

# The Myth of Media Interactivity

## Technology, Communications and Surveillance in Japan

*Kiyoshi Abe*

### **Abstract**

Since the 1980s, a number of discourses have celebrated the coming of the information society in Japan. In those discourses, enabling media interactivity has been emphasized as the objective of technological innovations, creating a sort of 'myth' of media interactivity. This article tries to investigate the close relationship between media interactivity and surveillance modality in newly emergent information and communication technologies, especially SNS (social networking services) on the Internet. While the traditional image of surveillance society is gloomy and repressive, contemporary, ubiquitous surveillance appears brighter and more fun, since people voluntarily engage with interactive media whilst acknowledging its surveillance modality. In that sense, the logic of surveillance is not merely repressive but also seductive for users of interactive media. Given the rising desire for public security after 9/11, the logic of surveillance is becoming more prevalent and dominant all over the world. With the rise of globalized security, philosophical and social scientific interrogations of security-obsessed contemporary society have become indispensable for critical academic discourse. In order to critically interrogate rising surveillance and media interactivity, this article tries to analyze the liberating potentials of the ideal of hospitality, which is expected to offer a counter-logic against surveillance.

### **Key words**

hospitality ■ information society ■ media interactivity ■ surveillance modality  
■ transparency of communication

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### Introduction

I WILL TRY to critically interrogate the myth of media interactivity that has been reproduced through both administrative policies and academic discourse in Japan. With the coming of the 'digital era' the myth of media interactivity is becoming part of everyday life. While the proponents of the digital revolution stress the empowering aspects of newly emergent digital media, the coming ubiquitous media society seems to have not only the potential to liberate but also to repress social relationship with others.

Firstly, I will consider the socio-political background of the information society in Japan. Secondly, I will try to investigate the present situation of media interactivity in our daily life. After critically assessing the surveillance modality of recent interactive media, I will shed light on the problem of transparency of communication on the web. Finally, I shall interrogate the concept of hospitality, in order for us to overcome the impasse caused by the surveillance society, which is completely obsessed with the notion of security. Through critically reassessing the myth of media interactivity, this article aims to clarify the very problem of the present modality of surveillance, which is fostered by the interactivity enabled by digital information and communication technologies (ICTs).

### The Myth of the 'New Media'

Looking back on the history of media development, it seems fair to say that we have been fascinated by myths that tell us of the coming of a new era. According to those myths, the advent of technological development of media enables us to go beyond the present conditions of society, towards a more liberating and empowering one. Radio, broadcasting, cable television and the personal computer have been expected, at times, to bring about a society completely different from previous ones, at each point in history when they were 'new media'. As Vincent Mosco argued, the media have been regarded as something sublime in the societies in which they have been introduced (Mosco, 2004).

While different versions of the myth have appeared over time, we can see the continuing story of discourse on new media, at each period of the history of media development. This is what we could call the 'myth of media interactivity'. It has been expected that the more interactivity new media can bring about, the more liberating and empowering they can become. This myth of media interactivity has had a great influence, not only on people's expectations and perceptions of new media, but also on the administrative policies towards media development. In Japan, the positive image of new media and the coming of the 'information society' was constructed by both academic and administrative discourses. As a result of it, the myth of media interactivity has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, the public's imagination about a coming 'brighter' society, engendered by technological development of media.

### **Celebration of 'Interactivity' in the Discourse on the Information Society in Japan**

From the early 1980s to the present, there have been many discourses, both academic and journalistic, celebrating the coming of the information society in which people would live more conveniently and happily thanks to the interactive media. Contrary to one-way media like broadcasting, those discourses claimed, the newly emergent interactive media would be more communicative and humane, so that people would have more social interaction.

We have seen several national policies that tried to foster the information society in Japan. All ministries competed with the others to obtain the budgets, and to gain hegemony to strengthen their influence on making the national policy of 'informatization'. The 'Techno-Police' and the 'New Media Community' (ministry of international trade and industry), the 'Tele-Topia' (ministry of posts and telecommunications), the 'Intelligent City' (ministry of construction) and the 'Green-Topia' (ministry of agriculture) were only some of the policy campaign buzzwords used (Abe, 2000). However, at the time of what is called the 'New Media Boom' in the 1980s, technological innovation alone was not enough to realize interactive media at the everyday life level. Therefore, the image of the coming information society that was celebrated in the ministry's papers and policy propaganda appeared as a sci-fi-like future image to ordinary people. While people could dream of the information society, it was somehow distinct from the real life they lived at that time.

