

A NOTE ON THE CONCEPT OF PLACE

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Abstract Many arguments on place have appeared in recent years again. In general, much of the arguments assert contextuality of place in order to get over the duality of the concept of place; geographical space as a substance and repository of meaning. In this paper, I focus on an aspect of the concept as a meaningful unity, and examine it semiotically and linguistically, keeping the communications about the places with the names in mind. Derridean examination on place shows us that place has no essence. A large number of descriptions of place surround around the void of an essence, and produce so-called discourse. Thus, the place appears to us as a unity. By considering place name from the view of the theory of reference, I notice that the place name as a proper name conceals the lack and stays in the center of the discourse. A proper name is a social existence which makes it possible for us to designate its object.

Key words: place, place name, reference, signifier, supplement

1. Introduction

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to **replace**. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. (Derrida 1976, 145; bold face was added by the author)

Since Agnew and Duncan (1989) highlighted the importance of study of place, the arguments about place are going toward other directions than that of Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977), and many readings and books entitled "place" were published (*e.g.*, Anderson and Gale 1992; Duncan and Ley 1993; Kearns and Philo 1993; Keith and Pile 1993; Urry 1995; Massey and Jess 1995).

As we will mention later, much of them tend to capture the concept of place as a relationality, or a domain where various forces concentrate. Though such arguments are important as a geographical manifesto within social sciences, I will argue about the state of affairs that the places are treated as meaningful unity. In other words, I will critically consider the semantics of place by Tuanian humanistic geography from inside.

Firstly, I will justify my emphasis on symbolic aspects of place (unity of meaning) rather than contextual (spatial) aspects through outlining some studies by Japanese geographers. Secondly, through the examination of the Saussureian (structuralist) semiotic understanding of place by Uchida (1987, 1989), I will consider the concept of

place as Derridean and Lacanian (post-structuralist) "the logic of signifier". Finally, based on the fact that the place obtains the unity as a kind of sign because of referred to by place name, I will in addition consider place from the theory of reference. These considerations will lead us to the direction of the subject matter: "metaphor in descriptions of places".

2. Body of Place

Abe (1990) and Ohshiro (1994) both pointed out the significance of concepts of place in landscape study. For Abe who tries to return to the Husserlian phenomenology, the concept of place in humanistic geography is coincident with the "life-world" by Husserl (Abe 1990, 456). While he emphasized the concept of place as an object of intentionality, he drew the another concept of place as a field of consciousness from Nishida Kitaro's philosophy. In his argument, these two concepts were respectively displaced by "landscape" and "meaning matrix", and in his later articles about lover's inn (Abe 1991) and Mt. Fuji (Abe 1992), he did not use the concept of place.

Ohshiro (1994) referred to the arguments about concepts of place in English-speaking countries. Reading Sack (1988), Entrikin (1991), and Daniels (1992), he wrote "where the relations drawn from social, political, historical, economical and every other moments are interwoven, I mean to say, that is exactly what we call 'place'" (Ohshiro 1994, 170). While Abe (1990, 465) noted, "the concept of landscape coincides with that of place", Ohshiro (1994, 171) wrote, "'landscape' is an arena where visible landscape elements are involved and contested with social relations, that is, a locus of relationality where 'places' associated with some landscape elements are folded in a syntagmatic (grammatical) structure." For Ohshiro (1994, 169) who intends to read and interpret a landscape of rural settlement in Okinawa Island as a text, some places are included in one landscape.

According to Daniels (1992, 319) who asserted, "so far I have emphasised place as the context of social relations, as a cultural construction", metaphor for places (or landscapes) as texts to be read seems to be fashionable. While metaphor of text is applied to landscape (Barnes and Duncan 1992) and city (Duncan 1990), there is a condition that some criticism and debates to these applications appeared (Walton 1995 1996; Mitchell 1996; Peet 1996). For this reason, I would argue this relations between landscape, place and text in other occasion.

