

Uprising: Music, youth, and protest against the policies of the Abe Shinzō government 反乱 若者は音楽で安倍晋三の政策に抗議する

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The passage of the Act on Protection of Specified Secrets (Secrecy Law) in Japan on December 6, 2013 was a turning point for many antinuclear and anti-discrimination activists, causing them to shift their energies to protesting Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's policies. This law, which would jail people for inquiring about state secrets even if those secrets had not been so identified, has been flagged by the UN Human Rights Council and the Japan Federation of Bar Associations as compromising the people's right to know and undermining democracy. When it was passed in the middle of the night on December 6, 2013, about 40,000 protesters had been maintaining a vigil in front of the Diet. On a live internet-radio program on [Dommune](#) on July 30, 2014, the activist Banchō¹ expressed concern that the Secrecy Law could turn Japan into a "police state" that did not require police to explain the reasons for one's arrest "because it was secret" (Banchō, Dommune, Tokyo, July 30, 2014). Lawyers like Tamura Yūsuke of [Asu no Jiyū o Mamoru Wakate Bengoshi no Kai](#) (Association of Young Lawyers for the Protection of Tomorrow's Freedom) have also highlighted the problematic nature of the Abe Cabinet's

reinterpretation of the Constitution without undergoing an amendment process, which would require a two-thirds majority in the Diet. He argued that the Right to Collective Self-Defense primarily enables overseas wars in cooperation with the United States rather than Japan's self-defense, which is already constitutionally permitted (Tamura Yūsuke, Dommune, July 30, 2014).

Polls show that a majority of citizens oppose both the Secrecy Law and the Right to Collective Self-Defense, as they also oppose restarting nuclear reactors. An overwhelming majority of over three-quarters object to the way the Abe administration has passed these policies—without sufficient discussion in the Diet or with the public in the former, and without any discussion at all in the latter.² Many activists see these issues as symptomatic of a basic problem: an oligarchy that ignores the people's will and exerts excessive control over available information. Many feel Japanese democracy is under threat. Hence, recent protests have addressed a blend of these issues.

This article presents the sights and sounds of performances critical of Abe's policies, featuring the role of youth in spearheading many protests. Musicians have been giving performances criticizing the Abe administration in demonstrations, festivals, and recordings. As with the [evolution of musical style in earlier street demonstrations](#), these performances show continuity in performance practices and personal networks with the antinuclear movement. As explained by Charles Tilly

(2008), precedents in contentious repertoire both guide and limit practices. The anti-Abe movement borrows the symbols, slogans, T-shirt logos, costumes, lyrics, and songs from previous movements. These borrowings include not only the Japanese antinuclear and anti-discrimination movements but also anti-fascist and antiwar movements from around the globe. References to recent Japanese movements keep their spirit alive; references to global movements infer similarities that the protesters recognize between historical issues and problems with Abe's policies.

Demonstrations Recombining organizations

[Tokyo Democracy Crew](#) (TDC) was formed in 2013 out of members of the [Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes](#) (MCAN), volunteers for Utsunomiya Kenji's campaigns for the Tokyo governorship, and the [Counter-Racist Action Collective](#) (CRAC). This last group counter-protests against the neo-nationalist Zaitoku-kai, which stages anti-Korean demonstrations in zainichi Korean neighborhoods.³ As a coalition of several groups brought together for the purpose of organizing demonstrations, it "leverages the experience, gained from MCAN, of gathering together resistant voices" (Banchō, Dommune). From CRAC, the movement adopted the catchwords "Antifa" (anti-fascist) and "No pasaran" (They shall not pass), the latter being Spanish Communist leader Dolores Ibárruri Gómez's slogan against Francisco Franco's Siege of Madrid (1936). Banchō explained, "Both the Zaitoku-kai and Abe are fascists, so it seemed only natural" that people, activities, and symbolism would flow from the anti-discrimination movement to the other (Dommune, July 30, 2014).

On March 21, 2014, members of TDC protested outside of the Shinjuku studios where Abe was appearing on the "Waratte itomo!" television program, shouting "No nuclear restarts!" and other slogans. An affiliated group also involved

in antinuclear demonstrations, *Ikari no doramu* (Drums of Fury), held its first [anti-Abe demonstration](#) on May 24, 2014. When it became clear that the Abe Cabinet intended to reinterpret the constitution to allow for collective self-defense, TDC called for a protest in front of the prime minister's official residence; it also called on SASPL and Civitas, two groups of younger activists, to join them.

Entry of student activists

The participation of university students in anti-Abe demonstrations is a major change from the antinuclear actions of 2011–12, from which students had been conspicuously absent due to fears that identification at a protest would disadvantage them in the job market, among other concerns. This increased activity makes sense, given that Abe's policies will have the greatest impact on the young, particularly if Japan becomes involved in wars. [Students Against the Secret Protection Law](#) (SASPL), a network of university students, was formed out of study sessions and symposia held at Meiji Gakuin University, International Christian University, and other universities shortly before the passing of the Secrecy Law in December 2013. [Civitas](#) is a group of university students and alumni, researchers, citizens, musicians, and artists around Musashino in western Tokyo. Since December 2011, it has held symposia and study sessions about post-3.11 society and alternative energy, as well as shared information through social networks. Recently, it published statements outlining its reasons for opposing the Secrecy Law and the reinterpretation of the Constitution.