### **Realization of Interactive Media at Present**

Whereas in the 1980s the information society was still a dream-like image, we now actually live in a social situation where using the interactive media is nothing but everyday practice. Innovations in digital technology and networking, especially the Internet, have made the information society both more mundane and more real. People have come to experience the convenience and efficacy of digital interactive media in their everyday life.

For example, using email is an indispensable aspect of our daily practice, not only in business but also in private life. Email enables us to communicate 'interactively and semi-simultaneously' with people who are physically remote from us. Though the modes of communication fostered by email are not as simultaneous as face-to-face verbal communication, it is much more interactive than postal mail or facsimile. In a sense, it could be said that the digital electronic technology of email brought us a new mode of mediated interactive communication.

Technological innovation has aimed to make media more interactive. Through a variety of discourses on the information society, we have been persuaded to believe that the coming interactive media can make our society more wealthy and humane (Abe, 2000). While the keywords that characterize 'the newest medium' at any given time have changed, for example 'new media' in the mid-1980s, 'multi media' in the mid-1990s and 'ubiquitous

media' in the early 2000s, the basic assumption that making media more interactive is an unconditionally significant objective seems not to have changed at all.

#### **The Dark Side of Interactive Media**

However, I think that we had better be more cautious about these happy assumptions concerning the 'interactivity' of media. As several studies on media and surveillance have shown, newly emergent interactive media can be used as very effective tools for surveillance (Abe, 2004, 2006; Haggerty and Ericson, 2006; Lyon, 2006; Monahan, 2006). Certainly we can enjoy the interactively mediated communication as if we talk to each other under face-to-face circumstances. But this also means that every aspect of our communication via those media can be easily traced back and stored. From the standpoint of those who would like to monitor communications, the interactive media with which users voluntarily interact with other people are very desirable tools.

Strangely enough, many users and customers of interactive media seem to be neither aware, nor to particularly mind, that their engagement with interactive media makes the surveillance of communication much easier and more pervasive. One reason why they do not mind is that they are often not properly informed of such surveillance by those who are eager to advance the interactive media.

#### **Insufficient Information for Users**

Telecommunication companies, for example, seduce us in their advertisements to introduce the newest mobile phone service, but they never mention the commercial gains they can get from the data on individual customers they thus gain. Not only phone calls and email but also Internet browsing is becoming a common usage of the mobile phone in Japan. Therefore, telecommunication companies and other organizations doing business on the Net can gather a huge amount of information about each customer, enabling them to gather precious data for their marketing strategy (Tinic, 2006; Turow, 2006; Wall, 2006).

However, owing to the myth of interactivity, which has celebrated the coming of any new information and communication technology that promises to realize interactively mediated communication, many users seem not to be fully aware of the dark side of interactive media. One might say that if each customer chooses to use such interactive media that can be used as surveillance tools for the company at their own volition, this reflects a personal decision to risk personal data. Following such a discourse, it is customers' or users' responsibility, not that of a company or new technologies *per se*, to protect their data. But this sort of argument, aimed at legitimizing the dark side of interactive media, I believe to be simply misleading. As long as we are given all the information about what will happen when we use the interactive media, more specifically what sort of personal data and records become available for the company providing the services, the result of one's

choice can be attributed to the self-responsibility that ought to be taken by each user. In other words, when full information about the potential risk concerning the engagement with interactive media is not provided, the assumption that personal choice implies personal responsibility is a mere fraud.

