

Making Music in Japan's Underground

The Tokyo Hardcore Scene

Jennifer Milioto Matsue

Making Music in Japan's Underground

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*To everyone who allowed me to perform
the underground Tokyo hardcore scene with them,
especially Suzuki Miyuki and “Q,”
who took me into their “lives” and made this project possible.*

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Note on Translations, Japanese, Names, and Sources

The author completed all translations, with assistance from Ryota Matsue. Translations were made with an emphasis on general intent to maintain the original tone. Kanji (Chinese characters), hiragana, and katakana (the two Japanese alphabets) are included throughout the text to provide further clarification of textual meaning when appropriate. Japanese words appear in the modified Hepburn Romanization system, with long vowels indicated with a macron (e.g. oo or ou = ô), except in the case of words and names now commonly found in English, and with people's names when the person prefers that their name be Romanized in a certain way. Japanese names of informants appear in customary Japanese fashion with the surname first, followed by the given name, unless otherwise indicated. All images were photographed by the author unless otherwise indicated.

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Introduction

Ethnography of a Scene

Early one evening in the spring of 2007, I found myself in the basement of a building tucked down a side street at the small, but well-known, livehouse¹ called Heaven's Door, in the Sangenjaya neighborhood of Tokyo. The hallway leading down to the entrance was plastered with flyers of both past and upcoming live events, band stickers, and dirty scuffmarks presumably made by the gig bags and boxes toted in and out of the space on a daily basis. A young woman sat in the vestibule: a tiny transitional space large enough only to hold her, a small desk, and one or two patrons on the way into the livehouse proper, which was of course couched between two heavy soundproofing doors. She collected the required entrance-plus-drink-ticket fee, placing the money in separate envelopes designated for each band performing that night. When a patron arrived without a connection to a specific band, she paused, thought a moment, and then placed the money in the pouch belonging to the final band that would perform that evening, essentially designating them as the headlining group. Armed with a fresh stack of flyers featuring the upcoming live² schedules of that night's bands at a variety of other livehouses throughout Tokyo, one could finally slip into the one-room livehouse.

The night, entitled "Opposition to Pops," featured a variety of all-male, mixed-gender, and all-female bands. The various groups performed a range of musics loosely connected under the umbrella style of hardcore. The collective style generally leaned either towards a guitar rock or kitschy punk aesthetic, with quite a lot of screaming, fondly referred to as *sakebi* (叫び), often in nonsensical Japanglish,³ or intensive mumbling. The music was uniformly incredibly loud, regardless of the specific style of each band, and with the exception of two foreigners in the audience, no one seemed to be wearing earplugs.⁴ Each group performed short sets of under thirty minutes, utilizing the amplifiers, drum kit, and microphones supplied by the livehouse, on a low platform separated from the audience by a hip-high sturdy bar running the length of the stage. Between sets, the crowd was entertained with an odd, short, low-budget sci-fi film continually looping on two televisions suspended from the ceiling on opposite sides of the room, the sound muted while nondescript hardcore was piped over the



Figure I.1 “Opposition to Pops” at Heaven’s Door.

house audio system. During a set, a band’s image would be projected on the video screens.

The smoke-filled space was fairly crowded, with thirty to forty people. Approximately 60% of the audience was male, and 40% was female. The majority of the men and women were in their mid- to late twenties, with a large portion of the audience actually members of other bands performing that night. A few older people, in their late thirties, still seemed quite comfortable; this included the manager of two of the bands from Nomadic Records. One rather proper older woman in her forties appeared to be the mother of one of the band members, and one man in his fifties, or perhaps even sixties, was also likely related to one of the band members, sharing polite greetings with the Nomadic Records manager following their set and then leaving. Both were quite noticeable in the crowd with their stylish, mature clothes. Others blended in, sporting relatively plain and relaxed street clothes; only a few with distinctive hairstyles, slowly sipping beers or soft drinks while standing, chatting in groups, or seated around one of the few tables that peppered the room; many were smoking. All turned to the stage and politely listened when a band’s set would begin, a handful occasionally dancing about before the stage for particularly lively songs. With the close of the final band’s performance, the live wrapped up well before eleven o’clock in the evening, and everyone meandered up the hallway back to the street.

Such live events often serve as the focal point for performance of various musical scenes: the nebulous social systems comprised of a network of individuals and institutions that bring a particular music and its related cultural practice to life (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Cohen 1991; Finnegan 1989; Jackson 1998; Marchessault and Straw 2001; Shank 1994; Slobin 1993). Such scenes are performed into existence through the intense social interaction of the participants, including the musicians, audience members, stagehands, managers, and mixers, both on stage and beyond. Scenes—in particular those enveloping certain so-called “underground” musics—such as the punk, the hip-hop, or the hardcore scenes, for example, are often thought of as somehow subversive, motivated by a desire of the participants to express resistance to mainstream musical and/or socio-political norms. The enactment of resistance through musical performance has long been recognized in varied expressions, including the style of dress and behavior, the agenda of lyrics, or even the quality of the music itself, in many scenes globally (Cushman 1995; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). But this expression of resistance is often quite subtle or may in fact actually be confirming hegemonic values and systems, calling for more nuanced reads of just what is happening in such underground music scenes (Bannister 2006; Baranovitch 2003; Kahn-Harris 2007). This is especially true in the case of contemporary Japan, where participants may not be staging overt musical and/or sociopolitical acts at all through musical performance. Nonetheless, music scenes still express important critiques of mainstream musics and society.

Through initial fieldwork in Summer 1996 and again from Fall 1997 through Fall 1999, I found myself increasingly entrenched in one such scene in Tokyo, focused on the production of a type of light hardcore music featuring loud, aggressive sounds, screaming vocals, and a relative absence of guitar solos. This hardcore music was performed by both men and women predominantly in their mid-twenties to early thirties, with various backgrounds and distinct reasons for participating. The vast majority of these performers did not have any connections with corporate labels nor express any desire to become professionals. Only a few groups were on independent labels, thus positioning this scene in the underground. I worked intensely with this group of Japanese hardcore rock performers, frequenting various livehouses, record shops, recording and rehearsal studios, and even performing as a vocalist with the otherwise Japanese band, Jug. I returned to Japan periodically through Spring 2007 to continue my exploration of what I label as the “underground Tokyo hardcore scene.”

Within this scene in the late 1990s and early 21st century, the performance of hard and heavy music with screaming vocals and an, at times, equally aggressive style, in dark and dirty livehouse spaces could be read as resistive, in the least, to the dominant perception of the clean-cut and glossy performance of mainstream Japanese popular music,⁵ and by

extension, pressure to conform in mainstream society. The performance of hardcore and its scene may, indeed, be voicing the disgruntled feelings of a new generation of Japanese facing difficult economic times and increasing social conflict. But few if any members of the scene consciously conceive of their activity in this way, and even more rarely do they hope to enact any change in mainstream culture. Rather, the people on the stage, in the audience, working the mixing boards, or managing the bands and live-houses are better understood as actually seeking release from mainstream expectations through performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, while never endangering their positions in society. Performance in the scene allows participants a space to negotiate distinct individual and collective identities that can at times be further characterized by a sense of resistance, but this resistance is often temporary, even playful, calling for a more nuanced read of such scenes and their purpose.

THE HISTORICAL POSITIONING OF THE SCENE

The “Opposition to Pops” performance at Heaven’s Door in Spring 2007 provided a way for me to momentarily reenter the underground Tokyo hardcore scene that was the focus of my research in the late 1990s. Attending the event was particularly welcomed as it allowed comparison with my earlier experiences, highlighting key points of continuity and transformation to consider when examining any musical scene. On first entering the livehouse in Spring 2007 for example, much appeared unchanged from nearly a decade earlier. The space remained small, dingy, and terribly smoky. The general quality of the music, style of the bands, gender distribution of all in attendance, and age of the audience appeared consistent with my earlier perceptions. Perhaps even the equipment on the stage was the same from the late 1990s. But closer observation revealed certain changes. At some point in the past few years, management installed several sets of tables and chairs, giving the livehouse more of a dance club or bar feeling. The use of two televisions and video between sets, and perhaps most notably the sturdy bar across the stage, were also new additions to Heaven’s Door since my last visit, in the Summer of 1999, for my farewell party and performance hosted by my compatriots in the scene.

Comparatively, the bands too, on closer look, seemed to be embracing a distinctive alternative ideology both in their style and dress, some even sporting Mohawks, as seen in the preceeding picture, and through all the bands collectively naming the night “Opposition to Pops.” This title, itself, presented a more defined and overt statement of their ideological position and imagined collective identity, in relation to mainstream popular music and culture, than typically would have been voiced in the late 1990s.

Some of the same individuals who were active in the scene in the late 1990s are still performing in the same bands, others in new bands, new

roles, or new locations, and still more have left the scene completely, moving on to pursue alternate leisure activities. Jug, the band I joined in 1997 as a vocalist and who would become my primary conduit into this scene, for example, dissolved shortly after I departed Japan in Fall of 1999. The female drummer, Suzuki Miyuki, went on to study cello; her husband and the bassist for Jug, Suzuki Shigeru, fondly known as “Q,” went on to play in other groups for a while.⁶ Jug’s guitarist’s whereabouts are unknown to me, and he is no longer in contact with the Suzukis, although I heard he was still playing with other groups in the early 2000s. The Suzukis now reside in a freshly constructed condominium in the increasingly popular suburban Chiba area outside Tokyo and have two young and energetic children. There simply is no more time to pursue this all-consuming hobby. The aforementioned experience at Heaven’s Door, however, confirms that the underground Tokyo hardcore scene still exists, but at the same time, many elements encountered in Spring 2007 suggest that the scene has transformed to meet the new needs of the immediate temporal moment, as well as of the new individuals involved. The underground Tokyo hardcore scene is, in fact, arguably still vibrant precisely as a result of this constant state of transformation. The ephemeral nature of such a scene can also intensify the experience for those involved, enhancing the read of the moment in the late 1990s as something special and significant in Japanese performance practice of that time, yet connected to a larger historical and cultural context.

This monograph is, indeed, able to place the underground Tokyo hardcore scene of the late 1990s in its historical position. Although this study began nearly a decade ago, my continued contact with certain performers and periodic reentry into the scene allow me to reflect on both what made the scene so unique in the late 1990s and how it continues to transform to meet the needs of participants today. In essence, this historical distance has facilitated further understanding of what was happening in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the broader context of Japanese culture at the time of my primary research. The focus of the manuscript, thus, will be primarily historical on the late 1990s period, yet the information remains relevant for understanding how young Japanese people negotiate their complex positions in contemporary Japanese society through musical performance both then and now.

This study thus further considers the various ways that Japanese citizens make music in this particular scene at a particular time, ultimately expanding views on the complicated position of young Japanese adults in contemporary Japan as they negotiate both increasing social demands and escalating problems in society at large. Grounded in the fields of ethnomusicology, anthropology, popular music studies, and Japanese studies, *Making Music in Japan’s Underground* in essence provides a model of scene ethnography, in the tradition of Cohen (1991), Finnegan (1989), and Shank (1994), for example, but offers new information on the production of

scenes with its location in Asia and, more specifically, Japan. As such, this monograph explores the on-the-ground production of an arguably global popular musical form, but with a focus outside of the typical Anglo-American geographic and cultural locations of similar extant works.

The driving thrust of this study is indeed a deep ethnographic read of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, bringing to life an important musical world of contemporary Japan that has not been documented in monograph form. With this ethnographic focus, the exploration of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the subsequent chapters follows a logical progression. First the general key characteristics of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene are introduced, followed by a closer look at the primary spaces where the scene is performed, then at who is performing, then at how it is performed, and last, at what that performance means for the individuals involved.

Further drawing on theories of play, identity building, and, most important, the increasingly influential field of performance studies, *Making Music in Japan's Underground* offers a highly interdisciplinary look at how performance of musical scenes allows much needed opportunities to play at leisure activities, negotiate shifting identities, and escape from mainstream societal demands for the participants involved. Through performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, individuals are, in fact, able to construct individual and collective identities, in intimate and potentially illicit spaces, with an arguably challenging sound and performance style. Either individual or combined aspects of the performance of the scene can at times be perceived as resistive, although at other times what initially suggests resistance is, in fact, conforming. Such details on the quality of the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene are revealed through the process of ethnography.

But where is the data on this, or any scene, actually collected? And how does the collection and processing of that data affect how scenes have come to be represented in ethnographic writing? The following discussion considers such methodological questions involved in the ethnographic study of music scenes, especially those generated by the performance of popular music. Such exploration of the actual ethnographic process involved in the study of popular music in general, and scenes more specifically, is important for contextualizing the representation of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene: a representation whose validity should be questioned precisely because of the nature of ethnography.

THE PROCESS OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Whether in the fields of anthropology, sociology, or ethnomusicology, ethnographers have long been sent into the world with a set of questions that they then attempt to answer “in the field” and finally process into some kind

of written form. Ethnography in this sense traditionally can be understood as a two-step process, involving first the collection of data through field research, and second, processing that data into some type of recognizable written narrative form (Milioto Matsue 2003). Fieldwork methodology is necessarily individually based, informed by the particular nature of the project at hand, and dependent on the ethnographer's personality. Fieldwork further is typically learned while actually in the field, sometimes with little practical preparation, and thus is a highly independent enterprise. Written ethnographies, although comprised of certain necessary elements to be considered valid and typically constructed in identifiable narrative forms, similarly allow a certain amount of creative freedom for the author, who must process and translate fieldwork data to an eager audience. Obviously these two components of ethnography are intrinsically linked, and the term can simultaneously refer to both aspects of the overall process.

Although scholars of anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology have been most active in producing thoughtful critiques of the application of ethnography and its effect on the social reality that is presented, the term "ethnography," itself, in general is understood in this way with little debate (Amit 2000; Barz and Cooley 1997; Cooley 2003; Emoff and Henderson 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Van Maanen 1988). This general understanding of ethnography is applicable within many different academic disciplines, yet there are additional unique problems to be considered, and potential contributions available in the ethnographic study of popular music in particular. The nature of the process of ethnography of popular music itself, for example, arguably has actually generated increased studies of scenes. At the same time, the very nature of ethnography of popular music also leads to questions and concerns about the quality of the research it generates.

Defining Popular Music

Although it has become increasingly futile to attempt a single, definitive explanation of the nature of popular music, the term "popular," itself, should be clarified in the context of this discussion. In a basic sense, the term "popular" has often been used to refer to music that is, indeed, popular, meaning it is consumed in great quantities and enjoys a large following. In essence then, popular music may be labeled as such simply because it is mass-produced, disseminated, and consumed. But popular music may also be categorized by its aesthetic qualities, even when artists who perform in a popular vernacular enjoy limited recognition and sales. Popular genres may also be defined by corporations looking to place recordings in the most likely bins at record shops or lists on I-tunes to attract potential consumers. Often popular musics are thus defined by what they are not. In other words, popular is popular when it is not "traditional," "folk," nor "art" music, again in an attempt to find the appropriate niche market

(Manuel 1988; Middleton 1990; Shepherd et al. 2003; Shuker 1994; Starr and Waterman 2007).

For the purpose of understanding the process of ethnography here, popular music can be understood as typically associated with urban locations, involving certain qualities of musical construction and performance practice that assist in classifying the music as popular within its local cultural context. Popular music in this local context typically belongs to a historical, at times transnational, trajectory of other so-called popular musics. This music is, indeed, often mass-produced and consumed, a standard qualifier of popular genres in various cultural contexts, but this is not always so. In the case of underground scenes, for example, musics may be considered popular for aesthetic reasons, while generating limited followings. Thus, although some music can easily be labeled popular with little debate, in other cases the ethnographer herself must differentiate and classify the music under research, considering both the objectives of the project at hand, and the local conceptions of the music in question.

Researching Popular Music

The ethnography of popular music, in turn, encompasses many avenues of research, ranging from traditional fieldwork practices to reading alternative musical texts, that can coincide with techniques employed by ethnographers of other musics (Myers 1992; Titon, Reck, and Slobin 2002). Fieldwork of popular music, for example, often involves attendance at performances, interaction with musicians, audience members, and others involved in the production of the music, including extensive interviews and participation in the production of the music itself through the ethnographic technique of participant-observation. Locations of musical performance may include clubs, large stadium venues, and recording or rehearsal studios. But spaces where musical performance, itself, is not featured may also need to be considered, such as record stores, instrument shops, and clothing vendors. Such locations serve as other physical spaces that comprise the popular, predominantly urban musical landscape. The private listening to recordings, and the recordings themselves, may also serve as additional musical texts not tied to live production in urban centers. Similarly, non-musical items, including both major and independent magazines and Web sites, are also useful sources for ethnographic inquiry.

Although interviews are traditionally a necessary component of fieldwork, ethnographers of popular music may have trouble gaining access to musicians, particularly when working with major “star” performers.⁷ Obtaining both live and mass-produced recordings also can be problematic. It can be difficult to gain permission to record live performances of professional musicians of any genre, but especially those on major record labels at the star level, as bags are searched for cameras and recording equipment as one enters the large stadium venue. The expense of purchasing professional

recordings can be prohibitive as well. One also cannot assume that they will be able to obtain the necessary copyright permission to reproduce lyrics and transcriptions for publishing purposes.⁸ Again, many of these issues affect musical ethnographers regardless of the style of music, but they are exacerbated in the high-profit world of popular music. This is not to say that ethnographies of popular music can not be completed, even involving major star performers.⁹ Individuals interested in such ethnographic projects can gain access to performers and materials through alternative avenues, such as music journalism. The majority of popular music ethnographies, however, historically have focused on genres and performers involved with independent labels, or completely underground music, where the concerns of big label business are not as prevalent (Cohen 1991; Finnegan 1989; Fornäs, Lindberg, and Sernhede 1995; Shank 1994). This focus is partially the result of the practical implications of fieldwork—the need to have access to performers and supporting materials—but also because of the nature of ethnographies, themselves, to focus on social behavior and musical practice in localized communities.

There are, in fact, advantages to approaching popular music in general through the ethnographic method of participant observation. Cohen (1993), for example, raised important critiques of the long established cultural studies approach to the study of popular music, which are still relevant today. She argued that reliance on journalistic and statistical sources, common in popular music studies, historically led “to a concentration upon the small minority of professional performers and ‘stars,’ rather than the vast majority of amateur music-makers” (126). The drastic increase in ethnographically based studies of popular music around the world in the past decade, of course, suggests that this threat is no longer as apparent.

Drawing on the work of Middleton (1990, 1993), Cohen (1993) further argued that there has been a privileging of youth, particularly male youth, and a focus on popular music as a mass-produced and consumed commodity, which does not reveal the deeper possibilities available through a localized view of the consumption of music (126). Cohen similarly argued that “much research on rock has been more influenced by linguistic, semi-otic and musicological traditions than by the social sciences, and has relied upon textual sources of analysis,” resulting in a focus on deconstructing musical texts in search of embedded meaning with little focus on meaning in social context (126).

Such critiques of the cultural studies approach to popular music do not imply that the field is no longer useful but, rather, suggest that more can be learned about the practice of making music through deep ethnographic study in coordination with the broader theoretical approaches available through such disciplines. Cohen (1993) similarly argued that “an ethnographic approach to the study of popular music, used alongside other methods (textual decoding, statistical analysis etc.) would emphasize that popular music is something created, used and interpreted by different individuals and

groups. It is human activity involving social relationships, identities and collective practices" (127). Ethnography of popular music thus provides more concrete information as to how such music is used in everyday life by individuals. And ethnographic research on relatively contained and identifiable scenes provides particularly rich avenues to explore an individual's attachment to popular music. Thus, ethnographic studies of various localized and transnational scenes have continued to expand in recent years (Bannister 2006; Condry 2006; Fonarow 2006; Kahn-Harris 2007).

Local Ethnography in a Global Setting

Ethnographically-based studies in popular music are now not only accepted, but energetically encouraged. Nonetheless, scholars across fields continue to question the relevance that a study based in a small-scale setting has to larger issues, ultimately debating ethnography's ability to consider broad social implications. There is, in turn, a concern with ethnography's ability to represent larger global implications through a deep reading of local practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hammersley 1992; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Van Maanen 1988). This argument, regarding ethnography's ability to represent larger global systems, in fact mimics the debate surrounding the role of ethnography in popular music studies. Within popular music studies there is often the perspective that viewing only the larger processes involved in making music within a popular context misses the local possibilities available through ethnography. Cohen (1993), again, reminded us that the cultural and popular music studies' view of popular music has often addressed "the music industry and its networks of production, distribution and marketing, and in terms of technology, mass communication and global culture and capital" (126). This has led to "a focus upon global processes of homogenization or diversification and the fears or resistances they provoke, the conditions of fragmentation, placelessness and timelessness they give rise to" (126). Through an ethnographic approach, however, more is revealed about local practices.

Van Maanen (1988) similarly argued that ethnography presents "concrete moments" in a postmodern global-scape, in a sense resisting critiques of Western-dominated homogenization (xiii-xiv). Marcus and Fischer (1986) supported this view, arguing that ethnography, and concomitantly modern anthropology, refuse to submit to the notion of a Western-dominated global world. They argued that "anthropology has stood for the refusal to accept this conventional perception of homogenization toward a dominant Western model" (1). Just as with approaches to ethnography, Cohen (1993) argued that "within popular music studies, and even more within cultural studies generally, there has been a recent shift in perspective from the study of the global to that of the local, and from work on production to consideration of consumption, subjectivity and identity in the context of everyday life" (127). A view that is too local, however, misses larger

implications. The issue here is clearly finding the balance again between deep ethnographic detail and reflections on larger social and broader global implications.

A deep ethnography of relatively localized musical practice can reveal much about what is happening at the local, even individual, level. Yet a balance is necessary to allow for the detail of ethnographic work to be informed by larger systems, whether musical, social, or global. Scenes again offer an ideal perceived liminal space to locate ethnographic research, but within broader national and transnational systems, as individuals and institutions intersect. As such, though I do not explicitly enter the discourse on popular culture and globalization (Allen and Sakamoto 2006; Chun, Rossiter, and Shoesmith 2004; Condry 2006; Craig and King 2002; Iwabuchi 2002), the research here feeds these discussions through its in-depth analysis of localized performance of an arguably global musical form in Asia.

Scenes, particularly those associated with a musical aesthetic such as that produced by hardcore bands in Tokyo, are often viewed as existing in some sort of opposition to mainstream dominant culture, even sharing more with other similar scenes globally than with music production closer to home. There may, in fact, be many similarities with performance practice in hardcore scenes globally. It is even, perhaps, difficult to locate this study sonically in the context of Tokyo, as the sound of hardcore music is both hard to define and produced in many local contexts globally. Indeed, although live events in Tokyo may initially sound similar to many other hardcore performances in other locations, deeper ethnographic work reveals the elements that characterize the scene as somehow Japanese. Further ethnographic studies of such musical moments would prove useful to not only understand similar musical worlds in contemporary Japan but also how local musical scenes are performed globally. Looking at transnational scenes comparatively would, in turn, clarify what is happening locally in Japan.

Representing Social Reality

Ethnography's ability to represent social reality is also no longer accepted without question. Rather, this assumption is continually critiqued both in theory and in final written representations. Found in the work of many theorists of ethnography is an assumption that social reality, and through this culture itself, is at least in part created through the actual process of writing ethnography. Indeed, according to Hammersly and Atkinson (1995), the inherent problem with ethnography is that it presents a constructed reality (11). Similarly, Clifford and Marcus (1986) shifted the focus in debates on the ethnographic project to a focus on writing as part of the process of constructing culture. And according to Marcus and Fischer (1986), ethnographies can be considered fictions, where "truths" are partial (6–7). Ethnography thus engenders power relations as the ethnographer makes choices in how things

will be represented in the “truth” she will construct. Following this critique of ethnography’s ability to represent these “truths” of another culture, couched in postcolonial and postmodern epistemologies, there is now an accepted practice to examine the written representation of Others. Marcus and Fischer (1986) described this awareness as “the sophisticated reflection by the anthropologist about herself and her own society that describing an alien culture engenders” (4). Ethnographers have become aware of their own position in constructing the presented social reality through this reflection, which arises when one questions the reality encountered through fieldwork that will be presented in writing. Consequently, ethnographers have come to accept that ethnography cannot represent reality without problems, which are, in turn, often related to power dynamics. Ethnography’s problematic position is now recognized and authors, such as Van Maanen (1988), keep “the pressure on ethnographers to continue experimenting with and reflecting on the ways social reality is presented” (x).

Even though the position that reality is, at least in part, constructed through the ethnographer’s reflection and subsequent writing is generally accepted, ethnographers must also accept that writing is not completely arbitrary and that social phenomena exist on some level beyond the author’s imagination (Salzman 2002). Thus, ethnographers not only need to adequately represent observed social behavior in a narrative form, informed by larger theoretical musings, but they must also be sensitive to the larger implications of their localized study, as well as the power that they exert in constructing the experience of others in writing. As such, ethnographers and readers alike need to be mindful of how their position in the ethnographic process affects the ultimate representation of any musical scene. This is particularly true when one is an active participant in the production of the scene in question.

Summary

Ethnography is clearly necessary in popular music studies to better understand the localized performance of global musical forms. Yet there is no single answer as to how to best conduct research of the popular and construct subsequent written representations. Rather, from the fieldwork to the final written form, the ethnographic process is unique to each author, and open to subsequent reader interpretation. Ethnography of a scene thus is ultimately a process involving many steps through which a constructed social reality is conveyed. The subjective positioning of the ethnographer affects the process of ethnography at every stage, from the selection of a topic, through collection of data, and in the writing process (Davies 1999, 4–5). My own subjectivity has necessarily been present at every moment in the ethnographic process that has created this monograph but is most difficult to voice in this final written narrative. One reason for this is that the writing has taken a less personal tone with each revision, as the distance

from the experiential moment increases. Ultimately though, my own position in the ethnographic process directly affects the social reality of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene that I present here. There is no doubt, though, that the scene I describe here exists, although something exists beyond what I describe.

The following discussion explores my own position in the creation of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. To do so, I first relate the practical methodology involved in completing the project. I next problematize ethnomusicology's ability to represent the self and the effect of my role in the scene on what is included here. Last, I consider how my own subjectivity affects the interpretation of the data that is presented in the chapters that follow.

A FOREIGN WOMAN IN THE FIELD

My ethnographic study of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene began first with preliminary research in the Summer of 1996, with an extended period of stay from Fall 1997 through Fall 1999, followed by several additional one-month short-term trips in Winter 2003, Fall 2004, Winter 2005, and Spring 2007. I also spent an additional four months in the Osaka-Kyoto area in Fall 2004, allowing some comparison between music worlds in the Tokyo-centered Kanto region and the distinctive Osaka-Kyoto oriented Kansai region.¹⁰ During my time in the field, I saw literally hundreds of bands, attending one to two live performances a week on average. My standard research equipment included a 35mm camera, a digital camera, a small tape recorder, and my old black leather biker jacket, about five sizes too large. Every live performance, even at very small livehouses, was so loud that I kept a set of earplugs in every bag and jacket so that I was never caught without them, although I still left many shows with ringing ears. I took hundreds of pictures at the lives, which was not that unusual, as people were always videotaping, or snapping photos. I was, however, a bit more discreet when I turned on my little tape recorder.¹¹

On certain occasions, I wanted to enjoy the performance and attempted to shut off my ethnomusicologist's eye for the evening. I would position myself right in front of the stage with other members of the primarily Japanese audience who had similar inclinations. In this setting, it seemed appropriate to move around, relax, and even dance a bit on occasion, although dancing in front of the stage was never a major part of this scene. But such interaction increased my sense of solidarity and belonging with others around me. And by doing this I managed to avoid burning out and kept my love for this music.

Much effort and time was needed to develop relationships with the Japanese performers that I encountered in the scene.¹² Although I had studied Japanese for years prior to arriving in Tokyo, it took a great deal of preparation to interact with native speakers in such colloquial settings. In addition,

shortly after I arrived I became aware of my position in this predominantly Japanese music world. Given the scarcity of westerners frequenting such small livehouses, people began to recognize me by appearance alone at shows.¹³ This recognition increased the longer I stayed in the field, presenting a difficult ethnographic situation at times. I made the choice to be very open about the research and my position as an ethnomusicologist. On the positive side, most Japanese musicians that I encountered were quite flattered to know that I was interested in their music. The negative side was that many musicians seemed very uncomfortable around me in the beginning, nervous to play in front of me, or to discuss music with me. I made a point of explaining that I was a musician myself and that I wanted to learn to sing like them and really just hang out and chat at these shows. As people began to talk with me more, this elusiveness usually began to disappear. Partially for this reason, I did not take notes at actual events, because, quite frankly, I would have felt completely out of place. I wanted to acclimate, to feel and present myself more as a “participant” and less like an “observer.” Besides, I would not have been able to see the notebook through the surrounding cigarette smoke.

In the end, I learned a great deal about the scene and the people involved in its production through conversations at livehouses during the long afternoon sound checks, inbetween sets, after lives as people relaxed backstage, or over drinks at *izakaya* (居酒屋), the popular drinking establishments that feature cheap food that can be found throughout the city. People were extremely busy, living in distinct parts of the city, working long hours, and struggling to find time to rehearse and perform live, but they were usually happy to talk about aspects of the scene at lives, once their nervous concerns were assuaged. I supplemented my personal interactions with individuals in the scene through meetings away from the livehouses for more lengthy discussions, the distribution of a questionnaire to a select group of performers, and, subsequently, through continued correspondence over e-mail. The voices of all these individuals pepper the pages that follow.

I question now whether this set of strategies was the best methodological choice, but still find myself preferring to ask questions of performers in more informal situations, leading them toward the issues I am curious about and following their own interests. It was during such conversations that I learned about these people as individuals and performers in this scene. Ultimately though, it was through participating in the scene as a coperformer myself, in disparate roles, that I came to understand the most about this musical moment. At the same time, I find incorporating personal reflections based on these experiences most difficult.

Ethnomusicology and Representing the Self

As stated in the preceding discussion, ethnographers of varied disciplines now recognize their position in the ethnographic process. Indeed,

ethnomusicologists, in particular, typically not only observe, but also participate in cultural production through actual musical performance, providing deep insight into the area of research, but also complicating how it is represented (Barz and Cooley 1997). This awareness led to a surge of experimental and often highly personal ethnographies with varying degrees of success and audience response (Kisliuk 1998; Shelemay 1994). Nonetheless, many ethnographers continue to struggle with how to reach a balance between supposed objective reporting and awareness of their own subjective position. Bakan (1999), for example, argued that ethnography inevitably involves the researcher's personal experiences, yet the ethnographer

without self-reference . . . must describe events and phenomena that she has come to understand largely through participatory experience; and in adopting this mode of cultural representation, she is implicitly denied the opportunity to openly and honestly address the many ways in which her own participation has altered the normal flow of human action and interaction among members of the culture she studies. (13)

Bakan struggles with the traditional approach to ethnomusicological ethnography, in which the researcher's position in the experience is either entirely absent, or "the experiences ethnomusicologists have while sharing their lives with people in places and cultural worlds foreign to their own continue to be regarded as essentially unworthy of explicit scholarly attention unless they can be shown to have direct relevance in terms of our understandings of the cultural Other" (14). Finding such approaches unsatisfactory in relating his ethnography of Balinese music, Bakan defined ethnomusicology as "the study of how music lives in the lives of people who make and experience it, and of how people live in the music they make" (17). This definition shifts the focus away from culture and toward people, and thus "allows for the experiences and creative agency of all who participate in a musical world—insiders and outsiders, culture-bearers and ethnomusicologists, music-makers and music-listeners, professionals and novices—to be included within the parameters of significant ethnomusicological investigation" (17–18). With this view of ethnomusicology and the process of ethnography it is not only possible, but also necessary to take a moment to more deeply consider my own role in performing the underground Tokyo hardcore scene during my time in the field.

My Role in the Scene

My initiation into the underground hardcore scene essentially began through meeting the guitarist and vocalist of the group Berotecs shortly upon my return to Tokyo in Fall 1997. Attracted to Berotecs' sound and prominent inclusion of female performers, I began attending the group's shows regularly at a variety of livehouses throughout the city. I was quite noticeable

at these events, being the only foreign woman in attendance. At one such event, a Japanese woman approached me at the bar while we were both turning in our drink tickets, having recognized me in the audience from other shows. As often happened in these initial encounters, the conversation focused on which band we had come to see. Following the Berotecs' set, I accompanied her and several other people I would later come to know as the other members of her band, Jug, to have ramen at a famous little shop down the street. We exchanged brief information about ourselves, including the list of bands that we liked best. With Smashing Pumpkins, Sonic Youth, and myriad other bands in common, the comfort level quickly rose. Jug invited me to their next gig, and a friendship was born.

The woman who approached me at the bar was Suzuki Miyuki, the drummer for the band Jug. Suzuki Miyuki and I are roughly the same age and share remarkably similar tastes in music. She also lived in London for two years, allowing us to work through more complicated concepts through a combination of Japanese and English vocabulary as our relationship continued to develop on both a personal and professional level. It was through this relationship with Jug that I infiltrated the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. I began attending shows with them, following their performances, and eventually made the decision to perform with them on one of their songs. Working more closely with one group provided insight into the actual practical issues of having a band, revealing the particulars of booking gigs, financing a band, and creating music, among other issues relevant to performing in Tokyo. One cannot overemphasize the importance of feeling comfortable with informants throughout the ethnographic process in such a project.

I also continued to research bands that I thought would prove interesting for the project or that I particularly liked for some reason. But, although I went to concerts by myself at a variety of livehouses, I found my reputation as an associate of Jug's spreading through the broader scene. Thus, during my time in Japan, Suzuki Miyuki would become the axis on which my understanding of the scene developed and, subsequently, my understanding of the scene as a whole, although my experiences in the scene would extend beyond the paths that she opened for me. As I spent more time with Jug and other members of the scene, I found myself assuming different roles as a cop performer in the scene myself.

My main role within this scene was most often as a member of the audience at live events. In Winter 1998, however, Suzuki Miyuki suggested that I sing one song with Jug, as a guest vocalist, or *gesuto bôkaru* (ゲスト ボーカル). Although I had long been attending live shows, interacting with bands, had brought my bass to Japan with the intent of perhaps performing with a band, and continue to have the dream of one day being a rock star, I had never actually been on stage. I decided early in my stay that the musicians were too skilled for me to reveal my mediocre bass skills, but the idea of singing seemed more plausible. I began rehearsing with Jug in February 1998,



Figure I.2 The ethnographer live with Jug at Heaven's Door.

first memorizing the lyrics for “Swell Head.” As with all of Jug’s songs, as well as those of many other bands in this scene, the lyrics were in English, although quite comical for native English speakers. I distinctly recall my first rehearsal with Jug, when I continually fell into hysterics as I sang the line “A dwarf died, it’s my fault” to the amusement of fellow bandmates who had not realized how humorous this line would appear to the native speaker until I arrived. I continued to make mistakes with this line during live performances, singing instead “A dwarf died, it’s NOT my fault.” For some reason interjecting the negative seemed more comfortable for me.

In my debut performance in March 1998 at the livehouse 20,000volt, Jug’s vocalist, Nagatome Yôichirô, and I sang the vocals together. I believe they were concerned about my ability to carry the song live, but I found the situation restraining and frustrating. We did not attempt harmonies and ultimately did not work well together. Despite these issues of musicality, performing even one song with a band was a tremendous experience for me, as I usually performed in the audience. I had become well known

among the bands that regularly played at 20,000volt, so many individuals were extremely supportive of my efforts. As this was my first live, I was extremely nervous during the sound check. But I sang, or rather screamed, with great effort during the actual performance. The band decided that I should sing that song with them anytime they played at 20,000volt, and later at their other lives as well. They did not want me to sing more songs with them, however, as this would have affected the “balance” of the band. Even so, this limited performance experience was extremely enlightening and revealed further issues related to hardcore performance practice. The music itself, for example, sounded extremely different on the stage than in the rehearsal studio, thus causing problems in rhythm and timing.

I continued performing with Jug through the remainder of my time in the field. With each performance, my skills and fit with the band improved. Jug, as well as the other bands associated with the livehouse 20,000volt, began to see me as an auxiliary member. At first I thought this type of close relationship with one band might inhibit my research with other bands in the scene, but in the end this was not the case. Other bands were always extremely supportive and asked if I would sing more often. They saw me as a fellow musician and warmed to me through our shared experiences. In the end, performing with Jug drew me further into the scene.

My positions both as a member of Jug and as an active participant in the scene were further solidified at a live show in September 1998. On this evening, presented by Jug and called “Indignation Night,” I gave a short speech in Japanese about my work in front of ten to fifteen people prior to the actual band performances. Interestingly, I was actually listed as an act, “jeni” (“ジェニー”), the Japanese equivalent of my nickname, Jenni, at the livehouse and in the entertainment weekly *Pia*. Exhausted from moving that same weekend, and unfortunately not completely familiar with the entire vocabulary employed in the speech, it was not my best performance. However, people again were extremely supportive of my effort, thanking me afterwards. Many explained that they really had no conception of my work prior to my speech and subsequently revealed more about themselves in later conversations. I also performed that night, singing “Swell Head” with Jug. But much was a blur as I collapsed in exhaustion afterwards and slept for several hours in the backstage area, an amazing thing to do considering the incredible volume of the bands on stage.

Jug organized the night and, therefore, was responsible for collecting the money from the other bands to pay 20,000volt. Approximately twenty of us went to drink at *izakaya* following the live event. It should be noted, however, that the ritual of many bands going together to drink after an event does not occur as often as one might think, usually depending on how well the bands know each other and how late the event runs. I usually ate with Jug after a live, but only occasionally did we join other bands for drinks. The primary location of social interaction was clearly within the spaces of livehouses themselves.

In addition to attending lives, singing with Jug, and occasionally recording vocals for others I met in the scene, I found myself involved in other capacities. I began feeling obligated to attend performances by groups I had met either on my own or through connections with Jug, which in turn brought me closer to many other performers. Such reciprocal relationships were incredibly important in this scene and perhaps in other underground scenes globally.