On February 1, 2014, SASPL held its first demonstration in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Sporting a sound truck with hip-hop beats and several college-age rappers, it attracted about 500 student protesters and drew the attention of *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Tokyo*, and other newspapers and media. The group held a second

demonstration on May 3, attracting a similar number of people as well as newspaper and overseas media coverage. As rulings on the right to collective action loomed, it organized a university symposium attended by about a hundred people. To advertise its events, it produced eye-catching posters and YouTube videos, which showed central members talking about their reasons for demonstrating and scenes from the demonstration itself, and distributed them through its Twitter and Facebook accounts.

For the protest with TDC on June 30—the evening before the Cabinet vote on the reinterpretation of the constitution—SASPL and Civitas jointly released a one-minute promotional [video](#) on YouTube. Against ambient music, the narrative explained:

“Sovereignty ultimately lies with the people.”

“We all have to raise our voices.”

“If the Cabinet decides to allow collective self-defense and we get involved in a war, the politicians that started the war won’t die. Citizens who didn’t even want a war will die.”

These words were accompanied by videos of SASPL’s youthful members rapping and speaking on top of trucks, while young protesters followed them. To emphasize the urgency, the music drops out, letting the final command stand out:

“You absolutely must come.”

An estimated 40,000 protesters gathered in front of the prime minister’s residence and Diet on June 30, many shouting Sprechchor (call-

and-response slogans) to drum beats from 6:30pm to nearly midnight; the following day, 60,000 protested. Street demonstrations occurred around the country, including a 1,200-strong Drums of Fury protest in Shinjuku on July 5, a 230-person protest in Nagoya on July 6, a 100-person protest in Nagano on July 12, and 600-person protest in Utsunomiya on July 15.

Bulldozer of Fury Demonstration, August 2, 2014

A few days later, Banchō gathered momentum around a bulldozer demonstration, with the idea of “crushing the fascists” who are trying to “crush democracy” (@bcxxx, July 8, 2014; @Tokyo_Democracy, July 12). Launched in the spirit of fun, he also intended to break the traditionally negative image of bulldozers among leftists, among whom they represent repression of movements opposing the construction of the Narita Airport in the 1970s or the Henoko base in Okinawa today (Banchō, Dommune). The date was set for Saturday, August 2, in Shibuya, with the demonstration titled, “Ikari no burudōzaa demo” (Bulldozer of Fury Demonstration), after the Drums of Fury demonstrations. The poster (Fig. 1) prominently featured the bulldozer, with the sign, “This machine kills fascists”—the same sign that the singer Woody Guthrie had put on his guitar in the 1940s with reference to Nazi Germany. CRAC leader Noma Yasumichi put together a promotional [video](#) using Rage Against the Machine’s “Sleep Now in the Fire” as background music.



Poster, Bulldozer demonstration, Tokyo Democracy Crew

TDC's younger partners had different ideas for the demonstration. Most students find it "difficult" and "uncool" to talk about politics, and those who do speak up about politics are seen as extreme and scary. In addition, social movements carry a negative image, making it difficult for students to go to demonstrations. The members of SASPL understand that their ability to attract attention to demonstrations lies in their social capital of being *kakkoii* (cool). As Okuda Aiki of the group explained, "We make sovereignty a cool issue and protests cool to look at. That's why the media acknowledged us" (Okuda Aiki, SASPL, Dommune).

So far, they have succeeded. The men of SASPL said that young women approached them after classes, saying, "You were involved in the demonstration, right? That was so cool. I'll definitely come next time." A female SASPL member said, "Although I found the issues hard to understand, I went along to the demonstration because my friends were in it. It was really cool and fun. There was all this music that I neither had in my iPod nor ever heard on YouTube. I thought, well, if I'm going to participate, I should study up on the issues. So I read up on them, and I learned from

friends about the Secrecy Law and the Right to Collective Action. And I thought, it's definitely dangerous!" She has since been giving speeches from the sound truck, because "thinking about it is not enough. You need to say out loud that this situation is not right" (SASPL, Dommune). Hence, her route to activism involved several stages—1) participating out of fun, 2) studying the issues, 3) realization of the dangers, 4) internalization of the movement's goals, and 5) speaking out. But she would never have participated in the first place if the event had not seemed cool and fun.

Hence, SASPL/Civitas put together their own promotional posters, featuring its fresh-faced, youthful members—particularly the women—in colorful, cheerful layouts that were suitable for a magazine cover and not in the least threatening (Fig. 2). Another poster showed a photo of the iconic Q-Front Building facing the busy Hachiko exit of Shibuya station—familiar to Kanto-based youths—with a startling wake-up message (Fig. 3). SASPL expected these posters to attract "a different kind of person" to the demonstration than the bulldozer concept. They need an approachable, non-threatening image to attract the still-intimidated student population. Their strongest asset for doing so is that they themselves are from the target population, with wide social networks among them. One indicator of the strength of their networks was viewership for the Dommune show. When Banchō finished his segment, there were about 6,000 viewers. This number skyrocketed as SASPL and Civitas took the stage and stood at about 27,000 by the time their show had ended.⁴ SASPL members believe that their cool approach is being vindicated through media attention, and that the image of social movements and talking openly about politics will become cooler:

We can't have a society where it's uncool to say what you think or be involved in politics. . . Sometimes people say, "You're not qualified to

say anything because you're a student." If you believe that, only university professors would be able to say anything . . . We think everyone can say something and should keep on doing so (SASPL, Dommune).



