

The Crisis of Language in Contemporary Japan: Reading, Writing, and New
Technology

Jun Mizukawa

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013

© 2013

Jun Mizukawa

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

The Crisis of Language in Contemporary Japan: Reading, Writing, and New Technology

Jun Mizukawa

My dissertation is an ethnographically inspired theoretical exploration of the crises of reading and writing in contemporary Japan. Each of the five chapters examines concrete instances of reading and writing practices that have been problematized in recent decades. By calling attention to underlying moral assumptions, established sociocultural protocols, and socio-technological conditions of the everyday, I theorize the concept of embodied reading and writing thresholds. The scope of analysis is partly informed by popular discourse decrying a perceived decline in reading and writing proficiency among Japanese youth. This alleged failing literacy figures as a national crisis under the assumption that the futurity of children's national language proficiency metonymically correlates with the future well being of its national cultural body. In light of heightened interests in the past, present, and future of books, and a series of recent state interventions on the prospect of "national" text culture, it is my argument that ongoing tensions surrounding the changing media landscape and semiotic relations to the world do not merely reflect changes in styles of language, structures of spatiotemporal awareness, or forms of knowledge production. Rather, they indicate profound transformations and apprehensions among the lives mediated and embodied by the very system of signification that has come under scrutiny in the post-Lost Decade Japan (03/1991-01/2002).

My dissertation offers an unique point of critical intervention into 1) various

forms of tension arising from the overlapping media technologies and polarized population, 2) formations of reading and writing body (embodiment) at an intersection of heterogeneous elements and everyday disciplining, 3) culturally specific conditions and articulations of the effects of “universal” technologies, 4) prospects of “proper” national reading and writing culture, and 5) questions of cultural transformation and transmission. I hope that the diverse set of events explored in respective chapters provide, as a whole, a broader perspective of the institutional and technological background as well as an intimate understanding of culturally specific circumstances in Japan. Insofar as this is an attempt to conduct a nuanced inquiry into the culturally specific configurations and articulations of a global phenomenon, each ethnographic moment is carefully contextualized to reflect Japan specific conditions while avoiding the pitfall of culturalist assumptions. Understanding how an existing system of representation, technological imperatives and sociohistorical predicaments have coalesced to form a unique constellation is the first step in identifying how the practice of reading and writing becomes a site of heated national debate in Japan. Against theories that problematize the de-corporealizing effects of digital technology within reading and writing, I emphasize the material specificity of contemporary reading and writing practices.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Embodied Connoisseurship	45
Chapter Two: It's Me! It's Me!	97
Chapter Three: Disorder of the Mind	140
Chapter Four: <i>Kanji no yure</i> – A Space of Indeterminacy	192
Chapter Five: Breath and Strokes	243
Conclusion	295
Bibliography	306
Appendices	319

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Words can hardly express my gratitude; I am nonetheless compelled to proceed with my thanks to the following people.

I believe it to be my good fortune to have been able to work under the guidance of an inspiring advisor, Professor Marilyn Ivy in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. I am deeply grateful for her continuous support, insightful suggestions and generous mentoring through and through. I would like to thank Professor John Pemberton for introducing me to many conceptual foundations for this project. I am also thankful for Professor Tomiko Yoda, Professor Thomas Looser, and Professor Michael Taussig for agreeing to serve on my committee.

The department of Anthropology Sheldon Scheps Memorial Library Research Grant funded my preliminary research in 2004 and 2005. For twenty months in 2007 and 2008, Social Science Research Council—International Dissertation Research Fellowship enabled me to stay without interruption to conduct my dissertation fieldwork in Japan. When it was time for a follow-up research in 2009, Columbia University Weatherhead East Asian Institute Weatherhead Ph.D. Training Grant came through to make it happen.

I am forever indebted to Yasuo Hatsugai and his son Yasuyuki, Kōnosuke Hashiguchi, Ryōta Saito, Shigeki Yoshida, and Yukio Nishiaki for their interests in my work, hospitality and candid mentoring during my fieldwork in Kanda Jimbō-chō. Special thanks to the members of Tokyo Kōten-kai and Tokyo Kosho Kumiai, without whose understanding and support, I would never have been able to set a foot inside their headquarters and auctions. I am grateful for rare friendship extended to me by Kazuhiro

Yamaji, Maki Uehara, and Tomoaki and Yuki Tatsumi during my research in Tokyo and thereafter. I also thank Professor David Slater at Sophia University and staff at the Institute of Comparative Culture at Sophia University for their assistance during my fieldwork in Tokyo. Needless to say, many who remain unnamed also helped me complete this journey as I moved back and forth between Tokyo and New York, from New York to Boston, and finally from Boston to our current home Chicago. I could not have been here without them.

I was fortunate to have a number of opportunities to present my work at various stages of dissertation writing, where I encountered sobering critique and received invaluable advice. I owe some of my major rethinking to the participants who have either read drafts of the chapters or generously engaged in congenial dialogues with me at workshops below: *From Fieldwork to Text* at Columbia University, *Infrastructure Workshop* at University of Chicago, *Japan at Chicago: ReMediations I&II* at University of Chicago, and *Writing Workshop* at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

To my parents, Hajime and Michiyo Mizukawa, my sister, Yuki, my parents-in-law, James and Rochelle Fisch, and my adopted parents in Tokyo, Masaki and Yukiko Yanagita for their good humor, numerous care packages, and most of all, their undying faith in me.

To Frederick for reminding me everyday at 5 p.m. that it is time to put down the pen (figuratively speaking) and feed him, and that there is a life beyond the computer screen.

To my son, Kai, for coming into our lives.

And, to my husband, Michael, for everything else.

Note to the reader

Wahon is a generic term used among the antiquarian booksellers in Japan when referring to the pre-Meiji publication and the style of bindings. Although some historians make a distinction between *kinsei* and *kindai* by giving a chronological specificity by designating a term, early-modern for *kinsei* and modern for *kindai*, in this dissertation for the convenience of the argument, I will describe *wahon* as “pre-modern” publication in accordance with the understanding that the dawn of modernity arrived in Japan with the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Kanji is another term that makes a repeated appearance in this dissertation. Since a direct translation of *kanji* is Chinese characters, the term, Chinese characters, is usually used in English publications. However, at the risk of burdening the reader, I will use *kanji* instead of Chinese characters in order to provide consistency to the discussions of the dissertation. On occasion when I use the term, Chinese characters, the use is with reference to Chinese characters used in other East Asian languages. In sum, my use of the term, *kanji*, is always in reference to and within the context of discussions on Japanese language and the reading and writing practices in Japan.

All the translations from Japanese texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

Whenever I consider beneficial to the reader, I cite terms and passages in the original Japanese (rendered in romanization and/or Japanese scripts).

All names in this dissertation are cited with given names first, followed by family names, including the names of the scholars not published in English, for the sake of uniformity.

Throughout this dissertation, I employ the term “analog” and “digital.” Often time, it is used as a prefix to specify a sociocultural and technological generation, and the designation alludes to the underlying logic of an alleged divide. Although the categories of “analog” and “digital” are self-referential when used to portray a certain group of population in Japan, my use the word “analog” and “digital” with regard to technological generation assumes the following logic. On the one hand, analog technology has an indexical relation between the medium and the script, which focuses on what stems from sensorial input and understands body as a channeling medium thus foregrounding the immediacy of the bodily materiality. On the other hand, digital technology forces what is imperceptible to eyes (or undetectable to sensorial normal/natural capacities) to become “rendered” or “converted” so that we can see the “effect” of the algorithmic calculation. This makes the secondary layer of mediation more pronounced, as the “effect” is how we perceive the technological intervention.

Introduction

The nuclear crisis in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami brought to the foreground the troubling questions of literacy in contemporary Japan. Put simply, an individual's ability to read and comprehend new registers of information became a matter of life and death. Consequently, the event saw residents of Japan trying to protect themselves from the invisible threat of radiation in various ways, either by keeping apace with the constant media broadcast on the state of the nuclear meltdown and the subsequent fallout, or taking advantage of an expanding digital information sphere. What this event and its aftermath announced was that in the space of Japan's post-3.11 everyday, an individual's welfare had become implicitly but unavoidably contingent on the ability to master new kinds of literacy: a proficiency in gaining access to the right information, understanding it in the right context, and making the right decisions about something as mundane as where to shop for grocery or which streets to walk home in order to avoid radiation hotspots. Not surprisingly, the strain caused by such worries has fallen unevenly on people with different abilities and resources. Those with greater financial means, mobility, and more favorable socioeconomic connections have fared better, relatively speaking, than those with fewer options. As a result, a noticeable socioeconomic divide has surfaced. Incidentally, a kind of "literacy gap" has also appeared alongside this unfortunate aftereffect. While media-savvy *netizens* actively utilize a politically vibrant digital sphere not only to exchange information but also to

mobilize street demonstrations in solidarity with other citizens' groups, those who are not nearly in sync with the latest media landscape mostly rely passively on mainstream media to keep them abreast of the situation. In other words, those who are socio-technologically proficient manage to obtain an arguably more balanced read on the situation by gathering information, evaluating official claims vis-à-vis unofficial reports, and making necessary arrangements to ensure or improve their safety. In the meantime, those who are unable to access the same variety and volume of information often experience a form of ignorance much the same way illiteracy has traditionally afflicted those with limited reading skills. Although a form of literacy gap has been on the rise for the past couple of decades, slowly separating readers and writers of Japanese into two different socio-generationally identifiable groups, namely "analog" and "digital" generations, in the post-3.11 Japan, a literacy gap has taken on the additional character as that which dictates an individual's access to qualitatively different kinds of information as well as participation in a burgeoning anti-nuclear sociopolitical sphere. The banality of this new type of literacy gap distills a problematic I hereby refer to as troubled state of reading in contemporary Japan.

Crises of Reading and Writing

This dissertation is an ethnographically inspired, theoretical exploration into the crises of reading and writing in contemporary Japan. Specifically, the discussions revolve around questions of reading thresholds. Each of the five chapters composing the dissertation examines concrete instances of reading and writing practices that have been either troubled or problematized in the recent decade in Japan. As I trace the sociohistorical context in which these events transpire, I call attention to the underlying

moral assumptions, expected practices, and sources of confusion. I believe that the dissertation offers an unique point of discussion for 1) various forms of tension arising from the overlapping media technologies and polarized population, 2) formations of the reading and writing body in an intersection with heterogeneous elements and everyday disciplining, 3) culturally specific conditions and articulations of the effects of “universal” technologies, and 4) the prospect of “proper” national reading and writing culture. By the time the reader reaches the conclusion, I hope that the seemingly disconnected events explored in respective chapters as a whole will provide both a broader perspective on the institutional and technological background, and an intimate understanding of culturally specific circumstances that have compelled different reading and writing practices to become a site of heated national debates.

While these events and phenomena are themselves worthy of investigation as points of contention and negotiation about what is a “proper” reading and writing threshold for the Japanese, the real significance of the events is that they are symptomatic of the *keitai* (Japanese smartphone) era, which curiously coincides with the post-bubble economy era of the 1990s’ in Japan marked by socioeconomic predicaments and pervasive anxieties. Particularly, morally inflected discourses of the crises of failing “national language proficiency” (*kokugo ryoku*) among the youth and misgivings largely expressed by the “analog” generation about their (in)competence in a new media climate have been a compelling force behind pronounced anxiety-ridden discourses.

Contemporary experiences of everyday Japanese reading and writing are profoundly influenced by the available technologies and services provided by densely networked communication media industries and infrastructure. For instance, a page after page of

aggregate information, an endless stream of digital sound bite-esque textual bites, a continuously appearing slew of attention grabbing advertisements, and strategically located hyperlinks are all familiar tools and aspects of digital reading and writing interface. The ocean of information presumably stored securely in an ever-expanding digital archive exudes exaggerated confidence that much of what the viewers need and want to know is only a few finger taps away, equally accessible and effortlessly digestible to all. But, is it really so? Given that individuals have developed an extended threshold for processing an increased volume of online communication traffic, have they attained a proportionate increase in a qualitatively better procurement of information and knowledge? With the advent of Youtube, Twitter, Tumblr, Vimeo and other numerous World Wide Web interactive news stream sites and networking services, understanding specific historical contexts, political connotations, and social ramifications of digital transmissions and broadcasting have become even more critical than the task of deciphering the content itself. Perhaps, more than the need to systematically apply a syntactical analysis, effectively interpreting the overall semantics of information exchange is an even more pressing matter, if we want to be genuinely proficient in this heavily mediated space of the everyday. Today, reading has come to mean effective information processing at one level. In other words, individual reading ability suffers greatly without proper awareness of digital mediation-specific protocols, an appropriate level of technological proficiency, and a sufficient degree of receptivity to digital cultural references.

Reading Thresholds

I would like to take a moment to explain why I choose to formulate the set of inquiries examined here through the concept of “threshold.” First of all, my investigative approach has been greatly inspired by the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s suggestion that all recording media have recording thresholds, and that what can and cannot be recorded is technologically determined. This premise also posits that information falling outside of the parameters set by respective thresholds will remain unrecorded, un-registered, un-recognized, and therefore un-read.¹ Since successful reading usually happens only when something is properly recorded, registered, and recognized, the idea of threshold seems especially befitting for the present investigation. However, in order to better situate the concept of threshold in my analysis, I expand Kittler’s use of “recording media” to include more than what is normally associated with the word. For example, in some cases, I refer to technologies of inscription with different recording and storage capacity—such as the Japanese *kana*-typewriter, the Japanese electric word processor called *waapuro*, and *keitai*—as recording apparatuses. In other instances, I discuss both the corporeal and mental capacity of Japanese readers and writers as a principal attribute of recording media. The basic thinking behind this liberal interpretation is that in order for an object to become a subject of investigation, it must first and foremost be recognized as such and approached accordingly. By giving equal consideration and credence to different recording technologies and bodies under the rubric of recording media while insisting on the specificities of each and its individual materiality and logic, I hope to identify distinctive manifestations and articulation of

¹ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990); Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, *Writing Science* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

thresholds as well as the conditions and processes in which each threshold is defined. This will help establish how confusion of transcription, translation, and transmission occurs across different generations of people and media technologies, troubling their thresholds.

Secondly, insofar as a threshold is a tentatively stipulated perimeter, it is inherently more receptive to changes. I might even advocate that threshold already anticipates future technological progresses and possibilities of previously unknown materials to be discovered, recorded and made available. I believe that such a protean potential in threshold is more theoretically robust and interesting than the idea of limit, which feels a little more definitive. Insofar as changes are expected in the material conditions of reading and writing, the idea of threshold is more conducive to a continuous recalibrating of practices that transpire.

Thirdly, throughout this dissertation, my approach treats reading and writing as thoroughly embodied practices. Since neither reading nor writing is an innate skill, I insist on characterizing them as highly habituated forms of everyday art that require a constant disciplining not only of eyes, but also of bodies situated in a particular constellation of sociocultural and technopolitical milieus. What I call reading threshold is hence a form of acquired reading and writing proficiency that is also subject to formal and informal interventions. Following this logic, my analysis tries to encompass different aspects of mediating technologies, including materiality, mechanism, and logic as significant attributes that come into interaction with reading and writing bodies. After all, questions of reading and writing cannot be sufficiently addressed without studying the functions of recording apparatuses and the capacity of their respective recording

thresholds. This particular angle is in alignment with the present attempt to both situate and appreciate a reading and writing body beyond the purview of conventional discourses concerning creative agency and subjectivity. However, my intention is not to theorize anti-subjectivity. Rather, it is to contribute to a critical exploration that underscore the importance of the corporeality of a reader and writer, the function of official and unofficial disciplining, the element of automaticity inherent to the practice, and the materiality of a medium through which reading and writing takes place.

If a reading and writing body is a kind of recording media, then literacy as a form of acquired sociocultural receptivity and proficiency could be considered analogous to the threshold of a recording medium. In the most rudimentary sense of the word, literacy and threshold both operate on the assumption that something falls either in or outside of the parameters of recognition. Recognition hinges on many things, but previous and perhaps repeated exposure contributes to forming a solid ground for identification. In reading and writing, recognition can be ascertained when legibility translates into intelligibility. Or, one might describe that a recording media is successfully “reading” the information, when it captures the sound and image and renders it audible and visible to a viewer. In both cases, the ability to read determines successful absorption and processing of information. Given the extent at which reading and writing practices are predicated upon the function of the eyes as a principal, not a sole, arbiter, I am also defining literacy and threshold broadly to mean that together they amount to something comparable with perception. On this, I draw much insight from a discussion by the modern art theorist, Jonathan Crary who describes “vision and its effects” as “inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of

certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification.”² Building on this thesis, I hope to situate the reading and writing body at the nexus of diverse mediating forces and materiality.

While changes in the practice of reading and writing have attracted much attention since the introduction of portable digital communication devices all over the world, few have grappled exclusively with a question of reading and writing practices. Through my expanded notion of literacy and threshold, I ask both general and specific questions such: What exactly do we mean when we say we “read” or “write”? What are the implicit assumptions regarding a national cultural identity vis-à-vis Japan’s widely acclaimed 99.9% literacy rate? What discursively constitutes “good” and “proper” reading and writing, through penmanship, brush-movement and digital manipulation? How does state intervene in the formation of “proper” reading and writing subjects? Even after acquiring a minimum level of literacy and writing proficiency, readers and writers must continue to learn and re-learn while making necessary adjustments in order to stay competent in a changing media landscape. Since different formats of text and forms of media profoundly affect the way reading and writing takes place, should we not expect the experience of using iPhone, iPad, kindle, nook, laptop, desktop, and other digital devices to vary as well? Already, diligent readers and writers have become aware of the fact that depending on what they read, they must apply different modes of engagement with a text. Reading may require a simple scanning and skimming or the judicious supplementing with visual aids. And sometimes, it is enough for the reader to simply indulge in the thrill of narrative development and enjoy the poetics and aesthetics of the

² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, 1st MIT Press paperback ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 5.

writing. While a reader may continue to make use of all the “traditional” reading techniques, he or she is also obliged to acquire new techniques that provide qualitatively different spatiotemporal and textual experiences. This is why attention to both contents and forms of media is critical. On the one hand, I relate to the question of legibility and intelligibility as a way of analyzing how overlapping technologies create confusion and challenges to an existing sociocultural paradigm. On the other hand, my investigation tries to imagine reading and writing as an embodied practice, which is subject to sociocultural idiosyncrasies, technological advancement, and state-led pedagogical endeavors to disciplining a national subject with an appropriate level of reading and writing proficiency. Practices of reading and writing are thus understood as sensory experience as well as manifestations of the sociotechnological conditions of the everyday.

Equally important to note is that the question of reading and writing is about different instances of mediation as well. As a form of cultural transmission and transformation, issues concerning bodies and embodiment, questions of sociality, and possibilities of new spatiotemporal experiences and configurations, questions of mediation compel and challenge us to respond in some ways. Amidst a great deal of excitement and anticipation surrounding the future of a global digital network, a popular discourse known as the “Youth Abandoning Print and Text” (*wakamono no katsuji banare*)³ has gained momentum among schoolteachers and conservative politicians in

³ Strictly speaking, *katsuji* means printing type used at letterpress printing. A phenomenon of the “Youth Abandoning Print and Text” (*wakamono no katsuji banare*) characterizes a discursively identified tendency among the younger generation to read less and less newspapers, books, classic literature, literary weekly/monthly journals and other printed matters. The putative decline in the younger generation’s readerly capacity is often corroborated by anecdotal evidence, and most of the claims against their unreaderly constitution are substantiated by a dramatic sales drop reported by the publishing industry and the government issued White Paper in the last decade. However, the accuracy with which such figures mirror the

Japan, who bemoan the putative decline in reading and writing proficiency among youth. Notwithstanding the veracity of their claims, the discourse is at least helpful in recognizing two issues that are troubling contemporary Japan: pervasive anxieties about changing reading and writing practices, and growing intergenerational tensions. It is my argument that ongoing tensions surrounding the changing media landscape and our symbolic relations to the world do not merely reflect changes in styles of language, structures of spatiotemporal relation and awareness, or forms of knowledge production. They indicate profound transformations and apprehensions among the lives mediated and embodied by the very system of signification that has come under scrutiny.

In unpacking the pervasive discourse of the “Youth Abandoning Print and Text,” my first task was to consider the meaning of *katsuji*, which I have provisionally translated

actual reading practices among the ‘younger generation’ is debatable since the sources of information and reading material have multiplied in the last decade, depriving the traditional print media sources of a privileged status. The expression of the “Youth Abandoning Print and Text” itself appears as early as 1984 in Japanese newspapers. Regardless the veracity of the expression, it is still a convincing and influential concept, which carries a moral undercurrent. In a letter to the editor, a twenty-one year old male student living in Tama City divulges his shameful reading habit in which he customarily relies on study-guides rather than patiently perusing through the original texts. Picking out *Theory of Escape* by Asada Akira from his own bookshelf, he ponders over what it means to be a part of the generation that takes “A light journey toward the intellectual frontier,” an advertising pitch printed on the spine. While there is no question about his sincerely in wanting to acknowledge his mindless participation in abandoning print/text, his disappointment with country’s educational institutions that allowed such a lax academic training is evident in his self-mocking tone. By way of concluding the letter, he makes one last remark on another despicable trait of his generation, ‘After all, we are a generation of seeking high productivity without effort.’ His voluntary admission to being a youth ‘abandoning print/text’ is both illuminating and suggestive of a moral underpinning that somehow *shames* him. “Rou sukunakushite minori nomi tsuikyuu (Seeking High Productivity Without Effort).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 1984. Although the older generation seems universally liable to lament and complain about the younger generation, around the mid-1980s openly reproachful letters and editorials began appearing periodically against the waxing tide of multimedia society and waning ‘reading culture’ owing to the “Youth Abandoning Print and Text” pandemic. Twice in 1984, once in 1985 and again twice in 1987, similar letters and editorials appeared in Asahi Newspaper: *Asahi Shimbun Newspaper*. 1984. Resurrect “Pronunciation in Kana Rubies” Next to Kanji to Ward Off the “Youth Abandoning Text and Print. October 27, Editorial. *Asahi Shimbun Newspaper*. 1985. Youth, Spring and Culture. April 17, Editorial. *Asahi Shimbun Newspaper*. 1987. Utilizing Newspaper Article as Class Supplement. October 14, Editorial. *Asahi Shimbun Newspaper*. 1987. “Abundant Books” Cannot be Equated with Fuller Life. October 28, Editorial.

as “print and text.” Admittedly, this is an awkward translation since the literal translation is “(printed) type.” Nonetheless, whenever *katsuji* is mentioned in promotional pamphlets distributed by national and local government offices and the proponents of increased reading time among the schoolchildren, it implicitly but consistently refers to printed matters, such as newspaper and books, especially important literary works (fiction, non-fiction, essay). In other words, *katsuji* in this context means both “(printed) type” and “text,” with an unequivocal emphasis on “printed.” Therefore, in my analysis, I examine a wide range of texts: antiquarian book colophons and titles, bookstore catalogs, index cards, telephone transcriptions, government archival documents, individual family registrations and criminal records, school classroom essays, *keitai* text-messages, blogs, online postings, handwritten notes, and calligraphy compositions. Texts are broadly conceived as embodiments of often highly habitualized reading and writing practices, which are neither solely passive nor active in nature. Insofar as texts considered here are “written” materials, it is especially important for me to pay close attention to the material specificities of respective medium involved. Instead of writing myself into an epistemological cul-de-sac, I seek to introduce some troubling and hopefully productive elements to the discussion of the voice and text and questions of their primacy and secondariness. Hence, my intention is to explore the tension and complexities of the issues further.

A few words to qualify the objective of this dissertation: this dissertation is not about unpacking a semiotic logic behind what I call a reading threshold. What it tries to do is to pursue a possibility of imagining a body that is constituted by a field of heterogeneous elements, a body “supplemented” by different forces that resist being

inscribed in symbolic representation. It is about a threshold that needs to be acquired and continuously honed in. I am interested in teasing out what underlies the tensions that arise between inscription and transcription, identification and mis-identification, conversion and mis-conversion, and transmission and reception. While Kittler gestures to this tension via his discussion of signal to noise, he never fully addresses the sociocultural ramifications within the everyday context associated with thresholds. I find instances of confusion to be highly productive as mistakes often offer a valuable point of critical intervention. But more importantly, my analysis of the use of *kanji* in terms of a space of indeterminacy (*kanji no yure* – a space of formal fluctuation of *kanji*) in Japanese language composition brings to light the eternally provisional relationship of heterogeneous elements of *kanji* that greatly influences how reading threshold becomes established.

Finally, the dissertation hopes to offer alternative to theories that suggest that universal digital technology and new communication media contribute to a genuinely democratic discussion forum and cultural homogeneity. To conduct a nuanced inquiry into the culturally specific configurations of a global phenomenon, each ethnographic moment is contextualized to demonstrate how Japan specific conditions give rise to Japan specific articulations. The key to appreciating Japan's idiosyncrasy lies in understanding how an existing system of representation, technological imperatives and sociohistorical predicaments since the late 1990s has coalesced to form a unique constellation, situating the practice of reading and writing within the discourse of national culture, establishing a correlation between conventions of reading and writing and the formation of national subjects. Against theories that problematize the de-corporealizing effects of digital

technology within reading and writing, I emphasize the material specificity of contemporary reading and writing practices.

Sites and Period of Fieldwork

The main argument developed here is built on ethnographic observations made in the summer 2004 and 2005 during my preliminary dissertation fieldwork, an extended dissertation fieldwork between January 2007 and August 2008, and a follow-up research I conducted in Tokyo, Japan. During the twenty-month fieldwork, I was fortunate enough to have been able to maintain congenial working relationships simultaneously with a few groups of people located at different sites on a regular basis. However, I spent the largest portion of my time conducting participant observation as a store clerk among the members of the Tokyo Antiquarian Bookseller's Association (TABA) in Kanda Jimbō-chō (a neighborhood in the heart of Tokyo considered to be the 'Mecca' of antiquarian bookstores) and as a fellow practitioner among a group of urban practitioners of Japanese calligraphy. I have also worked closely with, albeit with less frequency in comparison with the first two groups, a number of schoolteachers and students, urban as well as suburban Tokyoites, and professionals in the publishing and communication media industry. Through structured interviews and open-ended conversations, I have not only come to realize the complexities and dynamics of society in a state of technogenerational flux, but also to appreciate the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and frustrations expressed by my informants.

Although my field sites and informants are physically disconnected, they are thematically connected by shared interests in the current state as well as the future possibilities of reading and writing practices in Japan. Intimate knowledge of pre-modern

books and techniques of reading patiently relayed to me by a group of antiquarian booksellers of Kanda Jimbō-chō helped me appreciate the art of apprenticeship. I have also been able to see first hand how the connoisseurship of a traditional form of media production and exchange becomes fully embodied by the antiquarian booksellers. State-funded symposiums and educational programs hosted at a number of libraries and public institutions provided excellent hands-on material, which details the steps taken by municipalities and schools to improve students' reading proficiency and writing skills against so-called failing "national language competence." Numerous discussions I had with ordinary Tokyoites, parents and schoolteachers on the issues of students' *keitai*-mediated reading and writing practices were tremendously helpful in identifying concerns for emerging *keitai*-culture and challenges met in and outside of school classroom reading and writing practices. In a climate where scandalous reporting of youthful deviations from a proper reading and writing practice is one of news media's all-time favorite activities, tech-savvy children are portrayed either at peril of exploitation and victimhood, or the criminal masterminds and harbingers of the cyber-culture upon which the future of national culture hinges. At the time of my research, the latter portrayal was gaining ground as more and more children were found to have devised ways of evading supervision by parents whose well-intended vigilance was unmatched by their technological ineptitude. I suspect that the anxieties harbored by these adults are in fact a refraction of their sense of helplessness. In addition, interviews with a marketing research team at *Jeki* (Japan Railway East Japan Planning), a product designer at a major *keitai* manufacturer, and several editors at mid-size publishers have offered insights as to how the incorporation of new communication media informs novel forms of spatiotemporal

experience in Tokyo. For one thing, a glimpse into how the commercial industry competes and collaborates to capitalize on this new market has cautioned me against underestimating the practicalities and logistics of “being mobile” afforded by the public infrastructure. At the same time, it reminded me to take account of the industry’s involvement in facilitating the acceptance and establishment of some reading and writing practices rather than others. I have tried to situate these findings within a larger sociohistorical framework by reviewing articles on related issues in the major Japanese newspapers of the past three decades. Lastly, but not in the least, monthly calligraphy classes under the guidance of a teacher named Master Sakuta were a constant reminder that one’s rhythm and breath (i.e. breathing techniques) play a critical role in instilling good cadence in a calligraphic body. Together, these multiple spheres converge to offer an unusual site of exploration into the discursive production of a proper national body, emergent spatiotemporality and sensorial experiences of reading and writing, and the various forms of mediations in contemporary Japan, which are all instrumental in forming a particular calibration of reading and writing threshold.

Needless to say, the politics and poetics of reading and writing have been major topics in Japan. In particular, the subject of “Japanese” reading and writing in connection with the “origin” of Japanese culture and identity has been extensively studied and theorized by a number of prominent scholars. Apart from Sakai, I have briefly mentioned earlier, Tomiko Yoda’s astute observation and thorough analyses on the cultural significance of *The Tale of Genji* reveals that the discipline of *kokubungaku* (national literature studies) has, through an intricate and often contentious sociopolitical maneuvering, firmly established a link among “national culture, literary tradition, and

women/femininity.”⁴ Since the advocates of national literary studies uphold literature to be “both the hallmark of human civilization in general and the expression of a discreet national culture,” they conclude that “(A)ny nation worthy of civilizational status, in other words, must possess a unique literary tradition.”⁵ For Japan, *The Tale of Genji* is an exemplary expression of a “unified and the alleged organic wholeness of” Japanese identity.⁶ Hence, it should come as no surprise that the stakes in drawing up a proper trajectory for Japan’s digital reading and writing culture have been high during this transitional period. Fortunately for me, during the time of my research, there was a considerable amount of media coverage on a wide range of issues regarding the past, present and future of books, and a series of significant state interventions into the prospect of “national” text culture. To begin with, in July 2005, the presiding members of the Diet unanimously passed legislation to preserve and promote traditional print text culture.⁷ Inconsistent with the state’s economic and political imperatives to expedite a “digital information society” (*dejitaru jyōhō shakai*), the new state mandate allocated sizable financial support for local public libraries to ensure the success of various state-funded initiatives to improve children’s “analog” reading and writing proficiency. New

⁴ Tomiko Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

⁵ Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity*, 5. This is an underlying assumption beyond the discourse of the “Youth Abandoning Letter and Text,” which is buttressed by government-supported programs that draws a correlation among the prosperity of the national literature, national culture and national subject.

⁶ Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity*, 7.

⁷ Passing the bill to “preserve and promote traditional print text culture” (*moji katsuji bunka shinkō hō*) comes across as being inconsistent with the state’s own effort to introduce a radical socio-technological transformation. However, the very commitment to defend culture of publishing and reading in actual print stems from none other than the very success in transitioning to a new media-led society.

directives also aimed to preempt children's involvement in notorious new digital criminality by inculcating them with the moral and legal consequences of digital copyrights infringement (i.e. cut-and-paste plagiarism and illegal file-sharing), social faux pas (i.e. taunting via flaming or text message), and the danger of visiting adult content sites.

A mission statement released by an alliance, *Characters Culture Promotion Organization* (*moji katsuji bunka suishin kikō*), founded in support of the 2005 legislation—the Twenty-first Century Text Culture Project for the preservation and promotion of text culture—warns that a failure to preserve traditional print culture foreshadows the dissolution of the foundation upon which a sound democracy prospers.⁸ An alleged failing national language competence among the youth becomes a national crisis because the futurity of children's national language proficiency metonymically correlates with the future well being of its national cultural body. My project partly responds to the sense of urgency with which the Japanese national text culture has been re-configured during this time. The reader might wonder if I intend to argue either pros or cons of these changes. Rest assured, rather, my goal is to ask how sociocultural context informs changes and perceptions of change in reading and writing practices so that I may better understand the nature of changes. Insofar as *keitai* and pre-modern books exemplify formal differences, they are depicted as seemingly occupying polar opposites. The juxtaposition is done merely to highlight the differences in materiality, interface, implicit assumptions about reading and writing protocols, and supporting socioeconomic structures that facilitate production, distribution and consumption. It is intended to put

⁸ The complete mission statement is found at their website: http://www.mojikatsuji.or.jp/gaiyou_laisatsu-shushi.html#g2. (Last Accessed on May 15, 2013)

our current “crises” in historical perspective, not to favor or reminisce one way or the other.

