The Sound Truck as an Apparatus of Democracy in Japanese Street Protests[1]

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On March 7, 2021—near the tenth anniversary of 3.11—the Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes (MCAN) held its last large-scale protest prior to its disbanding at the end of March. This group had sponsored the longest-running recurring demonstration in Japan—the antinuclear demonstrations in front of the prime minister's residence (Kantei), held every Friday since March 2012. At their peak in the summer of 2012, these demonstrations had attracted 200,000 protesters.

The Fukushima nuclear accident triggered the beginning of the largest social movement that Japan had seen since the movement against the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) of the 1960s. It also opened a protest cycle that spread to protests against racism in 2013, the State Secrets Law in 2014, and the Security Bills of 2015, and protests for a higher minimum wage and better working conditions in 2016 and beyond. In these protests, sound—chanting, singing, playing, banging casseroles or drums by demonstrators—played an important part, engaging both demonstrators and onlookers in the street spectacle. The mode or conception of this sonic participation changed according to political circumstances.

This paper considers the factors that shape sonic participation in protests. Starting with ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino's concept of performance as presentational or participatory, I examine the ways in which sociopolitical circumstances, policing, urban acoustics, and landscape shape protest performance and participation. Drawing from field work, I analyze an unusual feature of many Japanese protests: the sound demonstration (demo), featuring a sound truck, piled high with speakers and sound equipment, upon which DJs, rappers, and bands perform. The constraints placed by the police and the urban environment push Japanese protesters toward tactics that maximize visibility and participation—tactics that differ from those seen in U.S. protests.

What are the characteristics of a participatory performance?

Turino categorizes musical performances in one of two styles: presentational, where artists play music for an audience who do not participate in the music-making; and participatory, which has "no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles."[2] These approaches differ in both goals and aesthetics. Presentational music involves a separation between artist and audience, with musicians performing scripted pieces. These performances aim to entertain the audience; they therefore tend to emphasize virtuosity, complexity, or showmanship. Most concerts are presentational. In contrast, a participatory performance aims to involve as many people, as intensely as possible. As such, the music must be easy enough for newcomers to join in; it is comprised of short forms that are repeated over and over. While the repetitiveness may make the music uninteresting to an outside audience, it adds to the intensity of the performance for the participants. The emphasis is on inclusivity, regardless of the players' ability, at the expense of showmanship. Because it requires participants to pay close attention to others, participatory music promotes social bonding.

[1] Parts of this article previously appeared in Noriko Manabe, The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima, New York, 2015, and Noriko Manabe, "Chants of the Resistance: Flow, Memory, and Inclusivity," Music and Politics 13, no. 1 (Winter 2019), http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0013.105.

[2] Thomas Turino, Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation, Chicago, 2008, p. 26

In a street demonstration, the "audience" includes both protesters and onlookers. But the protesters also participate, by playing drums or instruments, engaging in call-and response patterns, or simply walking along with the demonstration. These protesters shift their performance style along a spectrum from presentational to participatory. Several factors affect which style predominates in a protest. In Japan, the early stages of the antinuclear movement saw presentational styles predominate, while protests become more participatory over time. The political scientist Charles Tilly has noted that protest repertoires change incrementally in response to changes in political opportunity structures, available models of performances, and connections among potential actors.[3] This tendency toward incremental change is correlated with increased participation: people are more likely to participate in performances, chants, or songs if they are already familiar with them. It explains why protest sounds tend to be intertextual with previous protests. Tilly's theory also applies well to the way in which sound demos have changed over time, from a presentational to participatory format.

Japanese sound demos

Japanese streets have a long history of allowing sound-emitting vehicles: nationalists blast military marches from trucks; and political campaign trucks bark out slogans. Both examples harness noise to command bystanders' attention in an urban environment saturated with stimuli. Sound trucks have also long accompanied Japanese political protests. Since the 1990s, Japanese LGBTQ parades have featured sound trucks with DJs playing house music to a dancing crowd. In 2001, the Chance! Peace Walks, which opposed war in the Middle East, played a recording of John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance" from a truck while protesters marched along.

