

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



Tuesday, 21 January 2014, 18.30 h

Bruce Baird  
(University of Massachusetts Amherst)

### ***Cabaret as an Artistic Beachhead: The Case of Butoh***

The dance form butoh has shocked and enthralled audiences around the world, and become one of postwar Japan's most important contributions to the world of performing arts. Perhaps no aspect of butoh is more interesting from an academic standpoint than the fact that for three decades the performers made their living not from their avant-garde dances, but rather from nightly burlesque performances. This presentation seeks to progress toward a unified theory of butoh and burlesque by examining the relationship between the two. I start with a brief introduction about the burlesque activities of the dancers and how they evolved over time. Following the introduction, specifically I consider how the burlesque shows were used to support a communal life-style by providing room, board and tuition for dancers, as well as how the burlesque shows could be used to raise money for the expenses associated with performance such as equipment, advertising, costume, and stage design costs (and I contrast this with the then-current *iemoto* system that underpinned other arts). Then I consider the way that burlesque performances could provide a foothold in different markets as butoh expanded internationally. Finally, I explore resonances between the burlesque performance and the butoh performances themselves to understand how the actual performing styles influenced each other.

Bruce Baird is an Associate Professor in Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; he is interested in Japanese theatre, philosophy and new media studies. He is the recipient of two Fulbright fellowships, author of a book about the founder of butoh entitled *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012—nominated for the 2013 International Convention of Asian Scholars Book Prize), and working on a general history of butoh.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum for early/mid career researchers and Ph.D. candidates in the field, organized by Miki Aoyama-Olschina and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but registration ([weber@dijtokyo.org](mailto:weber@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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