

“It's Our Turn to Be Heard”: The Life and Legacy of Rapper-Activist ECD (1960-2018)

Noriko Manabe

Abstract

History tends to memorialize the stars and leaders, yet both musical and social movements are also made possible by people who work in the background, organize, seed trends, and otherwise help make things happen. The Japanese rap pioneer and activist ECD, who passed away on January 24, 2018, was neither the earliest nor most commercially successful rapper, and he would have eschewed calling himself a leader of any protest group. Nonetheless, he was what Gramsci would have called an organic intellectual of the working class. The frankness of his music, writing, and performances touched his audiences at an affective level, connecting them to the movements in which he participated. This article looks back at his life, which embodied the worlds of hip-hop, contentious politics, and the working class. It also examines his songs, which not only convey a vivid account of his life, but also reflect his personal and political concerns as well as the ambience of street protests. ECD was a key figure in the development of the underground hip-hop scene, organizing events that allowed it to take root and be lifted into commercial viability. He was on the front lines of several Japanese social movements—anti-Iraq War, anti-nuclear power, anti-racist, pro-democracy, and anti-militarization. He wrote protest anthems, inspired Sprechchor, performed at protests, and helped to establish a new mode of participatory performance, which engaged protesters more fully. His sheer presence at demonstrations, constant and reliable, energized and reassured protesters. Part I describes his years as a hip-hop pioneer, and

Part II portrays his role in Japanese social movements of this century.

Keywords: Japan, ECD, rap, hip-hop, protest, social movements, sound demo, antinuclear movement, SEALDs, CRAC (Shibaki-tai), protests against Abe's policies

ECDはきっと有名になる人

その時君だけ自慢できる人

皆に自慢できる今日会えたこと

皆に自慢できる今日聞いたこと

そいつは約束するよ君だけに

教えてあげる 誰も知らない

教えてあげる 僕の名前

ECD will surely become famous

Then you'll be the only person who could brag

You could brag to everyone that you had met me

You could brag to everyone that you had heard me

I'll promise that

I'll tell only you. No one knows it yet:

I'll tell you my name.

--ECD, "[Check Your Mike](#)," Major Force, 1989

When the family of ECD (Ishida Yoshinori), the Japanese rapper and activist, announced that he had passed away from cancer on January 24, 2018, the music and activist worlds let out a collective groan. Having started in the mid-1980s, ECD was one of Japan's first rappers and an important figure in the development of the underground hip-hop scene. Today, Japanese hip-hop is an established and recognized part of the music industry, with its own show on terrestrial television (*Freestyle Dungeon*) and visibility in radio, magazines, satellite television, and web TV. Prominent rappers whom he'd helped along paid tribute: Zebra, perhaps Japan's most commercially successful rapper, [cried audibly](#) while honoring him on his radio show. Rappers like [K Dub Shine](#) and [Erone](#) (of Osaka crew Infumiai Kumiai) acknowledged him as a major inspiration in their trajectories. Rather than just adhere to U.S. models, ECD had set an example by sampling Japanese popular music, and his vast knowledge of that repertoire was cited by music critics [Isobe Ryō](#) and [Takahashi Yoshiaki](#). Furthermore, in an entertainment industry that discourages musicians from engaging in politics, ECD was one of very few Japanese musicians who not only produced political songs but also performed in street demonstrations. In doing so, he helped to establish new forms of protest performance that continue today. Political theorist [Ikuo Gono](#) credited his constant presence in demonstrations with creating a "liberal moment" mixing culture and politics. A high school dropout with a philosophical take on social movements,² he was what Gramsci would have called an organic intellectual, who articulated the concerns and stances of the working class in his music, writing, and

performances.

Yet despite this outpouring of recognition for his contributions to Japanese hip-hop and protest culture, material success eluded ECD during much of his life. Although he had a record contract between 1994-2003, for many years he earned his living supporting backstage operations. His family's struggles to survive on 165,000 yen a month (US \$1,829) were publicly documented by his wife, photographer Uemoto Ichiko, in her [blog](#) and book, *Hatarake ECD* (Work, ECD). After his illness became known, fellow musicians, record and book stores, and the internet broadcaster [Dommune](#) set up [donation campaigns for him](#). His lack of mainstream success was immaterial to the admiration and importance that he held in the community.

This article examines the life and songs of ECD—a pioneering rapper-activist who was not a conventional star, yet whose looming presence impacted the course of events. He embodied the worlds of hip-hop, contentious politics, and working-class life, reflecting their struggles for recognition. The frankness of his music and writing impacted audiences at an emotional level, and in turn, connected them to movements he championed. His story is that of a man who held firm to his beliefs in a society that eschews confrontation. It is also an illustration of the ways in which the artists who most greatly impact movements are not necessarily the biggest stars. Part I describes his years as a hip-hop pioneer, and Part II narrates his role in Japanese social movements of this century.

Part I: ECD, hip-hop pioneer, 1982-2003

A punk fan, ECD was introduced to hip-hop in 1982 when he read an interview about Johnny Lydon that mentioned [Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's](#) "The Message (1982)."³ He began to experiment with rapping as an actor

in a troupe performing rock musicals, singing songs by David Bowie in translation. Seeing the hip-hop film *Wild Style* in 1983 inspired him, and he began frequenting Cisco Records in Shibuya, collecting hip-hop records like Afrika Bambaataa's [Planet Rock](#) (1982).

Run-DMC's "[Walk This Way](#)" (1986) is often credited with bringing hip-hop to mainstream attention in the US and around the world. When the group came to Japan in 1986, ECD attended the show. Chikada Haruo, Itō Seikō, and Tinnie Punx performed as the warm-up acts. The concert pamphlet contained an advertisement for Chikada's newly formed hip-hop label, BPM, which triggered ECD to pursue rapping himself. He made a demo tape using a sample of a riff by the 1970s rock group Murahachibu and began working for Chikada's office. In 1987, he won a contest sponsored by Vestax, rapping over a reggae beat. He began performing in clubs like Shibaura Ink Stick and toured as a warm-up act for Chikada's Vibratones. He judged several rap contests, at which he met the up-and-coming acts who would become prominent in the 1990s, such as Rhymester, Twigy, Gaku-MC, and Scha Dara Parr. In 1989, he performed as an opening act for Japan tours of top American hip-hop artists of the day such as Public Enemy, Jungle Brothers, DJ Red Alert, and Queen Latifah, and traveled to New York as a representative of his label, Major Force, at the New Music Seminar. He also began organizing the hip-hop club event, Check Your Mike, at clubs like Roppongi Ink Stick, Yoyogi Chocolate City, and Shimokitazawa Zoo.⁵

ECD, live performance, 1995

Songs of the 1980s-90s

ECD's political concerns were evident from his early days. His first, single, "[Pico Curie](#)" (Major Force, 1989), reflected his worries about radioactive fallout and nuclear power following the Chernobyl disaster. Partly inspired by Japanese reggae pioneer Rankin Taxi (who, like ECD, became a constant presence in protests), ECD rapped over a reggae beat. He also rapped about the history of global racism as a consequence of exceptionalism (in "[Racist](#)," 1993) and the omission of the Nanjing Massacre from Japanese history textbooks.

ECD, live, "Pico Curie," 1989

"ECD's Lonely Girl" (1997)

Another distinctive feature of ECD's tracks was his sampling of Japanese pop for musical background to his rapping, well before the current international vogue in retro-Japanese pop music. He sampled the funky disco track "[Vibration](#)" by Kasai Kimiko (1977), formulating it into "[Vibration](#)" (1995), and he released CD mixes of Japanese pop under the title *Private Lesson*.⁷

ECD's best-known song is probably "ECD no Lonely Girl ft. K. Dub Shine" (ECD's Lonely Girl), based on a 1983 song performed by the idol singer [Satō Yuri](#), with music credited to Tsutsumi Kyōhei. The journalist [Takahashi Yoshiaki](#) attributes the revival of interest in Japanese popular music to this song.

