

The Atomic Gaze and Occupied Bodies: Performance in Japan during and after the Cold War

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 21 March 2017, 4.30–5.45pm

Speaker

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Seminar Room 1, Level 3, Sir Roland Wilson Building, 120 McCoy Cct, ANU

Ankoku butoh is an original Japanese dance form that emerged in the mid to late 1950s in Tokyo. Co-founded by Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo, it was an artistic response to social conditions as the nation of Japan underwent radical shifts in Imperial Japan's engagement in the Asia-Pacific war (1931–1945), defeat and US-led Occupation of Japan (1945–1952) and the US-Japan alliance within the cold war division system. In this paper I explore how the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 and the *hibakusha* (people exposed to the atomic blast 被爆者 and radiological effects 被曝者) it produced can be seen reflected, in both a conscious and subconscious manner, in the artistic works and approach of *ankoku butoh*.



The impact of this historical event was not limited to the concentrated devastation wrought by the atomic bombs. Rather, the fusing of the atomic bombs and human *hibakusha* was symptomatic of broader changes that were underway during Occupation. Not only were the lives of living organisms permanently altered due to direct exposure to this force, entire societies were impacted both before and after Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the military, industrial and epistemological systems required to devise, construct and use it.

One way of conceiving of this apparatus is as a modality or way of seeing, which for purposes of brevity and utility I call the 'atomic gaze'. Of the many and multifaceted, realist and abstracted, grounded and surrogate artistic renderings of this event, in the poetic phrases and movements of *ankoku butoh* of the late 1950s and early 1960s I explore how Hijikata and Ohno responded to the atomic gaze as a driver underlying the Occupation. I also identify how this response as it developed over time can be regarded as a creative and prototypical form of resistance to the force of this atomic gaze. This is intended to contribute conceptual ways of approaching social and cultural histories in the post-1945 period and to our understandings of the present.

Adam Broinowski is a visiting fellow in the School of Culture, History and Language, where he is currently completing his ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award (DECRA) entitled 'Contaminated Life: 'Hibakusha' in Japan in the Nuclear Age.' His monograph *Cultural Responses to Occupation in Japan: The Performing Body during and after the Cold War* was published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2016. His research areas include cultural and historical studies of modern and contemporary Japan and East Asia, critical theory and performance studies and environment, energy and security politics in the Asia Pacific.

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