These sound demos were set up by a collective of artists, writers, and temporary workers called Against Street Control, which was protesting not only the war in Iraq but also the increased privatization of public space. They aimed to take back urban space through extraordinarily loud sounds and dancing in the streets.

But it wasn't until 2003 that the term "sound demo" was coined, to indicate a marching demonstration featuring a sound system carried on a vehicle. These sound demos were set up by a collective of artists, writers, and temporary workers called Against Street Control, which was protesting not only the war in Iraq but also the increased privatization of public space. They aimed to take back urban space through extraordinarily loud sounds and dancing in the streets; the organizers recognized that they would eventually conflict with the police. In contrast, the Chance Peace Walks were so deferential to the police that their organizers had dinner meetings with them and publicly thanked them during the demonstrations. Since then, sound demos have been employed in protests against nuclear power after the Fukushima accident, hate speech from neo-nationalists, overreach in the State Secrets Law, the Security Bills that enable Japanese troops to be sent abroad, and poor labor conditions. Their style has shifted from the moving street rave of 2003, in which the crowd reclaimed the streets by dancing to techno, to topical performances by rappers and bands just after the Fukushima accident, to a way of engaging protesters in calls and responses, rapped over beats.

Political circumstances have influenced the ways in which sound demos are conducted. The ethos of the 2003 sound

[3] See Charles Tilly, Contentious Performances, Cambridge, 2008.

demos was captured in the name of the organizer, Against Street Control: the aim was to take back urban space—first sonically, through high-volume techno and noise, then physically, as participants occupied space by dancing and moshing. The central musicians were DJs. Following the triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident (called 3.11), the sound demo format was used for antinuclear demonstrations. The aim of sound demos shifted from momentary anarchy to making a concrete statement opposing government policy. The central musicians in protests moved away from DJs to rappers, who voiced antinuclear claims. These musical performances served to attract people to the protest and raise awareness. Musicians like reggae singer Rankin Taxi spent most of their time at the protests performing pre-composed songs in presentational performance.

The first large-scale antinuclear protests after 3.11 were organized by Shirōto no Ran (Revolt of the Laymen), a used-goods shop and activist group in the bohemian Tokyo neighborhood of Kōenji. Their monthly demonstrations, held between April to September 2011, each drew crowds of 15,000–20,000, catching the attention of the police. At their demonstration in Shinjuku in September 2011, the police arrested twelve protesters near the sound truck, including an organizer, because the protesters were crowding the sidewalk. Since an arrested person could be held without an indictment for twenty-three days in Japan, these arrests intimidated people from going to demonstrations. It was a turning point in the movement.

Activists believed that a new approach to sound demos was necessary—one that focused not on presentational performances to attract attention, but on encouraging participation among protesters in voicing claims. By this time, a practice had steadily developed by which protesters chanted slogans to drums in call and response. The activist Noma Yasumichi believed that these chants could be led by a DJ's beats from on top of a sound truck. In December 2011, he invited the rapper Akuryō, a frequent participant in drum-oriented protests, to perform in a sound demo in a way that engaged protesters in call and response. In July 2012, the restarting of the Ōi Nuclear Power Plant, prior to an overhaul of the inspection system, was greeted with widespread outrage. At a protest just before the restart, Akuryō noticed that protesters were not listening to the bands on the sound truck but were instead shouting “saikadō hantai” (we oppose restarts) at the top of their lungs. He recalled, “It was so powerful. No performance could beat the sound of everyone shouting, 'We oppose restarts' over music.” This galvanizing anger, combined with the protesters' accumulated experience, solidified the participatory style of sound demonstrations, subsequently deployed at protests against the 2013 State Secrets Law and the 2015 Security Bills enabling Japanese troops to be sent abroad.

