Lovable Anarchism:
Campus Protest in Japan From the 1990s to Today

By Carl Cassegård

Abstract

This is a paper on the transformation of campus activism in Japan since the 1990's. Japan's so-called freeter movements (movements of young men and women lacking regular employment) are often said to have emerged as young people shifted their base of activism from campuses to the "street". However, campuses have continued to play a role in activism. Although the radical student organisations of the New Left have waned, new movements are forming among students and precarious university employees in response to neoliberalization trends in society and the precarization of their conditions. This transformation has gone hand in hand with a shift of action repertoire towards forms of direct action such as squatting, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and opening "cafés". In this paper I focus on the development of campus protest in Kyoto from the mid-1990s until today to shed light on the following questions: How have campus-based activists responded to the neoliberalization of Japanese universities? What motivates them to use art or art-like forms of direct action and how are these activities related to space? I investigate the notions of space towards which activists have been oriented since the 1990's, focusing on three notions: official public space, counter-space and no-man's-land. These conceptions of space, I argue, are needed to account for the various forms campus protest has taken since the 1990s.

Introduction

An unusual performance took place at Kyoto University in February 2009, on the day of the annual entrance examinations. In front of the big camphor tree before the main clock tower one of the university's part-time librarians, Ogawa Kyōhei (1969-), started singing in a seemingly improvised way while dancing and making movements vaguely reminiscent of a strip-tease performance.

> So it's five years and then out, right?
> But I've worked here on and off for altogether seven years.
> Yes, seven years, here at Kyoto University.
> So it's about time for this, right?
> [he shows how his head will be cut off]
> Is it really!?
> No, no, no, no!

Next to him an oil drum was standing, painted in big white brush strokes with the word "Kubi" – a common word for being fired which also means neck or getting decapitated. The oil drum was filled with water that had been heated by his comrades in Union Extasy and was in fact a bath tub, in which Ogawa was soon bathing stark naked, all the time singing or shouting at the top of his voice to the high-school students who were walking by on their way back from their entrance examinations: "Let everybody pass!! Let everybody pass!! Kyoto University, let everyone enter!! And stop cutting off our heads!!"(Ogawa 2010b).[1]

Union Extasy is a union for the university's part-time employees which was founded in 2007 by Ogawa and another librarian, Inoue Masaya (1971-). At the time of the oil drum bath, it had just initiated a strike to protest against the part-timers' employment conditions. In particular they turned against the university's so-called "five year rule", according to which part-timers would at most be able to hold on to their jobs for five years. Setting up a tent-like struc-

Members of Union Extasy in the "Dispersal and disobedience" (*Chōsan to fufukujū*) May Day demonstration in Kyoto, 29 April 2010. Photo: author

ture next to the camphor tree, a well-known symbol of Kyoto University, they quickly gained attention and much laughter through their drastic methods, which struck some observers as charmingly clownish and others as outrageous and provocative. A big tuna head was placed in front of the tent to get the message through. In April they turned their shack into Kubikubi Café, a place for pleasant talk and cheap coffee which was in existence for over two years, serving as a gathering place, as a center for disseminating information and, for a time, as the temporary residence of one of the union members.

The union's activities illustrate the rise of protests against "precarity" and "neo-liberalism" on Japanese campuses in recent years. They also illustrate the tendency among campus activists today to resort to spectacular acts of direct action that often involve the occupation of space – e.g. sit-ins, hunger strikes or opening cafés in shacks or tents. That campus based anti-precarity protest and direct action go hand in hand is a trend that can also be seen in many other countries today – e.g. the wave of student and faculty protests against "austerity" or "corporatization" in California, Québec, Chile, the UK, Italy and elsewhere, which have involved flash mobs, kiss-ins, blockades, traffic disruptions, house occupations, street theatre, the painting of government buildings, nightly "snake-march" demonstrations with no pre-determined route, and casseroling (banging pots and cans from balconies and windows), apart from ordinary street demonstrations and dance parties (see Connery 2011; Ayotte-Thompson & Freeman 2012; Lagalisse 2012; Caruso 2013).

In this article I will attempt to shed light on the interconnection between anti-precarity protest and direct action by focusing on the role played by space in activism and on how this role has changed over time.[2] Tracing the development of campus protest from the 1990s until today in Kyoto, I will attempt to answer the following questions. Firstly, how have campus-based activists responded to the ongoing transformation of Japanese universities into profit-driven corporations that increasingly subject students and staff to perceived market demands? Secondly, what motivates activists to use direct action in general and space occupations in particular? I will show that a sensitive instrument for tracing the process of shifting forms of action can be gained by relating them to theories of public space. A third question will therefore be: What use have campus activists made of space and how have they conceptualized space?

Let me briefly flesh out the theoretical background behind my choice of focusing on space. The publicness of a space is not a static given and can be an object of contestation. In the course of struggle, space can be used in various ways, and I will distinguish between three ways of conceptualizing space: as officially recognized public space, counter-space and no-man's-land. Officially recognized public space is largely attuned to the rhythms of mainstream life. Such space can be important to political challengers since it helps them project messages to a wider public and to authorities – to participate in what Habermas (1989) calls a public

sphere where citizens deliberate on their common affairs. Patricia Steinhoff points out that this use of space has been prominent in student activism in Japan, which has always gone "beyond campus issues to engage the major political issues of the day", often in close collaboration with oppositional political parties, labor unions and other civil society groups who were engaged in the same protest movements (Steinhoff 2012: 73). At the same time, there are limits to how radical the demands and the conduct permitted in such space can be, since they need to be considered legitimate or in tune with the normative expectations of the surrounding society.

