Lost in the dream: negotiating a life in street music in a Tokyo neighbourhood

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Abstract

This thesis presents an in-depth, long-term ethnographic study of the lives of street musicians in the Kōenji neighbourhood of Tōkyō. My interlocutors moved to the metropolis to begin lives as musicians: to become music professionals, to gain fans and popularity, to dare to do what they cared most about, and in doing so, to follow a musical dream. There has, however, never been a worse time to be a young aspiring artist. The Japanese music industry today is deaf to all but the most celebrated bands and musicians, fewer artists gain industry support every year, and many live venues charge performers to play on stage. As financially insecure and opportunity-poor irregular workers, my participants took to the walkways around Kōenji train station in search of a place to play, to be seen, and to connect with the passing crowds. Their incursions into rail spaces gave them access to an audience, but also gained the attention of police and station staff, and playing involved a continual process of managing their noise and their visibility. Prioritising music put them on the margins of popular discourses of life trajectories in Japan, and as time progressed their dreams of 'making it' began to fade. I ask why they continued to perform regularly at the station despite their increasing awareness of this, and what role remained for street music in their lives. I uncover how their music practices negotiated the space left by diminished hope, and explore how they found new meanings of 'a life in music'. Their journeys took a different route to those which they had envisioned before arriving in Tōkyō, but nevertheless offered a sense of direction, momentum, and an understanding of who they were in relation to the crowds that passed them on the street.

Contents

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Tsun Tsun

「かれの魂はかれが演奏した場所に生き続ける」

'*kare no tamashī wa kare ga ensōshita basho ni ikitsuzukeru*'

'His spirit will live on in the places where he played music'

Introduction

Fig. 1: A train pulls into Kōenji Station.

In Tōkyō, at the centre of Kōenji neighbourhood, is a train station. Compared to others in the heart of the metropolis, this one is quite small, providing access to a mere two commuter lines that run from the eastern border of the metropolis, through its heart and out to the western foothills of a leafy mountain. From the station's four elevated platforms, the passenger is afforded a 360 degree view of the station surroundings. On either side a traffic rotary *(rōtarī)*, around which buses and taxis circulate, and in the middle of them a 'public square' or *hiroba* within which people gather, sit on benches, talk in groups, or stand and smoke in a small corner partitioned from the rest by plant-topped low walls. Connected to these two *rōtarī*, narrow roads radiate out and away from the station

in every direction. Progressing along and in between the neighbourhood's fourteen 'shopping streets' or *shōtengai*, they burrow deep into Kōenji's dense residential hinterland though backstreets littered with cheap restaurants, drinking holes and spluttering air conditioning units. Leaving the station from its north or south exit, the commuter emerges onto 'thoroughfares' or *tsūro* that wrap themselves around the station complex, cutting underneath the train tracks in three places to produce underpasses with high ceilings where sound reverberates as though within the belly of a huge urban amplifier. As the evening closes in, musicians arrive at Kōenji Station by train, bicycle, or foot, and against the flow of commuters around them, stop, take out their instruments and begin to play music.

What this is about

This is a thesis about those musicians. It is about their dreams as individuals who set up their lives for one thing: to play music. It is about the fading of these dreams, and why they did not give up on them despite financial hardship, deep insecurities about their future and a music industry that was completely deaf to them. It is about the role of a town called Kōenji as a place the musicians were drawn to, and the spaces within it that they attempted to make their own. It is about what music represented for people with few opportunities in Japanese society, who started a journey that became a journey with no end. A journey that took a different route to that which they envisioned, but which nevertheless offered hope, direction and a sense of who they were in relation to the faceless crowds that passed them on the street.

The introduction will elaborate upon this statement of purpose, taking the reader down a three-part inroad to the dissertation's main chapters. Firstly, I give an account of my research methods, detailing my pathway into research, setting up, establishing a rhythm and the methodological changes that occurred as time passed and my relationship with the musicians changed. I move on to explore the particularities of carrying out anthropological research at an urban train station, how I adjusted to it and what I have learned about these spaces as a field site. Secondly, I give a tour of the background of my field site in and around Kōenji neighbourhood, in order to give an understanding and a sense of the environment within which street musicians went about their activities every evening. I attempt to give a glimpse here of why street music might work in Kōenji town, by introducing facets of the neighbourhood that have given it a degree of notoriety elsewhere in the metropolis: its growing used and remade clothing culture, its 'amateur' networks of activism, the history and atmosphere of its shopping districts, its backroads and alleyways, and its live music

venues. Lastly, I will employ the case of one street musician called Koba, charting a journey of his arrival in Tōkyō and his progression in music over time, to lay out the foundations upon which my chapters are constructed. Each chapter summary will relate to the experiences of Koba's performances in Kōenji.

What I call them, what they said and what they did

In telling the musicians' stories I refer to individuals by pseudonym unless they gave me permission to use their real names or performance monikers. All transliterations are my own. In places these are followed by the Japanese so that readers proficient in the language can acquire a direct sense of what I was told. Elsewhere, the Japanese comes first where I aim to highlight the exact spoken wording. Throughout the dissertation I will use a number of terms in referring to the musicians' practices as a whole. I will begin here by calling it street music, which is the simplest and most comprehensive term I know of to describe music played on a set of pathways around a train station. I will, however, not limit my terms to 'street music' alone, as by itself it fails to describe the complete range of activities comprising what the station musicians did. I also wish to avoid reducing what they were doing to terms employed in other research. In her study of New York's Washington Square Park street performers, Sally Harrison-Pepper (1990) differentiates 'street performance' from 'street music', suggesting rather reductively that the latter is a show of music based almost entirely upon the musicians' desire to collect gratuities in a centrally placed collection tin or other receptacle (1990: xvi). Street music ignores the environment it takes place in, says Harrison-Pepper, unlike street performance involving fire breathers or magicians, which she argues is more committed to the street and to the audience (1990: same page). In light of this I will also employ the term street performance, both because as a group my informants' activities at the station were not always limited to music, and because they were not there simply to, as Harrison-Pepper suggests of street musicians, engage in 'rehearsals' for future concerts (1990: same page).

In her book *Underground Harmonies*, Susie Tenenbaum (1995) sidesteps these hurdles by using the specific and localised term 'subway musicians', which she goes on to suggest grew out of street performance as an activity that occurs in plazas, parks and on sidewalks (1995: 12). She also uses the term 'Busker' frequently. I avoid using both the word 'busking' and the consequent designation of 'busker' altogether, as busking is first and foremost considered to be a commercial activity (Twomey 2012: 17-18). My research participants, however, demonstrated time and again that they were not playing at Kōenji Station primarily for gratuities, called *nagesen* ('tossed coin') in Japanese, but rather

for an array of reasons. Where the sale of music was a goal of street music performances, it more commonly took the form of CD sales, but even this was rare in light of that fact that Japan Rail (JR) regulations on commercial activities within the station grounds forbade it.[1] As a general term for the street performing musicians I worked with, I made the decision to use their word, *rojō raibu.* The written Japanese form of *rojō raibu*, 「路上ライブ」, is constructed from the character for 'street' or 'road' and the character for 'above' or 'on', followed by the English loan-word 'live' - as in a live concert - in katakana.[2] It literally means 'live on the street' and, together with the shorthand *rojō,* is commonly used by street performers in Japan including the majority of the musicians I worked with. Throughout this thesis, I will frequently use the terms *rojō raibu*, the shorthand *rojō*, street music and street performance in referring to their activities.

Setting up *rojō raibu* at Kōenji Station and beginning research

By the middle of July the street music season at Kōenji is well underway. The humid rainy season, which drenches Tōkyō in regular showers for a couple of weeks in June, gives way to a new, sterner heat and the familiar stridulating 'reep reep reep reeeeeep' song of the Japanese *semi* (cicada). The evenings stretch out to their longest, and nighttime descends at a leisurely 8:30pm or so, which is ideal for street performers as prime *rojō raibu* playing hours at Kōenji fall between seven and nine o'clock on most days. On one such summer's day in July of 2013 I began my research at Kōenji Station grounds, arriving by bicycle at 8:00pm and taking a stroll past the station exits, along its walkways and under its railway arches in an attempt to get a feel for the neighbourhood's street music at that hour. My circle complete, I returned to the long thoroughfare running between the south exit and the first railway arch where two young men were sat reclining against the station wall, playing guitars (see Map 5, space no. 3, at the back of this thesis).[3]

As I approached I took the measure of the one nearest to me. He looked to be of university age, slim with dark mid-length hair and high cheek-bones that accentuated his lean face. He was dressed in tight, faded black jeans and weathered black boots, and wore an old short-sleeved Hawaiian shirt

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[1] I was told in conversation with a blue-uniformed station guard that musicians must not sell their CDs at the station because of these regulations. I could not find access to the regulations he had mentioned, however.

[2] Katakana is a form of Japanese syllabary used to make up the pronunciation of loan words from foreign languages. For instance, the Japanese word for 'beer' is ビール, a katakana word that is romanised as 'bīru' and pronounced 'bee-ru'.

[3] All maps may be found on the very last pages of this thesis and will be used for reference throughout the chapters.

over a white vest. I noticed that he was playing a vintage K Yairi guitar: a revered maker with a small factory in Japan producing quality hand-made guitars to a high specification. He sat staring out into the space in front of him, people passing by on their way to and from the station, and picked absentmindedly at his guitar strings while his playing partner Daisuke performed a pop song with serious gusto further down towards the railway underpass. Summoning up my courage I introduced myself, and as I sat down cross-legged next to him on the floor he shook my hand; 'My name is Koba, I'm a musician', he said with a chuckle of embarrassment.

Fig. 2: Kōenji Station's South Exit, and the *tsūro* ('thoroughfare') running away from the exit.

My conversation with Koba that evening provided me with the ethnographic material for my first field diary entry, and in this introduction I will draw upon interviews with him and his experiences in Kōenji as windows onto important questions and themes running through my chapters. As he began playing music in the neighbourhood, I myself was at the beginning of a long, in-depth study of street musicians (35 months passed between my first and last field diary entries). Koba was the first of seventy *rojō* performers I met in Kōenji, a town in Suginami-ku (Suginami Ward) in western

Tōkyō with a population of just under 50,000.[4] Kōenji feels removed from the metropolis's major centres of economics, business and tourism, but it is in fact only a fifteen minute train ride from its modern epicentre in Shinjuku (see Maps 1 and 2). Kōenji Station is situated fairly centrally along the East Japan Railway Company's (JR East) Chūō Line and Chūō-Sōbu Line, which together serve some of the most well-known parts of the metropolis, including Shinjuku and Tōkyō stations. During my research I lived in central Chūō line towns on these same lines: in Nakano, Ōgikubo and Musashi Kōganei, and rode my bicycle each day along the railway tracks to Kōenji.

Details of research methods

Fieldwork leading to this thesis was conducted over two separate periods: one between June 2013 and July 2014, and another upon my return to Tōkyō between October 2015 and May 2016. While I was active in the field for a total of 21 months, I kept in touch with Koba and my other key informants via email, phone and social media during the time in between research blocks. The duration of my fieldwork was longer than normal for a research degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), owing to the opportunity I had to begin fieldwork during a Japanese government scholarship (MEXT) after successfully competing the initial upgrade from Mphil to Ph.D year. After an essential six-month period of intensive Japanese language study at Gakugei University in Tōkyō, I spent a year as a visiting researcher at Meiji Gakuin University at the invitation of Tom Gill, Professor of Social Anthropology. I returned to SOAS and officially entered my second year, which facilitated my return to the field for follow-up research.

I visited Kōenji train station at least four or five times a week including weekend days, and on some weeks I went every day. I also made around twenty trips to Asagaya Station, the next stop along from Kōenji, during my time in the field. I took fieldwork trips to Shinjuku Station ten times, and to Shibuya Station five times. Following street musicians as they performed took me beyond train station environments and into homes, neighbourhoods, parks and live music venues in Kōenji, Asagaya, Nakano, Shinjuku and Yoyogi, and to other music establishments in Tōkyō including venues in Shibuya, Shimokitazawa, Kichijōji, Akihabara, Ōkubo, Ebisu and Akasaka. In Japan, live music rooms or halls of varying sizes are usually called 'live houses' (*raibu hausu*), and in Kōenji this term applied both to tiny single-room venues with the most basic equipment, and to the largest, multi-level concert hall in town, 'Kōenji High'. During the early stages of fieldwork I used a pre-

[4] The population as of August 2017 was 47,492 according to the ward office statistics: http://www.city.suginami.tokyo.jp/kusei/toukei/kakusai/1030440.html

established and memorised series of ice-breaker questions when approaching people playing on the street. These were particularly helpful when a natural rapport failed to materialise between me and the musicians. During the first few months of active research I was still absorbing a large amount of Japanese every week and so relied upon topics I was comfortable with when developing discussions. A typical first conversation with a new interlocutor would proceed along the following lines: 'Hello, I'm sorry to disturb you. I like your music by the way. I'm a writer from the UK studying street musicians and I'm very interested in the street music culture of Kōenji town. Do you have a couple of minutes?'

This approach was effective in securing five to fifteen minute conversations in around seventy percent of cases, though sometimes musicians were visibly suspicious, confused or annoyed by my interruption. Other lines of enquiry that extended discussions included the choice of playing spot around the station, the numbers of people stopping to listen, their performance schedules, the weather and street music, police interference, their hometown, how they began playing in Kōenji, and advice for me if I wished to begin playing street music myself. Conversations within the first few months of research rarely went beyond a fifteen minute boundary because in most cases I remained a stranger disturbing the musicians during a performance, and many were impatient to get back to their songs. During the first six months of research spanning summer and autumn, I began building up a database of street musicians based upon initial meetings and shorter discussions with a broad range of performers. I accumulated this data into a 'street musician glossary' containing their name, age, sex, educational background, parents' employment (when this information was available), work status, home town, reason for moving to Tōkyō, current employment and a short summary of their personal goals and aspirations.

Methodological changes over time

Six months into research my method began to change, until I was spending more time with a selection of musicians. I would generally arrive at the station between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. in the evenings, and remain in Kōenji until midnight or later, depending upon who was playing and until what time. Until I began taking my own guitar to the field site in the spring of 2014 my evenings were spent sitting with better-known musicians as they performed, discussing aspects of their playing styles and techniques, song lyrics and musical composition, interactions with people on the street, schedules and progress, work and home life, and whatever else they felt they wanted to share. I also accompanied these musicians to studios, rehearsal rooms, karaoke booths, instrument and music

shops, local bars and cafes, as well as live houses and performance spaces outside of Kōenji. On occasion I was invited into their homes. Arriving back at my apartment between midnight and 3:00 a.m. most evenings, I would write up my field diary immediately from memory, from notes written on my smartphone's memo feature as well as any recordings taken from its dictaphone app. No recordings were taken without the spoken consent of the performers. On a standard research day, I finished my notes and went to bed between 3:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.

Further to these research methods, I conducted a series of recordings of live house shows with the consent of performers and the live house master.[5] I also undertook a series of semi-structured, semi-formal interviews with ten street performers who agreed to have an extended discussion on a number of themes that had emerged over the first year of research. These interviews were conducted at a cafe on Yon Chōme Road just south of Kōenji Station, and lasted for around an hour and a half each. The ability to use my smartphone for most interviewing and data-gathering exercises was an advantage given that the ubiquitous presence of these devices tended not to arouse the same unease or tension that dedicated cameras or dictaphones do (see Gill 2001, Fowler 1996). Gill (2001) refrained from conducting formal interviews with his day labourer research participants, assured of the fact that this would qualitatively affect the relationship of the fieldworker and the subject, and by extension the data obtained (Gill 2001: 8). In my experience, however, street performers who I invited to interview after having known them for more than six months tended to appreciate the opportunity to talk more in-depth about themselves, and most appeared to enjoy the experience of a more formal interview away from the station.

One interviewee told me that it wasn't until the formal interview stage that he finally began to see me as a 'real researcher', and that this awakened a new respect for my project. In contrast, a musician appearing in the latter half of this dissertation by the name of Fuji remained consistently opposed to any hint of intrusion into what he called our 'one-to-one' discussions. He turned down the semi-formal interview and preferred not to be recorded, which was in keeping with his view of street music as an antithesis to what he described as a music industry focused upon the production of 'products' rather than the creative, temporary moment of performance. Beyond direct research I kept in touch with my informants via LINE, a smartphone-based messaging service popular in Japan, as well as through social media sites. I checked Facebook, Twitter and blog pages regularly in cases where *rojō* performers used them, and have incorporated information based on public posts online in this thesis with their permission. I also collected promotional materials in the form of

[5] The proprietor or person in charge of a live house or bar is often referred to as *masutā* ('Master').

posters, live schedules and flyers, which I considered an important source of information concerning how the street musicians presented themselves to the general public, and as a part of the way they constructed their *rojō raibu* personalities. Finally, and as I will come to shortly, I played street music myself during research.

Ethics

All participants were aware of my research methods and how I intended to use the data I collected from our discussions. In each case I first received verbal consent to use the information shared between us as research data, and later presented them with a statement of intent before requesting written consent. I endeavoured to carry out my research in accordance with the ASA and AAA ethics guidelines.[6] Chiefly among these I took care to uphold the principle of doing no harm, to protect research participants and to honour their trust. I encountered no major conflicts of interest during research, but when considering that my actions might affect the activities of the street performers I always chose the option that I felt least impacted upon their lives. I refrained from continuing with enquiries that I came to understand as too intrusive. In addition to these measures, I also observed and upheld the particular standards of conduct for each organisation that supported my research.

The most pressing ethical concern arising during research pertained to my own performances of street music. Performing without a license was not legal on the streets of Suginami ward, but neither did local authorities consider it to be a particularly illegal activity. Based in Shinjuku, the Tōkyō Metropolitan Government (TMG) provide performance licenses under a programme called 'Heaven Artist [sic]'. However, a combination of factors, including the time taken to process license applications, strict selection criteria, and a limited list of 'official' pitches (of which Kōenji was not included), made them very unpopular among the *rojō* performers. Only one musician who played at Kōenji had one of these licenses, and he told me after having booking issues at a site in Futago Tamagawa Station that he thought the programme a waste of time, especially as in practice it was possible to play without one. There was ambiguity and a fine balance in the relationship between *rojō* activities and those charged with overseeing what goes on in the spaces where musicians play. When discussing street music with police officers or the local *anzen paturo-ru* (Security Patrol), and when I played at the station, I was aware that I may generate increasing, negative attention that

[6] http://theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml, http://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1895

could impact upon my participants. I was stopped while playing, as other musicians were at times, and asked to produce my identification and my residence card.[7] I worried with each apparent new wave of regular crack-downs on performances at the station that my own participation was in some way to blame. While crackdowns occurred before and after my own playing period during research, I nevertheless decided to limit my performances to less busy times late at night and to collaborative 'jams' with musicians who had invited me to do so.

Participant observation: getting into research with musicians

Joshua Hotaka Roth, in an account of his fieldwork among *nikkeijin* (Japanese diaspora) working in auto-parts factories in Hamamatsu in Japan, talks about the 'physical and logistical' challenges of conducting interviews while working on an assembly line (Roth 2003: 336). In particular, he recalls how he found himself limited to a series of five minute breaks and one meal time a day during production in order to talk with those he was interested in studying. I was often reminded of Roth's research whilst in Kōenji, where the location and activities I was investigating created a recurring sequence of windows for interview; collections of three to five minutes which would add up to a regular total. One evening in September, while sat outside the main south entrance to Kōenji station with a 27 year old street musician from Osaka, I noted that we were repeating intermittent slots of conversation between his performances of songs. When he stood up to begin a song, I would sit and watch, or read through his song sheets and folders teeming with scribbled lyrics and chord patterns. These were also useful breaks because they gave me the chance to think over what we had just been discussing, write some notes about interesting points made, or otherwise devise my next series of questions. I quickly got used to this general rhythm of fieldwork with the musicians - talk, some music, more talk, some more music - until it soon became the basic pattern of my daily fieldwork at Kōenji.

[7] Foreigners living in Japan 'mid- to long-term' are issued with a residence card *(zairyū kādo)* as photo ID. Further information available at http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/tetuduki/zairyukanri/whatzairyu.html

Fig. 3: *Rojō raibu* in the first rail underpass at Kōenji Station.

In learning which kinds of involvement were most appropriate, I have made mistakes along the way. For instance, during my first day with the performer from Osaka, he offered up his guitar to me; 'Here you go, would you like to play a song?' he asked hesitantly. I declined on that occasion, overcome by fear brought on by the unexpectedness of the invitation and my own embarrassment at having just been handed a guitar on the street. He was not offended, but neither did he find new ground upon which we might bond as associates or friends. Saying no to him was an error of judgement that I knew I had to correct if I was to gain mutual respect, and in doing so balance our interviewer and interviewee relationship with a sense of shared experience of *rojō raibu* musicianship. Towards the end of my first period and throughout my second period of fieldwork I played street music in an effort to submerge myself into the world of Kōenji Station musicians, and to understand it from the inside out in an attempt to achieve a fuller, 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) in my ethnography. Given that my informants were musicians and that I could also play, my anthropological training compelled me to at least attempt to join them and to 'make sense through assimilation' (Watson 1999: 4) by putting myself in their shoes.

While scholarly opinion ranges widely on the appropriate balance of observation and participation (Aull Davies 2008: 82), as the a priori method in anthropology, participant observation's tenets compel researchers to conduct deep ethnography wherever lawfully and ethically possible and practicable (Caplan 2003, Bernard 2006, AAA 2009). There were, however, considerations to bear in mind as I arrived at Kōenji Station with my own guitar on my back. Street musicians had their favourite spots, and I did not want to prevent anyone from accessing these, nor delay or stymie their performance of *rojō raibu* in any other way. As I discuss in chapters covering performance spaces and wellbeing in this thesis, visibility and the balance of volume within the sound environment was an important factor in enabling street music. The conspicuousness of my own performances, especially as the only non-Japanese *rojō* player at Kōenji,[8] potentially threatened the balance of visibility others had worked to maintain, especially regarding the subtle management of local authorities such as the station *kōban* (police box) officers. As a result I tended to play with other performers, taking turns or else jamming together. When performing solo, I did so either at times that were less popular with my informants, or in other *rojō raibu* venues outside of Kōenji, such as Asagaya.

It was not necessary for me to become a *rojō* performer in the same way as others to understand firsthand and phenomenologically the experience of street music. My occasional performances were enough for many of my informants to accept my presence over extended periods of time. It is no coincidence that my closest friends and participants were also those with whom I endeavoured to play music at the station. Equally important, if not more so, were actions that indicated I was prepared to help, support and encourage people in their lives, and to show genuine interest in them. If street performers were also playing small music bars in Kōenji or elsewhere, an effective way of involving myself was to demonstrate that I would like to support them in this. If they had made flyers for their music, CDs or live events I offered to distribute them while they played. I also brought friends along to some shows, increasing the numbers at the live house or bar they were playing in. Understood as a helpful influence in their musical activities, I found myself introduced more frequently to others connected to the performers' networks, to live house owners, bar staff, friends and other musicians.

[8] I should at a caveat here that on one occasion during the course of my research I saw another non-Japanese street musician performing in Kōenji. This proved to be an exception as far as Kōenji was concerned, though I recognised him as somebody I had seen playing in Yoyogi Park in Shibuya Ward. His choice of performance spot, outside a nearby *konbini* (convenience store) rather than one of the popular playing areas at Kōenji Station, is likely to have caused his ejection from the space.

Fig. 4: A street musician performing on the north side of the station (see position 4 , Map 5). Hitomi was told to stop playing on numerous occasions for selling CDs.

Spontaneity as a tool for getting involved was absolutely crucial at my field site because of the quick turnover of musicians, the unpredictability of outdoor public spaces, and the consequent inability to plan my visits in detail. Learning to recognise glimpses of opportunity was essential in an environment of flux, and I strived more and more as time went on to maintain a readiness for these moments. When one performer, a twenty year old pianist on his first attempt at Kōenji, confided in me that he did not know where he ought to play, I offered to take him on a tour of popular performance spaces in the area. When another told me that he was changing apartments in Kōenji, I offered to help him with the move. When a third told me about his regular shows at Kōenji live house Muryoku Muzenji, I asked if I could attend his next performance, which transpired to be the following evening and an experience that triggered a long series of regular visits. A constant readiness to move, to take part and to play music when asked or to fill a silence, combined with an observable willingness to help and be active in the places into which *rojō raibu* extended, produced

my own personal method resembling Bernard's (2006) participant observation as a 'way of life' in my particular context in Tōkyō.

Urban train station as field site

As a study of Paris railways, Marc Auge's (2002) *In the Metro* did little to advance research on interstitial spaces of transit within the social sciences beyond furnishing it with personal reflections on solitude and some interesting musings upon the station as 'total social fact' (2002: 59). Auge's study of the Paris Metro did, however, illustrate some of the methodological hurdles involved in conducting social science research in such spaces. Auge's principle method was to walk through the train station, observe and record. This is considered by Bernard (2006) to be a valid component of participant observation, one which he called 'unobtrusive direct observation' (2006: 413). A similar approach was notably adopted in Japan by the 'Modernologist'[9] Kon Wajirō (1987) as the key method of note-taking when he attempted to document the changing landscapes and people of early twentieth century Japan within his journals of scribbled images and notes.

After submitting my PhD upgrade paper in the first year of SOAS's doctoral course, I travelled to Tōkyō with the support of a JSPS Summer Programme[10] award to undertake a series of trips to potential train station field sites. During this period I was hosted by Dr. Julian Worrall, an architect and scholar at Waseda University in central Tōkyō. Worrall's own doctoral thesis focused upon 'railway urbanism' as a concept to explain how the production of public space in the metropolis was influenced by the commuter railway (Worrall 2005). During our field trips for prospective research to stations such as Shinjuku, Shinbashi, and Ueno among others, Julian indicated aspects that had taken precedence in his study: carriages, the station complex and station squares or *hiroba*. While his research concentrated on the architectural aspects of the train station's built environment in creating different permutations of public or common space, the ethnographic 'thick description' necessary for an anthropological examination such as mine was lacking. Possible options were limited: station staff, commuters, shop managers and assistants.

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[9] Kon Wajirō essentially created the school of Modernology in his book *Kōgengaku nūmon.*

[10] JSPS (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science) Summer Programme awards are conducted over the course of two and a half months in Japan with a professor based at a Japanese University. For more information see the JSPS website at https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-summer/

Fig. 5: Kōenji Station's northern *hiroba*, or 'public square'.

In a couple of recent studies that have focused on gendered aspects of the carriage in Japanese commuter life, Steger (2013) and Gertreuer-Kargl (2012) used observations within carriages and interviews to uncover women's tacit use of bodily comportment in negotiating the male gaze and the complex power-relations in non-verbal communication when riding the rails. Miki Hasegawa (2006) conducted her study of Shinjuku Station's homeless cardboard village along the sheltered walkways leading away from its West Exit. These recent ethnographic accounts of transport spaces have proven that the train station is not only a possible field site within anthropology, but that in Tōkyō it can tell important stories about everyday adaptations to life in urban centres.

Passaro's (1997) article *You Can't Take the Subway to the Field!,*[11] draws out assumptions within the anthropological research community that tie where and how people do ethnography to an exoticised ideal of fieldwork. While the article illuminates the much-feared colonial hangover within present debates, the title juxtaposes 'the field' with the 'the subway', and I would argue that the current dearth of ethnographic attention given to train stations in cites like Tōkyō is also partly due to the hitherto categorisation of transport spaces as outside the purview of what constitutes a possible field site. My own investigations with Dr Worrall brought me to the conclusion that within railway spaces it is best to keep one group or activity as a focus point, and that this will usually coincide with a particular area within the whole, such as the inner station complex, the trains, the station squares, or its walkways. In studying Kōenji's street musicians my ethnography is largely limited to the station walkways, connected to and wrapping around the main architecture of Kōenji Station. In my case, I could indeed take the train to 'the field', in fact it deposited me right into the heart of it.

Adjusting to the particularities of my field site

In comparison with other anthropological research conducted in Japan, mine was relatively uncomplicated by red tape, formal etiquette or obstructions caused by parties other than those within my immediate group of research participants. Much of this was due to the nature of train station space as interstitial and ambiguous, wherein different approaches to its governance were present depending upon the authority or official body. See discussions throughout the thesis and particularly the final chapter for further exploration of this. Just as the non-licensed performance of street music existed between allowed and disallowed status due to the existence of performance permits distributed though the Tōkyō Metropolitan Government, so too were most other aspects of *rojō raibu* conducted outside any official status or procedures.

While *rojō raibu* faced a constant threat of shut-down from local police officers and station guards, I was under no time constraints beyond those limiting my research windows to the evenings and the night. As with other research on nighttime activities and practices, such as Takeyama's (2016) account of young male hosts or Allison's (1994) study of corporate masculinity in hostess clubs, as ethnographer I had to adjust my own schedule of waking and sleeping hours to accommodate late nights and early mornings in the field. Like my closest research participants, I became much more nocturnal, beginning my day's work at 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. and finishing between 1:00 a.m. and

[11] The full title of Passaro's article is *"You Can't Take the Subway to the Field!": "Village" Epistemologies in the Global Village*, and is presented as a chapter in Gupta and Ferguson's edited volume on the boundaries of anthropological locations.

3:00 a.m. As with Takeyama's and Allison's studies, the nighttime in *rojō raibu* produced new social worlds to study and rules that differed to those of diurnal hours, providing space for contrasting modalities of selfhood to those of the daytime.

Though I was limited to the hours of night, *rojō raibu* remained ever-present and followed similar patterns throughout. It did not appear that my research topic was in danger of disappearing after a given number of months or years. Recent research by Slater et al. (2015) and O'Day (2015) on the young activist SEALDS (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) movement out of private universities in Tōkyō, was conducted with haste in light of the fact that the new movement could potentially implode or fizzle out. SEALDS activism occurred in pockets of space, organised marches and demonstrations that lasted a few hours, while a great deal of their work was carried out on social media. In contrast I did not have to do this kind of informant chasing exercise, and while my research participants updated personal blogs and twitter accounts, I relied on my regular, continued presence at Kōenji Station to be enough to secure access to them. Individually, musicians talked to me about sensitive matters and issues of personal danger, but within my research I did not come into contact with politically sensitive practices. As a largely anti-Prime Minister Abe movement, SEALDS engaged directly with political polarities even while they eschewed the hard anti-establishment rhetoric of previous *furīta* ('freeter' or 'part-time worker') or ANPO protestors.

Other recent anthropological research in Japan has focused on communities affected by the Fukushima triple disaster and its evacuees (See Gill, Steger and Slater 2013). Authors in this collection of research have followed individuals and groups from place to place, dealing with issues of safety and pollution of food and bodies. In comparison my research was relatively straightforward, if not what some might consider as comparable to the way fieldwork has been undertaken in isolated communities: despite excursions to other parts of Tōkyō, I mostly remained in the same neighbourhood, spent my evenings at the train station and tracked my research participants' progress slowly over everyday interactions for periods totalling two years. During this time, however, the seasons affected both how and when *rojō* musicians performed. I discuss this throughout the chapters, which begin in the summer months and end in winter.

Another aspect of playing *rojō raibu* in Kōenji was the surrounding shape and atmosphere of the neighbourhood itself. In the following section I give a brief tour of the places, people and scenes that together produced the environment within which the street musicians played music each day.

The station and the surrounding neighbourhood

Over the course of my research, street performers played at ten separate parts of the station grounds, and these pitches are illustrated on Map 5. I have ordered these from one to ten, with number one being the performance space used by the largest number of musicians. Koba's favourite space was the South Exit *tsūro,* or number 3 on the map: the broadest section of the station's walkways and one of the busiest with human traffic due to its proximity to the station's entrance and exit.[12] Performers favoured particular spots for their distinct qualities, be it physical comfort, shelter from the weather, shelter from the view of people or particular actors such as the police, exposure to the public, the quality of sound the space produced, how light or dark they were, how safe they were to perform in at night, or a combination of these factors. The first railway underpass, where the walkway passes under the railway tracks to connect the north and south sides of the hub, was the most popular performance space on average throughout the year. It was within the immediate station grounds, allowing good access to possible audiences, and was also the most flexible; a musician could increase or decrease their visibility to the public by playing closer to either opening where the majority of the public passed back and forth. It offered shelter from the weather, privacy for more experimental performances, good acoustics, and was somewhere *rojō* musicians felt they could be for extended periods of time.

Koba preferred the South Exit pitch, he said, because it gave direct access to some of the largest numbers of people passing directly in front of the performer, while feeling his *rojō raibu* caused less of a nuisance there than it would on the northern flank. Five of the ten performance spaces were on the walkway that wrapped itself around the station building. I also recorded four pitches within the two station *hiroba*: three in the more crowded north *hiroba*, and one in the south *hiroba*. Performances in these spots were often closer to practice sessions, with musicians sat along the low walls, strumming with friends or working out a new guitar progression. The final spot, and second most popular with *rojō* musicians, was the second railway underpass further to the west end of the station complex. Like the first underpass it was sheltered, and the furthest pitch from station guards or station police (*kōban*) officers, and while it was not directly connected to walkways leading up to the station entrances, it was well illuminated at night.

[12] As with train stations in other parts of the world, entrances were also exits at Kōenji Station.

Fig. 6: 'Inokashira Folkies' play up for the crowds in Kōenji's second rail underpass (see position 2, Map 5).

Youth power, youth looks

In interview, Koba described Kōenji to me as something of an exception in Tōkyō: 'Youth power is weak in society, but in Kōenji I feel that lots of individuals are opening their own businesses and are involved in their own projects. In Kōenji they have more power I think' *(wakate no pawā ga shakaiteki ni yowain dakedo, Kōenji de wa, dondon sa, jibun no mise ga yattari toka sa, yarukoto ga aru hito ōi ki ga suru. Kōenji nara motto pawā ga aru kamo shirenai)*. Though he later suggested that there were plenty of older Kōenji residents who did not see Kōenji in this way, or remembered a time before the town took on this facet, Koba touched on an important point about Kōenji's contemporary standing in Tōkyō: the way it is seen and talked about by people within the metropolis and outside of it. When Koba and I were elsewhere in Tōkyō, people we accosted sometimes mentioned that he looked like a 'Kōenji person' *(Kōenjipoi hito)*. Koba adored searching for bargains and unique items of clothing in one of the town's many second-hand clothing stores (*furugiya*). Koba told me that one of his earliest memories of Kōenji town had been of the *furugiya* stores he visited; 'I remember going to one place

and thinking, who is the owner here? There isn't a single piece of clothing that isn't my style here!'. Though he toned it down over the years, Koba's look was decidedly 'rockstar' with a hint of 'spaghetti western'. On the walls of his apartment Koba had hung pictures of Native Americans on horseback or in standing portrait, and he was always drawn to clothing that in someway represented a connection to his idols. Koba's body movements were slow, as was his confident and languid gait, and this in combination with his particular fashion sense seemed to set Koba out from the crowds that swept passed him at twice the pace.

The attribution of 'Kōenji person' to Koba outside the neighbourhood itself is connected to a larger discourse about Kōenji town in comparison to other places of residence and work in Tōkyō. In recent years Kōenji has become increasingly well known for its large and growing number of *furugiya*. In a 2011 article, Shimomura suggested that Kōenji's *furugiya* 'boom' was due to economic incentives: the post-bubble lack of regular work for younger people matched with the area's strong association with the production and consumption of 'subculture'. For Shimomura, this environment germinated the fast agglomeration of furugiya, from as few as 15 in 1995 to over 50 by the late 90s, and 140 by 2011 (Shimomura 2011: 87, see also Mantell 2009). *Furugiya* are part of Kōenji's popularity with younger people, and they are a part of a culture that draws from and feeds into the many music scenes that also operate within the neighbourhood, and with which they share spaces along sprawling backstreets and alleyways. While *furugiya* and fashion culture is an important aspect of Kōenji's attribution as a place of 'youth power', and one that connects it to similar neighbourhoods such as Shimokitazawa or Harajuku, a more detailed analysis remains outside of the remit of this thesis. I advise readers interested in this aspect of the town and of Tōkyō in general to begin with Philomena Keet's (2013) anthropological study of Tōkyō's youth fashion scenes. The literature online concerning Kōenji's Kitakore building, a pre-war construction transformed into a maze-like network of micro boutiques, is a fascinating insight into the trend of reworking and remodelling clothing and other discarded items that come to represent each designer's individuality. Since 2015, the store even has an unofficial 'sister store' in London's Tooting market.[13]

[13] For more details on the Kitakore building, its history and the process that saw Yoshimitsu Gotō reinvent a dilapidated structure into the miniature, maze-like series of re-worked, re-modelled paraphernalia stores that it remains today, see Majima 2012. Petit Kōenji's owner told me when I visited her store that she intended for her London version of Kitakore to represent the same ethic of creativity, wherein a similar essence of individuality was distilled in the items she sold, and that like Kitakore they would be an extension of the shop owner's personality. She thought of her London store and Kōenji's Kitakore to be 'like twinned cities'. Just like Kitakore, Petit Kōenji has a pair of stylised, angry eyes painted on to the awning above the shop. At the Kōenji store, the shutters that pulled down over the entrance after closing also bore an image of a large pair of sharp teeth, threatening to devour those walking by.

'Amateur' activism

Kōenji has a history of counter-cultural activity and social activism in the form of its *shirōto no ran* (Amateur's Riot)[14] network, headed by the long-term activist and thrift shop owner Matsumoto Hajime. Until the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11th March 2011 and the nuclear disaster that followed immediately after it, Kōenji saw small waves of unrest, voiced in locally organised and locally performed protests. A majority of these events were orchestrated by Matsumoto, for whom incentives for political activism ranged from unemployment rates to the imposition of a charge for toilet paper in train station rest rooms (Kuchikomi, 2008, Tabuchi 2009). These kinds of social innovations are, according to Julia Obinger (2015) , very real forms of political activism; a practical application of the network's 'do it yourself' logic of instigating change through one's own positive actions. Her own study of the *shirōto no ran* network focused upon the small group who take part in collective demonstrations in the neighbourhood, wherein she claimed that the community-scale of their operations and resistances presented opportunities for empowerment among the neighbourhood's poorer young people.

In April 2011, 15,000 people took part in a rally and protest march beginning and ending at Kōenji Station. In what was seen at the time as a reawakening of Japan's politically active populations, young men and women were joined by those old enough to remember the student protests of the 1960s and 1970s, chanting slogans, waving placards and calling for an end to the use of nuclear power (Wilks 2011, Morris 2011). Reminiscent of the 'new youth movement' rave demo protests that occupied Shibuya's Miyashita park in 2003 (see Hayashi and McKnight 2005), local musicians, drummers and rap artists joined in with the throng, making the protest by far the largest in Kōenji's history, and marking the neighbourhood as a centre of alternative social participation within Tōkyō.

***Shominteki* backstreets, narrow alleyways**

Azumari Dori ('Azumari Street') and Jūnjō Shōtengai ('Jūnjō Shopping District') are two prosperous parts of town connected directly to Kōenji's north *hiroba* and surrounding *rōtari-* ('roundabout'). Both have a long history, Azumari Dori was founded in 1953, while Jūnjō Shōtengai has its roots in the pre-war era, and are often said by locals and media to have a 'friendly', *shitamachi* ('downtown'), and *shominteki* ('working class') essence to them (http://www.kōenji-azuma.com/, http://

[14] I use Julia Obinger's translation of the name here.

www.kouenji.or.jp/). In Kōenji, shop associations (*shōtenkai*) appear to take pride in the idea of the neighbourhood as 'down to earth' or as a common person's place, and websites boastfully announce the large concentrations of live houses, thrift shops, or *furugiya* present in each particular *shōtengai.*[15] Kōenji Sutorīto ('Kōenji Street') *shōtengai* can be found under the JR rails heading west to Asagaya. Almost deserted during the day, it awakens each evening to the reverberations of giddy socialising and clinking beer glasses through the length of the tunnel-like structure as trains pass overhead. It includes a tiny little restaurant serving free *gyōza* (pan-fried dumplings) with every drink order, a long-established book shop and one of the most unique live houses in the whole town, Muryoku Muzenji. One online author describes Kōenji Sutorīto as 'quintessentially Kōenji-like', 'subcultural', and '*ayashī*' (Osaka 2015)[16] - a Japanese word which straddles the boundary between the meanings 'mysterious' and 'suspicious'. Just to the south of the station, PAL *shōtengai* is the location of the infamous rehearsal studios Sound Studio Dom, where all night concerts bring underground bands together in packed, sweaty gigs that take place simultaneously in each studio room. PAL's shop association (*shōtenkai*) also introduced and oversees the neighbourhood's largest and most famous yearly event: the Awa Odori dance festival.[17]

In between the town's 14 *shōtengai* are interlacing backstreets (*roji*) where independent stores add to the atmosphere characteristic of Kōenji neighbourhood. Takano Seika, a greengrocers established soon after the end of the Second World War, stands today as it always has on the west flank of Kōenji Station's north rotary. Joined by his younger staff, the elderly owner calls out the daily deals across the *hiroba* and surrounding pathways in his customary heavy, hoarse voice. Cardboard boxes stack up where the path outside his store meets the roundabout as each day progresses; a practice which has frequently gotten him into trouble with the local community and law enforcement for obstructing pedestrian traffic. The real character trait of Takano Seika, though, is the exceptionally cheap prices, attracting Koba and other local street musicians. One musician called 'Mr. Whisper Z!' or 'Whisper' for short, who appears in the latter parts of my thesis, told me that where music was his primary reason for regularly visiting the station area, Takano Seika was a close second. A tiny entryway along the side of the greengrocer leads to a series of narrow backstreets where Mahjong parlours coexist with Okinawa-style *izakaya* (drink and snack taverns) and grubby fried-food eateries.

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[15] *shōtenkai* ('shop associations') should not be confused with *shōtengai* ('shopping streets or district').

[16] http://e.deepannai.info/Kōenji-street/ (accessed 24.02.2016)

[17] The Awa Odori was first introduced in 1957, and today over 150 dance troupes squeeze down the town's backstreets and shopping avenues over a long weekend to crowds exceeding a million spectators. For more information see: (http://www.Kōenji-awaodori.com/)

It is thought that this area of Kōenji operated as a black market in the post-war years (Osaka 2014).[18]

Fig. 7: Kōenji *rōji* or 'alleyways' leading away from the station environment.

On station maps and within train cars, the little circle representing Kōenji's stop on the Chūō Line marks it as indistinguishable from other towns in the same, western central part of Tōkyō. It is, like its neighbouring stops, a popular residential town where people commute with ease over short distances to the business centres of the metropolis. Between the train station and the dense clusters of residential lanes that sprawl outwards in all directions, however, is a town with a particular atmosphere for those who know it as a place of independent music and youth subculture: one of *furugiya* style and counter-culture, a rabbit hole of tightly-woven backstreets, smokey, *shominteki* shopping streets and basement live houses. This was the atmosphere and the environment within which *rojō raibu* took place each evening, around a station at the heart of it. In the final part of the introduction I move on from my discussion of my field site at Kōenji and into a breakdown of what is to come in the main chapters. In doing so I return to Koba once again, this time providing a

[18] http://e.deepannai.info/Kōenji-kitaguchi-backstreet/ (accessed 24.02.2016)

deeper acquaintance with him through a discussion of his journey to Tōkyō and subsequent attempts to turn his vision of a musician's life into a reality. I incorporate material from participant observation, conversations at Kōenji Station and interviews conducted in cafes, music bars, and at my kitchen table in Ōgikubo. Through these insights I open a window onto each of the five chapters that, one by one, advance the narrative and argument of my dissertation.

Koba's journey

Before leaving for Tōkyō, Koba lived with his parents in Tokai City on the border of Nagoya, 350km to the west. At that time he had only the faintest recollection of the name 'Kōenji'. While Koba had furnished me with a basic account of his trip from Nagoya to Tōkyō in the early days of research, it wasn't until more than a year into the study that I learned the full story. Sat at my kitchen table in Ōgikubo with a steaming mug of fresh coffee, he started again from the very beginning.

Koba told me how he had dropped out of university after a few weeks of an economics course, upon coming to the realisation that he had only enrolled to satisfy his parents' wishes . Feeling confused and restless in the aftermath of rejecting this first path, he decided that this time he should endeavour to make his own decisions, and to do what inspired him to 'try his best' (*'ganbaru'*). Soon afterwards he told his family that he was leaving home to play music and build a life for himself in Tōkyō. It was 2013 and he was 20 years old at the time. The next day he packed a hold-all with some clothes and a sleeping bag and attached it to his bicycle. With his guitar on his back he began the long journey toward the capital with what he described as a 'decent general sense of which direction to go in'. Altogether it took Koba a few days to reach Tōkyō by bike, during which time he cycled along motorway shoulders and over high hill-top roads, sleeping out under the night sky in wooded areas, parks and on the beach when following the coastal roads. Koba confessed to moments of insecurity and even hopelessness on route, and recalled being reduced to tears as he rode through heavy rainfall on the side of a busy road, unsure of his direction and despairing at those failing to take pity on him as they drove by.

Koba eventually arrived in Tōkyō, but his transition to life in the metropolis did not go smoothly at first. With only a little cash in his wallet, he decided to save money by continuing to sleep out at night in parks and on the banks of the Arakawa River. Unable to find work immediately, his funds ran low after a few days and Koba was left effectively homeless.

> 'Eventually I had no food left to eat', Koba said, 'so in desperation I began eating the grass next to me as I sat by the river. The following morning I approached an older homeless man and asked him, "How do you feed yourself out here?" He replied that there was a bakery giving away food not far from the riverbank and offered to take me along with him later that afternoon. I learned that it was possible to queue up behind the bakery each day and get a free bag of bread crusts (*pan no mimi*) because they always cut them off when making sandwiches. I found other bakeries in the area and began living principally off of those handouts for a month or so.'

One day, standing by the ticket gates of Shibuya Station, Koba looked up at the JR (Japan Rail) map of stops in and around central Tōkyō. Contemplating a place to visit in the city, his eyes hovered over the colour-coded rail lines until they came to a stop at Kōenji, remembering that a friend in Nagoya had once described the town to him as a laid back neighbourhood, popular with musicians and creative people. Koba paid the train fare and spent that afternoon in Kōenji, wandering around the circuitous backroads and *shōtengai*, until he came to the distinct impression that the atmosphere suited him. In an incredible stroke of luck, that evening Koba bumped into Daisuke, the same young man who had been playing street music with him on the evening we first met at the station. An old friend from Nagoya, Daisuke was surprised to see Koba in Tōkyō, having heard little from him in many months. Daisuke lived a fifteen-minute walk from Kōenji station, and on that same evening offered Koba a place to stay until he found some work and could afford to pay a share of the rent.

Fig. 8: Koba.

Chapter 1: Negotiating selves in between music and work

Not everyone had a beginnings story quite like Koba's, though there were themes that reverberated through my interlocutors' descriptions of starting out in street music in Kōenji. For instance, the majority of the street musicians I met moved away from their hometown in different prefectures to Tōkyō with the aim of concentrating on a music career. Some individuals claimed that they were dedicated to an everyman's or 'journeyman's' dream of moving to the capital and being picked up off the streets, that a music executive or scout would find them and turn them into professional musicians. Others sought to put a band together once in the metropolis, to work hard at promoting it on the street or in live music venues across Tōkyō, and to eventually sign a record deal. Like Koba, some expressed a more humble, but no less meaningful desire, to attempt to perform music in front of an audience as the thing that gave them satisfaction and that they were best at. During a conversation about his notion of a life in the future, Koba picked up his guitar and said 'this is all I

can do' (*kore shika dekinai yo*). Koba's goals in music were not directly connected to financial security or to different markers of popularity such as the size of his fanbase or the kind of venues he was performing in. Instead, Koba emphasised his desire to connect with people through the medium of musical performance;

> 'If I am playing by the station, for example, and somebody stops to listen - I mean really listen, not just enjoy the atmosphere while playing with their phone - and I see that they are moved by my music, that we have connected because of it… if that person stopped and responded to me, *that* would make me happiest of all.'

Once Koba had moved into the apartment of musician and old friend Daisuke, he signed up with a *haken-gaisha* ('temporary staff recruitment company') and took on irregular work. He later found more structured *arubaito* ('part-time') work at a local Japanese cuisine restaurant in Kōenji. In conversation Koba claimed, however, that this was not *who* he was. He actively sought to distance himself from terms that conflated character attributes to an employment status, and joked with me that he was closer to a *tabibito* ('a traveler') than any of the terms he or I could come up with. He talked about his *ikigai* often during interviews. Constructed of Japanese characters meaning 'to live' and 'to be of worth', *ikigai* translates into English as 'a purpose in life':

> "People want security' Koba suggested, 'but not everyone has access to the possibility of finding it, so their *ikigai* must be different. When I came to Tōkyō, I reset my head and my feelings *(atama mo, kimochi mo, resetto dekita)* and reoriented my outlook from the one that made me feel stressed out in Nagoya. I came to think that if I had a regular job that made me feel secure then I might know what tomorrow would bring, but I would lose the *ikigai* that I have now. I would miss the things in front of my eyes.'

'To have a purpose', what Koba called his *ikigai*, is an important concept running throughout my thesis, and particularly in the first and the last chapters. In the first chapter this concept becomes relevant when I examine the intersection of two important trajectories in many street musicians' lives. Firstly, in moving to Tōkyō and committing to a musical dream, the majority of street musicians I met had simultaneously chosen or accepted an indefinite mode of employment that would see them change jobs regularly without the benefits or security of long-term positions at a single company. They were detached from the institutions that, since the post-war period of economic growth, have provided a sense of *who* one is in society and a purpose in life. In chapter 1 this situation in performers' lives interlocks with the slow fading of their musical dreams. Music

writers in Tōkyō have recently stressed the extremely unpropitious environment of the contemporary music industry, that today's musicians are simply 'going nowhere' (Martin 2016). I ask why musicians continue to play on the street despite increasing odds stacked against their endeavours, and explore how they deal with the indifference of the music business, and of the general public. In doing so I use Lauren Berlant's (2011) work on 'affective attachment' and question if their persistence is a kind of 'cruel optimism'. Alternatively, is the position taken by Furuichi Noritoshi (2015) more accurate here, that despite fewer prospects for future security, or because of it, today's Japanese youth are simply content to live in the moment? By the end of the chapter I hope to have shown that neither is quite the case, and that a dream fading can engender a search for new possibilities.

Chapter 2: Affordances of space at a train station

In order for Koba and other street musicians to work through the reorientations described in chapter 1 and to develop a sense of self as musicians, it was necessary to gain regular access to the train station as a space, or collection of spaces, of street performance. I joined Koba at the South Exit walkway (*tsūro*) on many evenings during my first summer of research in 2013, my back leant up against the station wall just like his. 'The station is free to play at', he told me in reference to live houses in the neighbourhood, the majority of which require musicians to cover a quota of the ticket sales for the show in a system known as *noruma.* 'Then you have to pay to play at rehearsal rooms, karaoke rooms, studios', Koba continued. 'And obviously I cannot play at my apartment because it is in a residential area (*jūtakugai*) and so it is too noisy. Plus there is *ongaku kinshi* ('a ban on playing music').' Indeed, due to the presence of narrow lanes and tightly packed construction in many of the residential areas of Tōkyō, music bans are put in place to minimise noise pollution and to ensure that residents do not become a nuisance to their neighbours.

> 'At the station I can play long sessions, and experiment, and its all for free. Also, because it isn't a specific kind of music venue, it can be different things at different times. Kōenji Station is a place where you can play however you want, I think. So I don't have to stand up, stiff; I can lean against a wall, lounge about, play in a relaxed way or however I choose'.

In chapter 2 I draw out these issues of urban station space and street music by considering performances as a process of creating temporary possibilities for the appropriation of public space. As *tsūro*, Kōenji Station walkways privilege and signal the movement of human bodies. Koba and

other musicians, however, stay still during performances, creating pockets of space from which music radiates out, attracting attention and signalling a contrasting permutation of the walkways wherein people slow and stop to listen, or on occasion to gather together. I use the example of a long-term day labourer in Tom Gill's (2015) study of 'everyday affordance' (*mainichi ahōdansu*), for whom the urban landscape of Tōkyō offered certain 'affordances' to somebody in his particular economic and social position, and attempt to uncover how street musicians produce and maintain their own affordances at Kōenji Station.

Koba recognised the transitional qualities of station space and the *tsūro* within which street music took place. In particular, he once described to me how his 'playing around' *(asonderu)* at the station would suddenly become 'performance' when somebody from the the passing crowds stopped to listen to them. He told me of one example, of a taxi driver who had left his car to sit on a bus stand bench and listen to him play.

> 'I remember that day well. Daisuke and I were fooling around, we were taking it in turns to guess the song the other was playing, when a taxi driver sat down on the bench directly front of us. I stood up and began playing my music, focusing on him and picking songs that I thought would suit him best. Halfway through one song he stood up, walked over to me and tucked a 10,000 yen note into my pocket![19] Then he walked back to his taxi saying "do your best *(ganbatte ne…)*!" We usually went home after playing at the station, but that night we celebrated with *yakitori* ('skewered fried chicken') and plenty of beer!'

Koba believed that this example was one of many illustrating what it was that made playing in Kōenji special, as a town where 'the streets have everything' *(nandemo ari teiu fuinki ga Kōenji no michi)*.

I look to the case study of a new group moving in on the station, a young rap troupe of teenagers and twenty-somethings, and ask how it was possible that they were able to play there consistently, and with a membership that grew from a few individuals to double figures within six months. In order to understand how, I delve into the history of urban change and rail spaces in Tōkyō, prying out moments of human interaction with trains and train stations that have produced a climate wherein informal inscriptions of space have become commonplace. I incorporate Fumihiko Maki's (1979) discussion of *roji* or 'alleyways' as background spaces of social activity to understand how street musicians attempt to manage their visibility and suspend the normal operation of the *tsūro*.

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[19] As of August 2017, 10,000 Japanese yen was worth approximately 70 British pounds or 78 Euros.

Chapter 3: The role of neighbourhood live houses

While street music is visible to all, bands, event organisers, independent label owners and music writers take part in networks that go on unseen in Kōenji but for the ubiquitous presence of people strolling through town with guitars strapped to their backs or pulling along a small trolley loaded with an amplifier and a little flight case of leads and electronic kit.[20] In following one of these individuals or groups of an evening away from the station and into the circuitous *shōtengai* roads and backstreets, one would likely arrive at one of the many studios, rehearsal rooms, music bars or live houses that are scattered throughout the town, providing the venues around which networks form and dissolve away from. Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the millennium, 'post-punk', 'hardcore', 'indie' and 'electronic' music joined the still present 'punk', 'noise' and 'new-wave' communities to form the eclectic mix of artists performing in a Kōenji that had become recognised as a 'lab of musicians' within the metropolis (Vroman 2008). The situation has been catalysed over the last thirty years by a growing selection of cheap rehearsal rooms and studios that allow musicians living in Kōenji or nearby to practice, record and perform without leaving the neighbourhood. Boundaries are porous between scenes, and also between the street and indoor venues when the price or the circumstances are right. Koba made a complete transition over a couple of years from street to live house, though he was an exception in doing so. When I met him he played exclusively at the station, but by the time I left the field Koba had almost completely dedicated himself to one live house, and a music bar.

About six months after we first met, Koba and I were walking alongside the railway tracks in the western end of Kōenji when he told me that he had played a few acoustic songs at a local restaurant during the previous week. He then invited me to a small performance of his the following evening at a bar called Tetsu[21] just around the corner from the station. When I responded that I had no idea he also played music at places other than the station, he said;

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[20] Due to the reliance on rail travel within Tōkyō, musicians have overcome the problem of transporting their various musical instruments and devices from one place to another by strapping them to small trolleys of the kind used by delivery companies to wheel along a stack of parcels. A fully loaded instrument trolley will fit on a station escalator and is easily lifted on to a train car while causing minimal inconvenience to other passengers. In the case of street musicians, they even made handy makeshift boards for displaying contact information or concise personal introductions.

[21] See Map 4

> '*Rojō* is important to me because there is no other way of performing that allows for so much freedom of playing style or interpretation and experimentation. I chose Kōenji because I thought "ah! If I play and sing on the street there is sure to be somebody who hears me and gets where I'm coming from." I still feel that way, but those occasions when I do feel that connection are fewer than I thought. So many people pass by, and that can be tiring too. But when I play at some place, a bar or somewhere like that restaurant, people really listen. Everyone listens! Recently I've been increasingly attracted to that.'

Over the course of the following year, Koba built relationships with Tetsu, the proprietor of Tetsu bar, and Inoue, the master of a live house a few minutes further south of the station called Alone. Between them, Tetsu and Inoue supported Koba's music in ways that gave him a sense that he was progressing in music and eased the pressure he put on his station-based performances; This simultaneously introduced him to new aspects of Kōenji's musical society and connected him with others for whom musical performance and participation was just as important.