This concept of place associated with relationality and contextuality seems to suggest some interesting arguments. But to me, the concept of place seems to be a theoretical concept that is used by social scientists in order to attach great importance to geographical dimension. In other words, this concept is not an answer to the question, "what is place?", but a definitive word to argue the geographical contextuality under the word 'place'. "To define an expression is, paradoxically speaking, to explain how to get along without it" (Quine 1987, 43-44). Such a concept of place can be replaced by another concept, for example 'arena' which Buttner (1993) drew from contextualist thought and Giddens' (1990) well-known 'locale' concept. These suggestions associate with a spatial aspects of place. Here the place is the actual geographical space with a specific site on

the earth. Any human activities need specific spatial-temporal position and extent. For this reason, specific place can be a locus where various activities and phenomena can take place. The problem of politics of place could appear because of this nature of place.

Though I intend not to deny these arguments, what needs a careful examination is the concept of place on a level of ordinary languages. This is a question how we use the specific place with the place name in our communication. Once I attempted to understand communication about the place in comparison with that about "the other" (Naruse 1993). One's name and characteristics of his/her body which are the premise on communication about the person correspond to the place name and geographic location. While these arguments which I mentioned in this chapter concerned with the side of body of place, namely place as geographic space, the matter of place which I will examine is the side of name of place. In our society, much of the surface of the earth has been given names because of political division or postal index. But, we deal with places like human beings, without consciousness of the strict boundary. Because of this side of place as a meaningful unity, we can distinct the word place from some geographical terms; space, region, area, location, and site.

In his review of the studies of place in French language geography, Berdoulay (1989) gave the title "the necessity of discourse" to the section of his own assertion. Though Abe (1990) also paid attention to discourse ("story" in his term) as representations of inhabitants' consciousness for symbolic landscapes, Berdoulay understood a landscape as "intertext" which builds meaning structure within production and consumption. Berdoulay (1989, 135) noted, "the place has a narrative level, where the meaning potential laying in the textual (landscape) level becomes actualized, or represented, for communicative purposes." I will thus try to consider place at the level of discourse or narrative.

3. Semiotics of Place

What is place image?

Uchida (1987) has tried to capture the features of place as meaningful unity in the scheme of semiotics. He suggested two stages of the symbolization of place: personal baptism and socialization of sign in our communication. According to Uchida's scheme, the relation between the place name and spatial expansion (geographical space) referred to by the name corresponds to *signifier*, and what he called place image to *signified*. He called this signification *place*, and solved the duality of the concept of place by this inscription (Fig. 1). Though his considerations are full of suggestiveness, his term "place image" has one weakness. Later this term has been used by Zonn (1990), but it is difficult to understand what this term means. According to Uchida's later article on Karuizawa (Uchida 1989), this place name/place image relation coincides with "Karuizawa/an upper-class summer resort". For example, this relation might resemble "roses/passion". Like a gift of roses to the opposite sex means a passionate declaration of love, going to Karuizawa for the summer may express an upper-class consciousness. Here, this place name "Karuizawa" designates the place (as geographic space, we can express it by latitude and longitude, or the expression "a town at Nagano Prefecture on the east

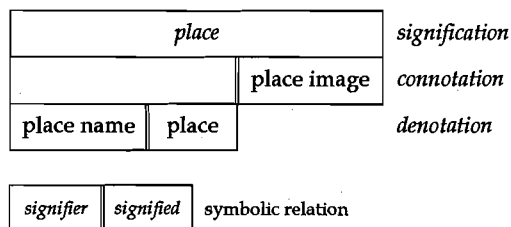


Fig. 1 Uchida's scheme of signification of place (social level) (Figure 3 in Uchida (1987, 395) is modified by the author)

border with Gumma Prefecture"). This is a stage of *denotation*. Next, the signifier as "Karuizawa" in this relation acquires a social meaning with the signified "an upper-class summer resort". This is a stage of *connotation*, or "myth" by the term of Barthes (1957). In this stage, these arguments enable us to unfold such a myth and to criticize commercialistic use of the myth. According to this Saussureian and early Barthes' semiotics, signified has the same value with signifier, and a sign is lead to endless (and hierarchical) chain of signification.