Poster for August 2 demonstration, SASPL

Poster of Q-Front for August 2 demonstration, SASPL.

Continuities with antinuclear and anti-discrimination protests

August 2, 2014 felt as hot, if not hotter, than July 29, 2012, the day of the peak [MCAN antinuclear protest surrounding the Diet](#). The similarities with antinuclear demonstrations of 2011–13 were many. First, the route through Shibuya was almost identical to that of many *TwitNoNukes* and *No Nukes More Hearts* demonstrations: starting in Yoyōgi Park, it went down the hill on Park Avenue to Marui, continued on Fire Avenue to the busy Hachiko intersection, went under the railway bridge and up the hill to Aoyama Dōri, marched through Omotesandō to Meiji Jingū-mae, and returned via Meiji Dōri. The segment left off the route was the turn west to the narrow, crowded road of Inogashira Dōri, which would have brought the protest within a few blocks of Abe's private residence.⁵

Three or four separate blocs of protesters eventually formed, with people joining their preferred bloc. This formation was similar to antinuclear demonstrations by MCAN, Shirōto no Ran, Datsu Genpatsu Sugunami, and other groups, which were divided into sound car blocs, drum blocs, and general blocs. Two blocs missing were the union bloc and the family bloc, and I did not personally see many representatives of these groups. There was a marked absence of mothers with children, who have figured prominently at antinuclear demonstrations out of fear about the impact of radiation on children's health; perhaps a demonstration against the Abe administration, which is accused of anarchism by right-wing internet trolls, was too intimidating for them. On the other hand, there were many people in their late teens to twenties, who had largely been absent from antinuclear demonstrations in recent years. The anti-Abe demonstrations have a somewhat different demographic of

interested parties.

The first bloc seemed almost identical to a TwitNoNukes demonstration. It had many familiar faces from antinuclear demonstrations: drum corps members Ide, Suzuki, Oda Masanori ([sporting a special drum-and-brass contraption assembled for the occasion](#)), and others; MCAN leaders Misao Redwolf, Hirano Taichi, Noma Yasumichi, and Banchō; rappers ECD, Akuryō, and ATS, who have performed in many antinuclear demonstrations; and Communist party Diet Councilor Kira Yoshiko. Akiyama Rio was busy taking videos, as he usually does at demonstrations.

The steady beats of the drums accompanied similar calls. The call-and-response slogans of “Abe wa yamero” (Abe, quit) and “Imasugu yamero” (Quit right now) sounded just like the call, “Noda wa yamero” (Noda, quit), in the TwitNoNukes and Kantei-mae antinuclear demonstrations of mid-2012 (Ex. 1, mm. 1–2). The call, “Kenpō mamore” (Protect the Constitution), evoked “Kodomo o mamore” (Protect the children), a favored slogan from antinuclear demonstrations.

Sprechchor rhythms

The visuals were also similar: the “Tokyo Against Racism” logo of anti-discrimination demonstrations had been refashioned into “Tokyo Against Fascism” and was seen in banners, placards, and T-shirts. The “Public Enemy” placard, which in antinuclear protests had juxtaposed TEPCO’s logo (Fig. 4), sported instead a picture of Abe’s face (Fig. 5). Sayonara Atom’s colorful banner of “Sayonara Genpatsu” (Goodbye Nuclear Power), which

had fronted many TwitNoNukes protests, was refitted to say, “No War.”

[SASPL’s sound truck](#) also harkened to practices of the antinuclear protests. It featured pairs of rappers engaging the protesters by trading calls and responses of slogans to hip-hop beats. This style was pioneered by the rapper Akuryō and further developed with ECD, ATS, and Noma Yasumichi of i Zoom i Rockers in [antinuclear demonstrations for No Nukes More Hearts and MCAN](#) from late 2011 onwards. Several of the Sprechchor were highly similar to the antinuclear ones (Table 1). The rappers’ Sprechchor also included “genpatsu iranai” (We don’t need nuclear power).

