now described as the Dolphin Hotel (Figure 2).

I can't define exactly when it happened, but I found this investigative process very interesting, and stepped up my study

■ **Figure 2: Iruka (Dolphin) Hotel, Kunio Nakamura and Hiroko Dozen, Rokujigen, 2014**

of content tourism. Extending this approach to other areas of content, I published "People who Travel in the Story: What is Contents Tourism?" in 2010. At the time, rural distress was chronic and villages and towns were transitioning from a settled residential strategy to one of attracting new people into their communities. This same point is highlighted in the charter of the Academy of Contents Tourism, of which I am a founding member. The idea is to establish methods of harnessing content at the local level and build up sustainable strategic structures through surveys, analysis, and discussion within the Academy of Contents Tourism, and make this information widely available to as many people as possible.

In the year 2016, a great deal of interest was focused on "pilgrimages to all the sacred sites" associated with animation. We saw a great increase in the number of pilgrimage fans after the release of the highly successful animated film, "Your Name," and fans gathered at all the sites associated with the story. Indeed, the term "pilgrimage to sacred places" (*seichi junrei*) to describe this phenomenon was nominated as one of the top buzzwords for 2016. This suggests that content tourism—including fans making pilgrimages to sites featured in animated films—may be entering a new phase. Seven or eight years ago the whole concept of content tourism was little known, but today *seichi junrei* (pilgrimage to sacred places) is in everyone's vocabulary, and content tourism stands on its own.

Well-known cultural critic and novelist Hiroki Azuma stated "the fact that "Your Name" was such a smash hit proves that animation is no longer just the provenance of nerds and geeks (http://blog.livedoor.jp), but I think the show's popularity can also be attributed to the pilgrimage phenomenon." In other words, content tourism in the broader sense is no longer the minor tourism activity that it once was. At the same time, the influx of tourists from abroad provides an excellent opportunity for overseas visitors to learn more about Japan's unique culture attributes. While this involves challenges, I would still argue that content tourism could effectively bridge mutual understanding between Japan and other countries.

Content tourism has clearly entered a new phase. The fact that content tourism is no longer the minor nerd-oriented tourism activity it once was can probably be attributed to certain challenges and possibilities that have recently emerged. Certainly, "Your Name," the big hit of 2016, played a major role in the recent popularization of content tourism. More than 15 million people have seen the movie in Japan alone, so it has had a tremendous impact. Essentially, content tourism is tourism activity in which fans visit sites or places that are associated with a book or film. In other words, identification of specific places is what is important. Here we assume that the site is a fixed place such as a building or a store. But the rapid penetration of *Pokémon GO* in 2016 may necessitate a redefinition of content tourism. One could argue that this is linked to tourism activity that involves tracing the steps of celebrities or characters, a sacred place that in this case is mobile. Or if you go out into the city in search of a Pokémon character,

this activity involves a whole new dimension of city walking. This new aspect of content tourism would require more space than I have available, so I will save it for another paper.

In 2016, Hosei Graduate School of Regional Policy Design (the author's school) joined forces with the University of Tokyo's Hirose-Tanikawa Research Lab and Koto City Tourism Association to develop and AR-based walking tour around Fukugawa (Koto-ku, Tokyo) that permits viewers to superimpose the current cityscape on top of the same views from 57 years ago around 1960 (see photo). While only a few people can take the tour at a time because we could only build a limited number of hand-held terminals, the participants were all quite pleased with the tour. This too should be regarded as a new dimension of content tourism.

But since this city walking tour is actually accompanied by guides, it represents a first trial demonstration. There is still much room for improvement on the implementation side, and we are now considering other walking tour destinations in addition to Fukugawa. This city walking tour also permits participants to navigate through historical fragments and explore layers in the city's history. We also intend to give participants a sense of the passage of time and experience historical changes by superimposing real-world reality over a virtual reality.

While today this can hardly be considered a truly novel approach, in terms of implementation it was quite experimental, and represents a new type of city walking tour proposal. And looking further ahead, we can envision all sorts of variations on this approach. For example, in my particular area of content tourism interest, applications are already being developed that

■ Figure 3: AR-based walking tour (photo by the author)

leverage AR through animation. And we needn't confine ourselves to animation, for eventually content tourism will find ways to harness books, music, and other manifestations of popular culture.

We can expect these developments to unfold in the future, but first we need to perfect plain-old AR-based city walking. There are still many enhancements to be implemented, and I would like to interview some of the participants who took part in the first experimental city walking tours. In my own mind the wheels are turning, for I am trying to come up with improvements to the Koto City walking tour. Helping people rediscover the cityscape around them is the primary objective, but if people could somehow draw inspiration from the landscape as they participate in these walks, that would be ideal.

Contemplative strolls through the city offers a way of directly communing with the cityscape. Certainly the style of interaction will change somewhat with the introduction of AR. While certainly we must continue to explore the value added pleasure of incorporating AR in city walking tours, we must also pursue case studies of other cutting-edge AR technologies as they become available. And no doubt there are other case studies in other countries that we should consider, and we must recognize that advances in civilization always preceeds in tandem with technological innovation.

3. Conclusions

There is much more to say, but I have used my allotted space, so I will conclude with a very brief recap. Although the title of the paper is "Transformation of the Philosophy of City Walking," at this point I cannot probe any deeper. Only to note that city walking can be likened to taking a miniature journey. The true baseline of a journey is the dialog one has with the landscape. For example, this involves altering your usual path through everyday life, then looking back to see what is different, what is changed. You often hear that life is like a journey, but perhaps it's more accurate to say that one's everyday existence is the journey itself. And if you make little discoveries along the way, then you are forever immune from boredom. Shuji Terayama counseled "throw away your books, and run into the streets!" No truer words were ever spoken, for urban spaces are perennially fascinating.

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Cover Art

Tokaido gojusantsugi Taibi Kyoto Sanjo Oohashi (The Great Bridge at Sanjo (Keishi, Sanjo ohashi), from the series "Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido)

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)
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