Barriers to protesting in Japan

Sound demos found a place in Japan partly because they counteracted conditions that make it difficult to protest there. First, demonstrations have long held a negative image in Japan, owing to violence by radical groups in the late 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, political apathy is high, as demonstrated by declining voter participation. The country has been under the one-party rule of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) almost continuously since 1955, with the exception of 2009–2012, when the party in power, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), was blamed for the handling of the 3.11 disaster. Many citizens feel politics is futile because only one party can be trusted.

Another issue is the overpolicing of Japanese protests. Jacques Rancière (2010) notes that the police serve to “partition the sensible,” keeping order by confining the people to preordained roles and controlling their movement in public spaces.[4] While he uses the term “police” to mean all the structures in a society that keeps people in their places, the

[4] See Jacques Rancière, Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics, London, 2010, p.36.

uniformed police behave in ways that reflect these structures and beliefs. The ratio of police to protesters in Japanese protests far exceeds that at many American protests, with police sometimes as numerous as the protesters. The Public Safety police take notes and photos of protesters, which are filed. Such actions make protesters feel that they are under surveillance and intimidate people from joining protests, particularly students on the job market or employees of the government or well-known corporations. The police may also arrest people for questionable reasons. They push protesters in a crowd and arrest them for "interfering with an officer" when they accidentally push back. An arrested person could be detained for twenty-three days without an indictment. If convicted, one could be jailed for up to three years. Hence, a Japanese citizen has to overcome considerable disdain and intimidation in order to attend a demonstration.

The police also endeavor to make the protest look smaller. They surround the protest, making it invisible. Instead of letting protesters take up an entire avenue, as police usually do in the U.S., the Japanese police restrict the protesters to one lane of a multilane road, so that the protesters are marching right beside speeding cars. Instead of marching as one continuous mass, demonstrations are broken up into small groups spaced some distance apart, so that bystanders are often unaware of the entire extent of the protest. The police can make a 200,000-person protest look like a few hundred people.

Japanese protest organizers compensate by dividing the protesters into blocks that are determined by *sound.* There is often a drum-corps block; a family block, with wind bands like Jinta-ra-muta playing children's songs;[5] a sound truck block; and a union block with megaphones. These blocks may partition people in ways that reflect their socioeconomic class, age, or family status, but they also encourage protesters to participate sonically; they illustrate the centrality of sound in Japanese demonstrations. Japanese protest marches I have seen are much louder than American ones. This loudness makes tactical sense: if the police limit the visibility or apparent scope of a protest, a demonstration can compensate by occupying the streets with sound.

Affordances of sound demos

The principal aspects of sound that benefit protests are that it takes up space; it can be heard in all directions, and before the source can be seen; and it moves us, emotionally and kinetically. The sound truck has two crucial affordances: height and mobility. On top of a truck, rappers, DJs, and activists are visible to both protesters and bystanders from farther away. This heightened visibility compensates for the actions of the police, who surround the protesters and make them less visible. The physical elevation converts these performers into leaders of the protest, effectively onstage, giving speeches and leading call and response patterns. The mobility of the truck is important, as many demonstrations in Japan march through busy shopping districts like Shibuya or Shinjuku. This is because Japan has little available public space in front of centers of power (unlike the Mall in Washington, D.C.). Furthermore, shopping districts are packed with people, giving protesters a bigger audience. With a truck, musicians and activists can speak and perform nonstop through a crowded district, allowing the largest number of people to see and hear the protest.

The speakers and amplification equipment have the affordances of loudness and heavy bass, both of which are crucial to protests. While a person can only see what is in front of them, they can hear in all directions; indeed, most passersby will hear a demonstration before they see it. Sound can project far and wide in a city, because tall, contiguous glass

[5] See Marié Abe, Resonances of Chindon-Ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan, Middletown, CT, 2018.

buildings form a sonic canyon in which the sound propagates and resonates for a long time.[6] The bass-heavy music—hip hop, techno, reggae—that is preferred in sound demos also expand their aural horizon. Low bass sounds are less absorbed by soft materials (like people or trees) than higher frequencies and thus travel over longer distances. When the sound truck enters an intersection, the sound propagates in several directions. The protest also has a captive audience at intersections, as pedestrians wait for the light to turn. Demonstrators become most animated and participatory at crowded intersections as they perform to this audience.