Sociopolitical conditions of the post-Lost Decade (2000~)

Why do I repeatedly single out the 1990s as a pivotal moment in Japan’s sociotechnological climate? It is because the 1990s marks the beginning of the infamous decade known as Japan’s Lost Decade. What is Japan’s Lost Decade? Briefly, the term usually refers to the years of 1991 to 2000 after the land price bubble abruptly collapsed in Japan. The sudden demise of the 1980s high economic growth and conspicuous consumption left Japan in socioeconomic turmoil with insolvent banks and widespread bankruptcies. So what makes turn of the century post-Lost Decade a particularly fitting point of departure for the purpose of this investigation? Though having somehow survived the post-bubble era economic recession and political stagnation of the 1990s, the conditions of the post-Lost Decade were complicated not only by a number of crises precipitated by socioeconomic and demographic transitions, but also by tensions around emerging technogenerational gaps. The 2007 historic en masse retirement of the first post-WWII baby boomer generation known as *dankai no sedai* —a generation most strongly associated with a period of epoch-making postwar economic recovery and political fervor—had significant repercussions for Japan. For one, it necessitated a large scale corporate restructuring and social reshuffling, which took place on top of an already shaky economy that had recently undergone structural reorganization and liquidation. Moreover, in the face of increasing disparity between a growing geriatric population and a declining birthrate, a seemingly insurmountable financial obligation promised by the National Pension Plan put the issues of future sustainability of the *dankai no sedai*

pension beneficiaries and their livelihood in serious doubt. Suddenly, the prospect of a retirement that the *dankai no sedai* had worked hard for was fast withering. For a society trying to shed a pervasive “feeling of hopeless social entrapment” (*shakaiteki heisokukan*),⁹ a phrase popularly used to characterize the post-Lost Decade social ambiance, the global imperatives to expedite a shift from analog to digital technologies also posed considerable logistical pressure, adding tremendous anxieties to the soon-to-be-retired, technically-challenged *dankai no sedai* generation.

At last, the tension culminated in a major scandal involving Japan’s cornerstone social welfare program, the National Pension Plan, when a large number of future retirees’ claims to years of accumulated dividend were denied at the municipal Social Insurance Agency offices because the official files confirming their enrollment had been lost amid digital-archivization. In the absence of official documents authenticating their lawful beneficiary status, it was decided that even the meticulously kept personal copies of National Pension Plan booklets alone were not enough to substantiate the beneficiaries’ claims. This ended up undermining an already suffering public confidence in the government and its digitalization project. By then the *dankai no sedai*’s departure from the front line had already marked an end of a postwar historic reign during which Japan

⁹ When or where exactly a compound word “a feeling of hopeless entrapment” (*shakaiteki heisokukan*) was first employed is unknown, but began appearing in mid-1990s in relation to economic stagnation and rising juvenile crime rate. However, during my fieldwork, it was used almost invariably with reference to issues of growing socio-economic inequality, rising suicide rate, worsening economic recession, and soaring crime rate. People seemed to rely on this term to convey a pronounced sense of distress they saw Japan as a nation was experiencing, even if they did not feel the same way about their own lives. Given the post-Lost Decade economic climate, it is quite telling that the term even appeared in one of the press statements released in December 2008 by Japan Productivity Center (*Nihon seisansei honbu*), a third-sector agency. According to their press release, consuming sense of ‘hopeless entrapment’ can only be overcome by immediate governmental action toward securing 1) stable employment, 2) labor-management cooperation, and 3) fair distribution of company profit. Only then can hope and bright future prospect return to Japan. See “Emergency Press Release: Quest for Resolving an Issue of Unstable Employment,” (2008): 2.

rose to a global market competition with economic robustness and industrial ingenuity. A momentous handover from *dankai no sedai* to *dankai junia* (*dankai junior*) & *rosuto-jenerēshon*¹⁰ (Lost-decade generation) generation heralded the beginning of another era in which the national foundational narrative rested not on glory but rather notoriety in the wake of the Lost Decade trauma and the prognosis of future un-sustainability.

In this particular socioeconomic climate, the current social malaise can be seen as symptomatic of a burgeoning sense of helplessness and frustration originating in an ostensible media literacy gap between a self-professed “analog generation” and a intuitively tech-attuned youth perfunctorily referred to as “digital generation.”¹¹ The source of anxiety-ridden discourses about the uncertain futurity of the national body as manifested in the unsustainable National Pension Plan and culture as equated with the perceived media literacy gap is commonly misconstrued as having to do with each generation’s varying receptivity to and adeptness in keeping up with the technological

¹⁰ *Dankai junia* (The first postwar baby boomer generation junior) refers to children born mostly in the early to mid 1970s to *dankai no sedai* parents. As a result, they are sometimes called, *dainiji bebī būmā sedai* (Second postwar baby boomer generation). On the other hand, *Rosuto-jenerēshon* (Lost Generation) is used to describe people born between 1970 and 1984, with an implicit emphasis on the children born in the latter 1970s and early 1980s, who graduated from two-year college or four-year university during Japan’s Lost Decade (between 1990-2000) era. It must be noted that the use of, Lost Generation, in Japanese does not either reflect the same ideological inclination or coincide with the socio-historical context observed in the United States. Instead, the original connotation for “lost” stems from the post-bubble era of the ‘Lost Decade.’ Typically, *rosu-jene*’s job-hunting effort in the fresh out of school years was severely hindered by a dire job shortage and increasing unemployment rate at the time. Although by mid-2000 the job market did eventually improve, the experience during a period of 1995-2005, what is now known as *chō hyōgaki* (extreme ice age) or *shūshoku hyōgaki* (employment ice age), has left its long trail on *rosu-jene*’s professional career which continues to suffer from irreversible handicap. Owing to the crush of the global economy in 2008-2009, some self-claimed *precariat* (precarious+proletariat) have been actively involved in the political sphere. Publication of the extreme left magazine, *Rosujene*, is a way to reach out to a larger *rosujene* population in Japan.

¹¹ Although the division between analog and digital generation is loosely drawn, demographically speaking, anybody belonging to the age group of *dankai no sedai* and up is considered “analog” generation.

evolution. Changes instantiated by the relentless intervention and saturation of new media certainly put an emphasis on the practical imperatives to keep up, which further obscures the nature of the current anxiety. It is no surprise then that explanations routinely offered by ordinary Tokyoites tend to simplify the matter by relegating it as a generational, cultural schism that cannot be resolved. Regardless of how recent these changes and transitions may appear however, the technosocial paradigm shift has been long anticipated by experimental ventures and slow sociocultural reconfigurations within the past few decades. Therefore, the present circumstances are more accurately assessed if considered in a cumulative sense. We must remember that something had helped foreshadow the shape of things to come for Japan circa 2007.

But, as the symbolic significance of the perceived precarious futurity gained more rhetorical leverage, the stakes were raised higher. With the *dankai no sedai* soon to be joining the rank of un-employable “silver age,” their presumed technological incompetence and limited socioeconomic participation was seen to forecast their limited contribution and eventual sociopolitical irrelevance. That is to say, the *dankai no sedai* began to worry about their technological un-readiness to partake in, let alone understand, a future national narrative woven in an unfamiliar media landscape. Whether their apprehension was overblown by the general anxiety caused by the present-day socioeconomic instability or not, as long as this line of prognosis struck a chord and informed the way the *dankai no sedai* imagined themselves living, the effects must be taken seriously.

As far as technology goes, the intrinsic logic of digital computation and the fundamental mechanism of the devices are globally applicable and not susceptible to

local idiosyncrasies. Hence, what will be culturally distinct is the way in which technology is incorporated in order to accommodate to local lifestyles. These articulations are bound to reflect the needs and concerns of the specific lifestyle of a distinct locale. To a certain extent, paradigm shifts trigger traumatic response as new modes of existence challenge old modes, demanding readjustment and giving rise to reactionary repudiation while intensifying tensions for uncertain future. Yet, transitional periods are also equally pregnant with unknown possibilities and uncharted discoveries. As contemporary readers and writers of Japanese who occupy such a contested space and time, many Japanese are finding novel forms of situating as well as identifying themselves through a newly constructed textuality and system of representations. The shift appears to be registering at two distinct, but interlacing conceptual terrains: one in connection with the phantasmagoria of the modern nation-state, and the other concerning a spatiotemporal orientation vis-à-vis a newly configured media landscape.

Although regional variations through which changes become manifest deserve a nuanced analysis, the global resonance digital technology continues to exert should not be neglected either. While Japanese sociocultural phenomena remain the focus of my investigation, I believe that underlying questions of the tempo and temporality of different media, cultural practices and evolving social scenes will speak to many who are grappling with the questions of technology, body, social change, the nature of cultural transition and mediation. I will try to balance a focus on Japanese experiences against global phenomena as I examine both specificities and generalities of the problems of reading and writing thresholds. Finally, the spirit of the present inquiry is also led by a proposition that if twentieth century anthropology was concerned with the passage from

nature to culture, then twenty-first century anthropology may be more intimately informed by questions regarding the changing nature of the relationship between human and machine, something akin to a prelude of an uneasy leap from a study about culture industry to artificial intelligence and life.

In the chapters to follow, I will demonstrate that the literacy gap I refer to above presents itself repeatedly as a site of ideological and aesthetic contention, a mark of technological adeptness and political potential, a space of sociocultural negotiation, and fertile grounds for new criminality in the post-Lost Decade Japan. Each ethnographic moment examined is hence contextualized to demonstrate how Japan specific conditions give rise to Japan specific articulations, even if comparable cases may be found elsewhere reflecting similar concerns and interests. The key to appreciating Japan's specificity, I argue, lies in understanding how existing systems of representations, technological imperatives, and sociohistorical conditions have coalesced to form a unique constellation. On the one hand, to characterize such complex practices as reading and writing as technologically determined or to ascribe specificities of Japanese language to a narrowly defined "indigenous" cultural predilection, as it were, would be a gross simplification. On the other hand, to do an exhaustive study is obviously far beyond the scope of this dissertation. So, I will submit the following turn of events and cultural attributes to be the guiding threads that weave the formative layers of the present condition in Japan: 1) the state-prescribed pedagogical dictate for children to gain proficient command over two systems of phonetic syllabary (*hiragana* and *katakana*),

Roman alphabet, approximately 2500 *kanji*¹² and various symbols (〒, α, ♪, ☆, π, etc.) in composing a non-technical Japanese text, 2) Japan-specific technical difficulties instantiated by the aforementioned condition, which dictate the way in which practical applications and technological thresholds are set for each communication media instrument used within the space of everyday, 3) existing aesthetics of reading and writing practices, 4) the post-Lost Decade socioeconomic conditions, and 5) global imperatives to digitalize society and archives for the twenty-first century.

In this context, the literacy gap instantiated in failures to correctly identify a corresponding body and information not only creates colossal confusion, but also bespeaks reading thresholds that are being challenged by different sociotechnological generations. I will show, for instance, that an unsuccessful attempt to sift through a growing volume of digital data have not only cost a newly instituted cybercrime unit at Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department a dozen deaths and injuries in Akihabara in 2008, but also thoroughly compromised the operations of one of Japan's esteemed social welfare programs in the face of surging retiree population. When examined in a culturally sensitive context, the failures to read and write can provide helpful insights to the nature of troubled reading thresholds in Japan. These fatal failures are the results of cumulative effects of the sociopolitical and technological changes of the past few decades. I hope that the moments of crisis analyzed in this dissertation will help us rethink and recalibrate

¹² Among the 50,000 *kanji* compiled in a major kanji dictionary, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) had designated 1945 *kanji* for everyday use (*Jyōyō kanji*), and 1006 *kanji* from there to be learned throughout the first and sixth grade elementary school curriculum (*Gakushū kanji/Kyōiku kanji*). According to a renowned kanji scholar and Classic Chinese literature professor, Shizuka Shirakawa the number of *kanji* sufficient for everyday reading and writing is 2500, which will have been presumably covered by the time Japanese finish their compulsory education at the age of fifteen. Shizuka Shirakawa, "Moji seisaku wa souseki no jidai wo mokuhyō to seyo (Letter Policy Must Aim the Standard of Souseki's Era)," *Bungakukai* 60:7 (2006): 122-29.

what we mean by reading and writing, and how we might relate to various forms of media in an ever-evolving world.

Theorizing Reading and Writing Bodies

A number of scholars have inspired me and guided the direction of this research. I want to make reference here to a core few who have been most influential in my attempt to theorize reading and writing thresholds. From the inception, Friedrich Kittler's analyses of the relations among technological apparatuses, bodies, and discourses on writing have been one of the main driving forces.¹³ I have also drawn much from Jonathan Crary's unique study regarding the origins of modern visual culture and changing perceptions,¹⁴ which compliments Kitter's formulation of the nineteenth-century reading and writing body. Following Kittler and Crary, who locate a subject in the web of emerging social and mass consciousness of the modern era and define a body as a site of technological intervention, social discipline, and machine production, I have tried to work out a theoretical framework that recognizes sociohistorical complexities and technological impacts. The work of Patricia Crain, Lisa Gitelman, and Katherine Hayles has also helped me think broadly about the disciplining of bodies and implications of growing proximity between bodies and machines. Specifically, Crain's thesis on the Alphabetization of America resonates with Kittler's discussion of "Mother's mouth," which has inspired me to pay close attention to the embodied cadence of reading and

¹³ Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*.

¹⁴ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*.

writing as well as the underlying impetus and rationale for moral disciplining.¹⁵ In my attempt to map the spatiotemporal relations mediated by *keitai*, Gitelman's work on patent rights of new media and systematization of copyrights has cautioned me to take account of regulatory moves by the state, manufacturers, and promoters as well as the participation of end-users as they form a sociocultural matrix particular to Japan.¹⁶

Hayles has shown that the material specificity of media devices must be addressed so that we may understand how the materiality "interacts dynamically with linguistic, rhetorical and literary effects we call literature."¹⁷ Last but not least, Jacques Derrida's meditation on *écriture* has urged me to tease out the underlying philosophical and political concerns within discourses about reading and writing in Japan.¹⁸ I thus make a conscious effort to carefully contextualize my ethnographic findings in order to reflect the historicity of the associated discourses and phenomena. I owe this historically conscientious approach not only to Derrida but also to a few others who rightly underline the politics inherent to the discursive production of the "origin" of the modern nation state and national-cultural identity.¹⁹

¹⁵ Patricia Crain, *The Story of a: The Alphabetization of America From the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000). Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*.

¹⁶ Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).

¹⁷ N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, vol. Mediawork (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1st American ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity*. Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Kojin Karatani, "Nationalism and

Needless to say, my thinking is deeply indebted to scholars of Japan in different fields for their insights. The seminal works of Kojin Karatani, whose intellectual rigor has profound resonance with Derrida, and those who are directly or indirectly in dialogue with Karatani have been a guiding light in many respects. In particular, Karatani's idea of "inversion" (*tentō*), which operates through the repression of pre-modern points of "origin," has reminded me time and again of the importance of historicity.²⁰ Relating to Karatani's thesis on "inversion" as essentially a discussion about paradigm shift in perception in the modern era, I establish a constructive theoretical link between Karatani and Crary. In my analysis, I try to be attentive to Karatani's suggestion that talking about *écriture* amounts to thinking a political dimension.²¹ We would be setting on an unsound path of inquiry, Karatani seems to argue, if we did not properly acknowledge the foundations *kanji* has laid down for modern Japanese literature and the modern literary subject. What brings *écriture* and nationalism together as close accomplices, Karatani further observes, is the thrust of nation "to unify language," and germinate an imperialism that "insists upon homogeneity."²² This is an important criticism that is revisited by other scholars of Japan, including Marilyn Ivy, Sakai Naoki, Tomiko Yoda, and Thomas LaMarre, who in their different ways, with varying emphases, address the problems of repressed origins. For instance, Ivy demonstrates that people and places

Ecriture," *Surfaces* 1, no. 201 (1995): 1-25. Thomas LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: an Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription*, Asia-Pacific (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000). David Barnett Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

²⁰ Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*.

²¹ Karatani, "Nationalism and *Ecriture*."

²² Karatani, "Nationalism and *Ecriture*," 7.

construed as belonging to a space of “pre-modern” are retroactively identified as primordial “origins” of national culture, and how such “origins” continue to be placed under erasure in Japan.²³ Sakai’s painstaking analysis of the work of eighteenth-century Confucius scholars demonstrates the importance of intertextuality and obligations to grasp the effects of translation and layers of mediation. He posits that “Japanese” language has been tasked to perform as an implicit index of national unity, compelling a curious metonymy between the order of language and that of society.²⁴ Yoda argues that feminine literary aesthetics have been “typically constituted as the negativities to be overcome or sublated” and shows that the “discovery” of female hand (*kana* syllabary) has supplied a conveniently appropriate sense of legitimacy during the Meiji as well as the post-war era Japan.²⁵ LaMarre recalls Karatani’s discussion on the repression of “origins” by shedding light on a fictitious notion of “homogeneous” Japan as a basis of his discussion of Heian poems.²⁶

The discussion in the above texts regarding the historicity of cultural constructs and academic discourses encourage me not only to look for implicit political motivations behind the claims about “proper” reading and writing practices, but also to bring to light the complex mechanisms that over-determine a particular point of “origin” for a national cultural identity. Likewise, I intend to approach instances of confusion as generative

²³ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁴ Naoki Sakai, *Kako no koe: jyuuhasseiki nihon no gensetsu ni okeru gengo no chii* (*Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse*) (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2002).

²⁵ Yoda, *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity*.

²⁶ LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription*.

forces that would “dislocate” a profoundly internalized regime of representation and its supposed unity and totality. In addition, LaMarre’s perceptive discussion on the role of “figural operations of sounds and images” and Yoda’s insistence on “visual analysis” are especially conducive to elaborating the “visuality” of written Japanese. Their discussions confirm much of what I have gleaned from working with the antiquarian booksellers in Kanda Jimbō-chō and calligraphy practitioners: prior to the standardization project under the auspices of the Meiji government, there was no unified “speaking” community in Japan. But, the fact that there was a vibrant “reading” community in premodern Japan goes to show how “reading” has revolved fundamentally around the “visuality” of text in Japan.²⁷ Based on this revelation, my analysis reiterates the importance of the process of habituation and acquisition of reading and writing proficiency. Noting that this particular proficiency is also subject to different levels of institutional intervention and aesthetic expectations, I also work toward identifying the nature of a playful optical dialectic that results in a morphing of text and icon in the digital age.

Moreover, the following passage by Derrida is a crucial theoretical springboard for me to think through relations between thresholds and sociotechnological gaps: “we are written as we write, by the agency within us which always already keeps watch over perception, be it internal or external. The “subject” of writing does not exist if we mean

²⁷ I owe much of what I know about the premodern “reading” community and the production, distribution and consumption of the premodern books in Japan to my mentor in Kanda Jimbō-chō, Hashiguchi Kōnosuke and his books. Kounosuke Hashiguchi, *Wahon nyuumon: sennen ikita hon no sekai (Wahon for Beginners: The World of Books That Have Lived Through a Thousand Years)* (Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2005); Kounosuke Hashiguchi, *Zoku-wahon nyuumon: edo no honya to hon zukuri (Wahon for Beginners Vol.2: Book Making and Booksellers of Edo)* (Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2007).

by that some sovereign solitude of the author.”²⁸ As I construe perception as a form of embodied reading and writing threshold, the challenge lies in how to define the sociotechnological gap that emerges alongside this reading and writing subject. If I am to submit to Derrida’s postulation that perception already implies the framework of the instituted trace, the formation of a reading and writing threshold must also reflect an underlying structure and logic. That is, insofar as perception is written to respond to certain internal or external stimuli and conform to what is sanctified by “tradition,” a reading and writing threshold must also be similarly anticipated by the concept of a possible system of representation. Only, the realm of the symbolic is not a pure emergence, either. This is why Kittler endeavors to go beyond the confines of discourse and recognize sociopolitical as well as technological reverberations in the concept of network makes absolute sense. According to Kittler, the nineteenth-century saw the configuration of a period specific discourse network, which was superseded by the discourse network 1900 after the twentieth-century paradigm shift. If so, is it not reasonable to deduce that reading and writing threshold could also be socio-techno-generation specific, reflecting its period’s sociotechnological conditions and discourses?

What complicates this postulation for Japan is the unique visual versatility inherent to written Japanese. By visual versatility, I am referring to a wide repertoire of stylistic and formal variations of *kanji* and *kana* syllabaries as well as an added range of digitally rendered characters and icons, such as *gyaru-moji* (girlish-style scripts), *kao-moji* (elaborate Japanese emoticons), and *e-moji* (electronically animated picture icons) in

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 226.

written Japanese.²⁹ Whether visual versatility is manifested in “analog” or “digital” reading and writing, the experience relayed to me by my informants suggests that this visual versatility should be explored as a non-representational register. I hasten to add that a non-representational register does not necessarily translate into a pre-social or pre-linguistic register. However, this presents a theoretical impasse as the difficulties of describing and defining this visuality implicitly assumes a kind of corporeality that is beyond the purview of symbolic representation. Given this conundrum, I want to extend our discussion of visuality to include a slightly tangential, but ultimately supplemental issue of Japanese compositional style known as *kanji kana majiribun*.³⁰ As the compound word *kanji kana majiribun* suggests, it is a compositional style that uses a combination (*majiri*) of *kanji* and *kana* (phonetic syllabaries). This is a customary writing style widely used by ordinary Japanese to facilitate overall reading comprehension. The distinctive feature of this writing style is found in the “logographic” use of *kanji* to represent content and some grammatical words, and the “phonographic” use of *kana* syllabaries for grammatical functions.

On the one hand, this hybrid writing system seems to exemplify, in an exaggerated manner, an aspect of Derrida’s theory on *écriture*: “Temporalization presupposes the possibility of symbolism, and every symbolic synthesis, even before it falls into a space “exterior” to it, includes within itself spacing as difference. Which is

²⁹ I will discuss issues related to digitally rendered characters and icons (*gyaru-moji*, *kao-moji* and *e-moji*) at length in chapter four.

³⁰ Bjarke. Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). According to Frellesvig, *kanji-kana majiribun* has been used since the middle of the Heian period. Frellesvig argues that “the practice of writing grammatical elements of a Japanese rendition in *kana* glosses next to Chinese text served as the model for the *kanji-kana majiribun* style of writing” (Ibid.,158).

why the pure phonic chain, to the extent that it implies differences, is itself not a pure continuum or flow of time. Difference is the articulation of space and time.”³¹ Troubles with homonyms are quite striking in this respect. If a reader is presented with a text composed exclusively in *kana* syllabaries without any spacing, the reader often resorts to reading aloud in order to sort out homonyms and ascertain semantic units. Guided by a “proper” cadence instilled in a reading and writing body, anyone with a proper level of proficiency can be expected to accurately establish meanings via differences (spacing) and subsequently represent them in sentences using combinations of *kanji* and *kana* syllabaries. Thus, application of *kanji* is seen to “visually” resolve the confusion of sound. Incidentally, this ability to apprehend “spacing as difference” is often portrayed as a testament to an effective state-led pedagogical disciplining of a Japanese reading and writing body.³²

On the other hand, a system of representation that makes use of characters with emphatically “logographic” and “phonographic” qualities also raises a set of intriguing questions. When the text written exclusively in *kana* syllabaries is converted into combinations of *kanji* and *kana* syllabaries, the ostensible need for phonetic articulation largely dissipates. Since reading comprehension is visually aided by the “logographic” use of *kanji* and “phonographic” use of *kana* syllabaries, there is no apparent need to read aloud by relying on the habituated cadence in the effort to discern units of meaningful sound. In other words, as long as the text is composed of combinations of *kanji* and *kana* syllabaries, reading could very well take place without the intervention of voice (i.e. phonetic articulation), because the text would be “visually” intelligible. By virtue of the

³¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.”, 219.

³² This is a topic I will discuss further in chapter five.

logographic quality of *kanji*, the visual recognition of *kanji*'s formal variations and the successful deciphering of the semantics alone can typically suffice to make written Japanese intelligible. Simply put, intelligibility of Japanese texts hinges on the reader's "visual" reading proficiency of *kanji* in this respect. While "logographic" qualities of *kanji* ostensibly underscore the visual registers, "phonographic" qualities of *kana* syllabaries accentuate the auditory registers of reading and writing in Japanese. Here, the reader might wonder if I am unconsciously resuscitating a reading of voice criticized by Derrida.³³ To be sure, my interests in voice are not characterized either by the quality of sound it releases or by the presence it signifies. The voice in the background of "spacing" here is understood as, figuratively and literally speaking, a "trace" of forces that dictate the body. Among the forces I allude to, the body is a pneumatically operated apparatus of the reading and writing subject. Body as a pneumatically powered medium is a concept I explore further in chapter five, but suffice it to say here that what I am trying to do is to imagine a sensorial experience of the body vis-à-vis *écriture*.

On this curious relation between intelligibility and legibility (visuality) in written Japanese, David Lurie proposes a concept of "alegibility." This neologism not only dissolves the tension between legibility and illegibility, but also accommodates the above-mentioned notion of multiple literacies in Japanese. Warning the reader not to confuse questions of illegibility with those of semantic intelligibility, Lurie maintains that writing has a symbolic dimension that can be appreciated "visually," independent of the content.³⁴ The idea of "alegibility" thus permits us to move away from a binary discourse,

³³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17.

³⁴ Lurie's discussion on a symbolic (performative) significance of writing, which must be assessed independently of semantic intelligibility of the writing, is his attempt to elaborate on the

simultaneously giving us some latitude in broadening the concept of legibility and illegibility. Insofar as the concept of “alegibility” affords a chance to detect the nuances of different articulations of legibility and illegibility, it also recognizes multiple forms and levels of literacy. I am sympathetic to Lurie who shares reservation toward “overemphasis on ‘transparent’ or ‘legible’ literacy” as it “diverts attention from the full range of ways in which writing facilitates the making of meaning and the exercise of power, many of them independent of specific or systematic linguistic association.”³⁵

I am also grateful to Lurie for providing a rigorous overview of the syntactical and semantic logic of the Japanese system of writing, its adoption and adaptation of *kanji* and most importantly, his discussion on the sociocultural, politico-historical significance of *kundoku* (“reading by gloss”).³⁶ Although Lurie is not alone in appreciating the significance of *kundoku* in relation to a larger discussion of literacy,³⁷ his treatment of *kundoku* offers a perfect theoretical link for the analysis of audio and visual ambiguities of *kanji* in this dissertation. According to Lurie, the eighth-century reading and writing community devised *kundoku* in the effort to translate “Chinese” into Japanese, which was the primary literary style of the canonical work at the time. What this implies is that already in eighth-century Japan at least two types of literacy existed. Furthermore, the use

concept of “alegibility” through his reading of Derrida’s famous meditation on the original incident documented by Claude Levi-Strauss. Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.”

³⁵ Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*, 64.

³⁶ Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*.

³⁷ Karatani, “Nationalism and Ecriture.” Peter F Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History From the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 1998). Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language*. Hideo Satake, and Kuniko Satake, *Kotoba no hyoki no kyokasho: nihongo wo shiru, migaku* (Tokyo: Beret Shuppan, 2005).

of *kundoku* signals a routine use of rubies (old type size equal to 5½ points) in Japanese reading and writing. Typically in smaller font size either on the right side of or above the main text, rubies provide not only auxiliary grammatical functions to facilitate *kundoku*, but also phonetic pronunciation to lesser known *kanji* and *kanji* compounds to assist reading comprehension. But, the most interesting capacity endowed in rubies is its ability to furnish *kanji* with multiple layers of semantic and audio registers. For example, a *kanji* compound “郷里” is normally accompanied by phonetic reading of *kyōri* and it means “one’s hometown.” However, rubies could offer phonetic readings that bear no auditory resemblance to *kyōri* such as *kuni* or *furusato* without causing a problem because both *kuni* and *furusato* also mean “one’s hometown” in Japanese. I must qualify however that though *kuni*, *furusato* and *kyōri* mean roughly the same thing, “one’s hometown,” they each carry slightly different connotation. That is to say, the reader and writer of Japanese cannot indiscriminately use all three phonetic readings for 郷里 at his or her own will. To the extent that the officially recognized phonetic pronunciation of 郷里 is still *kyōri*, the correct paring should remain 郷里 as *kyōri*. But, the reader and writer of Japanese are allowed at times to invoke a particular semantic and auditory register by taking advantage of a gap artificially created by an “incorrect” paring, such as 郷里 as *kuni* or 郷里 as *furusato*. As in *kundoku*, notations in rubies bring to light existing multiplicities of meanings and phonetic readings of *kanji* in Japanese language.³⁸ The multiplicities inherent to *kanji*-reading thus demand that literacy should be taken to mean literacy and not Literacy.

³⁸ Quoting from Maejima Ai’s work, Karatani also notes on page 53 ambiguities of phonetic reading inherent to *kanji* compound Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*.

Despite its usefulness, I find the concept of “alegibility” ultimately dissatisfying since “alegibility” chiefly denotes a quality and condition. Given the increasing proximity between human and communication media apparatuses, it is imperative that we entertain possibilities for an active body located exactly at the intersection of legibility and illegibility as well as intelligibility and unintelligibility. As Katherine Hayles astutely observes, digitally rendered texts are gaining speed and movement that create images and marks that challenge the limit of human perception. As the “text announces its difference from human body through this illegibility, reminding us that the computer is also a writer, and moreover a writer whose operations we cannot wholly grasp in all their semiotic complexity,” the source of illegibility is becoming deeply technological, too. Therefore, “illegibility is not simply a lack of meaning, then, but a signifier of distributed cognitive processes that construct reading as an active production of a cybernetic circuit and not merely an internal activity of the human mind.”³⁹ Questions of legibility in this context resonate well with the questions of visibility mentioned above. In the era of digital reading and writing in Japan, the visibility that destabilizes and resists phonetic articulation presents a new challenge and points to unknown potential. Some digitally “deformed” characters not only circumvent the voice, but also exploit auditory and visual ambiguities. This morphing potential has indeed already become a breeding ground for a new type of criminality and bureaucratic catastrophe in recent decades in Japan.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, defining a reading and writing subject with twenty-first century Japan-specific “visibility,” “thresholds,” and “pneumatic body” should warrant some consideration.

³⁹ Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 50-1.

⁴⁰ This is a major topic I examine closely in chapter two.

To a noticeable degree, the advent of digital communication media technology has created an impetus for prolific dis-assembling and re-assembling of *kanji* and *kana* syllabaries, de-coupling and re-coupling of *kanji* and phonetic reading, and dis-orientation and re-orientation of bodies. In this climate, LaMarre's characterization of Heian poem calligraphy finds a curious echoing. Instead of a speech reaching a point "where it disperse into figures, patterns and images that no longer operate by the rules of speech or grammar,"⁴¹ it is the digitally rendered "deformed" Japanese writing that no longer operate by the rules of speech or grammar alone. Twenty-first century reading and writing practices in Japan exploit all three (logographic, phonographic and pictographic) qualities. Some of this "visual" versatility is undoubtedly reminiscent of rebus whose efficacy lies in the successful rendition of auditory and semantic proximity in visual registry. But, the fundamental logic behind digital assemblages lies in the visual and phonetic ambiguities that resist being wholly subsumed under either dictation. By collapsing the presumed integrity of an ostensible system of symbolic representation, the new media landscape challenge the conventional understanding and protocols of reading and writing. At the same time, changes effected by the novel technologies urge us to put the current "crises" in historical perspective so that nascent forms of sociality and practices can be documented and perhaps rightly appreciated. In this sense, LaMarre's treatment of calligraphic intelligibility puts digital writing in valuable perspective. On the one hand, it suggests that reading and writing "tradition" in Japanese lends itself not only to the process of dis-assembling and re-assembling, but also to a playful visual oscillation. On the other hand, the question of intelligibility supports my argument that it is a kind of

⁴¹ Thomas LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 48.

literacy. Thus, there's no surprise that new digital writing also operates on the assumption that it requires an acquired reading threshold.

Whether the focus of each discussion in the dissertation is on visual registers of *kanji*, calligraphic scripts, and other variously morphed characters, affective registers of emoticons and digital avatars, or corporeal registers of bodily alignment, cadence, and breathing, I argue that the mundane disciplining of the body is what dictates the subject's relation to the practice of reading and writing. In proposing to conduct an investigation that positively but also critically engages with the nature of structural and stylistic morphing potential in the Japanese system of representation, I hope to better understand how people experience meaning, communicate with one another, and occupy this ever evolving media landscape. Despite the unceasing undulation of the socio-cultural, politico-historical forces of our past and present, the practical ramifications of changes are felt in the space of everyday. With a peculiar lexical adoption that cedes agency to the media, the distance between human and machines appear to quickly cave in. This is an especially fascinating moment for Japan and the world regarding reading and writing practices of the everyday.

