

Retelling, Memory-Work, and Metanarrative: Two Musical-Artistic Mediations for Sexual Minorities and Majorities in Tokyo

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ABSTRACT

Music is not only something to play, but it is also a way to produce a new sharable metanarrative through musical practice, which could represent a renewed set of social values in which people of diverse backgrounds are appreciated. The present paper explores this aspect of music, examining two musical activities held in Tokyo, Japan. One is "Prelude", an annual music festival for music circles of sexual minorities and their supporters, and the other is "Living Together Lounge", a monthly club event for those who are both HIV-positive and negative. These activities aim to create community empowerment and social transformation among minority and majority groups. While those involved are aware of musical aspects being an integral part of the events, the ways in which music plays a central role has not been well articulated. This is partly because the declared mission of each event has no overt connection to music, but more significantly because there has been no proper way, either commonly or academically, available to describe what is happening performatively in the practices of these events. The present study thus attempts to examine the unuttered aspects of these practices through ethnographic and interdisciplinary investigations. It reveals that the musical practices with various artistic engagements represent tangible memory-work in which participants are enabled to retell existing musical works in their own ways, producing a new sharable metanarrative and acquiring an acknowledgement of the retelling in public. Creating this musico-ritualistic practice is itself a work of art, which eventually becomes a life resource for those who take part in the events and a means of transforming a social situation of conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

Music has a narrative that generates meaning.¹ However, music also produces a metanarrative by means of its performance context, which may be related but not restricted to the original narrative of a piece of music. Since the metanarrative, often in a ritualistic form, affects us on an emotional level, creating a special kind of metanarrative through the performance context of music may bring about unique effects, potentially empowering those taking part and giving rise to a change in their social environment.

The purpose of this article is to propose a new way to describe musical effects in community empowerment and social transformation among a minority and majority groups by drawing attention to the production of a new sharable metanarrative through musical practice. At the heart of this discussion are two musical events called Prelude and Living Together Lounge. Prelude is an annual music festival for music groups comprised of sexual minorities and their supporters. It was so named because it was launched as a pre-event to promote and raise funds for the Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade. Meanwhile, Living Together Lounge is a monthly club event for those who are both HIV-positive and negative.² It started out as a new type of HIV prevention strategy and, as such, has been funded by the Japan Foundation for AIDS Prevention and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

While those involved in both activities are aware of music being an integral part of the events, the ways in which music plays important roles has not been well articulated. This may be because the declared mission of each event had no overt connection to music, but more significantly because there has been no proper way available to describe what is happening performatively in the practices of these events.

My years of fieldwork have revealed that the success and uniqueness of these two events lie somewhere outside of the scope of their respective initial missions. Indeed, what the participants at these two sites actually engage in is not just performing musical works but also creating a ritualistic framework for their musical practices, which produces a metanarrative that fosters community empowerment and social transformation. Even though those involved may be unaware of this aspect of the events, it has become my conviction that producing the musical metanarrative that allows the participants to empathize with each other is their work of art, which ultimately becomes an important resource in their lives as well as a means of social transformation.

In the following sections, I offer a literature review and methodological discussion to contextualize the issues that this research explores. I then move to my case studies, beginning with Prelude and then Living Together Lounge. Sketching their backgrounds and describing what takes place at these events, I examine how these musical practices can serve as community care as well as transform conflict situations. With a particular emphasis on the musical effects of their respective metanarratives, I explore what music mediates and how it mediates in these cases.

¹Musicology has had a considerable numbers of discussions about the issue of musical narrative (e.g., Newcomb, 1987; Abbate, 1991; Kramer, 1991; and Maus, 1991, 1997, 2005).

²Throughout this article, the term “sexual minorities” refers to individuals who are members of gender and sexual minority groups, mainly but not exclusively those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Finally, I conclude by suggesting a mechanism for the emergence of the power of music in terms of the performative nature of music.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ritualistic functions of music are evident even in musical settings that are not usually considered religious or ritualistic.³ Christopher Small has remarked in *Musicking: the Meanings of Performing and Listening* that a symphony concert, with its universal metanarrative, serves as a ritual “for the reassurance of the industrial middle and upper classes” who gained social power in the 19th-century West (Small, 1998, p. 93). While Small’s argument is reasonably persuasive, it may be criticized that he has discounted the possibility that such concerts could produce different metanarratives with unexpected effects.

A ritual encompasses a repetition. But the repetition is inevitably not the same as the original. Richard Schechner, one of the pioneers of performance studies, emphasizes the performative nature of a ritual using the term “restoration of behavior” (Schechner, 1982). Also, prominent feminist scholar Judith Butler, who has influenced Schechner’s theorization, finds hope in the subversive power of repetitive citations (Butler, 1990, 1993). Certainly Small’s claims that “musicking is about relationship” and that during a performance “desired relationships are brought into virtual existence so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist” are credible, but he apparently overlooks the performative nature of musical meanings and lacks insight into music as space or medium of agency (Small, 1998, p. 183).