Moreover, personal choice seems to be allowed only with respect to the usage of interactive media in one's own private sphere. Engagement with media at more formal occasions, for example using email for the purpose of working with fellow employees or trading with customers at the workplace, must be experienced rather differently from the private usage of interactive media. As the studies of surveillance at the workplace have pointed out, the employee's usage of electronic media at the workplace has been heavily influenced by the power relationship between manager and employee, while the actual power balance between them cannot be determined by the developments of technology alone (Zureik, 2003). Owing to such a power relationship, the engagement with interactive media at the workplace is nothing but a sort of compulsion, from which workers cannot escape at will. It seems that there is no room for the personal choice of an individual worker not to use email at the workplace. As a result, the manager who controls the email system at the office can monitor the email usage of all employees. In other words, every worker is put under surveillance via the interactive media. Even if sufficient information about the potential risk concerning the privacy of email users is given to those who work in offices, they cannot but choose to keep on using interactive media so that they will not lose their jobs. Therefore, it can be said that in the case of usage of interactive media at work, the personal choice is just an illusion. Employees are compelled to engage with interactive media, and it enables the manager to control them more easily and effectively.

#### **Appropriation of Interactive Media as a Policing Tool**

We sometimes come to know how interactive media can be used as an effective tool for surveillance. For example, newspaper articles and news broadcasts often report that the police have succeeded in arresting suspects by tracing a call made with the mobile phone of one of those who seem to have something to do with a criminal case. In such cases, the police organization analyzes huge amounts of data from the traffic records of private telecommunications. Under ordinary circumstances, however, we are seldom aware that any traffic we create by using a mobile phone is automatically captured by the telecommunication company's system. We just enjoy our conversation and email exchange with those who are intimate with us, and never think that such interaction is electronically and automatically monitored. But the monitoring of communication can be done without our consent, not only in emergency situations but also in ordinary ones.

The potential of this kind of electronic monitoring can be seen in what is called the Car Navigation System (often called Car-Navi in Japanese), which is becoming more and more popular in Japan. Using a satellite

telecommunication system and GPS, the Car-Navi system provides customers with information about where they are, and which route to take for reaching their destination. It is a very useful and convenient information and communication technology for car drivers. But I wonder how many drivers realize that when they drive automobiles navigated by the Car-Navi system they are 'seen from the satellite'. In other words, every route or destination they take is monitored by the system. Of course many people would say that since they have nothing to hide or conceal with respect to their driving, they do not care. Unless we are suspects or criminals, we need not mind it even if the traces of driving are monitored and stored by the Car-Navi system.

But is it all right just because many people do not mind? Is there nothing to worry about, or is there no potential danger that the information and communication technologies can be used as surveillance tools for the police? I do not think it is all right. People may expect that they will not be put under surveillance by the police, as long as they have nothing to do with criminal activities. However, that sort of expectation is not guaranteed at all. This is because nobody is free from the automated surveillance facilitated by the interactive media. Even though the users expect that they just engage with certain media for utility and comfort, technology does not care about such subjective expectations of individual users. It is not human expectation but technological fact, not the advertised utilities for customers but the potential availability for the police that should be considered.

Here we can see a coexistence of the bright ubiquitous media society with the gloomy surveillance society. On the one hand, we can engage with several sorts of information and communication technologies that enable us to communicate interactively with others who are remote from us, or to interactively transact the commercial services that are delivered from media companies. This is nothing short of the dream that has been dreamed in discourses anticipating the coming of the information society. On the other hand, we are continuously electrically monitored, in other words captured as data, to the extent that we engage with such interactive media.

This fact would become understandable if we would pay close attention to the dark side of the information society. But the myth of interactivity, which we have seen not only in the national and local policy papers, but also in many academic discourses on the information society, has prevented and still prevents the public from fully recognizing the potential danger of interactive media. Not a few of us are still unaware of the dark side of the information society in the age of ubiquitous media.

As I have discussed, one of the reasons why the newly emergent interactive media can be used as surveillance tools without dissent from users seems to be the lack of information. People engage with interactive media in their private life believing them to be just useful tools. But they do not know how, and to what extent, these can be used for collecting personal data and policing the activities of users by third parties. We might be able to say

that people are deceived because they are not being given enough information about the potential of surveillance when using interactive media for private purpose. Lack of information appears to be one of the main causes why people are not cautious of or skeptical towards the surveillance modality of interactive media. If this is the case, can we expect that, once people come to know the truth, they will become more cautious about the dangerous dark side of the information society and begin to criticize the deceptive legitimacy of the surveillance society? I would like to hope that people will, but the reality we face seems to be more complicated and tangled.