An Overview

Introduction:

The introduction acquaints the readers with a set of overarching theoretical concerns and questions about mediation as well as reading and writing practices in Japan. By surveying anthropological perspectives on cultural transmission and reconfiguration, new forms of sociality and embodiment, and representation and abstraction formulated

through technologies of inscription and simulation, I situate my project in relation to existing literature and lay grounds for a theorization of reading and writing “thresholds.” In my analysis, I emphasize the processes in which socio-technological generation-specific literacy and perception become defined and embodied. I demonstrate that a techno-generationally defined “literacy gap” presents itself repeatedly as a site of ideological and aesthetic contention, a mark of technological adeptness and political potential, a space of sociocultural negotiation, and fertile grounds for new forms of criminality in the twenty-first century Japan. In this particular socio-economic climate, the crises of reading and writing practices are symptomatic of a burgeoning sense of helplessness and frustration originating in an ostensible media literacy gap between the self-professed “analog” generation and an intuitively tech-attuned youth perfunctorily referred to as the “digital”

Chapter One: Embodied Connoisseurship

Chapter one analyzes the embodied connoisseurship of Tokyo antiquarian booksellers. While connoisseurship is a unique expression of the booksellers’ continuous learning, mercantile acumen and professionalism, their heightened sense of appreciation for the pre-modern Japanese books is informed by expert knowledge not only of materiality and bibliography of books, but also of outdated *kanji* use and other period-specific modes of writing. In comparison with laypersons’ *kanji* reading threshold, their *kanji* reading threshold not only reveals the inherent complexities of Japanese reading and writing, but also highlights the role played by the state-prescribed compulsory *kanji* education that seeks to define the *kanji* reading threshold among ordinary Japanese. By way of examining ambiguous identities of antiquarian books as fetishized objects of

national cultural heritage, highly specialized commodities that demand connoisseurship, and palpable embodiments of literary work, I inquire into the concept of cultural transmission and mediation, possibilities of alternative socioeconomic relations, and questions of information and entropy at the time of sociotechnological transition in Japan. In so doing, I seek to define different levels and kinds of literacy (reading and writing proficiency) and media-specific sensibilities.

Chapter Two: It's Me! It's Me!—mis-assigned identities

This chapter probes the ramifications of having a *kanji* reading threshold dictate daily reading and writing practices. Specifically, the argument revolves around two major events in the past decade in Japan: the first event involves mis-recognition and mis-transcription of *kanji* used in proper nouns in the process of the state's attempt to digitalize hand-written pension records. The result is catastrophic, erasing individuals' lifetime pension savings. The second incident is about a popular phishing scam collectively known as *ore ore sagi* (Its' Me! It's Me!), which has routinely targeted the “analog” generation since the late-2000s. The intense media reporting and mayhem it created not only mirrors the “analog” generation's deep-seated anxieties about their digital-media (il)literacy, but also exposes inherent ambiguities and uncanniness about audio-registry of identification. I show that 1) the former incident should be viewed as symptomatic of a growing sense of mistrust in the government's ability to address a heightened anxiety about a mis/dis-communication between the “analog” and “digital” generations and to protect its aging “analog” population by effectively responding to new forms of digital criminality, and 2) the latter bespeaks a burgeoning media literary gap that haunts a so-called “analog” generation struggling to keep up with technological

innovations that continue to re-define the practices of reading and writing and social relations. Through these two troubling instances in which previously held understandings about national futurity, identity and information come undone, I establish that seemingly discrete incidents occurring on different plains coalesce to articulate anxieties about reading and writing practices specific to Japan in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Three: Disorder of the Mind (*kokoro no midare*)

Taking off from an oft-repeated mantra among schoolteachers, “Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind,” chapter three explores the effects of new media devices in re-configuring spatiotemporal relations among schoolteachers, students and parents. By focusing on changes within this three-way communication that are effected by *keitai*, I explore questions of “literacy” in relation to digital media. Each instance of communication is a negotiation of socioculturally inflected boundaries that challenges conventional ideas about cultural transmission and mediation, culturally accepted forms of sociality, and scripts and underlying subjectivity. The goal of this chapter is to tease out the nature of negotiations that are frequently couched in a morally invested discourse. I argue that the real problem hinges on a disruption caused by the inversion of intergenerational cultural transmission, which interferes with an accepted view of a natural trajectory of a social development. Traditionally, the status of children has been politically overdetermined as a site of national reproduction and preservation. However, a growing intergenerational literacy gap appears to have inverted the order of sociocultural knowledge production. Through concrete examples, I inquire into the assumed subjectivity of a writer, the nature of contemporary media literacy, and an increasingly porous boundary between the public and the private. The chapter concludes by exploring

prospects of digital-media specific experiences of reading and writing, what I call sympathetic reading and writing of the digital era.

Chapter Four: *Kanji no yure*—a space of indeterminacy

Chapter four re-evaluates a space of formal indeterminacy inherent to *kanji*, what I refer to as *kanji no yure*. More specifically, *kanji no yure* denotes a spatially conceptualized margin of difference permitted to kanji that becomes manifested as a visual indeterminacy and instability in both reading and writing. I argue that *kanji no yure* performs as a generative indeterminacy in the era of digital reading and writing. In this context, the chapter entertains possibilities of “animated” visual morphing in the pixilated reading and writing practices. This is another way of identifying a digital-media specific reading threshold. Critically addressing the automaticity associated with digital reading and writing, I extend the notion of sympathetic magic to offer a theoretical meditation on sympathetic reading and writing in a digital age. The argument is predicated upon the proposition that changes in the recording media threshold give rise to a qualitatively different media receptivity and literary sensibility. I bring to light paradoxical aspects of the peculiar corporeality inherent in people’s relation to the symbolic world while inquiring into the nature of confusion between digital texts and bodies. I argue that media receptivity is not only informed by the material and socio-historical conditions, but also expressed through a broadening spectrum of cultural metaphors. As such, the metaphor of sympathetic reading and writing bespeaks conditions of socio-technological connectivity, digital sociality and the changing media-landscape.

Chapter Five: Bodies in Flux

Chapter five considers the acquisition of *kanji* reading and writing threshold by attending to the role of official and unofficial disciplining of bodies. I argue that the state-prescribed pedagogical methods of instilling proper reading and writing practices in children singularly contribute to a formation of Japanese language specific perceptual biases and corporeal orientations. Based on the ethnographic findings on a group of Japanese calligraphy practitioners and their bodily engagement, this chapter attempts to theorize reading and writing practices through the concept of bodies in flux. Inspired by lyrical and onomatopoetic expressions found abundant in the language of calligraphy practitioners, I explore their relations to the art of calligraphy through the material specificities of bodies, paper, brushes, ink, etc. Insofar as rhythmical brush strokes and breathing dictate the disciplined body whose goal is to “forget” its body, a concept of habituated automaticity bears a particular resonance in this chapter. In this context, body is one of many variables that complete the execution. Attending to techniques as well as spatiotemporal experiences of reading and writing mediated by the breath, brush strokes, postures and tactility, I seek to identify the specific corporeal engagement and affect of Japanese language specific reading and writing threshold.

Conclusion

The conclusion reviews the main findings and central arguments of the dissertation. Contrary to global interests in the ongoing socio-technological reconfigurations and universalizing logic of technology to intensify multimedia interventions in everyday life, I offer a different perspective by insisting on factoring in

historical debates and socio-economic conditions specific to the respective cultures in my investigation. My conclusion reiterates the way in which reading and writing practices becomes a site of theoretical exploration as questions of mediation and cultural transmission and anxieties about national futurity converge to destabilize the integrity of national culture.

Chapter One: Embodied Connoisseurship

Antiquarian Bookstore: S-shobō

It was a typical early afternoon at S-shobō, a reputable antiquarian bookstore in the middle of Kanda Jimbō-chō. Sitting behind the store counter, I had an unobstructed view of one of Yasukuni-street's many alleyways. But, separated by an automatic glass sliding door, I was feeling removed from the hustle and bustle of the neighborhood's usual post-lunch-break scene. It was almost as if the distance between us had sequestered me in a temporal air pocket somewhere between here in the fleeting world of the pre-modern Edo and there at the heart of Japan's metropolis, Tokyo. The only thing different that day was the *kaichō*'s⁴² presence, a founder of S-shobō in his mid-seventies. He too was quietly watching the world go by as a stream of salary-men in hues of gray, navy and black suits with toothpicks hanging from the corners' of their mouths and female office workers clutching their wallets and purses hurriedly walked back to their respective offices in the surrounding business buildings.

⁴² *Kaichō* is a Japanese word for *president* of a society or other organization. Incidentally it is a position often assumed by a CEO, known as *shachō* in Japanese, who has recently semi-retired but continues to exert influence over matters of great significance and substance as a mentor. Within the context of Sara-shobō, as *kaichō*, a founder of the bookstore still makes most of the decisions pertaining to a long-term management of S-shobō, albeit in consultation with his son. Meanwhile, his son, as *shachō*, oversees the actual day-to-day business transactions. This type of division of labor is hardly uncommon in Kanda Jimbō-chō, and the practice of acknowledging each other as *kaichō* and *shachō* publically announces to the fellow members of the community that the transition of power to the next generation is already underway at S-shobō.

Since I had a few hours before Yasuyuki-*san*, *kaichō*'s son, returned from a daily auction with a *furoshiki*-bundle of new acquisitions for me to catalogue, I could have spent the afternoon examining rows of bookshelf in search of intriguingly titled books, such as *A Fully-Illustrated Guide to Prison Torture Techniques During the Late Tokugawa Period*. This was one of my favorites: A set of two oversized woodblock print booklets from the mid-nineteenth century was fully illustrated in lavish color, rich in exposition and preserved in impeccable condition. I would have gladly spent the afternoon admiring the remarkable durability and silky feel of handmade Japanese *washi* paper while I gingerly leafed through the book in morbid fascination. Specializing in the Edo-period maps and pre-modern Japanese publications, S-shobō housed a myriad of books I had never heard, read or known to have existed with just enough space for a few uncluttered but narrow corridors. It was full of air so unmistakably exuding the scent of an antiquarian bookstore. With *kaichō*'s blessings, I always managed to find a few hours to pass with minimal interruption during which I was free to explore the wonders of the pre-modern writings, illustrations and prints that have been re-discovered, salvaged and indefinitely suspended in the slow-moving tempo of antiquarian bookstore. This was the space of S-shobō where I spent my eight-hour shift three days a week.

On that particular afternoon, however, I relinquished the delights of book browsing to being *kaichō*'s willing audience. After silently sitting side-by-side for awhile, he began to recount the years of what was once an obligatory yet highly coveted apprenticeship at I-shoten. Widely celebrated as the “Mecca of antiquarian bookstores in Japan,”⁴³ Kanda Jimbō-chō is home to approximately hundred and sixty individually

⁴³ Kanda Jimbō-chō is by far the most densely populated and arguably the most-written and filmed antiquarian book quarter in Japan. Centrally situated within the Chiyoda ward—one of

owned antiquarian bookstores as well as a handful of flagship stores of nationally recognized bookstores that specialize in new publications.⁴⁴ Being a third son of a rural family in north Kantō, *kaichō* was expected to go into the world and make it on his own. On turning eighteen, he began boarding at I-shoten with a number of like-minded youngsters. There, he not only acquired the practical knowledge needed to running a successful antiquarian bookstore, but he also taught himself to cook, sew and clean. Together with equally enthusiastic fellow boarders, he organized various after-hour study groups to analyze stylistic differences and commit physical characteristics of different books, booklets and scrolls over discrete periods of Japan's pre-modern era to his memory. He reminiscently described his years of apprenticeship as full of exciting discoveries and bitter but ultimately rewarding learning experiences. But most of all, he fondly remembered the thrill of waking up to the view of famous Mt. Fuji on a clear morning sky and enjoying the spectacular summer fireworks of Ryōgoku from the rooftop of a four-story building. "It was the tallest building around here," he hastened to add. Working for one of Kanda Jimbō-chō's most prestigious bookstores at the foot of

the twenty-three special wards designated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government—Kanda Jimbō-chō neighborhood is a short walk from the Imperial Palace, Nippon Budōkan (an esteemed indoor arena in Japan), and many government institutions, such as the National Diet building, Prime Minister's residence, and Supreme Court. In addition, three of Japan's leading publishing houses' (Shōgakukan, Iwanami Shoten, and Shūeisha) impressive headquarters are located within a walking distance from one another in Kanda Jimbō-chō. Incidentally, the publishing industry is one of the most vital sources of revenue for the Chiyoda ward, and there has been a series of collaborative projects between Kanda Jimbō-chō antiquarian book community and the radically reinvented Chiyoda Library (<http://www.library.chiyoda.tokyo.jp/index.html> Last Accessed on May 15, 2013) since its re-opening in 2007. While Kanda Jimbō-chō has the largest concentration of antiquarian booksellers, neighborhoods such as Yanesen and Waseda, also known for a cluster of well established, independently owned antiquarian booksellers, draw a number of bibliophiles as their specializations differ slightly from the ones in Kanda Jimbō-chō.

⁴⁴ *Kanda jimbo-cho furuhon-ya sanpo (Walk in Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores)* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper Publishing, 2004); *Kanda jimbo-cho koshogai: eria-betsu kanzen gaido (Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores: Complete Guide)* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shimubn Newspaper Publishing, 2005).

the Imperial Palace made him feel privileged. He was proud of the fact that his profession served a noble cause. As an antiquarian book dealer, he believed in making genuine contribution to preserving Japan's cultural heritage and paving the way for Japan's future print-culture especially amid the ash-colored ruins and impoverished lives of the immediate post-war years. Despite the punishingly long hours spent in inspecting and cataloguing, loading and unloading, and dusting and shelving books, dreaming of one day opening his own store kept him in high-spirits.

Quickly, our afternoon conversation became something of a routine. Although *kaichō*'s stories were often spontaneous and meandering, interrupted every now and then by telephone inquiries, infrequent walk-in customers, and a daily tea break at 3:00 p.m. with a freshly brewed pot of green tea and Japanese sweets, I enjoyed his company. Whenever he did not have doctors' appointments or prior commitments with fellow dealers in the neighborhood, he would come down from his second floor office where books of considerable value were kept in the locked glass cases and share stories with me on the first floor where I worked. Akiko-san, who was my predecessor and an invaluable confidant at the store, was pregnant at the time and did not care for *kaichō*'s close company since he also happened to be her husband's uncle. The topic of her family was too close to home, and frankly, the space behind the counter was getting to be a little too small for three of us to sit comfortably with her growing stomach. The more proficient and hence self-sufficient I became at handling detailed miscellaneous paperwork needed at the store, the less obligated Akiko-san felt about having to commute for an hour during Tokyo's notorious morning rush hour. Eventually, she phased out and went on to an early maternity leave, which turned out to be her retirement as she became pregnant with a

second child soon after giving birth to the first. Increasingly, I was spending time alone with *kaichō* in the afternoon. Although he initially struck me as terribly blunt and taciturn, I soon learned that behind his sullen look he was actually a very warm, loquacious person with incredible business acumen.

On that afternoon, *kaichō* was exceptionally talkative and indulgent, and let me in on a slightly clandestine aspect of his trade. With tactfully placed bravado, he depicted the rush of receiving an air-chilled package from a customer and finding a wad of unmarked money underneath an assortment box of also perfectly refrigerated pickled vegetables. Playing on the mouth-watering smell of pickled vegetables and the scrumptious nature of gift money received under the table, he energetically declared that the package indeed “smelled” from miles away. This was not the only time his vigilant book hunting efforts bore fruit in a similarly dramatic fashion, he cheerfully pointed out. On a separate occasion, he succeeded in procuring a set of exquisitely illustrated *Ise-Monogatari* booklets in mint condition. Following *kaichō*’s personal delivery to one of his long-time customers, a bank deposit was made without delay. The very next day, to *kaichō*’s surprise, the appreciative customer showed up at the store unannounced, bearing an extra 500,000yen (approximately 5500 US dollars) in cash to thank him in person. I do not know the specifics of the accounting requirements such gift money entails, but I suspect that there are ways to evade taxes when one’s business operates primarily on cash. When *kaichō* took me into his confidence for the first time, I knew that he was leading me by the hand to cross the infamous closed doors of Kanda Jimbō-chō.

***Mekiki* (Connoisseurship)**

This chapter considers a connoisseurship among the seasoned antiquarian

booksellers who specialize in Japanese pre-modern publications, collectively known as *wahon* as a form of literacy with a distinctive reading threshold. Even though *wahon* is esteemed as a treasury of ancient Japanese literary and aesthetic tradition, basic requirements of *wahon* appreciation are such that *wahon* is also regarded as terribly esoteric and disconnected from the mundane affairs of the contemporary Japanese. Drawing on various ethnographic accounts, I will show that the booksellers' *embodied connoisseurship*, or what they refer to as *mekiki* in Japanese, exemplifies a subject- and period-specific literacy appropriate for *wahon*. Substantiated by extensive bibliographic knowledge and intimate insight into old Japanese scripts' stylistic differences, usage, lexical registers, and syntactical patterns, the booksellers' *mekiki* should be related to as a manifestation of their remarkable ability to recognize bibliographic value of *wahon* and uniquely acquired proficiency in deciphering outdated *kanji* (Chinese characters) use and period-specific modes of writing. The stark contrast that emerges from the juxtaposition between the laypeople's *kanji* reading threshold and their superb grasp of *kanji* will not only reveal the inherent complexities of Japanese reading and writing system, but also highlight the role played by the state-prescribed compulsory *kanji* education that defines *kanji* reading threshold for the ordinary Japanese. As I imagine it, *mekiki* of *wahon* lends itself to an exemplary case study of a particular articulation of reading threshold.

The majority of the *wahon* booksellers studied here are active members of the Tokyo Antiquarian Bookseller's Association (*Tokyo kosho kumiai* or TABA)⁴⁵ whose headquarters is at the heart of tight-knit community of Kanda Jimbō-chō. As self-

⁴⁵ Tokyo Antiquarian Booksellers' Association headquarters is located at the bottom of Meiji-Dōri Street, a block away from Yasukuni-Dōri Street. According to the TABA handbook, the TABA sponsored activities promote the actualization of the organizational motto: "Let there be light upon old books, let there be power among old books." (*Kosho ni hikari wo. Kosho ni chikara wo*).

appointed custodians of a national-cultural heritage and practitioners of emphatically “traditional” socio-economic relations, these booksellers epitomize a sensorially dictated connoisseurship. Although to qualify their expertise as embodied may seem redundant since a combination of a formally acquired knowledge and an appropriate sensorial register that recognizes a distinct merit is what typically substantiates connoisseurship. I insist on characterizing it as embodied, not only because *wahon* as tangible objects demand that we take its materiality and material components seriously, but also because the *wahon* booksellers’ connoisseurship bespeaks a distinctive embodied reading threshold that exceeds a normal state-prescribed reading proficiency deemed requisite for a “proper Japanese” reading body.

In exploring various instantiations of the embodied connoisseurship, a concept of *ajiwai* serves an informative function. As *aji* (flavor) in the word *ajiwai* suggests, it gauges a presence of what we might associate with a taste or a flavor. Used customarily in conjunction with an adjective indicating depth, *ajiwai* encapsulates an implicit but unmistakable quality found in an object or a person. Among the *wahon* booksellers, the capacity to recognize *ajiwai* is a measure of their honed connoisseurship as it attests to a uniquely attuned receptivity to hard-to-detect value. Insofar as, the merit communicated by this concept is recognizable only among those properly trained to appreciate the latent attributes, *ajiwai* is unequivocally lost to those without receptive capacities. Although food and art critics are in the habit of using *ajiwai* as a conceptual yardstick in reviewing the quality of artistic execution and presentation, lending to further analyses on styles and idiosyncrasies of the work, *ajiwai* is also a conventional household expression in describing someone’s personality, quality of writing, pleasantness of voice, etc. Since

ajiwai already carries connotations of object and person embodying an inalienable exquisiteness or an ineffable charm, the application to *wahon* by the booksellers is not surprising. What is curious, however, is that the booksellers' notion of *ajiwai* is neither reducible to a conventional enumeration of historical or literary significance of book content nor a recognition of an aesthetic quality of a book as an artifact. Rather, *ajiwai* is believed to emanate from the unlikely but fortuitous survival of a book against the fate of entropy (i.e. the inevitable material disintegration and spatial dispersion over time) and the qualities detectable only to those equipped with a proper reading threshold. *Ajiwai* is, as one of the TABA members resignedly described, "something you know in your gut the book has or has not."

Although I may appear to overindulge or exaggerate the way the *wahon* booksellers obsess about their distributed senses, I have come to see that their olfactory and tactile sensitivity constitutes a core of their embodied connoisseurship. It is a type of technique and form (*shosa*) resulting from a long-term bodily disciplining that has now become a second nature. This may come as a surprise, but the booksellers spend only a fraction of their time attending to customers at the store. Their day is largely spent engaging in some type of cognitive and physical labor inside their climate-controlled storage space, conference rooms at the TABA headquarters, in front of their computer, or en route to delivering and collecting precious merchandise (antiquarian books) to and from the clients. Although running an antiquarian book business cannot be reduced singularly to a question of booksellers' mnemonic, physical or fiscal competence, it would also be erroneous to trivialize any one of them. Whether the booksellers' profession entails a veritable manual labor or a figurative one, because a rigorous commitment of mind and

body is expected of them, a joke involving an excruciating lower back pain triggered by heavy lifting that confine people to bed for days invariably yields a knowing chuckle and unconditional sympathy from those in the bookstore business.

My analysis thus reflects their commitment, though it does not blindly subscribe to their use of an idealized trope under *ajiwai*. Instead, I regard *ajiwai* to be a rhetorical and heuristic device for the booksellers to communicate their professional sensibility and further support their claims about their expertise in respective fields. Simultaneously, I approach the professed allegiance to embodied connoisseurship as a conceptual tool to tease out underlying assumptions about tempo and temporality that ostensibly dictate what is a respectable socio-economic relation befitting of Kanda Jimbō-chō. While scholars of different disciplines have theorized the issues concerning tempo and temporality of texts and the nature of reading, none has made a specific inquiry into antiquarian books from the perspective of the booksellers' connoisseurship and reading threshold.⁴⁶ Ultimately, I argue that the embodied connoisseurship steadfastly defended by the *wahon* booksellers reminds us that the corporeality of a reading and writing body matters greatly in shaping what gets written down, who gets to read it, when and where reading takes place, and how reading as a practice becomes habituated. That is to say, the

⁴⁶ Roger Chartier, "Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading," *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings* 97:1 (1987): 299-329; Roger Chartier, "Languages, Books and Reading From the Printed Word to the Digital Text," *Critical Inquiry* Autumn, no. 31 (2004); Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture From the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson, and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series ; No. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present Vol.6*, ed. H Kuklick (Jal Press, 1986); Kielbowicz, Richard B., "Mere Merchandise Or Vessels of Culture?: Books in the Mail, 1792-1942," *Bibliographical Society of America* 82:2 (1988): 169-200.

materiality of reading and writing media, conceived here in the broadest sense to include various components of reading and writing technologies and apparatuses, has a considerable impact upon a formation of a specific reading proficiency-cum-threshold, subject and practice. Seen this way, the booksellers' connoisseurship that figures as, among many things, a proficiency in deciphering esoteric pre-modern writing is a reading threshold specifically tailored to respond to the demands of the *wahon* reading milieu. Ethnographic moments examined below are instantiations of the bookseller's embodied connoisseurship that simultaneously articulate Kanda Jimbō-chō's unique reading and writing threshold.

On Tempo and Temporality of Kanda Jimbō-chō

Let us examine an irreconcilable claim that the *wahon* booksellers implicitly make when depicting themselves as somehow incompatible with, and therefore antithetical to, capitalism. What undermines this self-professed status is, of course, their extremely lucrative cash-based economy that exploits the fundamental principles of scarcity and desire. To be fair, the point in insisting on such impossibility does not lie in gaining actual exemption from the forces of capitalism, but in suggesting an alternative regime of social economy Kanda Jimbō-chō lays claim to by consistently opting for business transactions and social relations based on trust and connoisseurship. The objective therefore is to highlight differences of tempo and temporality belonging to Kanda Jimbō-chō.

Since the economy of Kanda Jimbō-chō pivots ostensibly on collaborative reification of historical, cultural, aesthetic and bibliographic value immanent in books, the professional book dealers and amateur bibliophiles strive for perpetual learning. In

the presence of a romanticized camaraderie, commercial interests are set aside from time to time to indulge in their shared pursuit. In fact, there is a standard practice that demonstrates a wish to maintain a spirit of fraternity across the professional and amateur, vendor and client. It is a form of learning known as *mimi gakumon*. As the word *mimi* (ear) and *gakumon* (study/learning) indicates, it is a process of acquiring knowledge second handedly through one's ears. What this means in practice is that *mimi gakumon* not only advocates a collegial social relation (trust), but also incentivizes a mutually beneficial, continuous exchange of information (connoisseur). By way of promoting such communal solidarity and circulation of knowledge, the competition is effectively forestalled among the TABA members. Incidentally, the sentiment is subtly conveyed as the booksellers' wish for their less diligent customers to cultivate a proper bibliophilic sensibility and devotion.

Admittedly, the booksellers' hope for a utopian coexistence is self-serving, albeit not completely without a philanthropic merit. According to their logic, once the true value of books is recognized, adequate care is likely applied to preserve the material integrity of books. Because proper care increases the chance of books outliving a current owner, this in turn enhances the prospect of a future book trading volume. Furthermore, since a better preservation ordinarily results in a greater profit, which presumably will be made by the future generations of antiquarian booksellers, the longevity of the community as a whole can also be hoped for. Interestingly, the distinctively ephemeral nature of assumed antiquarian book ownership contributes to further justify this line of reasoning. The booksellers maintain that the true value of books will become finally apparent and rightly honored, only when customers realize that their ownership merely

constitutes a point in time, a brief moment in a long succession of past, present and future owners. The ownership of antique books should therefore be deemed serendipitous and temporary at best, and that the owner's privilege should also lapse with the expiration of their natural lives.

Empirically speaking, a private antiquarian book collection tends to "return" to the market after the owner's passing. Save for the few who make conscientious effort to locate suitable public institutions to donate in its entirety, most surviving families know next to nothing about a cultural significance or monetary value associated with the deceased's collection. As a result, the task of appraisal and disposal is usually consigned to obliging antiquarian booksellers who subsequently sell the collection either in whole or in part at the TABA auction as they see fit. In contextualizing the nature of this short-term ownership, it is helpful to remember *wahon*'s lesser-known fact that unlike antique objects whose production volume was indeed small and limited, even prior to the height of *wahon* production in the mid-nineteenth century, hundreds of copies were being printed for the best-selling *wahon* titles in Japan. Despite a surprisingly large number of *wahon* still in circulation today, private *wahon* ownership remains to be categorically defined in a temporally restricted term. The rationale behind this type of ownership in some way resonates with a sense of co-ownership we observe over common resources and public property.⁴⁷ That is to say, in a larger scheme of things, *wahon* belongs to a breed of "national" property. By virtue of this finiteness associated with antiquarian books and the ownership, a temporality of Kanda Jimbō-chō's socio-economy calls into

⁴⁷ With regard to the idea of individual's right to common resource and property, I was inspired by an interview with Indiana University Professor and the 2009 Nobel prize for economics winner, Elinor Ostrom aired on October 23, 2009 during a segment of Planet Money on the National Public Radio. The podcast is available on the Planet Money website under the title of "#108 Planet Money: Elinor Ostrom Checks In."

question the process of entropy generally understood by the laws of physics, which I will discuss shortly. Seen in this light, the booksellers might be compared to shrewd handlers of exceptionally profitable ghosts whose perpetually over-extended physical and spiritual presence provides their livelihood and wealth.

Given the recent global financial crises exacerbated by mathematically formulated regimes of economy, it seems exceptionally timely to look carefully at the socio-economic implications of the booksellers' insistence on running a "family" business. Rather than making decisions based on computer generated cost-benefit analyses, the booksellers remain partial to the idea of doing business based on their hard-earned social relations and expertise despite the laborious acquisition processes and logistical challenges met at transferring the wealth from the present generation to the next. Although striking a balance between conflicting obligations continues to test their business acuity and perseverance, their unique struggle is what elevates their embodied expertise to connoisseurship and in turn defines their identities as antiquarian booksellers of Kanda Jimbō-chō. Let me say a few more on this subject. If booksellers' demands for customers to eventually grow into full-fledged aficionados of *wahon*, not just consumers of art, may seem old-fashioned, their business practice is even more traditional in many respects. Despite a *de facto* extinction elsewhere, with remarkable leniency, many antiquarian bookstores in Kanda Jimbō-chō continue to run a generous monthly, quarterly or even annual tab, what is referred to as *tsuke* in Japanese, for frequent customers and large educational institutions. The booksellers defend this seemingly altruistic and rather quaint measure as an unspoken code of collective appreciation for irreplaceable national-cultural artifacts. They maintain that a mutual trust cannot be reduced to a strictly

economic calculation. Their business transactions, in other words, defy the basic capitalist thrust of rationalization. Instead, their business relations must be seen as continuously renewed, unwritten social contracts. They are expressions of mutually agreed upon promises of reciprocity and long-term commitments. As *kaichō* at S-shobō once explained: “Unlike most short-sighted profit seekers in the current (i.e. capitalist) market, we are not fighting against time. Time is our best ally. In time, books gain more value. I just have to wait for the right time to bring them into the market.” The relation to time and tempo of socio-economic transactions in Kanda Jimbō-chō thus differ noticeably from the fast tempo of a burgeoning media-landscape that dictates the current market, where nothing is ever quite instantaneous or responsive enough.

One might rightly ask, though if the *wahon* booksellers are really unaffected by time, as *kaichō* would like us to believe. If time can add more value to books, is it not capable of obliterating value? What *kaichō* seems to imply is that the antiquarian books and booksellers have a fundamentally different set of concerns with regard to time. Never having to keep up with time-sensitive imperatives to churning out the most innovative and noble commodities, highly specialized *wahon* booksellers such as the ones prevailing in Kanda Jimbō-chō only have to consult their store inventory vis-à-vis a capricious rise and fall of customers’ interests and trends. Not infrequently, historic figures portrayed in the NHK national broadcasting serialized dramas or themes related to popular TV programs influence what is currently most sellable at a 100yen (approximately 1 US dollar) paperback wagon or on a display window at the store. If the timing is not right, one of the booksellers has echoed *kaichō*, “I only have to hold on to the items until it is time.” He quickly added the following as he wholeheartedly laughed, “Thank goodness,

books don't rot!" Figuratively speaking of course, books can and do go to seed as the public interests wane. But so long as the store merchandise is kept in a semi-climate-controlled storage space and treated with appropriate care, most of the acid-free pre-modern publications are likely to remain intact easily for another century. In the long run, it is their embodied connoisseurship that matures over time that will surely bear fruit. After all, there is no crash course to expedite the learning process, which characterizes the formation of reading and writing threshold in Kanda Jimbō-chō.

The booksellers' relation to time is thus intimately informed by a starkly *finite* nature of their merchandise, while at the same time defined by a positively *infinite* possibility of enhancement of their embodied connoisseurship. Here, by finite, I do not mean to suggest that books are perishable, albeit they are doubtlessly susceptible to deterioration and disintegration over time. Instead, as touched upon earlier, the finiteness of antiquarian books has to do with an inevitable decline in number suggested by the notion of entropy.⁴⁸ After all, the production of what is now considered antiquarian books has long been discontinued along with a dissolution of socio-economic network and infrastructure, which was supported by a wide range of services provided by artisans and merchants – wealthy patrons, writers, publishers, scribes, woodblock carvers,

⁴⁸ For a seminal text on literary temporality, see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* and Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, and David Pellauer, vol. 3 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988). A French school of historiographer, known as the Annales school, is of course renowned for an investigative approach to literary work that pays special attention to material specificities of literary work and spatiotemporality emerging therefrom Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture From the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*. Finally, but not the least important is Friedrich Kittler's work Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Writing Science (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999). Gitelman's investigation Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).. I am also inspired by the writings by Gregory Bateson Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, University of Chicago Press ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). The Society for Studies of Entropy, "Jyunkan-gata shakai wo tou: seimei, gijyutsu, keizai (Inquiring Into a "Circulatory Society": Life, Technology and Economy)," (2001): 276.

compositors, painters, printers, booksellers, book lenders, etc. There will never be another edition by the publisher that had gone bankrupt in the seventeenth century. The amount of antiquarian books that can be salvaged and redeemed is unequivocally *finite*. In actual fact, the booksellers believe that the total number of antiquarian books from the pre-modern era is on the decrease even at the hands of skilled and dedicated booksellers and collectors.