Table 1: Similarity of slogans between antinuclear and anti-Abe protests

Antinuclear	SASPL
Genpatsu iranai	Fashisuto iranai
<i>We don't need nuclear power</i>	<i>We don't need Fascists</i>
Noda wa yamero	Abe wa yamero
<i>Noda, resign</i>	<i>Abe, resign</i>
Genpatsu yamero	Dokusai yamero
<i>Stop nuclear power</i>	<i>Stop the autocracy</i>
Kodomo o mamore, (kodomo o mamore),	Seikatsu mamore, (seikatsu mamore),
inochi o mamore (inochi o mamore)	inochi mamore, (inochi mamore)
<i>Protect our children, protect life</i>	<i>Protect our way of life, protect life</i>
I say “Genpatsu,” you say “yamero.”	I say “Abe,” you say “yamero.”
Genpatsu (yamero), genpatsu (yamero)	Abe (yamero), Abe (yamero).
I say “nuclear power,” you say, “stop it.”	I say “Abe,” you say “resign.”
<i>Nuclear power (stop it), nuclear power (stop it).</i>	<i>Abe (resign), Abe (resign).</i>

Like the rappers on July 29, 2012, the SASPL rappers varied intonation, singing the Sprechchor on occasion (“Kaishaku kaiken zettai hantai,” Ex. 2, mm. 11–12). In a nod to these predecessors, in its February and May demonstrations, Ushida Yoshimasa of SASPL rapped, “Yūkoto kikaseru ban da, oretachi ga” (It’s our turn to make them listen to what we say)—[ECD’s line from “Straight Outta 138,”](#) which he had reprised in the July 2012 demonstration.⁶ Just as Japanese rappers paid homage to Public Enemy, Gil Scott-Heron, and others in their antinuclear raps, SASPL pays homage to socially conscious African-diasporic artists. Peter Tosh’s “Get up, stand up, / Stand

up for your rights” is its signature Sprechchor; Ushida quotes De La Soul’s “Stakes Is High”; and the DJ plays Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” and Curtis Mayfield’s “Move On Up” as background tracks. SASPL rappers also employ performance tactics that are similar to the MCAN rappers, playing to the crowds at intersections, overhead pedestrian bridges, or whenever the truck has stopped. In such circumstances, they or other students on the truck often give speeches.



Public Enemy/TEPCO placard, Datsu Genpatsu Suginami antinuclear demonstration, February 19, 2012

ECD holding Public Enemy #1/Abe placard, Bulldozer demonstration, August 2, 2014

Changes from antinuclear demonstrations

These on-truck speeches seemed different from those of antinuclear demonstrations. TwitNoNukes leader Hirano Taichi had also launched into speeches at busy intersections during demonstrations, explaining its purpose; similarly, performers on sound trucks in antinuclear demonstrations talked to protesters when the truck was stopped. These speeches were short and seemed improvised, serving as

explanatory comments to passers-by or breaks in the main action of the rhythmic Sprechchor.

SASPL's speeches took on a different tone. Each student speaker introduced him/herself with his/her full name, university, and year in college; there was no attempt to hide one's identity. They gave prepared speeches that were several minutes long and were sometimes read from a text. With the microphones cranked up much higher than the music, they were clear and audible—much more so than protesters speaking through a megaphone. The speeches seemed at least equal in importance to Sprechchor, and perhaps the main event itself.

The speeches were earnest, moving, articulate, and thoughtful. Honma Nobukazu, a sophomore at Tsukuba University, gave an impassioned, convincing speech outlining how the Abe administration was “throwing away peace and democracy.” Evidently an eyewitness to the protests, he described how the Secrecy Law had passed in the middle of the night while large crowds protested in front of the Diet, and how large crowds had again protested there for hours against the reinterpretation of the Constitution. Other students told personal stories: one student with a teaching job commented on his objections to Abe's education policies. A graduate student admitted that he had taken no interest in politics until recently, and that he now respected his parents' experience in prior social movements. These heartfelt testimonies were interspersed with literary and cultural references. These speeches received a warm reception from passers-by as well as protesters, many of whom had come to cheer their friends. They were youth speaking to youth, helping to attract young people to the protests.

The rap performances, too, differed. In antinuclear demonstrations, rappers tend to deliver Sprechchor on-beat, even if they syncopate their freestyles or improvisations

traded with other rappers. This tendency is likely a function of the origin of Sprechchor rapping in antinuclear protests: they grew out of rappers Akuryō, ECD, and others' regular participation in TwitNoNukes, in which Sprechchor were shouted to steady drum beats. These rapped Sprechchor thus retain a certain martial cadence, with a continuous flow of morae (short syllables; Kubozono 2002) emphasizing the first and third beats of a 4/4 measure.

On the other hand, SASPL's Sprechchor-raps have no such history; their cadences have more of the loose, syncopated rhythms characteristic of hip-hop and much of African-diasporic music. As shown in Ex. 2, most of their rapped Sprechchor contain an abundance of rests, breaking up morae and making the flow of morae discontinuous and irregular. For example, space is created in the placements of “Tokutei himitsu hogo hō hantai” (m. 1, beat 3) and “get up, stand up” (m. 17–18). Strong beats are left empty, e.g., on the downbeat (“Minshushugi tte nanda,” m. 9) and third beat (“Don't give up the fight,” m. 19). Downbeats are also elided (“Shūdan teki jieiken wa iranai,” m. 6; “This is what democracy looks like,” m. 14). Ushida also swings his delivery so that the words are in triplet rhythm (e.g., mm. 1–2), a characteristic also seen in the flow of many African-American rappers. Even the calls they share with the drum corps swing because of their faster tempos and occasionally triplet responses (mm. 21–22).