### Peer Surveillance in SNS

In some cases it seems that we enjoy the surveillance modality of interactive media of our own volition. We engage with interactive media that function as surveillance tools not because we are being deceived or compelled, but because we have comfort in that very aspect of the media. It is possible for us to discern such aspects of our relationship with the interactive media in the social networking service (SNS) on the Internet.

One of the most popular and biggest SNSs in Japan is mixi. The number of subscribers to mixi (<http://mixi.co.jp/>) is said to be more than 15 million as of July 2008. One of the most prominent characteristics of mixi is that one cannot subscribe to the system without an invitation from a member. New members are admitted into mixi and use a variety of services which the system provides only when one is willing to subscribe. Without an invitation from a member, one can never participate in mixi. In this sense it could be said that mixi has a sort of monitoring system with respect to those who are allowed to enter.

Another prominent characteristic of mixi is its 'trace record' system. Thanks to the trace record system each user can check who visited his/her profile and diary page in mixi. So each user can know how often other members browse and read their mixi page. Of course the subscribers recognize the functioning of this system in accessing mixi, so the trace record system cannot be considered a surveillance tool based on a deceptive relation with users. Moreover, it seems that users of mixi enjoy the system because they can utilize it as a mechanism for showing the relationship and social distance between self and others. In that sense the monitoring function of mixi is fully recognized, and accepted as desirable, by users. That is because it makes the mediated communication in SNS more comfortable for each subscriber by showing how intimate the relationships among users are.

Here we can see a kind of 'peer surveillance' on the Internet. Not only the SNS system as a whole, but also every user of the SNS seems to function as an active agent of surveillance, enabled by interactive media. But one important point to discern is that users do not at all regard the monitoring mechanism on the Net as oppressive. On the contrary, it is practiced as comfort and fun by participants themselves in mixi.

I suppose that one reason why people enjoy such peer surveillance on the Internet is the feeling of ease and safety guaranteed by the invitation certification and the trace record system of mixi. On the Internet we can meet and have interaction with people we do not know at all, but this often causes anxiety and fear that we might be involved in some trouble. As the use of the Net pervades the population at large, the image of danger on the Net, where anything goes without legitimate rules and due process, also becomes prominent. To protect themselves from the troubles caused by dangerous intercourse with strangers, people like to 'limit' the range and scope of mediated communication on the Net, so that they can safely interact with welcome strangers without being bothered by intrusions from unwelcome strangers.

In this context of fear of strangers on the Internet, the surveillance modality of interactive media can function as a useful mechanism to make users of the Net feel safe and comfortable. It also guarantees that only 'safe strangers', who are certified at the entry and monitored during their interaction, are allowed to participate in the service of mixi. In this sense, 'peer surveillance' is regarded as a desirable and good thing, rather than as repressive and bad for the participants in SNS.

The reason why the participants in mixi are neither skeptical towards nor critical of 'peer surveillance' on the Net seems to have something to do with the cultural background of Japan. In Japanese society, the homogeneity of members of a social group is said to be relatively high in comparison with that of other advanced societies. To ascertain the homogeneity of members, social mechanisms to monitor and control deviations from the normative communality are indispensable. The peer-to-peer surveillance enabled by interactive media like mixi can be used as a social mechanism for guaranteeing the homogeneity of the Net-fellows with whom one wants to interact on the web. Therefore, it seems that users of SNS in Japan prefer the surveillance modality as it can ascertain their feeling of communality through crosschecking the personal data and information on members' diary pages. In this sense it can be said that the 'peer surveillance' in mixi functions as a socio-political mechanism to reproduce the cultural homogeneity of community which is often said to be a characteristic of Japanese society.