In [Satō's "Lonely Girl](#)," the protagonist is a young woman, imagining herself saying goodbye to a lover who has discarded her for a woman apparently of higher socioeconomic standing; she says she will "see him off" as he goes off to a party without her, leaving her like a "doll with a lost screw."⁸ In the chorus, she denies that she's lonely or sad, claiming that she just likes being alone. She's not crying; it's

just that the wind is hard on her eyes.

Satō's "Lonely Girl"

[ECD and K Dub Shine's "Lonely Girl" \(1997\)](#) takes the opposite view to these lyrics to address the teenagers who hang around Shibuya and date rich, older men for money to buy luxury goods (dubbed *enjō kōsai*). ECD tells them that they're being "consumed like food" and "cut down as saplings," and that they should "hurry up and stand up." K Dub Shine paints a more explicit picture of these "X-rated lost lambs" with their tanned skin, lightened hair, and color contacts, having sex in pursuit of products by "Fendi, Versace, D.K.N.Y."

"ECD's Lonely Girl ft. K. Dub Shine" (1997)

The song became more broadly known through an answer song by pop singer Katō Miliyah ("[Dear Lonely Girl](#)," 2005), in which she presents her perspective as a high school student herself, hanging out in Shibuya ("Don't treat me like a child, . . . don't make facile analyses").¹⁰ It rose to no. 15 on the Oricon charts. In December 2017, Katō released a new version, "Shin Yaku [Dear Lonely Girl](#)," with ECD supplying the guest verse. Revisiting Shibuya as a twenty-nine-year-old, she talks to her teenage self ("You'll get hurt, and you'll get stronger").¹¹

Katō Miliyah ft. ECD, "Shin Yaku Lonely Girl" (2017)

Mass vs. Core (1995)

In 1994, Japan experienced a "J-Rap boom," as a light-hearted, television-ready, J-pop-like form of rap, complete with comedic sketches and attractive female pop idols, achieved mass-market attention. Scha Dara Parr ft. Ozawa Kenji's "Konya wa bugii bakku" ([Boogie Back Tonight](#), 1994) and East End x Yuri's "[Da.Yo.Ne](#)" (Isn't That Right, 1994) became big hits. "Da.Yo.Ne" was so popular that East End x Yuri were included in *Kōhaku Uta Gassen*, the long-running year-end program on NHK with enormous ratings, in 1995.

East End x Yuri's "Da.Yo.Ne" (1994)

This newfound renown of poppy J-Rap was not welcomed by the many Japanese hip-hoppers who populated the underground scene exemplified by Check Your Mike. They felt it was necessary for Japanese hip-hoppers to appreciate the culture behind hip-hop—the competition, the confrontation, the realness, the blackness, the maleness—that was valued by the underground scene. They considered poppy rap to be an inauthentic, sanitized sellout and were particularly repelled by the presence of female pop-idol Yuri in East End.¹² As ECD explained to me, "We, the underground and the street—we were the real hip-hop. We weren't going to kowtow to the masses" (ECD, interview with the author, Sugunami-ku, Tokyo, December 29, 2008). As the rapper [Cypress Ueno recalled](#), "People of all ages, including young people, would hear 'Da.Yo.Ne' and get really excited. But the people who were doing the real hip-hop in the clubs [*genba*] at the time were still collecting in the basements, like magma." The underground tried to disassociate itself from poppy J-Rap by calling themselves another name. As [Cypress Ueno reflected](#), "Record companies, top-20 programs, and the media would call it 'J-Rap'

because it was rap in Japanese, even though we weren't calling it that . . . [We'd say,] 'We're not J-Rap! We're rapping in Japanese, so we're Japanese hip-hop, Japanese rap [*nihongo rappu*].'"

ECD, "[Mass vs. Core](#)" (1995)

In response, ECD composed the Japanese hip-hop classic, "[Mass tai core](#)" (Mass vs. Core, ft. You the Rock and Twigy, 1995), a defiant piece that drew the battle lines between mass commercial popularity and hardcore hip-hoppers.¹³ He articulates the core values and captures the spirit of the underground in his lyrics, declaring the "live and original flavor" that he and his buddies were "playing non-stop, all night" in a crowded basement couldn't be "heard on the radio or in a convenience store."¹⁴

As Cypress Ueno remarked, "When someone would say to me in school, 'Yeah, I know hip-hop. "Da.Yo.Ne," right?' I felt that [these lyrics] spoke for everything we felt."

マス対コアならゲリラ戦 アン
チJRAPここに宣言

As for mass vs. core, it's guerrilla warfare,

We declare right here: we're anti-J-Rap.

It was this attitude, this swell of the underground, that led ECD to perhaps his most remembered role in hip-hop, as the organizer of Thumpin' Camp.

Thumpin' Camp

Thumpin' Camp was the first large-scale hip-hop festival in Japan, a legendary event that took place on July 7, 1996 in Hibiya Yagai Ongakudō (outdoor amphitheater). As its organizer, ECD showcased underground, club-based hip-hop, in opposition to pop-oriented J-Rappers like Scha Dara Parr or East End x Yuri, whom he didn't invite.¹⁵ He declared at the beginning of the event, "[J-Rap is dead! I've killed it!](#)" The performers included the most popular rappers in that scene at the time—Buddha Brand (incl. Dev Large), Shakkazombie, Rhymester, King Giddra (Zebra, K Dub Shine), Muro, You the Rock, Soul Scream, Lamp Eye, and others. The event coincided with a high point in enthusiasm among Japanese hip-hop fans, following the recent release of such classic tracks as [King Giddra's "Sora kara no chikara"](#) (Power from the Sky), Buddha Brand's "[Ningen hatsudensho](#)" (Human Power Plant), [Rhymester's "Mimi o kasu beki"](#) (Listen Up), and Lamp Eye's "[Shōgen](#)" (Testimony).

ECD, Thumpin' Camp: "[J-Rap is dead! I've killed it!](#)"

[Rhymester](#), "[Mimi o kasu beki](#)"

King Giddra, "[Sora kara no chikara](#)"

Just the fact that it was the first large-scale showcase of Japanese underground hip-hop would have been enough to give Thumpin' Camp a place in pop-history lore. The sell-out crowd validated the underground hip-hop scene; many of the hip-hoppers of the following generation, who were teenagers at the time, cite Thumpin' Camp as a major inspiration.¹⁶ ECD also made sure that a video and album of the concert would be made available, in the tradition of Woodstock. This media created an archive that could be watched by hip-hop fans outside of the Tokyo area, where hip-hop was not so widely diffused

at the time. As the site [Backflow](#) recently wrote, “In those days, there was no internet, and B-boys¹⁷ in the regions depended on hip-hop magazines for information, reading them from cover to cover until there were holes in the pages. . . The videotape (of Thumpin’ Camp). . . sold like hotcakes, a real high-quality item had reached hungry hip-hop junkies from all over the nation.” It gave the youth of Nagoya, Osaka, and cities further afield, who would have had to go to Tokyo to see a live Japanese rap show at the time, a [model of hardcore rapping](#) in Japanese.