On one occasion, I also began to realize my role as a “music specialist” at these shows. In August of 1998, I attended a live at the livehouse *Cre-scendo* in Kichijoji, which included a performance by Jug, of course. The band *Anchor* presented this particular event. All the bands, consequently, were either friends or acquaintances of *Anchor*. Following the performance, members of *Anchor* sought my opinion over drinks. Simply to qualify them as “good” was not enough. They had not performed live in three months, continually lost the sound through the microphone, not an uncommon problem as bands were often relying solely on the livehouse’s equipment, and lacked a certain cohesion. Still, they had an interesting sound and stage presence. This became a difficult position for me, as I did not want to criticize bands but realized that too simplistic an opinion was also not appreciated. Tension was abated though, as I was jokingly encouraged to serve drinks to many of the men sitting around the table like some kind of hostess.

I also occasionally assisted people with their English. On one occasion, for example, I helped the manager of the livehouse *20,000volt*, Hayakawa Shunsuke, a member of the respected band *Kirihito* himself, write a letter to a livehouse in the United States. I also remember sitting backstage with a group of young male musicians, instructing them on how properly to pronounce the word “fuck.” Japanese hardcore bands often incorporate English swear words into their lyrics but have some trouble pronouncing the word “fuck,” which sounds something like “hu-ku.” I was much more cautious about editing lyrics in English, feeling that the special quality of *Japanglish* should not be disturbed; it was central to the overall characteristic sound of hardcore for many of the bands.

But, admittedly, with each subsequent trip to Japan since departing in 1999 after my two years of intensive fieldwork, my own involvement as a performer in the scene has diminished. I never would have whipped out a notebook at an actual live event then, for fear that I would be less a participant and more an observer, but I felt so far on the outside by Spring 2007 that this was no longer a concern. This distance, though, has allowed me to further reflect on the experience in a way not possible at the time.

I now view this research as a personal voyage through many trying moments and depressing days, as well as great fun. My interactions with so-called “informants” ranged from casual and professional conversations to deeper personal relationships. Many factors, such as culture and language barriers, issues with gender, my immediate representation as a foreigner, and hierarchical positioning in Japanese society, all deeply affected my social

interaction with other performers in the scene, thus shaping my experience both in the hardcore world and beyond. A potential weakness of any ethnography, though, is to lapse into gratuitous self-indulgence. At the same time, however, I feel personal involvement, in the truest sense of participant observation, and the subsequent personal reflection through the writing process is also one of the greatest strengths of any ethnography. Thus, it is important to consider some of the broader implications that my presence has on how the underground Tokyo hardcore scene is presented here.

Selection Process

The process of selecting the individuals that are considered more deeply in this study, out of the hundreds of bands that I saw, for example, was intimately connected with my passage through the scene as the ethnographic project developed. Jug, naturally, serves as the primary case study throughout much of the monograph, as the particulars of band life are largely extracted through my experiences with them. Additional details are provided on a number of bands introduced to me through my association with Jug, as well as several other bands encountered outside of Jug's immediate circle of acquaintances. My relationship with Jug, though, illustrates how the main performers in this study were largely selected based on accessibility. Although I had met other bands first and had an idea, initially, that I would only focus on all-female bands, I had some difficulty personally connecting with people until meeting Jug. My relationship with Jug then influenced which people I would have easy access to in the scene. The ethnographer, through research, not only seeks to understand how individuals flow through a scene observed, as it were, from the outside, but thus also finds himself or herself within a personal network of individuals.

The main bands in this study, thus, were all friendly with Jug and each other to varying degrees. My knowledge of them was primarily positioned in the context of Jug's network, which mainly revolved around contacts made at the livehouse 20,000volt or through interactions at other livehouses. The majority of bands often played at 20,000volt, either with other groups or together, attended each other's performances at other livehouses, and shared some social contact outside of the space of the livehouse itself. Indeed, the social expectation to attend performances by other bands in one's network was strong and kept an active member of the scene quite busy during the week, even when they were not performing themselves.

The primary bands in this study also all shared a similar style of performance: a "light hardcore," although each band had a distinct sound. All of the primary bands, with the exception of Berotecs and Cowpers, were without label representation. This not only lessened the burden of obtaining copyright permission for publishing but also raised interesting questions about different individual's views on labels and their intent in performing, while locating this study truly in the "underground" as defined here.

Another factor determining the primary groups in this study relates to issues of musical affinity. Although I mention several groups for their curious and provocative music-making practices, I enjoyed the music itself of the primary groups tremendously. Thus there was a sonic component involved in directing both the network Jug operated within, and my own. Although ideally I would like to consider all types of performers in detail in this monograph, the paths of fieldwork led me primarily to the musicians and audiences in the scene. I continue to use the term “performers,” however, to stress that others were, indeed, involved in the ultimate imagination of the musical moment at hand. And again, my own role as a performer—as an ethnographer, musician, and audience member—deeply informs the read of other performer’s roles.

A Perceived Hetero-Normative Space

As reflexive approaches to ethnography expand, the subjectivity of the ethnographer is, in turn, viewed in increasingly varied ways. One area, however, remains a delicate subject: the constructed gender and sexuality of the ethnographer himself or herself in the field, and the resultant effects of this assumed identity on the research.¹⁴ Within popular music studies, for example, despite an increasing interest in exploring conceptions of gender and sexuality, little scholarship has focused on the potential knowledge gained, and potential problems faced, through turning the lens back on ourselves. But here I elaborate briefly on some interpretive issues faced in my own fieldwork that reveal how my position as both a foreigner and a heterosexual female affected the process of this research. This combined categorization also reveals that, in this particular context, I could not consider gender and sexuality alone, without also connecting to the third identity marker, “foreignness,” something I, of course, realize through reflection as I write.

Shelemay (1994) addressed issues of gender in the practice of ethnography that I find useful in considering the path that allowed me to engage with this scene. In particular, and here Shelemay’s words can stand for my own voice, she addressed how I continually confront “the way in which gender has shaped topics I studied, influenced my research strategies, and colored the resulting interpretations” (xxi). Both my foreigner status and female gender were significant factors in considering this project on many levels.

I first entered the cacophony of sounds that inhabit Tokyo in Summer 1996 with a vague notion that I wanted to study Japanese female punk bands. It is unclear at this point where this focus originated, although it certainly developed from an initial interest in Japanese culture, popular music, and female rock musicians in the United States and Great Britain. Having long been interested in women in popular music, both through personal experience and academic study, I was immediately attracted to the various female musicians I encountered. This is not to say that a man could not be

similarly interested in such practice, but to point out that my own failed attempts to play bass and form a band in highschool, largely as a result of my perceived gender I believe, might offer a different form of inspiration for such study and color subsequent interpretation. It was, quite honestly, a very natural topic to pursue, given my position as a woman.

Being a woman affected my research in myriad ways. Not only was I initially attracted to working with women based on experiences prior to entering the field, I actually found it easier to approach and speak with Japanese women than men. This increased facility to communicate with, and even bond with, women resulted, in part, from the nature of Japanese language, which is quite gendered itself, as well as from a socially supported tendency for men and women to socialize separately from a very early age in Japan. Of course I wanted to talk to men, and of course I did talk to men, although often through introductions by women. But when speaking to men, I experienced more difficulty understanding male colloquialisms.

Questions of sexuality also come into play when examining characteristics of the scene. For example, the underground Tokyo hardcore scene arguably presented a hetero-normative space for social interaction, but it is impossible absolutely to claim this characterization, as sexual relations were rarely discussed. Nor do I believe that anyone with a nonheterosexual identity would have been likely to come forward to me because of my clearly hetero identity; first as a married, then as a single, and then as a intergender-dating individual. But, perhaps more significantly, Japan remains a culture where nonconforming sexualities remain firmly closeted in mainstream society.

Further, although intergender dating did occur between members of bands, this scene was not primarily a place to “hook-up,” a noted characteristic of other underground scenes in Japan, such as in the hip-hop scene (Condry 1999, 2006). I have little first-hand experience in this area though, despite one attempt by a close female friend to arrange a romantic engagement for me with a male drummer from another band. It is possible that my foreigner status precluded individuals from attempting to approach me with romantic intentions. Consequently, it is difficult once again to make a definitive claim about the scene, but important to consider, as this observation serves as a further indication that people’s motivation to participate in these music-making practices were motivated by something other than seeking a romantic partner. I believe it is interesting to note here that when it became known that I was dating a Japanese man, a noticeable change occurred in the social interaction I engaged in with several individuals, perhaps as a result of increased solidarity from a perceived deeper involvement with Japanese culture, although it remains unclear.

Indeed, can I truly make an argument that any one of these perceived categories directly influenced the social interaction that I engaged in and the quality of data I collected? Perhaps they did, and perhaps they did not. But I will make an argument here that it is important to note the possibility that

my position as a foreign woman in the field informs the data that I received and my subsequent interpretation of that data. For me to make a claim that the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was a decidedly hetero-normative space, without noting possible personal reasons that may feed this perception, would be absurd on some level. The difficulty, of course, lies in that I do believe it was hetero-normative at the same time.

Summary

Where does this leave the role of the ethnographer and ethnography itself in presenting observations on human behavior, in turn seeking to present some significant, meaningful point to an audience of readers? Arguably, in ethnographic reporting, the ethical author, to the best of her ability, attempts to present a view as close to reality as possible, but much remains open to personal interpretation; the ethnographer's focus at the time of collecting data, the distance between the experiential moment and what the author believes that they experienced at the actual time of writing, and finally the author's desire to use fieldwork evidence to support their particular argument, even where the ethnographer allows the fieldwork data to "speak to them," or to shape the theory. Thus, ethnographic data is inherently subjective to some degree. Still, the fieldwork and resultant writing remain significant forces in gaining knowledge about the world in which we live.

This monograph, as an ethnography of a popular music scene, explores this complex relationship in several ways. Data from fieldwork with Japanese hardcore bands is used to extract, examine, and ultimately shape theoretical arguments. At the same time, I am keenly aware of the potential dichotomy between the reality of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene and my written representation of that reality. I hope that the reader will increase his or her knowledge of music-making in Tokyo and contemporary Japanese society, as I conceive it, and also reflect on my role in shaping that reality: a reality that is presented in the chapters that follow.

SETTING THE SCENE

As an ethnography of a scene, the following chapters are organized in a logical fashion, beginning with a general outline of the characteristics of the scene and an introduction to a few key theoretical issues. This overview is followed by a closer look at the spaces where the scene is performed, then at who is performing, what is being performed, and, last, what this performance means for the individuals involved. As such, the underground Tokyo hardcore scene unfolds through the following chapters of the monograph.

Chapter One: "The Underground Tokyo Hardcore Scene" presents an in-depth overview of the key characteristics of the scene. The chapter opens with a translation of a published Japanese review of a special live hardcore

event at a club called Yellow in Nishiiazabu, Tokyo. This translation is followed by a narrative description of additional happenings backstage at the same concert, which featured performances by a group of bands promoting the release of a new independent label compilation album. These opening excursions serve as a portal into the performance of the scene, bringing to life key elements that characterize this musical world. The subsequent sections of this chapter, in turn, clarify what I mean by the label “underground Tokyo hardcore scene.” The chapter ultimately argues that what was most significant about the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was that its performance stood in opposition to mainstream society and commercialism, yet participants were firmly operating within the parameters of the mainstream or parent culture, at times enacting a dynamic tension between resistance and conformity. Indeed, performers can be understood as actually playing with resistance in the context of the scene, as they played in spaces distinct from other established spheres of their lives. Performers further played with their identities, as they shifted out of expected daily roles into roles that momentarily challenged or confronted those very same expected roles. Participants in the scene similarly played at creating musical forms and performance practices that were often consciously constructed as oppositional to mainstream Japanese popular music but firmly operated within that same system.

Chapter Two: “Trains, 20,000volt, Tower Records, and the Illicit Intimacy of the Spaces of Play” considers the context for the performance of the scene in more detail. The quality of both the individual and collective identity possible in the scene is deeply informed by the spaces in which the scene is performed, from the larger context of Japan of the late 1990s and early 21st century, to the more immediate geographical positioning in Tokyo, to the actual buildings and rooms, and finally to the sonic space of contemporary Japan. The character of Tokyo, for example, often understood as impersonal, crowded, busy, and expensive, enhances a sense of intimacy, as well as illicitness, within the small architectural spaces of the scene. Livehouses, in particular, are especially significant as the primary location for performance of the scene. The main livehouses of this study were quite compact, holding between fifty to one hundred people at most, creating a tremendous sense of intimacy. They were all typically dirty, often positioned in the bottom of buildings, and were difficult to locate, all qualities that create a sense that someone is participating in something dangerous, far removed from mainstream society. In this way, certain spaces of the scene actually fostered a sense of playing at resistance, as the spaces appeared illicit, yet were predominantly safe and advertised in the regular weekly entertainment magazines. This sense of illicit intimacy fostered in the close-knit and questionable quarters was important, and actually an attractive aspect of the scene in the impersonal mass that is Tokyo.

Chapter Three: “Schoolboys, Aspiring Stars, Underground Girls, and the Multiple Identities of the People who Play” considers the individuals

who brought the scene to life through intense social interaction with each other in the physical and sonic spaces described in the preceding chapter. To do so, this chapter introduces some key performers to provide a greater sense of the people who inhabit the scene, suggesting some important characteristics of bands, managers, and audiences, and the ideals that they value, which, in turn, shape the identity of the scene. Through the intense social interaction of these people, performers negotiated at times shifting individual identities while also participating in the creation of the collective identity of bands, groups of bands centered around certain livehouses, and, ultimately, the scene as a whole. Performers thus can be understood as playing with identities within the liminal space of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

Performers, for example, first and foremost played with their individual and collective identity through assuming roles distinct from the other sectors of their lives, shifting away from expectations that they faced as part-time workers, students, or family members. They participated in the scene in distinct roles that were often arguably resistive and involved behavior not suitable in mainstream. Performers were thus able to play with different identities than those available to them in their traditional spheres of work, school, and family, and even to challenge expected gender roles, although they returned to these conformist positions outside the limited space of the scene. Individuals, in turn, shifted in and out of the scene, enjoying different levels of participation.

In some cases, this play was characterized by a sense of illicitness or resistance. *Sararîman* (サラリーマン), the hardworking, white-collar, male laborers of Japan, for example, were able to resist pressures of conformity at work, while safely expressing violence, anger, and aggression in the scene. Women were similarly able to play at resisting stereotypical gendered roles of daughter, sister, and mother, instead taking to the stage and screaming right alongside the men. But neither men nor women overtly challenged such gendered behavior expectations in their lives outside the scene. Very few women, for example, overtly claimed a desire to effect change in gender relations in society at large. Still, the very act of choosing to pursue leisure and play at identity in this particular way could, arguably, be seen as resistive itself. After all, these men were not playing golf, and these women were not studying flower arranging. Rather, they opted to pursue a leisure activity that allowed them to create distinct and potentially challenging identities, even if only momentarily.

Chapter Four: “More Than the Musical in the Performance of Hardcore” analyzes, more deeply, how both the music and the broader underground Tokyo hardcore scene are actually performed. This exploration identifies key characteristics of that performance that further shape the identity of the scene, which is at times playful, and again often expresses a play at resistance. To do so, this chapter looks at the *kata* (形) of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, or the stereotypical patterns of performance

that characterize specific genres of music in Japan (De Mente 2003; Yano 2002). “*Kata*” typically refers to codified elements within music itself or standardized, and therefore meaningful, behaviors on stage, but here the term extends to broader aspects of social interaction as well. This chapter thus explores the performance of both the musical and the extra musical “*kata*,” or tropes, that characterize the scene. The *kata* of hardcore are revealed through close comparison of live performances by key bands introduced in the preceding chapter. The performers of the scene primarily came together in these spaces to make music, creating a sound that, in itself, plays at resistance. This light hardcore rock was loud, aggressive, even angry music, typically featuring equally aggressive vocals, often with intense screaming: a sound that was arguably constructed as resisting the glossy, manufactured sense of mainstream Japanese popular music, or “J-pop” style, and, in turn, mainstream society. The lyrics reinforce this read of resistance, as the dominant language of J-pop is Japanese, used to tell tales of love, loss, and happy reunions against upbeat pop themes. Hardcore, in contrast, predominantly relies on a form of Japanized-English, or “Japanglish,” with the screaming vocal styles of both men and women often delivering nonsensical guttural sounds, rather than logical lyrics. The “*kata*” of hardcore thus express a clear voicing of anger and passion not possible in mainstream music or culture. But again, many performers in the scene play with this potential resistance, purposefully exaggerating their musical and extramusical performance styles, or letting all traces of anger fade as they leave the double doors of the livehouse.

The Conclusion: “Meaning and the Power of Performance” asks why individuals participated in this particular scene, as opposed to any other musical scene or leisure activity, ultimately exploring what it meant for them. It is at the moment of shared understanding of the performative tropes of the scene, or the “*kata*” detailed throughout the monograph and especially in Chapter Four, between participants of distinct social backgrounds that gives shape to the collective identity of the scene and, in turn, allows meaning to emerge for participants. The more involved in the performance of the scene one becomes, the more meaningful the experience is for that individual; in other words, more strongly associates with the collective identity of the scene, the greater the meaning one finds in that very performance and, in turn, the more powerful the participation. Performance is thus powerful in the context of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, with the temporary nature of participation actually increasing the intensity of the moment and ultimately enhancing the experience. The power of this experience is further strengthened by the intimate moments that the performers share in the tiny livehouses, by the intensity of the participation in the scene, by the ability to play a different role within the scene, and through expression of an arguably powerful music itself. Perhaps most important, the deep nostalgia that participants often feel for such scenes long after they have stopped performing in them is powerful. The experience remains a part of who the

performers are long after they have stopped performing. The monograph concludes with a brief Epilogue that returns to 20,000volt in Spring 2007, complete with some final words from Suzuki Miyuki and Suzuki Shigeru, formerly of Jug.

CONCLUSION

Participants in the hardcore scene thus often opted to perform in an arguably subversive manner, through nonsensical lyrics or aggressive music, but these moments of resistive expression were limited in both location and time, as participants returned to their regular job the next day, or left the scene entirely after a few months of intense participation. This was predominantly an amateur or semiamateur scene: a hobby for many, albeit a serious one with highly skilled musicians, but not a professional money-making venture for most. Nor did participation in the scene require a complete lifestyle transformation, which would arguably shift their performance out of the realm of play. Some performers did make their living through work at various institutions in the scene, but I argue not in the same way as professionals in the mainstream music industry. There is rather an element of play for all involved in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. The imagined space of the underground musical scene thus offered a relatively safe space to experience resistance at play, but one that did not completely transform the participant's life, leaving them permanently on the fringe of acceptable society. Although people performed arguably oppositional acts only in the space of the scene, they were still enacting a significant voice in contemporary Japan, one that does, indeed, reveal a disgruntled, even resistive voice of this generation.

1 The Underground Tokyo Hardcore Scene

In the city called Tokyo, there are various ‘nights’ unfolding. This night at the club called Yellow, a bunch of cool bands congregated to perform radical sound—fucking heavy and fucking fast. Walking through the room with a bar counter where a mirror ball was turning, and entering a dark floor with a stage, there was a figure of a DJ, which is relatively rare to see at a livehouse. The unusual atmosphere, compared to other livehouses, made me feel rather cozy. While I was enjoying the ambience, the bands suddenly began to play on stage.

The first group consisted of vocals and guitar, bass, and drums: the three-member band called Jug. The performance was kind of rough but vigorous. And when I looked at them carefully, the violent drums, which supported the rhythm, were being played by a woman. When the last song began, a foreign woman jumped in as the vocalist. At first the crowd circled at a distance, but the intense noise and beat enticed the crowd to sway to the rhythm unconsciously. The next band was the four-member group Life Line. With the cycle of yelling of the vocalist and hard play, people started gathering in front of the stage and jumping, and some boy even started dancing. It feels good to see people enjoying themselves, as if saying, “This is live.” The next band was called Sports. This band had really distinguishable hard and soft ways of playing. One can’t help but listen to the words emanating from the vocalist’s mouth, sometimes whispering, sometimes throwing his whole body into the words. The number of people entering the floor in front of the stage increased, as they let their bodies feel the flowing waves of the rhythm. The next band, called Boiler, was even more energetic. It seemed that a lot of people were waiting for this band, and the crowd began to gather in front of the stage. Both the stage and floor were swelling with happy emotion as people enjoyed the music from head to toe. The next band, Brain Dead Assassin, experienced typical live performance problems and could not play well. I felt sorry for them not being able to play as well as they should.

The bands played successively one after another on the stage. And even when changing sets, the sounds of the DJ emanated without interruption from the dark floor. Some people were drinking at the bar counter, while others were letting their bodies feel the music on the floor where the mirror ball revolved. Everyone was spending time as they pleased.

At that moment, suddenly everything shook. Really, the floor and air began to shake when the next band began to play. The band was called Rise a Gate and they were something! Each of them exuded a certain cool, creating an overall sense of freedom. Even though they had guitar trouble, I felt they had the ability to continue playing their music under any circumstances. On this night, the last band to perform was Guilty Vice. It was already passing midnight, but there were a lot of girls on the floor, and it seemed like the four members were playing hard music just for them. Following the yelling voice, the audience raised their arms and jumped up and down, bobbing their heads again and again. The vocalist surprisingly stated—"I wasn't sure how it would be because it was late, but everyone was so energetic."

The seven bands that played were finished. Somewhere in Tokyo tonight, might there be a similar event? It makes me happy to imagine this. At the end of the century, people are searching for something radical and that is why this kind of event is so appreciated.

—translation of "Sui Event Live 98," Staff of *M-Gazette*, 1999¹

On any given night, the curious novice or expert prowler can visit any of the many bars, clubs, and livehouses that can be found throughout Tokyo. Many of these spaces are small, dingy, and terribly difficult to find without a knowledgeable taxi driver, intricate map, or, better yet, your own personal guide. Located in the basements of buildings, down shopping arcades, or tucked between a coffeeshop and Italian restaurant, hip-hop, techno, noise, punk, and various types of hardcore music pour forth from the distorted sound systems, sometimes reaching the streets despite the double doors. These spaces offer an opportunity to make music, dance, or drink until dawn breaks, and perhaps most important, to escape from the daily social pressures of family, school, and work. Such establishments promise a warm, family feeling for the regular; by offering moments of repose or rebellion, which are desperately needed in the busy, socially stratified, impersonal mass that is Tokyo. The opening concert review introduces one such space featuring a hardcore performance. The following backstage view of the same event reveals additional details of the night.

BACKSTAGE AT YELLOW

On a winter's afternoon in December 1998, I arrived at the train station around one o'clock, running late as usual, and began hunting for the club called "Yellow," where I would meet my bandmates, primary informants, and friends, the other members of Jug. The typical Tokyo winter day was cloudy and damp, with a bit of a chill wind, and I was not feeling particularly well, partially due to nervousness and partially to a late

night of clubbing the evening before. This was a special night for Jug, as many of the bands performing that evening had already recorded for a hardcore compilation album produced by the independent label Omnibus; other bands, including Jug, would record for later volumes in the coming months. I had been to Yellow before with my "social friends," primarily composed of other foreigners residing in Tokyo, but had some trouble finding the club, which was nestled down a side street in the affluent Nishiazabu neighborhood of Tokyo, by daylight. I finally arrived to find Jug's drummer, Suzuki Miyuki, who also was not feeling well and was a little nervous about the evening, as Jug had never performed in this space before. We nevertheless finished unloading equipment and ran through the typical greetings with other bands as they arrived, soon descending the stairs to the entrance of Yellow.

It was strange to see this space, typically crowded with foreigners and Japanese dancing to techno music, now relatively empty in the afternoon. The normally smoky front bar appeared rather dirty and sad in the fluorescent light as we passed through the doors to find the staff constructing a stage with large wooden blocks across half the dance floor. Various band members were milling about, storing equipment, and chatting with each other. Several bands brought not only their instruments, but also amplifiers and mixers. The drum kit clearly belonged to the headlining band, already preparing for a sound check, with the name "Guilty Vice" proudly stamped on the two bass drums.

We were directed up the steel stairs at the back of the room to the upstairs bar, again shocking as the light reflected off the various mirrors along the walls, revealing every scuff mark on the white retro-plastic furniture arranged in groupings around the room. Not recognizing many of the bands reclining in the chairs, in addition to not feeling very chatty, I collapsed on a bench near the back of the room. From this position I could sit, listen, and look at my surroundings, quietly taking in everything around me.

The backroom on this particular evening exuded a much stronger sense of machismo than that exuded at other live events I had previously attended in Tokyo, with a number of men sporting wild hairstyles and tattoos, drinking, and socializing with girlfriends. One man actually changed his clothes several times in front of us all, asking his bandmates their opinions on his various costumes. While I was sipping my water, the pungent smell of marijuana reached my nose, snapping me to attention. I had seen drug use in other worlds in Japan, but never among my band friends. Seeking the source, I noticed one of the more energetic groups lighting up in the open, which didn't seem acceptable to some of the other bands, who appeared uncomfortable with this behavior. Later that night, the same band members seemed to be high, presumably on speed. I looked at Suzuki Miyuki, who also seemed uncomfortable with the situation, although it was often difficult to tell what she was really thinking. Perhaps my impression of the mood backstage was exacerbated by the fact that we were the only

female musicians scheduled for the evening, which was both exhilarating and nerve-wracking; we were clearly performing with a much more intense, if not professional, group of bands than usual.

Shortly after this tense moment, we headed down to hear some of the other bands during sound check, particularly Sports. They were friends with Jug and we often attended each other's lives during this period of research. The drummer asked to borrow Suzuki Miyuki's snare, as his was broken, and she reluctantly handed it over to him. Desiring to take some photographs of the evening, Suzuki Miyuki politely asked the organizers for permission for me, as this was a media-covered event. Permission was granted, but being respectful of the promoters, I only took a few photographs.² Jug's turn for a sound check finally arrived several hours later. Suzuki Miyuki adjusted the drums as best she could while the bassist, Suzuki Shigeru, plugged in his own bass amplifier, and the guitarist, Nagatome, worked with a rented one. Jug played through two or three songs before inviting me on stage. After hearing the intensity of the previous bands, I wanted to make my song come alive and scream my best, and, thoughtfully, another vocalist actually advised me to hold the microphone in a way that produced a stronger sound.

The actual live began shortly after, with Jug opening the night. Suzuki Miyuki had some unexpected trouble, as the drum kit was so large that she, being quite petite, could barely reach the cymbals. I jumped on stage between songs to help adjust the kit, and she managed well enough, yet the set was surprisingly sluggish, compared to Jug's typical performance style. I took to the stage at the end of their set with a certain amount of confidence at that point, simply because I am a woman and a foreigner in Japan, relying on the novelty factor to carry me through. Our set was short and sweet. Jug was then followed by a series of bands, which increased in experience, intensity, and sheer loudness. The bands were all typically hardcore, in the sense that they performed aggressive music, often leaning towards a punk aesthetic, with screaming vocals and a noticeable absence of guitar solos, yet each group exhibited great variance and personal style. The audience, in typical fashion, politely hovered about the dance floor, occasionally pressing forward in enthusiasm for favorite bands. We stayed until close to the end, despite our exhaustion, and once again I offered to help pay for the expense of performing, which of course Jug refused, shell-ing out the ¥40,000 (about US \$400) on their own.

INTRODUCTION: THE UNDERGROUND TOKYO HARDCORE SCENE

Both the opening concert review and backstage narrative highlight a moment in an underground music-making world of Tokyo. Yet the previously discussed live event at Yellow is both typical and atypical of underground music

production considered in this monograph, as it represents a very special evening featuring many different types of hardcore bands and styles. This variety, itself, reveals the fluid nature of the musical gathering and, in turn, the need for a flexible approach to identifying boundaries and examining deeper meanings below the surface. This musical moment, for example, does not address the additional spatial locations, involving the many small live-houses, record and guitar shops, and rehearsal studios; the social interaction between performers outside of the livehouse space; nor the more ambiguous elements that characterize the sound and its role in the public performance at Yellow. Despite this arguably isolated depiction, this particular ethnographic moment does reflect a common Japanese hardcore performance practice, while also revealing such subtle differences. The elements that make this particular performance unique from other ethnographic experiences, in turn, reinforce the read of this scene as extremely localized. The event at Yellow, in essence then, serves as a portal to what I imagine as the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

This label, itself, first deserves clarification, as each term—"underground," "Tokyo," "hardcore," and "scene"—is embedded in distinct discourses of thought. Each term further clarifies the meaning of the others, giving shape to the overall character of the musical moment under consideration throughout the rest of this monograph.

Underground

The modern underground music scene in Japan is arguably the most interesting and diverse on the planet. Though Japanese pop has often been an exercise in western idolatry, the musicians in the underground tend to be more interested in making music for music's sake, rather than cashing in on popular sounds from the west. Ironically, the diversity and seemingly endless streams of strange music coming out of this scene is contrary to its spirit of community and collaboration. Underground musicians have been known to switch between various genres, and it's this cross-pollination that has helped keep the Japanese underground so vital.³

Since the 1970s, Japanese musicians of various genres have actively engaged in both cosmopolitan flows of so-called underground musics within Japan, as well as contributing to transnational exchanges of underground musics around the globe (Hosokawa 1994). "Underground" is used in this context to categorize a broad variety of genres of domestic and imported musics and the cultures associated with their proliferation in Japan. Wallach (2005) found a similar use of the term among musicians in Indonesia to denote "an extensive countrywide network of local urban scenes dedicated" not only to the importation and dissemination of "esoteric independent rock music from around the world" (1) but also to the

production of underground musics by Indonesian musicians themselves.⁴ In both Indonesia and Japan, underground thus serves as an umbrella category covering a number of other, more specific, genres, including punk, metal, alternative, and, of course, hardcore (3).

Any number of terms could be used to express the same general meaning of the term “underground” here; to indicate some musical type and its related social formation, which is positioned in contrast to a “mainstream” cultural form. Earlier studies that explored certain underground musics, for example, predominantly labeled their related worlds as “youth-” and/or “sub-” cultures, emphasizing the imagined oppositional position of these musics and their associated cultural performance to mainstream musics and dominant cultural practices among assumed rebellious youth groups. This approach to the study of popular music was instigated by various works from Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which often focused on the formation of such communities in opposition to mainstream culture, in turn providing participants a sense of identity through belonging (Gelder and Thornton 1997; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1991). More recent studies, however, have found this approach too limiting in its heavy emphasis on hegemonic relations between the dominant and subordinate groups, not allowing for momentary participation, nor fully appreciating the existence of shared values between groups (Bannister 2006; Baranovitch 2003; Jackson 1998; Peddie 2006). In essence, the subcultural approach often is too fixed, and it is often too loaded within academics in its association with issues of class.

Other terms, such as “alternative” and “indie,” have been employed to refer to musics that were initially seen as originating and/or operating separately from mainstream major labels. In some cases, truly alternative and indie scenes that avoid mainstream agendas and marketing techniques are still thriving (Bannister 2006; Fonarow 2006; Hibbett 2005). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, these broad genres were embraced by major labels cashing in on the new styles covered by these categories, resulting in the terms “alternative” and “indie” now denoting major label categories as well. Although a similar situation is arguably occurring with “underground” musics, the term remains the most appropriate here for a variety of reasons.

As with subcultures, the use of the term “underground” does imply that there is some related activity occurring “aboveground,” and that such a distinction requires the continued existence of a hegemonic system, yet it is more current and flexible. Most important, the individuals involved in the performance of the hardcore scene in Tokyo employ the term themselves in a variety of ways. “Underground,” for example, is a comfortable translation from the Japanese term *angura* (アンゲラ), which is typically used as a qualifier for a variety of artistic expressions, as in “underground film” or “underground literature.” *Angura* can convey an illicit sense when used in this way, a quality that many individuals involved in underground scenes

want to embrace and project. “Underground” can also be translated as *chika* (地下), which literally means “under the ground,” as in *chikatestu* (地下鉄), the underground train or subway. The livehouse 20,000volt advertises in the weekly magazine *Pia* as “Koenji, the sacred place for underground music” (高円寺 地下音楽の聖地 [koenji chika ongaku no seichi]), using the term for being physically underground to denote the musical category, playing on the fact that many small livehouses are actually underground in the basements of buildings. Both the terms *angura* or *chika*, although suggesting different nuances, are best translated as “underground” when referring to such musical scenes in English, and therefore the term “underground” is the most appropriate for capturing the character of the scene in question in Tokyo.

Approaches to underground music-making are often associated with political movements (Cushman 1995; Szemere 2001). But here the term “underground” refers to music-making associated with bands without labels, or on local independent labels, known as “indies,” *indîzu* (インディーズ) or *jishuseisaku* (自主制作) in Japanese, without direct expression of a unified, reactionary political stance, as can be found in other cultural contexts. This lack of an overtly unifying political agenda in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene is further explored as a key characteristic of the scene later in this chapter. Underground musics thus should be understood as performed in particular locations, in this case, Tokyo.

Tokyo at the Turn of the 21st Century

Tokyo is such a huge, sprawling city that you could spend a lifetime exploring it and still make new discoveries. Coming in on an airport limousine bus or by train, it often looks vaguely depressing: an unending sea of bleak concrete housing estates and office blocks traversed by overhead expressways crowded with trucks, buses, and commuting Toyotas. But it doesn't take long to realize that, like all great cities, Tokyo is a bizarre conundrum, a riddle of contradictions that springs from the tension between the large-scale ugliness and the meticulous attention to detail that meets the attentive eye at every street corner; the tensions between the urgent rhythms of 20th century consumer culture and the quiet moments of stillness that are the legacy of other, older tradition[s]. . . . Tokyo is a living city. It is less a collection of sights than an experience. (Taylor, Strauss, and Wheeler N.D., 155)

Although the title of this monograph clearly locates this study in the socio-cultural context of Japan, the ethnographic research itself was primarily conducted in the geographic and cultural space of Tokyo: hence my choice not to refer to Japan as a whole, but to Tokyo only in identifying the location of the scene. As with many cities, Tokyo itself has its own nature, style, and identity that distinguishes it from other urban locations both

inside Japan and globally. The unique character of the city serves as the backdrop for musical practices within. Indeed, musical performance can actually reflect the identity and character of the city in question, yet also construct and reinforce that same character in a symbiotic relationship (Cohen 1991, 1994).

Tokyo, for example, is typically perceived as a sprawling metropolis that was rebuilt quickly out of the ashes of World War II. It is expensive, crowded, and often overwhelming for the novice visitor, although Tokyo offers an amazing array of arts, foods, fashion, and entertainment at any hour of the day for the more adventurous. Within Japan, Tokyo often serves as the central point from which politics, news, and entertainment emanates, inspiring fierce pride in regional differences beyond the city's borders.

Although certain elements of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, for example, can be identified in other urban centers within Japan, such as in Sapporo, Kyoto, or Osaka, each area exerts its own distinct character on the performance. Thus, despite the myth of a homogenous Japan, each urban center is, in fact, quite unique. Leaders of Japanese cities proudly note their architectural differences, unique histories, and even linguistic and culinary variations. Although the specific character of Tokyo will be further explored in Chapter Two, it is important to note here that these unique characteristics of each city inform the performance of music within them. Thus, it is important to view underground music-making in Japan in its local context: in this case, the sprawling mass that is Tokyo.

As I completed my research in Tokyo primarily in the late 1990s, it is important to consider the ephemeral economic, political, and sociocultural conditions specific to that moment, although many of these conditions remain consistent through today. In 1997, for example, the Tokyo area's total population of nearly thirty million⁵ was continuing to face a major recession that began with the burst of the economic bubble in the early 1990s. The depressed economic situation that Japan continues to face today is difficult to discern on the streets of Tokyo however, as consumers continue to purchase the latest electronics, vacation both within Japan and abroad, and frequent entertainment establishments. Nonetheless, high-paying salaried jobs had become more difficult to obtain by the late 1990s, and many women were forced from permanent positions that provided benefits back to part-time labor as banks collapsed, the real estate industry suffered, and the Ministry of Finance continued to seek ideas on how to motivate the economy. The turn of the 21st century was a time of social transformation in Japan as a whole.⁶

Since the early 1990s in Japan, "there of course [has] been change as the country moved from the heady years of Japan as Number One in the eighties and early nineties to the bursting of the land speculation bubble and the so-called 'lost decade' of economic stagnation, social disruption, and psychological uncertainty" (Ashby 2002, i). During the past two decades in

particular, Tokyo has experienced various economic woes that have deeply affected the workforce; the permanent employment available to graduates of even top universities is no longer a guarantee. This has led to changes in the composition, devotion, and commitment of the workforce in general, with young people now expecting greater time to spend with families and friends, and no longer feeling as secure about their jobs.

Despite the image that women are excluded from work in Japan, many women do, indeed, work outside the home, although in lower paying part-time positions without benefits, even when working thirty hours or more a week. Still, the rising cost of living has placed increasing pressure on both men and women to work to make ends meet, just as in the United States. This, of course, both reflects and creates new gendered roles for both men and women. Women no longer immediately marry, some choosing to live at home, work, and enjoy their leisure income and time with friends. Some young men and women opt not to have children or even to marry. This, of course, has caused a disconcerting decline in the birthrate in Japan, as well as a transformation of expectations based on gender for men and women.

Traditional family structures are breaking down; extended families no longer necessarily live together. In fact, the expectations of youth have undergone massive shifts since World War II. Disillusionment with strict social systems has created new youth generations less satisfied with the old status quo. These economic changes have also seen a rise in youth categories such as "Freeters," or permanent part-time workers between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, and "Neets," jobless, unmarried people not pursuing an education, not working, and not training for future employment, also between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four.⁷

Tokyo has also been experiencing an increase in certain types of crime, such as child abuse, sexual assault, and crimes committed by youths, or at least an increase in the reporting of these crimes. Tokyo, as a city and cultural area at the turn of the 21st century, thus remains a "bizarre conundrum;" a culture of tension and uncertainty in which the performance of underground hardcore musics serve a particular social function.

Hardcore

Part of the US underground in the late 1970s, hardcore developed out of punk and was linked with grunge and alternative rock. By the late 1990s the label had become a cliché. 'Uncompromising' is the word often used to characterize the genre. Originally harder and faster than its direct ancestor, punk rock, hardcore took punk music and 'sped up the tempos as fast as humanely possible, sticking largely to monochrome guitars, bass and drums, and favoring half-shouted lyrics venting the most inflammatory sentiments the singers and songwriters could devise' [Erlewine et al. 1995, 917]. While internationally in evidence, hardcore's chief breeding ground was the United States. . . . Politics

were left of centre, but enmeshed in a mass of contradictions, for instance that hardcore was against sexism and racism, but its performers were generally white and male. Nearly all (early) hardcore bands were on small, independent labels (Shuker 1998, 159–160).