However, campus-based movements cannot be understood solely by focusing on their contribution to the mainstream public sphere. Spaces for direct action often assume the character of what Lefebvre (1991: 381ff) calls counter-spaces. These are spaces for the provocative visibilization of behavior that is subject to sanctions or stigmatization in mainstream public areas and therefore normally hidden or bracketed. Typically the very right of activists to use the counter-space is contested. While part of the aim of Kubikubi Café was certainly to promote the union's voice in the public sphere – the café serving as a place for interaction with passers-by, for gaining the attention of local newspapers, and for exerting pressure on the university – it was also a counter-space that intentionally and gleefully "desecrated" a symbolic spot on the main campus and whose very existence was a gauntlet thrown to the university. The popularity of direct action in today's campus activism has gone hand in hand with an increasing prevalence of counter-spaces.

Direct action on campuses cannot be understood in isolation from a third kind of space which I will call no-man's-lands (see Cassegård 2013). These too are places permitting behavior considered contrary to mainstream norms, but unlike counter-spaces they are not created in order to challenge these norms publicly. Instead they thrive on official neglect. Waste and garbage, things that are free to pick up for anyone who feels like it, belong to this world.

Although seemingly unrelated to politics, no-man's-lands have political import since they are places where activists and other people can spend time relatively sheltered from mainstream norms in times when not engaging in publicly visible acts of confrontation. During their drawn out struggle with the university, it was important for the participants in Kubikubi Café to be able to use the campus as a no-man's-land, taking electricity and water from nearby buildings and gathering firewood from construction sites to heat their oven in the winter. Unlike many other public spaces, such as streets and squares, campuses are places where such resources are relatively abundant and accessible to activists.

Paying attention to how activists use space helps us to see that activism is not always oriented to participation in the public sphere or towards instrumentally working for social change. In particular, access to alternative arenas such as counter-spaces or no-man's-lands has been important in processes of empowerment –

the strengthening of people's self-confidence as political actors. Empowerment can be furthered through activities that at first sight do not appear political: it can be about escaping isolation by discovering and associating with likeminded people, having access to spaces relatively free from outside sanctions, or engaging in protest activities as a form of practice when political stakes are seemingly insignificant. The way activists navigate between or combine various forms of space is often conditioned by the degree to which they see empowerment as an urgent task (see Cassegård 2013).

Background: New Cultural Movements and Precarization

For a long time, campus protest in Japan was virtually synonymous with the student movement, usually bringing forth associations to the radical so-called New Left groups that had used the campuses as bases for rallies and street demonstrations in their heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. This student activism weakened and lost popular appeal in the late 1970s, being discredited by political failure, violent sectarian infighting and dogmatism. Severely damaging the reputation of New Left activists was their tendency to get embroiled in violent sectarian infighting. Even more devastating to their image was the development of terrorist groups like the United Red Army, a militant grouping who murdered 14 of their own for their alleged lack of revolutionary zeal in their hideout at Mt Asama in 1972. Among many radical activists in Japan, this so-called Asama Sansō incident achieved iconic status as a powerful symbol of the New Left's failure (Suga 2003, 2006; Igarashi 2007; Oguma 2009; Steinhoff 2012).

Since then, radical youth activism has made a comeback, especially after the turn to the new millennium, as can be seen in today's precarity movement or the movements against war or nuclear power (see Cassegård 2013). This activism, however, has usually not been campus-based. Participants have often been so-called freeters, young people without regular employment, a group which has increased rapidly in Japan since the early 1990s, rather than students. With its use of performances, art, music and dancing, this activism is typical of what Mōri (2005) calls "new cultural movements". In contrast to the widespread image of the New Left these movements are said to be characterized by an open and loose network-structure, ideological diversity, more egalitarian and individualist forms of organization, and a predilection for art, performances and fun (Mōri 2005, 2009a; Hayashi & McKnight 2006).

This cultural activism became known to the wider public through the rise of protests against precarity among freeters. However, it is important to point out that it was not simply a reaction to the deterioration of economic conditions during the so-called lost decade which followed the so-called economic "bubble" of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its roots can be found in bubble-years themselves, which was a fertile period of experimentation in which new forms of protest and

organization were tried out among young people outside the established Leftist groups (Kohso 2006: Toyama 2008). A decisive contribution was that it offered forms of action, organization, style and "thought" that were no longer felt to be tainted by the negative legacy of the New Left and which matched the needs and desires of the quickly growing freeter stratum.

Although freeter activism has generally taken the "street" as its preferred scene of action rather than university campuses, the rise of freeter activism has not meant that universities have lost their role as platforms of activism. New Left groups dating back to the 60s continue to exist on several campuses. Even more significantly, the processes that have produced freeter activism in society at large have also fuelled the rise of new forms of activism on campuses. In line with the international trend towards "managerialism" or "New Public Management" (Goldfinch 2004, Dunleavy et al. 2006), universities in Japan have increasingly adjusted to the role of service-providers on a capitalist market. This shift is part of a wider neoliberal trend in Japanese society, if neoliberalism is seen broadly as social and economic transformations under the sign of the free market, including the institutional arrangements to implement this project (Connell 2013: 100). In Japanese higher education, this shift was accelerated by a 2003 law turning national universities into national university corporations. The incorporation took place 2004 and forced national universities to rely more heavily on private funding, making them more similar to private universities, at the same time as they became more tightly supervised by the Ministry of Education (Tabata 2005, Yonezawa 2013: 128f, 133-136).