#### **Transparency of Communication**

It seems that users of SNS seek to achieve the ideal of transparency of communication by using the entry certification and trace record system of mixi. Communications on the Net are often said to be more anonymous and unpredictable than face-to-face interaction of everyday life, but it is possible to make such communication more 'transparent', in other words more visible and manageable, by placing the interactively mediated communication under surveillance. By knowing who visited one's diary page on the Net via a 'trace record' and visiting the pages of those who have read one's page, users can make communications in the SNS more visible and predictable, even though there is no guarantee that the written contents of one's profile

and diary page are true. However, it is possible for users to have the feeling that communications on the Net enacted between others and them might be 'truthful'. In order to ascertain the feeling of truthfulness, the surveillance mechanism of the SNS, which increases the degree of transparency of communication, seems to be indispensable.

When engaging with the Internet, people would like to make their interaction partners more trustful and communication with them more visible and comprehensible. This is because of their eagerness for ease and safety when communicating with strangers on the Net. In such a context of eagerness to make intercourse more transparent, communication seems to be regarded as almost identical to information by those who participate in SNSs like mixi. As the tradition of informatics has noted, the more transparent and accurate the information is, the more predictable and comprehensible things become. Therefore, to make the situation safer and securer one has to gain more transparent information. It seems that the same logic is adopted by SNS participants who feel fearful and anxious about anonymous, dangerous, and unpredictable communication on the Internet. For them, to make communications transparent by utilizing the surveillance mechanism of mixi is nothing but a good thing, as it enables them to ascertain security on the Net. Needless to say, such a feeling of security as gained by 'peer surveillance' via interactive media might presuppose the normative cultural homogeneity of members of electronic communities

Making information more comprehensible might be necessary for telecommunication in general. Unless information is definite and clear, we cannot understand the situation in which it matters. In that sense, it could be said that the 'transparency' is a basic value of information. However, in the case of communication the same cannot be said. While the transparent information is expected to reduce the unpredictability of a situation, making communication transparent seems to repress the potential of human interaction, even if it might foster predictability of social communication. In order for communication to be liberating and critical, the potential generated by unpredictable social interaction is crucial and indispensable. If communication between social agencies proceeds just as expected, there might emerge nothing new and creative in society. In that sense the 'transparency' is not unconditionally valuable for communication.

#### **Difficulties of a Critique of Surveillance**

Interactive media have contributed to making our everyday interaction with others more speedy and efficient. However, it has also enabled the surveillance modality of information and communication technologies to become more pervasive and effective in the age of the ubiquitous media society. As long as we are obsessed with the myth of interactivity that has dominated the discourses on newly emergent information and communication technologies in Japan, we cannot critically interrogate the changing socio-political power relations caused by usage of the interactive media in the larger population. In order to de-mythologize the media interactivity that is becoming

popular and prevalent in contemporary Japanese society, introducing the critical perspectives of surveillance studies into media studies might be useful. What is needed in future critical media and communication studies in Japan is not a celebration of the coming of interactive media, but paying close attention to what is going on in the ubiquitous media society and analyzing the socio-political effects of the myth of media interactivity.

However, it seems to be not so easy to criticize the logic of surveillance per se. As I have discussed, the contemporary mode of surveillance is based not only on the deceptive relationship with the public, but also on more eager and enjoyable motivations of users of interactive information and communication technologies. To not a few people, the surveillance society might seem to be neither repressive nor authoritarian, as many researchers had expected. Contrary to the gloomy image of the surveillance society, the ubiquitous media society seems to be welcomed as a brighter future by the public. Nevertheless, the present ubiquitous surveillance society does actually control our social life as a whole, and limits the scope and scale of freedom of society at large.

The reason why the present surveillance society, which is fostered by the diffusion of interactive media, is accepted voluntarily rather than through compulsion is that interactive media give users the feeling of active participation. In the case of mixi, subscribers can participate in communication with other subscribers through a variety of services so that subscribers can ascertain their feeling of active engagement with the media. Mixi's trace record system is regarded as an indispensable tool for enabling those participations by users, as that can ascertain the security of interaction with others on the web.