The music also gives people the courage to raise their voices. Futatsugi Shin, who helped to organize Shirōto no Ran's demonstrations, recalled a pivotal event in the demonstration in Kōenji on April 10, 2011:

Mayuri was DJ-ing to a huge crowd around the sound truck. We were all very tense. It was still too soon after the disaster, and none of us knew what to do. We were just following the truck, not raising our voices. Then Mayuri played a cool techno track [Dutch DJ Joris Voorn's "Incident"]. . . She cut the bass. As we went into the intersection of Oume Kaidō, she suddenly put the bass up, and everyone began to dance in unison. Someone spontaneously yelled out, "Genpatsu yamero!" (stop nuclear power). Without any leader, everyone joined in this call-and-response.[7]

The call spread throughout the entire block. As Futatsugi said, "At that time, people were not yet accustomed to going to demonstrations, raising their voices, or repeating Sprechchor. Everyone had a hard time doing that. Techno music gave us this huge push. 'Everyone, we can raise our voices!' The music was the trigger."[8]

In the age of social media, a sound demo does not end with the march but lives in perpetuity in cyberspace. During an antinuclear protest on July 29, 2012, a protest was held in Kasumigaseki, the government district of Tokyo. The sound truck rolled in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which was then in charge of both promoting and regulating nuclear power. This conflict of interest had caused a breakdown in oversight. The rapper Akuryō freestyled:

> Everyone, can you see coming up on your left, the towering METI [building]?
> They're the guys who approved the restarting [of nuclear power plants], the one and the same.
> Can you believe that? Scumbags! METI Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency?
> Seriously, it's dumbfounding. Everything they say is bogus.
> Isn't there talk that there's an active fault at the Ōi nuclear power plant?
> Do your jobs right, you bastards![9]

It was a dramatic and memorable moment. But it was a Sunday, and the streets and offices were empty. I wondered if the moment had been wasted. The activist Illcommonz, however, explained that the real point is to protest against the symbols of power and capture it on video. Even if no one is actually in the offices, and even if there's no audience in the streets, the cameras are on. When the videos are uploaded and streamed, they turn into a protest in their own right. The video showing angry, passionate protesters criticizing a silent, unresponsive building—a symbol of unresponsive

[6] See Jian Kang, Urban Sound Environment, Abingdon, 2006.
[7] Futatsugi Shin, interview with the author, Tokyo, August 17, 2012.
[8] Ibid. See "Hangenpatsu demo, 4.10 Kōenji, DJ Mayuri," YouTube video from antinuclear demonstration in Kōenji, April 10, 2011, uploaded by "wwwzubarjp," April 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU8hdWbOK9c (sequence begins at 1:02).
[9] Akuryō's freestyle in front of METI, with ECD and ATS, antinuclear protest in Kasumigaseki, July 29, 2012. Original video from ken23qu; subtitles by Noriko Manabe. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvquM5xanQ4.

powers—invokes a strong emotional response. The demonstrators are thus performing not only for themselves, but also for the audience that will see them later on YouTube.[10]

Conclusion

The performance of democracy, in the form of participatory sound in protests, can differ due to cultural or political circumstances. In Japan, the behavior of the police accounts for many of the distinct aspects of Japanese protests: the tendency to break up protests by type of sound, to compensate for the police's minimization of protests; the persistence of sound trucks, to assert sonic presence when the protest is made invisible; and the tendency to use sound trucks, drums, megaphones, and rehearsed chants to encourage participation. The kind of participation changed over time, depending on political circumstances. Presentational performances helped to draw people to protests at a time when citizens were not used to participating in protests. Once protests became seen as normal, the style shifted toward a more participatory mode.