Recent literature from the sociology of music has provided valuable new perspectives on the role of agency. The first thread, initially proposed by Antoine Hennion, is that music does not cause some kind of magical power to change something but is rather a “mediator” (e.g., Gomart and Hennion, 1999; Hennion, 1983, 2003). Tia DeNora introduces the idea of “affordance” in music and prompts us to see how music behaves in a given context (e.g., DeNora, 2000, 2003). In the contexts of cultural studies and performance studies as well, music is now investigated not as an object to actualize musical texts acoustically but rather as a medium through which we can help ourselves do something (Madrid, 2009). For instance, Sarah Thornton points out that musical practices in club culture rewrite the “authenticity” embedded with music (Thornton, 1996: pp. 29-30). Simon Frith meanwhile discusses popular music in terms of value (e.g., Frith, 1990), and Philip Auslander further states that the attendance of a particular musical live event could “constitute valuable symbolic capital” (Auslander, 2008, pp. 66-67).

The second thread of these perspectives is that although music may have intrinsic qualities that bring about an effect of empathy, the object of this empathy is unscripted. Felicity Laurence notes that empathizing can be the critical quality of music, something which merits further exploration (Laurence, 2008, p. 14). Cynthia Cohen, on the other hand, warns against the totalitarian use of music, suggesting instead that retelling a story with music may transform conflict situations in multicultural settings (Cohen, 2008, p. 32). In a similar vein, Craig Robertson draws attention to music and memory in his discussion of an inter-religious choir in Bosnia

³Many studies of ritual have been made in anthropology (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1990) and in music (e.g., Becker, 2004; Dissanayake, 2006).

in which “the choir members temporarily create purely musical identities based on their singing role within the choir” (Robertson, 2010, p. 49).

These studies collectively suggest that while musical performances powerfully affect us on a deeper level, how music works is contingent on its context. In terms of the potential use of music for community care, retelling and memory-work seem to be particularly important. Incidentally, retelling has often been discussed as a source of empowerment in feminist and post-colonial studies as well as studies of narrative therapy (*e.g.*, Gilroy, 1993; Scott, 1992; White, 1993). Philosopher Susan Brison, for instance, writes that what is important for recovering a trauma is to be able to feel “that life is a story in the telling, in the retelling, and that one can have some control over that” (Brison, 2002, p. 115). Furthermore, geographer Karen Till, who studied artistic and activist practices in South Africa, finds “memory-work” to be a promising artistic activity for emotional recovery. “Memory-work,” she explains, refers to “the difficult process of working through the losses and traumas resulting from (revisiting) past violence and injustice, and of imagining more socially just futures” (Till, 2008, p. 110).⁴

Given all above, the present paper argues that its potential for creating a proper ritualistic framework for retelling and memory-work makes music an effective means for community care as well as a certain degree of social transformation. Perhaps, the key to the success is innovating this framework of musical practice, which may be used to produce a new metanarrative linked in some way to zest for living.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, ethnographic research has been conducted in two sites of sexual minorities’ musical and artistic practice in Japan. These sites were chosen because they were bottom-up activities and aimed for community empowerment and social transformation between minority and majority groups, rather than top-down educational campaigns or as explicit means for engaging in identity politics (Bergh and Sloboda, 2010). While I had not initially intended to combine the two cases, as my study proceeded, I realized that doing so would generate a complementary effect and deepen discussions on the issue of musical retelling and memory-work.

In studies of both Prelude and Living Together Lounge, I took four interrelated approaches: participating in and observing the events, conducting in-depth formal interviews of certain participants, analyzing online information and comments posted by participants, and taking account of my informal conversations with people who are involved in these activities.

For the Prelude case study, I participated in the festival in 2010 and 2011. In 2011 my role was as an audience participant, but in 2010 I was asked to be a substitute MC for Prelude, to replace an MC who had cancelled a week prior to the event. It was not my intention to be an MC, but the opportunity proved greatly advantageous for my fieldwork. During the rehearsal the other MC and I posed questions to members of each group to prepare for the interviews in the show. These questions included, for example, how they chose musical pieces for Prelude, what were the characteristics of their groups, and what they found enjoyable about playing music together in their groups. I was also invited to join the after-party, through which I became acquainted with many people, which made it easier to get in-depth interviews and observe later

⁴For a larger discussion of memory-work, see also Onyx and Small (2001).

rehearsals of the music groups. I conducted five in-depth interviews, including one with the organizer, one each with the conductors of three music groups, and one with the stage manager. Each of the interviews lasted two to three hours. The official website for Prelude, to which participants post their announcements and comments, was also a great resource for my study. The video recording of the Prelude 2011 and the past programs were also consulted.

For Living Together Lounge, I learned about the project in 2004 in the context of HIV prevention research that I had been involved in between 2004 and 2007. My intensive fieldwork on site was conducted between 2009 and 2011, during which I participated in the event eighteen times. While I had quite a number of casual conversations and discussions with participants, I also conducted two-hour in-depth interviews with five individuals: the organizer, the director, the main DJ, a regular participant, and a semi-regular participant. Resources in the related two organizations and the website of Living Together Lounge were also greatly helpful for my study.

Asking people about their musical experience was not an easy task because individuals do not usually articulate their experience accurately or in detail. People attend musical events, in which they feel, enjoy, and experience various things. But verbalizing their experience is another task and often thought of as nonsense (e.g., Adorno, 1976). In my work, therefore, I did not always take what was told to me in the field at face value, but occasionally asked individuals to narrate in a reflective sense, focusing on what they were actually doing through the musical activities. In my in-depth interviews in particular, I used the approach of the “active interview,” through which the interviewees and I together explored what they were really trying to convey with their words (Holstein, 1995). The transcribed formal interviews and the written comments were also analyzed in terms of both what my interviewees said and what they were actually trying to express through their words, in view of what, as I had observed, happens in the events.