This chapter opens with a reviewer's intense, although perhaps not exactly definitive, description of the evening's music at Yellow as "radical sound—fucking heavy and fucking fast." The reviewer continues to describe the "intense beat" that "enticed the crowd to sway," using such descriptive terms as "hard" and "soft" to further clarify the style of play of the bands. My own account of the events that night similarly relies on abstract qualifiers in an attempt to further clarify the musical genre found in the opening backstage narrative, applying such terms as "loudness" and "aggressiveness" to describe the music itself. There is an underlying assumption that the reader shares an understanding of antecedent or related genres when I claim that the hardcore performed that evening at Yellow leaned "towards a punk aesthetic, with screaming vocals, and a noticeable absence of guitar solos." This is clearly a description that could only bring the music under consideration to further light if one is aware of what exactly "punk" or "grunge" involve and of the significance of the shift away from the guitar work that dominated rock of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Although it is difficult to ascertain what was performed at Yellow without recorded excerpts from all the bands,⁸ the previous excerpts from the review and backstage narrative begin to paint both a sonic and performative picture of what I mean by the label "hardcore."

Defining a musical genre, however, can be problematic for a variety of reasons (Brackett 2002), often placing individual artist's creative goals against corporate needs to assign at times seemingly arbitrary genre designations in order to connect with an appropriate consumer group. Nonetheless, it is important to have some understanding of what constitutes a particular musical style in order to understand how people use it. This often proves difficult, as identifying certain stylistic commonalities is possible, but great variety exists within any given genre. "Hardcore," for example, is a more specific genre designation under the umbrella category of "underground," but "hardcore" too is a broad and nebulous classification of musical style. The term "hardcore" itself has multiple applications, as it may refer to a broad genre of alternative music and its various subgenres, or may serve as a prefix to other genres, to imply a harder, edgier version, as in "hardcore punk." The term's most common application relates to pornography, as a quick search for the term on the Internet will easily prove.

Shuker's (1998) explanation does, indeed, treat the genre "hardcore" as a general style of music and related performance practice originating in the United States, with connections to punk and grunge, initially distinct from mainstream production systems. Shuker's definition, though, also highlights the nebulous nature of the label, as he provides little in terms

of a definitive definition of what musically constitutes hardcore. Shuker further places the origin of hardcore in the United States,⁹ but then notes its international proliferation, as evidenced by its performance in Tokyo. Yet it is, in fact, extremely difficult to provide a single articulate definition of the sound encompassed within the label. Although it is difficult to isolate the specific genre of music that served as the focus for research in Tokyo, for example, again illustrated by the reviewer's eloquent analysis of the sound as "fucking heavy, fucking fast," certain generalizations, such as those already mentioned, can be made. "Hardcore" in this study roughly aligns with Shuker's definition. The bands under consideration generally featured screaming vocals, a sense of varying speeds within a single song, and the absence of clear, melodic, or virtuosic guitar solos. Although not as fast and firmly grounded in punk as Shuker's definition, drawing on grunge and alternative guitar rock styles as well, the majority of hardcore bands embraced a style quite distinct from mainstream performance practice. Most Japanese hardcore bands, however, did not feature explicitly politically charged lyrics, an issue that is further considered in Chapter Four.

The term "hardcore" is employed here for reasons beyond the sonic as well. The term "hardcore," for example, reinforces the sense of an underground musical happening that is edgy, different, and potentially illicit. As with the term "underground," "hardcore" was also a common referent among performers in the scene; *hâdoko*a (ハードコア) in Japanese. The label *hâdoko*a, for example, is regularly used in various promotional materials for the scene. In the late 1990s, the term was slightly less prevalent than it is today, though some band members would describe their own music as hardcore even then, and certainly people shared an understanding of what the term meant.

More significant than such generalizations, however, is that a single definition of "hardcore," in terms of sound, did not seem that important to the performers involved. There was even a tension between my label of "hardcore" and the bands' own conception of their music at times. When the members of Jug, for example, were asked what genre they considered their music, the answers varied slightly from "heavy guitar rock" to simply "rock." Their guitarist further explained, "If I try to categorize our music it might be 'heavy rock,' but I don't think we match any genre." When asked why they think they belong to a particular genre, the remaining members of Jug reinforced the sentiment expressed by their guitarist's initial answer, with the following responses.

The drummer claimed that she "does not think about genres that much. 'Heavy guitar rock' is the genre, if I am forced to put a name. I think it is just 'rock.'" The bassist for Jug added, "I don't think we belong to any other genres. It depends on how I feel about a certain genre." The guitarist then expanded with, "I don't think we match in any other genres. Jug's sound is heavy, but I don't care whether we belong to any genre."

Another band, Sports, on the other hand, categorized their music as the more specific genre “emotional-core,” or *emokoa* (エモコア) in Japanese, a subgenre of hardcore. They were not able, however, to offer an explanation for exactly why they felt that their band fell under this category. Another group in this scene, Music from the Mars, made the strongest argument against categorizing their music. Their vocalist argued that their music should be called just “Music!!! But maybe rock because our songs are composed for the guitar . . . We really want to be a band that can play anywhere [or any genre]. We think it is best to let the audience decide what genre we are. We are just making the band ‘Music from the Mars.’”

Although not explicitly stated in these comments, what all these bands have in common is that what they were performing was decidedly NOT mainstream Japanese popular music, or J-pop. Often they considered themselves simply playing “rock,” but consistently different than more mainstream J-pop or J-rock. This is evidenced by their referring to more J-pop style bands as being more “lyrical” or in a “pop” style: a distinction often focusing on the vocal qualities and style of production of the bands. The most significant issue in defining the aesthetic at play here arguably is that it was NOT J-pop. It is not uncommon to define alternative genres by what they are not (Bannister 2006), and, in fact, this practice actually sets up an important tension in the scene. Underground hardcore is understood as Japanese produced popular music that is not J-pop, yet it is informed by J-pop by being both part of the historical trajectory of Japanese popular music while decidedly going against it at the same time.

Scene

Each scene is unique. Nonetheless, it is useful to recognize in this scatter several distinct types that share a number of characteristics in common. Of course many classifications are possible, but for the sake of this discussion . . . we define three general types of scenes. The first, local scene, corresponds most closely with the original notion of a scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus. The second, translocal scene, refers to widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and lifestyle. The third, virtual scene, is a newly emergent formation in which people scattered across great physical spaces create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the Internet. (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 6–7)

The most complicated, and simultaneously most revealing, concept in this discussion is “scene.” Such events as the concert at Yellow are often connected with, or in the least understood as comprising, experiential moments of a larger system of intimate social interaction within an urban setting. A variety of terms have been employed to assist in understanding

such local, and at times transnational, shared musical practices, including “worlds,” “communities,” “subcultures,” “soundscapes,” and of course, “scenes,” with certain subtleties in theoretical intent and overall larger applicability. All these terms, though, attempt to limit exploration of the social interaction associated with the production, dissemination, and consumption of a particular music. Clearly articulating one’s intended meaning in employing any one of these terms can be quite complicated, as there is a tendency to use any one or many of the terms in attempts to define the others, as in my own discussion of the “underground Tokyo hardcore scene,” leading at times to a circular, even empty articulation of the specific term under consideration. Nonetheless, I have chosen to use the term “scene” here for a variety of reasons, both to locate the broader ethnographic experience and to understand this musical moment, as it motivates exploration of meanings beneath the descriptive surface of an event such as that at Yellow. Beyond academic considerations though, scene is the most appropriate term here, again precisely because it was a common referent among participants, *shin* (シーン) in Japanese.

Although problematic, the use of the term “scene” here is supported by the development of the term in academic studies. Finnegan (1989), for example, relied on the term “world” in her seminal exploration of music-making practices in Milton Keynes. Finnegan argued that “world” is the most appropriate term, as it is a common referent among the participants under study (46–47), yet must rely on other related terms (“community,” “network,” “systems,” “pathways,” etc.) in articulating her use of the term (54). Cohen (1991), Straw (1997a), and Kruse (1993) all cited Finnegan’s important contribution to the study of local musics, at the same time critiquing, either overtly or through subtle implication, the application of the terms “world,” “community,” and “subculture” in their respective studies, instead opting for the more fluid term “scene.” Straw, for example, argued that community implies a relatively fixed group of performers making music that is “rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage” (494), yet scene encompasses a wider range of musical practices that take into consideration historical change and, perhaps, global intersections.

Drawing on works by Finnegan, Cohen, Straw, and Kruse, as well as Shank (1994), Jackson (1998) posited what I find as the most useful and articulate definition of the term “scene” for my own purposes. Finding the concept of community too loaded within jazz scholarship, Jackson opted for the term “scene,” as “a socially constructed world in which various actors and institutions (musicians, audience members, educational institutions, performance venues, the recording industry, and critics and the media) interact in complex and shifting ways to enable the public presentation of jazz” (1). Jackson further argued that the concept of a scene, as opposed to community, world, etc., takes into consideration the translocal connections of musical practice. According to Jackson,

on one level, a focus on a particular local scene necessitates engaging the interactions among actors and institutions on the local level with those on the national and international levels. One has to be attentive to the varied processes of boundary construction and policing that are essential components of a given scene. It is important to note, however, that the study of musical scenes does not eliminate the possibility of focusing attention on specific geographic locales: where one chooses to focus depends on her/his research questions. (39)

Thus Jackson encourages the exploration of local music practices within a particular urban location, while at the same time allowing consideration of global intersections, depending on the focus of the project. An understanding of the term “scene” as perhaps vague “yet implicitly holistic in defining something that encapsulates music-making, production, circulation, discussion and texts” (Kahn-Harris 2007, 15), whether at the local, translocal, or virtual level, as defined by Bennett and Peterson, today seems accepted in general popular music studies (Bennett, Shank, and Toynbee 2006).

Clearly scenes are difficult to define. Nonetheless, the previously-mentioned literature suggests that the concept of a scene can make the location of study more manageable; it emphasizes the complexity of relying on such terms (subculture, world, scene, etc.) to assign liminality to musical experience. Again, “scene” is the best option here because of its current acceptance in pertinent literature, which is largely due to its fluidity and malleability as a definition for both participants and theorists. As a result of this malleability, the ethnographer herself must clarify her intended meaning. For my purposes here, I find that there is a lack of reference to the ethnographer’s role in creating a “sense of scene” in such scholarship and add this to the definition. The use of the term “scene” thus provides not only an opportunity for locating the activities of the participants, but also the research of the ethnographer, in both disparate and intersecting ways.

A scene then is best understood as encountered and shaped through ethnography. Ethnographic work, in turn, reveals the local interpretation of global sound and performance within the scene. Localized performance of global music needs to be understood in terms of its immediate geographical, spatial, temporal, and sonic contexts, as well as through global connections when appropriate. Scenes are performed into existence through networks of individuals and institutions and unified by a shared system of communication. And they, of course, are imagined into existence through the work of the ethnographer, yet they exist beyond the work of the ethnographer as well.

Summary

The underground Tokyo hardcore scene can thus be understood as performed in the geographical space of Tokyo, and further at certain physical

sites, such as livehouses, record shops, and rehearsal studios, during a particular temporal moment, the mid- to late 1990s. The scene was performed into existence by individuals—musicians, mixers, stagehands, managers, and audience members—through the production of codified musical and extramusical tropes. With this general understanding of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in place, the following discussion considers what is most interesting about this scene in particular.

PLAY IN THE UNDERGROUND TOKYO HARDCORE SCENE

What was indeed most significant about the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was that individuals were able to play in various ways through participating. The concept of play itself is at once both simple and complicated in the context of contemporary Japan.¹⁰ Play, here in reference to adult play specifically and not child's developmental play,¹¹ implies an activity separate from the traditional spheres of family, school, or work in Japan. Play further indicates time spent pursuing a leisure activity for enjoyment and also suggests that the activity is temporary.¹² Play often is not part of reality, as people play to escape the real world. Play thus serves as a release from pressure, and people typically play for no other purpose than to play. This is not to say that the cultural function of play should be ignored though, as play is serious business in Japan, and the Japanese play particularly hard.

Spending countless hours, and often equally endless amounts of money, practicing everything from *karaoke* (カラオケ) to *ikebana* (生け花), the fine art of flower arranging, the Japanese, long mythologized for their tireless efforts at school, work, and meeting the demands of dependent family members, are now being recognized for their equally devoted pursuit of play. Indeed, the desire to play, and play well, has generated a huge leisure industry catering to the needs of golfing *sararîman* on weekends, or their traveling wives, as well as a burgeoning area of scholarship on the importance of play and leisure in shaping contemporary Japanese identity and society (Hendry and Raveri 2002; Leheny 2003). There are many opportunities for the Japanese to play, so many in fact that it becomes interesting to consider why individuals choose to play the way they do and just what this play means for those involved. Some individuals choose more traditional modes of play, such as golf or *ikebana*, for example, that, although offering a moment of repose and release from daily social pressures, never challenge or confront those realms. Others may seek more subversive modes of play that could actually permanently place them on the fringe of Japanese society. Still others seek out leisure activities that sit somewhere in between, opting not to play in typical ways, but not completely resisting mainstream expectations.

Play is an especially powerful force in shaping the individual and collective identity of the Japanese in recent years,¹³ a time again marked by a

continued economic recession, increased military threats from neighbors in East Asia, and growing social disorder, among other social ills. Clearly the economic miracle of post-World War II Japan is at a standstill that is changing the face of young adult Japanese of this generation,¹⁴ a generation that has more actively sought means of play than ever before as a result. Understanding how Japanese people play in various ways thus reveals more about the nature of Japanese society in general at the turn of the 21st century, as the type of play people choose to pursue says something about who they are, and how they imagine and construct their individual identity, as well as about the collective identity of the group with whom they actually play. Japanese citizens who play in particular music scenes, as opposed to pursuing other leisure activities, for example, choose to do so for all the reasons mentioned: as a release, as an opportunity to socialize away from other spheres of life, and even as a way to express anger, but also because of a certain affinity with the music that is produced.

Play in Music Scenes

Music scenes, in fact, offer a particularly provocative location to explore the nature of play in contemporary Japanese society on several levels. Scenes themselves are commonly associated with spheres of leisure, as rarely does one refer to a “work scene.” “Play” through musical performance more specifically has multiple meanings, most immediately referring to the actual play of music, on guitars, basses, drums, and through the voice. But “play” here also refers to the broader act of play, play through the performance of the scene as a way to spend leisure time, with the primary purpose of enjoying oneself. This idea of “play” works particularly well in reference to underground music scenes, where there is little to no money to be made by the bands themselves. Rather, they pay for the privilege to play on stage and to play in the scene more broadly. Thus, the majority of participants are playing in the scene, in this sense of spending leisure time for the primary purpose of seeking enjoyment with people who have similar interests. This is not a career choice for many but, rather, a choice for play, although very serious play given the expense, and, as noted, the Japanese penchant for playing hard.

The concept of play here should not be confused with the similar concept of performance, which has been employed thus far to describe how the underground Tokyo hardcore scene is brought to life through the complex interaction of individuals and institutions in the geographical space of Tokyo. Drawing on the growing field of performance studies, performance is seen to involve all aspects of making music in the scene, from the plugging in of guitars to amplifiers, to the sweeping up of flyers advertising lives from the entrances of livehouses following an event, to the clerk making change in a local record shop (Bial 2004; Cook 2003; Schechner 2002; Schechner and Appel 1990; Small 1998; Wong 2004). “Performance”

remains the better term for capturing the sense of how a scene comes into being, as it encapsulates the entire performance, emphasizing the importance of all involved, and not just the bands on stage, in the creation of a scene. The term “play” though, given its broader applications as described, implies that the activity provides an escape from reality, highlighting the at times actual “playful” aspects of this performance. One adorns the appropriate accoutrement, as it were, and enters the fantasy world of the scene to play, but that play should still be taken seriously, as it deeply affects the identity of the participant.

Play at Identity

In fact, according to Shank (1994), “the performance of new, sometimes temporary but nevertheless significant, identities is the defining characteristic of scenes in general as well as their most important cultural function” (x). Music scenes offer a safe space to play with new identities away from one’s traditional spheres of life.¹⁵ But what exactly is identity in this context and how is it played with in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene specifically? The concept of identity and the need to explore its creation and negotiation is nearly ubiquitous in humanistic studies, but noting a single shared understanding of just what constitutes identity is extremely difficult, although some generalizations can be made.

In social theory, for example, identity is “no longer conceptualized as a fixed or unitary entity—as something that is an expression of inner ‘essence’,” rather, identity is now perceived as a “product of social ‘work’” (DeNora 2006, 141). Identity formation thus refers to the way “people continually create themselves and are created in terms of the multiple pictures that people weave with others and their environments as they move through life” (Rosenberger 1992, 14). Similarly Shank, drawing on Lacanian models, sees identity as “the continually constructed product of the interactions of a desiring body with the complex cultural systems through which humans conduct symbolic exchange” (129). In other words, identity is understood as the construction of one’s conception of their subjective-self—who one is—which is accomplished through acting in the social world; the self-constructed-through-society model of identity. The quality of this identity is mediated by broader urban, regional, national, and transnational influences that inform the place of the performance of that identity (Connell and Gibson 2003, 279–281). One arguably can never remove identity from the space where it is being negotiated, either in terms of geographic location or indeterminate conceptual spaces (Benko and Strohmayer 1997; Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993; Morley and Robins 1995). Each cultural area thus brings its own nuance to the practice of building and negotiating identity. Kondo (1990), for example, argues for a multiplicity of Japanese selves, stating that “identity here is not a unified essence, but a mobile site of contradictions and disunity, a node where various discourses temporarily intersect in particular

ways” (47). There is a perception that Japanese people, in particular, are excellent at shifting between multiple identities, in essence role-playing the appropriate character in the appropriate situation, which allows them to easily shift between differing worlds.

Music and Identity

Music can be used as a projection of one’s identity as one shifts between these worlds. Identity building involves both a process of projecting an image of self to others, as well as an image of self to self, which “involves the social and cultural activity of remembering, the turning over of past experiences, for the cultivation of self-accountable imageries of self. Here music comes to the fore, as part of the retinue of devices for memory retrieval (which is, simultaneously, memory construction)” (DeNora 2006, 141). Music is often used in this process of constructing memory, which in turn, is used to construct a perception or sense of self. According to DeNora, music is often used in this way through association with particular people, such as deceased relatives, or to recall former lovers and partners, and related emotionally heightened moments in one’s life with these people (141–144). Individuals draw together an image of self that they share with others through these social interactions of the past, and music becomes a part of that history and one’s remembering of it.

More specifically, “musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity—for identity’s identification” (145). Individuals can “find themselves” as it were “in certain musical structures that provide representations of the things [one] perceives and values about [himself or herself]” (146). As such, engaging with a particular type of music, or even a specific moment in a song, affirms certain beliefs that one has of who he or she is as a person. “Here, the music provides a material rendering of self-identity; a material in and with which to identify identity” (146). In essence, individuals connect with certain musical materials that represent things that one values and “different styles of music can be used by the same person to articulate different identities” (146). Fonarow (2006) supports the idea that looking at what is valued by an individual or combined community helps identify the identity of that group, community, or in this case, scene. There are thus multiple layers of identity to explore in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene: at the level of the individual, the band, the networks of individuals localized around certain livehouses or other sites for the performance of the scene, or the scene as a whole. There were a wide variety of individuals and bands involved in the performance of the scene, who did indeed express individual creativity and shape their own, unique identities, but what they had in common with others created a sense of community identity as well.

Identity in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene then can be understood as referring, on the one hand, to an individual’s imagined sense of

self; a momentary subjectivity, constantly in flux, and actively played with in the context of social interaction. Identity also refers to the collective identity of the scene, articulated through the recognizable prized values of the individuals who performed it to life. Play with identity was certainly central in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, but this aspect of the scene was often further characterized by the resistive quality of many of the acts.

Play at Resistance

Resistance as a concept has long been a part of popular music scholarship, yet now is generally accepted as subtler than in earlier applications (Bannister 2006; Baranovitch 2003; Epstein 2006; Peddie 2006; Stokes 2004). Resistance here can be understood as a desire to avoid, change and/or reject mainstream dominant socio-political systems through resistive behavior; play at resistance implies a temporary performance of these same arguably resistive actions: dressing the part, but not necessarily walking the walk as it were, or only doing so temporarily and in a limited space. The young Harajuku girls provide an interesting example of how Japanese people can play with resistance. These girls, in the late 1990s, could be found wearing swastikas and SS uniforms on Sunday afternoons at the entrance to Yoyogi park in Tokyo. These young women were not actually supporting Nazi-Germany, but were well aware that their choice in fashion made a statement. They would, however, change from this clothing to more suitable skirts and blouses or school uniforms in the train station bathroom before heading home that evening, thus recognizing that this play had an appropriate place and time, was resistive and not resistive. Japanese people are particularly adept at compartmentalizing their lives, separating spheres, and playing at one thing one moment, then another the next.

CONCLUSION

Within the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, traditional ideas of resistance are expressed in more subtle practice, or indeed, may not be resistive at all, but rather ultimately reinforce mainstream cultural practices. Concomitantly, what may be seen as conformity may, at times, actually be a subtle form of resistance. There is a romanticization about what people do in many underground music scenes that belies the real function of these moments for many of the performers, as it is in fact this play at various levels and in various contexts that is the most significant characteristic of the scene that brings these performers together.

The scene, thus, is not exactly "resistive," as earlier subculture theory might suggest. Performance in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene actually affirms certain mainstream cultural values, while at the same time

presenting a supposedly alternative space. For example, as noted in the opening narrative, the lack of drug use in this particular scene, although dominant in other scenes within Tokyo, such as harder-hardcore or trance, suggests a retention of mainstream Japanese negative views on such activities. The levels of formality in language and the socialization process present in mainstream society were also reinforced.

Similarly, women seemed to enjoy great creative autonomy when little to no money was involved, only at the very independent, local level; but as more economic rewards became available, fewer women participated (e.g. as DJs, mixers, musicians, etc.). The very fact that women have long enjoyed great success in the arts (poetry, literature, etc.) that were NOT considered the most prestigious at the time only supports the claim that this trend is perhaps not new or resistive, but a continuation of long-established gender roles in Japan.

Participants thus look to the underground Tokyo hardcore scene for alternatives to mainstream culture, but most still participated in the established social order. Nonetheless, a young woman who chooses to scream in a hardcore band, as opposed to studying ikebana, is enacting some change to mainstream socialization systems, revealing the complexity of reading resistance as a classic binary system. She is indeed resisting, but only in a particular space, for a limited amount of time. The following chapter explores the primary geographical, physical, and sonic spaces where young Japanese played in this way through performing the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

2 Trains, 20,000volt, Tower Records, and the Illicit Intimacy of the Spaces of Play

Walking through the room with a bar counter where a mirror ball is turning, and entering a dark floor with a stage, there was a figure of a DJ, which is relatively rare to see at a livehouse. The unusual atmosphere, compared to other livehouses, made me feel rather cozy. While I was enjoying the ambience, the bands suddenly began to play on the stage. . . . Somewhere in Tokyo tonight, might there be a similar event?

—excerpt from “Sui Event Live 98,” Staff of *M-Gazette*, 1999

I arrived at the train station around one o’clock, running late as usual, and began hunting for the club called “Yellow.” . . . I had been to Yellow before . . . but had some trouble finding the club by daylight, which was nestled down a side street in the affluent Nishiiazabu neighborhood of Tokyo. . . . It was strange to see this space, typically crowded with foreigners and Japanese dancing to techno music, now relatively empty in the afternoon. The normally smoky front bar appeared rather dirty and sad in the fluorescent light as we passed through the doors to find the staff constructing a stage with large wooden blocks across half the dance floor. . . .

—excerpt from “Backstage at Yellow,” Chapter One

The event at Yellow highlighted in the opening quotes once again serves as a portal for understanding the geographic, physical, and sonic spatial contexts for the performance of the scene. The descriptions of the event at Yellow reveal that the location in Tokyo, the structure and nature of the performance space itself, and the background sounds filling the room all inform the ultimate performance and quality of play in the scene: with its hard to find location, the dirty bar used as a backstage area, unusual construction of the stage on a floor intended for dancing, and rare DJ spinning dance music not typically connected to a hardcore event. The reviewer comments that the “unusual atmosphere” made him or her feel “rather cozy,” establishing

the mood for the performance to come. Both the concert review and backstage narrative serve the purpose of placing the performance of the bands in context, describing the location within Tokyo, the particulars of the club-turned-livehouse, and the musical sounds that intersect to provide a space for the performance of hardcore that night. Space, thus, refers to not only the actual physical sites that inhabit the scene, but also to more abstract locations, such as the sonic space, as well as the imagined space of the scene in totality, that both inform and are informed by the quality of performance.¹

The space of the scene as a whole fosters a sense of illicit intimacy in the impersonal, huge, and crowded mass that is Tokyo. The dark and dingy appearance of the immediate physical spaces, such as the livehouses and studios, and the sonic nature of hardcore itself, which on some level stands in contrast to the dominant sounds of mainstream Japanese popular music, both inform the quality of the identity created by people participating in the scene. Certain aspects of the scene actually foster a sense of playing at resistance, as, despite appearances, the spaces are all relatively safe and drug free and advertise in the regular weekly entertainment magazines, and the music that is produced, which sounds so combative, can be found in the same record shops that feature the latest top J-pop artists. Yet this sense of illicit intimacy fostered in these close-knit and questionable quarters, as well as the position of the hardcore music produced in the broader space of mainstream Japanese popular music, are important and actually attractive aspects of the scene. Indeed, the idea that participants are doing something illicit adds to the power of the liminal moment of the scene, as a space removed from work or family, but their participation does not actually jeopardize individual's positions in mainstream society.

The event at Yellow culminated in the production of hardcore sound by all the individuals involved, but occurred at a particular moment, in a specific space, informed by the sociocultural patterns that characterize Tokyo. The review, itself, suggests that this is not the only such happening but that other similar events may be occurring throughout the city. The following discussion explores the broad physical space of the scene through a train ride and subsequent consideration of the importance of trains in shaping the character of Tokyo. The train ride, in the spirit of Shank (1994), takes the reader along for the ride through a key neighborhood in Tokyo, in essence providing a "lived" sense of Tokyo. Such exploration illuminates not only the nature of the event at Yellow but also reveals the broader context for the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene and the illicit intimacy of the spaces of play.

A TRAIN RIDE THROUGH TOKYO

It is a crisp, cool day with streaks of sun shining through the gloomy panorama of skyscrapers as the Yamanote-sen, an extremely busy trainline that

circles the center of Tokyo, speeds along the tracks.² Even though there are a scant number of trees in the area, one can almost feel the bright auburns, yellows, and deep reds of the autumn leaves in Yoyogi park, a large park in the heart of Tokyo, just a few stops away. Looking through the cloudy window of the train car, the narrow winding streets, the power lines and telephone lines crisscrossing everywhere above, blocking clear views to the sky, and the small, square, gray concrete buildings, stringing one after another, laundry hanging outside—all whisk by at alarming speed. How remarkable it is to notice a small, old wooden temple or shrine from centuries ago nestled between rows of remarkably nondescript and downright ugly buildings, sidewalks, power lines, and city filth. The train car is typically packed with commuting *sarariman*, the infamous white-collar worker bees of Japan, stowing their briefcases in the racks above and then reading their papers folded neatly in half to avoid hitting other passengers. They vie for seats next to housewives sitting upright, ankles tucked against the benches and numerous packages perched on their laps; college students with their backpacks pressed against their chests so as to avoid accidentally hitting someone else; high-school students in uniforms, chatting in groups, boys on one side, girls on the other; and, of course, several individuals toting their guitars and basses in convenient gig-bags. The seats that line the sides of the car filled long ago at the stations in the outlying neighborhoods, so one must resist the pitch of the train by grabbing the conveniently placed poles and handgrips.

As the Yamanote-sen circles the center of Tokyo, it stops at major urban centers—Shinagawa, Ebisu, Ikebukuro, Ueno, etc.—that serve as points of intersection with the many other train lines that, in turn, connect to smaller stations, seemingly limitless neighborhoods, and express trains running beyond Tokyo's borders. The Imperial Palace and its extensive grounds are located in the middle of this loop, enhancing the sense that there is a heart of Tokyo, which is outlined by the Yamanote-sen, spreading forth with the many railways that intersect and extend beyond the various stations along its path.

As the train passes through station after station, the announcer finally exclaims, "Next stop Shinjuku!" in polite Japanese as numerous *keitai* (携帯), the ubiquitous mobile phones that were in abundant use in every imaginable location in Tokyo by the mid-1990s,³ are whipped out and calls are placed to the business associates, friends, and lovers that wait at the station. As the train pulls into the station, the crowds of future passengers move to the right and the left of the doors, which align with the yellow lines running intermittently down the sides of the platform. The doors part, as the announcer politely reminds passengers to "not forget anything." The force of the disembarking mass sucks the passengers onto the platform, as the new riders force themselves inside against the flow to grab the opening seats.

Passengers find themselves on one of the many platforms at Shinjuku-eki,⁴ one of the busiest train stations in Tokyo. Now they must find the

exit, heading towards one of the many maps on the platform, complete with details of major landmarks to assist in navigating Shinjuku. Overhead signs indicate the directions not only to the exits, but also to the other train lines and store entrances connecting to the station. Even though many of the signs indicate all necessary travel information in both Japanese and English, the foreigner still can have great trouble navigating the stations. Nevertheless, passengers purposefully head down the stairs in what should be the passage to the south exit, only to find another set of maps, exit signs, and train entrances. Many other stations are similarly large, crowded, and confusing with multiple levels, many train lines intersecting, and huge crowds of people. Even Japanese citizens not familiar with the system can feel lost when first navigating Tokyo's railways.

To add to the confusion of negotiating the train platforms themselves, within train stations it is quite easy to become momentarily lost in the labyrinth of passageways, passing by a multitude of small shops ranging from those specializing in supplies for the traditional tea ceremony, *sadô* (茶道), to trendy clothing and cosmetic shops. There are turnstiles intermittently opening to one of the many large department stores clustered around, and even sitting directly above, the station. Finally reaching the south exit, passengers must pass their tickets through the electronic turnstile and ascend the stairs to the outdoors.



Figure 2.1 The south exit at Shinjuku Station in Tokyo.

Directly beyond the exit are clusters of people leaning against walls or railings, or sitting on the ground, clutching their keitai once again, desperately trying to locate those that are now similarly navigating the station below.

Directly across from the station is a bridge to the massive complex containing the expensive Takashimaya Department Store, Kinokuniya Books, and Japan's answer to Home Depot—Tokyu Hands—all towering above the tracks below. When one tires of shopping, he or she can hit the IMAX theater or 3-D arcade located on the top floor or stop to rest and enjoy exorbitantly priced coffee or tea in one of the many shops. Turning west from the station, one can wander through arcades, movie theaters, and the drunk college students emerging from the various *izakaya*, the ubiquitous drinking establishments featuring cheap food, to find tucked between department stores and coffee shops one of the larger branches of the record store Disk Union. On the compact first floor are racks of recordings from independent and underground labels. One can take hours purveying the cramped space, scouring through the shelves of new and used magazines, LPs, CDs, and recent releases by Japanese bands. The other floors feature imports, electronica, soul, or even jazz at a neighboring location. Two large record shop chains, Virgin Records and Wave, are just around the corner and contain an even broader selection of mainstream, world, and art musics, but they are typically more expensive than Disk Union.⁵

North of the station there are more second-hand recording shops that specialize in distinct genres, such as rare punk, hardcore, and other underground styles. One can continue on to the entrance of the famous livehouse, The Loft, which can be seen as the “CBGB’s of Tokyo,” with its tremendous history stretching back to its opening in the 1970s (Kunieda et. al. 1997). The small space, holding around one hundred audience members, has been the launching ground for many underground bands, some actually reaching major label status.

Finally, moving east of the station one passes into the infamous Kabuki-cho area: a major red-light district that is home to many adult bars, with explicit advertisements for sex acts displayed on signs, and fairly shady characters, drunk students, and foreign partiers wandering the streets. The neon signs, endless electronics shops, and general hustle and bustle of the street can be a bit overwhelming at first. Beyond the congested main thoroughfare of Kabuki-cho lies the entrance to Liquid Room, a large livehouse on the seventh floor of one of the many nondescript buildings crowded in the Shinjuku area.⁶ Liquid Room, holding approximately seven hundred people, is used for a variety of events ranging from concerts featuring mainstream bands, to hardcore lives, to electronica raves. With its extensive sound system, large main space, permanent stage area, and central location in the city, Liquid Room is a popular location to enjoy a variety of musics, drawing diverse crowds. After a live at Liquid Room, one can easily race back to Shinjuku-eki to catch the train to yet another crowded, bustling urban center within Tokyo.

THE SPATIAL CONTEXT FOR PERFORMANCE OF THE SCENE

This short trip on the Yamanote-sen and tour of Shinjuku introduces key elements that create the context for the performance of the scene. Through description of the layout of Tokyo, quality of architecture, types of fellow passengers, the train itself and its ability to shift between neighborhoods, and the complexity of Shinjuku, the character of Tokyo begins to take shape as fast, crowded, multilayered, and divided by neighborhoods with major centers clustered around train stations. As such, this narrative highlights important characteristics of Tokyo that inform the character and identity of the scene. The choice of couching the narrative description itself within a trainride and arrival at Shinjuku-eki similarly highlights the significance of this transportation system on my imagination of Tokyo, and, as is discussed later, leads to further consideration of the practical implications of trains on band culture.

The additional view of spaces more immediately relevant to the production of hardcore, the record shop Disk Union or the livehouse The Loft, suggests the importance of exploring the effects that these spaces have on the production of hardcore more specifically. Similarly, brief encounters with the musics on the streets of Shinjuku only begin to provide a glimpse of the sonic context for the sound of the scene; the music of hardcore does not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, the sonorities themselves are thoroughly informed by the surrounding sounds.

The following discussion thus expands on points raised in the opening narrative: the character of Tokyo, and the importance of the train system in defining that character, the more specific sites for performance, and the surrounding musical forms—all of which both serve as the backdrop and actively influence the performance of the scene.

TRAINS AND THE CHARACTER OF TOKYO

My own reflections of Tokyo have taken me down many paths, different images surfacing at every moment, ultimately revealing the importance of trains in shaping not only my imagination of contemporary Tokyo, but their importance in the actual daily lives of Tokyo's inhabitants, and direct influence on the performance of the scene. I have relied on trains in such cities as Boston, Chicago, London, and New York, although only for short trips in the latter two, but my experience on trains in Tokyo stands unique in my mind; one cannot discuss the character of Tokyo without considering the importance of trains in framing the neighborhoods and daily life of its inhabitants. I do not believe that it is too strong to claim that life in Tokyo completely and utterly revolves around trains.⁷

Trains in Japan are expensive and exhausting; riders fight their way through crowds, feeling their energy drain on the ride home. Trains are a primary mode of transportation both within Tokyo and extending beyond, as millions pass through the stations daily. Apartments are advertised by their walking distance to the closest train station. Addresses and directions are given in relation to the nearest train and not by street name and number, as there often are no street names, and numbers correspond to the specific section of the neighborhood and the year of construction. People typically meet at train stations or clear markers near them, particularly entrances. And, of course, there are clusters of clubs and livehouses well situated within brief walking distance from particular stations. Late night prowling is, in turn, encouraged by train schedules; trains stop running between eleven p.m. and one a.m., depending on the line, not to begin service again until five or six a.m., leaving many stranded, unwilling to pay the exorbitant fee for a taxi home, and looking for something to do until the trains begin again in the early morning hours. Trains are, indeed, a powerful force in shaping the urban landscape of Tokyo.

The intricacy of the Tokyo train system is evidenced through the number and variety of maps available, ranging from barebones pocket maps to complicated, and nearly impossible to decipher, representations of the complete set of local railways and related timetables.⁸ It can take a significant amount of time to become truly comfortable with the intricacies of negotiating the various train lines.⁹ Despite certain difficulties, Tokyo trains are exceptionally efficient and timely, although they are susceptible to delays from the occasional malfunction, foul weather, or even the rare suicide. If it snows, trains running above ground basically stop, leaving people stranded in their offices or, worse, on platforms far from home.¹⁰

If we had visited any one of the neighborhoods that our train passed through before disembarking in Shinjuku, we would have encountered a distinct area; each major center in Tokyo tends to have its own personality, from the upscale shopping area of Ginza to the trendy, youth-oriented Shibuya. The development of neighborhoods and train lines is perhaps fluid, with trains built to connect existing locations and urban centers developing along new stops of the train lines.¹¹ As the trains define neighborhoods and distinct areas of the city, they also define the dominant pop-styles and livehouses in those particular areas. The Chuo-sen running west from Shinjuku, for example, features a number of stops with clusters of hardcore livehouses around them.¹²

Trains influence people's choices about going out at night, how late they will stay out, or if they will go out at all. Trains even influence live schedules; livehouses typically schedule bands early in the evening so that people can meet the trains. And the general safety of the trains allows women to feel safe carrying their equipment on the trains, even after a gig, late at night. This is particularly significant as issues of safety and the ability to

transport gear have been noted as possible reasons for a historical exclusion of women from band culture in the west (Bayton 1998).

It is perhaps difficult to gain a sense of the intensity of Tokyo without actually residing within the area for a period of time, but the myth of crowded trains with white-gloved attendants shoving passengers into closing car doors, speeding bullet trains between major cities, and the overall cosmopolitan character of Tokyo have certainly been exported. And it is within this tableau of contemporary Tokyo that the underground Tokyo hardcore scene is performed, primarily at specific sites that allow for immediate social interaction among the performers.

SITES FOR PERFORMANCE OF THE SCENE

This brief tour of Shinjuku introduced several of the primary sites for the performance of the scene, including the record shops and, most important, the livehouses where music is actually performed, both in the traditional sense of musical production and in the broader sense as a moment of intense of social interaction. The following discussion further considers such locations that are significant in the production of the scene as well, such as rehearsal and recording studios. All of these locations provide an actual space where hardcore music is produced and consumed, in either live or mediated forms. Shinjuku is an important location in Tokyo for all the reasons suggested, but the most significant sites for performance of the scene under consideration here were actually located in other areas of the city, all of course connected by the extensive train system that spreads through Tokyo.