A question that has received scant attention is how activism on the campuses has changed under the influence of this shift. While the mass-media has reported on the repressive measures directed towards some of the remaining New Left groups, far less attention has been paid to new forms of activism that have emerged in recent years in response to the neoliberal transformation of universities. These newer movements cannot be viewed exclusively as student movements. Largely they have emerged among university employees who protest against their precarious labor conditions. Spanning student and labor issues, they take aim at the transformation of universities into corporations that increasingly need to secure their budgets through attracting private funding and investment, raising student fees where possible, and curtailing the costs of the labor force by increasingly relying on short-term contract employees.

From Students and Employees to Freeters

Campus activism today is not just a student movement and also not just a movement among employees. Behind its emergence lie social processes that are increasingly transforming both of these groups into a condition of "freeter"-likeness. The precarious situation of students today has often been pointed out.

"The majority of universities are no longer institutions for producing middle-class, white-collar workers, to say nothing of Japan's future elites, but temporary camps for chronically jobless youth", Sabu Kohso states (2006: 416). Asato Ken, founder of the General Freeter Union, emphasizes that since students are now part of the precarious worker stratum, the time has come for them to fight, not *for* the workers, but *as* workers (PAFF 2003). The lack of openings for stable employment after graduation has its factual background in the overall increase in university graduates in addition to processes of deregulation and economic slowdown (Hommerich 2012: 212f).

That many students face an uncertain future after graduation is not all. Already as students, they enter a milieu on the campus that has been transformed in a neoliberal direction. Four interrelated areas can be discerned that have aroused student protest in recent years. One is the burden of student fees, with a movement arising both in Tokyo and in Kyoto against the "blacklisting" of students who fail to pay back their student loans (Ribault 2010). A second has been the time-consuming job hunting, which many students feel that they need to engage in already in their second or third year, reflecting the increasing competition for regular employment (see e.g. Nagata 2010). A third area is the suppression of political student activism, with Hōsei University (see Saitō 2009; McNeil 2009; Yabu 2009) and Waseda University (see Suga 2006: Suga & Hanasaki 2006) in Tokyo being particularly notorious examples. A fourth, related area has been the gentrification of university campuses – a process which Bose (2012: 816) refers to as the "material transformation of campuses into 'commercial spaces' with an increasingly visible corporate presence". Typically, this has involved the reorganization of campus life to allow a greater role to privately run cafés, restaurants and convenience stores along with a concomitant rebuilding and prettification of its physical infrastructure and attempts to ban, remove or tear down manifestations of the culture of student activism, such as standing signboards, shacks or rooms for students' circle activities or dormitories strongly associated with student self-rule (such as Tokyo University's Komaba Dormitory). A group that pioneered the protests against campus gentrification was the "Society for preserving the squalor of Hōsei" (Hōsei no binbōkusasa o mamoru kai). This group was formed by Matsumoto Hajime – later a leading activist associated with the Amateur Riot (Shirōto no ran) – when he was a student at Hōsei University in 1997. Aghast at the transformation of the university into what he saw as a preparatory school for work, he started inviting students to *nabe* (hot pot) parties on the campus, creating "liberated zones" where they would also camp. These gatherings were not political demonstrations so much as playful acts of sabotage against the prettification of the campus, but they were popular and easy to imitate and soon spread to other universities in Japan (Amamiya 2007: 226-238; Matsumoto 2008a:95-102, 2008b: 38-66, 70-75; Takemura 2008).

While these changes were happening, there was also a conspicuous flexibilization of employment for university staff (e.g. Shiraishi & Ono 2005). As will be discussed below, university employees have played a leading role in protesting against this flexibilization. However, their protests should not be seen as separate from the protests of the students. The activism of students and employees has developed in interaction with each other and today new forms of solidarity appear to be taking form between these two groups. Below, I will illustrate this development by discussing campus activism from the 1990s onwards in Kyoto, focusing to those episodes of activism in which Union Extasy's two founding members, Ogawa and Inoue Masaya, have been involved.

Kinji House, or "Cleaning is love"

In the 1990s Kyoto became the place for a strong student activist ferment, which saw students at Dōshisha University develop Japan's first so-called sound-demos (street parties), as well as much activism related to feminism, queer and AIDS. In the early 1990s many students still felt it was easy to find employment and found it easy to take breaks in their studies in order to pursue interests such as theatre or engaging in activism while making their living on irregular work (Noiz 2009: 17ff; interviews with A and B, 2011-07-23 and 2009-08-20; with D 2010-06-27 and 2010-07-29).

In contrast to Tokyo, where many activists who pioneered the new cultural forms of activism were students who had chosen to migrate out of the still New Left-dominated campuses, in Kyoto the new cultural movements were largely campus-based. One reason for this was the relatively strong tradition of non-sect student activism at universities like Kyoto University or Dōshisha, which meant that activists critical of the New Left factions had less need to find a base of activities outside the campus (Ogawa 2010a: 80; interviews with activists C and D, 2010-03-19 resp. 2010-06-27). A second reason for the continued importance of university campuses in Kyoto may have been their relatively liberal management, which made them more tolerant of New Left groups as well as newer non-sect groups to a higher degree than in Tokyo (C, activist in Kyoto, interviews 2009-09-24 and 2010-03-18).

One offspring of the activist ferment in Kyoto was the creation of Kinji House at Kyoto University in 1995, one of Japan's few examples of large-scale squatting. The prime mover in this enterprise was Ogawa, who had entered Kyoto University in 1989. As he looks back on Kinji House, he emphasizes the importance of the year 1995 for activism in Kyoto.