Uchida noticed that a place is not exactly a sign, and I will examine the relation he suggested. Passion as a content makes a pair of roses as a form, but it is always hidden. So to speak, it is a production of metaphor or imaginations. On the other hand, "an upper-class summer resort" as a content for Karuizawa is one attribute of the region named Karuizawa. For roses, "red" is one attribute. This is the relation of subject/predicate or particular/general, rather than of signifier/signified.

This relation necessarily appears in a statement in which a place name is the subject. "Whatever is noted about a thing is seen as ascribing a property to it, or an attribute" (Quine 1987, 22). We can think that much of predicates associated with the place name are the property to it, or the attribute. A place has properties and attributes as well as other meaningful unity. Uchida's concept of *place* as a signification seems to mean the statements about the place connected with some properties and attributes, or the whole of many descriptions about it. In conformity with Uchida's example, the descriptions examined in his analysis are various in the long term. The place image of Karuizawa is a product which Uchida, as analyst, picked up by drawing similarities of them and abstracted from them, and this signified is not a mere predicate. Is this image a social identity of the place? For Uchida, the image spread by enormous descriptions is not an essential identity of the place, but is created arbitrarily in commercialism: "The symbolized place image alters the place itself and even the place name" (Uchida 1989, 512).

For example, the expression "an upper-class summer resort" does not refer to Karuizawa necessarily. Can a cluster of various expressions refer to the place? Of course we can refer to Karuizawa by some expressions in our daily life. But, if we can confirm its identification, how many expressions (properties and attributes) are needed? Today's understanding of identity would deny the above questions. According to Žižek (1991, 36),

“identity is the surplus which cannot be captured by predicates.” One predicate as a place image which Uchida abstracted from some predicates is what Žižek called *Master-Signifier*. By ascribing “to one signifier the function of representing the subject (the place of inscription) for all the others (which thereby become “all” — that is, are totalised) — the proper *Master-Signifier* is produced” (Žižek 1991, 23). As I mentioned above, subject/object relation coincides with particular/general (universal). Žižek (1991, 46-48) wrote, too; “subject exists only within this “failed encounter” between the Universal and the Particular — it is ultimately nothing but a name for their constitutive record”, and “*the subject is this void, this lack in the series of the predicates of the universal Substance.*”

I noted that in many languages, grammatically a statement on an object takes its name as the subject and its property or attribute as the predicate. How do these properties and attributes of an object connect to its object? Again, Žižek (1991, 117) wrote, “the predicate is some completely in different abstract-universal property, acquired by the subject, not something dependent on the subject’s inner nature.” In the case of place, this opinion can be true. For, a statement, “subject + predicate + preposition + a place name”, is thinkable.

Signified cannot present

In his *For They Know not What They Do*, Žižek (1991) drew this logic from reading Hegel and Lacan. He criticized Derrida there. Derrida’s insistence in *Of Grammatology* seems to coincide with Žižek’s opinions. In this section, I will focus on Derrida’s (1976) *Of Grammatology*.

For Derrida who gave priority to what presents to us, its presence is not a result of any hidden structure as a cause. Of course the presence does not always literally mean its passage; for instance, the presence of an absence means anything. “Essence is presence” (Derrida 1976, 310). Quine (1987, 23) has also noted, “things are not felt to cause their properties.” It is not a sign that a concrete form (=signifier) represents *a priori* content (=signified) to be expressed, but Derrida thought essence most important: “The “formal essence” of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence”, and “the formal essence of the signified is *presence*” (Derrida 1976, 18). Now that we regard signified as essence, signified never presents. A little thing we can recognize ought not to be essence of a subject:

