The Flesh, Subject, Embodiment in Postwar Japan: Through Nikutai and Gutai

Fusako Innami

DOI: 10.4000/books.cdf.12570
Publisher: Collège de France
Place of publication: Paris
Year of publication: 2022
Published on OpenEdition Books: 7 February 2022
Series: Institut des civilisations
Electronic EAN: 9782722605817

http://books.openedition.org/cdf/12570

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 9 February 2022.
Introduction: In Search of the Individual Flesh


I contend that thought [shisō] is my flesh. Other than my physical flesh itself, I do not think that there is thought anywhere. Therefore, I realize that my novels are not yet thoughtful enough as my fleshness is not yet sufficiently materialized as a creative act, but I do not think “there is no thought” at all. I think I can search for thought by persistently pursuing my own flesh. I cannot think of any existence of thought without thinking of my flesh.

私は思想というものを、自分の肉体だと考えている。自分の肉体そのもの以外に、どこにも思想というもののはないと思っている。従って、私は自分の肉体性が、まだ十分作品行動として具現化されていないということで、私の小説はまだ十分に思想的でないとは自覚しているが、まったく「思想がない」とは考えていない。私は自分の肉体をどこまでも追求することで、思想を探求することが出来ると思っている。いや、自分の肉体を考えずに思想というもののが存立さえも私には考えられない。¹

2 After having spent several years during the World War Two at the front in China, Tamura presents in his works a body in terms of the physical necessities of food and sex, and experiences of desire and pain. His works, including [The Devil of the Flesh] / 肉体の悪魔 (1946) and [The Gate of the Flesh] / 肉体の門 (1947), which received an explosive contemporary reaction, have been called the literature of the flesh / 肉体文学, along with works by such authors as Sakaguchi Ango 坂口安吾 (1906–1955) and Noma Hiroshi 野間宏 (1915–1991). Tamura’s statement above, expressed during the postwar turmoil, alludes to a fundamental rethinking of the relation between the individual and the state body, the body and thought/language, and body and act.
Having studied French at Waseda University and been influenced early in his career by stream-of-consciousness writing and French thought, and called, Sone Hiroyuki writes, an “intellectual / 知性派” writer and critic, it was the wartime experience of merely sleeping, eating, and fighting that turned him into a flesh / 肉体派 writer. Tamura’s unavoidable engagement with bare bodies at the extreme condition led him to pursue the “flesh”.

An existential inquiry and a sense of individuality with a focus on the individual flesh / nikutai came to occupy an explicit position in intellectual and literary discussions soon after WW2, freed from the unitary state focused on the polity / 国体. In the literature of the flesh, which flourished and soon declined, the authors identified fallacies in the wartime spiritualism that realized itself through militarism and imperialism. Douglas Slaymaker examines plural axes of flesh in contrast to such concepts as the material body / 体 which could join 肉 as flesh / 肉体 or 国 as 国体 / the polity and body, 身体, philosophical term with both a bodily and spiritual sense, the latter sense of which writers focused on the flesh eschew. Slaymaker writes:

The flesh writers, by assuming that the body is central to individual identity, and by extension to a national identity, reflect the attempts in the postwar years to come to terms with the war years by both repressing the body through disavowal, and expressing it through carnality.

Tamura brings mind and language back to the body by placing the body as the very basis of the human condition. Sakaguchi argues for the discovery of language of the flesh, emphasizing what the body itself speaks instead of what the mind speaks about its thoughts. Post-surrender concerns of Japanese writers and critics on the body and subjectivity, permeating through literary, political, artistic debates at the time, shaped the rise of flesh; this rise of flesh, expanded from the first generation of postwar writers / 第一次戦後派 such as Noma Hiroshi 野間 宏 (1915–1991) to the second generation such as Abe Kōbō 安部公房 (1924–1993) and Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970), further gave rise to bodily awareness and self-consciousness beyond the mere representations of the carnal desire.

