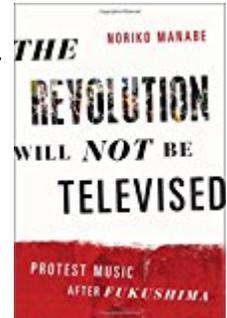


Noriko Manabe. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music after Fukushima.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 464 pp. \$27.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-933469-8.



Reviewed by E. T. Atkins

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Commissioned by Martha Chaiklin

Taking its title from the spoken-word funk masterpiece by singer/musician/poet Gil Scott-Heron (1949-2011), *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* is a broad and comprehensive description and analysis of the political soundscape of Japan after the “Triple Disaster” of March 11, 2011 (3.11). On that horrible day, the northeastern (Tōhoku) region of the Japanese archipelago’s largest island, Honshū, was shaken by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and devastated by tsunami waves as high as nine meters, almost twice as high as the seawall they breached. In some places the water went as far as five kilometers inland. Moreover, the seawater compromised the cooling system of two reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, causing a level 7 meltdown and a release of radiation not seen since the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in 1986. An estimated twenty-two thousand people died in the earthquake and tsunami or are missing (p. 6). It may be decades before the effects of radiation exposure on human health are assessable.[1]

The impact on Tōhoku residents’ everyday lives is almost indescribable—and, unfortunately, still ongoing. At this writing, some people still live in temporary housing.[2] More generally, the confidence of many Japanese in their government and industry—which has been unusually high compared to other democracies—was shaken to the core. The ineptitude and slow, tepid, and even evasive responses by both the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) bred widespread cynicism among the populace. Moreover, there is broad disapproval of government efforts to reactivate twenty-six other nuclear plants that were immediately taken offline after the Fukushima Daiichi meltdowns.[3] In fact, 3.11 encouraged the reactivation of civic protests in Japan on a scale not seen since the demonstrations against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty, the Indochina War, and industrial pollution in the 1960s.

Ethnomusicologist Noriko Manabe shows us the centrality of music to this new post-3.11 culture of protest. “Music has been ubiquitous in the

spaces in which antinuclear activism takes place: It spreads anti-hegemonic messages over the internet, accompanies demonstrations, and provides an attraction for an antinuclear gathering or fundraising concert.” In the study of political and social action, why focus on music? Because “music has served as an important means of communication for people with few options” (p. 11). Encouraging active participation, music also “can evoke memories of other injustices, places, or circumstances,” and acts as “a call to action, a source of consolation, and an outlet of creative expression—all of which are particularly important in a situation where entrenched interests make political change difficult” (pp. 11, 33).

Manabe detects purposeful strategies, reflection, and responsiveness in the deployment of music in post-3.11 antinuclear protests. She examines in depth four “spaces of protest” in which music is used for political messaging: cyberspace, public demonstrations (*demo*), festivals, and recordings. The performers, organizers, activists, and participants whom Manabe shadows and interviews come off as extraordinarily responsive and reflective, carefully using prior experience to adjust their messages and delivery methods.

Section 1 provides background information on “self-censorship” in the Japanese media generally, and the music industry specifically. In the second chapter, Manabe recounts the history of nuclear power in Japan. The details of both chapters are actually quite chilling. We see time and again the ways that government and industry regularly thwart any efforts to convey messages that they find threatening to their interests—and that is a broad category. Freedom of speech is protected in the Japanese Constitution, but there are plenty of mechanisms by which law enforcement and corporate interests can effectively silence protest.[4] “The government doesn’t explicitly censor the media,” Manabe writes. “The [entertainment] industry imposes it on itself in deference to its advertisers, and the nuclear industry is

among the biggest” (p. 8). The censorship mechanism in Japan’s broadcast and recording industries is “prior restraint,” the refusal to sign certain artists or to release their recordings (p. 9). Musicians who want their work to reach a wide audience thus have little incentive to be openly anti-establishment.

Chapter 2 recounts the creation and impact of the “nuclear village” (*genshiryoku mura*), “an entrenched network of politico-industrial interests,” on Japanese life (p. 34). Its casual disregard for safety standards became apparent after 3.11, as the Japanese gradually found unconvincing TEPCO’s claim that the disaster was of such magnitude that no one could foresee or prepare for it. The nuclear village consists of nine electric power companies, government bureaucracies, politicians (particularly those in the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, LDP), local politicians and business interests in host communities, pro-nuclear academic scientists and economists, and advertising agencies. Despite their unpleasant experiences with atomic energy at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the 1950s and 1960s Japanese corporations and politicians—under considerable pressure from the United States—aggressively promoted nuclear power, “a secure energy source that could power industrial growth in a resource-poor country” (p. 38). Electric companies co-opted academics, provided advertising revenue for television and other media outlets, and used this leverage to suppress investigative journalism that might have generated skepticism or outrage among the populace. After 3.11, the same pressure prevented major media outlets from covering antinuclear protests in communities throughout Japan, including regular demonstrations outside the prime minister’s residence in Tokyo. Protests received more coverage in the overseas press than at home.

Chapter 3 examines the roles, motivations, and risks of musicians who get involved in antinuclear protests. The prominent artist Sakamoto

Ryūichi, member of the groundbreaking Yellow Music Orchestra, has lent his celebrity and artistic clout to the movement. Predictably, he has been inundated on social media with admonitions to “shut up and sing.” But unlike less established or prestigious artists, his career can take such hits without causing serious pain. Unlike in North America and Europe, Japanese artists are rarely admired for taking political stances, and in some cases doing so is an act of professional suicide: “the media has more commonly ignored Japanese musicians’ political activities, negating this source of value; in fact, it has brutally attacked, discredited, censored, and blacklisted several antinuclear celebrities” (p. 104). Musicians require “a degree of independence of the media” in order to speak out (p. 105). Whereas the activism of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, James Brown, Nina Simone, The Staple Singers, Bob Geldof, Bono, Sting, and Lady Gaga has been professionally beneficial, there are no such rewards for their Japanese counterparts.