The buzz around the event buoyed business for Japanese hip-hop, as artists from the event were given more performance opportunities around the country. But sometime after Thumpin’ Camp, ECD himself began to withdraw from the hip-hop scene, partly because that scene was becoming less subcultural. “I’d been saying that the hip-hop scene was underground, but once groups started signing with major labels, I felt that I didn’t really want to go mainstream; I wanted to remain in an underground scene. That scene was no longer hip-hop, but more in live houses” (small clubs with live performances; ECD, interview, 2008). He’d already had connections in this underground scene of hardcore punk and experimental musicians; since around 1992, he had been performing with Kimidori, a group of rappers with an entourage of hardcore punkers. A high-school dropout from a working-class family, ECD seemed more comfortable with the company: “they were all working class, doing manual labor by day, going to live houses on the weekends” (ECD, interview, 2008). This social status was in contrast with some Japanese hip-hop performers and fans in the mid-1990s, many of whom came from middle- or upper-class families and had a college education. He also fell into alcoholism, a low period which he describes in his autobiographical novel, [Shitten in the Park](#) (Blunder in the Park, 2005).¹⁸ When his record contract with Avex expired around 2003, he set

up his own label, Final Junky, and produced his recordings independently. Free from the censorship of the music industry,¹⁹ he would find it easier to pursue politically contentious material. He gradually faded from the hip-hop scene and continued to perform in underground live houses. But political events, and his participation in them, would transform his legacy.

Part II: ECD as activist and musician, 2003-2018

Sound demos against the Iraq War, 2003-2004

In 2003, just days before the Iraq War began, ECD attended his first protest, which was in front of the U.S. Embassy. However, he found that “the road to the Embassy was completely blocked, and we couldn’t get near it. . . I got angry that a road that you can normally use freely was blocked. I felt a switch in me go on. . . I decided at that point that I was going to participate, be it by demonstrations or any other method” (ECD 2007, 176). He ran into artist Ishiguro Keita, who invited him to join a group that was designing “a new kind of demonstration that would be more stylish (kakkoi)” (ECD, interview with the author, December 22, 2011).

Demonstrations against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had been organized since 2001 by Chance! and its successor organization, World Peace Now.²⁰ Their organizers tried to control the flow of people, placards, and sounds of the protest and were deferential to the police, which alienated many of the protesters who had come to express their frustrations about the wars. Furthermore, the lack of style was a problem. As [ECD explained](#), “In order to participate in protests, a protester has to go from someone who is looking [at the protest] to someone who is being looked at [participating in the protest.] . . . When you go

underneath the pedestrian bridge [at Meiji Jingū] and turn into Park Avenue (Kōen Dōri) in Shibuya, a lot of people are watching you. . . If [the protest] doesn't look good there, it won't raise your morale."

A collective of musicians, writers, designers, students, and others came together to form Against Street Control (ASC). ECD and Ishiguro were among its members. Unlike World Peace Now, ASC's demonstrations were about taking back urban space in Tokyo, which was becoming increasingly controlled through surveillance and the exclusion of the homeless in favor of commercialism (Hayashi and McKnight 2005). Its slogan was *rojō kaihō*, reminiscent of "Reclaim the Streets" from the British movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s. ECD believed that "liberating the road is itself very political." He explained, "By framing the war in the Middle East as 'a war on terror,' the Bush administration converted the debate from 'war vs. no war' to 'siding with the U.S. or siding with terrorists.' If you didn't want to support the American war on terror, you were siding with terrorists. How can they force us into such a choice? I wasn't putting up with that. I didn't support the American war; I felt sympathy for the Middle Easterners. So it was fitting to use a nonviolent sound demo to disturb the order of the road. We felt, let's go wild." (ECD, email communication, December 30, 2011). The Koizumi administration supported the U.S. war and sent Japanese [troops](#) there despite fierce public opposition (ECD et al. 2005, 130). The road was a space emblematic of national hegemony; dancing in the street was symbolic opposition to this national hegemony and its acts.

ASC's first demonstration took place on May 10, 2003, in Shibuya. A so-called "sound demo," it featured a truck, packed with speakers with DJs and musicians performing on it. The street-party atmosphere, with dancing behind the truck, made it easier for people to participate in demonstrations, while the sheer volume of

sound captured people's attention.

ECD participated in the sound demos as a sax player in TCDC (Transistor Connected Drum Collective), led by Oda Masanori. Playing drums and acoustic instruments, this band marched with the demonstrators, encouraging them along with sound and occasionally shouting slogans. Run with a philosophy of strategic amateurism, in which nothing was rehearsed and anyone could join in, TCDC was a forerunner of the drum corps which came to accompany many protests after 3.11 (Oda Masanori, interview with the author, Koganei, August 16, 2012).

A turning point was the sound demo on July 19, 2003. With DJs including Eye of the Boredoms, the demonstration attracted between 700 and 1000 participants, who moshed behind the truck while surrounded by riot police. Suddenly an altercation erupted and the riot police intervened. As ECD described, "The people in front of me were knocked down like dominoes. At the same time, the riot police came toward us, trampling over those who fell" (ECD 2007, 178). Several people were arrested—a big deal in Japan, as an arrestee can be held for 23 days without an indictment. As ECD was picking up people who had been knocked down, he heard a protester yell, "We're not the kind of guys who'll do as we're told" (言うこと聞くような奴らじゃないぞ). The words stuck in his head.

ECD, "[Yūkoto kikuyō na yatsura ja naizo](#)"

"*Yūkoto kikuyō na yatsura ja naizo*" (2003)

ECD made a rap based on this retort, "[Yūkoto kikuyō na yatsura ja naizo](#)," (We're Not the Kind of Guys Who'll Do as We're Told, 2003) with a backing track based on Japanese singer Shuri Eiko's "[Ie ie](#)"²¹ (Yeah, Yeah, 1967). ECD describes the riotous atmosphere of the sound demonstration, recalling the "racket in the

streets with Oda Masanori," his cohorts beating "oil cans . . . for three hours." He criticizes the police for their violence at demonstrations, calling them "hooligans with a bad attitude" (Mōri 2009, 186). As ECD recounted on Dommune on September 1, 2015, the aggression of the police at the 2003 demonstrations made him feel that "the police were the guys who weren't doing what they were told." Declaring the streets "liberated," he encourages demonstrators to "fight back, fight back."

オタマジacksonで街を埋めつくし
 小田マサノリで道をハメはずし
 通りは踊り場 用事は放り出し
 ポリは怒り出す 総理に言いつける
 ありえない景色 かつてないクライ
 シス
 渋谷どーなる 知るかグローバル
 ひびけ一斗缶 たたく3時間
 反戦 反弾圧 反石原
 言うこと聞くよな奴らじゃないぞ

Filling the city with musical notes,
 Making a racket in the streets with
 Oda Masanori.

The streets are a dance floor,
forget your business.

The cops get furious, tell it to the
prime minister.

An impossible scene,
unprecedented crisis.

What will happen to Shibuya? We

don't care about globalization.

Ring out, oil cans! Beating them
for three hours.

Anti-war, anti-oppression, anti-
Ishihara.

We're not the kinds of guys who'll
do as we're told.²²

**"[Yūkoto kikuyō na yatsura janai zo,](#)"
 Miyashita Park, October 5, 2003**

The song became an anthem of these protests. On October 5, ASC organized a daytime symposium and free concert in Miyashita Park to precede the sound demo. ECD performed "[Yūkoto kikuyō na yatsura janai zo,](#)" with a Japanese drum adding a matsuri-like dotted lilt to his performance. The song would reappear in post-3.11 protests.

Antinuclear protests after the Fukushima disaster, 2011-2016

ECD, "[Exodus 11](#)" (2011)

"[Exodus 11](#)" (2011)

The frightening images of the hydrogen explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant following the earthquake and tsunami caused many people in Northeast Japan, including Tokyo, to flee the radioactive plume, traveling or sending their children to points further west or even out of Japan

entirely. Uploaded less than a week after 3.11, ECD's "[Exodus 11](#)"²³ tells his family's story at this time. Now married with a toddler and a baby, he had taken his family to his in-laws in Hiroshima ("so that at least the children could survive") and returned to Tokyo due to work commitments ("separated from my family like a *dekasegi*"²⁴). Worried about the possible effects of radiation on his own body and the continuing aftershocks, he marveled at the darkened, quiet city. Suddenly remembering that his wife had expressed a desire to have a third child, he realized that no matter how bad the world became, they retained their right to have that child if they so chose.

