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BODIES THAT SHATTER: POPULIST PERFORMANCES IN POSTDISASTER JAPAN

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Abstract

In the summer of 2012, the usually desolate sidewalks in front of the prime minister's official residence (Kantei-mae), the Japanese equivalent of the White House, became the stage for a weekly antinuclear protest that claimed turnout in the hundreds of thousands to become the definitive symbol of political life in a country still reeling from nuclear disaster. Protesters, most of whom demonstrated for the first time in their lives, gathered here for two hours every Friday evening to "make visible the will of the people" to the Prime Minister in his own residence. When successful, such populist performances appeared to participants and spectators alike as nothing less than a manifestation of "the people" itself.

Populism, as I approach it here, imagines such moments as deeply meaningful, in that they do not just claim to express, but carry the potential to directly embody the will of "the people." As an ethnography of mass protests and the organizing efforts behind them, my dissertation asks how such populist imaginaries are expressed in protest rhetoric and strategy, and how new endeavors to envision and embody "the people" as a locus of political legitimacy came to the forefront in the aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdowns. As I attend to this endeavor ethnographically, I reach for a critical notion of the "legitimacy" of mass protest as one tangible aspect of protest organization and participation — legitimacy, that is, not "from above," as the right or acquiescence to rule, but asserted "from below" in terms of the relation between mass protest and a broader public. Postdisaster populism, in this sense, posits the figure of "the people" as both wellspring of legitimacy and antidote to a decades-long distaste for mass protest in Japanese society. Scholars and pundits alike have held up the Kantei-mae crowd as a symbol not just of legitimate assembly, but of the postdisaster period as a renaissance of political agency and expression. What was it about this embodiment of

populist legitimacy that succeeded in summoning unparalleled multitudes in front of the Prime Minister's official residence — and why did it ultimately fail to gain traction with the wider populace, and shatter into disunity and discord just like the illegitimate precursors it tried to distance itself from?

This dissertation asks how the endeavor of enfleshing the figure of "the people" in stringently surveilled public spaces came to constitute both impetus and "imaginative horizon" for new formulations of political legitimacy, agency and subjectivity in postdisaster Japan. Who can speak in the name of the people? What voices have been left out of this claim to univocality, and what sorts of violence have been sanctified in its shadow? By asking these questions from within the effervescence of the crowd amassing again and again in Japan's symbolic center of political authority, my ethnography seeks to contribute to a critical understanding of democratic participation in an age of resurgent populist fervor.

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"The *people as event* can seem to resolve, for a time, the constitutive aporia of representation" — Rosanvallon, Democracy Past and Future (2006, 92)

"Do you hear the people sing?" The question was written in colorful, uneven letters on a white banner, surrounded by countless faces and a smattering of plastic umbrellas. Hand-painted signs called for attention to a plethora of causes as policemen draped in clear raincoats lined up along the curb. It was a damp Friday evening, and "À la Volonté du Peuple," the notorious number from hit musical *Les Misérables,* echoed between the well-guarded façades of Tokyo's government district.

"It is the music of the people who will not be slaves again…" Like every week for the last several months, a large crowd swarmed around the sidewalks in front of the Prime Minister's official residence (*Kantei*), the Japanese equivalent of the White House. Accompanied by drums, half a dozen violins and the odd accordion, and occasionally drowned out by harsher chants, the synthetic howling of bull horns, and distorted announcements from riot control vehicles, the crowd was singing.

"When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums" (*kodō ga ano doramu to hibikiaeba*)… In the summer of 2012, the usually desolate sidewalks in front of the official residence (*Kantei-mae*) became the stage for a weekly antinuclear protest that claimed turnout in the hundreds of thousands, to become the definitive symbol of political life in a country still reeling from nuclear disaster. The weekly protests were on everybody's lips. Surveys showed that a majority of participants demonstrated for the first time in their lives. Lacking demonstration permits, the crowd had hitherto been confined to the sidewalks. But

as participation peaked in late July, the police barricades collapsed, and the crowd surged into the streets.

"Beyond the barricade, is there a world you long to see" (*toride no mukō ni akogare no sekai*)? In the summer of 2012, I joined the choir claiming to speak in the name of the people. Every Friday evening the gathering crowd clawed at my attention, and I soon found myself abandoning other commitments to brave the hills of the government district, joined by a growing trickle of the emboldened, curious or bored. An air of anticipation saturated the sidewalks as we drew closer to the distinct rhythms and chants of the crowd, and we held our breath as it embraced us. There were no riots, no street battles, no teargas clouds at the *Kantei-mae* rally. Every Friday evening, the crowd poured silently out of subway exits and municipal buses, politely dodging riot fences and governmental clerks leaving work, only to disperse obediently after exactly two hours of rhythmic chanting. Pundits proclaimed the phenomenon proof of a new paradigm of democratic participation, soon dubbed the "Hydrangea Revolution" after the purple blossoms lining the sidewalks of the government district. And yet, their voices betrayed a hint of concern that the massive crowd would turn out to be just that: a crowd, and nothing more.

"Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me?" Across the nation, countless protests opposed the reactivation of Japan's fifty remaining nuclear reactors, which had laid dormant since the meltdowns the previous year. The *Kantei-mae* rally escalated this opposition into a direct confrontation between a "we" of ordinary people and the Prime Minister as a figure of illegitimate political representation. This crowd bespoke its own legitimacy in terms of a capacity to speak in the name of "the people" — and challenged that of the country's leaders in terms of their capacity to listen. But the task of us protesters was not just to deliver "our angry voices," but to physically "make visible the will of the people

(*min'i wo kashika suru*)" to the Prime Minister in his own residence. When such performances were successful, the assembly appeared to participants and many spectators alike as nothing less than a manifestation of "the people" itself — what historian Jason Frank (2010) calls a "constituent moment," when claims to speak in the name of the people resonate with a public even as they defy established rules for democratic representation.

Populism, as I approach it here, imagines such moments as deeply meaningful, in that they do not just claim to express, but carry the potential to directly embody the will of "the people." As an ethnography of mass protests and the organizing efforts behind them, my dissertation asks how such populist imaginaries are expressed in protest rhetoric and strategy, and how new endeavors to envision and embody the people as a locus of political legitimacy came to the forefront in the aftermath of nuclear disaster. I dwell on the central figure of that populist imaginary — the crowd — from a number of perspectives: as a repository of effervescent energy, indeterminacy and innovation; a stage for mimetic performances of collective identity production; and — increasingly for its various stakeholders — as an object of curation, control and choreographic intervention in the interest of preempting obstacles to the endeavor of embodying "the people" in Tokyo's government district.

Drawn to the crowd as a casual participant, I soon came to work closely with the organizers of the weekly *Kantei-mae* assembly. An umbrella alliance of antinuclear activist groups, the Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes — henceforth MCAN or "the Coalition" for short — had nurtured the weekly assembly from a few dozens to hundreds of thousands in a matter of months. Now, they had become the inadvertent custodians of "the people" as claim and event, cautiously curating the *Kantei-mae* crowd as the "tip of the iceberg" of ordinary Japanese reluctantly rising up against illegitimate rule. Over the next several years, the Herculean efforts of such organizers to summon an ever larger crowd each week in Tokyo's

government district became my primary site of ethnographic inquiry. At the protest, I shouldered a range of responsibilities: jockeying flows of protesters between different parts of the crowd, accompanying the legal teams ambulating throughout it in anticipation of illegitimate intrusion, and managing the temporary stages set up each week to capture and focus the crowd's effervescent energies. Joining countless other volunteers in the vast logistical machine which underpinned the spontaneous assembly of "ordinary people," I attended to the mimetic performances of protesters distinct crowd choreographies through which the organizers sought to grow, groom and govern the crowd as an authentic expression of populist legitimacy.

Beyond the boundaries of the crowd, I witnessed the Coalition cultivate their position as stewards of the populist imaginary, as I accompanied the group's core members to meetings, summits, and a vast network of similar protests held across the country in tribute to the "original" *Kantei-mae* assembly. I saw the culmination of those efforts as a group of Coalition members confronted the Prime Minister in front of live cameras later that summer. The mass-mediated face-off effectively consecrated the organizers as delegates of the *Kantei-mae* crowd, and in turn, the crowd as a legitimate incarnation of "the people" as such.

"The people" is always a political claim, an act of political subjectification — not a pregiven, unified, or naturally bounded empirical entity. Typically, this claim recognizes no limit to the political agency of "the people" as political subject. There are, however, real limits to the forms taken by the performance of embodying that subject. Even as it insists on immediacy, "the populist mobilization of the collective flesh is necessarily grounded in archives of experience" (Mazzarella 2019, 53). It draws on *mimetic archives* of political experience, expression and emotion — archives that figure both historically, as the sum total of forms that have already been actualized, and virtually, as latent potential (Mazzarella 2017, 8).

An anthropology of populism, then, must attend not only to those potentially "constituent" moments where the collective flesh appears in ways that exceed institutional representation, but to the mimetic archives actualized and appealed to in those same moments. In examining the unique elaborations of populist performance that took place in the wake of Japan's 2011 nuclear disaster, my dissertation foregrounds the challenges of contemporary activists engaging with those archives: in particular, the conflicted legacy of radical politics in Japan. Since the decline of student radicalism in the sixties and seventies, Japanese society has nourished a stigma against the violent tendencies of the protest crowd. A widely shared consensus holds that public protest acquired a persistent negative image of violence and disruption, that led to a decades-long hiatus in mass demonstrations (Gonoï 2012). Activists today grapple with this general aversion to contentious politics — what sociologist Mōri Yoshitaka (2009, 13) refers to as the "demonstration allergy" of contemporary Japan. But as my work shows, they also anticipate and reproduce it in elaborating their own claims to legitimate assembly. Postdisaster populism thus took shape in ambivalent relation to authority: as reaction to, but also as repetition of public aversions and anathemas against collective action. For the *Kantei-mae* organizers, this meant staking the populist performance of "the people" on an increasingly martial commitment to protect the protest crowd from adverse association.

As I attend to this endeavor ethnographically, I reach for a critical notion of the "legitimacy" of mass protest as one tangible aspect of protest organization and participation — legitimacy, that is, not "from above," as the right or acquiescence to rule, but asserted "from below" in terms of the relation between mass protest and a broader public. Postdisaster populism, in this sense, posits the figure of "the people" as both wellspring of legitimacy and antidote to a decades-long distaste for mass protest in Japanese society. Scholars and pundits alike have

held up the *Kantei-mae* crowd as a symbol not just of legitimate assembly, but of the postdisaster period as a renaissance of political agency and expression. What was it about this embodiment of populist legitimacy that succeeded in summoning unparalleled multitudes in front of the Prime Minister's official residence — and why did it ultimately fail to gain traction with the wider populace, and shatter into disunity and discord just like the illegitimate precursors it tried to distance itself from? In this introduction, I situate my ethnographic project as a contribution to the anthropology of populism and the broader literature on social movements, in terms of legitimacy as commitment and compromise for activists in contemporary Japan.

The half-life of disaster

The earthquake that struck Japan's eastern coast on March 11, 2011, was the strongest recorded in the country's history, and the fifth most powerful worldwide. It triggered 130-feet tsunami waves that devastated communities as far as six miles from the coast and caused more than 16,000 deaths with thousands more missing and millions of households left without electricity and water. The tsunami deposited on land a layer of salt and toxins accrued on the ocean floor during a century of industrialization and caused infrastructural damage in the hundreds of billions of dollars—making it the costliest natural disaster in world history (White and Mahul 2013).

Before long, damage wrought by the earthquake and tsunami would compete for attention with another disaster, at once less spectacular and more sinister. Some 200 kilometers from Tokyo, three flooded reactors at Tokyo Electric's Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant went into successive states of meltdown, leading to the uncontrolled release of reactor core fragments into the air, ground and sea. Despite various cover-up attempts, the meltdowns were soon

undeniable, admitted publicly some two months later. “Fukushima” became a global catastrophe; the second nuclear accident after Chernobyl to max out the International Nuclear Event Scale.

Uncertainty gripped the nation. Kathleen Tierney (2014) calls the ”triple disaster”—earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown—of March 2011 the most mediated disaster event in human history. Seismographs triggered alerts on millions of handheld devices; the world watched through helicopter broadcasts as tsunami waves engulfed the east coast. Reactor explosions broadcast on national television triggered widespread panic and confusion, even as the government insisted that the growing plume of radioactive fallout posed “no immediate health risk” to the populace. Mass media committed itself to crisis, regular programming suspended as “unfamiliar newscasters donning helmets in news studios reported the events in a hypnotic cycle” (Karlin 2016, 30). On alternative media, official discourses competed with an emerging cast of renegade journalistic voices (see Kindstrand et al 2014).

At stake in these media regimes were the boundaries of disaster itself. State dramatizations of early disaster response—shaky footage of helicopters dousing an erupting reactor with water, or legions of firefighters sent on suicide missions into its unruly abdomen—insisted on “Fukushima” as a spectacular yet spatiotemporally bounded event. After Prime Minister Naoto Kan stepped down in September 2011, his successor Noda Yoshihiko called for the “conclusion” (*shūsoku*) of disaster management, seizing on the first anniversary of the catastrophe to declare a new era of national “revitalization.” In such government rhetoric, the disaster was enshrined in the past as formative national experience, its primary outcome a surplus of political resolve and strengthened “bonds” (*kizuna*) amongst a people committed to overcoming hardship.

Even as the political establishment washed their hands of moral responsibility, the boundaries of "Fukushima" as event remained the focal point of contestation. In the early aftermath of "Fukushima," social theorist Brian Massumi (2011) pointed to the "half-life of disaster" as a media-imposed window of opportunity for political claims to resonate publically, before the disaster event inevitably "decays in media" and gives way to an endless chain of succeeding media spectacles. If these are the tragic terms of environmental advocacy in late modernity (Fortun 2001), they were shared by a broad range of political initiatives, among which the *Kantei-mae* crowd would become the most visible.[1] They shared a sense of both urgency and opportunity in insisting on the disastrous present as a vanishing opportunity to effect change before crisis fades into the past.

The promise of the postdisaster

The proposal of postdisaster populism — to imagine this conflict as a confrontation between "the people" and illegitimate rule — begun as a direct challenge to Prime Minister Noda's announced "conclusion" to the disaster. It was in order to prevent the reactivation of nuclear reactors dormant since the earthquake — a political outcome which would seem to consign the disaster to the past — that protesters in the *Kantei-mae* crowd pledged to "thrust their angry voices" at Noda in his official residence. But postdisaster populism also pointed to a

[1] These included a multitude of disparate and often conflicting issues: from food safety and independent radiation monitoring to autonomous evacuation schemes (Kimura 2018, Kumaki 2020); from compensation for evacuated residents to the growing ranks of "nuclear gypsies" (Slater et al 2013, Tanaka 1988) drawn into the cleanup effort, and from shareholder revolts against Tokyo Electric to a bevy of civil lawsuits against all levels of government (Jobin 2020, Kingston 2012).

different proposal. Increasingly, mass protest in the government district coalesced around the assertion of a national subject-matter for which the disaster has not, can not end — the "living proof" of catastrophe as embodied experience. As I will show, it was in the crowd performances of the weekly protest that this imaginary became coherent. Here, the task of attending to the disastrous present and the uneven distribution of exposure it effected gradually gave way to a narrative of general exposure (see chapter 3). The mimetic performance of protest congealed around a new enunciatory community (Fortun 2001): a community of injury.

From the urgency of capturing fissuring public attention to the certainty of being affected, the language of radioactivity again lent itself to a political claim: this time, not regarding the decaying half-life of public concern, but the encounter with radiation as an awakening, an animating stimulus to the national body politic. This shift unlocked powerful formulations of populist dissent pitting a populace united in injury against an insulated elite that suffered none of the catastrophic consequences of their own actions. At the same time, there was a strange affinity between this imaginary and the Prime Minister's grandiose statements regarding the relation between the disaster event and a reinvigorated body politic. To the weekly assembly, it reiterated the mimetic link between crowd and public: if the entirety of "we-the-people" was at least symbolically affected, could not the *Kantei-mae* crowd speak all the more convincingly on its behalf?

In retrospect, there was no shortage of coordinates for thinking the postdisaster as a present pregnant with populist promise. In 2011, the signature chant of the Arab Spring — "the people wants to bring down the regime" — resonated with protest crowds across the Middle East just as the severity of nuclear catastrophe was beginning to dawn on the Japanese public. The Indignados movement inspired majoritarian anti-austerity campaigns under the moniker

of “the people” all over Europe, and Occupy Wall Street another movement on behalf of “the 99%” (Graeber 2013). As antinuclear protests in Tokyo called for solidarity with Egypt’s Tahrir Square or Zuccoti Park, many in Japan shared a sense that they, too, were in the midst of a moment of historic change.

The previous decade of cultural inquiry had revolved around a cluster of critics and scholars attempting to make sense of postwar media cultures in terms of critical theory — the so-called “thought of the aughts” (*zero-nendai no shisō*). Thinkers like Ōsawa Masachi and Azuma Hiroki parsed cultural life in the postwar period as a tripartition: to wit, an “idealistic age” (1945-), a “fictional age” (1970-) characterized by postmodern retreats into fiction and narrative, and a third age of anomie and weakening social bonds since the financial crisis (1995-).[2] After the disaster, however, Azuma and his coterie resisted ruminations on a posthistorical condition (Looser 2017, 350). On March 17, just as the severity of the meltdowns were dawning on the world, Azuma declared to the New York Times that “for a change, [he was] proud to be Japanese,” outlining a new national spirit of budding patriotism and pride in government. Echoing conservative punditry, he told a global audience that ”the Japanese people could use (…) this catastrophe to rebuild a society bound together with a renewed trust” (Azuma 2011a). Later that summer, Azuma returned to the disaster as an event that “broke *us* apart,” exposing irredeemable differences of class, geography and irradiation across an apparently homogenous populace (2011b, 222). But these were differences to be overcome. Berating himself for peddling the “thought of the aughts” as new

[2] See Tanaka 2014, 44-46. In particular, Azuma’s (2009 [2001]) ventriloquizing of Kojeve and Lyotard painted a bleak picture of the contemporary consumer subject stuck at the end of history, masturbatorily tampering with decontextualized historical and aesthetic tropes.

wineskin for the old wine of resistance through mass consumption, Azuma called for new kinds of scholarship and criticism that could "increase the possibility of a 'new solidarity' to come about [and] widen a new horizon of possible meaning beyond fragmented narratives and conflicting interests" (Ibid.).

These critical voices pointed to the postdisaster as a space of possibility beyond the Japanese postwar and its stultifying terms of intellectual inquiry — one that would undoubtedly bring with it a new constellation of cultural and political coordinates, complementing and superceding the tripartite division of postwar cultural paradigms. Here Azuma echoes Harvard economist Mikuriya Takashi's (2011) exuberant announcement that the "postwar ends as the postdisaster begins (*sengo ga owari, saigo ga hajimaru*)." In other words, the postdisaster premises not just a new beginning, but the convenient "conclusion" of Japan's postwar period and its persistent contradictions—the ambiguity of its sovereignty, its fraught relations with both former colonial subjects as well as imperial adversaries, etc.

In the problem-space of the postdisaster as a "post-postwar," the urgency of these issues fade into the background of a solipsistic inquiry into the postwar as *national* experience (Satō 2011, cf. Harootunian 2000, Ivy 1995, Katō 2010, Ōsawa 1996) – now bookended on both sides by events of sublime destruction. As government rhetoric settled on ambiguously defined "bonds" (*kizuna*) of patriotic solidarity as the ultimate outcome of the disaster as national experience (cf. Tokita 2017), even critical voices like Azuma's focused their interventions on questions of national character (*kokumin-sei*). What aspects of Japanese-ness had caused this turmoil, they asked, and what other parts of the national psyche might be recovered and cultivated in order to prevent the country from repeating its mistakes? A government-appointed citizens' commission on the disaster rehearsed these anxieties, declaring that:

> This was a disaster "Made in Japan."… Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to "sticking with the program"; our groupism; and our insularity (NAIIC 2012, 8).

Such statements pointed to the nuclear catastrophe as all but inevitable as "Fukushima" reappears not as cause, but as symptom of other pathologies lodged deep in the national subject. This way the collective experience of disaster could be reimagined: no longer a systemic crisis of governance or the nation-state (*kokka*), it now appeared as a crisis endemic to the Japanese people (*kokumin*) itself. At stake in the postdisaster was whether Japan and its "ingrained conventions" could change — and many would point to the *Kantei-mae* crowd as an indication that it had.

Protest as performance

In holding mimesis and performance writ large as central to my conception of social movements, I find the late Columbia sociologist Charles Tilly's approach to protest both arresting and helpful to the ethnographic endeavor. For Tilly, social movements are "historically specific clusters of political performances" at once inviting informal improvisation, and yet formalizing the mimetic capacities of its participants. The way social movements imitate, adapt and improvise around the legacy of their predecessors makes them "logically parallel to a loosely-choreographed dance, [or] a jam session with changing players" (Tilly 1993, 5). Over time, political performances stabilize into repertoires: "the limited, familiar, historically created arrays of claim-making performances that […] greatly circumscribe the means by which people engage in contentious politics" (Tilly 2006, vii). Repertoire is an expression of the mimetic archive of mass protest: by once again

foregrounding the mimetic aspect of political performances, the term indexes not just what protesters do, but what they know how to do within a culturally sanctioned range of options (Tarrow 1993, 283).

In repertorial terms, the endeavor to summon massive crowds in the government district each week was nothing short of groundbreaking. Seeking to mitigate the risk of arrest which had crippled earlier antinuclear parades (see chapter 1), the Coalition organizers negotiated a *fait accompli* of permit-less protest in one of the most scarcely trafficked but stringently surveilled parts of the metropolis (see chapter 2). Unexpectedly, the crowd they summoned there engendered a more elaborate claim: repeated protest rituals eased participants into a rhetoric equating themselves with "the people" as such, elevating the "national" experience of nuclear disaster to a claim of universal injury (see chapter 3). To participants and media audiences alike, this appeared an unprecedented turn of events.

At the same time, the stage for this appearance of "the people" invoked images and memories of mass protest distant to many participants: the weekly assembly gestured to the memory of another crowd, which had gathered on the very same streets half a century earlier. The 1960 protests against the US-Japan Security Treaty (or "*Ampo*" for short) had brought hundreds of thousands of protesters to the government district, and culminated with the storming of the gates to the National Diet (*Kokkai*) — as well as the death of a young student activist. The failure of "*Ampo* -60" spelled doom for the Japanese New Left, which descended into factionalism, violence and eventual decline over the next twelve years (Gonoï 2012; Kapur 2018; Andrews 2016; see chapter 4). Sociologist Carl Cassegård's provocative interpretation of this legacy in terms of trauma emphasizes that:

> The New Left's collective trauma … depended on the ability of major newspapers and government spokesmen to discredit and marginalize the New Left and on the inability of

its adherents to publicly defend and legitimate themselves (2013, 17).

According to anthropologist Oda Masanori, when Japanese today see a demonstration approach "they think 'what a nuisance. Noisy too. Cut it out' (*meiwaku, urusai, yamero*). There's no way around this antipathy" (Leser and Seider 2011). Thus *Ampo* also marked the beginning of the end for mass protest as such. As the common narrative holds, since the failure of the student movement in the sixties and seventies, mass protest has been virtually absent from Japanese society (Gonoï 2012).[3]

In formulating their own claims in terms of a political present, however, contemporary activists have no choice but to confront the mimetic archive of mass protest. Cassegård points out that new protest repertoires have arisen "in opposition to the New Left," but at the same time,

> [their] attempt to overcome this legacy has not meant a rejection of the entire history of previous struggles. The re-innovation of activism has taken place hand in hand with politics of choosing predecessors, which are held up as positive models for today's movement" (2013, 43).

Here, the mimetic archive of contentious politics appears as a smorgasbord of symbolic and strategical successes of the past, the contemporary activist as a bricoleur of efficacy in the present. Activists in the postdisaster expend tremendous effort constructing alternative genealogies of dissent in which to anchor the legitimacy of the present. But just as often, they

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[3] Among the many challenges to this narrative, the Okinawan experience presents the perhaps most urgent (see e.g. Nelson 2020, Inoue 2004).

find themselves busy proving to themselves and their surroundings that they are not repeating the mistakes of the past. That is to say, the mimetic archive of mass protest is not just mined for "positive models" — it is treated as a minefield of negative association to be anticipated and averted. I came to think of their approach to legitimacy as a balancing act, with the risk of being dismissed or delegitimized in either direction: on one side, as surreptitious sectarians, and on the other as a mindless mob.

From this point of view, the postdisaster populism of the *Kantei-mae* crowd can be understood as a particularly aggressive answer to the question of legitimacy. The protest was not a place for activists, but for ordinary people with ordinary lives upended by crisis. Legacies of protest predating the 2011 nuclear disaster were at best downplayed, often ridiculed as pointless or counterproductive. As a figure of legitimacy, the *Kantei-mae* crowd simply had no history or political motive until propelled into action by the disaster event. The *fait accompli* of mass assembly in the government district, where acquiring a protest permit in the first place was considered impossible, was proof of that legitimacy.

Academic accounts of protest in postdisaster Japan are abundant and overwhelmingly sympathetic (Higuchi 2021). In social movement studies, the postdisaster period has become synonymous with the first new protest cycle since the student movement of the sixties and early seventies (Obinger and Chiavacci 2018). This makes the postdisaster a long-awaited addendum to a history of dissent that for many ended with the decline of the New Left forty to fifty years earlier. In this sense, many academic accounts of postdisaster protest betray an ambition akin to Azuma's: could the postdisaster be an opportunity to transcend the constipations and contradictions of postwar protest? By investing its object of study with the qualities of an epistemic break, both with the "old-school" Left and with a postwar conceived as politically quiescent, the literature has tended to assume the momentum of the present in a

way that only makes sense in relation to the felt inertia of the past. Without considering the volatile and sticky associations latent in the mimetic archive of mass protest, it is not surprising that some scholars have asked why "the massive rallies that followed the [disaster] bear no sign of the 1960s' radical ideas and repertoires," or concluded that "the new activist culture [of the postdisaster] seems to come from nowhere" (Falciola 2017, cf. Andō 2016). When even the most nuanced of accounts concur that "with the [postdisaster] anti-nuclear power movement, the shadow of the New Left has almost disappeared in Japan" (Cassegård 2013, 250), it is no wonder that so many scholars have taken up their interlocutors' insistence on a present unblemished by association to an illegitimate past.

It should be noted here that the notion of a protest cycle — sociologist Sidney Tarrow's term for conceptually bridging the fleeting euphoria of collective effervescence with the historical continuity of the repertoire (1993, 281) — was intended to highlight conflict and competition over consensus. As Tarrow stresses,

> Protest cycles are *not* unified movements, and they seldom come under the control of single movement organizations. More often, the growth in popular participation … invites organizational proliferation, and these new organizations compete for space with each other (Tarrow 2011 [1994], 208).

As "a phase of heightened conflict across the social system," protest cycles shake up the relations between established actors, making room for new ones (Ibid., 153). They bring about diversity.

Unfortunately, in extolling the representative moments and movements of postdisaster protest, earlier studies tend to assume the opposite, and either flatten divergent understandings of agency and purpose into a monolithic movement comprised of reasonable

individuals committed to the same broadly defined issue, or foreground individual motivations for participation while losing sight of the protest as a site for mimetically cementing those commitments. Considering the postdisaster as protest cycle seems a productive way to interrogate its legacy in relation to a structural-symbolic order (Sahlins 1985). But if anything, that approach should be attended not by an assumption of aligning imaginaries and vocabularies of protest, but a sensitivity to conflict and contention within an emergent ecology of protest (cf. Engler and Engler 2016). For that reason, where earlier accounts of contentious politics in Japan's postdisaster have accentuated consensus and cooperation, I have tried to stay sensitive to difference and discord. Instead of positing convictions of a reasonably concerned citizen as the locus of contentious politics, I foreground the relation between the mimesis of political performance and the effort to present those performances as legitimate.

Approaching legitimacy

Understandings of political legitimacy in the social sciences can largely be divided between the normative and the descriptive. When anthropologists are not analyzing the role of ritual, myth or ideology in maintaining or undermining political authority, they approach the notion of legitimacy by looking at the processes that render particular places and populations legitimate or legal, and others dangerous or illegal (Thomas & Galemba 2013, Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). In so doing, anthropology is usually concerned with the conventional notion of political legitimacy as the justification of political authority: whether as the right to govern, or as the acquiescence of governed subjects (Pardo & Prato 2019). Because the normative approach needs some standard of justification to argue that legitimate authority

creates obligation, the legitimacy is tantamount to the difference between de facto and just(ified) authority.

By contrast, Weber famously approaches political legitimacy descriptively, that is, without invoking normative criteria. For Weber, "the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief" (1964, 382). Legitimacy matters to the extent that such belief results in more stable forms of social order (124). The ambiguity of this "weak" or descriptive definition of legitimacy in Weber's binding of social action to a "belief in the existence of a legitimate order" (1978, 31) has irked generations of social theorists (see e.g. Habermas 1988; Grafstein 1981). But the binding nature of Weber's "legitimate order," whether one "live for rules or from them, abide by them or fight against them" (Albrow 1990, 163), is precisely what I want to hold on to in developing an ethnographically informed understanding of legitimacy.

How does this dichotomy translate to the legitimacy of mass protest? In the sociology of social movements, the normative position asks not how movements (de)legitimate social order, but whether social movements as such are or can be legitimate political actors. This plots social movements somewhere along a spectrum spanning social progress and disorder, depending on the normative criteria invoked. On one end of the spectrum, adherents of Le Bon's crowd psychology have seen collective action as the antinomy to individual reason: challenges to social order both irrational, and illegitimate by definition (cf. Le Bon 1896, Couch 1967). On the other end, Marxist perspectives evaluated social movements as potential historical subjects and agents of social change. At its most reductive, this perspective only considers social movements to be legitimate if they fulfill this historic role (Touraine 1971).

Social movements either agents of progress by definition, or unworthy of the label in the first place.[4]

I am interested in legitimacy as it is evoked and elaborated by generations of activists in a diverse movement ecology, not in holding their commitments (e.g. non-violence) to some normative standard. In other words, I prefer the descriptive approach to the legitimacy of mass protest, which again draws on Weber to locate the source of legitimacy in a movement's ability to find broad support in the populace. In descriptive terms, legitimacy resides in the eye of the beholder; it expresses the relationship between a movement and a larger public. To be clear, I am not saying that the legitimacy of mass protest pivots entirely on public perception (cf. Olsen 1967; Turner 1969), or that it is solely determined through public discourse or media images. Even as social movements shape performances to a cultural present in order to garner the public support they need to realize their claims (Haunss 2007, 162), legitimacy is granted, not accrued; it can be asserted, but not traded in for political gain. My dissertation takes the broader ecology of postdisaster protest as a salient context for examining how dissent takes shape through mimicry: as reaction to, but also as repetition of official sanctions on political expression.

To begin to make sense of this, I want to highlight another, oft-neglected aspect of Tilly's performative approach to social movements: specifically, the unwieldy acronym "WUNC" short for worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. Tilly argues that protesters insist on

[4] If this normative yardstick fell into obscurity with the 1970s turn to resource mobilization theory, it returned in an unexpected guise as fin-de-siecle mass mobilization against immigration defied the sensibilities of European social movement scholars (Haunss 2007, 159).

the legitimacy of their efforts by enacting a stable register of "WUNC displays" (Tilly 2006, 54)[5]. Likewise, those efforts may be scrutinized, challenged, or dismissed along these same terms (Wouters and Walgrave 2017, 4). The point is that the legitimacy of public protest is negotiated in the encounter between mimetic performances of protest and reflexive concerns for legitimate appearance (cf. Mazzarella 2017, 66). Tilly's "WUNC displays" are, at their core, public rituals of self-production acted out reflexively with an external audience in mind. From this perspective, social movements are performative endeavors, profoundly preoccupied with enacting and embodying a collective "we," and the legitimacy of its appearance from the generalized viewpoint of an imagined spectator. This preoccupation will be my focus over the following chapters as I approach the actions and anxieties of contemporary activists around legitimate assembly.

Chapter outline

This dissertation asks how the endeavor of enfleshing the figure of "the people" in stringently surveilled public spaces came to constitute both impetus and "imaginative horizon" (Crapanzano 2010) for new formulations of political legitimacy, agency and subjectivity in postdisaster Japan. Who can speak in the name of the people? What voices have been left out of this claim to univocality, and what sorts of violence have been sanctified in its shadow? By

[5] By worthiness, Tilly refers to elements of visual appearance, such as "sober demeanor; neat clothing; presence of clergy, dignitaries, and mothers with children." Unity can be performed through "matching badges, headbands, banners, or costumes; marching in ranks; singing and chanting." Numbers might be expressed through "headcounts, signatures on petitions, messages from constituents, filling streets." Finally, commitment is displayed through "braving bad weather; visible participation by the old and handicapped; resistance to repression [or] ostentatious sacrifice" (Tilly 2006, 54).

asking these questions from within the effervescence of the crowd amassing again and again in Japan's symbolic center of political authority, my ethnography seeks to contribute to a critical understanding of democratic participation in an age of resurgent populist fervor.

The next chapter traces the roots of populist legitimacy as elaborated in the *Kantei-mae* crowd, by comparing two protest campaigns of the early disaster aftermath. After the nuclear meltdowns of March 2011, antinuclear protests arose spontaneously across the Tokyo metropolitan area. The two initiatives I investigate both sought to summon large crowds onto the streets of Tokyo without appealing to affinities predating the disaster. They shared the same contempt for conventional repertoires of protest, but their respective elaborations of legitimate assembly differed drastically. One considered itself as antithesis to the other in the elaboration of a populist legitimacy, capable not just of speaking in the name of "the people" but of physically embodying its vital energies.