Be that as it may, the very finiteness associated with antiquarian books also encourages the booksellers to embrace a self-appointed guardianship of Japanese print culture, and their connoisseurship incidentally warrants their sentiment as “unsung heroes” (*en no shita no chikaramochi*) who safeguard the cultural longevity against the grain of time and oblivion. Although an occasional display of the *wahon* booksellers’ disapproval of “blind money that knows no name or face” is reserved for the safe privacy of the fellow TABA members, a kind of ostentatious purchasing power that makes no qualm about buying “indiscriminately” (i.e. not caring from whom they are buying, nor cultivating personal collections or attaching sentimental value to books) is met with restrained suspicion. Whether it is a customer’s deliberate attempt not to establish a potentially complicated, long-term socio-economic relationship or an innocent failure to acknowledge such a practice, when a transfer of money becomes a sole defining moment in their business transaction, it is considered uncouth and therefore unbefitting of Kanda Jimbō-chō. The booksellers’ ever so subdued disapproval seems to derive from their allegiance to the idea of trust and connoisseurship that *ostensibly* dictates socio-economic relations in Kanda Jimbō-chō. It is crucial to note that the emphasis here is on the word *ostensible*. Obviously, the booksellers are not as naïve as to be motivated singularly by a

sense of philanthropic duty to protect scarce artifacts or a pure delight in successfully directing precious books to worthy owners. Their first priority is to securing sustained prosperity of their family business by exercising an astute mercantile acumen and embodied connoisseurship.

Here, I would like to make a tangential remark on the very finiteness of the printed material as it bears an intriguing resonance today. Although much discussed dichotomy between the analog and digital technologies places the aforementioned finiteness in an increasing juxtaposition with a putative infinity associated with an ever-expansive sphere of digital computation and data storage system, I will not undertake a close examination of recent debates about digital publishing in this dissertation. I have decided not to pursue this line of investigation because the focal points of these debates are too often very narrowly defined either as a question of new business models or stipulations of copyrights. This detracts attention from the real issue I am interested in exploring, which is the physicality of books and the way it informs the formation of embodied connoisseurship among the booksellers. By emphatically reinstating books as commodities and cultural artifacts, I want to provide the critical attention they deserve in addressing the complexity of socio-economic relations that make possible the circulation and consumption of these books, and above all the reality of connoisseurship among the TABA members. In so doing, multiple dimensions of books – books as objects of congealed human labor, carriers of knowledge and information, and instantiations of socio-economic relations – can be addressed.

Past, Present and Future of Kanda Jimbō-chō

Insofar as the social imaginaries of Kanda Jimbō-chō are concerned, the neighborhood has traditionally been linked to a legendary connoisseurship of printed text, and men and women of letters. What is perhaps less known is just how robustly this community has withstood various socio-political upheavals since the dawn of the modern era. Not only did it re-build itself in the aftermath of the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake, it also survived austerity measures and censorship imposed by the interwar government, miraculously escaped the successive air raids during the last war, weathered the interference and destruction caused by the 1960s and 70s student protests and street-riots, the real-estate frenzies and the ruthless advances made by the land sharks in the 80s, and finally, somehow managed to persevere throughout the post-bubble era recession and depression.⁴⁹ Today, Kanda Jimbō-chō as a community continues to offer valuable insights as to how different generations and media technologies, reading/writing-cultures, and assumptions about socio-economic relations converge to create conditions of possibilities for the future while maintaining its reign as the “Mecca of antiquarian books.” Kanda Jimbō-chō’s response to technological changes and socio-economic reconfigurations in the past decade not only bespeaks the community’s resilience, but also lends itself to a philosophical inquiry into the expertise knowledge that supports the operation.

The community’s longevity has by now attained an air of inevitability. One of the most frequently cited anecdotes involving what seems like a historical fluke reinforces

⁴⁹ Bunkichi Shimizu, *Hon wa nagareru: shuppan ryuutsuu kikou no seiritsu-shi (Books Flow: Historical Formation of Publishing and Distribution System)* (Tokyo: Japan Editor School, 1991). Shinichi Sano, *Darega “hon” wo korosunoka (Who Kills “Books”)* (Tokyo: President Publication, 2001). Eiji Oguma, *1968 I&II* (Tokyo: Shinyosha, 2009).

the view that the community's survival has indeed been ordained by providence: During what is now remembered as the Great Tokyo Air Raids of March 10, 1945, millions of shells began falling from hundreds of B29 bombers before daylight, and continued to scorch the center of Tokyo. Miraculously however, the streets of Kanda Jimbō-chō along with the Imperial Palace remained untouched.⁵⁰ Founded on these slightly embellished but fascinating accounts, Kanda Jimbō-chō's current dominance is made even more indisputable by its status as geographical epicenter of governmental and commercial policy changes, editorial decision-making and shifting literary trends. Today, at the heart of the Kanda Jimbō-chō antiquarian bookseller's community sits the headquarters of the TABA. Although the TABA is composed of seven branch offices spread across Tokyo prefecture, by virtue of its space afforded by the newly built eight-story building, not to mention the accessibility to/from government offices, ministry quarters and related commercial and financial sectors, the Kanda headquarters has been the most prominent organizational force nationwide.

Currently, the TABA Headquarters is home to six discretionary associations that are organized around different themes and specializations: *Chūō Ichi-Kai*, *Tokyo Kōten-Kai*, *Tokyo Yōsho-Kai*, *Tokyo Shiryō-Kai*, *Isshin-Kai*, and *Meiji Kōten-Kai*, respectively. Throughout the year, from Monday to Friday, each association in turn hosts a daily

⁵⁰ There is another version to the miraculous survival tale of Kanda Jimbō-chō. See Ryotaro Shiba, *Honjyo, dukagawa aampo, kanda kaiwai (a Walk in Honjyo, Fukagawa, Kanda Area)*, vol. 36, Kaidou wo yuku (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Publications, 1992). For more on Kanda Jimbō-chō as an epicenter of books and print culture at large, see *Kanda jimbo-cho duruhon-ya aampo (Walk in Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores)*; *Kanda jimbo-xho koshogai: eria-betsu kanzen gaido (Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores: Complete Guide)*. Also Shimizu Bunkichi's book *Hon wa nagareru: shuppan ryuutsuu kikou no seiritsu-shi (Books Flow: Historical Formation of Publishing and Distribution System)*. Shimizu's outlines a formation of modern Japanese publishing and distribution system, which inevitably includes a brief overview of evolution of Kanda Jimbō-chō.

auction at the TABA Headquarters. For example, on Monday, *Chūō Ichi-Kai* manages sales of weekly/monthly journals, graphic novels (*manga*), adult-content publications, miscellaneous hard cover books, and popular pocket size books. *Tokyo Koten-Kai*, to which S-Shobō has been a member since its foundation in 1967, specializes in pre-modern manuscripts, scrolls, and prints, what are generally referred to as *wahon*. Most of *wahon* handled by the TABA are auctioned off at their famous Tuesday auction. *Tokyo Yōsho-Kai* handles publications written in a language other than Japanese or classical Chinese and also hosts a separate auction on the basement floor on Tuesday. *Tokyo Shiryō-Kai*, on Wednesday, exclusively deals with academic papers and research writings (both pre-war and post-war) in the fields of history, social science, natural science and the humanities. *Isshin-Kai* oversees sales of miscellaneous pre- and post-war publications on Thursday. Finally, *Meiji Koten-Kai* organizes sales of modern authors' manuscripts, first-edition literary works, paintings and handwritten letters/postcards of prominent modern authors on Friday.

In order to participate in these in-house auctions, a bookseller has to be first and foremost a government certified antique dealer and subsequently becomes a registered member of the TABA. Once an membership is approved and the membership fee is paid, a bookseller is free to petition either one or multiple subdivisions of the TABA for a separate membership and take part in the activities organized by the TABA as long as s/he shoulders responsibility to ensure an over all smooth operation of the association. Besides an obligatory service at the TABA Headquarters and subgroups, volunteering one's time and physical labor to the benefit of fellow members is considered an honorable gesture, which promotes comradely acceptance and ample learning

experiences. According to an unspoken agreement, it is customary for a predecessor to offer a successor's service to the group whenever a next generation of bookstore owner is chosen. Both *kaichō* and Yasuyuki-san, who is a future successor to S-Shobō, have served extensively on committees and sub-committees inside the *Tokyo Koten-kai* (the Tokyo Classics Association) at different times.

In addition to day-to-day administrative responsibilities and logistics concerning book-related events the TABA Headquarters is delegated to oversee, the TABA is in charge of coordinating a daily in-house auction for the members. As briefly referenced earlier, the in-house auction, or what is affectionately referred to by the members as a “market” (*ichi* or *ichiba*) or “exchange” (*kōkan-kai*), is held daily and exclusively for the TABA members. But the formality of the procedure more closely resembles an auction than that of a regular wholesales or retail business transaction, hence I refer to market as auction. Each morning, participating members of antiquarian booksellers haul in books that are deemed ill-suited (and thus unprofitable for the store) or consigned by its clients. After merchandise is loaded into a number of large metal cargoes and carried into a preparatory floor, a handful of volunteers sent from the participating member stores begin their inspection and re-organization at around 8:30 a.m.. In the next few hours, the chaos on the floor will be given order by reshuffling the books into thematically organized piles, properly labeling each bundle, and displaying the countless stacks on the floor, against the wall and on the tables for a pre-auction viewing by noon. According to the experienced TABA members, these volunteer book handlers are merely “paying their dues” as apprentices, since the mandatory pre-auction inspection and organization process not only exposes them to a wide variety of merchandise in circulation, but also

teaches them how to assess physical conditions and overall quality of merchandise.

Although the pre-auction preparation is extremely time-consuming and literally backbreaking for the volunteers, even if they are mindlessly going through the piles, the advocates of this old-style apprenticeship argue that it is never a loss for them, because the repetitive exposure gradually but invariably instills knowledge that cannot be incorporated otherwise.

With its global prestige, Kanda Jimbō-chō towers over other neighborhoods with well established, though comparatively smaller-scaled, publishers and nationally acclaimed antiquarian bookstores in Japan. As a matter of fact, until the mid-2000, most antiquarian bookstores have operated in relative anonymity and seclusion, known mainly to the local bibliophiles who sought out specific book dealers that best catered to their needs. The collective initiative to form a regional partnership among the remote booksellers was hardly heard of.⁵¹ Although the TABA has tried to help sustain the oft-isolated local booksellers by enabling them to dispose and replenish their stock at the daily auction, the small-scaled booksellers outside of the great Kantō area have struggled to keep their business afloat in the post-bubble era.

With that said, Kanda Jimbō-chō was also not exempt from the post-bubble economic predicament. Between the years of late 1990s and early 2000, Kanda Jimbō-chō was at a crossroads. The imminent paradigm shift in the publishing industry precipitated by the new digital media technology was being discussed everyday with increasing urgency among the new, used and antiquarian booksellers. Online shopping

⁵¹ There has been a steady growth of local book fair involving both new and old booksellers, such as *Bookoka* in Fukuoka and *Bookmark Nagoya* in Nagoya in the past few years, which in return seems to have inspired other similar book-related events with endorsement by municipal offices and community storekeeper's association.

was gaining a larger share and broadening a niche market thanks to a fast developing media-network and the minimal overhead required for starting an online business. What is more, Japan's decade long depression and sluggish retail market was showing no sign of recovery.⁵² A prevailing sense of socio-economic uncertainty at a national discursive level was further exacerbated by the public debates carried out by conservative politicians, youth culture pundits and social critics on the detrimental effects of digital (dis)connectivity and sociality on the youth.⁵³ Despite these socio-economic predicaments, Kanda Jimbō-chō began to experience a surprising turn of events. Sons of renowned booksellers, in their late 20s and early 30s, who less than a decade ago went out of Kanda Jimbō-chō to find their own professions, were returning to take over the family business.⁵⁴ Coincidentally, the completion of a new TABA headquarters was also on the horizon, just in time for the combining forces of generations. As some TABA members reminisce, a scent of promise for institutional renaissance and hope for regeneration was in the air.

⁵² For more detailed account on the changes that were happening around this time inside the printing press, see Nakanishi's excellent autobiography Hidehiko Nakanishi, *Katsuji ga kieta hi--konpyuutaa to insatsu (the Day Printing Type Disappeared: Computer and Printing)* (Tokyo: Shoubunsha, 1994); Hidehiko Nakanishi, *Honga kawaru!: katsuji jyouhou (Book Will Change!: Cultural Theory of Print Information)* (Tokyo: Tokyo Sogensha, 2003).

⁵³ Shinji Miyadai was one of the most vocal and prolific figures during this period. Shinji Miyadai, *Toomei na sonzai no futoomei na akui (Opaque Malice Within a Transparent Existence)* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1997). Shinji Miyadai, Yoshiki Fujii, and Akio Nakamori, eds. *Shinseiki no riaru (Real in the New Millennium)* (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsho, 1997). Coincidentally, a young female novelist's work, *Install*, won one of the most prestigious Japanese literary awards in 2001, which thematized a sense of disconnect of those fallen out of social normalcy surrounding a digital anonymity and criminality. See Risa Wataya, *Insutooru (Install)* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2001).

⁵⁴ The same group of younger generation now comprises many of Yasuyuki-san's drinking/baseball-playing cohorts of like-minded businessmen and woman.

In a matter of half a decade, new marketing campaigns pushed forward by the younger generation of the TABA members gained momentum, albeit with some resistance and skepticism expressed by the older generations. Kanda Jimbō-chō was breaking into a new demographic frontier by zeroing in on a young urban population whose buying power had until then remained fairly un-explored and un-exploited. Among many innovative enterprises that were introduced during this period, a bi-annual “sell on the spot” (*sokubaikai*) weekend event known as the *Underground Book Café* (UBC)⁵⁵ was phenomenally successful. It not only drew unprecedented volume of public attention, but also mobilized a considerable number of first-time customers to Kanda Jimbō-chō. The success of the UBC is said to be a result of the younger TABA members’ relentless effort to make Kanda Jimbō-chō digitally visible and accessible to digitally mediated younger customers. It was also a genuine collaborative attempt by the surrounding establishments (restaurants, cafes, etc) and the TABA to inject some new energy into Kanda Jimbō-chō by lowering the average age of customers. Lucky for Kanda Jimbō-chō, some key players involved in the neighborhood rejuvenation project were able to take advantage of the resources they had via connections with their previous work.⁵⁶ A bright orange canvas apron, which many Kanda Jimbō-chō booksellers are still seen in today, was custom-designed during this period of buoyancy as a symbol of much-welcome renewal as well as the community’s resolve to prevail over what was considered an inevitable slow death of a traditional, print publishing culture and industry.

⁵⁵ On the completion of the 11th UBC in May 2007, the project was deemed to have served its function and gone into an indefinite hiatus.

⁵⁶ For more on this topic, also see *Kanda jimbo-cho koshogai: eria-betsu kanzen gaido* (*Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores: Complete Guide*); *Kanda jimbo-cho furuhon-ya sampo* (*Walk in Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores*).

Though a generational change that was set in motion a decade ago is not quite complete, today the ambiance is different. Differences in the appearances of antiquarian booksellers are already noticeable. Traditionally, the old-school Kanda Jimbō-chō *wahon* booksellers have been seen in sober two-piece or three-piece suits whose drab color often made them look a little dull and faded, curiously matching the overall dusty-colored merchandise at the store. More prim ones are never without a tie or a jacket even in the middle of Japan's sweltering summer. Nonetheless, the younger generation has consistently opted for a more fashionable, quirky, clean-look to set themselves apart from the preceding generations. For instance, Yasuyuki-*san* is known for a sporty look with an unwrinkled brand-name T-shirt or polo shirt, a pair of chino pants and an expensive pair of sunglasses. One of Yasuyuki-*san*'s colleagues is always dressed in a body-fitting European suit coupled with a pair of *Comme des Garçon*'s deck shoes or other brand name casual shoes. A signature style of another dealer, who is soon to take over a bookstore with the oldest lineage in Tokyo, is dashing in his button-down shirt with a pair of *Dolce & Gabbana* jeans or some other expensive brand name denims. None of them quite fits the stereotype of an antiquarian bookseller. When asked, their answer comes with a knowing smile and their mantra, "Because we are the new generation of antiquarian booksellers."

The seeming superficiality of the younger booksellers' stylish looks is not only deceptively effective in reinforcing an image of new generation of antiquarian booksellers, but also critical to actualizing the alchemical transformation of "one man's junk is another man's gold." It may be too evident a point, but a book's value is often conspicuously relative, perhaps far more than usual. A well-adorned and illustrated set of

Tale of Genji booklet from the eighteenth century might be equally pleasurable to behold for everyone, and because of its obvious beauty and historical acclaim, people might be convinced of the value rendered on a price tag. But only a select few will find it worthwhile to pay a great sum to own it. The livelihood of book dealers depends on the ability to first acquire books and then redeem their value formerly denied or obscured by the centuries of grime; once acquired, the dealers go extra miles to draw out the book's value in a perceptible way through their initial "inspect and catalog" processing at their store: Books are wiped clean and debugged. Creases on the pages are carefully straightened. Missing or out of order pages are noted, and damages caused by water, insects, mildew and general wear and tear are judiciously annotated on a store inventory. In some cases, special cloth folding cases are ordered to house the booklets. Unless the aesthetic or bibliographic significance of books is evident through the title or gorgeous embellishment, the value of antiquarian books is frequently beyond the layperson's grasp. In other words, valuable books must be treated as such by locking them away in a glass display case. This is where a kind of alchemical magic is performed. Since the value is difficult to perceive, it must be brought out somewhat forcefully through a *fait accompli*. As for the dealers, they themselves have to look reasonably authoritative and well groomed in the eyes of non-regular customers. When I cautiously probed this point, Yasuyuki-san put it plainly: if the store is carrying books that are clearly luxurious, costing a small fortune, he too has to look equally smart without giving the impression of being snobbish or ostentatious. This is a delicate balance to strike since looking well groomed is also linked to personal wealth, and perhaps greed.

Even after a few years of close but intermittent contact with them, I am not entirely certain how well off or badly-off these *wahon* booksellers truly are. Although they are often heard complaining that “business is ever so slow these days” or “compared to the 80s bubble era, one really has to work hard to earn meager daily cash income to support a family,” I have learned to listen to them with a grain of salt, as the same dealers who are supposedly just getting by can be seen leisurely having lunch alone or feasting with the colleagues at fairly fancy restaurants in and around Kanda Jimbō-chō. I have been present at many such occasions and heard quite a few entertaining stories involving heavy drinking and not entirely wholesome actions, which the parties concerned are embarrassed to admit later. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the healthy rivalry in the community, there is an amazing level of transparency that lends itself to the camaraderie amongst the dealers. From the gossip involving who recently made what purchase, and how much it had cost them, to who won the arm-wrestling match at the end of a long dinner the night before, the news travels fast through the grapevine of Kanda Jimbō-chō. The presumed transparency is not necessarily a flip side of some unarticulated skepticism toward one another or subdued competition among them. Rather, it bears witness to a sobering realization that they need one another for a survival. Trust in one another’s good conscience is vital not only for the sustainability of the community as a whole, but also as a currency with which the dealers extend courtesy and favor in exchanging at the TABA in-house auction.

My appointment at S-Shobō is a case in point. When I started my days as a store attendant, I was blissfully unaware of much of the esoteric antique book learning I was soon obliged to undertake. *Kaichō* and Yasuyuki-san were delighted to have an on-site

English-Japanese translator for unscheduled but not infrequent visits by foreign customers and dealers. They both seemed to have few, if any, expectations for me beyond what was minimally required of any store attendant. A week before my first day at S-Shobō when I came in for a job interview, *kaichō* barely looked at a Japanese-style handwritten resume I prepared for the occasion. No sooner did I sit down to introduce myself, *kaichō* began briefing me on my hours and responsibilities at the store. *Kaichō* needed no further reassurance from me because Hashiguchi-san had already vouched for me. It was almost as if an introduction from a fellow TABA dealer and a relative – Hashiguchi-san’s wife is a younger sister of *kaichō*’s late wife – was more than sufficient for me to qualify as a store attendant. I quickly learned that the spirit of mutual reciprocity was the rule of the game, and that my presence must be justified by my participation in a larger communal effort, which they knew how to enlist tactfully. Following a delightful pattern of upward spiral, as I became more involved and seen as able to “contribute” (*kōken suru*) to the community, more privileges were liberally extended to me. In no time, I was even allowed to move around freely through the “members only” viewing floors of various TABA auctions with *kaichō*’s ID tag.

But not until I observed the gradation of preferential treatment *kaichō* reserved for his loyal customers and the nonchalance he blatantly displayed to the others, did I begin to fully understand how lucky I had been to have Hashiguchi-san show me the way. Or else, I would have been confronted by the cold shoulder Kanda Jimbō-chō dealers are famous for giving to an outsider. Compared to the lack of formal enthusiasm extended to those with whom *kaichō* expects no more than a passing engagement, the kind of warm and ready hospitality the long-time clients receive from *kaichō* is not simply noticeable

but unreserved. Not only does their personal visit merit a rare invitation to join *kaichō* in his office on the second floor, but it also prompts Yasuyuki-san to gesture me discreetly to brew a cup of hot green tea. Soon, I learned to discern the importance as well as the expected length of meeting *kaichō* was having based on the absence or presence of the ‘tea request.’ I suppose, it was not unfounded that *kaichō*’s generation of *wahon* booksellers has been infamously described as “haughty” (*ōheina*) and their store “intimidating” (*shikii ga takai*), and this is the stereotypical image of a *wahon* bookseller Yasuyuki-san’s generation has been trying to overcome.

Through the Distributed Senses

During an eight-hour shift, my primary responsibilities ranged from something as uneventful as dusting bookshelves and answering infrequent telephone inquiries to a more exacting task of preparing clients’ invoices and official proof of purchase using a carbon copy pad. But, as a recently installed antiquarian bookstore clerk, an initial bibliographic processing after acquisition was one of the most thrilling and enlightening, though challenging, undertakings. In accordance with the TABA custom, Yasuyuki-san would retrieve the auctioned-off items in the afternoon at the headquarters and return to the store bearing a bundle by his side or pushing a large pile of books carefully wrapped in S-Shobō’s brown *furoshiki* on a store dolly. Although the volume of acquisitions fluctuated depending on what was available and how successfully Yasuyuki-san and *kaichō* bid that day, my responsibility consisted of the same task – inspect and catalog – similar to the procedure performed by the TABA volunteers on the morning of their in-house auction. I would put on Kanda Jimbō-chō’s signature apron in order not to get my clothes dirty, and carefully arrange stacks of books in a tight semicircle so that my swivel

chair provided the most efficient use of narrow space behind the store counter. After a preliminary inspection during which I was to locate any visible evidence of wear and tear, missing and/or out-of-order pages and other undesirable damages found in the items, cataloguing was needed.

Despite Japan's infamous humidity during the rainy season and stifling summer, to say nothing of a bone-chilling wet winter, handling the newly acquired merchandise always left my hands chapped and blackened with soot. A bottle of hand lotion was simply a necessity.⁵⁷ Unlike the stripped down to minimum labeling and abridged cataloging that sufficed the purpose at the TABA in-house auction, cataloging at the store had to be done more extensively in order to help store attendants organize and locate the books. Following the initial physical inspection, documenting pertinent bibliographic information, such as a book's title, author, publisher, publication date, a number of volume, etc., and annotating the conditions of books had to be done on S-Shobō's original index cards. The only information I was not responsible for providing was price, which was for Yasuyuki-san and *kaichō* to decide after their official appraisal. Once the index cards were properly filled out, the cards were digitally converted and incorporated into an electronic database at the store computer. In this way, the inventory was kept in check according to two different regimes of representation: manually through the cards and price tag stubs, and electronically using a special program designed and networked for the TABA members by Hashiguchi-san.

⁵⁷ I also learned another neat trick from Yasuyuki-san's drinking cohort, Yukio-san. Because he was in the habit of wearing a stylish starched-collared white shirt, each morning, he made sure to put some baby-powder in and outside of his cuffs in order to prevent them from getting dirty.

Setting aside the handicap I suffered while cataloging books, I enjoyed learning about running an antiquarian bookstore. Much like the TABA volunteers, I gradually learned to identify different literary genres and publication periods based on the clues imparted from the architectural composition (size, format and binding technique), printed colophons, and materials used to prepare the prints and books (paper, bug-repellent varnish and fabric). It was especially amusing to watch *kaichō* perform an alchemical transformation of seemingly worthless stacks of brown dusty books and paper. By giving them a definitive price, he not only allowed these books to emerge from the shrouding obscurities of the past as cultural artifacts, but also announced their value as worthy commodities. It was as if he was personally responsible for sustaining the grand illusion of the global antiquarian book market that revolved around an endless circulation of books and whirlpool of desires.

During my brief apprenticeship, I also managed to pick up a few quintessentially *wahon* bookseller techniques. One of which was so integral to the trade that on my first day three different people—*kaichō*, Yasuyuki-san, and Akiko-san—demonstrated it to me on three separate occasions. According to the instruction, I was to hold a book upside down on my lap at a strangely contorted angle and swiftly count leaves with a ball of my right thumb when inspecting a book. My mastery over gestures typical of antiquarian book dealers quickly became a measure of my growth as a trainee, and my Kanda Jimbō-chō interlocutors made a constant reference to my “speedy” adaptation with a visible delight. But, no matter how proficient I became in their professional parlance or a few of their inimitable techniques, there was an abysmal between us. A breadth of professional expertise extended from an encyclopedic knowledge about a distinct kanji use during a

specific socio-historical period, a genealogy of a certain genre of books, deep appreciation for various book binding techniques, to the cultural and political significance of particular material components used to adorn books. Those who were better financed, and more proficient in reading antiquated kanji as well as detecting the telltale signs of bibliographically significant details always outmaneuvered the less informed and experienced. The gap was most brutally announced during the daily auction when their acumen was put to test and competitive bidding was publically performed. My recently acquired knack for counting pages was the least of what was considered professional skills. As I pointed this out to Yasuyuki-*san*, who sometimes joked about my “seamless acclimation,” he nodded in agreement that after all some things were meant to take years of training.

***Kanji* Reading Threshold**

On the reading threshold of kanji, I must begin with an explanation of the nature of S-Shobō's store specialty. Most of its merchandise predated Japan's modern era. From sixteenth and seventeenth century hand-painted maps, pre-modern Japanese-style books, clothbound topographical documents on Hokkaido and its indigenous population of *Ainu*, to official excavation reports from across the archipelago, the book titles at S-Shobō posed a visual as well as semantic conundrum for my uninitiated eyes. This was of course, in part due to the use of a bygone era's inscrutable *kanji*. As briefly mentioned above, the Japanese Ministry of Education prescribes a list of *kanji* as a guideline for its reading and writing population. The guideline was first promulgated in 1946 as *Tōyō kanji hyō*, “A(n official) list of kanji designated for daily use.” The list contained 1,850 *kanji* that had been deemed appropriate for the use of official documents and everyday mass media.

Drafting this list coincidentally facilitated the standardization of *kanji* and inclusion of theretofore officially unrecognized simplified *kanji*. In order to respond to public needs and reflect the actual *kanji* use among the populace, the list underwent a substantial revision in 1981 and was re-released as *Jyōyō kanji hyō*, “A(n official) list of *kanji* designated for common use.” Since then it has undergone a few minor, albeit infrequent, revisions. The latest version is pending a final approval from the National Language Council (*kokugo shingikai*)⁵⁸ on the decision regarding the exclusion of 5 *kanji* and inclusion of an additional 196 *kanji*. This will bring the final count to 2,136 *kanji* to be named as “*kanji* designated for common use.” The stated purpose of the list is to eradicate *kanji* that are considered too elaborate or complicated (in terms of a number of strokes required) to write under normal everyday circumstances. It is also part of an emphasis on promoting higher literacy rate among its reading and writing subjects. In so far as the list is a recommended guideline, use of *kanji* not included in the list incurs no legal or social penalty. But most major publishing firms and daily newspapers in Japan refrain from using unlisted *kanji*. And when forced to use unlisted *kanji*, they vigilantly provide phonetic reading in rubies. Approximately 3,000 *kanji*, a little more than the number of *kanji* covered by the guideline, are believed to be sufficient for ordinary Japanese to get by without having to experience serious inconvenience. People rarely contest the guideline’s practicality or argue for an expansion of the list. According to teaching guidelines also prescribed by the Ministry of Education, children enrolled in

⁵⁸ The National Language Council (*kokugo shingikai*) was disbanded as part of the 2001 Central Government Reform (*chūō shōchō saihen*), which led to the establishment of a new ministry, the merging of existing ministries and the abolition of others. Responsibilities once overseen by the National Language Council has since been taken over by the Cultural Council (*bunka shingikai*), which is placed under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Japanese schools are expected to learn to read and write a little over 1,000 *kanji* during the first six years of compulsory education. By high school graduation, children are expected to be at least proficient in reading, which is the same thing as “recognizing,” all the listed *kanji*.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, the state recommendation regarding *kanji* is neither optional nor subtle. It can pose a serious challenge for parents when naming a child. If a name of a newborn is put together, either in part or in whole, with *kanji* that are noncompliant with the official standards, a city hall clerk is known to disapprove openly, or worse, refuse to issue a birth certificate under the submitted name. The rationale behind the decision seems to rest on the ground of public interests and welfare: if a child’s name uses listed *kanji*, everyone including the child and his/her peers should be able to read and write the name upon the completion of compulsory education or high school graduation. This seems to promote a relatively easy integration of a new member, i.e. the child, into an existing socio-linguistic community. However, even when a child’s name uses listed *kanji*, the state can still deny issuing a birth certificate. A controversy in 1993 involved parents who insisted on naming their son *akuma* (悪魔), meaning *devil* in Japanese, using two *kanji* from the recommended list. Although the presumed readability of the child’s name fulfilled the objective intended by the guideline, it was considered an abuse of parental rights that put the child’s welfare in danger. Aside from such extreme cases,

⁵⁹ On the latest revision, please refer to “196 Shin-jyoyou-kanji (Another 196 Kanji to Kanji Designated for Common Use).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2010. . As for a brief overview of the list of Chinese characters, see Hidetoshi Ito, *Kanji bunka to kompyuutaa (Culture of Kanji and Computer)*, vol. 9, Chuukou PC Shinsho (Tokyo: Chuuo Kooron sha, 1996). Koichi Kato, *Den-nou shakai no nihongo (Japanese Language in the Electronic Brain Society)* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjuu, 2000). and Jiro Enmannji, “Shouwa wo sawagaseta kanjitachi: touyou kanji no jikenbo (Kanji Hat Caused Great Sensation in the Showa-Era: A Casebook of Kanji Designated as Daily Use),” *Rekishi Bunka Library* (2007).

because parents and grandparents spend a considerable amount of time trying to come up with the most auspicious combination of *kanji*, it has always been an emotionally invested issue. Additionally, in the past few decades, the question of readability surrounding *kanji* has taken on a layer of technological complexity. The question is no longer limited to that of readability and acceptability within the community, but has undergone metamorphosis into that of digital legibility and compatibility. Most of the electronic word processors and computers sold and used in Japan primarily operate on a coding system known as the Japan Industrial Standard (JIS). The writing devices are capable of outputting at least 10,000 *kanji* on a screen and through a printer. Nonetheless, providing genuine compatibility across different communication media devices that operate on disparate coding systems and platforms has been a laborious task, necessitating a coordinated approach of an international consortium.⁶⁰

The visual and semantic conundrum I encountered while performing an obligatory “inspect and catalog” at S-Shobō stemmed essentially from my lack of *kanji* decoding and decrypting competence. More than once I awkwardly asked the store customers to assemble a series of *kanji* that would bear the book titles using a pen or a finger, and they frequently corrected my phonetic reading. Although I wondered about my ability to traverse a constellation of *kanji* now pushed to the wayside as antiquated, undesirable and impractical, I secretly hoped that my years of training in Japanese calligraphy had made me reasonably familiar with artful renderings of *kanji*. This wishful thinking soon proved to be ill advised. I was only marginally competent at reading *kanji* that had been reduced in numbers since the birth of modern nation-state and simplified beyond recognition in

⁶⁰ I will discuss in detail the technological challenges met and overcome by the word-processor manufactures and engineers in Japan in chapter four.

the post-war era in Japan. Not only was there an overwhelming number of book titles written in archaic *kanji* long consigned to oblivion, which were undoubtedly beyond the bounds of my knowledge and educated guesses, but the titles themselves demanded more than a straightforward reading of *kanji*. Even the characters I vaguely recognized based on visual familiarity were often semantically impenetrable. Part of the difficulty of decryption had to do with a pre-modern literary predilection toward plays on homonyms with an unexpected choice of *kanji*. The deliberate mis-assignment of *kanji* was not at all formulaic; poets and writers competed against one another to devise a singular expression of one's literary sentiment through elements of surprise. Apart from the visual mysteries and semantic riddles, I also discovered that *kanji*-related orthographic rules in Japan were surprisingly ambiguous and lax, as some of the conjugational endings added in the *hiragana*-syllabary after *kanji* turned out to be misleading, confusing and counter-intuitive at times. While the plurality of reading associated with *kanji* is arguably a common knowledge among the ordinary Japanese readers and writers, I had not realized just how incredibly generative and disorienting it was until I was forced to become aware of it.⁶¹

While the lack of a proper lexical and bibliographical frame of reference specific to pre-modern publications admittedly made my task more time-consuming, I did come to a reasonable conclusion that I was not entirely responsible for my so-called deficiency. After all, my limited proficiency in *kanji* became acutely noticeable only among the *wahon* booksellers. Compared to their startling proficiency, which reflected their

⁶¹ Plurality of reading with *kanji* is an important aspect of "Japanese" language theorized by Sakai in his seminal book, Naoki Sakai, *Kako no koe: jyuuhasseiki nihon no gensetsu ni okeru gengo no chii (Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse)* (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2002).

assimilation of a pre-modern socio-cultural, literary constellation of *kanji*, my visual recognition threshold had been defined by the post-war Japanese state ideologies and literary culture thereof. My eyes had been schooled with a severely curtailed *kanji* exposure. Is it not fair then to suggest that my reading and writing proficiency mirrored a kind of period specific *kanji* reading threshold? Although this hypothesis, which remains rather personal, anecdotal and more speculative, did not alleviate my daily difficulties, it did make me take a closer look at my sense of visual recognition and semantic acuity, or lack thereof. In the end, my attempt to ascertaining a phonetically and semantically sensible reading was not without its merits. Because I needed to turn to various dictionaries, and because dictionaries are designed in such a way that at least one component of *kanji*, be it phonetic, semantic or visual, must be recognizable, I was compelled to articulate an already deeply internalized process of systematic visual disassembling and semantic analysis of unknown or unfamiliar *kanji*.⁶² Thus, I became meticulous about the way I identified, tested and confirmed each assembling part of *kanji* in compliance with *kanji* compositional rules. Additionally, I learned to pay attention to the way my eyes moved in search of a helpful clue. Whenever I came across a character in a book title that should have imparted some degree of semantic significance or visual familiarity but failed to do so, I proceeded to pore over a sequence of unintelligible characters. First, my eyes scanned the character while tracing brush strokes. Though more often than not visual dissonance threw me off balance, sometimes a glimmer of familiarity was enough to allow me to make an educated guess. Otherwise, the character

⁶² Most children who go through the compulsory nine-year education system in Japan learn to use at least two types of Japanese dictionaries: Japanese language dictionary (*kokugo jiten*) and Chinese character dictionary (*kanwa jiten*). As the examples to follow show, while both dictionaries contain some of the overlapping information about a character in question, each dictionary generates the answer differently.

read more like a sequence of esoteric computer command language or a complicated arithmetic formula. Despite the conspicuous presence of symbolic representation, there was very little visual or semantic input through my eyes. This semiotic disorientation was both disturbing and refreshing.

