

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



May 19 (Wed), 2021, 18:30h JST

### **‘Radioactive Aesthetics’: Distance and Avisuality in Post-Fukushima Literature**

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Among the first attempts to capture the Great East Japan Disaster, photographs and amateur videos have perhaps been the most prevalent. These responses are notable because they favor a certain mode of representation often associated with catastrophic events – one that relies primarily on sight and that privileges proximity, and a sense of immediacy and authenticity, over distance. Such close-range vision seems to also have extended its influence on other branches of cultural production, originating for instance several testimonial works and fictionalized travelogues chronicling the state of the disaster areas, which have been almost immediately absorbed under the label of ‘post-Fukushima literature’.

This talk will explore the political stakes of modes of seeing and remembering through the lenses of proximity and transparency, while proposing a possible reevaluation of these concepts in the light of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Radiation, in fact, upsets spatial hierarchies and visual regimes in place by posing its own questions on positionality and representation. A possible, tentative answer to such queries, I will argue, might come from a careful consideration of recent directions in scholarship in new materialism and ecocriticism, and in the form of a kind of ‘radioactive aesthetic’. This mode of expression reveals an “impossible, unimaginable visibility” (Akira Mizuta Lippit, 2005), which might be inspired by radiation, but which more broadly embraces the invisible realms beyond human perception. Thanks to its poetics of avisuality and distance, radioactive aesthetic often attracts into its orbit literary works apparently removed from the catastrophe, thus proposing a corrective to the criteria of authority and proximity implicit in the process of canonization of works of ‘post-Fukushima literature’ – and of disaster literature in general.

*Chiara Pavone is a Ph.D. candidate in Japanese Literature from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently a Yanai Initiative Visiting Research Fellow at Waseda University, and she is in the process of writing her dissertation on embodiment and the aesthetics of radioactivity in works of post-3.11 literature. Her research interests include ecocriticism, disaster studies and queer studies. She has recently published on notions of embodiment in two recent novels by Itō Seikō.*

#### **About:**

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. This session is organized by Barbara Geilhorn. All are welcome to attend.

#### **Registration:**

Registration is required via email to [geilhorn@dijtokyo.org](mailto:geilhorn@dijtokyo.org) until 18 May 2021 (JST). Log in data will be provided after registration.