Chapter 3 delves into the relationship between *rojō raibu* and live music venues in Kōenji, and the role that live houses and music bars play in providing important connections and support to station musicians, who appear at first impression to be all alone on the street. I will not range into particular band scenes or live venue histories and the connections between the two, which are better explored in other recent studies (see Martin 2016, Matsue 2008, Cope 2007). By focusing on three venues, Muryoku Muzenji, Alone and Traghetto, I uncover how different kinds of engagement at live venues and the connective threads between these activities and performances on the street demonstrate the depth of social bonds that occur behind the facade of *rojō raibu* seen in passing at the station. Compared to the solitude of the street, live houses presented musicians with something similar to what Goffman (1963) called 'little societies': a collection of extended moments of involvement and camaraderie for the duration of each live house event. It was, however, the relationship between individuals and the live house masters that formed the foundation of support. Each master had a particular outlook on music and performance, a personality that they channelled into their live houses or bars until the venues themselves came to represent these idiosyncrasies.

As well as little spaces, and little societies, the live houses emerge in chapter 3 as a space of *hinichijō*, or 'the uncommon in everyday life'. In Muryoku Muzenji and Alone in particular, the masters' contrasting approaches nevertheless aligned in their capacity to offer performers a window of time and a stage upon which to live out the most unfettered version of their dreams. It is, however, the much maligned pay-to-play *noruma* system that has created the situation wherein musicians

effectively take turns to be each other's audience, opening up a space for unrestrained expression in some venues. By reference to Ben-Ari's notion of 'the frame' as a space and set of social relations for alternative social participation, and Kondo's (1987) work on individual affiliation to institutions in Japan, I explore how live houses in Kōenji bring together traits of societal inclusion and hierarchy such as *senpai-kōhai* ('senior-junior') relationships as well as expressions of individualism and experimentation in one space. On Friday nights in the neighbourhood, one *rojō* musician and his band managed to stretch the boundaries of street music and live house performances to the point whereupon they blurred beyond recognition. Their popularity within the neighbourhood challenged the general perception of *rojō* musicians as failures.

Chapter 4: The benevolent spirit of Kōenji town

Koba occasionally discussed returning to street music at the train station, particularly at the beginning of 2016 once he was well established at Alone and playing occasionally at Tetsu bar. He said that he missed the atmosphere of being out on the street, sat leant up against the south exit wall of the station, and not knowing what might happen during an evening's performance. During an after-event party (*uchiage*) at Alone live house, Koba told me how he would only return to street music if it was at Kōenji. 'I've have tried playing at a few places actually. I even did *rojō* once at the station in my home town before leaving for Tōkyō'. 'And how did that go?' I asked, 'Not very well at all. Some of the locals got mad at me for being too loud. I suppose it was a reasonable complaint. There are apartments close to the station and I began at some time between 11:00 p.m. and midnight.' While I intimated quietly that I thought the complaints were probably quite fair, Koba continued with his thoughts:

> 'When I first began playing *rojō raibu* after arriving in Tōkyō I felt that I wanted to enter into that world of people who think and feel like I do. I wanted to meet them in that world. At that time I tried out a few other places as well. I remember Shinjuku and Shibuya stations in particular.[22] I remember the overriding sense that they were lonely places. I think it was the number of people maybe… so many people moving so fast. I hardly played any music at all. Instead I just sat outside the station drinking *shōchū*[23] and feeling like the world was leaving me

[22] See Map 1 for the location of these cities in Tōkyō.

[23] *Shōchū* is a Japanese spirit distilled from rice, barley, buckwheat or other grains and vegetables.

> behind. Somehow, in Kōenji I have always felt like people are on my wave length, that they can relate to my feelings on some level, even if I don't know them.'

It was the 'accepting' quality of Kōenji (*nandemo, daredemo ukeirareru toko*) that Koba said he appreciated the most. Unlike other places he had tried to perform in, Koba said of Kōenji that it was a strongly spiritual place, a 'town with a strong heart' *(seishinmen ga tsuyoi machi da to omou, kokoro ga tsuyoi machi)*.

Chapter 4 is about Kōenji's heart. The spatial analysis present throughout my thesis, of enclosed spaces of live houses, the spaces of tunnels and walkways, and of the tight alleyways of the neighbourhood, opens out here to examine the emotional relationship between street musicians and the station as an *ibasho* or 'place to be'. In doing so I uncover how Kōenji represents more than a public commons, and can at times go beyond a space of affordance as argued in chapter 2. Both chapters 4 and 5 concentrate on the winter months of street music, wherein a small number of dedicated musicians persevere through cold and difficult playing conditions in order to perform regularly at the station. Both chapters will focus on the cases of three participants in particular: Whisper, Fuji and Tsun Tsun, while including ethnographic examples from other musicians I have discussed on the way to arriving at this last part of my thesis. For these musicians, Kōenji had a benevolent quality, a genius loci or 'spirit of place' that made returning to the station a matter of personal as well as musical importance. Playing at Kōenji could set things right, reignite a sense of belonging and of emotional connection to place.

Contrasting with the station, the home was experienced by Whisper, Fuji and Tsun Tsun as a lonely and suffocating space that only exacerbated their sense of separation from the world around them. Incorporating Norberg-Shultz's (1980) work on the genius loci of place I question Auge's (1995) contention that transport spaces of major urban centres are 'non-places', devoid of human relationships and connection to place. Kōenji Station is experienced here as transitory space that was simultaneously somewhere that informants went to find 'connection' (*tsunagari*), 'good people' and 'support'. Within the ethnography presented in chapter 4 I consider how Kōenji's character is constructed through the activities of *rojō* performances and in the language of good fortune, *gūzen no deai* ('chance meetings'), and through the identification of the station as a *shominteki* ('working class or everyman's') space. 'Kōenji', a song regularly performed by one *rojō* performer reveals a longing to be accepted into the neighbourhood's giddy world of 'dreams', a place where even someone like himself can live out his life. The song, and the place-making practices ongoing in chapter 5 question

the trend in recent precarity studies to portray today's youth and marginalised as unable to find a place to be in Japanese society.

Chapter 5: Nighttime, sound and wellbeing

As I draw my thesis to a close, the final chapter sets ethnographic attention onto a close study of *rojō* musicians' street performances as I did in the first chapter, bringing the reader full circle. Chapter 5 takes its cues from the emotional and sensory elements of the previous chapter and argues that *rojō* performance is a practice that directly and positively affected Kōenji street musicians' sense of wellbeing as opportunity-poor individuals in Japanese society. It pulls together major themes that have been present throughout the thesis, as well as the acquaintance with Koba in this introduction, but not given direct anthropological attention in the chapters until now. Most closely related to this was Koba's notion of an *ikigai*, a sense of purpose to drive a person forward, to keep striving. Many things changed throughout Koba's musical career from the day I first met him at Kōenji Station in the summer of 2013, to the day I left the field for the very last time in the summer of 2016, yet his *ikigai* was always music, he just adapted it to best fit the changing circumstances of his life, and it in turn got him through the process. 'If I had to fill out some official form, I would have to mark myself as a 'part-timer'. But emotionally my status is one of a traveller, I'm just wandering (*kōshiki na naniga kaku toshitara, ore wa arubaito ni naru. Demo kimochiteki ni, tabibito jōtai… hōrō shiteiru*). In this final chapter I will make the claim that for many street musicians, the music dream has no end: the activities of *rojō raibu,* and the wellbeing that individuals derive from it, is inextricably tied to the status of being *within* the journey.

Within the chapter I explore how the journey draws attention to *rojō raibu* at the intersection of the nighttime, the unseen soundscapes of the city and wellbeing, which is rendered yet more visible during winter. As a little-studied aspect of human sociality in anthropology, I will approach the nighttime here as a temporal space of *rojō raibu*, one that contrasts with the diurnal working day. Koba, for instance, often used the hours between midnight and sunrise to write song lyrics. While association with the night has been negatively stereotyped in the past, I follow street musicians as they attempt to claim it as a time of opportunity and of a sociality with others not limited to that of the daytime, which they considered to produce formulaic, institutional relationships.

Sound, like the temporality of the night, allowed street musicians to focus on a sensory moment. I explore the capacity of sound to mediate shifting constructions of personhood and understandings

of the self. I suggest that one performer's increasing focus upon a technique he called *zekkyō* ('to shout, or scream') closely paralleled a series of personal and emotionally tiring episodes in his social life that brought about a need for change. I hope to demonstrate that sound materialises emotions and creates a sonic environment for healing, and incorporate David Novak's work on music and soundscapes, (2008, 2010) and Samuels' (2004) thesis on emplacement to illustrate how adding their voice to their surroundings helped street musicians to battle an encroaching sense of dislocation from it. Without stable employment or institutional connections, adding their sounds to the neighbourhood was also a struggle for visibility in Japanese society.

The chapter draws to a close by looking to the future, or rather the future as the winter *rojō* musicians felt and understood it. Consistently performing *rojō raibu* throughout the winter was, Fuji said, his reaction to thoughts of the future wherein at some point his own body would harden, and no longer allow him to play street music. Certain of the fact that his future would bear no comfort, or prospects of security, Fuji preferred to remain interminably on the road, to privilege the journey and the people he met along the way without recourse to an end. Fuji was not alone, and others shared this outlook with him. Yet a future bereft of certainties did not diminish the performers' search for wellbeing. Where Koba talked of *ikigai*, others spoke to me of *jyūjitsukan* ('a sense of fulfilment'). By incorporating Genda Yuji's (2008) exploration of the work that 'hoping in vain' can do in retaining forward momentum, and Iza Kavedzija's (2016) contention that hope itself can be reoriented, I suggest that *rojō raibu* is a sonic and social practice that enables individuals to deal with a high degree of lived uncertainty. By looking to a night of street music in Kabukichō, a series of cold late nights under the rails at Kōenji, and an intensely draining performance at a live house, I attempt to tease out the connective threads: that it was the journey that provided *ikigai*, *jyūjitsukan* and wellbeing, not the real circumstances of a journey's end.

Chapter 1

Removed from institutions: the production of a recognisable self in street music

Just around the corner from Kōenji Station and nestled within a narrow backstreet occupied by wheezing air conditioning units was Tetsu bar, owned and run by a popular local musician in his fifties of the same name.[24] Off to one side a small wooden door opened onto a staircase just large enough for a small person to climb, and led upwards into a compact second floor studio.[25] An old-fashioned coat stand in the corner of the room had been reworked into a novel instrument rack, with a circle of *shamisen* lutes hanging down from the hooks. Sat at a desk looking out over the alleyway below, Jack rubbed at his eyes and finished off his coffee before hurriedly clicking through a selection of emails in his inbox. 'I'm sorry Robāto san' he apologised, 'if I don't sort out these emails before Yūji and Kōhei arrive to load up the van for our show tonight I'll never get around to it.' As he said this the door opened at the bottom of the stairs and Yūji made his way up. 'Jack, we've gotta go, aren't you ready?' Jack looked at his phone and winced. 'It's already four o'clock. I had no idea.' Outside the studio, as the four of us loaded up the van with *shamisen*, amplifiers and dislocated sections of a drum kit, Jack apologised to me again for his poor time keeping of late.

> 'It's just that at the moment I have to do everything myself. For example, I have a performance in Shibuya at the beginning of next month and I just realised that I have to design the flyers for it. Recently everything has just piled up. There is all the networking, organising travel outside of Tōkyō, emailing live house managers and other bands or working out the logistics of my schedule. I have so little time just for music sometimes, for what I really want to focus on, what I started out doing. I suppose it will eventually lead to the realisation of the lifestyle I hoped for (*jibun no risō na raifusutairu wo shikkari kakurittsu suru*). Perhaps I'll have a more comfortable life as a working musician sometime. Right now I'm busy, so busy. It is fulfilling,…

[24] See Map 4 for Tetsu Bar's position in Kōenji neighbourhood.

[25] In Japan the 'ground floor' at street level is called the 'first floor' and progresses accordingly.

> but I feel controlled by my current lifestyle (*isogashikute, isogashikute. jūritsu shiteiru kedo,… furimawasareteiru*).'

'Tonight Yokohama, tomorrow Kyōto' Jack said as he shook my hand before squeezing into the van alongside Yūji in the passenger seat. Kōhei motioned a playful salute from the driver's seat before firing up the engine and easing out and away from Kōenji's backstreets.

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address a tension in many Kōenji street musicians' lives: the value they attach to themselves as musicians and individuals as against the context of working life in both the music industry and the environment of employment in Japan. In doing so I will focus on the contrasting experiences of four musicians: Guru Pari, Hayashi, Rila and Jack. Jack was an exception among the seventy street performers who participated in my research because he had succeeded in pursuing the commonly expressed dream of becoming a self-sufficient, full-time musician. He worked no other job. The irony of this position is that while many of my informants viewed Jack's situation as an ideal on a distant horizon, Jack himself was often troubled by the way his success and subsequent diminishing personal time had caused him to feel disconnected from the process of writing and performing music on the street; a lifestyle he had become accustomed to since picking up the *shamisen* a decade before. The verb *furimawasareteiru* used by Jack to describe the cause of his discomfort indicates above all a lack of control, of being at the mercy of and manipulated by outside forces.

When Jack was on the street he was the sole link between his shamisen music and those who listened to it. His increasing popularity had changed this, however, and he later no longer felt himself to be as in touch with his music in the same way. Over the course of a couple of years Jack had worked hard playing street music four or five times a week. He also played at local Kōenji bars including Tetsu bar, and at increasingly large venues in the neighbourhood and in other towns such as Shibuya and Shimokitazawa. He amassed a solid fan base from the ground up: his fusion of traditional *shamisen* sounds with rock music phrasing and performance tropes appealed to both young and old alike. In an interview I conducted with Jack at the beginning of 2015, a year prior to the passage above, he had told me in no uncertain terms: 'I will always be a street musician. I will never lose my connection with that kind of performance. I started out that way and I'll always return to it.' When he left with Yūji and Kōhei in the van bound for Yokohama city, he hadn't

played any *rojō raibu* for almost six months. Could he ever have led both lives? Could he be a full-time working musician and still enjoy the immediacy, satisfaction and experimentation of taking to the streets with his *shamisen*? Which of these was the dream he started out with? And in the end, was he better off for the small degree of industry recognition he had received? Jack was still battling with these issues when I left fieldwork in 2016.

Fig 9: Jack (left), Kōhei (centre left), the author (centre right), and Yūji (right) in front of bar Tetsu, below Jack's studio.

As I noted, Jack was an exception. The majority of street musicians in my study remained in part-time employment throughout my research and played street music in their free time, just as Jack himself had done ten years ago. It is their position relative to the institutions of work and music that I will focus on in this chapter. Without understanding the common perception of a working life and full adulthood in Japan it would be difficult to make sense of the value the *rojō* performers placed on different presentations of themselves in music. I will argue that while Kōenji's street musicians come from various backgrounds and have different expectations of their *rojō raibu* activities, their common dislocation from the still pervasive model of lifetime employment produces various personal

practices seeking to address their position relative to it. These practices fall into two main forms here: one in which amateurism is celebrated as a positive reaffirmation of the individual as music maker and non-conformist, and another wherein tropes of professionalism are used in an imagined reconnection with the mainstream. I suggest that amateurism and professionalism within Kōenji street music are ultimately two sides of the same coin: they are attempts to instil value upon themselves in the absence of affiliation to institutions that have traditionally performed this role in the past. I will return to and expand upon this concept when looking at the supporting role of live houses in *rojō raibu* in chapter 3, and it is a connective thread that runs through the whole thesis.

For musicians Guru Pari and Hayashi, expressing difference in street music from their perceptions of standard working lives was a statement of personal empowerment. It was a way of navigating those lives through narratives that addressed their relative marginality in a positive way and through tropes of freedom. In contrast, Rila and Jack's street performances were attempts to set themselves on a path towards music industry success, to connect with an imagined future of affiliation with a major music company. Unlike Guru Pari and Hayashi, their *rojō raibu* activities were garnished with markers of their professionalism, their acumen as self-promoters and their dedication to hard work. Whether emphasising the pursuit of personal freedoms or a search for industry-recognised success, however, *rojō* performers each produced performance personae based upon their individual perceptions of self-worth, authenticity as a musician, and their outlook on the future. These took the form of *yadonashi-kun* ('vagabond boy') in the case of Guru Pari, and Hayashi as the '*poor rebel*'. Rila presented a fully fleshed out music 'idol' in street music appearances, while Jack built an image of himself as a bridge between two worlds: the light of traditional *shamisen* music and the dark, enticing world of rock music. Regardless of their differing ways of cultivating it, much of the *rojō* performers' sense of personal value was tied into the question, 'What is the measure of a successful musician in Kōenji?'

1.2 Japan's music industry and the contemporary employment system from the perspective of a *rojō raibu* musician

Access to the music industry is extremely difficult for street musicians. One of their largest hurdles in the music business is that they are unclassifiable and unconnected to a 'scene'. Whether in Japan or abroad, many musicians affiliate themselves to a particular scene for which neighbourhoods and towns then become renowned (see Heine 2012). For instance, the popularity of the American grunge band Nirvana in the 1990s did much to promote the 'Seattle grunge music scene'. Kōenji

was well known for its punk scene in the late 1970s and 1980s, and then later on for its indie and underground scenes. Music, money and relationships flow around a scene, but the majority of street musicians in my research did not enter one. Even if *rojō raibu* became a scene all of its own, like the noise scene for example, and like the noise scene provided localised networks of support and distribution, the outlook would still remain financially bleak. Quite literally, music is big business in Japan, with a handful of music corporations controlling the production, marketing and sale of bands either discovered and signed to their respective branches and labels, or else cast and manufactured by audition. Matsue (2009) has argued that turning to localised, city- and neighbourhood-wide perspectives on music consumption offers a more contextualised approach when considering sub-genres that cannot compete with the dominating force of 'J-Pop' (Japanese Pop) in terms of mainstream chart success. This is sensible, as there is little point wasting time here on dissecting the inability of a musician with only localised popularity to challenge a chart-topping and professionally processed J-Pop or Idol band such as the mighty AKB48.[26] The subject of the continued dominance of such bands today, despite falling slightly from the height of their power in the 1990s, is much better addressed by authors who have written specifically about Japan's music industry, such as Ian Martin (2016) and Julian Cope (2007).

Unfortunately for Kōenji's street musicians, even if they had found themselves a part of one of Tōkyō's many vibrant and independent music scenes, wherein small local labels, event organisers, music journalists and other bands offer financial and logistical support, they would still be bidding for limited commercial success at one of the worst times to be doing so. As Martin (2016) notes in his overview of the Japanese underground music world, major music labels are releasing fewer and fewer new artists, and even when they do they often cherry-pick the best offerings from local scenes in Tōkyō and elsewhere, which has in the past facilitated the scene's subsequent collapse by removing the most exciting and innovative musicians from it. As Martin suggests, success interpreted as music industry recognition and financial reward in the 2010s in Japan is more or less unattainable for most musicians: 'Exciting, vibrant music has continued and does continue to happen unabated throughout the new millennium and into the 2010s. But the big difference is that most of the best music now really is going nowhere' (2016: 99).

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[26] AKB48 are a Japanese all-girl pop idol group formed in 2005 by Akimoto Yasushi, with their own dedicated theatre in Tōkyō's Akihabara district. The group's members total well over 100 young women who rotate in an ever-changing performance troupe. This enables them to perform more frequently and at separate locations at the same time. (For more, see: http://www.akb48.co.jp/about/chronicle/). In 2016 their best selling single sold over 2.5 million copies (http://www.billboard-japan.com/d_news/detail/46708/2)

Street performers Harada and Sayaka expressed their desire to be scouted by a music company representative on the street, a one-in-a-million dream that another musician, Whisper, put down to the still prominent notion that some of Japan's biggest stars started off as nobodies until they were discovered:

> 'I remember back in the 1980s, TV shows like "Ikasu Band Tengoku" gave unknown artists the opportunity to audition for success. I think even some pretty big names today appeared on that. It's long gone now, but I think the idea of being picked up from the street has been passed down to today's street musicians.'

According to Koba, one of his favourite bands, the now famous Blankey Jet City, were helped along the way by an appearance on the show. Ikasu Band Tengoku was known to both Harada and Sayaka despite them being too young to remember it. Both musicians claimed, however, that the desire to be scouted was most intense when they first moved to Tōkyō to begin their music careers, and that they subsequently began to feel more realistic about their goals as time passed and they gained experience on the street. Still, they did not leave Kōenji, nor stop playing *rojō raibu*. To address why this might be the case for Harada, Sayaka and others like them, it is important to understand their position in Tōkyō, not just in music, but within the broader structures of working life.

Of the seventy street musicians I interviewed or shared conversations with over a year and a half in the field, only one person self-identified as a *shakaijin*, a Japanese word meaning both 'working adult' and 'a full member of society'. The remaining sixty nine used different words when I asked them to describe themselves, with many finally settling on *furītā* ('part-timer'), though invariably with some discomfort or a wry half-smile as the term is historically loaded with negative images of selfish and lazy young people (see Matthews 2004: 123-124). Others found it easier to describe to me what they did than pick a label, and the most common response was something along the lines of 'I work a part-time job to support my music'. The lifestyle of a part-time worker and struggling musician brings romantic imagery of personal endeavour and of individualism breaking free from the shackles of employment norms. In Japan, however, this perspective is more problematic. To a large degree it remains the case today that personal identity and individual value are less easily separated from the prevailing narrative of lifetime employment in a single company, even while this is not the lived reality of many Japanese people. The education system teaches children to think of others before themselves and to put the needs of the group before their own desires. It funnels them into high schools and through *shūshoku katsudō*, the period of intensive 'job hunting' designed to pair off

individual students (and responsibility for them) with companies to ensure a smooth transition from class room to office. While the system has slackened somewhat to allow for hiatuses such as gap years or a period of part time work or training, eventual consolidation of the process remains the expected model for a member of Japanese society in order to ensure that they become a fully fledged *shakaijin*.

As long as Kōenji street musicians remained outside of what was considered to be the employment norm, and whether they described themselves as such or not, they shared the same socio-economic status as *furītā*. The advent of the *furītā* as a recognisable worker and social category is often thought to have gone hand-in-hand with the socio-economic changes that swiftly followed Japan's burst economic bubble in the early 1990s. As Kosugi (2006) pointed out, however, the term was first coined during the boom years of the 1980s to describe young people who decided to buck the trend of becoming full-time company employees and instead take up temporary or irregular work. Like Kosugi, authors have written about how the post-bubble recession subsequently forced many school and university leavers into part-time occupations, and so into a similar categorisation socially. In simplistic terms, *furītā* are part-time workers aged between 15 and 34, neither in education nor living as full-time housewives (*shufu*) (Cook 2013: 29). Use of this broad definition has had a propensity to engulf other types of worker of perceived non-typical status, such as 'temporary employees' (*haken shain*), 'contract employees' (*keiyaku shain*), 'day labourers' (*hiyatoi rōdōsha*), or even 'irregular workers' (*pūtaro*) (Cook 2013: 30, Slater 2010: no pagination), and in doing so cloud the heterogeneity of labour and class forms present within.

Musicians have been cited as an exemplary case study in literature dealing with *furītā*: of those emerging as the first *furītā* during the 1980s, Kosugi claimed 'many of these hoped eventually to become professionals in the worlds of music or theatre' (2006: 1). Emma Cook's research with *furītā* in Hamamatsu city in Shizuoka prefecture included an interview with Ken, a 24 year-old would-be musician and part-timer. Presented as a typical case of aspiration before eventual resignation (Cook 2013: 35), Ken was unable to establish a financially viable career in music before his personal cut-off point for 'making it' by the age of 26, beyond which he had resolved to find a 'regular job'. This example, Cook suggests, is indicative of an expectation that a lifestyle of part-time work and music would not last, leading eventually to a consolidation of the individual as a full-time company worker (*kaishain*).

Matthews (2004) demonstrated how Japan places a particular emphasis upon a precise meeting point between the education system and labour market; a period of intense job hunting during

university students' final year called *shūshoku katsudō* ('job searching'). Within the labour market, this process culminates in a concept known as *shinsotsu ikkatsu saiyō* ('collective adoption of new graduates'), wherein all new staff are hired by a company from 'one batch' of graduating students. In other words, the hiring window opens, then it closes. For Matthews, the fact that Japan has yet to adjust its values and ideals regarding employment practices, despite the reality of decades of structural change in the labour market, is encapsulated in the significance still attributed to *shūshoku katsudō* and *shinsotsu ikkatsu saiyō* . Regardless of the fact that only around thirty percent of Japanese employees have ever enjoyed the 'standard life-model' of middle-class lifetime employment in a single company (Macnaughtan 2015: no pagination), there remains a powerfully embedded expectation that Japanese university students will find 'their company' during *shūshoku katsudō.* This middle-class model is not only normative, it impacts on the working-class and other patterns of employment. So strong is the connection between appropriate age, educational timing and company hiring policy, that missing one's opportunity makes it much harder to enter into the same full-time positions later on.

Since the millennium the debate surrounding the '*furītā* problem' has since shifted away from one of youth attitudes, towards one of labour deregulation and employment difficulties for those in their twenties and thirties (Yoshitaka 2006; Inui 2005; Kosugi 2006). It remains, however, a heavily cultural and educational issue predicated on the reified idea of lifetime employment. Slater (2010) has further demonstrated how Japan's education system operates as a fundamental institutional mechanism for creating, organising and legitimising class practices (2010: 4). He uses the example of Musashino middle school in western Tōkyō, to demonstrate that students in similar schools at the lower end of district rankings are subject to an education in skills, aspirations and strategies, which together ensure their systematic channelling from working class backgrounds into working class jobs. In short, some young people have never been given access to equal opportunities to take part in the white-collar lifetime employment system hailed as both the ideal and the normal mode of living in Japan.

Toivonen et al. (2011) discussed how the employment system has affected young people once out of education, dividing the labour market culturally and by class, and marginalising those who do not secure full-time work at the appropriate time. Ideologies imposed upon the new 'flexible' youth in the mid-1990s emphasised 'individual responsibility' (*jiko sekinin*) as a boat to ride the wave of labour deregulation policies (Allison 2013: 29)[27]. While the full-time *sararīman* ('salaryman') was expected to

[27] The academic discourse on *jiko sekinin* delves deeper into debates surrounding neoliberalism and deregulation of labour in Japan than I cover for the purposes of this chapter. See Noguchi (1998), Toivonen (2013).

conform to ideals of *amae* (depending on others) and to entrenched cultural codes that valorised the qualities of a true *shakaijin* (Toivonen et al. 2011: 3), young people excluded from this category were left isolated and individually responsible; a situation referred to as the *muen shakai*, or the 'society of the disconnected'. The rhetoric of *jiko sekinin* set a personal focus not only on the responsibility for adjusting to a changing situation of employment, but promoted new attitudes towards self-valuation (*jibun no nedan*) and risk-taking (*risuku*) (Miyazaki 2006: 151). Some street musicians had never even come close to becoming a *shakaijin* in the sense promulgated by older generations in their dedication to decaying education and employment patterns in Japan. In response, some chose to make a complete break from these ideas, while embracing the capacity of musical performance to create contrasting narratives of life in Tōkyō. These stories focused upon a sense of identity tied increasingly to self-realisation and self-worth, which emphasised their difference from unattainable life courses.

Sixty three of the seventy street musicians I worked with were men. I have included the accounts of four female street musicians in this thesis, who also enter into a male-dominated activity at the station and must navigate these power relations of performance and the gendered discourse of normative women's lifestyles in Japan. The relatively low number of young women doing *rojō raibu* at Kōenji Station may have been due in part to issues surrounding exposure to unwanted attention and the dangers of playing alone outside in the evenings. At least three female street musicians are missing from my ethnographic data because of a failing on my part to speak comfortably with them one-to-one. As a male in my early thirties, approaching young women of a similar age or younger who were performing alone made me increasingly aware of my own presence and my desire not to appear to be hitting on them. This made me nervous, and on three occasions I left after very strained conversation. Women's position in street music, however, like men's, is also played out with reference to dominant discourses of gender roles in Japanese society. Roles established within the salaryman model emphasised those wherein women would carry the burden of family work (North 2009; Koyama 2013). As these expectations became structurally embedded, so have they worked to keep women out of the positions reserved for men in the workplace (Macnaughtan 2015). These are important issues, but due to the weight of ethnographic data I collected on male *rojō raibu* in comparison to the female perspective, my focus here is on street performance and masculinity. For a further discussion of the gendered aspects of women's *rojō raibu*, see the final section of the following chapter, wherein I discuss three female musicians' use of station spaces.

Terms like *shakaijin* and *kaishain* took on a culturally loaded meaning for male *rojō* performers within the gendered discourse on work and masculinities in Japan. In its divergence from dominant

narratives of salaryman lifestyles, the irregular work that most *rojō* musicians did was cast in a comparative light that also illuminated alternative and shifting perceptions of masculinity and adulthood. The 'salaryman doxa' emerged from nation-building practices and industrialisation processes after the Meiji state had been established, and proliferated during the post-World War Two era of economic growth in Japan. It came to define the ubiquitous everyman who simultaneously embodied the honourable 'corporate warrior' of Samurai lineage: a dedicated, loyal and selfless company worker (Dasgupta 2000: 192). Dasgupta (2009) has followed the changing perceptions of full-time salaried white-collar men in workplaces and the media during these periods of reification, and the subsequent turbulent years during and after the 1990s once the economic bubble had burst. He noted that despite the weakening hold of the icon of the salaryman within common expectations of work and family life in Japan, new forms have come to replace it wherein to 'make it' in hegemonic masculine professions became associated with a newer generation of tech-savvy entrepreneurial and cosmopolitan men (Dasgupta 2009: 91). In its negative reevaluations in visual and print media during the 1990s and into the 2000s, the typical salaryman came to be associated with less appealing lifestyle traits such as *karōshi* ('death from overwork') and *kitaku kyohi* ('fear of returning home'). Dasgupta demonstrates how these 'uncool' (*dasai*) salaryman images were gradually replaced by newer masculinities associated with the increasing 'cool' (*kakoii*) trend toward media and service industries, with an accompanying emphasis on youth, individuality and creativity, and even risk (2010: no pagination).

Researchers and scholars have come to identify how the pluralisation of the salaryman doxa to include multiple interpretations of masculinity have enabled the ideal to persist by surviving long years of recession and increasing disparity between rich and poor in Japan. Christensen (2015), for instance, has argued that the construction of dominant forms of masculinity can be found within cultural practices such as those of drinking and the enjoyment of inebriation. For Cook (2013), criticism of male *furītā* by full-timers was conflated with a critique of their inability to achieve full adulthood by dropping out of school or failing to demonstrate the responsibilities that follow the transition from education to employment.

As well as their bind to irregular and quickly changing employment patterns, street musicians' visible association with spaces outside of the 'common workplace' - the station grounds and *hiroba* ('public square') - also exposed them to what Roberson (2005) called a double marginalisation of gender and class. Much like the steel factory workers of Roberson's study, male street performers' experiences were not given the same cultural legitimacy as middle-class salarymen, while at an institutional level they were excluded from positions of power. Gill (2005) has argued, however, that

the lived spaces of exclusion from persisting ideals of masculinity should not be pathologised without accounting for the presence of a degree of freedom without anomie. Day labourers, he argues, may face stark choices and serious problems to their health and wellbeing, but their conspicuous difference from masculine ideals of family life and work may also contain choice and at least some ownership of their marginality (2005: 157). In producing different performance personae through street music, much of the form of *rojō raibu* playing styles and their presentation to the public depended upon whether they emphasised similar freedoms from the mainstream, or else an imaginary reconnection with it in the future.

1.3 'Hate Pop': the performance of authentic difference

It was late in the evening, and raining hard when I ran for cover under the first railway underpass of Kōenji Station, the 'kachunk kachunk' sounds of the Chūō Sōbu line passing overhead as I entered.[28] There in the rail arch stood Guru Pari. He usually played under the tracks; the dim lighting and the relative quietness of the space a perfect stage for his own unique brand of dark psychedelic tramp-folk. On the first night I saw him he wore a knee-length grey cotton smock, with black jeans and well-worn Converse trainers. His mustard-coloured zip-up hoodie and multi-coloured baseball cap completed the look, with his long, thick, black hair running down to his shoulders and covering the majority of his face like two curtains closing mid-show. His guitar, which he played confidently and skilfully, shot out sharp and angular string-ends at the headstock.[29] His songs, which included numbers such as 'Hate Pop' and 'Oyasumi Nasai' ('Goodnight') were three minute windows into the world of Guru Pari, a moniker and a character that symbolised his living conditions, and his world view. He sang his songs with an intentionally nasal tone, and a forced goatish vibrato that emitted from the corner of his mouth, angled upwards towards the apex of the archway as hair fell down over the rest of his face. Somehow the distant and mottled sounds of traffic light signals, human voices, car horns and rain on that first night perfectly complimented the tone of his deeply affecting presence. As I and a young man in his twenties sat watching, Guru Pari introduced a song he called 'Kinsei' ('Venus').

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[28] The first railway underpass is indicated on Map 5, position 1.

[29] Though it is the choice of each guitarist, most players clip the ends of the strings off neatly at the headstock after changing them, which also prevents the trailing fibres from interfering with performance.

Fig. 10: Guru Pari performing ‘Venus’ at Kōenji Station.

「金星」グルパリ

しずんでく夕陽をながめわすれてしまって
とほうにくれる
明日が来るから「まぁいつか」って
ほおりなげた期待や不安
声がして降り向いたら相変わらずな君がいたんだ

金星だよ
多分
一番最初に見える星は
間違ってない
多分
おそらくそう
あれはそうだよ

地球にはもう少しくらい
ゆっくり回ってもらいたいね
僕なんて周回遅れ

みんなから白い目で
見られちゃう、見られちゃう
僕はいつまでも、ゆっくりさ

「明日いいことあればいいな」
と思ってた、昨日とは違う
生きなくちゃ、全力で
生きなくちゃ、何もつかめない

金星だよ
多分
なんだかきれいさ
輝いて見える
間違ってない
間違ってるしかない
世界がきゅうくつだよ

'Venus' Guru Pari

I forgot the view of the setting sun
I was at a loss
'Well it's fine', I thought. Tomorrow will come.
Hopes and fears I cast away
I heard a voice, looked around, as ever you were there.

It's Venus
Maybe
The first star I can see
No mistake about it
Maybe
Perhaps that's what it is
Yeah, that's what it is

I wish the earth, if only a little,
Would turn more slowly
I'm always a lap behind
The people, with their white eyes
Look at me, look at me
I'll always be, slowly

'Wouldn't it be nice if tomorrow brought something good'
I thought,
different from yesterday

I've got to live! With everything I've got!
I've got to live! I can't hold onto anything!

It's Venus
Maybe
It's kind of beautiful
I can see it glistening
No mistake about it
Nothing but mistakes
This world is stifling[30]

'It's a distraction, Venus. Like the nighttime.' Guru Pari's description of his song's central refrain was intriguing. His verses were dark, with emphasis laid on the nasal, laboured aspect of his vocal style. Yet as he entered the chorus, the guitar's cadence becoming softened and extended, flowing rather than chopping, a sweeter contemplative mood emerged. 'I wrote Venus on the street actually. I based it on my feelings of being stood still while everything else passed by.' Guru Pari's lyrics contain clear tropes of detachment. In the first verse he forgets the setting sun, a regular and an everyday occurrence that brings balance to the flow of time, but he puts these fears to one side along with his hope, and concentrates instead on his detached contemplation of the night sky. Coming back to earth again in the next verse he clearly references the immediate world around him, an outside space in the city, and he concentrates here on his inability to keep up with this world ('I'm always a lap behind'), and the askance looks of the passing public ('with the whites of their eyes, look at me, look at me'). The Japanese verb *mirarechau* (見られちやう), indicates both the subject and direction: Guru Pari is the actor being looked upon, and that action is impolite, they are stealing glances at him. In response, Guru Pari claims that there is nothing to be done, he will always go at the same slow pace. In the last part of the song the barrier between contemplation and reaction to his surroundings breaks down, he strums more forcefully and screams the lyrics 'I've got to live! With Everything I've got! I've got to live! I can't hold onto anything!' before returning to calm detachment once more for the final chorus. Here he rejects his initial self-assurance that the star he sees is Venus, instead tolling it up as another one of many mistakes he makes.

'It also has an aspect to it about it just being what it is, nothing to be done' (*shō ga nai no imi mo haitteru jyanaika to omotteta*) explained Guru Pari. 'I'm used to this lifestyle' (*kono seikatsu mō naretekita*). Within his musical style, his appearance and his attitude, he presented an individual at odds with the world

[30] As is the case throughout, this is the author's transliteration, from the original Japanese lyrics. Guru Pari kindly sent me a lyric sheet for his song 'Venus'.

he perceived around him. Behind his head, Guru Pari had used thick parcel tape to affix a board to the grubby wall of the underpass, displaying four sheets of paper. The lower right-hand sheet was branded with a stylised 'Guru Pari' (グルパリ) written in katakana[31] and using calligraphy (*shodō*).

The left-hand sheet displayed a stylised Guru Pari character, which he drew himself in thick black pen, and showed a list of live houses and dates when he was due to appear. It listed ten performances in the month of April, though it was by then already the end of summer. On the middle sheet there was a stylised cartoon rendering of a young man in the moment of performance, the neck of the instrument being shaken so forcefully that it bent sharply upwards and downwards as he strummed at it. Finally, the top-right sheet of paper gave some basic information about Guri Pari, listing his home town as somewhere in Okayama prefecture, his age as twenty-four, and ended with the sentence; 'I am a vagabond boy who makes a living through the generation and sale of sound and street music' (*ongen no uriage to rojō raibu de seikei wo tateteru yadonashi-kun desu*).

Fig. 11: An information board Guru Pari affixed to the station wall with parcel tape.

On the floor in front of Guru Pari lay a small yellow metal tin that he used for collecting occasional money donations. I dropped a few coins in and returned to the rail I was perching on. 'Thank you', said Guru Pari. I asked him if many people gave *nagesen*, the Japanese word for gratuities and translating literally to 'tossed coin'. 'Nope. That is fairly rare. But I tend to play late in the evenings,

[31] Angular Japanese syllabary, chiefly used for loan words from English and other non-Japanese languages.

so maybe it's my own fault…' The metal tin was no larger than a small coffee mug and was hard to see against the concrete ground of the railway hub. It was also dwarfed by a large pink suitcase that stood up against the wall of the underpass, covered with performer pass-stickers from events that Guru Pari had previously played at with the band he had hoped to promote after moving to Tōkyō. I was keen to ask about the presence of the suitcase, to which he replied; 'It has my stuff in. My life. I take it with me everywhere I go… I'm generally never in one place very long. But Kōenji is a regular part of my rounds.'

Later that evening Guru Pari set down his guitar and made a phone call to a friend about the possibility of a floor to sleep on, though he seemed in no hurry to confirm this, nor to leave from his spot under the archway. Indeed, Guru Pari played long, marathon-like *rojō raibu* performances. He began late, at around 10:00 p.m. in the evenings when many musicians were winding down, and would play three or four songs in a row before resting his guitar against the wall and sitting down to smoke a cigarette, sipping occasionally from a large bottle of water. On the nights when I was in Kōenji he played in this way up until and often after the last train had left the station at gone 1:00 a.m. I put it to Guru Pari that he played later than most other street musicians, and wondered out loud if this was because he had other work commitments. 'This is my work, I guess. Music and street performance' (*kore wa ore no shigoto kana, ongaku to rojō raibu*).

'But I like to play when there are fewer people around' he told me, 'I'm left to do what I want, and I like the night. It's calming'. When I found Guru Pari's Youtube channel some time after our first meeting, I discovered that these after-the-last-train sessions were a frequent event. I watched self-recorded videos of him playing in front of deserted train stations, the metal shutters pulled down in front of the ticket gates, and a palpable lack of human traffic to observe him and his suitcase. With no permanent residence to return to, Guru Pari focused on performing music through the night, producing a regularity and stability that saw him through until the morning. 'First and foremost I'm a *rojō* player' he said, 'it suits the way I am, my timetable. It's a good match. *Rojō* can be played whenever a musician likes. We decide the schedule, the style, the hours. For a night-owl like me it is a natural choice (*ore no yō na yorugata nara rojō raibu suru no ga tōzen da).*'

Guru Pari did not actively seek out human connection in his *rojō raibu,* often preferring withdrawal and isolation that set him apart from the crowds desired by many other street performers. Though he performed in this way publicly on the street, however, he also played at live houses and was the frontman of a band that put on regular gigs. When I pointed out this contradiction he replied matter of factly, 'The city at night is a venue for music, and so is a live house. What matters is the

music, not where or how, so I play on the street, with friends in a band or when invited to play at a live house. I will pretty much play anywhere.' On another occasion, however, he intimated that he was increasing his street performances because his band's progress had plateaued; 'I love being in band, but gig after gig costs money. Live houses are expensive and we are not making any money from it. In fact, we are losing money.'[32] *Rojō raibu* was instead a personal confirmation, a construction of the character Guru Pari by presenting and giving voice to him in public spaces of the city. '*Rojō* is where I feel most at home. I can breathe out here', he told me. This narrativisation of the persona of Guru Pari pervaded all aspects of his musical performances: from his appearance, his artwork, his musical expression, vocal timbre, sense of time and use of space, and a lifestyle that bled over into his Youtube channel and social media webpages.

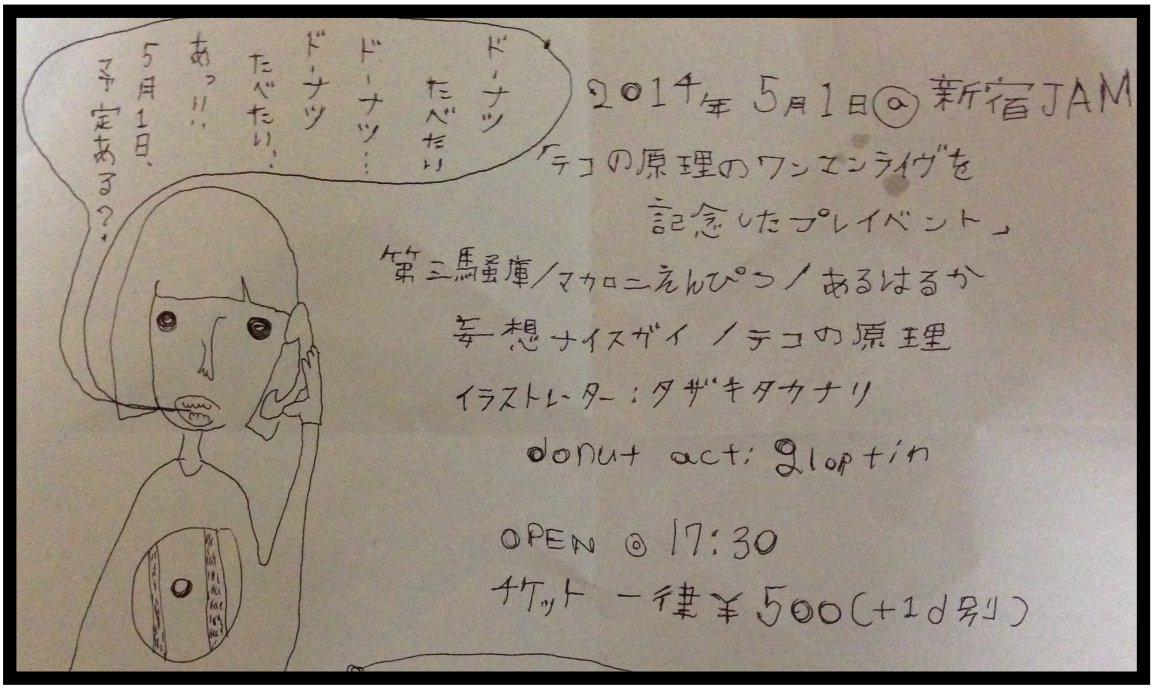

Fig. 12: One of Guru Pari's many doughnut-themed hand-drawn flyers.

It was on twitter and blog sites that the story of Guru Pari was given added depth; another skilful representation of colour, grunge-tinged and eclectic artwork set as a backdrop to photos and episodic diary entries. His social media presence was a contrary collection of reports from street performances, live house shows and passing thoughts, heavily peppered with the ever present donut-related news and updates. Guru Pari was devoted to the doughnut, indeed he infused everything with the presence of his favourite snack, from hand-drawn flyers, to a collection of selfies taken in

[32] I explore this economic aspect of live house performance in chapter 3.

Mister Donut[33] and online posts conveying his insatiable hunger for them. This only underlines Guru Pari's ability to build a character of considerable depth and presence. His hunger and fervour was portrayed as an addiction and a dedication, as delivering direction and meaning to a young man during the daytime, who spent his late nights outside train stations. His refusal to observe the usual hours and rhythms of the working day, and his preference for performing outside the regular hours of street performance, was a positive marker of authenticity held up against a reality of confusion and meaningless grind, a constant theme in his lyrics.

In his ethnography of imitation and authenticity among Japanese rappers and rap fan culture, Ian Condry (2000) explores how understandings of authenticity are used to create difference between those involved in rap music and mainstream cultural values. Following Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, Condry sought to explain how the production of difference occurs within spaces that are socially, economically and politically connected (2000: 167). Association with the 'blackness' of rap culture emerged as a way for disaffected Japanese youth in his study to produce authentically different aesthetic, generational and classed values from the establishment they felt had alienated them. This subtle protest not only produced a valued sense of alternative participation, but opened up a space for discourse between varying interpretations of authenticity within the culture of Japanese rap music, evidenced in the contrasting values of female-dominated 'party rap' and the more 'serious' underground hip hop whose participants were mostly male.

Similarly, Guru Pari used stylistic modes of playing, clothing, lyrics, space and time, pictures, video and the internet as devices to tell a story of himself as authentically removed, to reorientate the narrative of dropping out towards one of value in self-realisation. For him, *rojō raibu* was an activity tied in with the performance of a persona in relation to the perception of the individual in society, and his critical view of that position. Guru Pari played in a band, he performed at live houses, he was active on social media such as his blog, and in this he was socially connected and engaged in a music project. The detachment he addressed through street music was, however, the disconnection he felt from the narrative of stability in the lifelong, full-time employment model in Japan. Moreover, it enabled him to shift value and notions of success away from his band's inability to find a foothold in the music industry, and towards an individual project that he had greater control over.

Guru Pari was a character capable of engaging in this process and simultaneously absorbing the hardships of reality, lived at least partly on the streets without a permanent dwelling. Indeed, the

[33] Mister Donut is a popular coffee and donut chain store found in many towns and cities throughout Japan.

persona was an efficient device for coming to terms with a high degree of lived uncertainty. By nurturing and reinforcing his image on the internet and social media himself, Guru Pari contributed a personal counter-narrative to popular concerns over socio-economic change in Japan and the position of helplessness it cast young people in. The instability of music played in public, the lack of clear rules of engagement, the variously interpreted temporal elements, all lent themselves to him as somebody who had fallen through the gaps in the education and employment system but who recognised himself as a person of consequence as a music maker. The very basic subsistence he lived out had its own small advantages despite the disadvantage it put him at should he have wished to take up a more conventional career track. But Guru Pari had turned away from this, putting his energy instead into the creative process of reproducing *yadonashi-kun* as a niche musician, providing an authenticity to his music and value within this performance persona.

1.4 Poor boys and amateurs

Like Guru Pari, Hayashi was a musician who incorporated positive narratives of a basic subsistence into his performances, seeking to embrace amateurism as a relevant mode of engaging with music and life. He was well known to the *shirōto no ran* ('Amateur's Riot') network in Kōenji, individuals who espoused a form of social organisation based on non-profit and mutual support though joint ownership of a few stores in the neighbourhood. Hayashi played *rojō raibu* at the station, and especially during the summer of 2013, during which I met him often on the station's walkways over a series of long, warm evenings. I will address the significance of Hayashi's connection with *shirōto no ran* in his *rojō raibu* activities. Before this, however, I look at his personal approach to performing street music at the station by recalling our first meeting along the *tsūro* ('passageway') of the station's South Exit.[34]

Hiyashi stood leant up against the south wall of Kōenji Station, fiercely raking at his guitar strings and singing in a loose, gravelly voice that accentuated his rough style of play. He performed a powerful and raucous folk music that both demanded attention and elicited befuddled reactions from people passing by. Unlike Guru Pari he played earlier on in the evenings, usually between 08:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. His appearance matched the tone created by his music; his loose shirt hung open over a vest and his short-sleeves revealed a long scar running almost the entire length of his forearm. He wore a well-loved pair of cotton shorts and flip-flops, which exposed his dusty feet

[34] Map 5, position 3.

and long toenails. At his side a can of cheap faux beer[35] rested on the floor, and I wondered at the time if his unique playing style could be attributed to the fact that he was inebriated. Yet there was no glaze in his eyes, nor slur in the voice of Hayashi.

Hayashi was joined by two friends, Kota and Haruka, who sat out in the middle of the walkway facing him. Kota had his own guitar and stood up periodically, wandering off toward the first railway underpass as he played a tune and crooned into the humid evening air. In their relaxed semi-circle, sitting with legs crossed and arms stretched out behind them, the three took up a centre-section of the southern walkway, causing a small bottle-neck of people passing between the station and the neighbourhood's popular *shōtengai*. Hayashi was nonchalant, and very vocal. Newly enlivened by his powerful off-key performance he seemed delighted to welcome me into the circle, chain-smoking, drinking and engaging the three of us in various debates. We began discussing Hayashi's playing style, a conversation during which he emphasised his casual, disorganised approach.

> 'This is all for pleasure', he said with a playful smirk, 'I play like this naturally when I do *rojō raibu (ore, rojō raibu suru toki shizen ni yatteru yo)*. I don't play for money, it's never been about that. Anyway, people in Kōenji don't ask for money, even the poor ones, but come instead for the atmosphere. I am the same. It's comfortable and easy to play here. I meet my friends and we stay for a while, just hanging out, talking about things like people do in coffee shops, but just here on the street where it is free.'

Hayashi described himself to me as 'poor' (*binbō*), and referred to his living arrangements as 'non-permanent', preferring to emphasise that he had moved to 'this part' of Tōkyō from Saitama. In a by now familiar narrative among some performers, he mused that playing street music was about being a part of the things going on in Kōenji (an aspect I give closer inspection to in chapters 2 and 4), but he also claimed that he wanted to meet other musicians, and especially like-minded individuals.

> 'I do play in a band', Hayashi began, 'and I'm not going to say that I wouldn't be happy if it did well, you know? Of course I want to be in a famous group. But this is about something more attainable: being here with other people, because it means something to talk to each

[35] In Japan, various kinds of beer-flavoured alcoholic drinks, commonly referred to as *happōshu*, are available at half the cost of 'real' beer as they fall under a different tax bracket.

> other and play music. All those other *rojō raibu* people take themselves too seriously… They ought to try relaxing a bit.'

Kota and Haruka listened silently and nodded along to Hayashi's words. Removing her white surgical mask[36] to speak, Haruka added, 'Kōenji in the summer is particularly good. You can be outside until late at night, and other people are here doing the same thing. It's cooler than being in a tiny apartment indoors and I can listen to live music for free! You don't get that everywhere.'

In her study of Kōenji's *shirōto no ran* ('Amateur's Riot') network, Julia Obinger (2013, 2015) describes its members' engagement in social participation, organisation and political demonstration as 'Do It Yourself'. This relates to a makeshift and purposefully amateur organisation of their members in a rejection of structures of employment, work practices and bureaucracy, which they considered to limited their engagement in society and place an unhealthy and immoral focus on profit maximisation. Led by the infamous Matsumoto Hajime, who began the network in 2005 as an alternative radio station run from a recycle shop in the neighbourhood, *shirōto no ran* politics were based upon a rejection of Japan's 'oppressive social conventions and institutions' (2015:2) by encouraging local-level interpretations of independent self-determination. These goals were supported by a network that included a shop, a cafe and a hostel run intentionally without clear hierarchy to avoid the trappings of profit-based decision making and to create an enclosed market that rejected rather than competed with the mainstream.

By association with terms like 'poor guys' *(binbōnin)* and 'amateurs'*(shirōto)* (Obinger 2015: 1-2), Matsumoto and his associates attempted to emphasise the self-determinism of their disconnection from middle-class ideals based upon a readjustment in scale. Matsumoto's vision of *shirōto no ran* members was opposed to the conflation of non-conformity with laziness and desperation. Rather, individuals were active and involved on their own terms and supported by a basic network of others who felt the same way. Within Kōenji, *shirōto no ran* operated quietly on the whole. I visited the cafe and shop on a few occasions, where regulars and those drawn to the idea of Matsumoto's principles collected and shared in discussion and put on talks. Occasionally there have been small-scale protests held locally in Kōenji, such as the 'Give-Back-My-Bike Demo' (*Boku no Chari wo Kaese Demo*), which protested the municipal authorities' dogged removal of unlawfully parked bicycles in the area surrounding the train station (2015: 4). Public disruption and a convivial atmosphere, as the desired goals of the demonstration, are indicative that structural change was not on Matsumoto's agenda.

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[36] The use of surgical masks in public is common in Japan, particularly for colds or other illness that the wearer might transmit to others.

Rather, the network sought to produce local conditions and social environments within which a sense of community and purpose gave their members momentum in life to move forward.

Shirōto no ran amateurism and cheerful self-identification as "poor" people may be interpreted as an alternative way of living life, a 'counter-public' (Fraser 1990) and a fresh bid for a different kind of collective identity. The scale upon which they operated, however, precluded the formation of any serious challenge to the structural limitations they publicly rejected. An alternative, though not mutually exclusive, interpretation is that which Butler (2009) argued in her work on performance and precariousness. For Butler, affiliation with certain socio-economic circumstances such as being financially poor or insecure is sometimes done willingly in contrast to the perceived flaws of the secure, the majority or the powerful. She argues that performativity 'has everything to do with "who" can become produced as a recognisable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering, and whose life, when lost, would be worth mourning' (2009: 7). The *Shirōto no ran "*Give-Me-Back-My -Bike" demonstration was not about a few impounded bicycles but about recognition of the network's activities, and more precisely the individuals within it. The publicness of their local demos is significant because it took their self-determined lifestyle out from the shops and cafes and showcased it in the most public realm of Kōenji, its train station. The production of a recognisable self, a 'person worth mourning' as Bulter said, was also central in the street practices and the production of personal narratives within *rojō raibu* performance.

Hayashi's description of himself as a "poor" musician, his emphasis on the pleasure and camaraderie of *rojō* performances over financial rewards, and his little obstructions of the train station's walkways, present similarities with the principles of the *shirōto no ran* network and are indicative of his involvement with them. But performing on the street with unclipped toenails on full display, the act of sitting on a thoroughfare where people are instructed to walk (a clash between movement and stillness addressed in the following chapter), singing rough and loud, drinking beer: none of these were very likely to effect much change if demonstration against societal institutions and bureaucracy was the principle goal. Quite likely, it gave some around him the distinct impression that he was a bit of a brat. For Hayashi, however, these performances were not intended to create a dialogue with every silent commuter passing him by on their way to the station, but to create a specific performed character, a personal narrative about himself rendered visible through the action of playing music in public. In short, to be seen and to be recognised as living a different kind of life.

Hayashi's *binbōnin* ('poor guy'), and Guru Pari's *yadonashi kun* ('vagabond boy'), were attempts to create authentic difference to a perceived normative life from which they felt excluded. A combination of pressures prevent contemporary musicians in Japan from getting off the ground, including working life, playing expenses and the indifference of audiences and industry. Limited by the probability of success highly stacked against them, Hayashi and Guru Pari chose to readjust the framework and scale within which they participated in everyday life. Their street music personae were alternative embodiments, what Emma Cook (2013) called 'embodied personhood', set against the wider expectations of their role of as young men and *shakaijin,* and embracing the personal, individual reality of just about getting by.

1.5 Professionalism as a self-fulfilling prophecy

Non-conformism, retreatism, and lifestyles left of centre in Japan have often been framed within discussions of resistance (Kinsella 2012; Condry 2004; Ikuya 1991), or focused on the few instances of activism that spring up here and there, such as the recent SEALDS student protests in response to government plans to readdress its constitutional position on military action (See Slater et al. 2015; O'Day 2015). While these are important cases that illustrate Japan is not the harmonious and homogenised middle-class society that its media has portrayed, it is also important to recognise that there are positions in between that neither fit the mould of a standard 'middle-class' life, nor erupt into activism. Through music, street performances at Kōenji were usually private engagements and personal embodiments of their performers' own individual circumstances, not outward challenges to a perceived status quo. *Rojō* musicians were neither social activists nor *hikkikomori* ('shut ins'), but part of a great number of part-timers exposed to the reality of their social situation, and devising ways to come to terms with it.