There is thus no phenomenality reducing the sign or the representer so that the thing signified may be allowed to glow finely in the luminosity of its presence. The so-called “thing itself” is always already a *representamen* shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The *representamen* functions only by giving rise to an *interpretant* that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity. (Derrida 1976, 49)

Signifier and representamen which present to us circulate around an essence without reaching it, and Derrida called this movement “game” or “play”: “In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable” (Derrida 1976, 36). It is not clear how he thought of this; either this origin or essence does not exist, or it is not graspable but exists. However, in our writing, the presence of an object is presented to us again and

again, and we grasp the thing (object) as a meaningful unity by the repetition of its representations. We call "by the name of *discourse* the present, living, conscious *representation* of a *text* within the experience of the person who writes or reads it" (Derrida 1976, 101). As a study of this writing (and reading) Derrida proposed "grammatology".

Another key word in this book (Derrida 1976) is the famous "supplement"; "The supplement is nothing, it has no energy of its own, no spontaneous movement. It is a parasitic organism, an imagination or representation which determines and orients the force of desire" (Derrida 1976, 178). The notion "imagination" (especially "geographical imaginations" in recent human geography) which is evaluated positively by Cosgrove (1994) is given negative value by Derrida. An imagination or metaphor which makes the supplement possible is the origin of languages. Therefore we can often deal with an object without any essence and substance as a unity. "This relationship of mutual and incessant supplementarity or substitution is the order of language. ...The graphic of supplementarity is the origin of languages" (Derrida 1976, 235), or "what has the name *origin* should be no more than a point situated within the system of supplementarity" (Derrida 1976, 243).

Let's go back to talk about place. According to Derrida's understanding of sign, descriptions of the place represented in novels picked up by Uchida (1989) and popular magazines by Naruse (1993) are all signifier. The relations "Karuizawa/an upper-class summer resort" and "Daikanyama/a hidden place" which they grasped are also signifier displacing all the others. Change and transformation of the place image might be caused by endless substitution of numerous predicates to conceal the lack of essence of the place.

Well, what is the essence of the place? First there are the physical geographic features of land. Derrida (1976, 218) also noted simply, "the locale signifies first the nature of the soil and the climate." Furthermore he regarded it as time-spatial location: "Place is at the same time geographical situation and seasonal period". Next, the place associates with human activities. There are buildings fixed to the land and events at specific geographical situation, and many of us are linked to the site on the earth by the name of address registered with the government. "As individual agents we are always "situated" in the world" (Entrikin 1991, 3).

For Berdoulay, the nature of place is narrative: "The discourse on place is underlined by a discourse on social issues" (Berdoulay 1989, 135). On the other hand, Daniels (1992, 319) noted, "narrating places involves configuring the relevant objects and events, 'plotting', in both a spatial and temporal sense, their meanings", and further in relation to one Greek word "topos" which means both topic and place, he talked about nature of place: "The topic is the place, the arena where the speaker and audience meet and participate" (Daniels 1992, 321). Here we can recognize that the feature of place as a relationality could apply to the concept of place as a meaningful unity as well as a geographical space. But, while the actual place can ascribe it to the land as a body of place, to what we can ascribe the centrality of its unity? I think that it is the place name, and a place name is a kind of proper name.

4. Naming Places

The arguments on proper names were in fashion in the last decades. In the beginning of *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke (1972, 24) has noted, "here I will mean a proper name, *i.e.*, the name of a person, a city, a country, *etc.*" Though such arguments were associated with "identity thesis" and "possible world", Kripke began his consideration with the criticism for the "description view" or "cluster concept theory" by Frege (1892) and Russell (1905). "What I do deny is that a particular is nothing but a 'bundle of qualities', whatever that may mean" (Kripke 1972, 52). In the case of Nixon, Kripke (1972, 43) wrote, "one is given only qualities. One can observe all his qualities, but, of course, one doesn't observe that someone is Nixon."