However, we have to pay close attention to the symmetry of interactions generated by mixi. The peer-to-peer surveillance enabled by the trace record system may guarantee a symmetrical relationship between the users in which all subscribers can monitor each other, but the relationship between users and mixi is far from symmetrical because not every user can access the huge amounts of personal data collected and stored via the trace record system, even though it contains information about personal participation in mixi. The only thing subscribers can do is to check who has visited their own diary page. As Mark Andrejevic correctly points out, there seems to be an asymmetrical relation between the system, and the individuals actively using interactive media (Andrejevic, 2007). In other words, the active engagement with the media practiced by users of mixi is nothing but 'cybernetic participation', as Andrejevic calls it, which contributes only to the commercial objective of the media, not to the realization of liberating communication as is needed for a democratic transformation of society. Therefore, the point of discussion is not just whether there is a deceptive relation concerning the modality of surveillance between the system of media and its users. What should be considered in critically assessing the socio-political significance of interactive media like mixi is the asymmetrical nature of power sharing between the users who participate in the service

and the system that gains data and information through the users' engagement with the media.

In order to resist the dominant logic of surveillance, we will need a counter-logic by which we can criticize the violent asymmetry of power relations that seems to be inherent in the surveillance society at present.

### **Tolerance and Its Limit**

There can be no doubt that the logic of surveillance is becoming more pervasive and dominant in many areas of our daily life (Lyon, 2003). Obsessed with the fear of 'dangerous strangers', we are inclined to accept, sometimes even welcome, the tightening of surveillance measures implemented by national and local governments. Not only the public sphere but also the private sphere are now keen to introduce the new surveillance-enabling technologies for ascertaining 'security' in a variety of ways. In the context of the ordinary and prevalent surveillance in our daily life, it seems difficult to criticize the logic of surveillance *per se*, because many people believe in the emergent need for a higher degree of surveillance, believing it can bring them more safety and security. People seek security because they expect it to enable them to do what they would like to do. Therefore, questioning or criticizing the logic of surveillance is easily regarded, often misunderstood, as the negation or underestimation of the importance of a comfortable life guaranteed by security.

One of the key concepts by which we try to critically interrogate the conditions of a surveillance society, and envisage a future direction, is 'tolerance'. It is often said that we have to be more tolerant of our differences in order for different civilizations to co-exist rather than clash (Habermas, 2003). Needless to say, the basic attitude that characterizes the logic of surveillance is being suspicious and intolerant of others. Trying to be tolerant of strangers might be more productive than the intolerant attitude, backed by ambiguous fear and suspicion of others, which is becoming strong in surveillance societies.

However, I suppose the conception and practice of tolerance is not sufficient to overcome the fundamental crisis caused by the rising degree of surveillance in contemporary societies. The reason why is that the ideal of tolerance, as Derrida pointed out, resides in charity, and therefore has a very paternalistic character, influenced by Christian thought:

Indeed, tolerance is first of all a form of charity. A Christian charity, therefore, even if Jews and Muslims might seem to appropriate this language as well. 'Tolerance is always on the side of the 'reason of the strongest', where 'might is right'. (Derrida, 2003: 127)

As is often pointed out, the practice of surveillance as 'watching over', typically seen in the case of parents' surveillance of their children, is of course inherently paternalistic (Lyon, 2001). The objective of parents' surveillance is to protect their children from potential dangers. This is considered the legitimate mission of the powerful (parents), to be enacted

upon the weak (children). Here we can see a similarity between tolerance and surveillance in that both conceptions foster not an egalitarian but a paternalistic relationship. As far as the spirit of tolerance has something to do with paternalistic relationship with 'others', it cannot be a proper counter-logic by which we can criticize and fight against the dominant logic of surveillance.

In 'the exclusive society' (Young, 1999), which at the same time is cannibalistically inclusive in its nature, we can see a variety of tolerances which at first glance seem to be tender and liberal in their spirit towards different cultures. But such tolerance is fundamentally paternalistic in that it compels the guests to accept the basic value standards of the host if they want to be invited into host societies. As far as 'they' (foreigners, immigrants, strangers, etc.) pledge due loyalty to the standards that 'we' ought to respect, they can be treated kindly by us in the name of tolerance. However, if they show their reluctance or antagonism towards accepting our basic value standards, 'we' sometimes have no hesitation in repressing and excluding such others, labeling them 'dangerous strangers' who are the most prominent threat to public security. Therefore, we can say that this sort of 'tolerance' implies a 'conditional' invitation for, and acceptance of, others.