Discovering 20,000volt

The Chuo-sen is a busy main train line that speeds west from Shinjuku, arriving at the center of Koenji, an interesting, largely residential neighborhood. Near the station is a covered shopping arcade that stretches in both directions and is a pleasure during the rainy season as one strolls from shop to shop in relative dryness. Following the directions provided in the weekly entertainment guide *Pia*, one can hopefully manage to find the nondescript entrance somewhere on the left down this cluttered street. Note the obscured sign and employee perched outside on an overturned bucket in Figure 2.2. Despite the shabby outward appearance, or perhaps precisely because of it, this particular livehouse would become the central space of research for the entire ethnographic project.

I first discovered this livehouse one night early in Fall 1997, based on a lead from a clerk at Disk Union in Shinjuku, who suggested I go see a particular band that would be performing there that evening. I arrived to



Figure 2.2 Street entrance to 20,000volt.

find the music already pounding away, just barely audible on the street, and proceeded to descend the dirty stairs entering a doorway on the left. Upon asking if the group in question had performed yet, I was informed that I was at the livehouse called Gear and that the group I was seeking were performing at the other place downstairs. Amazed at finding not one, but *two*, livehouses tucked in this building, I headed further down the broken stairs,



Figure 2.3 Indoor entrance to 20,000volt.

taking in the walls plastered with band posters and schedules, stepping around people sitting in clusters, smoking, drinking, and talking, finally arriving at the entrance to 20,000volt.

Pushing past the table, covered with flyers, that crowds the already narrow entryway, I made my way to the front counter to purchase my ticket. While the attendant sitting behind the high counter assisted other customers

ahead of me in line, I began to gain a sense of the music that would be heard within. The entryway, lined with additional posters and stickers, occasional glimpses of the black walls with tape and staples peeking through, the floor covered with cigarette butts, an old television sitting to the left showing what was happening on stage in the next room, all created a definite atmosphere—rough, dirty, and potentially illicit—even before one entered the main space of the livehouse. Behind the attendant stood the marker board with the evening's performers listed in order in faded blue ink. I happily acquired my ticket, watching the attendant produce change from an ancient cash box. Two doors faced me to the right of the counter, similarly plastered with posters. One obviously protected the backstage area, as various performers entered and exited, crowding the narrow entryway. A quick peek inside revealed a very small and rather grungy room, gig-bags and drum pedals, knapsacks, bags, and jackets thrown in heaps on old sofas and tables, as band members sat about chatting while munching on McDonald's hamburgers from around the corner. The music itself seemed to be coming from behind the second door. I turned to enter, pulling on the heavy handle and was blown away by the volume of the sound that immediately assaulted me. I put in my earplugs and passed through the doorway, closing the heavy door behind me. I entered yet another narrow, short hallway that turned into the main space of the livehouse through an archway on the left.



Figure 2.4 Interior of 20,000volt.

A doorway at the end of the hallway separated the office, a segregated space reserved for the manager alone. Through the opening to the left, though, I finally entered the central space of 20,000volt.

A drink machine, small bar serving beer and soda, and an area for the mixing board lined the back of the room, with bathrooms tucked behind. Directly opposite was the stage area, raised a few feet from the floor and packed with a drum kit, amplifiers, microphones, and, of course, the band that was currently playing. The stage itself extended most of the width of the room, with speakers stacked on either side and in front. The two walls extending on either side of the stage were covered in black and white graffiti, including the name of the livehouse in Chinese characters, 音響二万電圧 (*onkyô* [sound] *niman* [20,000] *denatsu* [voltage]), typically contracted to “*niman-boruto*,” or 20,000volt, with a few benches in front. The entire space was shockingly compact, full of cigarette smoke, and featured overwhelmingly loud music.

Hovering in the back of the room, I watched the remaining four or five bands take to the stage, making the most of the brief moments of reprieve between sets to chat above the various sounds of primarily western hardcore bands, which were being pumped over the speakers at a much lower volume by the sound mixer in back. The final band politely thanked the audience for coming, as people began collecting their bags and jackets, milling towards the exit. I worked my way back through the hallway and ascended the stairs, passing groups gathering to chat a bit longer, often



Figure 2.5 Audience gathering outside Cyclone in Shibuya.

while distributing demo-tapes or flyers of upcoming shows, perhaps again at 20,000volt or at one of the many other livehouses found throughout the city.

Livehouses

During my research, I visited many livehouses throughout Tokyo, as well as in Yokohama on occasion, but found myself most often at a few locations: Shelter, in Shimokitazawa; Heaven's Door, in Senganjaya; and, most important, 20,000volt, in Koenji.¹³ Because it was the livehouse that I frequented most often during research, 20,000volt was, indeed, the most significant space for performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene under consideration here. But 20,000volt is also of central importance as it was representative of such livehouses in the generalizations it raises, as well as by possessing its own unique character.

Typical hardcore events in Tokyo in the late 1990s often took place in similarly run-down small spaces, positioned in the basements of buildings, holding at most fifty to one hundred people. However, not all livehouses of similar quality and capacity possessed a backstage area, or a separate manager's office, as encountered at 20,000volt. The backstage area at 20,000volt was entered only when one was performing that evening or had to greet very close friends. The manager's office was even more sacrosanct. Most livehouses did possess decent sound systems, and provided performance equipment, such as amplifiers, drums, and microphones, for the bands. The access to equipment, coupled with the extensive train systems previously described, meant that musicians did not have to own a car for transportation, and it was not uncommon to see groups of people toting snare drums, guitars, and pedal boxes on the trains at any given time. In general, four to six bands would perform on a given night, playing half hour sets beginning around six p.m. and finishing before eleven p.m. to allow everyone adequate time to catch the trains home. Occasionally more bands played together, and some livehouses did have later hours, particularly in other areas of the city, such as Shibuya. Audiences remained small, except for a few well-known local acts or visiting acts. In fact, at many shows the audience was almost entirely made up of members of other bands, and there were sometimes fewer than ten people in the audience. Most evenings featured a mixture of all-male bands, all-female bands, and mixed-gender bands, with fairly equal distribution of gender in the audience.

Livehouses survived largely on proceeds from tickets, as bands had to sell ten to twenty tickets at ¥1500 to ¥2500 each on average, for a total of ¥15,000 to ¥50,000 (@ US \$150 to \$500), or cover the expense themselves. This pay-to-play system may, in part, account for the high level of skill demonstrated by most bands performing at even the smallest livehouses, as \$500 is a tremendous amount of money for a young, independent band to cover.¹⁴ Guests were also required to purchase drink tickets, typically

for ¥300 to ¥500 each, although there was actually limited alcohol consumption at the lighter hardcore shows, and individuals often brought their own drinks and snacks from nearby convenience stores to avoid the high livehouse prices. This practice may account for the high entrance fees; with the lack of alcohol consumption there was a similar lack of revenue from bar sales. Based on periodic observations of the same livehouses from 1997 through 2007, the composition and basic operation has remained the same, although some establishments have changed their appearance slightly. Heaven's Door, as described in the opening to the Introduction, for example, added tables and chairs in the audience area, as well as two televisions suspended from the ceiling on either side of the stage, creating more of a club feeling than it previously had, perhaps to encourage drinking. Padded railings separating the performers from the audience have also been added to livehouses throughout Tokyo (see Figure 2.4), as is discussed later in this chapter.

Despite certain common practices, each livehouse tended to have its own style, regular performers, and regular audience members. The livehouse scene in Shibuya, for example, appeared to be quite different from the livehouse scene in Koenji or Shimokitazawa, featuring later hours at many establishments, and arguably more playful and kitschy bands. Exceptions can always be found to such generalizations, although these impressions are based on several visits to a variety of livehouses in different parts of Tokyo. Other livehouses had distinct architectural features, such as Area in Takadanobaba, which used to be a theater, having tiered levels, tables and chairs, and a comparatively large size within the scene.

Although the same bands may have performed at the three primary locations, Heaven's Door in Sangenjaya had a "campier" feel than Shelter or 20,000volt. Bands appeared to put more effort into sporting a decided style, and drug use may have been more prevalent at Heaven's Door; friends noted that they have smelled marijuana there on occasion. Shelter was operated by the same management as The Loft, as well as another livehouse called Tiger Hole. Shelter drew what I consider slightly more professional bands in the scene, often featuring bands on labels, although Shelter was typically small and located in the basement of a building in the young, hip Shimokitazawa area.

Livehouses actually made quite an effort to construct their own identity within the scene, which they promoted through flyers, Web sites, newsletters, and in weekly entertainment magazines. Livehouses, for example, now include a self-description or catch phrase in *Pia*, intended to capture their essence. These descriptions are brief and typically take a playful, even irreverent tone. Heaven's Door, for example, describes itself as 下町 発 天国行きの ナイス な 店 (*shitamachi hatsu tengoku iki no naisu na mise*), or, "The nice shop on the way from shitamachi [old town Tokyo] to heaven." Shelter describes itself as 普通の ライブハウス です (*futsu no raibuhausu desu*), or "A regular or typical livehouse." Although not explicitly stated,

there is a particularly irreverent sense here, as if the management of Shelter is saying “Well, we’re a regular ol’ darn livehouse; what else do you expect?” Otherwise, it seems somehow odd to simply call a livehouse “regular.” 20,000volt has one of the more interesting descriptions, again 高円寺 地下音楽の聖地 (*koenji chika ongaku no seichi*), or “Koenji, the sacred place for underground music.” Here they play with their position actually as a physical space underground, and the fact that they promote underground music, while also bringing allusions to celestial approval by referring to the space as “sacred.” Livehouses clearly attempt to construct and promote playful, rather than antagonistic or arrogant, identities—rare would be the livehouse in Tokyo that would claim it is the “best” for example. Nonetheless, livehouses do try to attract novice customers through such advertising. In Fall of 2004, *Pia* even included photographs of the interior of the livehouses, although that was not in practice in the late 1990s nor in Spring 2007. And many people do not rely on *Pia*, finding their way to livehouses by word of mouth or because they know someone playing that evening.

Bands typically chose to perform at particular livehouses based on the quality of the sound, here meaning overall quality of the equipment and expertise of the sound mixer, as well as the perception that the sound of the livehouse matched the desired sound of the band. When Hayakawa, member of the group Kirihito and manager of 20,000volt, was asked how he decides in which livehouses he likes to perform, he explained that “Each livehouse has a color, so I don’t have to choose, the decision is made without deciding.” “Color” here could refer to both the quality of the sound and the overall atmosphere of the livehouse. Indeed, for many performers the culture of the livehouse was actually more important than the quality of the sound. According to a fellow audience member at a live at the small but famous livehouse Bears, in Osaka in Fall 2004, the sound was bad, but Bears has the “best culture.” Hayakawa’s band, Kirihito, performed that evening and, although they had not been there in six years, they were happy to be back as it is a “classic place.” It is the culture and reputation here that generates the loyal following in both band and audience members. Based on general conversations with many other bands in the scene, the overall attitude of the staff and respect for and familiarity with the other bands that perform at the livehouse in question also influence these choices.

Livehouses, in providing a location to limit social interaction and enhancing a sense intimacy, present a particularly important space where these performers came together and negotiated individual and collective identities in the scene. At 20,000volt in Koenji, for example, there was a strong sense of family, or *uchi* (内) in Japanese, among the many bands that regularly performed there. They were very supportive, often playing in each other’s bands and sharing instruments and music. At any one show, the audience was likely to be made up of members of other bands that also regularly performed at 20,000volt. When a band that played at 20,000volt performed outside, or *soto* (外) in Japanese, at another livehouse, others

from the 20,000volt family would make an effort to attend their performance, offering support. In the same vein, bands that typically performed at 20,000volt often did not feel as comfortable when performing in a different livehouse, affecting both their sound and behavior. Jug did, indeed, behave differently when they performed outside of 20,000volt, and obviously the band members were not as comfortable. For example, they did not distribute their usual newsletter at other locations, which they always did at 20,000volt, and Suzuki Miyuki would only wear her sports bra with “Jug” emblazoned across the front at 20,000volt. She usually wore a non-descript t-shirt when performing in other locations. This family of bands was both typical and remarkable: typical in that many other underground livehouses had a similar core group of bands and audience members, but remarkable in the especially tight formation of bands around 20,000volt in the late 1990s. Some attribute the strong sense of social cohesion to the style of management provided by Hayakawa at the time, which promoted camaraderie. But it is also, arguably, reflective of social relations in mainstream Japanese society at large.

This sense of intimacy was, of course, both informed and reinforced by the quality and character of the livehouses. The intimate physical space and run-down atmosphere of the livehouse itself encouraged a certain sense of illicitness: that performers were participating in something dangerous, even illegal. The location of livehouses in actual basements, their general run-down appearance, and their smoke-filled ambience is easily recognized as something alternative to high-end big arenas and posh nightclubs. The appearance of the bathrooms, as well, support this sense, as pictured in Figure 2.6.

The typical Japanese pit-toilet is pictured here, which is not uncommon in public spaces. But the plastering of stickers and flyers creates a particularly grungy feeling in this livehouse, consistent in bathrooms throughout the scene.

At some point in the early 2000s, padded railings were also added to livehouses throughout Tokyo, as seen in Figure 2.4, despite the fact that most lives are quite sedate. The railings can be padded or raw metal, rising about two to three feet in front of stages, thus creating a barrier not there in the late 1990s. The bar is there presumably to protect bands from audiences, or audiences from bands, or perhaps both.¹⁵ The bar separating the stage from the audience does create both a physical and psychological distance between bands and audience members. The bar also increases the sense that something dangerous could happen here, with its sturdy metal frame and large bolts securing it to the floor.

The actual space of livehouses also promoted intense listening, supporting the argument that all involved were coperformers. Condry (1999), speaking about Japanese hip-hop culture, noted that “a club in some ways compresses space. The absence of windows focuses attention inside, and one quite physically squeezes through the packed hallways, crowds onto



Figure 2.6 Bathroom at Heaven's Door.

the dance floor, waits in line at the bathroom or jostles one's way up to the bar" (158). The small size and low, raised stages of the livehouse also placed the audience in close proximity to the bands, as well as allowing all in attendance the ability to interact on some level with everyone else in the room. The audience may feel an increased sense of moral responsibility to

“listen” rather than socialize, which is certainly reinforced by the incredibly loud sound precluding any conversation except during brief breaks between bands. The less commercial aspect of this essentially non-money-making endeavor also supports such deep listening.

For musicians, the quality of the acoustics in a particular livehouse were also important. Hardcore was created in the intimate space of the rehearsal studio and then transferred to stage, and the difference in the sound may result in problems during the live performance. But this only added a certain excited tension to the live moment, as audience, musicians, stage hands, and managers all travel together through the evening’s events, not entirely sure what will come next.

Condry (1999) further argued that hip-hop “clubs are regarded by producers, promoters, and fans alike as the ‘actual site’ (*genba*) of the Japanese rap music scene, where one finds the most devoted and most critical fans, and where the health of the scene is on display” (15). Condry (2006) further argued that the idea of *genba* (現場) in the hip-hop scene “can be applied broadly to sites that become a focus of people’s energies and where something is produced. Live shows are central for understanding the paths that Japanese hip-hop has taken, and they also constitute the events around which many musicians’ lives revolve, at least, the musical parts of their lives” (6). Although I never heard the term *genba* applied in hardcore circles, the idea that the live production of music within livehouses is the primary means of performing the scene is the same. As Condry noted, the term *genba* has a particular nuance, often used to refer to other such occurrences as the location of a car accident, and thus the sense of illicitness is present as well. It is important to note, though, that it is the social interaction of the performers—the bands, audience, and supporting players—centralized in these spaces that give them their importance, rather than the architectural spaces themselves. And livehouses, of course, are not the only spaces where such intimacy is fostered in the scene, as the performance of the scene also extends to other spaces where music is made: the rehearsal and recording studios.

Rehearsal and Recording Studios

The importance of spatially reinforced social intimacy is further evidenced through description of these recording and rehearsal studios in the scene. Condry offered a similar examination of the role of recording studios in enhancing a sense of locality in the production of Japanese hip-hop. Condry (1999) further argued that “recording studios, like clubs, are sites where musicianship culminates” (206). Just as with livehouses, there are numerous recording and rehearsal studios throughout Tokyo, offering necessary spaces for the performance of the scene. The following discussion focuses on two specific locations that inform the opening performance at Yellow.

Studio Trance

In January 1999, I found myself once again in Koenji, this time with members of the group Jug, searching for Studio Trance, a recording studio located a convenient ten minute walk from 20,000volt. The proximity was surely not a coincidence. This studio was being used by the independent label Omnibus to record tracks for a series of hardcore compilation albums that inspired the record release party at Yellow. Jug had been contracted by Omnibus to produce two songs, "Silicagel" and "Vagrant," for an album in the series that would be released in Spring 1999 (Jug 1999a, 1999b). Once we found the studio, we quickly unpacked Jug's gear and set up for the recording. The studio itself was small, with two rooms: a small recording room to one side with glass windows facing a sitting room with sofa, mixing boards, instruments, television, and a tiny kitchen/bathroom.

Omnibus paid for the recording, but Jug had to bring their own amplifiers and drum kit, which cost about ¥40,000 (@ US \$400) to rent. In the late 1990s, it could cost a band as much as ¥100,000 (@ US \$1000) to make a single recording on their own, so this was, indeed, worth the money.

The recording engineer, who was actually employed by Omnibus, recorded the material onto videotape, which has a wider band than other forms of recording media. All members of Jug played together, although each instrument was recorded separately. Each part of the drum kit, for example, had



Figure 2.7 Jug preparing to record at Studio Trance in Koenji.

its own microphone. The vocalist, Nagatome, had to record the vocals on a different track, standing in the separate studio with headphones. At first he found this so difficult that he held his guitar so he could strum the rhythm. It took two days to record two songs; instruments for one song on Saturday and instruments for the second song plus both vocals on Sunday. One more evening was required to mix the two songs. Jug also brought some recordings of other artists from their own collection to demonstrate what kind of sound they were hoping for in the mixing process. They also passed along demo tapes from friends to promote them, as well, to Omnibus, enacting the strong family network of bands that characterize the scene.

The recording studio, itself, was another important location for the performance of the scene. Although I only visited one such space, they can be rented throughout the city. Other spaces, as well, can be used for basic recording and mixing, such as karaoke boxes or with home equipment, particularly useful for other genres that rely less on live instruments and more on synthesized sound. But hardcore bands typically produced a few songs on their own in such studios, copied them to tape, and distributed them to friends and interested listeners at live events. Compilation albums, such as those found in the series produced by Omnibus, were also quite common. Both situations allowed bands the opportunity to take their live music to another level through mixing and modifying existing song forms.

The time in the studio was expensive and rather stressful, however, forcing members of bands to work with each other in a distinct situation from the live performance. The recording session was a more private moment, shared by the band members and sound engineer alone. The experience resulted in songs that could be quite different from their corresponding live versions, depending on the quality of the studio and the expertise of the others involved in producing the final recording. Indeed, there could be a tremendous distinction between live and mediated forms in the scene. Jug, for example, rerecorded a version of a song for Omnibus that they had already recorded on their own. The Omnibus version is remarkably distinct, with greater manipulation of the vocals and stronger blending on the various parts. Although most of the bands under consideration here were, again, without label connections, or only on independent labels, most did, indeed, produce such demo tapes for distribution, or occasionally joined a compilation. As such, the experience in the studio space was shared by many of the participants.

Sun Studio

The intensity of pressured performing was also encountered in rehearsal studios, as they similarly offered a private moment of social interaction between the band members alone. Practice in a rehearsal studio was, and remains, an absolute necessity for any hardcore band in the scene. Most young adults in Japan either live at home or reside in terribly small apartments. Even if living

in independent standing homes, garages, or other rooms appropriate for rehearsing are rare, and homes are situated so closely together in a city such as Tokyo that noise would prevent rehearsing. As such, to rehearse bands must rent space in hourly increments from studios designed specifically for this purpose. Such establishments are tucked on side streets throughout any major city and typically have a front counter that handles reservations and fees. Down hallways are a number of rooms with heavy soundproof doors that provide some relief from the mixture of sounds that emanate from within at all hours. Small establishments can have as few as three or four rooms on a single floor; larger studios can have multiple floors with many rooms of various sizes available. Bands choose rehearsal studios based on location, quality of staff, fees, hours of availability, and the quality of equipment.

Jug, for example, typically rehearsed at Sun Studio in Gyôtoku, located in the eastern suburb of Tokyo, Chiba, which was near all their homes. These studios tend to keep long hours to accommodate a variety of schedules, and cheaper hourly rates can be obtained late at night or early in the morning. Jug always rehearsed on the weekends or late at night, given the member's schedules, once or twice a week. Sun Studio was a fairly relaxed studio, featuring several small rooms for hire, sitting and smoking areas, and the ubiquitous drink machines. I usually attended late night rehearsals with them from ten p.m. to midnight and, surprisingly, the studio was alive



Figure 2.8 Jug rehearsing at Sun Studio in Gyôtoku.

with a variety of different bands banging away in the various rooms. These rehearsals were tiring in themselves, exacerbated by continuous problems with the equipment supplied by Sun Studio. All studios supply the amplifiers, drum kit, and microphones necessary to practice. On one occasion, however, Suzuki Miyuki, the drummer for Jug, could not rehearse properly as one of the cymbals was broken on the supplied drum kit.

During Jug's rehearsal, they would typically warm up by playing through already established songs that they planned to perform at the next live, working out any slight changes in tempo, dynamics, or overall feel. When creating new songs, Nagatome typically provided the lyrics and basic guitar work for the song, and then Suzuki Shigeru and Suzuki Miyuki would work their parts in with Nagatome's initial vision, building out the song together. I did not witness many songs being born, as it were, but the group seemed to work well in the rehearsal space at this time. Jug needed the time in the studio though, as they could drastically change the feel of songs with unexpected shifts in tempo in the live setting.

Rehearsal studios, in essence, offer the most private moment for bands, as the members alone congregate to create new music. Indeed, the importance of all three spaces—livehouses, recording studios, and rehearsal studios—is located in the social intimacy fostered, supported, and even reinforced by the similar small size, run-down appearance, and stressful pressures experienced in all these locations.

Record Shops

A variety of retail shops were also important physical spaces for the performance of the scene. Instrument shops, for example, are located in different parts of Tokyo and range from large, multifloor complexes in Shibuya or Shinjuku to smaller, more specialized retailers marketing the latest technology in the form of instruments, pedals, synthesizers, etc. Many performers in the scene worked in these shops, and all certainly visited such shops at one time or another. Instrument shops could serve as important locations for individuals with similar musical interests to find each other and form bands as well.

Record shops, similarly, were an important space for performers to connect with each other. They were significant for transmitting sonic information about both Japanese and foreign produced musics, and occasionally featured recordings of some of the bands under consideration here. Record shops, however, were not the primary means of sharing recorded versions of songs by most of the bands in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene; rather, bands would produce singles on tape to distribute at lives. Record shops, though, were an extremely important resource in the development of the research project at hand as one of my first discoveries during the Summer of 1996 was, indeed, the record shop Disk Union in Shinjuku, briefly encountered in the opening train ride narrative of this chapter. The clerks

themselves became valuable resources as I began to collect recommended recordings of performers and information on local groups performing live who fit with my interests. One afternoon, for example, while scanning the shelves for interesting recordings, a fellow customer actually overheard me speaking with the clerk about my interests in all-female punk bands. He kindly addressed me, suggesting that I attend an upcoming concert called "Viva! La Woman," which was presented by the female duo Cibo Matto, with Super Junky Monkey, Buffalo Daughter, and OOIOO. I discovered, as quickly as I could, how to purchase a ticket and found my way to the live. Although this encounter is not considered in detail in this monograph (Milioto 1998; Milioto Matsue Forthcoming) it opened an important conduit of research. In Fall of 1997, shortly after returning to Japan, I found myself once again at Disk Union, asking the clerks for recommendations of recordings and possible live shows featuring interesting bands.

With the absence of live production, these particular spaces have a less immediate sense for me in creating the scene, yet they were still important in the production of hardcore. They provided resources, in the form of inspiration from other artist's recordings; allowed consumers to fulfill an important obligation, as one buys recordings produced by friends; marketed a variety of magazines; and distributed flyers. Such shops can be encountered throughout the city. They range from major international chains, such as Tower Records in Shibuya¹⁶ to national chains, such as Disk Union in Shinjuku and Shimokitazawa to the small, independently owned, and highly specialized shops around The Loft.¹⁷ There is also a sense of play in these shops as consumers spend hours browsing bins and reading magazines.¹⁸ Depending on the shop, these spaces can also create a sense of illicitness through their appearance, contents, and clientele. For example, the shops around The Loft exude a certain tough appearance as they peddle various subgenres of punk and hardcore. Nonetheless, consumers are still consuming recordings, and in reality there is nothing actually dangerous or illegal here. Record and instrument shops thus embody additional physical spaces of the scene. Additionally, if sound, itself, is conceptualized as a space, then record shops can be further understood as introducing performers to the sonic space of the scene, through providing recordings of the totality of music that can be heard in Tokyo on any given day.

TOWER RECORDS AND THE SOUND OF TOKYO

Tower Records in Shibuya is particularly interesting for both its physical composition and the sense of the sonic space of Tokyo in the late 1990s that its contents provide. Tower Records, furthermore, is both locally and globally significant, as it was the largest record shop in the world at the time, and remains one of the largest music retailers, in terms of space, today. Straw (1997b) noted that

In 1995, in what seemed a frenzied rush to gargantuan monumentality, global retail chains specializing in home entertainment software leapfrogged over each other in their efforts to construct the world's largest store. In May, the US-based Tower Record chain claimed that its Tokyo store, at 52,000 square feet, was the world's biggest. It encompassed, the trade press reported, 'seven floors of merchandise, another floor for events, and three basements, one of which contains a café' [Jeffrey, 1995]. (58)

Although both small independent record shops and large chain stores pepper the city, this particular Tower Records remains quite impressive, although, as of Spring 2007, the café was no longer operating in the basement. Nonetheless, the size of Shibuya's Tower Records allows the store to market a wide breadth of music that comprises the sounds of contemporary Tokyo. What is missing from the shelves in such a shop reveals the importance and position of musics in contemporary society just as much as what is readily available, neatly organized in the various bins, as well as speaking to the long history of exchange between Japanese forms of music and those borrowed from elsewhere. As Nettl (1985) argued, a record shop can serve as "a fairly accurate reflection of the musical life of a city" (76), even presenting a "microcosm" of the sonic space of a particular urban location. The point in examining Tower Records in such detail, again supported by Nettl, "is that such a store, within four walls, had all of the kinds of music that could be heard in the city, with all their gradations of style. It presented the culture's way of categorizing music. And it brought together the adherents of a large variety of music who would otherwise probably not be found under one roof" (76). Although Nettl's exploration was focused on record shops in such areas as Beirut, Tehran, and Madras in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the thrust of his argument is still applicable in the current context. Understanding the other musics that inhabit the urban landscape of Tokyo, as well as the history of the development of Japanese popular music, of course further expands the understanding of hardcore more specifically.

As Straw (1999b) mentioned, Tower Records in the late 1990s featured seven distinct floors, plus a café in the basement, with a glass elevator transporting one upwards and while allowing views of the street scene below. A map provided at the door quickly helped me locate the particular sections I was seeking in the shop whenever I visited. Indeed, the following description of Tower Records and its contents is based on the maps and descriptions contained in the "Tower Records Shibuya: Floor Information" pamphlet acquired directly from the store, as well as personal experience, as I regularly frequented the shop while residing in Tokyo and continue to do so with every trip to Japan. The seventh floor itself was, and as of Spring 2007 remains, a major hangout for many foreigners in Tokyo, being devoted to "Imported Books and Magazines." Although not academic in orientation per se, there is a fair collection of novels, gifts, and reference

manuals, as well as books in English on Japanese culture, music, and entertainment. There are no recordings on this floor, but the inclusion of such a large section devoted entirely to imported items within a record shop speaks to the, at times, complicated relationship between musics considered indigenous to Japan and styles borrowed from beyond the borders. Admittedly, the focus on a record shop chain imported from the West, in turn, further speaks to this complicated transnational relationship. The transnational flow of popular music, itself, is revealed through the historical development of Japanese popular music.¹⁹

The History of Japanese Popular Music and Transnational Musical Flows

Although Japan boasts a perhaps mythical ability to adapt foreign cultural forms to meet local aesthetic needs reaching centuries into the past (Tobin 1992), examination of the tension between imported cultural forms and the development of Japan's own popular culture and music typically begin with the Meiji Restoration of 1868.²⁰ During this period of rapid development, the "opening of the doors" of Japan to foreign influence, driven by a government desire to modernize following a long period of relative isolation, there is evidence of the influence of largely western musical forms, here meaning European and North American in origin, on developing styles within Japan. Military brass bands and songs, choral singing, and imported song forms were to have a strong and lasting effect on the subsequent development of musics within Japan, as western styles were copied and appropriated (Eppstein 1994; Fujie 1989; Malm 1971). Many western popular styles, such as jazz, blues, and a variety of Latin genres, would be imported and eagerly embraced by Japanese consumers in the early 20th century (Atkins 2001; Hosokawa 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Savigliano 1992). Sometimes, however, these genre labels referred to slightly different types of music than their original western counterparts. Prior to 1945, for example, jazz actually referred to a broad range of foreign popular music, only later coming to refer to the same genre as found in the west.

Rapid development of popular styles distinctly produced in Japan, although heavily influenced by western imported forms, would also flourish during the first half of the 20th century. The all-female theater, *Takarazuka*, for example, drew on imported opera and chanson but ideologically attempted to embrace uniquely Japanese ideals of femininity and masculinity, which were important to Japan as a nation at the time, through its performance style (Berlin 1987, 1991; Brau 1990; Robertson 1998). The early 20th century, thus, was a time for embracing foreign styles, modifying them to meet the new immediate aesthetic needs of the Japanese people, who were eager to consume all things western.

During World War II, imported popular music forms, not surprisingly, were banned. Japanese songs with appropriate patriotic themes were promoted

during wartime Japan, just as songs with optimistic views were promoted during the desolation and famine that immediately followed the war. During Occupation, however, imported forms, particularly from North America, flourished once again, and the constant negotiation of foreign styles in Japan continued and intensified. The term *kayôkyoku* (歌謡曲), originally coined in the 1930s, referred to a broad realm of popular songs following World War II, although its application is somewhat confusing. *Kayôkyoku* refers to the whole range of Japanese produced popular musics, including western-derived styles, as well as more indigenous forms (Fujie 1989). *Kayôkyoku* also refers more specifically to popular songs with a stronger Japanese “flavor” (Fujie 1989, 197–199). The confusion with the label itself, referring at once to both western styles and Japanese styles, again belies this constant struggle for Japanese popular music to assert its own identity. Indeed, the history of *kayôkyoku* following the war “is the story of a fight between native elements and American elements” (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 11).

Direct covers or newly composed songs appeared featuring boogie-woogie rhythm, rockabilly style, elements of country music (Mitsui 1993; Thompson 1992) or were heavily influenced by jazz techniques. Japanese covers of catchy American tunes of the time also flourished. On the other hand, some song types would retain strong references to earlier Japanese forms despite a surface resemblance to much western popular music.

Enka (演歌), as we think of it today for example, developed from slower ballad forms in the early 1960s and was originally considered a subgenre of *kayôkyoku*, although it later developed as its own marketing category of music aimed at a mature consumer base. The origins of *enka* can be traced back to political songs of the 1880s, with various songs and style developments serving as precursors to the current form. The now common usage of the term *enka* began in the early 1970s, referring to a relatively slow ballad with emotional lyrics that is seen as expressing uniquely Japanese sentiments (Yano 2002).

The 1960s also saw rapid expansion of popular music styles in Japan as yet more subgenres developed. The genre *gurûpu saunzu* (グループ サウন্ズ), or group sounds, for example, introduced rock rhythms to *kayôkyoku*, heavily influenced by such artists as The Ventures, The Animals, and The Beatles. Many Japanese groups would soon form similar groups, complete with English names, such as The Tigers, The Jaguars, or The Spiders, performing similar music (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 15). These groups are particularly significant in this discussion because “despite the influence of foreign music, these new Japanese bands had some originality. They began to play more than just translated foreign music; they composed and performed music of their own” (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 16). By the end of the 1960s though, many musicians moved on from group sounds to perform other styles influenced by more recent trends in imported rock musics or returned to traditional blues.

Similarly, under influence of such foreign performers as The Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and The Brothers Four, a new genre of folk music, *fôku* (フォーク), not to be confused with *min'yô* (民謡), or traditional Japanese folk music, gained popularity in the 1960s. Japanese bands copied the imported style and later began to use folk music as a vehicle of protest, just as in the United States, but speaking to the immediate concerns of Japanese youth. Both group sounds and folk genres would influence the development of later popular styles including rock, or *rokku* (ロック) in Japanese. Indeed, the broad category of rock music, which began developing in the 1950s and 1960s and continues today as J-rock (Yun 2005), was clearly influenced by these preceding genres. The negotiation between imported styles and domestic concerns emerges in rock as well. Beginning in the 1960s, rock musicians found themselves particularly concerned with the use of Japanese or English in their lyrics. "Bands who used Japanese were inclined to a folk-music approach, resembling the music of Bob Dylan. Yet, among those who used Japanese, there was an uncertainty whether the Japanese language was well suited for rock music" (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 16). Many rock bands did perform in Japanese and were quite successful, as themes and topics within rock lyrics naturally expanded. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, rock musics would continue to develop within Japan, often in response to foreign trends and influence, yet retain a certain Japanese flavor in the lyrics (sometimes in English, sometimes in Japanese), the overall style of the band, or the music itself.

The diversification of *kayôkyoku* styles and simultaneous blurring of the boundaries between those styles only intensified in rock music and other popular genres in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, "as *kayôkyoku* 'borrows' from foreign popular musics, e.g. house, soul, and disco, these styles are blended together, and the boundaries of *kayôkyoku* become more and more difficult to define. In that innumerable styles coexist in an unorganized fashion, *kayôkyoku* resembles the lifestyles and architecture of the cities in Japan" (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 12). It necessarily becomes more difficult to follow a distinct historical trajectory as popular musics continued to expand in recent decades.

In the 1970s, for example, Japanese popular music was further categorized as "white" or "black music" (Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991, 18), the latter referring to musics derivative of blues, rhythm & blues, and gospel (Russell 1998). Disco music and clubs also increased. A new style of music, *nyû myûjikkû* (ニュー ミュージック) or new music, also emerged, influenced by the singer/songwriters accompanied by guitar in the United States. The use of synthesizers also became common, hinting at the electronica boom that would flourish in the following decades. The 1970s also witnessed the emergence of idols, or *aidoru* (アイドル), the young, attractive singers who would debut one after the other (Aoyagi 2005). "Johnny" Kitagawa, president of the production agency, Johnny & Associates, also known as Johnny's Jimusho, was particularly skilled at bringing young boys

together and forming fabulously successful boy-bands in the idol tradition of the 1970s and 1980s (Darling-Wolf 2004). The 1970s and 1980s thus saw the burgeoning of an extremely economically successful mainstream Japanese music industry.

Not surprisingly, with the growth of mainstream music in the 1970s and 1980s came the development of numerous underground styles that connected with transnational flows around the globe, while sitting firmly within the popular music system of Japan. Japanese musicians were leaders in the development of noise, or *noizu* (ノイズ), and other performance art and avant-garde musical movements, for example. And of course the beginnings of J-rap, or Japanese produced hip-hop, would emerge in the 1980s as well, with Japanese hip-hop artists particularly concerned about how to appropriate this foreign form to meet immediate Japanese needs, while maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the genre (Condry 1999, 2000, 2006.) Imported punk and new-wave inspired similar underground musical movements in Japan in the late 1970s and 1980s, with performances at small livehouses growing in popularity and establishing the networks of livehouses that are part of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene today.

Music in Contemporary Japan

This overview speaks to the history of Japanese popular music that informs what is heard on the streets today in Tokyo, thus providing the sonic tapestry for the performance of hardcore. The history of Japanese popular music through the late 1980s reveals an industry in a constant state of growth and negotiation between embracing foreign styles and fostering indigenous styles. By the early 1990s, Japanese popular music, although still negotiating with foreign imported forms, saw rapid growth and recognition of J-pop, a broad umbrella category that refers to the now well-known, glossy, mass-produced mainstream popular music of Japan (Mitsui 2005, 146) that is successfully exported throughout Asia, although only a few Japanese groups have enjoyed limited success in Europe and North America. Throughout its history, there has been an inherent tension in Japanese popular music between imported and domestically produced musics; a tension that carries through on the floors in Tower Records today.

In the late 1990s, for example, the sixth floor of the store was completely devoted to “Classical,” with the latest Yo-yo Ma recordings of the *Bach Cello Suites* or several versions of Mozart’s *Le Nozze de Figaro* at your fingertips. There was even a piano nook devoted to regular live performances. Both Japanese and foreign artists regularly perform western art music throughout Tokyo, with pieces such as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as much a part of Japanese end-of-the-year celebrations as Handel’s “Messiah” is in North America. An educational focus on violin, piano, or flute long ago replaced standard study of traditional Japanese *koto*, *shamisen*, or *shakuhachi*. Although such traditional instruments were still

pursued, western art instruments dominated through the 1990s.²¹ The newly formed Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology has, in fact, recognized the problem with this system and is making an effort to put Japanese traditional music back into the required school curriculum. Since Spring 2002, for example, students in grammar school and junior high school are now required to learn at least one Japanese instrument.²² Nonetheless, concert halls devoted to western art musics, complete with exorbitant prices for star performers, are found throughout the city. The large collection at Tower Records is no surprise, given the general awareness of such western art musics, as well as the large numbers of professional Japanese performers who excel in this genre. Indeed, western art music may no longer be seen as “foreign” by all Japanese, but, actually, as a part of Japanese culture.