How are "constituent moments" of populist embodiment recognized or repudiated by their audiences? Chapter 2 is situated in and around the peak of physical turnout at the *Kantei-mae* protests, as police barricades ruptured and the crowd flooded out into the streets of the government district. The same event that tethered participants together through collective effervescence, and that mass media and academic accounts sacralized as a moment of national awakening, seemed to the organizers a devastating lapse of crowd discipline. I attend to this event in terms of a "communitas of defeat" that brought into stark relief the friction between organizers from the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, the crowd that they conjured in Tokyo's government district, and expectant media audiences.

What forms of mediation buttress the performative claim to speak in the name of the people? The *Kantei-mae* crowd asserted itself as the embodied manifestation of a general will: "the people" as such appearing in Japan's spatial nexus of political power. Shoring up this

performative claim was an idea of injury elevated to national experience. In the wake of nuclear catastrophe, the *Kantei-mae* crowd turned public fear and outrage into an occasion for staging the mattering forth of a "we-the-people" profoundly transformed by disaster. That claim, in turn, provided the grounds for anticipating and overcoming a decades-long stigma against mass protest in Japanese society. How can this postdisaster populism be approached without celebrating the aesthetics of entanglement in a context of mass involuntary exposure? Chapter 3 tends to two sides of the makeshift stages which, erected at key junctures throughout the crowd, became a key site for imagining and enacting this populist proposal. I trace the mimetic performances on stage as they gradually coalesce around the mattering-forth of a "we-the-people" greater than the sum of its parts, alongside the backstage work needed to make those performances possible.

How did the populist proposal come to dominate imaginaries of social change in the postdisaster moment? Chapter 4 fast-forwards to the summer of 2015, and a new generation of organizers inheriting the Coalition's crowd choreography. Amidst changing causes and slogans, a small group of students found themselves the new custodians of the crowd gathering every week in the heart of Tokyo's government district. They radicalized the Coalition's playbook of populist performance through slogans like "don't fuck with the people (*kokumin wo nameru na),*" garnering widespread media attention. This concluding chapter revisits some established themes: the performative staging of "ordinary people" gathering in righteous indignation, the confrontation with illegitimate representation, and the anxious anticipation of "extremists" infecting the crowd with their illegitimate presence. But this time, the failure to contain the sticky associations of a broader postwar Left was already anticipated in the organizers' crowd choreography. At its most reactionary, Japan's postdisaster populism culminated not in a constituent moment of celebrating corporealized

sovereignty, but in a crowd choreography that was fundamental distrustful, suspecting each and every one of the "ordinary people" assembled of harboring illicit intent.

Since I began to think about these topics ten years ago, the saccharine chorus of "À la Volonté du Peuple" has reverberated again and again throughout protest crowds across the world. It could be heard as demonstrators forced their way into the Wisconsin State Capitol in 2011, and as Istanbul crowds opposed the 2013 redevelopment of Gezi Park. It was sung at Ukraine's "Euromaidan" square occupations in 2014, and in Cantonese by Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement (Moore 2014). The passion and purpose of those performances may seem distant at a time when populism is thrown around as a pejorative for those unruly crowds and political passions which seem to resist all forms of representation, anthropology included (cf. Gusterson 2017; Bangstad 2017). Nowadays, "À la Volonté du Peuple" joins a reviled ensemble of cultural signs whose circulation and condemnation indexes anxieties surrounding the current populist moment, and the pressure it puts on liberal forms of public life (Mazzarella 2019, 46) — a popular version entitled "Deplorables Unite" fuses the feature film version of the musical with crowd footage from Donald Trump rallies.

Even though it can sometimes be hard to hear the people sing, this dissertation is my sincere attempt to pursue the unique elaboration of populist legitimacy that activists reached for in Japan's postdisaster moment, and the ways it took shape in the *Kantei-mae* crowd. Now, as I conclude this introduction, that crowd may itself be singing its last song. After four hundred weekly rallies, the Coalition ceased their protest activities in 2021 and left the crowd behind. In the meantime, their elaboration of populist performance became the blueprint for successive waves of postdisaster activism, as younger generations of activists sought to summon the *Kantei-mae* crowd and speak in the name of "the people" on a range of different issues. Over the last decade, imaginaries of social change on the Japanese Left have paid

homage to the tenacious figure of the crowd, appearing time and time again outside the Prime Minister's official residence. There is no doubt that the postdisaster period has been a renaissance for contentious politics in Japan. But the assumptions inherited from the antinuclear crowd were strangely austere. The populist turn of the post-disaster "Hydrangea Revolution" relied on a repression of internal difference, and refused contaminating connection with the complex and contradictory legacy of postwar dissent and democracy. Its contemptuous measuring of distance to a broader Left considered politically inept, histrionic preoccupation with the mattering-forth of "the people," and Sisyphean summoning of massive crowds in the desolate and hyper-surveilled government district as a self-imposed benchmark of possibility and progress — these conventions of the *Kantei-mae* crowd, not the minoritarian mores occasionally tolerated at its borders, will be the legacy of Japan's postdisaster populism.

Chapter 1. Mass versus core: competing choreographies of the crowd in the 2011 antinuclear movement

The shaking subsided; lights came back on. Where was I? Arms extended against two empty shelves, I stood Sisyphus-like, my feet buried in a mountain of books. A used copy of Graeber's *Direct Action*. Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*. Hirai's *Violence and sound*. I slowly let my arms down, looking up into the eyes of K, the owner of a small activist bookstore in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. We blinked, breathed in at the same time, then hugged, laughed, cried a little. We were alive! It was a wonder that the decrepit building still stood after the earthquake we had just experienced. A few, haphazard attempts at cleaning up later, we climbed down a staircase still trembling with aftershock.

The streets outside were overflowing with people. What just happened? Was anyone hurt? And was this how many people had always been hidden inside the non-descript office buildings around us? The streets were full of people. Bewildered, we took in the spectacle around us: hundreds standing in line for a payphone or banging on the windows of cabs suspended in congestion as far as the eye could see. Convenience store shelves picked clean. The train station, already busy with commuters on any given day, now a quivering mass of angry passengers pushing up against ticket gates and fences.

The wave: I saw it first, coming at us as through a row of televisions in an electronics store show window further down the street. Steadily creeping forward, it engulfed everything in its path across a dozen synchronized images of unfathomable destruction. Tracked from a helicopter in terrifying high definition, the unstoppable wall of mud and debris effortlessly upended whole lanes of vehicles and swallowed fleeing bodies. On our Shinjuku street corner, strangers clustered uneasily in front of the product display, petrified by the unreal

images. For a moment, it felt as if we could be part of the same picture, as if the helicopter camera would keep tracking the tsunami wave until it reached us; as if we would turn around just in time to see the wall of liquid death rush toward us and swallow us all as effortlessly as it had those tiny figures on the television screen.

But the waves never reached us. The video feed came to us from the coastline hundreds of kilometers to the northeast. Still looping in our heads as I took farewell of K and begun to walk home, the footage seemed to mark the brutal inequity of disaster. Even as, over the following weeks, the disaster event became elevated to national experience under the organizing banner of nation-wide bonds (*kizuna*), it was hard to dispense with that sense of inequity. For many, volunteer work became the recognized outlet of efforts to appease that gnawing feeling, and both K and I would soon be mobilized in a country-wide outpouring of solidarity with the tsunami-stricken communities of the Northeastern coast: K's bookshop turned into a center for coordinating emergency supplies, then a temporary shelter for disaster refugees. Soon it seemed as if every college, workplace, and neighborhood association had been drawn into some sort of relief effort for the stricken areas (Oguma 2013, 197).

On television, the grainy feed of exploding nuclear reactor vessels had soon replaced looping footage of the unrelenting wave. Official discourses competed with an emerging cast of renegade journalistic voices and conspiracy theorists on social media (see Kindstrand et al 2014). Fear of the nuclear fallout plume wriggling its path across the northeast complicated the moral calculus between center and periphery.[1] Even as a growing nuclear diaspora fleeing

[1] For more information on the disaster and its early aftermath, see Kimura 2016; Jones, Loh, and Sato 2013; Fitzgerald et al. 2012; Hirose 2011.

the fallout remained in flux across the country or trapped in temporary shelters, metropolitan denizens took to social media to negotiate the nuances of their own exposure and victimhood. Among young urbanites, taping shut windows of overpriced studios and ordering produce from remote parts of the country became common practices. In stark contrast to the gregarious nature of tsunami relief initiatives, reckoning with the complexity of unfolding nuclear catastrophe was an exercise both intensely solitary and profoundly public.

A somber mood enveloped the metropolis. As had happened after Emperor Shōwa's passing in 1989, state and corporate media rallied around a co-optation of mourning, steeped in a narrative of patriotic self-restraint (*jishuku*). Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō, who had called the disaster "divine retribution" for his constituents' consumerist vagaries, now urged those same citizens to abstain from seasonal events like concerts and cherry blossom viewing parties. Public announcements monitored the city's power consumption and warned for rolling blackouts, and the video screens ostentatiously surrounding commuter train terminals seemed even more of an eyesore now that they loomed dark above us.

I rehearse these tropes in the interest of sketching a larger, affective backdrop against which to understand the first mass protests of the postdisaster period. The radical uncertainty of unfolding nuclear catastrophe, the perceived ineptitude of government response, and the moral imperative of "self-restraint" amplified by deafening media regimes: it was these opposing forces, pulling at the fabric of public life in the metropolis, that provided the coordinates for elaborating cultural responses to the disaster experience. Critic Yabu Shiro (2012) writes of public life in the same period as stricken by a collective "suspension of thought" (*shikōteishi*) where contradictory representations of the same, disastrous condition could blur and coincide. In this context, people grasped for alternative venues of congregation and deliberation.

The next time I met K was in the throng of the crowd. On April 10, 2011 — just a month into the disaster — over fifteen thousand protesters gathered in the chic Tokyo neighborhood of Kōenji demanding an "end to all nuclear power." A seemingly endless line of punks, club kids, potheads, and academics poured out of the small park where we had gathered. Hand-painted signs parodied the government slogans and public service announcements that had saturated airwaves over the last month. One participant carried a Japanese flag, another waved a skateboard; a third held a sign simply saying: "I want to get laid."

The assembled riffraff formed loose cohorts behind flatbed trucks carrying loudspeakers, generators and turntables or entire live acts jamming for hours as the carnivalesque procession snaked its way through narrow shopping arcades and sleepy residential streets. With police officers stretched thin across the length of the procession, clowns, marionettes, and other effigies swarmed in and out of the blocks. A contagious feeling of contentment and joy spread throughout the dancing crowd.

The March 2011 nuclear catastrophe triggered spontaneous antinuclear protests across the country, of which the hoi polloi dancing through the streets of Kōenji was neither the first nor the largest (Kinoshita 2013, 306). But it was this unruly multitude that became emblematic of postdisaster protest, and its associated discourse of citizen connectivity, agency, and expressivity. A second demonstration the following month gathered similar numbers, and in June, an even larger crowd occupied the west exit of Shinjuku station—the world's largest passenger terminal—in explicit solidarity with concurrent events in Cairo's Tahrir Square (Amamiya 2011).

This series of antinuclear marches organized by a local group known as the Amateurs' Riot (*Shirōto no Ran*) is the first of two initiatives I describe in this chapter. For this first large antinuclear protest in the country since the reactor meltdowns, the official decrees of public

self-restraint in their wake also became targets of derision and ridicule. Over the previous decade, the organizers had drawn on romanticized images of popular revolt in articulating a repertoire of situationist interventions anchored in their idea of the street as the scene for a rediscovery of political life. Now, they staged the mass protest against nuclear energy as a refusal of the sombre mood which, they felt, had descended on those same streets after the disaster, stifling all attempts at political expression. In doing so, the antinuclear marches became celebrations of emotion and irreverence, using digital media and subcultural finesse to draw large crowds with no former experience of political participation, but figuring themselves outside and different from a broader populace dismissed as complacent or gullible.

Elsewhere in the metropolis, another gathering was taking place that would challenge the minoritarian antics of the Amateurs' Riot**:** the "TwitNoNukes" series of protest marches rallied under the moniker of "ordinary people" (*futsū no hitobito*) free of ideological conviction of pre-disaster political involvement. In naming themselves a portmanteau of their central demand and Twitter (the commercial social media platform on which they had found an audience for their concerns) the TwitNoNukes organizers opted to project the normative scaffolding of online social media discourse onto the spectacle of street demonstration: for them, the protest march ought to be amicably appealing to its surroundings, not a solipsistic street party antagonizing them. While neglected in existing literature, their elaboration of legitimate assembly prefigured many of the majoritarian impulses that came to underlie the weekly *Kantei-mae* gatherings a year later.

1. Crowd choreographies

This is not a chapter about social media. To the extent that I refer to online discourse, I am not particularly concerned with evaluating the efficacy of social media platforms as organizational tools — that is, the relation between metrics of status, reach or influence on social media ("the tweets") on one hand, and of successful physical mobilization ("the streets") on the other. Neither do I confront the mechanics of online self-presentation and branding (Marwick 2015), or the epistemological implications of recursive algorithms rendering our newsfeeds, timelines, or video playlists in ever more constrained feedback loops (Striphas 2015, Bucher 2018). Instead, I point to the intrinsic role of media technologies in modulating representations and expectations surrounding contemporary mass protest. Where the "tweets" meet the "streets" is *where technologies of representation give shape to the way that people assemble physically.* In developing this approach, I lean on Gerbaudo's notion of a "choreography of assembly," conceived as "a process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualized constituency" (2012, 5).

Gerbaudo follows Gramsci in arguing that there is no such thing as purely spontaneous participation. In the absence of a formal organization structure, collective action is always shaped by the assumptions and representations that "sets the stage" for its physical appearance (21). This approach points our attention to the representational technologies and practices that mediate the very conditions for physical assembly. Rather than praising spontaneity, it foregrounds the work of organizers who

> just like conventional choreographers in the field of dance […] are for the most part invisible on the stage itself [but] whose scene-setting and scripting work has been

> decisive in bringing a degree of coherence to people's spontaneous and creative participation (13).

What is lacking in Gerbaudo's notion of choreography is already implied in the theatrical character of the metaphor: a public audience. In shaping a mediated space of protest, the choreographer is concerned as much with conjuring an audience as with the performing cast. In fact, it can be said that inscribing the distinction and relation between performer and spectator is an inherent part of any choreography of assembly.

In this chapter, I compare two parallel elaborations of legitimate protest in terms of their respective concern with the skeptical gaze of an external spectator. Both wrestled with the idea of support from "the public" as a central premise of the modern protest repertoire (cf. Della Porta 2006, 167; Graeber 2009, 432). They also shared assumptions and motivations emblematic of postdisaster protest, in that they wanted to be seen as distant from what they saw as the negative legacies of the Left, avoiding the boons of the progressive political apparatus and its logistical infrastructure in favor of grassroots mobilization of individual participants using digital media. The orthodoxies of both Leftist radicals and the existing antinuclear movement were at best parodical counterpoints to their own elaborations of legitimate mass assembly that might not merely appeal to, but speak for a broader public. Meanwhile, their approaches to a choreography of assembly could not have been more different. Where one staged public protest as a solipsistic project of self-discovery and expression aimed at transcending the fear and uncertainty of unfolding nuclear catastrophe, the other attempted to anticipate and make amicable the encounter with a skeptical public. In the early days of the postdisaster, the former was exalted as a symbol of a new era of political participation, while the latter came to think of itself as antithesis to the other in the elaboration of a populist legitimacy, capable not just of speaking in the name of "the people"

but of physically embodying its vital energies. In different ways, the initiatives described in this chapter foreshadow central themes of populist legitimacy that would confront the *Kantei-mae* crowd**.** Their negotiation with the mimetic archive of mass protest would go on to provide important correctives to the myth of popular representation that the *Kantei-mae* crowd spun around itself, and concrete lessons to the organizers of the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes that would form a year later.

2. The minoritarian mores of the Amateur Riot

The April 10, 2011, demonstration was the brainchild of a local activist group known as the Amateurs' Riot, and their informal leader, Matsumoto Hajime. As a college student, Matsumoto and his "Society for preserving the squalor of Hōsei [University]" (*hōsei no binbōkusasa o mamoru kai*) had pestered the university administration, pulling off pranks and potlucks on campus (Cassegard 2013, 218; Amamiya 2007). He had spent a few months in jail for interrupting a faculty event with a fire extinguisher (Matsumoto 2008, 95).

Since 2005, Matsumoto had settled down with his accomplices in the hip Tokyo neighborhood of Kōenji, setting up a handful of recycle shops, bars and other pseudo-commercial enterprises, while also hosting a series of protest marches around the same neighborhood and a range of different, often facetious, slogans. One such rally simply demanded "my [impounded] bicycle back;" another called for "free rent" (Matsumoto 2008, 136). When Matsumoto applied for a demonstration permit for a mere three people, hundreds of participants turned up for an impromptu block party, provoking an emergency police response. For the next rally, welcomed by hundreds of riot police officers, only Matsumoto and two of his friends showed up. In this way, the Amateurs' Riot gathered fame and

admiration for situationist tactics that played with the conventions of public protest and police response.

The group's antinuclear activities attracted unprecedented numbers of people for obvious reason: the fear and uncertainty of unfolding nuclear disaster dominating public discourse but struggling to find an outlet in everyday life. Yet in some ways the catastrophe was more of a convenient excuse. Weeks before the disaster, Matsumoto had begun to solicit ideas for yet another rally in the neighborhood and even applied for permits with the police (Toyama 2017, 576). Although he liked to joke about being "irradiated" (*hibaku*) on a motorcycle ride past another leaky reactor years earlier, neither Matsumoto nor the group's other members had been particularly interested in the issue.

Promoting the April rally from a local bar, Matsumoto (2011a) kept things purposefully vague: "I've had enough! So, to put an end to this dangerous [situation] as soon as possible, we've decided to make a little bit of noise! […] It's going to be a blast!" While his announcement gestured to the "dangers" of the reactor meltdowns in the northeast, his call to action seemed more concerned with a crisis taking place on the streets of Tokyo. Facetiously predicting a turnout of 300,000, he urged readers to "smash this horrible mood of self-restraint and head into the streets" (Matsumoto 2011b, cited in Brown 2018, 40). The tongue-in-cheek certainty of the proposal seemed a perfect intervention in a moment of radical uncertainty: the precise connection between nuclear catastrophe and the moral protocol of urban life was left undefined, but Matsumoto nevertheless singled out of a certain "public feeling" as an obstacle to collective self-expression, and simultaneously something that could be acted upon and ultimately "smashed."

In Matsumoto's choreography of assembly, the crowd understood the legitimacy of assembly through its capacity to intervene in the generalized affective landscape of "self-restraint" by

way of spontaneous "self-expression." Matsumoto gave little credit to the group's established networks and vast social capital. "It wasn't because our group tried to recruit many people" that so many came out to their first march, he remarked in a later interview. "Rather, it was because everyone was so angry that word got around on its own" (cited in Manabe 2013). Higuchi, another Amateurs' Riot organizer, had a similar explanation for the large turnout: "Why did so many people turn up to the demonstration? They wanted to express themselves, that's why."

Organizers ought to provide space for such activities without interfering in them. Futatsugi Shin, a music critic and central figure in the Amateurs' Riot, argued that the ultimate goal was "an atmosphere where people feel that they can say what they want." It mattered little that the group proposed no concrete demands. Futatsugi gestured to still-unfolding events in Egypt to argue that "among the masses participating in the Egyptian revolution [of 2011], nobody had a clear conception of what governance would look like after the overthrow of President Mubarak. [Political] change starts out simply with those angry voices saying 'enough'" (Futatsugi 2011, 5). This way, their invitation to "smash" the stifling mood of the postdisaster metropolis gestured toward a collective rediscovery of self-expression, and by extension, of political life itself—not as a univocal mass, but as a multitude of individuals irreducible to a single stance.

1.1. Staging self-expression

Nobody believed Matsumoto's facetious forecast of 300,000, least of all himself — he had in fact applied for a demonstration permit for a mere five hundred (Hirano et al 2015). But on April 10, volunteers incredulously counted fifteen thousand participants. The influx of new and unexperienced protesters, the exuberant energy of the crowd, and the apparent laxity of

police response afforded the Amateurs' Riot a renewed sense of purpose. Soon, plans were drawn up for a second rally in May: this time in Shibuya, a major commercial district and commuter terminal southwest on the metropolitan ring line. I soon found myself joining K and the other members for a planning meeting at one of the Amateurs' Riot community spaces.

The room was warm and humid, dimly lit and filled with mostly male figures sitting or standing on every available object. Conversation flowed as effortlessly as the cheap drinks, without decorum or protocol. The tone was that of a consensual fraternity where neither the implicit hierarchy of the group nor details of the shared endeavor need to be made unnecessarily explicit. After flippantly settling the time and date of the second march in speakerphone consultation with a fortune teller, Matsumoto said to the room in a more serious tone: "I don't think we can call this a success if [the media] report it as just another rally (…) It has to look like it's getting bigger and bigger." The question was not whether protest would affect disaster response or energy policy, but what could be wagered and won in the interplay between protesters, police and media on the city's streets.

There was one notorious absence in the protest planning protocol. As the drinks kept flowing, the organizers seemed too concerned choreographing the crowd to care much about what bystanders might make of the spectacle. The notion of an audience only became acute when staving off negative associations with the rigor and uniformity of "serious" activism. Unlike a uniform mass of committed activists, the multitude must and could not be reduced to a single voice or message. Futatsugi wanted the march to appear as an aggregate of individuals "*showing their individuality* while [also] saying, 'we're against nuclear power!'" To outside onlookers, the sound demonstration would appear as what Futatsugi called a "chaotic amalgamation" (cited in Manabe 2013) irreducible to a single message.

In choreographical terms, the Amateurs' Riot organizers staged this imagined multiplicity by dividing the demonstration into a number of autonomous "blocs," separated by stylistic taste and subcultural affinity. Later, Higuchi told me that "if we all tried to do one big demonstration together, we'd just end up fighting." But he added in a more serious tone:

> When we put the demonstration together, we're extremely careful in order not to make something like a center. It is exactly because we're in something that is ultimately centralized that we split up in different blocs.

On April 10, the bill of fare included sound trucks headed by dancehall DJ Rankin' Taxi, the rapper Rumi, and several punk and rock bands; between them marched a host of drummers and a *chindon* brass band. In preparation for the May march, the Amateurs' Riot again coordinated different subcultural clusters in charge of a corresponding bloc of the parade. The sound demonstration represented an alternative genealogy of protest, different from and dismissive of the conventions of postwar protest. The repertoire took shape during the 2003 protests against the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (Gonoi 2012, 155; McKnight & Hayashi 2008). At the time, the formula was already conceived as a reaction against the felt complacency of the larger anti-war movement. Political scientist Gonoï Ikuo frames the sound demonstration as a response to the stigma of public protest: an explicit attempt to assuage public antipathy by turning the conventional street march into a "festival" of casual participation (2012, 155). Doubtlessly many of the organizers were attracted by the idea of eroding distinctions between protester and bystander, between performance and audience. At the same time, the sound demonstration contained another, conflicting proposal. Rather than addressing a rational public with pragmatic demands, the Amateurs' Riot "typically seem[ed] to aim more at maximising the sense of freedom on the street" for participants

(Ibid., 105). For anthropologist Oda Masanori, the sound demonstration was an adventure, a risky gambit that "turned the harmless 'amusement park' of Tokyo into a 'wilderness'" of risk and opportunity for its dancing participants (2005, 121; cited in Cassegård 2013, 69). As critic Yabu Shiro wrote on the subject, "what matters is not to try to achieve some result through the demonstration (…) since dancing in the street is what you really want" (2003, cited in Cassegård 2013, 102). From this perspective,

> there is no need to seek understanding from people around you if the action is endowed with meaning for you yourself (…) Public 'protest' is, paradoxical as it may sound, not voice, not an attempt to get across a message or to engage in dialogue, but a form of withdrawal from public communication (Ibid., 102).

By foregrounding the phenomenology of participation, and downplaying the relation to an external audience, it tempted participants to dispense with the entire premise of a protest as means to an end achievable gaining public support.

1.2. Crackdown

It would not be long before the antinuclear crowd had to confront the perils of Oda's "wilderness" on the streets of Tokyo. On May 7, the day of the second rally, another huge crowd had gathered in anticipation of a street party as hot as last month's. I ran into K on the sidewalk, selling balloons with stamped antinuclear motifs. Amidst a warm spring drizzle, uniformed officers surrounded the blocs of the procession, released them into the streets one by one, and herded them along the negotiated route. Sometimes moving forward, sometimes waiting for green lights or responding to marching orders echoed up or down the police chain

of command, each bloc harbored a speaker truck trailed by a dense crowd of exuberant protesters singing, shouting, dancing, and holding signs, balloons, umbrellas, or phones. The standoff between protesters and police escalated quickly. The first few blocks had not gotten far when police lines closed in further, successively enclosing each block and driving a wedge between sound truck and crowd. "As soon as we start to warm up they push us back. Why can't I walk close to the band I want to watch," complained one protester. "These heavy-handed cops won't let us enjoy the show like back in Kōenji" (Fukuyama 2011). Yuki, a young female organizer would be one of the arrested on May 7. She had been coralling the dancing crowd in front of one of the sound trucks as it made its way through the protest route. Like many others, she worked out the escalating confrontation in real-time consultation not with police officers, but with fellow protesters on social media. Her messages attest to a growing sense of apprehension:

> We're getting split up. Do we have to comply with this? Anyone know what the law says? Why are the police getting in front of us? Are they really allowed to? I asked and they said they didn't know… how can you be doing your job then? (@ysakaki 2011).

The Riot's choreographic commitment to staging self-expression was not enough to placate the police: the next time Yuki posted an update, it was from the police station:

> They pushed me down on the ground and arrested me for obstruction of public duty (*gyōmu shikkō bōgai*). My piercing came off and my favorite shirt got torn. When we got [here] I realized how many plain-clothes officers there had been around us. Did they instigate this? They made me write an affidavit saying that it's my fault, or they wouldn't let me go. I'm so sorry (@ysakaki 2011b).

Yuki's remorse for failing the other organizers of the Amateurs' Riot was tempered by ambivalence and alienation from the protest crowd, betrayed by an unexpected televisual metaphor: "I screamed, 'help! Somebody, please help!' But everyone just stared back at me," she later wrote. "It was as if I was looking at them from within a [television] cathode-ray tube (*Braun-kan no naka kara*)" (@ysakaki 2011).

As Yuki was apprehended, she turned back toward her fellow protesters, only to realize that they had turned into spectators; bodies that moments before had resonated with hers in the effervescent crowd revealed themselves as mere onlookers — they may just as well have been watching her through an impassive newscast of "extremists" being carted off to jail. Up until that point, the effervescent crowd had understood itself against an audience of bystanders who stood in for the ambivalence and apathy of the postdisaster moment. Now, as it descended into disarray, that distinction between audience and performer was thrown into doubt.

Prisoner support was an overwhelming responsibility for the weak ties of a movement preoccupied with individual agency and expression. According to Japanese law, suspects can be held for a maximum twenty-three days without having charges pressed against them. They can be interrogated, intimidated to provide a confession or further incriminating evidence and rearrested; if charged with a felony, they can be held for much longer. Soon, search warrants would be issued for unspecified "evidence" of radicalism. The homes of the nabbed protesters would be raided, further escalating the standoff by slotting them as insurrectionist enemies of the state. Such risks might be acceptable to committed activists like Futatsugi, who joyfully recounted his two nights behind bars in print (Futatsugi 2011). His experience could be reconciled not only with an irreverent, self-referential publicist career, but with the reputation of avant-garde rabble-rousing that the Amateurs' Riot already enjoyed. But as K

lamented, for most people with a day job, pets or rent to pay, "twenty-three days is enough to destroy a life." The arrests put significant strain on more vulnerable protesters, and on a broader premise of participation that located the legitimacy of its own transgressions in a spontaneous break with an oppressive affective regime. Here, Yuki's account exemplifies the emotional arc traversed by the Amateurs' Riot crowd: from mimetic exuberance defined in contradistinction to a silent majority, neither likely nor seriously expected to be compelled by the invitation to "smash" the moral imperative of postdisaster self-restraint, to a shattered sense of belonging.

Later that evening, we gathered outside the police station alongside several dozen organizers and protesters to "embolden" (*gekirei*) the arrested with music and speeches, ambivalently invoking a tradition from the student movements of the sixties (Steinhoff 1999).[2] The large crowd had dispersed, but the mood was still one of agitated confusion. K had switched out his balloon bag for literature from a prisoner support group. "The police claim that [the arrested] were caught *in flagrante delicto*," a newly formed prisoner relief committee argued, "but the real aim of the arrests can only be to intimidate psychologically." Anthropologist Oda Masanori also lampooned the police in a satirical instruction video for new cadets, but also vowed to release more damning material "unless our prisoners are immediately

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[2] After the mass arrests of student activists in 1968-69, the nonpartisan Relief Contact Center (kyūen renraku sentā) was founded in order to safeguard the rights of those arrested who did not already belong to one of the larger political sects. The center, which remains active today, encourages arrestees to practice complete silence. They also staff a twenty-four hour hotline, the mnemonic shorthand of which has been ritually memorized by generations of political activists to this day. The regularization of these support networks in the 1980s and their confrontation with the criminal justice system provoked escalating criminal charges but also new forms of long-term political involvement and a strengthening of collective identity (Zwerman & Steinhoff 2012, 72).

released." This was confrontative language of righteous indignation, a far cry from the playful rhetoric of the Amateurs' Riot and the casual strata attracted by the marches. In spite of their playful disavowal of left-wing radicalism, the organizers ironically found themselves forced to rely on knowledge and support networks accrued in that very context — and challenged to disavow their repertoire of playful police provocations in favor of bare-faced antagonism.

From here on, the Amateurs' Riot would fade into the margins of an emergent majoritarian moment.[3] Over the next several months, the group continued to host sound demonstrations across the city, attracting thousands of participants. But as the police response harshened, the arrests of protesters also mounted: at the September 11 rally, police made off with another twelve arrested — a large enough number to bring remaining organizers to their knees. The arrests had launched the spectacular outburst of public feeling choreographed by the Amateurs' Riot on a collision course with the same sticky tropes of radicalism that they had sought to avoid. Favorable coverage in mainstream and alternative media now competed with attempts to delegitimize the antinuclear rallies as an unruly mob, a front for militant leftists, or both. Local Diet representative, Ishihara Nobuteru (son of metropolitan governor Shintarō) exemplified this position by maligning the Amateurs' Riot both as "mass hysteria" — an "anarchic" crowd with neither intention nor ability to think seriously about alternative energy futures — *and* as mere façades for leftist radicals (Kinoshita 2011).

[3] After a brief, crowd-funded excursion to the Occupy Wall Street encampment, which began that same month in New York City's Zuccotti Park, they would renew their commitment to international exchange with autonomist groups across East Asia.

By and large, Matsumoto Hajime and his entourage had lost interest in the antinuclear cause. Perhaps Matsumoto had tired not only of escalating police repression, but of the preoccupation with popular representation that had come to characterize the broader movement (Toyama 2017, 163). In a conversation with *Kantei-mae* organizers years later, he talked about the antinuclear marches of 2011 "his single greatest mistake." The group had treasured what he called the "guerilla" element of their activities. Unconcerned with hegemony, they were content to stir up something "outrageous" (*tondemonai*) from the sidelines to see what happened. But after the disaster, "we tried to do the same thing, but instead we became the main attraction. It was paralyzing" (Hirano et al 2015). In the words of writer Nakagawa Fumito,

> Matsumoto's misfortune was that through the anti-nuclear rallies they became seen as part of the Left (*sayoku to omowarechatta*). They were really just trying to cause trouble, but as soon as the security police slotted them as Leftists (*sayoku nintei*) they started to get arrested one after another" (Ibid.).

In this context, a group of public intellectuals made a bid to rescue the boisterous crowd of the Amateurs' Riot from such negative associations and resuscitate it as a symbol of postdisaster political awakening and agency.

1.3. Redeeming the rabble

Police response to the Amateurs' Riot rallies harshened in the fall of 2011. At the September 11 demonstration, police made off with another twelve arrested — a large enough number to bring remaining organizers to their knees. As the march concluded in front of the Shinjuku train terminal, the crowd still flocked uneasily around one of the speaker trucks. Relieving a

flustered organizer of their microphone, an elderly man climbed onto the roof of the vehicle. "Never gave a speech in a place like this," he mumbled. Few of the younger protesters gathered knew or recognized him on top of the truck, but philosopher Karatani Kōjin had gained a large domestic audience and a wide secondary readership through translations (e.g., Karatani 2014) that influenced Western thinkers like Slavoj Žižek. With the agitated crowd surrounding him on all sides, he sought to reassure it by offering a novel interpretation of its place and significance in Japanese society.

Karatani began with a counterintuitive statement: "Some people say that demonstrating changes nothing. But by us demonstrating, Japan becomes *a society that demonstrates* (sic)". As the sun set on the Amateurs' Riot and the crowd they had summoned, Karatani put words to an instrumentality entirely different from their proposed "smashing" of an oppressive public mood — a proposal which in any case had started to ring hollow. He insisted that the antinuclear crowd was on the cusp of enunciating a much larger and more stable subject position: that of "the people" itself. At stake was a question of national character which thus far had hardly concerned the protest organizers. They seemed as puzzled by Karatani's circuitous logic as the assembled crowd, but his proposal resonated with national media audiences eager to include the Amateurs' Riot into a more capacious context of left-liberal opposition.

Karatani's speech signaled the entrance of a new nomenklatura speaking on behalf of the protest crowd. Soon Karatani was joined by Derridean philosopher Ukai Satoshi and Oguma Eiji, an authority in the sociology of social movements, in drafting a statement based on Karatani's rehabilitation of the protest crowd. Infatuated with the tautology of "a society in which people demonstrate," autonomist critic Hirai Gen soon intervened in the drafting process, where discussions had stalled around the wording of Karatani's elusive national

subject. Writer-activist Amamiya Karin also joined the lineup, and I was roped in myself, first to translate the statement and later to provide interpretation to an incredulous audience of overseas journalists during a press conference at Tokyo's Foreign Correspondents' Press Club.