The search for the flesh around this period was widespread among art and performance practitioners, as well as writers and literary figures. Among them, the avant-garde art group Gutai—organized in 1954 with seventeen members as Gutai Art Association / 具体美術協会 in Ashiya, Hyōgo Prefecture by Yoshihara Jirō 吉原治良 (1905-72), a painter and CEO of Yoshihara Oil, and lasted until Yoshihara’s death—brought new artistic creations through their bodies. Early activities of this group’s members included physically dashing through the paper canvas, swinging axes onto the composed woods, or wearing the dress of electric bulbs, to pursue the material properties and forms not only through hands but through their entire bodies as art of physical engagement. These activities were described by the media at the time as [Body Crash Art] / 体当たり芸術, or introduced as “the art of the flesh” / 肉体の芸術. Gutai was introduced to the world outside Japan by figures like Michel Tapié (1909–1987), a French art critic and the leader of Art Informel, and Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), an American artist who contributed to the ideas Happenings. Gutai, often considered derivative of Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel on one hand and a precursor to Kaprow’s Happenings on the other, with its subsequent shift of emphasis from performance-based art to increasingly two-dimensional tableaus, the history to which Gutai belongs has been debated. Nonetheless, Gutai contributed to the collective search
for an autonomous subject through the concrete awareness of the body. While “flesh” writers illuminated bare bodies exposed in the burnt aftermath of the war, Gutai artists, including female artists such as Yamazaki Tsuruko 山崎つる子 (1925-2019) and Tanaka Atsuko 田中敦子 (1932-2005), reflexively became aware of the materiality of objects with which they were in contact. The body, pursued both individually and collectively, functioned as a contact point across individuals, genres, and cultures.

This paper—a work in progress on the search for the body and the senses in postwar Japan at the intersection of literature, performance, and visual culture—attempts to read how the concerns about the engagement with the body and autonomous subject might have been shared beyond genres of arts and have shaped active practices of the body. This paper brings interrelated concerns in the literature of the flesh together with those of Gutai. Although the literature of the flesh and Gutai are rarely discussed together, with a few recent examples suggesting their interrelatedness through their attention to the flesh, an intermedia analysis of treatments of the body in their writings may contribute to a further understanding of what was at stake in the search of the body in postwar Japan. In all their concepts of the body—whether polity / 国体, flesh / 肉体, autonomous body / 主体, or concrete body / 具体—these artists pursued the new form of the body through their creations for, Ming Tiampo puts it, “a reconstruction of subjectivity through a deformation of the painted body characterized by a sincere pursuit of individualism”. Although the narratives around Gutai have so far focused on their artistic experimentation, innovation in performance, and international network, Gutai also offers an alternative understanding of the lived body: embodiedness.

Flesh as a Site of Controversy

Japan’s postwar reconstruction, after the experience of the atomic bombs and defeat in 1945, pushed the Japanese to pursue interests in the autonomous body, as distinct from the national “body” identified with the polity (kokutai). The idea of kokutai, representing the emperor as the living embodiment of the nation even in the absence of his physical presence, bore a “religious” character, indicating “the mystical body” of the nation, written with logographs meaning 国 / country and 体 / body. John Dower writes that the Japanese were “indoctrinated to believe that the supreme object of
veneration was the *kokutai*, or emperor-centered ‘national entity’”. Writers associated with the literary journal *Modern Literature* reflected upon the emperor system and Japan’s responsibility for the war; the accounts of politicized Merleau-Ponty were “readily apparent”, Slaymaker puts it, with “the need for the politicization of individuals while opposing the evil of political systems”.

Tamura’s experience at the battlefront made him realize the powerlessness of thought and ideology, and led him to choose instead to pursue carnal desire, exploring the new life that would follow the liberation of the body, via sensations felt at/on the flesh. Tamura writes:

> We no longer believe in anything other than our own flesh. Only the flesh is truth. Pain of the flesh, desire of the flesh, anger of the flesh, intoxication of the flesh, confusion of the flesh, and slumber of the flesh—only these are truths. Through the existence of these facts, we come to realize, for the first time, that we are alive.