> There was a feeling that things were being born and people got connected. Gays, sex workers and others got movements started and this was bound up with expression, performances, dance and poetry... One felt that if this feeling would spread the whole world would be happy... I too existed in the margins of all that, participating

here and there, and breathing the same air. Kinji House too existed in the same air. (Ogawa 2009c)

Together with a few friends he opened Kinji House in an empty building on Kyoto University's North Campus for a few months in 1995. This was a building scheduled for demolition that had been left empty after the death of the ecologist and anthropologist Iwanishi Kinji (1902-1992). At the start, the participants were mainly non-sect students at Kyoto University and a nearby art college. They kept the house going from early June to late August – a period when the university was relatively deserted by students – sun-bathing on the roof and sprinkling water on each other with hoses. In the house, they opened a café and a bar, a dance studio, a radio station and a gallery for exhibitions.

The exhilaration participants felt in the beginning was expressed in the cleaning up they started as soon as they had moved in: "A place belongs to the ones who clean it", Ogawa writes, adding that "cleaning is love" (Ogawa 1997: 227f). In these early days, an exciting uncertainty appears to have existed about what would become of the project: "Rather than 'what should we do?', Kinji was 'what will become of it?'", Ogawa writes (ibid. 231). His choice of words indicates that the participants felt enveloped in something that they could not fully control, but which they nevertheless experienced as thrilling and pleasurable.

Was there an idea behind Kinji House? During the occupation, there was no explicit political message which activists used to justify the occupation. A letter which Ogawa sent to the dean of student affairs at the time states that he had been guided by three ideas. The first was "direct action", a concept which he gives his own twist by explaining that it means to try an action and see what it leads to rather than to execute an already finished plan. Hence it is an action that "does not oppose the system with a system, but directly expresses one's feelings". The second was the idea of action based on rhizomatous networks, i.e. on autonomous individuals rather than a group will. The third was the idea of constructing a "place for traffic, a factory, a place welcoming everything and constantly changing" (ibid. 228f). Later Ogawa also referred to the attraction of an empty space with free electricity and heating where people were free to do what they wanted. In addition, he explains, there was something "extra" which everyone treasured, and that "extra was probably our dream" (ibid. 229).

At the time, there had been a vogue of interest in the idea of squatting among activists in Kyoto, fanned by publications introducing European anarchist or autonomist movements such as *Actual Action* and *BURST CITY*. Ogawa himself had previously lived for short periods in empty rooms or in self-made huts on the campus, learning how to gain access to water and electricity and how to make fires. Often this was done stealthily, but sometimes the squat was conducted in public, as during a three-day squat when he opened a "love hotel" called "Je t'aime" after having gotten his hands on a twin bed. Ogawa was also interested in exploring lifestyles that dispensed with the idea of a fixed home. He became well-

known for the *isōrō* (a word meaning to live in other people's houses) lifestyle he embarked on in the latter half of the 1990s, systematically moving from one acquaintance to another (Ogawa & Ogawa 1999).

One of his friends described him as an *isōrō* artist, pointing out the similarities between *isōrō* and children's play (Yamamura 1997b). Ogawa appears to have thought of *isōrō* and squatting as existing on a continuum, since both problematize the relationship between ownership and use of space. In both squatting and *isōrō* space tends to conceived of not only or primarily as a stage for participating in the general public sphere, but rather as a space which is free to use for creating and living beyond the norms and regulations of mainstream institutions, as no-man's-land.

In the end, Kinji House self-destructed because of inner conflicts – many triggered by the arrival of young *yankī* ("hoodlums" or members of the *yankī* subculture) who moved in during the summer vacations. Some were violent, used thinner, and refused to attend meetings. In August the electricity was cut off and people started to dwindle. When the police entered and arrested some of the *yankī*, the university used the occasion to close the building. The few remaining squatters offered no resistance. "Rather than resisting, we helped cleaning up", Ogawa writes, describing "the great sense of powerlessness" he felt when the house was emptied of their belongings. Soon after, the building was demolished by the university (Ogawa 2006: 235).

The violence and fatigue Kinji House engendered shows how easy the sense of possibility and freedom of a space with no institutionalized, shared rules can disintegrate. "Kinji aimed at becoming a square but failed and ended up as a vacant lot", one of the participants writes (Yamamura 1997a). The reason for this assessment was the diversity of participants which meant that communication broke down and that there was an uncertainty about what rules were valid. Other participants described Kinji House as a "wonderland of hoodlums" or as "fatiguing" because of the need to maintain diplomatic relations with people who did not share your premises. Ogawa himself points out that the failure was not that there was any closed sectarianism, but rather that the ambiguity and unwillingness of anyone to take responsibility hurt participants (Ogawa 1997: 233, 230ff).

> Some thought that I, who triggered it all, was irresponsible. They would probably not listen if I suggested to them that we should do something together again. As for me, I have lost the self-confidence to suggest such things, or rather I've lost all desire to do it [...]. But "what will become of it?" ought to be something good. I don't understand. The only thing I can say is that "what will become of it" and "whatever" are different. The difference lies in curiosity. As Kinji gradually slipped out of control, as it finally overwhelmed me and when it was actually destroyed, I was unable to utter a single word. But in reality it never slipped out of control. What really happened was that it gradually transformed into a "whatever". Curiosity is love. As love waned, cleaning too became scarce and the house became dirty. (ibid. 231)

Ogawa's ideal of an *isōrō*-life as well as the Kinji House experiment can be seen as manifestations of a wish to create an open, unregulated no-man's-land beyond the sway of institutions, money and status. He describes himself as close to anarchism. Being unconnected to confrontation or militancy and driven primarily by the dream of a world where everyone can have fun together without hierarchies or money, this might be described as what Oda Masanori calls a "lovable anarchism", more interested in creation and expression than in ideology (quoted in Aida et al. 2008:93). Rather than seeking confrontation, it hopes to remain undetected or that the world will be won over and tolerate its projects.