In the course of my analysis, I consequently ended up reconsidering my idea of the ontological and epistemological meaning of ‘music’. In this sense, the present work is “an account of what goes on within the field and within the ethnographer” (Rooke, 2010, p. 38). As will be seen, music has to be understood as part of a larger artistic endeavor.

PRELUDE

THE 2010 PRELUDE

The 6th Prelude was held on July 17, 2010 in the largest hall of Nakano Zero, a public event venue in Tokyo. Three chorus groups, four wind ensembles, one jazz band, and one string orchestra assembled and in the course of three and a half hours that afternoon played popular and classical music, occasionally accompanied by comedic performances.

The program consisted of two parts, the first being choral and the second being instrumental. Each part ended with a joint choral or instrumental performance, and the final performance involved an orchestra and a chorus.



Program Cover of Prelude 2010

The complete program follows:

PART I

Opening Performance

Special Guests from Overseas

Sing Out! Tokyo

“Yell” by Ikimonogakari (a young popular singing group)

“Climb Ev’ry Mountain” from *The Sound of Music*

Tokyo Kama-san (Queer) Choir, “Coro Elegante”

“The Rainbow over Hiroshima” from *The Rainbow for Prayer* (a Japanese contemporary choral work by Tokuhide Niimi)

Shinjuku Male Choir

“In Spring” from *Over the Horizon* (a Japanese contemporary choral work by Makiko Kinoshita)

“Viri Galilaei” by Couilart (a Renaissance *a cappella* piece)

Joint Choir for Prelude

“A Letter” by Angela Aki (a young popular singer)

“You Are the One Who Rings the Bell” by Akiko Wada
(a famous popular singer)

PART II

SSK48

Marche Slave by Peter Tchaikovsky

BASUE Wind Ensemble

Japanese Graffiti BASUE 2010, OK with Being Alone in This Summer, Too (a medley of Japanese pop songs in the 1970-80s arranged by a member of the ensemble)

Swingin’ Panda Orchestra

Dinner with Friends, Orange Sherbet, Strike Up the Band

Brass MIX!

Evangelion Fanfare, Butterfly,

A Medley of Yajima Beauty Salon, Proud Mary

Onkyo (Acoustic) Samurai

Folklore for Band by Jim Caudill

Brock M by Jerry Bilik

Ensemble Divertimento

Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky by Anton Arensky

Joint Orchestra

Prelude for *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

by Richard Wagner

Joint Orchestra and Chorus

Pomp and Circumstance, No. 1 by Edward Elgar

Although the repertoires and levels of the performance varied, the players' enthusiasm for their performance, the dedication of the volunteer staff, and the receptive attitude of the audience created a unique musical sphere in the public hall.

BACKGROUND

Before describing the details of the event, let us start by looking at the historical and social context of Prelude. Although there have always been sexual minorities in Japan, it was not until the 1990s that their fight for liberation began to attain significant public visibility. In 1991, the Japan Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement (OCCUR) sued the Tokyo metropolitan government in 1990, claiming that they were denied access to Fuchū Youth Hostel, the government-run youth hostel, eventually winning the case in 1997.⁵ In 1994, the 10th International AIDS Conference was held in Yokohama, and Place Tokyo was founded as a non-governmental organization for HIV-positive people (mainly serving gay individuals). 1994 was also the year of the first Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Parade. In the following year, the first officially sanctioned sex reassignment surgery in Japan was performed at Saitama Medical University Hospital.

Alongside these visible activities, various new community activities by sexual minorities were launched in the 1990s. Among these were the births of three music groups—one chorus group, one wind ensemble, and one string orchestra. Some of the founding members in the string orchestra reflected back in their conversations with me that it was just fun to get together, and that at that time playing music was a kind of warm-up for the drinking that was to follow. As their musical activities have become more vibrant and visible, the numbers of their members have increased. Newly founded music groups have also appeared. The membership requirements of these music groups differ from one group to another. Some of the oldest groups consist only of gay men. Others comprise all kinds of sexual minorities including lesbians and transgendered individuals. Still others welcome heterosexuals as long as they are supportive of sexual minorities. Given the blossoming musical activities among sexual minority groups, a music festival was planned in 2005.

It was Yoshihiro Okabe, organizer of the executive committee for the Parade, who proposed the idea of the music festival Prelude. A pianist and music teacher himself, he had accompanied a gay chorus group and had also taken part as an MC in “Voice”, an annual cultural event run by Place Tokyo between 1997 and 2007. Voice was intended for promoting community support for HIV-positive people as well as HIV prevention, encompassing various artistic activities including musical performances by members of sexual minority groups. Having known the vibrant activities of the music groups, he had hoped to have a music festival sometime in the future. This chance came in 2005 when Okabe was the organizer of the parade committee and had to propose ways of outreach and fundraising for the parade.⁶ He shared the idea of a music festival, which first took place as a pre-event for the parade on August 6, 2005.

Three choral groups, two wind ensembles, and one string orchestra participated in the first Prelude. Each group presented their repertoires, and the concert ended impressively with the “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s *Messiah* performed by the members of all the music groups. The concert was a great success for a community

⁵For more information on the case of the Fuchū Youth Hostel, see Taniguchi (2006).