In their work on youth culture and motivation in contemporary Japan, Toivonen et al (2011) devise categories of those 'unable to conform but unwilling to rebel'. Within these categories, including 'conformists', 'retreatists', and 'innovators', I struggle to place any of the street musicians I got to know. Could they be somewhere between the 'quiet mavericks', who create original life goals and engage with society on their own terms, or perhaps the 'ritualists', who conform to legitimate means without much hope for culturally expected rewards (2011: 4)? Toivonen et al. claim not to include more heterogenous groups who fall outside 'mainstream' Japanese society in their categorising, such as homeless people for example. Yet one thing that *rojō raibu* demonstrates powerfully is that a broad swathe of personal narratives span the spectrum between the tired salaryman and the inspired

SEALDS activist, and that even 'non-mainstream' conditions such as homelessness sometimes enter the lives of today's youth and irregular workers. Guru Pari and Hayashi set their own circumstances in contrast to conventional life goals through *rojō raibu* in order to create stories that centred on individual endeavour and self-determination. Others, however, employed street music to retain a dream of reconnection with standardised notions of success within the music industry. For Rila and Jack, the public demonstration of professionalism and a strong work ethic was a part of their own particular narrative. The complexity of performer personae revealed here complicates Butler's notion of performance as a practice primarily producing 'recognisable subjects'. The *Rojō raibu* practices of some musicians were also involved in a process of positioning them relative to the society in which they lived and to fulfilling the pressures of life course norms.

1.6 Idol aesthetics against a street backdrop

At twenty-four, Rila Fujioka was determined to get ahead in the music business. She moved to Asagaya in Tōkyō from Chiba prefecture two years after finishing high school at the age of twenty. Rila had worked on a visible professionalism in her live acts that was more exaggerated than any other street musician I had met. Resultantly, her approach to *rojō raibu* de-emphasised her connection to a local, rooted scene in Kōenji as Hayashi had done, and was instead infused with the language, behaviour and symbolism of a saleable and transplantable item of popular music. Indeed, relative to other Kōenji Station musicians she extended her performances widely around Tōkyō in her search for new fans and supporters. Rila approached the station more as a place to be seen and to advertise her live house shows, than as somewhere to pass time, practice or experiment.

I had an easier time getting to know Rila than other female street musicians I met at the station. Generally speaking, my efforts to approach female musicians and strike up conversation were met with greater suspicion than in the case of men, with some admitting to me later on that they had partly suspected me of hitting on them. Rila, however, performed her music with the tropes of a young Japanese 'idol', within which the attraction and management of male attention was part of the presentation of her music as professionalised performance, fitting into an identifiable bracket within the current structure of female idol pop music in Japan.

Rila was usually accompanied by a friend, a girl of similar age to her, as she was on the first evening we met in October of 2013. Rila cut a very slight figure, with long, straight black hair accented by a perfectly horizontal fringe and bangs that framed her face. She wore a one piece dress and thigh

length socks, and stood behind a large electric keyboard. Hanging from the keyboard stand was a large piece of material onto which 'Rila' had been painted in bright, stylised lettering. The keyboard case was propped open on the floor, with a calculated scattering of CDs for sale at one thousand five hundred yen each. Flyers lay in a neat pile at the end of the case, and neighbouring this was a large handbag adorned with frills and trinkets that hung from the straps. Rila sang with a high trill, delicate and controlled, while her songs ranged from upbeat pop numbers to slower romantic ballads, mostly about love. I thought them a sharp contrast to Guru Pari's discordant selections of songs, such as 'Hate pop'. Rila was an accomplished pianist, able to engage with the three men stood directly in front of her while playing complicated progressions along the keys. She stopped after each song and bowed to the men, all of whom were in their forties. The men, huddled closely together, appeared to know her and she them. Between songs she talked to her audience just as if they had paid to see her at a live house, as if the street were a stage, thanking them for their kind attention and giving an explanation of the inspiration for or contents of the song she would perform next. She was also playful, laughing and appearing bashful as the men complemented her looks as *kawaii* and her playing as *jōzu* ('talented').

As Rila wrapped up a lively piece she had introduced as 'Song for You', I was approached by her friend bearing a glossy full-page flyer for a live event that Rila was due to play at in the autumn. 'She's cute isn't she?' said the girl, 'and she has a pretty face too, and a great voice.' For some reason, embarrassment I think, I replied that I couldn't tell from where I stood, to which she responded by grasping my arm and telling me to take a better look. We moved in closer and after what I thought was time enough to take the measure of Rila, I made some quiet noises of acquiescence. 'Are you Rila's friend?' I asked. 'No, I'm Rila's staff' *(iie, Rila san no sutaffu desu)*. I nodded in feigned understanding but it was the first time I had ever heard of a street musician having 'staff'. 'So what kind of work is that?' I asked after a pause, 'Well, I am in charge of her promotion, I organise her schedule when I can and take bookings and call live houses… that kind of thing.' I prodded further, 'do you just have this one job, or do you also have others?'. 'Oh, yes I have another job, some part time work at a clothing store' she replied matter-of-factly, appearing to prefer not to talk about herself. 'Anyway, if you have time this evening please relax and enjoy watching Rila, and if you are free why not come to her next live show?'. Rila's staff handed me one of the flyers she had been brandishing and with a broad smile she backed off towards the other onlookers.

I turned back to Rila, who had been leading the three male fans in a call and response rendition of a chorus. They knew the lyrics, and were right on cue. On her next break, Rila came over to speak with me herself. Oddly, in a reversal of the usual flow of conversation at these moments of research,

Rila began asking me a series of questions. She wanted to know about London, and was excited to hear that I also played some music. She had a gift for talking to strangers, and maintained a bright, enthusiastic air throughout our discussions. She told me that she played at venues in Shinjuku, Nakano, Shibuya and Ueno, but that she had not played *rojō raibu* for some time because of the strain it put on her voice;

> 'I have to protect my voice, it is delicate, so I don't play outside as often as I would like. It is particularly bad in winter so I never perform on the street then. My voice is my strength, and sending my voice out into the world to be heard is the most important thing for me *(koenaki koe wo todokeyō)*, which is why I play street music too'.

Before she returned to her three male fans Rila told me to make sure to keep in touch; 'Just send me an email whenever you like! The address is on the flyer, contact me about live events or non-music related things, anything you like.' Walking back toward the station's south entrance later that evening I ran into Jack. 'Can't talk right now' he said, 'I've got a live house show in an hour and only a few more minutes to practice here.'

Fig. 13: One of the high-quality flyers I collected from Rila's *rojō* performances.

Rila performed a neat package of idol schmaltz and open friendliness. She had songs of romantic yearning, dedicated staff, large glossy fliers and a small following of fanboys. Indeed the narrative she constructed was well suited for the streets of Kōenji despite the fact that idol music is now seen

as a highly corporatised asset of major record labels. Martin (2016) argues that this general perception of idol music belies that it has always maintained a connection with more underground pursuits through its symbiotic relationship with *otaku* ('obsessive enthusiasts typically associated with manga and idol fandom') and otaku culture. Within these traditions, Martin claims that the idol represents a vicarious dream to ordinary girls who wish for success and fame, and ordinary guys who want to associate with them. Normality and everydayness are at the root of idol success, he argues, their amateurishness and their plainness, as ought to be reflected in their looks by being 'cute' and endearing rather than especially beautiful. For the everyday person on the street, the idol 'acts out a hero's journey of an ordinary schmuck with no great attributes except a dream and a burning passion to realise it' (2016: 213). In this context, Rila's performance of idol street music was a complete and well-rounded version of the classic idol story, performed as an attempt to initiate a self-fulfilling prophecy; a professionalism that was ready for inclusion in the music industry and acceptable within the Japanese mainstream.

1.7 Big risks and hard work

The struggles experienced by musicians engaged in *rojō raibu* activities were incorporated into a longer view of progression and reward by those individuals hoping for inclusion within the mainstream music industry and for success framed by that model. For the performers who sought value in their musical lives through professionalism, Jack represented the only success story among my interlocutors. He was the only *rojō raibu* performer able to make music his full-time job. Jack described his decision to give up part-time work as the most frightening of his working life, but one that was essential if he was to fulfil his dream of being recognised for the music he made:

> 'I was listening to the radio back home in Shizuoka prefecture one day - I was a bass player at that time - and a piece of *shamisen* music began playing. I remember thinking that it spoke to me more than any other instrument I had heard up until then. I found a *shamisen* instructor the next day and began learning. My teacher told me that I should practice on the street, that only by learning in front of others would I be confident enough to perform in front of them. So I took to the streets in Shizuoka and played outside. The instrument somehow came naturally to me, and I grew confident in my playing style and ability. When Emi and I moved to Kōenji we agreed that I would give full-time music my best shot, with her full support. It wasn't easy, I had to struggle at first to make contacts. I spent all my time on the streets playing, handing out flyers, getting to know the locals and networking. I was terrified that we wouldn't have enough

money between us to get by. But little by little I attracted people to me and built up a following. Something about the *shamisen* seems to draw people of all ages together.'

Jack was by far the most popular musician I met. As he said, people were drawn to the *shamisen*, both as a classical Japanese instrument capable of producing nostalgia, and as a curious and exciting tool to employ when playing forms of music and stylistic modes more akin to rock on the streets. Jack had been so successful in finding himself a niche in the contemporary music of Kōenji town that he achieved what the others could not, and even threatened to become a popular musician within Tōkyō in his own right.

I return now to Jack's studio above Tetsu bar, an hour prior to the events I relayed at the beginning of the chapter, and the arrival of Yūji and Kōhei to whisk him away to Yokohama.

'I distinctly remember moving to Kōenji with Emi six years ago, in 2010. We had talked and decided that I would only work at my music in Tōkyō. My no *baito* policy was dangerous, but I knew that if I did just a little, even one small *baito* job, that I would eventually get caught in a spiral of work and *rojō* performances indefinitely. It was all or nothing. Of course the lack of security was uncomfortable, and even now I feel it, especially when I think about starting a family. But back then it was a simple fear of not being able to eat or pay rent. Needing to make it made me hungry, because my failure would mean real hunger.'

Jack's single-mindedness was rare among the street performers I met. As he stalked up and down the small studio, picking up guitar effect pedals and collecting them together in a small flight case, preparing for his bandmates arrival, he discussed the importance of becoming a popular musician.

'Do you remember Robāto san, when Yūji and I would visit the corner of the station's north walkway to play *rojō*, back in the days when we did a lot of street music. I met many musicians at that time who were making compromises. Some told me that they would play as best as they could *(dekirudake gambatte yaru)*, but also accepted that in this day and age becoming a popular musician is unlikely. Well I am the opposite of that trend *(ore wa ama no jaku)*. I wanted to become a well-known, famous and respected musician, for me and my family and the people back in Shizuoka. And so I just pressed on towards that goal. I knew what to do: you must build a solid fanbase of people who follow you and support you over many years as a "local musician". After that, no matter where you go, those people continue to support you. That takes real hard work, people skills and the effort to keep everyone in the loop. It really is a full-

> time job that's even more demanding than a regular company job, and that's how I approached it.'

For Jack there was one way to make it in music: to labour even harder than he would working for a company with whom he was employed full-time, to 'do his best' *(gambaru),* because to make music a profession was at least as demanding as working long hours in an office as he envisioned most Japanese men doing. This, he argued, was rare in contemporary *rojō raibu*. He believed that the majority of musicians accepted at some point that they would have to let go of their initial hopes for escaping the loop of irregular work and evening performances. Jack was determined to buck the trend, however, to realise a successful and respectable life for himself and his family by placing special importance on his work ethic.

Between 2013 and 2016 Jack's work at the station, his networking within Kōenji, at live houses elsewhere in Tōkyō, and the continual nurturing of his growing fan base began to pay dividends. By early 2015, Jack had been all over Japan on tours he had organised himself for the three bands he played in. One of these, which included a Katakana-wielding dancer, a guitarist and a Japanese *shakuhachi* flautist, had even been to Austin, Texas twice to showcase their music at the yearly SXSW festival, which introduces up and coming artists in the music industry. Jack's popularity at home and abroad was, as Martin (2016) says of Japanese music that finds an audience outside of Japan, popular because it 'is the stuff that reinforces pre-existing notions of what Japan is like - particularly musicians whose imagery emphasise the exotic' (2016: 114). Jack's *shamisen* music experimented not only with fusions of Japanese cultural elements and rock and roll themes, such as pilgrimage and soloing battles, it also sutured modes, scales and musical conventions with roots in both Japan and the West. Jack held a traditional instrument but wore heavy black leather boots. He could sell his music and his story to an international market, but he could also sell it to the Japanese. While his *rojō* performances were always quick to draw a crowd of ten or more people at Kōenji Station, I watched his audiences in live houses steadily grow fuller over the course of my fieldwork.

Fig. 14: Jack, Yūji and Kōhei on stage in Shibuya for Jack's 'Japan meets the West' rock festival.

At the beginning of the Autumn in 2013 Jack, and his playing partner Yūji in the band 'The Syamisenist', invited me to Amusemuseum in Asakusa. The museum and gallery looked out over Tōkyō's oldest and most famous temple, Sensō-ji. Arriving early, Jack's wife Emi greeted me and led me to my seat in a spacious Japanese-style room (*washitsu*). The majority of the other guests had already taken their seats and some were dressed in formal *kimono* ('Japanese formal dress'). Jack and Yūji entered the low stage area from a side room, also dressed in *kimono* - Jack in a striking white to match his recently bleached-blonde hair and Yūji in contrasting black. Having only ever seen the two of them on the streets of Kōenji or in dark, smokey live houses, this new clean-cut version took me by surprise. Jack and Yūji, however, appeared unfazed by the elegance of the setting and the tone of the crowd. As always Jack was professional in his address, which remained the same whether on the roadside or in an elegant hall, using flawless *keigo* ('Japanese polite language') to introduce his band and thank everyone for coming. Neither had the music changed, and though they began with a few quieter numbers, by ten minutes into the set all reservations were cast aside and Jack and Yūji were back to their usual tricks, attacking their strings in ferocious bursts of percussive sound. Intermittently Jack called out *'huh!'* and *'hai!'* in between barrages to indicate to Yūju that they were about to go full pelt again.

By the end of the performance Jack was head-banging and stamping his feet along to their music as he always did. The audience of young families, middle-aged and elderly men and women responded

with generous applause and enthusiastic comments to one another that this was 'something new'. Jack had brought a patch of Kōenji streets into the Amusemuseum, indeed it was all a part of his appeal as a bridge between the traditional and the modern in Tōkyō. Jack's street backstory only added to the professionalism with which they presented their band, as his storytelling throughout the afternoon reemphasised. 'Has anyone here been to Kōenji?' Jack said, asking for a show of hands. Around five of the sixty or so people in attendance raised an arm. 'I highly recommend it, it is like nowhere else in Tōkyō' Jack said smiling.

> 'Once Yūji and I began a trip all the way to Aomori prefecture,[37] home of the *tsugaru shamisen,* from Kōenji. It is quite a tale, our travels to and from Aomori prefecture; of beautiful scenery and often terrible weather. We hitch-hiked between cities and venues, and were so fortunate to be able to rely on the kindness of strangers. It was a journey that tested us, and of opposites, which we are now so grateful to have experienced. We played in front of full halls and we played in front of four or five people in the middle of nowhere. Sometimes we arrived and were put up in nice hotels, but occasionally we got lost on the road and even had to sleep outside in the freezing cold once. We were just happy to be able to do it at all, and it has made us stronger. All our efforts have brought us here before you today.'

Street apprenticeship had given Jack the tools to play music confidently in front of complete strangers, and the ability to charm them with words in the gaps in between. The persona he produced through music had become the bridge between the old and new ways of *shamisen* performance, and the backbone of a professionalism that was taking him away from *rojō raibu* and into the serious business of the music industry.

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[37] Aomori is the northernmost prefecture of Japan's main island of Honshu, a trip of 700km from Tōkyō

Fig. 15: Yūji (left), the author, and Jack (right), at Amusemuseum in Asakusa, Tōkyō.

Despite his many achievements, Jack was conflicted about the circumstances caused by his increasingly popularity and the changes these pressures had wrought on his life. While proud of his success and the increasingly wide reach of his music from Japan to America, to India and China, he was nevertheless still only just about making ends meet financially. I found it increasingly difficult to meet Jack as his schedule filled out, and whereas I would run into him frequently around Kōenji in 2013, by 2015 our meetings were generally arranged by phone and squeezed into a half-open slot. In these latter stages Jack talked often about other street musicians in Kōenji, and in particular what he respected about the immediacy and affective quality of what they did.

> 'Instead of staying at home feeling sorry for themselves that they might not get a good job or write a hit song, *rojō* performers decide to get up and leave and play music on the street where people and life are. It's action, they do what they can do, and without action nothing can begin. *Rojō raibu* is about making something out of nothing, I remember how it was. When I played at the station I had made something that day, people had heard my music, stopped for a moment in their own busy day, and it made me feel relieved to have done it (*anshin shita*).'

In playing *rojō raibu*, Jack had access to a regular outlet for what he described to me as 'the production of something from nothing'. This, he said, provided an immediate sense of achievement and relief that he had made something positive happen, as was evidenced by his influence on other people's behaviour (who stopped for a moment to listen). Beyond its musical value alone, Jack discussed the value of *rojō raibu* as a collection of stories about overcoming adversity.

> 'What I wanted to say to you about *rojō* music after all this time on the road is that it really keeps you on the ground, because you have to challenge yourself each time. You cannot anticipate the audience in the same way that you can at a live house. That is exciting, and it gives *rojō raibu* a vividness *(iki iki to shita kanji)*. If nobody reacted to me or stopped I would feel like I was losing my ability… Frightening, actually! *(sore wa jibun no jitsuroku ga nai…. kowai! jitsu wa)*. So I was always testing myself *(jibun wo tamesu)*. I think everyone is testing themselves against their own fear when playing *rojō raibu*. A lot of street musicians that come here are fighting their own battles, they have difficult lives and insecurity *(fuan)* is a part of that. When I was a child I had a very dangerous heart problem, and my parents didn't think I would live to become an adult, but here I am today still. Playing on the streets after moving to Kōenji, there were a lot of "good happenings" *(guddo hapuningu)*, sudden things that I didn't expect and really gave *rojō* a special place in my heart. I think only *rojō* players can know what that means.'

Whenever Jack reminisced about his more frequent street music playing period, he tended to feel the need to reaffirm that he was satisfied with the way things were turning out now, and that he was inching closer to his initial plan of becoming pro *(puro de yaru tsumori)*. Back in his studio above Tetsu bar, as Jack swivelled in his chair and scrolled down through the unread emails in his inbox, he said: *demo ne, saikin sono guddo hapuningu ga sukunai ki ga suru na… sukoshi sabishii* ('But the thing is, recently I have the feeling that there are few of those good happenings… It's kinda lonely').

1.8 Responding to fading dreams

Jack longed to be back on the *rojō* journey again, not at its end. His case is important because in many street musicians' eyes, Jack had achieved what they could only dream of. Yet his transition to a busy life of gigging, promoting, networking and chasing time he no longer had made Jack think back to how things were before, along the way. He was still financially insecure, but had more responsibilities now. He liked to reminisce with me about the time he performed *rojō* on many nights of the week, and he valued the struggle as evidenced in the respect he paid to other street

performers for 'doing what they could'. I will return to this conception of struggle within a journey in the final chapter.

Lauren Berlant's work on 'affective attachments' (2011) explores the public realm as a space for emotion and desire to find expression through understandings of 'good-life fantasies' (151). On the other hand 'cruel optimism', she argued, is a 'condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic objective in advance of its loss' (2011: 21). In the ethnography presented in this chapter, I have shown how each *rojō raibu* performer engaged with street music in Kōenji as a set of practices that navigated the still pervasive structures of employment in Japanese society. These practices addressed their dislocation from not only middle-class institutions, but also music institutions that provide a recognisable sense of direction, of self, and of belonging to something greater than themselves. In coming to Kōenji, Guru Pari, Rila and Jack were involved in a cruel optimism: Guru Pari sought to find industry success with his band, Rila to become a pop-idol, and Jack to become a professional musician. Earlier in the chapter, Harada and Sayaka also said that they were hopeful of being scouted by a music company representative while playing around the station. None of these were realisable dreams at the time. They were, in fact, already fading upon arrival in the metropolis. In working professionally as a musician, Jack was an exception among 70 musicians. Were the musicians deluded, or was there more to it?

Berlant's notion of cruel optimism presupposes a fading dream, or rather a 'problematic one' likely to be lost, to be a dead-end. As Ian Martin said of Tōkyō's contemporary indie musicians, their music is going nowhere. But people still play nevertheless. The *rojō* performers appearing here have demonstrated that the measure of a successful musician in Kōenji is a personal and individualised process of self-evaluation and value creation relative to their socio-economic status. Each *rojō* musician performed in spite of their reduced opportunities for advancement, developing different strategies and their own narrative along the way of who they were in relation to these conditions. While performing over time in Kōenji, many recognised their dreams as fading, but navigated the space opening out in their absence with new strategies and positionalities. They used music to negotiate the space left by diminished hope.

Guru Pari came to prefer the late hours at the station, where he could play in the relative quiet of deserted streets and to claim a space of difference. Jack had sought out the most visible and tumultuous parts of the train station to be seen in, to 'test himself' continuously, and to bring people together. Hayashi's appearance and behaviour during his extended gatherings around the station were attempts to publicly disassociate with his notion of the hegemonising wave of mainstream

culture. In contrast, Rila put together a savvy blend of idol aesthetics and behaviour in order to present her own music as compatible with the kind dominating the charts in Japan's contemporary music industry. They each approached the station in different ways and as such came to measure success in different ways: as individuals detached from institutions, but with a need to feel a part of something greater than themselves. Their affective attachments to street performance at the station, to music that explored positive difference, alternative belonging, or reconnection with professional lifestyles and mainstream success, were all attempts to engage with and traverse a social landscape bereft of its most significant path to a notion of the individual's place in relation to society.

1.9 Conclusion

In his book *The happy youth of a desperate country*, Furuichi Noritoshi (2011) claimed that in contrast to media representations of widespread dissatisfaction and desperation among Japanese youth, they were in fact satisfied to live in the present under the principle of 'enjoy today, tomorrow is coming'. Furuichi suggested that young people today could not relate to their parents' mantra of 'poor today, rich in the future', because their economic instability precluded their ability to build wealth. While Furuichi's counter-argument does good work by cutting through moral panic-inducing, one-sided media accounts of helpless and powerless young Japanese people, it falls into a similar trap of over generalising about them.

Evidence from my research with street musicians does not support this argument. Certainly, the current state of the music industry and employment trends have meant that those dreaming of industry-recognised success and pop stardom are less likely than ever to actually realise these dreams, let alone make a stable living full-time in music. Furuichi's argument, however, exists at the opposite end of a spectrum to Berlant's in 'cruel optimism', suggesting that despite fading hope for the future, a comfortable existence in the present is generally enough for young people today. The musicians I knew did not fit into either of these evaluations. They were not blind to their situation, yet neither were they overwhelmed by it. They were not desperately clinging to ill-fated dreams, nor content to stop trying. Instead, they began reworking their attachments in ways that allowed them to retain optimism without cruelty compromising their wellbeing. While their common dislocation from 'recognised' paths in work and music brought them together at Kōenji Station, contrasting adaptations emerged.

Guru Pari and Hayashi performed in ways that emphasised their difference from their perceptions of middle-class Japanese lifestyles, from which they had resolved to remain apart. They were financially insecure but also championed the amateur, poor life of a *rojō* musician as authentically and morally superior, and infused these attitudes within the characters of *Yadonashi-kun* and *Binbōnin*. Claiming a form of personal betterment was also an attempt to grasp a sense of fulfilment that did not rely on their attachment to traditional work practices and lifestyle expectations. Rila and Jack, on the other hand, played street music as a way to reconnect with a dream of integration with standardised patterns of pop success and their place in the music industry as big business in Japan. Jacks's tireless work-ethic and Rila's self-alignment with Japanese idol tropes were attempts to create self-fulfilling prophecies, to plan for the future, by a commitment to professionalism.

In one respect Jack and Rila's *rojō* practices were dangerous, affective attachments that were likely to fail within current trends in the music business. But there is much more to it. What their attempts also address, and which includes Guru Pari and Hayashi's *rojō* activities, is that the meaning of success for street musicians in Kōenji was intimately tied to the realisation of a recognisable person in contemporary Japanese society. As the only full-time musician among all the street performers I met, Jack had realised the dream chased by many who moved to Tōkyō to begin musical careers on the street. As he sat in his studio above bar Tetsu, rubbing his eyes and lamenting his lack of time, Jack reminisced about the old days when all he did was write music and play *rojō raibu*. His own self-fulfilling prophecy had come true, but the reality was different to the dream. Success for *rojō* musicians is not straight forward, and if it is to be found anywhere, evidence here suggests that it is in the moment of performing, temporarily captured as a person recognised for being a music maker.

Chapter 2

Putting the *roji* in *rojō*: affordance, alleyisation and *roji kūkan* in Kōenji rail spaces

In this chapter I will use the concepts of affordance, alleyisation and *roji kūkan* ('alleyway space') to illustrate how street performers in Kōenji addressed and negotiated playing music in urban spaces built for use as railway space. Affordance is a concept I borrow from Gill's (2015) study of a homeless man who visualises the city as 'affording' him certain ways to get by on the margins, and expand upon it here to explore how musicians interact with the thoroughfares, underpasses and micro spaces produced and maintained by railway companies and city administration. Alleyisation is a process of incorporating behaviours associated with public spaces such as gathering, drinking and playing music within non-public or semi-public urban areas. Since the Edo period (*Edo jidai*)[38], the alleyway, or *roji* in Japan has been historically connected to the production of communal space within *shitamachi* (downtown) areas of the city where dense clusters of housing and small roads are deprived of access to open, public spaces. In reviving *roji kūkan* in the context of street music, I aim to demonstrate the manner in which individuals and groups spill out onto the street in a contemporary response to a lack of other public, usable spaces. I have also been inspired here by the work of Jonas (2007), whose research showed how the spread of informal street gardens in various parts of Tōkyō produced a tolerance for small-scale appropriations in spaces the gardeners had no official or legal right to claim. *Roji kūkan*, as the quality of felt space produced by alleyisation, maintains a temporary right of access based upon subtle, local contexts of urban and neighbourhood spaces, which must be continually produced and maintained in order for access to be upheld. I apply these three notions of affordance, alleyisation and *roji kūkan* here to the processes of recognising and utilising spaces in the city allocated for other specific means, and in doing so to demonstrate how meeting points of the built environment and human activity create contradictory strategies of inscription and appropriation that are always temporary and unstable.

[38] The Edo period, or Tokugawa era, in Japan began in 1603 and lasted until the Meiji Reformation of 1868.

I begin by introducing the concept of affordance as understood by Kimitsu, the central character of Gill's study and a Yokohama man who lived a large part of his adult life on the street. I then provide the ethnographic account of a group of young rappers who appeared in Kōenji in 2015 seeking a space for their troupe to meet and perform regularly. While the self-proclaimed leader of the rappers claimed that he had almost given up hope of finding a place where they could play regularly without fear of being moved on, they began to thrive once at the station, with Tuesday nights in Kōenji fast becoming a time and space for street rap battles[39]. I argue that their successful inscriptions of train station space were partly enabled by an ongoing discourse on human activity within railway infrastructure in Tōkyō, which emerged as the city developed from a system of commercial waterways in Edo to a modern metropolis dependent and centred upon railway infrastructure in the everyday lives of its residents.

To better understand how train stations have become the focus of the activities of individuals and groups in need of space in the city, I next look at the historical development of Tōkyō's urban railways. Here I also draw upon some literary accounts of human interaction within railway infrastructure, such as the work of Tayama Katai, who focuses on scopic practices on platforms and carriages, and Soseki's account that addresses the illicit thrill of being in public station space. As encounters on trains and in the new public spaces of transport increased with modernisation, so mass construction along railway routes produced clusters of dense residential areas and narrow streets with scarce access to green or open public space. I provide two examples of instances wherein groups have consequently been involved in claiming parts of a station as public space, by adopting them for purposes that differed from their intended function. Here I address the Shinjuku *hiroba*[40] case, wherein activists and musicians appropriated a central area in the heart of the station for political discussion and performances of music, as well as the case of a homeless 'cardboard village' that appeared in Shinjuku's West Exit thoroughfare in 1994, before being reclaimed by police and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) eight years later.

The two case studies illustrate how visibility and invisibility are two contrasting elements at the very core of affordance, alleyisation and *roji kūkan* in city spaces, and demonstrate how local circumstances on the ground and historical context are essential components in producing the appropriate platform for successful and maintained inscriptions of space by members of the public. Returning to Kōenji I draw upon a conversation between Jack the shamisenist and a local music bar

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[39] A 'rap battle' is a call and response contest of rapped verses between two participants. I explain this in more detail later in the chapter.

[40] *Hiroba* directly translates as 'wide- or broad-place'.

owner to show how the rappers' and other musicians' activities at the station were aided by the neighbourhood's close historical association as a 'musical town', as well as the specific spatial arrangement of the station's walkways and underpasses in comparison to other railway stations of similar scale. These elements combined to produce the circumstances, or affordance, for street music to thrive in Kōenji while they failed to do so in the neighbouring towns of Asagaya and Nakano.

I move on to discuss Japanese conceptions of social activity in public spaces, including Fumihiko Maki's interpretation of *roji* as representative of the hidden backspaces found throughout urban cities. This distinction, however, fails to account for how spaces such as station *tsūro* (walkway or thoroughfare) can fluctuate between 'front' (*omote*) and 'back' (*ura*) during the course of a day and as the result of human activity. Not all street musicians sought out those parts of the station where they might be concealed from view as the rapper troupe aimed to. In the final part of the chapter I address the approach to *rojō raibu* taken by three female performers, Reina, Sayaka and Hitomi, for whom visibility was highly desirable in order to gather the attention of new fans, and to protect against the dangers of the night. The alleyisation of Kōenji Station occurred within these differences between performers' inscriptions of station spaces and consequently took different forms. The 'right kind' of possibilities depended upon individuals' perceptions of their public music making, and were consequently produced as a cluster of moments set against the ebb and flow of transit space as day turned to evening, creating shifting, temporary affordances for street music.

2.1 What the city affords: Sainō's rappers and affordance at Kōenji Station

In his close study of a day labourer and homeless man called Kimitsu, Tom Gill (2015) describes the perspective Kimitsu had on his own position relative to the city around him as one of 'everyday affordance' (*mainichi ahōdansu*) (2015: 132).[41] Gill suggests that Kimitsu's view of the city around him was framed by his lived experience as a vagrant. In doing so, Kimitsu's *mainichi ahōdansu* in Gill's work moves beyond J. J. Gibson's original 'affordance theory' (see Gibson 1979)[42], which holds that a space, or object within a space, is read as having certain inherent 'possibilities' or 'affordances' by

[41] Upon hearing Kimitsu's use of the term *mainichi ahōdansu*, Gill first thought that Kimitsu had said *mainichi ahō dansu*, wherein *ahō dansu* would refer instead to an 'idiot dance'. While this (mis)interpretation has its own romantic imagery in terms of one man's struggle against the odds in life, it is also interesting in the context of Kōenji town's yearly Awa Odori dance procession festival. As the story goes, in 1957 when Kōenji first put on its Awa Odori festival, the organising committee feared calling it by the same name as the original event in Tokushima from which they had taken the idea. As the dancers failed at first to grasp the correct movements of the Awa Odori they decided to name it the Kōenji *bakadori*, or 'idiot dance'. The name remained unchanged until 1963 after which point participants had received two years of training from Mr Kamogawa, an Awa Odori master from Tokushima. (http://www.koenji-awaodori.com/)

[42] In his work on affordances, Gibson (1979) expounds upon environmental niches, which animals exploit to their advantage.

people within that space, and on to a post-Gibsonian perspective on an individual's active and direct engagement with their environment based upon their personal circumstances and idiosyncratic readings of it. Carl Knappett (2004), drawing upon the work of Conein and Jacopin, suggests that what Gibson's theory lacked was the perspective of 'situated action', allowing people to become both active agents in evaluating their surroundings and reactive ones in responding to understood possibilities (2004: 47). For Knappett, the world is not passively received, but actively read and mediated through an individual's social representations of that world based upon their experiences in life (2004: 48). Kimitsu's perception of affordance was of the limited possibilities that daily life offered somebody in his position; or, essentially, what he could get away with in the society in which he lived. His lifestyle created a particular window through which he viewed the world around him. Unmarried and irregularly employed, Kimitsu endured poverty and homelessness while seeking the best that such a life could offer him, such as time to read books and reflect on life at a more leisurely pace. Gill concludes that Kimitsu represents one of the many individuals living in cities who are in precarious positions but get by without becoming either helpless victims or empowered activists, and that Kimitsu accomplished this by finding a space 'in between' others, a niche within or a reading of the city that felt right for him (2015: 135). I consider the concept of affordance described by Kimitsu and expounded upon by Gill to be as relevant to the physical spaces of a city as it is to its structures of casual employment and social welfare within which Kimitsu eked out a living.

Conceptualised in this way, affordance illuminates patches of a city that are available at different times to individuals carrying out their personal endeavours in urban spaces, as well as under which circumstances this is made possible. Take, for instance, the example of a newly unemployed salaryman in Kurosawa Kiyoshi's film *Tōkyō Sonata*. Dasgupta (2011) suggests that Kurosawa's protagonist, a typified male middle class company worker, experiences the physical locations of his everyday life differently after he loses his job and, instead of telling his wife the truth, leaves the house every day to spend his days looking for work, wandering the city and hanging out in a park associated with the presence of homeless men. The home, a place of comfort and refuge, is seen as becoming a place of anxiety as it reminds the salaryman of the insecurities and problems in his life. Urban streetscapes, so fleeting in the earlier parts of the film, become more central to the protagonist's story after he loses his job and begin to hold their own emotional value as he spends more time in them. The streets, a place in between public and private parts of his life, grow in significance for him, offering peace and escape from the realities that trouble him in parts of the city now associated with loss. As Dasgupta argues, the affect attached to such spaces influence people's sense of time and space, until the boundaries between home and away, private and public, become less clearly demarcated.

The walkways (*tsūro*) and open areas of large central railway stations in Tōkyō offer a sense of being 'in between' based upon their primary function as transport hubs. The movement of bodies reduces the observable presence of private ownership, while the free-flow of the general public into, away from and through rail spaces at times gives a sense of gathering that visibly resembles a public commons: a place wherein people have 'a right not to be excluded' (Sand 2013: 50). In practice this is not the case, and like train stations in other parts of the world those in Tōkyō are subject to surveillance, policing and organisation that challenge the appropriation of physical space. Kōenji Station, along with other smaller stations, is a scaled-down version of these operations at large transport nodes. Much like its larger cousins, however, it is perceived by some individuals as a place of affordance in their lives; neither claimed by demonstration or riot, nor accepted under the terms of railway companies and city planners, but inscribable, utilisable, and like the case of Kimitsu, a place where they can get away with things if they do so well enough. For street musicians, the affordance of Kōenji station as 'live music space' was codependent upon the neighbourhood's close association with music culture. Musical inscription on space at the station would not have been possible without drawing upon the broader cultural narratives of punk and other musical genres that surround Kōenji station in the form of live houses, music bars, studios and rehearsal rooms, and the ubiquitous, visible presence of young men and women with instruments strapped to their backs.

'Mr. Whisper Z!', a street musician who I quickly began calling 'Whisper' in conversation, spoke of the importance of local context in discussion with a young hip-hop street musician named Sainō, who had been playing in Kōenji for a few months. When Sainō mused over why Kōenji's neighbouring town of Asagaya was so strict (*kibishī*) and so much more difficult to play in than Kōenji station, Whisper responded:

> 'It's true that the police reaction is different there, they actually get angry with you. Asagaya town is really bad for that now, and has been getting worse the less people play there. Even the townspeople seem to perceive *rojō raibu* differently now, as though one street musician stands out more because performances have become less frequent … But perhaps it's also because when you come out of the station and look for a spot, there isn't an obvious choice. Wherever you are it's sort of in the way, causing a nuisance. There is too much open space… somehow the station just isn't quite right for it.'

Fig. 16: Whisper found the first underpass at Kōenji 'just right' for *rojō* music performances.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor of the underpass, Sainō stretched out his legs and said, 'I guess you are right, in contrast Kōenji is probably too relaxed! (*gyaku ni Kōenji wa yurusugiru kamo na!*)' In his attitude and his behaviour towards Kōenji, Sainō understood that he was able to do something there that he could not do in other places. He viewed Kōenji Station as a collection of spaces that 'everyone had a right to use' (*minna wa tsukau kenri ga aru mitai*), and he went on to explain to me that he took responsibility for the actions of the other young rappers he gathered together in an effort to preserve these circumstances for future use. 'I know that we are loud, and we have been growing in number. Some of the boys get rowdy and drink too much, but I try to keep them in check and explain that we shouldn't ruin the good thing we have going here'. He understood that a balance of power existed and was maintained, and that the appearance of his rap group could potentially disturb this.

Towards the end of 2015 Sainō and a few others started arriving at Kōenji Station on Tuesday evenings between seven and eight o'clock. They would set up a clunky, retro style boombox[43] of the

[43] Boombox is a name used in rap music for a rectangular, large and powerful portable cassette player often used to provide the music for rap-associated performances in public.

sort made famous by rap videos in the 1980s, and attach a couple of microphones to a portable amplifier. They would then take it in turns to rap along to the backing track being played through the boombox. Intermittently a rap battle would break out, wherein two of the young vocalists faced each other with mics and took turns to improvise some lines of dialogue in a call and response collision of words. Sainō explained:

> 'A rap battle is a fight between mouths (*kuchi genka*). But it's all pretty open and laid back, that's how we do it. It's a positive vibe. People rap about anything, it can be everyday conversation (*nichijō kaiwa*), everyday situations, things that the boys are thinking about, rapping about girls or worries or whatever. It's just foolish stuff that doesn't matter (*tawaimonai*), but the point is to decide who was the coolest at the end. When there is a battle all the others in the group watch, so the decision is based on their reactions during the battle and afterwards. When people stop and watch, we try to get them involved as well, ask them who they thought was best, that kinda thing. It's important to include the locals rather than steal their space. It's a balance though right? An audience can be a good thing, but too many people is definitely bad news.'

Sainō went on to explain that he and some of the other guys had been ejected from a number of locations around Shibuya Station as their battles had attracted interest from passers by, who subsequently gathered in slowly growing numbers, causing them to become more visible. Sainō was only twenty one years old when I met him, but he considered himself to be the 'leader' of the rappers, most of whom were between fifteen and twenty years old. He told me that he had been searching for somewhere to begin a regular meeting of rap musicians, and that only after moving to Kōenji had he been able to make it work:

> 'I tried a few places with some friends. The best place for us up until now was in Shibuya along some of the backroads, maybe because it is a town with a strong youth culture. To be honest I thought that *rojō* was disappearing after I moved to Tōkyō two years ago, but Kōenji has proved me wrong, it's really taking off here and our group is growing stronger all the time now. It happened after I moved here to live. I noticed the other performers and thought it would be worth trying here, even though most *rojō* here is guitar or piano based. All I have done is to share the space by inviting friends to Kōenji Station and supplying the mics and amps for them to use. Now it's theirs as much as mine.'

Led by Sainō, the rappers had become a recognisable feature of Tuesday nights at Kōenji. In my conversations with Sainō he explained how word spread quickly about the group: 'Recently the fact

that we do this has been getting around, and has become a discussion on Twitter and social media … our meetings have become somewhat famous actually'. I watched their numbers grow from just two or three young men at the end of 2015 to upwards of twelve by the spring of 2016. According to Sainō, group members were also now commuting considerable distances to take part in the gatherings, some riding the train for an hour and a half each way. 'I feel proud about that, and a sense of responsibility' he told me, 'because people are investing in this… so we've made it consistent, always on Tuesday evenings and always until the very last train leaves Kōenji.'

Kōenji Station presented a space of affordance for the rap musicians who had been unable to find somewhere to battle on the streets until Sainō invited them along after moving to the neighbourhood. In general Sainō's group had been well received by the public, who occasionally stopped to observe or ask questions, and also by the neighbourhood's other *rojō raibu* performers. Whisper and Sainō became friends who sat in the railway underpass sharing news and discussion every Tuesday evening. Other musicians were curious about the rappers and the overall impression was one of spiritual support, even if they had nothing to do with them personally. Much of this must be credited to Sainō, who in taking responsibility as the group leader took it upon himself to stop and talk to other street musicians around the station. It was his ability to share his rap group's activities with others, and in doing so situate the music and the battles within the context of Kōenji neighbourhood more generally, which enabled Sainō to steadily expand his troupe's activities around the station. When the group grew to double figures this became increasingly important because, relative to Kōenji *rojō raibu* spaces of performance, ten or twelve people was a number large enough to draw the attention of most people passing by.

Sainō made efforts to involve other musicians in the sounds they produced, asking the double-bass *rojō* performer Yuu if he would like to play a bass backing-track to their rap battles. 'We also change our playing spot if somebody else is using our preferred one, and move to either the north or south *hiroba* if the underpass is taken' Sainō told me. 'We know other people need this place like we do'. It was this intersection, the inscribable nature of Kōenji Station space, and Sainō's own savvy when acting upon it, which offered him and his rappers an opportunity to realise their regular Tuesday night sessions.

But why would a train station end up as the setting for a rap night in Tōkyō above other urban spaces? Why were walkways, *tsūro*, areas which demand constant movement from people within their boundaries, approached by musicians seeking a space of everyday affordance for their regular and stationary music performances? And why could such a situation be derived from Kōenji

Station? In answering these questions I will first explore the close association between the development of modern Tōkyō and its urban rail system, and analyse the conceptions of public space that make the station an attractive place for *rojō raibu.* Along the way I will demonstrate how emerging forms of urban space laid the foundation for processes of alleyisation, and for inscription of station environments. I will then move on to address how those playing music within the walkways and underpasses of Kōenji Station, who make alternative readings of station space in contrast to its mandate to keep moving, do so via a process of alleyisation that produces a *roji kūkan;* a context for local appropriations based upon the 'atmosphere of the backstreets'.

2.2 New experiences in the city as Tōkyō orientates around its rails

As early private commuter routes on electric street cars and trains grew in number between the early 1900s and 1911, such as those operating on the new Chūō or 'Central' line, they also became part of the national railway network whose multiple lines and routes wove through the centre of Tōkyō according to the requirements of the growing inner city. Fujii (1999) notes the introduction of service schedules and timetables here, around which the landscape and the people within it were newly adjusting. In 1907 the electric cars of the Chūō line would run each day from 4:45 a.m. to 11:06 p.m., with a new train expected every seven minutes (ibid: 29). Under this new regime of the rails, commuters began to experience new orientations and aspects of the city, and came into extended close contact with people of differing classes, ages and gender with whom they previously had few reasons to spend much time before the introduction of mass transportation systems.

The train car as a space of new social intimacy in public features in Freedman's (2011, 2002) exploration of the new captivating environments of railways as retold by successful authors of the time, and in particular, within Tayama Katai's *Shōjo byō* (*The Girl Fetish*), published in 1905. This fictional story transports the reader to a period when a colonisation of Tōkyō fringe areas had begun in earnest and the new middle-classes were acclimatising to patterns of life marked by suburban home life and extended commutes into and away from the central districts of the capital city. The protagonist, Sugita Kojo, a run-of-the-mill *sararīman* ('salaryman') in his late thirties with an office job and a family, is the archetype of many men cramming onto electric trains in the early mornings and late afternoons of a working day. Dissatisfied with his new family life in the suburbs, Sugita Kojo seeks refuge in his observations of young schoolgirls – another new social persona of the time and a common sight on the new railways – catalysed by the confinements of the carriage. In his tale, Tayama Katai lingers on Kojo's obsessions with the fine details of young females

temporarily sharing the same space as him, and the positions in the car best suited to 'girl watching'. In so doing the author demonstrates the spectacle wherein men and women of differing classes were forced to look upon one another in previously unexperienced physical proximity. The railways emerge from this story not only as a cause of modern discomfort and a bind to rigidly structured lifestyles, but as providers of a concomitant sense of excitement. An illicit thrill of shared public space was discovered within these narratives; the opportunity to observe others and to be observed in return, and the prospect of liberating albeit fleeting relationships.

These accounts indicate some of the first instances wherein the railway was seen to transcend its role as a transport system alone, bringing in elements of pleasure, panoptic and communal revaluations of social behaviours and realigning ideas of urban living. Georg Simmel (1969) has made the point that people all over the industrialising world were experiencing similar reactions to the visual distractions of mass transportation at the time. In the Tōkyō context, however, and through the literature on rail encounters, the station emerges as an institution of everyday living and a site of some of its most enduring figures; the still ubiquitous *sararīman* and the uniformed schoolgirl. The 1905 story *Shōjo byō*, and other works such as Natsume Soseki's 1907 novel *Sanshiro*, which depicts chance meetings and erotic possibilities on Tōkyō's trains, begin the first threads of an emerging discourse regarding urban dissatisfaction and the overwhelming influences of accelerating metropolitan lives and their negative consequences. It is, in this respect and at the end of the Meiji period, aptly placed that in the conclusion to Taiyama Katai's story, Sugita Kojo's increasingly pathological attempts to gaze upon schoolgirls in order to escape from his own mundane routines cause him to lean dangerously out of a rail carriage and fall to a bloody death under the wheels of an oncoming train.

Early literary accounts that chronicle the new kinds of social interaction occurring in railway spaces illustrate two important points: the advent of railway infrastructure as an increasingly central focus of the public imagination, and the railways as sites for social possibilities beyond their function as mass transportation. Concurrently, weak construction initiatives of the Meiji and Taishō[44] periods were put under considerable strain by the doubling of Tōkyō's population between 1895 and 1923 (Smith 1978), and the destruction of central city areas by the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923, pushing increasing numbers to outlying areas via rapid suburbanisation. The 1919 City Planning System decreed that all public facilities be approvable by the Home Ministry alone, resulting in a heavily centralised approach to planning regardless of local conditions (Sorensen 2001: 399). This

[44] The Meiji era lasted from 1868 until 1912, and the following Taishō era from 1912 until 1926.

bequeathed to a Post WWII Japan a legacy of city administration that ignored the needs of civil society. The centralisation of political power over urban governance resulted in an extreme lack of popular support for poorly executed designs leading to sprawl and uncomfortable neighbourhood environments marked by a conspicuous absence of green, public spaces. As some have suggested (Freedman 2011; Sorensen 2002; Jinnai 1995), the emergence of the transport node and also the station front *hiroba* was significant at this time, as they not only began to replace key multi-functional waterside areas as spaces combining transport and social interaction as a way to populate central areas, but appeared to take shape in some form as an alternative to the symbolic public squares appearing in Europe and reflecting social issues and patterns of modern living. Due to their increasing social significance over time they became sites of contestation as well as gathering.

Smith (1978) suggests that the streetcar system of early 20th century Tōkyō was not only a system but a site of political and social unrest, and candid disputes over ownership, fares and labour conditions. The railway nodes were becoming a part of the social milieu via increasing architectural dominance and spatial negotiation of people, and in this process they were also conspicuous and influential as urban sites of dialogue and tension. Freedman further notes that station buildings in places such as Shinjuku were themselves becoming focal points of social activity in the city:

'… urban practices could be observed in train stations, just as they could in the cinemas, department stores, cafes and dance halls that opened around them… Tōkyō's rapid spatial, social and cultural transformations were apparent in Shinjuku Station… as the central axis of and conduit for the neighbourhood, the terminal afforded a different view of Tōkyō society than could be seen on its trains, streetcars, buses and taxis' (2011: 117-118).

2.3 New stations, old towns

Though train stations became the nexus of modern Tōkyō in the early twentieth century, establishing the rhythms and typical patterns of suburban livelihoods, a series of events including the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 were followed by lacklustre reconstruction efforts that rehashed an Edo-like architecture of narrow streets in downtown areas (Ashihara 1992; Hiroo 2003; Seidensticker 1983; Hayase 1974). The persistence of narrow roads and labyrinthine residential areas in Tōkyō until today has been an important aspect of the way people understand and interact with city spaces. Jonas (2007) for instance explores the use of alleyways and micro-spaces in residential parts of town in creating informal gardens; potted plants, decorative and wall-hanging features collected in large quantities that encroach onto the street. According to Jonas, building

regulations allowing construction on one hundred percent of a plot in Tōkyō have encouraged the public use of backstreets and alleyways, particularly in the old *shitamachi* ('lower-city') districts that remain the most dense residential areas of inner Tōkyō today (2007: 21). By their common use, and the diversity of activities occurring within *roji* (backroads) of *shitamachi* districts, Jonas recognises the development of a *roji kūkan* ('alleyway space' or 'alleyway atmosphere') as a context of localised common use enabling small-scale, subtle appropriations of traffic ways.

In the urban history of Tōkyō in the first half and middle of the twentieth century, allied fire bombings that razed swathes of the city to the ground, and rising levels of central governance in spite of new local autonomy laws in the post-war period, compounded the neglect of social infrastructure and the provision of green and open spaces for city residents (Hiroo 2003; Sorensen 1999; Okamoto 1997). At this time, however, train stations were increasingly at the centre of an extraordinary progress of economic growth within post-war stabilisation and the democratisation efforts of the occupation-led administration (Sorensen 2002; Allinson 1997). Land-reform projects focused on station-front (*eki-mae*) areas of major Yamanote line train hubs such as Shinjuku, Shibuya and Ikebukuro, while black markets sprang up around Ueno Station among others (Cybriwsky 1991; Seidensticker 1990). Railways became a symbol of modern living in the metropolis. Around the time of the 1964 Tōkyō Olympics, department stores at private railway stations multiplied and intensified the multi-functionality of rail hubs (Cybriwsky 1991). Among them, Shinjuku Station became, and remains today, a bustling business and social centre at the heart of the capital's business district, and the busiest station in the world with millions of people passing through it each day. Shinjuku's own dense web of walkways, connective spaces, open areas, and station front *hiroba* have continued to be sites of human activity and gathering beyond their primary function as the architecture of transport.

Since emerging as sites of new social encounters at the turn of the twentieth century, railway stations in Tōkyō have become the centrepiece of its cities and towns; places where people pass through en masse and gather for recreation. The accumulation of popular department stores, restaurants, bars and other socially-orientated businesses around train stations, and the proliferation of station-front *hiroba*, attracted increasing numbers of people to stations as they came to be understood as quasi-public spaces. There have been cases that highlight what happens at the intersection of railway infrastructure and people's interpretations of these spaces, and in each case attempts to adopt station areas for personal projects and group endeavours have failed where the appropriation attempt became too conspicuous. 'Sticking out' as a major cause of failed attempts was due either to the dimensions and location of the space that groups infiltrated, or else the

visibility of their actions within the context of the surrounding political and social backdrop. Shinjuku Station, for instance, may contain more pockets of potentially usable station space for individuals and groups than any other in the world, but it is also a symbol of Tōkyō's modernisation and economic power, a neighbour to the headquarters of the Tōkyō Metropolitan Government (TMG), and is as such under the intensified gaze of station and local authorities. As I have already mentioned in this chapter, subtlety and local context are critical elements of any attempt to realise station areas as spaces of personal or group affordance. Before returning to Kōenji to understand how street musicians negotiate these issues within *rojō raibu*, I briefly look at two examples in which the attempt to utilise station space as public space has failed at Shinjuku Station.

2.4 Shinjuku's vanishing *hiroba*

In *Tokyo Vernacular*, Jordan Sand (2013) uses the case of Shinjuku's West Exit Underground Plaza (*nishiguchi chika hiroba*) in 1969 to demonstrate how a cluster of groups appropriated a part of the station for use beyond its function as a transport space. During the previous two years the station had already witnessed confrontation between citizens and the police when youth groups of *fūtenzoku* ('drifters') were removed from the East Exit, and in the following year when anti-war demonstrators caused disruption first outside and then inside the station complex (2013: 51). In 1969, however, members of student groups no longer able to amass on campus began making regular visits to the newly constructed West Exit *hiroba*, legally property of the TMG and railway companies, to hold debates. On Saturdays they were joined by another anti-war group of musicians, guitarists and singers, calling themselves 'folk guerillas'. This was not forceful demonstration, it was appropriation by people playing songs as onlookers stood or sat in circles, or broke off into their own discussion groups. Within a few months the gatherings became popular, with hundreds of people accumulating in the West Exit Underground Plaza on Saturday nights, including new groups subsequently attracted to the station for their own causes and purposes (2013: 53).

As with many Kōenji street performers, the folk guerrillas performed sets of an hour or two, though with decidedly more political messages. *Kujō* (complaints) were registered with local police officers from rail users who claimed they could not use the public telephones, and businesses argued that the gatherings were affecting their sales. Sand explains how recorded *kujō* enabled the police to begin dispersals under both the traffic law (*dōro kōtsūhō*) and the railway commerce law (*tetsudō eigyō hō*) (2013: 54), violations of which occurred often in Kōenji but resulted in irregular police interference at most. Increasingly aggressive police action eventually ended Saturday night gatherings at the

station, and were concluded with an official name change: from 'Shinjuku West Exit Underground Plaza' to 'Shinjuku West Exit Underground Concourse'.

The activists and folk guerrillas were the victims of their own success in attempting to gain visibility and popularity at Shinjuku Station. The replacement of 'plaza' (*hiroba*) with 'concourse' (*tsūro*) marked the end of a series of events Sand considers important because they were focused upon the interaction of strangers and unplanned communal solidarity (2013: 55). Of particular significance was the fact that the West Exit Underground Plaza was not publicly sanctioned space such as a park, and that the gathering crowds were multi-vocal. In Shinjuku the transient space of the station, central in the rising business district, had been infiltrated and claimed as a space for unrestricted access and gathering, not for achieving one specific political objective but for common rights to common space. The years following the 1969 incident at Shinjuku Station saw new theorisation of the *hiroba* after the prominent architect Itō Teiji determined that the events had powerfully demonstrated that no plaza existed in Japan as it had done in Greece as 'agora' or Italy as 'piazza'. Instead he offered an alternative, that *hiroba* in Japan existed as a form of *kaiwai* ('activity space') wherein public right of access was not guaranteed, but where other urban spaces could be made to share similar characteristics in the process of *hirobaka suru* ('make into a *hiroba*') (Sand 2013: 62).

2.5 1994: The West Exit thoroughfare homeless

Twenty-five years later one group attempted to do just that. One of the most famous cases of a claim on train station walkways is described in Hasegawa's (2006) study of Shinjuku Station between 1994 and 2002, wherein a coalition of activists, volunteers and homeless men struggled to protect a village of cardboard box shelters lining the covered passageways of the West Exit. Hasegawa's monograph is important because it not only demonstrates the ability of homeless men to physically construct a space for themselves within railway infrastructure in the form of cardboard dwellings, but it also highlights the contentiousness of this appropriation in a station that, above all others, still represented Tōkyō's rise as the centre of a powerful world economy during the Post-WWII period. While its leviathan size created clusters and pockets of seemingly useable space, Shinjuku Station was also protected by the metropolitan government for whom it represented modern Japan. As far as the Tōkyō administration were concerned, homeless men in the West Exit thoroughfares were 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1984), and increasingly so after the TMG relocated their headquarters to the end of the West Exit passageway in 1991 (Hasegawa 2006: 71).

Any visitor to the area today can clearly see the rounded nodules that mark the spot where homeless men once set up camp and that now act as a permanent deterrent to their return.

The fire that swept through the West Exit cardboard-box settlement, killing four people (Hasegawa 2006: 121), ultimately ended the struggle for the passageway space by proving that it was unsafe as a makeshift domicile, while the years-long struggle between activists, volunteers and the TMG highlights that governance of certain public spaces in Tōkyō is more intense than in other parts of the city. This is not to suggest that homeless men are left unharassed elsewhere, indeed ethnographic accounts demonstrate otherwise (see Gill 2001, 2005; Fowler 1996; Patari 2008; Margolis 2003), but rather that the heightened attention placed on Shinjuku Station by Japanese and international communities results in more intensive policing of its physical spaces. In Hasegawa's account, the perception of homeless men as *furōsha* ('vagrants') led to them being swept up as 'garbage' by the TMG. This case study demonstrates how location and local context are as important as the physical architecture in presenting opportunities for alternative participation in urban spaces, while scale and visibility are clearly also important factors determining whether people's conduct in public exceeds local boundaries of expected or normalised conduct. Despite appearances, Shinjuku's West Exit Underground Plaza and walkways were clearly not the kind of spaces described by Sand as 'neglected spaces' with the potential to act as a contemporary 'commons' (2013: 48), because they were also spaces heavily invested in and visible to the TMG.

