

# Media Space and “Users”: A Study in Media and People’s Practice after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

by Yoshiji AWATANI\*

## Introduction

This article examines several aspects of media and cultural conditions in contemporary Japan. In particular, the article focuses media space and “users.” This study borrows the concept of “social space” that was extrapolated by Henri Lefebvre, a French philosopher/sociologist. The concept was further developed by Jody Berland (Berland, 2009). The “space” analyzed here is included in the term like “place” or “cyber space”; it is used as a metaphor in the arguments of position, location, and place for the globalization theory in the humanities and social sciences. In Japan, Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* is published as a work of contemporary sociology. In considering media space, the theory of Lefebvre will be a useful one.

Another key concept in this study is “users.” Although this term is mentioned by Lefebvre, we refer to the argument of Michel de Certeau to explore the practice of “users.” From these theoretical implications, we investigate the practice and function of the users and the media in the revival since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this article is to consider the meanings defined by people (users) as consumers of the media.

## 1. Social Space and Users

In his *Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991), Henri Lefebvre considered “social space” from the three perspectives : “Spatial practice,” “Representations of space” and “Representational spaces.” The three concepts are connected with each other dialectically. “Spatial practice” is a practice of production and reproduction by possessing a specific location and a spatial arrangement. This is also called “perceived” for the “perceived space” of a modern visual-dominated society.

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“Representations of space” is a “conceptualized space.” It is a space for scientists or planners of the social and the economic project. “Representational spaces” is a space of “inhabitants,” “users,” or artists, writers, and philosophers as “lived experience.” In this study, it is important to emphasize the concept of the space of “users” as a “lived experience” in the “Representational spaces.”

### 1.1. Everyday Practice in Space

Lefebvre’s exploration of everyday life continued in *The Critique of Everyday Life* and the related books for nearly 40 years. Derek Gregory (Gregory, 1994) classifies from the schema of Lefebvre’s space theory into “abstract space” and “concrete space,” and he assumes that “concrete space” is a place of everyday life. This article focuses the phase of “users” (*usagers* in French) in the “Representational spaces” of “social space,” related to the activity of people in the everyday life.

Lefebvre wrote:

The user’s space is lived –not represented (or conceived) ...the space of the everyday activities of users is a concrete one. (Lefebvre, 1991:362)

Also, the “concrete space”—the activity space of the users compared with specialist’s “abstract space”—is defined as “semi-public, semi-private spaces, ... meeting-places, pathways and passageways,” and it “would mean the diversification of space (Lefebvre, 1991:363).”

### 1.2. Users

Regarding the phase of “users,” French cultural critic Michel de Certeau also considered intensively. This study borrows the Certeau’s concept of “users.” According to Certeau, the consumers—he exchanges the term with “users,” as he dislikes the word “consumers”—perform “the way of the operation or doing things (Certeau 1984: xi)” in the action of a daily life. Users do not exist as a mere pre-established harmony to reproduce the social system; they de-construct the meanings against the dominant definition forced by the social system. Therefore, Certeau pays attention to a moment of the “production” by “users” as follows:

For example, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what cultural consumers do during this time and what they make of these images (Certeau, 1984:xii).

This consumption theme contrasted the passive consumption with the active production. However, Certeau considers “*another* production,” called “consumption” in contraposition to “the production” of the thing in an economic social system:

[*another* production, called “consumption”] is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *way of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (Certeau, 1984:xii-xiii)

“Users” are not the consumers who buy mere “commodity” but have competence. They construct their identity to have consumption. Certeau also considers “space.” He distinguishes “space” from the “place.” According to Certeau, the “place” is an order, and the arrangement of things is parallel. Therefore, “(t)he law of the ‘proper’” rules there. The “space,” on the other hand, is characterized by “movements,” and he thinks a great deal of the practice of “walkers”:

In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. (Certeau, 1984:117)

The “space” which Certeau uses appears to be a place for the daily practice. He converts the point of view that “consumers” are “users,” and he presents a model of the logic of an operation which assumes that “users” have gone in the daily life. His logic—their actions in a daily life are connected with “productions” and that such practices transform “place” into “space”—gains attention by illustrating the perspective of finding a meaning in the actions of “users.”

## 2. Community FM as Media Space in Kobe

This section examines how the media space is set up by “users.” It is based on the case of the practice of media and an event space that contributed to the revival of Nagata, Kobe after the Great Hanshin -Awaji Earthquake. The section analyzes the generation process of media (music) spaces in Nagata, Kobe, from the perspective of the activity of people (users). This study considers social space through the meaning of media from the practice of “users” and the activity on the music.

