Organiser: Adam Broinowski, gracjusz@mac.com, 0405 566 504

Chair: TBA

Panelists: Adam Broinowski, Helen Kilpatrick, Shoko Yoneyama

Discussant: (Optional)

Fukushima and Nature: Exploring limits in the Modern Episteme

In response to the multiple problems that have been unleashed by the meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant in 11 March 2011, solutions continue to be debated across a variety of disciplines and fields of expertise. While no single solution adequately resolves the problems, it is apparent that certain fields have been prioritised and others neglected in public discourse concerning the state-corporate responses to the radioactive contamination of the environment.

This interdisciplinary panel addresses some of the more neglected aspects of living with the results of the Fukushima triple disaster of March 2011. Through the examples discussed, which include visual literature for young people, life-world conceptions by a philosopher-fisherman, and filmic inscriptions of radioactive contamination, the panellists suggest alternatives to the dominant epistemology in post-Fukushima Japan.

If the bonds between living things have been weakened by the effects of the Fukushima disaster, as the panel argues, this has been produced by an over-emphasis on technological and economic perspectives in the modern episteme, while under-valuing emotional and spiritual aspects in connection with nature. In theorising visualisations of radioactive contamination, poetic negotiations of grief and loss, and a life-world philosophy, the panellists raise some pressing ontological and epistemological issues that arise from re-imagining human relations with nature.

Equipment requirements

Papers will be delivered via power-point. Mac computer is desirable, but PC ok if not available.
**Proposed Program Stream (in order of preference)**

Anthropology, Sociology, Interdisciplinary studies – Shun Ikeda

**Understanding Fukushima through visualising radioactivity**

Adam Broinowski

The Australian National University

Since the Trinity atomic test of 16 July 1945, biospheric contamination from unnatural amounts of long-lived radioactive material has markedly increased. Near-permanent radioactive signatures from a series of nuclear tests, accidents and weapons-use, have been inscribed upon Earth’s biological memory.

Following a stadial course of modernisation over the past two centuries, humans populations have dramatically accelerated energy production and consumption in parallel with anthropogenic pollution. The distinctive qualities of radioactive contamination have made the polluting effects of intensive industrialisation difficult to contain.

Despite existing institutional recordings with sensitive measurement technologies, in Japan (as elsewhere), lack of managerial transparency and ambiguous information regarding radiation levels and health implications have clouded public perceptions of their actual living conditions.

While the immediate responsibility for technical malfunctions at the Fukushima power plant lies with the operators – TEPCO – the ‘nuclear village’ in Japan and trans-national nuclear industry are ultimately complicit in risking the likelihood of such a disaster taking place.

Despite the ‘invisibility’ of radioactive contamination, the known effects of disease, mutation and heritable illnesses, and its genomic and biospheric dimensions evident in the specialist discourse demand our shared attention and interpretation across disciplines. Key aspects in three approaches to visualising radioactive contamination, by documentary maker Kamanaka Hitomi, visual artist Takeda Shinpei, and scientific artist Claudia Hesse-Honneger, will be considered for their attempts to render the actuality of the situation more apparent, and to frame the broader implications of this accident. In particular, in analysing these documents this paper identifies and discusses key ontological aspects intrinsic to the radioactive gaze which are evident from the nuclear disaster.
There have been a myriad of different responses to the Fukushima triple disaster of March 2011, not least of which include artistic and literary responses produced for young people. Besides the creation of new works of poetry and prose, these have included the resurrection or reinterpretation of existing narratives and themes with visual images. For instance, while Kimura Yuichi’s and Kuroda Seitaro’s collaborative picture book, Kaze kiru tsubasa (2002), was created to commemorate the first year anniversary of 9/11 in the US, the narrative also resonates with the grief and loss experienced by Fukushima survivors. Similarly, other visual works and films have been (re-)released alongside expressions of desire to help young people understand the catastrophe and its impacts. Poignant works such as Arthur Binard’s Sagashite imasu (2012), with photographs by Tadashi Okakura of objects from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, advocate against reliance on nuclear power and alert readers to the “catastrophic potential of nuclear fission.” While many of these texts do not directly deal with ‘Fukushima’, they simultaneously access the concepts of emotional trauma, iyashi (healing) and hope, and seek to respond to feelings of “disempowerment” in creative ways (Mundt, 2012).

This paper analyses how these literary and visual representations attend to the experience of pain and healing in the context of living with the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. It will examine the texts and their strategies through the lens of trauma theory and iyashi and explore the potential power of visual and verbal poetics.

Re-imagining Social Science for a New Modernity in post-3.11 Japan: The philosophy of the ‘life-world’ by Minamata fisherman OGATA Masato

Shoko Yoneyama
The University of Adelaide
Ulrich Beck writes that Japan has become part of the 'World Risk Society' as a result of the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima. According to Beck, the World Risk Society presents a catastrophic risk which is beyond geographical, temporal, national and social boundaries. It also signifies an unfortunate by-product of modernity, which, nonetheless, has a possibility of ‘mutating’ into a better modernity. It is not clear, however, how this 'mutation' could happen. This paper explores the theoretical possibilities presented by Beck from the perspective of post 3.11 Japan. What will be the theoretical contribution of Japan, if any, to social science, which appears to suggest an end of its 'second/late' modernity? What legacy can we extract from its history of intensive modernisation since the mid-1950s?

With these questions in mind, the paper discusses the philosophy of 'Life-world' by Minamata philosopher-fisherman, OGATA Masato, as an example of 'informal life politics’: “transgressive forms of everyday action undertaken by individuals or groups as they seek to protect their health and livelihoods in a world where the relationship between state and citizens is undergoing profound change” (Morris-Suzuki 2012 http://informallifepolitics.wordpress.com/). The paper argues that what has been jeopardised in the 'first' and 'second' modernity in Japan is a sense of connectedness. This not only points to a fundamental weakness of modernisation/westernisation, but also the weaknesses of western-made social science which has a limited epistemological framework for imagining the relationships between humankind, nature and spirituality. The paper suggests that to imagine a new modernity where sustainable development is possible, this lacuna of social science needs to be addressed; and that for that purpose, 'informal life politics' plays a central role, especially from those who still carry the intangible heritage of animism in the grassroots of Asia.

Helen Kilpatrick is a senior lecturer at the University of Wollongong. Her research focuses on modern Japanese literature, particularly works produced for young people and picture books. She is the author of Miyazawa Kenji and his Illustrators (2013). She has also published on visual aspects of the shōjo (girl), and constructions of transculturalism in Japanese fiction.

Shoko Yoneyama (PhD) is Senior Lecturer, Asian Studies, University of Adelaide. She has worked extensively on the sociology of Japanese education and youth, including a monograph, The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance (1999&2007 Routledge, London & New York), as well as on alternative (organic) agriculture and alternative education (e.g. futoko) movements. Her recent research involves the question of soul and spirituality in the context of modernity, and the role of Japanese Studies in this nexus.

Adam Broinowski holds a PhD from the Centre for Ideas and the School of Philosophical and Historical Studies, University of Melbourne on aesthetic representations of the body in Japan since the postwar. He has lived and worked in Japan on various occasions as a researcher and theatre practitioner. Recently Adam was Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Research Institute (ADRI), Deakin University, and lecturer at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne. He will take up a Discovery Early Career Research Award in 2013 at the Japan Institute, School of Culture, History and Languages at the ANU.