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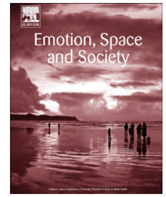

Above and below the streets: A musical geography of anti-nuclear protest in Tokyo

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ABSTRACT

Affects such as anger, fear and love have compelled Tokyoites to take to the streets in protest in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster of March 2011. One of the characteristic forms these protests have taken has been the anti-nuclear "sound demonstrations" in which bands, DJs and rappers perform from the backs of trucks that lead demonstrators through the streets. Projecting their emotive music through urban space with the aid of powerful sound systems, these demonstrations disrupt the everyday noises of the neoliberal city and create a public space for the vocalisation of dissent. After the demonstrations, these same artists and demonstrators move to the underground live houses and social centres that constitute a subterranean backbone to the visible demonstrations in the street. Expressing emotions through musical protest is a powerful motor for what Stevphen Shukatitis has called affective composition, the process via which collective political subjectivities are formed through the expression of shared emotions. This paper outlines the emotional geography of anti-nuclear music in post-Fukushima Tokyo. It examines the dynamic interplay between aboveground political protest and the city's subterranean network of musical performance spaces.

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In late 2011 I arrived in Tokyo to conduct research into the vibrant anti-nuclear movement which developed in the wake of a serious nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant caused by the earthquake and tsunami disasters of 11 March 2011. For eighteen months I travelled through the spaces of the anti-nuclear movement and the broader activist culture in which it was situated. As I attended street demonstrations, public meetings and fundraising concerts and visited sit-in tents and social centres I became increasingly aware of how the diffuse geography of anti-nuclear protest was connected through a common musical "soundtrack" (Flanary, 2011; Gonoi, 2012, p. 194). In December 2011, I took a train to a small, dark and smoky underground musical performance venue called "soup" located in the Kamiochiai district of Tokyo's Shinjuku ward. My destination was *Ikiteireba matsuri 2* (If You Are Alive Festival 2), the second in a series of concerts which featured bands who had performed at one or more of the many *Genpatsu Yamero* (No Nukes) "sound demonstrations" that were organized by activist network Amateur Revolt in response to the Fukushima disaster.

"Sound demonstrations" first emerged in Tokyo in 2003. They feature musical performers representing a range of genres who play from the backs of trucks leading blocs of demonstrators through the city streets (Cassegård, 2014; Driscoll, 2007; Hayashi and McKnight, 2005). The Genpatsu Yamero protests were organized by a network of activists who call themselves "Amateur Revolt". The network was formed in 2005 (Matsumoto and Futatsugi, 2008) in response to the growing insecurity and instability faced by a generation which has been largely excluded from regular, full-time work since Japan's post-war high economic growth period came to an end in the early 1990s (Obinger, 2013). As sociologist Oguma (2012)[1] has observed, the image of the crippled reactor shells at Fukushima Daiichi delivered yet another blow to people's faith in Japan's decaying industrial society. The "sound demonstration" was already a mainstay of the Amateur Revolt network's protest repertoire as they sought to draw attention to the proliferating risks (Beck, 1992) faced by young people in the metropolis. After Fukushima, it became a form of anti-nuclear protest.

The If You Are Alive Festival 2 concert took place in one of a

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[1] Here and elsewhere I have adopted the Japanese conventional name order of surname (Oguma) first then first name (Eiji) when quoting from Japanese sources.

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number of small bars, "live houses",[2] bookshops and second-hand clothing stores associated with Amateur Revolt and a broader activist milieu in Tokyo that is known among participants as the "Nantoka" community. The word "*nantoka*" has the sense of "somehow" as in the phrase "*nantoka suru*" ("I'll manage somehow"), or "something" as in "*nantoka naru*" ("something will work out"). It is a term frequently used by people who are scraping by in the risky and alienated social and economic landscape of post-industrial Tokyo. Participants in this network of activist spaces evoke a "Nantoka community" both through these everyday linguistic practices and by publishing the monthly newsletter, Tokyo Nantoka. The newsletter contains a "what's on" style guide to the concerts, meetings, film screenings and workshops which take place in a variety of activist spaces maintained by members of the community. By referring to themselves as part of a "Nantoka community", participants evoke a sense of the collective experience which they share with others in a similar situation. Music, whether performed in the streets as part of the sound demonstrations or in underground spaces like "soup", is an important part of the cultural life of the Nantoka community. The If You Are Alive concert, where musicians from the anti-nuclear sound demonstrations performed at one of the permanent spaces associated with the Nantoka community, connected these two sonic spaces. Brown and Pickerill (2009, p. 28) explain how "emotional journeys through activism incorporate different relationships, times, places, scales, memories and more". In this paper I examine the "emotional journeys" that are mediated by music in two types of space: aboveground street demonstrations and the underground "live houses" and activist spaces which are maintained by the Nantoka community. These spaces play different but complementary roles in creating and maintaining a sense of community. Sound demonstrations are conducted in the streets, an open and public space which makes them more accessible but less coherent. Underground spaces like "soup", however, are less public. They are less accessible to those without a pre-existing connection to the community and are therefore more intimate. They favour the development of close, ongoing social relationships. Music is part of the glue that holds the community together across these two geographic scales.