Fun as Resistance – the Case of Ishigaki Café

For a few months in 2005, a café existed on top of the stone wall surrounding Kyoto University's main campus on a conspicuous spot near the Hyakumanben crossing. Because the café rests on a small platform five meters above the ground and lacks walls, customers got a good view of the crossing below. The structure was especially striking at night, when it seemed to hover like a phantom over the crossing. Some customers described it as a "house above the trees", others as a "secret base". The platform could be reached through a ladder from the pavement. Shoes had to be taken off before entering the café platform, where coffee was sold for 50 yen per cup, allegedly the "cheapest in Kyoto".

One of the activists who helped create the café was Inoue. At the time he was a master's student in Italian. His favorite hobby was *kabuki*. He had a history of unconventional living. He had rebuilt his dormitory room into a field for cultivating rice and later squatted for three years in a small hut which he built just outside the dormitory (interview, 2007-07-19; Inoue & Ogawa 2009). When the university in the autumn of 2004 announced its plan to tear down part of the wall in order to create a barrier-free entrance, he and a few others – the group, which started at four, eventually included more than ten persons– reacted by camping on the site to physically prevent the demolition. To protect themselves against the cold, they brought a *kotatsu* (a low blanket-covered table with a heat source beneath). Soon they had constructed a tower-like structure topped by a roofed platform. At the suggestion of a visiting waitress, they turned the tower into a café, the Ishigaki Café (literally "stonewall café") (Inoue & Kasagi 2005; Kasagi 2006).

They managed to keep the café running for seven months, from January to August. Activities included live music, *bon* dancing, lectures, film showings and parties. Bigger events were a symposium with well-known radical intellectuals in May, and the Ishigaki dormitory festival in July with live music and noodle-selling on the pavement below. Meanwhile outdrawn negotiations were held with university representatives, ending with the university agreeing to leave part of the wall intact. After the settlement, the activists celebrated by arranging a festival

that went on for three days with live music, speeches on the street, and *bon*-dancing, before finally closing the café (Inoue & Kasagi 2005; Shinohara 2005).

During the period of its existence the café claimed to have served many customers, a majority of whom were non-students such as school kids, tourists, and families with children. It appears to have made a relatively successful appeal to people who would otherwise lack interest in student activities. By using the form of a café the activists created a space that was considerably more open and easy to enter than protest groups or organizations with a more traditional form. Compared to Kinji House, the café was a much more organized space. Rules such as the banning of alcohol were imposed on the space to create an environment that was welcoming and friendly to visitors.

A certain tongue-in-cheek traditionalism was characteristic of the activists in the café. As Inoue explained, the choice of a tower (*yagura*) was a respectful nod to previous struggles. Wooden towers were built during the Sanrizuka struggles in the 1970s by farmers who sought to prevent the construction of present-day Tokyo Airport. The idea of building towers was also a tradition among rebellious students at Kyoto University, who, he says, in all their actions would "start by building a tower". Inoue and the other activists also liked to speak about Kyoto University's tradition of "trouble-making" and expressed an elegiac love for the university's tolerant "shabbiness". Today, they lament, the squalor of Kyoto University is disappearing, with new stylish buildings like restaurants, cafés and convenience stores being built all over the campus. "If you take away the underground smell it will cease to be Kyoto University" (Inoue & Kasagi 2005).

The students claimed to be driven primarily by a desire for fun rather than by any serious political commitment. "Ishigaki Café was truly a 'space for mischief'", Inoue and another participant, Kasagi Jō, exclaimed triumphantly afterwards (ibid.). "More than anything else, Ishigaki Café was born from the desire for fun and enjoyment", another participant says (Shinohara 2005: 202).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, preserving a stone wall struck many of the more serious political activists on the campus as nonsensical and lacking a political aim (e.g. C, interview 2010-03-19). To the participants, however, fun was not unrelated to resistance. To Inoue and other activists, the act of causing mischief and trouble was clearly itself a source of fun. Conversely, Kasagi explains that it was as fun that it constituted good resistance. To perform simple café activities like selling cheap coffee and interacting with customers was in itself an act of resistance against the campus homogenization. One participant points out that Ishigaki Café was a "counter-space" protesting against the trend in society to homogenize space, visible in the creation of new monumental spaces and chic restaurants on the campus (Shinohara 2005: 194-200). They expressly distinguished their activities from those of more traditional student movements.

> Ishigaki Café wasn't a place for appealing ardently to visitors to get them to support our opposition to the removal of the stone wall. […] There was no need for us to en-

> gage in any particular political activity. Everyday talk and pouring coffee would in themselves constitute a performative resistance to the campus reorganization […] (Kasagi 2006: 65f)

Like Kinji House, the café involved the occupation of a space, which was torn from its officially designated use. Much more than Kinji House, however, it was established as a visible challenge to university authorities. The activists set up a tower on one of the most conspicuous spots imaginable, where everything going on in the café would take place in full visibility, and this visibility was itself something they thoroughly enjoyed. If the squatters in Kinji House thought of their project as a foray into no-man's-land, Ishigaki Café is better understood as a playfully and self-consciously established counter-space.

Hunger Strikes at Ritsumeikan and Kyoto Seika University

The year 2007 was an important year for campus activism in Kyoto. Several events occurred that led activists to protest against measures taken by university managements that appeared to increase the precarious situation of employees and students. At their height, these protests included two sit-ins during which activists engaged in hunger strikes. In both episodes, counter-spaces were briefly established in which elements of fun were prominent, but unlike in the case of Ishigaki Café, these elements were now wedded to "serious" causes and to an attempt to reachout to the public with a message.

