11/2 – “Systems of Writing Things Down: A Book Talk on Writing Technology in Meiji Japan” By Prof. Seth Jacobowitz

Systems of Writing Things Down: A Book Talk on Writing Technology in Meiji Japan

October 18, 2016

When: Wednesday, November 2, 2016 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Where: Sterling Memorial Library (SML), International Room (SML 177) [1]

Speaker: Seth Jacobowitz, Assistant Professor Department of East Asian Languages & Literatures, Yale University

Description: Prof. Jacobowitz will discuss his recent publication, Writing Technology in Meiji Japan: A Media History of Modern Japanese Literature and Visual Culture. The book boldly rethinks the origins of modern
Japanese language, literature, and visual culture from the perspective of media history. Drawing upon
methodological insights by Friedrich Kittler and extensive archival research, it investigates a range of epistemic
transformations in the Meiji era (1868-1912) from the rise of communication networks such as telegraph and post to
debates over national language and script reform. It documents the changing discursive practices and conceptual
constellations that reshaped the verbal, visual and literary regimes from the Tokugawa era. This culminates in the
discovery of a new vernacular literary style from the shorthand transcriptions of theatrical storytelling (rakugo) that
was subsequently championed by major writers such as Masaoka Shiki and Natsume S?seki as the basis for a new
mode of transparently objective, “transcriptive” realism. The birth of modern Japanese literature is thus located not
only in shorthand alone, but within the emergent, multi-media channels that were arriving from the West.

This book represents the first systematic study of the ways in which media and inscriptive technologies available in
Japan at its threshold of modernization in the late 19th to early 20th century shaped and brought into being modern
Japanese literature.


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