There were no mohawks, clowns or rappers in sight amidst the satin curtains and white tablecloths of the Press Club. K was not present to peddle his books or balloons, nor were the arrested protesters. As we lined up behind a wide table, the task of our ragtag group was to complete Karatani's undertaking: using the formal language of democratic legitimacy vested in rights-bearing subjects in order to reconcile the self-absorbed crowd summoned by the Amateurs' Riot with the a larger, more elusive subject position. As Karatani and Hirai spoke, neither thinker invoked the tradition of antinuclear struggle, nor the more rapturous repertoires of recent social movements. They were not concerned with the vulgar details of policy. Instead, Karatani and Hirai looked to the postwar constitution as the ultimate source of legitimacy, and an exegetical reading of its orthodoxy as the proper contribution of an organic intellectual at the helm of a national awakening.

Later refining his argument in the brilliant *Constitutional Unconscious* (2016), Karatani grounded his draft in a reading of article 21 of the Japanese postwar constitution (guaranteeing the freedom of speech and assembly), seizing on the English "original" draft of the constitution written by the US Supreme Commander's staff and its use of the word "assembly" (2012, 94; quoted in Brown 2018, 115). Karatani's palimpsestic reading insisted that even the boisterous sound demonstration, as a "moving assembly" was a constitutionally protected, and therefore legitimate exercise of free expression. Hirai, on the other hand, was less concerned with the crowd, and more with the constitutional subject carrying such protections. He insisted that the constitutional "the people" be augmented with its English

equivalent in parentheses, hoping that "the reciprocal translations of *kokumin* and people would continue to reverberate [in accordance with the] destiny shouldered by this constitution since its conception" (Hirai 2012, 169-70). The stakes of the statement amounted not to a specific demand, but to the political subjectivity of Japanese people as such, its historically constituted nature, and the possibility of transcending it.

Amamiya was convinced that the press conference had been the decisive moment when "the support of such distinguished people made the antinuclear demonstrations a 'serious matter'" (*ōgoto*). But for all intents and purposes, it did more to shift focus away from antinuclear . In the statement, Karatani emphasized that

> This is not just about opposing nuclear power, but more importantly about each individual expressing themselves through the demonstration. In that sense, the Japanese are finally beginning to express their will (*ishihyōji wo hajimeta*).

Had the Amateurs' Riot merely kicked in the door to a broader, national awakening? In the aftermath of the arrests, they were given the dubious honor of "smashing" through the cultural embargo on self-expression — only to find themselves irrelevant on the other end. Ironically, the press conference thus signaled the sortie of the boisterous multitude as a locus of legitimacy. In its place stood the solemn, sovereign citizen, and behind it an elusive national subject. A mere six months after the disaster, "the people" as event had begun to replace it as the definitive, defining moment, with the antinuclear issue giving way to a larger, more elusive project of elaborating popular sovereignty.

The intellectualist effort to rehabilitate the crowd as an instantiation of "the people" brought little attention to the protests themselves, and momentum fizzled out as charges for the twelve arrestees were dropped. Attempts to publicize the intergenerational encounter between

Karatani Kōjin and Matsumoto Hajime resulted in stilted situations where Matsumoto confessed to have given up on Karatani's doctrinaire prose of Karatani's manifesto after the first two pages (Matsumoto et al 2016). Both Karatani and Oguma Eiji, on the other hand, would emerge from the "joint statement" as stakeholders of an emerging mythos of civil participation feeding directly into the performative claims of the *Kantei-mae* assembly a few months later.

3. The majoritarian moves of the "Twitter demonstrations"

Let me now turn to another demonstration initiative, and the competing notion of legitimate protest they elaborated on the same streets as the Amateurs' Riot. The TwitNoNukes collective and their "Twitter demonstrations" (*tsuittā demo*) were to become another staple of the metropolitan protest ecology, taking shape in parallel, and response, to the efforts I have introduced so far. First gathering on April 30, 2011, and then monthly for the next year, TwitNoNukes rallies attracted about a thousand participants: a much smaller crowd than that summoned by the Amateurs' Riot. They would target the same nuclei of youth consumer culture where the former had first succumbed to police repression and the sticky associations of radicalism. But in what Futatsugi of the Amateurs' Riot (2012, 144) called a formula "antithetical to [their own] demonstrations," the TwitNoNukes marches were premised not on a break with an oppressive "public feeling," but on staging an amicable encounter with a skeptical audience by blending into an urban imagescape appealing to the consumer subject. Their choreography of assembly eschewed the idea of spontaneous expression as intervention, and instead invoked the protocological constraints of online public discourse in their elaboration of legitimacy.

“Would you hypothetically be interested in recruiting people on Twitter for an antinuclear demonstration somewhere around Shibuya? If so, please retweet.” Much like the rallies of the Amateurs’ Riot, the campaign began with a request on social media. The author was 26-year-old Hirano Taichi, a healthcare worker who had recently moved from Osaka to Tokyo. “I had no money, and almost no friends,” Hirano later recalled. “Seeing the worsening condition of the nuclear reactors on the news and Twitter I thought I’d give up and go back to my parents’. But this was the first time I had a place of my own, and I didn’t want to give up that life so easily.” Reeling from the initial shock, solitude, and profound uncertainty of the postdisaster, activism seemed as good an avenue as any to build something in the ruins of the present.

2.1. Account-able activism

Hirano’s call to action resonated with an audience of creative professionals who found the assumptions and aesthetics of protest an obstacle, not a vehicle, to public attention and political reform. The group lacked resources: they had no equivalent to the local networks which the Amateurs’ Riot had mobilized toward a new purpose earlier that month. Instead, TwitNoNukes organizers wielded immense social capital in the context of their respective readerships. The core members were already tastemakers with carefully cultivated online audiences: Hirano spoke critically and comparatively about the rights of gay and queer communities in the metropolis. Some, like writer and editor Noma Yasumichi, acted as curators of overseas art or music genres. Others, like the pseudonymous critic Banchō, as gatekeepers of club cultures or other subcultural consumer strata. They shared a certain entrepreneurial expertise I sometimes envied: the self-surveillance and restraint involved in projecting and pruning a consistently self-branded online persona, and the strategical sense to

deploy cultural capital in mobilizing their audiences around emergent issues (cf. Marwick 2013, 115). In this context, the portmanteau of a single demand (abolishing nuclear energy) and the Twitter platform comfortably posited as the building block of public discourse the account-able persona of a social media profile. They held up the commercial social media platform uncritically, as more than a novel technological implementation of public discourse: to them, it was a symbol and safeguard of the very possibility of public expression.

Looking for organizational hints in the protocols of digital communication is a common feature of contemporary social movements (Castells 2010 [1997], 427). Alterglobalization activists of the early aughts already invoked the internet as a model for their organizational structure:

> We organized ourselves as nodes, using the nomenclature of the internet (…) The nodes were the spaces where information was produced and made public, the physical embodiment of the Internet, what we might call affinity groups today (Juris 2008, 69).

A decade later, Occupy Wall Street activists cultivated an affinity to the metaphorical apparatus of the semantic web, while the Spanish *Indignados* movement has been described as transferring to street protest practices developed in online discourse (Tremayne 2014; DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun 2012; Conover et al. 2013; Penney and Dadas 2014; Gerbaudo 2013, 95). In a horizontalist gesture typical of such "cultural logics of networking" (Juris 2008), TwitNoNukes rallies would be held not by an organization, but an acephalous collective of "individuals gathering on Twitter." But what set the group apart was the eagerness with which they reached for the individualist interfaces of social media as an amulet for warding off associations with collectivism and centralized political organization. They invoked the Twitter brand to signal both what they were — accountable individuals

committed to some diffuse and digitally mediated conception of public discourse — and what they were not: over-committed activists of some "radical" persuasion or the other. As far as the group was concerned, they had no pre-disaster history, no stakes in other causes, and most certainly no ulterior motives. In fact, there was no group at all — merely mutually recognized individuals. As much was evidenced by their thriving amidst the protocological constraints of commercial social media.

2.2. A majoritarian manual

In many ways a typical protester, Hirano took to the protest crowd not out of conviction, but as an avenue for soul-searching. He found himself attending his first rally ever in late March 2011: a monthly antinuclear march through Tokyo's Ginza district, attended for years by the same one or two dozen aging participants. This time more than a thousand people had joined the rally, which filled up the whole street. The organizers were exuberant — Hirano not so much. As the marching and chanting went on, he felt unable to submit to the energies of the unusually large assembly: "it was frightening to discover that opposing something in a loud voice could be this difficult," he reminisced. He marched silently and self-consciously, until "right at the end of the march, (when) I shouted 'stop nuclear energy (*genpatsu hantai*)' three times. It was my first chant (*Sprechchor*) ever."

Hirano's demonstration debut was not an awakening, so much as a realization that the conventions and assumptions of "old school" activism had little traction with the postdisaster moment. With meek choruses and scattered percussion, the Ginza march carried on like it always had, despite a hundred-fold increase in turnout — and even with the onslaught of new participants, most people were still standing idly by, or averting their eyes. Were not these aging activists as much a party to the status quo as the elusive agents of the "nuclear village?"

Were these not the same signs and strategies that had condemned antinuclear protest to irrelevance for extension, and by extension, allowed the 2011 catastrophe to occur?

As he pondered these questions, Hirano again found himself alone in the crowd. At the April 10 Amateurs' Riot protest, the young nurse was among the ten thousand protesters dancing, singing and chanting amidst sound trucks and bullhorns unleashing a cacophony of chaotic noise. This was different, and it was not just about volume: the slogans were catchy, the crowd younger, the cheerful atmosphere of the assembly contagious. But from Hirano's point of view, the crowd's exuberance came at the cost of alienating outside spectators. He could not help but feel "pierced by the cold stares of pedestrians" on the sidewalks around them. Did other protesters not feel the same? Troubled by the disconnect between crowd and audience, Hirano later expressed remorse over his participation in such a "self-indulgent (*omoi omoi*) celebration of reprieve from the depressive mood of the post-disaster" (Hirano 2018).

Hirano's demonstration debut betrayed a reluctance, if not resentment for the associative baggage of the antinuclear crowd, both in its past and in its current, multitudinous guises. If his first demonstration experience served to embody the "old," inherently inefficacious and illegitimate, that TwitNoNukes would position themselves against, the Amateurs' Riot stood in for an equally inadequate present. Why, then, did the group not focus on tweets over streets in the first place? Should the gaggle of pseudo-celebrities and influencers not have stayed on their devices, coordinating their online audiences toward less compromised arenas of political participation? On a fundamental level, the organizers remained convinced that the protest crowd — more specifically, its appearance and relation to bystanders — was too important to leave up to others. While Hirano kept encouraging his online audience to attend all manner of antinuclear rallies "even if you dislike the Leftist 'groove'" (*sayoku no nori*

nigate), he had started to think that only a separate initiative could remold the relationship between protest crowd and its surroundings. While both the past and the present of protest culture could only function as cautionary tales for the group, they were beginning to formulate a new choreography of assembly. From here on, their efforts would increasingly be directed more toward the choreographical premise of legitimate assembly than the issue around which they rallied.

By the end of 2011, the group felt confident enough to share their vision of legitimate protest in a "manual" (*Let's go to the demonstration!*, published commercially in December 2011). Here, the group translated their six months of organizing experience into a formula for "lowering the hurdle" of protest. The reader is addressed as if about to physically attend a protest march, and walked through a step-by-step process of preparation: planning her trip, making a cardboard sign, etc, before finally joining the crowd. Then, the process starts over but from an organizing perspective.

The TwitNoNukes demonstration manual barely mentions nuclear energy at all. All reference to specific issues has been carefully removed, conventional protest culture jargon replaced with harmless euphemisms: protesters are depicted as adorable animals holding signs saying "please," "no," "stop" or occasionally (in English), "justice!" The city is portrayed as a board game-like labyrinth of endless opportunity for persuasion, populated by amicable individuals engaged in everyday activities like working, shopping, or pushing baby strollers, yet open to influence and distraction.

Much like Hirano's initial invitation, the manual invites suspicion of the conventional protest repertoire: protests are not fun. Marches are long and exhausting. Chants are embarrassing. Signs can be ugly and alienating if not given proper attention. Neither alternative nor improvement is on offer here: while "chants (*Sprechchor*) may be awkward for the

beginner," the manual claims, "they are just as important as carrying a sign" (2011, 20-21). In short, the repertoire of public protest can be an inconvenience and an embarrassment, but it is necessary. And because you, the protester, is an individual with a busy schedule and not a contrarian or a fanatic, it needs to be effective.

The group's majoritarian manual not only rehearses a budding performative commitment to the figure of "ordinary people" reluctantly taking a stand — a commitment that would reemerge in the *Kantei-mae* crowd a year later (see chapter 3). Tethered to that figure of legitimacy was TwitNoNukes' increasing emphasis on the importance of physical appearance and attraction. As a cartoon animal declares in their demonstration manual: "what's most important is to show up properly fashionable (*chanto oshare wo shite iku*)! Don't forget that *a demonstration is to appear in front of other people*" (Ibid., my emphasis). In this elaboration, physical appearance becomes a heuristic of political legitimacy, which can only be gauged through an imagined external gaze. As TwitNoNukes organizes Daraku told me, "people criticize our [antinuclear] movement as 'lookism' but that's all bullshit. Looking good means having the power to appeal to public opinion."

2.3. The in crowd

Celebratory coverage by mainstream media offered the TwitNoNukes organizers an opportunity to further elaborate their notion of legitimate protest in terms of an external gaze. The Asahi Shimbun, for example, praised the group's "designer placards" and its calls to "show up looking sharp" (o*share shite ikanakya*) as the call sign of younger generations. Turning to TwitNoNukes member and political scientist Takahashi Wakagi, the Asahi reporter asked if for this postdisaster generation of activism, "style" is "strategy"? Takahashi responded in terms of the encounter with a ambivalent audience:

> People with no interest in politics rest their eyes not on the message but on style (…) Do you appear to them as traditional leftists, *or as cool contemporaries*? (*kyūraitekina sayoku to utsuru no ka? dōjidai no kūru na hitotachi no undō to utsuru no ka?*) (Takahashi 2015)

For Takahashi, it is up to the normative sensibilities of the beholder to distinguish between (*mikiwameru*) outmoded doctrinaires and their "cool" contemporaries. The legitimacy of public assembly hinges on the moment of "appearing" in front of such a skeptical spectator, a moment that organizers must anticipate and actively plan for. Here, the concern with physical appearance is put forth as a symmetrical opposition between old and new, ugly and attractive, and illegitimate and legitimate appeals to a public.

In their obsession with external appearance, the group reminded me of the "antinuclear new wave" of the late eighties. The Chernobyl disaster brought a new wave of antinuclear sentiment to new and younger audiences, and public demonstrations attracted turnout in the tens of thousands (Suga 2012, 227). Talking points against nuclear power travelled mimetically across different social strata, a trendy commitment for the subculturally savvy, encouraged by rockstars and fashion magazine editorials. Popular appeal invited new metrics of influence and legitimacy. One example was writer Hirose Takashi, who toured around the country reprimanding the audiences of his massively popular antinuclear "talk shows:"

> So you signed a petition, good for you. You want to take the next step. I'm telling you to make sure you look sharp (*kimi jishin wo motto kakkō yoku miseru*) first. Appearance can make an impact, no? *Consider it part of the struggle"* (1987, cited in Yamamoto 2015, 195. My emphasis).

Singer and novelist Nosaka Akiyuki, one of many celebrities who had also jumped on the bandwagon, also loved to lambast the antinuclear crowd. For Nosaka, the late eightes antinuclear crowd was nothing more than a bunch of "pale guys that look like they've masturbated too much nitpicking about 'rights' or 'discrimination.'" The only hope was that "people who wear [designer brands like] Issey Miyake or Kenzo (…) start to speak up against nuclear energy" (Ibid.). For influential spokespeople like Nosaka and Hirose, the antinuclear movement could only achieve its goals if it managed to see itself from the viewpoint of "ordinary people."

If the "antinuclear new wave" of the late eighties ironically died away as one consumer trend among others (Ōtsuka 1988), its anxiety over external appearance returned strikingly intact twenty-five years later. In their anxiety over personal style, TwitNoNukes echoed the pleas of Hirose to consider appearance "part of the struggle," and Nosaka's desire for fashionistas wearing "Issey Miyake or Kenzo" to join the fray. For Nosaka, as for the anthropomorphic animals in TwitNoNukes' protest manual, embracing consumerist aesthetics was not a masquerade or an exercise in bad faith; it was as much a reminder of who "we" ought to be, as of who did not belong. In addressing adherents of the antinuclear movement itself, urging them to scrutinize themselves from the perspective of an imagined external gaze, they simultaneously provided a heuristic for identifying interlopers whose mere presence endangered the legitimacy of the assembly.

I must admit that something unsettled me about the uniformity of these emergent expectations, and how rapidly they were coalescing into a new set of choreographical commitments that looked past the urgency of nuclear catastrophe to address the legitimacy of public protest itself, awkwardly generalized as the "demonstration" that needed to be rescued from its own practitioners. While trudging along to a harsh trap beat at one of the group's

protest marches, I self-consciously asked one organizer how to single out undesirable elements. She told me to look at participants' shoes: anything old or dirty was a sign that the bearer was out of touch with the political present. The self-righteousness of the dissenter could only belong in the illegitimate past, a fact betrayed by their antediluvian apparel. Their presence on the streets of the metropolis was a crisis in itself — a crisis for the legitimacy of public protest writ large.

Where the TwitNoNukes diverged from mass media narratives related to the premise of the postdisaster period itself as a solvent for this cisis. They scolded sympathetic journalists who slotted TwitNoNukes alongside the Amateurs' Riot as ambassadors of a new paradigm of political expression and participation. As Takahashi Wakagi, a political scientist associated with the group condescendingly told the Asahi, the postdisaster had brought a disappointing return of minoritarian impulses oblivious to the sensibilities of a moral majority.

> After 3.11, most demonstrations in Japan ended up deploring or censuring Japanese society from the "outside (*soto*)." A "woke" (*mezameta*) minority of the weak resisting a strong majority. With their strained heroism (*kowabatta hisōkan*), they pushed bystanders away from the demonstration.(…) The reason *our* movement looks stylish (*sutairisshu*) is because the people raising their voices here are, like those pretty couples going for dates in Shibuya or Shinjuku, *people on the "inside"* (*uchi*) of society (2015, my emphasis).

Takahashi's dismissal of "most demonstrations" clearly sniped at the Amateurs' Riot and their failure to consider their own appearance objectively. The minoritarian mores of recent protests had brought nothing but trouble. Legitimate protest should not be a place for self-indulgent expression, and least of all for "smashing" the public affect that tethers together a moral majority.

The real weight of Takahashi's claim, however, lies in the confident distinction between an "inside" (*uchi*) and an "outside" (*soto*) that did *not overlap* with the critical distinction between performance and spectator. For context, *uchi* figures as somewhat of a key concept in Japanese studies, understood as "the center of participatory belonging [and] emotional attachment" in Japanese social life (Kondo 1990, 142). *Uchi* is both means and ends, as its normative content affords social identity by carving out social domains and the proper relations within them (cf. McVeigh 1998; Doi 2001; Quinn 1994; Lebra 1976; Nakane 1970 [1967]).[4] If there was a *uchi* to the Amateurs' Riot sound demonstration, it was that of the boisterous crowd itself, defined in opposition to its skeptical surroundings. As Yuki's account of her own arrest shows, that distinction was rendered dysfunctional the moment that the crowd shattered into individual participants incapable of collective action. Takahashi and the other TwitNoNukes organizers, on the other hand, had become as comfortable locating themselves alongside "pretty couples" shopping or going on dates on the "'inside' of society" as they were banishing the multitude of the Amateurs' Riot to its outside.

Surprisingly, even the stubbornly solipsistic multitude could be convinced of their errors. Futatsugi Shin — the Amateurs' Riot organizer and writer-critic who had been arrested in May 2011 — was among the neophytes. In November, he wrote enthusiastically about his experience in the TwitNoNukes crowd:

> Marching through [the high-end shopping district] I notice the warm welcome we're getting (*hannō ga atatakai*). *This is different from before*. High school kids, (…) women

[4] The notion of uchi has also been strategically deployed in the workplace, e.g. to suppress organized labor (Kondō 1994, 173-4).

> in black that look like they work at Louis Vuitton: they give us a look and a faint smile, and I can't tell if they're sympathetic or just perplexed (…) The antinuclear demonstration is no longer a foreign substance (*ibutsu*) but starting to become a welcome sight on the streets. Of course it wasn't anything like a 'welcome sight' from the beginning (Futatsugi 2011, my emphasis).

The demonstration is no longer a foreign substance. As a core member of the Amateurs' Riot, Futatsugi had been part of refining its choreography of assembly in ambiguous if not outright antagonistic relation to its skeptical surroundings. He had spent time in jail as one architect of the solipsistic street spectacle. Mere months later, Futatsugi attributed to TwitNoNukes the transformation in public mood which he and his accomplices could not accomplish — and he did so in terms of protesters confronting an external gaze on the streets of Tokyo. But rather than "smashing" the postdisaster moratorium on self-expression, his concern was now with the promise of "normalizing" the demonstration so that it would no longer be rejected as suspicious, but embraced as a "welcome sight" by ordinary consumers on the city's streets.

4. Conclusion: mass versus core

The first year of "postdisaster" protest made public outrage against nuclear energy the taken-for-granted backdrop of virtually any political claim. Conversely, the antinuclear assembly became carnivalesque affairs suffused with a diversity of claims and concerns. But the exceptionally popular mass protests that came to be considered under the label of postdisaster protest did not coalesce into lasting political alliances, nor form durable "chains of equivalence" (Laclau 2005) with other movements or causes. In lieu of tangible political victories they became preoccupied with myopic concerns regarding the perceived legitimacy

of public protest as such, as articulated in their attempts to elaborate legitimate alternatives to the conventional repertoire of contentious politics associated with the broader Left. In terms of both strategy and tactics, the emergent endeavors of postdisaster protest returned again and again to formulations of legitimate assembly that betrayed their contempt for Japan's progressive Left and its conflicted legacy, even as they failed to outrun its shadow.

Years later, TwitNoNukes member Banchō reminisced about his activism in the form of a letter to younger generations:

> Young'uns (*wakamonotachi yo*)! Just do your best without giving yourself such a hard time. That's all we [TwitNoNukes] did. Don't overdo it. Make lots of enemies. You'll have even more allies in the end (@bcxxx 2015a).

In "making enemies," Banchō was referring to TwitNoNukes's heuristic for singling out and confronting vestiges of a radical Left within the protest crowd. If enemies ought to be weeded out from one's own ranks, allies should be sought in the overwhelming majority of the "mass." Looking back, Banchō presented the group's aesthetic agenda as a turning point for public protest in Japan, arguing that

> if we hadn't done what we did, [the city streets] would have been taken over by [student movement-style] helmets, stupid sectarians (*baka sekuto*) and social justice warriors (*hesayoku katsudōka*); the police would be screaming their lungs off from armored vehicles, and walls of riot squads would have cut off the crowd from its audience and arrested everyone within five minutes (@bcxxx 2015b).

Banchō asserted the group's raison d'être not in terms of concrete political gains, but as an antithesis to the tropes of radicalism that would otherwise have condemned public protest to continued irrelevance in the postdisaster period. Just like in Karatani's rehabilitation of those

earlier protest crowds as a manifestation of "the people," somehow the perennial challenges to legitimate assembly had overshadowed the urgency of assembling in the first place.

As mass media and academic accounts of postdisaster public life congealed into a coherent narrative, it was a narrative whose protagonist had already begun to take shape: a spontaneous assembly of "ordinary people," self-aware, but neither ideologically invested nor oddly overcommitted to their cause. To Karatani Kōjin and company, the protest crowd was nothing less than a snapshot of "the people" itself. Ironically, it was the boisterous crowd of the Amateurs' Riot that stood to embody that ideal — but with mohawks, skateboards and tattoos retconned into the rosy cheeks of a people "finally beginning to express their will."

In this chapter, I have shown how protest organizers in Japan's postdisaster period elaborate distinct choreographies of assembly in anxious anticipation of the encounter between crowd and public. In "setting the stage" for legitimate assembly, social movements in Japan have become stewards of the same stigma against collective action that they anticipate in the encounter with an ambivalent audience. Where the Amateurs' Riot staged that encounter as an intervention into an oppressive public mood, TwitNoNukes reached for an amicable encounter defined against an illegitimate other. Earlier accounts of postdisaster protest have overlooked these differences, as well as the influence that this latter group exerted on Japan's postdisaster populism (e.g. Oguma 2013; Brown 2017). But TwitNoNukes' conception of legitimate assembly did considerable work in antagonizing the minoritarian mores of earlier protest initiatives, inching closer to the populist claims that were to enchant the *Kantei-mae* crowd a few months later. By way of conclusion, I will briefly sketch the trajectory of this majoritarian move from Tokyo's shopping streets to the government district.

The antinuclear crowd had hitherto imagined itself in the encounter with a public of ambivalent bystanders. Going beyond their choreographical commitment to that encounter

for the first time, the TwitNoNukes organizers were beginning to think about another encounter. If their crowd was so firmly ensconced “inside” a mainstream majority, could it not speak on behalf of a larger collectivity?

An early attempt to enact this embryonic elaboration of postdisaster populism failed prematurely. In December 2011, Prime Minister Noda announced a rare speech outside Shimbashi, a commuter hub adjacent to the government district and a frequent destination for politicians appealing to the salaried masses. It was his first public appearance in the metropolis since the disaster. Hirano and the other TwitNoNukes organizers prepared a “welcoming committee” for bum-rushing the Prime Minister’s speech. However, the appearance was cancelled at the very last minute. White-gloved aides bowed deeply from the top of their speaker car; the gathered crowd slowly diffused. To the TwitNoNukes organizers, Noda’s last-minute retreat was a sign of weakness and an insult. They felt like they were owed the opportunity to confront the Prime Minister with their emergent elaboration of populist legitimacy.

The government district was the final horizon in the performative project of confronting the Prime Minister. In February 2012, Hirano joined Banchō, Daraku and hiphop artist ECD on a venture into the government district, and attended a small protest immediately outside the Ministry of Economy, Transportation and Industry (METI). Hirano had avoided the area. Ordinary people had no business in the government district, he argued, and without ordinary people, protest could have no authentic audience. There was no legitimate reason to be in this “scary place,” overrun by minoritarian fringe groups and G-men. Directly addressing the government through sit-ins or blockades was a fool’s errand that could only alienate a larger public.

After a series of short speeches, ECD sidled up to the microphone in blue-collar overalls, apologized for coming straight from work, and delivered a syncopated rap verse drawing on his old club banger, *Mass versus core* (*Masu tai koa*), the final chorus repeated again and again:

> Our turn, our turn, our turn to make you listen to what we have to say (*iu koto, iu koto, iu koto kikaseru ban da ore-tachi ga)*

I wish to conclude this chapter with ECD's chant still resonating through its final sentences. Couched in the informal masculine first person (*ore*) plural (*tachi*), this "we" drew immediate criticism. To Asahi reporter Akuzawa Etsuko it carried "a certain machismo evocative of a domestic violence perpetrator" (cited in Noma 2015). Nevertheless, the majoritarian motto took hold to become a performative staple resonating with the ever-larger crowds assembling in the government district in the years that followed. The way ECD's chorus harmonized protest rhetoric around a stable "we" points to the ease with which the "strong majority" of Takahashi's analysis could now be performatively inhabited.

As far as the TwitNoNukes activists were concerned, the demonstration crowd was no longer alienated from its audience; they had "become one with" (*narikitta*) the public around them, and no longer needed to ask permission to speak on its behalf. The "you" of their audience was no longer the amicable mass of a consumerist agora, but the towering government complexes of the Kasumigaseki government district, and behind them the cowardly Prime Minister whose refusal to listen to "the voice of the people" had attracted its ire. This majoritarian move would directly inform a choreographical commitment tailored to the topography of the government district where — unlike the commercial thoroughfares favored by the groups I have described here — acquiring a demonstration permit was nigh

impossible. A month after ECD's premiere performance, Hirano, Noma, Banchō and Daraku all joined the nascent Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes to refine the enactment of these populist imaginaries in the spectacle of the *Kantei-mae* crowd. It would be up to them to reconcile their desire to inhabit an "inside" of the social body with Karatani's rehabilitation of the antinuclear crowd as a manifestation of popular sovereignty.

Figure 1: One of the Amateurs' Riot sound demonstration blocks departing into the streets of Shibuya on May 7, as attempts are being made to protect sound equipment from the rain. Source: Fukuyama 2011.

Chapter 2. When the levee breaks: communitas of defeat at the 2012 *Kantei-mae* protests

In the summer of 2012, a few hundred protesters gathering weekly in front of the Prime Minister's official residence (*Kantei-mae*) grew into a crowd that claimed turnout in the hundreds of thousands, attracting the attention of politicians, pundits and television cameras alike. Week by week, protesters gathering in the vast public spaces of Tokyo's government district had grown more confident along with increased turnout. Now, in the crepuscular gloom of early summer, the same crowd broke the brittle stalemate reached with the authorities. On June 29, the levees broke at the *Kantei-mae* protest and the crowd rushed into the street.

At seven thirty in the evening, I stood at the large intersection across from the official residence when suddenly, a queer sensation swept through the crowd. The rhythms of chanting and drumming around us fell out of sync and died out; my conversation with a fellow protester trailed off into astonished silence as the people around us waded through the knee-height, construction site-style fences distributed along the edge of the sidewalk. Steel scraping against the still-warm tarmac, the throng of protesters surged out into the broad streets of Tokyo's Kasumigaseki district.

Moments later, we found ourselves crossing the same boundary. Warily, we left the safety of the sidewalk and walked out into the car lanes of the wide boulevard. It had appeared to us an ocean, separating us from the tightly packed crowd on the other side of the road. It felt like treading on ice until we realized that people on the other side were also walking out on the street. We met halfway, cheering, clapping hands. Around us, people seemed to be walking in every direction at once. Confused police officers holding wooden clubs hesitated pending further orders. Cars stood captive in our midst, floating metal islands in a sea of bodies, some

blowing their horn furiously, others jovially, waving antinuclear flags and banners through open windows. It was as if we could see ourselves from above, one massive assembly of people gathered for here the same purpose. We looked around us, and smiled. Then, we were laughing. For a brief moment laughter was everywhere, before it eased back into a rhythmic chant, gathering in strength together with the thunderous drums and the density of the crowd, which now straddled the entire, ad hoc plaza in front of the Prime Minister's residence.

To the effervescent crowd, its coalescence in front of the Prime Minister's official residence seemed a sanguine state of affairs. To mass media audiences across the country, and soon the world, the *Kantei-mae* crowd appeared as nothing less than the protagonist of an emergent narrative of national awakening and paradigmatic social change. But the same moment would cause fissures that laid bare the limits of legitimate assembly in the government district. The Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes had nurtured the growth of the crowd week by week, mobilizing mass media attention toward an elaboration of legitimacy centered on casual congregation entirely unlike the uniform cadres of the organized Left. For them, the collapse of police blockades endangered the legitimacy of the entire assembly. In its aftermath, they articulated a different idea of legitimacy centered on the agonism between "ordinary people" reluctantly assembling because they have no other choice, and a political establishment oblivious to their concerns. At the very peak of both participation and public attention, the "collapse" of crowd boundaries at the *Kantei-mae* concretized a populist rhetoric of the crowd as a direct representative of "the people," *and* a relationship of distrust and disappointment between the organizers and the crowd they summoned in which either side failed to live up to its representational responsibility.

In August 2012, less than two months after the police barricades collapsed in the government district, both aspects of postdisaster populism would culminate in a confrontation between

sovereign and state, people and Prime Minister, as a delegation of Coalition members entered the official residence to confront the Prime Minister as envoys of a disgruntled majority — a media spectacle that effectively consecrated the *Kantei-mae* crowd as the embodiment of a general will.

1. Moments of madness

The figure of the crowd stands in overdetermined relation to modern democratic governance. As Mazzarella notes, "crowds are inseparable from our basic images of democracy," yet at the same time inhabit a divide between intimate, irrational affinity and the impersonal premise of public reason (2015, 93-94). Durkheim's phenomenology of crowd experience — an iconic but underdefined part of his larger theory of ritual — attempts to bridge this divide by investing the crowd's collective effervescence with transformative potential. Like his contemporary, Gustave Le Bon, Durkheim sees the individual participant becoming a "new being" in the crowd. But in a departure from other crowd theorists of his time, Durkheim looks beyond the dark, "de-individualizing" tendencies of this moment and sees positive transgression. In this sacred state the ecstatic individual is "raised above himself [and] sees a different life from the [profane] one he ordinarily leads" (Ibid., 220).[1]

[1] Beyond the thematic continuity I develop here, what is at stake in the idea of collective effervescence is what traces it leaves beyond the crowd event itself. The "problem" for Durkheim is that its effects are neither durable beyond the sacred time of the crowd moment, nor easily translated into the profane context of everyday life (Ibid.; Mazzarella 2017, 83-84).

Several authors have pointed to an affinity — even suggested a functional equivalence between — Durkheim's collective effervescence on one hand, and Victor and Edith Turner's notion of communitas on the other (e.g. Olaveson 2001). Communitas as an intense feeling of togetherness, equality and solidarity is sometimes described by Turner in terms of a "proboscis … reaching up high with an eye on the end of it [through which a community] turns around and looks at itself, fascinated" (2011, 23). It characterizes the threshold situations where we see ourselves "objectively," as in this account by Roy Willis of a healing ritual of the Zambian Lungu people.

> For us all, the drumming and the movement had pleasantly dissolved the boundaries of ordinary selfhood (…) I was lifted out of normal consciousness into a state where ordinary perceptions of time and space were drastically altered. (…) I could "see" myself more clearly than in ordinary reality, when self-perception is typically more fragmentary, tied to one or other fleetingly relevant social role. Then, in the moment of communitas, I saw myself whole and objectively. I was "at home" and among, as it seemed, "kinsfolk"

Victor Turner is likewise concerned with communitas as an "unused .. pontential [that is] not yet externalized and fixed in structured form" (1969, 128).