   The first of these episodes took place at the Kinugasa campus of Ritsumeikan University. Endō Reiko, a part-time lecturer in Italian and vice chair of the General Union, initiated a four-day hunger strike (conducted 17-20 July) to protest against the university's practice of hiring teachers on yearly renewable contracts with a maximum length of employment of four or five years. Already in 2006, the union had conducted a strike among Ritsumeikan teachers to protest against the practice and the university had responded by excluding union members from proceedings and threatening them with non-renewal of their contracts. When the university refused to renew her contract in 2007, Endō responded by initiating the hunger strike. A tent was put up at the campus which she called the Hunger Strike Café. Next to it was a flag with the words "Not just hungry, but angry". Her demands were for secure employments for irregular staff and a renewal of her contract. Backing her were not only the General Union but also the newly established Union Extasy and several other unions. When I asked her why she chose a hunger strike as her means of protest, she answered that it was the best way to get attention. She only had four days and couldn't do a permanent sit-in. One alternative might have been to make a "performance", but that would have required too much time and effort (Endō, interviews 2007-07-19 and 2010-04-29).

   The university did not rescind its decision, but Endō's action inspired other activists in at least two ways. Firstly, it directed attention to the so-called "3-5 year

rules" which later also became a prime target of Union Extasy. Following the incorporation of national universities in 2004, they and many private universities introduced a system of hiring staff on one-year contracts to cut labor costs. These contracts were renewable, but with a limit at 3-5 years.

This limitation was controversial, since it introduced an extra element of uncertainty in the lives of the staff and since no special legal basis existed for it. The Labor Standard Law only specifies that if contract renewals are repeated several times, a decision not to renew the contract cannot be taken without rational reason. The limitation thus seems to have been introduced by universities mainly in order for them to keep their freedom of action, i.e. their freedom to refuse to renew contracts should the need arise (Endō 2009).

Secondly, the very form of the protest – the hunger strike – inspired several other activists in Kyoto, including student activists. The second spectacular sit-in that year was performed by a student at Kyoto Seika University, Yamada Shirō, who, citing Endō as an inspiration, went on hunger strike for a week (5-13 December) to protest against the high university fees, setting himself up in a hut (which Union Extasy helped him build) with TV and *kotatsu* on a conspicuous spot on the campus. Yamada was also a participant in the movement's circles at Kyoto University, which inspired him to start raising chicken and pigs on the campus as a source of alternative livelihood. He thus expanded his repertoire of action by making use of campus space as a no-man's-land. He also succeeded in making himself heard in the wider public sphere by getting *Kyoto Shimbun*, the local newspaper, to cover his hunger strike. Later he was central in setting up the Black list association, a group that carried out sound-demos in Kyoto against the blacklisting of students who failed to pay back their student loans, a movement that soon spread to Tokyo (interview 2009-09-24; also see Shiraishi 2008; Yamada 2008; Yamada et al. 2010).

Yamada provides us with several clues to why direct action is attractive to activists today. These clues have to do with the similarities between direct action and art. To start with, artistic activities as well as direct action are often performed by individuals or small groups, who rely on impact rather than large numbers. Yamada explains:

> In a trial of strength, we are sure to lose. Better than that is to use a little imagination, irony or humor, including setting up weird buildings... What matters is not how many handbills you hand out or how many hours you spend in conferences, but rather something I think can be called art. In practice, it means doing what you think is fun where it will attract attention. (Yamada 2008: 171)

Shiraishi Yoshiharu comments that in Japan "there's no organization of students that can conduct a strike, like in Europe or North America, so what Yamada did was that he used his own body as a stake in the struggle instead" (Shiraishi 2008: 172). In a situation in which many students are reluctant to engage politically and activists lack the backing of existing student organizations, the numbers and re-

sources necessary for demonstrations of a more traditional kind were simply not be available.

A second similarity to art is that these acts are meant to be more than mere means to achieve some purpose. As Yamada stresses, the acts are meant to be enjoyed for their own sake, even when they are physically excruciating. "I wasn't thinking about dying or anything else as desperate as that", he states about his hunger strike, "I just wanted to do it in an enjoyable way" (Yamada 2008: 170).

A third similarity is that, just like many art works, many of these acts seem to aim at producing ambiguity. Their power stems from their ability to upset norms rather than from clear-cut political messages. Yamada's principle of not asking permission from the university authorities for his activities is an example.

> When I started raising chicken[s] on the campus, some guys engaged in some non-sensical circle activities came and asked me if I had permission from the university. Of course I hadn't. Again, when the people of the music circle wanted to do a guer-rilla live concert, even they went and tried to get permission. Then they got upset when they were refused. Sure, I understand their anger, but why on earth ask for permission in the first place if you're doing a guerrilla live? Pretty strange, in my view. In any case, that's why I go on doing my things without asking permission. I'm ready to discuss with people if they have complaints. Not with authorities, but with other people who use the place. In that vein, by doing things without permis-sion people will finally just think "Oh there they go again". What's really important is to create an atmosphere of not asking permission. (Yamada 2008: 171)

The power that statements like these, which by themselves are clear and unam-biguous, have to create ambiguity stems from the struggle that is latently or open-ly taking place over the use of the campus and in which onlookers are invited to choose a side. While some will identify with the authorities, others will feel drawn to the activists. Ambiguity arises because the question "Is this really defensible?" reveals itself as posed to society itself, rather than at the activists.

Taken together, these similarities between Yamada's actions and art suggest a conception of space that combines an orientation to participation in the main-stream public – as seen in the emphasis on direct action as a means of getting at-tention or in the attempt to influence onlookers by producing ambiguity – and an orientation towards enjoying the setting up of a counter-space as a goal in its own right – as seen in the emphasis on having fun or not asking permission.