Well, how can we refer to a specific object? The first proposition by Kripke (1972, 48-49) who suggested, "let's call something a *rigid designator* if in every possible world it designates the same object" is "proper names are rigid designators." If we think of a possible world where Karuizawa historically could not become a summer resort, we can refer to its place by the name of "Karuizawa". Moreover to refer does not mean that a name as a word has to be bound to a physical substance. What the place name refers to? To land or landscape elements? We can refer to the character in fiction. "If I am talking about it, I am talking about *it*" (Kripke 1972, 53). Or, "the only adequate predicate for the subject is the *subject itself*" (Žižek 1991, 119). According to Žižek (1991, 52), proper name is signifier-without-signified, or pure signifier. And the void where the subject is located is the signified of this pure signifier. Exactly, "it is the strange essence of the supplement not to have essentiality" (Derrida 1976, 314). For Kripke, "common name" is not particularly different from proper name. An abstract name can only be expressed after baptism.

For this reason, I am arguing about the place with name. The place which we take for granted, "life-world" is no problem to me. "The battle of proper names follows the arrival of the foreigner" (Derrida 1976, 113), or "the Greeks didn't call their country anything like 'Greece' " (Kripke 1972, 72). In many cases, a proper name is born from baptism by others. Is the name inherent in its object? As a member in a society in which a language system is adopted, we can designate an object by its proper name. In other words, the proper name takes inherence from the object, and becomes a social existence. Baptism is a sort of violence (Deguchi 1995). We are living in a finite geographic space and at a restricted historical period, at the same time, we can name, describe, and know many places around the world. What I want to problematize is the "social character of the use of proper name" (Kripke 1972, 163) which includes place names.

One point which I must note is the fact that "the reference is usually determined by a chain, passing the name from link to link" (Kripke 1972, 135). Though one phenomenology's lesson is to back to the presence, we must treat a text not as mere written words but in speech act like Searle (1969). To learn the uses of proper names we encounter with a great number of descriptions.

5. Concluding Remarks

I will show the matters which I have argued in this paper up to here briefly. Firstly, as well as other kind of substances, especially place has no essence. If its essence exists, it is ungraspable. Secondly, a proper name conceals the lack of its essence, and makes us deal with an object as a meaningful unity. Then one crucial question arises: what kind of centripetal forces connects to centrality as proper name with predicates? Such forces are the origin of languages, and they are what we call "metaphor" (or rhetoric). Žižek (1991, 50) defined metaphor as "the act by means of which *Zero is counted as One*." For him, the game of signifiers is "a metaphoric substitution" (Žižek 1991, 48). On the other hand, Derrida (1976, 275) wrote, "metaphor must therefore be understood as the process of the idea or meaning (of the signified, if one wishes) before being understood as the play of signifiers." His understanding of metaphor can be found in the sentence below: "It is the *inadequation of the designation* (metaphor) which *properly expresses* the passion" (Derrida 1976, 275), which is an insubstantial and abstract idea.

On metaphor and rhetoric, I will argue on another occasion considering the arguments in geography (e.g., Tuan 1978; Livingston and Harrison 1980, 1981; Mills 1982; Bishop 1992; Smith and Katz 1993; Bale 1996; Smith 1996). Here I will show my conclusion gotten from the exploration in this paper. Kripke (1972) notes that a proper name designates rigidly its object, at the same time an ostension [pointing demonstratively] before name also plays the same role. If the object is a thing, "this" or "that" is used at an ostension. In the case of place, special demonstratives are given; "here" and "there." The word "place" is always already hidden in geographic meaning — in the cases of reference by name and of ostension. For us, to pay attention to the other uses of the word is needed. In ordinary language, "place" appears in the uses like "take place", "replace", and "displace." They make important sense in Derrida's logic of supplement. To present is to take place (=arise), and the supplement is to be substituted, replaced, and displaced one after another. And, in the case of writing on place, the place name as a proper name occupies this position (=place).

Could what Derrida talked about supplement apply to place? Namely, it is the strange essence of place not to have essentiality.

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