絶対つくーる絶対つくーる /絶対作
るぞ三人目

We'll definitely have a third child

Shirōto no Ran demonstrations

Matsumoto Hajime's Shirōto no Ran (Revolt of the Laymen), a used-goods chain, was behind the first massive antinuclear protest after the Fukushima accident, unexpectedly attracting 15,000 protesters to Kōenji on April 10, 2011, a mere month after the crisis had started.²⁵ Subsequently, Shirōto no Ran held demonstrations once a month through September 2011. These demonstrations featured sound trucks, with punk rockers on one and a DJ/sound system on the other, as well as ambulatory chindon band Jintaramūta, drummers, and folk singers. Unlike the 2003 sound demos, which were dominated by DJs, the center of attention was the rappers and singers, who not only performed on top of the truck but also spoke directly to the audience. These performers included Rankin Taxi, Rumi, and on the June 11 and September 11 protests,

ECD. Each of these protests, in Shinjuku, drew between 15,000 and 20,000 participants.

In the sound demos of 2003, ECD had participated by walking along with Oda Masanori's group, playing the sax; this manner of participating fit with the sound demos, whose primary mode of contention was to take up sonic and physical space as a symbolic, anti-hegemonic act. In the antinuclear demonstrations and beyond, the protesters made specific claims, and ECD's role shifted to that of a rapper who could communicate those claims and command attention. In the June 11, 2011 Shirōto no Ran demonstration in Shinjuku, he engaged in some call-and-response patterns, but primarily performed his songs about the nuclear issue, such as "[Recording Report, Hangenpatsu Remix](#)" ([Anti-Nuclear Remix](#)), which he posted on YouTube on April 18. The opening repeats the phrase, "Toketa rashiizo, moreteta rashiizo" (There seems to have been a meltdown; [radioactive water] seems to have been leaking), articulating what many suspected but TEPCO was then denying: TEPCO only admitted to a melt-through on May 24, and the government did not confirm the full meltdowns at three reactors until June 7. ECD railed about the lack of reliable information and a parent's worries over the impact of radiation on children:

**["Recording Report, Hangenpatsu Remix"](#)
[\(Anti-Nuclear Remix\)](#), ECD, 2011.**

シーベルト調べると

水も野菜も空気も心配の

種は尽きない子供実験台

に一するつもりかここはガス室か

気一狂いそうだから何度でも
 NO放射能もういらないよ
 NOMORE原子力発電所
 If you research sieverts and
 radiation levels,
 There's no end to sources of
 concern:
 Water, fresh vegetables, the air.
 Do you intend to make children
 into subjects of experiments?
 Is this place a gas chamber?
 I think I might go mad. Therefore,
 repeat many times,
 "No radiation! We don't want it
 anymore.
 No more nuclear power stations!"
 —ECD, "Recording Report:
 Hangenpatsu Remix" (2011)

While this recording was never commercially released, many protesters became familiar with it on YouTube. When ECD performed this song at the June 11 demonstrations, they [joined him in a call-and-response on the chorus, "Acchi mo, kocchi mo"](#) ([Radiation is] here, there, everywhere, from 6:52 below).

[ECD performing in sound demo, June 11, 2011](#)

The next demonstration in which ECD performed—Shirōto no Ran’s demonstration in

Shinjuku on September 11, 2011—marked a turning point for sound demos. Twelve protesters were arrested around the sound trucks. As ECD said, "People got arrested for bullshit reasons. My acquaintance said the police suddenly yelled, 'You're pushing that girl,' then handcuffed him. It's harassment" (ECD, interview, 2011). Some activists began to sour on sound demos, not only because the police were targeting them, but also because their loud music, subcultural music fans, and inevitably, beer drinkers made the demo look more like a street festival than a serious political protest. "Sound demos are good for attracting people, but more and more people are now thinking that they're no longer necessary. It is hard to avoid the criticism that sound demos are just entertainment. You have to make it more serious" (ECD, interview, 2011). ECD began to wonder if the more stoic model followed by *TwitNoNukes*, which consisted solely of call-and-response patterns to drums, was more effective.

TwitNoNukes demonstrations

TwitNoNukes was a monthly demonstration in Shibuya, founded by Hirano Taichi and organized through Twitter. Beginning with its first demonstration on April 30, 2011, it attracted about 1,000 people each time, and it eventually spawned local versions throughout the country. ECD participated as an ordinary protester²⁶ in many protests and was often seen pushing his baby daughter in a stroller. He lent his booming voice to "creating the atmosphere" for the demonstration: "at first, everyone was still hesitant to raise their voices. Someone was leading calls with a megaphone, but if you were far away from it, you couldn't hear it. So as a rapper, as someone with a loud voice, I'd lead the call with my unamplified voice, so that participants would feel freer to raise their own [voices.](#)" Protesters who marched along found him inspiring: "You walk with him, and you,

too, are yelling from your diaphragm” (@ttuncut, January 29, 2012). ECD thought that the drums were helping to keep the protesters walking and encourage them to join in the Sprechchor—“the words can mesh with the rhythms” (ECD, interview, 2011). By December 2011, he noticed that protesters had become committed and strong.

When he couldn’t attend TwitNoNukes’s demonstration in December 2011, he sent a YouTube video in which he rapped [a cappella](#) “Baby Cart and Placard,” a song dedicated to the committed protesters that he saw at demonstrations. He later uploaded a fuller version onto [Soundcloud](#). Saying that he feels unsettled when he can’t attend a protest, he captures their ambience—the bustle of shoppers, the cheers and jeers of passersby, the noise of the drums. He tips his hat to the protesters—the men and women, the young and old, the unemployed and hardworking laborers, and most of all, the mothers with a baby stroller in one hand and a placard in the other:

暇持て余してるわけじゃない

今やらなかったらあとがない

こいつらがきっと

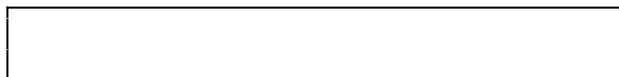
止める原発

They’re not here because they have time on their hands.

If you don’t do it now, there won’t be a future.

Surely they will be the ones

who’ll stop nuclear power.



ECD and Illicit Tsuboi, "Baby Cart and Placard," live at Shimokitazawa Indie Fan Club, July 1, 2012

Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes (MCAN)

The TwitNoNukes demonstrations led naturally to the protests that developed in front of the prime minister's residence (Kantei-mae kōgi), organized by the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN). Protesters shouted call-and-response patterns, accompanied by drums, in front of the buildings housing the politicians responsible. These protests began on March 29, 2012, and as of this writing, have continued to take place every Friday evening for the past six years. At their peak in June 2012, they attracted as many as 200,000 participants per session, with lines of protesters winding all over the government district of Kasumigaseki. [ECD](#) often led Sprechchor.

ECD leading calls in front of prime minister's residence, 2012



ECD, ATS, and Noma, antinuclear demonstration, Tokyo, October 13, 2013. Photo by the author.