Certainly, on the one hand, tolerance as a conditional invitation makes it possible for us to invite strangers in. Without it, we cannot even encounter different cultures. On the other hand, the tolerant invitation is somehow selective and discriminatory. Keeping this in mind, it is no surprise that a tolerant liberal society can quickly become an exclusive surveillance society in such an emergency situation as the post-9/11 socio-political panic period (Bigo, 2006; Lyon, 2003).

### **Potential of Pure Hospitality**

How can we imagine the potential of 'unconditional' acceptance of others? Is it impossible for us to make not paternalistic but rather egalitarian, open and indiscriminative relationship with unknown strangers? Derrida's thoughts on 'hospitality' might be suggestive and helpful here. As Derrida says, tolerance is always 'conditional hospitality'. It only enables very limited relationship among host and guest.

But tolerance remains a scrutinized hospitality, always under surveillance, parsimonious and protective of its sovereignty. In the best of cases, it's what I would call a 'conditional hospitality', the one that is most commonly practiced by individuals, families, cities or states. We offer hospitality only on the condition that the other follow our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture, our political system, and so on. (Derrida, 2003: 128)

According to Derrida, the very essence of hospitality resides in its 'unconditional' nature. In other words, 'pure hospitality' should be a more radical and challenging way of making social encounters between self and others.

But pure or unconditional hospitality does not consist in such an *invitation* ('I invite you, I welcome you into *my home*, on the condition that you adapt to the law and norms of my territory, according to my language, tradition, memory, and so on'). Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality *itself*, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, who arrives as an absolutely foreign *visitor*, as a new *arrival*, non-identifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of *visitation* rather than *invitation*. (Derrida, 2003: 128–9)

While Derrida's argument is highly abstract and philosophical, it seems that his discourse on hospitality gives us many suggestions and ideas about how we can resist the logic of surveillance. In contemporary surveillance society, where 'the culture of fear' (Glassner, 1999) and 'the culture of suspicion' (Lyon, 2003) dominate, we are, both consciously and unconsciously, inclined to demonize others with whom we might have nothing in common to share. However, it is not certain what would happen if we extend our 'pure hospitality' to include the unexpected strangers, instead of rejecting their visits to us by ejecting them from our home territory. While the visit of others might be risky and dangerous for us, as Derrida fully recognizes, we cannot pave the way for realizing true co-existence between 'them' and 'us' without taking any risky challenge of hospitality.

The visit might actually be very dangerous, and we must not ignore this fact. But would a hospitality without risk, a hospitality backed by certain assurance, a hospitality protected by an immune system against the wholly other, be true hospitality? Though it's ultimately true that suspending or suppressing the immunity that protects me from the other might be nothing short of life-threatening. (Derrida, 2003: 129)

As far as we are afraid of others, based on unreasonable fear and suspicion, which is re-produced and enhanced by the moral panics created by the mediated information and images of others, we cannot stop the prevailing logic of surveillance seen in contemporary societies. If we want to question and criticize the socio-political conditions of the ubiquitous surveillance society, and foresee an alternative future, we have to overcome our limited imagination concerning the social encounter with others.

Being wholly hospitable to others makes it difficult to maintain and protect one's national-cultural identity, as it might question the very core of who and what one is. Moreover, the visit of others might pose a risk to the security of our community, since it might threaten the feeling of ease and safety we share (Bauman, 2001). However, unless we can be hospitable to each other, there will be no potential for us to envisage a new horizon for realizing the globalized co-existence of the future.

### Conclusion

As I have critically discussed in previous sections, contemporary surveillance societies seem to be strongly backed by public eagerness for security and, more concretely, people's desire to gain a higher degree of transparency

of communication. Thanks to such a transparency, it is hoped, people can feel more safe and at ease with those with whom they can share something in common. Although the imagined communality shared by 'us' might be just an illusion, we cannot help drawing the sharp distinctive line between 'us' and 'them' in order to ascertain public security (Abe, 2008). While the seemingly liberal advanced societies can normally pretend to be tolerant of different cultures, their paternalistic attitude towards others can be easily channeled into more exclusive societies under the 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005; Bigo, 2006). In order for public communication to be more liberating, so that critical dialogues among different groups and actors can transform society in a more democratic direction, the collective practice of hospitality toward the social encounter between self and others could be indispensable.