⁶For more information about the 2005 parade, see Suganuma (2006).

event, even though it did not gather enough funding for the parade. The Prelude has since been held every year, even in the years when the parade was called off due to various difficulties. At the 2010 Prelude, nearly three hundred members of nine music groups appeared on stage. In 2011, audience numbers reached almost four hundred people, including family members and heterosexual friends, according to the event organizers' statistics and questionnaires.

All music groups appearing in Prelude give public concerts on a regular basis. But not all of their members have come out to the public as sexual minorities. In fact, the two of the oldest groups usually perform without referring to their sexuality. Because they have members who do not wish to come out to the public, these groups cannot appear on the Prelude stage. Therefore, the members of each group who want to participate in Prelude make up a special voluntary group specifically for their once-a-year Prelude presence.

The public acceptance of sexual minorities in Japan in recent years has increased greatly from the pre-1990s, but prejudice and bias are still prevalent. For instance, the former mayor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō (1999-2012), has deliberately repeated discriminatory remarks against sexual minorities. Prelude is not a political confrontation with this sort of discrimination but is rather a sustainable attempt to promote community interaction as well as social transformation in the relationship between sexual minorities and the majority population.

NEW METANARRATIVE

Although Prelude is a music festival, its function is not only about making music together. In fact, if you consider the 2010 Prelude described above in terms of *what music is mediating*, instead of *how well music is performed*, you will be drawn towards different aspects of the performance. First, I would like to focus on the meanings performatively generated by the musical works.

The 2010 Prelude was kicked off with a performance by a group touted as “special guests from overseas”. In reality, three members of the Tokyo Kama-san (Queer) Chorus who were disguised as performers from the 2006 film *Dreamgirls* showed up on stage and danced and lip-synced, which broke the ice with the audience in the public hall. The ensuing Part I of the show was comprised of three choral performances. Although all three groups were all-male choirs, they have quite distinct repertoires. Sing Out Tokyo! focuses on popular and familiar numbers. They first sang “Yell”, which was originally a hit song of Ikimonogakari (a Japanese popular singing group) and later arranged for a choral piece in the 2009 NHK school chorus contest (the most famous annual chorus contest in Japan hosted by NHK, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation). Then, they performed the famous choral piece from *The Sound of Music* (1959), “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”.

What is interesting about Prelude is that the lyrics of these pieces obtain new meanings. For instance, the song “Yell” expresses, in somewhat melancholic tunes, typical adolescent moodiness, loneliness, and hesitation to go out in public. In contrast, “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” is a glorious song that encourages listeners and singers alike. Although no one speaks of any political agenda or shouts for minority liberation at these events, the context of the concerts, such as the fact that the individuals who are singing the pieces are not adolescents but adult gay men, prompts the audience to reread the personas within the musical works such that they speak to the lives of the singers as well as the members of the audience. This kind of

deliberate musical selection is fairly consistent through Prelude and has become a unique and ritualistic feature of the event.

The Tokyo Kama-san (Queer) Choir, which followed Sing Out! Tokyo at the 2010 Prelude, is the best choral group from a technical perspective. They presented a serious and difficult work entitled “The Rainbow over Hiroshima”, which expresses a prayer for peace after the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. They sang the piece very persuasively. However, it was conspicuous that the conductor wore a rainbow shirt which is inarguably a global symbol of rights for sexual minority groups, and the three “Dreamgirls” from the event’s opening performance heartily joined the other group members to sing the serious piece.



“The Rainbow over Hiroshima” by Tokyo Kama-san (Queer) Chorus
Image from *g-lad XX* (<http://gladxx.jp/features/scene/400.html>) on 24 October 2011

At the end of Part I, the special joint chorus, consisting of members of all choral groups as well as volunteer participants including women, sang two well-known songs. The first was a song by Angela Aki, a young singer-song-writer who is half Italian-American and half Japanese. In the middle of the performance, someone disguised as Angela Aki appeared on stage, producing big laughs from the audience. The following song by Akiko Wada, a singer known for her deep, masculine voice, was performed expressively, accompanied by piano and a string quartet. Here also, the lyrics of the song were distinct. Its refrain, “everyone is in the midst of distress; you are the one who rings the bell” encouraged all the people who participated in the event to do something, even something small, to have a better life.

Part II began with a superb performance of Tchaikovsky’s *Marche Slave* by SSK 48. SSK 48, incidentally, is a parody name of the most popular contemporary Japanese girl group, AKB 48. The fact that the composer had homosexual feelings was included when introducing the piece to the audience, and the performance of this piece added another meaning for the event. The sexual identity of the composer is not necessarily a primary factor in the musical selections. However, when a musical piece was composed by or somehow related to a famous gay person, noting this in the performance brings additional excitement to the event.

Brass MIX! is a marching band accompanied by its color guard. The members of the band, including heterosexuals, gather from all over the country when a parade or an event for sexual minorities takes place. They usually communicate with each other through a Japanese social media website called *Mixi*.⁷ This group has a policy whereby the quality of the performance is considered irrelevant as long as the members have fun. Their performance for the Prelude 2010 was indeed as such. The third piece of Brass Mix!, “A Medley of *Yajima* Beauty Salon” is what they say is a typical “gay-tasted” piece.⁸ “*Yajima* Beauty Salon” is a parody show on TV, in which two famous male comedians and a musician are disguised as imaginary glamorous African-American celebrities, singing and dancing fashionable songs (apparently evoking the drag queens’ excessive performances).