In Japan, the behavior of the police accounts for many of the distinct aspects of Japanese protests: the tendency to break up protests by type of sound, to compensate for the police's minimization of protests; the persistence of sound trucks, to assert sonic presence when the protest is made invisible; and the tendency to use sound trucks, drums, megaphones, and rehearsed chants to encourage participation.

Having studied Japanese protests, I was struck by their differences with American protests. In contrast to the restricted movements of Japanese protests, the 2017 Women's March in New York was an unmissable spectacle that took up the entirety of Fifth Avenue; it did not require sound to the same degree. Unlike Japanese protests, no one was designated as call leader, with a megaphone; instead individual protesters spontaneously chanted here and there, never seeming to engage the entire mass of protesters. U.S. protests have a different conception of "democratic" or "participatory" sounds, sacrificing the sense of unity of Japanese protests in favor of a chaotic autonomy. Even in a U.S. protest, however, there are power differentials. For example, some minorities believe that protests like the Women's March are really meant for white people, and they complain that their chants are often ignored relative to those started by white protesters. This racial hierarchy has caused a visible racial segregation in protests, where fewer minorities are coming to some protests, and protesters at the same demonstration tend to congregate around similar-looking people. Hence, while demonstrations may attempt to prefigure an idealized democracy, I see them not as embodiments of a participatory democratic ideal so much as a manifestation of the democracy that the society allows, even for that brief moment of the demonstration.

[10] Oda Masanori [Illcommonz], interview with the author, Kichijōji, October 19, 2013.

Discussion Comments

by Miriam Kinsgberg Kadia , University of Colorado Boulder

Thank you so much for your fascinating paper, Dr. Manabe. Hi everyone, I'm Miriam Kadia. Before I begin, I'd like to express my gratitude to Tim for organizing this workshop. I'm honored to be included. It's hard for me to believe that ten years have passed since 3.11. Back in 2011 I had already been at CU for a couple of years and was on leave on a postdoc at Harvard. After the triple disaster the Reischauer Center for Japanese Studies there basically threw out its prearranged agenda for the rest of the calendar year and hosted weekly speakers, experts, and events on various topics related to the events in Tōhoku. It also created what Tim already introduced, and I believe Ryo worked on: the Japan Disasters Digital Archive project, an online repository of materials that (it is stated on the website) "seeks to collect, preserve, and make broadly accessible many forms of first-hand information and primary documentation of the events of March 11, 2011 and their aftermath." In those sad and anxious early weeks and months following the disaster, it was a great comfort to me to be surrounded by a community committed to victim assistance, commemoration, and understanding. Now, ten years later, I'm grateful for the opportunity to mark the anniversary with this important event.

Dr. Manabe's paper is firmly situated within the growing subfield of sound studies. My first introduction to this discipline was coincidentally also at Harvard, when my fellow postdoc Marié Abe, now an ethnomusicologist at BU, gave a fascinating talk on chindon-ya, or traditional, ostentatiously costumed street musicians who work as advertisers for small neighborhood businesses. Her book, *Resonances of Chindon-ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan*, which was published in 2018, came to mind as I read Dr. Manabe's paper, given the shared interest in sound as a political practice. And then, of course, I saw the book was cited in the pre-circulated draft.

The topic of Dr. Manabe's paper is sound trucks, which feature in some of my earliest memories of Japan. Growing up in Tokyo in the 1990s, I remember sound trucks regularly coming through our neighborhood at all hours, blaring military marches and exhorting citizens to revere the emperor and restore his authority. So, I've mostly associated sound trucks with the extreme right, and, in fact, when I looked online to find some clips to show as part of my remarks, those careening around waving the rising sun flag were more or less all I could find. So it was particularly interesting to me to consider their association with the democratic right to assemble in what are now called "sound demos."