Arguably, had the book titles I encountered read more like contemporary Japanese vernacular sentences, written in a mixture of *kanji* and *hiragana*-syllabaries, I may have had an easier time decoding them? Alas, in agreement with the aesthetic and literary disposition of pre-modern Japan, the book titles were mostly composed in *kanji* with sparing, if any, use of *hiragana*-syllabaries in rubrics. The whimsical nature of aesthetic trends within a high literary sphere of pre- and early-modern Japan aside, the supremacy of the aesthetics of *kanji* remained. By no means does this fact trivialize the historical significance of numerous surviving books and artifacts that testify to a wide spectrum of literary styles, innovations and practices among highly stratified pre-modern Japanese readers. But because this peculiar aesthetic grip that favored the solemnity of *kanji* was so ingrained in pre-modern Japanese literary production and the formation of a reading subject, Kōjin Karatani famously argues, a radical paradigm shift, which Karatani calls *tentō*,⁶³ could take place only after the scholars broke away from the shackle of a certain pre-modern visuality. This is something that I will discuss further in chapter four.

Decoding was most problematic during my attempts to “inspect and catalogue” as I could not complete the task without successfully entering bibliographic data electronically. Parenthetically, it is crucial to point out that there is a decisive procedural

⁶³ Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). I will discuss more in detail the significance of Karatani’s theoretical intervention and its pertinence to my discussion of reading/writing practices in the pages to follow.

difference between electronic data-entry and manual cataloging. While the latter merely requires that I hand-copy relevant bibliographic information as I see it onto customized index cards, the former actually demands that I accurately identify phonetic readings of *kanji* to be able to spell them out using a QWERTY keyboard. But there is a way to bypass the problem. As long as I can disassemble a sequence of unfamiliar *kanji* into several coherent units and possible compound words, I can overcome the obstacle. That is to say, for example, if 1) syntax is discernible, 2) the semantic component is intelligible, or 3) one or two characters that constitute a probable compound word is recognizable, I am able to refer to a Japanese language dictionary (*kokugo jiten*). This is probably the most intuitive and reliable way to decode many of the cryptic book titles. But, if none of the above indicators is readily available, I must resort to looking up one or two characters at a time in a *kanji* dictionary (*kanwa jiten*). For that, I must also be able to identify either a (left-hand side) radical (*hen*) or right-hand side (*tsukuri*) and isolate a vital constituent of a *kanji* from the rest. With either *hen* or *tsukuri*, I can locate the correct character in a seemingly infinite matrix of variations. Alternately, when neither of the above methods yields an appropriate answer, I can still conduct a strictly visual line of inquiry. Insofar as I can ascertain the total number of strokes of a character by tracing each and every stroke with my index finger, it is possible to find the character in an index of a *kanji* dictionary. Fortunately, I was able to avoid what would have been a tedious and not so fruitful endeavor to visually and semantically decrypt *kanji* by exploiting the very conditions of online digital search. By 2008, I had at my disposal – at my fingertips, actually – various digital archives and image databases on pre-modern publication and artwork, which have been organized by renowned cultural institutions and university libraries in Japan. I was

able to obtain phonetic readings fairly easily without ever having to acquire a correct reading. How did I do this? By virtue of technological premises of electronic word processing and obligatory “phonetic letter-to-*kanji* conversion” in Japanese, online searches helped me not only to circumvent much of the futile phonetic conjecturing but also to expedite the process of obtaining necessary information altogether. To put it simply, I could cheat.

Let us say that I need to type out a title of the sixth-century Buddhist scroll called, 百万塔 並相輪陀羅尼. Even if I know exactly how it is spelled out phonetically, the sequence of *kanji* shown above do not instantly appear on a computer screen because of the plenitude of homonyms in Japanese. I have to first disassemble a book title into a few smaller units, such as 百万 (*hyakuman*), 塔 (*tō*) etc. Although “*hyakuman*” might easily be converted into 百万 since it is an ubiquitously used compound for one million, “*tō*” is another story. It is bound to generate a list of *kanji* with the same phonetic reading but different meanings, as in 等、東、棟、灯、当、党、島、and 唐. Even then, the first three letters are relatively easy to convert. The next six characters are much more problematic to convert into *kanji*, as the sequence constitutes a proper noun. At a time like this, digital inputting solves the problem much more effectively. It allows me to reduce the six characters to pure visual representations, devoid of phonetic readings. I can reproduce the sequence exactly as it appears without any idea what they might mean altogether or how they should phonetically read. In other words, I can disregard completely the inherent semantic relations of each character. I can simply start with the first character 並 by typing “*narabu*” (meaning, *to line up* in Japanese) irrespective of structural or semantic relation to the next character 相. Once I hit an enter key which

prompts an auto “phonetic letter-to-Chinese character conversion” function, I am bound to end up with 並ふ. By simply erasing ふ, I am left with 並. Similarly, instead of phonetically spelling out “sō” for 相, which is likely to yield more homonyms in different renditions of kanji, I spell “aite” (meaning *companion* or *partner* in Japanese) to generate 相手. Again, by deleting the extra character 手, I am able to assemble a sequence 並相. All this is accomplished without having to figure out whether 並 and 相 actually constitute a compound word or how they should read phonetically. This eclectic mishmash of intrinsically unrelated phrases and words is akin to a work of linguistic bricolage. The objective here is to assemble a sequence of six kanji, 並相輪陀羅尼, on a computer display, and not to discover an underlying semantic relation or phonetic reading. A subsequent online search does the rest of the job; once 百万塔 並相輪陀羅尼 is entered in a search engine on a web, I learn that 百万塔 並相輪陀羅尼 should be read as “*hyakumantō heisōrindarani*.”

At one level, disassembling visual, phonetic and semantic components of *kanji* and re-assembling them for better understanding, is familiar to anyone proficient in Japanese. To some extent, we all feel our way through our language. Somehow, assembling 百万塔 並相輪陀羅尼 on a QWERTY keyboard through multiple layers of assembling and disassembling discrete linguistic entities without intrinsic semantic relations feels dishonest. I could not figure out why I felt guilty for cheating when it was not about cheating at all. It finally dawned on me while reading Katherine Hayles’ book *Writing Machines*,⁶⁴ that my guilty conscience originated in the ruthless butchering I had

⁶⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, vol. Mediawork (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002).

inadvertently carried out with book titles like, 百万塔 並相輪陀羅尼. By disregarding a proper semantic structure and temporal sequence of the title, I became complicit in the dismemberment of a meaningful sequence into incoherent bits by way of de-materializing computation. In other words, instead of taking into consideration the inescapable materiality, that is, the structural, temporal and semantic relations that these characters had with one another, I effectively relegated them to bits of electrons and bits – mere simulations of characters among which material the relation no longer mattered. In other words, I may have succeeded in circumventing having to actually attain a reading threshold that was a figuration of a prized connoisseurship among the TABA members, I did discover quite unexpectedly that threshold was subject to manipulation if one manages to find a loophole. But, there is more than intimate knowledge of ancient kanji to the quality of embodied connoisseurship.

Perfume of Old Books

Among the sensorially registered expertise that corroborates the learned bibliographic details – what I have thus far described as the embodied connoisseurship – information gathered through the olfactory organs is one of the most instructive among the *wahon* booksellers. Like a bite of *madeleine* summoning bittersweet memories for Proust, the stale air trapped in dusty particles released by a rustle of dry leaves not only calls to mind memories of the past acquisitions, but also communicates the conditions of the books to them with great confidence. Not only is this intensely transient olfactory-consciousness discourse a part and parcel of everyday speech among the armatures who make a regular pilgrimage to Kanda Jimbō-chō, the sensitivity to smell is a necessary obsession, one might even call it an occupational second nature, among the TABA

members. On closer observation, their preoccupation with a smell further reveals that tactility also plays an indispensable role in shaping a singular association with smell. Coupled with tactile sensations that color layers of olfactory experience, each antiquarian bookseller continuously refines a receptive capacity for *ajiwai* as well.

A part of the difficulties in making *ajiwai* seem less esoteric has to do with the elusive nature of tactile and olfactory experiences supporting their claim, since the experiences are susceptible to various individual idiosyncrasies and circumstances that categorically resist objective verification. But, in order to give due consideration to the gravity and different permutations of *ajiwai* in different contexts, one must be willing to stretch a spectrum of imaginations and pay attention to an interesting substitution that regularly occurs between *ajiwai* and *ōra* (aura) among the booksellers. This suggestive word swapping is by no means accidental. In a neighborhood where a carefully cultivated mercantile persona allegedly transcends the worldly concerns of money, vanity, and fame, the booksellers' capacity to appreciate *ajiwai* somehow exempts them from a stark alienation synonymous with a modern capitalist market, and makes the community of Kanda Jimbō-chō as a whole immune to the rules of mass-production, rampant-consumption of commodities and atomization of urban consumers.⁶⁵

But, the question of aura is a vital one as the antiquarian book market is perpetually flooded with numerous forged copies. The battle against the counterfeit books and manuscripts stipulates that singularity and authenticity be actively sought out and confirmed, and the price should reflect the “authentic” value. Insofar as values of books are contingent on the perception of the purported value as one of a kind—the contended

⁶⁵ As much as the idea of ‘aura’ did not exist prior to the age of mechanical reproduction, I wonder if *ajiwai* similarly emerged as an important concept over the years as the illusion of Kanda Jimbō-chō, the antithetical figure of capitalist principles, begins to be threatened.

rarity of books is often directly proportionate to exceptional circumstances in which books have been salvaged, preserved and acquired—any details the booksellers can provide about the process of preservation and acquisition strengthen the claim and make the sale viable. In the eyes of the bibliophiles, the more immediate, raw and well documented the process of ownership and acquisition, the more authentic and extraordinary are the books.⁶⁶ The spirit of Marshall McLuhan's word, "medium is the message," reverberates among the books that have come to command a presence as precious embodiments of the caprice and violence of the past era. The structural integrity or lack thereof, material condition, and fortuitous survival of the media lend themselves to an invocation of inalienable ties with the ghostly past and national-cultural imaginaries. *Ajiwai* compensates what has been lost in the infinite series of mediation, re-mediation and intervention, while simultaneously increasing the prestige as objects of congealed human labor, carriers of knowledge and information, skeletons of (dead) authors, instantiations of socio-economic relations and sites of national-cultural imaginaries.

As one would expect, such sensorially dictated insights that guide the antiquarian booksellers do not come about from formal learning only.⁶⁷ "A nose that can sniff out"

⁶⁶ Among the TABA members who specialize in *wahon*, there is a strictly observed custom of appraisal. There are a few pointers one can follow in an initial inspection in order to determine whether the book's point of 'origin' can be traced. In some cases, the information can be obtained in the plain sight of an inner book jacket. If a book bears a seal, or a multiple seals, belonging either to prominent historical figures or highly regarded private collection the chances of being able to trace back a genealogy of previous owners is much better than a book without any documentation about previous owners. With *wahon*, the quality of paper and penmanship (if it is a manuscript or even if it is a woodblock print), or the condition in which the book was preserved (whether it is kept in a decorative lacquer ware or a high-end pallownia box), everything contributes to deducing how the book might have survived and ultimately tracing back to the closest point to the very point of origin for a particular book production.

⁶⁷ During my close interaction with many of the TABA members in Kanda Jimbō-chō (between November 2007 and August 2008), there were a few different after work study-groups that met once or twice a month to study either well-circulated books or rarely-circulated by

the presence (or absence) of *ajiwai* is earned over the years of repetitive exposure and chance encounters. But once acquired, this unique sensitivity becomes an intuition that can detect, discern and remember what has been previously encountered and what has proven to be authentic. Eyes can be deceived, but the embodied expertise that harnesses a full breath of sensory capacities cannot. Informed by what is etched in their mind as the right psychosensory reactions, the antiquarian booksellers sniff out the presence of *ajiwai*. This disciplined bodily synchronicity is the connoisseurship that defines Kanda Jimbō-chō business.

The Smell of Money

In Kanda Jimbō-chō, there is one topic that is at the same time most and least openly discussed, i.e. money, which brings me to the last but not in the least significant olfactory-centered discourse popular among the TABA members. Different from the TABA sponsored annual auctions where the bids often run up phenomenally high, the prices of merchandise handled at a weekly auction catered to the amateur bibliophiles are rarely exorbitant. Regardless, the visible enthusiasm concerning the “smell of money” is equally present. To appreciate the exceptional familiarity intimated by the discourse of “smell,” let me describe the TABA auction halls and speak a little about the tacit protocols respectfully observed by the dealers.

In early summer of 2008, I was given a special pass to enter the TABA premise on a day of the pre-auction viewing. Upon arriving on the main floor, I saw a number of

renowned *wahon* books and manuscripts according to their specializations and interests. Although some of the groups have clearly been in operation more than a generation, others are organized and hosted by the younger generation of the TABA members running booksellers within a larger Tokyo. Usually, a professor of Pre-modern Japanese Literature/History or Bibliography, who has been a long time client of one of the members, or with whom the members have rapport, is invited to supervise some of their more difficult sessions.

suited men with member tags dangling from their neck quietly perusing through the auctions floors holding small bidding memo pads. Walking through stacks of rare, valuable antique books and manuscripts, I noticed strategically positioned private security guards in prim navy blue uniforms and immaculate white gloves. In a strictly air-conditioned, sterile, windowless exhibit hall, I quickly lost track of time despite a big generic wall clock. A visual incongruence between the modern architecture of TABA's newly renovated Headquarters and the auction halls filled with medieval illustrated scrolls, feudal-era woodblock prints, and handwritten manuscripts posed a temporal disjuncture where, like Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, I found myself stumbling into a heretofore-unknown temporal air pocket.

Despite a slightly nauseating disorientation I suffered at the auction halls, the displays themselves were immaculately put together. Tower after tower of slowly collapsing paperbacks and discolored former bestsellers were tightly bundled up and pushed against the wall, encircling the main display tables and covering most of the floor space. Between a dozen oversized rectangular display tables, there were aisles just wide enough for two people to pass while politely avoiding any awkward physical contact. Hanging scrolls and framed manuscripts were systematically affixed on all available wall surfaces, leaving only an elevator and emergency staircase door unoccupied. Everywhere on the auction floor, a tacitly agreed etiquette was solemnly observed. To the untrained eyes and hands, the meticulousness and efficiency with which a flawless display was maintained presented an insurmountable obstacle. Under a polite yet scrupulous scrutiny of the residing TABA members whose presence silently prescribed how the merchandise could be handled, as simple a task as unfastening a synthetic rope wrapped around a set

of books felt too daunting a challenge, since the next logical course of action would be to stack the once unbundled, variously-sized books back up. Or else, an impending avalanche of books was only too obvious. The longer I studied the loose end of a synthetic string holding the bundle intact, the more impenetrable those bundles appeared to my eyes. Meanwhile the experienced hands of a suit-wearing TABA member would yank it off the floor, swiftly loosen the knot, and pull out a couple of books in an effortless gliding motion. With ease and cool, a stack was un-strapped and a few books from the top, middle and bottom were orderly pulled out, giving an otherwise quite unremarkable gesture an entirely different significance. This was one of those subtle gestures that confirmed one's embodied connoisseurship and assured the mutual recognition among the fellow TABA members.

Only then, did it dawn on me how debilitating the pressure to perform and compete against the seasoned booksellers must be for the less experienced ones. So long as the auction put bookseller's embodied connoisseurship and financial assets to test, those lacking in either one was already at a greater disadvantage. Yet, the veteran booksellers assured me that in time even the less experienced ones would be granted a chance to "win big" at the auction because the time passed equally to all of them. Besides, the TABA members unanimously agreed, "One bitter loss could teach you much more than the jubilation of hitting a jackpot." It was in the interests of the less experienced to lose than to win, they seemed to insist. While the tensions on the auction floor on the day of the actual bidding can be draining, months-long preparation also takes its toll on everyone's mind and body.

As explained earlier in the chapter, the TABA Headquarters receives book

deliveries by vans and one or two ton trucks five days a week. Dozens of able bodies are mobilized to unload, unpack, inspect, clean, organize, label, price, display and finally load again at the end of the day to be recycled, thrown into cutting machines or incinerators. Although full-time clerks at the TABA Headquarters attend to the day-to-day administrative work, the members shoulder the responsibilities of preparing for the auctions, both big and small. Though TABA members spend a considerable amount of time together at the Headquarters everyday, it does not stop them from engaging in other social activities, such as playing in an amateur baseball league, bi-monthly and monthly study group, or endless nocturnal barhopping. Through these various activities, they bear the same responsibilities, share the same heartaches, and suffer from the same strained shoulders, chafed hands, swollen feet and recurring lower-back pain. Each new acquisition and each loss is thus physically registered and collectively narrativized.

Whether the perfume of old books is identified as coalescing with a whiff of quintessential Japanese middle-aged man's hair tonic or aftershave, a spicy odor of post-loading/unloading perspiration, or an unidentifiable mustiness of an obscure past, the pungent scent of discolored antique books hardly go unnoticed by those who have grown familiar. Attention given here to different permutations of *ajiwai* is neither a superficial reflection on some self-indulgent romanticism nor a poetic rendition that has no relevance beyond a gesture of mutual recognition. Insofar as the humidity contributes to the conditions of book preservation within a climate where a seasonal airing is an absolute necessity not only to avoid mildew and molding, but also to ward off minuscule insects that destroy books, the smell imprinted in books is a healthy barometer for detecting

unwanted moisture.⁶⁸ If insect infestation or excess moisture is found, the compromised item is swiftly quarantined and treated before it spreads to the rest of the store merchandise. Thus, an accurate olfactory-led early diagnosis and intervention can save a bookstore a fortune. For the TABA members, their books feel as close as extension of their bodies. In fact, when asked for an item at the store, a bookstore owner is most likely to be able to tell you not only exactly where it is on a shelf, but also what the jacket looks like, which publication year the particular copy it is, when it was acquired and, if available, how it came into his possession.⁶⁹

Since there is a direct correlation between the level of humidity and that of insect activity, it is also not at all uncommon for the TABA members to begin exchanging appetite-diminishing stories of nagging, capital-corroding (literally!) insects found among the pages of books and in their storage room during an inner-circle drinking session. Those who claim to have perfected techniques of running an insect-free store and storage environment often offer unsolicited quick-fix advice to those who still rely on a primitive system, such as shaking a book off of insects' empty shells and feces, or pressing a burning end of a cigarette butt onto live insects one at a time. Some even place suspected items in a microwave in the hope of "frying" the insects by zapping for a few seconds.

⁶⁸ Throughout the history of *washi* making, different vegetation was used and various coating techniques were devised in order to repel moth and prevent molding, however un-treated *washi* are considered highly susceptible to molding, mildew and insect activities.

⁶⁹ Their physical, topographical understanding of their store inventory is often so accurate and incredible that with much respect, I refer to them 'walking store catalogue'. In the past five-six years, a computer program has been introduced to build a digital archive/inventory at all the TABA member stores, so that they can run a comprehensive TABA online store. Theoretically speaking, everything owned by the TABA members are digitally input at respective store computer for the TABA to compile a thorough inventory of all items currently available in Kanda Jimbō-chō. But, the older-generation of the TABA members usually forgo using the computer terminal for retrieving information; they go right up to the shelf and pull out books requested by customers.

But, as the night deepens and more wine glasses are emptied, the topic of capital-corroding insects frequently leads to more serious money talk. Coaxing each other into disclosing respective stores' "dirty little secrets" and exposing one another's compromising outside-the-store personas,⁷⁰ they would indulge in a comradely bantering which eventually leads to a mutual interrogation.

Staying faithfully to their favorite olfactory metaphor, they would gossip who "snuffed out a good one" recently, who bid on what, which book was purchased by whom, etc. Every now and then, in a matter of business as usual seriousness, someone would throw a surprising curve ball and prompt him to concede to owning "unofficial" (unregistered or unaccounted) merchandise or having hidden storage rooms. The need for such a clandestine operation behind the closed door partly has to do with the taxation system in Japan, where all assets, albeit the actuality of sales, on a store premise are considered liable for income taxation since their possession suggests a potentiality for profit. Although each store hires a certified accountant to keep their family-run business afloat and legitimate, there appears to be a room to exploit tax loopholes. Once the trust is gained, one is bound to overhear or be confided on the nature of their murky business. While the need to operate on trust, promise and cash sequesters the *wahon* business to don on a veil of secrecy, a handful of stores in recent years have added credit card as a

⁷⁰ This is a vital bonding moment for generations of antiquarian booksellers in Kanda Jimbō-chō, who regularly go out for dinner and drinks twice, if not three times a week. Dining and drinking together after work is an integral part of life in Kanda Jimbō-chō for a tightly woven network of guild members as it offers a chance to stay connected, informed, and communicated. Despite the occasional ruptures one witnesses across generations on certain issues, their cross-generational communication channel is so incredibly effective and tight that something as trivial as someone winning a spontaneous arm-wrestling contest at the dinner table the night before will by the following morning be a public knowledge across and among a few generations of booksellers in Kanda Jimbō-chō. They seem to know down to the most inconsequential details of that night to be able to describe what the high point of the night was.

payment option in the effort to “lower the hurdle” for the *wahon* initiates.

By way of illustrating a curious tension between the sense of smell and that of money, I would like to share the following story. One afternoon I was attending the store alone when a customer came in asking for an item on a window display. The requested item was a beautifully illustrated woodblock printed book in magnificent color. After unlocking the display window and handing it to him, he quickly glanced through pages and gave me a bundle of crisp 10,000yen bills in a bank-issued envelop. With secretly trembling fingers, I counted 280,000yen (approx. 3,600USD) while the customer stood and waited patiently. Bringing it up at the register, preparing a receipt and wrapping the item took all but a matter of few minutes, and the customer was gone. When *kaichō* finally returned to the store and found an item missing from the store window, he asked with a big grin, “*Was it a walk-in?*” I answered, “*Yes.*” Slapping his knee gleefully, he asked, “*Did he give you a wad of crisp bills?*” To that I obliged, “*Yes, right out of a Mitsui-Sumitomo bank envelop for me to count.*” Bearing a big smile on his face, *kaichō* approved of my sale and said, “*Good, now you know (what money smells like).*”

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that *mekiki* is a form of reading cultivated and performed by the seasoned *wahon* dealers in Kanda Jimbō-chō. While the *wahon* dealers’ proficiency in antiquated *kanji* instantiates a particular *kanji*-reading threshold that exemplifies their expertise in a constellation of socio-cultural, politico-historical conditions of the pre-modern era, their *mekiki* is not reducible to questions of abstract knowledge regarding respective *wahon*’s bibliographic properties. The virtue of *mekiki*, I suggest, resides in the dealer’s hands-on knowledge with respect to *wahon*’s material properties. Through the distributed senses (olfactory, tactile, optic, etc.), the

wahon dealers daily compile knowledge that is truly embodied. For this reason, passing on the knowledge to the heirs is difficult, and the dealers uniformly insist on a “traditional” style of apprenticeship. Following the questions of *kanji*-reading threshold and reading in general, the next chapter will examine how new media intervention, such as a digitization of national pension registry archive, have created a new set of challenges and crises of reading and writing practices in the twenty-first century Japan.

Chapter Two: It's Me! It's Me!

“*Moshi moshi?* Mother? Can you hear me?
Ore [It's me]! *Ore* [It's me]! I am in big trouble.
 I was a cosigner for my friend's debt and now he's gone.
 Help me mother, the collectors are after me!
 I need to pay back two million yen today... and I am totally broke.
 At once, go to the bank and make a deposit at the following account for me!
 Bank closes in thirty minutes. Mother, please hurry!”⁷¹

Anxiety of Dislocation

In the early 2000s, a fraud scheme known as *ore-ore sagi* (“It's me! It's me!” scam)⁷² captured the attention of the Japanese media and encapsulated the anxieties of the aging population in particular. The scheme was ingenious and targeted the elderly

⁷¹ From “Reenacted conversation between *ore-ore/furikome* fraudster and a victim” (a series of five mp4 files made available at the National Police Agency home page at http://www.npa.go.jp/safetylife/seianki31/1_hurikome.htm. Last accessed on May 15, 2013). Two million yen is approximately 20,000 US dollar.

⁷² *Ore-ore sagi* has since been placed under a more inclusive classification of *furikome sagi* (make a deposit fraud). Among Japan's population of 127,560,000 (as documented in the monthly report released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in October 2009), an average of 21,000 cases of *ore-ore sagi* have been reported every year since 2004, incurring a staggering average annual total of 26 billion yen (approximately 290 million US dollar). The National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan (<http://www.kokusen.go.jp/map/>. Last accessed on May 15, 2013) and the *Furikome Sagi* Special Investigation Unit at the Metropolitan Police Department (http://www.npa.go.jp/safetylife/seianki31/1_hurikome.htm. Last accessed on May 15, 2013) keep statistics on each incident and the annual damage. While the extent of financial damage caused by *ore-ore sagi* /*furikome sagi* runs high, the actual national average of people who fall victim to this particular type of fraud in Japan is about 1.5-2 per 10,000. I am not sure if this is too large or too small a number. Despite the emergence of varying incarnations, the modus operandi has remained the same, in which con men manage to persuade their victims to make a large deposit at a bank ATM. By the time the police come on board, either the bank account is already closed or the account identity is compromised and thus untraceable to the real culprit. A large number of *ore-ore sagi* remain unsolved.

population in Japan. Claiming to be a family member in trouble, a conman would persuade a victim to transfer a large sum of money to a dummy bank account all from his *keitai* (Japanese smartphone). In the context of a pervasive sense of crisis of representation that has plagued Japan in the post-bubble decades, the cunning scheme became yet another example of the government's inability to protect its "analog" population in a rapidly developing digital media landscape. In this climate, everything from ineffective police investigating tactics against the rise of cybercrimes, to a series of state bureaucracy scandals instantiated the state's failure to prevent the far-reaching sociocultural repercussions of a technological shift from affecting the livelihood of the nation's population. To many it seemed that the government was incapable of successfully expediting Japan's full-scale transition into a "twenty-first-century digital information society" (*nijyū isseiki dejitaru jyōhō shakai*).⁷³

This crisis of representation in the early to mid-2000s is of course, only a partial diagnosis that is suggestive of much larger issues that are historically, politically, and economically informed. The much-discussed changing sociotechnological milieus and the rise of teenage delinquency in the *i-mode* (*internet-capable keitai*)⁷⁴ era alone did not

⁷³ This term made one of its initial newspaper appearances in 1996 in an interview with Softbank CEO, Mr. Son Masayoshi. From the late 1990s on, the term gradually earned support and became a staple buzzword in the media. In "Information-ization White Paper" (*Jyōhō-ka hakusho*) released in 1997, the term was introduced to indicate the direction in which Japan as a country was headed. By September 1998, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper had invited its readers to a symposium entitled, "@ digital: What Is 'Information Society'?" in Tokyo. Issues of the digital information society in the global climate were also on the agenda for the G8 Summit held in Kyūshū/Okinawa in July 2000. The summary was later released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the title "Charter of Okinawa on the issues of global information society."

⁷⁴ Only after the privatization of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation (NTTPC) into Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT), and subsequent revision of the telecommunications business law in 1985, did the use of personal computers at home slowly emerge in Japan. Even after the new regulations went into effect and plans to revamp telecommunication infrastructure were well underway, Japan-specific technological difficulties

instigate the pervasive sense of crisis. Nevertheless, the notion of public and private space undoubtedly underwent a radical reconfiguration after a web-capable *i-mode* made its debut in the late 1990s. Since then, the growing digital communications media network and supporting apparatus and infrastructure have transformed virtually every aspect of metropolitan life where wireless communication can be made relevant, if not necessary. Putting continuous area-coverage updates, numerous web-based services, and multimedia functions at individual users' disposal, cell phone service providers have been busy exploring pioneering models of communication and business transaction with little or no governmental intervention or restriction. These changes in everyday practices and the media landscape also seem to have added a dramatic flare to Japan's *anime* and game industry-induced fantastical images about Japan in the rest of the world. After all, Tokyo is a fiercely wired city where one's absence from the web of digitally transmitted signals metonymically alludes to one's nonexistence, nonparticipation or irrelevance as a social entity. On the one hand, a media landscape led by the third generation (3G) cell phone, or 3G *keitai* – no longer referenced with the traditionally attached suffix *denwa* or “phone,”

delayed the birth of cost-effective personal computers with more than serviceable word processing, displaying and printing functions until the early 1990s. See Hidehiko Nakanishi, *Katsuji ga kieta hi--konpyuutaa to insatsu (the Day Printing Type Disappeared: Computer and Printing)* (Tokyo: Shoubunsha, 1994). Furthermore, a *de facto* blockade imposed by NTT, whose predecessor singularly owned the existing telegraphic and telephonic communications infrastructure and which continued to monopolize the telecommunications market in Japan, made competition unrealistic. In December 2000, the Japanese Fair Trade Commission released a warning statement against NTT on account of antitrust law. NTT was accused of having effectively obstructed the nationwide ADSL installation effort by demanding an exclusive use of existing NTT-owned landline cable, and limiting competitors access to the communication circuit (Nikkei BP Net, December 20, 2000). When NTT finally introduced the *i-mode* (web-capable cellular phone) in 1999, it instantly eliminated the need for personal computers among teenagers, university students, and office workers who otherwise would have eventually had to buy personal computers for themselves. Once a monthly service fee was dramatically lowered, the *i-mode* quickly caught on among high school students, henceforth initiating a chain of social phenomena known as Shibuya culture: “thumb tribe”(*oyayubi zoku*), “blackened face”(*ganguro*), “street gang”(*chīmā*), and the notorious “assisted dating”(*enjo kōsai*).

but referred to rather as a versatile mobile telecommunication device—attests to an increased reliance and insatiable desire particular among Japanese consumers/users for a better and newer communication device.⁷⁵ On the other hand, recent news coverage and popular social discourse about the changing sociality simultaneously bespeaks a heightened anxiety and concern toward a mis/dis-communication across two generations (digital and analog) and an ensuing criminality born of a transgressive digital telecommunication.⁷⁶ *Ore-ore sagi* is just one variable of such criminality.

