

Preface

From the spring of 1997 to the end of 1999, an interdisciplinary research team of scholars from over a dozen universities and museums in Japan met bi-monthly at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (IRCJS) to analyze the rich collection of Japanese medical and erotic prints that survive from Edo and Meiji times. The 15th International Symposium held at the IRCJS between January 18-22, 2000 spotlighted one of the central themes of this project: "The Imagination of the Body and the History of Bodily Experience."

The phrase "the imagination of the body" was intended to encompass both the ideas and theories by which the body has been interpreted, and the images by which it has been depicted. The broad aim of the symposium was to explore, from a number of radically different perspectives, the relationship between these theories and images, which approach the body as an object, and the history of embodied experience. The meeting was remarkable not least for its diversity: it brought Japanese researchers together with scholars from Germany, Greece, Italy, Taiwan, Turkey and the United States; and it included specialists in the history of art, history of medicine, history of science, anthropology, philosophy, and literature. And yet as diverse as the gathering was, readers will, I feel sure, find that the papers here echo and respond to each other in rich and unexpected ways, returning time and again to the complex interplay between seeing, representing, and feeling.

In keeping with the spirit of a volume of proceedings, the papers appear in the order in which they were presented at the symposium. Unfortunately, budget constraints and copyright restrictions made such that we were able to reproduce only a portion of the illustrations that accompanied the original talks. On the other hand, those interested in the opening keynote lectures by Sakade Yoshinobu and James Elkins can see and listen to the recorded internet broadcast through the IRCJS homepage (<http://www.nichibun.ac.jp>). Focusing, respectively, on ethereal Chinese visions of the body submerged in flowing qi, and the blood and gore so prominent in modern art and film, these two presentations highlighted from the outset how the human body has historically been imagined in astonishingly diverse ways. But they also converged on a common, highly suggestive conclusion; and that is that in order to comprehend this diversity we must rethink, and perhaps ultimately forego the rigid opposition of the body's inside and outside. We must recognize how the history of seeing the body is inseparable from the history of being persons.

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