1. Emotion, space and sound: from collective identity to affective composition

Sociologist James Jasper (1998, pp. 397–399) has argued that scholars of social movements have not paid sufficient attention to the role of the emotions in collective action. He ascribes this failure in part to an overemphasis on notions of rationality and the false presumption that rationality and emotion are incompatible. As Joseph Davies (2002, p. 24) observes, people rarely participate in social movements without a strong emotional attachment to the movement. Nor is protest simply a means of achieving instrumental goals or expressing frustration over injustice. It can also be a source of pleasure. "Losing oneself" in collective motion, by marching together in the street can be a pleasurable experience in itself. Music and dance in particular have the power to facilitate closeness between strangers, making music a key tool to promote solidarity in emerging movements (Jasper, 1998, p. 418).

Collective rituals like concerts and street demonstrations are important means of fostering collective emotional expression (Collins, 2004, p. 108). As Jasper (1998, p. 418) explains, "collective rites remind participants of their basic moral commitments, stir up strong emotions, and reinforce a sense of solidarity with the group, a 'we-ness'". Jasper argues that singing and dancing produce moments "when a large group can attain a certain coordination and unity, can silence the small groups talking among themselves, [and] can concentrate the attention of all". Eyerman and Jamison (1998, p. 161) suggest that these qualities of music can facilitate the development of a "collective identity" among movement participants. Manabe (2012) has extended their argument to the anti-nuclear movement in Japan after the March 2011 disaster.

Social movement scholar Albert Melucci (1989, p. 34), who first proposed the notion of collective identity, defined it as

> an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.

As he later explained, collective identity was meant to be "of help in addressing the interactive and sometimes contradictory processes lying behind what appears as a stable and coherent definition of a given collective actor" (Melucci, 1996, p. 72). Melucci wished to elucidate a social *process*, rather than identify a discrete entity through the term. Yet, as Melucci acknowledges, the term identity "remains semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence and may, perhaps for this very reason, be ill suited for the processual analysis for which I am arguing" (Melucci, 1996, p. 70).

Sociologist Kevin McDonald (2002, p. 111) argues that the notion of collective identity has come to constitute "a significant obstacle to our capacity to explore the forms of social struggle characterizing social formations that increasingly take the form of networks, scapes and flows". Against the notion of collective identity he argues that actors in contemporary networked social movements engage in "a struggle for subjectivity" characterized by "the emergence of an ethic grounded in an experience of self and other, as opposed to an ethic of 'us'" (McDonald, 2002, p. 125). He emphasizes the importance of the "small groups" whom Jasper admits do not always join in the collective dance. Writing about dance music at alter-globalization demonstrations in Melbourne in 2000, McDonald notes that rather than trying to generate a collective identity, the dance party in the streets aimed "to change the codes that govern urban experience". He explains that "this is not an experience of simultaneity as one of temporal acceleration and loss of capacity to produce distance, but one of multiplicity".

The movement from "collective identity" to multiple "struggles for subjectivity" which McDonald has observed reflects the changing nature of social protest in the "network society" (Castells, 1996). Social movements in Tokyo today are defined less by shared ideological commitments or formal group memberships than by practices which intervene in and transform public space so as to create forms of "autonomous space" (Mōri, 2003; Watanabe, 2012, pp. 104–139). In a recent essay, Carl Cassegard (2012) posits that the relationship between the public spaces of the street demonstrations and autonomous spaces are mediated through play. Play, he argues, can ameliorate the feelings of powerlessness which many of the precarious participants in Amateur Revolt's anti-nuclear demonstrations experience through their social and economic marginalization. He posits that what he terms "alternative space", which I refer to in this essay as "autonomous spaces" "can contribute to empowerment [by providing] 'shelters' to the subaltern from the pressures of mainstream society". Music and dance can be seen as forms of "playful empowerment" which facilitate participation in political protest and create a sense of community among disempowered and alienated youth.

The culture of the anti-nuclear movement in Tokyo is characterized by ambiguous and shifting subjectivities which convene

[2] A "live house" is a musical performance venue, typically located underground to prevent noise complaints in Japan's densely populated cities.

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