SASPL's rapped Sprechchor

Thanks to these spaces in the delivery, the rhythms produce the looser, danceable feel that many students would associate with dancing and having fun. Indeed, many protesters at the demonstration were [swaying, dancing, or nodding to the rhythm](#) of the beats, and both on-the-street and Twitter commentary on SASPL's performances center on how "fun," "cool," and "feel-good" they are. The beats were also pulled from a variety of genres that would appeal to the youthful, fashion-oriented Shibuya crowd; on August 2, the tracks included not only hip-hop and R&B, but also J-Pop, such as Utada Hikaru's "[Travellin](#)" and an unidentified anime-like track. Perhaps due to a combination of these factors, I felt the reception of the SASPL truck was warmer than for previous antinuclear demonstrations, especially at spots usually cold to demonstrations like the Hachiko intersection, where people are fighting crowds to get somewhere and are annoyed that a demonstration is delaying their progress. Instead of annoyed looks, I saw people, both

young and old, bopping to the beat, some waving peace signs. In addition to agreement with the cause, this acceptance of the demonstration may be a sign that after years of recurring demonstrations in Shibuya, most visitors have gotten used to them as part of its atmosphere.

A final difference was the protesters' lack of attempt at disguise. Before the peak of antinuclear demonstrations in summer 2012, many antinuclear demonstrators concealed their identities by wearing masks, hats, sunglasses, or whole costumes, while others held placards up to their faces when photographs were being taken. In contrast, many protesters in the bulldozer demonstration were openly wearing T-shirts affiliated with specific protest groups—"Tokyo Against Racism," "Tokyo Against Fascism," CRAC's "Antifascist" and "No Pasaran" shirts, and SASPL shirts. These T-shirts were selling out as fast as they were stocked. Many protesters in antinuclear demonstrations also wear no-nukes-themed T-shirts, but in the bulldozer demonstration, the percentage of participants wearing a small set of T-shirts seemed much higher, creating an image of unity. Surprising for a demonstration involving the aggressive imagery of a bulldozer, police monitoring was gentle and not overwhelming in number.

Tokyo Democracy Crew's official count for the demonstration was 3,000, but to this writer, it seemed closer to 4,000, judging from the number and length of blocks by the end of the demonstration. Hence, as Tilly would predict, the performance practices of the anti-Abe demonstration harkened back to pre-existing practices from antinuclear demonstrations, with some incremental innovations owing to new networks of activists.

Continuation of practices in festival performances

This continuation of pre-existing practice is also present in festival performances criticizing

the Abe administration's policies. In 2011, Fuji Rock—Japan's longest-running rock festival that attracts over 100,000 visitors each year—had created the Atomic Café at its Gypsy Avalon stage. Itself a reboot of an antinuclear concert series organized in the 1980s by Ōkubo Seishi, who manages the NGO Village at Fuji Rock, the stage had hosted performances by Saitō Kazuyoshi, Soul Flower Union Acoustic Partizan, Katō Tokiko, Frying Dutchman, Gotch (Gotō Masafumi of Asian Kung-Fu Generation), Likkle Mai, and Toshi-Low of Brahman, in addition to talks by Tsuda Daisuke and the antinuclear character Monju-kun, journalist Tahara Sōichirō, and the members of Yellow Magic Orchestra, among others.

On July 25, 2014, a standing-room only crowd gathered at the Atomic Café at Fuji Rock to see the [Ese Timers](#) (Timers Look-alikes)—a group composed of musicians who “look just like” Gotō Masafumi of Asian Kung-Fu Generation, Toshi-Low of Brahman, Hosomi Takeshi of the Hiatus, and Tsuneoka Akira of Hi-Standard.⁷ It was a tribute to the Timers, a band assembled by the late Imawano Kiyoshirō following Toshiba EMI's withdrawal of RC Succession's *Covers* (1988) due to its inclusion of two antinuclear *kaeuta* (cover with changed lyrics) of Eddie Cochran's “Summertime Blues” and Elvis Presley's “Love Me Tender.” The original band—composed of pseudonymous musicians “Zerry,” “Toppi,” “Bobby,” and “Pa,” who “looked just like” Imawano, Miyake Shinji, Kawakami Tsuyoshi, and Sugiyama Shōjimarū—played Anglo-American rock songs with topical Japanese lyrics. In another nod to their predecessors, the Ese Timers also introduced themselves with nicknames: Gotō's “look-alike” was “Gori,” Hosomi was “Somi,” Tsuneoka was “Tsune,” and Toshi-Low jokingly claimed to be rock star Yokoyama Ken.

Sporting a helmet and sunglasses, “Gori” looked like Imawano in his guise as Zerry. [He opened the set](#) with a cover of John Lennon's “Imagine,” updating Imawano's version to

address the problem of hate speech and discrimination against resident Koreans (“minzoku mo nai,” no races). It set the tone: while the stage was still called the Atomic Café, other social movements had also grown in the three years since 3.11, engaging many of the musicians involved in the antinuclear movement. Launching into the “Ese Timers Theme”—an updated version of the original Timers' resetting of the Monkees theme—the band sang, “We want an end to discrimination and war.” By discrimination, they again referred to anti-Korean hate speech. By war, they were referring to Abe's reinterpretation of the Peace Constitution to allow for the Right to Collective Self-Defense, which many youths fear would send them off to foreign wars; it was a new reference, as at the Peace on Earth concert in March to commemorate 3.11, they'd said “nuclear power” in place of “war.” Also on discrimination, “Somi” sang the Blue Hearts' “Aozora,” which the Ese Timers had recorded as a [video](#) in October 2013 for the Tokyo March Against Racism. Returning to the antinuclear theme, [Gori sang an updated version](#) of Kiyoshirō's “Summertime Blues,” emphasizing the pushback on the antinuclear movement:

Politicians claim nuclear power in
Japan is safe . . .