As I have demonstrated so far in this chapter, the particular urban history of Tōkyō has focused the public imagination and practical day-to-day activities of its residents around the rail network. Consequently train stations have become focal points in the city where transport space is mixed with human socialising and enterprise. The density of construction throughout many parts of the city and particularly in residential areas has made the relatively open walkways and station-front areas attractive sites for a range of social activities. As a result conflicts of interest and transgressions of space and conduct have occurred. The visibility of such breaches has also made train stations attractive spaces for protest ranging from casual leaflet distribution to marches and sound demos (Obinger 2015; Smith 2014; Hayashi and McKnight 2005). Much more numerous than these are the micro-incursions that happen everyday: a drunk man slightly more inebriated than is usually tolerated, a fare-dodger, or a few market traders setting up along an exit way. The small scale of Kōenji Station, as well as its distance from the most central parts of Tōkyō, render it open to micro-incursions but also to appropriations that fall in between such micro-incursions and all-out claims to a space of dwelling or vocal political gatherings.

In the following return to Kōenji, discussions among local musicians reveal how the physical attributes of the station provide opportunities for *rojō raibu* by limiting visibility and the diffusion of sound, while the concentration of musicians and music-related activities ongoing in the surrounding neighbourhood create an environment for the tolerance of music performed in public. At Kōenji station, the balance of visibility and the subtlety of local incursions into railway spaces creates a temporary alleyisation of these spaces, a condition described by Christian Dimmer as that where 'administrative boundaries are ignored, and in their place *Yatai* (food carts) appear illicitly on nocturnal sidewalks, adolescents rehearse dance in front of mirrored office facades while signs prohibit them from doing so, and shop merchandise persistently encroaches on sidewalks, disregarding regulations' (2012: 80).

2.6 *Roji* and the domestication of a railway station

In Tetsu bar, a stone's throw from Kōenji Station's South Exit, Jack the shamisenist and I sat at the counter bar while Tetsu moved between us and the regular customers filling up the remaining seats. Having just come from the station where the rappers had been performing, I asked Jack what he thought about their recent appearance in the neighbourhood. 'They're great aren't they! Something completely new and exciting for the neighbourhood', Jack said. Jack was musing over the possibility that Sainō and his troupe might change the atmosphere of *rojō raibu* in Kōenji by bringing more collectivity to what he saw as a currently disparate group of individuals. Tetsu watched over us and listened as he dried a glass with a towel.

> 'There's plenty of atmosphere in Kōenji street music, sure. It's pretty dark and secretive somehow… like backstreets. I think that is the particular quality of *rojō raibu* here. Personally I've been getting tired of street music at the station recently because I don't feel much camaraderie with other performers. It is as though we use all our energy to connect with the public rather than each other. I definitely know some people like that, and I suppose Kōenji has that kind of "underground society" (*ura no shakai*), but for me it can be a lonely place too, and downbeat in mood. I think the space also lends itself to that kind of behaviour'

Jack looked up from the bar to Tetsu, who had just finished welcoming two regulars to their seats and was back to drying glasses. 'Kawasaki Station has a good atmosphere, right?' Jack said looking to him for support. 'Sure. Well, it's different anyway. They are another kind of musician perhaps or have their own set of reasons for doing street music? But Shinjuku Station's South Exit is different

again, also unlike Kōenji; different place and different people.' As Tetsu was called away Jack turned back to me;

> 'People know Kawasaki as a music town, just like they do Kōenji, and I've played there a few times at the station. It shares that atmosphere created by a lot of musicians coming together, but they also differ in big ways. I think for instance that you can call Kawasaki a "scene" more than you can say that about musicians here. The city hall (*shiyakusho*) in Kawasaki supports *rojō raibu* and many people are drawn to the comfort and security that the station provides for people who play there. It's all set up for the musicians. So the atmosphere is really healthy, more open and positive. I always think it would be good if Kōenji became more like that, but then I suppose in Kōenji musicians have to be careful when playing in ways that they don't in Kawasaki. People in Kawasaki use amps and mics all the time, they play whenever they want, and the quality is pretty high actually, higher than here, right master?'

Tetsu looked less convinced about this comment, replying simply, 'Well, I don't know about that… .' Jack pulled some coins out of his pocket and began arranging them on the counter bar as he explained to me what he considered to be the main physical differences between Kōenji and Kawasaki train stations. 'Kōenji is cramped … that's the image here' (*Kōenji wa ne, nanka kyūkutsu no imēji*), Jack said wrinkling up his nose and squinting, 'Suginami Ward should do more to celebrate and support the street musicians here…, it's a waste (*mottainai*)'. As he talked he grew stronger in his opinion that musicians in Kōenji are at a disadvantage to those playing in Kawasaki, and that he and other *rojō* performers must make the most of the way the station is laid out and find their own niche:

> 'Now that I think about it there really is a space problem in Kōenji (he begins to push coins around on the counter, drawing out an imaginary station map in silver and bronze yen). Here is the station, the rails across the top, coming in from Shinjuku to the east and running away to the west, with the square shape of the station underneath them. Perpendicular to the rails are the exits, South Exit on one side, North Exit on the other. Then rail underpasses on the west and east sides of the station - two on the eastern end if you include the second one where McDonalds is. Because the space is broken up in this way, people end up performing back-to-back (*senakaawase*) and separated from one another. Although that does mean that multiple musicians can play at the same time and attract their own audience. At Kawasaki station there are two floors, and if you go up to the second floor there is a huge open space, a square. Kōenji has nowhere near that amount of space. People play around the edge of that square

facing inwards, and while they might not be physically as close to one another as they are at Kōenji sometimes, they are facing towards each other. They see one another. And those people do go and say hello and have a chat with other musicians. So I think the atmosphere comes from the space… at least a considerable part of it. In Kōenji this square shape is the station building and so people play around it facing outwards … So maybe the individuality of Kōenji street performers comes from that somehow, maybe that's why it feels more secretive.'

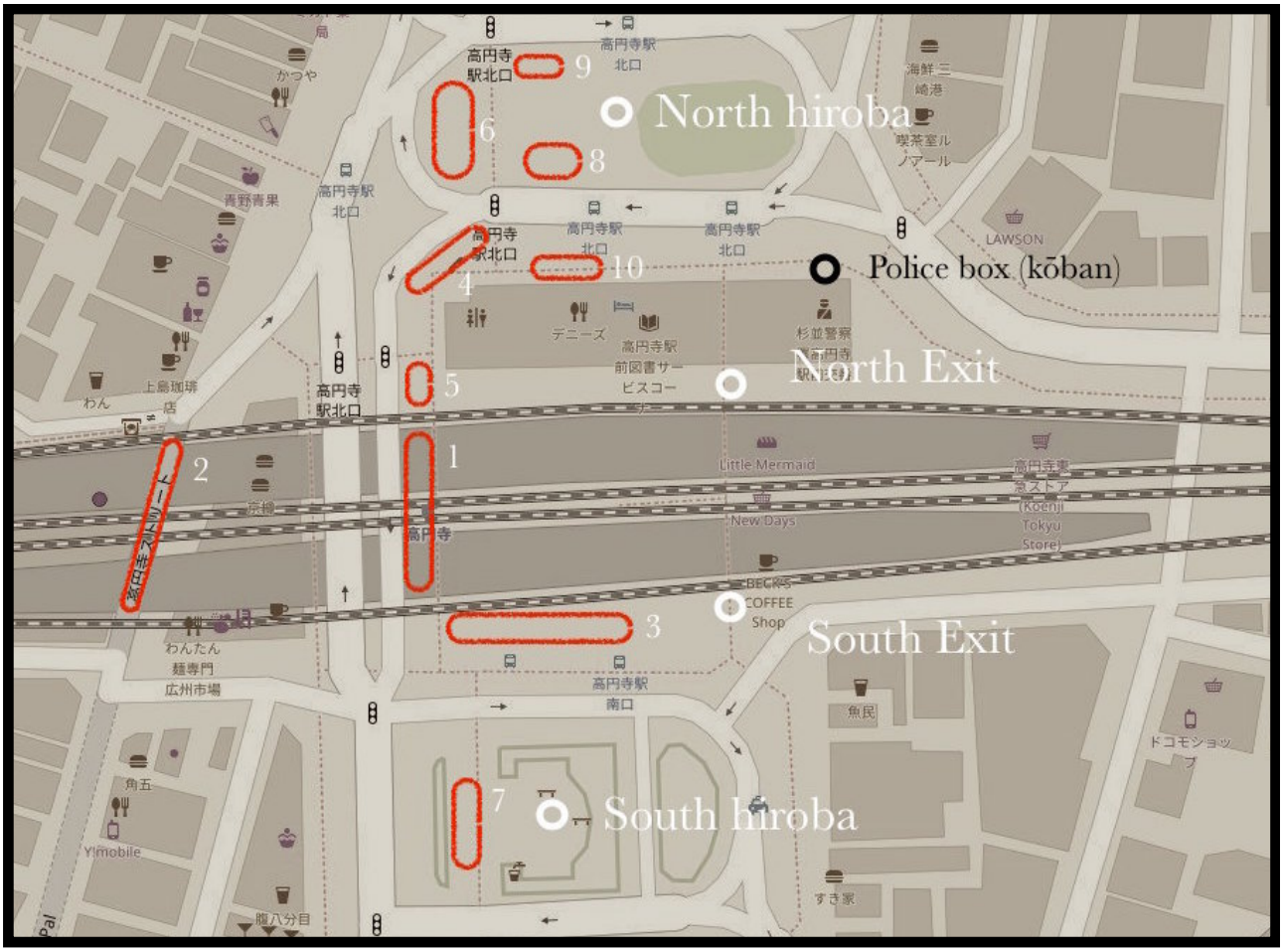

Fig. 17: Kōenji Station's spatial layout and performance pitches by popularity. See Map 5 for a larger version with a key.[45]

Under the rails Sainō told me that it was the dislocated quality of the playing areas around the station that made the neighbourhood the easiest place to play for them in Tōkyō;

[45] Map source: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=19/35.70536/139.64984

> 'The police leave us alone as long as the staff in the shops around here don't file a complaint. When we are here under rail tracks we are somehow separated from the main parts of the station… it is more difficult to see us in here, and it is less well lit. Sometimes it doesn't even feel like it is part of the station, you know? Then, even if we get kicked out, there are other options we can try before giving up… the next passageway along by McDonalds, or the *hiroba* on either side. Usually we find a way by moving around. Its nothing like Asagaya, seriously! We don't even last *two minutes* there [Sainō laughs]!'

The intervention of the police in *rojō raibu* activities influenced the ways in which street musicians perceived the station and approached music performance. The relationships between musicians and *kōban* (police box) officers or Japan Rail guardsmen also varied and were influenced by the severity with which station *tsūro* were policed. I address these issues later on in this chapter, as well as in the conclusion. In conversation Jack lamented that as a musical town, Kōenji could not be 'more like Kawasaki Station', though he conceded that Kōenji Station was a different kind of space altogether. While he contemplated the possibility that Sainō's group might affect Kōenji *rojō raibu* 'in a positive way', he was ultimately projecting his own personal hopes for the creation of a street music scene like the one he envisioned at Kawasaki.[46] Sainō's rappers were learning to play street music at Kōenji based upon the local spatial and social qualities of the station particular to its neighbourhood.

Unlike Kawasaki as described by Jack, Kōenji did not present the perfect circumstances for uninterrupted performance but, as Itō concluded following the 1969 Shinjuku Station *hiroba* case, a space needed to be made for performance (*hirobaka suru*), and maintained with reference to the particular local conditions. This meant embracing the *roji*, or 'back-alley' qualities that Jack described as particular to the spatial arrangement of the station; qualities most prominent in the railway underpasses that connected the two major walkways transporting bodies to and from the north and south exits. *Rojō* musicians like Jack and Sainō could not approach and act upon the station environment as an 'open commons' in the way that the 'folk guerrillas' attempted to do in Shinjuku in 1969. Indeed, their behaviour illustrates a perspective closer to that of Kimitsu in Gill's study of affordance located *in between* direct claims to space and docile acceptance of the railway station as a place of transit alone. As street music was not a wholly permissible activity, the association of the musicians' preferred spots as *tsūro* within the operation of the railway hub needed

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[46] The Kawasaki Jack envisioned as sympathetic to street music has also seen harsh expulsions of homeless people during 2007/2008, and the installation of anti-homeless devices such as sloping-top coin lockers within the station that prevent homeless men from storing anything on top of them.

to be 'loosened' (Jacobs 1961; Frank and Stevens 2006). As Sainō's comments above attest, Kōenji was not off limits, like neighbouring Asagaya had become, his group just had to know how to create the right circumstances and the right atmosphere for their public rap battles.

2.7 *Roji kūkan* at Kōenji, and Japanese conceptions of public space

I return now to Jonas's (2007) research on informal street gardens in Tōkyō. Focusing on the neighbourhood of Tsukishima Jonas notes that rows and stacks of flowerpots, *bonsai* and small shrubs line the ground outside many residential homes, and in some parts they have become so omnipresent and beautifully crafted that they attract sight-seers to the area. Jonas locates her informal gardens in a social and historic setting particular to Japan, and traces a connective thread back through a combination of urban features of contemporary Tōkyō and pre-reformation Edo in order to explain not only why small appropriations such as the street gardens are tolerated, but how this is a necessary socio-spatial attribute of the metropolis. In Tsukishima, the gardens present a legal and procedural grey area because they are 'illegal, or unofficial' and moreover, because there is no bureaucratic framework in place for dealing with them (2007: 18). For Jonas however, what is important is the treatment of the pedestrian areas by locals, which she argues draws upon Edo period *shitamachi* understandings of alleyisation processes that include a sense of communal access in practices of appropriation and place making. By producing *roji kūkan* , informal garden makers engaged in subtle and locally-sensitive appropriations of the small plots of useable urban space they had.

With its connection to Edo, *shitamachi* understandings of social behaviour within the context of localised architecture and urban form, *roji kūkan* also presents a useful lens for viewing the subtleties of street performers' appropriations of station spaces. As Dimmer (2012) pointed out, *kōkyō kūkan* (literally 'public space') only really emerged in Japan in 2007 (see also Shinohara 2007), though he acknowledges the prior existence of a sense of people's space or social 'lived space' (Soja 1996). Cassegard (2011) also notes that it is helpful to bring in other Japanese concepts of relations with space when researching contested parts of the city, and he uses the battle over the privatisation of Miyashita park in Shibuya ward to illustrate how the language used in discussing rights to access did not revolve directly around 'public space'. Following Amino Yoshihiko's idea of *muen* in Edo society, wherein spaces of 'non-relation' or 'cut ties' were provided in public for those needing sanctuary from personal circumstances, Cassegard suggests that Miyashita Park served as a similar location for

individuals who sought out varying degrees of freedom from the demands and repression of hierarchical relations (2011: 410).

Fig. 18: Kōenji Station's north *hiroba* is a popular gathering space in the evenings.

Though a variety of people benefit from such a space, in Miyashita it was visibly the homeless who relied on refuge the most. Between 2008 and 2010, a series of protests by activists, artists, homeless people and other citizens erupted against planned renovations that would see a new commercially-focused green space under the control of Nike Corporation and administered in tandem with Shibuya Ward. When closure was confirmed, protestors squatted in the park, busily organising workshops, concerts and readings in an attempt to realise their vision of a space for all. It is the ideas relating to this series of sit-in events that Cassegard concentrates on, recognising in them concepts that remain in the public imagination since the post-war 1960s era of public space debates, writings by Maruyama and Yoshimoto, but also the idea of *muen*, and the notion of *akichi* or 'vacant lot' (2011: 417). Cassegard demonstrates that those involved in protests eschewed the generalised term *kōkyō kūkan* for more context specific and historically placed ideas, which they believed had

been neglected due to the excessive focus in contemporary Japan on *kō* - 公, the first character of *kōkyō kūkan* - connoting official or government authority. By contrast, the premodern terms *muen* and *akichi* represent a temporary counter-public space of exit, which is precisely what protests against Nike and Shibuya Ward were intended to protect.

Fumihiko Maki's (1979) discussion of *roji* is important, setting the distinction of public life very clearly and nostalgically between *omote* ('front') spaces and *ura* ('back') spaces, wherein *omote* represents the increasingly compartmentalised conditions of modern city planning and *ura* the spontaneous sociability of the back streets. However, neither historically nor in modern Japan have train station spaces offered such a clean break. I suggest rather that it is the spaces in between these two opposites where *rojō raibu* exists as a space of affordance, where the 'right kind' of possibilities are present and acted upon by Kōenji's street musicians. In conversation with the performer Tassan, the station spaces' 'in between' quality as attractive to musicians comes through:

> 'It never occurs to me to play anywhere else…For example, I think there is less association with parks and music than train stations. At least for me anyway. The schedule is wrong, because parks are mostly used in the daytime, and what is the point of playing when people are at work? But also you don't get the same atmosphere and energetic rhythms; it can be flat. Yoyogi and Ueno parks are too large perhaps, others are too small and not enough people walk by… or else my playing would be a nuisance to others (*meiwaku wo kakeru*). There is something special here in Kōenji, lots of musicians, live houses, and the station at the centre of it. You aren't allowed to be here but you *can* be here if you do it right. That makes performing more interesting for me, and I think more interesting for people who discover musicians playing here.'

2.8 Making noise, being a nuisance, and obstructing flow

The grey area of permission and illegality raised by Tassan, of visibility understood by Sainō and the rappers, and as a part of the process of producing *roji kūkan* at Kōenji Station, was also a product of the particular practices of policing ongoing in the neighbourhood. The behaviour of the police appeared inconsistent: they would tell musicians to leave on a given evening, and not on others. I had several conversations with local *kōban* officers about this. On one such occasion in July 2014, a young officer said to me:

> 'There are no particular laws or policies governing our control of street performances exactly, so we must decide if the musicians are causing a problem to the surrounding people, shops, offices and homes. Also, disturbing automobile or people traffic is a problem.'

This particular officer sympathised with Kōenji *rojō* musicians, telling me that he thought that they were doing nobody any harm most of the time, and that he had only ever needed to issue a 'warning' (*chūi*) and had never heard of an arrest being made. He claimed that money received as a gratuity or as a sale of music CDs had no bearing on the officers' decision to issue a warning. This contrasted with the JR railway guards, who appeared on occasion in their blue uniforms before performers to announce that unpermitted consumer activity on station grounds was forbidden. What the *kōban* officers reacted to most strongly was noise (specifically, complaints about noise) and the accumulation of crowds. I tested the young officer with a hypothetical situation. 'Which is worse,' I asked, 'a musician with no fans, a mic and an amplifier, or a musician without amplification but a gathering audience?'. 'The audience', he replied immediately, 'the crowds and the obstruction is the greater problem.'

Most of the content of my conversations with local police was consistent with the official stance stated at higher levels of authority and in written law. Through a conversation with a Traffic Advice Officer for the Tōkyō Metropolitan Police, I was told that the policing of street music or performances of any kind was done with reference to article 77 of the Street Traffic Law (*dōro kōtsū-hō*).[47] Paragraph four of this article authorises the stoppage of any activity that obstructs the free flow of people and automobile traffic, though street musicians are not specifically mentioned. This would, however, account for the Kōenji officer's main concern with the gathering of crowds. Article 78 of the same law addresses the requirement for a permit for public performances involving traffic routes and walkways, but the Traffic Advice Officer believed that these were one-off event permits designed for festivals (*matsuri*) rather than regular street music. Elsewhere, article 18 of the Tōkyō Road Traffic Regulations (*tōkyō dōro kōtsū kisoku*) states that a permit is required for any performance likely to draw a crowd, including musical and dramatic performances, speeches and broadcasting.[48] From the information in these articles, from discussions with TMG police and local kōban officers, and the Shinjuku office of the Heaven Artist Project I referred to in the thesis introduction, it appears that only Heaven Artist permits are given out to individual street musicians, though each

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[47] See full text here: http://law.e-gov.go.jp/htmldata/S35/S35HO105.html

[48] See full text here: http://www.reiki.metro.tokyo.jp/reiki_honbun/g10121990001.html

kind is technically required. The Heaven Artist permits can take up to a year to acquire, however, and it is well worth noting that Kōenji is not among the project's listed official performance spaces.

The reality on the street in Kōenji was that nobody had a permit to play. No musician I met considered them necessary or worth the bother of attempting to acquire. From time to time, a street performer would be approached by a *kōban* officer and told that a complaint (*kujō*) had been received, or that they were making too much noise or a disturbance. No musician I knew ever demonstrated or complained. They simply packed up, moved on and returned later on or the following day. Towards the latter half of my research, in 2015 and 2016, formal warnings (*keikoku*) were occasionally issued by the local police in paper form, requiring identification, an address and a signature below an agreement not to return. Most signed this form and continued to perform as they always had. Musicians such as Whisper and Hayashi often claimed to have forgotten their wallet and so provided false information. Police officers looked unimpressed by this technique, but in most cases simply accepted the obvious ruse, leaving the musicians with a verbal warning and a promise to remember their face.

Over time, police interference was a constant factor in street music, occurring in increasing and decreasing waves of frequency and intensity. The musicians were ambivalent about them, and as Sainō recognised, Kōenji officers seemed to be kinder to musicians than Asagaya police. Avoiding or managing the authorities was another part of negotiating the station *tsūro*. It is another aspect that blurs and greys the station spaces as in between *omote* and *ura* spaces, and one in which alleyisation processes and affordances for street music depend upon a constantly changing balance of visibility. The police could be a hindrance to these processes, but at times and for some musicians, they were also an important part of *rojō raibu*.

2.9 Coda: Reina, Sayaka and Hitomi, the need for visibility in street music

In the final part of the chapter I return to the question of balance between subtlety in street performance and its visibility to others. Sainō's rappers acted as a group, creating *roji* spaces within which performers could face one another and battle by using the shelter of underpasses and the involvement of other musicians and the public to create a subtle permissibility. Here, however, I turn the model on its head by considering three female street musicians who for various reasons wanted to increase their visibility. Not only did they intend to incorporate the station's central neighbourhood position within attempts to attract an audience, they also relied upon the

atmosphere of a lively performance and the presence of police to avoid the dangers of playing alone at night in public spaces.

Female street musicians were some of the most vociferous on matters relating to the match between *rojō raibu* and train stations, often suggesting that safety was as significant as having the chance to play in front of others, meet people, distribute flyers or sell CDs. The ability to leave quickly and easily was as important as being able to arrive for Reina, Hitomi and Sayaka. I met Reina one evening in Kōenji's second underpass; she was visiting from Aichi prefecture on a self-proclaimed 'musical pilgrimage' of Tōkyō's street venues. Reina was very approachable, our conversation becoming easier and less restrained as we shot the breeze between each of her songs. I was particularly interested in the decision she made to wear a faux-leather wrestling mask as she played. 'I thought it might get me some extra attention', She said grinning. Indeed it did. People stopped to take photos and some made efforts to talk to her. One passing couple insisted that she must be a famous musician hiding her identity behind the mask. Later on that night Reina confided in me that she was worried about a man who had approached her earlier on in the evening: 'He was in his mid-forties, he gave me this card and said that he could help me with some connections in the music business if I would meet him at half-past ten tonight… what do you think?'. I asked Reina how she felt while talking to him, to which she replied,

> 'I thought he was a bit suspicious, especially because he wanted to go for a drink, insisting that it would be better to talk things over rather than discuss it by email. I just said that I would probably still be here at that time if he wanted to come back… I probably shouldn't have said that.'

'Wait, what time is it now?', I asked Reina. She looked at her phone and shrieked, 'Agh! It's nearly ten thirty! What should I do? Let's run away!'. The two of us hurriedly picked up her guitar, mic stand and portable amplifier and fled the underpass, speed-walking our way to the station ticket gates, where we stood for a while getting our breath back before Reina finally left to catch her train.

Fig. 19: Reina's leather wrestling mask grabbed the attention of people passing through the second underpass (Map 5, position 2).

Unlike Reina, Sayaka and Hitomi were both regular performers at Kōenji Station with whom I often met during the week and interviewed semi-formally at a local cafe in the spring of 2016. Both were in their early twenties when I met them and played at their preferred pitches at the station around two or three times week, though Sayaka was more unpredictable than Hitomi and would sometimes appear more frequently. As women they experienced *rojō raibu* in circumstances not unlike those of female train passengers in Gertreuer-Kargl's (2012) and Steger's (2013) study of the male gaze within the gendered spaces of train carriages. These studies demonstrate how women react to being looked upon by men by restricting the radius of their movements on trains, for instance by faking sleep (*inemuri)* or by deflecting exercises such as applying make-up. Steger also uses her research to question whether or not women's behaviour in public spaces in contemporary society is a sign of increasing defection from expected life courses. Inversely, female street musicians' performances aimed to attract the gaze and attention of strangers. Of the female *rojō* performers I knew, all had stories about men who behaved badly or made them feel unsafe during an evening's session at the station. However, most felt that the degree of 'publicness' of the station grounds at

Kōenji would prevent men from behaving too inappropriately, or that they were capable of leaving if the situation became too dangerous.

During our interview, Sayaka told me that when playing live she feared the police, male harassment and theft the most, but that recent events had prompted her to accept and even seek out positions near to the local station *kōban*. She stopped playing in Asagaya altogether after an incident in the summer of 2014 involving two young men, who feigned an interest in her music, pretended to work for a music company and then stole her smartphone while one of the two men distracted her. 'Since that day I have tried not to play alone if I can', she said, 'and certainly not in an isolated place. That's why I only play solo in Kōenji now, and even then I have moved to the second archway where it is well lit and where other artists and musicians sit under the rails'. Hitomi, who had not had the frightening experience that Sayaka had endured, was more contemplative about the dangers of street music at night, recognising the benefits as well as the dangers of late night performances at the station:

> 'It's mostly drunk people! There are good and bad ones. The good ones enliven the performance and stir things up in a helpful, positive way. They might also give money or buy a CD, the drunks especially. But the scary ones don't respect my personal space, or even wait until the performance is finished to approach me, then sometimes one will invite me out drinking with them… that can be creepy. Most people are fine of course, but occasionally strange ones turn up. What is great is that when good people come together and watch, it forms a protective barrier against those people who would otherwise engage in that behaviour. So for those reasons being in a busy place is also a safety precaution; as you know I always play by the crossing on the north side, which is visible from the station exit, the *kōban* and the *hiroba*. I don't play late at night either for these reasons… For me it's fine until about 9:00 p.m.'

Fig. 20: Kōenji Station's bicycle parking area (Map 5, position 5) presented a comfortable balance of visibility and shelter for Sayaka.

Reina, Hitomi and Sayaka clearly modified their performances in the face of a perceived or experienced threat, and they understood Kōenji Station to be a place where they could increase their personal safety easily by moving to a new spot or changing the time of day in which they performed. While like Sainō and the rappers they incorporated a transgression of transport space and appropriation of the walkways and underpasses into their performances as musicians, they also involved the surrounding neighbourhood in their personal musical projects that concomitantly ensured their safety when engaging strangers. Despite differences in their approaches to street music, whether seeking a space out of view and earshot or a position to catch as many locals and commuters as possible, Kōenji performers at the train station worked within subtle and often brittle margins. Theirs was the point at which the transport hub touches and blends into the surrounding

neighbourhood, like seawater dampening sand as it laps at the beach; is that patch part of the sea or part of the land? Just as the tide determines the answer, so do time and space regulate the relative availability of railway infrastructure to groups like street musicians. By negotiating the station's timetable and its walkways, and overlaying their own, in bringing locals into the soundscape of street music by temporarily gathering people within a performative moment, the musicians created a sense of Fumihiko Maki's *roji*, and I argue, *roji kūkan* through the alleyisation of station space.

2.10 Conclusion

In Gill's (2015) study of a Japanese day labourer in Yokohama, the subject of his study, Kimitsu, claimed that his particular circumstances created a frame though which he viewed life in the city. Life was tough, but there were also ways of getting by and even some advantages that his life afforded him. In this chapter I have investigated the affordance that street musicians seek and work to maintain at Kōenji railway station. The walkways and underpasses around the station are *tsūro*, passageways built to enable the uninhibited flow of passengers and the general public into and away from the rail hub. *Rojō raibu* is an activity that requires musicians to infringe upon the modus operandi of station *tsūro,* not only by remaining in place, but also by drawing the attention of moving crowds. When Sainō and his group of rappers began performing at the station on Tuesday evenings it was the first time that rap, and its inclusive and group-orientated battling style of play, had appeared in Kōenji. Their appearance, progress, and the increasing membership of the troupe made them an interesting case, and one that spoke to central questions addressed in the chapter: Why are train stations attractive to a range of musicians with different goals? How are they able to be there and to do it? And why specifically at Kōenji? I have argued that part of the answer lies within the historical process of urban change in Tōkyō, which has seen the increasingly central role of train stations within the economic and social landscape of the metropolis. The continued presence of dense *shitamachi* (downtown) urban districts where useable space is restricted to *roji,* or narrow roads and backstreets, has created a climate wherein processes of alleyisation have become normalised in parts of the city. Examples such as the proliferation of informal street gardens are indicative that subtle inscriptions of space that are sensitive to a local context can be successful.

The Kōenji that Jack described in conversation as a 'dark', 'undersurface of society' (*ura no shakai*) for the musician who played street music at the station was also a fundamental aspect of Sainō and the rappers' attempt to alleyise the station *tsūro.* The rappers pitched their performances with a subtlety that belied their numbers. Sainō made efforts to embed the group's activities within the

local context of street performance by introducing himself to other musicians at the station and by asking them to collaborate instrumentally. He reduced tensions with others by moving to different pitches around the station when their favourites were taken, and the rappers also reduced the visibility of their incursions by playing in those parts of the station that were darkest and most sheltered from view. I have argued that in order to play *rojō raibu* at the train station, musicians needed to understand and manage their visibility, whether visually, sonically or socially in the context of the local neighbourhood and the public view of Kōenji as a town with a rich musical heritage.

Maki's (1979) discussion of *roji* attests to a central point about Kōenji street music, that the city presents 'front' and 'back' spaces, those where participation is highly regulated and those wherein there is a propensity for a variety of activities to take place. It falls short, however, in explaining spaces such as Kōenji *tsūro,* which fluctuate between the two. The variety of approaches to *rojō raibu* at Kōenji also includes those where high visibility is desired, whether for exposure to the largest number of potential new fans, or for personal safety late at night. While the shape of street music between Sainō's rap group and musicians such as Reina, Hitomi and Sayaka, contrasted greatly, they all approached the station as a space of affordance for their music. With the continual threat of the station *tsūro* being reclaimed by police interference, as occurred at Asagaya, and the changing balance of station traffic throughout the day, the street performers produced and maintained a subtle appropriation: a *roji kūkan* that made playing at Kōenji temporarily possible. It was the cumulative impact of these determining forces at Kōenji which created the 'right kind' of possibilities; the affordance of the everyday life of street music.

Chapter 3

Small spaces of amplification: expanding the boundaries of street music

'I think there is a general perception among people here that street musicians are failures. They play on the streets because they aren't good enough to play in a band and perform at decent live houses (*hetakuso na imēji de, band mo raibuhausu mo chanto yarenai kara*)'

- Shingo, 29. Bassist and band member at UFO Club.

'Aren't street musicians just loners who can't get by in a band?'

- Kaname, 34. DJ at ONE bar.

'Street music here… above all, it's such a typical "Kōenji" thing to do!' (*koko no rojō raibu … naniyorimo Kōenji poi katsudō dayone*)

- Daisuke, 44. Master at a bar on Minanmi Yon Chōme Road.

'When one shop-owner told me that I should "get out of Kōenji as soon as I can" and perform elsewhere, he was worried that Kōenji would hold me back and this was based upon his opinion that the town is full of failures, of musicians that are licking their wounds together (*kizu no name*)'

- Jack, 30. Shamisen player and street performer.

As my research progressed and I moved from place to place I was offered opinions about *rojō raibu* performers by Kōenji residents, commuters, restaurant and bar staff, non-street performing musicians and the owners and operators of live house establishments. These opinions, some of which are presented above, exposed a general notion of street musicians as a group of individuals

who had failed in professional music and were reduced to seeking an audience outside among the general public.

Everyone had an opinion about street music, though these ideas were seldom reflected in the actual experiences of my informants and were mostly based upon snapshot impressions as people walked or cycled passed the station's walkways and caught sight of a still, lone musician. Isolation was both the appeal and the curse of street musicians in the eyes of Kōenji locals, liberating them beyond the usual concerns of daily life in the city but simultaneously causing disconnection from the world that passed in front of them. As the *rojō* musicians I knew were mostly solo street performers they certainly had a different experience of music in Kōenji to the band circles and independent scenes of punk, hardcore, noise, indie and psychedelic that revolved around selected live houses in the neighbourhood. But what was the reality experienced by the musicians I got to know? Did *rojō* musicians belong to a 'scene' or to any kind of network that supported and complemented their street practices? Were they really as isolated as people imagined them to be?

I put some of these questions to the *rojō* musicians Hitomi, Sayaka, Whisper and Koba during semi-formal interviews conducted at a cafe on Minami Yon Chōme road, just south of the station in January 2016. 'I don't think it's possible to think of Kōenji *rojō* as a scene' Hitomi claimed, '… besides, the police get stricter all the time and so with their interference there isn't really much chance for one to develop. Also, where is the mutual support? The networks?' Sayaka was equally perplexed by the notion of a *rojō raibu* scene existing in the same way as indie music or noise music scenes do in the area: 'Is there one? Sometimes I'll talk to other performers, and maybe we'll exchange Twitter details. Usually it'll be the ones around my age. Then we might keep in touch online, and sometimes a friendship develops. But there are lots of performers around here who have no particular interest in connecting with the rest of us.' When I asked Whisper the same question, however, he extended the boundaries defining his imagined street music scene to include local live houses.

> 'Scenes are quickly changing in Kōeni, and I think *rojō* is a part of that sometimes. But it is never a constant thing and it doesn't all fit together evenly. For example, I feel connected to the venue Muzenji, and maybe to Reef live house as well, but I don't think it really expands outwards from those places for me (*soko kara hirogaranai*). Even if it did, I don't think that everyone experiences Kōenji in the same way. If I play Muzenji and *rojō* in the same evening, does that make them part of the same scene?.'

In addressing that same question Koba offered an opinion that spoke to Whisper's conundrum:

> 'Isn't it like the question of whether or not what *rojō* musicians do is subculture or not? Isn't it just a matter of perspective? I think that people who aren't involved in music and do an office job might consider all Kōenji music to be a form of subculture just like they think of Kōenji as a subculture town. But those people in music see it differently. They see more layers and more depth and understand differences within a scene. So perhaps subculture is just a perspective. But music for people like me is the "main", so its all "main-culture". It all depends on what you call it I suppose. But if we are talking about support and something like a community, then I think that live houses are our version of that.'

Over the course of my research in Tōkyō, Koba eventually moved away from street music to focus upon a regular series of shows he had begun playing at Alone live house. While he talked about returning to the street, he hadn't done so by the time I completed my fieldwork in Kōenji in May 2016. Like Hitomi and Sayaka, Koba believed that what he did was essentially based on an image of himself as a lone musician: 'I think a lot of musicians are like me, they don't have the confidence to connect with others'. Yet Koba's story since moving to the neighbourhood had been one of searching for this connection, whether it existed or not. About Alone he said, 'The other Alone musicians are like me. Their experiences of everyday life compel them to express their feelings through music. We all do that at Alone.' This sounds remarkably close to Bennet and Peterson's (2004) description of a 'scene' in which shared tastes form the basis of a group's differentiation from others. But the act of classifying Alone as a live house scene, or indeed a subculture, in which Koba participated is unhelpful in a context where so many street performers denied belonging to one or had different ideas about how their own street music fitted into the broader narrative of music in Kōenji town. Colleen Heine (2012) noted toward the end of her article about the Savannah Georgia music scene that when examined in more detail it actually resembled small clusters of activity that were disconnected from one another. This created a problem for Heine because many musicians in her study claimed unity with others to be at the core of the scene's continuity; 'disjointedness and insularity are at odds with the single most common theme that emerged from this ethnographic research: *music unites people*' (2012: 212, Heine's emphasis).

When focused on the station, street musicians denied the existence of a cohesive scene connecting individuals together. As with Heine's discovery, their *rojō raibu* was not part of a sprawling and interconnected networks of music spaces and venues, but 'disjointed and insular', and illustrative of how street musicians created their own individualised experiences of connection with other

musicians, and to spaces and live houses in the neighbourhood. Their own personal 'scenes' were a tight web woven between independent points of the neighbourhood to personal specification. What they achieved in doing so was to blur the boundaries of social, commercial, and transport spaces in Kōenji. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, *rojō raibu* was capable of incorporating other 'clusters' of musical activity, of straddling the borders of other scenes and venues in order to find support, to build close relationships, and to take part in modes of performance that exceeded the limitations of their station activities. In taking a closer look at the relationships between street musicians and three live venues in Kōenji, I aim to demonstrate how even the 'loner' street musicians of the neighbourhood wove webs of connection and support for themselves: how they participated in circles invisible to commuters passing them by at the station, despite never once belonging to, or claiming to belong to, one of the neighbourhood's visible scenes.

Beginning with Muryoku Muzenji, a tiny live house under the railway tracks, I consider how the live house master's[49] disinclination to impose rules of performance, and his belief that live music is nothing more than a 'way' for individuals to express themselves among others, attracted *rojō raibu* players Harada and Whisper to become regular performers. Regardless of the differences in the way Harada and Whisper interpreted their thirty minutes on stage, they both drew upon the *hinichijō* (extraordinary) atmosphere incubated within the live house to create idealised versions of their street performance and to experience the full attention of an audience with whom they shared camaraderie within the context of the evening's events.

I move on to explore the close teacher-pupil relationship between Koba and the master of Alone live house, Inoue. In a contrast to Muzenji, social relationships at Alone were structured around strict codes of performance and seniority. Far from limiting his musical activities, however, Koba found that his *senpai-kōhai* (senior-junior) relationship of mentorship with the master gave his engagement in music the structure and legitimacy he found lacking within *rojō raibu* at the station. In exchange for Koba's patronage of Alone, Inoue provided performance and vocal training, access to other experienced musicians and a framework for charting his progress in the form of after-gig meetings or*uchiage* ("after-party"), wherein he received group feedback, advice and praise.[50] At a difficult personal junction, and disconnected from his previous regular patterns of work, his

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[49] In live houses and bars in Tōkyō, the owner or manager is often referred to as 'master' (*masuta-*) by their customers.

[50] An *uchiage*, meaning to 'launch forward', is an event in Japan that commonly occurs after the completion of a project or task in which a group of people were involved together. It is considered a 'closing party' to celebrate a successful completion. In music, an *uchiage* will usually include the participating bands and their close friends, and involve drinking and eating as well as the settlement of any outstanding payments.

connections with Alone live house helped Koba to reestablish a sense of who he was in relation to others around him in the absence of identity-affirming institutions.

Lastly I look at the case of Traghetto live bar, and the house band led by a musician commonly known as 'Spaghetti'. Connections between Spaghetti, the bar owners and his supporters were established through a series of movements back and forth between the second railway underpass at Kōenji Station and Traghetto music bar on Friday nights. By building an audience on the street and inviting them back to the nearby venue, Spaghetti and his bandmates blurred the boundaries of both *rojō raibu* and live house performances, producing extended sessions late into the night that gradually accumulated a fanbase and local popularity in the neighbourhood.

3.1 Muryoku Muzenji and extraordinary performance

Sutorīto (Street) *shōtengai* runs directly underneath the mainline rail tracks, bathed in a dim yellowish overhead lighting in the evening. Built in 1978 during Japan's Shōwa era, it has been described by one author as the 'slums of Suginami Ward' (*suginami no hinmingai*) (Ōsaka 2014) owing to its collection of cheap eateries, drinking holes, *teishoku* (set menu) restaurants and its dark, unpretentious decor. Towards the end of the long passageway lined by these lively little establishments a small doorway opens on to a narrow set of stairs: the entrance to Muryoku Muzenji live house.[51] Surrounding its frame a medley of colourful strips of paper, two Japanese national flags, postcards and other small assemblages draw attention away from the small A4 piece of white paper upon which a list of the evening's performers and scheduled times has been printed in black ink.

It was a Friday night and I had come to meet Harada, whose name appeared on the paper alongside 'Muzenji Shi' - the Master of Muzenji - and others I was unfamiliar with, including a final act called 'Panic Dry' (*panikku dorai*). Climbing the stairwell I came to a door on my left that was covered in a dense foam soundproofing material, which did little to muffle the whirling sounds of discordant electric guitar being played within. Opening the door into the world of Muzenji was a daunting experience for the uninitiated. It was surprisingly lightweight and swung open to reveal the entire audience sat on the floor of a space no larger than a generous living room.[52] Guests and musicians perched on small animal-shaped cushions and faced the stage, which was demarcated

[51] See Map 4.

[52] The live house was comparable in size to a small-medium 1DK apartment in Tōkyō.

from the rest of the room by a couple of amplifiers placed on the floor. Off to one side a couple of decrepit sofas were claimed by the master and the most regular Muzenji attendees, and a small kitchen at the back operated as the bar into which the master intermittently disappeared in order to fetch cans of beer or soft drinks from the refrigerator. The decor of the live house was a continuation of the explosion of colour radiating from the entranceway, and is perhaps best described as 'cluttered psychedelic'. The walls were covered in a hotchpotch of children's toys, hand-drawn scribbles, bath mats, dolls and various Hello Kitty memorabilia, and illuminated by sparsely installed strip-lighting in blue, red and green with a few lamps dotted here and there. An electric piano, a mastering deck and microphone stand littered the stage area, to the back of which was a bead curtain hanging in front of the door to the lavatory. This odd arrangement resulted in the strange circumstance whereby people needing to use the lavatory had to walk passed a musician performing 'on stage' in order to relieve themselves, and on return would find themselves staring out into the audience.

The master was on stage when I entered Muzenji, strumming arrhythmically at his large hollow-body guitar and blurting out spoken-word lyrics in the gaps between. I quickly shut the door and took my seat on a black cat-face cushion so as not to disturb the performance. The master was in his usual stage attire: a pair of Hello Kitty briefs and a loose unbuttoned shirt, and with his shiny bald head and broad grin he resembled an eccentric Buddhist priest. Indeed the master described his interests as including both 'cute things' and religion. His guitar was wired up to a large pedal board of effects on the floor, which he randomly switched between with one foot as he strummed, rarely fretting the guitar neck to produce chords of harmonic notes. His 'songs' were dream-like reminiscences of friends, loved ones, disappointments and fantasies. He would occasionally and without warning stop mid-song to talk with one of the regulars or somebody else in the crowd as though continuing a previous conversation. When he was done he put down his guitar and walked unceremoniously back to his sofa, before spotting me and coming to collect the 1,000 yen entrance fee.[53] This was very inexpensive for a live house, especially as the price also included a 500 yen drink ticket. The rest of the crowd, nine in total and consisting almost entirely of the evening's performers, sat quietly on the floor smoking, drinking and sharing in relaxed conversation between acts. At these intermissions the master played a CD of Christmas ballads with synthesised cat calls in place of a human choir.

[53] In September 2017, 1,000 yen was equal to approximately 7 British pounds, or 8 euros.

Amidst these scenes Harada busied himself setting up his guitar and mic, and a small camcorder on a stand so that he could record his performance. He was always documenting his music, producing videos that he would watch to improve his practice and which he occasionally uploaded to Youtube. The master faded out the intermission music and Harada began introducing himself, telling the strangers in the room his story of moving to Kōenji from Chiba prefecture and how the town continued to inspire him to play music. He performed six of his guitar and harmonica driven songs, politely thanking the audience after each came to an end before introducing his next number. Midway though his set another performer began a conversation with Harada, commenting that his music was reminiscent of a Japanese musician from the 1980s. In Muzenji, it was not necessary to shout to engage with a performer on stage, it was enough simply to talk normally. A few others joined the discussion and for a while Harada's performance was stalled by exchanges between the other participants. This was not unusual at Muzenji, and realising that his show would have to wait for a moment Harada pushed the mic boom to one side, rested his elbow on the hip of his guitar and joined in. As the conversation drew to a close Harada swivelled the mic boom back toward himself and ran an octave over his harmonica. Ten minutes later he was done, and took his seat to a quiet, polite round of applause as the sounds of the cat choir filled the room again.

Fig. 21: The master of Muzenji on stage at his live house.

'How was it'? I asked Harada. 'Um, okay, maybe. It's daunting to have these people watching so intently. I'm not used to that. I wasn't sure they would like my style.' 'Not used to it?' I asked. 'Well no, on the street people don't watch in the same way. They slow down, maybe lean up against a rail for a while, but they are distracted … not specifically watching me, just in the same place. They play with their phones, etcetera, you know what I mean'. 'So why did you decide to begin playing here?' I continued. 'To be watched I guess!', he said and then laughed somewhat sarcastically as though having surprised himself. 'Well, a friend told me about Muzenji and gave me the phone number. He said the audience was small but that they were attentive. And he said it would be cheap to play here. He was right, it only cost me 2,000 yen. Basically as long as there is an open slot and I pay the *noruma*, I can play here as much as I want… within reason.' I asked Harada if he would be playing more live houses and fewer *rojō* sessions from now on.

> 'No, *rojō raibu* is my main outlet. I definitely feel most comfortable at the station, and performing outside has that freedom. I know a few good people, other street musicians. Well, two. I occasionally talk to Jack, and I have spent quite a bit of time with Hayashi. But I'm trying to get to know a few more local musicians by doing this.'

As we talked a rotund man with fluffy, curly hair took to the stage and introduced himself as 'Ningen Kazaguruma Muru Robinson' ('Human Windmill Mul Robinson'), and proceeded to give a small picture presentation about his inspiration for the evening's music - giant squid from around the world - before playing a twenty-five minute experimental guitar piece to a CD backing track. Harada and I continued our conversation as caterwauls marked another interlude. 'So why bother with live houses at all if you prefer *rojō raibu*?' I asked.

> 'Muzenji is well known around here and so as a local musician I felt I should aim to play at the live house. I can't call myself a Kōenji musician if I haven't. Secondly, unlike other places the price isn't prohibitive. It doesn't take me very long to save up the *noruma* money. And now that I have played here I understand its special atmosphere too. I've never been anywhere like this before, and I feel a kind of easy connection with the other musicians. That's important because connections are also necessary if a musician wants to learn, improve and to eventually play larger live houses in the neighbourhood in the future.'

'And will playing at Muzenji be helpful to you?' I asked. 'Who knows who I might meet here. It might be pretty, you know, experimental, but that also attracts some very respected musicians from

time to time. It's a much-loved corner of Kōenji.' Harada's statements were slightly contradictory, having claimed that he preferred street music and being outside, but that performing *rojō raibu* failed to give him a sense of being watched and the positive, if temporary, association with others that this elicited. As a musician who worked only three *baito* shifts a week in order to concentrate on music, Muzenji represented a compromise; a venue that was cheap to play and whose master put no greater restrictions on his preferred mode of performance at the station than to request he kept it within half-an-hour. Harada also believed that Muzenji was a live house respected locally as representative of the musical character of the neighbourhood, and as an aspiring Kōenji musician who regularly performed his own tribute song to the town, he desired association with the venue himself.

The contradiction that situated Harada in between the street and live house connects his *rojō raibu* with performers like Guru Pari and the process of attachment to, and reorientation away from, a dying dream as explored in chapter 1. As Guru Pari took to the street in a move away from the indie band scene and the absence of industry recognition, Harada was in the process of repositioning himself relative to his street music. After the frustration of receiving only passive attention from the public on the street, Harada began to undo his attachment to *rojō raibu* alone, reorienting himself toward a new position of musicianship within the context of Kōenji town, as a Kōenji musician. His increasingly regular live shows in the following six months consolidated this shift in his own understanding of a career in music from one of debuting in the music industry to establishing himself within networks of Kōenji musicians as a local 'Kōenji musician'. In chapter 4 I take a closer look at Harada's song 'Kōenji', and his relationship with the town itself.

The last act, 'Panikku Dorai', walked on to stage in tie-dye spandex trousers, a punk band t-shirt, sporting platinum blonde hair and holding a Flying V electric guitar. He also had a collection of fresh fruit with him. 'I work in a local fruit and vegetable shop', Panic began, 'I am just an ordinary, poor guy really, but today I want to share with you all these amazing fruits I have from around the world!' With that Panic began to thrash at his guitar, screaming 'Paaanniikku doorrrraaiii' as he did so. After a few moments he settled back down and picked up a melon. 'Today I want to talk to you all about this Honeydew Melon from Mexico…' Panic spared no details, he explained about the climatic conditions in which the melons thrive, the area in Mexico his melon came from and the difficulties of producing Honeydews in Japan. After another fierce punk interlude Panic picked up some strawberries and the process began all over again. Finally Panic sliced his fruit into pieces and shared it out among us. As we passed around the food and ate, Panic let rip a final guitar solo. The master stood up and set the cat choir in motion for a final time and turned on the main lights of the

live house, snapping us all back into real-time and indicating that it was time to leave. It was 10:00 p.m. People wrapped up conversations as they put on their coats and made for the door, thanking the master on their way out. The end came unceremoniously, and there was no *uchiage*. I asked Harada if he had time to call in at a local Kōenji bar where a live event was scheduled, to which he politely declined; 'I'm all out of cash for a while. I'll just head home and work on some songs. See you again at the station though.'

Fig. 22: As a part of his show,'Panic Dry' presents the fruit he sells at a local store in Kōenji.

3.2 The master's Muzenji: music as a 'way'

'Muryoku Muzenji means "it can't be helped"' (*muryoku muzenji to wa「doushiyō mo nai」 to iu imi da*), said the master during an interview appearing in an amateur documentary about the live house in 2013.[54] The master of Muzenji was an accepting man, for whom almost anything could constitute a performance as long as the artist could fit it into a thirty minute slot: 'Just pictures even, or anything

[54] The documentary can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuTKxCznr5I

else is fine' (*e demo nan demo ii*), he said. The master's view of musical performance was simple; forget the music, it is all about the people, about 'people who want to express themselves' (*hyōgen shitai hito*). Within the documentary, sat in the same sofa he remained in throughout performances, the master claimed: 'Music is about people performing because they can play the guitar, right? No, it is a big mistake to think like that. Fundamentally, to its core music is a "way" (*ongaku te gita- hikeru kara minna yatteru deshō? sore wa ōmachigai. konponteki ni oku made ongaku wa shudan*).' On a couple of occasions when I was attending evenings at Muzenji the master replaced his usual brand of effect-heavy guitar poetry for a lecture on his alternative psychological approach to cancer, referring to sheets of hand-drawn data and charts he had cello-taped to the walls, which claimed that cancer could be fought with a positive mental attitude. The master led by example, allowing his performances to change with whim and fancy.

The master was as happy for Harada to record his quiet acoustic sets on video camera as he was for Whisper and Morita - a regular Muzenji musician living in Asagaya - to push their performances beyond the boundaries of possibility elsewhere. Indeed Muzenji was full of musicians doing what they felt they could not somewhere else: enjoying half-an-hour completely free from the limited stylistic conventions of performance promoted in other live venues in Tōkyō. When both were in attendance, Whisper and Morita used these opportunities to call upon one another to collaborate, share the stage, or dissolve the framework of a show into an impromptu jamming session. These were always heavily experimental and visibly cathartic, animating Whisper into some of his most memorable moments of abandon: He joined the master and sang from the sofa, he hopped and paced around the room, and once he even played his part in the collaboration from within the live house lavatory. Though Morita rarely played on the streets in Kōenji, she had performed *rojō raibu* in Asagaya in the past, where she was also part of an improvisation circle. Morita described this as a group of musicians of all standards who came together looking for a project or to be involved in music with others: 'The emphasis is on creativity rather than proficiency, to encourage people to think about music as a way to experiment in their lives and to think for themselves. Independent thinking is important to participation.' Morita shared this perspective with her friend Whisper, who one evening as we left Muzenji said to me,

> 'Both at Muzenji and while doing *rojō* I want to show people that there are many ways to make music, that it can take a form they are not used to hearing… it can be both funny and serious in the same moment or it can change suddenly… It doesn't have to follow the conventions we have come to know. It can be part of everyday life that we can all access, and it can take place anywhere at any time.'

Morita, Whisper and the Master's perspectives coincided with a celebration of amateurism at Muzenji, and performers were encouraged by the master not to worry about mistakes. On one occasion Whisper had just begun his live show when parts of the wall, thick with posters and hanging adornments affixed with parcel tape, began peeling down in the same moment as the electricity to Whisper's pedal board cut out. He picked up the small white delay pedal and tapped it repeatedly with his hand; *moshi moshi?* ('hello?'), he asked. It was no use, his electronic equipment would not respond. Whisper changed his tack completely as the master battled the teetering section of wall to his right, launching into an unprepared performance of dramatic storytelling that was more theatrical than musical.

A large part of the attraction for Whisper and Morita of playing at Muzenji, just as it was for Harada, was complete freedom of expression and control over the time they had. Muzenji put no more restriction on their performances of music than they experienced on the open walkways of the station. It represented inside what they had found outside, but with added comfort in winter and a sense of instant, easy fellowship with other musicians by bringing them together within a confined space. This was accentuated by the master's decidedly peripheral influence on events within the live house, his unwillingness to impose his will on others or any more hierarchy than was necessary to open and close proceedings, and fade in the cat choir after thirty minutes were up. Whisper took full advantage of the freedom this afforded him: on two occasions he spent his own time slot sat amongst the audience on cushions playing acoustic numbers that would intermittently break down into a conversation with somebody or a monologue more akin to poetry than song. He sang a cover of Champs Elysees while resting his back on a nearby shoulder, occasionally swapping the lyrics for a narrative about his new *baito* work at a local supermarket.

Whisper was not an exceptional case at the live house. Following his act one evening was a brother and sister duo called 'Rap River Meat Boy' (*rapuribā nikubiko*), who stopped half-way through their set to announce an intermission, a question and answer time: 'For the next few minutes you can ask us anything you want! Anything goes!'. 'How much do you love your brother?', 'What did you eat for breakfast?', 'To the drummer, what is your perfect type in men?', came the questions thick and fast. Complete flexibility, amateurism and experimentalism was upheld at Muzenji as the de facto rules of engagement above the professional modes of performance demanded elsewhere. The master of Muzenji is largely responsible for this. As with masters of other live houses in the neighbourhood, he determined the rules and regulations within his own establishment.

In expressing these sentiments though his management of Muzenji the master attracted individuals who found these principles attractive in their personal approaches to performance. The live house ethic of 'it can't be helped', was indicative of Muzenji's role in the neighbourhood. It attracted oddities, those called 'loners' in other circles, and people believed from peripheral inspection to be 'failures'. Indeed from a perspective that attributes success to economic markers such as CD or ticket sales, to social evidence in the form of Facebook Page likes or mentions in articles present online, or to industry measurements such as music label support and a growing following of young fans, many Muzenji performers, including the street musicians who played there, were demonstrably unsuccessful. Promoted by its master, Muzenji's special quality, however, was that it did not seek to play the game by these rules, and sought to create a space wherein conventions of performance could be loosened and challenged. Here the social space of the live house shares an ontological similarity with those of other groups such as the *dame ren*, that sought to construct spaces in the city, but outside of dominant discourses circulating within it, as I come to next.

Fig. 23: 'Mr. Whisper Z!' (or 'Whisper') reclines on the animal stools during a performance at Muzenji.

The colourful walls of Muzenji and its heavily ornamented entrance created a break not only from the framework of the habit and rhythms of everyday life for participants, but also from the parameters by which music and performance were judged and evaluated. Muzenji invited participants not to take part in the culture of music in Kōenji through performance but to drop out together. The practical method of employing a live house to achieve this invokes the same disinclination to take part in the surrounding politics of the time of the *dame ren;* a 1990s anti-establishment people's movement. The *dame ren* were concerned with the creation of alternative spaces in which to challenge the Japanese work ethic and its impact on life fulfilment. Yabu, a writer with a history of association with the *dame ren,* claimed that autonomous life was considered by its members as a place-based demonstration and reclamation of one's desires without deferring to the utilitarian question of 'what will come of it' (Cassegard 2014: 54). The space of Muryoku Muzenji worked in a very similar way, creating a frame for musicians and participants to indulge, to experience the emotional satisfaction of performing in the way they most desired without reference to structures existing outside the live house that would qualify their performances as *kakkoii* (cool) or *dasai* (uncool), successful or a failure. In choosing both Muzenji and the walkways of an urban train station to play their songs, Whisper, Harada and Morita subsumed the question of value in music and life within spaces and establishments wherein they could renegotiate its terms.