## 2.1. The Great Hanshin -Awaji Earthquake and FM YY

An earthquake vibration of magnitude 7.3 struck the area around Kobe at 5:46 a.m. on January 17, 1995 (SHINSAI HUKKOU TYOUSA KENKYU IINKAI ed., 1997). The affected area by the disaster was some 20% of the whole Hyogo Prefecture; about 64% of total population of the prefecture lived in this area. As for Kobe, the “International city” includes the Nanking-machi, the former residences of early foreign settlers, and the old colony street, all of which are the part of its image. According to the official website of Kobe-City, there was a large amount of damage to Nagata<sup>2</sup>.

FM YY was a multi-lingual and multi-cultural community radio station established in January 17 1996 at Nagata, Kobe, after the Great Hanshin -Awaji Earthquake by core members (“users”) living in this area.<sup>3</sup> FM YY is formally a company, but it is substantially a NPO (non profit organization). The “Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities” was established in 1998 after the earthquake. Therefore, its character is close to that of a grass-roots civic group, an image people have as an NPO<sup>4</sup>. FM YY forms a network with some NPOs at a Takatori church in Nagata, Kobe. It is Takatori Community Center that plays a central role for NPO as a network. This is produced by a unity of networks based on communication relation rather than a solid organization form. In addition, FM YY radio programs do not always have mass-appeal in broadcasting popularity ratings. The highly popular broadcast contents and the broadcasting standard which currently exist are not always on the air, especially trendy Western or Japanese music, such as that heard on commercial FM stations. For example, there is a program specialized to Okinawan music can be found in the broadcasting contents of FM YY.

## 2.2. Space of Community Media

FM YY was launched because radio is identified as the most accessible public media source since most people of Nagata would have a radio receiver. Originally, FM YY began to affirm the cultural identity of Koreans living in Japan. It was gradually opened to the public as multi-cultural broadcasting.

Radio, as a medium of “users” as “lived experience” in an everyday life, might be a part of “the diversification of space (cf. Lefebvre).” It seems that the space works as a kind of “imagined community” by the broadcasting media of the radio. “Community” as space is open from a group by a geographic connection to the virtual Internet world. Under the current circumstance, it is possible to listen to the broadcast of FM YY via the Internet all over the world. Moreover, the activity of FM YY forms the space opened up to the global arena through the Internet and a geographic connection of local provenances.

### 3. TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE as Musical Space

This section examines the development of a community event named “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE.” “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE” is a musical event in Nagata, Kobe. It started by people (users) who had suffered from the earthquake disaster in alliance with others associated with Soul Flower Mononoke Summit, a professional rock band.

In addition, this section explores the role of a musical activity as an example of the “space” where people (users) gather. It seems that music is an important theme to consider in the theory of media space. There is, of course, the concept of “soundscape” that Mary Sheffer (Schafer, 1977), a Canadian composer and scholar, advocated. The music referred to in this study is popular music mediated by technology. Popular music is a quintessential medium of the 20th century, differing from classical music or folk music (See Tag 1982). It has an affinity to reproduction technology, and is criticized by Theodor W. Adorno, a German sociologist/esthetician for music structure and its commercialized characters (Adorno, 2002). Adorno intended to critique the cultural industry, including popular music in the United States<sup>5</sup>. His critique did not have a lasting influence, however. In the present day, the researchers for popular music have increased in the humanities and social science.

#### 3.1. TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE

“TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE,” a musical event performed in Kobe/Nagata was the space that linked or tied songs to people’s daily lives. “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE- Okinawa/Korea/Yamato folk song/popular song” was mainly led by the members of a voluntary organization named START NAGATA on January 21, 1996, one year after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. A festival mainly focused on the music is also seen in a Caribbean festival of *Caribana* at Toronto, Canada (Awatani,2008) and Bon dance in Japan. “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE” was named by Hideko Itami of the Soul Flower Mononoke Summit, and it was launched in 1994.

Soul Flower Mononoke Summit was formed by Takashi Nakagawa and the members of Soul Flower Union with the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995. The sound is a combination of rock and traditional folk music. It is performed in a musical form of “Chingdong.”<sup>6</sup> Soul Flower Mononoke Summit performed many live concerts as volunteers in Nagata, Kobe. Having live performances pleased people, elderly people in particular, in many stricken areas after the disaster. They are a group with acoustic musical instruments to perform in the place without electricity; they have expanded the repertoire, including Japanese popular songs, revolutionary songs, Ainu folk songs, Okinawan songs, and folk songs of the Korean Peninsula.

### 3.2. The Meaning of Music

What kind of meaning does performing music have for them? It is related to how one thinks of “culture.” The activity of Soul Flower Mononoke Summit is aware of the cultural practice of music. They were performing a combination of music and musical instruments in various countries and regions by the performance. It can be perceived that the expressive culture like music is originally made by various elements of cultures in the world (See, Gilroy, 1993). Music is the media which can communicate through sound and also can be related to the feature that easily transcends national boundaries by broadcast, CD and iPod. Soul Flower Mononoke Summit showed that music was opened to the people (users) through the performance.

