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北海道大学

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50点

次の英文を読み、設問に答えなさい。

People often think of place as concrete, a fixed location. Space, on the other hand, is often envisioned as something more abstract, something not fixed. However, in contemporary society locations that were once seen as fixed can gradually come to seem more abstract. This point is apparent if we compare the present to the past. One way to see how some of our ideas regarding location are changing is by examining the development of cyberspace as a concept alongside the shifting meaning of one's hometown. At first glance, they seem almost to be in opposition, that is, cyberspace as abstract and a hometown as fixed. (1), today they have more in common than you might expect.

The concept of cyberspace emerged in the 1990's alongside the World Wide Web, a global network system of information exchange that revolutionized the way people think and interact. There were, of course, earlier precedents that combined globalization and networks, such as the emergence of air travel in the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, the more recent mixing of ideas, technology, and mobility highlighted by the rapid evolution of the Internet has altered how average people consider and conduct their day-to-day lives like never before. Today the influence of 'the web' can be witnessed in everyday aspects of life as diverse as research, banking, and dating. Moreover, the Internet can be found just about anywhere and socio-cultural shifts related to it are ongoing.

(2) Progressive urbanization is another socio-cultural shift. It has altered the way that many individuals think about their hometown. In Japan, for example, only a century ago the majority of the nation's population were engaged in occupations related to primary resource extraction, notably fishing and farming. Thus, unsurprisingly, the bulk of people lived, sometimes for generations, in the same rural towns. However, as Japan emerged as a post-agrarian and then post-industrial society, more and more people moved to cities. Today, the largest proportion of Japanese residents are urbanites who tend to work in a variety of 'goods and service' related industries.

Through such changes people are increasingly forced to reconsider

fundamental concepts like location and related terms like space and place. For example, cyberspace is, in fact, not a singular physical site, or a particular place, but a series of connections, some wireless and some wired. Cyberspace actually refers to a wide range of relations — a broad physical network from keyboards, to computer codes, to servers and on to the individuals that utilize the system. At first, the idea of a hometown seems to refer to the opposite, a (3) static place. However, urbanization has meant that due to rural depopulation many regions have become smaller or even disappeared. On the other hand, areas surrounding and even within cities have been dramatically altered via the development of new suburbs and the redrawing of urban boundaries. Urbanization has also meant that the majority of the nation's workforce is no longer bound to specific plots of farmland or coastal areas. More than ever, individuals relocate for a variety of reasons such as education, marriage, or employment. In short, these days, both cyberspace and the concept of hometown primarily refer to relations rather than fixed locations.

When we turn to physical perceptions of location, the increasing similarity between the experience of cyberspace and that of one's hometown becomes even more striking. We talk of an Internet community, but it is hard to envision cyberspace accurately in physical terms, that is to say, in the sense of a singular location in relation to an individual's body. In other words, an actual cyber 'place' largely remains unimaginable. One needs only to ask a simple, yet unanswerable, question: where, precisely, is 'it' located in relation to me? Alternatively, an individual's physical experience of their hometown may seem clearly linked to place. But here too, through mobility, community is becoming no longer recognizable for an increasing number of people. For example, one's 'hometown' may rapidly and radically change due to one or more of the above factors or a person may only reside in their place of birth for a short time never really being a part of the social, cultural or material relations of the location before moving away. Thus, the borderline between place and space is ever-shifting. (4) What used to seem fixed and definite is being modified by changes in society and social relations.