With its master's open policy regarding what constitutes 'performance' under his roof, Muzenji offered interpretive freedoms that only street music at the station could match. Nevertheless street musicians chose to play at the live house and pay for the privilege. The act of coming in from the station grounds, constraining their performances within a time frame, and demonstrating and receiving support from other musicians, created a different experience from street music. This music was framed in a different way, based upon the scale and boundaries of the live house, and the effect that this new intimacy had on the relationships of street performers and other participants. Ben Ari's (2002) exploration of the 'frame' as a situation-based set of principles allowing gathered individuals to feel they are 'in the know' is relevant in this case. In his own work Ben Ari uses the occasion of a *bōnenkai* (year-end drinking party) to illustrate how individuals of unequal status within a company environment find common ground for interaction based upon the temporary social framework of the event. Outside of music the musicians at Muzenji were a mixture of part-timers and full-time salaried workers, but their mutual experience of performance at Muzenji was guided by the live house's particular set of principles in contrast with their various experiences of everyday life. Based upon the work of Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974), Ben-Ari demonstrates how the Japanese *bōnenkai* is participated in by company workers of varying stripes by reference to a 'drinking

frame' (2002: 136), which emphasises a structure of behaviour in contrast to those established beyond its boundaries.

Muzenji demonstrates its own frame for participation, set very much in contrast to principles that the master believed were wrongly established in other music venues, and evident in his statement that it is a mistake to presume that music is simply about being able to play an instrument. In ways that echo principles of the 'drinking frame' in Ben-Ari's study, Muzenji live nights created internal cohesion by emphasising common principles of engagement, which in this case centred on the interpretive freedom of the individual. His notion of a person's relationship with music went no further than to claim it was a 'way' of expression. The ability to interpret this remit within modes of playing that suited each performer's hopes and desires for individual expression became the central message and frame within which the live house operated.

Muzenji was famous for this, for presenting a small space wherein the unexpected and the unconventional was simultaneously the expected norm. The bricolage of colour and the emphasis on child-like miscellany decorating the outer doorway onto the shopping arcade and the walls of the live house demarcated the exit from one life outside, to another within: a vision of Kōenji as seen through the eyes of the master and a kaleidoscopic filter of Hello Kitty culture and fading kitsch. The time slots for participation, the cat music interludes and the *noruma* fees were the scaffolding of an informal institution, enabling alternative interpretations about what musical performance could be or allowing each person taking the stage to indulge their own vision of a musical dream. Ben-Ari says of *karaoke* performances throughout *bōnenkai* events, such moments provide a chance for people 'to stand out: to become for a few minutes a film or singing star, or a fantasy character. In a society which provides relatively few opportunities for adult individuals to stand in the limelight, taking the microphone turns an individual into the centre of the group's attention' (2002:139). On stage, Muzenji performances gained the limelight, but they also provided a fulcrum around which the group could turn for a while, sustaining the collective.

3.3 Alone: a small space of mentorship and expression

Alone live house was situated on the south side of Kōenji station, on the fourth floor of a building between PAL *shōtengai* and Minami Yon Chōme road.[55] It was another minor live house in the

[55] See Map 4.

neighbourhood, yet it differed significantly from Muzenji in its approach to live music. Opened in 2005, Alone advertised itself on its basic internet homepage as a specialist acoustic live house. As such it attracted solo artists: singer songwriters who played acoustic guitars and crooned before dimly-lit audiences. The master, Inoue, was a single man who looked much younger than his fifty something years, with piercing eyes, neat goatee beard and mid-length jet black hair. He once said of Alone, 'it is a little space for expressive people who have their own independent worlds' (*dokuji no sekai wo motsu hyōgensha no tame no shōkūkan*). He poetically described his job as master, saying 'All the performers who come here have their own particular needs in life as in music, and it is my job to work together with them and help them meet the new self they are looking for' (*koko de atarashii jibun ni au yo na kimochi de isshoni ganbatteru*). Inoue demonstrated his investment in Alone performers' lives through the close relationship he built up with Koba over the period of a year. The notion of an *atarashii jibun* or 'new self', is one that I return to in the following chapters. In the next chapter I look at Whisper's attempts to restart or 'refresh' himself within *rojō raibu* in response to difficulties in his daily life. I follow up on this in the final chapter, which looks at how individuals craft their sense of self as a 'musician' through structures of the night and soundscapes, and how *rojō raibu* practices affect their wellbeing.

The investment was both personal and commercial. Inoue was paid by musicians for the opportunity to perform on stage at Alone: an arrangement commonly known as *noruma* ('quota') in Japan. It operates to make musicians, not live venue audiences, bear the cost of performance by either guaranteeing a percentage of ticket sales or footing the cost themselves when they cannot, as is most often the case. With the exception of a few venues like Muzenji, and while rates vary between establishments, noruma fees for even small venues can average at around 10-15,000 yen.[56] While the perceived convention may be that musicians are paid to play their music, this is not the case for musicians of lesser standing, and not only in Japan (Hadfield 2013). Some of those involved within the independent and underground scenes in Tōkyō have argued that this *noruma* is simply a result of economic necessity. There are hundreds of live houses in Tōkyō[57], and Ian Martin (2016) suggests that around 4,000 bands (500 live houses times 4 bands each) play every night in the metropolis. Events are poorly advertised, and well-circulated, widely-read listings magazines or online sites in Japan are claimed by many involved in the various scenes in Tōkyō to be almost non-existent (Hadfield 2013; Martin 2011, 2015). Added to this, rent for even the most modestly-sized Tōkyō live venue is astronomical, and the numbers of gig-goers are relatively few due to the early

[56] In September 2017, 15,000 yen was equal to approximately 105 British pounds or 115 euros.

[57] In his book *Quit your Band*, the Tōkyō-based music writer and small music label owner Ian Martin makes a conservative guess at 500 live houses in the extended Tōkyō area (2016: 130).

start of many events - between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. for most in Kōenji that I attended, while many people were still working - and an average entrance fee of around 2,000 yen.[58] All of this means that it is musicians, not the audience, who are Tōkyō live houses' main customers.

As a 'specialist' acoustic live house, performances at Alone were expensive. Koba would put money aside from his evening work at a local Kōenji *washoku* (Japanese cuisine) restaurant each month for one evening's *noruma*. At 15,000 yen[59] this was an expensive small live venue to perform at, and after some time Koba began performing occasional 'One Man Live' shows that cost him a steep 40,000 yen each time.[60] Inoue's live house is geared up for musicians, with high-quality instruments and live equipment on offer, as well as a professional lighting rig. Inoue recorded each performance, burned it to CD and handed it to musicians after the gig. As with other live house masters, Inoue was part of an industry that accommodated the huge numbers of musicians who wanted to perform in public but did not have the support or commercial success to attract paying customers to their shows. He was running a moderately successful business from shaping local musicians, but in return he believed he offered them a 'small world' of their own making as and when they required it. With each performer, Inoue's relationship was economic, but also personal. He mentored each one individually, he knew their families or partners, and he gave of his own free time when he could. With Koba, this relationship was especially close, supporting him through great personal hardship, becoming a friend, *sensei* (teacher) and anchor.

Alone became important to Koba during a period of intense loss. Since beginning to play *rojō raibu* at the station in the summer of 2013 he had accumulated many evenings of experience. He had learned to balance his local *baito* with street music, and had become friends with Tetsu, the master of Tetsu bar, for whose customers he performed once or twice a month. Topping all of these early achievements as far as Koba was concerned, he met a woman at a gig at Kōenji High[61], who soon afterwards became his girlfriend and began appearing at his *rojō* and Tetsu bar live performances. I got used to seeing the two as a pair, and enjoying Kana's superb cooking from time to time. When I returned to Tōkyō in the autumn of 2015 Koba met me in Nakano Central Park. He was visibly thinner and I thought he looked unwell. He told me for the first time that his girlfriend Kana had been fighting cancer for many years, but that she had suddenly worsened and was now bed-ridden.

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[58] In September 2017, 2,000 yen was equal to 14 British pounds or 15 euros.

[59] In September 2017, 15,000 yen was equal to approximately 105 British pounds, or 116 euros.

[60] In September 2017, 40,000 yen was equal to approximately 281 British pounds, or 308 euros.

[61] See Map 4.

Without money for private care, the couple remained in their small apartment in Nakano where Koba nursed Kana with the occasional help of carers. He had stopped working and had taken out loans to pay for their expenses for a while. A week later I received a phone call from Koba from his apartment. Kana had passed away. A few days later I attended the funeral, a simple Buddhist *sōshiki* (funeral service) wherein her body was displayed before cremation, after which her remains were transferred by chopsticks to a small urn by the gathered attendees. Unsure of where to go or what to do with myself as I arrived, I began asking passing members of staff for help. This was the first time I met Inoue who, hearing me mention Koba and Kana's names, walked forward and brought me to where Koba and the others were waiting.

It was not until Koba's first appearance at Alone two months after Kana's death that I met Inoue properly. Koba explained that evening how Inoue had been a great source of support during Kana's illness.

> 'Inoue visited us in Nakano, and would tell these stupid jokes. Kana would drift in and out of sleep, but she always laughed at him. He also helped us get Kana to the live house in the wheelchair for my shows, and rearranged the seating so that she could sit in the centre position and watch. It wasn't easy, you know how small that elevator is in the building!'

After an emotional return performance, Koba drank heavily while he and Inoue shared stories about Kana with the other musicians and their guests. On that evening as with many others it was evident that Inoue had taken Koba under his wing. He provided emotional and even financial support, and he encouraged Koba to throw himself into his music after Kana's death, during a period of many months when Koba had stopped looking after himself and had taken to serious drinking after his *baito* shifts at the restaurant. When Koba's bicycle was impounded for illegal parking[62], Inoue gave Koba his own and told him to keep it. At the post-gig *uchiage*, Inoue san would often refill Koba's whiskey glass from his own supply, free of charge. Other regular performers at Alone began following suit, filling up his glass with their own drinks on the evenings when Koba had no money for the *uchiage*. In order to keep to the strict loan repayments he owed, Koba worked constantly at the *washoku* restaurant and took on extra short-term *baito* in various places in the mornings and early afternoons. During this time Inoue focused on Koba's musical development. He invited Koba to the live house before opening for the evening in order to give him vocal training and other performance tips and advice. He was a strict teacher, insisting that he control his emotions

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[62] Retrieving a bicycle from the impound centre in 2016 cost approximately 5,000 yen, or 35 British pounds.

while on stage and concentrate on developing the best possible listening experience for his audience. All of this Inoue did without charge and by investing a great deal of his own free time.

Fig. 24: Inoue and Koba at Alone live house in 2016. As photography during performances was prohibited, I could only take photos during the *uchiage*.

Unlike the master of Muzenji, Inoue took control of all elements of Alone. Auditions to play at the live house were strict according to Koba and other regular musicians. The seating was arranged by Inoue and could not be changed. Alone was over twice the size of Muzenji, and from his control desk at the back of the room Inoue directed the flow of each performance, lowering the background music and announcing each performer, who would subsequently emerge from the dressing room and walk through the seated area and up onto the raised stage. He invested great effort in the lighting for each performance, raising and lowering the intensity, changing the hue of colours and fading in and out of darkness to amplify the mood created onstage. Inoue also imposed strict behavioural codes. On my first trip to Alone I made the mistake of standing up to smoke at the back of the room while a musician was in the middle of a set. Inoue quickly appeared behind me and whispered that I must take my seat again and remain there until the set was finished. It was only

later that I realised this was part of Inoue's dedication to producing and protecting each performers 'little space' (*shōkūkan*); approximately thirty minutes of time within which they could become the 'new self' he had claimed to help them realise. My gaffe was to break this process of becoming, an anomaly in an otherwise intentional alignment of seated and attentive audience members.

At the end of the live event Inoue directed the reordering of seating for the *uchiage*, which was held each night at Alone rather than at a restaurant or bar in another part of town. We sat around a long table, with positions pre-determined by Inoue that seemed to represent our degree of participation at the live house, with the older and most regular participants next to Inoue and less consistent individuals or neophytes furthest away at the end. Inoue sat at the head of the table, drank heavily and orchestrated proceedings. If Inoue decided that every guitar-playing individual around the table should take part in a twelve-bar blues jam, then we had little choice but to do so or risk offence. Leaving early was also heavily frowned upon, and once when I got up to leave at midnight Inoue waved me back down, grinning and insisting that there would be trains from Kōenji station until twenty minutes past one, and that the *uchiage* would go on for at least another half an hour.

While it was possible to interpret Inoue's behaviour as the heavy-handed and overbearing force of a master at his own live house, it is also true that he was as generous with performers as he was demanding. I cannot say that he was representative of other live house masters in this respect, being as strict and exacting as he was compassionate and giving. Entering into the 'small independent world' of Alone was not easy, and came at a price that rivalled some larger establishments in the neighbourhood. Yet Inoue invested much of himself and his energy into individuals in and around Kōenji. Alone represented a place where they could live out a specific ideal of a musician's life: one based upon regular and polished performances, recorded for posterity before a carefully managed and maintained audience. At Alone this was possible without the need of a moderate fan-base, and where they could rely on a small band of similarly minded people for support and a sense of scene-based community. It was a patron-client relationship, which kept Inoue in business, but also a carefully maintained social world ensuring companionship, camaraderie and a framework for an attainable form of success and recognition within Kōenji's local music culture.

Dorinne Kondo (1987, 1990) argued that in studies of ideology and selfhood, the interrelationship between people and institutions have too often been overlooked, and that researchers should soften the boundaries of their thinking about the interplay between them (1987: 269). Koba's relationship with Alone live house, its other musicians and guests, and in particular with Inoue provides a strong case in point as it illustrates Koba's negotiation of himself as performer, musician and young person

in relation to the venue's own framework for participation. During and after a difficult time in his life Koba needed emotional support, a context for his increasing musical output and a set of guiding principles. In particular, being forced to give up his restaurant job during the time he was caring for Kana set him adrift from an affiliation that had structured his time in and out of the workplace. It was at that time that he found Alone and entered into a close *senpai/kōhai* (senior/junior) relationship of mentorship with Inoue. It is also significant that Koba's desire to play *rojō raibu* at the station also dwindled significantly at this time. Kondo's own research at a company 'ethics retreat' and also among the employees of a small confectionary company, have shown that an awareness of the self, particularly in Japanese society, is contingent upon institutions that can be constraining, but 'also tells you who you are' in relationships with others (1987: 245). Peter Cave (2004) has furthermore illustrated that institutions demanding dedication and large amounts of an individual's personal time, such as school clubs, contain the potential for creativity and self-realisation along with the coercion and domination that affiliation brings.

In his study on the educational role of after-school *bukatsudō* (club activities), Cave argues that in Japan the notion of one's self in relation to others in adult life is commonly learned within the school system and emphasised in sports and culture societies through the hierarchical framework of senior and junior relationships (2004: 396). Whether it be tennis, baseball or music, the after-school or after-university club encourages social organisation without the interference of teachers, within which vertical relations between students are emphasised with reference to older, more experienced *senpai* and younger, less experienced *kōhai*. Without the teachers around, this is many individuals' first experience of life in the 'real world'.

As a performer and writer within Tōkyō's underground music scenes, Ryotarō Aoki (2013) has noted the presence of *senpai-kōhai* relationships within circles of bands considered to be part of the Tōkyō underground. In one article Aoki presents the reader with a scene at a busy *izakaya* (a Japanese pub), describing a young man carefully pouring beer into his superior's glass while making sure not to cause offence by delivering a bad beer-to-head ratio, or else anything that might make the drink less appealing to him. A typical scene at an izakaya where company men collect after work, Aoki says, only these are members of underground punk bands. Aoki argues that the hierarchical structure of relations between bands in the music clubs of after-school *bukatsudō* sometimes continue away from an educational setting. He also suggests that musicians are simply amplifying something that already stems from the education system in Japan. They expect to find these kinds of relationships, so they create them when dealing with other musicians and bands.

Aoki's article is an insightful peek into the opportunities and restrictions afforded to those who defer to seniority-based social organisation within music activities, in aspects ranging from who should invite who to play at a live house, to whether experience or popularity should determine the order of appearance on stage. Aoki's most important point however, is a comment he makes about the balance of power between the institution of seniority-based social organisation and the culture of independent band music, questioning which appropriated the other?: 'I like to think – to a certain extent – that the Japanese seniority hierarchy (sic) system was modified and moulded to fit indie music, not the other way around – social norms and traditions found in society and *"bukatsu"* activities were placed upon alternative music in order to create a structure that would allow people to participate without going "full-on delinquent", "rebel", or what have you' (2013, no pagination). The presence of hierarchical relationships of seniority in a seemingly unlikely place, such as an underground band circle, is in Aoki's interpretation not as straightforward as a continuation of the *senpai-kōhai* structures learned within the education system. Rather, there may be instances wherein the use of such relationships allows musicians to seek out their own independent paths not in contrast with, but in reference to recognised norms of major institutions.

The relationship between Koba and Inoue at Alone live house is an instance that supports Aoki's claim. In contrast to Muzenji, the frame for performances at Alone was much more rigid. Inoue emphasised this by imposing strict rules for the ways that music should be both played and watched, and through commitment to professionalism between the first and last performances. Koba deferred to Inoue on many aspects of his music, from playing techniques to vocal training. One evening during a long *uchiage* at the live house, Inoue scolded Koba in front of everyone for being too emotional on stage; 'You rely on the audience to feel sorry for you' Inoue said, 'and we understand that you are upset when you sing about sad things, but you must think about your audience and deliver more balance.' Inoue was schooling Koba in music, but he was also teaching him how to deal with life and relate to others around him. In doing so he was also performing the social function of institutions to which Koba had a reduced connection with due primarily to his work patterns since moving to Tōkyō, but also after he had given up work altogether to care for Kana.

Within work as kitchen staff at a local Kōenji restaurant, Koba did not experience hierarchy in the same way, nor the group-first rhetoric of a large company investing in and developing a corporate family member. Instead, Koba learned how to get by in the informal institution of a live house under the watchful eye of his *senpai*, while his and Inoue's relationship of trust and the regular live performances he did at Alone gave him a sense of being a legitimate musician in ways he struggled to achieve through *rojō raibu* alone. His loose associations with his places of part-time work offered

little sense of self to Koba, but in his relationships at Alone he found, as Inoue said 'a small space to find the new self musicians are looking for'. As it was for Koba, seniority and self-realisation were not mutually exclusive aspects of the lives of musicians who played at Alone.

3.4 Traghetto: ferrying people between live venue and the street

Throughout most of the year, Spaghetti and his friends would appear late on Friday evenings to perform blues or jazz music under the second underpass at Kōenji Station. Spaghetti played keyboard and piano with exceptional skill, forming the backbone of a four-piece act that filled the first evening of every weekend with lively, catchy sounds that encouraged participation from passers-by and people emerging from the town's restaurants and drinking holes. Spaghetti orchestrated the musical direction with changes in his piano-playing, or else followed the lead of Kōhei, who moved and jived in front of the band playing harmonica and singing impromptu lyrics. It was often midnight before the group emerged onto the street, but this only seemed to work to their advantage as neighbourhood participants were more forthcoming after a night of drinking. The atmosphere under the rail arch on those Friday nights attracted a mixed group of people, and at times numbers swelled to the point where the whole underpass appeared to be for the exclusive use of Spaghetti and his band. Passing musicians with guitars occasionally joined in, or else men and women would dance or clap along with the music. One evening Spaghetti commented on their Friday-night popularity;

> 'We sometimes attract a decent crowd, which is why we come out here to play, to bring people together and to create an atmosphere that we can all enjoy. Those times are the most fulfilling, all kinds of things can happen that are impossible at indoor venues. The problem though is that when we attract people playing outside we also attract the attention of the police, even though we play in the spot furthest away from the *kōban* (police box). People coming together creates a good vibe, but it also makes more sound. We play louder too because the tension rises. Almost every time we play we reach a point where the local officers appear and ask us to stop. Luckily though this is where Traghetto comes in, which is just ten seconds walk away down there, so we just return to the bar and continue playing, taking whoever we can along with us.'

Traghetto bar was situated on the second floor of a building just a short stroll from Kōenji Station, and served as a base for Spaghetti and his band.[63] The owners of the bar were a young couple who told me that they 'wanted to open an establishment for music lovers'. The floor space was large enough to accommodate five or six small tables and it included a corner area by the bar with a set-up of instruments, at the centre of which was Spaghetti's electric piano. 'We play here all night' he told me as we arrived at Traghetto from the street, 'So we never have to worry too much about being told to stop because we can always try again an hour later. Traghetto is great because the focus is on music. People come here to listen to music and take part. Even those we bring back from outside will sing a bit or pick up an instrument.' Spaghetti's band had an informal arrangement with the owners of Traghetto. They could play all night on Fridays and free of charge when other live events were not scheduled. They were indeed the de facto house band. In reciprocation, Spaghetti and the others would bring as many people as possible into the bar and invite them to return, occasionally turning them into regulars. As a venue Traghetto supported its musicians, but as was the case when I first visited the bar, street musicians could return the favour by attracting customers, especially in an environment people knew as a musical town.

Fig. 25: Spaghetti and Kōhei perform at Traghetto after returning from the station.

[63] See Map 4.

Traghetto nights were marked by these rhythms, of Spaghetti and the rest of the band leaving and returning to the bar multiple times during an evening. Their street music hiatuses from Traghetto could last for fifteen minutes or over an hour, but the repetition ensured a slow accumulation of new fans and friends, and more effectively than *rojō raibu* alone could gain. Spaghetti became a popular musician in Kōenji, known to many with reason to spend time in the neighbourhood at weekends. In this way Spaghetti was a local feature, a recognisable face in town. As far as I am aware he never appeared in publications such as the Japan Times or online magazines composed by music writers in Tōkyō. He was not on the cutting edge of a scene nor did he gain the attention of the music underground. Within Kōenji, however, Spaghetti could pull in a crowd. In fact, he could fill the largest live house in the neighbourhood, Kōenji High, to capacity.

One afternoon, passing by the south side of Kōenji Station I bumped into Spaghetti on his way to a rehearsal; 'I'm playing Kōenji High tonight!' he said, 'Come along! I'll put your name on the 1,000 yen list so just say my name at the door. Otherwise it's 3,500 yen I think… try to come if you have time, it starts at 08:00 p.m.!'. With that Spaghetti made haste into the brightly lit entrance of PAL *shōtengai*.

That evening I returned to Kōenji and bumped into Whisper practicing mouth organ under the first railway arch. As usual I sat down next to him and we shared a cigarette and a coffee together. I told him about Spaghetti's live event and asked if he would like to come along. 'If it's Kōenji High I don't think so!' he said with a laugh that broke into a deep cough. 'Impossible, that kind of place is expensive! (*muri desho?! ana takai basho nara*) Thanks, but I don't really go there.' Whisper's regular live house as a performer, Muryoku Muzenji, was a world away in size, cost and reputation, and where Muzenji held a key position in Whisper's personal islands of performance in the neighbourhood, Kōenji High existed beyond these limits; not as a part of his Kōenji. I told Whisper that I would see if he was still around after the gig, bade him farewell and headed on towards Kōenji High.

Spaghetti had forgotten to write my name on the 1,000 yen list but quickly appeared in the foyer to confirm my place once I had called him to explain the omission. As soon as he appeared upstairs Spaghetti was greeted by attendees from all directions. Though four bands were due to play that evening, the majority of the audience seemed to be there to see him and his band perform. Presently we made our way down to the second floor underground and into the live house proper. When Spaghetti and the other four members took to the stage as the second to last act, the atmosphere noticeably lifted. Jokes and banter were passed between stage and audience. Their songs

were mainly tongue-in-cheek covers of famous tracks, blues or jazz versions that exhibited the musicians' virtuoso talent. Members of other bands were called onto stage to join in, as was Kōhei, the harmonica player and vocalist who always appeared during Traghetto and *rojō* sessions. Kōenji High was packed to the rafters, and filled with the calls of 'Spaghetti—' as he tore into another frenzied Piano solo. After the event was over I talked with Spaghetti back upstairs about his popularity; 'Does it come as a surprise to you that you could fill a venue like Kōenji High with fans?' I asked.

> 'I don't know if they are fans… Rather, it's because it's in Kōenji perhaps (*fuan teiuka… Kōenji dakara jyanaika to omou*). We have been playing in this neighbourhood for many years now. Every Friday night we play by the station numerous times and slowly, little by little people get used to us and think of us as a neighbourhood band. Some ask us about live performances and others come to Traghetto bar for a while. Gradually we have reached the point where the number of people who know and support us can fill out a live house like Kōenji High. It doesn't mean we are famous though, just popular in Kōenji maybe…'

Within the frame of one night Spaghetti and his band would cross a threshold between two distinct forms of performance. Whether imposed or caused by a general awareness of the different playing codes at live houses and during *rojō raibu*, musicians generally changed the way they performed when moving from one to the other. Spaghetti's band were different, however, playing an open form of jam-driven music that encouraged audience participation regardless of where they were doing it. Even their performance at Kōenji High seemed to break down the barrier between the band up on stage and the crowd down below, as calls from the audience were met with responses from the stage, and the music started and stopped signalling spaces for their participation. According to Spaghetti many of the people attending their Kōenji High gig got to know them in their form as a late Friday night band moving back and forth between the street and the bar.

The sign for Traghetto bar displayed a stylised gondola under the name, an Italian 'traghetto' or ferry used to transport people from one port to the next. Like a musical gondola Spaghetti's band crossed between the two spaces of live house and the street, ferrying people back and forth between them, and in doing so blurring the performative boundaries and scales of both. This movement reflects the assertion of Tim Ingold (2000), that while meanings and cultural codes are attached to spaces by the imposition of boundaries, such boundaries can only persist through the activities of people for whom they are recognised as such (2000: 193). Spaghetti's musical activity and his relationship with fans, friends and strangers did not recognise the line between an indoor venue and

an outdoor space in Kōenji, and as such created a channel of support that transcended the capacity of either side.

The flexibility of the threshold between musical performance and social event is something Sally Harrison-Pepper (1990) claims to exist at the core of street performance. In her ethnography of street performances in New York's Washington Square, Harrison-Pepper suggests that in turning the street into a stage, any performer must incorporate a large degree of flexibility into their act - be it juggling, fire-breathing or magic - to allow for the unpredictability of the environment and the audience. Turning disruptions and restrictions into opportunity was a challenge faced by all and only the most successful achieved sustained audience participation. Drawing upon Schechner, Harrison-Pepper suggests that in Washington Square the key to keeping people with you was to create audience participation precisely at the point where 'the performance breaks down and becomes a social event' (Schechner 1973: 40, in Harrison-Pepper 1990: 115). For Spaghetti and his band, the sociality of street performance became an indistinguishable part of the music, first by the environmental context of *rojō raibu*, and then by travelling together with their audience from the street to the bar.

A large part of the popularity that Spaghetti's band achieved in Kōenji must be attributed to the close relationship he built over time with the owners of Traghetto cafe and music bar. Their relationship was similar to others taking place within the small live houses and music bars of the neighbourhood. Jack was, among others, a Tetsu bar musician, which was clear after five minutes spent with Tetsu because he talked so frequently about Jack's music and affixed pictures of him and his playing partner Yūji all over the walls and bar area. Koba and Inoue's relationship was developing in a similar direction, as Koba improved and his 'One Man' solo live shows at Alone increased in frequency. While not all such relationships were as close, in my experience those between street musicians and local live houses tended to develop into long-term and personal relationships of care and exchange, displaying reciprocity and ties beyond the transaction of *noruma* paid to perform. Smaller live houses relied on the street musicians I met during my research in the neighbourhood to bring in business, to fill spaces during quieter week day evenings and to become a regular customer (*jōrenkyaku*). In return, the live house offered a regular stage for performance and reduced fees or even 'freebies'.

The owners of Traghetto were in the audience at Spaghetti's Kōenji High performance, who told me that they never missed a show. 'We feel close to Spaghetti, he's become like family. And we've met a lot of interesting people through his music. We're proud that he is a Traghetto musician.'

Spaghetti's affiliation to and patronage of Traghetto bar was rewarded with an open-stage policy allowing him, Kōhei, the guitarist and the bassist to leave and return throughout the night without losing their performance space. It enabled the free accumulation of people from a large supply of potential audience members on Friday nights at the station, and combined it with a venue with which to turn temporary interest into potential relationships of fandom. It generated money for the live house and ticket sales when the band performed locally. Tanenbaum (1995) notes that in music played in the subways of New York, over-popularity causes performances to fail due to the negative effect of human congestion in the small spaces of the underground (1995: 102). At Kōenji Station too, a large crowd was likely to increase noise levels, make a larger spectacle and draw the attention of the local police or station guards. Just as the New York underground in Tanenbaum's research alleviated this issue by rhythmically carrying crowds away in carriages, so Spaghetti and his band took new crowds off the streets and back to Traghetto, where relationships with their audience could deepen, potentially throughout the night.

While Koba decided between street music and live house performances in what appeared to be a permanent move from Kōenji Station to Alone, and where Harada and Whisper put their *rojō raibu* activities on hold to claim their 30 minutes in the world of Muzenji, Spaghetti moved between the two in smooth transitions that benefitted from the street's access to Kōenji Station's public and the bar's capacity to promote intimacy, proximity and a sense of camaraderie. Ferrying from Traghetto to the station's second underpass and back again changed the context of performance in both places, and blurred the boundaries of relationships established at each. The transition increased the intensity of the performer-audience relationship, something I experienced for myself having been invited from the street into the band's personal place of music, making the short walk there together, and remaining in the bar until Saturday morning.

The creation of these more 'focused interactions', what Goffman (1963) described as 'little societies' or extended involvement in a moment of interaction in public spaces, also facilitated closer performer-fan relationships. Tanenbaum (1995) noted the thrill experienced by underground passengers who could get physically close to musicians and performers, sometimes to the point where they were looking over their shoulders to watch them play. Conversely, Stevens (2004) has explored the lengths that fans of the Japanese rock band Alfee would go to reduce the physical boundaries between themselves and their heroes by sending handmade dolls and souvenirs to their dressing rooms, which might even appear together with band members in photos. Stevens suggests that Alfee's sustained image of mutual closeness with their fans was the key to the long-term success of these relationships, and therefore to the longevity of the band's popularity (2004: 69-74). What

Spaghetti and his bandmates offered in boating people back to Traghetto was a close physical proximity with the band and a performer-audience relationship framed by intimacy. In repeating the pattern, by moving back and forth between performative spaces, by bringing people indoors from outside over many Friday nights in Kōenji, they gained enough local popularity to rival audiences of much more widely known bands in the neighbourhood's largest live house.

3.5 Coda: Return to Muryoku Muzenji

In closing I return to Muzenji one last time. In many ways the master's self-proclaimed home of *dō shō mo nai* ('it can't be helped') artists and musicians epitomises the way in which broader perceptions of street performers' hopelessness, received both externally and generated by themselves, were challenged by rescaling their performances and social interactions within the small spaces of local live houses. Transformations at Muzenji were temporary, but no less valuable for it. Nor did connections with live houses provide permanent escape from the broader expectations of lifestyles in Tōkyō to which my interlocutors compared themselves and their street music pursuits. Yet these *shōkūkan,* the 'small spaces' as Inoue described them, offered a way of connecting with that vision of music performance and appreciation received as a person producing a thing of value. They provided an incentive to keep going, because there were others like them who understood, as well as the opportunity to construct an authentic sense of musicianship within the social transactions of musical performance. For *rojō* musicians such as Whisper or Spaghetti there would have been no street music without the complementary spaces of Kōenji's live houses.

In the amateur Youtube documentary about Muzenji to which I referred earlier in the chapter, one performer described his first impressions of the venue and how he had since become a regular participant. The young man in his thirties admitted to being afraid to enter the live house at first, and to doubts about the kind of place it was. 'I felt compelled to return however' he said, and somewhere in the midst of trips back to Muzenji he came to the understanding that 'it was not a place where people doing music or doing it well gathered together, but a place where people with a *need* to make music joined together' (… *sono hito ga ongaku wo yaru hitsuyō ga aru hito ga atsumatteiru*). Another young musician featured in the documentary suggested that Muzenji represented 'another world in addition to that of everyday life' (*sono nichijō dewanai mō hitotsu no sekai*). A third simply stated 'It's everyone's home' (*minna no ie da*). The brother of the boy and girl sibling band Rap River Meat Boy supported these sentiments as we discussed his life and involvement at Muzenji.

'I'm a middle school maths teacher actually. You could say that is why we perform here as often as we do. My job is dull, and really it is just a job. It doesn't mean anything to me or say anything about who I am. My sister and I love playing here, and I need this in my life. Our style suits Muzenji and though there are other live houses in Kōenji, none of them encourage us to be as experimental as we can be here. I just feel at home.'

Fig. 26: Muzenji performer discusses regulars at the live house during a short YouTube documentary. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuTKxCznr5I

Regular disconnection from everyday life, the 'world in addition to that of everyday life' described in the Muzenji documentary by a local musician marks out the live house out as a place sharing common features with *rojō raibu* practised at the station grounds. Many street musicians tolerated uninspiring part-time or temporary employment, which they recognised as one of the realities of their lives and necessary for a basic subsistence of food and housing. Another reality existed for them at Kōenji, through street music and the activities and experiences making up *rojō raibu*. For the street performers in the neighbourhood who were attracted to Muzenji, the live house occupied a closeness to the street by sharing similar principles, and in doing so became a natural extension of *rojō raibu* as a self-controlled musical life wherein they enjoyed the choice to play what they wanted. Yet Muzenji offered them even more, and for the lowest *noruma* in town street musicians could explore unrestrained expression within a room set apart from the rules of the everyday life; a space of *hinichijō or* 'the extraordinary'. For many, playing at Muzenji was as easy as walking in off the street. No sound checks or other preparations were necessary.

Whisper, Harada and Morita sometimes played *rojō raibu* before or after a Muzenji performance, and occasionally both. Whisper and I fell into a pattern of meeting before his Muzenji shows at Kōenji station at around 06:00 p.m., where he would play for an hour or so in his favourite spot. From there we walked into Sutorīto *shōtengai* and to Whisper's favourite cheap *teishoku* (set menu) restaurant, where he ate a large meal for under five hundred yen while talking to the elderly couple who owned the establishment. After we had eaten, we crossed the passageway to Muzenji. On nights when Morita also attended, the three of us left the live house between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. and walked back to the station together, sometimes bringing other interested performers along with us. The atmosphere of Muzenji seemed to spill out onto the passageways around the station on those nights. Whisper and Morita continued to experiment and collaborate outside as they had been doing inside, people stopped to listen, an old man shuffled a dance as he walked by, and strangers came together for company and conversation while the *rojō* musicians performed.

Fig. 27: Whisper and Morita return to the street after a night at Muzenji.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored live houses in Kōenji neighbourhood as part of the limited musical and social archipelagos that street performers constructed in support of their *rojō* activities or as a way to progress away from them. The visibility of street music around the train station to commuters, cyclists and people on foot often created an image of *rojō raibu* that reduced performers to a one dimensional and often negative characterization of 'loner' and 'failed musician'. This was particularly the case among local 'underground' bands and musicians who played in the town's live houses and believed themselves to be a part of an interconnected, coherent scene.

In interviews, street musicians themselves doubted the existence of a *rojō raibu* community at the station, though Whisper and Koba suggested to me that whether or not they were considered part of a scene or something greater than solo street music would depend upon the definition of that connectedness, and where the boundaries of their social relationships were drawn. Based on their suggestions and Heine's (2012) discovery during fieldwork that Savannah's music scene was not a cohesive whole but a cluster of lightly connected independent circles, I began looking at the shape of social and performance 'networks' taking place beyond the boundaries of the station. I focused upon three venues, Muryoku Muzenji, Alone and Traghetto, and found three very different kinds of engagement. What emerged supports the conclusion that the musicians were hopping across an archipelago of personally defined musical islands, not moving along smooth lines of an enmeshed network that might demarcate a scene.

Though approaches to participation at live venues and its connective threads to street music contrasted significantly between Harada, Whisper, Koba and Spaghetti, their accounts illustrate that *rojō raibu* musicians were invested in much deeper musical and social connections than their public appearances at the station led many to believe. What took shape upon close inspection was a series of focused interactions and a temporary sense of camaraderie existing for the duration of the live house event; similar to what Goffman (1963) described as 'little societies' or extended involvement in a single moment. Threading these collections of moments together, a constant, supportive relationship between *rojō* musicians and small live house owners emerged. This relationship was central to their sense of affiliation to an institution that could offer them unrestrained expressive freedom and a space to explore a sense of extraordinary musicianship, a tangible feeling of progression, mentorship and guidance, or the opportunity to blur the boundaries of street music itself.

The master of Muzenji believed that music was not just for people who could play an instrument, but rather a 'way' or form of expression. In his management of the live house and his own idiosyncratic performances at the beginning of Muzenji nights, the master set a clear principle of unbounded experimentation that kept true to his interpretation of the name 'Muryoku Muzeniji' as 'it can't be helped'. Just as the Japanese characters for 'Muryoku' translate as 'no power', the master imposed no hierarchy upon events in the live house beyond a small entrance fee and a request that each performer restrict their show to half-an-hour out of respect to others who had paid to play. As such the live house was a space of *hinichijō* ('the uncommon in everyday life') wherein performers could become *hyōgensha* ('expressive people'). They had paid for thirty minutes of indulgence, and for an audience fully accepting of this. Whisper used his many visits to Muzenji to create eccentric and theatrical moments in between street music sessions at the station, including spontaneous collaborations with others, songs performed sat within the audience, post-rock styled extended musical interludes or effect-pedal vocal experimentations.

While Whisper transcended both the social and musical limits of the street at Muzenji, Harada's performances at the live house remained close to his station *rojō raibu*. For Harada, Muzenji offered a crowd that stopped and listened for a whole set, which was something he had yet to experience on the street, and at a price that he could afford despite his limited finances from three days of *baito* work per week. Harada wanted to become a 'Kōenji musician', and playing at the town's most infamous live house was a way for him to embed himself deeper within the music culture of the neighbourhood.

Drawing upon Ben Ari's (2002) notion of 'the frame' in bōnenkai events I have argued that by coming in off the streets and limiting their performances to a time frame and principles shared by all participants, street musicians at Muzenji benefitted from mutual, shared experience set apart from the realities known to each individual. The master's open policy of *dou demo ii* ('whatever goes') was concomitantly a frame that set the live house apart from the rest of the performers' lives wherein this was most certainly not the case. The time sandwiched between the masters' cat choir music was theirs do with as they pleased, and by taking the microphone for half-an-hour they each stood out on their own terms, becoming whatever they felt defined them in a preferable way to the reality ongoing outside, and acting as a centrepoint around which the gathered musicians turned, sustaining the collective.

The themes of boundaries, and of scale in constructing social relationships and a sense of the musician in respect to everyday life 'outside', were also present at Alone live house. The master,

Inoue, proposed to help musicians meet their 'new selves' (*atarashii jibun*) by providing them with a 'small space' (*shōkūkan*) wherein his experience, attention to detail and his guidance would lead the way. Koba stumbled upon Alone while walking through Kōenji one afternoon, having given up his job and taken out a loan to look after his ailing girlfriend. The name 'Alone' stood out to him. In his most trying of times since moving to Tōkyō, Koba struck up a close bond with Inoue, who soon afterwards became personally involved in Koba's life outside the live house.

Koba also developed close friendships with Alone's older and more experienced patron musicians. Inoue protected his business throughout, charging expensive rates to perform at Alone, especially when individuals decided to put on 'One Man' solo live shows wherein other musicians were invited but no one else performed. As Kondo's (1987) work has shown, such affiliation to an institutional framework can be constraining and demanding - and in the case of Alone, expensive - but it can also tell individuals who they are in relationships with others. Koba's movement away from *rojō raibu* and to live house affiliation at Alone supports Aoki's suggestion that social norms found in Japanese institutions such as *bukatsu* (club activities) are adopted within more 'subcultural' settings. In the places of independent music this adoption allows individuals to seek out their own paths in reference to the recognised norms of Japan's major institutions. Alone presented a different frame to Muzenji, one that was dedicated to creating polished performances by well-trained musicians. For Koba, however, this provided him with the sense of confirmation and connectedness he lacked in street music. Adrift from work and newly bereft, the structure of seniority at Alone became an essential aspect of legitimising his self-perception as a musician.

Finally, Spaghetti's performances at Traghetto live bar presented a considerable contrast to both the scale and boundaries of the social relationships of performance at Muzenji and Alone. By moving between the street and the live venue, and ferrying audiences and fans from outdoors to inside, the band eroded the threshold that separated *rojō raibu* from live house performance. By disregarding these boundaries, and by nurturing a reciprocal relationship that favoured both his band and the live bar, Spaghetti discovered a flexibility that enabled his relationships with new fans and friends to develop from temporary moments, or 'little societies' in Goffman's terms, into extended and long-lasting relationships of support. By leaving the street and entering Traghetto, Spaghetti could offer physical proximity and performer-audience relationships based upon intimacy. By repetition over successive Friday nights in Kōenji, Spaghetti and his fellow musicians became well connected and widely known within the neighbourhood. Their sell-out performance at Kōenji High was testament to the strength of connections they had threaded between the live house and the street.

Chapter 4

‘Kōenji, won’t you accept someone like me?’: the *ibasho* of Kōenji and its genius loci

なんとなく遠くの街に行ってみたくなって　明るすぎる太陽を背に家を飛び出した
電車にゆるりゆられて辿り着いた街は　デイズニーランドより夢の詰まっている高円寺だった
夕日に照らされ始めた高円寺駅は　シンデレラ城よりも美しく見えて
ふらふらと商店街を練り歩きながら　僕もこの街の人になりたいと思ったんだ

あぁ、夢の街こうえんじ。こんな僕を受け入れてくれないか
あぁ、情緒あるこうえんじ。いつか僕に微笑んでくれよ

中央線の見えるモダンな喫茶店で　コーヒーを飲みながら日が暮れるのを見ていたい
高架線下に軒を連ねる大衆居酒屋で　勢いに任せて女の子を口説いてみたい
拓郎やようすいやこうせつ達が　フォークソングを歌っていたこの街の片隅で
言葉にならないような青春の日々を　やさしい風に吹かれながら綴っていたい

あぁ、夢の街こうえんじ。ほんのり酒の匂いに包まれている
あぁ、情緒あるこうえんじ。ほろ酔い気分にさせてくれよ

「高円寺」原田克洋[64]

Wanting to see a far away town I left the house under a powerful sun
By and by the train arrived at Kōenji, a place with more dreams than Disneyland
Kōenji Station in the light of the evening sun, more beautiful than Cinderella’s castle
As I wandered through the streets I thought, I want to be a Kōenji person too

AoaaAA Kōenji the town of dreams, won’t you accept someone like me
AoaaAA Kōenji that place of emotions, Someday smile at me

I want to watch the sun setting, from a modern cafe overlooking the Chūō Line
In the energy of the moment I want to flirt with a girl in an *izakaya* under the tracks
In a corner of the town, where Takuro, Yosui or Kosetsu sang folk songs
I want to spell out the indescribable days of youth to a gentle passing breeze

[64] No copyright exists for Harada’s Kōenji song lyrics.

AoaaAA Kōenji the town of dreams, wrapped in the faint smell of sake
AoaaAA Kōenji the town of emotions, come and intoxicate me

'Kōenji', Katsuhiro Harada.

Harada played his song 'Kōenji' every time he performed *rojō raibu* at the station, sat in his usual spot as the crowds passed him by in the corner of the north exit walkway and the first underpass. He also played it on the occasions I saw him at Muzenji live house. The song is shrouded in a sense of mystery, hope and youthful energy, and encapsulates Harada's attachment to the neighbourhood. Much like Koba's retelling of the day he discovered Kōenji, Harada's song plays on the fatefulness of his arrival at the station. In the lines 「電車にゆるりゆられて辿り着いた街は」(*By and by the train arrived at Kōenji*) the train appears to take him to Kōenji at a noticeably relaxed pace. Upon arriving in Kōenji Harada then begins to discover its charm, eventually deciding that he wants to become a 'Kōenji person' as well 「ふらふらと商店街を練り歩きながら　僕もこの街の人になりたいと思ったんだ」(*As I wandered through the streets I thought, I want to be a Kōenji person too*). In the lyrics, Harada builds upon two themes. Firstly, Kōenji is an animate entity with the ability to act upon individuals, bestow good fortune, or to accept or reject people entering the neighbourhood 「夢の街こうえんじ。こんな僕を受け入れてくれないか」(*Kōenji the town of dreams, won't you accept someone like me*). Secondly, it is a well of 'youthful vigour', of abandon to the enjoyment of sensory things, the *ikioi* ('spirit' or 'energy') of the moment. This is observable in Harada's description of longing for certain things: a view of a sunset from a cafe overlooking the rail track, a flirtatious moment with a stranger in an Izakaya, and days spent performing in the streets of the town as others have done; the 'indescribable days of youth' 「言葉にならないような青春の日々」. Finally, at the end of the song and after an extended harmonica solo as he strummed a train track rhythm on guitar, Harada would sing choruses one and two repeatedly until the end. Both choruses are an act of invocation, the first an entreaty to take him in, and the second a request to fill him with the 'drunken spirit' of Kōenji; to intoxicate him with its affective quality 「あぁ、情緒あるこうえんじ。ほろ酔い気分にさせてくれよ」(*Kōenji the town of emotions, come and intoxicate me*).

In this chapter I delve into the relationship of three street musicians, Tsun Tsun, Fuji and Whisper, with Kōenji Station as a place of significant emotional and spiritual consequence in their lives. The kind of connection with Kōenji that is explored by Harada in his song was also described by other *rojō* musicians in the neighbourhood. For some Kōenji was not simply a location where their dreams

of becoming successful musicians might be realised, or a step in a series of imagined progressions towards professionalism, it was also a place to be and grow in, to find human connection or to revel in the lifestyles associated with the town and contrasted with perceived negative exterior forces acting on their lives. While the train station in literature on contemporary Japanese cities is often portrayed as a conduit for the fast-paced and efficient transport of office workers, a contemporary 'non-place' (Auge 1995) of modernity, a close look at activities in situ tells a different story. By investigating how the station became a 'place to be' - an *ibasho* - for street musicians at Kōenji, I will demonstrate how urban spaces in Tōkyō can become interwoven with personal narratives that combine autobiography and place.

Connected to a Japanese sense of 'the commons' and traced back to the Edo period, *roji kūkan* ('alleyway space' or 'backstreet space') is reconstructed by some *rojō* performers in urban spaces generally associated with human traffic flows and transitory aspects of the modern city. In times of difficult personal circumstances, when musicians felt detached from life around them, such activities gave them back their sense of belonging and emotional connection to place. Some were able to forge such attachments where they had previously been lost or given up elsewhere. For some *rojō* performers Kōenji became not only an important destination in their daily lives, but a town with a soul and the capacity to act benevolently. By exploring the 'character' of Kōenji, its *genius loci* as seen through the eyes of street musicians, I will also argue that like the street performers I knew, the poorer or socially immobile of Japanese cities are not as lost' or as helpless as discourses on contemporary precariousness have suggested. It was not until the winter season that I began to understand the importance of Kōenji as a place to visit for some street musicians outside of or in addition to their musical performances, and so I begin by briefly introducing the shape of *rojō raibu* at this time of the year.

Fig. 28: Harada returned each time to the same busy spot at the station (see Map 5, position 4).

4.1 Winter

I experienced two winters during my research with street musicians in Kōenji. In both years Kōenji Station was a comfortable place to perform until around late December, at which point temperatures began dropping below ten degrees centigrade in the daytime. Winter lasts well into March, when swathes of pink sakura blossom invariably appear along the streets and riverbanks of the city. The station became a darker, quieter place to be during the winter months. Gone too was the buzz of constant activity that heightened in mid-summer, when street performers could be found in larger numbers on both the north and south sides. As January arrived, the number of street performers dropped to one or two appearances a day. During February, the coldest month in Tōkyō, I often waited in vain for somebody to arrive at the station grounds, and indeed for days at a time the walkways and underpasses were devoid of all music except for the chirp-like bleeps of pedestrian crossings.

Tassan told me once that he did not heed the cold, 'I just wear more layers and play for a shorter time', he said one afternoon in late autumn. At that time Tassan lived in Asagaya, just a short ten minute walk alongside the rail tracks to Kōenji, yet like many others he stopped visiting the station in the depths of winter. This behaviour was completely understandable, and as someone who also played street music on occasion in Kōenji and Asagaya, I could sympathise full-heartedly. Fingers quickly lose their feeling and dexterity in the cold air, and even a simple arpeggiated picking of guitar strings becomes difficult if not painful as red swollen flesh meets cold hard steel. Musicians such as Whisper and Hitomi would warm their hands on heated bottles of tea bought from the local *konbini* (convenience store), or else people who stopped to listen would bring them warm beverages to encourage their efforts. However, despite myriad individual attempts to prolong the street music season, most eventually gave in to the cold, preferring to restrict their activities to live houses or studios until winter abated.

Those who remained outside were people who played throughout the summer and autumn, and then endeavoured to play through winter as well. Whether due to the general fall in numbers, or the camaraderie of spending time together outdoors during the darkest days of the year, these were some the street musicians I got to know the best, and in particular Whisper, Tsun Tsun and Fuji. Their presence at the station in January and February posed important research questions. This time of year is colder and darker than any other, which means that not only is it more uncomfortable to play music outdoors, but there are fewer people in the area to listen. Those passing by on their way to or from the station are much less likely to stop than they would during the warm spring and hot summer months when the streets and open spaces of Kōenji town are bustling with activity. Why then did some street musicians continue to visit the station and play music? Why did they feel that they wanted or needed to continue throughout the year when, for most others, spring, summer and autumn were enough? I believe that Harada's Kōenji song provides some clues to finding an answer, touching as it does on the personal relationship between the town and the individual, and to the way in which a railway station in the centre of the neighbourhood is perceived as a shelter bestowing care and as a force of positive influence on the lives of those who dwell there.

4.2 The station as a 'commons' of last resort

The romantic imagination of Kōenji in Harada's song is palpable, painting a picture of the town in easy, languid summer tones. Those playing in the coldest months, however, including Harada, freely

admitted that much of it was far from ideal. No one talked about long cold nights with language such as 'the indescribable days of youth'. There were practical reasons for being at the station that had little bearing on the time of year, or else were understood case by case as making sense, which made braving winter performances a worthwhile endeavour.

As a 'commons' for street musicians, the station was both positively and negatively affected by the winter season: the fall in numbers of musicians and general public at night meant less competition for space but it increased the visibility of individual musicians to the authorities. Further, with a reduced scale and frequency of activities taking place around the station, the process of alleyisation discussed in chapter 2 became complicated. In her study of community gardens in New York, Eizenberg (2012) says of 'community commons' that they are always in a process of negotiation and being produced, and that they offer a set of livelihood qualities such as social space or dwelling in a non-commodified manner (2012: 766). She suggests that in New York the combination of this material space, knowledge and meaning recreates these commons in forms that 'supplement needed but unavailable resources' (ibid: 778).

Due to their own need for both regularity and useable space, some individuals could be found around Kōenji station despite difficult conditions for both performance and dwelling. Where the commons as a theoretical and recognisable concept in social science has been strongly associated with openly political groups and organisations, especially within the framework of music and resistance (see for instance Sand 2013; Slater et al. 2015; Hayashi and McKnight 2005; Manabe 2012; Cassegard 2013), Ash Amin argues that 'by working with the grain of everyday usage… the workings of urban public space are politically modest, but still full of collective promise' (2008: 8). *Rojō* performers are a clear example of the point Amin makes, in that their motivations for keeping Kōenji open as a common playing space are both practical, signalling the need for such spaces in order to play music, and tied to the promise of 'belonging' in the form of a place that protects and nurtures their spirit.

In January, in Yonchōme Cafe[65] overlooking Kōenji Station and its south side traffic rotary, Whisper sipped at a coffee and surveyed the empty station walkways. '*Noruma* has forced some people to play outside as well', he began.

[65] See Map 4 for position in Kōenji

> 'It wasn't always like it is now. During the live house boom years in the 1990s musicians had to audition to play at venues like Niman (Niman Denatsu) or Lazyways… the likes of Muzenji weren't even around then. As far as I can remember there was no *noruma* in the old days. Instead, venues had to put on bands that would draw a crowd, that were either relatively well known or with a great potential to be popular. Auditions were strict, but with the introduction of the *noruma* system that all changed. There are some positive things about it, for instance sending a demo tape to a live house is basically enough to get you in through the door now. It works to allow anyone and everyone to find a live house that they can perform at, with quality being much less of a barrier to entry. I even like that aspect, some live shows are just ridiculous. There is so much variety and artistic freedom. However, musicians have since become constrained by the cost of performing. You ask why I come here even when it is less comfortable to do so? Well, there is one reason: musicians like me - many of the other *rojō* performers as well I think - cannot afford to play at live houses where a costly *noruma* system is in place. We are forced to play outside if we want to play regularly.'

This financial aspect of playing *rojō raibu* was exposed in winter. My informants did not become any more or less wealthy during the summer, but performing on a warm, pleasant evening was attractive to both year-round street musicians and those fair-weather street performers who did not regularly play at the station. Being outside with others in the summer was attractive to many people, but only the winter highlighted the inability of Whisper and others to be somewhere else when they played. For Whisper this restriction was not only financial but temporal as well. 'I am pretty much nocturnal', he often joked when talking about his work and sleep patterns.

> 'I work at the supermarket in Shin-Kōenji during the night as you know, doing the night-shift. Usually I go there straight from playing *rojō* at around midnight and work until the early morning, then I go to my other *baito* to deliver the morning papers. I go home and eat, maybe play quietly on an un-amped electric guitar for a bit, and then sleep. I just have one window in the evening for performing, practising and seeing people, and the station just fits in to that schedule for me.'

Like Whisper, other winter performers considered their time at Kōenji to be a part of their everyday life as well. Playing *rojō* became a habit formed through both personal circumstances and repetition. Saino and his rap group played at the station through most of winter because Tuesday nights were rap nights at Kōenji for his troupe, and members depended on it being there. For whatever reason individuals first began playing at Kōenji Station, their perseverance during January and February

was at least partly due to ingrained rhythms. It structured their day. Indeed, Harada often seemed surprised by how cold the temperature was while performing outside in winter, as though climatic conditions played second fiddle to other impulses. He played on his regular days even if they happened to be the coldest of the week, because keeping to a strict schedule was his way of promoting his music and sustaining his chances of being discovered by a music scout. It also gave him a personal sense of achievement, and proof that he was 'trying his best' (*gambaru*). Harada acknowledged several times that the likelihood of being scouted at the station was slim, and even slimmer in winter, yet he adhered to his schedule nonetheless. In this same way, Guru Pari always played late at night and often after the station had closed, and Hitomi always between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. and invariably in the same spot on the north side walkway. Whether by time or by season, Guru Pari often determined to play during the quietest hours:

> 'I like the emptiness when the station closes. It's calming to play when the streets are empty and I feel like I can be me without worrying about others. I can sing and play louder because businesses have stopped trading and fewer complaints (*kujō*) are received at the kōban. So the police leave me alone and I can play however I wish. That's even more the case at this time of year when it is colder.'

Avoiding the police, and dealing with them when they came by, was a skill that only the most seasoned street performers learned well. Positioning and timing were both important factors, but the winter provided some respite from the intensity with which the *kōban* officers operated during the summer. As life in Tōkyō moved indoors, sounds from the station clearly registered with fewer people. In Yonchōme Cafe, Whisper lit up a cigarette and blew the smoke up into the air between us.

> 'As well as habit, Kōenji provides me with a solution to another problem - being at home. Sometimes I just can't be there. The apartment is small, dark. It feels cramped and I quickly get down on myself, I start thinking negatively. Kōenji is also somewhere I can be, you know? (*Kōenji wa hokanimo ibasho da ne, wakaru?*). I know that I can leave my house whenever I want and it's there. Not just for me. It's there for anyone.'

Fig. 29: Kōenji's south side from the station's railway platform. Yonchōme Cafe can be seen in the left image.

Other performers had home lives that were very similar to Whisper's. Harada's living space was a cramped room in a share-house, and limited to the bare necessities. Appearing later in this chapter, Tsun Tsun lived about an hour by train from Kōenji, and felt isolated and without access to stimuli that helped him to enjoy life (*nani mo nai basho da yo*). After the death of his girlfriend of two years, Koba struggled with a constant sense of loneliness in his apartment, and worried about how he would pay the large debts he owed after taking on the rent by himself. In her book *Precarious Japan* Anne Allison (2013) describes similar circumstances in Japan, of loneliness, debt and a lack of comfortable living space as part of an encroaching precariousness from the margins into mainstream Japanese lifestyles. For individuals such as the street performers I knew, whose irregular employment (*jisekikoyō*) 'break the mould' of the post-war family-corporate system, 'there is no movement forward, no long-term placement or security' (2013: 45).