Back on the sound truck: antinuclear demonstrations, July 2012-2015

In summer 2012, Noma Yasumichi, an editor and activist with MCAN, persuaded ECD to return to performing on top of a sound truck at demonstrations. By then, a new style of Sprechchor was taking hold, whereby rappers were rapping Sprechchor in rhythm over musical tracks. The protesters, many of whom had marched silently in 2011, were now shouting back, encouraged by the beats. The rappers and music were enabling these protesters to vocalize their claims at exactly the time when Japanese citizens needed to participate more fully in the political process. As a participant-observer of these protests, I felt that the rappers and the act of shouting these Sprechchor conveyed a sense of political agency. It was a new and energizing type of protest performance, and it has become established as a common practice in Japanese protests which continues to the present day.²⁷ The timing coincided with renewed anger over the restarting of two reactors at the Ōi Nuclear Power Plant. On [July 7, 2012](#), ECD performed on a sound truck with rappers Akuryō and ATS and Noma as DJ, in a No Nukes More Hearts demonstration through Shibuya. Subsequently, [they performed](#) in the [July 29, 2012](#) MCAN demonstration in Kasumigaseki, which attracted over 200,000 participants.²⁸

ECD, ATS, Akuryō, and Noma performing in antinuclear demonstration, [July 29, 2012](#)

"[Straight Outta 138](#)" (Dengaryū ft. ECD, 2012)
 Unlike the Shirōto no Ran protests, which centered on pre-written songs, these sound truck performances centered on call-and-response patterns. All three rappers were participants in TwitNoNukes protests and were

familiar with Sprechchor. They shared an intuitive sense of the dynamics of trading calls with the protesters, and as a participant-observer, I felt that they varied and volleyed them effectively with the protesters and each other. Instead of rapping entire pre-written songs, the rappers typically took lines or phrases from them and converted them into chants. For example, ECD would shout, "Yūkoto kikasuru ban da, oretachi ga" (It's our turn to make them listen to what we say)—a quote from "Straight Outta 138" that references his aforementioned 2003 anthem. The style became the norm in sound demos, and ECD himself performed in this manner in protests on September 17, 2012, October 13, 2013, and February 14, 2016.

This song appears on the rapper Dengaryū's second album, *B-kyū eiga no yōni* (Like a B-Movie, 2012).²⁹ In his verses, Dengaryū spits out his many frustrations with Japanese society—the lack of opportunities, self-serving politicians, the media serving as propaganda, and Japan's dependent posture toward the United States, among other issues. His hook was a clear homage to ECD:

[ECD] 言うこと聞くような奴らじゃないぞ

We're not the kind of guys who'll do as we're told

[Dengaryū] 言うこと聞くようなオメコじゃねえぞ

We're not the kind of pussies who'll do as we're told

Dengaryū invited ECD to do a guest verse, saying that he was quite taken by ECD's hook. ECD explained to him that the political

situation had changed. In 2003, to oppose the war was to fight the geopolitical hegemonic order; the philosophies underlining those protests had anarchistic tendencies. But the antinuclear issue called for domestic policy change: “You can’t just call out for everything to be torn down. There has to be someone responsible for overseeing nuclear power plants all the way through decommission. . . No matter how much you dislike the government, you have to acknowledge it, and let them do what they have to do” (Kawachi 2015, 73). It wasn’t enough to oppose through anarchy; one had to act as a citizen to convince the lawmakers to change (ECD, Isobe, UCD, Dommune, September 1, 2015). He therefore transformed his line to fit the political circumstances:

[ECD] 言うこと聞かせる番だ、俺たちが

It’s our turn to make them listen to us

As Dengaryū added, “The resulting lyric was so persuasive. It made me think, ‘He’s totally right.’ It made me think about how I am going to live in the future, and it encouraged me” (Dengaryū, interview with the author, Tokyo, December 21, 2012).

In his verse (from 3:04 below), ECD appeals to citizens to speak up (“If we stay silent, we’ll be killed”). He blames the government for making parts of Fukushima uninhabitable due to radiation, and he fears that radiation will compromise people’s health. He expresses anger toward the disdain that conservative factions show to antinuclear protesters, quoting the *hikokumin* (traitor) insult that they use. Most of all, ECD calls for citizens to make their

voices heard—“sign petitions, vote, demonstrate.”³⁰

"Straight Outta 138," Dengaryū, ECD's verse (2012)

いうこというこというこということ
いうこと聞かせる番だ俺たちが。

黙ったまんまじゃ殺される、

国が 人の住めない土地に変えたんだ。。。

人が死ぬのをわかっててやめない。

反対すると非国民あつかい。

なんかに似てる、とにかく狂ってる。

67年前のボロ負けで 終わったはず
のあの戦争を

続けたかったやつらの夢。

それが原発だ間違いねー 。だから
もうとっくの時代おくれ。

署名投票デモンストレーション、

いうこと聞かせる番だ俺たちが。

It's our turn to make them listen to what we say.

If we stay silent, we'll be killed.

The nation has converted the land to be uninhabitable by humans. . .

They know people will die, but they won't stop.

If you oppose [nuclear power], they treat you like traitors.

The situation resembles something—anyway, it's crazy.

It's the dream of those guys who wanted to keep fighting that war

that should have ended with our crushing defeat sixty-seven years ago.

That's nuclear power; no doubt about it. It was already outdated long ago. . .

Sign petitions, vote, demonstrate.

It's our turn to make them listen to what we say.

—["Straight Outta 138," Dengaryū, ECD's verse](#) (2012)

ECD performed an [cappella version](#) of this verse in front of METI in early 2012 and on top of the sound truck in the MCAN demonstration on July 29, 2012.³¹ But it was UCD, the rapper of the activist organization SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy, explained below), who converted ECD's line into a popular call-and-response pattern at protests.

Countering racism, 2013-2018

In January 2013, Noma Yasumichi founded the Counter-Racist Action Collective (CRAC, originally known as Reishisuto Shibaki-tai), a group dedicated to challenging the Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi (Zaitoku-kai) and other neonationalist groups that protest the alleged privileges of ethnic minorities in Japan, particularly resident Koreans. The Zaitoku-kai marched through Korean neighborhoods like Shin-Ōkubo in

Tokyo, shouting "die" and "go home to Korea" at residents, children, shopkeepers, and fans of the Korean Wave (most of them ethnically Japanese) who shop for fan goods in the neighborhood. CRAC would blockade their progress, surrounding them or sitting in front of them. By March 31, 2013, CRAC's counter-demonstrators, at about 600, were [outnumbering the Zaitoku-kai demonstrators](#).

ECD was a reliable presence in these protests³²; he was often on the front lines, sitting down in front of trucks, running after racist demonstrators, shielding younger protesters from the police, and leading calls with his booming voice. Many protesters said that he had inspired them to join the counter-protests (e.g., @89Tweet, July 14, 2013; @atcq1994, September 1, 2015). Given how confrontational these protests were, his inimitable presence was a comfort. As one said, "At the counter-demonstration on June 30 [2013] in Shinjuku. . . I saw ECD from behind, and I felt safe and not at all afraid." (@a_s_a_n_t_e, October 1, 2013). As the writer Lee Sinhae wrote, "I felt supported that such a famous person [as ECD] would come to counter-protests, chasing them down and raising his voice continuously" (rinda0818, September 24, 2014).

"The Bridge - Anti-Racist Remix" (2013)



In the midst of the counter-protests against racism, ECD and Illreme released "[The Bridge—Han-Reishisuto Remix](#)" (Anti-Racist Remix, 2013), inspired by a photo of a young woman, shocked and crying at an anti-Korean demonstration in Shin-Ōkubo on February 17, 2013. It is a remix of the [title track](#) from his album, *The Bridge: Asu ni kakeru hashi* (The

Bridge to Tomorrow, 2013), which reflects his feelings about the post-3.11 world. As ECD explained, "When many people started coming to demonstrations, I felt that the demonstrations were a different kind of movement. I thought, 'Everyone is trying to cross a bridge, or in the midst of constructing a [bridge](#).'" The lyrics depict a treacherous bridge, with no assurance that things will be better at the other end, but from which there is no turning back; one must keep going.