Their activity also demonstrated that music was not the same thing but always changeable. It might embody the concept of “changing same” of Leroi Jones whom Paul Gilroy quotes (Gilroy, 1993). Originally, the popular music is hybrid in style. All songs of three albums which Soul Flower Mononoke Summit released were given arrangements by original tunes to be suitable for Japanese Chingdong. In the history of popular music, such as Rock ’n Roll or hip-hop, the musical styles consist of a mixture of various elements. From this point of view, it is natural that popular music styles become hybrid.

Soul Flower Mononoke Summit created space of music while repeating “call and response” with the people (users) by singing “songs.” They emphasized “songs” are among the people by singing various “songs” together. It seems to express that “songs” synchronize with the phase of the “daily life” that people live.

### 4. The Space of Users on the Internet

In the case of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake or any natural disaster for that matter, the activity of the people who used the Internet played an important role<sup>7</sup>. In addition to the support of the government and the local government, it is important that people (users) work independently as volunteers. The record of the activity in START NAGATA can be still seen on their old Web site<sup>8</sup>. In the space of the Internet, the activities of “inhabitants” and “users” in Nagata are emerging. The information of “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE” is also available on the related Web sites.

The voices of the users who participated in the event were written in BBS (Bulletin Board System) in their Web sites or personal blogs. This means that the space of users spreads out in cyberspace as an open space. Thus, the meaning of the space is made from users’ “words.” For example, the community of Soul Flower Union in mixi (a social networking site in Japan) also posted some comments about “TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE” and related matters. In the cyberspace, “words”

recorded in the Web sites, personal blogs, and SNS construct the space of users. This contrasts with media like the fanzine which contains data that only fans can read. Moreover, on the Soul Flower Mononoke Summit's Web site, members made some connections with fans on BBS; this kind of communication tool on the Internet is easy to construct the community of users. Unlike the magazines or the television, BBS or SNS in the cyberspace under the electronic environment is able to express users' opinions. BBS has a feature that differs from printing media, there is little time loss. Such space forms a relationship that is different from communications in one direction-based media, such as newspaper, the radio and the television.

The community on the Internet is different from the real community in the existence form, but it does not matter at all to the users. In other words, the "community" of the users on the Internet is formed, while having negotiations with the real society. It might be considered that the virtual community is an electronic space enhanced by the place based on a geographic connection. When people act in the real society, interactive communications on the Internet provide important information. For instance, people can know about things from other users who can post various sets of information on Soul Flower Union not only BBS on the Web site but also the community of mixi. Regarding the participation to "virtual community" on the Internet, Gerard Delanty considers that it improves the role of communications (Delanty, 2003). It seems that a part of reality we recognize can be expressed in a virtual space of the Internet. It can be considered that users who participate in such space partially complement "public sphere" and "civil society." It seems that the problem is how to evaluate the ability of "users."

FMYY and "TUDURA-ORI NO UTAGE" might be the media space produced to use media by "users," and it will be necessary to understand the moment when it emerges.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the domain of "space" and "users" from a sociological, or media studies perspective. The study analyzed various spaces that mediated the musical activity and the media practice. The musical activity affects people's feelings when they participate in the media space. It is also pointed out that culture of amusement, such as music, was necessary for people to live fully. Therefore, it seems that the cultural practice of music functions as media tied to the people (as users) and space. Songs belong not only to the artists but also to people's (users) space. The performer and the audiences relate to each other there, and music can emerge from the space by making "call and response." Music and the dance might lead to the construction of people's connections and cultural identities<sup>9</sup>.

The "users" live in each daily life. After being active in a local community or a virtual space of the Internet, they construct a connection between the person and the

person. It works as the media tie for them. Therefore, the space of users is formed as an area—be it a real or a virtual—and it emerges as a different domain from a nation or a market.

## NOTES

1. All case studies in this article are based on my research from 2005 to 2007. For detail see Awatani (2008).
2. <http://www.city.kobe.lg.jp/safety/disaster/earthquake/earthquake04.html>
3. <http://www.tcc117.org/fmyy/en/history.html>
4. About the NPO, a definition by Leicester Salamon is introduced. According to Salamon et al, an NPO is a group including all the five elements. Salamon et al (1997).
  - 1 Formal organization
  - 2 Non-governmental
  - 3 Non-profit-distributing
  - 4 Self-governing
  - 5 Voluntary
5. On the contrary, Walter Benjamin expected the possibility of the revolution by the proletariat in the process when “aura” of art disappears.
6. Soul Flower Mononoke Sumitt released following three CDs. *Asyl Ching-Dong* Respect Record, (1996), *Levelers Ching-Dong*, Respect Record (1997), *Deracine Ching-Dong*, Respect Record (2007).
7. See also Hosikawa (2003).
8. <http://www4.airnet.ne.jp/start/>
9. In my research, that can be understood in the case with Toronto Caribbean Festival (*Caribana*). See Awatani (2008).

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