But how exactly is *ore-ore sagi* different from other instances of phishing scams or identity theft? And, why should it be of special interest to us at this point? Apart from Japan-specific sociocultural assumptions regarding family (which I will discuss in detail below), and the rapidly reconfiguring sociotechnological environment that enables criminals to pull off the scam, it is notable that the population roughly fifty years olds and over harbors tremendous apprehension about being “left behind” (*oite ikareru*) and “taken advantage of” (*damasareru*) in the fast-evolving digitally mediated society. The

⁷⁵ Per a series of in-depth interviews with a senior product designer for Panasonic whose company’s technological as well as product planning contribution to the biggest mobile market shareholder, NTT DoCoMo, revealed that the only thriving 3G mobile market is situated in Japan. 3G technology enables users to command a high-resolution TV-phone application and transmit high-volume content, such as high-resolution images and animated messages. Unlike Japan, 3G markets elsewhere in the world suffer from slackening growth and profits and gravely uninterested consumers. The global market for smartphones has changed considerably since the debut of the first generation of iPhone in 2007. The most recent iPhone, the sixth-generation iPhone 5 appeared in 2012. From the second-generation on, the iPhone offers Wi-Fi and cellular connectivity.

⁷⁶ To name just a few, in 2004 there was an incident in the city of Sasebo (Nagasaki Prefecture) in which, after escalated online bickering, a female sixth grader was murdered by a fellow classmate during a school lunch hour; there also was a report of a 37-year-old man killing, on different occasions, three previously unassociated victims whom he met on a website facilitating a group suicide (*Shūdan jisatsu* website). The years between 2004 and 2006 were particularly troubled by incidents of group suicide in Japan in which people burned charcoal briquettes to kill themselves through carbon monoxide poisoning. Numerous cases with a similar group-suicide method have been reported in South Korea as well.

hypersensitivity, skepticism, and vaguely embraced victimhood among this demographic group are not unsubstantiated. The same demographic group in fact accounts for nearly 70% of the total number of *ore-ore sagi* victims in Japan.⁷⁷ However, my analysis of *ore-ore sagi* in this chapter is not intended to either confirm or refute the often media-exaggerated argument over the ubiquitous-ness or the scandalous nature of the phishing scam. Nor am I interested in belaboring the novelty of the crime for its own sake. What interests me about *ore-ore sagi* is the way in which one breed of *keitai*-linked fraud and criminal ingenuity has become the center of national attention as it curiously captures the underlying mistrust (*fushin*) of the general public in Japan. Incidentally, *ore-ore sagi* has never been portrayed as a straightforward case of fraud. It is instead projected as cause for anxiety and humor, as it often elicits reactions from people that convey a sense of nervousness and disgust. Insofar as the reaction and the prolific discourse of *ore-ore sagi* are manifestations of mistrust, they are also symptomatic of the sociocultural conditions of contemporary Japanese society.

By way of *ore-ore sagi* and other instances where previously held understandings about national futurity, identity, and information suddenly come undone, I hope to show in this chapter that seemingly discrete incidents occurring on different planes ultimately coalesce to form a constellation of Japan-specific articulations of anxiety about reading and writing practices. Specifically, I will be looking into the manner in which various expressions of anxiety concerning reading and writing practices converge and point to an immanent uncertainty and instability in the socioeconomic and technopolitical conditions of the post-Lost Decade predicaments. In my analysis, I use a broadly conceived notion of *reading and writing practice* to point to what I call an “anxiety of dislocation.” This

⁷⁷ See footnote 72.

anxiety of dislocation denotes the articulation of a disturbance in received frameworks for understanding and engaging in reading and writing practices. It is conspicuously manifest as well in the form of “humans reading like machines and failing,” and “machines reading like humans and failing.” Ultimately, this chapter raises the question of the nature of our reading and writing practices in a changing sociotechnological milieu.

Whether real, fictive, or media-inflated, a progressively intensified feeling of national crisis continues to be discussed as Japan transitions into the digital information age. While the events I propose to investigate surrounding this crisis share the same sociohistorical context and spatiotemporality, I insist on seeing them in terms of a cumulative effect. That is to say, it is not my intention to establish an intrinsic causal relationship among these events. Rather, I am interested in exploring those half-finished sentences and phrases that hung from the corners of my interlocutors’ mouths, that expressed unease and excitement; and in understanding what is at stake when people talk about national crisis as a way of describing a vague sense of anxiety. In this context, the *ore-ore sagi* scam provides one such telling instance where a burgeoning socio-technologically informed generation gap between “the digital generation” and “the analog generation” is dramatically played out. The unlikely success of *ore-ore sagi* not only bespeaks an existing gap between two different generations but is also shown to exacerbate general anxieties about new types of criminality and forms of sociality.

The Failure to Read “Voice”

The term *ore-ore sagi* designates the key moment of the scam—the moment at which a relation of dependence and obligation is constituted by a misidentification emanating from an audial misreading. This is the ore-ore moment when the con artist

introduces himself using the familiar pronoun and in such a way that not only infers an intimate relation between the callers and the victim but also assures that all demands henceforth will be met without question. Naturally, the nature of the scheme requires a thorough background check of the intended victim.⁷⁸ Whether the pertinent information is gathered from illegally traded old school yearbooks,⁷⁹ stolen bank statements or credit card histories, targets are narrowed down to relatively well-to-do individuals over the age of fifty who fall into the category of “analog generation” and have a son or grandson of employable age with poor credit history, since a troubled son or grandson is likely to resort to his parents’ or grandparents’ financial assistance in a pinch.⁸⁰ Most cases of *ore-ore sagi*, then, follow one of two established patterns: According the first pattern, the victim is contacted by a man claiming to be a son or grandson in serious trouble with the

⁷⁸ In a brief report submitted by two graduate students at Nagaoka University of Technology who conducted a data analysis of major Japanese newspaper articles published between 2005 and 2006 on *ore-ore sagi/furiome sagi* and digital contents analysis posted by 47 prefectural police departments, a plausible correlation between the median total bank savings of each prefectural population and the success rate of phishing scams corresponding to the areas was identified. While the likelihood of successful scamming is weighed against practical concerns, such as availability of intended victims’ personal information and, logistics involving the accessibility of the victim’s house to the ATMs, etc., in the age of digital wiring systems, the motivation is perhaps less geographically determined, but the availability of financial wealth, helps narrow down the targeted victims. See Hiroki Asada, and Tatsuo Asai, “Furikome-sagi higai no tokusei bunseki (Analysis of Characteristics of Damages Caused By Phishing Scam),”): 2. (Report, Nagaoka University of Technology, 2008)

⁷⁹ Until very recently, school yearbooks (or what are called “graduation albums” in Japanese) in Japan used to have a comprehensive list of names and addresses of all the graduating schoolmates and faculty members. Personal information, including individual and group pictures, stored in these books has since become a highly sought-after, lucrative commodity and is often illegally solicited, sold, and bought via online bulletin board.

⁸⁰ The chapter two of the 2008 White Paper on the National Lifestyle shows that 28% of victims of *ore-ore sagi* are men ages fifty and above, and 72% are women ages forty and above. No victim younger than twenty or between twenty and thirty, regardless of the gender, has ever been reported. A significant gap between the male and female victims indicates that the majority of the female victims are indeed stay-at-home mothers and housewives who answer a phone call while their working husbands are out, and has less to do with the allegation that women are more technologically challenged than men.

law, the mob, or a loan shark and in dire need of financial help. To assuage any suspicion over the inevitably unfamiliar phone number on the caller ID, the con man assures the victim that he is calling from a new *keitai* with a brand new number; thus, his number understandably appears as “unregistered” on the number display. Alternatively, the victim is contacted by a person claiming to be a colleague of or attorney for a family member who was either in a fatal car accident or taken into police custody for a misdemeanor, such as groping a woman on a commuter train or bus. Either way, the phone conversation unfolds with gentle coaxing and a quick succession of mild threats that make the victim feel compelled to settle the matter quietly with an immediate deposit via a bank ATM. Fortunately for the con men, victims rarely try to contact the actual family member or consult with others to confirm the veracity of the story before they succumb to the impulse to rescue a troubled family member. By the time the conversation is over, victims are all fooled (*damasareta*) into thinking that the voice on the phone is indeed familiar and that the scandalous nature of the trouble requires swift, discreet handling. One way or another, all victims end up being swindled out of years of savings.

What makes *ore-ore sagi* an instantiation of the dislocation in the reading and writing practices stems from the manner in which the culprits force their victims who are more at home in the “analog” media environment (i.e. pre-*keitai* telecommunications network), to navigate through unfamiliar terrains of a digital communication network sphere. Tricked into believing by the con men’s skillful persuasion, the victims are compelled to go out of their sociotechnological comfort zone and engage in digital reading and writing practices that they do not fully inhabit. In understanding how *ore-ore sagi* exploits a weakness and lack of confidence in digital reading practices it is crucial to

recognize first that the scam is set in motion by a panic-inducing *keitai* phone call. Second, deception revolves around a supposed accident or a tragic mistake that requires immediate monetary compensation and a delicate transaction on a bank ATM. Initially, the majority of *ore-ore sagi* victims were instructed to stay on the phone until they made a deposit at the bank. This virtually guaranteed that the victim would talk to no one, while making the victim more reliant on the con man's help in navigating the touch-screen interface of the ATM. It also had the secondary benefit of ensuring that the victims would correctly enter the necessary information provided by the con man. By contacting the victims after 3:00 p.m., when banks in Japan uniformly close the tellers' windows for the day, con men also ensured that the victims would have no other recourse but to be dependent on their step-by-step instructions at the ATM. Following the first wave of *ore-ore sagi* whose victims made transactions at bank ATMs under duress, on January 4, 2007, banks across Japan instituted a restriction on the use of bank ATMs for making a deposit over 100,000yen (approximately 1,000 US dollars). This change was adopted partly following a recommendation from the International Financial Action Task Force as a measure against global money laundering and the support of terrorist groups. Suddenly, a stack of deposit slips disappeared from a fill-in counter at the bank, and slips could only be obtained directly from bank clerks upon request. People became obliged to take a number, wait their turn, and sit with a vigilant bank clerk who asked cautionary questions and advised the customers when making a deposit over 100,000yen.⁸¹ Finally, I cannot

⁸¹ To view the article, refer to the following website at Security NEXT <http://www.security-next.com/005203.html> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). Also, for more detailed restrictions, see the PDF files at the Financial Services Agency at <http://www.fsa.go.jp/policy/index.html> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). Those who used to value a speedy service and less expensive handling fee associated with using ATMs, now begrudgingly endure a long wait and a vigilantly supervised process of filling out multiple deposit slips upon

emphasize enough how crucial the *keitai* is for the success of the scam. The *keitai* not only facilitates the con men's skillful orchestration of mis-assignment of voice and identity but also allows them to exploit an older victim's minimal *keitai*-related knowledge.⁸² Although people are scandalized that so many victims have been middle-aged housewives, they also seemed resigned to the idea that a technologically less adept sector of the population is bound to become the target of such schemes. In other words, *ore-ore sagi* seems to corroborate a time-honored notion that when technology and society advance, there will be those left behind.

When the 59-year-old Machiko first heard her 57-year-old friend's account of an attempted *ore-ore sagi* phone call, she could not believe what she was hearing. Machiko remembered her friend twitching a little, as if talking about it made her re-live the telephone conversation. According to what Machiko told me later, her friend received a late morning phone call from a man who introduced himself as her husband's coworker. Before she could ask for his name, the man on the phone said that her husband was hospitalized after a terrible car accident. After a pause, the man spoke at length about her husband's condition and the damage his accident caused on the street. Thankfully, the man added, "There was nobody else injured." Naturally, her friend was speechless at first. But as her mind raced to recall the conversation she had had with her husband that

making a deposit over 100,000yen. During my visit to Japan in summer 2012, I found out that even the envelopes provided by ATMs at convenience stores had clear warning signs against *ore/furikome-sagi*. Please see the figures 1 and 2 (of chapter two) in the appendix.

⁸² The idea of "mis-assignment" not only begs the question of indexicality and ambiguity, but also multiplicity of the objects that are being indexed. That is, in order for *ore-ore sagi* to work, it is essential that mis-assignment remains undetected, despite the intrinsic uncertainty and instability of identities associated with pronouns, such as *ore*. Unconscious act of *ignoring* the fact that mis-assignment is possible, or that our relations to pronouns are fundamentally tenuous and prone to mistakes, is what facilitates *ore-ore sagi*.

morning, she suddenly remembered that he had not taken the car that day. In the end, she narrowly escaped becoming another *ore-ore sagi* victim. Listening to her friend, Machiko could not help but wonder if she could remain as levelheaded during such unusual phone call. Like any housewife, she too was concerned for her husband's safety on his way to and from work. Though he was relatively sharp and youthful for his age, he was, after all past 60, and perhaps a little less agile and aware of his surroundings than before. Besides, like many of the people from her husband's generation, her husband only turned on his *keitai* when he wanted to make a phone call. Which meant that trying to reach him on his *keitai* to confirm the story would be impossible. Although Machiko had been using a *keitai* for over five years, she knew that she did not fully understand how all the functions and services worked on her KDDI au *keitai*.⁸³ Machiko confided to me, "My friend's account of her incident gave me no confidence. ... I've used ATM machines a million times before. It doesn't scare me. But imagine getting a phone call like that when I'm least expecting. ... In a panic, I might do something stupid."

Of course, it is not that Machiko does not know the dangers of *keitai* phishing scams or does nothing to keep up with what is happening in the *keitai*-accessible web world. From the best grocery store in town, to the best insurance plan for their retirement, Machiko and her friends' *kuchi-komi* (mouth-communication, i.e. word-of-mouth) network covers a great deal of interests and topics that directly affect their lives.⁸⁴ In fact,

⁸³ Next to NTT DoCoMo and Softbank, KDDI au is one of the major cell phone service providers in Japan.

⁸⁴ I have occasionally accompanied Machiko to her local gym, and have witnessed ever energetic, convivial discussions in and around the gym sauna room, bathtub, and locker room with dozens of regular fellow gym-goers. Her friends' ages range from mid-30s to mid-80s, though most of them are in the 40s and 50s. None of her friends are by any standard exceedingly wealthy, as some of their memberships were not for recreational purposes, but were obtained

when the “one-click” phishing scam was a popular discussion topic among Machiko’s friends, who were mostly 40-years and older, they were collectively on the lookout for any suspicious text messages sent from unknown *keitai* mail addresses. They even activated a filtering service function to screen messages from unregistered sources on their *keitai*. On top of that, her children always reminded her not to open any suspicious messages or indiscriminately click on those pop-up ads while browsing the web on her computer. Machiko is hardly uninformed or helpless in the face of cyber-attack. And yet, she is still unsure. Be it on her *keitai* or on her home computer, she feels that she is barely keeping up with the technological trends. She has a few favorite websites she frequents, a handful of email addresses stored on her PC, and dozens more on her *keitai* address. As long as Machiko and her friends are able to place and take phone calls, send and receive a text and photo-messages, most of their everyday *keitai*-related needs are satisfied. With her *kuchikomi* network and the digital network at her fingertips, she finds the arrangement more than adequate. But she seems overly conscientious about her participation in the digital communication sphere, as if her *keitai* ownership is a constant reminder that she and her friends are exposed to a variety of colorfully disguised scams and other technical complexities.⁸⁵

upon a doctor’s recommendation or as a way of offsetting medical conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, rheumatism, osteoporosis, etc. Machiko also joined the gym following a doctor’s advice to delay the inevitable hip-replacement surgery for her existing congenital hip displacement inflammation. She found a handful of women who were at the gym for the same reason and quickly bonded over their shared physical hardship. I came into contact with them around 2005 through my mother, who also goes to the gym daily. Over the years and especially during my fieldwork, these women serendipitously turned out to be a tremendous source of valuable information.

⁸⁵ According to a January 26, 2008 *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper article, a public-opinion poll conducted by Cabinet Office (*Naikakufu*) in November 2007 shows that 45.5% of the participants worry about the online safety, especially of their personal information (credit card, security password, etc), becoming victims of fraudulent web content and billing, and having their

As mentioned above, what lends *ore-ore sagi* the qualities of a real threat for Machiko and her friends is that *keitai* have become ubiquitous.⁸⁶ From news feeds, at-a-glance real time train schedules, weather forecasts, restaurant and supermarket coupons, and store discounts, to a *keitai* novel and music downloads, a wide range of free *keitai*-facilitated information services makes it exceedingly easy and inexpensive to become embedded in the digital information grid run by either the service industry, public transportation companies, or media. Via the *keitai*, people in Japan have gained unprecedented mobility and accessibility in a matter of a mere decade. The *keitai* has indeed become an indispensable portal of connection with family and friends, an access point to a life-sustaining network and a fluid space of intimacy. Those without *keitai* have become something like sociocultural pariahs and their friends with *keitai* grumble about the inconvenience and frustration that comes with not being able to “locate” and “get connected” with them once they leave the landline-accessible space of their home. Machiko’s unease thus should not be interpreted as her absence from the communication grid. Far from it. However limited her daily engagement with the network may be, it is precisely her and her *keitai*’s inescapable embedment in the contemporary Japanese digital media landscape that makes her feel empowered and vulnerable, stylishly efficient and insufficiently informed, all at the same time.

Whoever concocted the *ore-ore sagi* scam must have had an intuitive understanding about what makes it almost foolproof. Over and above the ambiguity of

computers infected with malicious software (computer virus). Not surprisingly, 62.2% of the participants also turned out to be both uninformed and unequipped to either activate a filtering service or install antivirus software to protect themselves. The poll goes to show that Machiko and her friends are not alone in “fearing for” their embeddedness of their online everyday existence. “Netto riyō ni fuan” 45% naikakufu-yoron-chōsa (45% “Worry About (Their) Internet Use” Cabinet Office Opinion-Poll).” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2008.

reference inherent in each utterance of *ore*,⁸⁷ *ore-ore sagi* exploits an instinctive emotional receptivity that registers in the addressee when uttered. Similar to other languages, Japanese has more than one first-person pronoun. Each form of address resonates with an array of familiarity and unfamiliarity.⁸⁸ Depending on a time, place, occasion, and/or social relation, an appropriate first-person pronoun is chosen by the speaker to reflect a befitting mental as well as physical distance between him or her and an addressee. Since *ore* is a first-person pronoun used by a younger man of a socially junior position and thus with less responsibility, even when his demands are unreasonable or immature they are often entertained and complied with, though not without some resignation. As shown in the transcribed conversation above, *ore-ore sagi* con man relies on the virtue of this relational premise through a dramatic pretense. By begging earnestly and giving a victim no time to think, the perpetrator implores the addressee to comply with his urgent request/threat. What is implicitly at stake is nothing less than the spectrality of language and voice. Ordinarily, our capacity to inhabit a language is so self-evident and automatic that we *forget* how exterior language actually is to us. Learning a new language makes us feel self-conscious, unsettled, and/or frustrated as we are forced to confront the very medium that enables us to communicate. Only then does it dawn on us just how *forgetful* and *unconscious* we are about layers of mediation. It also makes us

⁸⁷ Emile Benveniste, "The Nature of Pronouns," in *Problems in General Linguistics* *Miami Linguistics Series; No. 8* (Coral Gables,: University of Miami Press, 1997).

⁸⁸ For more comprehensive discussion on first-person pronouns and "relational selves" emerging therefrom, see Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).. Miyako Inoue also offers an illuminating account on different intonations and inflections specific to gender, social status, etc in her book, Miyako Inoue, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*, *Asia--Local Studies/Global Themes*; 11 (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2006).

realize that the question of linguistic proficiency is closely tied to cultural proficiency, as linguistic sophistication more often than not extends to acquiring knowledge over a range of culturally acceptable manners and socially expected protocols. As our receptivity toward linguistic and cultural references improves, we learn to fine-tune our action and reaction to comply with a culturally acceptable repertoire. Since the challenge of gaining a linguistic command requires a process of externalizing a subdued internalization, if and when a state of *forgetfulness* or *unconsciousness* is achieved, we might actually succeed in *forgetting* the inherent spectrality. We know this because listening to our recorded voice is always a disorienting experience, if not profoundly jarring. This uncanniness, that is, exteriority and spectrality, embedded in ourselves is what *ore-ore sagi* seems to awaken.

In other words, a fraudulent phone call from a con man exploits several sociocultural assumptions. First, it co-opts the use of the first-person pronoun *ore*. Second, it capitalizes on the imperative form of a vernacular language associated with a particular sociocultural type. And third, it plays on the victims' intuitive dependence on the audio-register (or "sound-image," to borrow de Saussure's term⁸⁹) in identifying the voice by a quick differentiation and elimination. Since an imperative form carries an assertive undertone, the use is typically reserved for a casual, often joking, conversation among family members and close friends, or for a rare occasion when some kind of threat is being made explicitly. Once the audio-register is established as presumed, the use of the imperative form randomly obliges a victim into a socioculturally assigned role. One might say that there is nothing more compelling than a use of the first-person pronoun, *ore*, as a choice word to initiate a phone conversation with an intended victim, since it

⁸⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

seems to instantly turn the victim into a dutiful parent and grandparent. When addressed thus, intimacy is forcefully drawn out to set the tone of the conversation against the victim's better judgment. From this point on, all a con man has to do is to wait for the victim to conclude who the unnamed, elusive *ore* must be and commit to the task required of him or her in a speedy fashion. By putting to the test the victim's audio-register, which establishes an orderly correspondence between the voice and the body, *ore-ore sagi* undermines our routinely reinforced overconfidence in our acoustic *knowing*. This fatal *knowing* is solicited by our well-rehearsed audio-receptivity with the aid of a threat. Time and again, the victims have proved that uncanny intimacy invoked under deviously wrought circumstances works wonders for providing a perfect acoustic disguise for a perpetrator whose unfamiliar voice the victim initially suspects, yet resigns to *hear* as familiar in the end.⁹⁰ The *ore-ore sagi* case goes to show that just as swiftly an identity can be conferred, so can it be cheated out of us.

There is a joke that captures the essence of the ghostliness and intrinsic absurdity of the *ore-ore sagi* scheme. The joke has been in circulation for a while. Its impact is strengthened when it is told by someone who in mock seriousness relays it as a conversation between two unsuspecting high school girls he or she happens to have overheard while riding a train. Each teller tends to embellish the pretext with some personal flair, but the gist of the overheard conversation between the teenagers goes something like this:

A: Wanna hear something really spooky?

B: Sure.

A: You know that my grandma lives alone, right? One day, her phone rang. When she

⁹⁰ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Uncanny*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

answered the phone, she heard a man say, ‘Mother, it’s *ore*.’ Startled at the voice, my grandma hesitantly asked, “Kazuyoshi?” And guess what? He said, “Yes”! But my uncle Kazuyoshi has been dead for over a year since the car accident!

B: Are you serious? That is so creepy! What happened next?

A: The man apologetically said, “*Ore*... I got into a car accident.” Hearing this, my grandma totally freaked out. Even before he could finish, she started to wail uncontrollably. She was so scared that she began chanting sutra and pleading with him, “Don’t worry about the accident. Go, rest in peace!” As soon as she said that, she hung up the phone!

B: Jeez! How scary... and so heartbreaking at the same time!

A: I know, some bizarre story, right?

The joke plays on the unsettling sensation invoked by a ghostly utterance of *ore* by the deceased son, Kazuyoshi, as well as a conman’s ill-fated attempt to solicit money by impersonating someone who is already dead. The comical effect intended by the conman’s unwitting act of resurrection is not lost, or rather; it is highlighted even more when compared to the unadulterated innocence of the two high school girls who find the telephone exchange genuinely “creepy” and “bizarre.”

But, what else does this joke tell us? Emile Benveniste writes that “I” is always, only contextual⁹¹: What he means is that “I” as a first-person pronoun only indicates a position of a speaker, and not a speaker’s identity. It is precisely because the position and the identity of a speaker coincide under normal circumstances that *ore-ore sagi* can effectively harness a figure devoid of corporeality and at the same time lend a faint sense of materiality to a familiar audio-image. Here, one cannot help but notice the irony in the argument that the origin of meaning is not to be found in the identity but rather in the

⁹¹ “Each *I* has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such. ... It has no value except in the instance in which it is produced. (...) These definitions refer to *I* and *you* as a category of language and are related to their position in language.” Benveniste, “The Nature of Pronouns,” 218. In some respect, the thesis elaborated by Benveniste might work better in Japanese since “I” takes on so many different forms without compromising any linguistic functions. What do I mean by this? As mentioned, *ore* is a first-person pronoun, an equivalent of “I.” But if the man were to make a phone call in English, he would no longer be able to present himself as “I,” the same way Benveniste has argued, since he would have to address himself as “It’s me.” However, *ore* can serve both.

“*difference*.”⁹² Since it appears that one difference the *ore-ore sagi* victims are compelled to overlook is coincidentally what makes their (mis)identification devastating and meaningful. A leap of faith taken by the victims in confirming the self-proclaimed identify is the one mistake they cannot afford to make, but nevertheless end up making.

Upper-middle-class and middle-class housewives like Machiko are already unsure of their own adeptness in the new digital milieu of reading and writing practices, even when they enjoy convenience and access to information and services afforded by their *keitai*. *Ore-ore sagi* seems to remind them not only of a known layer of digital mediation, with which they struggle frequently, but of a more instinctive and far more inhabited layer of mediation about the spectrality inherent in their audio-registry. Although Machiko is not bothered by the spectrality of her own language since she has fully inhabited this regime of representation as part of the given conditions of life, the digitally mediated preexisting spectrality of the audio-registry seems to disturb her greatly. Machiko wonders if her receptivity and capacity to discern (i.e., to read and write) is sufficient for the digital era. I believe Machiko might be conflating issues of inherent spectrality of language and her own lack of confidence with handling digital technology. But I think she is right to suspect that there is more to the uncanny sensation of *ore-ore sagi* than the contextuality and spectrality associated with the first person pronoun, “I.” We have to ask, what are the social, cultural and emotional repercussions of *ore-ore sagi*? It seems to me that the operative logic behind *ore-ore sagi* calls our attention to an intriguing duality that exists in our mode of *knowing* stemming from “reading voices.” Just as remembering and not-remembering the ambiguous indexicality of “I” destabilizes

⁹² Barbara Johnson, “Writing,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia, and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 41.

our relation to mediation, in a curious oscillation between not-recognizing and recognizing, not-seeing and seeing, or not-knowing and knowing, something becomes recognize-*able*, see-*able* or know-*able* to us. Our capacity to make sense of the world appears to be contingent on the possibilities prescribed by a socioculturally instantiated spectrum. By surreptitiously introducing a dislocation into our otherwise orderly semiotic correspondence and constellation of representation, *ore-ore sagi* creates affective disorder, and by so doing interferes with our process of finding a correspondence and relation to the world. The mis-assigned voice of *ore-ore sagi* is a hijacked voice, so to speak. Torn away from a rightful body to which the voice belongs, the voice suffers a level of ghostly decorporealization that is beyond a socioculturally permissible repertoire. As such, it seems to undermine the confidence of people like Machiko.

Machines Reading Like Humans – Fatal Errors

If *ore-ore sagi* instantiates the dislocation of a deeply internalized audio-registry of knowing and reading in the digital era, a scandal involving the Japanese government's mismanagement of the official National Pension Plan archive points to the enormous repercussions of failed reading and writing practices in the midst of a technological transition set in motion since the mid-1980s. It demonstrates Japan's specific sociotechnological predicament as well as a general problem of technological incompatibility across converging modes of inscription and media. To put it simply, when there is a fundamental incompatibility across different inscriptive machines, discrepancy between different modes of register and representation will become apparent in the subsequent text. The mediated text often becomes seriously garbled and rendered unreadable. This is why issues related to technological compatibility are extremely

crucial when updating or switching an existing inscriptive medium to a new one. Whether stored in analog or digital forms, personal data can bring both fortune and misfortune to people's lives in unexpected ways. Even on a false pretense, certain personal data can successfully embody a person by furnishing a name and the contours of a face, to an anonymous identical silhouette. Paradoxically, if such information can substantiate someone's existence, the same piece of information can just as easily declare someone nonexistent. Worse yet, in the case of an official government record, if personal data is accidentally misplaced or deleted or irrevocably damaged or corrupted—that is to say, deemed irretrievable, illegible and/or or questionable—its absence or illegibility can create bureaucratic havoc if it is interpreted as real absence. As if a body can be lifted off a textual surface and vanish into thin air, a person becomes an uncanny site of a bureaucratic gridlock. Before delving into the latest scandal involving the National Pension Plan, I will briefly discuss an episode, which could very well be interpreted as a typical case of bureaucratic tragedy. Or, with a certain disposition, the analysis can paint a far more interesting picture. Insofar as this is a way of preempting a subsequent analysis of the source of germinating mistrust (*fushin*) in the government's competence to keep its vital national institutions in order,⁹³ the instance of dislocation occurs with loss of faith in the state bureaucracy that is supposed to safeguard the population and its future wellbeing.

On February 7, 2007, an evening news program on Fuji TV reported an incident that initially took place in a suburb of Tokyo in June 2006. The delayed report aroused my suspicion and speculation, but looking back, I see that by all accounts the time was

⁹³ A reputed 10,000 consumers' questionnaires released in December 2009 by Nomura Research Institute (NRI), Japan's largest consulting and IT consulting firm, shows a steady increase in the number of people who ostensibly express concern for their financial instability, deteriorating quality of life and the future well-being of their livelihood. It is thus safe to suggest that *fushin* is a well-articulated, pervasive feeling among contemporary Japanese.

ripe. The story was couched in the ongoing discourse about Information Technologization (*IT-ka*, the digital archiving project in and around various state institutions), and reports concerning a failure in reading and writing proficiency among the youth in Japan. The tone implied that people already expected to hear a less favorable prognosis for Japanese national futurity. Even sensible but reasonably anxious people were becoming susceptible to seeing more negative side effects of the state effort toward the Information Technologization. According to the news and major newspapers' morning edition the next day, a 20-year old man was caught with a partially clothed four-year-old girl inside a bathroom stall at a local supermarket. Upon his arrest for petty theft and kidnapping of the minor, he provided his name, current home address and birthday with an alarming difficulty because of his limited command of Chinese characters. In fact, his dismal mastery of written Japanese barely sufficed to prepare initial police paperwork. At age of 20, which legally marks "adulthood" in Japan,⁹⁴ his reading and writing competence hardly matched that of a second-grade elementary school child.⁹⁵ Bearing no sign of physical or mental retardation, the man should have been more than sufficiently

⁹⁴ Legally speaking, "adulthood" is defined by the coming of age ceremony held at the age twenty in Japan, upon which one becomes eligible for voting. Incidentally, drinking and smoking also become permissible.

⁹⁵ Section 27-17 of Japan Statistical Yearbook 2009, (released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Statistics Bureau, Director-General for Policy Planning and Statistical Research and Training Institute) lists a ratio of school enrollment and literacy between 1996 and 2005 in Japan the rest of the world. According to the Excel spreadsheet (available digitally at <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nenkan/27.htm>, last accessed on May 15, 2013), Japan maintains nearly a 100% student enrollment until the age of 15. This number reflects the number of students enrolled in the first and second-level compulsory education between the ages of six and 15. The Japanese government regards the percentage of the enrolled students as equivalent to the percentage of literate persons of corresponding age. In other words, the Japanese literacy rate is, theoretically speaking, 100%. On a side note, about half of the second-level school graduates (59% male, and 52% female) go on to the third-level school (high school) in Japan, indicating that half of the entire postwar Japanese population are more than minimally literate and proficient in reading and writing Japanese.

literate. His illiteracy was simultaneously puzzling and disconcerting. He had no other known alias and presumably lived his entire 20 years of unmarried life in a neighborhood not far from where he was apprehended. But, not a single thread of registration record could be retrieved under his name. To make matters worse, he failed to give the address of his *honseki* registered at the national household registry, which would have helped determine his legal as well as genealogical standing for adequate processing. On top of being illiterate and illegitimate, he was both irretrievable in a bureaucratic paper trail sense of the word, and illegible vis-à-vis the sociopolitical identification matrix operative in Japan.