10 Tamura’s fictional works, which often depict women being stripped, tied, and beaten, were widely associated with eroticism—especially when “subcultures,” involving the world of prostitutes for GIs called *panpan*, the black market, self-indulgence, communicated via fragmentary cheap materials called pulp/culture and commercialized sex. As Dower finds one of the features of so-called flesh writers in the “solitary physical individual”, Tamura mapped the individuals’ bodies in space where the desire for fundamental necessities drove their lives, rather than depicting characters’ subtle psychological struggles. Ik-Koo Hwang writes that while, in politics and medicine, the flesh *nikutai* was a metaphor of social distortion, in literature it was concrete, appearing as a motif to represent the postwar sociocultural space. The flesh, as a concrete living being, occupied burnt space and urban confusion.

11 Sakaguchi Ango alludes to physicality through speaking of the fallness (often translated as “decadence”) through which humans come into the world: “Humanity has been born from the womb of decadence’s truth. To live, and to fall—this is the correct procedure; can there be any easy shortcut to the saving of humanity outside it?” Sakaguchi believed that this falleness makes us human through a condition in which an individual, by thoroughly falling, can discover and rescue him- or herself. He, started making claims for the flesh slightly earlier than Tamura, also emphasizes not the mind talking about its thoughts, but what he believes is spoken by the body itself, with reference to Jean-Paul Sartre’s short novel “Intimacy” (published in France in 1939 and translated into Japanese in 1946); with Ango’s comments, Japanese readers “understood” Sartre’s writing as erotic literature and existentialism as a form of literary eroticism.

12 In Sartre’s “Intimité”/“Intimacy”, in which Lulu escapes from her impotent husband Henri but ends up returning to him after only a night, various voyeuristic elements peel off consciousness from the seen: the almost naked Henri as seen by Lulu and the Texiers, Lulu as seen by other characters, and then by the readers. The gaze in Sartre surprises the subject, reducing him to shame, but disappears when this subject sees the eye that is looking at him, making him conscious of himself as the seen. Lulu, who looks like a sleepwalker to Rirette, acknowledges Henri’s somnambulistic appearance.
chasing her after she has left him alone, but then decides to return and stay with him. Sakaguchi, with reference to this story, writes in his [The Flesh Itself Meditates] / 肉体自体が思考する (1946): “There is nothing like logic in this novel. Only the flesh thinks and speaks. Lulu’s flesh weirdly loves the impotent’s flesh.” / この小説には倫理などは一句も説かれてゐない。たゞ肉体が考へ、肉体が語つてゐるのである。リュリュの肉体が不能者の肉体を変な風に愛してゐる。. Here Sakaguchi searches for a discovery of the language of the flesh itself.

In Sakaguchi’s “The Flesh Itself Meditates” and Tamura Taijirō’s “The Flesh is the Human” (1947), mentioned above, both writers problematize language and thought that was once in a body and has left, while illuminating lived or felt experiences through the body. The flesh here is something that is particularly acute to the senses. Sakaguchi Ango’s [The Idiot] / 白痴 (1946) also presents the ambiguity of the body through various corporeal expressions amid the postwar confusion. While the extensive pursuit of the body demonstrated its complexity, the body became almost like a thought itself. Political scientist Maruyama Masao 丸山真男 (1914-1996) points out that the literature of the late 1940s is constantly preoccupied with matters of intercourse, and is remote from actual life, with the writers offering a symbol of what they longed for: “As long as there isn’t any inner working of the spirit that makes the creation of ‘poetry’ possible within the context or our lives, it’s always going to be the same old story”. What would this subjective impulse mean in this context?