Closely following the definition of the activist Amamiya Karin, Allison considers these people to be part of the precarious proletariat in Japanese society for whom life is ensnared by an 'everyday refugeeism', the symptom of which is the ubiquitous state of having 'no place to be': *ibasho gai nai* (2013: 47). Problematically, in her work this notion equates to both the actual condition of

homelessness, as well as to the emotional, felt sense of being stranded with nowhere else to turn. For Allison, those who are not the recognised 'winners' (*kachigumi*) in Japanese society are necessarily the 'losers' (*makegumi*), lacking the respect, recognition and belonging afforded to those fully engaging in the family-corporate system (2013: 68). While street musicians in my research sometimes questioned their own place and value in contrast to 'typical Japanese lifestyles' (*ippan no raifusutairu*), and though some self-identified as 'failures' (*dame na hito*), 'strange' (*kawatteru hito*) or even 'vagrants' (e.g. Guru Pari referred to himself as *Yadonashi-kun* or 'a vagabond boy' on some of his flyers), their involvement in street music at Kōenji Station questions the inability of those 'breaking the mould' of standardised Japanese work and family life to build an *ibasho* for themselves outside of it.

4.3 **Rejuvenating Whisper**

Hannah Arendt suggested that it is the publicness of the commons that allows individuals to become social beings. Affect, the sharing of emotion and hardship with others and with an audience, she argued 'assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves' (1998: 50). For those like Whisper, Kōenji Station was a place of creativity and sharing that musicians could rely on. While the details of their lives changed over the course of my fieldwork, Kōenji remained a constant that performers held on to, at times keeping them afloat. It offered respite from work, stress and sometimes from home life. On occasion a tangible sense of relief was apparent in conversations with individuals who had escaped to the station for an evening.

On one such night in late February I was walking up Minami Yon-Chōme street, and when I reached the hiroba traffic lights on the south side of the station I saw a shape under the first rail underpass, which I made out to be Whisper. He sat balancing on the low chain railings watching a girl strumming guitar and singing with a powerful, constant vibrato. As I drew closer I recognised the performer as Morita, a regular at Muzenji and close friend to Whisper and the master of the live house, who involves herself in a series of music groups and workshops in the Chūō area of Tōkyō. Whisper looked different, and if it were not for his unmistakable wiry frame and gangly posture I would not have recognised him from a distance. Until that day Whisper had been an image of the classic rock musician with long black hair, open shirts, narrow trousers and boots, which suited his relaxed laissez-faire personality. Instead, on that day Whisper wore loosely fitted jeans, a black puffer jacket and a small black baseball cap covering a freshly-shaven head. Now exposed, his boney features appeared exaggerated and he looked even more like a street urchin than ever.

I thought that, for the first time, he looked to be cold. 'Ah, Robāto san!' Whisper called out as he noticed me approaching under the archway. As I smiled and pointed to his head, Whisper took off his cap and rubbed a hand across the stubble where his long hair used to be, emitting a coarse scraping sound. 'Somehow I felt I wanted to refresh myself' (*nantonaku rifuresshushitai to omotta…*) he said looking at the ground and chuckling with embarrassment. The word 'refresh' or *rifuresshu* in Japanese is often used to refer to the spirit, or to feelings in addition to physical appearance. In this instance, Whisper's decision to 'refresh' himself was most definitely born of a desire to kickstart a positive change in his personal life. Only a few days prior Whisper had sent me a phone message to tell me that his short marriage of six months had come to an abrupt end. I sat down with him on the underpass floor and we watched Morita play for a while, talking between songs with her and the white-haired man sat a few steps away who she jokingly referred to as her 'director'. The director spent most of his time rummaging through a white plastic bag of flyers (*chirashi*) and CDs, waving bits of paper at groups of people who walked through the underpass. 'I never really play street music properly' Morita said in her usual low, sarcastic tones, 'I just practice on the street when I feel like it. Or to drum up some interest for a live show… I'll bring some flyers and CDs in case I get lucky and someone wants to buy one though'. Whisper returned from the nearby SevenEleven *konbini* with a canned coffee in his hand and proceeded to sip at it quietly while he listened to us. With another rustling movement Morita's director pulled a beer from his plastic bag and offered it to me.

As we sat talking Whisper gradually came out of his shell, becoming slowly but evermore animated. Even so, I was surprised when Morita suddenly brought up the subject of Whisper's marriage. As accommodating as ever, Whisper talked honestly about the break-up: the age difference, the misunderstandings and arguments, and the difficulties caused by Whisper's working hours and inability to spend much time at home. Fearful of ruining the mood, Whisper interjected his explanations with lighter comments about his own stupidity, followed up with a toothy grin. After another ten minutes Shibasaki, a friend of Whisper's and musician who once played in a Shoegaze rock band, crossed the road into the archway and called out as he recognised us. The four of us, Morita and her producer, Shibasaki and me, stood around or sat on the walkway talking to Whisper. He told us how he now needed to find a new place to live, that contract problems were making his money troubles worse, and that he did not think he would ever be able to pay his pension (*nenkin*) fees. He was now considering staying in a Kōenji's *ryō*, a dormitory with basic facilities for people who need a bed.

After an hour or so Morita left for the train with her producer in tow. Shibasaki and I took Whisper to a nearby cheap Yakitori (skewered meat) restaurant overlooking the station, where we spent the next couple of hours exchanging band stories amidst the surrounding commotion and the smoke and scent of fried chicken. At one point Whisper piped up, 'I'm so happy that I came down to the station tonight!' and proceeded to repeat this intermittently. 'Somehow I knew it. Kōenji is special in that way, you always run into good people you know here. It doesn't happen anywhere else in the same way.' Whisper appeared moved by the spontaneous series of meetings at the station that evening, and he attributed this good luck to the fact that Kōenji was 'a place where his heart could rest' (*kokoro ga ochitsukeru basho*). The uncharacteristically reticent Whisper I had run into at the beginning of the evening was rejuvenated by the end. Outside Yakitori Taisho, the three of us stood in the south-side *hiroba*. Whisper insisted on taking another of his much-cherished group photos, stealing my hat and balancing it on his shaven head as we posed. Hugging and kissing both Shibasaki and me on the cheek, Whisper strolled off in the direction of his motorbike, singing words of thanks and affection back to us as he went.

At a difficult emotional time Whisper went to the station in expectation of finding something or somebody there to help him cope. Indeed his comments to Shibasaki and me, 'Somehow I knew it. Kōenji is special in that way', indicate that Whisper understood the station not only as a place of musical performance but of rest and nourishment. As Harada's Kōenji song revealed the neighbourhood as a benevolent force in his life, for instance, in the line 'Kōenji that place of emotions, Someday smile at me', so too was Whisper hoping to tap into the nurturing 'spirit of place', the 'genius loci' of *rojō* at the station. Beyond the *ibasho* as 'a place where one feels at home' (Otaya 2012), the genius loci describes the special characteristics of a place that attract people to it, the combined feelings, images and thoughts of those who deal with the space, or as Yi-Fu Tuan described, the 'embodiment of feelings' (Tuan 1977).

The winter *rojō* performers' sense that Kōenji was not just a place to be but that it could have a more positive effect on visitors than other places in the city is captured by Laura Menatti's description of the genius loci in ancient Rome. According to Menatti, in Roman times the genius loci was a spirit ascribed to a place and a deity that would protect its people (2013: 224). For some authors this meaning has been adapted into contemporary life to mean the spirit of a place, created in a place-making exercise from the on-the-ground experiences of those who use it regularly (Jiven and Larkham 2013; Strecker 2000). Building on Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling', Christian Norberg-Schultz argues that the genius loci of place has come to represent the nature of attraction between human beings and parts of the city: 'Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify

himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful.' (1980: 5). While the general public travelled to and away from it each day, Kōenji Station existed in the eyes of street performers beyond the character of an inner-city rail hub. It had distinctive features, it could be '"festive", "solemn" or "protective"' (Norberg-Schultz 1980: 14). For Whisper it held an enticing potential for connecting with others like no other place he frequented in his daily life in Tōkyō. On numerous occasions Whisper and other performers described this latent potential around the station grounds as taking form through *gūzen no deai*, or 'chance encounters'.

4.4 *Gūzen no deai*, homelessness and the sociality of the street

Whisper had many ways of describing the moment during *rojō* performance when he felt a sudden connection with the public, with individuals who stopped to listen, groups that passed by and interacted briefly, locals leaving him a tea or coffee bought from a *konbini*, drunks, strangers and fellow musicians striking up conversation. He even enjoyed the simple, free flow of human bodies passing him by during a performance, something he described as 'the wind of others' on the first day I met him in the summer of 2013. He also used the term *gūzen no deai* when talking about happy and unexpected passing moments with the general public. I have seen countless examples of this while at the station: a girl stopping and doing an impromptu flamenco-like dance to Whisper's guitar, causing him to burst out into laughter; an old drunken man in his sixties engaging Whisper in a cheerful battle of insults after he had told Whisper to 'go home' because he was 'talentless', and locals attempting to give Whisper tobacco, *sake* or money and talking about their own days as aspiring musicians. At other times impromptu jam sessions led to friendship or opportunities for studio or live house collaborations.

Another regular winter street musician, Fuji, also used the language of *gūzen no deai* to describe his own preference for playing *rojō raibu* over other modes of performance. Fuji felt that the street had provided him with basic social exchanges at a time when he had nowhere else to turn. Fuji lived in Asagaya, where he had moved to from Ōsaka in April 2015. At 34 years old, Fuji was one of the older street performers I knew, yet his story reminded me of the much younger Koba in many ways.

> 'Around five years ago I made a trip around Japan on local trains (*kakueki densha*), you know, always the first to last stop. I was able to do that without paying much, you can just tell the station staff that you lost your ticket and that you began your journey at the previous town ten minutes away. My travels included Tōkyō, where I discovered Kōenji for the first time. I had

> such great memories of that period; the music, the atmosphere and the different people I met. I actually knew the Kōenji *rojō* performer Reika from back in Ōsaka, which is also her hometown, so I spent some time with her as well. I picked up this sticker [points to his guitar, covered in colourful labels, to a now weather-beaten and faded white sticker with the statement 'I♥Kōenji']. Upon my return I couldn't stop thinking about the town. Nobody really plays in Ōsaka. I don't know why, but I never saw many people whenever I played *rojō* there. People aren't a part of something like I feel they are here. So I saved up 200,000 yen from *baito* jobs and moved to Tōkyō just over six months ago. I didn't spend that money wisely, but I had a great time for a couple of months. Then my money began running out and I hadn't even begun thinking about a place to live permanently and what I would need in order to secure those things. I couldn't stay with my friend any longer and so I was out on the street with only a few notes left. I lived on discounted *onigiri* (filled rice balls) and water for a while… did you know that you can survive on only water for two weeks?'

As Fuji began to talk about his homeless period in Tōkyō his devil-may-care attitude became replaced by a more sombre, serious expressiveness:

> 'Being homeless is difficult though. You can't eat when you want to, when you need to. It was full of hardships and personally I was surprised how easily and quickly I fell into it. I always thought something catastrophic would have to happen to make me homeless, but it didn't. I just ran out of money and slipped into it. Finding work became more difficult as well, because I had no address and so couldn't complete the forms I needed to. Nor did I have any personal ID (*shōmeisho*), so things became a bit desperate. I copied my friend's ID, adjusted it and added my own picture [smiles slightly and puts his finger to his lips, emitting a "shhhhhh" sound]. I forged some work documents for a company I thought sounded like it might exist, and used them along with the ID to get my current job cleaning windows and to secure an apartment in Asagaya. I didn't have a choice, I was homeless.'

Both Koba and Fuji described homelessness as a state they entered into almost smoothly as they ran out of money in Tōkyō, surprising themselves with the ease with which they accepted the street corner, park or riverbank as a place to bed down for the night in the open. In both their cases, being without an apartment or bed for a few months gradually enabled them to see spaces such as Kōenji Station without differentiating outside from inside in the same way that they had prior to their homeless experience. This is another quality Norberg-Schultz (1980) ascribes to the genius loci of place: by dwelling in parts of the city made meaningful by individuals they experience a shift in

perception from 'outside' to 'inside' incrementally the more their lives occur there. For Fuji, *gūzen no deai* was a part of the sociability of the street during *rojō raibu* performances. As he explained, *rojō* in this context was an act of emplacement within the social order of the city beyond the basic infrastructural and built environment. *Gūzen no deai* enveloped urban life by creating the opportunities for people to come together in shared experiences and forms of communication that incorporated the qualities of the street.

Fig. 30: Fuji along the south wall of Kōenji Station. As I took this photo a man stopped and asked Fuji if he was famous. He laughed.

Homelessness touched the lives of a number of Kōenj's street musicians, in particular Fuji, Koba and Guru Pari. The winter *rojō* performers were usually those most susceptible to slipping in or out of homelessness with a change in their work or living circumstances. That transition into homelessness can occur with surprising ease, as Fuji contemplated in our conversation, has been noted by other anthropologists studying marginal groups in Japan (see Gill 2001, 2003, 2005, 2011; Patari 2008; Aoki 2006; Fowler 1998). In his article *Failed Manhood on the Streets of Urban Japan* Gill (2011) argues persuasively that the autonomy or agency (*shutaisei*) of marginal men is a gendered phenomenon in Japan that emerges from a society that expects men to be self-reliant and women not to be. Indeed in his research individual men display pride in their ability to get-by in a condition

of homelessness in their own way and by employing tactics learnt on the street such as can-collecting. In a similar fashion, Koba learnt where and when to queue for free bread crusts during his own homeless spell living by the banks of the Arakawa river. The danger when researching marginal men, Gill suggests, is the tendency to portray them as either 'passive victims or as active resisters' (2011: 3), and he notes a couple of successful ethnographies including Aoki's work on underclass men that have managed to illustrate how such individuals often patch together improvised lives within conditions of discomfort and alienation. These authors demonstrate that there are lives to be found in between easy distinctions and categorisations of inside and outside society's normative lived experiences. Becoming homeless may have put certain street performers in a precarious position, but this did not mean that they lacked the ability to reconnect with the world around them in various ways.

In his analysis of the film *Tōkyō Sonata*, Dasgupta (2011) explores how director Kurosawa employs the 'everyday physical and emotional scapes of post-bubble urban Japan' (201: 383) to frame a narrative about an average salaryman's descent into unemployment and disconnection with his previous life. According to Dasgupta, where as streetscapes are fleeting at the beginning of the film, they become more and more prevalent as the protagonist spends more time outside the spaces of home and work, first noticing, then acclimatising to the streets and parks in which he spends increasing amounts of time.

For Fuji, the streets played an increasingly central part in his experience of life in Tōkyō not long after moving from Ōsaka. Like Koba, or Guru Pari who pulled a large pink suitcase around with him to his performance spots, Fuji acclimatised to spending the majority of his time on pavements, in parks and around train stations before he enlisted the help of a friend to acquire work and a small apartment in Asagaya. The personal, emotional connection Fuji made with Kōenji Station as he slipped in and then out of vagrancy remained with him long after he had become relatively settled. Indeed Fuji felt more comfortable outside than he did being alone in his apartment, and used the station for almost all his social interactions with others outside of work. His distrust of what he perceived as an unfair system of employment and class-based institutions in Japan was juxtaposed by the faith he had in his ability to exist outside of it in the places he felt calm and safe (*anshin*) and where he discovered human fellowship on his own terms.

One evening in late November I found Fuji sat down, back leant against the long wall of the station's South Exit, playing his usual brand of powerfully strum chords and voice-cracking vocals at high volume. His guitar bore deep scratch marks where his plectrum had dug deeper and deeper

into the wooden body. He sat on a mustard-yellow throw covered with sanskrit and symbols, and next to him was a girl in her early twenties watching him as he played. 'We met on the website "oursounds",[66] which I've been using to find band members', Fuji said as he introduced me to his friend. 'I said that she should come and hang out here in Kōenji because I wanted to play *rojō* tonight, and it would be better than being in a cafe somewhere'. As we talked, Shachō, the old vagrant who spends much of his time talking with friends, selling his art and presiding over events in the northern *hiroba*, appeared from around the corner and set a canned coffee down at Fuji's feet, smiling and inclining slightly into a bow before turning and leaving in the direction of the underpass. *Rojō no shiriai* ('a street acquaintance') Fuji said as he puffed on a cigarette and cracked open his coffee.

As Fuji played and the three of us sat talking throughout the evening, various people joined us for short periods of time before eventually moving on. First of all were a couple of young men in their early twenties who stopped, listened and then approached us, one of them asking Fuji if he could play his guitar for a while. Fuji agreed silently and passed his guitar over to the two musicians as he lit up another cigarette. Crowds of people coming and going from the station passed behind the young guy now playing Fuji's guitar. 'We are in a band', the long-haired one began, 'we came down to Kōenji to visit a studio. It's great to hear music out here too though, and I'm happy we could stop and talk to some locals. Keep it up!'. After fifteen minutes they got up and left. Fuji took back his guitar and shook the visitors' hands. Tucking his guitar back between his right arm and chest he appeared refreshed: 'Interesting… That guy was playing exactly the kind of chords I love the most' Fuji said nodding his head as if in agreement with himself.

> 'It's usually the case, there is something about the way I play *rojō* that attracts like-minded people. When I perform I feel that I am inviting people to come and join me. Not directly, but by revealing something of myself that those with a similar way of life (*onaji yō na ikikata*) understand. Those guys stopped and listened, then when he played it was just the kind of music I'm interested in. So you see, it is as if he stopped because he heard my call. It has been like that with other people as well. Homeless men have stopped and listened to me play and talked to me, but it is not because they simply feel that they like my music or want to support me. No, it is because they hear something that speaks to them, that is ultimately my voice calling to them. The people I meet on the street, who stop and spend time with me, are people

[66] 'oursounds' [sic] is the original name of the band member search site, it has not been translated from Japanese.

who hear my heart, who share a similar outlook on life and are compelled to come and be with me'.

Not long passed before another passer-by stopped, listened and ventured to ask us if she might sit with us for a while, introducing herself as Midori. 'I have played in a few bands', she began after the introductory small talk was done. 'I'm a huge My Bloody Valentine fan,[67] a designer and illustrator… I like your music, there is something very honest about it (*kitta toki ni nantonaku sunao na ongaku to omotta*). Fuji picked up on Midori's description of band life and offered his guitar to her, 'Will you play something?' he asked with a devious grin. Midori waved her hands and said 'It's okay (*kekkō desu*), but I'll make you a deal. If you play a song that I know, I'll sing the vocal part for you.' For a moment Fuji seemed troubled, he did not do requests as a rule, but the opportunity to collaborate with somebody who had stopped especially to talk with him eventually persuaded him, and they discussed possible options. Midori seemed nervous, her voice choked and brittle, but as Fuji played he focused in on her, encouraging her with positive, affirmative nods as she raised the volume of her vocal. The two fell into laughter as they finished, Fuji noodling a comically protracted outro on his guitar. The girl sat on the left of Fuji, the potential band member who had been very quiet until now, applauded enthusiastically, calling out *bando yarō!* ('let's start a band!').

Our evening was cut short when a *kōban* police officer appeared from the station's south entrance and approached us slowly. Noticing this Fuji raised his hands and made a cross sign to the policeman to indicate that he intended to call it a night. The policeman stopped in his tracks, nodded affirmatively and waited patiently for us to pack up and leave. Midori san handed out her *meishi* (business card) to the three of us and asked Fuji if it would be okay to meet again. 'Yeah let's meet, but here, outside at the station', Fuji replied, 'I'll let you know when I play *rojō* again.'

Clearly Kōenji Station was more than just a last resort for the winter street musicians. Through a combination of experience and expectation based on positive memories and habit, street performers went out of their way to play *rojō raibu* even when other options were available. As John Brinckerhoff Jackson commented regarding his work on the vernacular architecture of American cities, 'certain localities have an attraction which gives us a certain indefinable sense of well-being and which we want to return to, time and again' (1994: 157-158). For Jackson these could take the form of a section of road or parking lot in contrast to traditionally conceived spaces of belonging such as the family home. In the metropolis of Tōkyō, Fuji and other musicians were drawn to, comforted and

[67] My Bloody Valentine were a popular band of the late 1980s and early 1990s, whose particular sound, incorporating noise music and swirling, distorted guitar lines pioneered the genre now widely known as 'Shoegaze'.

inspired by a small collection of walkways and underpasses surrounding a compact mainline train station. Through their efforts they realised a feeling of being meaningfully located within the broader context of the city, which I argue also draws upon Japanese concepts of *roji kūkan* discussed in chapter 2.

Recent scholarship in Japan has put forward the proposition that since the Edo period *roji* have functioned as 'safe spaces' which offer a feeling of protection and a sensation of local 'at home' rootedness based on their narrowness and the human scale of the alleyway (Nakano and Hirayama 2006). Within the context of *rojō raibu*, *roji kūkan* is produced in Kōenji in juxtaposition rather than in place of the home, existing in between common sites of emplacement in the city; beyond the home and the workplace, and even the bars and restaurants that surround the railway station. In doing so it also exceeds their possibilities for social interaction, affording intimacy in open urban spaces and the enticement of not knowing quite what might occur when behaviour is released from more established place-based conventions.

In contrast to an historical European model of public space in which the plaza and the public square operate as the loci of common social exchange, according to a number of authors in Japan public space and social life has historically taken place in the winding alleyway or *roji* (Imai 2015; Schulz 2008). Imai states that everything occurring within *roji* happened at a human scale, encouraging foot traffic and a 'slow life' based upon the casual intermingling of neighbours. According to Imai, the *roji* is now vanishing from city life, made marginal by the long modernisation of Tōkyō that has privileged rail-centric construction and an *eki-mae* (station-front) concentration of social life in place of the interwoven *roji* of old *shitamachi* (low town, working class) districts. Imai claims that in contemporary Japan people must go to the Edo Tōkyō Museum in Sumida Ward, or the Shitamachi Museum in Ueno to experience a *roji* atmosphere for themselves, or else visit one of the remaining vestiges in places like Tsukadajima (2015: 4).

Evelyn Schulz (2008) suggests that renewed interest in the *roji* and in *roji kūkan* is related to the notion of urban amenity and community-centred street space. She notes that within the concept of *machi* (town), *roji* were useful intermediary spaces within which there existed no clear-cut division of private and public life: '*Roji* are considered as localities, that have either been spared from or were not directly threatened by the urban planning of the modern age with its ideas on technical and cultural progress, redesigning the space with an eye to nation-state representation and modern means of transport, as well as the economic promotion of (multi) national building groups' (2008: 22). Ironically, Kōenji Station on the Chūō Line, symbol of Tōkyō's modernist drive as a central

urban train station, appears to have been interpreted as an emotionally meaningful locality and a spiritual *roji* for the street performers of the neighbourhood. As a narrative on street-based, face-to-face interaction with friends (*tomodachi*), associates (*shiriai*), and strangers (*tanin*), street performers' investment in producing a *roji* atmosphere at the station at night also created a common space. By emphasising the commoner, *shominteki* (working class) quality within interactions on the station walkways, producing *roji kūkan* was a narrative about spatial autobiography and authentic lifestyles in the city.

4.5 The right moment, the right atmosphere

To use a Japanese term, Fuji did not *awaseru*, meaning that he rarely matched the rhythm of others or fitted in with their wishes. The verb *awaseru* is often used to describe the condition of acquiescing with somebody else's wishes. It also has a broader meaning in Japanese society that is closely connected with the sense that one should put the needs of the group or community before personal desires. In return the individual or group has a reciprocal duty of care towards the individual performing *awaseru*. Fuji however did not feel that he benefitted from these principles, and instead he chose to put his trust in the lifestyle that had worked for him since arriving in Tōkyō.

I was unsurprised when Fuji agreed to meet Midori again but insisted that it take place during another of his street performances. On numerous occasions I invited him to cafes and low-key local restaurants in Kōenji but Fuji invariably preferred to remain outside on the street. Financial reasons were certainly a part of his disinclination to meet me or others in the neighbourhood's local establishments, often responding *kane nai yo!* ('I've got no money!') to my invitations. However, even when I insisted that I would pay because he was helping me with my research, he simply replied *sutorīto no hou ga ii* ('it's better here on the street'), and that was an end to it. The more time I spent with Fuji during the winter season, the more I noticed his suspicion towards what he perceived as restricted, formulaic settings or circumstances. Fuji rejected the burden of *awaseru* placed onto him by society because 'society' in his eyes was not working to his advantage. As a result Fuji was extremely *maipēsu* (literally 'my pace', 'doing things at one's own pace') in his activities on the street, a term commonly used in Japan with strong derogatory overtones to describe sluggish individuals who focus on themselves. Like others, in coming to Tōkyō Fuji was determined to realise a personal dream, and the station environment allowed him to build his own version of a music-centred life without needing to *awaseru* in the same way that he did during the manual labour dispatch work (*haken rōdō*) that caused him so much consternation. He always declined my request for more formal,

recorded interviews, commenting 'I'd freeze up!' (*kōtte shimauyo!*), 'It wouldn't be me anymore… we should just talk out here like usual'. *Rojō raibu* was an activity that Fuji deeply respected because it was, as he described, 'borderless' (*kyōkai ga nai),* unstructured and without what he considered to be the pretensions of other modes of playing music. Yet concomitantly playing street music was something Fuji could control, a situation wherein he could set his own boundaries. He often commented that he considered other aspects of his life to be muddied with the restrictive expectations of others.

I met Fuji one day in Asagaya, straight after he had finished his *baito* for the day. He arrived in blue overalls, half-peeled down to the waist revealing an old grey t-shirt. He wore a baseball cap over his mid-length hair and gesticulated toward the station smoking area with a cigarette as he caught sight of me. As usual Fuji looked tired and grumpy when not playing music, with dark rings around his eyes. When I asked how his work had gone he shrugged his shoulders and said 'It can't be helped I suppose, if I don't work like this I can't eat, so…' (*shōganai na… konani baito shinai to gohan kuenai*). As we sat in Asagaya Station's *hiroba* that afternoon Fuji seemed frustrated by what he deemed as an inescapable working situation:

> 'I've never enjoyed working, not like this [points to his overalls]. It's not that I'm lazy. I'm talking about choice, the way I need to work to live in this society. People like me work in the way our government decides we must, so I work for the benefit of powerful men who don't know me and are nothing like me. They use our taxes for their own benefits and we just continue on like this, just about scraping by. It doesn't matter if it's *baito* or office work in the end though, it doesn't change the principle. That's why I dedicate myself to street music, it's in *my* hands and there is no policy or regulation, just time.'

Fuji was highly sensitive to both the atmosphere of a place and to the moment he was in. As time passed he felt that he had the measure of Kōenji. One night he explained to me how the station felt different to him depending on the time of day he played.

> 'I play at different hours of the day based on how I feel. I can tell you what to expect depending on the *rojō raibu* timetable and differentiate between the kinds of experiences and types of audience or public you would meet. When I play early, at 7:00 p.m. or so, people are quite polite, but busy. If anyone stops it is for a short time, and they don't often talk to me. A little later on, perhaps 9:00 p.m. or so, I would expect to meet younger people, and couples out together, also a lot of musicians are around at those times. It's a good period to meet

> people who are genuinely interested in spending time together. When it gets later, closer to the last train, the *oji san* (middle-aged men) and the drunks and the oddballs appear. It can go either way late at night let me tell you… It can be rowdy, which is sometimes fun, sometimes annoying or troubling depending on the night. I occasionally get *nagesen* (tips given to performers) from the drunks late at night, or alternatively they might just stand there asking me the same question over and over or request songs. Sometimes the hours after the last train are best, when all is quiet. Just sounds reverberating in the open air and time of your own making.'

As well as time, a sense of inhabiting a space was also of singular importance to Fuji when choosing a place to play *rojō raibu*. During a conversation we shared about towns in Tōkyō as fitting street music venues, Fuji said of Shimokitazawa; 'Shimokita is one of the more interesting places in Tōkyō for me. A lot of bands play there, I like the live houses too, probably some of the best in Tōkyō. It's a cool place to be… but that doesn't make it right for street music though. The streets are too narrow, which makes a street musician more "annoying" (*urusai*) and there is no spot that invites me to play there.' Fuji was more concerned about a space having the 'right atmosphere' and creating the 'right moment' than he was about the number of people he might reach or the difficulties associated with playing certain spots.

> 'Atmosphere is everything for playing *rojō* I think. For instance I can't play under the second underpass in front of McDonald's because it is just too bright. If I don't feel the conditions are right then it's like I'm producing something false when I play. I'm not in the moment and the music doesn't channel from inside of me outwards. It becomes dull.'

Making music and interacting with other people was part of a 'moment' that Fuji bore great respect for in his *rojō* activities. He told me that street music was less about the music itself than the sense of 'living in the moment' (*ikiteiru kanji*) that it produced. Realising the feeling of being alive in the moment, Fuji juxtaposed the endlessness of his tiresome work life with the sense that a real and authentic life was fleeting and had to be captured on the street. In brief moments with others, producing what I have described hitherto as *roji kūkan* in the outside spaces of the station, Fuji engaged in a personalised, autobiographical attempt to live what he perceived as a self-determined life based on inter-personal connections made beyond the normative spaces of work and leisure in the city. This concept reappeared time and again during our conversations at the station. Regarding the sale of CDs and producing promotional demos for potential live house performances, Fuji spoke quite decidedly against the use of recorded materials:

> 'No. I have no interest in making CDs. I'm not in it for any money, so why would I? You know, once you make a CD it becomes old immediately and always less and less related to the musician who made it. I think of it like this: sites like Facebook create a character that people begin to recognise and understand in a particular way. But it is something else, it's not that person. For instance, People might stop and say "I know you, you are from that band", yet I have never met them and I have no interest in being known just through information about me on the internet. I want to live in the moment and enjoy it for what it is, not to exist beyond that time in some less interesting state… I prioritise that, the most human moment.'

Fuji did not evaluate music as good or bad, though he was a very capable musician able to sing, play guitar and drums, and he rarely judged other street musicians for the music they performed. Rather, he understood his music as a thing producing atmosphere and enhancing musicians' understanding of themselves and relationships with others. The master of Muzenji's insightful observation, that music is a 'way' (*shudan*) for individuals with a need to express and connect, has relevance here on the street as well. 'I don't play just to make music' Fuji said, 'I play to create something between myself and others'. Koba demonstrated similar principles during his performances at Kōenji station and Alone live house, stating that above all else he played to find people who would truly understand the sentiment contained within his music, and that the occasions when someone was genuinely moved by his music were more valuable to him than general popularity or making a financially comfortable living from musical performance.

When speaking of the *noruma* system in Japanese live houses, Whisper expressed discontent at the effect the spread of *noruma* had on the atmosphere within live houses.

> 'It used to be that live houses were at the centre of our musical world' Whisper began, 'full of interesting people all coming together in a basement somewhere. Since *noruma* became so widespread it has become bands watching other bands. I've seen the difference myself… the atmosphere has changed, it is more insular and less exciting to be a part of.'

Whisper felt himself to be adrift since the dissolution of his group Tōkyō Straight Band in the early 1990s and the atomisation of musical circles created by the live house *noruma* system. Since that time he had been using the street as a new venue for both experimentation and dwelling. He encouraged an atmosphere that he described to me as *shominteki*, which welcomed anyone in the area to join in and increased the likelihood of a satisfying *gūzen no deai.* Whisper had a talent for adapting the way

he played *rojō raibu* to suit anyone who showed an interest in what was going on. One evening in November, Whisper and I left Muzenji live house at 11:00 p.m. with a girl who organised live events at the local Sound Studio Dom in PAL *shōtengai*.[68] We stopped in the brightly-lit second underpass and Whisper played a few numbers. The girl got up to dance, and as she did this Whisper leaned over to me: 'Watch. She is interesting, she often dances without music, just to the sounds around here on the street, interpretively'. He then proceeded to set his guitar down and took off his shoes just as she had done, revealing his bright red socks. He stood up and danced with her, completely throwing himself into the motions as bewildered onlookers passed by.

Fig. 31: Whisper dancing in the second rail underpass (Map 5, position 2) with a girl he met at Muzenji (left), and later playing a song with 'Baka'.

After ten minutes Whisper rested his feet and we jammed for a while, sat up against the closed shutters of the underpass stores. By and by a drunk man in grey cotton shorts and leather shoes stumbled into the underpass, greeting us and singing Elvis Presley's 'Can't Help Falling in Love' through a thick atonal slur. On his right cheek *baka* ('idiot') had been inscribed in black pen. Though he did not know him Whisper was quick to jump to his feet, embrace Baka and hold him up as he accompanied him in song. Baka joined us, picked up a guitar and slumped against the shutter doors with a clatter. As he proceeded to run through a list of blues and RnB classics, Whisper supported him on guitar, soaking in the experience with a large grin. After half an hour or so we sat and talked, and when I made my way home at 1:00 a.m. Whisper and Baka left together to find a *ramen*

[68] Sound Studio Dom is an affordable practice studio space divided into several rooms. It became particularly popular within underground band scenes in the 2010s as a makeshift live house, wherein bands would pay the all-night rental fees for the rooms and then put on raucous all-night live shows, charging minimal entrance fees. Bands played at the same time as others in separate rooms, with audience members changing between live rooms as they liked, and occasionally escaping up to small rooftop garden for a break and some fresh air.

(wheat noodles in a hot broth) restaurant. From this unexpected event, Whisper's initial reaction to the appearance of Baka and the short time they shared that evening, he had made a friend. I saw Baka again in Kōenji with Whisper, and he even turned up to support him at a few street performances in Shinjuku.

4.6 Displaying 'human imperfection'

Understandings of the street as a place to form affective bonds with others and in doing so to advance a more fulfilling lifestyle conceived as more 'compassionate' and 'human' were common among street musicians in Kōenji. This was particularly the case among those performers who played outside of the most conventional hours and seasons, namely late in the evening or during the winter. In conversation musicians sometimes spoke about *rojō raibu* as a way to embrace the failures and imperfections in their lives. *Rojō* was not held up as perfect craft: far from it, it was unpredictable and irregular like the quality of space it took place within.

During the early months of research I developed assumptions about *rojō* musicians concerning their esteem for street music. I presumed that certain dedicated individuals understood their art as a form of 'pure' (*junsui*) expression, and an untainted mode of performance comparable in intention to the difference between a long walk and a religious pilgrimage. I was unprepared, however, for the degree to which *rojō* musicians were capable of meaningfully connecting with an activity they themselves saw as imperfect. Whisper suggested to me that the streets *rojō* musicians played on were '*koshi ga hikui*', an expression that could be translated as 'humble' or 'modest' and indicates the low bowing posture of a submissive individual to another. In an almost complete reversal of my assumptions, some individuals respected street music at Kōenji precisely because the aesthetic of imperfection was also considered to be a marker of the authenticity of their lifestyle. In street music at Kōenji even standard notions of success were occasionally seen as a concession to a less worthwhile engagement with everyday life. Having difficulties was considered to keep the musicians honest and within this idea even the performance of *rojō raibu* itself was an indicator of struggle.

While individuals such as Harada, and musicians passing through Kōenji on their own personal tours of Japanese cities like Reina, claimed to have sought out the neighbourhood as a place they desired to play in, others were less prepared to idealise the circumstances by which they ended up playing in Kōenji. Whisper once likened his relationship with Kōenji Station to the situation by which a person becomes homeless:

> 'There is a part of *rojō raibu* here that cannot be helped (*shō ga nai bubun mo aru yo*), because we have little choice. I feel that I need to play music but where should someone like me play? I have no money for studios and am unable to play at live houses very often without big discounts from the master on the *noruma.* I can't play at home because it is small, there is a music ban (*ongaku kinshi*) and you hear everything between the walls. Like others, the station became my only option. Where else was I to go? I don't think I ever sought to become a *rojō raibu* performer, but it happened nonetheless out of necessity, like a homeless man that took to the streets as a last resort. There are plenty of those types hanging around in the north *hiroba* here. Do they want to be out there or did they just end up there? Some of them look happy, drinking *sake* with their friends. And perhaps they are, but it doesn't mean they intended on being in that position.'

Having just made this fairly dour portrayal of his musical connection with the station, Whisper visibly softened and readjusted his view:

> 'But you know, even if it is out of necessity rather than choice, you get used to it and you even come to love it for offering what it does, for having aspects no other music venue can boast, and for accepting you as you are. Maybe it isn't always ideal, but I'm not exactly perfect either, so we're suited I suppose (*kanpeki ja nai kedo, ore mo so deshō? dakara ottagai ni yoi deai datta kamo shirenai*). I began thinking I would just practice on the street, but being out here, playing in the open in front of strangers and out of my comfort zone. Playing in that way changed my perception of the station, and the station changed my perception of music.'

Exposure of one's imperfections, musically and personally, developed as a cathartic exercise for a number of performers playing around the station. Of all street musicians, Tsun Tsun exhibited this quality the most. Appearing after my return to research in Tōkyō in the autumn of 2015, Tsun Tsun became one of the most regular and resolute *rojō* musicians I knew. He was young, just twenty three when I first met him. He was also an old friend of the girl Whisper married and separated from six months later. He and Whisper began playing duets at the station, and soon after at live houses in the neighbourhood such as Reef and Penguin House (See Map 4). Tsun Tsun was an open book, welcoming to all and instantly likeable.

The first time I met him he was stood under the first archway, reluctantly providing some personal details to a police officer who had come to warn him about using amplifiers while performing

around the station. He looked the part, as he always did, in his flared blue jeans, leather jacket and long curly hair under a baker-boy hat. He played a large red jumbo acoustic guitar that needed no amplification to reach an impressive and pervasive volume, especially considering the way in which he attacked his strings while strumming. Our meeting came at an opportune moment. Having been told to stop playing for the day Tsun Tsun had some time to spare, and after some initial introductions invited me to sit and drink a beer together in the station's north *hiroba*. After a while we were joined in the square by Whisper and later on by Shachō, the area's most familiar eccentric *ojī san* who is also well-known by musicians for appearing before them with an offering of tea or other beverage, just as he had done for Fuji. Keen to continue playing, and reassured by Shachō that he wouldn't be bothered by police while within the confines of the *hiroba*, Tsun Tsun took his guitar to a nearby bench and invited me to come with him. The songs he played were unfinished and roughly delivered, littered with errors and moments of uncertainty. Yet Tsun Tsun appeared unfazed by this. Setting his guitar down next to a flowerbed and sipping at his can of beer, he began talking. I was surprised how quickly Tsun Tsun opened up to me about himself and his personal reasons for coming to Kōenji to perform.

> 'I play to expose my own weakness, because I consider that a great virtue of music. I expose my heart to others on the street when I play, to people I don't know. There are always mistakes. It could be the way I play or my voice might have trouble, or I'm just not in the right frame of mind… Either way I want people to see that I'm not perfect, that I have flaws and weaknesses. I would like other young people to see me on the street and say to themselves "hey, he is okay with showing what's inside and displaying his fragility, so perhaps it is okay for me to be like that too."'

Fig. 32: Tsun Tsun during an evening *rojō raibu* performance under the archway at Kōenji Station.

I learned early on that Tsun Tsun was a fan of Charles Bukowski, the late novelist and poet of poor lives in America. The second time I ran into Tsun Tsun at the station he was sheltering from the rain in the underpass and clearly in a thoughtful mood. He asked me if I had heard of Bukowski, and if I liked his work. I had read a little here and there out of my own interest in Los Angeles underclass and homeless culture, which Bukowski sometimes addressed in his writing. Tsun Tsun produced a copy of Bukowski's *machi de ichiban no bijo* (*The Most Beautiful Woman in Town*), and as he flicked through the pages described his admiration for the author, and the inspiration he drew from his poetry and prose:

> 'Bukowski was in touch with that aspect of us all that is the most human; desires, physical needs, the soul and connection with other people, that kind of thing. I think he spoke honestly about basic human needs in a way that people needed to hear, without the guilt of what that meant about him as an individual in a society where we must play our part. He didn't understand why he should get up early in the morning to do a terrible job that kills your soul for somebody else's gain. I really feel that a lot of what he said describes exactly how I feel, and I try to live my life in the way he did.'

The evidence of Tsun Tsun's devotion to his hero Bukowski was apparent early on. Tsun Tsun lived for the here and now, and he was always compassionate towards people in Kōenji who spent a lot of time outdoors drinking and socialising in the open air, to vagrants, drunks and locals drawn to the *hiroba* or station environs by the appeal of passing the time with their fellow man. In a similar way to both Fuji and Whisper, Tsun Tsun saw his *rojō raibu* as an ongoing story of his own authentically different lifestyle to a standardised model of middle class Japan with which he felt he had no substantial relationship. Rather than passively accept a role he felt society expected him to take up, Tsun Tsun preferred to satisfy what he considered to be his inner, 'more human' nature (Cassegard 2004: 6).

Rojō raibu was necessarily *sutorīto* (street), which like many individuals in Condry's (2000) research into hip hop culture in Japan, Tsun Tsun considered to be an authentic representation of his life. This was not because street music was quantifiably more authentic than other forms of music, but rather because by claiming its authenticity he added value to a life he considered to be undervalued by the world around him. Following Frith (1996) on musical performance and authenticity, 'personal authenticity' of this kind is highly subjective. It is not important whether or not Tsun Tsun's performance of *rojō raibu* at Kōenji accurately reflected the conditions of his life, but rather how he produced and consumed new kinds of belonging to a place as well as individual and collectivised identity. Tsun Tsun's Twitter account bore an image of Bukowski looking drunk or dazed, sat on the floor in a wine-stained shirt and jacket, leaning against a fence in the street with a bottle of beer in one hand and a quietly contented expression on his face. Above the image Tsun Tsun had written; *ore wa kō naritai* ('I want to become like this').

Tsun Tsun was devoted to playing music on the streets, considering this to be the only contribution he could make to others, and above all other places he felt that Kōenji came closest to his ideal of a simple street-based life. 'All I can do is sing a bit and play this', he said spinning his guitar in his hands as he puffed on a cigarette. 'I write short stories as well, and the occasional poem. But this gets through to the most people I think. Music is better than words in that way, playing out here I can connect with people more directly'. Tsun Tsun suggested that we go to the SevenEleven store to buy a beer and return to the underpass to talk while the rain was still pouring down. On our way back, waiting for the traffic signal to change I nodded towards Tsun Tsun's guitar, rain drops now dripping from its glossy red body, and asked, 'Aren't you concerned about your guitar getting wet?' 'Oh this? No. This guitar is like people, experiences just make it stronger', he replied. Under the railway arches once more Tsun Tsun opened his beer, brushed the worst of the rainfall from his guitar and continued where he had left off. 'The thing is, you can't live a life in the way I am talking

about everywhere. You need a place that is suited, that is accepting of that kind of behaviour and the accumulation of people of a like-mind.' Still with Bukowski on my mind I asked Tsun Tsun if he meant somewhere like Skid Row in Los Angeles, to which he responded:

> 'I've never been there, so I don't know what it feels like. I know Kōenji though, and I know what it is like to be here. You understand what I mean right? You can feel the difference between being here and being in other cities in Tōkyō? That is why you see so many musicians and artists here. The same goes for all the eccentrics (*kawatteiru hito*) too. We feel comfortable here, not because we are told this but because we feel it like warmth and cold on our skin.'

Tsun Tsun went on to say that he lived in Musashi Murayama out in the western suburbs. With no direct line to Kōenji it took Tsun Tsun over an hour from door to station exit each time he decided to play *rojō* in the neighbourhood. Despite this he remained convinced that Kōenji was the best place for him to perform as there were no substitutes closer to home.

> 'Here it is okay to be a musician all the time. Not as just a hobby or something you do after work, but as a lifestyle and the whole experience that it includes. Somewhere like Shimokitazawa or Shibuya have interesting live houses, bars also perhaps, but where is the street culture like Kōenji has? Where are those parts of town? I think Kōenji has become a place a lot of people need. They come here searching for something…Or perhaps they are running away from something. A place like Shinjuku… is at the heart of Tōkyō and it is an area for business. There is pressure there, a demand for success and I think it makes a lot of people ill. Kōenji is also very central in Tōkyō when you think about it… Shinjuku - Nakano - Kōenji, two stops on the Chūō Line. So it is the first place people can reach easily when they need to escape. Even the musicians playing along the south exit of Shinjuku Station are more business-minded, with their sales pitches to the public, the perfect flyers and the professional CDs. People that come here are not looking for that kind of success. It isn't about money, it is about people and connection, and expressing yourself. Unfortunately, some people find that hard to understand.'

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relationship between *rojō raibu* performers in Kōenji and the station as an *ibasho* and genius loci within their musical and extra-musical lives in Tōkyō. This relationship became particularly relevant to a discussion of *rojō* musicians during the wintertime when a hardy few persist in visiting the station despite uncomfortable weather and playing conditions. Unlike those who performed mostly during the summer, these individuals had additional reasons for playing at Kōenji Station beyond those of progression toward professionalism, attracting fans or potential customers, playing bigger and more famous live houses or being scouted by a music company representative.

So far in this dissertation I have discussed the quality Kōenji demonstrates as a public commons supplementing needed but unavailable spatial resources in the neighbourhood and elsewhere in Tōkyō more generally. This is certainly the case throughout the year. The needs of winter street performers, however, frequently went beyond the musical alone. Whisper was convinced that *noruma* had kept him and other musicians on the outside of indoor venues, with live houses being the most problematic of all. Homelessness had also touched the lives of some of the winter musicians such as Fuji, Koba and Guru Pari, and at these times the station provided physical and emotional shelter during the evenings and into the night.

Whisper's visit to Kōenji in search of companionship and conversation and during which he met Morita, her 'director', Shibasaki and me, also illustrated that contrary to conventional understandings of belonging in a large city, the station could also function as an escape from the home. While this is the case, I also argued that *rojō raibu* performers in my research did not display what Allison (2013) called 'everyday refugeeism' as a necessary condition of being part of Japan's recently much discussed poor proletariat. Instead, examples such as Whisper's night with *rojō* friends in Kōenji illustrate that public and semi-public spaces in the city are being used to re-orientate individuals' sense of affective attachment and belonging. The station was somewhere Whisper could find 'good people' and 'support', and where he felt his 'heart could rest' (*kokoro ga ochitsukeru basho*). Contrary to Auge's (1995) notion of the non-place of transitory spaces, this chapter has shown that such urban spaces can be claimed and made into 'a place to be' by the activities of those frequenting them.

In the literature on the precarious people of Japan, *ibasho* is commonly used to describe a place where one feels a quality of being comfortable as though 'at home'. Lack of *ibasho*, a state confirmed in conversations with precarious Japanese men and women who commented *ibasho ga nai* ('I have no *ibasho*') is taken to its logical extreme in some writing that claims that Japanese people are losing their sense of home. I suggest that such conclusions are unhelpful in understanding firstly how marginal men and women perceive themselves in relation to Japanese society, and secondly how they deal with these feelings and circumstances proactively, as people who endeavour to keep on living. Findings that offer broad generalisations tend to emerge from research that is also broad but shallow. Close participant observation fieldwork has the advantage of recording how human relationships develop over extended periods of time. My fieldwork at Kōenji station, conducted over two years and multiple research periods, has illustrated how the station has been remade as an *ibasho* by the continued presence of its street musicians. Moreover, attachment to Kōenji for many went beyond securing an *ibasho* and grew into a narrative about the animated spirit of the place, its 'genius loci', and how *rojō raibu* performers entered into an affective relationship with it. This relationship was captured in Harada's 'Kōenji' song, in which he writes himself into Kōenji town, longs to become a local himself and entreats Kōenji to accept him in the lowly state in which he arrived.

A belief that the station would provide was captured in references Fuji, Whisper and Tsun Tsun made to *gūzen no deai* as a condition in which temporary bonds of friendship or companionship were made with strangers during *rojō* sessions. Due to the attraction of Kōenji Station, and the relief individuals found there, some musicians returned time and again and even when others would not. Whisper called the atmosphere around the station at these times *shominteki,* in reference to the common, working class districts of the *shitamachi*. Fuji liked to refer to this quality as 'honest' and uncomplicated, something and somewhere he could trust. At these times the spaces around the station, mixed use, semi-public walkways and underpasses, took on qualities of the neighbourhood *roji* or alleyway, a series of backroads that connected commoner housing together from Edo times and which have declined severely with the modernisation of Tōkyō.

The *roji* atmosphere or *roji kūkan*created by *rojō* musicians in this chapter coexisted with a discourse about class and ideas regarding how they - *roji* spaces and by extension the musicians themselves - interacted with Japanese society. Through his disinclination to *awaseru* for others, and his *maipēsu* approach to music and human relationships, Fuji disconnected himself from what he perceived as the behavioural norms of the middle-class that had left him in his current position of fending for himself.

Finally, conversations with Tsun Tsun showed that Kōenji Station was somewhere he felt comfortable 'exposing imperfections' to others, and in so doing was able to produce an autobiographical narrative about *shominteki* lives and 'real' or 'authentic' musical performance. Though he claimed that Kōenji was somewhere he could be 'a musician all the time' and not a pretender, it was also clearly a place where he could perform that part of himself he considered to be the most authentic recreation of the life of his hero Charles Bukowski. In a similar way to both Fuji and Whisper, Tsun Tsun saw his *rojō raibu* as an ongoing story of his own authentically different lifestyle to a tired, outmoded and out of reach model of middle class Japan with which he felt he had no substantial relationship and from which he stood to benefit very little. Rather than passively accept a role he felt society expected him to take up, Tsun Tsun instead preferred to satisfy what he considered to be his inner, 'more human' nature, one he felt he could recreate in Kōenji more than anywhere else in Tōkyō.

Chapter 5

‘What works on the street’: nocturnality, sound, and wellbeing

「Whisper and I sat in the northern *hiroba* outside Kōenji Station sharing coffee and a cigarette. ‘Shall we go?’ said Whisper, handing me his spare motorcycle helmet and swinging his guitar case over his shoulders. Since the beginning of December Whisper had been inviting me to trips to alternative *rojō raibu* spots, and recently he had been urging me to accompany him to Shinjuku’s Kabukichō district. I had been playing street music myself for a few months by this time, usually with other *rojō* musicians, alternating turns to play songs or jamming together. Knowing Kabukichō as a popular and bustling central part of Tōkyō, famed for its nightlife and *mizu shōbai* (‘water trade’ or nighttime entertainment industry)[69], I struggled to see where we would even attempt to begin playing. At the same time I was not about to turn down Whisper’s invitation, so I shrugged my shoulders and said ‘why not?’ Whisper mounted his vintage Kawasaki, which he had parked in the middle of the *hiroba*, and jumped up and down dynamically on the starter lever causing it to splutter into life.

As had become our routine I climbed on to the back, gripping Whisper’s guitar for balance and to prevent the neck from jutting out to one side in traffic. We pulled out of the *hiroba* and the bike slowly picked up pace along Yon Chōme road, as Kōenji Station disappeared into the night behind us. Whisper’s motorbike choked and wheezed, yet the sensation of riding was a distinctly smooth one, as if gliding through the neighbourhood at low altitude. As we reached Higashi Kōenji and

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[69] The *mizu shōbai* includes drinking establishments, cabarets, hostess bars and sex-related clubs. For a detailed study of gender, male corporate identities and their relation to women working in the *mizu shōbai*, see Anne Allison’s (1994) book *Nightwork*.

passed Sanshinomori Park, the road gradually widened and filled with more traffic. Before long we were cruising through Nakano, and soon after that the broad Ome Highway. By this time the bike was purring along at considerable speed and the cold wind caused tears to stream across my face. Whisper weaved between lanes and sped past taxis cruising along beside us. Dipping under Ōga-do railroad bridge, we rose up and emerged on to Yasukuni Dori, Shinjuku's main drag between towers of bright light and colour. Whisper pulled into the side of the road and I jumped off so that he could find a parking space. Two minutes later he returned and together we descended along a backstreet leading away from Yasukuni Dori, into Kabukichō and a cacophony of sound.」[70]

Despite the proclivity of *rojō raibu* performers to stand still in urban spaces of movement in the city, these moments constructed a broader narrative of their slowly unfolding journeys as musicians who came to play music in Tōkyō. Continuing to concentrate on Whisper, Tsun Tsun and Fuji in this chapter, all three of whom played throughout the winter, I will explore how 'the journey' - a concept I have touched on in chapters 1 and 3 - here draws attention to *rojō raibu* at the intersection of nighttime, soundscapes, and wellbeing. Though Whisper was in his forties, Fuji in his thirties, and Tsun Tsun in his twenties, they had each moved to Tōkyō with the goal of becoming musicians, and remained locked in a cycle of evening performances slotted in between irregular work of varying hours. While they were not exceptions among street musicians in having difficult relationships with their families because of their life choices, all three were disconnected from their family homes and felt that they could not return. With the past left behind with their *furusato* (hometown),[71] Whisper, Tsun Tsun and Fuji looked to the future, but financial insecurity and low prospects in both work and music made focusing on what might come an unappealing and anxiety-inducing venture.

As I have shown through acquaintances with performers like Koba, Harada and Guru Pari in this thesis, it was within their present that street musicians sought relief and attended to their sense of wellbeing. The noises they produced after dark were soundscapes within which they emphasised the

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[70] Three vignettes about this trip to Kabukichō appear throughout the chapter, marked by 2.0 line spacing instead of my standard 1.5, and Japanese half-brackets placed at the beginning and end of the vignette. Our route by motorcycle from Kōenji to Kabukichō is also marked on Map 6.

[71] *Furusato* as a concept in Japan linking individuals to their imagined countryside roots, 'traditional' moral values, the nuclear family and its conflation with national belonging within media has been well addressed by Marilyn Ivy. Her work on Japan Railways' use of *furusato* in station posters can be found in her book *Discourses of the Vanishing* (Ivy: 1995).

corporeality of their playing and the emotional rewards of accomplishment, satisfaction and, whether imagined or not, their connection with people. By the end of the chapter I hope to have demonstrated that my trip to Kabukichō with Whisper was one moment in a collection of similar evenings that he, and others like Tsun Tsun and Fuji, relied upon to elevate their lives beyond the reality of scraping by in everyday life. By remaining in the interstitial point of their journeys between the beginning and the end, the realisation of their goals, or the disappointment of them, lost its potential to cause them harm.

I begin by looking to the night as the temporal space for *rojō raibu,* one that is dependent upon but contrasts with the diurnal working day in Tōkyō. Whether practicing in their apartments in the afternoons, writing lyrics at 4:00 a.m., or heading to the station to play as people made their way home to Kōenji from workplaces around the metropolis, their music activities were set against the daily rhythms of others, also drawing attention to their difference. While association with the night has been negatively stereotyped in Japan, Fuji claimed the night as a period of opportunity for those uncommitted to a job requiring their presence every morning. Though he is not a main focus of this chapter, I visit a discussion with Koba here as somebody who thought of himself as inhabiting the night positively and by choice. Fuji claimed that evening street performances were places for 'real' connection and relationships, whereas those he found in work were suspicious because of their dependence upon the rule of institutions and what he saw as the predominance of profiteering.

I move on to consider how sound was utilised and experimented with by performers in ways that kept their focus trained upon the creation of a sensory moment and the context for their engagement with the world around them. Whisper's increasing focus upon his voice in a technique he called *zekkyō* (lit. 'to shout or scream') paralleled a series of emotionally difficult episodes and demonstrated that making new sounds at the station was connected to his shifting constructions of personhood and the embodiment of healing. I also give the example here of Fuji's preference for playing loud, energetic songs at Kōenji Station, and his insistence that he would only play cover versions of other people's music. Fuji believed that people would be drawn to what they know or recognise as familiar, bringing them to him on the street. He also suggested that the lively covers he performed were better suited to the environment as a public space, and because no one would want to hear the 'quiet, depressing songs' he played back in his apartment. For Fuji, street music was about recognising and understanding the boundaries of sound in the places of performance. Indeed, power relations within *rojō raibu* were often mediated by sound, with transgressions of the invisible acoustic boundaries of the neighbourhood eliciting *kujō* (complaints) from local residents and businesses, and intervention from the authorities.