His absence from the national household registry, a process required of all citizens born in and outside of Japan,⁹⁶ meant that he was never really incorporated into the state system. The social welfare programs, to which all citizens are equally entitled irrespective of social, political and economic standing, such as the National Health Insurance Plan (*kokumin hoken*) and the National Pension Plan (*kokumin nenkin*, or *nenkin*), were never made available to him. As far as the respective authorities were concerned, he might as well have never existed. This involuntary exile had ramifications that were far more than a minor bureaucratic inconvenience. Deprived of opportunities to acquire adequate social skills and legitimacy, to say nothing of language proficiency, he was irrevocably made vulnerable to the prejudice associated with illiteracy—that is, criminality. In October 2006, with a missing piece of genealogical information belatedly

⁹⁶ As I elaborate in detail in the pages to follow, *honseki* is one of the most basic pieces of information, which physically as well as genealogically locates a Japanese national within the matrix of sociofamilial relationships in Japan, especially in the eyes of the state. Even the homeless population has this registration record as long as their parents properly registered their births with the local authority. It is often the lack of registration of current address (*jyūmin tōroku*) that compromises their future and impedes the prospect of landing a more secure, permanent job.

obtained from his mother who attributed her years of negligence to hardship in a poverty-stricken household, he finally earned an official entry to the national household registry. Ironically, by the time he emerged from years of obscurity and unwarranted criminality, he already had a first-time-offender criminal record under his belt.⁹⁷

Despite the obscurity regarding the news report's attribution of responsibility (who exactly is responsible for not keeping an impeccable registration record, and can a clerical mistake within state agencies be attributed to a bureaucrat's or a citizen's oversight?) and the disproportionate media attention it received, the report seemed to have hit the right emotional chord in transitional Japan. What appeared to be at the center of debate was bureaucratic inflexibility and subsequent, albeit unintended, administrative quagmire. This incident was discussed specifically in relation to the various forms of mandatory national registration at the state agency as well as a recent scandal with the National Pension Plan. The National Health Insurance Plan and the National Pension Plan are Japan's two most important, cornerstone state institutions. In May 2007, the Social Insurance Agency in charge of running the National Pension Plan came under scrutiny as it was discovered to have seriously "deceived" (*damasu*) and "betrayed" (*uragiru*) the confidence of national populace.⁹⁸ But before inquiring into this any further,

⁹⁷ It is helpful to refer to John Guillory, "The Memo and Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004): 108-32. He identifies the development of memo in the later nineteenth-century business world and the emergence of the memo as subsequently resulting in "an act of oblivion." Guillory argues for "the invention of the memo entailed a deliberate forgetting of rhetoric." (116) I found the case of the neglected 20 year-old man to be both sad and ironic, because he finally became "un-threatening" to the society once he was registered. As if to say that once you have been written down, you could be forgotten.

⁹⁸ One of the initial journalistic exposés on what was to become one of the biggest scandals of the post-Lost Decade Japan appeared in *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper's morning edition on May 12, 2007. The newspaper article was picking up on the inquiry made by a member of the Democratic Party of Japan during an interpellation at the deliberative council, who asked the Health, Labor and Welfare minister at the time to comment on the "pension holder's registration

let me offer a few basic facts about Japan's population control registration system. In order for various state services and social welfare programs to function smoothly in Japan, a number of pieces of personal information are required in order to place Japanese nationals in a familial genealogy and presumably in relation to a whole national lineage. One such essential component is called *honseki*. As the word components *hon* (original, real, source) and *seki* (register, membership) suggest, the term denotes the official registration of an "original membership" of one's natal household. Since each national is required to submit a copy of *honseki* at the time of obtaining a passport, housing, bank account, and job and/or school application, among other things, one's *honseki* is vital personal identification information in Japan. Anyone who puts together the necessary paperwork for the submission of an intended application must make a formal request at the local municipal office to have an official copy of their family registry (*koseki tōhon* and *koseki shōhon*) issued. On this certificate, under a heading, a person's "original membership" (*honseki*), one's natal household's 'original' address is recorded. For all intents and purposes, whenever someone asks for a person's *honseki*, what they are asking for is this address. Now, what makes this idea of *honseki* highly confusing is first, that one's *honseki* does not always reflect one's current address; and second, that the definition of "original" address itself is arguably a fictitious one.

For instance, when I married in 2008, I was expected to "exit" my natal household and "enter" into another one. That is to say, after I secured a marriage certificate from one window at the local municipal office, I needed to report this change to another window at the same office to make my official removal from the natal household and

record in the air" (*chū ni uita nennkin kiroku*). *Chū ni uita nennkin kiroku* has since then become a standard way of referring to this particular issue.

entrance into a new household. This called for a decision. I could either choose to set up an independent household registry under my name, or to migrate into my husband's natal household. Although my removal and entry would be recorded in the existing natal household registry document, from the moment that I become part of a new household, my *honseki* would also be different from the original *honseki* of my natal household. A clerk at the local Nerima office told me "Just pick a city or address, wherever is most convenient for you." I asked him, "What do you mean, 'just pick one'?" The middle-aged male clerk said with an apologetic smile, "It doesn't matter ... it's for the sake of formality, you know, to put something on the record. Some people pick their own [natal] household *honseki* so that they won't have to remember a new address. Other people pick their favorite place, like Disneyland!" and let out an uneasy laugh. Seeing that I was slightly bewildered by his comment, he tried to assuage my concern, "Why, if you wanted to, you could pick an address of the Imperial Palace, and that would be perfectly fine with us. Don't think so hard, just pick somewhere." Since my husband was a "registered alien" and did not have a *honseki*, I had no choice but to set up an independent household under my name. Despite the pretense of facetiousness the city office clerk displayed, he was by no means cynical about his clerical duty. I merely wish to point out the inherent discrepancies that the bureaucratic paperwork generates under the current Japanese government system.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Hardly any mention of canonical works by Max Weber is necessary, such as Max Weber, et al., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford university press, 1946); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, vol. Routledge classics (London; New York: Routledge, 2001). to get across the point that the topic of modern state bureaucracy in Japan merits a serious study and corpus of its own. However, such inquiries lie beyond the scope of the present investigation and distract the attention away from the point I hope to shed light upon, which is the inherent irony and room for debilitating discrepancies to grow within the bureaucratic machine.

In principle, *honseki* is a bureaucratic technicality. But, of course, it is never simply just that. So long as one's genealogical origin can be traced back, it is also used as a basis of social discrimination¹⁰⁰ and site of state control. Just as in any other modern bureaucratic state, in Japan, whenever registered citizens move, they are obliged to procure copies of certificates and documents, haul them back and forth between different agencies and leave a long paper trail behind. But for all practical purposes, with the document easily available at a local municipal office, one can change *honseki* to lessen the cumbersome paperwork. Still, it was in the state's interests to digitally archive and integrate these documents bearing personal information so as to expedite the process and centrally administer the population. In 1997, the Japanese government introduced a 7- to 12 digit "basic pension number" (*kiso nenkin bangō*) to be assigned to each and every pension holder and beneficiary in order to facilitate this digital integration process. The initiative coincided with the other aspects of the analog-to-digital conversion project such as Information Technologization. This project has been underway since the mid-1980s and has raised practical concerns about the protection of individual identity, the security of public records, and the successful regulation of the expanding global circulation of data. Circa 2007 in Japan, the results of this conversion process posed unexpected conundrums. Life in a transitional period, in which not altogether compatible multiple sociotechnological platforms operate side by side, can have consequences far more sinister than the one prompted by a dead fly falling into an automatic teletype, which

¹⁰⁰ Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity*, vol. Transitions, Asia and Asian America (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

subsequently punched out a letter addressed to “Mr. Buttle” instead of “Mr. Tuttle.”¹⁰¹

My passing reference to a 1985 movie, *Brazil*, is not a facetious attempt to regurgitate the well-known predicaments of modern bureaucracy. It is meant rather to foreshadow the absurdly catastrophic snowball effect that a seemingly insignificant oversight can have on a larger scale, such as what happened in May 2007, in Japan. Though the figure seems to fluctuate every so often, approximately 500 million pension holders’ data vanished into thin air (*chū ni uita*, or “went up in the air”) from the Social Insurance Agency’s database. The timing of this revelation could not have been riper for the onset of elevated anxiety, as the fiasco coincided with the first wave of post-*dankai no sedai*¹⁰² retirement shock in Japan. Soon after the news report of the Social Insurance Agency’s administrative catastrophe, an investigation committee was formed by statesmen to identify the cause of the scandalous disappearance of pension holders’ information. The mysterious disappearance of pension holders’ data was soon concluded to have had been caused by the process of a digital archivization gone terribly awry, which I will discuss in depth after reviewing an abridged history of digitization below. In any case, the focus of the Upper House Election in the summer of 2007 was on the question of who could best represent the interests of the “deceived” (*damasareta*)

¹⁰¹ A film maker, Terry Gilliam’s movie, *Brazil* (1985), opens with an unforgettable scene of neon color explosion, which is followed by a brief scene in a gray, industrial building office where a fatal administrative mistake is made by none other than an electrical short circuit caused by a dead fly. A contrast between the look of satisfaction quietly born by a clerical worker, who after climbing all over an office desk and filing cabinet managed to smash a fly against an office ceiling, and his complete oblivion to what would become of Mr. Buttle is not only absurd, but also eerie. The automatic teletype is typing away summoning letters to a series of Tuttles without a vigilant human eye. Although a male clerk physically occupies the office space, he is only mindlessly watching TV screen while being bothered by a buzzing fly. In my opinion, this scene brilliantly portrays the brutality and absurdity of bureaucratic nightmare of the modern era.

¹⁰² As briefly discussed in the introduction, *dankai no sedai* is the first postwar baby boomer generation of Japan, who faced an *en mass* retirement at the age of 60 between 2006 and 2008.

populace, and who was most likely to bring justice to the same people. As testimony to the brewing distress and mistrust among the people, Japan was to see a cabinet form and dissolve three times under three different prime ministers,¹⁰³ who in one way or another all struggled and ultimately failed to resolve the issue in a matter of three short years.

Unlike the national household registry (*honseki* and *koseki tōroku*) and registration of current address (*gyūmin tōroku*), which nationals are responsible for registering with the local office, the universal healthcare and pension plan are provided by one's employer, if not by a spouse or parents' employer.¹⁰⁴ A stipulated percentage is automatically subtracted from an employee's monthly paycheck and put into a reserve fund for post-retirement pensions. In the mid-1970s, the Ministry of Health and Welfare launched what went down in history as a landmark digital conversion project in which handwritten documents for the registered National Pension Plan beneficiaries were converted into a digital database. Although the online cross-reference system was still not perfectly synchronized, this was considered one of the very first steps to transform Japan into a fully functional digital information society. Aided by numerous administrators who were temporarily hired to complete the eye-straining data-inputting task, the Social

¹⁰³ Between 2006 and 2009, Japan saw Prime Minister Abe appear and disappear after an alleged attempted suicide within a year after his appointment (September 2006-September 2007); then watched Fukuda take over the cabinet with a somber demeanor of a technocrat only to dissolve the cabinet abruptly after less than a year (September 2007-September 2008); and finally elected Aso's party (Liberal Democratic Party [LDP]) to run the cabinet for another unsuccessful year between September 2008-September 2009. For the next few months after Aso's appointment, while Aso's party steadily lost its national support and suffered from numerous scandals, Aso resisted scheduling the much-expected election. In August 2009, when the general election was finally held, the LDP was met with a landslide victory of the Democratic Party of Japan, then led by future Primer Minister Hatoyama and lost its control of the lower house and the government.

¹⁰⁴ It must be noted that because the National Pension Plan is fundamentally a "voluntary" system for which one "signs up" and pay the due, which usually happens after he or she is over the legal age of 20, a self-employed individuals has a choice to pay or not to pay. Most of the companies that provide benefits, including government-subsidized universal healthcare, to their employees automatically also enroll their workers in the National Pension Plan.

Insurance Agency offices across the archipelago unanimously undertook this conversion as a top priority. By 1989, the conversion was reported officially complete. Roughly two decades later, much to the pension holders' dismay, individuals who had paid a series of deposits for their pension plan suddenly found themselves ineligible for monthly pension payments that would have started on their sixty-fifth birthday, a few years after Japan's average retirement age. When I say that the National Pension Plan is a state institution, I am also implying that it is the staple post-retirement pension policy most people in Japan count on. As of July 2008, there are 20,010,000 registered pension holders, and one-fourth of those pension holders are registered as a current beneficiary.¹⁰⁵ After the news broke out and alarmed pension holders rushed to their local Social Insurance Agency offices, grave discrepancies were found between the digital database at the agency and the handwritten, manually stamped pages of a government-supplied red booklet. This discrepancy was predominantly in a total or partial loss of personal information. Even when the loss was not complete, the information in the database was so incomplete and faulty that each information recovery required an exhaustive retracing over an extended period of time, which often demanded the resubmission of years of corroborating paperwork. Because the nature of the data lapse was prompted by a failure to reflect a change in marital status or change of employer, which commonly entailed a drawn-out procedure and complicated paperwork, in some cases initial paperwork was lost over time, and in the other cases, reissuance of documents was not possible because the previous employer had long been defunct. When the initial estimate of damage was

¹⁰⁵ Annual report between 2001 and 2008 are electronically available at the Japan Pension Service website at <http://www.sia.go.jp/infom/tokei/index.htm> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). Note that no report with an adequate demographic division was available for me to definitively determine the number of people who are eligible to apply for the National Pension Plan. However, the number of people age of 15 and up is 110,426,000.

announced, the agency was said to have caused half a million beneficiaries' names and evidence of reserve funds to disappear without a trace. What should have been just a few clicks away on a computer screen proved to be something hopelessly irretrievable, thus nonexistent.

Recovery of the data remains difficult. Notwithstanding the beneficiaries' own copies and booklets, when third-party corroboration is not properly obtained, the authorities often refuse to acknowledge the beneficiaries' eligibility. Even when their enrollment in the plan is validated, the authorities lag behind in rectifying the situation because of bureaucratic impasse or ill-defined technicality. Yōko was one of many whose eligibility suddenly "went up in the air" when she found out that the "change of marital status" she had filed nearly forty years before was not properly cross-referenced with her pension registration record. This created a break during which she was supposedly "not paying" her quarterly premium, thus punching out wrongly calculated accumulated dividends for her. Whether the name was not properly updated after a change of marital status, a change of employer was not properly registered, or the name of the pension holder was incorrectly typed using the wrong set of *kanji*, the nature of the mistake was frequently clerical. When the source of the sloppy data conversion was determined to have been caused primarily by temporary workers' inability to *read kanji* used to transcribe beneficiaries' names correctly and to *write* their names accurately using a word processing program installed in the computer, the discourse of the "Youth Abandoning Text and Print" gained even stronger momentum among the analog generation. To be fair, there was and is a technical dimension to this critical mal-conversion, which deserves another section. Admittedly, the disgraceful outcome of the government's ambitious

digital archivization dealt a tremendous blow to an already declining morale among a generation who felt that they were being increasingly outmoded and taken advantage of. Forced to realize that their life savings had been unexpectedly compromised and/or denied, the pension holders and beneficiaries are now discovering that it was the government, to which they had innocently entrusted their future, that was responsible for letting hundreds of overworked and careless temporary workers mindlessly and irresponsibly let thousands of “small” typographic errors slide. From missing a stroke here and there to using a different version of *kanji*,¹⁰⁶ the end result of an infinitely small, seemingly insignificant chain of errors had a truly catastrophic effect on the lives and livelihood of tens of thousands of people.

The irony this fiasco brings out can be explained in two fold. On the one hand, people generally welcome technological advancement in inscriptive media despite the risk of blurring the line of “authorship” since the improvement typically promises increased accuracy and speed. On the other hand, people in Japan are usually wary of the result of even the first-rate optical character recognition (OCR) machine since OCR infamously “mis-reads.” After all, it is an optical character recognition “scanner” and not a “reader.”¹⁰⁷ I suppose the Japanese government took measured precautions by hiring actual human beings to “read” and type in *kanji* rather than mindlessly placing the

¹⁰⁶ Some *kanji* share the same root, but have multiple variations while maintaining the integrity of the sound, meaning and recognizable appearance. In chapter four, I will address technological limitations and challenges that are responsible for causing such devastating mistakes to the digital archive project commissioned by the National Pension Plan. Additionally, I will devote a substantial part of chapter five to discussing different components of *kanji* as well as to establishing that the literacy among school children in Japan is customarily assessed by their competence in identifying various components of *kanji*.

¹⁰⁷ This is an important distinction raised by Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 123-4.

documents through OCR for seemingly similar results. Of course, one may also argue that all information, be it in stone, paper or digital form, is equally subject to destruction. Whether by earthquakes, floods, wars, fire, leakage, mice, insects and other accidental events... danger is never absent. Some documents and archives survive for sociocultural and sociopolitical reasons, and others do not. The point I want to emphasize here is that the digital archivization project that the Japanese government undertook was at least intended to help existing documents withstand expected years of wear and tear, and to expedite information retrieval, not to further deteriorate the integrity of data and complicate the process. If it were not for the thousands of pairs of hands and eyes, the paper archive might have stayed undamaged. But, within the framework of the modern nation-state, one's recognizable identity and existence conventionally hinges on a pile of records that confirms and locates one's very *corporeality* within an intricate web of retrievable, legible and credible information. Insofar as a system of representation mediates our thoughts and the world, a certain level of abstraction naturally occurs. Abstraction, as we know it, renders information always already *separated*, *reorganized* and *decorporealized*. (Unless of course, we learn to transfer our thoughts directly to one another via a flash drive or other form of cerebral plug-in devices.) Even today, the corporeal presence figuratively endowed in a text is formidable, and the rhetoric emanating from this particular romantic sentiment is compelling to many of us who have been trained to read between the lines.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in the age of the "information society," the principle of binary logic characteristic of digital media is seen to be steadily ridding our textual world of a customary trope of corporeality by unhinging a tenuous material link

¹⁰⁸ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990). A reference I have in mind is a discussion of hermeneutic reading offered by Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*., especially the first half of the book.

between a text and a body.¹⁰⁹ The space between a text and a body has been pried open to expose its ambiguity and has been denied an accustomed structure of arbitrary correspondence. One could say that the process of digitization did not simply shed light on the spectrality inherent in the system of representation. Rather, it unexpectedly unveiled a shrouded multiplicity. But, apart from the universal echoing of disembodiment, Japan has encountered a whole different set of creative conundrums and technological difficulties due to the role played by Chinese characters, which further accentuates an already existing ontological ambiguity within the decorporealized text.

The hyperbolic discourse over the demise of national culture and loss of national integrity in Japan no longer strikes me as being totally farfetched; rather, these changes are seen to undermine one of the most fundamental, life-supporting institutions of the nation. While the discourse of the post-Lost Decade crisis of representation harks back to an age-old problem of a generation gap, a dispute over the nature of man's struggle against machine, or a question of a national-cultural integrity, I argue that the actual crisis, which may well have been technological in nature, revolves around a spatiotemporal unhinging of bodies from representations, and a destabilization of a conventional historical trajectory for an "imagined community." But, as the case of ore-ore sagi shows, an initial dislocation does not take place in the media spotlight. Instead, it takes place in a seemingly insignificant oversight committed by a well-meaning ordinary citizen. A mistaken identity in writing or hearing can cost money, a life, and sometime the future of a nation-state.

¹⁰⁹ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2001).

Humans Reading Like Machines

While the problematic reading and writing practices among the digital generation are discussed as prefiguring a progression toward the inescapable extinction of “analog” aesthetics, the disfiguration characteristics of a digital text and digital reading practice have been figuratively construed as an epitome of twenty-first century national-cultural predicaments. With regard to the spread of *keitai* among the digital generation, the initial marketing strategy was influential. Based on the previous popularity of beepers among schoolchildren, *keitai* service providers set the price low for a *keitai*-to-*keitai* text messaging service. As a result, text messaging was the primary form of communication among many teenage schoolchildren. Even after the price for a *keitai*-to-*keitai* telephone conversation was significantly lowered to meet perceived demand, ubiquitous ringtones followed by a silent thumb-dance across the small three-digit by four-digit keypad became a customary scene inside a waiting room or a public transportation car.¹¹⁰ By then, conventional protocols concerning placing or receiving a phone call had become obsolete among the “digital generation” both at home and outside of home. Although there were many instances of actual *keitai*-to-*keitai* telephone conversations, the self-identified “analog generation” complained about having to listen to what sounded like a cacophony made up of an unchecked stream of intimate conversations in the middle of public space.¹¹¹ The “analog generation” also quickly took notice of a conspicuous

¹¹⁰ There seems to be two different types of people on the phone in public: 1) those who whisper into a receiver and apologetically hung up, and 2) those who compete with the surrounding noise as the conversation gradually escalates into a shouting match. From my observation, these two distinct modes, too, mirror two separate “generations.”

¹¹¹ A letter to the editor appearing on June 26, 2004, in the *Nihon keizai shimbun* newspaper was the first of its kind to object to the increasing frequency of public cell phone use. This anonymous contributor denounced the use of cell phone in public spaces, criticizing them as

deformity and illegibility in digitally rendered *keitai* texts. When it became evident that the “digital generation” paid no heed to a previously observed communication protocol, the “analog generation” openly displayed their disapproval: not only did they frown upon the use of *keitai* in public spaces, but they also became highly disturbed by the visual disorder deliberately created by the new digital composition practice on *keitai*. A presumed mirroring relationship between a writer’s interiority and a text is something I will take up in detail in chapter three and four.

Of course, digitally rendered texts also include things like *ASCII* art and QR codes (Figure 1 and 2).¹¹² While *ASCII* art mostly stayed within the space of alternative,

unsightly and inconsiderate of other. Brought on by the swelling voices of request to put an end to unchecked public cell phone use, what is now widely known as “manner posters” (*shanai manā*) began appearing in and around train cars, station platforms and other confined public space, admonishing against loud phone conversations and blaring ringtones. Soon manner posters became part and parcel of “manner campaigns” routinely launched by train companies across Japan, citing sources like rush hour delay, general public annoyance and occasional quarrels among the fellow commuters/riders. On the status of cell phone use in public transportation, see Mizuko Ito, et al., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005). The question of what it means to have “good manner” in public spaces with regard to the use of new communication media devices is dealt with in chapter three.

¹¹² *ASCII* art is a graphic design technique that consists of pictures assembled together from the 95 printable characters defined by the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (*ASCII*) from 1963. A detailed explanation can be found at the Wikipedia website at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII_art (last accessed on May 15, 2013). In Japan, *ASCII* art initially appeared on an obscure alternative culture website called 2-channel where heavy internet users frequented. Both *ASCII* art and 2-channel website became widely known when an unlikely love story about a shy 23-year old man rescuing a fellow female passenger from a drunken man on the train surfaced as a book, *Train Man* (2004). Partly thanks to *keitai* manufactures’ effort to provide ordinary *keitai* users with ready-made *ASCII* art in their text message emoticon database, the use of *ASCII* art became popularized. 2-channel now offers a comprehensive *kao-moji-ASCII* art dictionary on their website, which can be accessed at <http://matsucon.net/> (last accessed on May 15, 2013).

An example of *ASCII* art shown below depicts two snowmen like figures huddled together out of fear.

```
(´ω´)・ω´) キャー
/   つ□   \   怖いー
```

subculture websites, such as 2channel,¹¹³ QR codes—which are a small matrix barcode initially developed to overcome logistical problems and expedite the process at factories and warehouses in Japan—were quickly being adopted for commercial and marketing use in urban areas. Similar to preceding forms of optical machine-readable representations of data, like the barcode, the readability of a QR code is contingent on *keitai* use. That is to say, in order to retrieve information embedded in a QR code, an optical-reading function must be activated on one's *keitai* and placed over the small matrix. The labor of reading has completely departed from human eyes and is now completely relegated to *keitai*. Here, the metaphorical dislocation is inscribed at the level of one's visuality and “reading” capacity. In thinking about dislocation happening at one's visuality and reading capacity, I am simultaneously thinking about representations of value and labor of abstraction that goes into our “reading.” In the process of forming a certain culturally sensitive visuality, we all learn to inhabit a system of value that helps us decode surrounding representations. At the level of semiotic abstraction, we learn to retrieve/read value according to a regime of representation. Since the current reading and writing practices are embedded in the post-Lost Decade socioeconomic predicaments, I am implicitly subscribing to a tangentially drawn analogy of “confusion of value” that has existed in Japan for the past few decades.

Although I am not in any way inferring a causal relationship, I do see that in time sociotechnological conditions can line up in such a way as to create a cumulative effect. Now, the economic predicaments of Japan's Lost Decade are, in some way, the most logical outcome of an incredibly irrational inflation of land and stock prices during the

¹¹³ For more on 2channel, please see Toshiyuki Inoue, and Org Jinguumae, “2channel sengen: Chosen suru medhia (Declaration of the 2channel: Media That Provokes),” (2001).

1980s bubble economy. When the initial ripples of the market crash spread like an infectious disease or a domino effect across Southeast and East Asia in the mid-1990s, Japan had previously hit the record lowest yen-to-dollar conversion rate—that is, the yen was the strongest it had been since the 1985 Plaza Accord.¹¹⁴ Japan's exports were already struggling when the domestic economy was hit hard by a whirlwind deflation of land and stock prices. People began to wonder about the transparency of value, in particular of the universal currency—that is, money. In analyzing the financial crisis that started in Thailand in 1997, Rosalind Morris offers an illuminating account of “dislocation” and the Thai government's attempt to reinstitute order to the “confusion of value.” She states that the government “seemed to be obsessed with the fantasy of a return to meaning and the possibility that the madness of its own economic excess could somehow be undone.”¹¹⁵ The undoing Morris discusses involves stabilization of the market. Before the inflation could be ameliorated, the identity between the *baht* and its “value” had to be somehow resuscitated and restored. This was, by no means, a small feat. In the aftermath of the burst of the bubble economy, Japan too needed to follow similar footsteps. However, the road to economic recovery was stifled not only by the difficulty of instituting corporate disclosure or fiscal transparency, but also by a series of traumatic events, both natural and manmade disasters. As if the confusion of value in the economy since the early 1990s precipitated a further dislocation of the previously held myth of the

¹¹⁴ In 1995, the rate between the Japanese yen and the US dollar was 79yen per 1 US dollar. In a matter of one decade since the removal of the fixed-rate system since 1987, the yen grew stronger from 360yen, 310yen, 200yen, and 120yen per 1 US dollar.

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Morris, “Modernity's Media and the End of Mediumship? On the Aesthetic Economy of Transparency in Thailand,” in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001), 206-07.

identity between the yen and its “value,” an equally deep-rooted myth about the youth and future stability of its nation somehow became unhinged. Against the backdrop of a lingering national trauma of the 1995 Kobe earthquake and the subway sarin gas attack by a cult group *Aum Supreme Truth*,¹¹⁶ the 1997 *Sakakibara* incident in Kobe—in which a then 14-year-old boy known as Sakakibara gruesomely assaulted, killed and mutilated a handful of preteen children—became known as a decisive event that turned Japan’s youth irrevocably “monstrous”¹¹⁷ in the public discourse.

Is the timing of a reverse alchemical transformation of lucrative securities and bonds into a worthless pile of paper and the overnight sensation of children becoming the object of threat for national futurity a simple, innocent coincidence? The unforeseeable risk in the market economy evinced by the mid-1990s economic crisis was a rare wake-up call for the capitalist world that the ‘real value,’ if there can be such a thing, of our universal medium remains mystified and highly undecipherable. The 1980s bubble-economy-induced optimism was certainly not equipped to foresee an unprecedented economic depression or domestic turmoil concerning children in the Lost Decade. Nor could children ever be imagined as a harbinger of social distress. It seems low visibility has created a certain refraction and confusion. Perhaps it is not a mere accident after all that both discussions circled around the question of predictability, controllability and the readability of the children’s identity. Suffice it to say, when seemingly unassuming youths began striking sleepy suburban train stations and crowded city streets with

¹¹⁶ Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? - Aum Shinrikyou’s Path to Violence* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996); Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save it* (New York: Owl Books, 2000).

¹¹⁷ Andrea Arai, “Killing Kids: Recession and Survival in Twenty-First-Century Japan,” *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003).

serrated dagger knives in the early 2000s, it created an instant media panic. It was not altogether unlike the killing sprees of the late 1990s, but the eruption of atrocious violence was spasmodic, and seemed to spread like a wildfire among the generation of those in their late teens and twenties via a thriving online network. But when it was revealed that the recent murderers were contemporaneous with *Sakakibara*, the discourse of crisis was thrown back to people like a return of the repressed.¹¹⁸

News reports and crime scene photographs in the mass media relayed potent images of the tragedy that befell ordinary people walking home or enjoying their days off. While no explanation can make intelligible the nature of the staggering violence committed by the assailants or the utter disregard shown for the lives of fellow citizens, what sent shudders across the archipelago in the aftermath of bloodthirsty outbursts were not the lurid details. Rather, it was a somber realization of the sheer unpredictability and senselessness of such violence. Upon their arrest, stupefied killers invariably muttered a following cathartic confession, “[Killing] anybody would have been good” (*daredemo yokatta*).¹¹⁹ All of them uniformly complained of a lack of support at home and/or work,

¹¹⁸ On June 11, 2008, an article appeared in the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper reminding the readers that sporadic incidents of indiscriminate violence in the past decade have all been committed by youth belonging to the “Lost Decade” generation (*rosu jene*) or “*Sakakibara*” generation. The article went on to suggest that their witnessing a turn of the century at the age of 17, at the height of an impressionable adolescent period, might have contributed to their eventual but mysterious “snapping.” Since what triggers such an abrupt onset could never have been located, they are also referred to as a “generation of criminals without a clear cause or motive.” (*riyūnaki hanzai sedai*). Also, see *AERA*’s special reportage on this topic in Aya Oonami, “Daini rosu-jene daihassei suru -- shuushoku yougaki ga mata yattekuru (Looming Outbreak of the Second Lost-Generation: Another Employment Ice Age),” *AERA* (2009), 18.

¹¹⁹ Examples of crimes, collectively identified as “anybody would have been good” crime (*daredemo yokatta hanzai*), in which a target is picked seemingly at random and killed viciously with little or an obscure reason, are endless. Just to name the most recent ones during the time of my fieldwork between January 2007 and August 2008: 1) On September 12, 2007, three men who met on an online job classified site for questionable social engagements and requests, known as “back-alley” site (*ura saito*), conspired to attack a woman walking home after work in Nagoya

blamed Japan's stagnant economy for their financial instability, and at the same time lamented their bleak future prospects. Another common object of their rage and resentment was dismal conditions of urban living characterized by insufferable alienation. If this was all it took to kill someone, the media decried to the audience, no one was safe from anyone anymore in post-Lost Decade Japan. Nobody is free of at least a few setbacks in life. But the prospect of miraculous recovery, the kind enjoyed by the "analog" generation long ago, was nowhere in sight. And it was questionable if anyone knew how to get past this despondency. The unemployment rate remained record high. The working-poor population among the "digital generation" began to present itself as a serious impediment for building a robust global economy. Against the backdrop of a soaring number of NEET¹²⁰ and Net Café Refugees,¹²¹ a seedy industry was quietly

(reported in the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper), 2) On March 24, 2008, a 24-year-old "socially-withdrawn" (*hikikomori*) male in Ibaraki went on a killing spree outside of JR station in Ibaragi, murdering and hurting eight people. He explained that he "*kireta*" by his father's advice to look for a job (Nikkan gendai Net), 3) On March 30, 2008, a runaway boy from Osaka killed a man standing on a train platform by pushing him off and slamming his body against an incoming train in Okayama. (Nikkan gendai Net), 4) On July 24, 2008, 33-year-old salaryman killed two women at a bookstore inside a mall adjacent to the Hachiōji station on the Keio-line. Most of the major newspapers and online news sites use the term, "anybody would do" crime because it is the very phrase used by many killers and is readily identifiable. But I believe that generating a pattern helps the media build their argument that these are not isolated events, and should be considered indicative of the social ill of Japan. I say this because the *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper is one of the major sponsors for the Character Culture Promotion Organization (*zaidanhōjin moji-katsuji bunka suishin kikō*) and has a strong political agenda in perpetuating the anxiety-ridden discourse about a failing national culture by jumping on the bandwagon to eradicate contemporary social ills.