The sociology of social movements has confronted a similar problem of event and structure in understanding the character and consequences of the great crowd moments that herald social change in modern society: those "moments of madness" that, as Aristide Zolberg poetically remarked, impact the social "like a floodtide which loosens up much of the soil but leaves alluvial deposits in its wake" (1976, 206). In the introduction, I referred to Sidney Tarrow's notion of "protest cycles" as one attempt to address the relation between event and structure in terms of the residue of effervescent experiences:

> Seldom widely shared, usually rapidly suppressed, and soon condemned even by their participants [protest cycles] appear as sharp peaks on the long curve of history. New forms of contention flare up briefly within them and disappear, and their rate of absorption into the ongoing repertoire is slow and partial. But the cycles they trigger last much longer (1993, 62).

(1999, cited in Turner 2012, 219).

Through such accounts, we often associate Turner's communitas with a sense of freedom, euphoria and possibility, but also of affinity and collective agency. Communitas seems particularly popular with researchers of radical politics in capturing the experience of togetherness and possibility in crowd moments that come to signify "a liberating rupture with ordinary society" for its participants (Cassegård 2011, 150; cf. Juris 2008; McAdam 1989; Katsiaficas 1989). McAdam's influential work (1988) compiled activist accounts of an intoxicating "freedom high" that they contrasted with the assumptions of their ordinary lives. But for Carl Cassegård (2013, 150-52), it is unfortunate that communitas has become

> associated with empowerment, victory and jubilant feelings of togetherness when applied to social movements … since it leaves us without a concept to describe those moments of emotional heightening … that end in traumatic defeat or failure.

In response, Cassegård develops the notion of a "communitas of defeat" where "collective effort, shared focus and emotional heightening can go together with pain, inner doubt, and a marked heterogeneity in the way events are subjectively experienced" (Ibid.,151). Developing the notion specifically in the context of Japanese social movements, Cassegård is interested in the treshold situations "characterised not only by positive but also strong negative feelings, or by a heterogeneity of positive or negative feelings shifting and replacing each other" (166).

This communitas of defeat draws on Michael Taussig's critique of Turner, through an iconic account of ritual drug use. In contrast to the emphasis on unity as an outcome in Turner's conception of communitas, the *Yagé* nights that Taussig participated in are characterized by instability, unexpected juxtaposition. In this sense, a communitas of defeat unsettles the

causal connection between ritual and symbolic order (1986, 443). I invoke these terms here in order to get closer to the complex aftermath of events of crowd effervescence where "instead of unity, there is volatility and heterogeneity" (Cassegård 2013, 152).

In this chapter, I attend to the June 29, 2012 "collapse" of crowd boundaries in terms of a communitas of defeat that left both participants and spectators torn between different, incongruous interpretations of the same event: a fissure resulting from the friction between organizers from the Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes on one hand, and the crowd that they conjured in Tokyo's government district on the other. I supplement my own ecstatic experience of the event by recounting it from the perspective of three protagonists who played key roles in the Coalition and its reaction to the "collapse:" Misao Redwolf, the group's informal leader; Hirano Yū, a veteran of the student movements of the sixties and seventies, and Noma Yasumichi, a member of the TwitNoNukes outfit introduced in the previous chapter.

2. The Hydrangea Revolution

Situated at the top of the *Gumi-zaka* hill, the official residence had become the symbolic site of government response and responsibility in mass media representations of the disaster. But the glass-and-granite mansion's inhabitant was no longer the charismatic civil rights veteran who had overseen the early disaster aftermath: Naoto Kan had resigned in September 2011, implicitly shouldering blame for the catastrophe. His successor, the much younger Noda Yoshihiko, cultivated a public image of pragmatic efficiency. Two months into his premiership, Noda spoke "on behalf of the people of Japan" in announcing the "conclusion" (*shūsoku*) of the disaster and of state-directed disaster management. This was a bid at

redefining the nuclear catastrophe as constitutive national experience, firmly located in the past.

In a Washington Post op-ed on the disaster's first anniversary, Noda designated the postdisaster a new era of "full-fledged [national] revitalization." Just like Japan had come back stronger after its defeat in World War II and turned postwar oil shocks into opportunities for increasing energy efficiency, the country would rise like a phoenix once more. This was a "pledge to the Japanese people" through which Noda styled himself simultaneously as the personification of a new collective resolve, shedding what he called the "politics of indecision." Controversially, this resolve included reactivating the 50 nuclear reactors remaining dormant for over a year since the reactor meltdowns. Noda declared that nuclear reactors would no longer be built or renovated, but that those "found to be suitable for restarting after … rigorous checks" would soon be brought back online (Brown 2017, 150; Williamson 2015). The foremost candidate was the Ōi power plant on the northwest coast, set to be restarted on July 1, 2012.

In the months and weeks leading up to Ōi's reboot, the contours of postdisaster populism coalesced around a challenge to Prime Minister Noda's claim to speak for the Japanese people. In choreographical terms, the Coalition's call to gather for two hours every Friday evening was an invitation to take that challenge directly to the Prime Minister's symbolic location in the official residence. From here on, attendance begun to double or triple from week to week. By late June 2012, the crowd itself had become an attraction, the catchphrase "*Kantei-mae* now (*nau*)" trending on social media platforms. Everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of the *Kantei-mae* spectacle. On both sides of the *Gumi-zaka* hill, the sidewalks were filling up with people eager to be a part of something that seemed both spontaneously urgent and unburdened by undue association.

At the foot of the *Gumi-zaka* hill, a middle-aged man in a band t-shirt, worn-out jeans and a knitted cap triumphantly held his walkie-talkie aloft with one arm as he elbowed his way through the crowd with the other. Noma Yasumichi, a core member of the defunct TwitNoNukes outfit, and now of the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, took in the exuberant atmosphere of the crowd surrounding him on all sides.

Noma thought back to the early summer. Then, the sidewalk arteries of the government district had not been as congested. Great numbers of people had moved freely in and out of the area. Mass media coverage of the weekly assembly highlighted the curious ability of so many protesters to appear at once, only to disappear two hours later. Minutes before six on a given Friday night, the sidewalks around the official residence might still look largely abandoned; when the rhythmic chanting and drum patterns abated at eight, the sidewalks once again drained down slopes and into subway exits as if the stopper had been pulled out of a bathtub. Minutes later, the same broad street corners had returned to their usual state of quietude. Such agility had relied on the abundance of public transit connections afforded to the armies of bureaucrats commuting to the government district. But since June, the National Diet subway stop on the Chiyoda and Marunouchi subway lines, some few hundred feet under the *Gumi-zaka* hill, had been converted into ersatz police checkpoints to keep protesters out of the area.

What begun as spontaneous attempts to circumvent roadblocks turned into a game of cat and mouse that spanned the entire government district. Strangers shared cars or cab rides with each other. Tour buses maneuvered by masked impersonations of the No-Face spirit from the blockbuster film *Spirited Away* ferried protesters past police checkpoints into the government district. I had myself followed the trickle of students and faculty members from a nearby university, down the gas-lit Kioi-zaka slope and past the Akasaka Prince hotel, balancing on

the old battlements of the outer castle moat and recently turned into a makeshift shelter for nuclear refugees evacuated from the irradiated northeast. Continuing south across the Benkei Bridge, we would scurry past the noisy traffic and neon lights of Akasaka-mitsuke crossing, and from there follow the faint echoes of chanting further south, up the steep hill between Hie Shrine and the official residence. When police barricades clogged up that route, we would instead climb the hill east toward the Nagatachō subway station and join the edges of the crowd behind the National Diet.

Noma made his way up the *Gumi-zaka* hill, listening to the crackle of confused conversation on his radio. He leaned out into the car lane just in time to witness the barricades collapse, and the mass of protesters flood out from the sidewalks and into the streets. As he later recalled,

> I confess, I was deeply moved by the sight. It looked like the kind of thing I'd seen on television news since I was young — the Philippines' People Power Revolution in 1986, Tiananmen Square in 1989… and of course, Tahrir Square in 2011 or the Occupy movement from last fall. But this time, it was happening in front of my own eyes (2012, 14-15).

As if to correct himself, Noma supplemented televisual tropes of generational experience with a more recent host of images. Since the early protests of the Amateurs' Riot over a year earlier, commenters had rehearsed comparisons — sometimes provocative, sometimes dangerously puerile — between Japan's postdisaster moment and the Arab Spring and the occupation of New York City's Zuccotti Park.

Some were to point to the very scene unfolding before Noma's eyes as the iconic inception of a "Hydrangea Revolution" (*Ajisai kakumei*), referring to the thickets of hydrangea which

lined the boulevards of the government district, framing the protest crowd in lush crowns of blue and purple. Carrying a flowerhead around or affixing it to one's lapel was one way to endorse that notion, but this was no statement of revolutionary ambition, nor of political affiliation. Rather, it was a claim regarding the relation between crowd and public, event and structure. The moniker of a "Hydrangea Revolution" insisted on an unstable symmetry between Japan's postdisaster moment on one hand, and on the other, a series of arbitrarily connected "global revolutions" covered favorably by Western media (cf. Mason 2012). This made the *Kantei-mae* crowd the protagonist in an emergent narrative of the postdisaster as a renaissance of political participation and expression. On the other hand, the moniker all but suggested that Japan's resurgence of public protest had eclipsed the disastrous events that prompted it in the first place. In the political language of this "Hydrangea Revolution," the movement against reactivation of dormant reactors had — without first achieving internal cohesion, much less political victory — already unfolded into the first link in a populist chain of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

These implications of the populist proposal were precisely what bothered Noma. From his perspective, it put the promise to gather in the government district "until all reactors are shut down and nuclear energy is abolished" in ambivalent relationship to the same boundaries of disaster which earlier protests had been compelled to challenge. More urgently, Noma considered the legitimacy of the assembly as deriving from its single-issue focus on nuclear reactivation alone. It was by refusing to entertain any equivalency between the antinuclear question and the cluster of concerns characterizing (or, from the Coalition's perspective, crippling) a contemporary Left — particularly Japan's wartime legacy and its infected relationship to the U.S. — that the crowd snaking its way around the sidewalks of the

government district had managed to avoid the sort of police repression which had crippled earlier efforts to rally against nuclear energy.

As turnout doubled or even quadrupled from one week to the next, it belied a crucial fact: there was no permit issued for the assembly. Members of the Coalition considered the successful negotiation of one a remote possibility at best — some flippantly suggested that if one was actually granted, it would spell the end for the entire spectacle. Others argued that "the people" needed no such thing as permit, and spoke of its absence as a further expression of the legitimacy of their enterprise. Why was the crowd allowed to congregate here week after a week? "If you think about it, it's a mystery," Noma wrote later.

> For whatever reason, this has become a *fait accompli* (*kisei jijitsu-ka*) of protest experience. Even the riot police squadrons rotated here every week think that's just the kind of place it is" (2012, 178).

But now, the crowd that had been perilously confined to the sidewalks was breaking out of its enclosure, into the wide boulevards of the government district. The legal grey zone which had allowed the crowd to grow larger week by week had become a horizon of expectation, beyond which nothing was certain. The televised uprisings that came to Noma's mind all shared an attendant series of visual tropes — riot police, burning cars, water cannons and tear gas clouds (Noma 2012, 15). Could the *Kantei-mae* crowd be trusted to resist re-enacting these tropes of contemporary mass protest? As he hurriedly continued up the *Gumi-zaka* slope, through increasingly dense throngs of protesters, Noma wondered what the Coalition could do to prevent the exuberant crowd from repeating its own tragic history.

3. Landscapes of memory

Halfway up the *Gumi-zaka* hill, Noma passed an elderly man with a walrus mustache who stood at the very edge of the sidewalk, leaning on a still standing section of riot control fencing. As the crowd rushed into the streets, the old man held out a phone over the railing. "Y'all ever seen anything like this? This is probably one of those historical moments," he said, smiling to his online audience for a few jagged frames before twisting the phone around again and letting it capture the flood of people rushing past him, into the intersection.

A septuagenarian former student activist, Hirano Yū was the founder and owner of the *Loft* chain of concert halls and night clubs.[2] Opening his first club in nearby Shinjuku in 1976, Hirano had stood at the forefront of Tokyo's live music scene for decades. Now he lent his logistical expertise and massive inventory to the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes: a conduit for coordinating action amidst a consortium of smaller antinuclear activist groups. Hirano's Loft group was one of the few Coalition members older than a year — most were informal affinity groups formed after the 2011 nuclear catastrophe, with only a handful of core members.[3]

Hirano the elder was confident but weary. "That's enough," he grimaced into the camera as more and more protesters pushed past him into the street. "Best not to go any further… Last time, we antagonized the police and failed because of it." Was the elderly man referring to

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[2] No relation to the younger Hirano Taichi of TwitNoNukes.

[3] Of the two groups introduced in the previous chapter, TwitNoNukes organizers took on considerable responsibility in the new outfit, while the Amateurs' Riot were notoriously absent.

his halcyon days in the student movement, or the decline of more recent initiatives? His comment made sense either way: a year earlier, tens of thousands had marched through the city's commercial districts indicting the reticent mood of "self-restraint" gripping the populace. As I showed in the previous chapter, the solipsistic street spectacle met with escalating police suppression and buckled under a devastating number of arrests that punctured the unity and momentum of protest. These perceived failures of a broader movement urged the Coalition's members to stage a different sort of street spectacle in Tokyo's government district. It was no secret that they saw their distinct choreography of assembly as a remedy to the quandaries of a "movement" they put little faith in themselves. The Coalition's move to abandon Tokyo's commercial thoroughfares in favor of the government district's desolate boulevards was nothing short of groundbreaking. It mitigated the risk of arrest which had crippled early antinuclear gatherings, negotiating a fait accompli of permit-less protest in one of the most mediatized and surveilled spaces of the metropolis. It accompanied a move away from conventional repertoires bound up with the spectacle of noisy marches through busy commercial districts, away from the relationship with an audience of passersby as the benchmark of success for those marches. The endeavor also carried its own risks: approaching the vast, empty spaces extending from Japan's symbolic center of political representation, protesters entered a political topography of abundant association and allusion. This landscape extended in all directions from the sidewalk where Hirano busily broadcasted the crowd's moment of collective effervescence to a larger audience. Since the early days of the modern Japanese state, countless spectacles of political representation and recognition had been staged here, in an area no larger than a few square miles (Yoshimi 2018, 112).

From the official residence, the *Gumi-zaka* slope descends steeply eastward, from the large intersection at the top of the hill to the five-way Kasumigaseki crossing at its foot. Continuing east, a few minutes walk takes one past the towering structures of Kasumigaseki's government ministries to the headquarters of Tokyo Electric and the urban oasis of Hibiya Park. Here, protests against the 1905 armistice with Russia escalated into two days of rioting, seventeen deaths and hundreds of arrests (Thomas 2001, 186). From his office across the street, Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur probably knew it as Doolittle Field, named after the general who led the first bombing raid on the Japanese capital in 1942. After the formal end of occupation, the park became a gathering place for progressive protests throughout the postwar period, its damp cherry groves succumbing to Molotov cocktails during 1971 demonstrations demanding the return of the Okinawa islands from the United States. A few minutes south of the *Gumi-zaka* hill, the American embassy compound remains in intimate and intimidating proximity to this day.

Northeast of the *Gumi-zaka* slope, past the National Police Agency and the Supreme Court, the Imperial Palace: Barthes' empty signifier, surrounded by an intricate mesh of moats. Its former parade grounds (*kōkyo-gaien*) were known as the "people's plaza" to the Communist Party-led crowds that clashed with American soldiers there in 1950, setting off a Red Purge (*akagari)* of suspected sympathizers across the country. Two years later, police opened fire at another crowd marching on the plaza, killing two and wounding dozens more in what became know as the Bloody May Day incident (Kapur 2018, 14).[4] North of the *Gumi-zaka* slope, the

[4] The Communist Party, which had called for militant revolutionary struggle after being criticized by Stalin's Comintern in 1950, forswore violence as a political tool after losing all of its seats in the following election.

illuminated dome of the National Diet building. And to the northwest, the headquarters of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which since the US occupation had ruled Japan virtually uninterrupted — perhaps the most durable one-party domination in any democracy — until an unexpected and geopolitically infected election defeat in 2009 (Maeda 2010). This was a landscape pregnant not just with possibility, but with memories of contentious politics. In engineering the shift away from Tokyo's commercial districts, organizers probed the historical associations of this landscape with trepidation — as if its semiotics could, at any moment, overwhelm the Manichean enterprise of staging a showdown between "the people" and its illegitimate political representatives in the government district.

But of all the specters haunting the weekly rally, the most prevalent was undoubtedly the 1960 protests against the US-Japan Security Treaty[5] (or *Ampo*) — which allowed the US to maintain military bases in Japan after the formal end of occupation in 1952. A broad alliance of organized labor, peace and student movements opposed the ratification of *Ampo*: the largest strikes in the country's history paralyzed the country as the streets around the official residence, Diet building and government ministries filled with seemingly endless lines of protesters. The *Ampo* protests culminated on June 15, 1960, as New Left student activists fought their way through the gates of the National Diet. The drawn out melee with riot police ended with countless injuries and the death of a young student activist. The protests succeeded in uniting traditional enemies on the political spectrum in a popular front against imperialism, but — as Hirano Yū reminded his audience fifty-two years later almost to the

[5] Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (*Nichibei anzen hoshō jōyaku*)

day — the ratification of the treaty entered history as a defeat for the Japanese Left from which it never recovered (Andrews 2016, 170).

In 2012, the figure of the crowd overtaking the *Kantei-mae* intersection drew immediate comparison to the 1960 *Ampo* protests. Mass media relished in juxtaposing images of the ongoing protests with the summer of 1960. On June 22, Asahi TV's news hour showed an eight-minute segment from the front lines of the protest. With impeccable hair, reporter Torigoe Shuntarō stood in the thick of the crowd and declared to the camera that "today, after 52 long years, the citizen demonstration returned to Japan." Senescent celebrity journalist Tahara Sōichirō rehearsed the same tropes while shaking hands with other, older protesters in the crowd: "This really hasn't happened since *Ampo* '60. Back then, I was a protester [just like you]" (Tahara 2012). Was reactivation of Japan's nuclear reactor fleet the new security treaty — an issue capable of uniting some semblance of "the people" against their political representatives? In short, was *Kantei-mae* the new *Ampo*? Posing the question this way meant asserting an equivalence that recognized no intermediary between the *Kantei-mae* crowd and the one gathering in the same streets half a century earlier.

4. Tallying the truth

As Noma reached the *Kantei-mae* intersection at the top of the hill, he looked up at the news helicopters dotting the sky and tried to imagine the entirety of the massive assembly as it spread across the government district. Below the *Gumi-zaka* hill, where the crowd snaked its way around various government buildings, convention competed with confusion as news of an unprecedented "liberation" (*kaihō*) spread from one protester to the next. Halfway up the hill, car lanes now filled with people provided the fertile ground for emergent imaginations of populist representation, and protesters commingled in a shared sense of communitas; what

Noma scathingly called a "pastoral (*bokka-teki*) haze." And here, at the front lines atop the hill, the crowd was ecstatic: it resonated with countless incoherent chants, billowing back and forth across the intersection.

Surveying the sea of banners, flags and balloons covering the large open space from sidewalk to sidewalk, Noma spotted a familiar figure: a middle-aged woman in a bomber jacket and ponytail, perched above the crowd on a stepladder, clasping a bullhorn in one hand and a cigarette butt in the corner of her mouth. Misao Redwolf was the Coalition's unofficial but indisputable leader. At the Coalition's late-night meetings at a nearby coffee shop, her charismatic leadership had silenced dissenters and consolidated the group around an increasingly coherent vision of legitimate assembly. On the front lines of protest, her harsh voice interpellated both the Prime Minister's invisible presence across the intersection as well as the crowd behind her. In the media, she increasingly took on the role of ambassador and apologist for the *Kantei-mae* crowd spectacle, as progressive dailies turned to her for indignant responses to interview questions, and gossip magazines obsessed over a tribal tattoo sleeve running down her left arm.

In her media appearances, Redwolf foregrounded physical turnout as a central measure of success. She spoke of the crowd in terms of voice and volume. Her goal was to "make the demonstration even larger until our voices reach the very political core [of the state] (*seiji no chūsū*)." The point of amassing so many people in the government district was to make demands that could not be disregarded: if a certain number of people attended, the combined volume of their voices would become impossible to ignore.

Redwolf's rationale made head counts a constant concern. The Coalition had dispatched volunteers like me to track the gathering's rapid growth week by week: from 300 to 1,000 in April 2012, 2,700 to 4,000 in May, and from 12,000 to 45,000 in June (MCAN 2012a). But

as the rally continued to grow, counting turned into guesswork. Daraku, a forty-something member of TwitNoNukes now brandishing a Coalition bullhorn at the very front of the *Kantei-mae* crowd, hoarsely vented his frustration in a mid-June radio broadcast:

> Things started to get hairy around the 4,000 mark. If some protester was hogging the mic I used to slip back into the crowd and see how things were going behind us. That became difficult as we hit 12,000 people last week. Now you can no longer get a sense of turnout with the naked eye.

Increasingly difficult to divine, turnout took on a life of its own. Many organizers had a carefree attitude to the inflation of turnout numbers: "If 10,000 can't make [the government] change their mind, we'll have to aim for 100,000," Hirano Taichi said defiantly in a radio broadcast. The same number appeared in the Coalition's call to action for June 29 (MCAN 2012a). But few organizers seriously believed that the government district would or could accommodate a crowd numbering in the hundreds of thousands: "think of it as an advertisement," one member told me. As Noma later recalled, "even if us Coalition core members were fanning the flames on social media saying '100,000 people are coming,' nobody really thought they would" (Noma 2012, 19).

Beginning with the collapse of the barricades of June 29, influential voices would insist on six-figure counts as a central truth of the *Kantei-mae* crowd and the legitimacy of its assembly. In the cycle of projecting an ever-larger horizon of expectation, few asked how many could reasonably fit on the already cramped sidewalks of the government district. Even fewer asked how many people would be enough to force the Prime Minister to listen. Someone who did was sociologist Oguma Eiji, who had contributed to an earlier elaboration of populist legitimacy when attempting to rehabilitate the protest crowd as constitutionally

enshrined embodiment of "the people" (see the previous chapter). Oguma often frequented the weekly assembly, and celebrated it in a series of widely recirculated speeches:

> if one person comes to the demonstration, that means another 100 agrees with her ... and 100 to 200,000 participants equals one to two percent of Tokyo's population, times a hundred ... that means the majority is on our side (Oguma 2012, 137)!

Oguma's applauded interpretation helped to cement the number — two hundred thousand — as the "truth" of June 29. The *Kantei-mae* assembly was legitimate *not if, but because* it represented a majority of the metropolitan population and, at least implicitly, the nation. This was an emphatically majoritarian response to the lingering question: how many is enough? The fantastical inflation of turnout numbers only became problematic when challenged by other authoritative tallies. For the June 29 rally, the Tokyo Broadcasting Station echoed the Coalition's claim of 200,000 protesters, while the Asahi newspaper counted 180,000 even as Asahi's own Hōdō Station broadcast suggested 50,000. Meanwhile, the Sankei newspaper estimated turnout at less than 20,000, while the similarly conservative Yomiuri did not cover the protest at all. Police leaked an estimate of 17,000 protesters to the press.[6] A few organizers whom I spoke to recognized such extreme discrepancies as problematic insofar as it gave rise to doubts among protesters themselves. But Redwolf dismissed such concerns. Not only were police estimates a lowballing attempt to placate the crowd, she argued; anyone

[6] For comparison, the same week a parade of Olympic medalists returning from the London games, less than a kilometer down the road from the government district, drew an estimated half million spectators according to organizers. The police provided no competing number.

who "complains that our numbers and the police's are completely different" failed to realize the importance of reported turnout as a "truth" (*jijitsu*) about the assembly (2012a, 35).[7] The truth was: turnout was as much a measure of legitimacy as a means of asserting it; a way for organizers to attract more people, but also a way for participants to imagine themselves as part of a majority more important than the accuracy of any actual headcount. In that sense, Redwolf understood the importance of mass media attention. She readily admitted that the vast majority of people learned about the protests through such media outlets. Alongside Asahi TV's jubilant vox pop segments, both the Fuji and TBS networks featured the crowd spectacle on primetime news, as did most major newspapers the following morning. Without their news helicopters noisily hovering above the *Kantei-mae* crowd, it was doomed to become irrelevant.

At the same time, Redwolf was troubled by mass media's proposed equivalence between the "past" of *Ampo* 1960 and the "present" of the *Kantei-mae* crowd amassing against nuclear reactivation. Because most Coalition members were not like Hirano the elder. They did not remember or care much for *Ampo* or the New Left student movements of the 1960s and 70s. Most had become politically active only after the 2011 accident, and joined forces under the umbrella of the coalition in response and reaction to earlier antinuclear endeavors. And they flinched from the notion, which journalists and intellectuals alike reveled in, that their endeavor was a repetition of earlier historical achievements — not because they wanted to amend its simplifications and connect the *Kantei-mae* crowd to a living tradition of dissent —

[7] While the reader may interject that the word "fact" would be more apt, I have chosen to translate Misao Redwolf's account this way in order to emphasize the idea that turnout

indeed, they would much prefer if the contemporary crowd had no history at all. If there was going to be any comparison, it should emphasize the irreconcilable difference between the two crowds of past and present.

One such rendering was provided by the latest issue of the Weekly Playboy (circulation: about 200,000) which, in addition to glossy pinup spreads, and like many larger print publications in the summer of 2012, carried a hefty feature reporting from the front lines of the *Kantei-mae* crowd. Competing for space with scantily clad women was a caricature of two male figures. One of them, clad in sportswear, flashed a stupid smile and a placard saying "no nukes" in English. From the improvized percussion instrument ("starting to feel like a festival?") to the mobile device ("streaming on Twitter for three times the fun!") slung around his neck, the figure wielded all the hallmarks of legitimate participation. This was the contemporary *Kantei-mae* protester: casual, connected, concerned but far from zealous. Across the page, the other figure's face was frozen in a belligerent grimace. From the knickerbockers, steel-toed boots, and helmet ("Don't get your head kicked in!") to the brick in one hand and wooden club (*geba-bō*) in the other ("The rally is a battlefield — to arms!"), the second figure carried all the accoutrements of a conflicted past, the twisted legacy of which activists still struggled with in the present. In addition to these visual markers of New Left radicalism, he carried all that which the contemporary protester had neglected to bring: ill will, ideological inspiration, institutional affiliation, and infatuation with a longer tradition of struggle.

The same juxtaposition between casual present and complicit past returned time and time again in mass media accounts: as the eminent journalist Tahara told his primetime audiences, the *Kantei-mae* crowd was "a demonstration alright, but feels more like a festival" (Tahara 2012). Seizing on these media images, Redwolf saw the organizers' task as lowering the

hurdle (*shiki'i wo sageru*) for the curious, skeptical, and bored to join the protests alongside the already committed. To do that, Redwolf admitted, they had to attract people who attended casually, "like they would a music festival" (*fesu kankaku de*; Redwolf 2012a).

The weekly assembly was an attraction, a festival; a space of collective experience far removed from the profanity of participants individual lives. Advertising it as such was at least partially about renouncing responsibility for the crowd: no nuanced understanding of policy was asked or expected of participants; no prior knowledge of historical coordinates, no comprehension of the tenuous legal grey zone in which the assembly took place or the consequences of arrest. But Redwolf did have expectations for the crowd explicitly bound up with the sacred nature of the assembly. Elsewhere, she explained her hope that the collective effervescence of the crowd would galvanize the immature incentives of these "casuals" into something more meaningful:

> There's this chemistry happening in the demonstration. Study groups and lectures, while certainly informative in their way, they're passive, no? The demonstration, of course, is prepared by the organizer, but ultimately it's by the will of individuals who participate, march, bring their own signs and make their voices heard, and there's more and more of us. It happens within a framework of organization, sure, but there is a chemistry here kind of like an abscess bursting; a tendency for chemical reaction, for synthesis (Redwolf 2012b).

Redwolf's crowd psychology trivialized the task of channeling collective effervescence into something less ephemeral. At the same time, the figure of casual ordinariness she invoked (much like that mobilized by the TwitNoNukes organizers a year earlier; see chapter 1) also served to safeguard the crowd from its constitutive other: the ominous figure of the radical

whose presence would once again endanger the legitimacy of the assembly. In that sense, however facetious, the Weekly Playboy and its juxtaposition of an archetypical *Kantei-mae* protester with his counterpart from a hazy past of inconvenient associations provided a brutally honest shorthand for what had become Redwolf's choreographical conundrum. That conundrum was not about turning one figure into the other, but to insist on the distinction between one as new, recognizable and legitimate, and the other as old, outdated, outdone — and prevent any seepage between the two. In reality, the Coalition's raison d'etre had already grown beyond that of "lowering the hurdle" enough to attract that former figure of casual participation. The group tasked themselves with keeping out the intemperate, illicit figure of the past which haunted the preoccupations of the present. The continued legacy of the weekly assembly, they came to think, hinged on the success of this task.

5. Bringing it down

As the sun set on the government district, Noma and Redwolf both took in the site of the exuberant crowd from opposite sides of the intersection. Redwolf had tried to stay one step ahead of the inevitable: as the mass of protesters begin to bulge out and spill over from the sidewalks on either side at 7:10pm, she was fruitlessly pleading with police commanders to move the riot control vehicles lining both sides of the *Gumi-zaka* slope and block off the main intersection. Five minutes later, the north side collapsed, and she had found herself sprinting back and forth, pleading with furious cab drivers suspended in the sea of bodies. At 7:35pm, more armored vehicles pushed up behind the lines of police, forming an additional perimeter along the east crosswalk of the *Kantei-mae* intersection.

As more and more people pushed further up the hill, the density of the crowd was increasing as it pushed up against the new perimeter, and the atmosphere was changing, from

effervescence to aggression. The new front lines were quickly turning into a brawl. Redwolf's Coalition had conceived of the weekly assembly as an antithesis to earlier crowds and their respective elaborations of legitimate protest. Now the elaboration enfleshed by the crowd they had themselves summoned forth was mere moments away from becoming part of the problem it proposed to solve. There was no time to waste: pushing into the center of the confrontation, Redwolf mounted a newspaper photographer's folding stepladder and, leaning onto the mass of bodies around her, cranked the volume up on the transistor bullhorn slung across her shoulder:

> If anything happens here, this place will be lost to us all. The struggle continues. But now, I beg you from the bottom of my heart, please leave.

Despite scattered applause, few protesters heard a plea that was easily overpowered by other loudspeakers and megaphones. Agitated protesters rippled in great waves against the new police perimeter in the middle of the intersection. The casualness of the crowd as it had been articulated in mass media accounts was nowhere to be found: instead of happy festival-goers, Redwolf looked around to see the grimacing faces of an angry mob. The stepladder wobbled; someone pulled at her ankle from below. With a look of despair, she disappeared into the sea of protesters.

At 7:45pm, just as the final perimeter between the crowd and the crossing seemed at the point of being overrun, Redwolf appeared again: this time behind the police perimeter. She climbed one of the riot control vehicles at the center of the blockade and, clutching a mouthpiece connected to the car through a braided cord, appealed to the crowd through an amplificatory apparatus of unrivaled clarity and volume:

> There's no use in picking a fight with the authorities here. It's dangerous for women and

> children. The fact that 200,000 people came here is incredible. But 200,000 is not enough to affect government [policy]. We'll continue to organize, we'll bring more people. But for now, please go home…

Redwolf, who had extolled the quivering crowd in terms of voice and volume, was now the one outshouting it. Her head count made the crowd both a historical achievement and a disappointment at once. In other words, she both recognized the crowd in terms of the fantastic figure that ought to have made it sufficient and legitimate, and, at the same time, dismissed it as instrumentally insufficient.

5.1. Communitas of defeat

This time, the crowd went silent. Chants died out mid-sentence. Bullhorns crackled and popped as power died. Furiously waved flags and streamers slowed down and slackened. Less than a minute after Redwolf's second plea, the *Kantei-mae* intersection was quiet. Pressure along the front lines eased as, slowly, the great mass of protesters began to disperse. And yet the dissipating crowd was also in a state of disquiet. With great masses of people beginning to trickle down in all directions from the top of the *Gumi-zaka* hill, many did so still suspended in the "pastoral haze" which Noma had witnessed on his way up the hill. They felt the afterglow of the collective effervescence which had brough them together around a claim regarding the relation between crowd event and social structure, a joy that would fill out the cracks of a burgeoning narrative of social change, of a "Hydrangea Revolution" that promised to overcome the contradictions that had made the disaster inevitable in the first place.

Others left in a state of bewildered agitation. What had happened at the front lines? Why had the protest been foreclosed in what seemed to be a moment worthy of celebration? What

would happen to the reactors due to be rebooted the next day — the prevention of which was the stated purpose of the entire rally? If the crowd really represented a majority, why did it have to disperse? And if the June 29 assembly was a failure, if the impossible large crowd around the government district had still been insufficient, how many people were really needed to fulfil the Coalition's populist promise?

Yet another part of the crowd reacted to Redwolf's second announcement with anger. In the car lanes at the very center of the intersection a small vanguard remained in defiance of her decree, chanting, jostling against police offers and shaking fences. As one participant said,

> I'm so disappointed. Dear organizers, the Ōi reactors are about to be restarted. What are you thinking, teaming up with the police and stopping the energy of the demonstration? (DJ Kinako, 2012)

Cartoonist Imashiro Takashi also expressed his dismay with Redwolf's statement:

> I was shocked when Misao Redwolf of the Coalition told the crowd that 'even 200,000 people on the streets isn't enough to stop nuclear power.' Deep down I know she's not wrong, but to show up only to be told by the organizers that it was all in vain… I was both offended and exhausted (…) And why is the Coalition collaborating with police in the first place? (Imashiro 2012a).