When we run our electric guitars
on solar power

and call out for abandoning
nuclear power,

an idiot comes over and says,

“Without nuclear power, we'd be
back in the Edo Period.”

The most memorable performance was “Let's Live for Today,” a song popularized in 1967 by the Grass Roots and covered in Japanese by the Tempters. The first verse lamented young

people being led off to war. The second verse, delivered with characteristic humor, drew guffaws and applause from the audience:

What kind of face is that? x 3

(LDP Secretary-General) Ishiba's face.

He chases after the Candies⁸

And makes young people go to war.

The band invited an audience member to improvise a third verse. A young man extemporized about collective self-defense and his grandfather's internment in Siberia during World War II. The disclosure led Gori to say that his grandfather died saying that he could finally be with his friends and brothers who were killed in the war, while Somi said that both his grandfathers had died as soldiers in the war when his mother was barely a toddler.

The chorus ranted against Abe, quoting his campaign slogan:

Sha la la la, the Abe government,

It must be over for the Abe government,

"Make this country strong, take back this country."

In the last iteration, the band began singing a phrase that has been commonly seen in anti-Abe tweets and protests, which activists have been trying to discourage. Perhaps realizing that he had gone too far, Gori made the excuse that these words worked better in text setting and rhyme. Several audience members tweeting about the incident wrote the phrase in fuseji (omitted letters) or deleted their tweets

later in an apparent attempt to protect the artists, the event, or themselves (e.g., @baron_090, July 28, 2014). I'm joining them in this precaution.

As a finale, Somi gave a passionate rendition of John Fogerty's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain," which many Japanese believe to be an anti-Vietnam War song, with "rain" assumed to mean "napalm."⁹ Somi refashioned the refrain to be, "Wasurete shimatta no? . . . Wasurete iku no ka na?" (Have you forgotten? Are you going to keep on forgetting?). When it was sung at the Peace on Earth concert in March 2014, I heard the kaeuta to be about citizens forgetting the tragedy of the tsunami and nuclear accident of 3.11; hearing it in summer 2014, it took on the meaning of forgetting past wars.

The performance was well received, judging from the full crowd, its warm reaction, and the Twitter feedback. Many tweeters listed it among the best shows at Fuji Rock (e.g., @redthread78, July 28), remarking on the "unforgettable," "passionate" performance (@sato_sibt, July 28), "direct words" (@KenTierra, July 27), and "sincere message while joking" (@ikedih_y, July 27). For the entire weekend at Fuji Rock, the [most tweeted-about artist was Gotō, and the fourth-most tweeted was Ese Timers, ahead of headliners Arcade Fire \(#5\).](#)

The performance also summarized several aspects of music as political expression in Japan. First, it paid homage to artistic forebears in resurrecting the songs, costumes, names, and spirit of Kiyoshirō's the Timers. Second, all the songs performed were straight covers or kaeuta of pre-existing songs, showing the efficacy of recirculating pre-existing material for political purposes. The musicians, who are fully employed in other groups, could assemble material quickly, while the audience could listen nostalgically to familiar songs while contemplating the political meaning of the new lyrics.

Third, the performance was inflected with self-censorship. As a live performance, the musicians had more freedom to express their views than in other spaces, like commercial recordings or a television broadcast, which carry explicit rules against songs that shame specific individuals or corporations (Dorsey 2013). The Atomic Café, a special stage set aside for antinuclear expression, also encouraged them to speak out. Nonetheless, the pretense of a group of pseudonymous musicians, even if everyone knew their identities, recalled the prevalence of pseudonymity among political activists and creators. For example, the identity of the creator of the popular antinuclear character Monju-kun, who has over 100,000 followers on Twitter and has written four books, remains unknown to the public. After three years of being an activist, Banchō continues to use a pseudonym, and he covered up his face during the Dommune broadcast.

The performers themselves were restrained in talking publicly about the event. In [Gotō's account of the performance](#) in his blog, he humorously referred to the Ese Timers in the third person as “a pitiful band that talked more than they played.” He also said nothing political in his solo performance the following day at the Red Marquee stage at Fuji Rock. [Fuji Rock Express](#), the online newspaper of the event that reports on performances at the festival, did not mention the actual lyrics to “Let’s Live for Today,” probably in order to maintain good relations with the artists’ management companies. I myself am only including my English translation of them. I am also refraining from posting my own pictures from the event in this article, as I would need to get permissions from the artists’ management companies to use them. As these are major-label artists, that is unlikely.