The fifth floor of Tower Records in the late 1990s was similarly packed with so-called imported musics, including “Jazz, Blues, Country, World, New Age, and Healing,” offering a wide variety of musics in a limited space. The “World” and “Jazz” sections were, by far, the largest at the time, with “Brazil/Latin” warranting its own separate section. This is not surprising, given the great popularity that such musics have enjoyed historically, and continue to do today, among the general public in Japan. There is a particularly strong connection between Japan and Brazil, with the largest Japanese diaspora located in São Paulo, Brazil, and Brazilian-born Japanese regularly returning to Japan (Olsen 2004). The fourth floor, in contrast, offered a mixture of media with “DVDs, Videos, and Soundtracks,” surrounding bins of imported “Soul/R&B, Hip Hop, and Reggae.” The third floor was given over to imported “Pop/Rock, Clubmusic, and domestic CD-singles.” CD-singles, rather rare in record shops in the United States, were significant sources of revenue, as well as controversy, in the Japanese recording industry. Most singles in Japan continue to include an instrumental version of the song to allow consumers the opportunity to practice for public karaoke performance, certainly a valuable marketing issue.²³ Many shops allowed these CDs, as well as full albums, to be rented for a few days, causing concern about home pirating. In fact, recordings produced by non-Japanese based recording companies were not available for rent.²⁴ This highlights, again, the tension between domestic and foreign produced musics in Japan but in a different way than found in musical content.

To this point it may, in fact, be unclear whether the artists on these recordings are indeed Japanese or from abroad, although there is an obvious emphasis on western produced goods. And, in fact, it can be difficult to discern now, in the face of historical and continued cultural flows, where foreign ends and Japan begins, but the distinction is made in some genres. The guide for the Tower Records store did not make it immediately apparent where recordings of genres that originated in Japan could be found. Nonetheless, tucked in narrow bins there were a few examples of *enka* or

recordings of traditional Japanese music, such as solo pieces for *shakuhachi*, or the increasingly popular styles of Okinawan musics.²⁵ Even so, the description of Tower records thus far presents a rather single-sounded perspective of the musics that inhabit Tokyo. The second floor, however, was completely devoted to “J-pop and J-indies,” again the terms used to refer to contemporary mainstream Japanese popular music and its related independent market respectively. This was followed by “New Releases and Recommends” on the first floor, facing the street. Being at lower levels is, of course, an indication of the dominance of Japanese-produced popular musics, as Tower Records positions its most marketable music in the best position to attract customers. “New Releases” may have contained recordings produced in a variety of countries; however, the “J-pop and J-indies” floor was completely devoted to artists on Japanese labels. Indeed, it is mainstream Japanese popular music that provides the primary sonic tapestry that pervades the streets of Tokyo.

Although dominant popular music in Japan, thus, may be seen to consist of both western produced and Japanese produced popular music, they remain quite separate in everyday life. Just as in Shibuya’s Tower Records, most record stores market western popular recordings and magazines in entirely separate departments from Japanese produced items. Concert listings for J-pop artists are similarly advertised separately from western artists, although the prices are comparable. Japanese releases of western produced popular recordings do often contain an extra track not available on the straight western import and, consequently, are significantly more expensive.

Although western produced music had dominated sales in Japan from the end of World War II through the 1960s, in 1967 sales of Japanese produced music, *hōban* (邦盤), first overtook sales of western produced music, *yōban* (洋盤), and have continued to dominate the market in Japan ever since (Kawabata 1991, 335). Japan currently possesses the second largest recording industry in the world. According to the National Music Publisher’s Association’s “Country Profile on Japan,” in 1996, Japan’s market accounted for approximately 17% of total world sales.²⁶ Within Japan, the Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) reports that sales of domestic recordings from January 1998 through December 1998 of “audio records” (including CD, analog disc, and cassette tape, but excluding videodisc/videotape, CD-ROM, and CD-graphics) totaled ¥470,855 million.²⁷ Total sales of what the RIAJ terms “western music,” here meaning anything non-Japanese produced regardless of specific country of origin, totaled ¥136,639 million—for total sales of audio items at ¥607,494 million.²⁸ Clearly, domestically produced goods far outsell imported items.

In summary, J-pop is the most prevalent popular music experienced on the streets of Tokyo. Japanese alternative popular music is located within the J-pop sections of record stores, magazines, and concert listings. Thus Japanese popular music at the underground level should first be seen in

relation to J-pop, as this is where it is located in the immediate culture. This is not to say that J-indies have no connection to the west. Indeed, Japanese underground musics can be argued as related both stylistically and ideologically to many musics of the west. Nonetheless, as evidenced in the previous sections, Japanese popular music has its own historical trajectory of development and immediate concerns.

Contemporary J-pop, J-indies, and Underground J-hardcore

For many pop-culture consumers, the postmodern imagination of Japanese popular music consists of highly produced, glossy, synthesized music—an image of ephemeral girl-pop artists and all-male bands producing an undifferentiated music derivative of popular music in the west. Produced and marketed by major record labels, such as Sony and Columbia, Japanese popular music is consumed via recordings, at clubs, on the radio, in stores, and even on television as theme songs and commercial jingles.

Often intentionally comic or playful, mid- to late 1990s mainstream J-pop was marked by consistent, highly-produced music and images, resulting in an extremely clean style.²⁹ Musicians sported crisp looks, trendy clothing, and produced clean vocals. J-pop artists usually sang in Japanese, although an English hook-line was not unusual. Indeed, English is increasingly common in Japan, although often appearing incomprehensible, even comic, to the native English speaker.

Images of performers ranged from very polished and wholesome to the androgynous, over-the-top style of groups who take glam rock to a whole new level. Despite a certain androgyny presented by many J-pop performers, they were operating in a clearly heterosexual paradigm, reminiscent of some pop-performers in the west during the 1970s and 1980s. Women, of course, also pervaded mainstream music-making of the late 1990s, sporting a variety of styles, from cute and playful to sexually assertive, as with well-known idol Amuro Namie (Aoyagi 2005). Male performers were, of course, also marketed as sex-symbols, particularly towards female teenage markets (Darling-Wolf 2004). The Johnny's Jimusho produced boy-band, S.M.A.P., for example, features a group of diverse young men, brought together at an early age and taught to sing, dance, and act, either together or separately. This type of mass-produced, glossy J-pop is typically viewed as superficial and lacking a certain musical substance by critics. Nonetheless, one cannot deny the commercial success of the J-pop industry; it is the second largest recording industry in the world. S.M.A.P.'s musicality remains questionable, as does their individual singing, dancing, and acting skills, yet they have enjoyed tremendous popularity for many years and will likely continue to do so. One member in particular, Kimura Takuya, was ever present in a variety of media—from the weekly variety show featuring all the members S.M.A.P and regularly producing recordings with them, to appearing in a wide range of advertisements, to being a popular, if not

exactly skilled, actor in multiple television dramas and even feature films. Kimura, with his long hair and pouty expressions, fondly referred to as “Kimutaku” by the general public, was certainly a major icon of the late 1990s. His success in a wide variety of media is an ideal that many J-pop artists can only hope to achieve and speaks to the pervasiveness of J-pop talents in the everyday life of the average Japanese. You simply cannot turn around in Japan without experiencing J-pop in some form.

These brief descriptions, however, only touch the surface of Japanese popular culture, remaining an image of what is happening in the far more complex world of popular music. Beneath the world of dominant Japanese popular music lie many underground music-making possibilities, often including Japanese bands and musicians who mark their style as distinctly resistive to dominant Japanese popular music, resulting in relatively insignificant record sales and popularity. Alternative musicians, promoted by independent record labels shape distinct underground music scenes in Tokyo and other urban centers through livehouse performances and recordings; a world of music-making beneath and beyond the surface of the pervasive popular imagination at the turn of the century in Japan. As of Spring 2007, J-indies had more subcategories within Tower Records, including J-reggae, J-punk, and of course, J-hardcore. This diversification of bins inside the J-indies’ section speaks to the increased popularity and identifiable consumer base of each of these categories of so-called independent musics. J-indies are now given their own “top ten” lists in Tower Records’ annual “best of” pamphlets: further indication of their importance in the Japanese music system.

J-hardcore, the new specific subgenre of J-indies, actually inhabits a sonic space located within Japan and the history of Japanese music; at the same time it is part of a global movement of similar hardcore sounds and scenes. J-hardcore is, thus, located at the intersection of global hardcore sound—historically predominantly Anglo-American in production, although now firmly positioned in Japan—and domestically produced mainstream and underground Japanese popular music. It is neither uniquely Japanese in its general sound nor entirely foreign. It is both imported and domestic at the same time. Although the Japanese music industry identifies J-hardcore as Japanese produced, and therefore Japanese, this distinction is harder and harder to make, as more Japanese artists across all genres work with non-Japanese producers, mixers, managers, and even complete labels around the world.

The position of J-indies, and more specifically J-hardcore, as both part of and separate from J-pop speaks to another tension here: that between mainstream dominant sounds and the independent and/or underground sounds. These are seen as both part of the dominant system but also independent from it, oppositional, and even resistive. This position creates an illicit intimacy in the sonic space of the scene as well. Many of the performers in the scene, in fact, actively conceive of their performance as directly oppositional to the objectives of J-pop. A passion for the more limited, and

therefore localized, sound of hardcore, in essence, creates a sense of illicit intimacy, as performers share a passion for a music with a more limited group, even if transnational, than the fan base for J-pop. Performers feel closer to each other because it is an underground genre, and therefore as if they are participating in something illicit. The sound itself supports this read, with its edginess, aggression, and lyrics.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the culture of Tokyo, with the importance of trains, creates the geographic context for the performance of hardcore at the end of the 1990s. The quality of the primary sites for performance—the tiny live-houses, recording, and rehearsal studios—enhance a sense of illicit intimacy for the participants who frequent them. The surrounding sounds of J-pop and western imports intersect to form the sonic backdrop for the performance of hardcore itself. Although it was not a significant factor in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene of the late 1990s, today the widespread use of the Internet is creating yet another space, a virtual space, for the performance of hardcore as well.



Figure 2.9 Back cover of Berotecs' album, *Sonny's Guinness* (1999).

The illustration shown in Figure 2.9, from the cover of Berotecs' album, *Sonny's Guinness* (1999), clearly positions the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the very backdrop described in the preceding sections. The Chuo-sen whisks by, while in the background there are views of several buildings, no sky in sight, and a street running below the tracks. Although this band typically performed at the type of livehouses described in this chapter, thus firmly fitting in the underground scene, they did indeed have label representation, and their recordings, either as solo albums or on compilations, could be found in the J-indies section of major record stores in Japan, just as this one was found at Tower Records in Shibuya. But the most significant aspect of this image is found in the three band members, who are small, but clearly visible in the center of the photograph. It is indeed these band members, the performers of the scene, who inhabit the spaces of livehouses, rehearsal, and recording studios, frequent record shops, and create the sound of hardcore. Their voices both influence, and are influenced by the surrounding sounds of Tokyo. As such, the following chapter introduces several performers in bands, as managers, and in audiences to better understand their roles within the scene.

3 Schoolboys, Aspiring Stars, Underground Girls, and the Multiple Identities of the People who Play

The first group consisted of vocals and guitar, bass and drums; the three-member band called Jug. The performance was kind of rough but vigorous. And when I looked at them carefully, the violent drums, which supported the rhythm, were being played by a woman. When the last song began, a foreign woman jumped in as the vocalist. . . . With the cycle of yelling of the vocalist and hard play, people started gathering in front of the stage and jumping, and some boy even started dancing. It feels good to see people enjoying themselves, as if saying, “this is live.” . . . The bands played successively one after another on the stage. And even when changing sets, the sounds of the DJ emanated without interruption from the dark floor. Some people were drinking at the bar counter, while others were letting their bodies feel the music on the floor where the mirror ball revolved. Everyone was spending time as they pleased.

—excerpt from “Sui Event Live 98,” Staff of *M-Gazette*, 1999

I looked at Suzuki Miyuki, who also seemed uncomfortable with the situation, although it was often difficult to tell what she was really thinking. Perhaps my impression of the mood backstage was exacerbated by the fact that we were the only female musicians scheduled for the evening, which was both exhilarating and nerve-racking; we were clearly performing with a much more intense, if not professional group of bands than usual. Shortly after this tense moment, we headed down to hear some of the other bands during sound check, in particular Sports. They were friends with Jug and often attended each other’s lives during this period of research. The drummer asked to borrow Suzuki Miyuki’s snare, as his was broken, and she reluctantly handed it over to him.

—excerpt from “Backstage at Yellow,” Chapter One

These excerpts from “Sui Event Live 98” and “Backstage at Yellow” confirm that it is the individuals performing at Yellow—the musicians, audience members, DJ, drinkers, and dancers—who are central to the events of the evening. All are involved in the ultimate production of hardcore that

evening, performing slightly different, yet equally significant roles. The reviewer's comments further reveal, in particular, that the various audience responses—the jumping, dancing, letting one's body “feel the music”—set the mood for the evening, highlighting the significance of the shared moment of “the live” as all in attendance “spent time as they pleased” and “enjoyed themselves.” For many involved in performing hardcore that evening, this ability to “enjoy themselves” in the company of others with similar inclinations was arguably the most significant aspect of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the 1990s.

Musicians, as well, came together at the event at Yellow primarily to “enjoy themselves,” not only through sharing their music with others, but also by spending time with comrades backstage, in the audience, and, following the close of the actual performance on stage, perhaps drinking at *izakaya*. The primary motivation for the individuals performing at Yellow that evening, indeed, may have been the intense social interaction that the event fostered, rather than an isolated appreciation for the music alone. The quality of the interaction between Sports and Jug, evoked through the passing of the snare, is further evidence that performers belonged to more intimate networks of social interaction within the broader scene. Jug and Sports, for example, typically attended each other's performances and socialized beyond the borders of the livehouse. Although both bands were friendly and familiar with a number of other groups on stage that night, many more were not known to them, and little interaction occurred. In this way, the event at Yellow also highlights another important characteristic of the scene, namely that more immediate networks of interaction existed between certain bands, and through this interaction performers negotiated not only their shifting individual identity but also created collective identities for bands, groups of bands centered around certain livehouses, and ultimately for the scene as a whole. I, too, found myself firmly grounded within a particular network extending primarily from the group Jug and the livehouse 20,000volt, as I negotiated my identities as a researcher, a band member, and a foreign woman in the broader scene.

Both the opening review and backstage narrative, in fact, further highlight the unique position of not only myself, as I am the foreign woman “who jumped on the stage,” but other women at Yellow that night and within the broader scene. Women were indeed a highly active and noticeable force in the production of hardcore music, although the comments from the concert review and backstage narrative suggest that their participation was still somewhat unexpected at the time, even challenging, as Suzuki Miyuki and I were notable as the only women in attendance that night. The reviewer further seems to want to highlight how surprising it was to not only find a woman on drums, but a woman on *violent* drums. Shouldn't women be pursuing other, more suitable leisure activities and modes of play?

Japanese women do, indeed, have a wide range of play open to them in contemporary Japan, which is typically focused on more socially accepted and mainstream activities, such as the study of traditional arts, language learning, or travel. Although pleasurable and offering release, these activities never threaten these women's positions in mainstream society, and, in fact, often confirm mainstream expectations of ideal femininity. Performance in underground hardcore rock bands, however, allows women to assume independent, unexpected, and even resistive identities. The quality of the identity that women constructed in the scene was distinct from the expected and sanctioned identity of young women as daughters, office workers, and mothers. I do not in any way mean to undermine the importance of women's roles in these various categories, but to point out that these roles, valuable though they may be, are not challenging, threatening, or resistive in any way to mainstream cultural expectations of women's roles in contemporary Japanese society. In the scene, women, instead, assumed masculinized roles, powerfully striding across stage and screaming. But this identity was typically only expressed in the safe space of the scene. Suzuki Miyuki, for example, when not on drums, was a part-time worker and housewife, and is now a stay-at-home mother and no longer plays drums. The scene, as such, offers a particular liminal space where individuals played with identity through performing behaviors, asserting values, and expressing attitudes that were not typical and even confronted mainstream ideals. The daughter, office worker, or mother becomes something else in the scene, although this may not be embraced as a permanent identity. Rather, performers play with momentary imagined identities.

The main point of this chapter is to introduce the performers and their shifting roles in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, such as the bands and their individual members, managers, and audiences. These introductions also highlight the nature of the activities that these performers had to partake in to participate in the scene. The performative style of bands in particular—both the musical and extramusical—are then further considered in the following chapter, thus expanding the exploration of key characteristics that define the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. This participation, in turn, shapes the identity of these individuals, as well as the collective identity of bands, audiences, and the scene as a whole. This is by no means an exhaustive treatment of all the performers in the scene, but a broad selection that should provide a sense of the individuals involved, and the ideals they embrace, highlighting the values that are most prized in the scene by the individuals who perform it. Looking at the valued ideals and attitudes expressed by individuals in the scene further expresses the identity of the scene as a whole.

The following discussion focuses primarily on the individual performers of the scene as they interact as members of bands and in audiences, as well as in such supporting roles as photographers and managers. Bands, of course, receive the most attention, as it is the bands on stage that motivated

all the other roles individual performers assumed off stage in the scene. Each band considered here arguably represents a general, identifiable type in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene—for example, Jug as a “serious hobby band”—that collectively present a further sense of the key characteristics of the scene. The following labels of these band types though, of course, are fluid, and some bands easily may fall into one, another, all, or none of the categories.

THE PERFORMERS ON STAGE

Serious Hobby Bands, Heavy Guitar Rock, and Jug

My primary conduit into this scene was through the mixed-gender band Jug. The members of Jug described their music as “heavy guitar rock” and typically performed relatively slow, heavy, almost sluggish feeling hardcore. The guitarist/vocalist for Jug, Nagatome, was twenty-five years old and a student at Waseda University at the time of fieldwork (see Figure 3.1, with Nagatome on the right). Nagatome was self-taught on the guitar and met the other members of Jug through an advertisement in *Player* magazine. He was a rather shy but intense person, struggling through his studies, and dealing with many personal issues as he prepared to graduate in a difficult economic climate. He was originally from Kyushu, a southern island of



Figure 3.1 Jug live at Heaven's Door.

Japan. I heard many stories about his dealings with his traditional, and at times overbearing, parents, who were concerned about his living in Tokyo. Nagatome was the oldest son and, thus, had additional familial responsibilities.¹ Nagatome dealt with these issues in different ways, of course seeking an outlet for his frustrations through performing with Jug. He also stopped attending university for one year without informing his parents so that he could keep collecting the tuition and support money from them. Eventually they did discover his ruse and forced him back to school. But his chances of finding decent lifetime employment upon graduation were seriously hurt by this break in his studies. The other members of Jug, a few years older and more stable, spent a great deal of time counseling him.

Suzuki Shigeru was similarly self-taught on the bass. He was thirty years old at the time of research. Suzuki Shigeru was unusual in that he was a traditional *sararîman*, working as a Systems Engineer. *Sararîman* typically work some type of professional job in fields such as engineering, banking, or law. The typical *sararîman* has long worked extensive hours, especially in the past during Japan's economic boom, leaving little time for leisure activities. Although white-collar professionals are working less overtime than in the past, they still keep strict hours and take little vacation time. This created potential problems with scheduling rehearsals and lives, but Jug worked through these issues rather successfully. Suzuki Shigeru's regular paycheck was a great asset to funding the band, and he acquired a hand-made bass, later purchased a bass amplifier, and even bought a van to help transport everyone. During preparations for Y2K, Suzuki Shigeru was particularly busy. He remains a very quiet person, yet with a wonderful, although at times rather dark, sense of humor, as expressed in the regular newsletter that Jug produced (see Figure 4.7). During performances, he continually hunched over his low-slung bass, staring at the floor. Because he was tall, this presented an interesting stage presence that many people commented upon. He claimed his idol was the bassist from Nirvana, who performed in a similar style (see Figure 3.1, with Suzuki Shigeru on the left).

The life force behind Jug, though, was clearly Suzuki Miyuki, a thirty-year-old woman on drums. Suzuki Miyuki was also essentially self-taught on the drums, although she did take two to three months of drumming lessons when fifteen years old. She did not start playing drums regularly until she was twenty-seven though: a fact that amazed many people when they heard her perform. Suzuki Miyuki and Suzuki Shigeru were actually married during the time of research, but did not have a public ceremony. They both originally came from the Nîgata area, met in technical school, suffered through a long-distance relationship while Suzuki Miyuki studied in London, lived together upon her return to Japan, and then quietly married.

Suzuki Miyuki claimed that one of the reasons she moved to London was to allow Suzuki Shigeru time to mature on his own. Upon her return,

they decided to start a band together essentially as a hobby—to have something in common. When I first met them, I had no idea that they were even partners. This is partially because of the tendency among many Japanese to avoid open affection in public, but I also believe that they desired to keep this relationship relatively quiet in the scene for reasons still unclear to me. They married without ceremony by signing their names at city hall and Suzuki Miyuki continued to use her maiden name, Nishimura, for some time: an unusual practice even in contemporary Japan. She has since begun using Suzuki as her last name.

Suzuki Miyuki remains largely a paradox for me. Her forwardness and willingness to connect with a stranger surprised me at the time of our meeting. She listed as her primary occupation housewife, and worked part-time as an accounting assistant, yet played drums in a hardcore rock band. She has had an unusual life for a young Japanese woman, having lived abroad in London where she studied English and calligraphy, and attending many live shows in small London clubs. She now worries about many of the same concerns that face many young housewives in Japan—who will take care of her parents as they age, how to best educate her two rapidly growing children, and what to cook for dinner each night.

Suzuki Miyuki's patience and generosity were instrumental in the success of my research. Through her I came to know Jug, and through Jug the larger scene opened before me. I attended their rehearsals, a recording session, and, of course, the countless lives that they performed in the two years during my time in Tokyo. It is through these experiences that I came to understand all aspects of band life in the scene more fully and, in turn, the identity of the scene itself.

Lives

Lives, for example, were particularly exhausting for the bands. At a livehouse like 20,000volt, bands would arrive for thirty-minute sound checks in the early afternoon, sitting through the other rehearsals, waiting for their respective turns. Once finished with their sound check, they left to shop or eat, but the last band often waited three to four hours for their turn. This need to arrive so early was partly a reflection of the loose scheduling system in use at many of the small livehouses, but it also feeds the intense social responsibilities that bands faced in the scene. Indeed, the interaction between performers before, during, and after a performance was a significant social custom that strengthened the bonds of the network and was, in fact, an important defining characteristic of the scene. I typically attended sound checks with Jug, even when not performing with them, arriving at noon, although they might not perform until nine or ten o'clock. Members of bands almost always stayed until the very end of a night of performances, which often resulted in a ten to twelve hour day at the livehouse.

This schedule could be quite grueling, especially for a band like Jug, where one member was busy with his studies and another worked a full-time job. Often Nagatome would sleep or study during breaks in the sound check, especially during finals time, and Suzuki Shigeru had to work extra hours on other days to take the time off for lives. On one night in particular I remember the band being extremely exhausted; Suzuki Miyuki had been ill and Nagatome had been busy with schoolwork. They were sluggish throughout the night and were extremely apologetic about their questionable performance afterwards.

Musical Equipment

Bands typically used house equipment (drums, amplifiers, microphones, etc.) not only at rehearsal studios but also at livehouses. Individuals only had to bring guitar(s) and bass (which they carried in light gig-bags), guitar pedals (usually in a hard case), and their own snare and bass drum pedal. This system facilitated performance in several ways, as a car was not necessary to transport larger equipment. Bands could also begin performing live with little financial investment in equipment. Although this constant use of studio and livehouse gear facilitated performing for many bands, it also created certain problems, such as those described in the section on rehearsal studios in Chapter Two. The constant switching of amplifiers, drum kits, and sound systems often led to problems of balance within the band, although confronting such problems arguably created stronger performers. Suzuki Shigeru mentioned that bass amplifiers, in particular, were difficult to work with, as each studio and livehouse had different types, which produced distinct sounds, or more often were blown. Guitar amplifiers were usually made by Marshall and did not seem to cause the same problems for the guitarists. A new bass amplifier was quite expensive, costing approximately ¥300,000 (@ US \$3000), yet Suzuki Shigeru did eventually buy his own. He did not, however, always bring it to rehearsal or lives.

Scheduling

Jug typically performed only once a month. This was due in large part to the expense of playing live, as each band had to sell tickets or cover the expense themselves, again in a “pay-to-play” system. On certain occasions, a particular band “presented” the evening’s events. The band coordinated all performances for the evening, usually with bands directly in their network, performed themselves, and collected all the money, which they then turned over to the livehouse. Because Jug had only three members, playing live was particularly expensive for each person. When I performed with them, I offered to contribute, but they refused.

Summary

Although I am most familiar with the practical issues involved with Jug's performance as a band, many of the same issues were shared with the other bands directly in their network, as well as within the broader scene. Other aspects, however, marked Jug as unusual. In general, band members were usually in their early to mid-twenties when they started performing in these livehouses, and most members worked part-time jobs in related businesses: at livehouses, studios, and record shops. Jug was unusual in that the two older members were in their late twenties to early thirties, while the youngest was a student at the prestigious Waseda University. Although I did meet a few other musicians who were *sararîman* by day, Suzuki Shigeru's position as a *sararîman* was particularly striking. Jug thus represents a particular type of band in the scene: a type of band that could be loosely called a "serious hobby band." All three members had other pursuits and interests, although they took their playing seriously when on stage. Suzuki Miyuki, when asked why she was in a band, even explained her reasons for playing with Jug as "It feels good, I enjoy it, and it's a hobby to spend money!" Suzuki Shigeru similarly claimed that he played in Jug "because it is fun and to express anger. Also for enjoyment and as a hobby." Nagatome simply replied to this same query with "for enjoyment."

Although none of the group expressed overt negative feelings about signing with a label, they did not express an active desire to pursue a label either. Suzuki Miyuki, when asked if she wanted a label contract, responded "No! I don't think about that." She further explained that "we want to keep our style so I am not that interested. If they [a label] understand and respect our style, it might be okay." Suzuki Shigeru, again similarly stated, "No, we do not [want a label]. If a label were interested, then we might want to, but it would depend on production. It is a chance for a lot of people to listen to our music, so I think they are positive." Nagatome was a bit more eager, although he, too, initially responded, "No." But he went on to claim that if having a label "is going to extend our field of play, then I think it is great." Thus, the group felt that having a label was not essential, nor even a goal they should actively be seeking, but it would be agreeable if they had a label connection that did not affect the sound they could produce.

Jug's desire to keep control of the creative process and focus on making music for enjoyment, rather than for monetary gain, was a common value shared by many individuals in the scene, in particular other bands in their immediate network. The following bands, in fact, were all part of Jug's immediate network, either through performing with them or because Jug regularly went to see them perform live, or both. The subsequent discussion of bands appears in order of their increasing professionalism, followed by exploration of women performers in the scene specifically. The detailed

look at these other bands continues to introduce key performers in the scene, while expanding the understanding of both typical issues in having a band and general aspects that characterize the scene, as well as the uniqueness of each individual group.

Schoolboys, Rock, and Music from the Mars

I met Music from the Mars relatively late in the research process through their association with 20,000volt and friendly interactions with Jug. They were a young, all-male band that comprised three members. The members of Music from the Mars performed a type of hardcore that best can be described as simply “rock,” as they represent perhaps the lightest of the hardcore bands that are considered in this monograph. The drummer, Yoshimura Yûji, was a twenty-two-year-old student. Ôno Shintarô was a twenty-two-year-old bassist who worked part-time. Fujii Tomonobu, who was largely responsible for the creation of Music from the Mars’ songs, was a twenty-one-year-old student who performed vocals and guitar, and was, without a doubt, the “face” of the band (see Figure 3.2). Fujii had a wonderful sense of humor in his performance style and open personality off stage. He was quite appreciative when either members of Jug or I attended one of their lives.

Music from the Mars had been performing together for three years at the time of my research, although they did not tell me how long they had each been playing their respective instruments. Fujii and Ôno also played in another band called Pull, and Yoshimura performed with a jazz band at school. They met in high school, but started performing together after graduation, thus my designation of them as “schoolboys.” It is, in fact, not unusual for young musicians to meet each other in school, particularly in college band circles, although this scene tended to attract slightly older performers. Music from the Mars, though, were one of the many younger bands that treated Jug with great respect, and, in turn, received much attention, particularly from Suzuki Miyuki.

Like Jug, Music from the Mars desired to make music for enjoyment. When asked why he was performing in the band, for example, Fujii responded, “Since we were little children, we have been moved by music, so I wanted to move other people and surprise them.” Fujii continued to explain that Music from the Mars would have liked “to make a contract with a label that understands us. [Labels] are not a bad thing. It would be splendid if everyone around the world could listen to us through such an opportunity.” This expressed a perhaps naïve desire to be on a label to spread their music, but again not noting a desire to obtain stardom as their primary motivation for performing. Other bands in the scene did have hopes of greater financial success, such as the following group Sports, although they remained somewhat suspicious of the effects of being on a label as well.

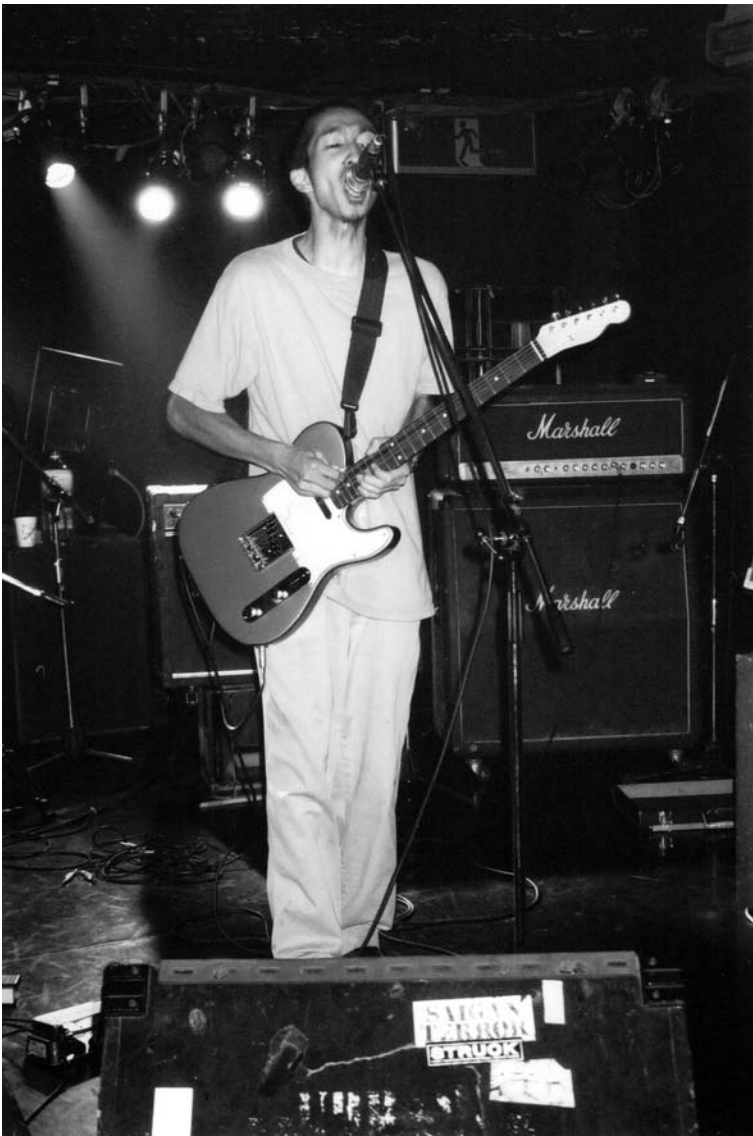


Figure 3.2 Fujii from Music from the Mars live at 20,000volt.

Working Class, Emo-core, and Sports

Jug performed with the group called Sports early in the research project. I was immediately attracted to their music and stage presence and attended many of their shows throughout my two years in the field, even traveling to see them perform in Yokohama, a neighboring port city of Tokyo.



Figure 3.3 Sports live at Heaven's Door.

The members of Sports were also very friendly with Jug, attending each other's lives and even sharing equipment when necessary, as mentioned in the opening "Backstage at Yellow" narrative. Sports comprised four members, three of whom were quite tall, a fact that members of the audience often commented upon. The group described their type of hardcore as falling under the more specific umbrella term of "emotional core," or "emo-core," a new descriptor at the time used to delineate a particularly plaintive and emotional type of hardcore. Sports, in fact, performed the "hardest" hardcore of all the bands that I consider in detail in this monograph. Ôno was a twenty-four-year-old drummer, who thought of himself as "unemployed," although this could mean he was a part-time worker.² Yamada, the guitarist, was also twenty-four years old, and worked in a bakery. Toda also worked in a bakery, was twenty-four years old and played bass. The vocalist, Nishida, was twenty-six years old and worked in accessory repair (see Figure 3.3).

Sports had been playing together for approximately two years at the time of my research. Toda also performed with the group *sâdo wisshu* (サード ウイツシュ), or Third Wish. Ôno and Yamada met at junior college and then contacted Toda and Nishimura through an advertisement. Their performance style was particularly intense as Nishida, small in stature compared to the other members, screamed intensely in Japanese, which was unusual in that the majority of other bands in the immediate network performed in English.

Out of the bands introduced so far, the members of Sports expressed the greatest desire to obtain financial success with the band. Nishida, for example, goes so far as to explain that he was in a band “because the only thing I can do is play in a band!” He further explained that he “would like to be able to make a living from performing in a band.” Sports did not have a label contract at the time, although they desired one, “depending on the situation.” Nishida felt that “Labels are okay, but not everything about them.” Other bands in the scene, or at least on the periphery of the scene, enjoyed greater success, and had even clearer aspirations.

Aspiring Stars, Guitar Rock, and Cowpers

The group Cowpers, for example, occupy a particularly special place in my imagination of contemporary Tokyo, although my personal interaction with them was somewhat limited. Cowpers were from Sapporo, on the northern island of Hokkaido, but during my primary time of research they regularly performed at both smaller Tokyo livehouses and some larger venues to promote various album releases. I first saw them, on a suggestion from Jug, at the livehouse Shelter in Shimokitazawa. I was immediately attracted to Cowpers on several levels. Their music was sonically pleasing, performed in a hard “guitar rock” style that incorporated unusual musical elements live, such as a violinist on stage for the song “Curve II.” Cowpers had been active in the studio, recording several albums and including many songs on compilations (see References for additional information). In many ways, they exist on the periphery of both my network and the underground scene in Tokyo; but their stage presence and general popularity among performers that I focus on here were persuasive in my decision to include them in this discussion.

As Cowpers were represented by a label, and enjoying a fair amount of media attention at the time, additional information about their position in the Japanese music industry can be gleaned from an extensive interview with the band published in *Indies Magazine* (Murata 1998). Murata describes Cowpers as “an alternative guitar band whose weapon is the rushing feeling of punk and the melodious, loud, yet delicate guitar” (16). Cowpers formed in 1992 and had four male members: Hamano Shôji on drums, Komori Nozomi on bass, Takahashi Kazutomo on guitar, and Takebayashi Gendô on guitar and vocals. Takebayashi was a particularly provocative character. He was rather short in stature, but powerful on stage, straining and sweating as he sang (see the series of photographs in Figure 3.4). The many young women who would position themselves in front of the stage at each performance evidenced his magnetism; Takebayashi Gendô was clearly seen as very alluring. He was as intense off stage as on stage. This phenomenon illustrates another way in which Cowpers were not like most of the other groups considered here, as no one else appeared to have such “groupie” type followers.



Figure 3.4 Takebayashi Gendô of Cowpers live at Shelter.

Cowpers, during this time, were clearly “aspiring stars,” releasing a widely acclaimed independent album and touring in Kyushu, Kansai, and Tokyo before returning home to Sapporo. Nonetheless, Takebayashi described the tiny Tokyo livehouse, Shelter, as his favorite livehouse in all of Japan, clearly connecting himself with the underground scene in Tokyo (Murata 1998). Cowpers’ ability to operate both within the scene and outside of it—a result of their aspirations for stardom—is further evidence of the fluidity of the boundaries of the scene.

Underground Girls, *Onna No Ko Bando*, and the Berotecs

The discussion of bands and their identities up to this point may suggest that the scene was predominantly a male sphere, with the exception of Suzuki Miyuki on drums for Jug. This decidedly, however, was not the case, as on any given night it was typical to have several female members of groups, and even many all-female bands performing on stage right along with the men. Women, in fact, found the underground Tokyo hardcore scene a particularly fruitful space to play at identities, often resisting mainstream expectations of ideal femininity, even if only temporarily, in the safe space of the scene.



Figure 3.5 Berotecs live at 20,000volt.

I initially met Suzuki Miyuki and the other members of Jug at a live featuring one such female group, Berotecs (shown in Figure 3.5). Berotecs were actually one of the best-known of the female bands that regularly performed at 20,000volt from 1997 through 1999.

Berotecs consisted of three members: Chiba Megumi on bass and vocals, Kimura Kaori on guitar and vocals, and Kimura Kaori's brother, Kimura Masahiro, on drums.³ Despite the inclusion of a male drummer, the "front" was female, and both Chiba's and Kimura Kaori's performance styles were decidedly aggressive, their presence dominating the performance. I attended countless performances by this band and remained friendly with them at lives, although we had little interaction outside of the livehouse space. Given the degree of popularity that they enjoyed in the scene during this time, however, additional information is available on Berotecs in a published interview in *Indies Magazine* (Tsubouchi 1999).

Berotecs' performances indeed remained consistently crowded throughout the duration of my research, despite them taking a four-month hiatus at one point. During that time, Chiba returned home, and Kimura Kaori pursued her other projects, such as performing with another otherwise all-male band, Copass Grinderz. They also spent a great deal of time in the studio, producing their own albums and including songs on many compilations (see References for additional information). Despite their actively recording, I do not see them as attached to any single label, and therefore consider them firmly in the underground in the late 1990s. They were regular performers in the scene, either on stage or in the audience, having intense, immediate social interaction with many other individuals.

Berotecs, in fact, are representative of arguably the most identifiable type of hardcore band in the scene: a form of female performance common in the underground known as *onna no ko bando* (女の子バンド), which directly translates as "girl-band." I am not entirely sure at this point where I first heard this term. Nonetheless, when I questioned Japanese about issues related to *onna no ko bando*, we seemed to share an understanding of what type of group would qualify for this categorization in the immediate underground scene, although it is difficult to present a concise definition. The Japanese expression *gyaru ban* (ギャルバン) also directly translates to English as "girl-band," but to the best of my recollection, I never employed this term in conversations with performers in the scene under consideration here. In employing a term that is syntactically related, both terms do ask us to question if these women were playing with the mainstream idea of "girl-pop." In addition, by using the term "*onna no ko*" (女の子), girl, rather than "josei" (女性), woman, a certain level of intimacy may be implied in this label.