The BASUE Wind Ensemble (meaning “the outlying part of a town”), presented a medley of famous Japanese popular songs from the 1970s and 80s, all of which were about women’s lost love and longing. They wore *yukata* (a traditional Japanese summer robe) and performed with their original choreography, which visualized the original lyrics of the musical pieces they played. The musical selections of the BASUE are consistent every year in the sense that they choose works associated with loneliness and lost love, which are arranged and presented in humorous ways.

The final performance for the all-member orchestra and chorus was Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance, No. 1*. The conductor told the audience that ever since he went to the UK and listened to this piece in the fever of the BBC Proms, he has wanted to conduct it himself. Subtly but clearly, the symbolic scene of the nationalistic event was appropriated for the unity of all participants and audience members.



Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance, No.1” by the Joint Chorus and Orchestra
Image from *g-lad XX* (<http://gladxx.jp/features/scene/400.html>) on 24 October 2011

⁷Mixi is form of a Japanese social media similar to Facebook, which allows users to use nicknames rather than real names. It was the most popular social networking site in Japan in 2005, but now Facebook has taken its place.

⁸The connotation of “gay taste” differs among communities of sexual minorities in Japan. In a gay ethnic music group for Eisa (Okinawan drum dance), for instance, effeminate qualities are not welcomed (Sunagawa, 2010).

As described above, the meanings of individual musical compositions are transformed into meanings which are different from those usually perceived. Selecting and programming musical works in a certain way, along with adding their idiosyncratic stage gestures, prompt the audience to reinterpret the meaning of the musical works. Even if the music is played in a straightforward manner, as in Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slave*, they are reinterpreted in a unique performance context. In addition, the joint performances featuring the all-member orchestra and chorus, particularly the concluding performance, help to afford a process of bonding people together and represent the unification of all kinds of people regardless of their sexuality. The musical works are thus "retold" in the way that they produce a new metanarrative, which could empower the participants and prompts community care and empowerment.

MEMORY-WORK

The second point I would like to focus on is that the memory of *Prelude* becomes a source for living for many of the participants. The following is an excerpt from a comment on the Internet posted by a member of the Shinjuku Male Choir several days after *Prelude*:

I have read a lot of diaries on *Mixi* written by those who take part in *Prelude*. They rarely mention how it was successful as a concert or how well-received it was by the audience. Instead, they write: "We did a good job!", "Enjoyed it very much!", "Thanks a lot!", "See you next year!" and "See you soon, not next year!". Seeing these, some people would say that *Prelude* is an inner group activity for self-satisfaction. It may be difficult for other people to understand the enjoyment, pleasure, and feeling I perceived in *Prelude*. Certainly, this might have been a momentary excitement. But without *Prelude*, it would have been just a hot and dull beginning of summer. I am pretty sure that many people felt that the experience from the festival has become the most important source of energy for living, not just self-satisfaction.⁹

As this comment as well as other remarks obtained from my fieldwork suggest, having fun through making music with people they consider to be fellows becomes a good, lasting memory as a life resource for these individuals. Music can be a media that crystallizes a memory, as well as a later mediator for accessing the memory (DeNora, 2000, pp. 66-68).

As for the memory of the experience, performance rehearsals are also important. The ensembles described above usually rehearse to perform a work better in the same way as a regular music ensemble. However, they sometimes use homosexual-oriented metaphors to bring out certain musical expressions, which would definitely be taboo in a heterosexual music group. The conductor of SSK 48 in particular told me that when they use such metaphors effectively, their performance gets intensive and convincing. Considering the fact that they rehearsed many times for their public performance, one musical piece would carry quite a number of metaphors. Rehearsing music together is a way of crystallizing their experiences into musical works. In other words, their musical practice is a form of "memory-work", in which they perform existing musical works in new, creative ways and embed a new metanarrative in them.

⁹Comment posted on July 22, 2010 at (<http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/sinjyukudansei/61178057.html>).
Translated by the author.

ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPHERE

The third striking feature in *Prelude* that I would like to mention is that even if the stage performance sometimes becomes comical, it maintains a certain prestigious quality. This prestige partly comes from the high-quality performances of the event (on average), but it comes perhaps more from the excellent and professional stage management. The stage manager and his team are excellent and dedicated, and it is rare to have problems with staging, lighting or audio. The production progresses as if it were a professional concert performance. This is important because *Prelude* becomes able to manifest a representation of an alternative public sphere.

This may remind us of Small’s “musicking”. Small saw the concert hall as a place to embody the public sphere in the sense of Jürgen Habermas’ monolithic bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1989). In *Prelude*, however, the public hall is transformed into an alternative sphere of the public, which is even embodied in a “plural” form, as Nancy Fraser wrote in her criticism of Habermas’s work (Fraser, 1991). The music in *Prelude* enables the participants to performatively represent and perceive a new set of values in which their diverse lives are appreciated and praised.

The musical performance of *Prelude* thus affords to embody an ideal state of the public sphere in a performative sense, which is otherwise almost impossible to realize in the real world despite Fraser’s hope. Of course, the performatively created public sphere disappears once the music ends. However, once they have gone through the experience of musical “retelling”, in which they perform existing musical works in new and creative ways, the memory-work seems to become a resource for their later empowerment. It seems that musical retelling can have the same affect as the retelling in narrative therapy and feminist and postcolonial works.