In the last part of the chapter I look at how this all contributes to the wellbeing of Tsun Tsun, Whisper and Fuji and by extension why they return to play *rojō raibu* again and again throughout even the coldest times of the year and despite uncomfortable playing conditions. I argue that Tsun Tsun's emotionally intense performances at Penguin House were an attempt to achieve a sense of fulfilment that he contrasted with the empty successes of societies 'winners'. His hero Charles Bukowski provided Tsun Tsun with a template for his own personal sense of wellbeing as *jūjitsukan* ('a sense of fulfilment or completeness') . Musical performances emerge as a form of therapy for Whisper, whose confessional, call and response vocal style at Muzenji and on the street allowed him to give voice to the things ailing him and to deconstruct his fears before a listening audience or a procession of bodies. Both Fuji and Whisper worried about their bodies ageing and slowing down, eating away at their ability to play *rojō raibu* on the street. In both of their cases the answer was to focus on the present and to live in it. They had no final goals in *rojō raibu* because they felt that their lives were already set on an inexorable path of making do. Instead, they played *rojō raibu* because it was a journey with no end.

5.1 Nocturnal selves: a dark world in winter

「'I've got somewhere in mind' said Whisper as we walked through the streets of Kabukichō packed with revellers, men in suits peering at menus and tourists snapping photos. Restaurant touts approached us with offers of *nomihōdai* ('all you can drink'), a few seconds later young smartly dressed men appeared alongside us with pictures of girls and lists of erotic services. None of this disturbed Whisper's concentration, who was impressing me with his detailed knowledge of Kabukichō's history and stories of its theatre. After a detour down some narrow alleyways lined with glowing vending machines, we arrived at a square: a wide open space of concrete bordered by a theatre, a pachinko parlour and a department store. Next to the theatre was a huge poster of *gojira* ('Godzilla') that was attracting the attention of nearby tourists. 'Here we are', Whisper said as he began unzipping his guitar case. Unlike the dark walkways of Kōenji Station, the square was bright, full of young people gathering in groups and office workers collecting for afterwork drinks.

I visited the nearby *konbini* to purchase some drinks and *onigiri* ('rice balls'). Returning to a curb in front of the closed pachinko parlour where Whisper's helmet and guitar case were placed, I looked up to see Whisper already out in the heart of the square. Playing one of his more upbeat numbers, 'Highway Ojīsan' ('Highway Geriatric'), Whisper rotated on the spot, occasionally drifting across the ground like a musical spinning top. A group of asian tourists noticed Whisper and began filming him on their phones, and a young couple holding hands laughed as they passed, looking back over their shoulders with quizzical expressions. Whisper wandered over to a statue at the end of the square and began serenading it; looking up to its peak as he sang. This drew amused attention once again and some people moved in closer to take photos. As he moved across, and up and down the square, I watched Whisper do something I had seen him do before late at night in Kōenji: he locked on to and began following individuals or groups that noticed him, modifying his songs so that the lyrics described them or aspects of their lives he had fabricated. As they laughed (some uncomfortably) and scurried away, Whisper called after them with invitations to join in and playful reprimands for skedaddling. At one point Whisper wandered into a group looking up at the portrait of *gojira*, taking his place among them and echoing their stances as he sang.」

Fig. 33: Whisper overlooked by *Gojira* ('Godzilla') in Shinjuku's Kabukichō.

Whisper worked the night shift at a twenty-four hour supermarket, sandwiched by an evening and morning paper round. He would leave his apartment for the first time in the early evening to play music before beginning a night of work. The winter *rojō* performers experienced daily living rhythms that contrasted with established ideas about the working day in Japan. While Fuji worked a *haken* ('dispatch worker') job offering hours at short notice and frequently during the night, Koba began his job at a *washoku* ('Japanese cuisine') restaurant at 6.00 p.m. and didn't leave before 1.00 a.m. TsunTsun was slightly more cagey about his work, describing himself as a 'carpenter' (*daiku*) who made sets for musical concerts and art exhibitions, props and plinths. He told me that his hours varied, but he certainly spent most of his nights out playing music on the street or at a live house, or else socialising with friends in local Kōenji bars.

In her exploration of nighttime in Japanese society, Brigitte Steger (2003) noted that there is a well-established, positive association with 'early-risers' that she ties back to the period during which Japan embarked on modernisation. According to Steger, this idea applies regardless of the time an individual went to bed, and is premised upon the belief that those getting up early reduce the idle

hours of their day, increase their output, enhance their knowledge and become more productive. While Steger and Brunt's (2003) collated research on the night has demonstrated that those who rise with or even before the sun are frequently considered more trustworthy and given tasks with greater responsibility, it also exposes the character and status of those who inhabit the night as one considered lazy, morally suspicious and even dangerous.

For Koba and Fuji, however, nighttime was a world that they could embrace. It offered them a sense of security and opportunity precisely because they distinguished it from Japan's normal daily time schedule. Fuji told me on several occasions that the time frame that night work installing windows afforded him to play music was the only consolation in an otherwise unjust employment system in Japan.

> 'What is somebody like me to do? My parents weren't rich, and I never had many opportunities in life. I start work in two hours (it was 9.00 p.m. when we spoke) and won't finish until tomorrow morning. Then I go home and sleep until mid-afternoon while everyone else is awake. This is the kind of work people like me have to do. The government, large companies, they've already given up on us. My life happens at night because most people don't want to live like me. It's what is left over. But at least it suits a musician in some ways. In the afternoons I can practice at the apartment when people are at work, so the neighbours don't complain. It is just as well I guess, the walls are paper thin… I tell you, I can hear everything, I can almost hear the neighbours breathing.'

Fuji's disassociation with diurnal life was a source of resentment for him, and he felt that he was given little choice but to undertake the kind of work that kept him apart from the majority. Yet as research has shown, reasserting their difference from others, especially when they suffer negative stereotyping, can create a sense of empowerment for individuals by absolving them of responsibility for their situation (Kitanaka 2015). Through *rojō raibu* Fuji inverted his sense of restriction to nocturnal life into a set of opportunities to play music, and he understood that the negative aspects of his life could be assuaged by appropriating the nighttime as a period in which to redress the imbalances he felt his work life had caused him. Fuji's perception of friendship in street music was also temporal. His evening *rojō raibu* produced what he called 'real connections' (*riaru na tsunagari*), those that take place in the here and now. He opposed these to what he considered to be formulaic, compulsory, and institutionally governed kinds of relationship of the kind found in *senpai-kōhai* bonds and produced within the city's offices during daytime hours. Just as Fuji envisioned no plans for the future of his street music, a point I come to in the final section, people he met at or invited to the

station tended to disappear from his life once again after a short while, facilitating his ongoing search for connection.

Fig. 34: Fuji and the author during a cold night at Kōenji Station.

Unlike Fuji, Koba described his schedule as one he decided for himself from the beginning, embracing it as a part of a musician's life. He sometimes talked about late nights when we were together, and always with great fondness:

> 'There is something special about the time when I get home from work at 1:00 a.m. I know that I am done for the day and that others have to get up after a few hours to start theirs. I put on a record, at a low volume of course, and I sit down and stare out of the window. I can't play guitar at that time, so I often write lyrics instead. I listen to records, a lot of Azaki Yutaka, SION, and Nina Simone, and I write. There is a stillness that is absent in the daytime, and I can think more clearly. At about 5:00 a.m. or 6:00 a.m., or when it begins to get light, I turn off the record player and go to bed.'

Whisper had one of the busiest night work schedules of any street performer I knew, and he considered this to give him a particular perspective on the world around him.

> 'You develop a special way of looking at things when you work at night (*yakin suru to tokubetsu na mikata ga kuru*). There is a feeling that you are not a part of the main flow, like you are in the side lanes. I think about that when I am driving my bike past people on my way home in the mornings. They go one way, I go the other. I even feel sorry for them sometimes. It is a feeling of freedom and a pang of loneliness in one instant, strange that… but it also makes me want to connect with people from that life. So I'm never really at home more than I have to be after sleep. I go to the station a lot when others are finishing work.'

The night as a time of affective difference has been explored in Novak's (2008) study of all night music cafes (*ongaku kissa*) and the listening practices of those who frequent them. Novak describes the juxtaposition of solitude and communal experience occurring within the small spaces of such establishments between the last train of the night and the first of the morning. Jazz cafes (*jazzu kissa*) are, Novak says, 'dark corners that provide a space of total and overwhelming difference from the everyday world. The promise of an alternative affective space of reception' (2008: 21). It is clear from what Fuji, Koba and Whisper said of their own nocturnality, that they consider the dark hours of the night to produce distinctly different ways of living in the city in comparison with those of the daytime. In their own ways they each perceive these different experiences as either facilitating or forming their musical practices. What is more, in connecting the night to performances in their minds, they create the possibility to take back control of their personal and social appraisal as individuals existing outside of the 'main flow', and to reconnect.

Researchers have argued that the anthropology of the night has been understudied because it is taken for granted as a temporal inevitability (Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005). Galinier (2010) suggests that this is a shortcoming of anthropologists and ethnographers whose method is well suited to identifying the 'transformations and developments induced by public activities qualified as "nocturnal"' (2010: 820). Galinier suggests that field studies of groups and individuals involved in nighttime pursuits have the capacity to describe situations within which beliefs, behaviour and discourse are differently oriented than during the day, and that the study of social phenomena such as isolation, fear, drunkenness and deviance are intimately connected to the socially constructed threshold of day and night. Steger's work on the early-risers and fear associated with of those who do not work during diurnal hours, clearly shows that this threshold has social significance in Japan as well. Studies of street life by Lovell (1997) and dancehall clubs by Farrer (2008) have demonstrated that the night can separate one 'self' from another, or that in nightlife people can explore sociality that they cannot during the day. Within Japan, this latter concept was the focus of Allison's (1994) study of the social economy of a hostess bar in Tōkyō, though in contrast her

research highlighted the role of women's night work in such places as reproducing corporate masculinities associated with and reaffirming the role of women as subordinate to salaried male workers. Elsewhere, Takeyama's (2010) study of young men working as male hosts at nightclubs frequented by wealthy women, demonstrates how they use carefully constructed and sexualised behaviours in order to secure the patronage of women and improve their social mobility.

The ethnography of *rojō raibu* contributes to these studies by uncovering how the night was much more than a backdrop to the musicians' activities. Rather, it operated as an essential device in facilitating street music and an affective environment within which performers created a sense of self and wellbeing in relation to their self-perceptions of difference. While in previous chapters I have demonstrated how urban space was loosened and alleyised to incorporate *rojō raibu*, the nighttime is here a time-space that is also negotiable, offering a different social framework within which street performances became achievable and relationships possible, if only on temporary terms. Lastly, Schnepel and Ben-Ari's contention that the night priorities non-sight senses (2005: 155) is relevant to the street music I have studied at Kōenji Station as it signals the central place not just of the nighttime but of the voice, sound and of soundscapes in *rojō raibu* activities. As I move on to consider how sound mediated my informants' relationships with space and performance in street music, I will give a description of Whisper's live performance in November 2015 at the Asagaya live house 'Ten'. During this period, Whisper was beginning to change the way he performed both on the street and in live houses, putting his guitar away and becoming more focused upon the sounds of his vocals alone. He became increasingly fascinated with dreams, and his own place in between the night, as the world of dreams, and what he described as 'the real world' of everyday. His performance at Ten illustrated powerfully how performance operated for him at the intersection of the night, sound, and wellbeing.

Asagaya Ten could easily be missed among the great abundance of colour, sounds and smells of a busy *shōtengai*. The wooden entrance door opened on to a steep staircase lined at intervals by ashtrays; as is the case when space is at a premium, the staircase doubled up as the smoking area. Inside Ten took a familiar shape, a counter-seating bar where the master presided over the evening's events and served drinks and snacks, with a small stage at one end and the rest of the space given over to tables and chairs. Candles provided ambient lighting, while the stage area was illuminated from above by a professional rig of different colours. Whisper was setting up his gear, tuning his guitar and checking the connections on his amps and effect pedals, while intermittently communicating with the master about the sound levels. This proved to be purely ceremonial, as he didn't use his guitar at all on that night, throwing himself instead into a performance he called *imi no*

nai jikan ('a meaningless moment'). During a theatrical twenty minutes he used two delay pedals[72] to loop spoken words, shrieks and mutterings as he cursed the lack of time in the day, remonstrating at an old clock he had brought along with him as a prop. As the jumble of words cascaded through the pedals and flooded in from the amplifiers behind him he proceeded to read from a book of *keigo* ('polite') phrases, followed by a lament of the pressures of daily life to the front row. He responded to a fellow musician's jovial dig of *urusai!* ('loud' or 'annoying') by striding over to him and repeating *urusai!* with a cry into his left ear. After twenty minutes of manic intensity Whisper finally fell to the floor of the live house and pretended to sleep, hugging the clock to his chest. After a protracted moment of silence and feigned sleep, he sat upright, opened his eyes and said smiling, 'Oh, thank goodness. It was just a dream' (*ō, yokatta! yume dake*).

Fig: 35: Whisper clutches at a clock during his performance of *imi no nai jikan* at Asagaya Ten live house.

[72] A Delay Pedal is a small box with a foot switch connected to an input device (a microphone in this case) and an output device (usually to an amplifier). As with other electronic effects, a Delay works by delaying a source signal before playing it back. The effect is an echo, and depending upon the particular settings selected by the musician, this echo will slowly trail off as the sound reoccurs but volume is diminished. For instance, say 'Echo' into a microphone connected to a Delay Pedal and you would hear 'ECHO, echo, echo' through the amplifier.

5.2 Sound, voice and soundscapes

「Crashing down on the curb beside me, Whisper grinned,

> 'it's not bad here is it! A different kind of crowd… and the sounds are interesting too, depending on where you are. Sounds bounce off of the buildings I guess, and the reverberation is great in some parts. In places it's nice just to stop and let the noise of the surroundings lay on top of the guitar.'

Apart from the elation he felt from interacting with different people in a short space of time, Whisper repeatedly mentioned how exited he was about the sounds he discovered in the evening's new performance space. As he played he disappeared into narrow alleyways and little cubby holes between buildings to test out the acoustic properties within. Occasionally he stopped playing, clapped his hands and vocalised enquiring 'aaaaa, aaaaa, ooooo' sounds to determine the resonance of the space. Halfway through the night Whisper took a break and tucked into his *onigiri* while I played a couple of my own songs. I mixed these up with extended instrumental pieces, into which Whisper sang complementary notes, or else injected little guitar solos. At other moments Whisper closed his eyes and sang gibberish lyrics of made-up words that were closer to extended meditation chants than language. After some time spent riffing in this way, a man in his fifties stopped in front of us and turned, asking 'why are you playing here?' Whisper opened his eyes and looked directly up at the man; *ikioi ni nagasareru tokoro desukara* ('because here you are carried along by the vigour of the place'). As if this had reminded Whisper of something, he stood up and strolled out into the centre of the square once more, strumming and eyeing up a circle of young students who had collected together outside the department store. At 11:30 p.m., and after nearly three hours in Kabukichō, we headed back to Whisper's motorbike and returned to Kōenji.」

During the latter part of 2015 and over 2016, Whisper's performances increasingly resembled the kind of loop pedal driven, vocal experimentation that I first saw at Asagaya Ten. This pattern also occurred on the street, as it did in our trip to Kabukichō wherein Whisper repeatedly investigated and commented about the acoustics of the square and passages leading away from it. He also used his voice to reach others, whether working descriptions of those he saw or followed through the square into his songs, or emitting sudden bursts of sound to jump-scare a group of people for comical value. His reaction to my own playing was usually to sit and close his eyes, humming or vocalising melodies that harmonised with the musical progression. Whisper discussed this change with me at Kōenji, one night when he had left his guitar at home in favour of a harmonica.

> 'For a while I have been feeling like the guitar confines me, that whatever I play sounds like a replication of something else, or that it gets in the way between what I want to express and what sound actually comes out. Ballads confine the sound by putting a structure on it, and I often stop half-way through anyway, or trail off into something else… [laughs], you know this. The voice is different though, it has language but also sound, and I control it directly without a tool like a guitar. Have you heard of *zekkyō* before? I have become increasingly interested in it as a way of getting out what I cannot with ballads. I don't even need lyrics, I just explore my own voice and transmit that sound out into the air.'

Zekkyō translates into English as 'scream, shout' or 'exclamation', but Whisper saw it increasingly as a principle upon which to base his *rojō raibu* performances. Whether performing at a small live house or on the street, he used these techniques to add his voice to the space he inhabited, to elicit reactions from the public or to expunge tensions and concerns he felt building up over time. The disconnection with reality that he expressed feeling as a consequence of his nocturnal lifestyle, and the isolation from those he saw in the mornings as he returned home to sleep, was addressed in his explorations of *zekkyō* performance at the station though a process Whisper described as a form of cleansing.

> '*Zekkyō* removes the blockage I feel with the routine of conventional music. It really pushes out all of the ill feelings that my lifestyle can cause to build up. It puts me right, refreshes me. In Japanese Buddhism the body gets caught in a sort of limbo or purgatory after death where all remaining issues are resolved. It could be arguments with neighbours and feuds, or leftover desires and sins, but they all get worked out to purify you. Well, for me *zekkyō* performs this function in the living world. When I dance about on the street or let out a scream at someone,

when I work through looped vocal experiments at my live house shows, I feel a lightness in me because in those moments everything comes rushing out. I can do it endlessly. *Zekkyō* is my limbo, and *rojō* helps me access it easily and regularly.'

Fig. 36: Whisper's *zekkyō* set: a microphone, two delay pedals and an amplifier.

Whisper's prioritisation of his voice and vocal aspects in performances is indicative of the role, not just of music, but of sounds and the soundscape of the places of *rojō raibu* in mediating public behaviour and social knowledge. Weidman and Mawr (2014) noted that the voice is located at the intersection of music, sound, embodiment and subjectivity. In their ethnography of Indian 'playback' singers, women who record vocal parts for Bollywood stars but remain relatively unknown, the voice mediates their character when they give public performances by producing sounds recognised by others. In one example Weidman and Mawr provide, an experienced playback singer scolds a girl for performing her vocal with too much abandon, insisting that the girl not forget who and where she is while performing. In doing so she reminds the girl that the vocal sounds produced by the generation of singers before her were intimately linked to a carefully constructed sense of cultural value tied to an acknowledged mode of delivery. Weidman and Mawr's study points to the link between the voice, body, and constructions of the individual within uneven power

relationships. In Whisper's case, his use of *zekkyō* draws attention to the voice as a particular sound in social space, which he used to engage with a sense of disempowerment, and to address anxieties produced by self-perceptions of marginality.

That the sonic is also highly social is argued by Samuels (2004, 2010) to call for a total appreciation of the human environment that recognises the 'acoustic construction of knowledge'. Samuels claims that research hitherto addressing this issue (Condry 2006; Veal 2007) elucidates the link between the vocal production of sound and association of individuals with particular groups or classes in society, while grappling with 'the means of understanding an auditory intimacy while maintaining a sense of socially, geographically and historically emplaced relationships' (2010: 337). Samuels' own book *Putting a Song on Top of It* (2004) explores how a group of country singers use song to draw attention to the contradictory pressures of being Native American within the contemporary social and political environment of the San Carlos reservation. Here, sound and the voice negotiate a changing sense of being Native American in society by managing shifting constructions of personhood that are linked simultaneously to 'mountain spirits' and 'the hard edge of country and rock music'. Whisper's gradual change to a playing style biased toward *zekkyō* and consequently focused on his voice, was also something he described as an attempt to communicate an inner self to the environment around him, one that had hitherto been restricted by his reliance on standard guitar and piano playing conventions.

David Novak has explored the refashioning of a sense of self through forms of music in different places in the city, and his research on the performance of *onkyō* ('quiet music') in tiny venues in Tōkyō emphasised the role of environmental sounds in the cultural production of the genre (Novak 2008, 2010b). Novak claims that *onkyō* emerged as a particular style of music because it was performed in small rooms in busy neighbourhoods where sound bleed would lead to complaints. The minimalist and improvised sounds made by musicians using 'empty' or 'no-input' instruments de-emphasised its connection with familiar musical categories because the instrument did not 'speak' in and of itself (2010b: 46). Instead of building a social environment based upon call-and-response performer and audience relationships, *onkyō* encouraged mutual attention of performer and audience upon the sound's emplacement within the surrounding environment of silence (2010b: 47).

Novak uses Lorraine Plourde's (2008) description of 'disciplined listening' at venues playing *onkyō* to argue that participants are involved in local cultural practice and a bodily technique that reflects the emplacement of participants within a discourse of social behaviour. Through *zekkyō* played on the

street Whisper's performances shared similar qualities to those appearing in Novak and Plourde's description of *onkyō*. Whisper's disassociation with guitar music was concomitantly an attempt to delimit himself from the social context of those sounds in public, and with the performers who performed them. His vocal improvisations channeled his most personal emotions as he explored the mixing of his own sounds with those of the environment around him, testing dark corners and backstreets, or rail underpasses for their acoustic value and ability to amplify his own output. The emplacement of his voice in the local soundscape worked to soothe Whisper's fears of disconnection from his lived environment, but it was not a practice centred upon the production and mingling of sound alone. Much like Fuji, he was also attempting to kindle small moments of exchange with those entering the soundscape of his performance.

Fuji was always concerned about the relationship between his vocals, his music and the surrounding environment at Kōenji, and like Whisper he attempted to find a place for his voice amid the web of social and power relations that spun around the station. He would suffer cold nights for hours on end to do this, insisting that as long as he was playing and singing he never became too cold. Apart from the usual expression of *samui!* ('cold!'), which just about everyone in Japan vocalised repeatedly on a cold day, Fuji simply mentioned to me between songs that the cold weather made his fingers hurt (*yubi ga itakute… konna tenki yarinukkui na*). In the winter of 2015 Fuji visited Kōenji at least three times a week, and more often if his work schedule did not prevent it. Placing a mustard yellow throw on the ground, he sat crosslegged with his back leant against the wall of either the south exit walkway or the first underpass. Dressed in his trademark ripped jeans, black boots, grey hooded sweatshirt and wearing a brown trilby hat over thick brushed-back hair, Fuji sang with force and strummed his guitar with such vigour that his seated body almost lifted into the air. 'I have a lot of pent-up feelings…', he said in response to my comment that he didn't appear to hold back at all when performing. 'I like late nights here at the station because it is so quiet'. I listened for a moment and heard the sounds of chirping traffic lights, intermittent loud voices passing by at either end of the underpass, laughs, car horns, restaurant employees declaring their best deals, station announcements and the rumble of overhead tracks, and replied that I didn't follow his meaning.

> 'Okay…rather, it is a better time for me to play like this. There is a space for me to play into… I can really attack my strings like this [clatters his guitar with a hand, emitting Eb tuning sounds that reverberate up into the eaves of the archway], and experience the full sound of it. I sing in a way that holds nothing in, transmitting what is inside me to the outside.'

As we discussed Fuji's music he told me that he only played covers of other people's songs, and in particular those of his favourite bands: Aciman, Ellegarden and The Back Horn. Despite his low opinion of music that was too 'commercial' or bland, Fuji insisted with a smirk that his covers were often regarded as better than the originals by passing commenters. 'People have often stopped to tell me that they prefer my versions and that I have my own style that adds something to them'. Indeed one evening as we sat under the archway a man in his forties appeared and said to Fuji, 'Me and my friend could hear you from Yakitori Taisho[73] (a skewered meat restaurant on the far side of the south exit *hiroba*) while we were sat outside eating. I really enjoyed your versions, do you do requests?' Fuji replied that he did not normally play at other people's behest, but would make an exception if they could find a song that he knew well enough to play confidently. I asked Fuji why he didn't want to write his own music.

> 'The point is about finding the sound that fits the environment. At the apartment I can only play quiet songs, and I prefer to play a lot of gentle music when I'm there. At the station I can play more aggressively. This allows me to express myself in ways I cannot at home. But also, gentle songs don't work here, they get drowned out. Plus, introspective music on the street makes me feel lonely. Here it is the upbeat songs that people respond to, that and cover versions of things they know or have perhaps heard somewhere before. You can play *rojō raibu* in almost any way you want, but you have to understand what works on the street.'

Novak's (2010a) work on street music performances of *enka* songs in Ōsaka's Kamagasaki day-labourer quarter has demonstrated that soundscapes are exposed to shifts in structure and balance that render them as possible spaces for the voiceless or else sites of power struggles. In Kamagasaki Japanese and foreign day-labourers set up makeshift karaoke booths in order to hold song parties as social events and a time to relax and release the stresses of work. Their singing was also a place-making exercise that nursed their sense of displacement after losing their homes. After receiving increasing attention in the run up to an international rose convention, the city evicted the labourers: a process they termed 'normalisation' and with a focus on the return to a sonic balance through the act of *shizuka ni saseru* ('to quieten') (2010a: 5). Novak claimed that 'environmental noise has become a context of social knowledge' (2010a: 5) influencing both the emplacement of people and cultural evaluations of musicians and participants (see also Hayashi and McKnight 2005, Smith 2014). The same is true in Kōenji, where Whisper, Fuji and others have added their voices to the local soundscape, producing an accumulation of sounds and narratives that exist alongside those of

[73] See Map 4.

others. As I began to witness in 2015 and 2016, noise regulations at Kōenji Station, and their enforcement by local merchants and residents through *kujō* (complaints) or as police interventions, began tipping the balance towards a dangerous precedent for street music. Within just the last couple of years Asagaya had become almost impossible for street musicians to use, and as I prepared to leave the field, I began recognising signs that suggested *rojō* players in Kōenji also faced an uncertain future.

Processes wherein Whisper and Fuji used their voices to negotiate wellbeing, and to realign themselves in relation to other musicians and the surrounding public, speaks to other research carried out in Japan on linguistic practice, agency and the voice. In her study of the discourse about 'schoolgirl speech' (*jogakusei-kotoba*) among male intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, Inoue Miyako demonstrated that the notion of the 'speaker-as-agent' in anthropology failed to capture the part played by powerful men in listening to and interpreting the speech patterns of schoolgirls as unpleasant or 'hard on the ears' (*mimizawari*). Speech, Inoue suggested, 'signifies in the order of social things' (2004: 157), which is to say that the sounds people make are released into a social world of expectations and power relations that recognise categories of people and their place within it. Rather than operate as resistance against linguistic and social expectations of women, 'schoolgirl speech' was confiscated by male intellectuals and used to produce a negative discourse about them.

My ethnography here suggests that, as musicians, both Whisper and Fuji had an awareness of the way their *rojō raibu* could be heard by a public that would create specific perceptions about them. They each attempted to traverse this sound environment in a particular way. Fuji considered the train station to be a place wherein his particular sounds would meet with approval, and even attract others to him. This was unlike the space of his home, wherein his music was interpreted as noise pollution, or at work wherein his musicianship had little or no positive influence on his relationship with coworkers. On the other hand, within *zekkyō* performances Whisper focused upon himself. Though he sought to elicit responses from passing individuals or groups, the exterior perception of his performances were less important to him than the cathartic exercise of releasing his stresses into the surrounding environment as sounds that were heard. Whisper's descriptions of *zekkyō* in the context of Buddhism and spirituality suggest that these winter performances became inwardly-focused upon self-control and preservation, and connects into discussions on the bleeding of *shugendō* practice into urban social life, wherein the body is theorised as a central 'text' and site of ascetic practice for personal betterment (see Lobetti 2013; McGuire 2013).

5.3 *Rojō* and wellbeing

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how *rojō* musicians perceived and interacted with Kōenji Station as an *ibasho* and place with a distinctive 'genius loci'. While the space was an integral part of the musicians' activities and sense of fulfilment, the sonic, performative moment of street music played an important role in my interlocutors' sense of wellbeing. The sense in which I use wellbeing here is as that appearing in Michael Jackson's (2011) book *Life Within Limits*, wherein he describes wellbeing as a condition of existential dissatisfaction that kindles hope of something better in the future. This is a concept at the very core of many street performers' reasons for leaving their hometowns and moving to Tōkyō, for taking irregular employment and the accompanying financial insecurity, and for those appearing in this chapter, for playing in conditions that were cold and uncomfortable. It also offers an alternative approach to Lauren Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism', as addressed in chapter 1, by emphasising the affective and positive role of hope in place of an affective bind to a fading dream. As I suggested at the end of the first chapter, *rojō raibu* was not simply a means of attaining future success or goals in music, but also a practice within which the musicians negotiated and began undoing the cruel optimism that threatened their attachment to a life in music.

By wellbeing I do not mean happiness, of which there have been increasing numbers of studies conducted by researchers in Japan in recent years. I do not recall a street performer ever mentioning the word 'happiness' (*shiawase*, or *kōfuku*) in our conversations. They did, however, talk about *jyūjitsukan*, which in translation is a word used to describe one's 'sense of fulfilment'. The word is closer to the English 'enrichment', and the middle kanji *jitsu* ('reality') emphasises the actual, felt condition of enrichment without recourse to a broader sense of happiness. This is important because winter performers also talked about *utsu*, meaning 'depression' or 'low spirits', in relation to their lives and *rojō raibu* activities. Tsun Tsun told me that he thought *utsu* to be a normal part of life that we must all accept; 'What matters is to be the most human that you can be, to accept that life is hard, but build relationships with others, with something fulfilling - that's music for me - and try not to be alone.' As I will demonstrate, for these musicians *rojō raibu* also functioned as a form of therapy that applied a compress to the damage done by fear, insecurity and doubt. A final resolution to happiness was much less relevant in winter performers' lives than the battle against giving in to low spirits. The musicians felt that they could not change the direction of their lives in any significant way, but in their *rojō raibu* and live house performances, these individuals found a vessel that made the journey more comfortable.

'Kōenji is a town with a hangover (*futsukayoi machi*)', Tsun Tsun said to me as he, Whisper and I stood in the station-front's north *hiroba*. It was mid-December and he and Whisper were due to play a live show at Penguin House that evening and had invited me along. 'So many people here have a story to tell, you know… Like Shachō san. He has been here for so many years. He drinks, he hangs out in the *hiroba,* and I see him every time I come here. He knows just about everyone who isn't just passing through.' Shachō (Boss) appeared briefly in chapter 4, he is a man who cycled around the station grounds stopping and listening to the street performers before depositing a gift of tea or cheap sake at their feet and leaving. 'That's true about Kōenji', said Whisper. 'I think it has been that way since the 70s, maybe even before that, but definitely since punk arrived here. I know what you mean, it is like the people are always suffering from the night before because they gave it their all.'

Shachō arrived almost on cue, with a bag of drinks and a few drawings that he said he intended to sell in the *hiroba* later on. We sat in a circle, with Shachō on a bench and Tsun Tsun, Whisper and I on the floor. Shachō opened a small bottle of *shōchū,*[74] the kind you can buy at a *konbini* for around 100 yen, while Tsun Tsun and I drank Sapporo beer. Whisper, as always, was on the coffee, which he had been drinking in eyebrow-raising quantities ever since giving up alcohol years ago. Shachō spoke of changes he had noticed in the area. 'I remember when many more people would come out and spend their time on the streets, when musicians and artists were everywhere and these *hiroba* were busy with life. But that is changing, and Kōenji is not the same anymore. Whisper, who along with Tsun Tsun called Shachō *sensei* out of respect for his age and experience, agreed that during the late 70s and 80s musicians used to walk about in greater numbers: 'they didn't care back then, the punks especially, I remember a lot of drinking, and trouble, and quite a few musicians I knew died because of that lifestyle'. After twenty minutes Tsun Tsun mentioned that we should head to Penguin House, and so we bade Shachō farewell, who quickly moved to sit with another couple of men sat across from us, and made the short walk from the *hiroba* to the live house along a small shopping street of eateries and bars. On the way Whisper turned to us and said, 'I'm not sure I believe everything that Shachō tells me… but then perhaps that doesn't matter. Maybe the story is more important than the reality to him.'

[74] A Japanese spirit distilled from potatoes or rice.

5.4 Penguin House

We descended the stairs from the street to the basement room. Penguin House was clad in wooden panelling all the way along its walls, giving it a look that reminded me more of a log cabin than a basement live house in the middle of Tōkyō. Small statues of penguins lined the stairwell and were dotted about in places across the main room. The bar and cash desk was positioned in the middle of the room, with storage and lavatories towards the back and tables and chairs in front before a ground-level stage. A piano, amplifiers and mics were in place ready for performers to use.

There were around eight people in the audience when Tsun Tsun and Whisper took to the stage. Five of these were other musicians due to play that evening and one was the master of the live house behind his desk. Tsun Tsun stalked about on stage as though impatient. He had prepared a small table to the side of the mic stand, upon which stood a shot glass full to the brim with whiskey. Tsun Tsun took up the glass and necked the spirit before smashing it on the floor in front of him and screaming 'rock and roll!' immediately before he and Whisper launched into their first song. My eyes darted about the room but no one appeared particularly moved or surprised by Tsun Tsun's outburst, they simply sat and looked on with polite interest.

Musically, Tsun Tsun and Whisper had a very standard rock show. Tsun Tsun strummed forcefully on his large red acoustic guitar and sang with a strong and consistent vibrato that flowed through an otherwise raspy vocal. Whisper's role was as a guitar virtuoso, laying intricate electric notes over the chorus and verses. He appeared disconnected, like a whirling dervish to one side of Tsun Tsun who twirled, jumped, shimmied and shuffled his feet in some very Jaggeresque[75] movements. Three more people entered the live house and took seats. Tsun Tsun used the breaks in between songs to speak to the audience, as he often did in conversation, a little about his favourite poet, Bukowski; 'Like Bukowski, we should all live lives true to ourselves' he said. 'If there is something you are passionate about, then you should do it, make that your work. And if you can't do that, live your life around it.' In the final two songs before they came off stage Tsun Tsun and Whisper increased their intensity. This was not reciprocated by the audience, however, who remained stoney faced at their tables. Tsun Tsun and Whisper were now drenched in sweat as they bounced off the walls, pulled classic rock poses and circumnavigated every inch of the stage space they had in flashes of unrestrained exuberance.

[75] I refer here to Mick Jagger, lead singer of the Rolling Stones and famed bottom-shaker.

Fig. 37: Tsun Tsun and Whisper on stage in Penguin House.

After the performance, Whisper and Tsun Tsun returned to our table briefly before Tsun Tsun pulled out sheets of drawing paper, pencils and chalks. 'Ai Fujiwara is playing next, and we are doing a collaboration' he began, 'While she plays her piano pieces I will draw images that come to me as I listen (*kīta kankaku de ironna imēji wo kaku*)'. 'I won't think too much about what I am drawing, just go with the emotion and feeling that I get from her music'. It was typical Tsun Tsun: he knew many musicians in the neighbourhood from spending so much time in Kōenji in the evenings, approaching and talking to people in the honest, endearing manner in which he first talked to me under the railway tracks. He kicked off his boots, exposing red and white stripy socks and took to the stage. The master had set a chair and table in the middle of the stage, another glass of whiskey and an ashtray were placed upon it. Tsun Tsun sat looking broodingly at his paper pad, massaging the bridge of his nose and sipping at his glass as Ai walked on to the stage in a simple black kimono. She had a short, angular haircut and wore thick black mascara. Ai bowed to the audience and took her place at the piano, beginning a collection of songs that mixed impressive classical virtuosity with staccato single notes, over the top of which she sang playful, crystal clear vocals.

Tsun Tsun began drawing. He stopped, sipped at his whiskey, massaged the bridge of his nose a little more, and began carving into the pad once again with chalks. Each picture took between two and five minutes, and Tsun Tsun affixed each one to the wall behind the stage with masking tape. After he had completed a couple of these, he decided to tape blank pages to the wall and draw on them while standing up. He kept dropping his chalks, which made a horrible clattering noise as they hit the hard floorboards. On a couple of occasions he tripped over an amplifier as he stepped back to purvey his drawings, twirling around and righting his balance at the last moment. He also pulled a couple of pictures off the wall with the force of his drawing. The comedy of these incidents contrasted with the tone created by Ai's music and Tsun Tsun's drawings. The pictures slowly amassed; black and red colours, sharp angles and frantically scribbled lines of chalk that came together to produce images of bleak circumstances; a person trapped in a web, and another walking into a menacing black hole. He gradually picked up pace and intensity, the master brought a refill of whiskey to his table, and occasionally Ai would swivel around on her stool and look silently at his drawings, before continuing on. By the end of forty minutes, he had taped twelve drawings to the wall of Penguin House. He returned to our table looking exhausted, bought us all a drink, and fell fast asleep on Whisper's shoulder.

5.5 *Jūjitsukan* and revealing in musical performances

Fischer (2014) has argued that wellbeing is morally laden, replete with notions of value, worth and virtue, which take the form of meaningful projects used to define self and character (2014: 2,7). Fischer's ideas here overlap with Jackson's (2011) notion of wellbeing, wherein inevitable hardships accruing from the limits individuals feel are imposed on their lives lead to a search for a forward momentum. This is not to say that under such conditions people are looking for 'happiness', but rather direction in commitment to 'meaningful projects' regardless of wider perceptions of their successes and failures (MacIntyre 1984, cited in Fischer 2014: 7, 8). When *rojō* musicians played on the street or in a live house, many sought a sense of personal nourishment and enrichment, or *jyūjitsukan.* As Tsun Tsun slept on his shoulder, I asked Whisper if he was okay. 'It isn't the first time he has worn himself out like this when performing' Whisper said, chuckling to himself and looking down at the sleeping man.

> 'Playing music is what he invests his energy into more than anything else, whether we are playing a gig at a live house or he is doing *rojō raibu* at night. He likes the phrase "Among the

> winners in society there are losers who feel a sense of fulfilment" *(shakaiteki na kachigumi no naka ni jūjitsukan no makegumi ga iru),* and it works as a sort of mantra for him. He talks to me about Bukowski sometimes, and there is something of that poet in Tsun Tsun. He doesn't care about losing in a wider view of life success as long as he feels a sense of fulfilment in everyday life. Though we argue about a lot of things, this is something I agree on. After all, daily wellbeing is a part of life that cannot be measured like annual income or standard of living (*hibi no jūjitsukan wa nenshū toka seikatsu suijun mitai ni sūchi-ka dekinai bubun dayone).*'

The 'meaningful project' was an important part of the wellbeing addressed by Tsun Tsun in the gamut of his music performances. In his scores of books, his hero Charles Bukowski wrote confessional works that detailed his passion for unfiltered behaviours: his insatiable drinking habits, his lasciviousness, and also his liberating ability to accept himself as a marginal man adrift from general conceptions of 'the good life' (See Bukowski 1983, 1969).[76] As we emerged from Penguin House, the cold air of the quiet streets woke Tsun Tsun, who we had needed to encourage away from Whisper's shoulder. As we walked back towards the station I asked Tsun Tsun about previous comments he had made about Bukowski, and whether it affected his music performances as well.

> 'It is the same whether on the street or in a live house… I play to expose my weaknesses, as something I want to get across to other people, that it is okay to have imperfections or faults. Or if we are a talking about music, then I'm not the best musician, but that doesn't matter as long as playing keeps giving me a buzz. But Bukowski teaches me not to care about the fear of failing in front of others. Like when I made mistakes tonight, for instance. As a person watching, don't they just make you feel better to know that other people aren't perfect?! I won't change this way of approaching music.'

The meaningful project and realisation of *jūjitsukan* in Tsun Tsun's station performances and live house shows distilled a sense of wellbeing in hope. His lateral connections with others, emphasising a shared humanity, suggested hope in the possibility that such qualities might be used to judge the worth of an individual without recourse to markers of success that emphasise economic position and wealth. Tsun Tsun interpreted the life of Bukowski into his own *ikigai,* or 'that which most makes one's life seem worth living' (Mathews 1996: 718). Gordon Mathews' interviews with bank workers, *salarīman* and truck drivers in his article 'The Stuff of Dreams, Fading', illustrated that many conceived of *ikigai* as unattainable self-realisation: as long as they were caught up in work all

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[76] These were TsunTsun's favourite collections, which he recommended I read: *The Most Beautiful Woman in Town* (1983), and *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* (1969)

the time they would never find 'their own purpose' (1996: 739-740). Tsun Tsun's case was a reversal of this: not a hope of one day finding an *ikigai* in the future, but an *ikigai* realised in an eternal present through the experience of *jūjitsukan*.

My argument here aligns with that of Genda Yuji (2008), who suggested that hope for the sake of hoping, and what can appear to be 'hoping in vain', is still a productive individual endeavour for those struggling against diminished possibilities when it encourages a gradual redefinition or redirection of that hope onto other outcomes. My ethnographic data also supports Iza Kavedzija's contention that hope itself can be reoriented: 'In other words, if we cannot see a future that will sustain us, we may need to find a different way of looking. Perhaps hope itself has become an obstacle to our thriving, and must be recast: the future gaze afforded by hope reoriented' (2016: 9). Where hope is reoriented, 'cruel optimism' as a 'condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic objective in advance of its loss' (Berlant 2011: 21), can be undone. For Kavedzija, there are a number of examples that illustrate that hope is being resurrected in places where the dominant logic moves away from the market (2016: 9).[77] I suggest that hope for the street musicians appearing in this chapter was being recast in reaction to both the likely interminable situation of their irregular employment patterns, and to the dreams that have faded since their arrival in Tōkyō. Yet for Tsun Tsun, Whisper and Fuji, reorienting hope became about prioritising wellbeing in the present, and an *ikigai* that did not reference a future change in personal circumstances. Whisper's latest *ikigai* had become about attaining a deeper sense of self-knowledge and catharsis through regular performances of *zekkyō*. Tsun Tsun's, on the other hand, was to use his own performances to promote a shared human condition with his fellow man. Both promoted a sense of wellbeing wherein the future bore less relevance, and by extension posed less of a threat.

As our evening at Penguin house drew to a close, Whisper and I put Tsun Tsun on a train back to Musashi Murayama and then walked back around the station building to the railway underpass. It was nearly midnight and Whisper had an hour to kill before beginning his shift at the supermarket. Whether from the release of his live house performance, or the hour or so he had been nursing a sleeping Tsun Tsun, Whisper was less skittish than usual, crouching down and leaning against the wall as he lit a cigarette.

> 'I agree with Tsun Tsun. But I don't think you have to be yourself necessarily when you play, like he argues. Maybe he is too honest. I worry about that sometimes because he is so sensitive.

[77] For access to the examples Kavedzija is referencing, see her co-authored special issue to HAU on *Horizons of Purpose* at http://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau/ issue/view/16 (accessed 10 July 2017).

> But personally I think that it is good to become something else occasionally. I don't think I play *rojō raibu* with the intention of being myself, or maybe I do, … maybe it is the me I want to be. Perhaps I don't even have full control over which one comes out. But when I play, wherever it is, it does bring something up and I feel a relief afterwards. I become more settled. Work is usually easier for me when I have played beforehand.'

Jūjitsukan and the fullness of accomplishment was not the only form of wellbeing Whisper derived from his playing. There was also a process occurring throughout his performances, both on the street and at indoor venues, that acted as a form of release or therapy. Whisper's dynamic movements, his vocal experimentation and his enthusiastic engagement with other people in public, all of which were highlighted in our trip to Kabukichō, served to rebalance Whisper until the following day. This was also present in his attempts to 'refresh' himself' (*rifureshu suru*) by shaving his head, and in his eccentric and abstract thirty-minute performances at live houses such as Asagaya Ten and Kōenji's Muzenji.

During one such performance at Muzenji in February 2016, Whisper was kneeling on stage, his head bobbing back and forth, engrossed in the layers of sounds he had produced using just his voice and two loop pedals; a formula he had been employing increasingly. As spoken words, mouthed noises and lines of gibberish reverberated around the room Whisper began a conversation with himself, acting out two different voices:

> 'How have you been recently? *(saikin chōshi wa dō?)* …mmm recently I've not been feeling good *(mmm… saikin wa chōshi warukute)* … A bad feeling has been installed! *(chōshi warukute… insutōru saremashta!)* … But you know, out of singing something will come through I expect … or will it? *(demosa… uta no naka kara… nanika ga detekuru kamoshirenai yo… dō kana?)*…'

At times Whisper would put his own feelings under scrutiny and examine them within a performance. As he said, he could become somebody else when playing music, and this enabled him to reveal his darker emotions such as anxiety or low spirits by deflecting them into his compositions. Watching him on stage was as though witnessing two Whispers appearing before us. One was the floundering and inhibited soul, while the other a concerned second party; a friend or doctor. Together Whisper and his other half hashed out the cause of his emotional discomfort as two detached observers. By the end Whisper was calm and whole once more, having excavated and displayed his disquiet before a listening audience.

Fig. 38: Whisper at Muzenji performing *zekkyō* (left), and on another night, blindfolded while playing (right).

Back under the rails it was nearly 1:00 a.m. in the morning and Whisper began intimating that he should be getting to work. As we set off down alongside the train tracks to the backstreets where his motorbike was parked, Whisper said,

> 'You know, I am forty-four years old now, and as time passes I can feel my body hardening up, and it feels like my behaviour towards others also becomes more rigid, as though I find it easier to hate other people or lose my patience quickly. But playing *rojō raibu* keeps my sense of connection to other human beings close, it softens that feeling of stiffness.'

'So you are still a spring chicken?' I jested.

> '[laughs] Well, in mind if not in body perhaps. I see no difference between me and, say, Sainō and the rappers. I still don't feel settled in life or with myself. I'm like a twenty-year old I suppose, I still make lots of mistakes. I'm still searching for some kind of balance. But essentially, yeah, I'm no different to Sainō and those guys who would get themselves into trouble if they weren't in Kōenji, putting their energy into making music.'

5.6 Wellbeing and the 'journey'

In my final part of looking at wellbeing in *rojō raibu*, I examine how street performances were focused upon the context of time and movement, keeping performers' bodies and minds trained upon a series of narrative moments without recourse to their resolution. In Anne Lovell's (1997) ethnography of a schizophrenic homeless man called Rod, she details how his movements through the city, through interstitial spaces and the occurrences within them, are understood with reference to a narrative about his search for his mother. When Rod found food, it was left there for him by his mother, when he had money it was bills that she had sent to him. The 'city is my mother', Rod says in conversation with the ethnographer, in a conflation of his real-life separation from his birth mother and subsequent search for her, and his methods for subsistence as he moves through the city. While Lovell is referring to a specific case, of which the schizophrenic condition blurs Rod's ability to distinguish clearly between the reality of his vagrancy and the story of his disconnection from his mother, certain elements apply to the question of wellbeing and the journey described above. Lovell claims that in a life framed by homelessness, Rod's narrative rests upon the condition of him never actually finding his mother. Without the meaningfulness of the search, his homelessness would become more desperate (1997: 360). Ultimately it was the journey that provided Rod with a sense of wellbeing, not the real circumstances of the journey's end. Lovell came upon this realisation when an attempt to reunite Rod with his mother, after contact had been successfully made, resulted in his initial denial of a possible reunion, and then his disappearance.

As a sufferer of schizophrenia, Rod did not distinguish between reality and his mother-narrative in the way those without the condition would, but the journey as a context for proactive intervention is a trait shared by the winter street musicians of Kōenji Station. If the search for wellbeing is a state of 'existential dissatisfaction' leading to a 'hope for something more' as Jackson has argued, then the journey, going to places, was an essential method for continually maintaining connection to a sense of hope. From bits of information he had told me over half a year, I learned that Fuji was disconnected from his family. Though he did not wish to tell me what had happened, it was clear from his tone and his hints that he was not on speaking terms with his mother or father in Ōsaka, and that he did not expect to see them again. Having told me before that he 'has no place to return to' (*ore wa modorubasho ga nai yo*), Fuji was left to build a life and relationships for himself in Tōkyō.

One of the ways he went about this was to concentrate on forming a band. For one reason or another, however, and despite inviting many potential members to join him at the station, he never felt that anyone was quite right; *nantonaku ki ga awanai na* ('somehow we just don't get along') was how he described two girls who had intended to play bass guitar. On an ear-bitingly cold January night at the station, Fuji had been frustrated by a question an elderly man passing us by had asked about Fuji's hopes for the future.

> 'When I think about the future, I think about my body getting old. How these fingers will become heavy and slow and I won't be able to play like I can today. Sometime in the future my body will prevent me from being out on the street, healthy, and enjoying these sounds. So I just want to think about doing this now, as much as I can, to sing and play loudly while these moments last, because the future has little to offer me. I don't have any other expectations. There are only these moments. Don't talk to me about later on.'

The narrative elements of Fuji's life were formed by these passages of time spent on the street playing music. Lovell suggested that for Rod, narrativity formed a social space in which he engaged with his subjectivity of self (1997: 363). Disconnected from his old life in Ōsaka and resigned to a belief that there was no return, Fuji chose to frame his new life in Tōkyō around his visits to Kōenji Station and *rojō raibu* as the time in his day most representative of the self he most desired. As such Fuji played throughout the year, and even on the coldest of nights, so as to continually reassert this aspect of his life and prevent other less desirable realities from taking hold of his sense of self and wellbeing. He claimed that his disinclination to think about the future was based upon the fact that his body would slowly betray him, becoming stiff and eventually preventing him from playing street music. I suggest that these comments should also be considered with regard to his employment status as a *haken* ('dispatch') worker without job security or prospective promotion, his inability to save any money for the future, and his feelings of detachment from a family life. His journeys to the station represented an opportunity to escape these conditions temporarily and to claim control over at least one aspect of his moral and social life.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Fuji claimed that his voice and his music 'called' to others within street performances. This aspect, and his continual search for band members indicates that in *rojō raibu* he also invested some hope in the future despite his denial of this fact. When people did stop and talk to Fuji, or when musicians offered collaborations on the street, he was visibly lifted. But very few of these relationships were more than passing moments that Fuji idealised in our discussions. The band never took shape, and his search was ongoing despite continual meetings with

candidates, even after I left fieldwork in 2016. This indicates to me that the wellbeing and sense of direction he drew from his search for bandmates as a meaningful project, not only delayed its resolution, but prohibited it. The journey as a preferable, romanticised internalisation of uncertainty was also evidenced in Whisper's *rojō* life. Whether at Kōenji Station or in another part of the city, *rojō raibu* was a space to work through life: to provide affective moments of release and relief from his sense of disassociation with the daytime world he glimpsed during his morning paper round.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has been interspersed with moments during a trip that Whisper and I took from Kōenji to Kabukichō and back again. The journey drew attention to the performance of *rojō raibu* at the intersection of nocturnality, soundscapes, and wellbeing. The night was an interstitial space for street musicians, contrasting with but dependent upon the diurnal rhythms of Japan's working day. As such, afternoons presented opportunities for *rojō* musicians to practice in their apartments while neighbours were at work. In the early evenings as the rush of workers coming out of the station on their way home went one way, the street performers headed in the other, towards the railway spaces to look for a patch to play on for the night. A nocturnal life created a particular way of being and sensing the surrounding world according to Whisper, which at times gave him the uncomfortable feeling that he was disconnected from the main flow of everyday life. Others like Koba delighted in the small hours of the morning, wherein his time was his own and he could write new songs until the sun came up.

Though research has shown that association with the night is often perceived negatively by those who rise early, and can cause individuals to be treated with doubt and suspicion, performers like Fuji insisted that the nighttime was a period that those with fewer opportunities in life could inhabit, and make their own. For him, evenings at Kōenji Station were times of 'real' connection and relationships that contrasted with those of the daytime, which he viewed inversely as suspicious and indicative of the rule of institutions over his life. As diurnal workers followed the rhythms of daylight hours, the street musicians approached their performances through the social framework of the night. The music they made drew upon this temporal contrast, exploring a discourse of selves and lifestyles differing from those of the working day, but also reflecting their dependence upon the presence of a 'main flow' in order for them to exist along its margins.

In Kabukichō, Whisper used his voice to explore the new environment and to reach after others, teasing passing crowds with shock tactics or walking behind a couple while creating impromptu lyrics about their relationship. His gradual move away from guitar-based performances to vocal loops and the concept he called *zekkyō*, underlines how the production of sound in social spaces is connected to shifting constructions of personhood, embodiment and discourses of empowerment. Whisper's ability to address his own sense of dislocation from everyday life through the sounds of *zekkyō* also illustrates the role of musical performance in public soundscapes as a way of tapping into the lived environment. By mingling his voice with the surroundings of Kōenji Station, it became a part of the accumulation of sounds producing the local neighbourhood at night, temporarily emplacing him within it.

It was to the local soundscape that Fuji sought to situate his own voice as well, insisting that it was his cover versions of songs that drew people in because they were more 'recognisable' than original compositions. Fuji was enticed by the abandon with which he could strike chords and sing notes at the station, which contrasted with the patience he felt forced to observe during the day. He believed this was also attractive to others, who reacted positively to his passionate recitals and would invariably be drawn towards him. Yet as Novak argued, environmental noise is also a context of social knowledge, and is as such at the mercy of the same relations of sound, space and power. In adding their own sounds to the environment of Kōenji Station, the street musicians also drew *kujō* (complaints) and aggravated local figures of authority, such as the *kōban* police and railway employees, creating a dangerous situation in which Kōenji increasingly became the target of *shizuka ni saseru* ('to quieten') activities.

In the final part of the chapter, I have shown that the winter *rojō raibu* musicians' capacity to carry on playing during the coldest periods was driven by the connection these practices had to their sense of wellbeing. Tsun Tsun's intense and emotionally draining performances were part of telling his own story, which required continual retelling for it to remain, as he said, 'true to himself'. His suggestion that it was the manner of his performances and their error-laden 'humanness' that mattered most, was his attempt to live out the wisdom he found in the poetry of his hero Charles Bukowski. It was an attempt to confirm his belief that among the visible winners in life in Japan, a society of fulfilled losers also existed. Besides the search for a sense of fulfilment or *jūjitsukan,* some *rojō* musicians also engaged in therapeutic forms of performance in an attempt to work through personal issues and 'refresh' themselves against the build up of anxieties that encroached upon their sense of wellbeing.

Whisper's confessional role-playing in live house performances allowed him to address his personal state of mind during periods of low spirits in a safe space, wherein he could give voice to both the ailment and the possible remedy of his distress before a listening audience. Whisper claimed that channeling these parts of his life into music in Kōenji prevented his body from hardening with age and from losing the connection he felt to people he met in his life. Finally, I have suggested here that the capacity of *rojō raibu* to create and preserve narratives of the self, as well as a feeling of momentum, was dependent upon the sustained notion of a journey in street musicians' lives. The performances of Fuji, Whisper and Tsun Tsun maintained a constant sense of possibility despite their own awareness that their future would quite probably present worse, not better circumstances for them than they currently experienced. Aware that the trap of irregular employment and their decisions to prioritise music meant a life of making do, and because the ageing of their bodies would only exacerbate this, they preferred to focus on the journey than to realise the less attractive truth at the end of it.

Conclusion

In brief

This thesis has presented an in-depth, long-term ethnographic study of the lives of street musicians in Kōenji neighbourhood. It has explored their decisions to follow a path in music that brought them to Tōkyō and into a rhythm of regular music performances around a train station. Prioritising music meant binding themselves to patterns of irregular employment and financial instability, which placed them on the margins of popular, 'mainstream' discourses of life trajectories in Japan. In their performances the musicians addressed these issues, and their insecurities about the future by creating street personae that either emphasised their detachment from common narratives of music industry success, or else aligned with them by stressing professionalism within an ethic of hard work. I have argued that station areas are continually negotiated through music activities that invoke the 'public' nature of street space, producing a *roji kūkan* that turn walkways into a temporary stage. Kōenji Station affords the practice of street music, but only while visibility and noise are kept in balance.

Though considered 'loners' by residents and visitors to the neighbourhood, following street musicians away from the station and into the local live houses revealed the small spaces within which they found camaraderie, nurtured support and enjoyed the kind of focused interactions they lacked on the street. In live houses, the musicians entered into confined spaces that amplified their dreams of a musical self. Music negotiated the space left by diminished hope and diminished dreams as time passed and it became clear to my interlocutors that they were not going to be professional musicians. Yet they still had street music, and the affective relationships it inspired through accessing hundreds of potential fans, friends and conversationalists who used the station every day. Performers also sought out the station as a place to be, that would smile on them in times of need, and offer an escape from their homes and a shelter from their troubles. Within the hours of the nighttime, and by adding their sounds to the neighbourhood, the street musicians lived out the drama of their lives in Kōenji, tending to a sense of wellbeing that emphasised the emotional satisfaction of *rojō raibu*. Without a future that promised better things, they remained within the journey, living in the moment of street music that marked the transition from one day to the next.

Wrapping up the main arguments

In the first chapter I set out Kōenji street musicians' position relative to standards of employment, life trajectories and perceptions regarding careers in Japan that have persisted despite a steady increase in irregular forms of employment. In describing themselves my interlocutors did not use terms such as *furīta*, preferring to focus upon a less political, gerund formation such as 'a person doing part-time work', or else explaining themselves in a context of work that emphasised their musical endeavours. Many described themselves as musicians before adding the caveat about their part-time work. While there were exceptions among my research participants, the majority of *rojō* musicians I met had moved to Tōkyō with a dream of making music their profession. In doing so they led lives detached from mainstream ideals of working life, they changed jobs regularly, and they lacked the security and benefits that come from long-term employment and the assurances that age will bring status and comfortable wealth.

