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Art, Radioactivity, and Queerness

Since the birth of the atomic age on August 6, 1945, artists in both Japan and the United States have struggled with how to represent radioactivity—its slow, long-term devastation to the body is often resistant to direct depiction. This paper examines how the (ostensibly invisible) threat of nuclear radioactivity has especially intrigued and stymied queer artists. It also explores how artists have drawn connections between HIV/AIDS and nuclear catastrophe as parallel apocalyptic “endings.” I examine how contemporary artists figure radioactively toxic bodies using photography, drawing, experimental video, and performance in order to speculate about the difficulty of imaging (and also imagining) troubled, but also potentially hopeful, futures.