While illuminating the subjectively lived flesh, the sense of the self-created through the eyes of the other or even the self-bound by the other appear in writings of the flesh, in their search not only for individuality, but also community. Tamura’s The Gate of the Flesh is set in the Yūrakuchō area in Tokyo, where GHQ (General MacArthur’s General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) was located. It was “a contact zone” where the occupied and the occupier encounter and cross, a group of women work as prostitutes, with an involvement that is seen bodily and not mental. It is an obligation within this community that a woman should not exchange her body without a proper fee—if she breaks this commandment, she will be an outcast from the community, the self-observing community in the postwar period functioning rather like the self-regulating community of the fascistic nation in wartime. A community such as this, Hwang argues, reminds communities of neighbors during the war in which people would look after and support each other, and also watch one another and report anti-state behaviors or thoughts to officials if necessary, amid the democratic ideals of postwar Japan. It was not entirely that the new individual “flesh,” devoid of war-time ideology and the national body, emerged as a “cut” from the nation and community.

Ibuki, the male protagonist of The Gate of the Flesh, a returnee from the war, comes to play a central function in this story, as desired within this female community. The girls are considered too immature to fully know carnal joy. However, the war widow Machiko, upon falling in love with Ibuki, is expelled from the community, as if to suggest that the knowledge of physical pleasures unsettles the common ground of this community. Slaymaker writes, “The relationship between Ibuki and the war widow portends the loss of innocence, for maturity is marked by knowledge of fleshly pleasures”. Sone Hiroyoshi also points out that even though Tamura was inspired by the panpan girls’ strength to confront the postwar confusion by means of their bodies, it was not only the panpan serving GIs whom he sought to depict in order to illuminate the occupied-occupier relationship; rather, Tamura depicted Japanese girls who slept
with Japanese men, passing the threshold into adulthood in doing so.\textsuperscript{31} While being conscious of censorship from his earlier experiences,\textsuperscript{32} the body in this story is the place that concerns both the oppositions and continuity or succession of maturity/immaturity, prewar/postwar, and “in” and “out,” in Tsukada’s word, where the shadow of America is hidden and revealed.\textsuperscript{33}

The postwar liberation brought a measure of equalization of class and gender, as well as freedom of thought and expression. Tsurumi Shunsuke (1922-2015) writes of the transformation in everyday bodily practices that the occupation by GHQ affected Japanese models for opposite-sex physical interactions, giving the impression that “a new age had arrived”.\textsuperscript{34} And yet, male writers of the literature of the flesh recognized the radical possibilities in, as Yoshikuni Igarashi puts it, “the language of the body”,\textsuperscript{35} via female bodies. Advocates of the flesh believed, Harry Harootunian argues, that “Japanese had been denied ‘sensory stimuli’ down to the end of the war”.\textsuperscript{36} While the broad movement of equalization liberated women, in terms of the U.S. occupation army’s attempt to save Japanese women from patriarchal oppression, as Mire Koikari argues, it also solidified certain divisions, as regulation of gendered bodies became “a source of tension and controversy”\textsuperscript{37}. Even when the individual body, liberated from the patriarchy and wartime restriction, was supposed to function as counter-hegemonic, its extent was still limited; the liberation of the flesh occurred at the expense of female bodies. Distinctions between pre- and post-war, the collective and the individual, and repression and liberation might be the result of the way historicizing and understanding of a complex set of interrelated issues. Contested in some discussions is the historicizing of such distinctions through the very notion of the “postwar” period, Miryam Sas suggests that the typical way of situating the “rupture” between the pre-war and the post-war shows evidence of continuity.\textsuperscript{38}

The postwar period adjoined the wartime one, with Tamura living in a burned-down Tokyo as if it were the warfront in China for Sone,\textsuperscript{39} while the changes of the postwar “liberation” remained limited. The thirst for carnality in postwar Japan represented the search for an individuality that was curtailed during wartime, and the liberation of the flesh still meant that of the male body via the objectified female body. Having embodied the chaotic energy of the postwar period, Tamura attempted to rebuild the body and identity. It was to bring the carnal body and mind together, considering their unity to be the basis of the human condition. Or in Dower’s words, among writers such as Sakaguchi, Tamura, and Dazai Osamu 太宰治 (1909-1948) who “dramatically linked degeneracy and carnal behavior to authenticity and individuality,” Tamura’s choice of language “amounted to sacrilege bordering on outright lese majesty”,\textsuperscript{40} in respect to the kokutai. Tamura believed in the flesh—although the flesh, in itself, keeps evolving and shifting, and is unstable to rely on. The flesh (re)appeared in a burnt urban space with vitality, crying out its lived experience, unable to be completely reduced to language.