The public, too, practiced self-restraint in reporting the event. As of this writing, few videos of the performance have appeared on

the internet, although many audience members were taking them. Furthermore, most references on social media to the unrehearsed outburst were blanked out as fuseji. The audience members were acting like editors of the 1930s, censoring themselves to protect the artist (Abel 2012).

The performance demonstrated the continuity of networks from one movement to the other. All the musicians had previously participated in Sakamoto Ryūichi’s [No Nukes 2012 concert](#). The relationships reinforced at this and other events allowed for the formation of such groups. Participation in one movement also reduced hurdles for people—artists and audiences alike—to participate in the next. In addition, pre-existing forms (like the Timers’ songs) could be applied to other causes. As Tilly had described, and as shown in the case of street protests, both practices and networks of contentious performances were being extended into other political campaigns.

Recordings

In 2014, several musicians who have participated in the antinuclear movement have also released recordings critical of the political systems that support nuclear power and the policies of the Abe administration. Like the demonstrations and Ese Timers’ performance, they often address several issues, as does Sapporo-based hardcore band Slang in the album, [Devastation in the Void](#) (2014). The lead track, “[Scum](#),” rails against a “kleptocracy” that victimizes less wealthy regions like Hokkaido, proclaiming, “Destroy [the] nuclear Babylon system.”¹⁰ “Vicious Nuclear Fuel Cycle” refers to the unworkability of the fuel cycle, mentioning problems at Monju and Rokkasho; the issue is close to the group, as Hokkaido’s Horonobe Underground Research Center could be turned into a permanent depository for nuclear waste. “The End of the Nuclear Era” accuses the bureaucracy, Diet, and nuclear industry of not taking

responsibility for nuclear waste, and “162 Graves” reflects on Chernobyl. The album also contains several songs against wars around the world, such as “Apocalypse Now,” “Nakigara no oka,” “Reason of Brutality,” and “Cursed Dawn.” It was released on August 6—the date the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. On the penultimate page of its CD booklet is a picture of a spray-painted sign—“DEMOCRACY IS NOT DEAD”—that lead singer Ko had originally put together for Utsunomiya Kenji’s Tokyo gubernatorial campaign.

Musicians with a history on the Oricon charts have generally taken a softer stance in commercial recordings, as they did previously for antinuclear songs. In June 2014, Namba Akihiro’s band Namba69 released “[Take Me to the Streets](#),” an uplifting melodic punk song with the lines, “Take me where we laugh about/ the crazy news/ and politicians/ all the things that make me sick/ . . . all I wanna do is be free.”¹¹ More cryptic is Gotō’s “[Wonderland/Fushigi no kuni](#),” a single he released independently of Asian Kung-Fu Generation as Gotch (his nickname), with the solo album, *Can’t Be Forever Young* (2014, no. 14 on Oricon). Using the metaphor of a “wonderland” of “deceptive words,” Gotch paints a picture of a world in which people have little control over their lives (“move forward at 60 bpm,” “can’t accept it/gotta accept it”) and from which they have trouble escaping (“darkness without exit”); they are “mice” who don’t benefit “one cent” from hard work. Taken on playgrounds in southern California, the video has several shots of Gotō dressed as a rabbit—a docile animal for experimentation. My interpretation of the song is that it comments on the lack of freedom in Japanese society, the difficulties that many Japanese are facing in making a living, and questions concerning the benefit of Abenomics to ordinary people and the truthfulness of the country’s leaders. Gotō’s metaphorical song recalls the approach he took with Asian Kung-Fu Generation’s antinuclear songs “[N2](#)” and

“[A&Z](#),” which employ both textual and musical metaphors to portray a sense of entrapment (Manabe, forthcoming).

Rappers, too, have been active. K Dub Shine and Utamaru’s “[Bussō na hassō](#)” (2014) addresses income inequality, threats to democracy, nuclear power, and racism. Norikiyo’s “Mimi o sumaseba” (If you strain your ears, 2014) questions Japan’s morality in selling weapons to other countries and the reality of Abenomics, noting “the taller the building, the darker the shadows.” After producing “[Bustin’](#)” (2014), a joyous video about the Entertainment Law, Shing02 is rapping the Japanese Constitution at the Yokohama Triennale.

As with the antinuclear movement, the most explicit criticisms of Abe have been outside of commercial recordings, in free streams on cyberspace. The rapper Akuryō, who pioneered the [rapped Sprechchor style of sound-truck demonstrations](#), has released two tracks criticizing Abe. In “[Oh No Abe no Remix](#)”—a pun on “Abenomics”—he notes that all Abenomics has done is to raise the consumption tax, which has increased prices when wages aren’t rising and widened the gap between the rich and poor. In a mocking tone, he makes a rhyme out of “Fukushima Daiichi is not under control,” quoting Abe’s answer to the Olympic committee about the leaking water problem. Such quotes of official statements, most notably “Anzen desu” (it’s safe) and the Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio’s “Tadachi ni eikyō wa nai” (There’s no immediate impact [on health],” occurred frequently in antinuclear songs (Manabe, forthcoming). Akuryō sings the rap in triplet rhythm, a pseudo-matsuri bounce in keeping with the faux-shamisen track. In a humorous outro (coda), a woman from the “floating world” referenced in the lyrics scolds Abe. In contrast, “[Fight Music ANTI Fascist Remix](#)” is straight and urgent, expressing anger over the

Secrecy Law, the reinterpretation of the Constitution, and the administration's ignoring the people's opinion; he urges people to raise their voices.¹²

Hence, recordings criticizing Abe's policies, both in commercial CDs and on the internet, show a continuation of patterns from the antinuclear movement, with similar musicians involved. Moreover, the level of explicitness depends on how it is released and by whom: whether it is released commercially or for free on the internet; whether the record company is a major-label or an independent; whether the artist has a major-label association; and whether the genre is associated with mainstream or subcultural tastes.