It is a fact that the ritualistic framework of *Prelude* is not created overnight. Much trial and error since the 1990s has gradually shaped its form. Continually refining this form along with performing musical works is *Prelude*’s chief artistic endeavor.

LIVING TOGETHER LOUNGE

OUTLINE

Living Together Lounge was a monthly club event in Tokyo, held between 2004 and 2012.¹⁰ With its emphasis on “People who are both HIV-negative and HIV-positive are already living together”, it aimed to transform the conflicts between HIV-positive individuals and HIV-negative individuals as well as between sexual minority and majority groups. The idea of the event is that guest speakers read the notes written by HIV-positive individuals and their loved ones, and share them with the participants. The general procedure of Living Together Lounge is as follows:

PART I	Opening DJ
	First Speaker (reading & talk) Second Speaker (reading & talk)
	Break / DJ
PART II	Third Speaker (reading & talk) Live Music Show Ending DJ

¹⁰Although the Living Together project is still active, the monthly Living Together Lounge ended in April, 2011 after a total of 88 performances.

Each Lounge event consisted of three guest speakers' readings and talks, followed by the music-group's live show.

BACKGROUND

Living Together Lounge was run by two HIV support organizations, the aforementioned Place Tokyo and the Community Center Akta (then called "Rainbow Ring"). Place Tokyo is a non-governmental organization comprised of three interrelated functions: support, prevention, and research. As the name of the organization stands for "Positive Living And Community Empowerment", it values peer support and community care. The organization has been interested in exploring new ways of forming community activities such as the previously mentioned "Voice" event from the time it was established. Community Center Akta is also a non-governmental organization. It is based in Shinjuku Ni-chōme, a famous gay district in central Tokyo. Noteworthy here is that this Center has been a place to attract a number of art activists. Among them is Yukio Chō (a.k.a. Akira the Hustler). He was an important figure who has led the Living Together Lounge project.

When Chō was an art school student in Kyoto, he met an up-and-coming artist, Teiji Furuhashi, and his artist group Dumb Type.¹¹ He appreciated Furuhashi's work and highly respected him. Shortly after this, Furuhashi discovered he was HIV-positive. Although it was rare at that time that a gay, HIV-positive person came out in Japan, Furuhashi did it in a highly artistic manner. His most famous production was the 1994 stage performance called S/N, short for signal-to-noise ratio, in which the latest stage technology and innovative performance styles of the time were combined in a sophisticated manner to address issues of discrimination and HIV. Although the production caused controversy in Japan, S/N gained international acclaim and was repeatedly performed. Furuhashi died in 1995, and the film version of S/N is still shown all over the world today. His legacy was also taken over by many artists, one of whom was Chō.

In 2004 Place Tokyo and the Community Center Akta started a new project called "Living Together" with the goal of sharing the realities of HIV-positive people with those who are unaware of them. There was a shared frustration that the number of HIV-positive gay and bisexual men was increasing in Japan even though basic information about HIV transmission was by then relatively well-understood in the gay community. The organization believed the problem lay in the fact that HIV-positive people were not able to talk about themselves in public so that the HIV disease was seen as removed from the reality of ordinary people. It was a time when radical HIV activism dispersed, and a new sustainable and peaceful approach was sought (Hallas, 2009; Román, 2007).

The idea of the project emerged when Place Tokyo made a collection of personal notes written by HIV-positive individuals and their partners, family and friends for the 2002 Voice. The notes were written in the writers' own words, reflecting their own experiences and feelings. Finding it effective, Place Tokyo started making a booklet of the notes beautifully designed with compassionate photography done by a professional. When completing the second booklet, they began to explore a better way of disseminating the booklets to achieve their organizational objectives. After much trial and error, Living Together Lounge was born in 2004 and developed into a regular event. The Lounge was a particularly unique and artistic event among their

¹¹See Dumb Type (<http://dumbtype.com/>).

activities mainly because it was organized and managed by art-activist, Yukio Chō, with the help of another artist, DJ Wara, among others.

Although Living Together Lounge had been a target of occasional criticism, particularly in its initial stages, it has gradually become a popular event. Even a major radio station, Tokyo FM, made and broadcast a series of collaborative programs between 2007 and 2009, and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, NHK, created a nation-wide show focused on the Living Together project in 2010. Around that time, Living Together Lounge consistently gathered about 80 to 120 people, attracting not only gay people but also others including heterosexual women.



Booklets and the Logo of "Living Together"

Images from Living Together (<http://www.living-together.net/tools/index.html>) on 3 May 2011

THE READING AND THE DJ

Let us now take a look at what is happening in Living Together Lounge in a temporal sequence. Around 5 p.m. on the first Sunday of the month, Living Together Lounge opens. The Lounge takes place at an event bar in Shinjuku Ni-chōme. There is no entrance charge, but participants are expected to buy a drink. Until the event begins, they enjoy conversing with their friends and/or listening to the music the DJ plays. A big flag is posted at the front sidewall, which reads "We, both HIV-negative and HIV-positive, are already living together". There is an information desk in the back on which there are numerous kinds of Living Together booklets and flyers. Video monitors at the bar show beautiful pictures and messages taken from the booklets.