In general, the label *onna no ko bando* referred to female bands that were described as "violent," "angry," and even "rebellious" by critics and band members alike in the scene (Tsubouchi 1999). Bands who constructed their collective identity as *onna no ko bando*, or who were identified by

others as *onna no ko bando* were often implying a certain “noisiness,” or hardcore sound, complete with screaming vocals, á la the Berotecs. Some all-female bands would qualify as *onna no ko bando*, but not all, and similarly, several mixed-gender bands would fit this categorization.

Despite some variety in the gender of band members, *onna no ko bando* were unified by a strong female-front (vocals and/or guitar and bass), as well as an appearance that women were in charge of the creative production. They typically sported everyday clothes on stage—jeans and t-shirt, simple shoulder-length hair, and no makeup. This actually placed less emphasis on these women as objects of visual desire, evident in mainstream girl-pop, where performers conform to an ideal of femininity. This focus on the joy of performing in the underground, in turn, placed more emphasis on the content of the music itself, as musical talent was of utmost importance. Certain labels, such as the well-known Benten label, actively constructed their identity through promoting a wide variety of talented *onna no ko bando*, including Berotecs at one point.

Berotecs did, indeed, have hopes of financial success for the group, signing with the independent Bad News Records and releasing their critically acclaimed *Sonny's Guinness* in 1999. All the members continued to work day jobs, but expressed hopes for greater stardom, such as being interested in touring outside of Japan, and, in fact, the group did successfully tour in other parts of Japan, such as Osaka.

THE PERFORMERS OFF STAGE

Taking to the stage as a member of one of the bands was certainly a primary means of performing in the scene, but individuals performed a variety of other, equally important roles, as well. Individuals may have been on stage one moment, then working behind the counter at a livehouse, or at a record or guitar shop the next. As individuals, we continually assume different roles, and in turn, different identities, in all aspects of our lives, and this occurred in the band world as well. As such, the various performers introduced below represent the individuals and their roles off stage. As with the performers on stage, all these performers were also connected in some way to 20,000volt and/or Jug. And exploring their respective characteristics further clarifies the identities that people played with, as well as the identity of the scene as a whole.

Band Members to Managers

Certain individuals performed quite distinct and relatively concrete roles in the hardcore scene. Hayakawa was one such person. A thirty-four-year-old drummer, Hayakawa had been performing with his band, Kirihiro (the members of which met while in college), for ten years, and playing drums



Figure 3.6 Hayakawa of Kirihiito live at 20,000volt.

for fifteen at the time of my research. He also recalled attending drum school for one year at some point as a teenager. Approximately once a year he would perform in other bands. Kirihiito were a particularly interesting duo, featuring just Hayakawa and a guitarist. Both “vocalized,” but the guitarist was the primary singer. The guitarist also played a keyboard on the floor with his feet while working the guitar and singing, resulting in myriad computer-generated noises. Hayakawa had an amazing stage presence and

was well-known for his engaging appearance. He stood while performing, grunting and sweating, revealing his large frame when he took off his shirt (see Figure 3.6.). Kirihiro actively contributed individual songs on compilations and have performed in small venues in the United States as well (see References for additional information).

Hayakawa, however, played another important role in the scene, as the manager of 20,000volt. He had been manager for five years at the time of my research, claiming that he never sought the position, but simply found himself performing this role. He appeared to be well-liked and was respected by the many bands that performed at 20,000volt. His responsibilities included working the door or bar when necessary; taking care of finances, such as collecting fees from the bands; and selecting and scheduling performances. He chose new bands based on their demo tapes or recommendations from others.

As manager, he was well-known to many in the scene, but was not central in Jug's network in that Hayakawa did not feel compelled to attend Jug's performances at other livehouses, nor did Jug attend his. I believe the performance aesthetic employed by Jug and Kirihiro were quite different and resulted in mutual respect, but not a deep following of each other's musical endeavors. Still, Hayakawa represents how the opinion of livehouse managers shaped the overall identity of the scene.

Independent record label managers, who often were members of bands, also exerted a similar power in the scene. I met the members of the all-male band Powder at one particular live early in my research. Powder did not stay together as a band for the entire period of research, but I did continue to interact with certain members on occasion. One particular member, the guitarist, whom I came to know as "Kuni," remained friendly with me whenever we met at other lives. Kuni played another role in the scene, distinct but related to his work performing with bands. Kuni was a manager for the independent label ZK records. A small, unassuming person who often wore a wool cap, Kuni typically stood to the side of the stage at performances of bands under his care. A growing figure of significance in the label system, he was responsible at the time for managing the guitar-rock band Guitar Wolf, who toured both across Japan and in the United States, as well as the more localized band Cowpers.⁴ Managers like Kuni were either assigned certain bands by their respective labels or responsible for identifying particularly promising bands in the scene and signing them to the label. They then would assist in organizing live events, arranging for studio time, and just in general served as cheerleaders for groups under their care. As sales were limited, many of these managers still held regular part-time jobs to support themselves. Most of the bands I encountered were not on labels, yet such managers were still an important force for selecting quality and potentially commercial groups, and in doing so, they helped shape the character of the scene by deciding who was worth additional promotion. As I focused my study on predominantly amateur bands, however,

I had limited interest in record label managers. Kuni, nonetheless, presents another example of how individuals assumed distinct, yet related roles in the scene. He was also a regular member of audiences, for example, when not playing on stage or serving as a manager of a band.

Audiences

As already mentioned, attendance at these small livehouses was often quite low, with the primary audience members being members of the other bands that would perform the same night. The individuals within the audience, however, were equally essential performers in the scene, also exhibiting behaviors and expressing values that characterized the identity of the scene as a whole. Japanese audience members, for example, often sat on the floor, an act that seems unimaginable to me in my experience attending similar gigs in the United States. Occasionally a band on stage might ask people to stand, but usually they just performed their set without comment. The Japanese audience was also interesting in that its members usually did not dance, but only bobbed their heads, with arms folded across the chest. If the audience did dance, they rarely moved their arms, but rather kept them at their sides (see Figure 3.7). In comparison to similar shows in the United States, there was, perhaps surprisingly, little evidence of consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs among the audience, as well. Although everyone was required to purchase a drink ticket upon entering the livehouse, many



Figure 3.7 Audience during a live performance at 20,000volt.

turned this in for nonalcoholic beverages or only purchased one beer. Occasionally individuals brought in beer from the local convenience store, which was much cheaper than purchasing it from the livehouse. But I rarely saw people drunk during the evening. It was striking how intensely audiences appeared to “listen” at such events. They may have bobbed their heads but, in general, stared intently at the performers and listened with great concentration, apparently really trying to “understand” the music.

The quality of the audience, however, varied depending on the style of the band performing at the time. If the band performed in a harder style, then the audience tended to be younger and more energetic. For example, at a performance by Kirihito, the edgy, exuberant duo, at 20,000volt in December 1999, the crowd was noticeably younger than was typical. My friends thought the crowd was a bit young and purposefully strange, both because of the inclusion of a series of DJs between the bands that night, and because one of the other bands was really rather experimental. The experimental band arguably crossed the lines into performance art, with one member screaming “fuck you, mother fucker” over and over while the other one played the bongos. During a live on another night at 20,000volt, several high-school girls arrived complete in pinafores, the standard school uniform. This was very unusual, as high-school students rarely attended these events, presumably being too busy with their studies to find the time. Through conversations with others at the live, though, I determined that they had come to see one of the more comic bands: a hardcore band that sported makeup and costumes. The guitarist of this group, surprisingly, performed in blackface in an attempt to look like Jimi Hendrix and even played several recognizable Hendrix riffs.

Other bands, such as Copass Grindenz, the group that Kimura Kaori later joined, were quite popular with the ladies, almost like a J-pop idol band. They inspired comparatively more motion in the audience than was typical at lives with Jug or Sports for example. Often a few girls would jump madly at Copass Grindenz lives. Bands performing in a decidedly more hardcore punk aesthetic similarly inspired a bit more violence in the audience. The audience was, in general, younger, danced more, and even “moshed,” a violent style of dance where individuals slammed into each other.

Cowpers, in particular, inspired such energetic responses from the audience. One show, in January 1998, at Liquid Room in Shinjuku, is worth special mention. This night featured a string of fairly popular and rather heavy bands, including several western bands. Liquid Room was a comparatively large venue, and on this night there were approximately one thousand people in the audience. Cowpers performed second in the evening, and, as usual, many young women were directly in front of the stage, pressing against the railing. Cowpers often played with harder all-male bands, which tended to attract younger, more energetic audiences than were commonly found at the smaller livehouses, and this crowd was no exception. It was only earlier that week that a young man had kicked me

in the face stage diving at another Cowpers' show at the small livehouse Area in Takadanobaba. I was, therefore, on my guard at Liquid Room, grabbing the railing with both hands, jutting my elbows behind me, shoving the masses off my back. I also assisted a young, budding photographer, with whom I had become friendly at lives, keeping the audience away by standing directly behind him, wrapping my arms around and grasping the



Figure 3.8 Audience member during a live performance at 20,000volt.

railings on either side so that he could take photographs without fear of being bashed in the head.⁵

For the most part, however, audiences for the bands considered here performed in a lighter hardcore style that did not inspire such a response. Audiences, again, at the majority of lives that I attended were older than at these more violent events. This audience behavior may be both a reflection of the audience's age and commitment to the group on stage (Fonarow 2006). In Japan, as individuals are socialized into adulthood, there is a corresponding containment of one's body. In other words, as one gets older, they learn to restrain themselves: to fit neatly shoulder to shoulder on the crowded trains without making eye contact or disturbing their neighbors. This same understanding was exhibited by audiences at hardcore lives, with younger people displaying more rowdy behavior. However, at the same time, audience members with greater commitment to the band on stage would typically position themselves closer to the front, with audience members moving farther back as their interest in the band diminished. Thus, more mature bands inspired committed listening by mature audience members, although, as described, the quality of the sound could inspire more energetic behavior at the same time. If mature listeners and younger moshers found themselves attracted to the stage by the same band, a certain tension could result in the audience.

On one such occasion, a young man, who indeed had had too much to drink, was dancing rather wildly about the floor in front of the stage, while other audience members moved away from him, arms crossed, with disdainful expressions, although no one actually said anything to the man (see Figure 3.8). Individuals were clearly participating in the production of this aggressive music by standing, or sitting, in the audience but arguably behaved in a way that actually conformed with mainstream expectations of adult behavior, and as such, socialized younger participants to behave in a similar way.

Photographers

This discussion has focused on the general characteristics of audiences at hardcore lives. Certain individuals in the audience, however, assumed more specific roles within the scene.

Photographers, for example, were commonly present at these performances, most often as members of other bands or friends with bands performing at a particular event. Occasionally amateur or semiamateur photographers developed their skills at these events, as was the case with my friend at the Cowpers event; and more rarely professional photographers would visit these tiny livehouses to photograph particularly visually interesting groups. One middle-aged woman was even quite famous in hardcore circles, regularly visiting a variety of livehouses to photograph the bands, even publishing a book of her excellent work (Matsushita 1999).



Figure 3.9 Spasmon live at Milk.

The regular occurrence of photography is no surprise, given the prevalence of snapping photos throughout everyday life in Japan. The lack of money-making interests within the underground Tokyo hardcore scene allowed this action to occur, although photography was prohibited at larger livehouses and when certain bands with label representation performed. But within the walls of the many small livehouses, such as 20,000volt, for example, 35mm and digital cameras were a regular feature, and video cameras were occasionally used. Many livehouses, in addition, would videotape a band's performance on stage at their request—one simply had to submit a blank tape to the staff. Documenting the live moment was thus a central expression within the scene. It served the important function of disseminating information about bands, in this case through images of the performers live on stage, while also increasing a sense of solidarity, as various associates lined up together to pose for photos, perhaps to be dusted off and viewed with nostalgia in years to come.

Although photographers were, thus, arguably ubiquitous and therefore predominantly ignored in the scene: their presence did at times inspire heightened performance by bands on stage; an awareness that one was indeed performing, as illustrated in Figure 3.9.

Connected Observers

In addition, there were regular audience members attending performances who, to my knowledge, did not perform in bands themselves. For example,

there was the rather odd, middle-aged *sararîman* who was always in the audience at performances by Berotecs, cradling his sophisticated small microphone and recording equipment in his arms. I never spoke to this man but often observed him from afar. I now believe that he was following Berotecs as if they were a girl-pop group, avidly consuming them as an obsessed fan (Aoyagi 2005). But this type of devotion from afar was rare. Rather, regulars in the audience typically had strong connections with certain bands, even though they were not musicians themselves. Such regulars with interests in the visual arts were quite common, including several of Jug's friends, who attended art school, and assisted with producing graphics for demo tapes. Several of these budding artists were friendly with other bands as well, such as Sports.⁶ Such individuals were seen as connected, and were recognized by others as attached to certain bands or livehouses, thus adding a certain artistic and bohemian quality to the scene. The art-school-to-underground-music connection has long been recognized throughout the world.

CONCLUSION

Clearly there was a tremendous variety of individuals involved in the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the late 1990s. Nonetheless, all of these people performed something they understood as hardcore, although bands expressed their particular interpretation of hardcore differently, an issue that is further considered in the following chapter. Similarly, although some bands were on labels and even more not, the majority of individuals involved were cautious of labels, worried that they could negatively impact a band's vision or sound; a desire to create music for music's sake, rather than for economic gain dominated. Bands were, in fact, quite proud of their creative process, often extolling how all members of the group contributed to the creation of their songs. Fujii, of Music from the Mars, for example, brought "the bone of the song and then everybody add[ed] his desire." While in Sports, "Yamada or Toda [made] a guitar or bass riff quickly, then Ôno [added] drums and Nishida at last [added] the vocals." In addition, so-called copy-bands were not a common phenomenon, as original artistic work was most prized. Nonetheless, many groups actually performed in the scene "as a hobby," although a serious one, to relax, enjoy themselves, and play.

Both amateur and semiamateur groups, in fact, expressed a great deal of humor in the scene, although often a dark, even morbid, humor. The scene was thus an important space to escape other social demands, such as personal problems with family or the need to find regular lifetime employment. This escape did, however, create another set of social demands, as to be socially successful, all individuals in their various roles had to exhibit a great deal of passion and commitment to others in the scene, through attending each other's lives, sharing equipment, and in general being supportive in myriad ways.

What makes this commitment particularly remarkable is that all these individuals in the scene came from widely varying backgrounds—from housewives to students and from *sarariman* to the so-called “unemployed.” There was no single unifying class system at play here in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. Rather, the liminal space of the scene allowed all of these individuals to come together to perform hardcore in a safe space, removed from their positions in everyday society. Hierarchical social positioning remained in the scene, but one’s position had little to do with education or employment status outside of the scene. Rather, one’s position depended on how long they had been active in the scene in some capacity, the nature of that capacity, and the skill of their performance on stage.

Men and women similarly enjoyed a level of equality in the scene that was distinct from mainstream society. Occasionally individuals new to the scene would comment in surprise about the high quality of performance and the regular appearance of female musicians, but, in general, both men and women viewed other women as fellow musicians first and foremost. Women had equal access to electric guitars and percussion, even in bands where the remaining members were all male, which is still a rarity in many music genres of the world (Bayton 1998). And women commonly worked the mixing boards at small livehouses, exhibiting knowledge of technologies deemed “masculine” in more mainstream musics in Japan.

It was quite common in the United States in the 1990s for female folk, rock, and/or punk musicians to come together in women-only festivals and concerts to celebrate pro-female music-making, and for these women musicians to face particular issues as women in their respective scenes (Leblanc 2006). In Tokyo, *onna no ko bando* did, on occasion, organize similar women-only events in the underground, revealing an awareness of one’s identity as a woman, and a desire to promote female-produced hardcore (see Figure 4.5). However, other women in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene have arguably taken gender equality one step further by not organizing such events (Milioto Matsue Forthcoming). Berotecs, for example, actually rarely planned events exclusively with other female groups, choosing instead to play with a mixture of all-male bands and other mixed-gender bands.

Other women in the underground went so far as to say that they did not want their gender to be considered at all when performing in bands. This reading of female performance at this level of the underground is further supported by the voices of the two women on stage at Yellow.

The band Jug was clearly directed by their female drummer, Suzuki Miyuki. She organized performances, rehearsals, and advertising, yet she had only been playing drums for a few years at the time of research. Suzuki Miyuki was, in fact, extremely clear about her desire NOT to be identified as a girl-band, as she felt this might limit Jug’s appeal to a broader audience with its association to a particular style. Jug did, indeed, offer a different sonic interpretation of the label “hardcore” than that expressed by Berotecs, for example, both in their music and use of lyrics. Perhaps

most significant though, was Suzuki Miyuki's emphasis that she be identified as a "musician" first and a "female" second. A similar sentiment was expressed by other bands, as well. For example, when I asked the male guitarist from Squad, an otherwise all-female band, to express his thoughts on gender when performing in a girl-band, he responded, "They are not girls, they are musicians."

Based on my own experience as a performer, I wholeheartedly support Suzuki Miyuki's, as well as other performers', desire to construct identities as musicians with one's gender no longer entering into the equation. At the same time, I remain conflicted as I feel that the quality of social interaction in which we engage is significantly affected by our assumed gender and sexuality, both in how we are viewed and how we view others. Despite these expressions from the band members themselves, the opening review of the live at Yellow again highlights that, despite one's own position on the significance of gender as a musician, others will still recognize and categorize by one's gender. These assumptions can box in not only women, but men as well as they negotiate their identities within the scene. However, the vast majority of participants that I interacted with found this to be a welcoming, "genderless" environment where men and women could both freely express attitudes typically reserved as masculine, such as "anger" and "aggression."

This chapter has introduced many of the individuals and the roles that they played to bring the scene to life. Their participation in the liminal



Figure 3.10 Suzuki Miyuki on drums at 20,000volt.

space of the scene allowed them to play with individual and collective identities that were distinct from the identities that they assumed in other parts of their lives. Some generalizations regarding the particulars of operating within the scene, of course, can be drawn. These include such issues as the practical implications of having a band, as well as the tendency for audiences to be relatively sedate and largely comprised of members from other bands. The extensive time spent socializing in the spaces of livehouses and concurrent development of the more immediate networks of performers that one interacts with while operating in the scene are also significant social factors. However, the experience, and how one interprets the scene around them, is largely dependent on individual perspective. Individuals at times can resist expectations through this play, but also at times confirm and solidify those expectations through the very act of resisting. The methods that these individuals use to perform the scene—including the production of the music itself, lyrics, flyers, newsletters, etc.—are further explored in the following chapter. It is at this level that the strongest sense of the uniquely Japanese character of the scene will be revealed.

4 More Than the Musical in the Performance of Hardcore

This night at the club called Yellow, a bunch of cool bands congregated to perform radical sound—fucking heavy and fucking fast. . . . At first the crowd circled at a distance, but the intense noise and beat enticed the crowd to sway to the rhythm unconsciously. . . . The next band was called Sports. This band had really distinguishable hard and soft ways of playing. One can't help but listen to the words emanating from the vocalist's mouth; sometimes whispering, sometimes throwing his whole body into the words. The number of people entering the floor in front of the stage increased, as they let their bodies feel the flowing waves of the rhythm.

—excerpt from “Sui Event Live 98,” Staff of *M-Gazette*, 1999

Jug was then followed by a series of bands, which increased in experience, intensity, and sheer loudness. The bands were all typically hardcore in the sense that they performed aggressive music, often leaning towards a punk aesthetic, with screaming vocals, and a noticeable absence of guitar solos, yet each group exhibited great variance and personal style.

—excerpt from “Backstage at Yellow,” Chapter One

The backroom on this particular evening exuded a much stronger sense of “machismo” than at other live events I had previously attended in Tokyo, with a number of men sporting wild hairstyles and tattoos, drinking, and socializing with girlfriends. . . . While sipping my water, the pungent smell of marijuana reached my nose, snapping me to attention. I had seen drug use in other worlds in Japan, but never among my band friends. Seeking the source, I noticed one of the more energetic groups lighting up in the open, which didn't seem acceptable with some of the other bands that appeared uncomfortable with this behavior.

—excerpt from “Backstage at Yellow,” Chapter One

Back in Nishiazabu at Yellow, the music pours forth from the double doors, inspiring both the reviewer and myself to relate the events of that evening. The individual performers who inhabit both the event at Yellow and the

preceding pages share one thing in common: Despite at times drastic differences in background, aspirations, and their degree of involvement in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, they all participated in the production of some version of hardcore music that was at the center of the scene. Both the reviewer's comments and excerpts from the backstage narrative at Yellow call attention to the essential activities of the band members on stage and the music they created, which of course is defined as "fucking heavy and fucking fast." This music also typically moved between alternating "hard and soft" sections that created a movement between tension and release for all involved. The qualities of the vocalist mimicked this pattern, as he is seen "sometimes whispering, sometimes throwing his whole body into the words." All the bands on stage at Yellow, of course, "performed aggressive music, often leaning towards a punk aesthetic, with screaming vocals, and a noticeable absence of guitar solos." The descriptions in the review at Yellow and the backstage narrative highlight several of the key musical *kata* of hardcore, the stereotypical patterns of performance that define the scene. And admittedly I am making very liberal use of the term *kata* as synonymous with any meaningful practice—not necessarily referring to a single identifiable pattern only. The reviewer's comments and backstage narrative also highlight several other extramusical activities equally necessary for the performance of hardcore as well.

The reviewer, for example, describes the crowd as they "circled at a distance" and then "swayed to the rhythm unconsciously," until finally "the number of people entering the floor in front of the stage increased, as they let their bodies feel the flowing waves of the rhythm." Performers backstage, meanwhile, could be seen "sporting wild hairstyles and tattoos, drinking, and socializing with girlfriends," and each other for that matter. One gentleman even was glimpsed smoking marijuana, "which didn't seem acceptable with some of the other bands that appeared uncomfortable with this behavior." Although the importance of socializing has already been noted as a defining characteristic of the scene, the use of tattoos, heavy drinking, and of course drug use, were not common, and marked this event at Yellow as somewhat unusual. In fact, the general disapproval showed by my more immediate contacts highlights the disdain for such behaviors that was actually a key characteristic of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene localized around 20,000volt. The fact that such behaviors as marking one's body with tattoos, drinking, and drug use were not practiced—all acts that are arguably oppositional to mainstream accepted behaviors—highlights once again how individuals in this scene only played at resistance. The review of Yellow and backstage narrative thus begin to illustrate how the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was performed in its totality, through highlighting several key musical and extramusical *kata*, or performative tropes, that defined the scene. Clearly much more was involved in the production of hardcore that night than just the seemingly simple act of plugging in the guitar to the amplifier and producing sound.

PERFORMING THE UNDERGROUND TOKYO HARDCORE SCENE

I love Japan. The Japanese are good at so many things—but one thing they are definitely good at is smoking. Dedicated, loyal, and committed puffers—I don't think any other country smokes better than Japan. At our company, pretty much everyone smokes really well. I'm pretty sure our company's "No Smoking" policy is that you are not allowed to smoke when you are on fire, because it is dangerous. But of course this policy is not enforced. . . . I considered smoking—why not join my colleagues, fit in a little better and be part of the group. But with so many people smoking so well, I don't need to. My passive smoking has become active smoking. (Briggs 1999)

In late 1990s Japan, amongst individuals between the ages of twenty to twenty-nine, approximately 20% of women and 60% of men were considered smokers.¹ The opening quotation, from the then-well-known free English weekly newsletter *Tokyo Notice Board*, highlights this Japanese penchant for smoking in the late 1990s, as well as suggesting that the act of smoking, itself, was one way to "fit in a little better" with one's colleagues, either through active or passive participation. Regardless of one's commitment to the art of smoking, it was, indeed, a mainstay in corporate culture, as well as in many worlds devoted to the pursuit of leisure in late 20th century Japan, especially those involving live music-making.

Within the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, for example, the percentage of smokers jumps to perhaps 40–50% of women and 80–90% of men, as one had to cut through the smoke in the small performance spaces to even find the stage. A surprisingly large number of vocalists smoked as well, enhancing the husky vocal quality that was so greatly appreciated in this scene. Thus the act of smoking itself, either firsthand or secondhand, was a regular component of participating, confirming that there is much more involved in the performance of a musical scene than the creation and immediate consumption of the music alone.

The sound of hardcore itself, although of obvious importance in the scene, again is quite nebulous, with a wide range of variance despite certain shared key characteristics—the screaming vocals, churning rhythms, relative absence of drawn-out, melodic guitar solos, and moments of increased tension, release, and repose creating the general form. It is actually quite difficult to identify the scene, or even the broader culture of origin producing that scene, by the sound alone as the medium involved in the creation of hardcore (the instruments, amplifiers, etc.) is ubiquitous in the modern industrial world, enhancing the read of hardcore as a "global" sound. The sound in any local context, rather, needs to be viewed as *one* aspect of a broader performance. Indeed, no single performative element embodies the scene; instead all systems together perform the scene—from the pay-to-play

structure to the train schedules that affect livehouse hours. As such, the broader view of the concept of “performance,” as encompassing all aspects of social practice that bring the musical scene to life, proves most useful when exploring the distinct nature of this moment in Japan.

The preceding quote from the *Tokyo Notice Board* further highlights the importance of reading such performance in its immediate cultural context, as in this case the practice of smoking may be seen as more problematic outside of Japan. More and more cities in the United States, for example, are banning smoking in any building, including bars and clubs, and anti-smoking commercials regularly air on television.² Smoking has long been seen as subversive and rebellious—as something one does when young and then later regrets. The prevalence of the practice in mainstream Japanese culture, by men in particular, however, demands a different interpretation. It is a relatively common behavior in Japan of the late 1990s but noteworthy to an outsider. In a similar vein, outsiders are quick to judge various performative elements of Japanese produced hardcore by inappropriate standards, misinterpreting the significance of certain elements or looking for meaning(s) that are just not there. The practice of hardcore in Japan, rather, should be evaluated as just that—in *Japan*. It is the performance of this scene interpreted in its immediate geographical, spatial, and sonic contexts and performed by Japanese themselves that is the most significant for understanding how this global sound is performed locally. As such, the following discussion seeks to understand not only the musical performance on stage, but also the set of conditions that both informs and allows this performance to occur.

This broad view of performance necessarily informs the following exploration of different performative elements in the production of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. In other words, the following highlights which elements were central and served to characterize the local scene and which stand peripheral. The scene was performed through a variety of expressive media that are indeed central—through the transmission of flyers, newsletters, and stickers, or the exchange of demo tapes, as well as through particular linguistic and social rituals, and of course through the quality of the music itself. Each element, although perhaps also found elsewhere in contemporary Tokyo, or in other scenes globally, performs a certain function, assuming a distinct meaning itself within the imagined boundaries of this particular scene during this particular time period.

Thus, this chapter explores how the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was performed, first through examining representative songs by the bands introduced in the preceding chapter.³ The organization of the following discussion moves through the songs in order of increasing intensity of the bands, from Jug through Cowpers, and then turns to consider female performance practice more specifically. This discussion, therefore, first explores Jug performing “Swell Head,” Music from the Mars performing “Where it is,” Sports performing “Bird,” Cowpers performing “Curve”

and its revision, “Curve II,” and Berotecs performing “Go to Garage.” These case studies on the musical performance of the scene first introduce specific points related to each individual group. Analysis of the songs is based on attendance at lives, at times multiple performances of the same songs, supported by audio and video recordings. Video is particularly important to document the visual, even visceral experience of the live, which is equally important to aural experience, although the discussion here focuses predominantly on the musical, rather than the visual, *kata*. I do, however, rely on video recordings here of live performances taken by myself or that were provided by the bands to provide additional information. As mentioned earlier, though, Cowpers also released a professionally produced video of a live that I attended, *Rust Days* (1998), which will be referred to here as well.

The bands’ performances of these songs are then considered comparatively, in turn highlighting the significance of certain performative tropes in the scene. This exploration reveals both key characteristics of the performance of hardcore, while taking into consideration the individuality of each band in expressing this music. This look at the *kata* of performance then turns to consider the extramusical performance of the scene in further detail, considering the additional aural, written, and social expressions of the scene, through such varied items as homemade stickers to the creation of demo tapes. Such an approach expands the understanding of the night at Yellow, as well as the unique nature of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene more broadly. More important, looking at what is valued in performance also further clarifies the identity of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, and how individuals play at resistance through participating.

PERFORMING THE “MUSICAL”

Jug Performing “Swell Head”

The members of Jug typically wore loose, comfortable clothing, such as jeans and t-shirts, with the vocalist/guitarist Nagatome sporting his ubiquitous baseball cap (see Figure 3.1). When performing at their “home” livehouse, 20,000volt, Suzuki Miyuki sported her dark sports bra with the name “JUG” emblazoned in white on stage (see Figure 3.10). At other livehouses, however, she wore the t-shirt and jeans standard among other musicians in the scene. The guitarist and bassist of Jug, Nagatome and Suzuki Shigeru respectively, bent low over their instruments, Nagatome raising his upper body and straining into the microphone when he sang. Jug was actually rather calm in comparison to the intense performance style that dominated the scene; Suzuki Miyuki pounding away on percussion, although not clearly visible in the rear; Suzuki Shigeru never raising from his bent position during play; and Nagatome returning to his bent posture

whenever not singing (see Figure 3.1). Jug's overall style of play, although conforming to the general features of hardcore performance, was, nonetheless, unique. Jug's song, "Swell Head," further illustrates both some general characteristics of hardcore performance and Jug's own unique interpretation and presentation of the nebulous genre. The dark text of the song, written by Nagatome, follows:⁴

"Swell Head"

(stanza 1)

I want to seek, I don't know what's the time
My head is aching, I should go somewhere
A dwarf died, it's my fault
I want to seek, I should go somewhere

(stanza 2)

Death, all is meaningless
Burn, such silly bonds
A rope, hangs from above
So, I should go somewhere

(chorus)

You said it's a bad wrong
So I'm confused

The A section of "Swell Head" opens with a distinct, heavy bass solo, which motivates the instrumental opening, and returns throughout the entire song. The tension immediately increases as a churning, ascending guitar pattern emerges and the distinct tinkling of the high-hat is audible on the beat, although there is no strong sense of meter and even a feel of relaxed rhythm. The tension builds as each instrument enters in this rather long introduction, increasing in volume and intensity, until crashing into the B section featuring the full ensemble. Certain instruments drop out, leaving the bass striking chords to match the guitar and pounding percussion when Nagatome's somewhat mumbled English vocals enter the mix, delivering the first stanza of the song.

A cyclic sense remains in the instrumentation through the following C section, as Nagatome delivers the next stanza of the song. The bass and guitar now move in a descending pattern through a series of chord changes while Nagatome rises in pitch and intensity. Live, he pushes to the tops of his toes, while straining towards the microphone as he delivers the lines. The sounds of the B and C sections are quite distinct. Nagatome then quickly moves to the penultimate phrase of the song motivating the D section, or chorus, as he screams four times, "You said it's a bad wrong," over new musical material featuring slamming staccato chords that mark each word of the phrase. He concludes with the plaintive yell "So I'm confused!"

The song then turns to repeat the musical material of the opening B section with the complete first stanza, minus a buzz-saw guitar effect in the earlier passage, but equally dense, moving to a repeat of the contrasting C section and articulation of the second stanza. This is followed by a straight repeat of the D section chorus with the penultimate concluding “So I’m confused!”. Here Jug modifies the form slightly with an expanded instrumental D' section, creating almost a new section based on material from the preceding. Nagatome slowly ascends the guitar with quick tremolo effects through the entire passage over the same constant churning bass and drums, crashing again into section D'' with four repeats of the staccato “You said it’s a bad wrong.” The song concludes with four repeats of the staccato slamming chords without vocals, abruptly ending on the last chord of the last cycle, with the subsequent feedback gradually fading away. The overall form of the piece thus follows the pattern below, with time markings to the left:

“Swell Head” Form

- (0:00) A—opening instrumental material
- (0:38) B—stanza 1; full ensemble
- (1:10) C—stanza 2; contrasting musical material
- (1:32) D—chorus; staccato chords
- (1:44) B—stanza 1; full ensemble
- (2:26) C—stanza 2; contrasting musical material
- (2:48) D—chorus; staccato chords
- (3:10) D'—expansion of preceding musical material
- (3:32) D''—chorus; voice drops and guitar repeats melodic pattern;
collapses on final chord
- (4:00)

With “Swell Head,” Jug moves through a relatively simple song form with three basic sections: the opening stanza in relative stasis, the second stanza increasing in tension as Nagatome whines about “Death,” and the release found in the repeated screaming of “You said it’s a bad wrong.” Jug couches these lyric-driven changes in heavy voicing, again with a strong emphasis on bass, obvious chord changes, absence of melodic guitar solos, and an intense vocal technique. The lyrics almost feel forced into the cycles with short staccato articulation throughout. Jug’s use of English becomes another characteristic of much hardcore, as is discussed in the following.

Music from the Mars Performing “Where it is”

The brightness of the young all-male trio, Music from the Mars, stands in incredible contrast to the heavy hardcore style preferred by Jug. The members of Music from the Mars, though, similarly appeared on stage in baggy pants and t-shirts; the lead singer, Fujii, sports dark framed glasses

and a studious look (see Figure 3.2). Fujii's glasses had been known to fly off in the midst of performance, although he continued to play away, most likely unable to see the audience three feet in front of him. Fujii had also been known to incorporate harmonica into his accoutrements, with a Bob Dylanesque neck strap and frame positioning the harmonica before his mouth, leaving his hands free for guitar work, although the harmonica, too, was known to slip out of place in midperformance. Music from the Mars seemed to have tremendous fun on stage, although, of course, still taking their music quite seriously. Perhaps because of this attitude, their interpretation of hardcore feels somehow "lighter" than all the other groups considered here. The music of Music from the Mars relies on similar *kata* though, such as highlighting the possibilities of contrast, but lacks a certain tension, as demonstrated in the following song, "Where it is."

Just as with "Swell Head," this song opens with an A section instrumental introduction featuring the bass and guitar quickly, but quietly, plucking away. Although the A section is in common time, the rhythm feels somehow forced, even strained. There is no discernable increase in tension prior to the following full ensemble entrance, which simply bombards, indicating the move to the B section. The group plows through this B section with equally heavy instrumentation, featuring a distorted guitar articulating chords, which expand on the harmonic framework supplied by the bass. This heavy hardcore instrumentation supports Fujii's flat, nasally, even whining vocals. Fujii's vocals, although similarly mumbled, are distinct from Nagatome's murkiness. He produces a slightly more relaxed, even languid feel, although the entrance on each word is marked, as he cries out inaudible text. The words themselves are difficult to discern, although clearly in English, particularly when Fujii returns with the hookline, "Where it is."⁵ This B section also feels somehow forced into the common time meter, with the stretched feel of the vocal line and contour of the chordal accompaniment.

The following contrasting A' section draws on the opening, quiet instrumental material, now supported by light percussion and equally light picking of double-stops or full chords on the guitar. The A' section stands in further contrast with the B section in its absence of vocals, as well as finally feeling comfortably in common time, all adding to a sense of lightness or repose. The B section abruptly returns again with either the same or terribly similar lyrics, moving as expected to another return of the opening A section instrumental material. This pass through the A' section is slightly modified, now with more melodic and unaffected guitar work, actually the clearest, even "prettiest" use of the guitar in all the examples here. The A' section next moves through a turn, returning to B once again, not surprisingly followed by another straight repeat of the A' section. The pretty guitar work of the preceding A' section is further highlighted until turning back to the B section one last time. This final play through the B section is straight, very similar to the preceding B passages, until it briefly expands

in a B' section on preceding material, including a ritard and definite pause, announcing the arrival of presumably new material.

The roll of the snare drum sets the next C section apart; and on first listening it may indeed seem like new material, with either a change in meter or distinct increase in tempo. Deeper listening reveals the entire ensemble running through the B section once again though; in effect using diminution to create that sense of increased speed, or more to the point, intensity, ultimately creating a stronger punk feel in this particular section. Music from the Mars runs through some instrumental work based on the B section, repeats this with vocals, then passes quickly through another turn, to repeat the B section with vocals. They use the earlier expansion, complete again with ritard and pause, to move back to the now augmented material of the original A' section, comfortably arriving at the lighter material. This section passes through the original A' section with supporting bass and percussion and light, atmospheric guitar sound effects. The pretty guitar work then enters again, marking the return of the A'' section, which then slows down and stretches out into the final turn, now with added guitar feedback, which slowly breaks down, quietly, as the piece closes with the earlier turn effect and Fujii's vocals adding a last guttural utterance. Mild feedback closes the piece. The overall form of the piece thus follows the following pattern, with time markings to the left:

“Where it is” Form

(0:00) A—opening instrumental material

(0:16) B—stanza; full ensemble

(0:30) A'—instrumental; percussion added to A

(0:46) B—stanza; repeat of B

(1:00) A''—instrumental; light, melodic guitar added to A'; turn to B

(1:18) B—stanza; repeat of B

(1:32) A''—instrumental; repeat of A'' including turn to B

(1:50) B—stanza; repeat of B

(2:04) B'—brief expansion of B material, possibly with new vocal line

(2:14) C—complete B section at faster tempo; crashes and pauses

(2:58) A'—A' returns with additional guitar sound effects; moves seamlessly into following

(3:14) A''—instrumental, repeat of A''; concludes with final guttural statement and feedback

(3:45)

Music from the Mars often included more melodic work on the guitar in their pieces, although only in contrasting sections of repose against the more typical churning hardcore voicing. The form of “Where it is,” just as with “Swell Head,” is also typical in its reliance on aligning two distinct sections, with some modified section, either through expansion of material, as in “Swell Head,” or diminution as in “Where it is,” toward the end. The

final ending on feedback, as well, is common in many hardcore pieces, as is the tense, often flat vocal styles of the performers, although some may scream more, such as the following group, Sports.