**Gutai as Embodiedness**

The attention to carnality and to individuality comes to appear not only in the literary and political arenas but also in arts, especially in Gutai’s pursuit of autonomous subject, materiality, and originality. The pursuit of the flesh and the body-mind relation were crucial for Gutai artists, especially for Shiraga Kazuo. Shiraga presented a performative
work called *Challenging Mud* / 泥に挑む (1955)—which consisted of a pile of mud, clay, and sand in the courtyard of the Ohara Kaikan (school of flower arrangement) in Tokyo—and wrote a series of articles about the individual, the senses, and the body in the journal *Gutai* between 1955 and 1957. This pursuit of individuality took place by using the body as the site and medium of expression; Tiampo argues that the purpose of *Challenging Mud* was to express “the personal material of the individual for the purpose of creating a society of politically, ethically, and aesthetically independent individuals”.

Shiraga’s concerns were shared by Motonaga Sadamasa 元永定正 (1922-2011) and other *Gutai* members, and, potentially, beyond. Sas, bringing Sakaguchi Ango’s “discovery of the self” into the search for the “thought of flesh” in butō dance and experimental theatrical arts in postwar Japan, writes, “the kinds of problems these artists raise [the ambivalent relation between concept and body] are already foreshadowed by Ango’s early postwar writings and its interpreters in subsequent generations”.

The development of a subjective autonomy located in the flesh was also considered a matter of urgency in postwar artistic circles.


Shiraga employed the term “flesh” / 肉体 to explain the idea of art as an expression of the spirit that is contingent upon the body in his 1956 essay "On Distinctive Qualities" / 資質について. Through his exploration of subject, body, and individuality, Shiraga places importance on one’s innate physical condition / 体質 as the basis of everyday actions; it is accompanied by sensory qualities that keep evolving throughout life, which he calls distinctive qualities “資質”.

As each individual is born with a particular bodily condition, Shiraga believes that distinctive qualities developed through everyday practices cause individuals to realize their own particularities. “The free human being,” he writes, “means the one who can establish his or her own qualities and take responsible actions based on these. / 自由な人間とは、自己の資質を確立して責任ある活動をなし得る人間の事を指すのではないか。”

While referring to distinctive qualities, Shiraga describes the formation of the individual body, along with his work “Challenging Mud,” with a clear sense of political resistance against totalitarianism: the individual develops his own qualities through thinking and through physical acts or practices.
His idea of individualism saw it as a part of community; “the individual who actively understands its own quality is the one who constitutes the whole.” Yet it seems that the process by which Shiraga pursued the “distinctive qualities” was not far from that of the flesh writers, as becomes clear when he explains the act as lying at the intersection of the body and thought:

When only I myself exist without thought, feeling, and emotions, what I desire—that is without meaning. My action—whether or not it is stabilized, there exists my consistent action. There is spirit, which has escaped from mind. My innate state is the basis of my being. My action—whether or not it is stabilized, there exists my consistent action. There is spirit, which has escaped from mind. My innate state is the basis of my being.

What constitutes the self is the individual’s continual challenge to its own qualities; the act forms existence. Having been aware of existentialism, and having entered the Buddhist priesthood late in life, at the Enryakuji Temple in 1971, Shiraga understood the body as contingent upon the spirit, and thought of bodily action as uniting the two together—particularly in actions performed with his feet on the ground, or suspended with a rope to support the weight of his body, touching the ground just enough to allow himself to slide over a canvas. To touch the ground in this way is not to rest, but constitutes the point of departure for a new movement, from which to form and reform the body.