Section 2 analyzes virtual and physical “spaces of protest.” Cyberspace was a logical venue for activist musicians because it was the primary means of disseminating information about the aftermath of the Triple Disaster that corporate and public media (NHK) refused to air. Because of “a lack of censorship, anonymity, a separate but interconnected reality,” social media “helped residents to overcome the spiral of silence and the *kūki* (atmosphere) of compliance that befell Japan following the crisis” (p. 110). Cyberspace enables artists to release material that recording companies would not, and to organize and participate in protests. One of the most well-known examples of effective use of social media is reggae singer Rankin Taxi’s collaboration with the Dub Ainu Band, “You Can’t See It, You Can’t Smell It Either” (2011), referring to the inability to detect radiation through normal sensory functions.[5] Anonymity and the mobility of devices are mixed blessings, however, as they “impose fewer social constraints, and Twitter in Japan sees its share of personal attacks, flaming and hate speech against

ethnic minorities” (p. 115). Cyberspace allows the famously reserved and indirect Japanese to become vicious trolls.

Divided into subsections, chapter 5 portrays “sound demonstrations” (*saundo demo*) in which musicians, DJs, and speakers collaborate to “reclaim” or “reassert control over urban space” (p. 153). Hip-hop, punk, folk, reggae, and EDM acts; brass bands (*chindon*); and drum-and-bugle corps draw the attention of passersby, who sometimes join in the protests. Following Thomas Turino (*Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* [2008]), Manabe conceives of a spectrum between “participatory” and “presentational” modes of musicking, involving different levels of audience involvement in a performance (pp. 177-178).[6] One of the most fascinating chapters in Manabe’s book concerns activists’ deft use of urban geography and route planning to maximize the impact of their sound demos. They either tailor their sound to suit the path or exploit the topography—buildings, curved roads, open spaces, hills, etc.—to amplify their sound messages.

Manabe also examines the “communicative approaches” of music festivals, some of which are “politically themed” and others that are more conventional but allow some degree of political expression. Festivals provide an “immersive experience that enables a participant to envision an idealized future” (p. 264). The final chapter illustrates how recording artists with big-label contracts are sometimes able to sneak antinuclear messages into their songs through the use of “allegories,” “metaphors,” and “ellipsis,” indicating that “the existence of constraints can lead to creative responses” (p. 320). “Some methods *obfuscate*, as when musicians string together fleeting metaphors and metonyms in (deliberately) confusing chains. Artists also misplace word accents or mispronounce lyrics to sound like subversive homonyms or harmless English interjections” (p. 321).

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised—which just won the 2017 John Whitney Hall Prize from the Association for Asian Studies—is much more than a music ethnography: it is relevant to the study of social movements, antinuclear politics, and collusion between governments and corporate media. Having assigned it in a seminar on rebel music (composed of honors undergraduate and master of music graduate students), I can testify that its rich detail and clear exposition make it ideal for course adoption. If instructors choose not to assign the whole book, individual chapters will work well in courses on anthropology, media studies, sociology, political science, history, ethnomusicology, and urban geography. The companion website is an important resource, as well, providing links to videos and sound clips that help readers experience post-3.11 musical protests themselves.[7]

With the rise of right-wing “populism” in many countries, protests and demonstrations on the streets, at performance venues, and in cyberspace will likely become more common in the foreseeable future. Music will undoubtedly serve important purposes in the counterhegemonic movements to come. Manabe inadvertently, perhaps, provides some blueprints for these by showing us what Japanese antinuclear activists have already done and how they have learned to effectively deploy music as a “weapon of the weak” in the struggle against plutocratic corporatism and tyranny. Vive la révolution!

Notes

[1]. See Becky Oskin, “Japan Earthquake & Tsunami of 2011: Facts and Information,” *Live Science*, May 7, 2015, <http://www.livescience.com/39110-japan-2011-earthquake-tsunami-facts.html>; *Rare Video: Japan Tsunami*, National Geographic Video, <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/japan-tsunami-2011-vin>; and “2011 Japan Earthquake-Tsunami Fast Facts,” *CNN*, March 5, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/17/world/asia/japan-earthquake---tsunami-fast-facts/>.

[2]. A valuable resource for information and analysis of the social, political, and environmental aftermath is available at “Japan’s 3.11 Earthquake, Tsunami, Atomic Meltdown,” *Asia-Pacific Journal*, <http://apjjf.org/3-11.html>.

[3]. “Japan Nuclear Update,” Nuclear Energy Institute, <https://www.nei.org/News-Media/News/Japan-Nuclear-Update>; and Editorial Board, “Japan’s Careful Return to Nuclear Power,” *Bloomberg View*, March 10, 2016, <https://origin-www.bloombergvie.com/articles/2016-03-10/japan-s-careful-return-to-nuclear-power>.

[4]. Article 21 of the constitution states: “Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed. No censorship shall be maintained, nor shall the secrecy of any means of communication be violated.” Article 21, Constitution of Japan, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

[5]. Rankin Taxi, “You Can’t See It, You Can’t Smell It Either” (“Dare ni mo mienai, nioi mo nai”), 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF12h19h5uo>.

[6]. On musicking, see Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

[7]. Companion website to *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199334698/>.

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