The lyrics to the remix, which became a theme song³³ of the anti-racist movement, directly criticize the racist demonstrators in no uncertain terms. ECD takes the point of view of the young woman in the photo, capturing the horror of hearing the Zaitoku-kai's violent, racist rhetoric:

足すくむ震え止められない わめ
 き声「殺せ叩き出せ」って聞いて
 泣き出すの無理ねーだって自分が
 今
 大好きなアーティストがスターがア
 イドルが
 何人かどーかでそんないわれかた
 どんだけ悲しい悔しい恐ろしい
 そいつがレイシズム そしてヘイト
 スピーチ
 こんな世界があっていいわけが
 ねー
 いいわけがねー
 いいわけがねー
 My legs can't stop trembling,
 Listening to them scream, "Kill

them, kick them out."

I cannot help but cry, because
 they're slandering my favorite
 artists/stars/idols
 with horrid words because of their
 ethnicity.
 How sad, humiliating, frightening.
 That is racism and hate speech.
 There's no reason to have such a
 world.
 There's no excuse.
 There's no excuse.

Meanwhile, Illreme takes the point of view of someone recognizing an acquaintance among the Zaitoku-kai and trying to shake him into self-awareness:

「殺せ殺せ」と叫んでる顔を見てた
 らさ
 何だか洗脳されてるみたいでびっく
 りしたんだ
 Looking at your face, shouting
 "Kill! Kill!"
 You seemed to be brainwashed, it
 really surprised me. . .
 …その火種をつけてるのは . . .
 まぎれもない、そうだ集団の中にい
 た君なんだ

The person fanning the flames,
is unmistakably you, yes, you who
were in that group.

In May 2016, the Diet passed the Hate Speech Act, which gave municipalities the discretion to reject permission for activities that may involve hate speech. While [the number of hate rallies has declined](#) since the law was passed, it has been [criticized](#) for neither banning hate speech nor imposing penalties on it.

Protests against the Abe administration's policies

Another turning point in Japanese social movements was the lightning-speed passage of the Specially Designated Secrets Act (特定秘密保護法, hereafter Secrecy Law) on a midnight vote on December 6, 2013. Critics of the law, including the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner and the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, pointed out that its vague wording made its scope unclear, and that stiff jail penalties for journalists, legislators, and other information seekers who publicize state secrets would inhibit investigative research and endanger freedom of the press (Repeta 2014).

ECD was a constant presence in the many protests that took place over the two weeks prior to passage, including a 10,000-person rally in Hibiya on November 21, and a hastily organized [protest in Ōmiya, Saitama](#), the site of the only public hearing of the law, on [December 4](#). On the evening of the vote, 15,000 protesters assembled in Hibiya Park, and [40,000 gathered in front of the Diet](#), where ECD led some [calls](#).



ECD at Secrecy Law Protest, December 5, 2013. Photo by Tamura Takanori.

At the November 6, 2013 protest against the Security Law in front of the Diet, ECD overheard his punchline, “Yūkoto kikaseru banda, oretachi ga” (It’s our turn to make them listen to us) being yelled by a group of young people (@ecdecdec, August 25, 2015). This group was the [Students Against the Secret Protection Law](#) (SASPL), a network of students from Meiji Gakuin University, International Christian University, and other universities who had gotten together the night that the Secrecy Law was passed. SASPL held demonstrations in Shinjuku on February 1 and on May 3, 2014, in which SASPL’s members rapped call-and-response Sprechchor to hip-hop beats on top of a sound truck. Among their most memorable calls was ECD’s punchline. SASPL rapper UCD (Ushida Yoshimasa) felt it epitomized the spirit

of democracy, assigning agency to the protesters. It was picked up in newspaper coverage of the protests.

On July 1, 2014, the Abe Cabinet decided that Article 9 of the constitution could be reinterpreted to allow for “collective” self-defense, so that Japanese troops could be sent overseas to help an ally anywhere in the world. This decision prompted [40,000 protesters](#) to gather in front of the prime minister’s residence on June 30; 60,000 protested the following day. As momentum built toward the passage of the Security Bills, which would enable Japanese troops to be sent into overseas combat, SASPL reconstituted as SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) in May 2015. As Slater et al. point out, the group framed its cause as the protection of constitutional rights; they opposed such policies of the Abe administration as the reinterpretation of Article 9 in addition to the Secrecy Law (Slater et al. 2015). From June to September 2015, the group held protests every Friday in front of the Diet, attracting as many as 100,000 at a protest in mid-July. They first used a sound system to which members would call out call-and-response patterns, then shifted to accompaniment by a drum corps. This change helped to focus more attention on the words of the calls, allowing for new calls addressing the latest developments to be readily invented and heard.

ECD [leading calls](#) at SEALDs protest, July 17, 2015

As with the antinuclear protests in front of the Diet, ECD was a constant presence, sometimes [leading calls](#). By August, he was also working behind the scenes, helping to deal with the police. ECD and UCD struck an alliance, performing together on Dommune (September

1, 2015), and on the sound truck for [MCAN’s antinuclear demonstration](#) (December 5, 2015).

ECD’s line, “Yūkoto kikaseru ban da, **oretachi ga**” (It’s our turn to make them listen to **us**), has remained a favorite call of the protests. The call has spawned several variations, such as “Yūkoto kikaseru ban da, **kokumin ga**” (It’s time to make them listen to **the nation’s people**). “Kokumin” (national people) is a controversial word, as it is associated with military rule during World War II and can imply an exclusivity to “Japanese,” thereby alienating zainichi Koreans, Chinese, and others. However, this formulation stuck, as it underlined the fact that the majority of voters, to which the Diet was accountable, opposed the reinterpretations of Article 9 and the Secrecy Law. Several other formulations followed, including the more women-inclusive “watashi tachi ga” (us) or “omae ga” (you).

“*Lucky Man*” (2015)

“[Lucky Man](#),” ECD (2015)

まじか昔J Rap殺した男

Seriously, I’m the man who killed
J Rap long ago

ECD’s seventeenth and final original studio album, [Three Wise Monkeys](#) (2015), contains the song “[Lucky Man](#),” in which he intended to capture the spirit of the times. ECD said that the chorus is about the excitement of watching new rappers come onto the Japanese hip-hop scene, from the time that he first saw Scha Dara Parr at a contest to the present day

(Kawachi 2015). The track, with its blues-rock instrumentation and cheering sounds, conveys the ambience of a stadium arena. But the tone of the lyrics in the hook also suggests someone who has come to terms with the ups and downs of his life, with optimism and gratitude for his experiences:

何もねーガキが一夜でスターに変わる
的な

歴史的な瞬間に立ち会えたラッキー

そのときのことになるともう興奮して話

何回目だよって言われるような人間になるには

よそ見しちゃだめだ油断大敵

見逃した不運を一生後悔して嘆き

不幸の余生送ることになるのは悲劇

だってまだ始まったばかりか21世紀

The drastic change that a kid with nothing turned into a star overnight

I was so lucky to have been able to witness the historic moment

When the conversation turns to that time, I talk about it over and over with excitement.

They say, "You've told us many times already." To become such a person,

Don't look away. Concentrate, carelessness is the worst enemy

Feeling sorry for your misfortune and regretting a missed

opportunity,

It's a tragedy to live unhappily for the rest of one's life,

Because the 21st century has only just begun.

Some listeners have taken the first verse to refer to SEALDs, because it not only invokes the protests in front of the prime minister's residence, but also describes the protagonist—"a lucky guy who makes miracles happen"—donning a suit and going to a meeting to discuss politics, just as SEALDs co-founder Okuda Aki had done in his appearance at the Diet. ECD denies this inference was intended, claiming that the song was written as a "wild delusion" (妄想) in late 2014, before SEALDs had been formed. Still, the last two lines of this verse—"I hurl my protests in front of the prime minister"—could not have been more emblematic of that time.