The Japanese music industry was not waiting with open arms to welcome music playing part-timers who arrived in Tōkyō seeking a career. In 2016, after 12 years of experience writing about Japan's music business, the Kōenji-based music writer, event organiser and label owner Ian Martin claimed that the 2010s were the worst time to be a budding musician to date. Insurmountable structural barriers, as well as industry and pundit indifference kept all but the most precocious and hyped-up local bands stranded from mainstream channels of support. Low-level, local support in the form of independent record labels or promoters operating within music scenes, could only afford to offer minimal help to a select few musicians. As street musicians, my informants were on the margins of all of these networks, and even less likely to see their musical dreams come to fruition.

At the intersection of these two trajectories, faced with a dislocation from standardised employment norms and stood at the foot of an insurmountable music industry wall, I presented the stories of four *rojō* performers: Guru Pari, Hayashi, Rila and Jack. Their street music displayed great variation in performance modes, in style, and in the personae that each individual developed in negotiating difficult paths that ultimately questioned the value involved in pursuing a fading musical dream. While acknowledging their individual approaches, I divided the four musicians into two groups in order to draw attention to narratives and practices that referenced mainstream employment ideals or else denounced them. Guru Pari and Hayashi's *rojō raibu* emphasised their differences from middle-class career paths and ambitions, from which they resolved to remain in their present state

of disconnection. They championed the amateur, poor life of a street musician as financially insecure but authentically and morally superior. In so doing, they personified these values in characters that performed in public spaces: Guru Pari as *Yadonashi-kun*, and Hayashi as a *Binbōnin*. They were performance personae that were capable of dealing with a high degree of lived uncertainty.

In contrast to Guru Pari and Hayashi, Rila and Jack played street music with a view to reconnecting to the mainstream through established patterns of pop success and with the music industry as big business in Japan. In performing idol music at Kōenji station, Rila tapped into a well-rehearsed narrative of an 'ordinary girl' that makes it big: the idol dream. Her music was polished, her look and her mannerisms aligned with idol tropes, her modest fanbase could sing all of her songs, and her 'staff' and promoter worked hard to capture and sustain the interest of the public passing by. Jack said that he stood contrary (*ama no jyaku*) to the kind of street performer that would 'do what they could' to secure public and industry interest in them as musicians. He considered such an attitude as insufficient, and in our conversations Jack told me that he had to work like a salaryman, or even harder, to become a popular musician that people wanted to get behind, to make his family and his new wife Emi proud of him. Over the course of a couple of years Jack followed an exhausting work ethic, playing street music four or five times a week as well as upholding his obligations to play at local bars, organise live house shows and play in three bands. He amassed a following through sheer hard graft and a deft skill at networking within Kōenji neighbourhood as well as outside of it. He became popular, he began touring with his bands, and left *rojō* behind as the only participant in my research to work professionally as a musician.

I analysed the musicians' experiences within the framework of Lauren Berlant's work on 'affective attachment' and 'cruel optimism'. I found that where the musicians' practices were threatened to become overshadowed by cruel optimism, for instance that Jack and Rila's attachments to a particular path were likely to fail within current trends in the music business, they were also capable of renegotiations and changes in perspective. There was more to their attachments to musical lives than cruel optimism. What all four of the *rojō* musicians' cases address is how the meaning of success and the shape of their aspirations could shift. Guru Pari's, Hayashi's, Rila's and Jack's efforts in street music were not singularly directed at perceived end goals, they were also intimately tied to the realisation of a recognisable person in contemporary Japanese society through music performance. A fading dream can still be meaningful. Cruel optimism can be undone, and music can negotiate the space left by diminished hope.

Berlant's work could not account for the complexity in the music practices of Kōenji's street musicians. Furuichi's claim, that young people are living for the present because their futures do not offer the same assurances as they did for the previous generation, also falls short of explaining why the *rojō* performers strived as they did. The musicians were not blind to their situation, nor were they overwhelmed by it. I argued that while the musicians did live for the present, as claimed by Furuichi, it was not contentedness that engendered this state of being, but rather their affective attachments to a fading dream of the future, as reminders that their musical lives must be lived fully in the here and now. Due to the popularity of his *shamisen* music, Jack had realised the dream chased by many of those who moved to Tōkyō to begin musical careers on the street. Yet, for him the reality did not fit the dream. As he rushed to keep up with his new schedule he reminisced about the old days when all he did was write music and play *rojō raibu*. Success for *rojō* musicians was just as much about negotiating a persona that was recognised by the individuals themselves, as it was about their position in the music industry. It was in the moment of performance, as a person recognised as a music maker.

The concept of visibility, to be recognised as a music maker, was carried through into chapter two. Here, visibility and movement collided on the station's traffic spaces and *tsūro*. Expanding the focus from the kinds of performances played and personae negotiated by *rojō raibu* musicians, I considered the train station as a street music venue. The exploration that emerged, of post-Gibsonian 'affordance' inspired by the world view of a day labourer and vagrant in Tom Gill's monograph on Yokohama street life, was framed within a historical view of social and urban change in Tōkyō. Patterns of urban planning, combined with an increasing dependence upon rail travel, gradually produced the requirement to create informal pockets of space for public and mixed use. As hubs of social activity as well as transport efficiency, stations such as Shinjuku became sites of open contestation and subtle appropriations by groups that believed they saw affordance within its passageways, quiet corners and open *hiroba*. In the cases I addressed, of the Shinjuku *hiroba* and West Exit, however, the rule of movement was not to be undone: the West exit was cleared of its obstructions, and the *hiroba* was renamed a *tsūro*.

Kōenji Station is a smaller iteration of the spaces presented by railway giants such as Shinjuku, Ueno or Tōkyō. A neat symmetry of walkways and railway spaces exists, where north and south sides mirror one another and connect to tendrils of *roji* (alleyways) that bury into the surrounding neighbourhood in all directions. I argued that alleyisation processes occurring in other parts of the metropolis - a residential lane used for informal gardens, or a section of pavement transformed into an informal market place - were also ongoing at the station in activities that produced and

maintained *roji kūkan.* My account of the steadily increasing size and popularity of Saino's young rap artist troupe on Tuesday nights, drew attention to how street musicians manage their visibility within the station's passageways and underpasses. The subtleness of their appropriations, their attempts to include other musicians, to encourage collaborations, to change the location of their performance pitch often, and to keep to a regular night of the week, alleyised parts of the station by evoking a temporary sense of public presence. Jack described this aspect of *rojō raibu* at Kōenji Station as (*ura no shakai*) ('society's undersurface'), an impermanent affordance of space that existed in between Fumihiko Maki's descriptions of *roji* as consisting of clearly differentiated front and back spaces. The process of alleyisation in producing *roji kūkan* within the movement-oriented *tsūro* depended upon this aspect of slippage, as day became night and the station's modus operandi as a railway hub loosened to reveal the potential for alternative inscriptions of space.

Within *rojō* activities, visibility was cloaked at times and revealed at others. The station afforded the development of both. In Kōenji's case the rail underpasses were dark, forbidding tunnels that contrasted with the station's more exposed flanks. For those wanting to be seen, such as Reina, Hitomi, and Sayaka, the station grounds also offered spaces that gave access to more potential new audience members and fans than any dedicated music venue could. While thefts and harassment occurred, the station also included safer spaces where female performers were not as vulnerable to threat, and where visibility to the surrounding public and the station police box enabled performances at night. During my research, neighbouring Asagaya began shutting down *rojō raibu*, and by the time I left fieldwork the sights and sounds of street musicians were rare around its railway hub. In Kōenji, however, the station music continued to ring out, resounding into and along the surrounding alleyways: affordances of space made possible by the neighbourhood's association with underground music scenes, and the fluctuating, temporary production of *roji kūkan.*

Whether in addition to street-based performances or as a determined move away from the station, *rojō raibu* musicians also played at live houses. This was not live house performance like any other, however, and differed from the ways that other 'scenes' developed and operated, such as those of the indie and underground bands. Street musicians in Kōenji were commonly viewed by other musicians in band scenes, as well as by some other locals in the neighbourhood, as 'failures' in music who lacked the talent to play in a band and be part of a scene, or as 'loners' without the social skills to take part in these. Street performers themselves did not recognise a community or scene with networks operating within *rojō raibu* at the station, and on the whole interactions between the musicians were limited to nods of recognition and fleeting conversations. This situation, however, contrasted quite strongly with what happened at live houses in the cases of musicians who

performed in them. Chapter 3 looked at how the musical, social, and spatial aspects of performance at live venues differed to station-based *rojō raibu,* and it revealed my interlocutors' embeddedness in the 'small spaces' and 'little societies' of live houses, and the often intimate arrangements of support and camaraderie that emerged.

Studies of underground bands to date have revealed the close inter-relations of musicians with the same scene, and how these develop into networks that cross city, prefectural and even national boundaries. By contrast, though they occasionally performed elsewhere, the street musicians I knew would often pick one or two live houses within Kōenji neighbourhood and patronise these for years. Consequently, the restricted networks that emerged spun around these live houses themselves, forming an archipelago of venues in Kōenji with performer-patronage relations, where street musicians could augment their street activities. At the heart of these connections, master-musician relationships provided support and a feeling of affiliation. With the sense of belonging that emerged to a venue or a venue's regular group of musicians, I argued that the live houses performed a role as pseudo-institutions wherein musicians could acquire a more tangible sense of shared experience and of being a part of something greater than themselves.

As with other live house owners, the master of Muryoku Muzenji took a particular approach to the content and structure of performances "on stage". Music, he said, was simply 'a way' (*shudan*), used to express oneself and to communicate with others. He encouraged unbounded experimentation, and in this he led by example, switching up performances between atonal psychedelic poetry and philosophical lectures on attitudes to health. Muzenji was a space of *hinichijō* ('the uncommon in everyday life') wherein assembled individuals could become *hyōgensha* ('expressive people') for a short time, and where street musicians could go beyond the possibilities of the street in terms of expression, collaboration, and performer-audience interaction. As a *hinichijō* space the live house was an amplifier of whatever the street musicians wanted to realise most. While Whisper experimented with techniques, jammed with friends and gave unpredictable, unrestrained expressive performances, Harada sought out the experiences he had imagined but not enjoyed at the station: an attentive, responsive audience that made him feel respected for producing music of value.

As with all musicians who played at live houses, Whisper and Harada entered into an economic as well as a social relationship with the master of Muzenji. They paid *noruma* and they received a stage, an atmosphere, and an audience. I have argued that while the *noruma* system disadvantages musicians' progression in the music industry by creating sometimes insurmountable boundaries to accessing live venues - indeed *noruma* is one factor in why people play street music - it also creates a

few advantageous quirks in the system. At Muzenji, for instance, by paying to play the musicians who collected together on any given night became customers as well as artists. In general, assembled musicians were also their own audience, and released from the obligation to satisfy gig-going punters they could perform whatever they liked, anyway they chose to. In this way, Muzenji, like other live houses, could become a venue of complete introspection and self-satisfaction: a place to dream. Using Ben Ari's (2002) work on 'the frame' of *bōnenkai* events I have argued that live venues produced their own social frame or context for the *rojō* musicians who came in from the street. By entering into a small space with shared principles of engagement, scheduled performances and temporary contracts ensuring performer and audience are both present and participating, street musicians benefitted from emotionally rewarding and collectively produced experiences set apart from the realities known to them on the outside where *rojō raibu* took place.

Inoue, the master of Alone live house, believed that his part of the master-customer relationship was to help his patrons meet the 'new selves' (*atarashī jibun*) that they came to him to find through solo musical performance on-stage. Though just a short walk away, Inoue's *noruma* fee was many times that charged in the psychedelic neon-grunge room of Muryoku Muzenji. The experience was also far removed: Inoue offered top quality sound equipment, one-to-one performance coaching, an actual raised stage with professional lighting rig, recordings of each performance on CD, and a dedicated *uchiage* held at Alone after each event. Despite these differences, in describing his live house as a *shōkūkan* ('small space') for the realisation of new musical selves, elements of scale and of boundaries with everyday lives happening outside the live house establishment were once again present. Similarly, evenings at Alone were comprised of moments of focused attention by Inoue and the live house regulars on to the individuals engaged in performance on stage. Attention given to the performer was extended into the *uchiage*, where feedback was a communal process and Inoue's role as master and advisor was reproduced through spatial as well as seniority-based interactions.

With reference to Kondo's (1987) work on affiliation to institutional frameworks and Aoki's (2013) thoughts on the continued presence of *bukatsu*-like social structures in underground music, I argued that Koba's move from the street to the live house coincided with his immersion within a distinctive hierarchical framework at Alone. Koba used this process to negotiate a deep sense of personal loss and period of dislocation in his life. The *Senpai-kōhai* relationship that he entered into structured his playing, focused his mind and developed a sense of direction with goals set by Inoue's instruction. Koba's involvement in the tightly-knit circle of regulars at Alone gave him the sense of connectedness and legitimation he badly needed, and had succeeded in finding only on rare occasions while performing at the station.

In the final part of chapter 3, hitherto discussed scale and boundaries blurred as Spaghetti and his band traversed between the live house and the street. Here, *rojō raibu* formed an integral part of the musical networks and the fandom that Spaghetti's band cultivated as they transported people back and forth between the threshold of Traghetto music bar and the outside spaces of the street. The bar owners gave Friday evenings over to Spaghetti and the musicians as the de facto house band, and a reciprocal relationship consequently emerged, as bringing people in from the street drummed up business for the bar just as it increased Spaghetti's popularity. Overcoming the restrictions of both music venue performances and *rojō raibu*, Spaghetti developed new friends and fans beyond the temporal and spatial restrictions of either one. Using Stevens' (2004) theoretical insights on intimacy and fandom, I concluded that the sense of consistent availability and physical presence that Spaghetti could maintain though his agreement with Traghetto bar, enabled his band to become widely known in the neighbourhood, threading live house intimacy and outdoor visibility together and producing local popularity as Kōenji musicians.

The last two chapters of my thesis paralleled the seasonal transition into late autumn and winter at the station, wherein street musician numbers decline while a hardy group remain and push on through to spring. In doing so my analysis focused in on three main musicians: Whisper, Tsun Tsun, and Fuji.

Returning to Kōenji Station once more from a consideration of the relationships between street musicians and the neighbourhood's live venues in the previous chapter, here I examined interaction between *rojō* performers and the town as an emotional, positively reinforcing one where people and place make and remake one another. In doing so I revealed that the winter musicians had reasons for playing street music in Kōenji that went beyond those I had recorded throughout the summer, diverging from narratives of professionalism, attracting fans or potential customers, playing larger and more famous live houses, or being discovered and adopted by a music company. Indeed the needs of the winter performers frequently concerned their ability to access Kōenji Station specifically, and to become a part of Kōenji society. Whisper believed that *noruma* fees had, over time, impeded his access to indoor venues, making Kōenji Station his go-to place for playing music. Homelessness had touched the lives of some performing in winter like Fuji, Koba and Guru Pari, and at these times the station provided both physical and emotional shelter. This element of positive association with place was also present when Whisper visited Kōenji in search of companionship and solace when his home life began to unravel.

Contrary to understandings of living and belonging in large cities that centre the home at the heart of individuals' emotional and sensed maps of urban areas, Kōenji Station emerged in chapter 4 as a place of regular escape from a place of residence. Whisper found 'support' and 'good people' when he left his home for the station, and felt that his 'heart could rest' within its walkways and underpasses. Contrary to Auge's (1995) thesis on transport non-places, my ethnography in this chapter demonstrated how such urban spaces can be claimed and remade an *ibasho* through the practices of individuals and groups that frequent them. In this way, I also illustrated that my interlocutors did not display what Allison (2013) called 'everyday refugeeism' as a condition of being a part of Japan's poor proletariat and less advantaged social groups. I suggested that the concept is unhelpful in understanding how more marginal men and women perceive themselves in relation to Japanese society, and how they engage with their own circumstances proactively. Moreover, attachments to Kōenji went beyond the project of remaking space into a place to be and developed into a narrative about the benevolent, animated spirit of the town - its 'genius loci' - and how *rojō raibu* musicians entered into an affective relationship with it. Captured in his song 'Kōenji', Harada writes himself into the narrative of the town, and requests its acceptance of him despite his 'lowly state' (*konna boku*). In his formation of the town in song, Kōenji emerged as a place that is home to, as well as producing and caring for, local Kōenji musicians.

Playing at Kōenji could set things right, reignite a sense of being in and of emotional connection to place: the station was believed to provide. This was present in the way Fuji, Whisper and Tsun Tsun talked about *guzen no deai*, as a condition in which temporary friendship or companionship could develop with strangers through the practice of *rojō raibu*. This was also connected to what Whisper described as the *shominteki* ('working class' or 'everyman's') atmosphere of the station grounds, and feeds back into the process of producing *roji kūkan* as explored in chapter 2. A discourse about class and ideas emerged surrounding these felt connections to Kōenji station, and how *roji* spaces and musicians interacted with broader Japanese society. With his disinclination to *awaseru* ('to match another's rhythm', 'to fit in') for others, and his *maipēsu* ('my pace') approach to music and human relations, Fuji disassociated himself from what he perceived as behavioural fallacies that only benefitted some in society while leaving him in his current position of looking out for himself. Aligning with the musicians' involvement with the station as a *shominteki* space, Tsun Tsun suggested that Kōenji was somewhere he felt comfortable 'exposing imperfections', intertwining an autobiographical narrative about human imperfection with 'real' or 'authentic' musical performance in public spaces. Kōenji was a stage for such performances, for exhibiting human emotions and relationships in contrast to the sense of disconnection that threatened their social lives

and work experiences away from it. It was a place to be, and a home away from home unlike any other they discovered in Tōkyō.

From the emotional, sensory elements of place-making considered in chapter 5, the last chapter returned, full circle, to a close study of *rojō raibu* performances as the thesis began. Here and before a backdrop of the winter season, the ethnography came to an end at the intersection of the nighttime, soundscapes and of wellbeing. I argued that in considering the events of the chapter, and when combined with the argument progressing throughout the thesis as a whole, for many *rojō* performers the music dream ultimately had no end. Rather, they were lost within it: the activities of *rojō raibu*, and the wellbeing that individuals derived from it, were inextricably tied to the status of being *within* the journey.

I contrasted the rhythms of *rojō raibu* to those of the station and the working day in Japan. I found that while afternoons were a time when many of working age were in places of business, musicians could use these hours to practice at their homes without fear of causing *meiwaku* ('annoyance') or receiving complaints. *Rojō* musicians headed to the station in the early evening, as swathes of city workers returned to the station and made their way home or into the neighbourhood's *shōtengai*. Not only did their nocturnal life create different rhythms to the diurnal one, it also produced particular ways of being and sensing the surrounding world. Whisper described his discomfort during moments when he felt detached from the main flow of life around him; especially on his way back home after a night of street music directly followed by work. Yet the night also presented Whisper with attractive alternatives. Whisper and Fuji both viewed the night as a time frame that those with fewer opportunities in life could utilise, inhabit, and make their own. Despite negative perceptions of individuals who dwell in the night, Fuji insisted that evenings at Kōenji Station were periods of 'real' connection. He even contrasted relationships that he engaged in at night with those of the daytime. Fuji viewed the latter with suspicion due to his belief that they emerged from the working institutions that he felt to have an overly powerful grip on his life. The music and the performances of *rojō* musicians in chapter 5 addressed their removal from lifestyles associated with the working day, but they also reflected these individuals' dependence upon its existence, so that they might exist along the margins.

Through three ethnographic excerpts from our trip to Shinjuku's Kabikucho, I exhibited the role of the voice in the practices of street music. Whisper used his voice to explore spaces, to grab attention, to shock and to tease. He also used it to connect. Whisper's exploration of *zekkyō* during 2015 and into 2016 was a way of addressing the dislocation he described from the main flow of life taking

place during the day, and illustrated the role of musical performance within public soundscapes as a way of tapping into the lived environment. The production of sound in social spaces enabled shifting constructions of personhood, embodiment and discourses of empowerment. In showing how sound materialises emotions and creates a sonic environment for healing, I incorporated David Novak's work on music and soundscapes, (2008, 2010) and Samuels' (2004) thesis on emplacement. I illustrated how adding their voice to their surroundings enabled street musicians to battle an encroaching sense of dislocation from it. In frequenting Kōenji station, Whisper mingled his voice with the noises of his surroundings and emplaced himself within them; becoming a part of the collective make-up of sounds reproducing the neighbourhood at night.

Fuji was keenly aware that his own music needed to harmonise with the sonic landscape of Kōenji neighbourhood if he wanted to remain for long hours, make repeat visits and attract the right kind of attention. This was a fine balance that was easily thrown off-centre. Fuji believed that his abandon in musical performance and the passionate, driving way he attacked chords and vocals attracted people to him, with whom he could enjoy meaningful, if temporary moments of human connection. Yet as Novak argued, environmental noise is also a context of social knowledge, and is as such at the mercy of the same relations of sound, space and power. When street musicians added their personal sounds to the soundscape of Kōenji Station, they also provoked, drawing *kujō* (complaints), aggravating local authorities and increasing their visibility. As I addressed in chapter 2, visibility in *rojō raibu* must be managed at all times, and the miscalculation of sound and visibility by street musicians on occasion made them, and by extension the station, a site of *shizuka ni saseru* (to make quiet) activities.

As the chapter progressed I presented the argument that Tsun Tsun's emotional and uninhibited performances at Penguin House, which echoed his approach to street music, were part of a continual recreation of his social ideals, based upon a morality of compassion and humanity in interacting with others. This was the chief wisdom he drew from his hero, the poet Charles Bukowski. By remaining true to this in performances, Tsun Tsun was able to confirm his belief that among the visible winners in Japanese society dwelled a population of fulfilled losers. Besides the search for a 'sense of fulfilment' or *jūjitsukan,* some *rojō* musicians also engaged in musical performances or practices that attempted to work through personal issues, and to 'refresh' themselves against the build up of *fuan* ('anxieties') that encroached upon their sense of wellbeing in everyday life.

By incorporating Genda Yuji's (2008) exploration of the work that 'hoping in vain' can do in retaining forward momentum, and Iza Kavedzija's (2016) contention that hope itself can be reoriented away from the principles of the market, I suggested that *rojō raibu* is both a sonic and social practice that enables individuals to deal with ongoing lived uncertainty. Whisper's confessional role-playing at Muzenji and Asagaya Ten live houses was a process wherein by addressing his doubts and low spirits before a listening audience and in a safe space, he could sound out both the ailment and the remedy of his distress. He described these activities as having positive emotional and physical effects on him: keeping him connected to the public he feared drifting away from, and preventing his body and spirit from ageing and hardening. In the cases of Tsun Tsun, Whisper and Fuji, I have argued that the capacity of *rojō raibu* to sustain personae, narratives of self and wellbeing, was dependent upon their sense of being within a musical journey. The prospect of a future bereft of certainties did not diminish the performers' search for possibility. Aware that their decisions to prioritise music meant a life of making do, and because the ageing of their bodies would only exacerbate this, the musicians preferred instead to focus on the journey, on *rojō* as a positive social and sonic practice, without reference to an ultimate, final resolution.

Outlook: changes in the neighbourhood, and the fragility of *rojō raibu*

The practices of musicians that make up *rojō raibu* as I have studied it in this thesis were bound to time: to the passing of day into night, in escaping the threat of police cutting performances short, the half-an-hour live house slots, fear of the ageing body, and the stoppage of time as they remained perpetually within their musical journeys. Towards the end of my research, however, I began wondering whether time was beginning to run out on *rojō raibu* in Kōenji. As I have shown, street music is something fragile, an interloper in urban space and only made possible through a continual process of inscription and negotiation. Over time I began noticing changes taking place in Kōenji. Most of these were subtle, but taken together they presented a multi-layered change occurring in the neighbourhood that may well affect the ability of *rojō* musicians to play in the neighbourhood.

One evening just before my second and final research period came to an end, Whisper and I were sat in the first railway underpass. We were discussing his recent performances in a couple of street spaces in Shinjuku, when he told me why he had begun experimenting with new *rojō raibu* spots elsewhere in Tōkyō.

> 'Recently there have been more regular crackdowns on street music in Kōenji. These phases come and go, but the recent ones have been a bit more consistent than I anticipated. I think it is part of the reason I have been playing elsewhere a little. What if Kōenji becomes like Asagaya? I must be ready to have somewhere else to go to if that were to happen. If they throw me off here, I need somewhere else.'

What Whisper said was true. On successive Thursday evenings in the late spring of 2016, street musicians including Hitomi, Whisper and Fuji had been told to leave immediately after arriving. Hitomi even changed the time at which she arrived, and attempted to return later in the evening, but met with the same response. As Whisper noted, there had been periods of intensifying shutdowns followed by calm spells of infrequent interventions throughout the years I conducted research. But these latest ones appeared more considered and regular. I asked one police officer if a decision had been made about street music in Kōenji, but he only repeated what I had been told before: 'street music is a problem when it disturbs others, so if we receive a complaint, we tell them to leave.'

It was impossible to know if this situation would intensify further or recede once more as the musicians and I had become accustomed to. This was not the only concern, however. Reef live house closed down in 2016. ONE bar, a venue for a regular gathering of local musicians in the underground music scene, also closed down in the same year. Club Missions, a long-standing and infamous hard-rock venue, shut down in 2017, and conversations between musicians in the neighbourhood suggested that these were not isolated events, nor coincidental. Muryoku Muzenji was ordered to close for many months between 2015 and 2016 for 'earthquake proofing' measures to be implemented. While this is completely legitimate practice, some musicians began to suspect that the drawn out process might also be one way of harming less popular local businesses and forcing them to close or move on. The master of ONE bar failed to renew his contract with the owner of the building, Reef closed down due to rent prices, as did Club Missions according to the musicians I talked to. I am doubtful about the validity of any rumours that claim a conspiracy against music business in the neighbourhood, but the future profitability of Kōenji as a place for smaller businesses is a very real concern.

Due to its relatively small scale it is easy to forget that Kōenji is only 8 minutes by train from Shinjuku. Land values and rent have risen steeply over the last few years and I have noticed signs of gentrification creeping into the area. What used to be a couple of grubby set menu restaurants surrounding the northern *hiroba* have been renovated in the last two years and are now much

brighter, airier, and to my taste, less characterful. An expensive craft beer chain store has recently opened in an area near to the station, which now competes with Kōenji's more established and independent 'Koenji Bakushu Kobo', which has been doing business since 2010 out of its shop nestled within a residential area. In March 2014, Waseda University opened a huge international student dormitory in between Nakano and Kōenji train stations. Built over 12 floors the university describes it as 'the largest international student house in Tokyo'.[78] As might be expected, Kōenji is popular with these international students, and in the last two years English menus have even been appearing in the grimey, smokey *yakitori* restaurants lining the alleyways around the station.

While none of this is particularly eyebrow raising in Tōkyō today, there is every possibility that these combined changes may impact upon the number of live houses that can afford to remain in the neighbourhood, the subsequent strength of local music scenes, and prevailing attitudes towards the town's music culture. If current trends continue, if more live houses and music bars close down, if police interventions do not ease up, or worse, escalate, then what would this mean for *rojō raibu* in Kōenji? If musicians and artists move away from Kōenji, where will the next Kōenji spring up? Arguably the most comparable town to Kōenji in Tōkyō, Shimokitazawa is also changing rapidly. The ongoing construction of a huge motorway right through the centre of Shimokitazawa, and the current development of its station area are changing the face of a town that is known for its narrow, pedestrianised streets, its *furugiya* stores, and by music fans for its clusters of popular live houses. Will Kōenji musicians be pushed further out to the west along the Chūō line? A visit to Reef live house's website now redirects to a different live house called Doctor's Bar in Ōgikubo, two stops to the west. Even if musicians move away, is there another station along the Chūō line that offers the same affordance for street music as Kōenji does?

The future of *rojō raibu* in Kōenji remains uncertain, and in so being indicates that my research has given a glimpse of a moment in time when street music was possible in the neighbourhood. Yet it has only ever been fragile and fleeting, just as a visit to the station during the daytime provides no indication that it is a place of music in the night. Perhaps Whisper was right to begin searching out new performance spaces and evening haunts in other parts of the metropolis. Unfortunately, only time will tell, and time has run out on me here. The one thing that I can say is that experience suggests to me that *rojō* musicians will adapt. In conducting research with the street performers I have been witness to their creativity, their street savvy and their ability to manipulate the

[78] https://www.waseda.jp/top/en-news/34100

circumstances in which they have found themselves. They are dreamers after all. For the time being, however, Kōenji remains the street music capital of Tōkyō.

Epilogue

I will never forget the cold January day in 2016 when I received a message from Whisper. I had not seen any of the street musicians for a week. The *nenmatsunenshi* (end of year and new year period) had brought with it a busy cluster of social obligations, drinking parties and late nights. As I awoke bleary-eyed in my home in Ōgikubo, I thought I misread the *kanji* as I stared dumfounded at my phone: 'Tsun Tsun has passed away.'

Whisper asked to meet me that morning at our usual window table in Yonchōme Cafe, overlooking Kōenji's South Exit rotary and *hiroba*. I left the house and rode my bicycle through the backroads of Ōgikubo and Asagaya, nearing Kōenji as my head whirred with confusion and desperate hope that Whisper had mistyped and I misread. Whisper raised a hand as I entered the cafe and walked over to him. As we ordered coffee, Whisper stared out of the window and I waited for the confirmation I did not want to hear. Then Whisper turned to me:

> 'There is still confusion about what exactly happened. The police say that they are treating it as a suicide, but I don't believe that. Tsun Tsun would never do that… Apparently he was found at his home. It must have been an accident. He drank too much, we all knew that.'

As Whisper had said, we all knew about Tsun Tsun's drinking. Not an evening of *rojō raibu* with Tsun Tsun passed wherein he hadn't offered to make a beer-run to the local *konbini* as soon as the opportunity arose.

> 'He drank a lot when he was down. He got down on himself because he was so sensitive. He just went into slumps sometimes, but he always got through them and was thirsty for life once again. That was Tsun Tsun, a romantic! He loved life, poetry, books, music and art. So you see, he wouldn't give up on life even in his dark moments.'

Presently we were joined by Ai, Whisper's wife at the time, though they separated a month later. She was much younger than Whisper and just a little older than Tsun Tsun, whom she had known since their teenage years. She was quick to echo Whisper's thoughts:

> 'He wouldn't do a thing like this. He loved life, he lived to play music and read poetry. He was loved by so many people (*sugoku ai sareteiru hito*). He must have had too much to drink and fallen. He just didn't believe in moderation. In that way he wanted to be just like his favourite poet, Charles Bukowski.'

Whisper ordered some water. Then, in one of his usual animated moments of retelling he launched his glass into the air, ice cubes hovering momentarily before landing in his lap. Even at that time I remember smothering a smile and silently reconfirming a frequent observation that Whisper simply cannot be constrained in small spaces. As he wiped over the table with serviettes he made what I thought a strange observation.

> 'I don't understand that Tsun Tsun is just gone. But then in a way I have experienced this feeling so often before. A lot of people have died around me over the years, especially in the punk days in Kōenji in the late 80s. People were crazy then, the musicians drank heavily and had fights and used knives. They used to spit on people on the street from the rooftops above. The streets were dangerous. A lot of people I knew died from that lifestyle. But it was what happened in punk music. Since that time other musicians I knew also died early from drink or depression, or just from the problems of that lifestyle and from being poor. Tsun Tsun's death reminds me of those days, and in a way, it doesn't surprise me that he died as a young musician here either.'

Ai nodded as she contemplated what Whisper had said.

> 'Well, it is true that he was committed to living as he did. I don't think he was going to do anything other than work odd jobs as a carpenter and spend the rest of his time and energy writing music and playing in Kōenji. He loved this town, and I was always surprised at how many people would call out to him as we walked through it.'

I looked down at the station from the cafe window and watched as people went on with their day, walking to and from the station's exit along the walkways. In the mid-morning pale winter sunshine, there was no trace of street music. Whisper joined me in staring out of the window and said, *kare no tamashī wa kare ga ensōshita basho ni ikitsuzukeru* ('his spirit will live on in the places where he played music').

Fig. 39: Tsun Tsun during a rojō performance at Kōenji Station.

That evening I received another message from Whisper. There was to be a tribute event for Tsun Tsun at Kōenji's Reef live house in a couple of days, one of three venues in the neighbourhood including Penguin House and ShowBoat where he played frequently. The master of Reef live house was apparently arranging for musicians who knew Tsun Tsun to gather together in remembrance.

Reef live house was in a basement in PAL *shōtengai*. It was a long, rectangular room with a bar running along one side and a stage at the end. The master had placed photos of Tsun Tsun performing, or else drinking or caught in a smiling moment, along the counter. Once everyone had

arrived he gave a speech about Tsun Tsun, and peppered it with anecdotes that made people laugh and begin reminiscing across the room to one another. This was followed by a series of performances by local musicians, who each played a cover of one of his songs, or else read aloud one of his poems. In his final speech and with a raised glass, the master claimed that it was our duty to remember Tsun Tsun on the streets and in the live houses of Kōenji, much like Whisper had said, because these were the places where he would remain with us. The owners of Penguin House and ShowBoat were also in attendance and appeared to know each other well. Reef had become a microcosm of Tsun Tsun's musical life in Kōenji that evening, represented by individuals connected to the places where he played and where we would remember him. We were all a part of his Kōenji, a collection of individuals who stood as testament to the musical life he had built for himself since arriving in the neighbourhood. So many stories emerged from just one *rojō* musician's life on that evening, and I thought to myself that maybe this was what sustained Kōenji as a town for its musicians: thousands of stories connecting people, bringing them together and rebinding musical ties to place.

Leaving Kōenji behind

Tsun Tsun's death affected Whisper strongly. He had grown used to the pair's duos in both *rojō* performances and at local live houses. Though they squabbled like siblings at times, they clearly had a deep respect and affection for each other. Around a month after Tsun Tsun had passed, Whisper left Tōkyō by himself on a motorcycle tour of Honshu.[79] He took a change of clothes and a tent, as well as his portable amplifier, delay pedals and a microphone. During this time he wrote to me often with thoughts about Tsun Tsun, photos of the road and recordings that he had made with his gear, including a twenty minute session of *zekkyō* he had done alone on a beach to a backdrop of breaking waves.

Upon his return to Tōkyō Whisper threw himself into vocal experimentations at the station and at live houses. My leaving the field in May 2016 coincided with a period in which Whisper had started playing in other parts of Tōkyō with more frequency. He began doing vocal-intensive, creative performances in Shinjuku with a young man who called himself Ami, who beat a drum while wearing a horse-head mask. Ami's performances were closer to conceptual street art than music, but combined with Whisper's looped vocals the pair gained plenty of attention from Shinjuku's passing

[79] Honshu is Japan's main island, and home to Tōkyō and other major cities.

crowds. ‘It helps to be surrounded by so many people in Shinjuku’, Whisper told me, ‘I need to take a break from Kōenji for a bit while I get used to Tsun Tsun’s absence. You know me, I keep moving forward.’

As ever Whisper sent me updates and recordings, even after I had returned to the UK. He often sought feedback on performance technique changes or new musical directions, and always shared anecdotes about things that surprised him or made him laugh on the street. In one of these messages he wrote: ‘Tonight in Shinjuku someone threw a 500 yen coin at me! Perhaps I am becoming a professional musician after all!’

Fig. 40: Whisper sent this photo to me after he had left Kōenji on a road-trip in 2016.

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Original map sources

Map 1: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=12/35.6926/139.5978&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).
Map 2: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=14/35.6993/139.6516&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).
Map 3:http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=15/35.7034/139.6475&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).
Map 4: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=17/35.70459/139.64936&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).
Map 5: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=19/35.70536/139.64984&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).
Map 6: http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=15/35.6993/139.6748&layers=TD (accessed 05.05.2017).

Figures

Photos and images are the author's own unless stated otherwise.

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Epilogue

Glossary of Japanese terms

akichi Vacant lot

amae Dependence upon others

anshin Relief, peace of mind

awaseru To match the rhythm of something, to unite (often used in the context of fitting in with somebody or something else)

baito Part-time work

baka Idiot, fool

binbō Poor

binbōnin Poor person

bōnenkai End of year party

bonsai Miniature potted-plant

bukatsudō Club activities

chirashi Flyers

chirashi Flyers and promotional papers

chūō sen The orange central railway line in Tōkyō (also called the 'Chuo Line')

dame ren The 'no good' tribe

dasai Uncool

eki Train station

eki-mae Station front

enka Japanese style popular ballads

furiitaa Part time worker not in education

furōsha Vagrant

furugiya Second-hand clothing store

furusato Hometown, one's 'native place'

fūtenzoku Drifters

gojira Godzilla

gūzen no deai An unexpected/chance meeting

haken rōdōsha Dispatch worker

haken shain Contract employee, occasionally abbreviated to *haken*

hikkikomori Shut in / Person that does not leave their room.

hiroba (public) Square, plaza

hiroba Public square (lit. wide or broad space)

hirobaka suru Make into a *hiroba*

hiyatoi rōdōsha Day labourer

ibasho A place to be

izakaya A Japanese drinking establishment also serving snacks and side dishes

jiko sekinin Self-responsibility

jōrenkyaku Regular customer

jūjitsukan Sense of fullness or achievement

junsui Pure

kaishain Company worker

kaiwai Activity space

kakkoii Cool, stylish, attractive

kawaii Cute

keiyaku shain Contract employee

kimono Japanese formal dress

kissa/kissaten Coffee House

kōban Police box

kōhai Junior

kōkyō kūkan (lit.) Public space

konbini Convenience stores in Japan including SevenEleven, Family Mart, Lawson and others

Kujō complaints

kurō Hardship or suffering

machi Town

maipēsu My Pace, going at one's own pace (negative connotations of selfishness sometimes present)

mizu shōbai The 'water trade', or nighttime entertainment industry

muen shakai Society of the disconnected

nagesen Tossed coin/gratuities

nenkin Pension fees

nomihōdai All you can drink

noruma A quota of ticket sales performing musicians are required to secure or else pay for out of their own pocket

ojī san Elderly gentleman, male senior citizen

omote Front

ongaku kinshi Music ban

ongaku Music

onigiri Rice Balls

onkyō Quiet music

pan no mimi Bread crusts

pūtaro Irregular worker

rifuresshu To refresh (one's spirit)

roji Alleyway

roji kūkan Backstreet space / alleyway space

rojō raibu The performance of street music. My interlocutors also used the short-hand, '*rojō*'

sake Japanese rice wine. Also widely used as a general term for alcohol

samui Cold (weather)

sarariiman Salary man

semi Cicada

senpai Senior or superior (usu. at work or school)

sensei Teacher

shakaijin Working adult / 'full member of society'

shamisen Japanese three-string lute

shirōto Amateur

shirōto no ran 'Amateur's Riot'

shitamachi 'Low city' of commoner districts

shiyakusho City Hall

shōchū A Japanese spirit distilled from potatoes or rice

shōkūkan Small space

shominteki Working class

shōtengai Shopping street

shufu Housewife

shūshoku katsudō Job Searching

sutorīto Street (and the name of a shopping street running westerly under the rails in Kōenji).

teishoku Set meal

tsugarujamisen A type of *shamisen* and style of play believed to be of working-class origins and to have originated in Aomori prefecture in northern Honshu, Japan

tsūro Walkway or thoroughfare

tsuyu Japanese rainy season

uchiage An event to celebrate successful completion (lit. 'to launch')

ura Back

ura no shakai Background or underground society

urusai Noisy, annoying, troublesome

utsu Depression, low spirits

washitsu Japanese-style room

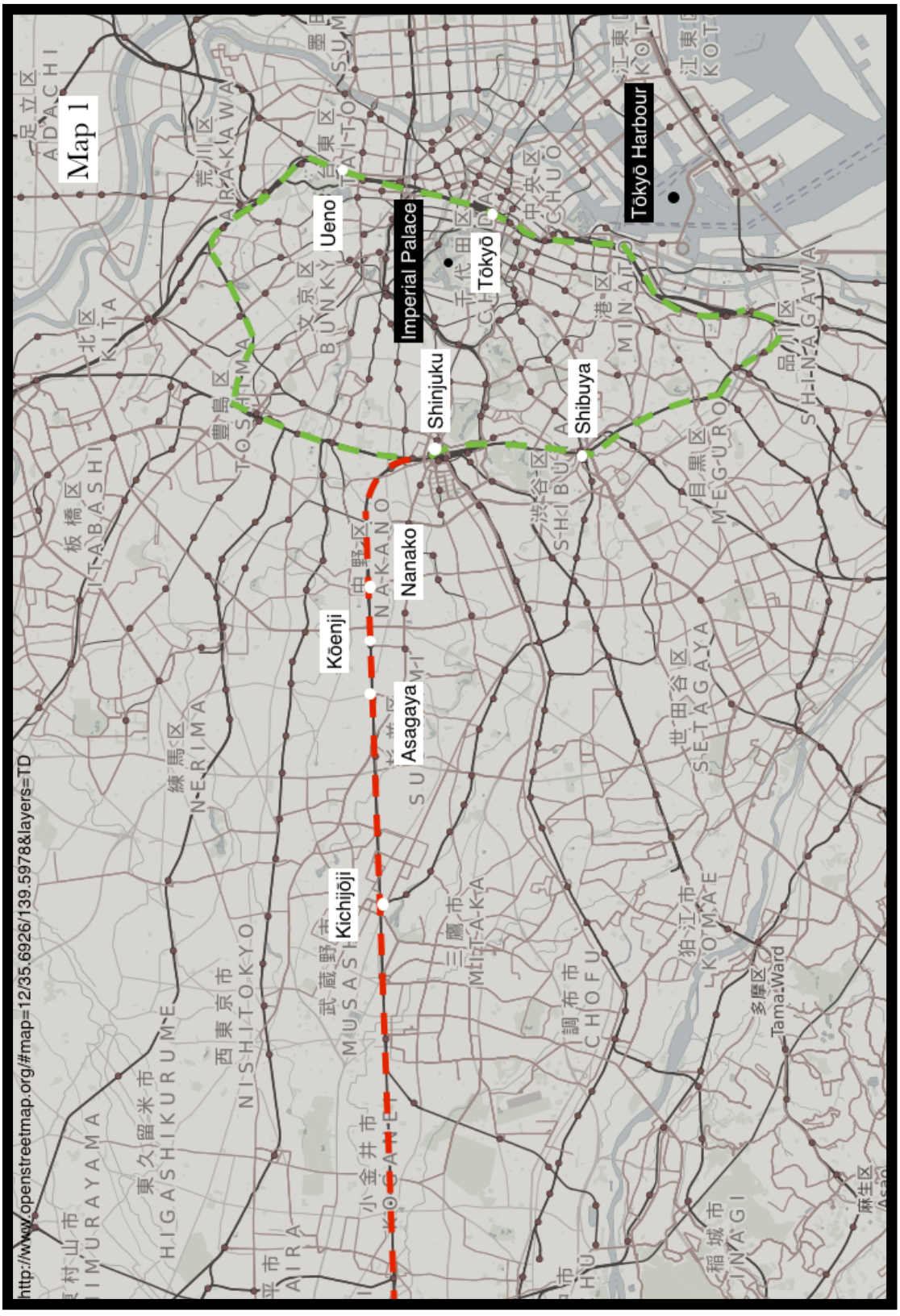
washoku Japanese cuisine

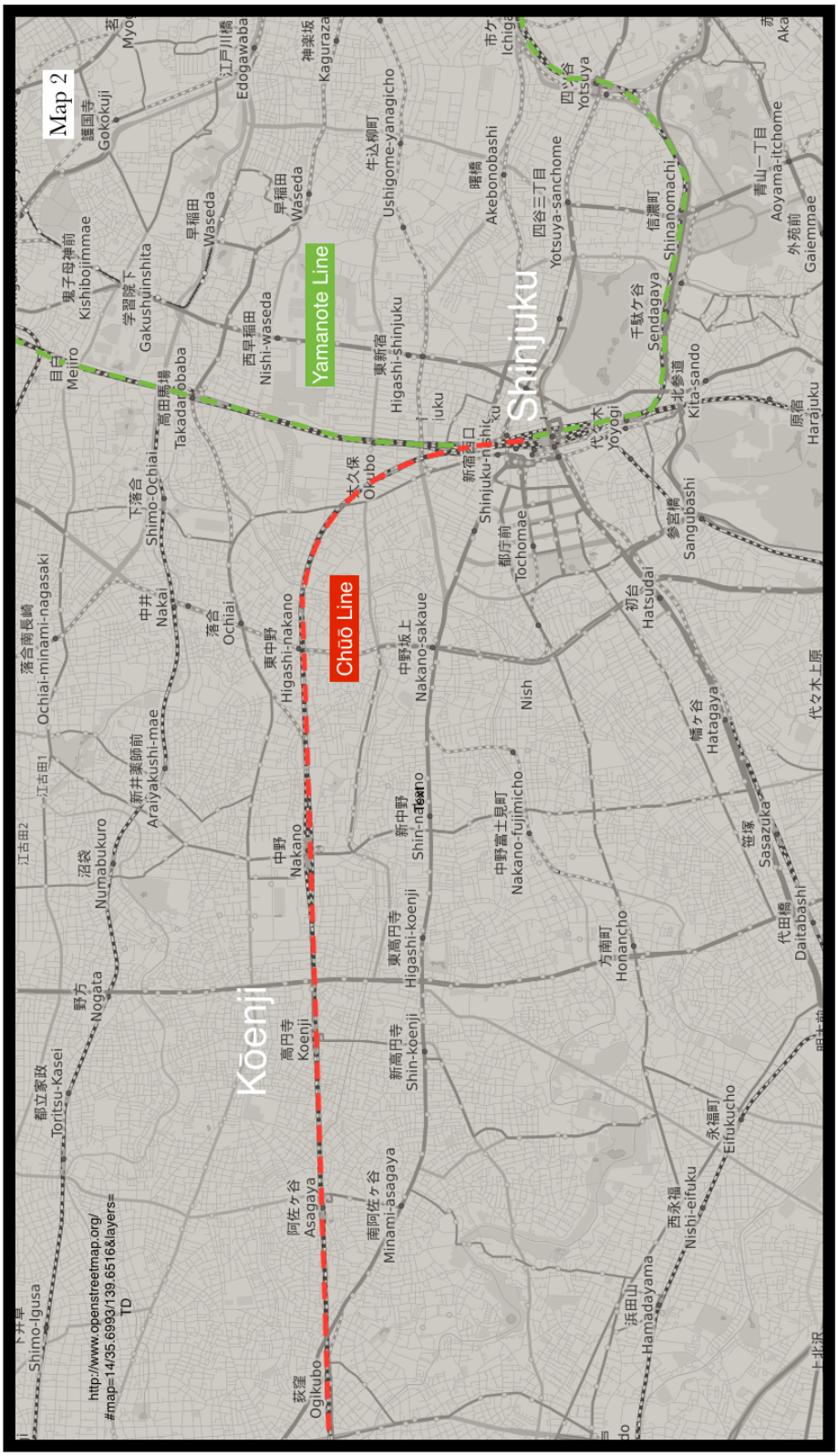
yadonashi-kun Vagabond boy

Yamanote sen The green circle railway line (lit. 'Hand of the Mountain line') in Tōkyō (also called the 'Yamanote line')

zekkyō To shout or scream

Maps


Map 1
Ueno
Imperial Palace
Tōkyō
Tōkyō Harbour
Shinjuku
Shibuya
Nanako
Kōenji
Asagaya
Kichijōji
http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=12/35.6926/139.5978&layers=TD


Map 2
Yamanote Line
Chūō Line
Kōenji
Shinjuku
Shimo-Igusa
Ogikubo
Asagaya
Koenji
Minami-asagaya
Shin-koenji
Higashi-koenji
Nogata
Toritsu-Kasei
Numabukuro
Araiyakushi-mae
Ochiai-minami-nagasaki
Nakai
Shimo-Ochiai
Ochiai
Takadanobaba
Higashi-nakano
Nakano
Shin-nakano
Okubo
Nakano-sakaue
Nishi-waseda
Waseda
Gakushuinshita
Kishibojimmae
Meiiro
Gokokuji
Edogawaba
Kaguraza
Higashi-shinjuku
Ushigome-yanagicho
Akebonobashi
Yotsuya-sanchome
Yotsuya
Shinanomachi
Sendagaya
Kita-sando
Harajuku
Aoyama-itchome
Gaiemmae
Yoyogi
Shinjuku-nishiguchi
Tochomae
Sangubashi
Hatsudai
Nishi
Hatagaya
Sasazuka
Daitabashi
Honancho
Nakano-fujimicho
Hamadayama
Nishi-eifuku
Eifukucho
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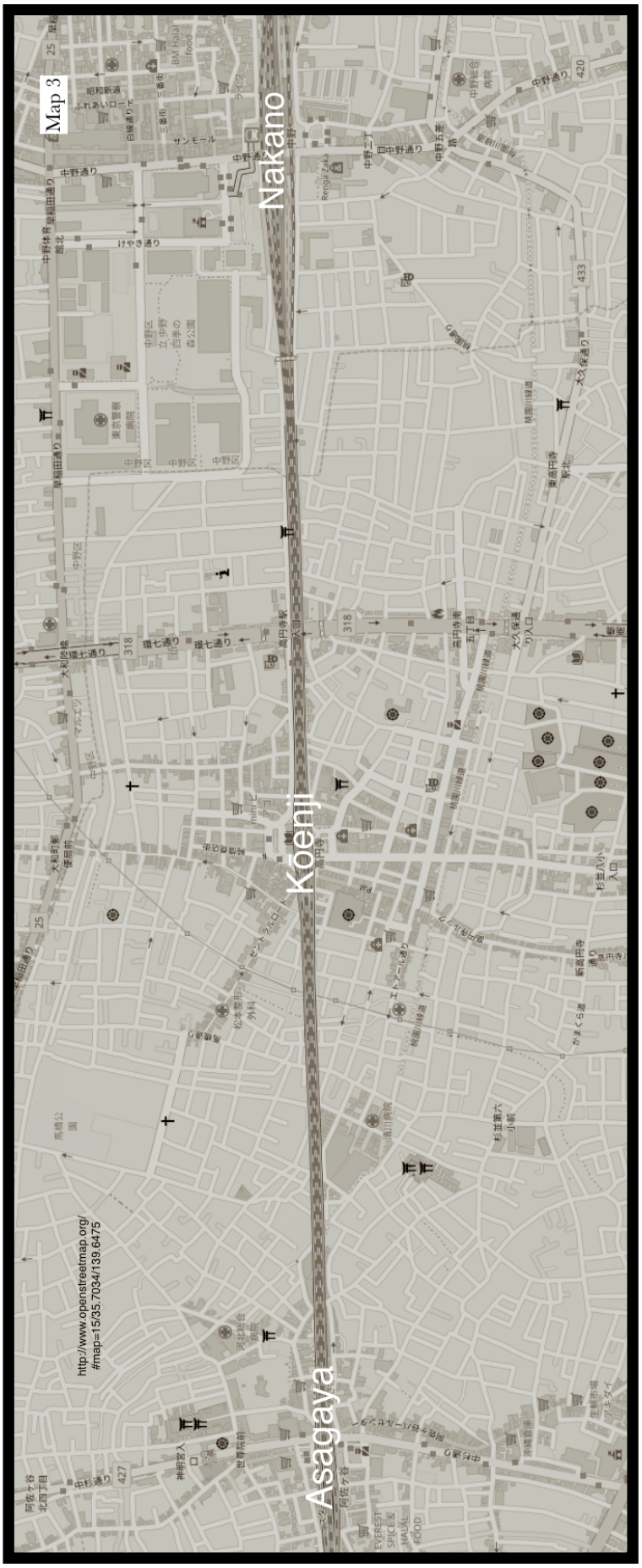
Map 3
Nakano
Koenji
Asagaya
http://www.openstreetmap.org/
#map=15/35.7034/139.6475


Map 4
Kōenji Live Houses
(and other places that have been mentioned)
Penguin House
Tragghetto
Muzenji
Enban
Bamii
Bar Tetsu
Sound Studio DOM
Yakitori Taisho
Von Chome Cafe
Club Missions (closed 2017)
Reef (closed 2016)
Koenji High
Niman Denatsu
(20,000 Volts)
Alone
Bar ONE
(closed 2016)
300 m
http://www.openstreetmap.org/
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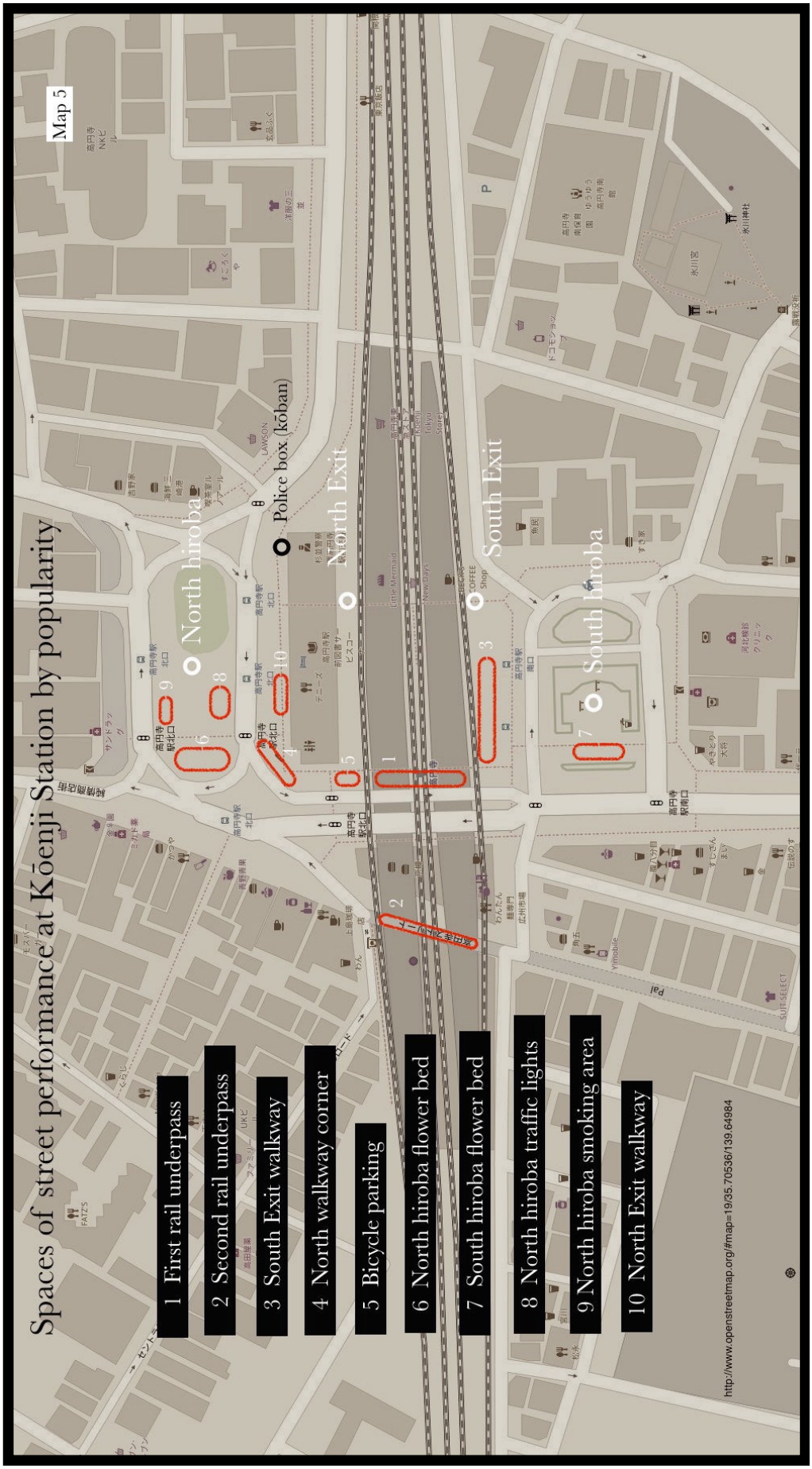
Map 5
Spaces of street performance at Kōenji Station by popularity
1 First rail underpass
2 Second rail underpass
3 South Exit walkway
4 North walkway corner
5 Bicycle parking
6 North hiroba flower bed
7 South hiroba flower bed
8 North hiroba traffic lights
9 North hiroba smoking area
10 North Exit walkway
North hiroba
Police box (kōban)
North Exit
South Exit
South hiroba
http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=19/35.70536/139.64984


Map 6
Kabukichō
Ōga-dō Railroad bridge
Sanshinomori Park
Kōenji
http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=15/35.6993/139.6748