At about a quarter past six, there are forty to fifty people gathered when Chō appears on stage. He begins: "Welcome to Living Together Lounge! Living Together Lounge is a party that is a part of a project aiming to share the reality in which both HIV-positive people and HIV-negative people are already living together". At both the beginning and after the break of each gathering, he explains the purpose of the event to first-timers but in a manner which does not become redundant to regular customers.

Before the break, two guest speakers appear on stage and read notes from the booklets. The speakers invited by the organizers could be the owner of a popular bar in town, a member of an HIV organization, a medical professional, a civil servant in a welfare department, a journalist, an artist, or a company worker. They may or may not be gay. These guests also bring their own supporters to the event. Chō asks guest speakers to browse the booklets and choose one for their reading in advance. In the Lounge, speakers read passages they chose from the booklet and talk freely about what comes into their mind. It could be their reaction to the passages or their own experience. One speaker usually speaks for between five to twenty minutes.

Although participants may not be fully aware, during these procedures the DJ music and background sound play an important role. The DJ music creates a particular atmosphere in the club and fades out when Chō appears on stage. Chō's voice is heard with no sound or music in the background. Then, when guest speakers began to read a note, an accompanying dry rhythmic beat is added. It is a simple repetition of three-layer rhythm in two measures. Noteworthy here is that the tempo is set at just about a normal heart rate. This helps guest speakers to relax. Some guest speakers are well experienced, but not all of them, and they may be nervous. And even experienced speakers may not be able to speak smoothly when overwhelmed by their memories and emotional feelings. For the audience, on the other hand, listening to the reading without the background beat might be too emotionally overwhelming, particularly when it is their first time. The heart rate beat in the background functions as a good mediator of emotional response. Wara told me that this musical track was an outcome of trial and error in the early Lounges.

Another device Wara invented is the selection of DJ music played right after the guest speaker. The message tends to become heavy and emotionally overwhelming. So if the ensuing music does not change the ambience, the air of the club becomes too suffocating. However, if the music is too cheerful, it appears tactless and the preceding message would seem insincere. The significance of DJ Wara's role becomes noticeable when a substitute DJ fills in. As some of the sensitive regular participants observed and Wara himself told me, he selects musical pieces that are somehow related to the talk in their lyrics or tone, and which somehow direct the audience's focus into their own lives. The DJ music Wara selects helps to tune the time and space as well as the participants' emotional response.



From left: Living Together Concert, Living Together Photo Exhibition, and Living Together Lounge

Images from Living Together (<http://www.living-together.net/archive/index.html>) on 3 May 2011

THE LIVE SHOW

After the third speaker, the live music show begins. The performers could be professional, amateur or semiprofessional. Some of them are outspokenly gay men, but many of them are not. Their gender and sexual orientation are irrelevant. Also, it does not matter who is HIV-positive or HIV-negative. The musical genre varies from event to event, and performances may be guitar solos, vocals and piano, rock, jazz, Latin, Japanese pop songs or ukulele ensembles. Sometimes it takes on the form of a music show and, once, even a theatrical performance. It depends on the guest musician's taste and ideas.

One of the regular participants, named Iku, told me that the participants would never know what is happening in Living Together Lounge in advance even though we knew which artists would show up. He said, "It is just like listening to the radio". What he meant was that, unlike buying a CD or downloading a music file onto a computer, the listener cannot choose what music they are going to listen to next on the radio. They may have to put up with something that they would rather not listen to, but they may also discover something interesting that they have not heard before.

Iku also added, "Although the diversity of the musical genre is varied, there is a consistent tone at the Lounge". That is, even though the music shows differ from time to time, there are several things that are always the same. First, all of the musicians agree with the policy of the event, that is, "We, both HIV-positive and HIV-negative, are already living together". Second, they have all read the booklets and reflected on their contents prior to their performance. And, third, the music performance is live even though some technology is used. These three things maintain the identity of the Lounge event.

In fact, musicians regularly refer to the personal messages from the booklet during their shows. Iku categorizes the live performances in the Lounge into four groups:

- (1) There are a few musicians who have composed a song about Living Together or a song inspired by their reading of the personal notes.
- (2) There are some musicians who voluntarily read the note they chose during their music show. They may or may not make a comment on the note. But in either case, they choose a musical work that fits the experience of the note they have just read so that the music deepens and explores it.
- (3) There are considerable numbers of musicians who select musical pieces to suit the Lounge, for example, the songs that share the philosophy of Living Together and whose keyword is "being together".
- (4) There are musicians who just try to have a good time as if they were saying, "Look at the bright side of life".

Many of the musicians take the second and third approaches, which seem to be realistic but most effective and appropriate for the Lounge.

However, one particularly interesting point at the Living Together Lounge is that, even if musicians are not skillful, the musical performance sometimes becomes very moving and impressive. Chō describes this effect as "making magic". There are elements of music – maybe a lyric, melody, or musical nuance – that we would never appreciate unless we listened to the reading and the comments preceding the performance. Chō told me that he learned this effect when he watched and then performed as a drag queen. When he was involved in the Kyoto club scene in the

1990s, he found that a cheesy love song could be transformed when sung by a heavy-bearded drag queen. The song could be deconstructed when it is framed in a different context, a fact he found interesting and wanted to apply himself. In fact, in Furuhashi's performance in S/N, for example, a dragging and parody-like subversion was an effective means for his intensive expressiveness.