Imashiro's autobiographical comic strips emphasized the widening rift between organizer and the crowd, blaming the Coalition for treating the crowd as a mob: "the Coalition don't have a very good reputation. I hear other protesters calling them micromanagers (*shikirisugi*) and fault-finders (*kuchi urusai*)" (Ibid.). They also spelled out the terms by which the Coalition could be singled out as an obstacle to legitimate protest, wondering what concessions could

be won "if we all started throwing Molotov cocktails instead of holding candlelight vigils" (2012b, 129).

In political theorist Kurihara Yasushi's account of the event, Redwolf's rebuke of the crowd betrayed a cynicism at the core of the Coalition's crowd choreography:[8]

> It probably goes something like this: the *Kantei-mae* rally is held pretty much every week. Organizers need huge amounts of people to put pressure on the Prime Minister and the House. Demonstrators have to stay calm and avoid causing trouble — it's a big problem if there's no next time (…) It's a valid approach. But, is it okay to treat people like mere objects for that purpose? How does that make you different from what the government did after the [nuclear] disaster? As this struck me, the loudspeakers came to life again. "Please refrain from violence." Oh, fuck off. I sighed and looked up at a hail of plastic bottles flying in the direction of the cops and the organizers. Suits you right, I thought to myself (Kurihara 2015, 8).

Being "no different than the government" was a serious accusation in the context of the Coalition's crowd choreography, which promised to deliver the righteous anger of a majority to an incompetent, illegitimate minority of lawmakers. Together, these dissentient voices articulated the contagiously contrarian position by which the crowd had to keep the Coalition in check as the real enemies of the people.

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[8] A celebrated author on anarchism and violence, Kurihara who would also contribute to the Japanese edition of an anthology on working-class music that I was translating at the time.

5.2. A new figure of legitimacy

Meanwhile, Noma Yasumichi had witnessed the quenching of crowd effervescence from across the intersection, astonished. He saw that the Coalition had crossed a Rubicon in terms of their relationship to the crowd. It was not what Redwolf had said the assembly, but how she said it:

> To "use the police" was a method avoided at all costs by the Left so far. It was simply taken for granted that the police were an instrument of state power, the forefront of imperialism and colonialism, [and that they] must be resisted as such (Noma 2012a, 44-5).

Using the police speaker car was a course of action "unheard of in the history of social movements, the taboo of all taboos, the ultimate exception" (Ibid., 29). But for Noma, the moment that Redwolf grabbed the mouthpiece had not exposed her or the Coalition as illegitimate stewards of the crowd. On the contrary, it served as proof of a common-sense pragmatism that separated them, and the majority they represented from a dogmatic minority. The Coalition were legitimate ambassadors of the assembly precisely because they were the kind of people that "if it seemed necessary, wouldn't even hesitate to borrow the speakers of a riot control vehicle:"

> People on the Left accused us of colluding with power and so on. But we were actually completely nonpolitical, even contemptuous of the Left (*ganrai ga nonpoli de, jitsu wa sayoku ni taishite reishōteki*). We simply focused on actual benefits (Noma 2012b).

For Noma, Redwolf violating the "taboo of all taboos" was a virtuous act. It demonstrated the legitimacy of the Coalition as ambassadors of the crowd, as well as the crowd's presence in the government district. Not as exuberant festivalgoers, but as the pragmatic, concerned and

only reluctantly dissenting members of a usually silent majority. As Noma would come to argue, the "mothers with children, salarymen or elderly" that gather at the *Kantei-mae* do so not out of desire but of necessity. If there is any desire at all to speak of, he argues, it is that of "stopping nuclear power immediately, so that we don't have to come to the *Kantei* ever again" (Noma 2012, 187).

This figure of legitimacy would soon become a major mimetic motif at subsequent rallies. For example, at the one-hundreth *Kantei-mae* gathering, organizer Daraku followed up his usual bellicose chant with a gruff appeal to the same sense of rational reluctance:

> How many times have we chanted these slogans? How many thousands of times have we made these same demands? One hundred rallies. One hundred. To me, it's a humiliating number. Why do I have to come here and protest again and again? If I could stay at home even once, I would! I wish today's gathering was the last.

In the context of June 29 and the communitas of defeat shared by the dispersing crowd, the same figure played an immediate purpose: it offered to replace an image of "festival-goers" that suddenly seemed to have outlived its usefulness, and to translate what for many participants felt like a moment of defeat into one of opportunity. Because the June 29 rally might look like a failure; the distraught, dispersing crowd might think of it as such. But from this new perspective, only a dogmatic minority remained beside themselves with excitement, distinct from a solemn majority who retained the concerned composure necessary to understand that it was in their interest to withdraw. Here, Noma invoked a Durkhemian distinction between sacred and profane, by way of folklorist Yanagita Kunio's dyad of *hare* as a non-ordinary time-space of ceremony and ritual, and *ke* as ordinary chronotope of work and rest. Whereas Redwolf had made the assembly legitimate as sacred, as festival, Noma

would come to argue that "the vast majority of participants at the *Kantei-mae* don't seem to think of that place as *hare*" (Noma 2012, 36). No, the protest was as profane as any other part of their lives, and they joined its ranks because those lifestyles were being threatened: out of necessity, not some wayward desire for ecstatic experience.

The commitment to congregate physically for two hours every Friday evening — and no more than that — was merely a representation, a reminder of their presence. And if the assembly was staged in the profane space-time of their lives, if it represented that silent majority whose everyday concerns prevented them from physically participating, was that majority not, in a sense, always present? Or, obversely,

> with people (*hito*) *always* gathered here, and protest becoming an everyday scene, was it so strange that the protest transformed from a sacred (*hare*) place to a profane one (*ke)*? (Ibid.)

This was no Hydrangea Revolution; it was just another day in the life of "ordinary people." Again, the assembly outside the official residence proved itself legitimate *not if, but because* it spoke for a majority; with its representatives inside illegitimate to the extent that they failed to recognize the crowd's true nature.

6. Conclusion: Tell the Prime Minister

In summary, there were several concrete outcomes of the June 29, 2012 breakdown, the organizers' intervention, and the "communitas of defeat" it resulted in. The dramatic crescendo cut short by Redwolf's last-minute intervention cemented her position of charismatic leadership, and in turn, the Coalition's enunciative privilege in defining the weekly rally. The same moment that shattered the effervescent crowd into incongruent parts

ignited new articulations of legitimate protest, replacing the casual "festival-goer" with a reasonable figure of quotidian ordinariness. At the same time, it drove a wedge between organizers and participants — a wedge that would fester and grow into a fundamental antinomy with significant consequences for the Coalition's conception of a crowd they had been in charge of both conjuring and containing. One side saw the time for decisive action as running out, and the Coalition's hesitation as a betrayal of the populist promise of the assembly — a promise that somehow would have been fulfilled without Redwolf's unjust intervention. The flock now watched its shepherds with suspicion and threatened to turn against them. Meanwhile, the organizers now returned that gaze with contempt and cautious anticipation of minoritarian wolves in sheep's clothing in their midst. Without Redwolf's intervention, the innocent crowd of casual participants would have turned into a mob, and lost everything in a violent confrontation mere steps from the official residence. These incongruous elaborations of legitimate protest in terms of the illegitimate presence of its constitutive other would both impact the crowd's impending showdown with the Prime Minister.

With troubling polling and increased media attention on the protests, pressure was mounting on Prime Minister Noda to address the protests going on outside his residence. Hatoyama Yukio was the former Prime Minister who had taken the Democrat Party of Japan (DPJ) to a landslide victory against the LDP, and one of many politicians who now opportunistically sought to associate themselves with the *Kantei-mae* phenomenon. He cautioned his successor not to underestimate the crowd as an expression of "people's power" (*pīpuru pawā*). But Noda had remained undeterred, dismissing the crowd in Nixonian terms of his attention to the concerns of a "silent majority:"

> Everything is as usual in the Ginza [shopping district] and at Kōrakuen [baseball]

> stadium. I can hear the "voices of the voiceless" [over the noise of the protests] (cited in Brown 2018, 161).

Therefore, the news that Noda had agreed to host a delegation of ten representatives of the weekly assembly of protesters shocked both the political establishment and mass media. Would bringing the *Kantei-mae* crowd into the residence not accomplish the opposite, and consecrate the crowd as the legitimate incarnation of popular discontent? Less than six months had passed since the Coalition first chaperoned the crowd in front of the compound, and in that time it had grown to become peerless among visual representations of postdisaster political life. As turnout exploded week after week, the protest had transcended its austere single-issue stake to legitimacy, and instead been made legitimate as festival, a space of exception where for just two hours every Friday, anyone could become part of something extraordinary. Since the breakdown of the barriers on June 29, the Coalition had claimed turnout in the hundreds of thousands, but also elaborated a new narrative of legitimate assembly based on the reluctant participation of "ordinary people."

Before confronting the Prime Minister, the Coalition would get a chance to rehearse the rhetoric of popular embodiment in an unexpected location. On July 31, 2012, a dozen representatives from Coalition member groups met with a similar number of allegedly antinuclear lawmakers from the sitting Democrats led by former Prime Minister, Kan Naoto. The location was a pristine conference room for Diet members, situated behind the official residence. The "dialogue" was conceived and chaired by Oguma Eiji, who had begun to take a more active interest in the Coalition's direction. Next to him sat Redwolf, Hirano and representatives of the Coalition's other member groups. The former Prime Minister and his entourage took seats at the far end of a large constellation of conference tables. I sat in my bed, part of an online audience anxiously attempting to deduce the stakes of the unexpected

encounter through a pixellated video feed. An irreverent stream of anonymous comments trickled across the screen from right to left, praising or poking fun at Redwolf and her entourage.

In late July, public debate focused on the proposal for a new Nuclear Regulatory Agency (NRA), heavily criticized as catering to the vested interests which had failed to prevent or take responsibility for the catastrophe in the first place.[9] The online audience assumed that the Coalition, as ambassadors of the crowd, would challenge these politicians to criticize the NRA hirings. The meeting, however, was not staged as a confrontation, but a formal endorsement of the crowd as a political symbol that could be spoken to and for by politicians as a stand-in for a broader body politic. Oguma opened the meeting by affirming the populist imaginary: this meeting was made possible, he declared, "by the tens or hundreds of thousands at the *Kantei-mae* [and] the tens of millions of people opposing nuclear energy behind them." Redwolf also credited the crowd for this felicitious encounter. But their tone was amicable; the politicians nodded sympathetically, then took turns to extol the crowd themselves. Was it a look of relief in their eyes? For the first hour, the meeting progressed as a series of cordial exchanges affirming the weekly crowd as a phenomenon that could not be dismissed.

In the back of the room, a sense of unease was growing with the direction of the meeting. Organizer Daraku had declined to sit at the roundtable, and lingered awkwardly next to a

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[9] The Nuclear Regulatory Agency (*Genshiryoku anzen iinkai*) was established in September 2012 from two existing regulatory bodies considered to have a conflict of interest in the wake of disaster, the new organization was to be established under the Ministry of the Environment. But among the appointees were names associated with utility companies or the "nuclear village" at large.

gaggle of aides and camerapeople. Watching the anonymous comment feed on his phone, he felt a sense of dread. Message after message called out the Coalition for their complacency: "Brown-noses." "Are they not going to mention the NRA appointees?" The legitimacy of the Coalition as representatives of the crowd was at stake. Phone in hand, Daraku shuffled over to Hirano's seat and hissed at the back of his head: "If we don't pressure them on the [NRA] hiring, the Coalition's done for." The previous speaker was concluding, cameras panning toward Hirano. "Promise me," Daraku said before scurrying back into the periphery.

When Hirano spoke, his voice carried a newfound belligerence that unsettled the atmosphere in the room:

> I am just one person, but behind me stand tens, no, hundreds of thousands of people. So let me ask *on their behalf*: do you agree with the [NRA] proposal? Please respond one at a time.

This unexpected turn of events made the half-dozen lawmakers shuffle uneasily in their chairs and glance around the room. Only two denounced the controversial appointment; the rest skirted the question. Former Prime Minister Kan stretched his legs out, clicking a pen impatiently. It was the facilitator, Oguma Eiji, who intervened: "Let's not do this here…" But the spell had been broken. In a rush of blood, other members snapped out of their complacency. As some of the lawmakers tried to skirt the question, they were also met by a storm of dissent. Interrupting Oguma, Daraku and the others joined in the beginnings of a chant.

With Hirano's words, the intended initiation of a political alliance had turned into something else: a dress rehearsal for confronting the Prime Minister on behalf of not just the crowd waiting outside, but of the Japanese people as such. Was the "dialogue" another defeat in that

the ambassadors of the crowd had failed to translate turnout into concrete political results? Or was it rather, as members like Daraku argued, a victory in that they had symbolically resisted the temptation of political opportunity, declined to affiliate with party-political interests, and reinforced their position as ambassadors of the crowd? This question remained open as the organizers geared up for their confrontation with the Prime Minister.

This first outing of the Coalition as ambassadors of the crowd and "the people" set the terms by which their next confrontation would be anticipated and dismissed. As eleven representatives of the Coalition lined up at the security checkpoint behind the official residence on August 22, 2012, they knew that they were putting on a performance: an assertion that the group could address — and be addressed by — the Prime Minister as ambassadors of the crowd, and in turn, of "the people." At the same time, that claim was made with an anxious look over the shoulder: would this crowd live up to that promise, or make it an empty one? The crowd returned the gaze, became, in effect, the real audience, a skeptical spectator eager to evaluate the Coalition or even expel them as false representatives, enemies of the people trading in the legitimacy of their assembly for petty party-political purposes. In their dress rehearsal, that audience had watched the Coalition's members through grainy video feeds. This time around, it waited directly outside the official residence, weighing every word in a dialogue piped directly to them through loudspeaker assemblies. Inside the residence, the arrangements made the previous month's confrontation with demonstration-sympathetic lawmakers seem like a friendly fireside chat. Instead of conference room, a massive reception table draped in white tablecloth awaited the group. The optics were more tightly controlled; only approved journalists were allowed in, and the cameras piping a video feed to the audience outside were in the hands of cabinet clerks (Tanaka 2012). After a courteous greeting by the head of government, and a moment of

anguished silence punctuated only by the clicking of camera shutters, Misao Redwolf begun. She read aloud a list of formal demands: reversing the reactivation of the Ōi reactors, elevation of nuclear abolishment to national policy and a shuffling of appointments to the proposed Nuclear Regulation Authority.

When Redwolf next spoke, she addressed the Prime Minister in familiar terms of voice and volume. The Prime Minister, she said scornfully, would do well not do dismiss as "noise" the sincere voices of the people that could be heard inside the residence. Then she added:

> Today, we really wanted to come here together with the many, the many hundreds of thousands of people outside, but due to the location [inside the Official Residence] it was not possible. I hope that one day you will listen … to the voice of the people.

Other members also spoke sonorously to the synecdochical relation between the Coalition, the crowd outside, and "the people." Next to speak among the crowd delegates was Oda Masanori, the cultural anthropologist who had embraced the solipsistic street performances of previous protest efforts (see chapter 1). He introduced himself as "one of the people beating our drums outside this building" and then continued, overwhelmed by emotion: "Why do I keep beating my drum? It's because you, the Prime Minister, cannot hear [our] voices. It's to make those voice larger, stronger."

The Prime Minister concluded the conference with brief, dismissive comments that declined either demand. The broadcast was cut short, and soon the delegation emerged from the residence with forlorn expressions. An impromptu press conference ensued as Redwolf explained her disappointment to an army of journalists in similar terms. Their demands, she explained, had not "resonated" (*hibiiteinai*) with the Prime Minister. The only reason conceivable reason was that "our voices aren't reaching all the way." In other words, the

crowd had not been able to trade its numbers for opportunity, and remained insufficient, unable to deliver the voice of "the people" all the way to the Prime Minister.

As invoked by Redwolf, the silent majority of "the people" are not to be found elsewhere, but "always" present in the government district — as fully incarnated by the tens or hundreds of thousands outside the official residence as by the ten present inside. But it is also a disappointment. When Redwolf calls the confrontation an achievement made possible only by "the people's" peoples presence outside, while foreclosing it as an opportunity for tangible outcomes and moving the goalposts to "one day" in the future, the crowd is simultaneously recognized in terms of its simultaneously ever-present gaze and dismissed due to its missing voice.

I have attended to the incongruous outcomes of the June 29, 2012 breakthrough in terms of a communitas of defeat in which the terms for evaluating success and failure remain perpetually ambivalent. The organizers intervened in a moment of collective effervescence fearing that it would endanger the entire endeavor of the weekly assembly, but left the crowd divided, its expectations of political opportunity and outcome shattered into incongruent interpretations. The premise behind their invitation to move antinuclear protest from busy shopping districts to the desolate *Kantei-mae* intersection was for the crowd to trade visibility for voice: a voice which would reach all the way into the halls of power. They had promised that with enough people on the streets, no matter how low their common denominator, the Prime Minister would have no choice but to listen. Now, if only he would listen, the people could finally go home. The weekly protest was no longer a festival, no sacred site of collective effervescence, but a profoundly profane place, populated by people who would rather be somewhere else, were it not for their political representatives' failure to recognize their voices.

In the aftermath of the collapse, many organizers, including Hirano the younger, would distance themselves from the Coalition. It was the animus of the crowd, not Redwolf's intervention, that seemed irreconcilable to them. For others the event was a victory: in Noma's epiphany the collapse had revealed a schism not between crowd and organizers, but between a "we" that, by voluntarily disbanding, proved itself judicious and its constitutive other, the minoritarian mob raging at the front lines in defiance of Redwolf's command. These incongruences lingered as the organizers returned to the articulation of a mode of address which would make the weekly assembly impossible to ignore. The fragile fait accompli of the weekly assembly could be safeguarded, if only the *Kantei-mae* crowd could shed its polyphonic prevarication in favor of a majoritarian monotony.

Figure 2: Redwolf unsuccessfully dissolving the crowd on June 29, 2012.
Source: MCAN 2021.

Figure 3: The Chunichi Sports daily declares a count of 200,000 at the June 29, 2012 protest.
Source: Chunichi Sports 2012.

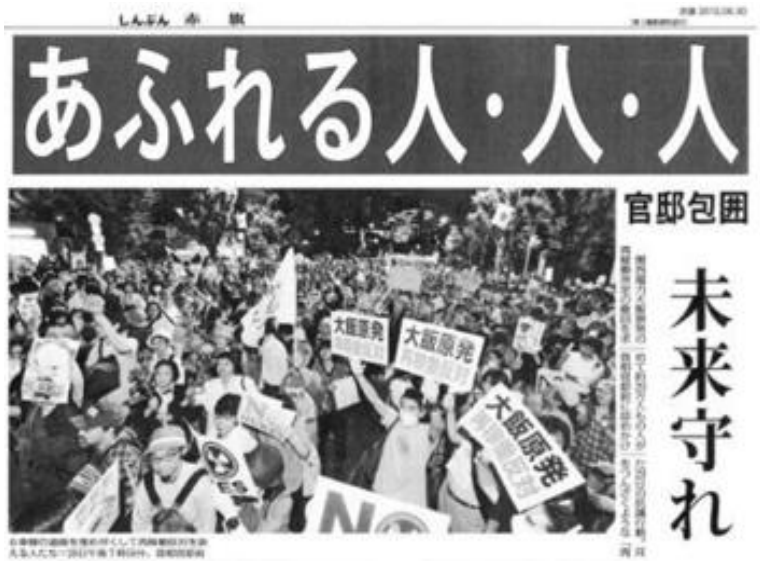

Figure 4: The Communist Party-affiliated Akahata daily ran with the headline "overflowing people, people, people" (*afureru hito, hito, hito*).
Source: Akahata 2012.

Figure 5: Members of the Coalition confront the Prime Minister as envoys of the crowd and "the people" on August 22, 2012.
Source: Nakanishi 2012.

Chapter 3. Setting the stage: populist refrains in the Kantei-mae crowd

When I was two years old, my parents heard rumors of a radiation leak at the local power plant. Apparently alarms had been going off all over the place for the last day or two. The strange thing was, it wasn't the workers leaving the reactor hall, but the next shift coming in to work triggering the sensors. It took us a while to realize, but the black rain had already fallen on our town. My parents called around for days trying to borrow a geiger counter. They measured the dirt at my playground, and the very next day we packed our bags and headed for the countryside. Blueberries, raspberries… deer, moose and boar carry the curse of Chernobyl to this day. As we left my birthplace behind, I kept thinking of all the kids in that playground…

Alas, it was all the time I had. A volunteer appeared in my peripheral vision, waving a laminated sign: "thirty seconds left!" I should have known. After all, I was usually the one holding the sign. How many of these speeches had I heard, here, on this tiny stage? From the rickety scaffold, one of several stages erected at key junctions throughout the protest crowd, I glanced over to the line of speakers waiting patiently behind me. By now, these short speeches were routine; they were ritual. Although mine could not hope to compete with the more virtuosic performances that night, it was enough. Just like the speeches before and after it, it needed only to hit a few familiar notes in order to play a part in a much larger chorus. Haphazardly concluding, I knew it was time for the chant. Even those who tuned out during my brief oration were awake now. I felt the presence of the crowd, so close yet shrouded in the evening darkness, illuminated at regular intervals by streetlights as it extended along the

sidewalk in both directions away from the street corner on which I was standing. I drew a deep breath and said what everyone wanted to hear. *Sprechchor!*

With the thunder of drums marking every syllable, one contagious slogan resonates through the crowd as it repeats back to me: *saikadō hantai!* "Against restarting" the fifty remaining nuclear power plants put on emergency hiatus since the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that propelled the Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant into uncontrolled meltdown. *Saikadō hantai!* "Against" a political elite that, in the midst of escalating nuclear catastrophe, vacillate on the question of nuclear power—itself a cornerstone both of Japan's postwar consolidation of political and economic power, and of its future energy security in a post-carbon world. *Saikadō hantai!* A mass movement not-quite-antinuclear, yet condemning the inextricability of state and atomic power in the nexus of complicity and vested interest now increasingly referred to as the "nuclear village" (*genshiryoku-mura*).

Saikadō hantai! In the following years, other chants would appear to complement and eventually replace it: *Listen to the people! Protect the children!* They addressed politicians in the imperative mood even as they dispensed with concrete demands. But protesters kept finding their way back to a refrain that marked the urgency of the crowd's original coalescence. *Saikadō hantai!* The chant was not merely "against restarting" Ōi reactors 3 and 4, first among the country's fifty remaining reactors to go online after a fifteen-month hiatus following the meltdowns at Fukushima 1. More broadly, it opposed a "restart" of — or return to — the status quo of "predisaster" Japan (Oguma 2013, 182; Horie et al 2020, 44). It was a demand as well as a claim: a claim about the relationship between event and structure, implicitly making the nuclear catastrophe little more than a symptom of a larger agonism involving the entire body politic (see chapter 2). It was in these uncertain terms that the project of enfleshing "the people" began to take shape in the government district.

David Graeber points out that such chants have no particular author; they "just somehow preexist" in the protest crowd (2009, 485). They are tangible products of a creative faculty inherent and perhaps unique to the crowd, where individual initiative can turn into collective capacity in the blink of an eye. Ultimately, his interest lies with an ideal moment where any individual can offer up a chant — much like how the rapper ECD contributed his chorus at the end of chapter 1 — that is taken up by the crowd, allowing that individual to "experience their own individual initiative suddenly become a moment of collective dissolution of individuality." Graeber calls this the "democratization of effervescence" (Ibid.). In this chapter, I am more interested in *the mimetic process by which the multiplicity of dissent discourse becomes streamlined, and individual initiatives come to harmonize more and more with shared assumptions and affectations*. If effervescence is ever democratized, it is when it is channeled along conduits of mimetic expectation and behavior that consolidate first as consequence, then as condition of sustaining that effervescence.

In this sense the *Kantei-mae* crowd performances diverged from the oft-praised horizontalist commitments of "human microphones" popularized by the Occupy Wall Street movement. Occupy's crowd rituals of repeating back the speaker's message phrase by phrase did more than merely replicating prohibited electronic means of amplification; they encouraged individual participants to reflect on the (mediated) condition of possibility for democratic communication (Deseriis 2013). As I will argue, the performative stakes of the *Kantei-mae* stages lied elsewhere: specifically, in using the rhythm and regulation of protest ritual to assert the legitimacy of a fragile collective subject in the presence of its constitutive others. I would like to entertain Durkheim's suggestion, from his classic account of collective effervescence, that "a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order

that permits harmony and unison of movement" (1995 [1912], 218) and ask both what made possible the monotony of the *Kantei-mae* refrain, and what, in turn, it made possible.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of the refrain (or *ritournelle*) as a rhythmic operation for organizing emergence out of chaos, producing security. By assigning an arbitrary center and drawing a circle around it, refrains territorialize; they delineate and organize territory by which "forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfill or a deed to do" (2004 [1980], 311). At the same time, its rhythms provide the background for opening up to an outside, for improvisation and innovation that remains recognizable; they provide the balance between emergence and order. Refrains are worlding, world-making endeavors that bring people in and in line with a shared horizon (Stewart 2010).

In this chapter, I attend to two sides of the populist refrain that took shape in the *Kantei-mae* crowd: on stage, the mimetic performances of a vox populi taken up by protest participants; backstage, the logistical efforts that sustained this performance. My own volunteer duties setting the stage for "the voice of the people" to emanate throughout the crowd — and symbolically, through the nexus of political power in the Prime Minister's official residence across the road — provide a lens for understanding the protest organizers' commitment to a refrain of ordinariness. Their efforts to reinforce the rhythm of an assembly seemingly on the cusp of dispersal came to focus on maintaining a monotony that helped stave off what they considered a dangerous polyphony (cf. Manabe 2015). To the protesters flocking to the boulevards in front of the Prime Minister's official residence every Friday evening, the *Kantei-mae* refrain brought a sense of belonging. It taught them to speak of, and on behalf of, "the people" as the subject of risk and representation. It also allowed another, more spurious

claim of postdisaster populism to arise: an elaboration of populist legitimacy centered on an idea of victimhood as smoothly distributed as sovereignty itself.

1. Vox pop

An hour before my stage performance, I am waiting outside the Coalition warehouse: a closet-sized storage unit located some ten minutes walk from the *Kantei-mae* intersection, in the basement of a nondescript office building adjacent to the Liberal Democratic Party's headquarters. Limousines and black cabs line up with engines running, their drivers smoking and playing cellphone games while waiting for some politician to re-emerge into the cool evening air. To my left, a young policeman in riot control gear leans on a wooden pole by the entrance to the complex, frowning at my quiet struggle with a convenience store lunch box; to my other side, a liveried valet dozes off on a folding chair, next to the entrance of an automatic car park. It is a beautiful evening in Tokyo's government district.

My transition from protester to organizer happens gradually. Once pulled into orbit around the weekly gathering, I stick around to help out alongside dozens of other volunteers. Soon, I start getting the same, brief text messages every week. "Please check the schedule." A link takes me to an anonymous spreadsheet filled with hundreds of pseudonyms: all volunteers pulled into orbit around the opaque Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, and assigned specific duties at each weekly assembly. After reporting in, I receive another text: "Be at the warehouse at a quarter past five pm. The car will be there at half past." A few months later, these duties become as much a part of my weekly routine as the resonant refrains of the protest itself.

The valet stirs as a small metal door just behind him swings open from the inside, revealing a familiar face in the darkness of the doorway. Toda greets me with a muted grunt before

disappearing into the dark again. A trench coat, small round glasses and a moustache gives Toda a dishevelled, John Lennon-like look which he wears with confidence. A stage actor and core member of the Coalition, he orchestrates much of the logistics of the rally, chaperoning me and other volunteers while commuting from the outskirts of the metropolis — a four-hour train ride to unlock the back door of this run-down office complex. Gulping down the last of my lunch box, I hurriedly follow him down a steep set of stairs lined with piles of buckets and cleaning equipment.

Our first task is to fill a number of large plastic tanks used to weigh down the collapsible speaker stands. In a dingy office building bathroom, we compete for faucet space with salarymen scowling at us through the mirror as they wash their hands with pocket handkerchiefs in their mouths and neckties slung over their shoulders. These guys are not going the rally. The office building basement feels like another dimension, still filled with the trappings of pre-digital corporate culture: smoke clouds sailing out of Xerox shops, coffee salons with payphones by the register and elevator music noodle stands. Past stained bead curtains and a buzzing neon sign, an elderly hostess behind a bar counter shoots us a blank look as Toda fumbles with a big key ring. As dusk falls on the metropolis, powerful men from the upper floors will join her over highballs, karaoke duets and light-hearted conversation. Though they might comment on the commotion further down the street, these people will not join tonight's rally either. But the crowd will make demands in their name. The lynchpin of the Coalition's idea of legitimate assembly in the government district is the crowd's ability to speak in unison as representatives of "the people." As one of many proposals for legitimate protest, it appeals to metropolitans with little to no demonstration experience. Kano, a woman in her thirties, spoke to me about the decision to join her first

rally in June, 2012. She is attracted less by reports of record turnout than by a symbolical narrative she could not find elsewhere:

> I was not convinced by the earlier demonstrations I read about. It wasn't clear to me who they were trying to address.

As I argued in chapter 1, early antinuclear protest after the 2011 disaster had been preoccupied with the encounter between the protest crowd and a public audience — whether that public was conceived as fundamentally amicable, or had to be roused out of its apathy. In Chapter 2, I attended to the move into the government district as an attempt to address the felt failures of earlier protest campaigns. Kano's account speaks to a larger shift in the "recipient" of protest that took place in the *Kantei-mae* crowd. She is but one participant intrigued by the Coalition's proposal to "thrust (*tatakitsukeru*) our voices of indignation" against the Prime Minister in his own place of (symbolic) residence, thereby "making visible the will of the people" (*min'i wo kashika*). She had actively sought out the crowd; now, she joined the collective endeavor of learning to speak as "the people." A new dramaturgy of protest was taking shape: one in which, shifting from the ambiguous addressee to the very subject of protest, the figure of "the people" took center stage, supplanting a concern for reaching out with imaginaries of popular representation.

How does one speak in the name of "the people?" Earlier writing on postdisaster protest in Japan have dismissed this question as fanciful, celebrating the weekly assembly as a successful example of how "democracy might look beyond representation" (Brown 2017, 161). But in my experience, neither protest participants nor organizers have found it as easy to dismiss. Today, Toda and I are looking for an answer to this question deep down a basement hallway, unlocking a series of doors and finally the small storage compartment,

packed to a degree that seems to signal imminent rupture with an assortment of equipment necessary for tonight's performance. Soon we are flitting up and down the staircase, hauling it all out into the last of the evening sunlight. Two dozen orange traffic cones, stacked; three hundred feet of speaker cable. Mixer units in scuffed aluminium cases, heavy-duty kerosene generators and a dozen forty-pound, felt-clad loudspeaker assemblies with telescoping tripod stands. Finally, a tall stack of plywood sheets, some six by four feet, painted black but already chipping, to be balanced on a tent-like lattice of collapsible aluminum rods. It's the standard stuff of live music — not surprising, as the Coalition includes a chain of underground concert venues with daily programming — but opulent by average activist standards.

Minutes later, we are splayed out on the sidewalk outside the LDP headquarters, cracking jokes, sucking on cigarette butts and squinting at telephone screens in the last rays of the evening sun. We are about to indulge in another luxury: at half past five, an unmarked van makes a sudden stop in the middle of the road, and backs up onto the curb to the visible chagrin of the young police recruit, whose knuckles whiten around his wooden staff. Two middle-aged union men reluctantly sidle out of the front seats and lean against the hood, breathing heavily, smoking and muttering while watching us load up the trunk. Our mutual restraint expresses the fragile and potentially explosive alliance between the Coalition as custodians of the *Kantei-mae* crowd and a broader Left. The affinities between the antinuclear cause and the mammoth institutional framework of the postwar Left may have become an open secret in the postdisaster. But the presence of these unionists in the crowd, as well as that of a growing host of other bogeymen, is somehow inimical to the appearance of "the people" in the government district. Nobody that we have encountered so far — from the impatient salarymen and apathetic unionists to the politicians inside the building behind us

and the policeman leaning on his club — are allies of the Coalition's agenda. But they all have a role in the play that we are about to stage in the government district tonight.

As protesters endeavored to speak as "the people," they wielded a signifier for popular sovereignty with its own variegated history. Brought into conversation with Western political theory, *kokumin* had since the Meiji Restoration (1868) served to signify the modern nation-state in contrast to ethno-national (*minzoku*) conceptions of cultural identity. In the latter days of the Japanese empire, *kokumin* instead marked the flexible boundaries of citizenship in the "melting-pot" rhetoric of integration of a growing imperial domain (Oguma 2002). The 1947 constitution bequeathed upon Japan by the U.S. occupation government enshrined the same *kokumin* as the sovereign nation of Japan (Doak 2007, 164). The emperor abnegated his role as divine incarnation of national morals; sovereignty no longer resided in the body of the emperor, but "excorporated" (Santner 2015) in the flesh of "the people." Rather than loyal subjects of the emperor, postwar Japanese were re-inscribed in a body politic inextricably tied to the liberal-democratic nation-state but with distinctly ethnic boundaries (Sakai 2014, 121).

Recent work in environmental history has untangled the understanding of postwar Japanese governance as dominated by a consolidation of power in an "iron triangle" of business, bureaucracy and the liberal-democratic party—showing how, from the period of U.S. occupation, a multitude of struggles contributed to the emergence of new forms of citizenship and rights-based claims (George 2001, 281, see also Avenell 2010, Kirby 2011, Stolz 2014, Walker 2010). The language of *kokumin* sovereignty found itself challenged by a rhetoric of rights and resistance. Civil rights activists of the 1950s and 60s argued that to be part of *kokumin* was also "to proclaim one's citizenship in the Japanese nation and, hence, involvement or complicity in the policies of the Japanese state" (Avenell 2010, 11). In its

place, they sought to reclaim the individually performed citizen-subject (*shimin*) from its "pejorative petit bourgeois connotations," and wield it against the hegemony of state violence (Avenell 2008, 711).

