

Systems of Writing Things Down: Writing Technology in Meiji Japan



October 20, 2016

All are welcome to join us for the following book talk in the Sterling Memorial Library International Room on Wednesday, November 2, at 4:00 pm.

Professor Seth Jacobowitz, Assistant Professor Department of East Asian Languages & Literatures at Yale, 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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