Conclusion

Street demonstrations, festivals, and recordings provide different spaces in which music and musicians can engage in criticizing the Abe government's recent policy decisions, just as they had in the antinuclear movement. In each of these spaces, many of the practices of the antinuclear movement, as well as the personal networks, have been carried over into the anti-Secrecy Law, anti-Constitutional reinterpretation movement.

In all these spaces, musicians act to minimize their risks, in accordance with their status as major-label, independent, or avocational musicians, with major-label artists being most subject to constraint (Manabe, forthcoming). In Japan, censorship of music is not a governmental action; it takes place at the level of the recording and broadcasting industries (Dorsey 2013; RIAJ). It rarely takes the form of banning a recording, which seems more common in the United Kingdom than in Japan.¹³ Instead, understood rules, both written and not, discourage most musicians from engaging in politically themed recordings, while severe punishment for entertainers who step out of line (as with Imawano Kiyoshirō or Yamamoto

Taro) serve as cautionary tales. The censorship is internalized, and musicians who feel compelled to express their political views do so in spaces where they face the least professional risks, some masking their identities through pseudonyms, or obfuscating their messages through metaphors. To communicate their message, they refer to the music and symbols of movements with similar characteristics. These patterns from the antinuclear movement are helping people to express their anxieties and anger over the Secrecy Law and the reinterpretation of the Peace Constitution. Moreover, they are helping the movement to reach out to a youthful constituency at this turning point in Japanese history.

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Notes

¹ Banchō is the pseudonym for a company employee who is the activist behind the Twitter account @bcxxx. Formerly in the antinuclear organizations TwitNoNukes and Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN), he currently participates in Counter-Racist Action Collective (CRAC) and Tokyo Democracy Crew (TDC).

² According to a TV Asahi poll on June 28-29, 2014, 59% oppose Abe's reinterpretation of the constitution without amendment (vs. 19% in favor), and 75% believe there has been insufficient discussion about it (TV Asahi, *Hōdō Station*, June 30, 2014). According to a Kyodo survey in December 2013, 82 percent of respondents wanted the Secrecy Law revised or abolished, and 71 percent were worried

about it (*Mainichi Shimbun*, December 23, 2013). According to an *Asahi Shimbun* poll on July 26–27, 2014, 59% disapprove the restarting of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant, far above the 23% that approve it (*Asahi Shimbun*, July 28, 2014).

³ Led by Noma Yasumichi of MCAN and originally known as the Shibaki-tai, CRAC's counter-protesters numbered 2,000 at their peak in 2013, far outnumbering the Zaitoku-kai.

⁴ The final count was nearly 50,000, but over 20,000 of these viewers accessed the Dommune site after the show was over.

⁵ In Japan, activists must obtain permission for demonstrations in advance from the police, including exact routes. The police sometimes seek to avoid Inogashira Dōri because it is narrow. However, activists like to go down this road precisely because it is narrow, allowing greater interaction between demonstrators and passers-by.

⁶ The rap is a reference to ECD's anthem of the 2003 sound demonstrations, "Yūkoto kikuyōna yatsura ja naizo" (We're not the kind of guys who'll do as we're told).

⁷ Official photos of the performance from Fuji Rock can be seen [at Fuji Rock Express](#).

⁸ Ishiba is a longtime fan of the girls group Candies.

⁹ Fogerty has claimed that the song is about the impending breakup of Creedence Clearwater Revival. "Have You Ever Seen The Rain?," Songfacts, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=1920>.

¹⁰ "Babylon" is meant in the Rastafarian sense of a degenerate, oppressive, materialistic system.

¹¹ The lyrics are also in English, which is Namba's usual practice.

¹² Not all rappers oppose Abe's policies. Show-k, a right-wing rapper who has released anti-Chinese tracks (Thomas 2013), has produced videos calling for overturning [Article 9](#) (as it makes Japan "defenseless," 2012) and [supporting Abe](#) ahead of the Lower House and Upper House elections of 2012 and 2013. However, even he [disagrees with the consumption tax](#) and the government's manner of pushing decisions through in the absence of public discussion.

¹³ See Cloonan (1996) for extensive examples of British recordings that have been banned from sale or broadcast, most famously of the Sex Pistols (e.g., EMI withdrew "Anarchy in the UK" [1976], and A&M scrapped "God Save the Queen" [1977]). Most of the examples he lists have to do with morality (i.e., drugs, sex, curse words, disorderly behavior) but they also include a number of Northern Island-themed songs (e.g., the Pogues' "Birmingham Six" [1988]).