In the decades since, both figures of *kokumin* sovereignty and *shimin* citizenship came to seem suspect as loci of political legitimacy. If *kokumin* carried the connotation of an inert body politic, interpellated and represented by lawmakers, *shimin* went from a marker of individual rights to one of non-governmental yet state-coopted advocacy (Avenell 2008, 711). The pejorative "professional citizen" (*puro-shimin*) came to mark a radicalized or overly committed activist masquerading as "ordinary."[1] The vernacular of *kokumin* thus functions as a repository of historical articulations of sovereignty (cf. Chowdhury 2019, 6) that threatens to overwhelm any elaboration of populist legitimacy. Why, then, was it the conflicted collectivity of *kokumin* that was seized on, half a century after being discarded from the progressive political lexicon? What possibilities did it promise in the postdisaster moment? One answer, which I consider in this chapter, is that it illuminated a way around the contradictions of the legacy of Left-liberal which made even the surly unionists and their unthinkable addition to any elaboration of legitimate protest for the *Kantei-mae* organizers.

1.1. Village vanguards

Toda and I have thrown ourselves on top of the sound equipment in the back of the van, and I revise my speech on the back of a stenciled flier as the vehicle circles around the government

[1] The term *puro-shimin* is a precursor to the notion of "professional protesters" popularized by President Donald Trump (Sharkov 2016). By contrast, *kokumin* lacks a corresponding inflection: see Horie et al 2020, 31.

district, slowly passing through several police checkpoints. Earlier in the summer, enthusiastic mass media coverage and word of mouth turned the *Kantei-mae* crowd a spectacle in itself, tens or hundreds of thousands flooding into the government district. As I described in the previous chapter, turnout peaked on June 29, 2012, when protesters overwhelmed police barricades and flooded out into the streets, turning the intersection in front of the Prime Minister's official residence into an ad-hoc public square. Failing to stem the inflow of protesters by barricading subway exits and thoroughfares, the police have upped the ante by preemptively partitioning the area in ever more aggressive manner. The streets are a maze of barricades, riot shields and armored trucks in perfect lines, belching exhaust over the sidewalk.

As we approach the wide T-junction in front of the National Diet building, dozens of protesters are already present on the sidewalk: mostly older women and men in outdoor leisure clothing, politely ignoring each other while reading or sitting on copies of progressive newspapers, scraping the pavement with the kind of padded loafers you would have to order from the back of the same newspaper, or fiddling with outdated flip-top phones. Elaborate marionettes and cardboard assemblies are resting against trees and fences. And things get messier further away from the stages.

Academic accounts of the *Kantei-mae* assembly describe the period following the peak of participation in June 2012 as a transition "from square to village" (Brown 2017; cf. Gonoï 2012) — in other words, from the evanescence of the people's square, to a semi-permanent occupation by recurring actors. Sidewalks have become dotted with settlements: music performances, candlelight vigils, merchandise booths and food stalls. This Friday, just like every Friday, the government district has transformed into an exhibition of the sprawling

multiplicity to be contained by that unwieldy moniker, “antinuclear.” One early account describes how in-between the Coalition’s stages,

> a number of groups established their own small protest areas. There were groups singing songs and others that laid out caricature artworks on the side of the footpath (…) A group of fans of the rock musician Imawano Kiyoshiro set up photographs of the singer and played recordings of his music through small speakers set up on the pavement. A “guerrilla cafe” served sandwiches and hot drinks to passers-by for a small donation (Brown 2017, 163-4).

Most notoriously, a group of retired activists have pitched their tents on the premises of the nearby Ministry of Energy, Transport and Infrastructure (METI). Populated by zealous alumni of the student movement — some with lengthy rap sheets — the “tent village” provides a stark contrast to the Coalition’s vision of legitimate protest. For protest regulars, the ephemeral effervescence of a crowd coalescing across collapsing barricades has settled into the steady rhythm of the refrain. Consolidated by the lingering experience of crowd communitas, a variety of village vanguardists turn to the rhythms of the weekly assembly for meaning, for comfort: they look, in a word, for *ibasho*.

The word *ibasho* consists of the characters for “to be” and “place,” and generally ‘‘connotes a place where a person feels a sense of peace, security, satisfaction, acceptance, belonging, and coziness’’ (Bamba and Haight 2006, 406; cited in Herleman et al 2008, 284). It cannot be given or provided, but must be sought out (Ibid.). The closest English equivalent might be a “niche” in which one can feel “comfortable and vital” (Ozawa 2005, 50). Anne Allison’s influentual study, *Precarious Japan*, takes *ibasho* as a quantitative measure of Gemeinschaft solidarity, and its perceived lack as “the sign, and symptom, of a widespread precarity in

twenty-first-century Japan" (2013, 14). Allison looks to metropolitan social movements as a model milieu (in place of a crumbling civil society) for manufacturing *ibasho* as a tangible resource in and beyond participants' lives.

From Allison's perspective, the Coalition's purported role as custodians of the *Kantei-mae* crowd would also saddle them with supplying that sense of security and belonging among its participants. Earlier that spring, the group had only reluctantly left Tokyo's commercial districts behind in favor of the government district: a place they thought of as overrun by fringe political elements and unsuitable for protest actions on behalf of a majority (see chapter 1). As the *Kantei-mae* protest grew week by week, their idea of legitimate protest had become tethered to mass media narratives about a crowd composed of "ordinary people" that was nothing like mass protests of the past — narratives that in turn lent themselves to a claim about "the people" as ever-present in the government district (see chapter 2). For the organizers to insist on that claim, ought they not also focus on easing the transition "from square to village?" If the refrain of the weekly assembly is to resonate "until the last reactor is shut down and nuclear energy forever abolished," should their choreography of assembly not turn the sidewalks of the government district into the *ibasho* of protest participants?

Alas, the Coalition explicitly refuse *ibasho* as either condition or concomitant of legitimate protest. not only frown upon the ad-hoc initiatives sprouting up around their stages: they lament comparisons between *Kantei-mae* and contemporary protest camps, such as Cairo's Tahrir Square or New York City's Zuccotti Park, which have captured the imagination of cultural elites (cf. Shibuichi 2016). And they detest those who linger in the protest area beyond the announced two hours every Friday evening. That much is clear as Toda scowls at the scattered "villagers" through the car window, mocking them as "*demo-ya"* (demonstrators) begging to be exposed as illegitimate "professional citizens." With no

coherent claim or capacity in the Coalition's vision of legitimate protest, they are not only unfit to speak in the name of "the people" — their mere presence could spell the end of the entire assembly.

2. Discipline

Toda and I clamber out of the union truck cursing our backs. Around us, police recruits are also pouring out of paddy wagons, velcro boots flexing as they unload the kind of modular steel fencing one might expect at a large outdoor concert, securing each segment to the next with bright orange rope in immaculate knots. An officer nonchalantly walks down the line of fences, softly trying each knot with the heel of his boot. When these uniforms speak to us organizers, it is invariably regarding minute modifications to the distribution of protest props inside the now fenced-off sidewalk: "Excuse me, sir, would it be possible to move these cones ten centimeters closer?" Or, "respectfully, could you turn down the volume slightly?" Their politeness accentuates the ambivalence surrounding our activities on the sidewalks: the legal grey zone arising from our practice of permitless protest the government district (see Chapter 2).

At the edge of the sidewalk corner, a group of male detectives loiter in their unmistakeable plainclothes outfits and fanny packs. Their tone is more casual, akin to the courteous disinterest of running into a co-worker at a supermarket. They sidle up to us organizers to share jokes and tidbits regarding other dissident actors they have been tasked with monitoring, or gossip on upcoming promotions. These are the detectives Coalition members might meet during their frequent visits to the police district station, and that they hope will help them remain in the legal grey zone of permitless protest in the government district. Yet without demonstration permits, negotiations surrounding the technological assemblage of

crowd control and choreography still occur on a knife's edge. A metropolitan ordinance defines "megaphone noise" (*kakuseiki bōsō-on*) as any expression of opinion audible above eighty-five decibel at a distance of ten meters — a level barely competing with the background noise of roaring train and car traffic in other parts of the city. It affords on-site police the power to suspend violating performances with charges of up to six months prison time (Abe 1992).

It is with this asymmetry of power in mind that the Coalition has refocused their efforts around a number of ad-hoc stages distributed across the government district. With police barricades molding the mass of protesters between choke points with limited throughput, organizers imposed another degree of discipline by dividing the crowd into distinct blocks. Unlike the sound demonstrations of the Amateurs' Riot, the stages are not consumable markers of taste or style (see Chapter 1). But with designated areas for elderly and families, they partition the crowd in blocks according to vaguely demographic criteria: a collage of archetypes implicative of a coherent totality. In this section, I describe how the protest organizer's expectations anxious anticipation of police intervention interpellated the larger crowd through a distinct disciplinary apparatus at the *Kantei-mae* stages.

Who is the imagined participant in this elaboration of legitimate street protest? In the previous chapter, I mentioned how the Coalition's Noma Yasumichi, in the wake of a lapse in crowd discipline that shock the entire organization to its core, fleshed out a new idea of protesters not as casual festival-goers, but as "ordinary people" who would rather be at home. In refusing *ibasho* as a desirable outcome of regular gatherings, organizers again turn to the intersection of the ordinary and the orderly. For Noma (2012, 265), the protest should not be a place of belonging "for former street fighters reminiscing over old battle scars, nor the fraternizing (*ibasho-zukuri*) of young protesters", but for the rank and file, the commoner, the

everyman. It is an orderly affair, attended by “ordinary people.” Their loyalty lies not with obscure political organizations, but with family, community and nation; they are individuals intent on authentic self-expression as a means to articulate political agency. In contrast to “villagers” pitching their tents or idling the afternoon away in the government district, “ordinary people” only show up for the stipulated two hours each week, and they leave the sidewalks spotless. It is an austere aesthetic ideal, asserted in the ambivalent aftermath of collapsing police barricades that I described in the previous chapter.

The stages erected temporarily around the government district serve as the rhythmic assertion of this ideal. They both formalize and fortify that performative commitment — to let the ”voice of the people penetrate the walls of power” — which first drove the Coalition’s organizers to abandon Tokyo’s cramped commercial streets in favor of the government district’s spatious boulevards. If only the assembly could be redefined around the unity of these stages, rather than the multiplicity settlements of the “village” surrounding them — if only the crowd could be coralled around, its evanescent energy bound by their amplificatory assemblages — perhaps the assembly can endure, perhaps its legal ambiguity can be asserted, and perhaps its populist promise can be actualized in the performance of individual protesters. But for that to happen, a degree of discipline is necessary.

2.1. Come on everybody

Toda climbs back into the trunk and pulls the door shut with a friendly grin: he is off to build the remaining stages at the other areas. From here, it is largely up to me and fellow volunteer Bon to transform the pile of equipment thrown onto the sidewalk into a stage worthy of tonight’s spectacle. Working quickly, we erect the plywood stage facing south, away from the intersection. Next to it, Bon stuffs a camping table with donation boxes and various

merchandise for sale. The large, white Coalition banner that I raise behind the stage catches in the evening breeze.

I squint up at the last orange rays of sunlight glinting off the central cupola of the National Diet building. Most people only ever see this place on television, yet here it is: behind police barricades, but still impossibly close. As speakers on stage face their sidewalk audience from the stage, the illuminated dome of the Diet building is in full view behind them. They can easily turn around and point a finger at the lawmakers inside on behalf of the crowd behind them. In a sense, our work consists of composing a picture: a picture of "the people" confronting the elites beyond the barricades; an extraparliamentary challenge to political representation illuminated by portable spotlights and framed by the gaggle of journalists and lumpen content creators already fiddling with their camera tripods inside a small press area, marked off with knee-height plastic cones and bars directly in front of the stage.

The aural aspect of the apparatus is at least as important. It involves five heavy speaker assemblies that we laboriously maneuver away from the stage, through a strip of dense shrubbery running parallel to the narrow sidewalk rapidly filling up with protesters. We scurry through the foliage with thick bundles of cord, swinging diaphragms toward the illuminated cupola of the National Diet, the placement, direction, and volume of each tower a negotiation with the expectations of crowd, police, and symbolic addressee. If the stages are the material instantiation of the Coalition's pledge to "thrust the voices of the people" all the way into the innermost sanctum of representative democracy, these speaker towers are the technological condition. This amplification is our promise to "let the voice of the people penetrate the walls of power" and "confront the Prime Minister" in his symbolic place of residence. More importantly, perhaps, their position behind the crowd now flocking to the stage makes the entire congregation resonate with the same, familiar refrain.

The final piece of the assemblage arrives on a scooter together with a bony fellow who takes off his helmet, shaking loose a silver ponytail. Hara lights a cigarette and flashes a toothless grin: “No rain today.” That is good news, since the nine-volt batteries he starts unloading from the seat compartment are notoriously vulnerable to moisture. Each tower crackles to life, Hara-san’s battery pack wrapped around its neck in a grocery store bag. Between the bundles of speaker cord sprouting from a digital mixer, I connect two microphones and an old Ipod playing Kraftwerk’s “Radioactivity” as half a dozen percussionists quietly line up behind the stage, hidden from view by the large, white banner. As their warmup drum rolls and cymbal crashes fills the evening air, the entire amplificatory assemblage comes alive alongside the mounting energy of the crowd now flocking expectantly to the small stage. Less than twenty minutes have passed since we arrived at the street corner in front of the National Diet (*Kokkai-mae*). The sun has set. Tall streetlights illuminate the throng that, guided by blinking traffic wands and fluorescent cones, flock to a stage bathed in white light from battery-powered spotlights and camera assemblages. With the conditions for a salient performance in place, me, Bon and Hara fade into the crowd, handing over the reins to an all-female crew in their forties and fifties. They run a tight ship: at six sharp, the music fades to a spoken introduction of the Coalition and its promise to the crowd. Then, a disclaimer reiterating the rules of the assembly: anyone present must

(1) refrain from handing out flyers or collecting signatures until after 8pm, and

(2) avoid signs or banners for issues or organizations unrelated to the antinuclear cause.

Beginning with the dozen or so already lined up behind the stage, all speakers must also agree to

(3) finish speaking within two minutes,

(4) speak only as an individual, not on behalf of an organization, and to

(5) surrender the stage if they express opinions incompatible with the organizers' intents (*shusaisha-gawa no ikō ni sowanai*).

This is our choreographical commitment at its most explicit: *anybody is welcome as long as they are nobody, or rather, everybody.* For two hours every week, the conventional paraphernalia of protest culture are banished as anathema to the appearance of "the people." The time limit — vigorously enforced by volunteers like myself, waving laminated sheets or phone screens in front of the speaker, sometimes snatching the microphone out of their hands only to berate them with it as if they were students who had just finished a mediocre class presentation — serves to safeguard the rhythmicality of the protest ritual. Alongside the ban on signs and banners, the pledge to speak only as an individual is an incantation for warding off the sticky associations of other, illegitimate initiatives who do not belong here.

There is little space for a "diversity of tactics" (cf. Graeber 2009, 8) in this vision where, much like the Coalition's "single-issue" framing, the distinction between contribution and distraction is mutually exclusive. It is true that, should someone diverge from its narrow repertoire, they will be stopped — by force, if necessary. But is it not more interesting how seldom that latent violence is actualized? Futatsugi Shin, the critic who played a part in planning the solipsistic sound demonstrations of the Amateurs' Riot, and later praised their antithesis in the courteous marches of TwitNoNukes (see chapter 1), lamented the "uncanny discipline" of the *Kantei-mae* assembly when he visited (Futatsugi 2012). I could also lend my voice to the detractors decrying as dictatorial the curation/choreography of the crowd that I contributed to every week in the government district. But is it not more tempting to stay on tune; more compelling to consider the conformity with which the crowd commits to the

chorus in a song about themselves? In the third and final act of this chapter, I consider the temptations and tangible outcomes of the *Kantei-mae* refrain made possible for those who stayed tuned.

3. The refrain

Lined up shoulder to shoulder along narrow sidewalks, or tightly packed around temporary stages; transfixed by oratory or erupting into spurts of spirited shouting — for two hours every Friday night, *Kantei-mae* protesters coalesce in the imagined affinity of "the people." The performative elaboration of that elusive national subject is a collective undertaking that found its rhythmical bearings across countless repetitions.

One protester told me that the *Kantei-mae* refrain reminded her of a "high school graduation ceremony" in that they served to infuse the crowd with public spirit, and craft a collective out of those distracted individuals who constitute the "stuff" of all bodies politic. It comes with its own revolving cast of anonymous archetypes: a young nurse, somehow still in scrubs; a salaryman simmering with anger. A high school student in uniform fumbles with her cell phone while pondering the radiological anxieties that burden "all young [Japanese] (*subete no wakamono*)." A nuclear family take turns delivering a bromide about radiation's hidden horrors scribbled in crayon, their daughter leading the chant from atop her father's shoulders. They are relieved by a single mother who cries over the infant, slung over her shoulder, that may never bear children of her own.

Emanating from speaker cones shrouded in darkness, their amplified voices reverberate through us, the audience, and we reciprocate: cheering, clapping our hands, stomping our feet on the sidewalk pavement. The most accomplished enthrall their entire audience, like the nurse reading from a report on revised irradiation limits, but choking up halfway through a

convoluted sentence, breaking into sobs. Momentarily overwhelmed, the audience offers impassioned cries of support: “Hang in there!” “Don’t give up!” We choke back our outrage together, knowing that release is imminent. Our swallowed tears, bitten lips and comic relief; our vehemence and venting of pent-up anger all belong to the same refrain.

That refrain reiterates through well-rehearsed routines of sentimentality, each performance an emotional arc that begins with the portrait of individual suffering and culminates in the crescendo of collective call-and-response. Skilled performers build toward that imminent release, much like the nurse who now grips the microphone with both hands, screaming into it as she turns dramatically toward the illuminated cupola of the Diet. Drummers hidden behind the stage accentuate moments of sentimental intensity with the appropriate rolls and crashes, then increase in rhythm and volume to drive the conventional call-and-response “against reactivation.” As one, the front ranks eagerly join in, then the rear guard. Their chorus stirs the shoulders of other protesters, who have dozed off while standing or become absorbed by their phone screens. The call bounces back and forth a few times, and then it stops — the speaker abruptly relinquishing the microphone with a bow and a quick thanks. Rushed off-stage, they melt into the crowd to scattered cheers, immediately replaced by another, and then another… until the crowd dissolves into the night two hours later.

3.1. The half-life of disaster

To be fair, crowd was not always this loquacious. When the stages first appeared, they were unceremonious undertakings to amplify vox-pop in the interest of attenuating the emotional energy of the crowd. Coalition member Daraku — the former TwitNoNukes member who intervened in the scripted confrontation with nuclear-skeptical politicians in the previous chapter — reminisced about getting the crowd to speak for itself:

> I remember trying to pass the microphone down the rows of protesters. Well… nobody wants to touch that thing. Sure, if you really compel somebody to speak, they would. Most people were [reluctant to speak] like that… then [on the other hand] you'd have the tough guys who show up with 20-minute manuscripts.

I also remember the nameless regulars who addressed the crowd week after week, jeered, booed, or applauded like television hosts. Some circled through different parts of the crowd to give the same speech several times in an evening. At our stage, a young man appeared every week in a spotless three-piece suit and sunglasses to provide detailed updates on radiation monitoring statistics. An older woman in thick glasses lost herself in narrating heavily annotated Tokyo Electric press releases. Some took on pseudo-journalistic duties, summarizing newspaper articles, lawsuits, social media scandals, or endless reports from a plethora of antinuclear initiatives across the nation. Others grumbled about globalists, freemasons, jews or other scapegoats. Diverse and often contradictory claims coexisted uneasily at rallies conceived as public fora for collectively attending to the intricacies of disaster governance and vulnerability; speeches teemed with a polyphony irreducible to maxims of popular sovereignty. If there was any place to experience the true breadth of the "antinuclear movement," it was in front of these stages.

Activists shared a sense of urgency that Brian Massumi (2011) refers to as the "half-life of disaster:" that media-imposed window of opportunity where claims resonate with an attuned public, before the disaster event "decays" in the public mind. As unprecedented numbers flocked to the government district a year after the meltdowns, they did so in opposition to the reactivation of nuclear reactors, but also to the Prime Minister's declaration that the disaster had been "settled" and consigned to the past. To prove that the disaster had not ended, the

task become one of unraveling the complexity of massively but unevenly distributed radioactive contamination.

Taken together, the task of narrating the diversity of disaster experience resembled a collective effort of explication — to borrow Peter Sloterdijk's term for the modern project of making explicit the latent or implicit (2009, 9). Collaborative radiation monitoring challenged government assessments of victimhood and compensation; electricity conservation campaigns in the metropole inadvertently pointed to its reliance on an externalized infrastructure of risk (Karlin 2014). Through a myriad of data points, the political reality of disaster was to be revealed through a slow unraveling of inconvenient truths.

What had to be made explicit was not only the unevenness of radioactive diffusion and entanglement, but a structural complicity that both predated and paved the way for the disaster event itself. For many participants in antinuclear public discourse, the 2011 catastrophe appeared not as cause, but as symptom of a fundamental inequity, deeply lodged in the body politic, between the metropole and its derelict peripheries (or "internal colonies") to which the nuclear reactors had been relegated (Hopson 2017; Akasaka 2011, 2012; Oguma & Akasaka 2012, 2015; Kainuma 2010). Far from an ode to popular sovereignty, this was a reckoning with the terms of political community around which Japan had first modernized, then reinvented itself in the postwar period.

An assembly committed to the public project of explicating an endlessly complex disaster might seem like poor soil for the seed of postdisaster populism as I have approached it thus far. But taking shape in the shadows and cracks of this explicatory endeavor was something at least as ambitious: a competing imaginary which equated citizenship with victimhood, and insisted on injury as universal rather than unevenly distributed. The largely middle-class, metropolitan mass movement against nuclear power would prove itself unwilling to consider

political outcomes in the form of a compromise between center and periphery (cf. Yamamoto-Hammering 2015). Given the choice between victim and perpetrator, the *Kantei-mae* refrain would iterate its idea of legitimate assembly around the former.

3.2. From immunity to community

Antinuclear rhetoric of the early disaster aftermath had targeted a public consumed by uncertainty. Amidst a deluge of unreliable information, the reality of radiological exposure (however miniscule) could only be expressed in terms of probability or prognosis — so and so many Sieverts of ionizing radiation, so and so many cancer diagnoses. If risk is an intrinsically social category (Douglas 1966, 1992; Beck 1992), the material substrate on which that risk is expressed is that of the population, the body politic. As Kathleen Woodward argues, that "statistical body" is both the object of collective action and the pregnable surface upon which we paint our individual present "in a perpetual state of risk," and plot out futures of risk exposure and management (2009, 196). In this probabilistic mode of engaging a future replete with risk, individual agency comes down to mundane consumer choice: a new water filter, the pricier bunch of carrots shipped from overseas, the indoor playground. Radioactivity joins a host of other risk factors unevenly distributed across the population, just as the project of minimizing ingestion of radionuclides joins an ensemble of other techniques intended to *immunize* the body from injury.

I am invoking immunity here in Esposito's sense of that which "keeps someone safe from the risks to which … the entire community is exposed" (2013, 59). Immunity thus stands opposed not to exposure, but to community itself, and the fantasy of a body that remains unscathed is also the fantasy of being exonerated from communal ties — in the case of

radiological disaster, from fissile radionuclides tied down in vulnerable tissue — and thus, of having nothing in common with an exposed body politic.

Anthropological accounts of the 2011 nuclear catastrophe have implicitly invoked similar terms of immunization. For example, Sternsdorff-Cisterna's ethnography of consumer activists, who order groceries from across the country or conduct their own radiation screenings, points to the "scientific citizenship" wielded by these activists as they acquire new scientific literacies to circumvent state authority under conditions of profound uncertainty. Drawing on Aihwa Ong's notion of citizenship as a flexible category through which upwardly mobile denizens renegotiate their relationship to the state (Ong 2006), Sternsdorff-Cisterna defines scientific citizenship as

> a transformation in the relationship between citizens and the state that is catalyzed and mediated by the acquisition of scientific literacy. It involves citizens amassing enough knowledge to critically assess expert advice and (…) circumvent the state's expertise in order to protect [their] health (2015, 456).

To the extent that such "scientific citizenship" is not a question of community, but of immunity from conditions of exposure that threaten to become communal (that is, general), it becomes a curious inversion of Adriana Petryna's notion of "biological citizenship" (2004, 2013), through which people learn to articulate affectedness in ways legible to official logics of governance and recompensation. Petryna treats postdisaster governance as an economy of victimhood recognized in terms of a "*common sense* that is enacted by sufferers themselves" (Petryna 2004, 250; my emphasis). But if Petryna's notion of citizenship remains inherently inequitable, the common sense enacted in the *Kantei-mae* crowd's articulations of

ordinariness differs in that imagines a victimhood as smoothly distributed as sovereignty itself. Here, everyone is a victim.

The conditions for considering oneself part of such a community of injury were in many ways already there. For one, as Woodward suggests, the statistical thinking which plots individual exposure on risk onto a collective body is always on the cusp of flipping over into a "statistical panic" in which we are all already affected (2009, 196). Meanwhile, claims that exposure to nuclear fallout affected all of Japan equally had become commonplace one year after the reactor meltdowns. For example, Hida Shuntaro — a celebrity doctor who had treated victims of the 1945 Fat Man explosion over Nagasaki — argued publically that with the 2011 disaster "every person in Japan became a *hibakusha*," that is, affected by exposure to radioactivity (cited in Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2018, 4). The ubiquity of such claims bent questions of recognition and citizenship into more figurative territory, while leaning into postwar narratives of national victimhood by which the atomic bombings of 1945 afforded Japan a unique position of victimhood (cf. Orr 2001).

The access to and allure of such a community of injury, of relinquishing immunitarian intent and the rationale of public discourse, at least for two hours on a Friday night, is difficult to describe outside of the refrain. It was within its monotony that polyphonic accounts of complexity and contradiction increasingly could finally give way to a univocal claim of representation, and where demands staged in terms of exposure and vulnerability could

surrender the stage to populist performances that insist on a general state of victimhood as the grounds of legitimacy.[2]

The quick succession of short speeches and deafening but monotonous calls "against reactivation" provide a never-ending stream of anonymous or generalizable accounts that, in spite of a near-infinite amount of individual motivators and factors, produce the composite effect of a representative totality. As mass protest in the government district coalesce around the assertion of a national subject-matter for which the disaster has not, can not end, the protest crowd stand as the enfleshed evidence, the "living proof" of catastrophe as embodied experience. The song which that crowd sung about itself became coherent across innumerable individual performances given in quick succession. It folded the incoherency of public discourse into a coherent, collective subject, a "we" that we all can access through the event which created it. Catastrophe continues in us all as the trauma of irradiation, now elevated to national experience and thus denied all internal variation.

It is true that this imaginary is easily disturbed by voices with a more immediate claim to victimhood. Who dares assert the smooth distribution of affectedness when a young refugee who lost everything in the exclusion zone takes the stage? "You claim to be 'enjoying delicious Fukushima rice,'", she says, "but are you really hearing what folks from Fukushima have to say?" She is addressing politicians who travel to the vicinity of the molten reactors to sip on tap water or nibble on strawberries in awkward photo ops — but might as well be

[2] One early mimetic elaboration was the rehearsed reminiscence of where one had been when disaster struck on March 11, 2011. Much like its North American equivalent — where were you during the 9/11 attacks? — it commemorates the moment of interpellation of the individual by a moment of world-historical significance.

addressing a crowd that indulge, perhaps irresponsibly, the notion of affectedness as a condition of community.

The young refugee's oratory was in danger of missing its mark and inadvertently target her audience, most of whom count themselves part of the strata of the metropolitan population who can afford not only immunitarian countermeasures but also to commute into the governmental district, and spend their Friday evenings performatively commiserating with fellow countrymen. But before we know it, her time is up and she dutifully offers up the conventional call-and-response before surrendering the stage.

On the other hand, this articulation of victimhood as utterly ordinary allows even those illegitimate interlopers — those elusive elements of the Left around whose absence so much of the populist proposal took shape — to face the crowd as another archetype of ordinariness. Take the young representative of Nazen, the antinuclear front of an infamous New Left splinter group.[3] Elsewhere, she would doubtlessly rile up her comrades with well-rehearsed tropes of class struggle, steeped in the "exceptionally harsh and violent" rhetoric of the far left (cf. Steinhoff 2006). Tonight, she instead takes to the stage as "an individual and mother, here with my daughter." The crowd celebrates her contribution to an emergent elaboration of legitimacy that welcomes anybody, as long as they are nobody… and everybody. After appending the very same call-and-response routine she too is swept off stage and disappears into the night.

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[3] Nazen, or the National Council for Immediate Removal of All Nuclear Power (*Subete no genpatsu ima sugu nakusō! Zenkoku Kaigi*) formed in late 2011 as a front for the Japan Revolutionary Communist League-National Committee (*Kakumeiteki Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei, Zenkoku Iinkai*) or Chukaku-ha sect.

I have pointed to a performative shift in postdisaster protest as one, unexpected outcome of the *Kantei-mae* refrain. The few critical voices who also identify this shift — one that I have attended to here as one from explication to mimicry, from complicity to victimhood, and from immunity to community — invariably attribute it to the gravity of the postwar Left, and thus dismiss the *Kantei-mae* refrain as a hopelessly compulsive repetition of its central dogmas. For example, popular radio host Morley Robertson used his media platform to admonish the *Kantei-mae* crowd:

> Tokyo Electric has its own interests: they'll keep promoting nuclear power even if we all get cancer. The mass media dare not defy them. Nuclear power was promoted by the CIA [and] doubled as a convenient storehouse for weaponizable plutonium. Before you know it, all the pieces of a Leftist view of history (*sayoku katsudō no rekishikan*) have fallen into place… Even if all the above's partly true, the bigger truth is that Japan became affluent through its dependence on nuclear power.
>
> But most antinuclear activists don't want to admit that. They prefer to see themselves as infinitely innocent victims (*mugen ni keppakuna higaisha*). I think most participants now are "amateurs (*shirouto*)" with no previous protest experience, but the only language they share is precisely that of jumping to conclusions which the Left tends to take refuge in (*sayoku ga nigekomigachina tanraku shita sekaikan*) (Koba 2012).

But as I hope to have shown in this chapter, postdisaster populism was far from a simple repetition of, and more an ambivalent attempt to sublimate a general aversion to the legacy of the broader Left into an articulation of legitimate assembly.

4. Conclusion

In his classic study of the crowd, Gustave Le Bon suggests that in the crowd, certain "general qualities of character … possessed by the majority of normal individuals … become common property" (1896, 9). In this chapter, I have explored a similar leitmotif as it was elaborated in the monotony of protest performances in the *Kantei-mae* crowd.

In the early aftermath of the March 2011 nuclear catastrophe, antinuclear activists in the Japanese capital addressed a public that they considered profoundly apathetic. A year later, this othering of a national polity — the "they" of the Amateurs' Riot acephalous choreography of assembly (see chapter 1) — had been transubstantiated into the "we" of a wounded collective. The ambiguity of the addressee that had contributed to a productive indeterminacy in the narration of collective trauma (cf. Mazzarella 2015) instead came to appear as an alienating obstacle that, according to the Coalition's Noma Yasumichi "excluded the real discontent of the masses (*masu*)" (Noma 2012b). This chapter attends to this shift in terms of my own experience setting the stage for this narrative, practicing it on stage, and then watching from backstage as it unfolded and, with unexpected consequences, transformed the crowd's conditions for coalescence.

In the political theater of the government district, the onus lay not on the crowd's capacity to convince a bored, ignorant or distracted body politic about the perils confronting it. By venturing to speak in the name of "the people," such rationalist expectations could be turned on their heads. On one hand, the endeavor of speaking in the name of "the people" was more than rhetoric: it took shape as a performative project that reiterated lines drawn between legitimate and illegitimate, between those fit or unfit for this task. On the other hand, narrowing the performative scope of protest from the staging of public discourse to the endless appearance of "ordinary people," the universality of catastrophic victimhood relied

on a repression of internal differentiation, of the contradiction and complexity that the antinuclear movement had thus far attempted to narrate. In unexpected and perhaps paradoxical ways, the monotony of the *Kantei-mae* refrain resolves the "problem" it was intended to address, engaging those illegitimate elements it had sought to silence albeit typecast in new, profoundly normative roles.

Figure 6: a volunteer placement map distributed in advance of the July 20, 2012 protest. Green arrows represent one-way pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks. Blue arrows show direction to the child-friendly “family block” and red boxes mark "speech areas."

Chapter 4. Populus interruptus: the legacy and legitimacy of postdisaster populism during "Ampo '15"

"Tell me what democracy looks like!" The shrill voice of a young woman pierced the night. In response, a deafening roar: "*This* is what democracy looks like!" Across the street from the iconic dome of the National Diet, pale beams of light illuminated a girl looking no older than high-school age, perched on a stool and clasping a bullhorn covered in colorful stickers. She was riling up a mass of protesters packed in tight rows, barely visible beyond the narrow beam of the spotlights, but unmistakably present ever further out into the damp darkness of the summer evening. Without missing a beat, the girl challenged the mob around her:

> I say *kokumin* [the people], you say *namenna* [don't fuck with]; *kokumin! (Namenna!) Kokumin!* (*Namenna!)*

The girl looked around the way a rock band singer might survey their audience during a guitar lick: lips pursed, head nodding confidently. Dropping the first beat, she eased back into the first chorus — "tell me what democracy looks like" (*minshushugi tte nanda*) — and the crowd reciprocated again, without hesitation: "This! (*kore da!*)

It was a warm evening in the summer of 2015, and the steady rumble of drums resonated throughout the gloom of the government district, regularly punctuated by car horns, sirens, and bullhorn distortion. Large crowds were once again congregating along sidewalks and street corners, loudspeakers and spotlights were erected, and rituals of dissent rehearsed in familiar ways. Yet this time, the amplified voices and faces visible in the pale floodlights both seemed considerably younger; rhythms were faster, more dynamic; refrains bolder. One by one, the nation's dormant nuclear reactors fleet were coming back online, but it was not their reactivation being decried by the weekly assembly, nor was it the vagaries of radiation

exposure and victimhood. Flags and banners addressed neither disaster governance nor energy policy, but issues of national security.