Dr. Manabe's paper begins by briefly surveying the history of sound in protest in contemporary Japan, a topic that I found especially interesting in light of my own recent research on the 1968 student movement. She describes the shift from presentational performance, which features an artist playing to an audience, to participatory performance, in which such boundaries are blurred or eliminated altogether. She then argues that sound emerged as a key strategy in Japanese street demonstrations due to the relatively stiff obstacles that these events must surmount, including public apathy, a relative absence of public space near the centers of power (historians have noted this as an intentional feature of modern urban planning in Tokyo), generally negative impressions of protests, overpolicing, and spatial interference to minimize the perceived size of assembled crowds. Through acoustic occupation of the streets, though, protestors can counteract misleading visual representations of their numbers and make their true scope felt. The case study of the demonstration thus emerges as a highly effective vehicle for demonstrating the intimate, at times contradictory and at times symbiotic relationship between sound and space.

In deploying sound as a mobilization strategy, sound trucks are particularly useful due to their height and mobility. These qualities enable them to be seen and heard by protestors forced by police to spread out, and of course by bystanders as well. They are also very effective in crowded downtown shopping districts, which tend to be enclosed by tall, contiguous glass structures that facilitate acoustic transmission and resonation. Protestors consciously play to this built environment (pun intended) with low base music that can be heard at long distances. The overall effect is very empowering for participants. In this day and age, Dr. Manabe notes, protests can also be recorded and put on Youtube

or Instagram, thus multiplying the audience.

So I came prepared with a clip on Youtube in case Dr. Manabe didn't have time in her presentation to show us a demonstration, but…I should have known better. Since we did have an opportunity to see a couple already, I'll just skip it, while observing that the snippets she showed us really speak to how protestors use sound to defeat space and effect unity. The protestors march alongside the cars in a very spread-out arrangement, but singing and repetitive chants allow for a kind of participatory performance that generates a palpable sense of energy and enthusiasm. While we were viewing the clips she showed us I had a hard time sitting still in my seat (but my camera was on, so I had to!).

Dr. Manabe reports that demonstrators are highly conscious of the power of film, with some even going so far as to believe that their main impact is through film. It occurs to me that, at least for the Youtube or Instagram audience, protestors can regain some agency over space through their filming choices: for instance, close-up shots in which demonstrators fill the frame can mitigate police efforts to break them up visually in real life. At the same time, though, the effectiveness of the acoustic experience is somewhat blunted, as most secondary viewers will probably not listen to clips at the uncomfortable volume that one might experience in person. And so, I'd love to hear more about how demonstrators think about and curate their intended sonic effect in recordings. How does the transfer to film change the relationship between sound and space?

Without wanting to take too much more time away from the general Q&A, I'd also like to invite Dr. Manabe to tell us a little more about her research process. You mention that this paper is based on fieldwork, and I would be very interested in knowing more about the kinds of experiences that you sought out and engaged in, the people that you talked to, the timing of your research, your informants, whatever you'd like to share. I'm particularly wondering about a couple of roles in demonstrations. Sound truck drivers: how do they balance perhaps dueling responsibilities to public safety and enthusiasm for the cause? Is this a consistent position with clearly outlined duties, or does it simply rotate among those with licenses? And police: how do they feel about the use of sound to circumvent their spatial efforts? Lastly, I'm also curious about where this paper fits into what seems to be a larger project on the politics of sound in contemporary Japan, if you'd like to say a few words about that. I'll pass the baton back now. Thanks so much.

Noriko Manabe is associate professor of music studies at Temple University. She researches music in social movements and popular music in Japan and the Americas. Her monograph, The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music after Fukushima (Oxford), won the John Whitney Hall Book Prize from the Association for Asian Studies, the BFE Book Prize from the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, and Honorable Mention for the Alan Merriam Prize from the Society for Ethnomusicology. Her second monograph, in progress, posits a typology of intertextuality in protest music and the patterns by which these methods are used. She is editor of 33-1/3 Japan, a book series on Japanese popular music from Bloomsbury Publishing; co-editor of the Oxford Handbook of Protest Music (with Eric Drott); and co-editor of Nuclear Music (with Jessica Schwartz).

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