プライムミニスター目前に抗議たたきつける

抗議たたきつける

Right in front of the Prime Minister, I hurl my protests

I hurl my protests

The song also hints at concerns shared by some protesters against the Abe administration, following the passage of the Secrecy Law (2013) and the (then) anticipated passage of the Conspiracy Law (2017). While they are embedded within stories in the lyrics, ECD makes a number of paranoid-sounding

references to “avoiding the investigative net,” “shadowing detectives,” “wiretapping machines,” and “registered facial recognition.” These comments echo not only ECD’s continuing concerns about surveillance (which he had expressed as far back as the 2003 sound demos), but also protesters’ concerns about heightened surveillance in the wake of the Conspiracy Law. He also mentions “the rule of U.S. organization,” a reflection of the discomfort of many Japanese about postwar U.S. influence on Japanese foreign policy and military buildup. Still, he declares, to a cheering crowd on the anthemic track, that “the twenty-first century has only just begun.”

Swan song

“[Kimi to itsumademo](#)” (Together Forever Remix, 2017)

Following his announcement of his cancer in September 2016, ECD finished a number of creative projects, including [his final autobiographical book](#) (his seventh, 2017) and a [compilation album](#) of his works since 2000. In the middle of his cancer treatments, ECD recorded his last track, “[Kimi to itsumademo](#)” (Together Forever Remix, 2017), as part of a tribute album to actor and singer-songwriter Kayama Yūzō with remixes of his songs by rappers Punpee, Rhymester, and Scha Dara Parr, among others. The original music for ECD’s track was from Kayama’s 1965 hit single of the same name, which was featured in his film, [Arupusu no wakadaishō](#) (It Started in the Alps, 1966). It was remixed by DJ Mitsu the Beats (of Sendai-based hip-hop group Gagle), and a video was shot featuring fellow rappers DARTH REIDER, Kai on the Mic, and Rino Latina II. A [short documentary](#) shows ECD struggling through physical weakness to complete the

recording.

The original song, a sentimental and optimistic number about enduring love, provides a perfect backdrop for ECD’s swan song, about the redemptive qualities of music. Conceding that “the sun will set” and “the long night is ahead,” he recalls his difficult childhood from a poor home and the ups and downs of his life. However, he notes how music has saved him, from the moment it hoisted him, as a child, up to the top of a *yagura* in a *bon* dance, and through the pleasures of making and performing music. Music, he says, gave him the happiest moments of his life—until the final lines of the song, when he acknowledges his wife. It seemed a fitting finale for a hip-hop pioneer who not only sampled Japanese popular songs long before it was fashionable, but also expressed exactly what he thought and felt in his lyrics and performances.

Even in his weakened state, ECD followed the movements he cared about. During a demonstration opposing Abe’s policies in Shinjuku on October 1, 2017, [he appeared at the side of the road](#), cheering on the demonstrators as they marched past. The spectacle of this emaciated man, so dedicated to the cause despite physical obstacles, touched many protesters. They cheered and gave him [high-fives](#) as they walked past. It was the last time that many protesters would see him.



ECD, anti-Abe protest, Shinjuku, October 1, 2017. Courtesy of Shimazaki Rody.

Rest in Power

自分の葬式の時だって棺桶から這い出してでもラップしてやる / 黙らねえ / 黙らねえ

I'll even rap at my own funeral, even if I have to crawl out of the coffin. / I won't shut up, / I won't shut up.

—“Damarane” (I Won't Shut Up, 2015)

History tends to memorialize the stars and leaders, yet both musical and social movements are also made possible by people who work in the background, organize, seed trends, and otherwise help make things happen. ECD was neither the earliest nor the most successful rapper, and he would have eschewed calling himself a leader of any protest group, as would many Japanese movement leaders. Nonetheless, he was an organic intellectual, in the Gramscian sense, for underground scenes and left-wing causes, and his philosophy and presence had a pronounced impact in both areas. In hip-hop, he championed the contentious, Do-It-Yourself spirit of the underground, a philosophy that culminated in his organization of Thumpin' Camp, which lifted underground hip-hop from relative obscurity to commercial viability. He also anticipated the vogue of sampling older Japanese pop, which is currently fashionable in both Japan and Europe. He also laid bare the trials and joys of his life in songs, books, and videos, which not only captured the moment in

social movements but also connected him with readers and listeners at an affective level. This affective connection made him all the more important when he was on the front lines of several Japanese social movements—anti-Iraq War, anti-nuclear, anti-racist, pro-democracy, anti-militarization. Seeing him at the front, leading calls with his inimitable voice, was one of the treats of going to a protest, as the thoughts and feelings in his writing were projected onto his performances. His sheer presence, constant and reliable at demonstrations, energized and reassured protesters. Whether in hip-hop or in protests, ECD was in the place to be.³⁴

As a musician, ECD was highly unusual in the way that he held firm to his beliefs and didn't hesitate to communicate them, in his music, writing, physical presence, or actions. Japanese musicians can face a backlash for engaging in political issues, and their agencies and record companies usually pressure them to keep away from politics (Manabe 2015, Chapter 3). As ECD said, “I saw a tweet saying that musicians that make political comments are third-rate. Musicians are said to speak truth to power, but when we do have a political message, we're told, ‘Don't say it.’ It's strange that there is this kind of criticism” (ECD et al., Dommune, September 1, 2015). As an independent artist, ECD had much more freedom than most artists, and he used this freedom to participate on multiple levels on the front lines of sociopolitical conflict. He wrote protest anthems, inspired Sprechchor, performed at protests, led calls, and worked behind the scenes. Along with Akuryō, Noma, and ATS, and later, in collaboration with UCD, he helped to establish a new mode of participatory performance at protests, which engaged protesters more fully. He inspired younger rappers, like Dengaryū and UCD, to become politically engaged. As UCD noted, “ECD is the most politically engaged rapper, and he raps constantly about politics. I respect him for that” (Ushida Yoshimasa, interview with the author,

Tokyo, August 20, 2015). His [spirit lives on](#) in Japanese protests, where his call, "It's our turn to make them listen to us," continues to be heard in recent protests for a living wage, against nuclear power, and for [Abe's resignation](#) in light of the deepening [Moritomo Gakuen](#) scandal.

On a personal note, ECD was one of the first people with whom I spoke about 3.11 and was among those who made me realize that the antinuclear movement—with all its implications for self-censorship, societal and media-industry pressures, collusion, the fragility of democracy, and the roles that music can play in social movements—was the story to pursue. For that, and for the impact he made on the world, I thank him.

Acknowledgements

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Noriko Manabe is Associate Professor of [Music Studies](#) at Temple University. Her book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima* (Oxford) won the John Whitney Hall Book Prize from the [Association for Asian Studies](#) and Honorable Mention for the [Alan Merriam Prize](#) from the Society for Ethnomusicology. She is currently writing her second book, *Revolution Remixed: Intertextuality in Protest Music*, and co-editing the volumes, *Nuclear Music* (with Jessica Schwartz) and *Oxford Handbook of Protest Music* (with

Eric Drott), all under contract with Oxford University Press. She has published articles on protest music, rap and the Japanese language, hip hop DJs, new media, and the music business in *Ethnomusicology*, *Popular Music*, *Twentieth-Century Music*, *Music and Politics*, *Asian Music*, and *Asia-Pacific Journal*, among other publications. She is series editor for [33-1/3 Japan](#), a book series on Japanese popular music and an extension of the [33-1/3](#) series on popular albums, at Bloomsbury Publishing. More about her work can be found on her [website](http://www.norikomanabe.com) (<http://www.norikomanabe.com>) and her [academia.edu](http://temple.academia.edu/norikomanabe) site (<http://temple.academia.edu/norikomanabe>).