In addition to this, a “chemical reaction” occurs at times at the Lounge. A chemical reaction means that the first speaker inspires the second speaker, the second speaker inspires the third speaker, and they together inspire the musicians, thus moving the entire audience. Iku explains the power of music at the Lounge from this perspective, saying that, “perhaps the audience is holding their feelings given by the reading inside of them when the live music starts at the Lounge, and that feeling often links to the music, which eventually brings about a ‘chemical reaction’.”

Producing a “chemical reaction” as well as “making magic” is not something Chō and Wara deliberately plan. Nobody knows when it might happen. This is why Iku mentioned above that the Lounge is like a radio program. However, it is certain that Chō and Wara are aware of this musical effect, and they make an effort to arrange the Lounge in various ways so they could maximize the chance that this effect takes place. As Wara said, “It has been known since the dawn of the time that music’s power comes not only from an individual’s musicality but also from sound combined with words.”

RITUALISTIC ART

Given what we have seen, Living Together Lounge may be regarded as a ritual, in which the participants’ “perceptual agency”, that is, “the conscious focusing of sensory attention”, is directed to an intersubjective realm (Monson, 2008).¹² What is performatively happening there is indeed the transformation of personal narratives into a sharable metanarrative, which occurs within a co-creatively emergent ritualistic framework combined with the readings and other artistic elements.

In front of the audience, a person reads a note written by a different person, which contains his/her idiosyncratic verbal expressions. The reader talks about what comes into his/her mind through the reading as well. Hearing the talk, the members of the audience on the other hand listen to their own inner voices. After these steps are repeated, a sharable ‘voice’ sounds in form of musical representations, which is what the musicians express but also what the audience attempts to listen to. In other words, the personal narratives are transformed into a metanarrative through the musico-ritualistic practice. All of this retelling process of the personal narratives gives the following musical works a new sharable narrative.

In addition, this musico-ritualistic practice helps the participants to accept diverse lifestyles, including those of sexual minority groups. Much of what is read aloud by the speakers is rarely heard in a regular public space because it is seen as too intense, too sad, too sexual, too gay, and/or too personal. Talking about the reality of HIV is a taboo as well. Nevertheless, the DJ music, the background sounds, and the live performances put the participants at ease. Because they are physically relaxed by the sound, participants can feel that it is OK to have a life that is unconventional and accept this reality without reservation.

¹²Monson defines “perceptual agency” as “the conscious focusing of sensory attention that can yield differing experiences of the same event” (Monson, 2008, p. S37). In this article, she discusses connections between musical perception and experience within larger contexts of social and cultural life.

Furthermore, as personal reflections have been transformed into a sharable metanarrative, those taking part in this performance-experience can better empathize with different lifestyles. In this way, the musico-ritualistic time and space in Living Together Lounge becomes an alternative sphere of the public, in which the border between minority and majority groups is negotiated and reconciled.

Living Together Lounge is often described by the organizers as well as the participants as a reading event followed by a live music show. But it is actually an opportunity to reflect on life and death and face the reality of our world by listening to the readings, talks, and music. If the audience feels no connection to the reading, neither a “magical” nor a “chemical” reaction would occur in the live music. Although a superb musical performance would increase the chances of bringing about this kind of emotional response, without the audience being moved by the readings and talks, this result becomes extremely difficult to create. Here, the musical performance rather serves as the abovementioned “memory-work”: that is, “the difficult process of working through the losses and traumas resulting from (revisiting) past violence and injustice, and of imagining more socially just futures” (Till, 2008, p. 110). Music actualizes this process in a relatively painless way.

Living Together Lounge has thus invented an interesting way of practicing a musical event to contribute toward transforming a community environment into one that is sensitive to and tolerant of differences among people. As the Lounge was underway, the situation surrounding HIV in Shinjuku Ni-chōme changed. Facing the reality of HIV and talking about being gay has become something more natural. Also, intercommunication between gay men and other people has been promoted and conflict seems to have reduced. Although Living Together Lounge may not drastically change the situation surrounding HIV-positive individuals and sexual minorities, it shows a realistic and sustainable approach in musical mediation that promotes community care and gradual social transformation simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The musical practices of Prelude and Living Together Lounge are metaphorical but tangible memory-work activities in which participants are enabled to retell existing musical works in a new way and acquire a public acknowledgement of the retelling. Music, when contextualized in a proper ritualistic framework producing a new sharable metanarrative, can represent a space for creating a renewed set of social values in which diverse people’s lives are appreciated.

This ritualistic experience is certainly performative and thus temporal. But the musical performance enables the participants to “retell”, or relate once again, their own existence of living and past experience in a new, positive context and, at the same time, embed this memory-work in the metanarrative of the musical representation. The very experience of the whole process empowers those who take part in the practice, and its memory becomes a valuable resource later in their lives.

These two case studies have shown that music’s potential for mediation is maximized when it is situated in a proper ritualistic framework in which performers have the opportunity to retell their stories and practice memory-work for their own needs. Furthermore, they have indicated that innovations in this ritualistic framework produce a new metanarrative, and that the very activity of participating in this innovation is crucial for practicing community care as well as transforming a conflict situation.

Throughout the present study, my view of music has clearly changed from that of making sounds into one of crystallizing new sharable meaning. In order to redefine the relationships between music and human beings, we must move beyond an idea of musical meaning as within the text, and instead see what we are artistically mediating in a space and time using sound. After all, music is a significant portion of our larger human aesthetic endeavor.

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