Yoshihara Jirō turned to art to pursue originality, his work a legacy to other members of Gutai, in response to his experience of being criticized early in his career by Fujita Tsuguharu (1886-1968) for his lack of originality. Yoshihara’s Gutai Art Manifesto in 1956, reads, “In Gutai Art, the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates matter. When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out.” Remaining unconvinced by other postwar milieus, Yoshihara selected the name Gutai (具体, concrete), initially proposed by Shimamoto Shōzō (1928-2013), to refer to the project of making art that addressed the world in a concrete manner.

Passing through the shortage of materials immediately after the war made them conscious of the “materials” they engage with in artistic creations; Shimamoto Shōzō, aiming to present a lack of physical materiality, worked on paper surfaces through his “paper-vas,” gluing layers of newspaper to prepare a neutral surface, then creating holes and ruptures on the surface (Work/Hole in 1950). It corresponds the time when Abe Kōbō meditated upon external materials reflected onto the skin, combining emotions, colors, and textures of the seen in his fiction [Cryptic Coloration] and [Starving Skin]; both the page and the skin mediate changes in the subjects caused by external stimuli. The lack of physical materials drove them to find distinctive qualities of the surface.

These features of engaging with the materials were not confined to how artworks are constructed but also how artists and viewers engaged with them. In his Please Walk Here, which was part of the Gutai Outdoor Exhibition in 1956, Shimamoto invited the creative involvement of the public by letting them step on the woodwork, and working with objects in an open space. The work involved making one’s body aware while it is “doing”—not only for artists, but also for the viewer who breaks
from the practice of looking. Going further than just exhibiting their works in alternative spaces like outdoors, on a stage, or in the sky, they engaged with the external of their bodies in seeking new ways of conceiving the relationships between self, body, and the world.

When Ukita Yōzō (1924-2013), a professional editor and a member of Gutai, commented on the second edition of journal called “Gutai”, he first and succinctly explained what this group was about: “‘Gutai’ might be literary translated as ‘Embodiment’.” The journals to record their activities and to create “international common ground” were issued through fourteen volumes from 1955 to 1972, including photographs of the objects with a resume in English, and were circulated amongst artists and critics, including John Cage (1912-1992) and Yves Klein (1928-1962), around the world to play a crucial role in connecting like-minded artists at the time. While the early Gutai activities aimed to engage with the body as the medium of action of the autonomous subject, their extended creations—in a form of two-dimensional tableau and journals—reached beyond the flesh itself.

Writing the Body (Out): Conclusion

This paper has examined the ways in which postwar authors and artists tried to resituate the body as the autonomous subject and attain a body. The search for the flesh, which took on particular momentum in postwar Japan, interconnected writing, thinking, and actions. Such a heightened attention to the flesh made those creative individuals aware not only of the lived body (desire, pain, and necessity), but also of the body as dwelling in space and interconnected with the other, community, and the external. It further interconnected concerns shared by critics and practitioners across the world. Both the literature of the flesh and Gutai sought to attain a physical materiality as well as a new formation of the subject by returning to the body, forging an identity through the bare flesh, and using the body as the site of event. In such a case, what is expressed and what is written on the surface is not merely a referent: the body not as something to be written “about” or on but as an exclamation. The body itself is a subjective site of living, a site for performative acts that engage with the environment.

Flesh writers’ attempts to attain a bare flesh and a language thereof, by pursuing the flesh as lived, was, in a way, already failing: to capture extra-linguistic experiences (flesh) through language in between the lived and the written, between the felt and the repressed, even if this language is the language of the flesh. And yet, such a failure may give birth to the body—as the written, marking a moment where the flesh appears, or “happens.” Concerning incommunicable pain and pleasure in Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-) writes to exscribe meaning, or writing it out. Nancy’s idea of writing and reading here is “to be exposed, to expose oneself” to “not-having” or “not-knowing,” not as the uninscribable, but as that “opening into itself of writing to itself, to its own inscription as the infinite discharge of meaning”.

The body being exposed, moves, creates a space for itself, and acts. The attempt to write such an undefinable body nonetheless escapes in the moment when a pen touches it.