Kubikubi Café and Union Extasy

2007 was also the year when Union Extasy was founded by Inoue and Ogawa, who at the time were both working as part-time librarians at Kyoto University. The union at first made itself known chiefly through its pranks – arranging barbe-ques on the campus or sailing down the Kamo River on a floating *kotatsu* during the 2008 "freeter May Day" demonstration. The playful attitude was evident from the start in the big signboard near the campus entrance through which it an-

nounced its existence. Next to a smiling, violin-playing grasshopper was the text: "We want ecstasy in our work like the grasshopper. But no death by starvation, thanks!". They also distributed pamphlets asking if the reader enjoys his or her workplace: "Everybody, do you enjoy your work place? Can you sing 'la-la-la' while cleaning up? Do you have tea time when you can sing 'la-la-la' while pouring up tea?". The text goes on to encourage everyone who doesn't feel like working, not to join their union, but to set up their own unions.

As for the union's name, Ogawa had insisted on "extasy" since it suggested something usually not associated with unions. By insisting on ecstasy in work, they wanted to formulate something close to a refusal of work: "Ecstasy in work is close to 'I won't work'", leaning more towards something akin to *eros* than to work (Inoue 2008; Inoue & Ogawa 2009: 37). The demand for ecstasy in work is easy to understand as a thinly disguised stab at capitalism. If alienation is part of all wage labor, raising the demand for ecstasy is to demand the impossible of capitalism, namely that it abolish itself.

Despite the playful attitude, this time Inoue and Ogawa took aim at a subject generally regarded as "serious" – the precarious working conditions at the university. Part-timers make up 2,700 of the university's employees, including teachers, librarians, janitors and guards. Most of them (85 percent) are women and like female irregular workers elsewhere in Japan their salaries are drastically below those of regular (mostly male) employees. At Kyoto University, part-timers earn 900-1200 yen per hour, a typical freeter wage, and they have almost no possibility of entering regular employment. As Ogawa (2009b) points out, this is a matter of exploiting female labor. The fact that wages are lower than for regular employees is justified by the university with the argument that the wages are only meant to be "supplementary" – i.e. that the work is "housewife part-time work". Today, this justification rings hollow since the universities are shifting from regular to irregular employees on a large scale, the latter including many single people who cannot rely on a family to supplement the income. With the five-year rule, which stated that contracts could at most be renewed for a period of five years, the position of such workers was made even more insecure.

Like many other universities, Kyoto University introduced this rule in 2005 after the university's incorporation. To protest against it, Ogawa and Inoue went on strike in February 2009 by setting up the shack that later became known as Kubikubi Café. This was a timely juncture, since the first employees scheduled to fall under the rule were some fifty employees whose contracts would end in early 2010. As inspirations for the café, the union quoted Ishigaki Café and Endō Reiko's hunger strike.

The union's methods made some laud it as an example of "cultural" activism or "collective art" (Mōri 2009; Amamiya 2010: 194). However, the fact that it was engaged in a drawn-out conflict in which it needed to represent many employees at the university meant that less playful aspects of activism gradually

came to the fore. Inoue and Ogawa both state that they learnt a lot about "responsibility" during their campaign and that they felt that they had grown closer to the struggle of the labor movement (Inoue & Ogawa 2009: 40f; Ogawa 2010a: 80). Another aspect that had not been as evident in the briefer sit-ins performed by Endō or Yamada were the sacrifices involved in out-drawn campaigns, which tended to harm the human relations of ordinary life. Ogawa used the simile of *nukadoko*, the bran used for fermenting vegetables into homemade pickles that needs to be stirred by hand every day.

> I used to take good care of my *nukadoko*, which I look on as a living thing that helps me and greets me as I return home every day. It needs to be stirred every day. If you eat it daily, it is a simple matter since you just need to put in new vegetables and mix them into the bran. But if you can no longer return home daily, taking good care of the *nukadoko* becomes hard. (Ogawa 2010c)

In its struggle with the university, the union achieved almost none of its aims: the five year rule is still in force and Inoue and Ogawa both had their contracts terminated. In February 2010 the university director agreed to meet for collective bargaining but restated that it needed to maintain the five year rule to press labor costs. Further rounds of collective bargaining proved unfruitful and court verdicts also went against the union. Meanwhile, the efforts involved in keeping the café running were taking its toll on the private lives of the activists. In June 2011 Ogawa withdrew from the union and in the autumn the café closed down, after more than two years in existence.

The union did succeed, however, in catalyzing a movement of part-time staff in the Kansai region. Following its example, similar unions such as Union Socosoco sprang up at other universities in Kyoto (Yanbe 2010). It also took the initiative to the first "Why temporary employments?" symposium, which it arranged in Osaka in February 2010 together with other university-based unions in the Kansai region with which it formed a network for collaboration. These symposiums have since been held every year – a good example showing that Union Extasy did not merely set up a counter-space but also participated in the public sphere and contributed to the public debate about temporary employment.

Direct Action, Space and Empowerment

Two trends stand out in the development of campus activism sketched here. One is that campus activism has become increasingly focused on precarization and neo-liberalization. The actions of Endō, Yamada, Union Extasy and Union Socosoco all target the transformation of universities from institutions relatively independent of the market into profit-driven corporations in which teachers are turned into flex-workers, students are mass-produced for a precarious labor market, and campuses are increasingly subject to control and surveillance (and prettified by chic restaurants and glass-covered facades).