However, in Japanese socio-political contexts, cultural homogeneity and communality are often regarded as necessary conditions for communication with others to be realized. Therefore, hospitality towards one who is 'wholly other', with whom 'we' might not share anything in common at all, seems to be very difficult to achieve in Japan, either through social institutions or everyday life practice. But as far as Japanese society clings to the illusion of a homogeneous community, whether it is cultural, ethnic or 'racial', it cannot transform itself into a more open and democratic one. In order for Japan to realize co-existence among different cultures, which seems to be one of the most essential socio-political tasks in the present globalized era, an ethical and political practice of hospitality towards others is needed.

Nevertheless, as I have pointed out, interactive media like mixi can be utilized as a social mechanism for regulating normative homogeneity and communality. Participants of mixi joyfully consume the peer-to-peer surveillance enabled by the system of mixi. At the same time, users of mixi are eager to make their communication on the web transparent and manageable. They seem to be obsessed with ascertaining security concerning their interactions with strangers. Owing to these strong orientations towards an illusionary communality and an obsession with security, both of which are keen to eradicate the presence of 'unwelcome strangers', the potential of hospitality, which is at least technologically enabled by developments of interactive media, seems to be structurally confined in Japan's socio-political context. Keeping this in mind, how – and with whom – 'we' ought to be hospitable in order to realize co-existence with different cultures should be considered and practiced not technologically but ethically and politically in Japan.

A ubiquitous media society might drastically change our social life as its proponents predict, but the transformation of society cannot and should not be technologically or administratively predetermined. If we would like to make the potential of media interactivity more democratic and liberating, so that it can facilitate co-existence of different cultures, we have to keep our critical gaze on the dangerous potential of exclusion and discrimination caused by the resultant conspiracy between the seemingly

brighter visions of a ubiquitous media society and the excessively security-obsessed paranoia of a surveillance society.

In recent Japanese society, where under the influence of globalization the ambiguous fear of others, as well as the strongly conservative political orientation towards 'Japanese-ness', are getting stronger, realizing the co-existence of different ethnicities and nations will be one of the most acute socio-political tasks not only for the government but also the public at large. However, for much of its postwar history Japanese society has dreamed of becoming a rich and wealthy nation only through technological development. Public policy to enhance the mutual understanding of different cultures has not been seen as a politically important task, because it was naively believed that Japanese society consists of one ethnicity. In the age of globalization, the socio-political conditions of cultural others are changing drastically, but Japanese society seems to lack the ability to imagine how to co-exist with others. Moreover, Japanese society is still not immune to the long-lasting myth of technological innovation, which is expected to automatically bring about a more wealthy and democratic society. Recent hyperbolic celebrations of ubiquitous media, in which the myth of the interactive information and communication technology is recurring, should be understood as a symptom of Japan's long-time technophilia.

As far as we cling to the myth that promises us a brighter future with respect only to the technological aspects of society, we will never be able to realize a more democratic and egalitarian society in the future. To turn the potential of media interactivity, enabled by technological development, into significant socio-political tools for realizing a 'better society for all', the ethical and political practice of hospitality is indispensable. If and when media interactivity fosters not the surveillance modality of communication but a hospitable encounter with others through social participation, the coming ubiquitous media society in Japan could indeed guarantee a brighter future for all.

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**Kiyoshi Abe** is Professor at the School of Sociology, Kwansai Gakuin University. His publications include 'Everyday Policing in Japan: Surveillance, Media, Government and Public Opinion' (*International Sociology* 19(2), 2004) and 'The Logic of Surveillance and the Predicament of the Social' (in Kosaka and Ogino (eds) *A Quest for Alternative Sociology*. Trans Pacific Press, 2008). His recent research interests focus on a critical investigation of the socio-cultural conditions of the surveillance society. [email: k-abe@kwansai.ac.jp]