Sports Performing “Bird” (“鳥” [“Tori”])

The members of Sports typically took to the stage wearing the ubiquitous baggy pants and t-shirts, with little extra-adornment, barring the occasional donning of a woven cap or baseball hat by the bassist, Toda. The lead singer, Nishida, and the drummer, Ôno, were also rather fond of experimenting with various hair dyes—blonde, red, etc.—adding a certain alternative feel to their appearance. Nishida’s activity on stage—striding about, even jumping, often bending in seeming contortions of pain and exertion—stood rather in contrast with the comparatively stoic appearance of his band mates, particularly Toda on bass and Yamada on guitar, as they hovered closely over their low-slung instruments, just like Jug, rarely engaging directly with the audience (see Figure 3.3). Nishida was often the center of attention when Sports took to the stage, whether at the various livehouses in Tokyo, or in Yokohama, where they also liked to perform. The tense song “Bird” is a particularly good example of both Sports’ individual style and the codified sonic components that characterize typical hardcore performance encountered in the scene. Below are the lyrics of “Bird,” first in the original Japanese, followed by the Romanization, and last in English translation:⁶

“Bird”

(stanza 1)

コノ手デ タタク コトゴトク 壊シタク 行く ダロウ 道 ガ
 気ニハ入ラヌ カラ 嫌 ダ 今 ハ水ニ 流シテ
 死ニ タク ナケレバ 切り開ケ

kono te de tataku kotogotoku kowashitaku yuku darô michi ga
 ki ni wa iranu kara iya da ima wa mizu ni nagashite
 shi ni taku nakereba kirihirake

Hitting with this hand, willing to destroy everything, disliking the
 road I am taking
 No, now let it flow in water (forget about the past)
 If you don’t want to die, open your way

(stanza 2)

迫リ来ル 意味ヲ 感ジル ヒマモ 無ク ユックリ 確実ニ
 流レユク 今ヲ 感ジル ヒマモ 無ク ユク ヨ

semarikuru imi o kanjiru hima mo naku yukkuri kakujitsu ni
 nagareyuku ima o kanjiru hima mo naku yuku yo

Not having enough time to feel the meaning coming close, slowly
and certainly

Not having enough time to feel the reality floating by, I am going

(stanza 3)

二人ノ老人ガ並び座リ話ヲ交エテイタ
ソノ声ノ気持ち良サニ我ハ眼ヲツブリ聞キ入ル
旅デノ想イヲ語ル二人ナゼカ一度モ
視線ヲアワセナイアナウンスニ気づキ立ち去ル
手ニハ白イ一本ノ棒ガ
握ラレテイタシッカリト多分今モ
暗イ部屋デ眠ル今モ

futari no rôjin ga narabi suwari hanashi o majiete ita
sono koe no kimochi yosa ni ware wa me o tsuburi kiki iru
tabi de no omoi o kataru futari naze ka ichido mo
shisen o awasenai anaunsu ni kizuki tachisaru
te ni wa shiroi ippon no bô ga
nigirarete ita shikkari to tabun ima mo
kurai heya de nemuru ima mo

Two old men sitting next to each other, talking to each other
To that pleasant voice, I close my eyes and listen carefully
Talking about the travels they have had, I don't know why but they
never make eye contact Hearing the announcement, they stand up
and leave

Holding one white stick
Tightly in a hand, probably still now
Inside a dark room, sleeping still now

(stanza 4)

鳥ガ見ルカラニ簡単ソウニ空ヲ飛ンデイル
コノ身体ナド邪魔ナダケダアトカタモナク
消エテシマエ今モマタ二人ノ老人ノ事ヲ
考エル旅先デ何ヲ見テイタ
ドンナ風景ガ広ガッテイタノカ

tori ga miru kara ni kantan sô ni sora o tonde iru
kono karada nado jama na dake da atokata mo naku
kiete shimae ima mo mata futari no rôjin no koto o
kangaeru tabisaki de nani o mite ita
donna fûkei ga hirogate ita no ka

The bird is flying through the sky easily
This body is disturbing, wishing it would vanish

I am still thinking about the two old men
 What have they seen during the trip?
 What kind of scenery was there?

The piece opens with yet another A section instrumental introduction featuring the bass, again heavy and throbbing. The short introduction establishes the mood, quickly leading into the B section, which features a slightly faster tempo, although still in the ubiquitous common time. This section is churning, dense, and intense, with Nishida's vocals screaming the first stanza of "Bird" through the instrumentation. The B section essentially becomes the chorus in this piece, returning two more times with heightened expression. The following C section stands quite in contrast, opening with only bass and percussion. The most notable point is when Nishida delivers stanza 2 in a comparatively calming spoken-style, with indistinct guitar articulations rounding out the supporting sound. With the almost whispered lyrics, Nishida closes his eyes, hugs the microphone close to his body and places a finger from his free hand into his ear, seemingly in an attempt to concentrate or stay in tune. The ultimate effect is not one of relaxation though, but rather a severe heightening of tension, building through the entire section, only released as the full frontal attack of the B section abruptly returns, as Nishida also releases his body on stage, thrashing about.

At the close of the repeated B section, rather than simply return to the preceding C section, Sports moves, instead, to a new contrasting sound in the D section. Although with the same underlying tempo, the rapidness of the lyrics and increased intensity in the voicing gives the sense that the surface tempo has doubled, another example of diminution. The D section opens with an even greater sense of churning, with instrumental music preceding the return of Nishida's delivery of the first five lines of stanza 3, strained and passionate, although not quite screaming. This continues, running into a slightly modified passage, section E, with more melodic guitar articulations and Nishida's now slightly flat voice delivering the sixth line of stanza 3, floating in the background. This section closes with a brief bass solo returning both to the original sense of time and another repeat of the B section in its entirety.

As the piece approaches its close, the variety of elements that are combined increases, creating a pastiche effect. The closing passages begin with a brief C' section, drawing on instrumental materials from the earlier C section, followed by another bass solo. The previous melodic contour and general instrumentation of the earlier E section returns in a modified E' section as Nishida delivers the seventh line of stanza 3, further stretching his slightly flat vocals. The final F section (on the demo tape version) seems to combine the flat vocals of E', now with a modified version of the earlier D instrumentation and vocal technique, only with the new text of stanza 4. The effect is frenetic, pulling together bits and pieces of the preceding piece, yet creating an entirely new sound featuring Nishida's distinct vocals

in a bizarre counterpoint: one slow, groaning, and flat; the other rapid and strained. The piece quickly moves through the final pastiche, collapsing in the end as the guitar and bass reverb fades away. The overall form of the piece thus follows this pattern, with the time markings to the left:

“Bird” Form

(0:00) A—opening instrumental material

(0:15) B—stanza 1; full heavy ensemble; screaming vocal style

(0:40) C—stanza 2; lighter instrumentation; spoken vocal style

(1:20) B—repeat B

(1:45) D—first 5 lines of stanza 3; increased sense of tempo and intensity

(2:20) E—6th line of stanza 3; melodic guitar; floating vocals

(2:45) B—repeat B

(3:12) C'—instrumental only version of C; bass solo

(3:36) E'—7th line of stanza 3; whining, stretched vocals

(3:59) F—stanza 4; combines elements of D and E'; concludes with fading distortion

(4:31)

“Bird” opens yet again with a brief and distinct, although relatively simple, throbbing bass solo, slow and heavy, establishing the feel of the song to come. Also in typical hardcore fashion, Nishida’s screaming vocals emerge with the sudden entrance of the full ensemble of bass, guitar, and drums. Nishida, though, expertly alternates between emotional screams, whispering, and more melodic vocal techniques as the song progresses through a pattern of tension and relative release in the supporting instrumentation. The text of the song, sung in Japanese, although difficult to discern even by the native speaker in either the live or recorded versions, is somewhat obscure, even dark. The form of the piece is best understood as a series of contrasting sections, alternating between increasing tension, high intensity, and repose.

Sports’ overall style, including the nondescript clothing with almost an absence of attention to dress, the stoic position of bassist and guitarist in contrast to the vocalist’s antics on stage, and their general demeanor when performing live, were common elements of the performance of hardcore. The musical language of Sports is also characteristic, with its focus on tension and release in contrastive patterns, a reliance on heavy bass, absence of guitar solo, and dominance of strained, even screaming vocal techniques, or *sakebi*. In other songs, Nishida was actually known to descend into pure guttural screaming as he bent to the floor or stretched nearly backwards in extreme effort, only then to suddenly curl into himself as he whispered through the next stanza. In this song, there is a certain primacy of rhythmic speech over lyrical expression that is not unusual, as Nishida moves through the text of the song, at times stretching a few words over a phrase (see E' section), at others articulating with incredible speed a long

passage of text in the same amount of time (see D or F sections). The form of “Bird” is also representative of certain hardcore pieces, as it spins out through several sections, drawing from previous musical material to build later expression, and again, with a continual emphasis on contrast between adjacent stanzas. “Bird” is actually somewhat more complicated than the vast majority of hardcore pieces, which usually feature only two blatant contrasting sections, as seen in the analysis of the two proceeding pieces. Sports’ choice to sing in Japanese will also be revealed as rather unique in the performance of hardcore.

Cowpers Performing “Curve” and “Curve II”

The Cowpers’ performance style was similar to Music from the Mars, in their focus on the guitar and self-identification as a “guitar rock” band. However, the lead singer, Takebayashi, leaned more towards Nishida’s passionate stage performance in comparison to the other groups discussed. Takebayashi, in fact, was the most passionate and intense performer that I discuss here, well-known for his physicality onstage (see Figure 3.4). Cowpers’ performance style, as a whole, really supported Takebayashi, as they created songs that highlighted his vocals and allowed him to exhibit his energies onstage. The group’s music exhibits many of the same common *kata* discussed already, such as dressing in the standard jeans and t-shirt; following a musical form that alternates between moments of repose, building intensity, and release; and utilizing a vocal style that ranged from mumbling to full-on screaming. Just as with the other hardcore bands in the scene though, Cowpers voiced these standardized *kata* in their own unique way. The songs “Curve” and “Curve II” illustrate well Cowpers’ performance style, and also clarify the importance of building tension and allowing physical release to have a strong hardcore song. The lyrics are the same for both “Curve” and “Curve II” as follows:⁷

“Curve” and “Curve II” Lyrics

(stanza)

Where’s the beginning of the curve
 What did I leave at the start
 How long does this curve go
 What will I see in the end
 What distance am I trying to shorten
 My days are numbered, running out
 Who’s the one sitting next to me?
 What did I pack on the trunk?

(chorus)

STUFFY LOCKED-UP ROOM
 STUFFY LOCKED-UP ROOM

STUFFY LOCKED-UP ROOM

STUFFY LOCKED-UP ROOM

According to Takebayashi, he originally wrote the lyrics in Japanese, which were then translated into English by the bassist, Komori Nozomi. In fact, all the songs by Cowpers were in English at this point in their career, although their later work would be in Japanese, a point that is further considered in the following. Although the lyrics remain the same in both versions of the song, the way they are delivered is quite distinct.

“Curve” is rather a standard, fast-paced punk song that follows a simple form with the single stanza and chorus repeating several times. The piece opens with a straightforward instrumental A section that establishes the fast, upbeat feel of the piece, utilizing standard rock instrumentation, and an interesting rapid four-note guitar flourish. This moves easily into the B section, featuring the main stanza, delivered in a constant high-pitched whine by Takebayashi, again supported by standard rock instrumentation: thick, but no particular instrument stands out.⁸ The C section uses a more melodic vocal style to deliver the simple repeating line of the chorus, “Stuffy locked-up room,” while a new guitar sound is heard in the background, creating a high-pitched feedback effect as it rapidly strums. An abbreviated selection of the opening A instrumental material returns, which essentially serves as a turn to a straight repeat of the B and C sections. New material is finally introduced with the following D section, as the tempo suddenly slows down and there is a relatively long instrumental section featuring a distinct bass solo. This is followed by a quick turn, a return to the original tempo, and then the sudden emergence of the C section chorus. After one pass through the C section, Cowpers provide an instrumental expansion of the musical material of the B section stanza, concluding with an abrupt ending as everyone just stops: an effect that is likely enhanced on the studio version of the song. The overall form of the piece thus follows this pattern, with time markings to the left:

“Curve” Form

(0:00) A—opening instrumental material

(0:16) B—stanza

(0:40) C—chorus

(1:04) A'—abbreviated opening instrumental material; turn

(1:12) B—stanza; repeat B

(1:36) C—chorus; repeat C

(2:00) D—new instrumental material at slower tempo; return to original tempo

(2:24) C—chorus, repeat C

(2:48) B'—lengthy instrumental expansion of the musical material of the B section; sudden end

(3:10)

This, again, is a relatively simple song form as compared to the other pieces that have been considered already. It creates a pleasant, upbeat song, but as the quality of the voice and instrumentation do not vary that much, and there is a noticeable absence of sections that feature a strong sense of tension building and subsequent release, the song does not create a strong emotional response in the listener. Cowpers, however, were able to take this simple song form and modify it into a much more powerful offering with "Curve II."

"Curve II" takes the original piece, but slows the tempo and modifies the instrumentation. Cowpers keep the same text but vary the vocalization and exaggerate the extremes of repose and intensity to create an entirely new song. "Curve II" opens with an A section featuring a violin tuning for several seconds. The violin drops out, and then the B section begins with a quiet guitar plucking staccato notes supported by an unobtrusive bass line, while Takebayashi mumbles through the first four lines of the stanza. The instruments actually drop out for several seconds leaving just the voice for the second line, and then they return, supported by a second, more melodic guitar, seemingly in the distance. Towards the end of the fourth line, the plucking guitar briefly introduces new material that serves as a quick turn, signaling the sudden entrance of the full ensemble.

The following C section assaults the listener. It is a rich instrumental featuring a thick rock instrumentation plus violin. The affect is heavy, forceful, and churning, with lots of distortion to create a wall of sound. The C section thus stands in remarkable contrast to the preceding quiet and internal B section. This musical phrase repeats four times before collapsing into a modified version of the opening B section. In this B' section, Takebayashi delivers the stanza from the beginning once again, with basically the same guitar, but now with a strong, running bass line and a second guitar mimicking the plucky style of the original. Although much softer than the preceding C section, this pass through the stanza feels as though the volume has been turned up from the original. Takebayashi is no longer mumbling, although not quite screaming either; rather, his delivery is tense and angry.

The guitar turn once again marks the entrance of the full ensemble, which repeats the musical material of the first C section, but here supports Takebayashi's now heightened, plaintive yelling of the chorus, "Stuffy locked-up room." This collapses, once again, into yet another modification of the opening B section. Here Takebayashi delivers the second four lines of the stanza, in balance with the earlier B, accompanied now by a melodic violin and minimal strummed guitar chords that mark the opening of each line. Takebayashi's vocal quality remains restrained, yet somehow angry.

A rather straight pass through the C' section with the complete chorus follows. Live, Takebayashi really appears to struggle here, growling and screaming through the simple lyrics. This is followed by an expansion of the original C instrumental, only this time the violin distinctly solos prior

to the piece rapidly concluding, as in the original “Curve.” The overall form of the piece thus follows this pattern, with time markings to the left:

“Curve II” Form

(0:00) A—violin tuning

(0:20) B—first four lines of the stanza; relatively quiet, minimalist musical accompaniment

(0:42) C—rich instrumental featuring the full ensemble

(1:24) B'—full stanza; similar musical material, but louder; more intense than proceeding

(2:04) C'—rich instrumental ensemble, now used to support the chorus

(2:48) B''—second four lines of the stanza; accompanied now by a melodic violin

(3:10) C'—return of the proceeding pass through the chorus

(3:53) C—expansion of the original instrumental section with violin solo; sudden end

(4:40)

Although the form is still relatively simple, Cowpers successfully create contrast and tension that bring the piece to life. The groups' energy live on this piece is particularly frenetic, with Takebayashi straining at the microphone, and all the musicians boisterously playing through the wall of sound of the C section. As Murata—who attended the same live as I did, which was filmed for *Rust Days*—states in his interview with Cowpers, “The melody from the violin and sound from the band connected, making a relaxed tension and clear melody, transferring their soul to my heart. This song contains everything they’ve made until now. This great song then moved into ‘Curve,’ changing the atmosphere from winter to spring, raising the tension higher and higher, until they peaked and their live ended” (1998, 19). Cowpers were able to capture the audience with both versions of the song, although the revision of “Curve II” again highlights of the importance of contrasting sections in building a powerful hardcore sound.

Berotecs Performing “Go to Garage”

The last group to be considered in this discussion is the *onna no ko bando*, Berotecs. This group performed many of the same *kata* that have been established in the proceeding analyses, yet, once again, they interpreted hardcore in their own way. The strong female front, in particular, necessarily affected the quality of vocals and overall appearance of the group, although they, too, typically took to the stage in the ubiquitous jeans and t-shirts. On occasion, Kimura Kaori would wear a skirt. The song “Go to Garage,” from *Berotecs Metered Aerosol* (1997), further illustrates some of the *kata* that characterize hardcore music-making, but more specifically here, of course, for female performers. The lyrics to “Go to Garage” are

remarkably simple, as Chiba simply repeats the line over and over throughout the song.

The piece opens with an A section in which Chiba, indeed, clearly dominates. The section begins with a brief, distorted guitar solo that establishes the basic melodic pattern that will relentlessly repeat throughout the piece. Chiba then enters with a statement of the line “Go to garage” with the full ensemble in the same churning, thick pattern. The phrase repeats, subtly building in intensity until the switch to the B section, which features basically the same musical material, but in a new key. Chiba continues to repeat “Go to Garage” over and over, rising in pitch and intensity through several phrases until she culminates in a guttural scream, nearly devouring the microphone. After the A section and B sections repeat, new instrumental music is introduced in the following C section. The buildup and release of A and B, thus, are interspersed with bridges that reveal Kimura Kaori’s prowess as a guitarist, as she plows through some serious punk-derived buzzy guitar work. The A and B sections repeat once again, next followed by a slightly modified version of the C instrumental to round out this short but powerful piece, which, not surprisingly, closes with feedback. The overall form of the piece thus follows this pattern, with time markings to the left:

“Go to Garage” Form

(0:00) A—brief guitar solo; “Go to Garage” with full ensemble

(0:24) B—movement to heightened vocals and new contrasting key area

(0:36) A—repeat A

(0:48) B—repeat B

(1:00) C—new instrumental material; buzzy, quick guitar work

(1:24) A—repeat A

(1:44) B—repeat B

(1:56) C'—slightly modified version of preceding C; concludes with feedback

(2:28)

The text never varies from the simple line, “Go to Garage,” yet the audience is not bored; nor is Chiba, for that matter. Rather, her powerful screams and strong bass line propel the song forward to its sudden conclusion, again through several seconds of feedback and distortion. Clearly the point here, as Chiba screams “Go to Garage,” is not to present complex poetic text, but rather, through using a limited vocabulary, and avoiding Japanese, to further explore sonic possibilities in her vocals—another *kata* of hardcore that is further explored in the following.

This particular combination of thick hardcore instrumentation and deep, intense screaming, again fondly referred to as *sakebi*, are tropes common in the underground, but the quality of the female voice adds a certain dimension that sets Berotecs apart from their male comrades. Kimura Kaori, in

the *Indies Magazine* interview, explains that she “was trying to be Kurt Cobain” (23) but found that impossible. When the reviewer Tsubouchi (1999) states that she sounds “more like Catherine Hanna or Courtney Love,” Kimura Kaori responds “Really? I like those strong vocals. I think it’s more feminine than singing pretty. I think everybody can sing pretty. Strong vocals like these are what I like and I think it’s sexy and cool. . . . Of course I myself love Courtney, the way she looks, lives, her voice, everything. But I can’t be like her” (23).

Female vocalists did go to great lengths to achieve a certain sound. For example, many women, including Kimura Kaori of Berotecs, chain-smoked to “crush” their voices. Smoking has already been noted as a relatively common phenomenon in the scene, and women in other performing arts, such as “Takarazuka,” have also been known to smoke to deepen their voices when playing male roles on stage (Robertson 1998). Women can actually use smoking, though, as a form of resistance in other areas of Japan (Spielvogel 2003), and the idea of chain-smoking to crush one’s voice to sing in a hardcore band would certainly not be seen as exactly ladylike by the majority of Japanese. Vocalists like Kimura Kaori can thus be seen as, once again, subtly resisting mainstream expectations of ideal female behavior through performing certain *kata* common in the scene.

Summary

Although there clearly is a great deal of possible variance, these five case studies have introduced the key characteristics that defined the musical performance of hardcore in Tokyo. Simply put, hardcore had to be loud and powerful, especially in the live setting, and even when listening to recordings privately to provide the visceral sense of actually being there live. The terms the musicians used to describe musical quality further support this conclusion. Japanese performers, for example, typically used such expressions as “*pawâ ga ippai*” (パワー が いっぱい), or “full of power,” to compliment a solid song or skilled band, and “*enerugî ga nai*” (エネルギー が ない), or “there is no energy,” to describe a bad set or weak band. Tsubouchi of *Indies Magazine*, in another example, describes Berotecs’ second album, *Sonny’s Guinness* (1999), as follows:

This album is violent; it is a masterpiece. It started just as revenge, something that pulled their power out, but they made the dimension higher and higher, and it came to the point where they said “We will not fail!” A latent power breathes through the album, created by an unwillingness to yield, almost like a madness. (22)

Throughout the interview, Tsubouchi continues to equate Berotecs’ greatness not only with their power, but also with the anger in their performance and that he feels in response.

These aesthetic requirements were conveyed through the totality of the performance on stage, as musicians regularly exerted great energy to bring the music to life. It was, indeed, amazing to watch the power and abandon in these performances. This is particularly striking when one is reminded that the next moment these same people, who were screaming and thrashing about, will shut off their mobile phones, so as not to bother anyone, when sitting quietly, politely, shoulder-to-shoulder with others on the train going home to get a good night's rest before heading to work bright and early the following day. It is hard to imagine these performers, such as Nishida or Takebayashi, returning to everyday life after giving such physical and immediate performances.

Audiences and other bands alike, in fact, greatly appreciated performers who actually appeared to be suffering for the sake of their art. Many performers wore strips across the bridges of their noses, attempting to open their nasal passages so they would have more force when singing, smoked like chimneys to achieve the desired vocal quality, and made a big show of falling in exhaustion at the end of their sets. Audiences, too, participated in this glorification of suffering in my opinion, as while intensely listening directly in front of the stage, and therefore in front of the stacks of speakers, as far as I could tell, Japanese audiences never used earplugs. I did, however, notice foreigners, including myself, regularly sporting plugs. This seems remarkable to me, given Japan's general interest in health. Of course, performers in the scene claimed that the earplugs interfered with their ability to listen closely to the music and really hear all its details, thus reinforcing that the music, itself, was the most important factor bringing these diverse individuals together.

The music of hardcore had to have certain instruments: most often percussion, guitar, bass, and vocals. Different bands occasionally processed the voice to create certain sound effects, or applied various pedals to create distortion, even noise, to the guitar and, occasionally, the bass. The use of keyboard did occur but was rather rare. Song form typically revolved around some alternation of tension and repose, keeping the song moving forward, creating dynamic contrast despite, at times, a limited musical vocabulary. Screaming, though, was perhaps one of the most common and distinctive musical *kata* throughout the scene. Thus, vocal production was also central, although, in the context of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, understanding what the bands were actually saying was not.

FROM J-POP TO JAPANGGLISH AND THE LYRICS OF HARDCORE

Indeed, bands might have something to say, but what they were saying was not always understood by the audience, precisely because of the characteristic mode of delivery of hardcore, with its focus on screaming or mumbling, whether in English or Japanese. English was certainly central to hardcore though, as most bands did, indeed, vocalize in some form of

English. Sports' interest in singing in Japanese was the exception, rather than the rule. Nishida of Sports explained, "I am Japanese and therefore it is easier to express what I want to say in Japanese." Singing in English, though, may suggest a strong relationship or, at the least, a desire by the bands to connect with hardcore produced elsewhere, as part of a globalizing process (Berger and Carroll 2003), but that relationship was not absolute. Rather, English may be used for sonic reasons simply because it sounded more appropriate for the musical medium. Nagatome of Jug explained that he used English because "The songs I usually listen to are in English and it is difficult to put Japanese lyrics in our songs." Japanese have long confronted the question of what language is most appropriate to sing in a variety of forms, whether performing rock in the 1960s or hip-hop in the 1980s, turning to Japanese when a desire to convey meaning through text dominated or to English for other sonic reasons (Condry 2006).

It is also important to note that in Japan, English is not necessarily a "foreign" language (Hosokawa 1989, 1996; Makino 2002; Miller 1998). English can be found everywhere in Japan, although often in the form of Japanglish, the mixture of English words often in nonsensical grammatical formations, or the use of English words in completely inappropriate contexts. The image of the mainstream Japanese band Michelle Gun Elephant, shown in Figure 4.1, nicely illustrates this point.



Figure 4.1 Advertising poster for the mainstream J-pop group, Michelle Gun Elephant.

This poster, advertising Michelle Gun Elephant's new record release, was proudly displayed in the subways of Tokyo for a short period of time in the 1990s, then was quickly removed, presumably when someone realized what the letters on their helmets actually mean and the cultural taboo associated with this word in native English-speaking countries.

The use of English in hardcore, of course, also stands quite in contrast with the lyrics in J-pop, or mainstream Japanese popular music, which are typically in clear, singable Japanese with English only in the hook-line, if at all. The desire by many bands to vocalize in English was, indeed, also motivated by this fact: bands choosing to avoid the language of lyrics in J-pop just as they rejected the entire musical style—glossy, highly synthesized, and often criticized for its cookie-cutter production strategies. Ultimately though, the use of English in hardcore released the vocalists from having to convey the literal meaning of lyrics, leaving them the freedom to explore the sonic potential of their own voices without any constraint, as nicely illustrated by Berotecs and their powerful offering, “Go to Garage.” In fact, Japanese people who prefer listening to Western-produced popular musics—as opposed to J-Pop, with its emphasis on Japanese lyrics—are quite used to hearing vocals as part of the sonic fabric, rather than as a medium to convey textual content. Fujii of Music from the Mars, for example, claimed, “The lyrics are not that important for me. I think English is an easy language to ‘ride’ the sound for Japanese people though.”

The quality of the voice then, especially with an emphasis on screaming, again was central to the local performance of hardcore, but language choices were more flexible. Clearly, musicians made choices regarding the language of vocals, with the majority again opting for the sonic freedom of English, although this choice may have come rather naturally with little conscious deliberation.

Chiba of the Berotecs, whose song “Go to Garage” best demonstrated the sonic freedom possible through use of minimalist English lyrics, claimed that Berotecs “are only seeking [a] kind of emotional moment, so we want people to feel emotional rather than talk about what the lyrics actually mean” (Tsubouchi 1999, 24). Kimura Kaori also stated that, “While recording, I fit the lyrics to the sound of the song like a puzzle, so meaning comes afterwards. . . . I’m sorry I don’t think about meaning that much. (laughs) That is my next project. Until recently meaning was produced accidentally. Of course, that is what I am thinking, but from now on, I want to think about what I’m singing” (24).

But hardcore was not performed through the express production of music and lyrics on stage and the activity of actively listening in the audience alone. Rather, this musical moment came to life through performing the extra-musical expressions of the hardcore scene, as well those that locate the performance of this global sound. Although the preceding discussion focused primarily on the aural expressions and the sound and lyrics of the music itself, certain extramusical tropes already have emerged, such as the

behavior of musicians on stage and their style of clothing and postures when performing, which also must be considered part of the local performance of hardcore that ultimately create a sense of this scene as “Japanese.” Thus, just as with the opening discussion of smoking, there are many extramusical elements that bring the scene to life, which must be viewed in the immediate cultural context. The following sections now take a closer look at these additional expressions, from newsletters to recordings, which facilitated communication between performers and thus are equally essential to the performance of hardcore in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

PERFORMING THE “EXTRAMUSICAL”

Stickers, Flyers, and Newsletters

Written expressions within the scene included such elements as flyers, posters, newsletters, magazines, monographs, and, of course, a growing number of Web sites. The production and distribution of stickers was particularly ubiquitous among bands. Such stickers took on a variety of forms, as revealed in the examples from the bands Jug, Sports, and Berotecs, shown in Figure 4.2.

These stickers were typically small, as pictured, and produced on glossy paper with peel-away backs. Often other bands within the scene would

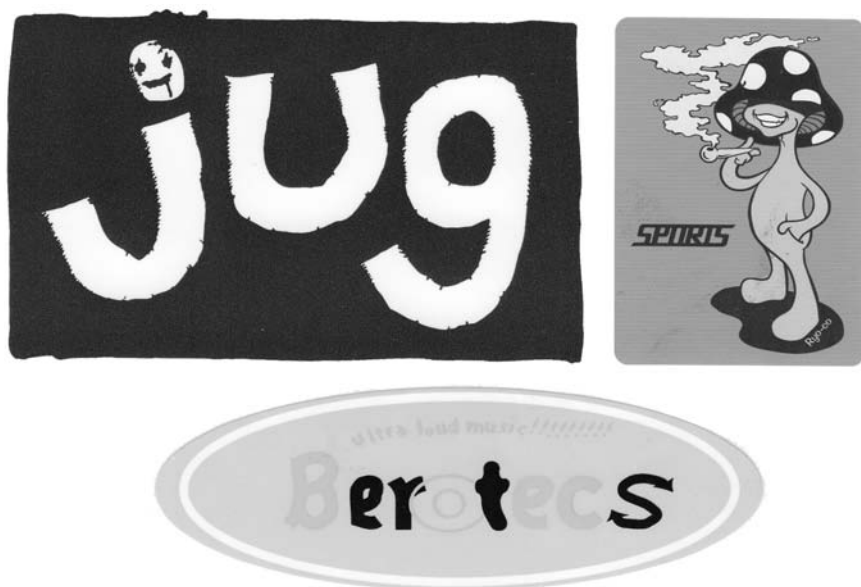


Figure 4.2 Examples of band stickers.

affix them to their gig-bags, drums, or even occasionally their guitars and basses, depending on one's personal taste. Suzuki Shigeru of Jug, for example, had a few stickers on the back of his bass, deciding to keep the front of his rather expensive and relatively new instrument pristine and clean. These stickers actually served as the *meishi* (名刺), or business cards, of the band world, as I was often handed several upon introducing myself and expressing interest in a new contact. Yet, bands typically distributed such stickers only to closer associates and fans, reflecting that they were relatively expensive to produce, in contrast to true business cards, which continue to be produced and passed around with great frequency in Japan.

Flyers and posters, on the other hand, were relatively inexpensive to produce, requiring only a decent home computer and a quick stop at one of the many Kinko's Copy Centers found throughout Tokyo. The quality and imagery on flyers varied greatly, depending on whether the flyer was produced by the individual band, a group of bands, the livehouse, or a label with some form of commercial sponsorship. Flyers ranged from handwritten notes cut from simple white paper to professionally produced, glossy, and colorful advertisements on cardstock, as pictured in Figure 4.3.

Note, as indicated on the example to the left of the Figure, that this live event was promoting the release of an album produced by ZK records of the group Gaji, one of the bands also performing that evening. A greater number of sponsors, or sponsorship by a larger label, would necessarily



Figure 4.3 Flyers advertising Berotecs' live performances.

result in a more elaborate flyer. In contrast, the flyer on the right appears to have been quickly scribbled down in black magic marker, and contains no references to any outside sponsors.

Both the homemade and professionally produced flyers could be found just about anywhere within the walls of the livehouse—on the hallways and doors at entrances and within the spaces themselves. Even the bathrooms would be wallpapered with a constantly changing pastiche of such advertisements for upcoming events, although the inexpensive Kinko's copy dominated (see Figures 2.3 and 2.6). Following the end of an evening's performances, members of bands often lined the stairs and adjoining street handing out flyers, inviting guests to their next event (see Figure 2.5). Although even the smallest of livehouses' schedules could be found in the weekly entertainment magazine, *Pia*, this ritual of flyer exchange was often the most accurate and convenient method of keeping track of a favorite band's schedule. Undoubtedly, personal Web sites have taken over this honor, although flyers were still actively distributed in Spring 2007.

Given the importance of these flyers in the scene, it is no surprise that the designs and images themselves were quite interesting and varied, again ranging from the barebones quick, handwritten list, as illustrated in Figure 4.3, to quite impressive pieces of artwork. Many bands would expand on the simplicity of the Berotecs' example, supplying their own hand-drawn graphics, varying in themes from the morbid to the humorous, reflective of the general feel of the music—at times dark, but with a certain humor thrown in for good measure.

At the other extreme, images drawn from traditional Japanese arts were also prevalent, as in the example from Sports shown in Figure 4.4. The use of such a traditional character, perhaps even of a deity, may seem incongruous considering the general aesthetic associated with hardcore music-making, but was actually fairly common. The character to the right of the image—*shinzui* (真髓)—means essence, soul, core, or spirit, making a reference to Sports' self-identification as an “emo-core” group. Many flyers and posters could be found that drew from Japanese woodblock style, or *ukiyo*e (浮世絵), especially images of an erotic nature. Indeed, kama-sutra-like depictions of lovemaking appeared, as did more graphic images of a sexual nature; some of which I found offensive, although no one else ever commented on them. The female body certainly was well represented in flyers, often by female performers themselves, as indicated by the image in Figure 4.5.

These two examples offer an interesting play on female imagery, with the “No Dicks” flyer advertising a live featuring mainly female performers, and the other flyer advertising Demi Semi Quaver (DSQ), an excellent experimental group led by a woman. DSQ album covers also often feature such exaggerated images of women.

But such flyers only represent a small sampling of the variety that existed, and too much should not be made of the few such sexualized images that



Figure 4.4 A flyer produced by Sports.

could be found, as interesting as they may be. Rather, innocent images, often in a graphic style reminiscent of Japanese animation, *anime* (アニメ), or comic book, *manga* (マンガ), styles of drawing were much more prevalent, as shown in Figure 4.6.



Figure 4.5 Flyers featuring female imagery.

Despite the tremendous variety in the quality of flyers and the nature of images as exhibited in the preceding figures, all the bands shared in common the production of some form of flyer regularly; it was an absolutely essential *kata* of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, equally important for the life of the bands, the livehouses where they played, and the labels that supported them.

Newsletters also served the similarly important function of disseminating information regarding upcoming live schedules, as well as more personal information about the musicians, although not all bands produced them individually. Jug did regularly produce their own newsletter, but usually only distributed this when performing at their home livehouse, 20,000volt.

Jug's newsletter, or the "Jug information free paper" as indicated in the top left corner of Figure 4.7, was again typically handwritten and featured their bizarre, morbidly humorous graphics. It also included information on recent events in their lives, such as the acquisition of a new pet or creation of a new song, in addition to play-lists for that night and reference to upcoming events.⁹ Production of such newsletters by bands themselves, however, was actually rather rare.

Livehouses, in contrast, would often produce monthly newsletters with complete schedules and information on events and particular bands they might feature live, in addition to interviews and information on "New Releases." As with flyers, the image and style of newsletters varied greatly,



Figure 4.6 Flyer featuring manga-style imagery.

ranging from black and white newspaper print to distinct and colorful graphics. It is unclear if all livehouses produced such newsletters, but many did, leaving them in stacks near the front counter for customers to peruse or to take home and read at their leisure. They were not produced in the same vast

Jug information free paper

Vol. 28 11 Mar. 99



member: NAGARU (G&V), Q(B) and MIYUKI (D): WE ARE JUG!

See you Soon. Jenny!!!

...という事で。Jug 4人目のメンバーとして時々
ゲストボーカルしてくれていたジェニーが、今回ももて
Jugを脱退。アメリカに一時帰国してしまいます。
本場のROCK魂を見せて。巷の話題を独占。
お色気たふりのステージも今回が最後。楽しんで
下さい。それと。ニュースも17。Jug初音源。4コマ
CDが6月下旬に発売予定。帥(スイ)というタイトルの
第2弾。8バンド参加でクワンからです。
よろしくね。

TODAY'S SETLIST

- SILICAGEL
- JAM
- STUN
- GENERATOR
- VAGRANT
- *SWELL HEAD
- *with Jenny!

JUG HOME PAGE ▶ <http://www.freepage.total.co.jp/jug/jug.html>
E-MAIL ▶ jugjug@selene.dricas.com

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: 〒212-0133 市川市江崎町4-14-7 ぱけぽん201 西村: TEL 047-359-4704

Figure 4.7 Jug's newsletter.

numbers as flyers and posters, but they served the similar important function of disseminating essential information for the life of the livehouses.

Such advertising media were common for clubs and livehouses throughout Japan, regardless of the genre of music they featured, as well as in music-making scenes around the world. But the types of images, the *ukioye* to *manga*

graphics, the themes, often dark, but with a certain humor, as well as the way they were distributed at the lives themselves, were truly remarkable.

Recordings

As with photography and videos, the process of producing and sharing recordings served an important community-building function within the scene. The professionally produced *Indies Magazine* is particularly worth note, as it included interviews with, and photographs of, many of the bands that performed in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, complete with a full-length CD-compilation of various recordings by featured artists each month. The CD found in *Indies Magazine* was an inexpensive and convenient introduction to a number of bands with professionally produced recordings. The majority of bands in the scene, however, were without label representation. As such, the most popular means for bands to produce recordings to share was through demo tapes, recorded in rented studio space, with or without professional assistance mixing. Demo tapes usually included three or four tracks on a short audiocassette tape. At the time of research, one could easily purchase inexpensive blank tapes in various time increments, ranging from ten minutes to two hours, at any neighborhood convenience store, thus facilitating the production of recordings to share. As expected, the recording quality would vary greatly, depending upon one's technical knowledge and the investment in the recording studio. All demo tapes would be supplemented with inexpensively copied liner notes, usually with just the name of the band and titles of the songs, although Sports did include lyrics with their demo tape, perhaps again stressing their importance to Nishida. Such demo tapes seemed to function as another *meishi* of the band world, as I was often handed one of these as well when I expressed interest in a band, and they were readily shared among bands particularly friendly with each other within the scene.

Many of the bands without label representation also found themselves recording one or two tracks for smaller label compilations. Nonetheless, as these bands had little desire to sign with a label and few aspirations for larger commercial success, their recording careers remained limited to their self-produced demos and the few tracks they might make. The compilation CDs or single-artist albums would be available for purchase at special live events and, of course, within the "Indies" bins of a variety of music shops around the city, offering another means of sharing the sounds of hardcore both within and beyond the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

CONCLUSION

It is, of course, clear that much more was involved in the performance of hardcore in the late 1990s than the notes alone: from smoking like chimneys or putting up with the smoke to performing ritualized greetings to

producing and consuming a variety of flyers, newsletters, and recordings via demo tapes, compilations, or full albums. Nonetheless, what motivates all these expressions—and in turn what localizes them in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene—was, of course, the music performed live on stage. Although similar *kata* can be found in other imagined scenes, this hardcore world did, indeed, feel somehow “Japanese.” For example, the fact that the majority of bands sing in Japanglish, the mixture of Japanese and English that results in an arguably new linguistic realm, takes on a unique meaning in Japan. Most lyrics, as such, were actually incomprehensible in this underground setting, in turn freeing the vocalist from having to convey literal meaning to allow increased creativity in sound production. In addition, although I don’t wish to perpetuate myths about Japanese behavior, the hardcore world did seem very polite in the Japanese context, with language and body movements revealing the hierarchical relationships between the bands, audience, and management systems at play. It was also quite common to find several female or mixed-gender groups performing on any given night, in addition to the women working backstage. Their prominent presence further characterized this particular scene in the local context.