Although through different genres, from different areas in Japan, thoughts on the body illuminated by figures such as Tamura, Sakaguchi, and Shiraga all convey attempts to live, rebuilding the body, subject, and its own language. The body functioned, not
merely as a site and surface to be inscribed upon, but as a site to move, act, and engage with the other. By tracing its movement, the viewer potentially comes to acknowledge the shape of its body. The body they searched for, while engaging with its lived experiences, drove it out to interact with others beyond genres of arts and shaped active practices of the body.

Acknowledgement:
This paper is a part of project, “In Search of the Body in Postwar Japan, 1945-1997,” funded by the British Academy (BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants, 2017-18, Grant Number SG163483).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


HWANG IK-KOO 黃益九, [The structure of body] / 身の構造 / Mi no kōzō, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 1993 [1975], 228 p.


TAMURA Taijirō 田村泰次郎, Waga bundan seishunki, Tokyo, Shinchōsha, 1963.


NOTES

1. TAMURA Taijirō, [“The Flesh is the Human”] / 肉体が人間である, in [The Gate of the Flesh] / 肉体の門, Tokyo, Chikuma shobō, 1988 [1947], p. 220. Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.


3. This is often represented in terms such as militarist spirit / 軍国精神 and imperialist spirit / 皇国精神, or obliterating the self and serving public authority / 滅私奉公, notions that themselves underwent drastic transformations during the war.


7. A movement in the mid-1940s and 1950s of abstract painting that emphasized gestural and material presence. It is widely known that Tapié had a certain impact on Gutai’s development and activities following his visit to Japan in 1957, including in the shifts of their creations from paper to canvas, and the increasing importance of two-dimensional tableaux over performance, for both convenience and marketability. See Gutai shiryōshi: Dokyumento Gutai 1954-1972 [Document Gutai], Ashiya: Ashiya shi bunka shinkō zaidan, 1993.


12. Ichikawa Hiroshi, neutralizing the division between the body and the mind, regards the body conceptualized as 身 mi not as an object but subjectively as that which experiences and lives. He describes the body as both mind and phenomenon, “a compound body of the world to smell, world to touch, and a world to hear”. See Ichikawa Hiroshi, [The structure of body] 身の構造, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 1993 [1975], p. 188. Ichikawa’s concept of mi was inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh (la chair), which connects the relationship between body and world to the mutual encroachment of those inseparable entities, further considering the proximity between the tangible and the visible. See Merleau-Ponty Maurice, The Visible and the Invisible, LINGIS Alphonso (trans.), Evanston, Northwestern U. P., 1968, p. 133-43. The perception of the world, body, and contact with the world in Merleau-Ponty is already mediated by others’ perceptions. See Merleau-Ponty Maurice, The World of Perception, DAVIS Oliver (trans.), London, New York, Routledge, 2008 [2004], p. 65; this perception is nowhere else than in one’s body.


17. TAMURA, [“The Flesh is the Human”], op. cit., p. 221.


19. Ibid., p. 158.


23. Sartre writes, “What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches cracking behind me is not that there is someone there; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I cannot in any case escape from the space in which I am without

24. SARTRE Jean-Paul, “Intimacy,” in Intimacy and Other Stories, LLOYD Alexander (trans.), London and New York, Peter Nevill, 1949, p. 29-30. The first publication of Sartre’s to be translated into Japanese was “Le Mur” (“The Wall”), by Horiguchi Daigaku 堀口大學. La Nausée (“Nausea”) was translated in 1941 by Shirai Kōji 白井浩二, followed by “Intimité” (“Intimacy”), translated by Ibuki Takehiko 伊吹武彦 and Yoshimura Michio 吉村道夫 in 1946. The Complete Works of Sartre / サルトル全集 is from 1950, and had sold one million copies by the time of Sartre’s visit to Japan together with Simone de Beauvoir in 1966.