Notes

¹ "Mic" is the more common spelling of "microphone," but the title on the recording is given as "Check Your Mike."

² One blogger claims that [ECD mentioned Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* \(2000\)](#) and their concept of multitude on his BBS (online bulletin board) in the early 2000s. This assertion can only be confirmed anecdotally, as the BBS was shut down in the mid-2000s, following constant attacks by right-wing trolls. Nonetheless, ECD did perform at a [symposium in Tokyo](#) in March 2008, at which Negri was scheduled to appear but was [unable to attend, and several people in his circle \(e.g., Oda Masanori\) were influenced by Negri](#).

³ The biographical information in this article comes from my interviews with ECD in 2008 and 2011, checked against his autobiographical book, *Irubeki basho* (2007). ECD did not release the first Japanese rap recording; those honors go to Yellow Magic Orchestra ("[Rap Phenomenon](#)," 1981), Itō Seikō ("[Tokyo Bronx](#)," 1985), Takagi Kan and Chikada Haruo ("[Nasu Kyūri](#)" and "Mass Communication Breakdown," 1986). Nevertheless, he was an early participant on the scene.

⁴ Major Force was a dance-music-oriented record label founded in 1988 by Nakanishi Toshio of the new-wave band Plastics, along with K.U.D.O., Takagi Kan, and Fujihara Hiroshi, as a sublabel of File Records.

⁵ Two other underground events, organized by rap group Kaminari's Anettaiurin and rapper You the Rock's Black Monday, were also operating around this time.

⁶ [A live version can be seen at ECD 「ピコキュリー」](#), accessed February 4, 2018.

⁷ ECD was first inspired to use Japanese tracks upon hearing Scha Dara Parr's "Theme Song," which samples the theme song from the television detective series, *Taiyō ni hoero!* (Bark at the Sun).

⁸ The lyrics can be found at "[ロンリー・ガール / 佐東由梨-カラオケ・歌詞検索](#) [JOYSOUND.com](#)," JOYSOUND.com, accessed February 5, 2018.

⁹ The lyrics can be found at "[ECDのロンリー・ガール FEATURING.K-DUB SHINE](#) [ECD-カラオケ・歌詞検索](#) [JOYSOUND.com](#)," JOYSOUND.com, accessed February 5, 2018. The topic of *enjō kōsai* is also addressed by Shing02's "[Nihon sei jijō](#)" (1998).

¹⁰ In the second verse, Katō seems less certain, saying "Shibuya Center City is fun right now, but I don't know how long it will go on . . . I want to get out from the labyrinth I've fallen into, I want to go home right now." Katō's song featured as the ending theme song for the Fuji TV program, "Hey! Hey! Hey! Music Champ." A shortened performance can be viewed [here](#). Lyrics can be seen at "[加藤ミリヤ ディア・ロンリーガール 歌詞](#)," accessed February 5, 2018.

¹¹ Katō evidently meant the 2017 version to be a tribute to ECD, who was not attributed in her 2005 song. In the list of women’s names at the end of the song are his two young daughters. She quotes her favorite lines from ECD’s 1997 [song](#): マジな話 早く立ち上がれ It’s a serious story, so rise up quickly, これちょっとシリアスだけど盛り上がり This is a bit serious, but get excited. Meanwhile, ECD declares in his verse: “Nothing has changed in twenty years!”

¹² For a discussion on “underground” vs. “party” rap, see Condry 2006, 70–73.

¹³ ECD also wrote an answer song to Scha Dara Parr’s “Boogie Back Tonight” called, “Do da Boogie Back” (1995).

¹⁴ ここにいきゃラヂオじゃたまにしかコンビニやなんかじゃその手には
耳には入りやしねえあからさまで生でオリジナルフレーバーで
家や仲間で死ぬまではまってるそんなSHIT詰め込んだカバン
地下室に集めて一晩中 ノン・ストップ今回転中 —ECD, “Mass tai Core” (1995)

¹⁵ The members of Scha Dara Parr attended Thumpin’ Camp as audience members. The following week, they held their own festival for Little Bird Nation at the same venue in Hibiya.

¹⁶ This was said to me in conversation with not only ECD, but also MIC Clocks, Erone of Infumiai Kumiai, and others. Thumpin’ Camp is also often mentioned in published interviews with rappers, e.g. “さんピンCAMP (ECD×RYUZO),” [Riddim Online - レゲエ、ヒップホップ、リアルミュージックフリーマガジン](#) (blog), accessed February 1, 2018.

¹⁷ “B-boy” and “B-girl” originally referred to break (hip-hop) dancers. In the context of the article, the term seems to be referring to hip-hop fans more generally.

¹⁸ The pun with “shitten” (blunder) is intentional. On the cover of the album of the same name is a photo of a public bathroom in a park.

¹⁹ See Manabe (2015), Chapters 3 and 7, on the multilayered system of self-censorship that operates in the music industry. Several of ECD’s tracks that were released by Major Force (a sublabel of File Records/Sony) have bleeped-out words, such as “Aoi me no Eijian” (Blue-Eyed Asian, 1992) and “Racist” (1993).

²⁰ For more information on this period of protests, see Manabe, Noriko, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima* (New York: Oxford, 2015), 155–175.

²¹ Shuri’s song was originally used in a Renown clothing commercial.

²² Translations for the lyrics to the entire song can be found in Hayashi and McKnight (2005) and Manabe (2015).

²³ The title is a reference to Bob Marley’s “Exodus.”

²⁴ *Dekasegi* are migrant workers; the term is commonly used to refer to Brazilians of Japanese heritage, working in Japan.

²⁵ It was, however, not the very first demonstration after Fukushima, but the first large one. See Manabe 2013b and 2015, chapters 5.3 and 5.4, for more background on antinuclear demonstrations.

²⁶ Several other musicians also participated as ordinary protesters in *TwitNoNukes*, including Rankin Taxi, Gotō Masafumi (Asian Kung-Fu Generation), Nakagawa Takashi (Soul Flower Union), ATS, and Akuryō.

²⁷ See Manabe (2015), Chapter 5.3, Manabe (2013b), and Manabe (2014) for more information on rapped calls-and-responses in protests. The rapped-call style was most recently seen (as of this writing) in a protest for the minimum wage and overtime pay in Shinjuku by anti-poverty/worker’s rights group Aequitas on February 25, 2018. See [here](#).

²⁸ A detailed analysis of this performance is given in Manabe 2013a and 2015, Chapter 5.3.

²⁹ For further information on Dengaryū, see Manabe 2013a.

³⁰ For more analysis on "Straight Outta 138," see Manabe 2013a.

³¹ See 11:23–12:42 [here](#).

³² Photos of ECD in protests can be seen [here](#) (by Shinta Yabe) and [here](#) (Rio Akiyama).

³³ Other songs associated with the movement at the time include "Peace and Highlight" by the Southern All-Stars and the Ese Timers' cover of "Aozora" by the Blue Hearts. See [here](#).

³⁴ The phrase, "in the place to be," appeared in Run-DMC's "Sucker MC's" (1983) and "Here We Go" (1984), and has appeared since in nearly 2,000 rap tracks (per a search on the rap lyrics site Genius.com). These include tracks by De la Soul, Busta Rhymes, Eminem, and Lin-Manuel Miranda (in *Hamilton*), among others. ECD has a track titled, "In the Place to Be" and also used the phrase in "Amaku kiken na omimai-gaeshi" (2017). The title of his memoir about his time in the music business is this phrase in translation (*Irubeki basho*, 2007). After ECD became ill with cancer, T-shirts saying, "in the place to be," were sold to raise money for him and his family.