Although it is, perhaps, still difficult to locate this study sonically in Tokyo, as the sound of hardcore music is both hard to define and produced in many local contexts globally, deep ethnographic exploration of the performance practice reveals the position of this musical world in contemporary Japanese culture. To argue that hardcore, punk, or heavy metal “sounds the same” fails to recognize sophisticated listening of popular musics, which on the surface may sound similar globally, but deeper listening may reveal subtleties of other local musical influences. A view of such underground popular music forms that does not take into consideration the processes of transformation that allow these musics to meet with the immediate aesthetic and emotional needs of performers is highly problematic. Screaming, for example, is, indeed, a trope common to hardcore globally, but such emphasis on expression in the voice is a significant characteristic of Japanese traditional musics as well. Thus, in the case of underground musics in Japan, exchanges with and influences from the broad world of Japanese popular music, which has been developing over the past 140 years or so, or within the centuries of traditional music-making, must be considered when exploring the meaning of certain musical elements.

The music performed live on stage was, indeed, the most central practice necessary for the performance of the scene. Its performance defined the scene locally, and part of that local character was the unique opportunity for the play at resistance available to the performers through making such an aggressive music. The sound of hardcore, in essence, was the sound of resistance played in the liminal space of the scene, and more specifically, in the actual space of the livehouses. With this understanding of where hardcore was performed, who was performing it, and just how it was performed in place, the Conclusion explores what performance in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene meant for individuals involved.

Conclusion

Meaning and the Power of Performance

The seven bands that played were finished. Somewhere in Tokyo tonight, might there be a similar event? It makes me happy to imagine this. At the end of the century, people are searching for something radical and that is why this kind of event is so appreciated.

—excerpt from “Sui Event Live 98,” Staff of *M-Gazette*, 1999

We stayed until close to the end, despite our exhaustion, and once again I offered to help pay for the expense of performing, which of course Jug refused, shelling out the ¥40,000 (@ US \$400) on their own.

—excerpt from “Backstage at Yellow,” Chapter One

This ethnography of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene closes as the bands at Yellow wrap up their sets, presumably to pack their gear and rush to catch the final trains home. The reviewer's comments suggest that, within the boundaries of a thriving city like Tokyo, on any given night many individuals can be found performing not only hardcore but myriad other musics not addressed within these pages: jazz to hip-hop to karaoke to Wagnerian operas. The event at Yellow holds a special position though, offering something “radical” to consumers of popular music in Tokyo in particular: bringing together people of diverse backgrounds with distinct motivations for participating in the music-making that evening, who might otherwise have little or no contact with each other. These individuals share a passion for the music of hardcore and its related performance practice, finding meaning through intimate social interaction with others of like mind. This is, indeed, the most important location of meaning in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

MUSIC AND MEANING

This ethnographic project, itself, began with the simple desire to explore how Japanese musicians in Tokyo perform hardcore music. Through this query, I sought to understand the types of people involved in the production of

hardcore, how individuals formed bands, how they negotiated the practical issues of band life, and, most important, why they identified with the hardcore scene, as opposed to other imagined communities. Such an investigation ultimately feeds an understanding of how individuals found meaning through performing in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. I choose the wording “through performing” deliberately here, to indicate that meaning is something “performed,” rather than something located solely in the music itself, although each approach to understanding musical meaning may feed the other (Frith 1996; Meyer 1956; Small 1998; Stockmann 1991). Certainly, exploration of the production of meaning in music is nothing new to musical scholarship. My own approach to exploring meaning in music is, in fact, heavily influenced by Jackson’s (1998) understanding of meaning in the New York jazz scene, which is informed by ethnomusicological theory.¹ Jackson defines musical meaning

as that which emerges from the shared understandings that participants bring to and create through participation in musical events. It is in this sense that ethnomusicologists generally conceive musical meaning: it emerges from performance, the concepts underlying it, and the negotiations between performers, listeners, and musical style that characterize it. While aspects of meaning may be illuminated by psychological, philosophical, and linguistic methods, they cannot be located solely within the confines of the ‘music itself.’ Pitches, rhythms and harmonies themselves come into existence and are perceived through a complex series of relationships (Marshall 1982) that the ethnographer must attempt to comprehend and communicate. (16)

Thus, meaning in musical performance is located in the actions that bring the music in question to life.

My interest in exploring the underground Tokyo hardcore scene was motivated by my own passion for alternative live rock music heard in small club spaces in the United States over many years, as well as years of study of Japanese language, culture, and music. The desire to investigate, more deeply, one aspect of underground music-making in Tokyo led me to ask the basic ethnographic questions of “who, what, where, and when” that produced the detailed descriptions of the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene that inhabit the pages of this monograph. Even after years of working on this topic, I am still left trying to answer the final ethnographic question of “why,” which expanded to encompass consideration of how individuals find meaning through performing the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. The descriptive details of “who, what, where, and when” culminate to answer this penultimate query, although a single response is difficult to give. This is further complicated by the fact that each individual performing in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene found unique meaning through participating, by the very nature of being

individuals; this is an issue that extant literature on musical meaning has failed adequately to incorporate.²

I find it interesting now that I never asked anyone what hardcore performance actually meant to him or her in the late 1990s. I am not sure what types of answers I might have received. Perhaps I did not ask the question in quite this way, as it would likely have solicited the response, "What do you mean by *mean*?" And it is extremely difficult to answer this question. Other questions during fieldwork were asked in attempts to understand meaning both at the individual level and shared among the broader scene, including: "Why do you play in a band?"; "Why do you attend the lives?"; and "Why do you listen to this music?" All these queries do, in some way, speak to the larger question of meaning as I conceive it. One's gender, age, musical awareness, and, of course, subjective, individual personality, however, allow for multiple and distinct meanings to emerge even in the shared moment; an analysis of broader understandings can only go so far. Nonetheless, certain conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the meaning gained through performing the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

MEANING AND THE UNDERGROUND TOKYO HARDCORE SCENE

In one sense, performers found meaning through simply bringing the scene to life: by belonging to an intimate social group within the urban sprawl of Tokyo. Meaning emerged at the moment of performing together in sharing an understanding of the particular performative tropes that identified the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. The choices made by individuals in bringing the scene to life informed the resultant meaning. The performers' move to reject mainstream J-pop, for example, although perhaps not conscious, does suggest a certain resistance to commercial success, if nothing else, and certainly an avoidance of the ideology of mainstream Japanese music, and perhaps provides an imagined link with transnational hardcore scenes. Yet the performance is local, as the arguably global hardcore sound is interpreted and performed by Japanese musicians in Tokyo. The exact character of the city itself, the transportation system, and the nature of physical performance spaces; as well as the quality of daily life, cultural values, and social expectations; are unique to Tokyo, immediately influencing the performance, and the subsequent interpretation of the meaning that emerged through the performance of the scene.

A certain musical affinity drew performers to the sound of hardcore itself, but it was the participation in producing that sound that seemed to hold the most importance. Participating in the scene, in a variety of roles, provided social interaction outside of daily life. For women, in particular, the scene provided a particularly creative performance space. The scene, especially as most of the participants were not professionals, thus allowed individuals an

opportunity to assume different roles and, in turn, reshape their individual and collective identities—at one moment playing the college student, the *sarariman*, the wife, the son, or the daughter—but assuming a different role when entering the imagined collective space of the scene—the mixer, the DJ, the musician, or the aficionado of hardcore. Such role-playing removed them from their colleagues at work or school, or from responsibilities at home, providing an important moment of performing meaning itself through assuming distinct identities—identities that further allowed expression of anger and release not possible in everyday life. This play, again, was often further characterized by an appreciated sense of illicitness in the scene.

Although individuals may also have performed hardcore through private listening at home, the ultimate moment of participation was enacted within the space of the livehouse, through attending such events as the night at Yellow. Within the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, even purchase of professional recordings was motivated by attendance at the lives, rather than through large-scale promotion by record companies or through exposure to play on the radio. Even more common, given the lack of label representation for many of the musicians, was the ability to listen privately only through the extremely intimate practice of receiving a demo tape directly from one of the bands. Intimacy was clearly a key issue within the scene, as musicians; audience members, again often the members of the other bands performing that evening; stage hands; and managers found their respective ways to these tiny livehouse spaces, sharing an evening of music-making often with only ten to fifteen other people, and standing one foot away from the band that happened to be playing on stage.

This sense of intimacy was further fostered among particular bands through the long hours that they spent in rehearsal studios, an absolute necessity for playing-out, or the recording studios, if they chose to record demos, tracks for compilations, or indeed found themselves on a label recording single-artist albums. Members of bands further interacted with each other and with other members of different bands on the day of a live, as they arrived early for sound check and reclined in backstage areas, if available, chatting away for hours, perhaps even heading to *izakaya* for snacks and drinks following a draining event to continue the socializing. Considering the amount of time that they must spend together, it is no wonder that bands within any realm of popular music constantly experience arguments and irreconcilable differences among individual members; being in a band is much like being married.

REVISITING THE UNDERGROUND TOKYO HARDCORE SCENE

Making Music in Japan's Underground attempted to explore the way that meaning was produced through an ethnography of the underground

Tokyo hardcore scene. The importance of ethnography was established in the Introduction, as I described my basic methodological approach toward fieldwork, relating how my own subjectivity may have affected the research and writing process. This reflexive ethnographic process, from the development of research topics and preliminary questions, to the collection of data in the field, to the final written narratives that sit on publishers' desks and pepper academics' bookshelves, encourages further discussion on the potentials and problems with ethnographic work itself. Ethnography, although questionable in its ability to represent the "truth" of social reality, was absolutely essential to gathering detailed information on the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene.

Chapter One established the musical moment in question through description of one particular live event at Yellow, in essence bringing the reader into the livehouse through both the published review and my own backstage description. This opening narrative served to frame the chapters that followed, motivating the particular focus within each. The event at Yellow also revealed certain common practices essential to the performance of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. The scene was presented as a social formation positioned in relation to mainstream practices—the "under" of the "aboveground"—firmly positioned within the boundaries of Tokyo and featuring music with the nebulous label "hardcore." The importance of scenes in late 1990s Japan for allowing play with individual and collective identities, especially temporary resistive or oppositional identities, was similarly established.

Ethnography further revealed the importance of exploring the production of hardcore music in its local context. Chapter Two, indeed, placed this musical practice in its immediate geographical location of Tokyo. The nature of the city itself is significant, with its immense population subdivided into distinct neighborhoods, each supporting a multiplicity of retail shops, restaurants, and, of course, livehouses. The dominance of trains, as they both divided and connected the various neighborhoods, and in the general population's daily reliance on them, deeply affects the overall character of Tokyo, resulting in a massive hustle and bustle of near-constant activity. More specifically, the train system was seen to have a direct affect on how the underground Tokyo hardcore scene operated. Train schedules influence what hours livehouses would keep and where livehouses were located through offering safe, reliable transportation to performers. The livehouses themselves, although sharing certain characteristics, such as being small and often dingy, possessed their own unique character and regular clientele. The rehearsal and recording studios were also important spaces for the performance of the scene, offering rooms for further intimate socializing among members of bands. Record shops were similarly revealed as significant spaces for the performance of the scene by providing access to a variety of recordings. The layout and contents of Tower Records in Shibuya, in particular, served as a point of departure for

considering the history and current position and production of Japanese popular music in contemporary Tokyo, providing the sonic context for the performance of hardcore.

Chapter Three argued, however, that it was the individuals inhabiting these spaces who were most significant for the performance of the scene, relating details of particular performers and their multiple roles. Jug was the



Figure C.1 Audience at a live performance featuring Berotecs.

primary band considered, allowing an in-depth view of band life through considering my personal and professional relationship with them. Other bands, such as Music from the Mars and Sports, were also significant for research and deserved the closer look provided in this chapter. The comparison of several bands reveals the tremendous variety of personalities and styles that intersected within the imagined boundaries of the scene. Additional roles were also considered, such as those of livehouse or band managers, and the audience, lending support to the argument that the scene was performed by a multiplicity of individuals, and not just musicians alone.

The role of musicians, namely that of making music, was, of course, also significant in that it was the music, itself, that motivated individuals to participate in the scene. Chapter Four further considered the actual music of hardcore through the exploration of some key defining characteristics, or *kata*, etc. Such analysis revealed, once again, that, despite certain commonalities, there was tremendous variety in the actual music heard behind the doors of the livehouses. I argue that the performance of hardcore involved much more than just the creation of music, examining in detail additional performative tropes, such as typical behavior and written expressions, including flyers and newsletters, all equally central to performance of the scene.

There is no question in my mind that the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the late 1990s was indeed a uniquely Japanese expression, informed by its immediate cultural context, which was revealed through ethnography, and imagined into existence by my words here.

Epilogue

“Koenji, the sacred place for underground music”

In Spring of 2007, I went to 20,000volt in “Koenji, the sacred place for underground music,” for likely my last time. Much was the same, but much different, not the least of which was the toll of ten years on my own body and psyche. Although I was by far not the oldest person in attendance at the “Opposition to Pops” event that opens this monograph, I was by far the oldest, and oddest for that matter, at all the other events I attended this spring. The music, which had been loud before, was nearly painful this time. The performers, who were once around my age, now looked younger than my students. The secondhand smoke was overwhelming. And, perhaps most shocking, Hayakawa Shunsuke of Kirihito was no longer manager of 20,000volt, having moved on to presumably greener pastures managing another livehouse.

20,000volt, however, remained much the same, although perhaps even more run-down in appearance. The new sturdy metal bar separated the audience from the stage (see Figure 2.4). The live was small, beginning with a limited audience of four or five young men, most assuredly in the other bands performing that night. By the end of the evening, the crowd had swelled to around twenty people, with a few women joining the audience along the walls, and another woman working the mixing board. A mixture of hardcore all-male bands, described by the attendant at the door as “metal-core,” took to the stage with the intense physical abandon that characterizes such performances, whether playing to one or one hundred people in the audience.

I quietly stood in the back, snapping a photo here and there. No one at the livehouse acknowledged any recognition of me as “Jenni-Jenni”—the American girl who was always hanging around, sang with the Suzukis’ band, Jug, and was writing some kind of paper about hardcore. Evidence remained, though, that proved to me that I had once been here; one of Jug’s blue trademark stickers still proudly clings to one of the bathroom doors, firmly applied nearly ten years before (see Figure E.1). It proudly serves as a symbolic connection of the past with the future and of the continued existence of the nebulous underground Tokyo hardcore scene.



Figure E.1 Jug band sticker on the bathroom door at 20,000volt.

FINAL WORDS FROM SUZUKI MIYUKI AND SUZUKI SHIGERU OF JUG

I also visited with Suzuki Miyuki and Suzuki Shigeru, formerly of Jug, in Spring of 2007, sharing a day of reminiscing while entertaining their two small children, as we strolled along a canal in Chiba, enjoying the cherry blossoms that were just starting to fall. Although Jug had long ago disbanded, I have remained in regular contact with the Suzukis through the years, discussing all of my publishing projects that relate to the underground Tokyo hardcore scene. They were most excited to learn that I was turning our experiences together into a book and offered the following additional insights via e-mail correspondence through Fall 2007. Because their voices inhabit, directly or indirectly, much of the preceding, it is ideal to conclude with them now.

Their comments certainly inform, and are informed by, many of the conclusions that I draw in the earlier pages. Given the historical distance from the actual time of my initial research, however, it seems more appropriate to me, ethnographically, to include them in a separate epilogue, as their own reflections *now* do not always represent how they thought *then*. I do, however, reflect on how their thoughts today further my understanding of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene in the late 1990s.

I initially asked both of them, for example, what they thought of their experience performing in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene now, years after Jug disbanded. Suzuki Miyuki, indeed, confirmed my conclusion that participation the scene allowed performers to assume different roles and escape the daily pressures that they faced in other aspects of their lives. She claimed that

it was a meaningful experience because I was able to get a glimpse of a world that I had never seen before. I was able to meet with people who I would never have met in my ordinary life (family, school, and work). It was a space in which I was able to do whatever I liked, and spend time meaningfully.

Suzuki Shigeru also said, “It was a meaningful experience.” He continued to explain that

I think performing in front of people is not an easy experience. I originally thought band worlds were special spaces, but came to realize that they are only a smaller version of human society. I found out there are all kinds of people: real artistic types, athletic types, some are just trying to make money, some are sick, and some are healthy. It was interesting to see the thick and muddy world of bands.

It is clear that the Suzukis continue to think of their time in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene as a positive, meaningful experience that allowed them to see a part of Japanese society, and in turn themselves, that they might not have seen otherwise.

I then asked them why they performed in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene, as opposed to participating in other leisure activities. Suzuki Miyuki stated that

listening to rock music was my way of releasing stress. I was satisfied just listening to music until my favorite band disbanded. And other music just was not enough. I decided to perform myself; I used to play in a brass band and performed a fourhanded piece on piano, so I knew that I liked playing instruments with other people. So it was natural for me to join a band.

Suzuki Shigeru was perhaps even more enthusiastic as he replied, “I really love rock music, and once you experience that roaring sound it is difficult to get out of performing. It was like a drug creating music with the three of us. This might not be what you are looking for, but Sonic Youth drew me in. That underground colored music strongly affected my musical sense and thinking.” For both of them, the love of rock music was a tremendous draw to the scene; the desire to create edgy hardcore even became “like a drug,” pulling them back and encouraging deeper involvement.

Given their obvious strong, positive feelings, as well as my interest in music and meaning, which I developed after leaving the field in the late 1990s, I took the opportunity to finally ask the Suzukis what the experience actually meant to them. Suzuki Miyuki reflected and responded, "Because I was able to devote myself to something I loved back then, I don't feel stressed right now, even though I do not have much time on my own. I experienced many things that I wanted to do, so I can have fun focusing on raising my children." Suzuki Shigeru stated, "I had a boring life before joining a band, but band life was so satisfying that I felt like I gained that time back. It was an important time in my life." This, again, highlights how individuals look back on these intense, temporal moments with nostalgia.

Given their enthusiasm for performing with Jug, I had to inquire why they stopped playing in the scene. Suzuki Miyuki argued that when "one of the members quit (Nagatome) I could not create the sound that I like. I was getting older too, and changed my lifestyle." Suzuki Shigeru agreed that they had to stop when "one of the members quit." He then went on to say that, "I did perform in another band for awhile, but their music was not what I wanted, so I quit." I believe Nagatome's departure was rather traumatic on them both for a variety of reasons, but I also know that Suzuki Miyuki had long wondered when to start a family, obviously deciding that having children was a priority when she entered her early thirties. This, again, reveals how individuals played in the limited space of the scene as long as that participation was meaningful, leaving the scene when other emotional and practical needs had to be addressed.

My perceptions of the scene did not always align with the Suzukis' current thinking however. Though Suzuki Miyuki and I had discussed the position of women extensively in the past, for example, I wanted to know what she now thought the underground Tokyo hardcore scene offered women specifically. Did she think men and women were equal? She responded, "I think it was overpowered by men. But women could naturally join too. However most of the time women were treated as 'women.'" I found this response particularly surprising, given the beliefs she expressed about the desire for female musicians in the scene to be seen as musicians first and foremost, or at least my perception of those beliefs at the time of research. However, perhaps that was always a desire, and not a reality, on both our parts. Suzuki Shigeru also surprised me with the following comment, "All-female bands, or bands with more female than male members were treated generously. So I would not say they were equally treated. I think they had more opportunities. However, there were really cool all-female bands, that stood out, and were treated equally." He then added, perhaps because his wife was looking over his shoulder, "By the way, men overpowered the underground Tokyo hardcore scene."

I, of course, also asked them what they thought about the idea of musical performance as a kind of resistance and, in particular, how Japanese people play with resistance. Suzuki Miyuki responded

I think the reason that we were in a rock band while being members of society was that we were trying to express something through music that we could not express in society otherwise. We were able to relieve stress in the music studios and through live performances. ‘Rock’ dissolved stress and the pressures of working as a member of society. As for ‘resistance,’ I was probably ‘resisting becoming an adult.’ It might be in Japanese people’s nature to resist society’s expectation of ‘what one should be,’ while not completely getting away from society. And those resisting people are performing music.

Suzuki Miyuki, again, notes the importance of playing in the scene for relieving stress and for allowing young Japanese to avoid the pressure of their daily lives. She also notes that Japanese may, indeed, commonly try to escape “what one should be”—but only momentarily. Suzuki Shigeru’s response is equally thoughtful, although somewhat difficult to follow.

Rather than saying musical performance is “resistance,” it is better to say it is straight “anger.” I don’t think those people who are on welfare or living off of their parent’s money have the right to resist. That is only the selfishness of a child. A screaming child will not change society. . . . When you are wearing clothes made by a profit driven company while holding a guitar, you are part of society. This could be extreme, but I will only respect people who are resisting and completely self-sufficient. I was able to work as a Systems Engineer and perform rock without feeling weird because I wasn’t resisting, but I was “angry at something.”

Suzuki Shigeru actually mentions anger several times in his responses, calling attention to the fact that young Japanese performers were able to relieve stress and express anger in the safe space of the scene but that they were not really resisting the demands, and subsequent rewards, such as expensive guitars and trendy clothing, of participating in mainstream society.

The Suzukis, in fact, have become the stereotypical ideal young Japanese family, with their two lovely children, well-placed new apartment in Chiba, and an even larger van than they had during their band days. Suzuki Miyuki stays home with the children, while Suzuki Shigeru continues to work the long hours of the *sararīman* to support them all. But their experience in the underground Tokyo hardcore scene will forever affect who they are and how they think of themselves.

CONCLUSION

As of Fall 2007, not only Jug, but Berotecs and Cowpers have disbanded as well, although members of Berotecs and Cowpers continue to perform

in other bands. I could not locate Sports, despite attempts to find them through the Suzukis and extensive Internet searches, so I presume that they, sadly, have disbanded, as well. Only Music from the Mars and Kiri-hito continue as the same bands today. This historical continuation, yet constant transformation, of the scene, as people shift in and out, is, indeed, one of the most vibrant aspects of the underground Tokyo hardcore scene that keeps it thriving in contemporary Japan today.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. “Livehouse,” or *raibuhaisu* (ライブハウス), is the general term used to refer to spaces for amateur and semiamateur musical performance in Japan.
2. “Live,” or *raibu* (ライブ), refers to the live performance in its totality, roughly equivalent to the concept of a “gig” (Cohen 1991; Fonarow 2006).
3. “Japanglish” refers to the unique linguistic form that results from Japanese use of English.
4. I was one of the two foreigners present that evening indeed sporting ear-plugs.
5. There is a rapidly growing body of literature on the history and development of Japanese popular music that both supports and problematizes this dominant perception of mainstream Japanese popular musics (Aoyagi 2005; Atkins 2001; Condry 2006; Craig 2000; Iwabuchi 2002; Martinez 1998; McClure 1998; Powers and Kato 1989; Robertson 1998; Slaymaker 2000; Treat 1996; Yano 2002).
6. To avoid confusion, both Suzuki Miyuki and Suzuki Shigeru will be referred to by their full names through the remainder of the monograph.
7. For example, the one time I attempted to communicate with a major label band at a live in Tokyo, they seemed disinterested in me in a way that I did not experience with other, lesser-known bands. I believe this is partly due to the fact that they had grown so accustomed to being interviewed by professional journalists that they found my interests repetitive or amateurish.
8. Ethnographers of any music often have to go through complicated procedures to obtain permissions, find the costs prohibitively expensive, or are completely denied permission from recording companies, resulting in their inability to include musical evidence in published works.
9. See Berger (1999), which features interviews with Timmy “The Ripper” Owens, lead singer of Judas Priest.
10. The Kanto and Kansai Regions of Japan are often compared and contrasted in contemporary discourse of Japan. The Kansai area, for example, is fiercely proud of its distinct dialects, regional foods, and aesthetic tastes in comparison to the dominant Kanto-culture emanating from Tokyo.
11. After reflecting on this process of collecting data, it became clear that I could only ethically use photographs, video recordings, and audio selections of individuals who were aware of my project.
12. See Bestor, Steinhoff, and Lyon Bestor (2003) for additional consideration of the unique issues and problems associated with fieldwork, specifically in Japan.

13. In the late 1990s, I rarely met other foreigners at the livehouses that I frequented, and those that did come were exclusively male. In contrast, there were a number of foreigners, both men and women, in the audience at a live I attended at the small livehouse, Bears, in Osaka in Fall 2004. Both the popularity of the livehouse Bears and the groups performing that night in underground circles undoubtedly attracted this audience, as well as the fact that this event was actually advertised in the English weekly *Kansai Time Out*. I did not approach any other foreigners that night, though, as all of them seemed to be feeling possessive, eyeing each other, as if angrily asking how could another foreigner infiltrate their own private little piece of Japan—a feeling I wholeheartedly shared at that moment.
14. Kulick and Willson (1995) noted that the absence of such concerns in anthropological writing may result from a continued “disdain for personal narratives” (3–4) in attempts to present an objective account of the topic at hand, as well as reticence to discuss sex in general. Another reason may lie in that it is precisely those individuals who often find sexual issues the most problematic—namely women and homosexuals—who have the potential for receiving the most criticism for bringing these issues into the open (4).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. *M-Gazette* does not list individual author names with articles. Hence my choice to list the author as “staff” in the references.
2. Several of these photographs are included in the Introduction to my dissertation, *Performing underground sounds: An ethnography of music-making in Tokyo’s hardcore clubs* (2003).
3. Dominique Leone, “Nihon no hardcore: Japanese underground,” *Pitchfork Media*, <http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/features/nihon-no-hardcore/> (accessed summer 2005; article no longer available).
4. Wallach, Jeremy, “Underground rock music and democratization in Indonesia,” *World Literature Today: Online Edition*, <http://www.ou.edu/worldlit/onlinemagazine/2005septdecember/06-WLTSept-05-Wallach.pdf> (accessed winter 2005; article no longer available).
5. According to Asahi Shinbun’s *Japan Almanac* for 1999, 29,812,577 people inhabited the Tokyo area, which includes city-central, Tokyo prefecture, and the surrounding suburbs within a fifty kilometer radius. 7,830,000 people resided in Tokyo’s central twenty-three wards.
6. For additional consideration of the recent social transformation of Japan, see Yoda and Harootunian (2006), which considers the discourse of 1990s Japan in the context of broader global concerns and the historical transformation of Japan since the post-World War II era.
7. Yomiuri Shinbun, “Number of ‘NEETs’ hits 520,000,” <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/newse/20040911wol2.htm>, (accessed winter 2005; article no longer available).
8. It was impossible to include accompanying recordings with this volume for a variety of reasons.
9. For additional readings on the history and development of Anglo-American punk and hardcore through the late 1990s, see Anderson and Jenkins (2001), Chronopoulos (1997), Henry (1989), Heylin (1993), Laing (1985), O’Hara (1999), Rice (1998), Sabin (1999), Tsistos (1999), and Wojcik (1995).
10. See Huizinga’s seminal work, *Homo Ludens* (1950), for important early work on play as a concept that continues to influence contemporary scholars of play in Japan, including Hendry and Raveri (2002) and Leheny (2003).

11. For additional information on the function of children's play in a variety of disciplines and cultural areas, see Caplan and Caplan (1974), Garvey (1977), Lytle (2003), and Roopnarine, Johnson, and Hooper (1994).
12. For additional information on the related concept of leisure and its important social function, as well as the development of the field of leisure studies, see Cheek and Burch (1976), Kando (1975), Kelly (1983), Roberts (1978), Rojek (1993), and Winniffrith and Barrett (1989).
13. For additional anthropological reads of the construction of Japanese identity see Donahue (2002), Iida (2002), Kondo (1990), and Rosenberger (1992).
14. There is a perception that deviant behavior is increasing among young Japanese as a result of the nation's declining position as an economic and political power, continued strict socialization codes, and expanded transnational cultural flows. For additional information on burgeoning youth deviancy, see Ambaras (2006), Mathews and White (2004), Yoder (2004), and Zielenziger (2006).
15. For further consideration of the potential intersection between identity and musical performance, see Berger and Del Negro (2004), Connell and Gibson (2003), Stokes (1997), and Whiteley, Bennett, and Hawkins (2004).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. For additional musings on the nature of space as a conceptual tool, see Benko and Strohmayr (1997) and Lefebvre (1993). For more theoretical considerations of the related theme of space and identity, particularly in cities, see Carter, Donald, and Squires (1993), and in the face of globalization and postmodern geography, see Morley and Robins (1995). The more focused study of music's connection to space, place, and identity is again addressed in Connell and Gibson (2003), Stokes (1997), and Whiteley, Bennett, and Hawkins (2004).
2. "Yamanote" refers to the specific name, and *sen* (線), meaning line, is used here as a suffix to indicate a train-line. See JR East Railway, "Map," http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/info/map_a4ol.pdf (accessed Fall 2007) for a JR East Railway map with the Yamanote-sen indicated in light green in the center.
3. Talking on mobile phones inside trains is now prohibited, although people eagerly text message each other.
4. *Eki* (駅) refers to a train station in general, with the proper name, here Shinjuku, preceding.
5. The Japanese recording industry claims that prices on recorded material are regulated, but my own experience in a variety of record stores suggests that prices do, indeed, vary at different shops.
6. The Liquid Room has since moved from Shinjuku to Ebisu.
7. See Guichard-Anguis (2002) for an interesting exploration of the importance of transportation systems, including trains, in Japanese culture as seen through children's literature.
8. For additional information on the train system and its connection to neighborhoods at the time of research, see De Mente (1997).
9. At the time of research, there were three primary divisions among the rail systems operating in Tokyo: the subways, *chikatetsu* (地下鉄), which run primarily underground; the East Japan Railways or JR East Railways, *JR-higashinihon* (JR東日本); and the various private railways, *shitetsu* (私鉄), which run both above and below ground. The subways and JR East Railways used entirely separate tickets and fare systems, although they often intersect in shared stations. Depending on the railway, the private lines sometimes accepted JR East Railway tickets. New electronic passes that can be used across systems have since been introduced.

10. This occurred once in Winter of 1998, when I was leaving the livehouse 20,000volt in Koenji. The train passed through two stations and then stopped. All passengers had to find alternative methods home or pay for a hotel, with a group of us electing to trudge thirty minutes through the snow to an underground train that would take us to the center of the city.
11. See Noguchi (1990) for an ethnographically based account of the historical development and contemporary operation of the vast train system.
12. See JR East Railway, "Map," http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/info/map_a4ol.pdf (accessed fall 2007) for a JR East Railway map with the Chuo-sen indicated in orange running across the center of Tokyo.
13. Though most of the livehouses I frequented during research were too small to be included in the following guides, see Brand (1993) and *Tokyo Journal* (1995) for descriptions of a variety of clubs, discos, and large livehouses, complete with train maps and directions.
14. Dominique Leone, "Nihon no hardcore: Japanese underground," *Pitchfork Media*, <http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/features/nihon-no-hardcore/> (accessed Summer 2005; article no longer available).
15. I tried to ascertain exactly when the bars appeared and for what reason(s), but I was unable to locate that information from informants. Some speculated that, perhaps, someone was injured at a live event at some point, inspiring a new city-wide regulation. Photographs of stages in various magazines show bars beginning to appear in some of the livehouses in Fall 2004, but they seem to be ubiquitous at this point.
16. Tower Records filed for bankruptcy in the United States first in 2004 and again in 2006, finally closing its stores late in 2006. Tower Records Japan, however, has been independent since 2002 and was not affected by the U.S. bankruptcy (Tower Records Japan, <http://www.towerrecords.jp/> [accessed Fall 2007]). As of Spring 2007, the flagship store in Shibuya, as well as other Tower Records throughout Tokyo, appeared to be doing fine.
17. See the guide *Record Map* (Gakuyōshobō), which is released annually in different major regions, such as Kanto and Kansai, for an extensive list of record shops and their specialties.
18. Japanese people can spend hours standing in front of magazine racks at record shops, convenience stores, and bookstores reading complete magazines, or other popular serials, without interruption from clerks.
19. There are several thorough overviews of the history and development of Japanese popular music from the Meiji era through the 1990s, including Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba (1991), Hosokawa (1994), Mitsui (2005), and Yano and Hosokawa (Forthcoming). All these summaries inform the following discussion of Japanese popular music.
20. Pre-Meiji forms of popular music may, arguably, be found in such genres as *kabuki* (歌舞伎), which has become classicized through a process of historicization, although originally it was viewed as a vulgar form, associated with the common people in the 16th century. Other pre-Meiji popular forms, such as songs of various types and festival dances and musics, are briefly described in larger overviews of post-Meiji popular music (Fujie 1989; Hosokawa, Matsumura, and Shiba 1991).
21. For additional information on the transformation of the music education system in Japan during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see May (1963).
22. Yomiuri Shinbun, "Japanese education news," <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/kyoiku/news/20071011ur01.htm> (accessed Fall 2007).
23. See Mitsui and Hosokawa (1998), which considers the development of karaoke in Japan, its effect on the recording industry, and its dissemination globally.

24. For additional information on copyright and issues of intellectual property in Japan, see Mitsui (1994).
25. See Johnson (2001) and Roberson (2001) for additional information on the rich world of Okinawan musics.
26. National Music Publisher's Association, "Country Profile on Japan," <http://www.nmpa.org/nmpa/survey6/intro.html> (accessed Summer 2003; survey no longer available).
27. These figures are based on data collected from twenty-one companies that belonged to RIAJ at the time. As such, it is difficult to estimate the number of recordings produced by independent labels that do not report to RIAJ, nor do these statistics reflect the attitudes of the many underground musicians who chose not to record at all.
28. Recording Industry Association of Japan, "A brief description of the Japanese recording industry," <http://www.riaj.or.jp/doc/yearbook/Ryb00j01.pdf> (accessed Summer 2003; article no longer available).
29. See McClure (1998) for a nonacademic, but informative, overview of contemporary Japanese popular music.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. There remain particular social expectations for the firstborn son of a Japanese family, referred to as *chōnan* (長男). Historically, for example, *chōnan* would inherit the family estate and be responsible for the care of aging parents. Although in contemporary Japan the role of the *chōnan* is less strict, there still remains a similar expectation in many families. For this reason, many young Japanese women still avoid dating *chōnan*, as they do not want the responsibility of assisting with the care of the husband's parents if they marry.
2. The members of Sports only provided family names in our discussions and correspondence.
3. To avoid confusion, both Kimura Kaori and Kimura Masahiro will be referred to by their full names through the remainder of the monograph.
4. Guitar Wolf was not a part of the scene under consideration here because of their different style of music, their position on a label, and their increasing large-scale popularity.
5. Amazingly, this night has been immortalized for me in a very concrete way. A year after this performance, I purchased a professional video of Cowpers live (*Rust Days* 1998). As I watched the video, the performance seemed more and more familiar, and I began to look for myself in the audience. There I was, or at least the back of my head, bobbing and swaying directly in front of Takebayashi. It is not hard to pick me out, as I am the only one with red hair in the audience, and one can occasionally just make out the silhouette of my friend pressed against the railing in front of me.
6. "Togo," for example, was one such art student, working as a graphic designer, who regularly attended Jug's shows. I came to know Togo outside of the hardcore scene through his ongoing projects in techno music. At one point, after I had begun singing with Jug, Togo requested to use my vocals for one of his techno pieces. I complied and met him in Kichijoji one evening, an area on the west side of Tokyo. We wandered to a karaoke establishment where we entered what is called a "karaoke box," a private room with a table and cushioned benches that groups can use. Togo brought his mixing box and played some electronica he had already composed while I vocalized above into a microphone attached to the karaoke machine with wires running to his box. I had a terrible cold, as I often did in Tokyo, and was not thrilled with my

performance, but later heard my voice sampled and processed in two of his songs, which he hoped to include on a European-produced compilation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Japan Health Promotion and Fitness Foundation, "Tobacco and health," <http://www.health-net.or.jp/tobacco/product/pd100000.html> (accessed summer 2003).
2. Even within Tokyo, some areas have begun to limit public smoking, although it remains relatively common in comparison to the United States.
3. Presenting musical analysis to a broad scholarly audience of ethnomusicologists, popular music specialists, and Japanologists can be quite problematic, given the different approaches of these disciplines to the study of music and familiarity with specific music terminology. This discussion, therefore, does not rely extensively on musical lingo, using general vocabulary instead to convey key points on the content and form of these pieces, which will hopefully provide enough information for musicians without becoming laden with jargon. This approach seems particularly appropriate as the musicians in the scene themselves do not use specific music terminology to discuss their art. Nonetheless, it is still important to talk about the music that is created on stage and disseminated in recordings, as it is the music that generates the scene.
4. The lyrics for "Swell Head" were provided by the members of Jug; I also sang this particular song as guest vocalist for Jug.
5. Although I contacted members of Music from the Mars to request the lyrics, I failed to receive them. It is also impossible to determine the lyrics through listening to the song.
6. The Japanese lyrics by Sports are included here as they appear on the cover of their demo tape, including the interesting use of the Japanese *katakana* alphabet.
7. The lyrics appear here as they do in the liner notes of the professionally released album *Lost Days*, including the use of all capital letters for the chorus, "STUFFY LOCKED-UP ROOM."
8. The text is audible on the professional recorded versions of both "Curve" and "Curve II," but is nearly impossible to determine, with the exception of a few words, in the live performance that I attended and that was captured on the video *Rust Days*.
9. This particular example marked my last live performance as guest vocalist with Jug in Winter 1999 prior to departing for a three-month stay outside of Japan. I would return to Japan later that Spring, but I would no longer sing with Jug.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Jackson groups approaches to the study of musical meaning into four main categories: psychological, philosophical, semiotic, and ethnomusicological. The first three approaches focus on the independent, objective musical work; the ethnomusicological approach is more concerned with "music's social and cultural meanings" (13).
2. See Crafts, Cavicchi, and Keil (1993) as one exception, with its focus on individual musical practice explored through extensive interviews with a variety of people of different age groups.

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