A second trend has been the tendency for activists to resort to direct action, in particular by using counter-spaces as a way of participating in the public sphere. Let me recapitulate the conceptions of space informing the activities described above. In Kinji House, space was hardly used at all as a way to transmit a message or to protest, but primarily as an arena for exploring the possibility of living differently. Put in a nutshell, Ogawa's ideal was to *live* in no-man's-land rather than to be an activist in mainstream public space. In Ishigaki Café there was a valuing of counter-space as such, but not yet much of a political message beyond a defiant demonstration of the possibility of an alternative life. In more recent activities, such as Endō's and Yamada's hunger strikes or Kubikubi Café, political messages came to the fore, although important elements of counter-space remained. Over time, then, activities appear to have become more oriented more to achieving public visibility and to participation in the public sphere, although recent activism still makes use, albeit in varying degrees, of all three kinds of space.

Why has the rise of a campus-based precarity movement come about in tandem with an increasing reliance on direct action? Interestingly, as the case of Ishigaki Café demonstrates quite clearly, the turn to direct action in the form of setting up counter-spaces appears not to have followed, but rather preceded the adoption of issues such as precarity. It thus cannot have been caused solely by any need for activists to direct public attention to the issue of precarity. How, then, can the turn to direct action be explained? Yamada's remarks on the similarities between art and direct action suggest *one* possible answer, namely the existence of pragmatic concerns behind the choice of artistic methods. In the absence of organizational support, resorting to activities like sit-ins and hunger strikes is one of the few available means activists have to gain attention. Endō too states that the hunger strike was the best way for her to get attention, considering the limited time she had. For Union Extasy as well, setting up a café at a conspicuous spot where it was a constant irritant to the university management may have been a rational choice for a small union that could not threaten to call out many members in a strike. Yamada also points to the fact that there may be practical considerations behind the emphasis on enjoyability. He explains that if you are on your own, you don't manage to continue unless the activity is fun. He frankly admits that there are limitations with the artistic forms of activism inherent in their low number of participants. Actions flare up but do not last, and they are often ignored by the mass media. It goes without saying that a movement gains more weight the more people it is able to mobilize (interview, 2009-09-24).

Still, the sit-ins, hunger strikes and cafés cannot be explained solely as a strategic choice to get attention or to keep spirits up. Getting attention is important, but mainly from the perspective of participation in the public sphere – as a means to spread a message and exert pressure on opponents. Several of the activities described above, such as the antics engaged in by Union Extasy, appear unnecessary or even counter-productive from the point of view of swaying public opinion.

But why would direct action have any intrinsic value beyond strategic concerns? As mentioned, having access to alternative arenas outside mainstream public space can be important since such spaces are crucial as spaces for empowerment. Although spaces like Kinji House or Ishigaki Café were criticized or looked askance at by some activists as being too preoccupied with mere fun or play, the playful activities they engaged in may have been important as a form of practice or training for challenging authorities. They furnished participants with experiences that later helped them to use direct action in other struggles which had more "serious" causes but which to a considerable extent were waged using the same playful style.

Play often involves a play with the categories of the dominant order in society, including spatial ones. Jacques Rancière (1999) points out that the dominant order is not simply discursive, but also a spatial "ordering of the sensible". When protesters make themselves visible in public they often do so through a rejection of given spatial arrangements. What I would add is that playful redefinitions of space do not merely come about through counter-spaces. No-man's-lands can be important arenas for exploring new uses of space since they provide activists with spaces relatively sheltered from interference by authorities. Such spaces are hospitable to those who are not yet empowered enough to openly confront the latter, they can be important in providing access to resources needed to sustain counter-spaces, and – as Kinji House illustrates – the attempt to create or expand no-man's-lands can itself be the goal of activism.

Arguably, the need for spaces for empowerment has been greater in Japan than in many other countries. Although campus-based activism in Japan shares some characteristics with contemporary campus-based protests against austerity or neo-liberal university management in other countries, the negative legacy of the Japanese New Left has meant that activists in Japan have had to grapple with a negative view of political activism in the general public. It has also meant that those activists who have attempted to break with the negative legacy by developing new forms of activism have been handicapped by their inability to rely on existing movement organizations and networks. This may explain why campus-based activism in Japan is still relatively small-scale and why broad mass-mobilizations involving older social movement organizations have been hard to achieve. In these years of reorientation, when new styles of action are being invented and new networks formed, there is also a need to "play" with space so as to increase empowerment. The playful forms of direct action in which campus-based activists in Kyoto have engaged from Kinji House onwards have been part of this trend. This playfulness has remained strong even as the precarious situation of university employees and students have become pressing concerns in recent years.

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Notes

1   The performance is shown in a You Tube video: "Kubikiri shokuinmura Suto 3.4 nichime Part 2 Doramukanburohen 2009/2/26"; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SZaT-4Y7oQ (accessed 2012-11-20).

2   The article is based on fieldwork conducted in Japan 2005-2011. The investigation was conducted through interviews, participant observation and analyses of texts. Material about Kinji House consists mainly of essays and reports left by participants, and interviews with Ogawa and two other participants carried out in 2010. Accounts of Ishigaki Café can be found in Inoue & Kasagi (2005), Kasagi (2006), Shinohara (2005), Shishido (2005). My account is based on five visits in 2005 and several conversations with Inoue and other participants. Kubikubi Café's activities are well documented by abundant material on the union's homepage and their blog (http://extasy07.exblog.jp/). I made altogether 32 visits to the café and events arranged by the union during 2009-2011. I also used various other texts written by Inoue and Ogawa (e.g. Inoue 2008, 2009; Inoue & Ogawa 2009; Ogawa 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b) as well as reports by visitors and journalists (e.g. Amamiya 2009, Matsumoto 2009, Mōri 2009b). In addition to interviews with activists named in the text, I also make use of four additional interviews with former activists (referred to as A, B, C, D) active on campuses in Kyoto in the 1990s.

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