

## “Self-Torturous Thresholds” in Post-WWII Japan: Three Thresholds to Queer Japanese Futures

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**Abstract :** This arts-based research is about "self-torture": the interplay of seemingly opposing elements of pain, pleasure, submission, and power. It asserts that "self-torture" can be considered a nontrivial mediation between the aesthetic and the sociopolitical. It explores what the author calls queered self-torture; "self-torture" marked by an ambivalence that allows the oppressed to resist, and their counter-valorization occasionally functions as therapeutic solutions to the problems they highlight and condense. The research goal is to deconstruct normative self-torture and propose queered self-torture as a fertile ground for considering the complexities of desire that allow the oppressed to practice freedom. While "self-torture" manifests in many societies, this research focuses on cultural and national identity in post-WWII Japan using this lens of self-torture, as masochism functions as the very basis for Japanese cultural and national identity to ensure self-preservation. This masochism is defined as an impulse to realize a sense of pride and construct an identity through the acceptance of subordination, shame, and humiliation in the face of an all-powerful Other; the dominant Euro-America. It could be argued that this self-torture is a result of Japanese cultural annihilation and the trauma of the nation's defeat to the US. This is the definition of "self-torturous thresholds," the author's post-WWII Japan psycho-historical diagnosis; when this threshold is crossed, the oppressed begin to torture themselves; the oppressors no longer need to do anything to maintain their power. The oppressed are already oppressing themselves. The term "oppressed" here refers to Japanese individuals and residents of Japan who are subjected to oppressive "white" heteropatriarchal supremacist structures and values that serve colonialist interests. There are three stages in "self-torturous thresholds": (1) the oppressors no longer need to oppress because the oppressed voluntarily commit to self-torture; (2) the oppressed find pleasure in self-torture; and (3) the oppressed achieve queered self-torture, to achieve alternative futures. Using the conceptualization of "self-torture," this research examines and critiques pleasure, desire, capital, and power in postwar Japan, which enables the discussion of the data-colonizing "Moonshot Research and Development program". If the oppressed want to divest from the habits of normative self-torture, which shape what is possible in both our present and future, we need methods to feel and know that the alternative results of self-torture are possible. Phase three will be enacted using Sarah Ahmed's queer methodology to reorient national and cultural identity away from heteronormativity. Through theoretical analysis, textual analysis, archival research, ethnographic interviews, and digital art projects, including experimental documentary as a method to capture the realities of the individuals who are practicing self-torture, this research seeks to reveal how self-torture may become not just a vehicle of pleasure but also a mode of critiquing power and achieving freedom. It seeks to encourage the imaginings of queer Japanese futures, where the marginalized survive Japan's natural and man-made disasters and Japan's Imperialist past and present rather than submitting to the country's continued violence.

**Keywords :** arts-based research, Japanese studies, interdisciplinary arts, queer studies, cultural studies, popular culture, BDSM, sadomasochism, sexuality, VR, AR, digital art, visual arts, speculative fiction

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