In 2015, a set of challenges to a long-standing progressive consensus regarding Japan's geopolitical relationship with its neighbors and the United States brought mass protest back to the government district on a scale not seen since the summer of 2012. A diverse coalition of peace, labor and civil rights groups opposed as unconstitutional a series of laws that allowed Japan's de facto military, the Self-Defense Forces, to defend overseas allies. At the center of this controversy stood one small group of college students, the "Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy" or SEALDs (*shiiruzu*) for short.

The students found themselves appointed figureheads of a mass movement, their emerging celebrity status a matter of mass consumption beyond partisan outlets. Lavish media attention to their spectacular protest performances dusted off narratives of social change coordinated through commercial social media networks that had once been applied both to the boisterous crowd summoned by the Amateurs' Riot (see chapter 1) as well as the weekly antinuclear gatherings in front of the Prime Minister's residence (*Kantei-mae*; see chapters 2-3). Jubilant coverage in the Washington Post, BBC and other foreign outlets appointed SEALDs as the protagonists of yet another renaissance of political expression in Japan, just a few years since the peak of antinuclear protests provoked similar commentary.

SEALDs both revised and reinvigorated the postdisaster populist proposal with their framing of the 2015 protests against collective self-defense in terms of a "constituent moment" — a self-authorizing moment of political creation in which "the people" is manifested. But they also inherited the fraught relationship to the crowd that I have described in earlier chapters. In August 2015, they spearheaded an alleged 350,000 protesters past police boundaries, only to stop moments before they reached the gates of the National Diet.

The short-lived saga of SEALDs and the figure of "the people" they summoned forth functions in this chapter as a surface on which to map the legacy of postdisaster populism: to wit, the notion that permit-less mass protest in the legal grey zone of the government district could become a stage for enacting a fleeting image of "the people," that its attendant repertoires could be generalized and deployed again and again to link disparate political issues into a chain of equivalence under the sign of popular sovereignty — and finally, that its everyman aesthetics could stave off the sticky, negative associations with postwar radicalism. This prompts a revisiting of themes developed in earlier chapters: a notion of legitimacy guaranteed only by the crowd's innocence as "ordinary people" and the organizers' anticipation and ejection of infectiously illegitimate fringe elements; the "truth" of physical turnout numbers as a heuristic for political initiative and influence, and the elevation of national character over concrete political gains as the ultimate stakes of collective struggle.

In reconstructing that saga, this chapter combines ethnographic perspectives on protest participation with interviews of both organizers and participants collected as part of the "Voices of Protest" oral history curriculum at Sophia University, to which I contributed as a guest researcher and instructor while conducting fieldwork. Even though I did not conduct participant observation directly with the organizers introduced in this chapter — several of whom were students at the university I was affiliated with — I hope that the nuance and ambivalence of their perspectives can help to complicate a narrative that has been told time and time again with great fervor, not just domestically (Kasai and Noma 2016; Tanaka 2016; Johno 2017) but in English-language scholarship as well (Kingston 2015; Dudden 2017; Hammond et al 2020).

My other correction to a narrative which has tended to fetishize a small group of teenagers as charismatic leaders with a coherent vision (Kingston 2015; Komori et al 2015) hinges on a dialogical emphasis on the relations between different parts of the postdisaster movement ecology. In this chapter, I attend to the students' endeavors in terms of engaging and appeasing the various "grown-ups" (*otona*) who congregated around them. SEALDs found themselves celebrated, embraced and ultimately suffocated by mass media, the progressive political establishment, academics and the older crowd gathering around their sidewalk soapboxes each week — all of whom saw in these youth a chance to rehabilitate and reinvent their own activities. With their private lives exposed to public scrutiny, with every utterance recorded, transcribed and scrutinized by both anonymous online audiences and renowned public intellectuals, the students tried in vain to turn public attention and protest turnout into political opportunity. In a different context, historian George Mosse spoke of the cadres of another youth movement who "sought to strip their own relationships of an eroticism that might get out of control and to direct their community of affinity toward ... an inner patriotism more genuine than the saber-rattling of their elders" (1985, 57). SEALDs epitomized a similar ambition, inherited from the caution, if not contempt, with which the Coalition's antinuclear organizers had approached conventions of an "old-school" Left in the previous years.

I begin by explaining the focus on SEALDs against the backdrop of an increasingly partisan political landscape, and progressive fears that the Japanese postwar was coming to an end. From there, I approach the group's protest performances in light of the complex and contradictory expectations they were confronted with by older generations of activists. Finally, I attend to the culmination of the students' protest activity (the anti-Abe protests of August 30, 2015, attended by an alleged 300,000 protesters) as an effort to represent, if not

resolve those contradictions within the crowd itself — an ambition crystallized in the moment where an ecstatic ("beside itself") mob asserts its own autonomous reason "in spite of itself" by sitting down in the middle of the street.

1. Dear Abe

As the Friday evening crowd once again begun to swell out across the slopes and street corners of Tokyo's government district, it did so against the backdrop of a political landscape much different from the summer of 2012, when Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko had welcomed a delegation of members from the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes into the official residence. Noda's Democrats had remained split on the nuclear energy question, and a controversial proposal to double the consumption tax further eroded public support. Bartering with the recently ousted Liberal Democratic Party for electoral and social security reform, Noda agreed to dissolve the Lower House in November 2012. In the general election that followed, the Democrats lost more than three quarters of their representatives, holding on to only 57 of a total 480 seats.[1]

The victorious Liberal Democrats, having ruled almost uninterrupted between 1955 and 2009, had only a few years to settle into their opposition status. The new Prime Minister was also a familiar face: Abe Shinzō (1954-2022), dubbed "the first Prime Minister born in the postwar," and the youngest in a hundred years after his successful first bid for the premiership in 2006. Abe called for an end to the "postwar regime" (*sengo rejīmu*) — his

[1] See Shinoda 2013, 226. The Democrats limped on for a few more years, and after several mergers with smaller opposition parties became part of the Democratic Party for the People in 2018.

moniker for the contradictory configuration of U.S. vassalage and anti-militarist ideology within which Japan had understood and legitimized its role in the global order — and vowed to "break free" (*dakkyaku*) from its stranglehold on Japanese society, beyond which could be discerned the hazy contours of a "normal" Japan (Abe 2006a).

At the core of this postwar regime was its most venerated artifact, the U.S.-provided constitution — above all the hallowed Article 9, through which Japan waived its right to a conventional military force. Revising that restriction had remained an elusive promise of conservative election campaigns for decades. Now, with 294 seats in the Lower House and the help of the allied Kōmeitō, a narrow two-thirds supermajority in the Diet meant a real chance for constitutional reform. But breaking free from the postwar regime was not simply a technical matter of parliamentary supermajority. To Abe, it appeared to require a reckoning with the "self-flagellatory" view of history which drove a wedge between peace-loving postwar Japanese and a longer national heritage, obscuring Japan's true national identity and potential. Abe made this clear in his first policy speech upon returning to the official residence: "The most important thing is to restore pride and confidence in yourself, is it not?" (Abe 2013, cited in Harris 2020, 323).

Abe's ambition echoed that of his grandfather and former Prime Minister, Kishi Nobusuke. A cabinet minister before the war, Kishi survived the Tokyo Trials and spent the following decade engineering his own return to the official residence in 1957. In the unfolding geopolitical logic of the Cold War, Kishi became a convenient asset for the U.S. national security apparatus and its desire to turn Japan into a bulwark against an expanding communist bloc (Weiner 2008), even as he sought to turn those desires to Japan's benefit by renegotiating both the constitution and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, or *Ampo*.

The treaty, which allows for US military bases on Japanese soil, was negotiated before the solidification of the postwar geopolitical order it helped to establish. Signed alongside the San Francisco treaty in 1951, it was met with fierce opposition from resurgent labor and student movements. Riot police clashed with protesters against the treaty on the following May Day, killing two. In the following years, the U.S. occupation had become increasingly receptive to mass protest provoked by the killing of civilians.[2] Accordingly, president Eisenhower agreed to cut stationed troops by half, and to further renegotiate the treaty. As Jennifer Miller remarks (2019, 192), protests against the treaty revision can seem puzzling to the contemporary observer. Designed to replace the 1951 treaty, the 1960 draft addressed many infected aspects of the U.S. military presence,[3] yet Japan's obligations remained much the same. Kapur also notes that there was great irony in this treaty revision, which was "intended to salve Japanese national pride and stem the rising tide of anti-American protests [but instead] resulted in the largest popular uprising in Japan's history" (2018, 17).

The movement against treaty revision involved not only general unions but a potpourri of anti-base, anti-nuclear (bomb), peace and women's organizations, ostensibly representing a postwar Left united for the first time in opposition to Kishi's proposed treaty revision (Sasaki-Uemura 2001; Gibson 2012; Packard 1966).[4] This united front tethered anti-imperialist rhetoric to the defense of the constitutional Article 9 as a lynchpin of democracy,

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[2] See e.g. the 1954 Lucky Dragon incident described in chapter 1; Kapur 2018, 16-17.
[3] Troops were no longer allowed to quell civil disturbance in Japan; the U.S. now had to both defend Japan and ask it's permission to mobilize troops. Cementing the United States' obligation to protect, the treaty also allowed for renegotiation every ten years.
[4] The People's Council for Preventing Revision of the Security Treaty *(Anpo jōyaku kaitei soshi kokumin kaigi*, or *Kokumin Kaigi* for short*)* welcomed both the Socialist and Communist parties, with the latter notably relegated to observer status (Kapur 2018, 19).

economic growth and material abundance (Sasaki-Uemura 2001, 3; Miller 2019, 201-202). By contrast, the recent wartime experience served as a reservoir of horrors which would revisit the populace should the country fail to honor its pacifist pledge.

When Kishi moved to extend the ongoing Diet session to ratify the treaty, and physically removed opposition lawmakers obstructing the proceedings, the shocked nation's gaze focused on Tokyo and the National Diet as the symbolic center of conflict. Turnout broke all records; organizers declared 330,000 protesters outside the Diet (the police counted 130,000; Tokyo Shimbun 2012). Despite majority support for the revision inside the Diet, "postwar democracy" became something which could and should be defended on the streets outside.[5] Besieging and breaching the gates of the Diet — the "sacred heart of Japanese democracy" itself (Andrews 2016, 176) — had already become a goal in itself when student protesters pushed past police barricades and onto the Diet grounds months earlier. When the protests culminated on June 15, 1960, student vanguards again stormed the main gates, but in the melee that ensued a young female activist was trampled to death and exalted as de-facto martyr of postwar democracy.

The tragedy of *Ampo* 1960 continued to exert an enduring influence on Japanese society. The crowd flooding the government district would be joined by those of the 1964 Olympics and the 1970 World Exposition in a series of pivotal moments of postwar mass culture (cf. Reischauer 1978, 200). But to the political imagination of generations of Japanese, *Ampo* meant much more. Even today, as William Andrews notes, "the word [*Ampo*] is talismanic. It

[5] Cf. Maruyama Masao's distinction between parliamentary (*innai*) and extraparliamentary (*ingai*) politics (Maruyama 1995 (1946)).

signifies protest, government arrogance—and also defeat" (2016, 170). The trope of three hundred thousand citizens from all walks of life amassing on the Diet lingered — typically to explain the political resignation of the decades that followed, or buttress the idea of Japan as a society where such gatherings (or indeed street protest in general) were no longer viable or legitimate means of political expression.

As the mass movement fizzled out in the wake of the treaty's revision, the tragedy of *Ampo* also installed a fundamental fissure in the Japanese Left. For the student radicals who had led the charge on the Diet, the treaty was but one theater in a broader class struggle, and the "one-country pacifism" (*ikkoku heiwa shugi*) of the larger movement was a farce (Andrews 2016, 176; Kapur 2018, 134). The Vietnam war provoked domestic resistance on familiar grounds of endangering peace and democracy, but also critiques of the same, naive pacifism: Japan did not send troops into Vietnam, but benefited financially by liberally interpreting the newly ratified security treaty (Havens 1987). Should Japan alone prosper from "peace," New Left activists asked, while its neighbors suffered under the yoke of imperialist violence? What kind of "peace" was only threatened by Japan's embroilment?

Abe Shinzo, in his own way, also embodied the legacy of *Ampo*. In fact, it had become "the point of origin for his political awareness and indeed his entire political career going forward" (Kapur 2018, 4). His grandfather had arguably cemented the nascent postwar clientelism he had sworn to undo. The treaty revision came at the cost of revising the constitution, the promise of which remained an elusive one for decades — until Abe once again entered the official residence fifty-two years later. In his autobiography, Abe (2006) recalls sitting on his grandfather's lap in the official residence, and the crowd outside as a sign of illegitimacy: protests are the product of a noisy minority while the silent majority of "ordinary people" are preoccupied elsewhere. As Abe broached the issue of constitutional

reform for his secondary term as Prime Minister in 2012, he suggested a similar relation between the contrarian crowds amassing outside his residence, and an otherwise preoccupied "people" (*kokumin*) who only needed to be properly persuaded.[6]

In late 2013, Abe announced a new legal framework for national security, including draconian penalties for whistleblowers and journalists disclosing designated "state secrets."[7] A mid-2014 "reinterpretation" of the constitution's infamous Article 9 allowed for overseas military deployments in the name of "collective self-defense" alongside military allies (i.e., the U.S.). In May 2015, the necessary legislation was introduced to the Lower House, and passed in a July 16 vote.[8] Just like his grandfather once had, Abe went on to extend the Diet session by three months knowing that even if rejected in the Upper House, the bills would be written into law. But in a pivotal development, three leading constitutional scholars testifying to the Diet in early June unanimously declared the bills unconstitutional. After this major

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[6] By the time of Abe's return to the Official Residence, the debate on constitutional reform had passed over the lofty idealism of Article 9 and congealed around a number of explicit issues: first, formal recognition of the Self-Defense Forces, which existed in legal and constitutional limbo since its U.S.-approved inauguration in 1950. Secondly, a state of emergency clause that would transfer power to the central government during natural disasters or pandemics. The year before, the Liberal Democrats had released a "draft" revision which augmented these amendments to a FIX the "basic unit of a society" from the individual to the family (LDP 2012). In 2013, Abe dismissed both in favor of lowering the treshold of reform itself, from a required two-thirds vote in both houses of the Diet to a simple majority. The proposal was criticized by constitutional scholars as a "backdoor" to more controversial reform, and eventually abandoned (Mutō 2016).

[7] The "state secrecy law" or "Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets" (*Tokutei himitsu no hogo ni kansuru hōritsu*) punishes the disclosure of designated state secrets with up to ten years incarceration for public servants; five for journalists and other civilians. The legislation led to Japan falling from 11th to 72nd place in the annual ranking of global press freedom by Reporters Without Borders.

[8] Officially the "Peace and Security Preservation Legislation" (*Heiwa anzen hōsei*) but more commonly referred to as the "security-related bills" (*Ampo hōan*) or less affectionately as the "war laws" (*Sensōhō*) by its opponents.

setback, a survey of by the Asahi found that ninety-eight percent considered the bills unconstitutional. From that point forward, opposition united around the same framing (Mutō 2016).

The rapid pace of Abe's reforms galvanized a Left-liberal bloc that had remained splintered throughout the postdisaster period. With a Democratic Party relieved to rejoin the opposition, and former Prime Ministers reinventing themselves as vigorous opponents of nuclear energy, a much-simplified discourse of political agonism was taking shape. Abe was, as one opposition congressman declared, "scarier than Godzilla" (Konishi 2017) — a state of exception that could only be confronted in the name of popular sovereignty. His landslide victory and parliamentary supermajority notwithstanding, many progressives eased into an imaginary that pitted Prime Minister Abe versus "the people."

2. The return of the postwar

In the simplified imaginary increasingly taken up by progressives, an idea of the postwar as a condition for peace, prosperity and liberal democracy, familiar from the mass movement against *Ampo* 1960, came to play an outsized role. This meant a turn away both from critical analyses of post-growth consumer capitalism that had dominated the social sciences during the "lost decades" since the turn of the century. It was also a turn away from the notion of the postdisaster as a paradigm shift. To look beyond the postwar was no longer to look toward the postdisaster as a field of political and epistemological opportunity (cf. Azuma 2011) — it meant trembling at the thought of an impending "prewar," set into motion by a process of military escalation and forever undoing the fruits of the postwar regime. When public figures asserted that "our times are starting to feel just like the prewar period" (Ōkata 2015), or university professors suggested that Abe was "not human" and had to be "cut to pieces" in

the name of democracy (Yamaguchi 2015), they likewise entertained an apprehension, widely shared among progressives, that the Prime Minister was unraveling the "postwar regime" before their very eyes.

With the impending seventieth anniversary of Japan's defeat, liberal newspaper, magazine and television specials asked their audience: would the postwar survive until eighty (e.g. Azuma et al 2016)? With this return to a "peaceful" postwar as something uniquely legitimate, but in urgent need of protection — complete with the figure of its undoing, Prime Minister Abe himself as state of exception — the stage was set for "*Ampo* '15" to play out as a battle over the future of postwar Japan. It was under these conditions that the "Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy" emerged as the figureheads of a loosely constitutionalist-pacifist mass movement against Abe.

2.1. Constitution kitsch

When the group officially formed (on Constitution Memorial Day: May 3, 2015) it was with the explicit purpose of preventing the passing of the security-related bills. When they appeared in the public consciousness, it was as an effort expertly tailored to the expectations of a Left-liberal consensus that equated "liberal democracy" with the postwar period, and indeed with "Japan" itself. At a June 24 press conference hosted by opposition lawmakers, one student told a gaggle of journalists that

> in a world where warfare is taken for granted, the only country that holds up an ideal, in the true sense of the word, not to engage in war is, arguably, this project that we call "Japan." That it has continued for 70 years is nothing less than a miracle. Now that it might be coming to an end, we must fight to maintain this peace and prosperity for future generations.

It was because "the current administration is an existential threat" to that project that the students had embarked on their "emergency action" (Okuda and Kobayashi 2015).

While echoing the urgency of opposition discourse, the students also instilled hope into their growing audience. The posters, flyers and promotional video "trailers" that SEALDs used to advertise their assemblies fused archival footage of nuclear mushroom clouds and wartime ruins with attractive young men and women posing like fashion models. Okuda Aki, a charismatic college senior and a founding member of the group, liked to reassure his Friday evening audiences that "in 30 years, in the one-hundredth year of the postwar, I will be the one to celebrate that we kept the peace for a hundred years" (*oretachi wa 100nenkan sensō wo shinakattandatte*)! And even if the security-related bills were to pass, he said, "what is at stake is *us, now*, before the bills are written into law. Okuda's "we" gestured to a political collective united by the historical experience of "postwar democracy," while also faced by an existential crisis in the form of the security bills. This was an image of "the people" that resonated with the urgency of the moment.

Ushida Yoshimasa, another founding member from the same college as Okuda, filmed rap videos extolling the constitution's Article 9 as a "modern-day samurai striding unarmed through a warzone" (Kaneko 2016). Other students took to tear-filled spoken-word performances of entire paragraphs from the constitutional preface, read out loud from cellphone screens: "We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time … trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world…" Here the students rehearsed a role as purveyors of a sort of "constitution kitsch" for an audience hungry for reassurance.

Many protesters of the generations shaped by the tragedy of *Ampo* were old enough to have children or grandchildren of the same age as the young student activists. For them, the youth were a messianic presence at the anti-Abe rallies. They carried a capacity for something

which older protesters thought they could not accomplish — perhaps not even imagine. For example, Miyazaki Manabu (1945-2022) was a former radical whose communist faction routinely crossed swords with other student movement factions in the *Ampo* days, as gratutiously described in his best-selling autobiography (2005 [1997]). Now spending his Friday evenings in the anti-Abe crowd, Miyazaki had nothing but praise for the new generation of student activists. Back in the day, he said,

> we tried to solve the problem with our fists. Our generation carries that dark history of killing each other in factional struggles [of the New Left]. Just when we thought we'd die of old age before ever properly figuring out why our movement failed, SEALDs came along (Kobayashi 2016, 64).

Voicing a similar appreciation was Mutō Ruiko (1953-), a Fukushima native who gained fame as the leader of a criminal lawsuit against Tokyo Electric (see Yamaguchi and Mutō 2012; Jobin 2020). In interviews, Mutō mused over a chance encounter with the young Okuda:

> The other day I ran into [the young man] at a park in Kamakura. And, as I had a chance to talk to him for a moment, I couldn't help but feel a force of imagination, a certain nimbleness and sensitivity that we [older generations of activists] lack. They do things completely differently, but maybe, just maybe, their way will allow us to pull through (Hirano 2016).

To these senior protesters, it seemed like any progressive agenda — even the postdisaster antinuclear movement — was too riddled with incongruities and doomed to fail without the young students. It was not just the opposition to constitutional reform, but the Japanese Left as such into which the students ought to breathe new life.

Far from every "grown-up" accepted the students' stewardship. A journalist interviewing protesters rallying behind SEALDs found that one in five openly criticized them (Kobayashi 2016, 61). They addressed the student organizers in the same generational terms, but from a perspective of disappointment where the youth could only fail to reenact the glories of yore. They dismissed the students' "lukewarm" attitude to the impending threat of legal and constitutional reform, their "naive" defense of postwar democracy, and their speeches being "polite to a fault." What irked the more radical elements in the crowd, then, was similar to what had earned the Coalition their ire: in particular, they expressed contempt for SEALDs' repeated calls to "offer a word of thanks to our police officers" (*keisatsu ni arigatō*). Why, one of the interviewees suggested, couldn't the students "storm the gates of the Diet once and for all?" (Ibid.)

Other older protesters dangled images of the *Ampo* crowd in front of the students as both warning and temptation. A meticulously documented debate with celebrity sociologist of gender, Ueno Chizuko (1948-), started as a warning against "extreme" elements in the crowd but quickly entered more ambivalent territory:

> You probably have no patience for an old woman's stories. [laughs] But let me tell you, [in the New Left] there was no place for women once the helmets (*metto*) and clubs (*geba-bō*) came out […] You know, in social movements you always have some radicals (*kageki*). They're bold and stylish, and they pull the rest with them […] The crowd which was so peaceful at first now floods into the street, holding hands (*furansu demo*). Ah, it feels so good! And now, the protesters are zigzagging through the streets in a snake dance. They stop traffic completely! Oh, yes, this feels even better (Isobe 2016)!

Ueno blinked away her reminiscence and looked at the group as if expecting an applause. The students laughed politely, seemingly at a loss for words. When she continued, the narrative took a sudden turn:

> That's when the riot squads come out with shields and batons, water cannons and tear gas. Things begin to escalate. Soon students are donning helmets in the name of self-defense. Some of their victims die of traumatic brain injury, you see. So those helmets are just for self-defense! You've probably seen it in photographs, but the handkerchief in front of your face — that's so they can't identify you… and for the tear gas (Ibid.).

There was little for the students to rescue in Ueno's rose-tinted reflections of charismatic leadership and violence — but also no outrunning the "grown-ups" and their insistence on the legacy of *Ampo* as archetype of legitimate assembly. But SEALDs wanted to be more than purveyors of feel-good "constitution kitsch" for these older audiences. They had a plan for them: a plan that looked to the open spaces of the government district and the distinctly postdisaster protocol for congregating there as the only means to achieve their goals and stop the proposed legislation.

2.2. The magic number

In early June, SEALDs held their first general meeting at Sophia University, a college in central Tokyo where I was also affiliated. A few dozen students had gathered in a classroom for a casual round of self-introductions and brainstorming concerns regarding the proposed legislation. As the gathered audience quieted down, Ushida, one of the core members of the group, appeared in a baseball cap and white t-shirt to rehearse the formula for political change on a whiteboard.

> People don't just turn up because you say you're doing a rally. It grows bit by bit. From here on we're going to want to bring in more and more people until we have 300,000 on-site.

He scribbled the number in the middle of the board, the squeal of the dry erase marker echoing in an otherwise silent room. Everybody seemed to be wondering the same thing: was it really possible to attract such a huge crowd from the usually silent street corner that the group had just recently appropriated as their stage? With just a few months left until the regular Diet session, the number seemed at once mythical in proportion and overwhelmingly real. Ushida corked, then uncorked his marker again and methodically underlined the digits on the whiteboard before committing to the narration of myth.

> Why is this number so important? So, back during *Ampo* ['60] Abe's grandpa, this real villain called Kishi Nobusuke, well, he pushed [the legislation] through the house. At that point, 300,000 people showed up in front of the Diet. What happened then? Kishi had to step down. People who say that protests have no influence haven't learned from history. It's a fact that Kishi was surrounded by 300,000 and that he had to step down. In other words, *if we can only get 300,000 people to come we can stop this*. That much is true.

Ushida seemed almost conspiratorial in recounting the widely known narrative, according to which three hundred thousand protesters from all walks of life had descended on the government district to prevent the ratification of a treaty which would endanger the country's postwar commitment to pacifism. If a similar crowd could be summoned seventy-five years later, would its voice not be that of "the people?" Would the government not have to listen? The fact that the security treaty had been ratified in 1960 was of little importance compared

to a larger truth: the controversial "war laws" could be stopped. It was merely a matter of turnout.

In front of larger crowds, Ushida grew more comfortable rehearsing the quasi-mythological narrative through which the equivocality of *Ampo* 1960 had been transmogrified into a victory for the people. At the next weekly rally he took the bullhorn and turned sideways, toward the official residence, to inform the Prime Minister himself about their agenda: "We'll bring 300,000 people and force you to step down! Just like we did to gramps!" He turned to the cheering crowd behind him: "Let's put this guy on the scrap heap of history!"

Ushida's confidence was contagious, and it mirrored that of older generations who expected nothing less than a repetition of the 1960 confrontation; an "*Ampo* -15" in which the people once again manifested itself to shake off the yoke of militrism. One such voice belonged to Koga Shigeaki (1955-), a pundit on the liberal Asahi television network well known for his diatribes against Prime Minister Abe. Earlier that spring, Koga had caused a major scandal by interrupting a news broadcast with a handwritten sign saying (in English): "I am not Abe" — an apparent reference to the Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris earlier that year. Asahi's *Hodo Station* was the flagship liberal news broadcast and had provided consistently critical coverage of the security legislation; the host Furutachi was the same reporter whose sympathetic voice-overs had guided television spectators through the *Kantei-mae* crowd three years earlier (see chapter 3). But Koga's sign was too much for primetime: as the broadcast went to commercial producers rushed the studio, fruitlessly pleading with Koga to put down his sign.

It was Koga's last appearance on the show, his sortie soon followed by that of the disgraced Furutachi. To Asahi's anti-Abe audience, Koga became a hero who challenged mass media's

tacit complicity (*sontaku*) in Abe's agenda. At the June 12 protest, Koga took to the stage to address the machinations of mass media.

> TV and newspapers don't care about justice, they're in it for the money. Put differently, if this movement keeps growing, they'll try to make a buck off of reporting it.

After a brief pause, Koga turned to the students and addressed them in a softer tone:

> It's not easy for you college students to get a job. Your parents did all they could to get you into college, and now you have to come here, become the targets of police surveillance, and worry about future job prospects? If you try to do this on your own, [the establishment] will crush you. But at a certain point, all of that is turned upside down…

Koga's speech moved the crowd by elegantly tethering cynicism to a promise of impending breakthrough: right now the movement was weak, putting individual protesters at risk, but greater turnout would change everything. If protest was a numbers game mediated from start to finish by the opportunistic gaze of corporate media, their base motivations could be exploited towards greater momentum. With media coverage and police response reduced to epiphenomena, physical turnout was at once the only metric for approximating the political agency of a mass movement, and its only legitimate expression. How many was enough? Koga spelled out his answer in a written appeal, circulated on July 7, 2015:

> Become one of three hundred thousand! During *Ampo* 1960, 300,000 protesters surrounded the Diet and toppled the Kishi cabinet. Don't expect anything from politicians. Let's make the 300,000 people demonstration a reality. From one in a thousand, to one in three hundred thousand — the smaller your own presence seems, the greater the power of the movement! (…) We'll get more mass media coverage, and sitting legislators will start to worry about next year's election. Only then will we have a chance

to stop these security laws (Koga 2015).

Koga's letter reiterated the causal relationship between turnout, media attention, and power. Opposition parties within the Diet walls could no longer be expected to stop the security legislation; that power lay only with the crowd outside. The magic number, the turning point, was once again that of *Ampo* 1960: 300,000 people on the streets. Nothing less would compel the media and political establishment to recognize the crowd.

It was thus amidst everpresent comparisons to *Ampo* '60 that the young students found themselves the figureheads of "*Ampo* '15," saddled with the contradictory challenge of reenacting an overdetermined historical legacy, here invoked as a victory for peace and democracy, while at the same time avoiding its inherent pitfalls. Expectations of *another Ampo* became a promise of latent eventitude; a historical blueprint that could be held up against the present. As figureheads of the movement, it was up to the young students to orchestrate its actualization in the *Kokkai-mae* crowd.

3. Alone in a crowd

In the summer of 2015, SEALDs was on everybody's lips. It is hard to overstate mass media's infatuation with the small group, whose name itself made it into the top ten "new words of the year" (Contemporary Society 2015). With interviews in daily papers and their bright-eyed faces slapped on magazine covers, the small student group became the figureheads of a mass movement, their emerging celebrity status a matter of mass consumption beyond partisan outlets. Everyone seemed to have an opinion: from the small cottage industry of relentless fault-finders reminiscent of the mockery targeting feminist protests in the 1970s and 80s (e.g. Tanaka 2016; Matsuoka & Okuda 2015; cf. Shigematsu 2007, 81; Ehara 2005), to the progressive pundits lining up for carefully curated

confrontations — often conducted in front of live audiences and written up in glossy print — and pointing to the students as evidence that Japan's youth had overcome its political indifference, ushering in a new age of civic participation.

Images of irreproachable youth taking to the streets of the government district suffused popular media: on television, mainstream franchises scrambled to make room for haphazard character portraits of youthful activism. Take hit soap opera *Wise and Foolish* (*Tami-ō*), which aired that summer and spawned several spin-offs, featuring a Machiavellian Prime Minister and his deadbeat son (played by slender heartthrob Suda Masaki) who end up body-swapped in a top-secret CIA weapons program. Unlike the novel it is based on, the television series culminates in the prodigal son agitating a mass youth movement that march on the Diet waving protest signs and proclaiming vapid hopes for the future through bullhorns. Or take the latest novel by Setouchi Jakucho, a 93-year old Buddhist nun and prolific producer of pulp fiction, written as a letter from an unnamed female protagonist breaking up with her hopelessly pragmatic boyfriend:

> Listen Eita, if the Prime Minister goes through with this war legislation, you will be dragged [into conscription] too. Girls won't be spared either. Our future will be destroyed. You can go ahead and laugh, Eita, but when you're demo'ing (*demotteru toki*) you'll feel it: it's like your insides become translucent and then, just for a moment, you stop existing as a person. There's a sense of togetherness that lifts you up; it courses throughout your entire body. Please understand, Eita? No matter what you say, I'll keep going to the protests that you hate so much (Setouchi 2015).

Such works of popular culture summoned sexually attractive and socially adept characters to enact the aesthetics of postdisaster protest in front of mass audiences. They invoked the

effervescence of protest participation as narrative devices in otherwise uninspired plots, and the crowd performances taking shape in the government district as stages of self-discovery and expression, populated not by faceless activists but by authentic, relatable, even lovable individuals.

Amidst these images of heroic youth, the SEALDs members themselves often narrated a sense of not fitting in. Many had experienced living overseas, and attended Christian or liberal arts colleges in the metropolitan area, but seldom spoke of themselves as elites. SEALDs member Shibata explained that "none of us felt like we ever 'fit in' completely in class or after-school activities. [SEALDs] was a random gathering of people who had always felt like they stood out from their surroundings" (Webdice 2016). For Okuda, the same sense of standing out from a crowd was bound up with the disaster experience as a moment of political awakening. He had graduated from high school the day after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami — only to get caught up in the wave of volunteerism which swept the country. Returning from the disaster zone for college, he felt alienated by the "temperature difference" (*ondo-sa*) with other students, and came to expect, even resent their ignorance (Furuya and Okuda, 114).

Antinuclear activism was at its apogee. For Okuda, however, the street protest was a place not for collective action, but for introspection and self-discovery. He "didn't have a very good image of social movements […] I pictured folks wearing helmets and swinging sticks." Reluctantly accompanying a friend for his first visit to the *Kantei-mae* protest (in May 2012, before the police barricades collapsed), Okuda expected the worst: the hostility and hopeless anachronism of "professional citizens" committed to lost causes. He was surprised to find himself smittened by the upbeat atmosphere of the crowd, and returned every Friday evening. Eventually, he started inviting classmates along after classes: "it doesn't matter if you're for

or against nuclear power," he told them. "Let's go down to look at the *Kantei-mae* rally. Something incredible is happening in Japan."

There was an important caveat in Okuda's solicitation: the freshmen were not to participate in the rally, but merely observe it (*kengaku*). Taking a position was optional, but a wariness of getting too caught up, or worse, losing sight of one's rational faculties — that was essential. In video feeds from the collapsing police barricades of June 29, 2012, Okuda can be seen in one corner of the screen — immobile, squinting at his cellphone — as a torrent of bodies ripples and surges around him, flooding into the car lanes. "I don't know why I couldn't bring myself to take a step forward and enter the fray back then," he said when later confronted with the footage. But this sense of being alone in a crowd was transforming into the desire to reach for something different, and to make the protest "more public" in place of the crowd's ostensibly united sense of purpose (Takahashi & SEALDs 2015, 31).