26. ISHIZUKI Mayuko interprets Sakaguchi’s corporeal expressions in this story, with a focus on the concepts in between the flesh and mind, such as 肉体 as an instinctual body beyond willful control; flesh / 肉体 in relation to the idiot woman in the story, which drives actions with an absolute control; and からだ / karada as a hollow or skeletal body without life and spirit. ISHIZUKI Mayuko, [“Sakaguchi Ango’s ‘Idiot’ Analyzed through Corporeal Expressions: From the Standpoint of Interconnection between the Flesh and Mind”] / Shintai hyōgen kara kōsatsu suru Sakaguchi Ango, ‘Hakuchi’: Nikutai to seishin no renraku to iu shiza ni tatte, Kokubungaku kenkyū 139:2003, p. 124-25, p. 128-29.


29. HWANG, [“The Occupation Meets the Flesh Secretly: Postwar Japan in Nikutai no Mon”], op. cit., p. 83.


32. Tamura’s works [To My Homeland] / 故郷へ of 1946 and [Beautiful Eyes] / 美しい眼 of 1947 were censored, with some deletions.

33. TSUKADA, [“Bind one’s sexuality...”], op. cit., p. 49.


the idea of securing the nation’s health rather produced inequality between “respectable” and “unrespectable” women (ibid., p. 349-50).

38. SAS Miryam, Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return, Cambridge, Harvard University Asia Center, 2011, p. 221. Slaymaker also contests the historicizing of such distinctions through the very notion of the “postwar” period, including when the war started and ended; for him and many others the term “postwar” indicates a prolonged time period, beyond just “after WW2.” SLAYMAKER, The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction, op. cit., p. 5-6.

39. SONE, [“Commentary”], op. cit., p. 240.


41. TIAMPO, Gutai..., op. cit., p. 42.

42. SAS, Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan, op. cit., p. 10.


44. Ibid.; Dokumento Gutai, p. 278.


47. This pursuit of originality overlapped with Japan’s position during the war through the suppressive censorship under the Peace Preservation Law / 治安維持法, enacted in 1925, and the Army Art Association / 陸軍美術協会 launched in 1939.


49. In the very short story “Cryptic Coloration,” a scientist and his assistant witness a girl’s skin changing from white to green and then to a skin covered with spots, emulating characters from the book she is reading and reflecting what she sees onto her skin. The doctor explains to her that this is not a sickness but rather realizes the human tendency to mimic coloring. In “Starving Skin,” set in postwar confusion in China, the protagonist deceives Mrs. Kim into believing that she is ill with cryptic coloration and periodically gives her opium pills to keep at his mercy. Both character’s skin color changes, representing their emotions.


51. In the International Sky Festival in 1960, where Gutai artists hung their artworks by balloons in the sky on the roof of the Takashimaya department store in Osaka.


53. See VISSER Tijs, “Mal Communication”, in Gutai: Dipingere con il Tempo e lo Spazio - Painting with Time and Space, KANAYAMA Akira et.al., Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2011, p. 16. The second and third volumes of Gutai journal were discovered in Jackson Pollock’s studio after his death in 1956. Michel Tapié received a copy of Gutai journal through Dōmoto Hisao 室本尚郎, then-Paris-based painter in 1957, in that year. Allan Kaprow also heard of Gutai via another paper medium of sunday edition of New York Times on Osaka exhibitions through his friend Alfred Leslie, gathered further information of Gutai’s work after 1963, and introduced Gutai in 1966. Yves Klein owned set of Gutai periodicals that Yoshihara sent him, including the article on Shiraga’s “Challenging the Mud” in 1955. Klein was in Japan in 1953 to obtain his Judo belt, set up a small temple upon his return to France in 1958, and read the French translation of Daisetsu T. SUZUKI’s book on Zen, including the account on Zen priest Toju NANTÉMPO’s calligraphy, while trying himself body print
by crawling in the pigment to later getting the life model to press onto the large sheet of paper on the ground.


AUTHOR

FUSAKO INNAMI

Fusako Innami is an Associate Professor in Japanese and Performance Studies at the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University. Her research interests include life writing, performance, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, the body and the senses, and translation. Her first monograph, Touching the Unreachable: Writing, Skinship, Modern Japan, appeared in 2021 (the University of Michigan Press). She received her MA from New York University and a DPhil from the University of Oxford.