The students were less concerned with the Coalition's choreographic commitment to "ordinary people" united in unambiguous opposition, and more interested in the individual performances of public discourse that still took place on the various stages scattered throughout the *Kantei-mae* crowd (see the previous chapter). The crowd seemed to them a massive experiment in crowd psychology; an enactment of the conflict between individual reason and collective ecstacy. Through a conversation with political scientist Gonoï Ikuo, they began styling themselves a "temporary autonomous zone" (cf. Bey 1991) that would embody the public reason that Okuda's field trips had failed to find, in spite of the collective effervescence of the crowd around them.

Before long, the students' defiant presence raised eyebrows with the Coalition. Okuda had already received an irritated response to his inquiry about "observing" the weekly protest. "They got very angry," Okuda said later. "But thinking about it now, if some random

students tried to make a big circle and hold conference [inside the protest crowd] I would have stopped them as well" ((Takahashi & SEALDs 2015, 31). Expelled from the *Kantei-mae* crowd, the students were no less enthusiastic about public protest: they abandoned their attempts to secure a space for rational discourse within the antinuclear crowd, but kept looking for other opportunities to contribute to the larger context of metropolitan protest movements. That opportunity came with the public uproar against the "State Secrecy Law" and its severe restriction of constitutionally protected freedom of speech (see above): soon, the students were not only showing up at larger assemblies, but organizing their own demonstrations as the "Students Against Secret Protection Law" (SASPL; active February-December 2014). Before disbanding, the students' short-term initiative held a final rally in front of the National Diet — a place they would return to a few months later in the guise of their "emergency action" against a new set of threats.

4. Caught between postwar and postdisaster

Public outrage against the security legislation was growing quickly in the summer of 2015. As different political interests and constituencies coalesced into a loose anti-Abe alliance, it seemed as if all roads led back to the government district, where a plethora of other groups now made claims to the once desolate intersections in front of the Diet and official residence. Thursday evenings belonged to the All-out Action Committee: the broad alliance organizing "old-school" cadres of labor unions and peace groups in much the same way as the mass

movement against *Ampo* in 1960.[9] On Friday evenings, SEALDs took up the task of summoning a younger, more casual crowd to the large T-crossing in front of the National Diet (*Kokkai-mae*). This meant that the students gathered at the very same time and place as the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, which still held its weekly rallies three years later. Whereas the Coalition erected one of its stages south of the intersection (as described in chapter 3), SEALDs set up camp on the northern sidewalk, just across the boulevard leading up to the Diet. Many protesters frequented both the antinuclear crowd and the anti-Abe one, and recognized a deep affinity between them. As one elderly activist said,

> structurally speaking, stopping [the security legislation] is the same thing as preventing the reactivation of nuclear reactors. Challenging the global order safeguarded by nuclear power, and preventing Japan from becoming a more oppressive society — these struggles are one and the same (Hirose & Akiyama 2015).

Coalition members, on the other hand, were ambivalent in their attitude toward the students. Some harbored hope that the weekly gathering could function as a vessel (*utsuwa*) linking the two crowds together in a populist chain of equivalence (Kinoshita 2018; cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985, 144). But for that chain to hold, the same anxious anticipation of illegitimate elements polluting the performance of "the people" which had led them to ostracize the youth three years earlier was a central condition. Misao Redwolf, the Coalition's informal leader, told me about the relation in terms of restaurants built wall-to-wall, helping each other attract an overlapping clientele. She then returned to a familiar dichotomy: SEALDs were on the

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[9] The All-out Action Committee
Senso sasenai 9-jo kowasu na! sogakari jikko iinkai, commonly abbreviated as Sōgakari

"inside" (*uchi*). On the "outside" (*soto*) were those whose "old school" tactics relegated them to irrelevance, or who challenged the Coalition's vision and supervision of the crowd. Others looked with no small hint of envy to the much larger crowd across the street. They considered as their legacy the *fait accompli* by which massive protests in the government district could be *de facto* advertised and conducted without a permit. The media narratives of unprecedented participation that they had seized on three years earlier to attract ever larger crowds to the government district were eerily similar to those that now surrounded the students. They came to see SEALDs as more than a contender for crowd custodianship and something more akin to a sucessor.

The idea was formalized in a stilted encounter staged by the *Contemporary Thought* magazine. Under the watchful eye of sociologist Oguma Eiji, Redwolf passed the torch of crowd stewardship not to the All-out Action Committee or to the broader movement against the security legislation, but to the young Okuda and SEALDs. From *Kantei-mae* to *Kokkai-mae*," declared the magazine's special issue, as if consigning the unresolved nuclear question to the past (Oguma, Redwolf & Okuda 2015). The symbolic bestowal of crowd custodianship was the Coalition's bid to dislodge the students from a "postwar" they considered politically inert, and into their idea of a postdisaster unburdened by historical association. As I mentioned in chapter 2, Coalition members had resented mass media comparisons between the antinuclear crowd and its 1960 equivalent: to them, *Ampo* was as inconvenient a historical coordinate as the antinuclear movement predating the disaster (see chapter 2). Oguma, too, had little patience for the juxtaposition between the two crowds, past and present. "2015 is an extension of 2011," he told *Contemporary Thought*, "and not the return of 1960. The character of the central stakeholders and the way in which people gather are both completely different" (2016b, 34).

As for the young students, they also carried with them an ambivalence toward the Coalition's copresence in the government district. For many of the students, returning to these streets in the summer of 2015 also meant returning to the site of their political awakening. Rhetorically speaking, SEALDs' framing of the struggle against "collective self-defense" in terms of popular sovereignty refined the claims of postdisaster populism. The young organizers' warnings not to "fuck with the people" radicalized rhetoric which many protesters had grown comfortable with three years earlier. In returning to the government district as the stage of that conflict, the students took up and refined the Coalition's populist playbook of political performances.

4.1. The tip of the spear

But amidst their mimicry, the students also departed from the Coalition's formula of legitimate protest in meaningful ways. Nowhere was that contrast as visible as in the crossing in front of the National Diet. At the Coalition's stage south of the intersection, speakers still replaced each other at a rapid pace, delivering two-minute *cris de cœur* interspersed with routine chants. There, the stage was positioned so that speakers faced the crowd with their back to the Diet, and delivered their tirades framed by its marble colonnades; cameras were consigned to the space in between speaker and crowd, and *pointed toward the Diet* so as to simulate the gaze of the crowd (see chapter 3).

On the north side of the street, SEALDs summoned a much larger, denser crowd. Here, the gaze had been inverted: at the very edge of the sidewalk corner, stacks of floodlights and a narrow bench upon which television crews and other cameras stood perched like pigeons, their backs to the Diet. Their gaze pointed *away from the Diet,* as if to mimic that of the lawmakers imagined inside. It was trained on a single, brightly illuminated speaker, flanked

on both sides by a dense wall of bodies, faces and signs. The speaker, usually a college student, faced the cameras as if directly addressing the politicians inside — but so did everyone else: a wall of earnest faces and signs extending into the darkness in both directions away from the street corner.

The students were usually first and last on the scene. At their early rallies, the crowd had seemed uniform enough that Okuda asked other members to greet all participants in person, and ask what school they were from. In view of SEALDs' media visibility and popularity, A handful of Tokyo high school students who met in the anti-Abe crowd organized as the "Tns-sowl" (short for "Teens Stand up to Oppose War Law") soon mingled comfortably with the older college students. Dozens of smaller student groups also realigned themselves as regional chapters with similar alphabet acronyms, staging rallies across the country.

But a large and growing majority of protesters were undeniably much older. A September 2015 opinion poll by conservative Sankei and Fuji outlets found that some four percent of all respondents had joined SEALDs' rallies. Forty-one percent sympathized with their cause, with fifty percent against. But looking closer at the responses, they differ starkly by age. Whereas half of all men in their sixties — the student movement generation —sympathized with the protests, only one of four males in their twenties did. And while less than three percent of people in their twenties had participated, over half of respondents in their sixties or over reported that they had (Kobayashi 2016, 23-4).[10] Amidst the banners and flags swimming through the sea of people at the anti-Abe protests, the alphabet acronyms of

[10] The 2014 census showed almost 86 million aged 64-67 compared to 50 million aged 20-23 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2014).

various youth groups were now complemented by ones like "MIDDLEs" or "OLDs," invoking the aesthetics of the student organizers but aligning themselves in solidarity based on age group.[11]

In SEALDs' choreography of the crowd, it mattered not only who was on stage, but who surrounded them as well. Whereas the Coalition encouraged the mimetic repetition of attributes marked as "ordinary" while singling out others as unfit to speak, here, across the street, was a different choreography for controlling the composition of the crowd, favoring certain attributes over others, prodding certain elements back and others to the fore. Urging young, attractive participants towards the relentlessly mediated tip of the spear in the corner of the intersection was an explicit bid to attract more people to the rally. As Ushida said,

> using young people just clearly has more impact on the way it is showed on the media. From a media point of view, it attracts attention. So that's why we have young people dominating the screens and have them come forward physically to the cameras ... if we only have old grandpas and grandmas, young people might feel reluctant to come (Voices 2015).

The tip of the spear was also a staging of representational anxieties exacerbated by the camera's relentless gaze. Where progressive pundits reported on "chic streetwear" (BBC

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[11] Whereas the students' early rallies were held in areas associated with youth culture and consumption, the OLDs rallied in Sugamo, known as a shopping and entertainment district for older citizens. While academic accounts (e.g. Yamamoto 2016) have tended to treat such groups as "parodies" I think they are worth taking seriously in light of the performative focus on demographic representation which had emerged since the disaster, and foregrounded the Coalition's efforts to partition the crowd in 2012.

2015), their conservative counterparts described "television cameras clustering around rapping teenagers. But elsewhere it was all old guys" (Sakurai 2016, 58). When a distressed Okuda complained that news coverage never showed any young people at their rallies, could be seen in their demonstration footage, newspaper . Okuda, whose face appeared in the mass media on a daily basis, replied sardonically: "In that case, I suppose I'll never be in the paper" (SEALDs & Takahashi 2015, 12).

4.2. Grown-ups, good and bad

Pushed outside the purview of the intensely mediated tip of the spear, many older protesters questioned their own activism in terms of their relation to the students. Some argued for complete separation. For example, Akiyama Toyohiro (1942-), a former journalist famous for reporting from the Mir space station in 1990, argued that "it's us [baby boomers] who've made the world such a horrible place," and as such older protesters "ought to leave the young activists in SEALDs to their own devices" (Akiyama & Hirose, 2015).

But most "grown-ups" treated the SEALDs assembly as the taken-for-granted arena for articulating their own ideas of legitimate assembly. A reportage in the Weekly Post described how

> riot police brought more fences and tried to contain the protest crowd overflowing from the sidewalk. Guys in their sixties, probably of the [*Ampo*] generation, kept running to and fro looking for a gap between the fences to slip through, and were getting warned by the police (Weekly Post 2015).

Critic Matsuzawa Kureichi (1958-) scolded these "bad grown-ups" (*warui otona*) for "behaving like children" at the front lines of the crowd:

> things are only going to get harder from here for SEALDs. They're doing this every week, after all. There's no doubt that the crowd is growing at breakneck speed. Meanwhile [the students] are exhausting themselves hauling gear and negotiating with other groups, cops and the media (Matsuzawa 2015).

An anonymous speaker similarly lambasted the "bad grown-ups:"

> As soon as these kids get some media coverage, you demand they do this and that. How much more will you put on their shoulders? If you know enough about society and history to lecture others, how about you shoulder some of the burden yourself instead of creating more work for them (@mipoko 2015)?

At stake in this discourse of efficacy was the finite energy and strength of the young student activists — a precious resource to be cultivated and conserved. It returned to the idea of crisis: "bad grown-ups" were not simply "counterproductive;" they were unwitting allies of Abe, and therefore enemies of the people.

How, then, to be a "good grown-up?" For Matsuzawa, it was not enough to ask "what one can do to reduce [the students'] burden;" one must deter the interlopers who might otherwise increase that burden. He praised the members of the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes who had already taken it upon themselves to do the same. "At the last rally some thuggish-looking guys (*chimpira mitai*) were making the rounds, way scarier than the police. You better listen to them if you know what's good for you" (Matsuzawa 2015).

It was an open secret that the Coalition took a deep interest in the crowd even after symbolically handing over the reins to the students. Since the early disaster aftermath, Coalition members like Noma, Banchō, Hirano and Daraku (familiar from previous chapters) had contributed to the construction of elaborate choreographies intended to protect the

innocent crowd from illegitimate associations. Now, they had crossed the boulevard in front of the Diet and roamed the anti-Abe crowd intent on protecting the students from its infectious influence. For these ambulating cadres (known as the *Azarashi*, or "seals," in a pun on the SEALDs brand) the numbers game proposed by Koga and the casual strata who filled out the ranks of the spontaneous assembly were taken for granted as mere backdrop for more hands-on operations. One historian reported matter-of-factly that the Coalition "has ceded the spotlight to the more youthful SEALDs, and these days they are assisting SEALDs *from behind the scenes*." Their duty was to "help with security by monitoring the crowds, keeping things peaceful and removing saboteurs" (Kingston 2015, my emphasis).

The difficulty which the student organizers faced in declining this "assistance" provided by the "good grown-ups" of the Coalition points to the paradoxical nature of their position, caught between postwar and postdisaster. Writer Sei Yoshiaki lamented the tendency for

> people in and around the Coalition [to] start calling themselves *Azarashi* and take it upon themselves to kick out New Left sects. I'm sure they're proud of themselves, but to their surroundings they are nothing less than SEALDs' defense corps. To other people, now SEALDs unfortunately look like just another sect" (Sei & Yamaguchi 2018).

Sei argued that "Okuda's big mistake was failing to control and cut off the *Azarashi*" (Ibid.). But what these concerned voices did not realize was the extent to which the students were already involving the entire ecology of "grown-ups," both good and bad, in their own, ambivalent articulation of legitimacy amidst the impossibility of reenacting the twin legacies they had inherited from the past.

5. Populus interruptus

On the morning of August 30, tension was in the air as all manners of activists descended on the government district for the final showdown with Abe's "war laws." Middle-aged protesters were mingling uncomfortably on the sidewalks in front of the National Diet. Impromptu chants were rehearsed here and there in the gathering crowd. In one corner, a high school choir barely drowned out their surroundings with the now-ubiquitous musical anthem, "Do you hear the people sing." Along the sidewalk, opposition party vans were being emptied of the usual equipment, older functionaries handing out pre-printed signs with the SEALDs coat of arms to a cluster of students.

SADL, PEDAL, SHIKOP, WIND, N-DOVE… the evening before, core members confronted a dizzying array of Roman acronyms as local chapters and knockoff organizations arrived from all over the country. Many met with celebrities they had only seen on television or in glossy magazines. In a scarcely furnished rental office, representatives from the various derivative groups settled down on the carpeted floor as Shibata pulled a rolling whiteboard stand out of a corner. In blue marker, she drew a large "T" approximating the crossing in front of the National Diet (*Kokkai-mae*), Diet building on top, the central approach extending right with sidewalks on both sides. Then, she drew a messy circle in the lower right. "We'll gather enough people here [on the right-hand sidewalk] to make it go …boom!" She drew a cross at the point where the bulging mass of protesters would break through the barricades and out on the street. "When that happens, the police will block entry to that side of the street… and we do the same thing on the other side of the street." Shibata scratched another circle in the lower left, approximating a rough Venn diagram on top of the T-crossing to represent the moment that a throng of people burst into the street from both sides to reclaim it

as a public square — an invocation of the *Kantei-mae* crowd's achievement three years earlier, but transplanted to a location down the street.

Ushida interjected from the back of the audience: "now, all these radical grown-ups (*kyūshintekina otona*) will come running this way, and our job is to be pushed back like this…" He feigned being washed off into the street by an angry mob while protesting meekly. Shibata treated the whiteboard as a piece of riot fencing, walking backwards and pushing it across the floor with her backside while addressing an imaginary rabble of encroaching "grown-ups" in front of her: "hey, don't push, don't push!" Her point could not have been made any more clearer: the very next day, the students would summon 300,000 people in a reenactment of the public outrage that had made *Ampo* '60 a "constituent moment;" a salient performance of popular sovereignty at the very heart of representative democracy. Only a scene coeval to the 1960 photographs of crowds enveloping the National Diet could, as the students had promised their audiences over the last several months, "really, really stop" the security bills. But SEALDs would *also* exploit the inner desires of that very same crowd and corral it around them, past the barricades, into the streets, and toward the Diet — reprising the achievement of the antinuclear *Kantei-mae* protests three years earlier. What would happen then? Nobody knew.

"Forward, forward!" Ushida's voice riled up the crowd through a bullhorn roaring with distortion, carried by one of the high school students. When the students executed their plan the next day, they did so with a choreographic precision unparalleled in the short history of postdisaster protest. As predicted, pressure was building up around the police barricades as "grown-ups" thrashed against them.

"Forward, forward!" A hand pulled at his collar, urging him to advance. A cluster of cameramen with press armbands flocked around Ushida like a school of fish, making the

ensuing moment of crowd collapse the most well-documented episode in the short history of postdisaster protest. As he stepped through the police perimeter and into the carlanes one of the cameramen whooped loudly, eye still glued to the viewfinder.

"Forward, forward!" Bellowing the same command into the mouthpiece, Ushida pushed further up, towards the center of the boulevard, His voice faltering, Ushida thrust the bullhorn into the arms of another student, and barked in someone's ear: "Tell them to push more from behind!" Ushida was ecstatic — it was as if he could see the intersection in front of the National Diet from above. He imagined himself as the protagonist of the summer blockbuster, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), leading the way through the desert followed by a rabid mob:

> I couldn't believe it. We were at the very front line, pushing forward without any sign of fear. Okay, I was scared, but even more so propelled by a mysterious sense of excitement (*nazo no kouyoukan*).

Closely behind him, the horde of elated "grown-ups" that Ushida had shepherded through the barricades spread in all directions across the intersection. The car lanes became a sea of protesters, camera crews, broken ranks of police officers halfheartedly pushing protesters back down the hill. Unlike the moment of rupture that had set off the Coalition on their trajectory to tame the crowd three years earlier, SEALDs had herded the crowd into the streets in broad daylight; the Diet building loomed over them across the intersection, the armed guards at the gate just steps away. The electricity of co-presence, to borrow Mazzarella's term (2017, 83), that many "grown-ups" felt in the car lanes was one they had not experienced for years. As one participant said,

> when we broke into the car lanes, I had no idea what was happening at first. But then, it

was as if the voltage had been cranked up (*borteeji ga agatta*) and I understood: we had come here to make this [the truth of 300,000 people] happen, and we had succeeded" (@ktcathouse 2015).

At that moment, one of the Coalition "grown-ups" whispered something in Ushida's ear. He froze, and after a moment's hesitation, turned around and addressed the crowd without amplification: "Sit down, everyone! Please sit down! Sit!" The students who caught up with Ushida met his gaze and slowly crouched on the pavement, one knee at a time. Their bullhorns took up the same command: "Sit, sit!" For a brief moment it was unclear what the crowd would do, but slowly, other grown-ups followed suit. The ecstatic mob had stopped in its tracks mere steps from the gates of the Diet, thousands upon thousands now sitting down in the middle of the intersection.

6. Conclusion: Aftermath

This much was clear to the students as they sat on the warm tarmac in front of the Diet: whether they wanted it or not, this — the breach, the hot-blooded spurt up the hill, and the sudden sit-down — was "*Ampo* `15." Taking the intersection on August 30, 2015 was the new event tethering participants and spectators together, much like the ecstatic breach of the barricades in 2012 around which another crowd had coalesced just a stone's throw away. If taming the mob that charged the gates of the Diet "beside itself" with effervescent energy amounted to a political victory, then what had been won beyond the legitimacy of the assembly as, after all, capable of returning to reason "in spite of itself?" And if bringing that same mob it to its knees amounted to political defeat, how could that defeat be turned into victory? Here, again, the crowd that SEALDs had summoned onto the streets of the

government district would lend itself to one, final elaboration of the same analogy between *Ampo* ’60 and “*Ampo* ’15” so entrenched in that crowd’s story about itself.

In this rendition, “*Ampo* ’15” was not so much about concrete claims or concessions, but a demonstration, a staging of the inherent conflict at the heart of the crowd. Familiar voices leaned into this interpretation, emphasizing not what happened so much as what could have happened; what was averted thanks to the students and their coolheadness. Ueno Chizuko, the scholar who had waxed lyrical about the glorious violence of the New Left, began her own account of August 30 by reiterating the comparison to the past: “that many people filling up the streets in front of the Diet…. I haven’t seen that sight in decades” (Isobe 2016). But Ueno did not praise the crowd for breaking through the police perimeter. Gone was the notion of the 1960 protest as benchmark of success. Instead, she narrated the moment as a momentuous what-if:

> If at that moment someone had said “Go! Charge!” everyone would have surged forward, to the gates of the Diet. And what happens there? Someone will definitely try to get through. And the whole sequence of events would have changed. Cops would have intervened, the protest forever branded with a negative image (*negatibu imēji*). Ordinary people couldn’t participate any longer. It’s incredible that *you prevented all that from happening*.

In Ueno’s retelling, it was not the crowd that had redeemed itself by regaining its rationalThe students had done the “incredible” by taming a belligerent mob at the last possible moment. They had proved themselves in spite of a crowd that ultimately could not be trusted:

> SEALDs’ greatest accomplishment is resisting [the passions of the crowd], including that time when Ushida-san stopped the demonstrators (*demo-tai*) marching on the Diet (Ibid.)

Historian Yamazaki Masahiro would also praise the students decisiveness in "preventing the protest crowd from becoming a mob (*bōto*) … considering that the goal wasn't to get inside the Diet, their rational judgement is commendable" (Yamazaki 2020). In Okuda's mind, too, the group was the sole bulwark against the passion of the crowd: .

> After the breach, Ushida screamed 'sit down' and everyone sat down even as they continued chanting. If they hadn't, we'd have kept charging towards the gates [of the Diet] and things would have gotten dangerous. My professor told us everything could be lost if [the crowd] turned violent. But in that moment it was us students that were calmer than anybody else (SEALDs 2015).

In many ways, the celebration of the young students in the aftermath of August 30 allowed them to reaffirm a deeply seated hostility for the crowd that they had carried with them since their very first expeditions to the *Kantei-mae* assembly in 2012. Like Mad Max, the protagonist of his favorite movie, Ushida had led a belligerent horde on a wilde goose chase through the desert of the government district, only to best them at the last possible moment. Okuda confessed that he had no idea how the August 30 rally would develop — but he knew that the "bad grown-ups" could not be allowed to ruin the scene. He had carried a tent in his backpack throughout the commotion, but not in order to turn the impromptu sit-in into a tent village and "occupy" (*okyupai*) the intersection:

> Nah, I just figured there's no way [the "grown-ups"] are all just going to go home. If we're not there around, there's a risk the place'll get taken over by strange people (*hen na hito-tachi).* In that case, I better stay until the last person has gone home.

In the aftermath of the August 30, 2015 rally, the students would be credited for averting a disaster. If the withdrawal could be construed as anything but a complete victory, it would surely be the crowd's fault.

What remained to be settled, as protesters remained seated by the thousands on the street in the middle of the intersection, was the matter of turnout. It was less than three months since Ushida had made the goal of reenacting *Ampo* public at SEALDs' first general meeting: for months the group had made this performative project the ambiguous condition of victory. Since earlier in the morning on August 30, members had counted protesters with handheld clickers. So had police detectives, *Azarashi* supporters and naysayers eager to disprove the youth's outrageous claim. Just like the truth of turnout at the June 29, 2012 rally written into movement history as doxa (see chapter 2), it was inevitable that "turnout would become the focus of controversy" (Tanaka 2016).

To begin with, the All-Out Action Committee which organized the broader anti-Abe alliance, did not share the students' performative commitment to the enactment of another *Ampo*. They had already disappointed the students by advertising the August 30 rally as one of "a hundred thousand in front of the Diet, one million around the country." Matters worsened as the police leaked an estimated turnout of 33,000 to the press. The Committee soon responded with a press release claiming a turnout of 120,000 as a "historic victory." One skeptical protester speculated on the motivations involved:

> [the Committee] ideally wouldn't want their announcement to diverge from the police's by more than a factor of 2,5. The police says 33,000 people came. Multiply by 2,5, and you get 80,000; by three, and you get 100,000 — but that is how many attendees they promised in the first place. In other words, a turnout of 100,000 implies that the rally was a failure. That's not an option: the organizers' *must* arrive at a greater tally [than what

> was expected]. If at all possible, it should outnumber the antinuclear crowd [gathering in front of the Prime Minister's office] three years earlier (Tanaka 2016).

In other words, the number given by police imposed a hard limit on what could credibly be claimed. But so did the "truth" of 200,000 flooding the same streets in the summer of 2012 (see chapter 2). When the "grown-ups" of the All-Out Action Committee declined to report a larger turnout, they recognized that legacy, but simultaneously dismissed the populist "chain of equivalence" that ostensibly linked the antinuclear protests of 2012 to the anti-Abe assemblies of 2015 as constitutive moments.

The students showed their unwillingness to to break this chain when they responded by declaring "a total of 350,000 participants today" (@SEALDSjpn 2015). This inevitable "truth" solidified their commitment to the idea of "*Ampo* '15," while offering a final challenge to the "grown-ups" in the All-Out Action Committee and their authority over the broader movement. As one protester speculated,

> by openly challenging [the Committe's stated turnout of] 120,000 and declaring … a tally of 350,000, [SEALDs] choose to insist on themselves as the true organizers, on 120,000 as the expected turnout, and on their own number as the actual outcome (Tanaka 2016).

In this way, SEALDs left the sitting crowd behind in the intersection in front of the National Diet under circumstances at least as ambiguous as that which had shattered the *Kantei-mae* crowd into incongruent interpretations of the same effervescent event. In shouldering both the legacies of the "postwar" and the "postdisaster," the young student activists had faced a double set of expectations from two distinct pasts. When the two finally coincided, it was in the imaginative horizon of a march on the National Diet as the majoritarian moment *par*

excellence, and the impossible task of insulating the crowd from the consequences of its own behavior.

The controversial security bills were put through the Upper House on September 17, and passed by the full house two days later amidst near-daily demonstrations. In early 2016, I watched the core members rehearse their old slogans of righteous indignation in front of a seated ballroom audience of opposition politicians. Vigorously courted by opposition parties, they offered their populist seal of approval to partisan talking points and local candidates, some of whom only reluctantly accepted it. Shibata recalled that "when I went around with Okuda-kun talking to politicians in June, they politely listened, then waved us off. But from August we started getting calls from lawmakers" (Voices 2015). Despite the passing of the controversial legislation, it seemed to her as if "politicians are finally listening to the voices outside the Diet" (*kokkai no soto no koe*; Ibid.). Leaving both the crowd and the ambiguous legacy of "*Ampo* '15" behind, the students seemed to have endorsed the very same "danger of being … subsumed into a political system" (Slater, cited in Sunda 2015) that had lingered as a central motif in the relation between crowd and organizers since the early days of the populist proposal to gather in the government district (see chapter 2).

We might ask what remains of that proposal with the political opposition that sought to absorb it since collapsed, and the broad boulevards of the government district returning to their usual, desolate state. After a series of attempts to rally around a postpolitical anti-Abe alliance, and ensuing electoral defeats, the Democratic Party (*Minshu-tō*) collapsed in 2016, and again in 2017, merging with smaller actors in 2018 to form the Party for the People (*Kokumin-tō*). Since it spilled onto the pages of the Asahi Shimbun daily newspaper in 2017, the Moritomo scandal gradually grew into Japan's equivalent of the Mueller investigation,

further segregating an anti-Abe "liberal" constituency, while reliniquishing the memory of the majoritarian moments that had brought it together.

In 2016, the Mainichi daily asked the young Okuda to rate the group's achievements on a scale from 1-100. Okuda gave their efforts a score of 50. It was true that "the security laws haven't been abolished. That's why we get only 50 points," he said. However, "we've achieved a trend of having citizens raising their voices" (Mainichi 2016). Two months later, he rehearsed the same notion of victory to a packed Tokyo auditorium:

> To sum up [our accomplishment], protests become more of a normal thing. Or rather, it wasn't cool anymore to say that protesting makes no difference, or is a waste of time. That's a huge thing for Japanese society in itself. The conversation around demonstrating is changing — I can feel it.

In "summing up" their accomplishment and that of postdisaster protest as such, Okuda did not mention the legacy of *Ampo*, the fantastical number of 350,000 that both invoked and eclipsed it, nor did he mention the dramatic taming of the crowd that in the blink of an eye had supplanted the reasons for its coalescence as the new condition for "victory" in the government district. Instead, the students had settled with a different condition, one familiar from philosopher Karatani Kōjin's tautological proclamation: postdisaster protest, and its embodiment in the crowd of "ordinary people" had changed Japan, if only to the extent that the country was now one "that demonstrates" (Karatani 2011; see chapter 1). In place of concrete political concessions, they equated the legacy of the postdisaster with the symbolic recognition of an opaque shift in national character, a national awakening with clear causes but without obvious outcomes.

SEALDs disbanded on August 15 the following year. Abe's second premiership continued until late 2020, when he stepped down citing poor health. He was assassinated two years later. Japan's 1946 constitution remains without amendment or revision. Unless we take the students (or Karatani) at their word, it is easy to be cynical in the evaluation of "*Ampo* '15" and its legacy — particularly the indulgence of "grown-ups" who elected a handful of college students to the impossible position of spearheading a mass movement rife with contradiction. But the outrage of the crowd descending on the government district to confront Prime Minister Abe, just as they had his predecessor, as well as the occasionally infantile imaginaries of postwar idealism that informed it, merits inclusion in any account of Japan's postdisaster culture.

Whether as an attempt to resolve the negative legacy of the postwar Left, or to escape it, the populist proposal to march on Tokyo's government district on behalf of "the people" became the defining aspect of the postdisaster protest repertoire. Organizers refined that proposal against their ambivalent and sometimes scornful attitude to the crowd they summoned every Friday evening. Many nourished hope that the *Kantei-mae* crowd, for all its faults, would serve as a "vessel" for further causes of popular discontent beyond the antinuclear; that its effervescence would lend itself to future links in a populist chain of equivalence. If the SEALDs students' media-savvy radicalization of the populist proposal represents the final link in that short chain, then the motivations for managing the crowd that they inherited — the compulsion to protect its innocence, the presumption that it behave predictably and pliantly, and the contempt for its latent desires, all culminating in their command that the ecstatic crowd regain control of its emotions at the last moment — these motivations, in my opinion, mark the ambiguous legacy of postdisaster protest as a series of interlaced attempts to articulate the legitimacy of assembly amidst the sticky associations of an ambiguous past.

Figure 7: Detail from printed flyer advertising the August 30, 2015 "a hundred thousand in front of the Diet, a million country-wide" gathering.
Wrenching apart a ballistic missile, an anthropomorphized ninth paragraph of the constitution blends into a multitude of protesters encroaching upon the National Diet. Surrounded, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has climbed to the top of the Diet building. The bottom left banner reads "Read the constitution properly," the bottom right says "can't make peace with military force" and in the top right, a sign reads "listen to the voice of the people (*kokumin*)!" Source: All-Out Action Committee 2015.

Figure 8: A map of the August 30, 2015 protest provided in advance by the Communist Party-backed Akahata newspaper.
The pink lines show suggested areas for the crowd to gather in; circles and stars show loudspeaker stages while green boxes represent subway exits. Numbers represent areas managed by different organizations, with the street corner claimed by SEALDs marked as "individuals and groups from across the country." Source: Sōgakari 2015.

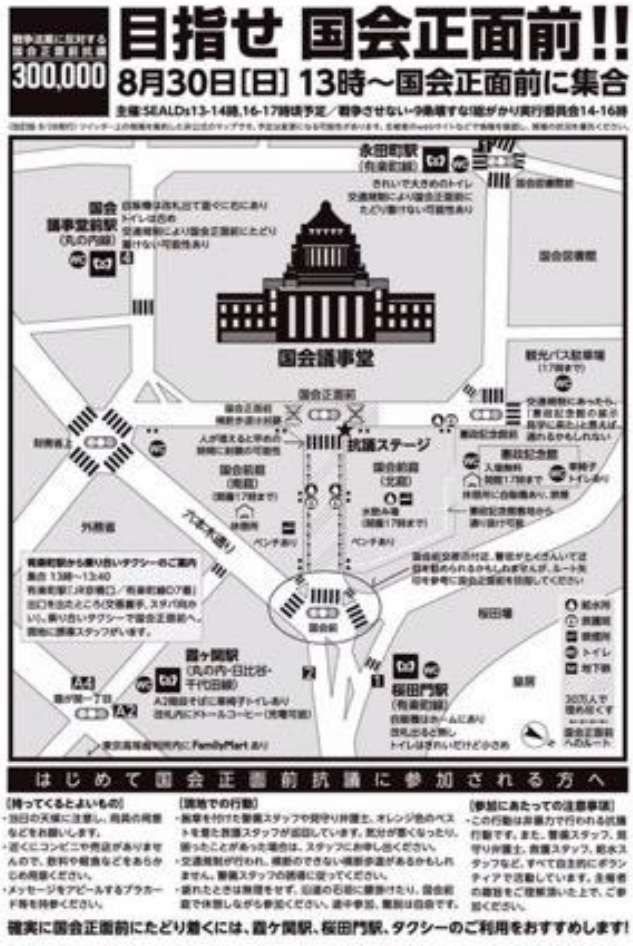

Figure 9: An unofficial map of the August 30, 2015 protest area circulated on social media. The map makes no mention of the All-Out Action Committee anticipated turnout of 100,000, and instead sets the bar at 300,000: the shaded area in the center of the map is to be "flooded by 300,000 people." In addition to public bathrooms, benches and watering stations, the map also shows expected police checkpoints, alongside instructions for bypassing them. Source: @shi_cop 2015.

Figure 10: The new perimeter in front of the National Diet.
The photograph is taken minutes after SEALDs members (bottom center) herded the crowd into the street and ordered it to sit down in the middle of the intersection on August 30, 2015.
Source: Mainichi 2015.

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