¹²⁰ NEET or *nīto* (ニート) is an acronym given in recent years to physically and mentally able people who are Not in Education, Employment or Trainig. Spelled as NEET, this "English" term has become a staple category, which is almost interchangeable with those who are known as *hikikomori* (socially withdrawn). *Hikikomori* are children (though some continue to act like "children" well after they are in their 20s and 30s) who parasitically live off the financial security and material comfort provided by their parents. While a term like *hikikomori* is commonly used to classify children who are enrolled in schools after refusing to leave home for an extended period of time being *futōkō* or *tōkō kyōhi*, the use of NEET in the media implies that they are at the age where enrollment in the education system is no longer either compulsory or expected. The cutoff

flourishing in the dark alleys of cyberspace, as it were. The circumstances that were said to have incited the assailants all appeared surprisingly mundane, if not petty, but strangely reflected anxieties and hardships that were immediately identifiable by many living in Japan at the time. There was no telling who might strike next or when and where it could happen. All things considered, there was not a single city that was exempt from becoming a target of a senseless wrath.

Subsequent media coverage further exacerbated the general public's apprehension—"it could happen to me"—by confirming that the killers indeed had no clear target to speak of. The killers, it seemed, were driven by inexplicable desires to kill, let off steam, or simply earn their 15-minutes of media fame/time. Fellow citizens were

line between *hikikomori* and NEET is not clear since one could find examples of middle-age *hikikomori* who might be now referred to as NEET. Nonetheless, NEET does not always carry the same somber undertone as *hikikomori*. Rather, NEET is used to intimate either pronounced unwillingness or indifference toward participating in society as a responsible member.

¹²¹ Net Café Refugee (*netto kafe nanmin*) is Japan's fastest-growing "working-poor" population whose unemployment status has driven them to take up a daily shelter at 24-hour operation Internet cafés. With a sign up/annual fee as low as a few hundred yen (a few US dollars), one is given a member's card which offers a member discount rate. Due to incidents in which computers at Internet cafés were used in connection with fraudulent operations of late, more and more stores are requiring prospective customers to submit photo ID and other documentation at the time of admission. For an extra few hundred yen, a warm shower is available for 10 minutes. In general, for a few hundred yen an hour, you can enjoy a wide range of *manga* comics, cold and hot drinks, and a high-speed Internet connection. But for those staying longer, different day and night package deals and promotions are available. For example, a night pack offers a semiprivate space in one of the numerous cubicles with a desktop and a chair from a couple of hours before midnight until a little after daybreak for less than 2,000yen (roughly 20 US dollar). Unlike the day laborer's quarters on skid rows of San'ya or Kotobuki-chō (See Edward Fowler, *San'Ya Blues: Laboring Life in Contemporary Tokyo* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1996).) that are chronically plagued by obstinate alcoholism, violence, gambling, and occasional mental health issues among the rapidly aging migrant workers who board there, internet cafés are not conducive to forming a community *per se*. On the contrary, the centrality of their location—most of the 24 hour operation internet cafés are normally tucked away in the windowless basement floors of shopping malls and retail-shop-filled buildings a walking distance away from major train and subway stations in the metropolis—offers bare necessities for a disconnected individual existence, i.e. public transportation accessibility desired by the newly unemployed workers to report to multiple day-job locations and essential life-support systems, such as coin laundries, convenient stores, and coin lockers where they store their oversized bags.

not worthy of their civil courtesy or compassion. They were a serendipitous means to their fiendish ends.¹²² The media wasted no time belaboring these points until there was a general consensus within the popular discourse that the ‘digital generation’ was mentally inaccessible, emotionally unpredictable, and socially unreadable, in much the same way their cryptically devious digital writings were. Even though most Japanese personally knew no youth who might fit the profile or had never been the victim of violence, the constant news feed on the monstrosity of children and youth had by then provided fertile ground for a certain anxiety-generating media reception and discourse. What I find most disturbing about these violent cases is not the idea that the analog generation can no longer read the digital generation, but rather these killers’ refusal to read like human beings. Their utterance, “[Killing] anybody would have been good,” is a refusal to acknowledge any existing heterogeneity. The moment they refuse to read differences at all, we become indistinguishable in their eyes. I imagine this as far more unsettling. Machines, if programmed to detect, might anticipate and acknowledge variables in human species, but we, as human beings, are prone to take notice. We cannot ignore differences, be it noticeable physiognomic or physical characteristics of people. Or so we have been led to think. This is why the police hire sketch artists to draw suspects and we stand in line at the airport with a photo ID to have our faces and our fingers scanned. Our differences stored in the state data confirm our individual identities.

¹²² The police psychologist who interviewed the killers often diagnosed these ordinary-looking killers as fundamentally too narcissistic and emotionally disconnected to relate to other people, and determined that they may have been in a dissociative mode at the time of crimes. Without an effective means of detection, any one of us could become the next victim. Incidentally, Internet Cafés in Japan have been ridiculed as a hotbed for a wicked criminality since the sensational matricide committed by a 17-year-old in May 2007. The boy reportedly toted his mother’s decapitated head in his school bag to a nearby Internet Café to watch his favorite band’s promotional video before turning himself in at the local police station.

The question of readability inadvertently though inevitably has entailed the question of unreadability. The few violent cases I raised here seem to mock not only the government's effort to contain the energy and momentum the digital media environment has thrust forward, but also the eyes and ears of an "analog generation" who struggle to be able to read the identity of someone whose identity should not be open to question. Just as digitally rendered texts require digital devices that can sufficiently read and understand what is being represented, perhaps the eyes and ears of the analog generation too need an update in order to respond to the changing modes of register and representations. Is the teaching of reading differences internalized by the analog generation still viable in this day and age? If not, what functions and capacities are necessary to read in the future?

In this chapter, I examine two social phenomena that have captured the national attention of Japan in the early to late 2000. Confusion of identities in both instances are prompted as well as exacerbated by the reading thresholds that were not quite up to par. I try to show 1) how the "analog" generations' deep-seated anxieties about their media (il)literacy inadvertently lend themselves to *ore ore sagi* impostures' exploitation, and 2) how the scandal concerning the national pension plan could be seen as a cumulative effect of the past few decades socio-technological transition in Japan and the reaction of the "analog" generation to be symptomatic of their growing sense of mistrust in the Japanese government. I suggest that anxieties manifested differently in these two incidents must be put into sociohistorical context of the post-Lost Decade Japan in order for the underlying assumptions about national futurity and identity can be rightly addressed.

Chapter Three: Disorder of the Mind

The age-old expression “Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind” (*moji no midare wa kokoro no midare*) continues to resonate as one of the most fundamental guiding principles among schoolteachers even today when much of schoolchildren’s daily reading and writing happen increasingly on their computer keyboards and keitai keypads rather than on paper. Unlike the deliberate deformity and transgression of script contrived by graffiti artists in public space, which amounts to an act of illicit writing subject to legal sanctions,¹²³ the disorder scrutinized and admonished by the aphorism here is strictly moral in its spirit. It is predicated upon a suggestion that disorder of the script is symptomatic of an underlying disorder of the mind responsible for the writing. While interests in the graphology and concerns regarding literacy are relatively universal, script takes on a markedly moral as well as cultural significance in Japan. This graphological orientation, which assumes that a person’s inner character can be inferred from the writing produced, is nothing new. However, given the unique system of signification, which relies on a person’s full command of three sets of phonetic alphabets (*hiragana* syllabary, *katakana* syllabary and the *Roman* alphabet) and kanji, both the high

¹²³ Mark Halsey, and Alison Young, “‘Our Desires Are Ungovernable’: Writing Graffiti in Urban Space,” *Theoretical Criminology* 10, no. 3 (2006): 275-306.

literacy rate and written proficiency among its national subjects have historically and discursively been understood as indexing the prosperity and integrity of Japan.¹²⁴

Whenever a criminal publically lays claim to a crime in letters or notes, graphologists are frequently invited to share their expert opinions in the media. On the basis of the correct use of *kanji* and phonetic alphabets and other evidential material, graphologists build a profile often specifying the culprit's age, gender, level of education, political orientation, social maturity, and/or the nature of the psychological pathology that may have been the impetus behind the crime.¹²⁵ In other words, the order of the script, as in the propriety of the language use of its people, has been interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of order in the nation. Hence, the impropriety of forms and protocols

¹²⁴ For an illuminating account of the specificity of Japanese language and its concomitants on the evolution of literary culture, see Henry D. Smith's article "Japaneseness and the History of the Books," *Monumenta Nipponica* 53:4, no. Winter (1998): 499-515.. To offer a North American example on the alphabetization of America and the link between a certain pedagogical approach to teaching morally upright values and letters, see Patricia Crain, *The Story of a: The Alphabetization of America From the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).. In terms of the specificity of the Japanese case, an excellent example can be found in monthly educational supplemental magazines for elementary school children, such as *The First Grader Shougaku ichinen-sei (The First Graders) Nyuugaku-mae no sakidori gakushuu moji kazu kansei tokushuu-gou* (Pre-elementary School Complete Edition on Letters and Numbers) (2007). These magazines often release special preparatory editions for pre-elementary schoolchildren in the fall in anticipation of the following academic year, which starts in the spring. For example, in the 2007 October special edition of *The First Grader*, a professor of elementary school pedagogy introduces a special teaching method that prioritizes reading and writing proficiency among elementary schoolchildren as one of the most important building blocks of the children's future educational success and sound psychological development. On literacy, see, *Shikiji-subete no hitobito ni moji wo (Literacy: Letters to All People)* (Tokyo: Akashi Publishing, 1990).

¹²⁵ See Kazuaki Uozumi, *Gendai hisseki-gaku jyoron (Introductory Theory of Contemporary Graphology)*, Bunshun Shinsho 149 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjuu, 2001). for a more thorough examination of the link between scripts and a writer's subjectivity, poetic and political sensibility, and other defining elements that make a certain script distinct. He also offers a brief analysis of a crime letter and diary penned by a then 14-year-old boy who killed one and injured three girls and eventually decapitated an 11-year-old boy in Kobe in 1997. For a more careful analysis of the historical development on the link between script, the literacy rate, and the integrity of national culture, see Kyuuyou Ishikawa, *Sho to nihonjin (Calligraphy and the Japanese)*, Shincho Bunko (Tokyo: Shincho sha, 2004).

associated with digital reading and writing practices has been metonymically translated as a failure to maintain the integrity of Japanese culture, which is subsequently seen to foreshadow or at least threaten dissolution of Japan's national unity as a whole.

In this chapter, I seek to examine sites of negotiation between the “analog” generation and the “digital” generation, where questions of proper reading and writing practices, culturally accepted forms of sociality, and assumptions about a script and its underlying subjectivity converge to not only create tension, but also challenge a conventional understanding of boundaries and communication protocols. Each instance of negotiation is a sign of socioculturally inflected boundaries and a sense of propriety now under scrutiny, and it insists on returning to the question of mediation in general. Interestingly, the negotiations are often couched in a morally invested discourse and partially serve to deflect broader issues in connection with anxieties about the national-cultural futurity of Japan. Although my analysis is based on the ethnographic material I have collected during my fieldwork, in order to offer a historical perspective to the present investigation, I make occasional reference to the past discourse on the correlation between a perversion of script and impropriety of mind and body within Japanese youth. The main ethnographic moments in this chapter revolve around the negotiation of boundaries among schoolteachers, students, and parents in a newly keitai-dictated communication sphere. Hence, the debates concerning disorder also take place around keitai and keitai-specific sociality and writing. I hope that the lines of inquiry followed here will help explore aspects of the current situation not covered by the discourses of anxiety with regard to a proper trajectory of national and sociocultural development. I am interested in understanding the arguments about the presumed detrimental effects of

keitai-mediated communication. But I am equally committed to documenting how the formation of new social relations among the youth as mediated by keitai is qualitatively defining new experiences of reading and writing, as these changing conditions give rise to new literary genres and literary sensibility. Ultimately, I argue that a perceived disorder in script and sociality may not mirror a state of disorder but rather suggest *a new order in mediation* in its nascent form. I imagine that by the time this chapter is read, the stories recounted to me by my interlocutors will have been reincarnated in a different form. Nevertheless, so long as our lives continue to be mediated, informed, and enabled by the conditions of technological development, the stories that unfold in the following pages will help imagine the direction in which we might be headed.¹²⁶

“Disorder of the script”

The following conversation I had with longtime friends, Tomoaki and his wife, Yuki, who have been teaching at their respective private junior and senior high schools for the past decade, illustrates the growing tension between teachers and students. On the one hand, there is nothing uniquely Japanese about the schoolteachers’ objection to permutations of digitally mediated reading and writing practices, which have been criticized as precipitating students’ transgressions of socially respected boundaries and communication protocols. On the other hand, the way in which the conspicuous orthographic deformity, literacy, and deviation from conventional sociocultural norms have come to bear unmistakably morally subversive overtones, is specific to Japan. The

¹²⁶ My thinking has been greatly influenced by Schivelbusch’s wonderful meditations on a certain feedback loop created between the evolution of technologies and human imaginations, the relationship to our senses, and our understanding of the world Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford ; New York ;: Berg, 1988).

conversation took place over dinner one night, during one of many extended visits I had with them, when Tomoaki came home a little more tired and dejected than usual.¹²⁷ As it turned out, one of his homeroom-class students was caught cheating with his *keitai* during an in-class quiz: he was browsing an online reference page to answer multiple-choice questions. Because the school decided to make an example of him, the student was facing possible suspension. This was the last straw for Tomoaki. He started to vent his frustration with students' *keitai* use at school in general. Soon his vexation was directed at other distressing *keitai*-related incidents at school and eventually at the deformity of children's script.

Tomoaki: You wouldn't believe the kind of essays I come across everyday at school these days!

Yuki: What he means by that is, well, it really is disturbing to see what poor vocabulary the kids these days have. Instead of appropriately using adjectives or adjective verbs to describe things, they simply write a sentence like, "It was great" and line up tons of emoticons next to it.¹²⁸ It is *un-believ-able*!

Tomoaki: For them, it's all about [whether they can convey] emotional affect and ambiance [via their text messages]. They aren't keen on being lucid. Nope, they certainly won't go the extra mile for us! And, guess whose fault it is when we don't instantly understand by looking at busily animated emoticons?! You are familiar with the aphorism, "Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind" [*moji no midare wa kokoro no midare*], aren't you? Don't think for a minute that's gone out of

¹²⁷ Thanks to a unique circumstance in which I found myself, I was able to sustain numerous conversations and discussions throughout the period of my fieldwork with teachers like Tomoaki and Yuki, their colleagues, my old junior and high school teachers, a number of parents who were struggling with the very issue of limiting their children's *keitai* use, and a handful of elementary school teachers in Osaka. I taped and took diligent notes throughout most of the conversations I had with them, which allowed me to reconstruct fairly vivid scenes. I owe much of the observations and analyses I offer in this chapter, as elsewhere, to my informants' candidness and willingness to talk about a broad range of issues, especially the sensitive ones.

¹²⁸ My use of the word, emoticon, as a translation for original Japanese words used by Tomoaki and Yuki is problematic, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter, but for the sake of the analysis at hand I decided not to expand on this point at this time and instead to use a popular word, emoticon, here.

fashion. Even in this day and age, or maybe because of the fear for “[youth] abandoning the script/letter” [(*wakamono no*) *katsuji banare*],¹²⁹ we pay pretty close attention to how kids write.

Yuki: You have to remember that although his school is considerably more liberal than most [other schools], it is still very academically competitive and prestigious. The teachers at his school pay *very* close attention to things like a student’s study habit, family environment, and monthly allowance. ... Each homeroom teacher is responsible for routinely collecting and verifying the students’ information, including details that families nowadays are wary of sharing because they’re considered “personal information” [*kojin jyōhō*]. Teachers keep students on a relatively tight leash. They even prohibit the use of *keitai* on school premise.¹³⁰ [At my school, it’s] not that we are not as diligent about disciplining our students, but by comparison [to his school], we don’t interfere with their lives nearly as much. Our basic stance is that as long as our students abide by the law we don’t put our nose in their private affairs. ... Still. ... it’s really flabbergasting to read some of the text messages my students send me on my *keitai*. [I] can’t say they’re being properly deferential [toward me]. Written in a totally casual, lightweight, colloquial language, there’s not a single use of polite form, much less an honorific form [in their messages]! It’s absolutely baffling because when I see them at school, they are pretty well behaved. They may say or do things that are inappropriate sometimes, but they are usually fairly conscientious about being respectful [toward me].

Tomoaki: It’s worse when they text you in the middle of the night. ...like [laughs], believe it or not, two in the morning! I received one just a few nights ago!

Yuki: That’s right! Two in the morning! [holding up two fingers with her right hand as if making a peace sign] And you know what else? The next day, they innocently ask me why I don’t respond right away. [her eyes widened with disbelief] They must think that, just like them, my hand is glued to my *keitai* all day long! I mean, really?! I have a husband and an infant; I can’t be expected to be at their beck and call 24/7!

Tomoaki: [chuckling] The worst offenders are. ... unfortunately. ...always the parents [laughs]! They too text me in the late hours of the night! Like parent, like child. It certainly wouldn’t be fair to expect students to be mindful of etiquette, if parents can’t provide the right model, don’t you agree? Obviously, I am. ... we are obliged to respond to text messages especially if they come from parents even when it’s about something as ludicrous as a class assignment or exam schedule. When I don’t answer immediately, they complain that my response time is needlessly tardy. Some even take this *alleged* offence personally. [I] can’t even relax at my own home with text messages pestering me to be a teacher all the time.

¹²⁹ The discourse known as the “Youth Abandoning the Print/Text” (*wakamono no katsuji banare*) is an important component of the argument I investigate in my dissertation, and I address this in detail in my introduction.

¹³⁰ Although most elementary, junior, and high schools, in principle, forbid the use of *keitai* on campus, the degree of implementation of the rules varies from school to school. But as the case of Tomoaki’s student shows, most students do in fact make use of their *keitai* while switching on a “silent/quiet mode” so as not to attract attention. It would be practically impossible to ban the use of *keitai* on campus, as most teenagers own a *keitai* bought and paid for by their parents. According to the 2012 annual report released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (http://www.soumu.go.jp/menu_news/s-news/01kiban03_02000096.html, last accessed on May 15, 2013), 101.4% of Japan’s entire population is a *keitai* owner. That is to say, some people own one or more *keitai* under their names.

Listening to a half-dozen more similar anecdotes, I realized just how profoundly disorienting and exasperating the *keitai*-mediated relationship has become for teachers. Schoolteachers are caught between a rock and hard place, trapped in a “dammed if you do, damned if you don’t” conundrum. Tomoaki and Yuki have grown wary and, to a justifiable degree, resentful of having to share their private time and space beyond the parameters of a conventionally recognized occupational obligation. When asked, they describe their students’ tendency to push the boundaries and try their patience as “[You] give them an inch, they will take a mile!” There is no doubt that they take great pride in being teachers, and like many teachers I have come to know in my fieldwork, Tomoaki and Yuki have made concessions to the reality that they are never truly free of their pedagogical worries and concerns. In fact, they have on occasion gone to the length of taking on the role of a surrogate father and mother for their students in their private time.¹³¹ But the recent invention of *keitai*-facilitated communication has upped the level of intimacy and blurred the public and private boundary to an unexpected degree. Neither of them was ready for the constant shifting of social boundaries that were once nonnegotiable. In this context, the question of “to be or not to be *keitai*-available” should not be understood simply as their unwillingness to respond. By choosing to become unavailable, Tomoaki and Yuki want to teach their students to respect proper boundaries and to observe socio-communicational protocols. If parents are not providing good role models at home, they seem to say, it is up to them to instill a sense of propriety in their students. In some way, their classrooms and schools are a microcosm of Japan and show

¹³¹ I have heard not just one, but more than a handful of stories from teachers themselves about how they visited the homes of troubled students and ended up taking care of household chores, such as cooking, laundry, and grocery shopping, neglected by the students’ parents. They all agreed that to do so was not part of the “job description” *per se*, but they could not simply ignore what they saw, and felt obliged to take control of the situation.

that the changing relationships between teacher and student, adult and child, public and private, are indicative of a symbolic disorder that has plagued Japan in the post-bubble decades. With that, let us look at the scene of spatiotemporal reorientation that took place in 2004.

Collapse of Spatiotemporal Boundaries

As the recent cases of the Google Books Library Project and the heated discussion over the DRM (Digital Rights Management) demonstrate,¹³² technological changes have tremendous sociocultural repercussions in everyday life across the globe. In Japan, since the late 1990s, the field of digital communications media and the corresponding infrastructure network have grown exponentially. From the pace of expansion of *keitai* coverage to the level of sophistication within the commercial digital media industries, the whole socioeconomic sphere is in a state of flux. Some changes are instantly picked up and incorporated while others take a longer trial-and-error period before the dust finally settles. When our world experiences a great influx of ideas and inventions, often connected with new social rituals, it is hard to ascertain the systematic relation or totality of all the moving parts. This further complicates the issues of boundaries, be they national or socio-economical. In teasing out the specificity of the Japanese digital media landscape, I will posit the 2004 release of NTT DoCoMo's mobile payment service, *osaiifu keitai* (wallet *keitai*), as an exemplary case of paradigm shift and spatiotemporal re-orientation for *keitai* users in Japan.

¹³² The experimental digital download release and "pay what you want" price setting by Radiohead of its 2007 album, *In Rainbows*, is still fresh in our memories. And, of course, there is an ongoing negotiation between writers and Google over the issue of intellectual property rights concerning the work included in the Google Books Library Project. The time-consuming and complex nature of this class-action suit lies in the global consumer market and the agreement/disagreement thereof among the writers whose work is protected by different copyright laws of many different countries.

Since the advent of *osaifu keitai*, other major *keitai* manufacturers and service providers have followed suit and introduced slightly different versions of a similar application. The application allows an individual *keitai* user to manage electronic money, credit cards, and public transit fare collection (i.e., railway, subway, bus, and airplane fares) through a mobile payment service application activated on *keitai* installed with an integrated circuit (microchip). The most attractive part of this application is that a user experiences little temporal or physical constraint. Almost all transactions can be facilitated electronically and wirelessly from a *keitai* screen at one's own convenience.¹³³ Thanks to the continuous circulation of information, commodities, and narrative currency (as in social networking sites), *keitai* users enjoy a feeling of greater independence. All this is literally available at their fingertips. And the increased ability to manipulate one's personal spatiotemporal orientation creates a more porous sense of boundaries. Without the need to be time-sensitive, there is little pressure to get things done before the bank window, store, or office closes. Transactions that used to require activities in public spaces now only demand dexterity while the user rides a bus, a train or stays within the confines of an office cubicle or a bathroom stall. Online banking circumvents having to line up at a row of busy ATMs during a short lunch break. Once the *keitai* microchip is configured, a swift touch to a luminous microchip reader at a store counter or a transportation ticket gate is sufficient to stay in an uninterrupted flow of motion in the city. Preplanning is no longer necessary when getting on a train or a bus. If the *osaifu keitai* value runs out or falls short for a desired purchase, with one well-rehearsed

¹³³ Since *osaifu keitai* and other similar applications provided by *keitai* service providers fulfill many functions on a *keitai*, there is an inherent risk for identity theft and fraud if the phone is lost, broken or stolen. Although the wallet function can be either suspended or terminated by closing the *keitai* account, there is a greater risk of identity theft if the microchip is stolen.

movement, the *keitai* user goes online and adds more value. Since changes are reflected on the spot, a temporary socioeconomic paralysis is quickly resolved. The ostensible liberation from the external and logistical constraints that have traditionally dictated both the space and tempo of capitalistic participation lends one the spurious sense that time and space are more susceptible to manipulation than they actually are.¹³⁴

Under the premise of a ubiquitously available digital network, physical confines that may have once marked customary boundaries constitute now minor restrictions to the flow of digital information. Or so it seems. An invisible *keitai* connection has no problem reaching schoolchildren, whether they are in the classroom or at home.¹³⁵ Since it is usually the parents who sign the contract and pay the monthly bill for the child's *keitai*, they try to monitor *keitai* use by activating an often-ineffective filtering service that puts a lock on certain web services.¹³⁶ But such preventive measures to steer children away

¹³⁴ While it is hardly fair to put all the blame for changing social etiquette and practices on a newly integrated technological innovation, such as *keitai*, popular gadgets do become easy scapegoats every now and then. When I read the March 16, 2007 *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper article in which the reporter bemoaned the increasing level of "private noise" caused by *keitai*-chatter inside a public transportation, I thought to myself, "I've heard this argument before. ...". It did not take long to figure out that a similar argument has repeatedly been made against items such as, the Walkman (remember the Walkman?), the *GameBoy* (Nintendo portable game player), the iPod, the Nintendo DS, etc. See Michael Bull for an illuminating discussion on the Walkman and youth Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life*, Materializing Culture (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000).

¹³⁵ Although some aspects of the fluidity of boundaries and the use of *keitai* among Japanese youth have been documented and analyzed in detail, in my opinion, the existing *scholarly* work neither directly nor sufficiently addresses the changing relational dynamics inside schools or at home. See Mizuko Ito, and Daisuke Okabe, "Intimate Connections: Contextualizing Japanese Youth and Mobile Messaging," in *The Inside Text : Social, Cultural and Design Perspectives on SMS*, ed. R Haper, L Palen, and A Taylor (Springer, 2005). Mizuko Ito, et al., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

¹³⁶ A September 21, 2006, article in the *Yomiuri shimbun* newspapers covers the most recent proposal put together by a special committee at the National Police Agency, that puts a

from undesirable web content, petty phishing schemes and other marginally illegal transactions have so far largely been unsuccessful.¹³⁷ A *keitai*-based mobility and sense of socioeconomic autonomy have granted children virtually unrestricted access to an unprecedented amount of information, online-facilitated services, and commodities. Tomoaki and Yuki worry that these seemingly unfettered *keitai*-activated, *keitai*-mediated relationships may be giving students with limited judgment a false impression that the existing niceties of sociocultural protocols no longer apply to them. Concerned adults and educationists claim that this, among other things,¹³⁸ is what foreshadows the

more severe regulatory procedure in place in order to prevent more children from becoming victims of phishing scams and other fraudulent Internet activities.

¹³⁷ According to a series of questionnaires I conducted at one of the high schools in Tokyo, nearly 99% of parents paid their children's *keitai* bills, and almost 100% of schoolchildren regarded their *keitai* ownership and use as indispensable. Japanese *keitai* service is designed so that the cost of transmission is reflected in the volume of information, or "packets," the user transmits or receives each time, and is not calculated based on "minutes." What this means is that the larger one's files, the more expensive it gets. One way for parents to control children's *keitai* activities is to choose a plan with restricted packets. This way, if a transfer of data exceeds the amount set by the plan, it will automatically raise the monthly bill, tipping the parents off. Mr. Okumura, who has a high school daughter and a junior high school son, told me that he once figured out that his son was passing a pornographic image around with his friends, just by looking at the amount of increase in file transfers his son made one month. "After getting an unusually expensive bill one month, I sat him down and interrogated him. I knew what he was up to, but I just wanted to see how he was going to explain the expense," he said gleefully. His interrogation approach bore fruit, his hunch was right, and he made his son pay for the extra expense that he incurred that month. He proudly added, "That taught him a good lesson. He now asks his friends to send large files to his PC mail, and not to his *keitai* mail after that!"

¹³⁸ Shimoda Hirotsugu famously founded a non-profit organization called *Netizen Village*, whose purpose is, among other things, to implement a peculiarly idealized notion of a paternalistic support group for technologically clueless parents and socially inexperienced children who fall victim to *keitai*-led cybercrimes. For a year in mid-2000, he hosted a local radio program called *Teen Express* in which he and his undergraduate students broadcasted programs with themes on various issues pertinent to *keitai* networks and communication among teenagers. He has also written a number of books on social information, the privatization of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT) and, in recent years, on the question of *keitai*-literacy in Japan. In late August 2007, I attended a symposium in Tokyo sponsored by the *Mainichi shimbun* newspaper and DeNA (Japan's leading *keitai* internet service company which owns and operates the *Mobagē* (Mobile Game) website, a popular game download site among teens and many young adults in Japan at the time) entitled, "The State of Affairs of *Keitai* Among

ensuing corruption of Japanese children, and the demise of future national culture.¹³⁹

Hirotsugu Shimoda, a professor-cum-journalist who once taught theories of social information at Gunma University, is one such adult and a staunch critic of unrestricted/unsupervised use of *keitai* among school-age children.¹⁴⁰ Under his famous slogan, “*Keitai* is akin to the pipe of the Pied Piper of Hamelin,” he has been making regular public appearances to raise awareness and alarm among adults concerning the danger of children’s unrestricted *keitai* use. This singular focus on the figure of a child questions the place of the ‘child’ within the national-culture rhetoric. So long as the

Teens: Toward a Bright Future for Children and *Keitai*-Phone.” A professor at Gunma University at the time, Shimoda gave an hour-long public lecture on how to raise and educate a child born into the Internet age, which was then followed by a presentation by Nambu Tomoko, the DeNA CEO. After a 10-minute break, there was a 90-minute panel discussion by Prof. Shimoda, Ms. Nambu, and Mr. Yamada (a representative from a research institute, the Foundation for MultiMedia Communications (FMMC). In conjunction with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, FMMC operates a cyber-related awareness campaign and hosts a lecture series on issues of cybercrime and cyber-literacy upon request from PTAs at local schools across Japan <http://www.fmmc.or.jp/data/english/index.html> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). This is done in conjunction with an actress who represents Japanese mothers with preteen and teenage children. The audience had to preregister a couple of months prior to the event and received a notification letter, which acted as a guest pass to the symposium. On the day of the event, despite the sweltering heat at the end of the summer break, the auditorium in Naikō-chō was packed with people in their 30s and older. I struck up a conversation with a woman who was sitting next to me. She was a junior high school teacher who, based on the description she gave me about her daughters and references to her first *keitai*, I concluded to be in her late 40s. She subscribed to *Mainichi shimbun* newspaper and was already familiar with Prof. Shimoda’s column and arguments. So when she found out about the symposium, she decided that it was her “teacherly” as well as “motherly” duty to educate herself on the possible dangers that lurk in the *keitai*-accessible virtual space.

¹³⁹ For a discussion on the figure of “children” within the framework of nation-state, please refer to Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially chapter 6 “Socialization of Nature: Museumification.” Also, see Andrea G. Arai, “Recessionary Effects: The Crisis of the Child and the Culture of Reform in Contemporary Japan” (Columbia University, 2004). for her discussion of the figure of “children” in contemporary Japan.

¹⁴⁰ His comments are often quoted in the major newspapers in Japan; May 29, 2007 *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper special report on the use of *keitai* among schoolchildren and their perilous connectivity and exposure in the virtual network implores the adult readers to heed Prof. Shimoda’s frightening research findings.

“child” continues to be a contentious site of national as well as cultural reproduction, the process of acculturation and integrity of culture also remain crucial. But which one of the past generations in any given society is not afflicted with one or more unflattering qualities that set it apart from its predecessors and successors?

I am curious to know what is considered worthy of being passed down from the previous generation to the generation of the Information Age. Are twentieth-century ideas about mediation and media still robust and relevant to the questions of twenty-first-century communications media technology? In what way do contemporary youth who have been ushered into adolescence amid a series of life-changing innovations benefit from the wisdoms inherited from the past?¹⁴¹ When Japanese youth circa 2007 receive a continuous ebb and flow of creative forms of inhabiting, mediating, connecting and consuming, how does the new technology inform their lives? Across the globe, the digital generation seems instinctively receptive, if not perfectly predisposed and attuned, to recognizing the undefined, untapped potentials of twenty-first-century virtuality.¹⁴² By now, youthful dexterity, along with an intuitive sense of knowing exactly how to use a digital gadget whose technical or social functions they know nothing about, is a familiar fact of life. Is it instinct, or is it simple exposure? There is no denying that the present media landscape is the new generation’s playfield, the only one known to them. It is

¹⁴¹ The question of inheritance, of course, raises the question of how to engage critically with the past and what sort of relationship will emerge from the attempt. The question of distance could also lend itself to thinking about a larger question of time and space.

¹⁴² Here I am invoking Samuel Weber’s meditation on the ‘virtuality’ discussed in his article, Samuel Weber, “The Virtuality of the Media,” *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media and Composite Cultures* 10 (2000): 37-54.. It is in the spirit of seeing beyond what is currently made ‘legible’ by making new connections, dissections, and transmissions.

merely their condition of possibility for their future.¹⁴³ What can children of a new era expect to learn from adults whose lives are still bound by the premises and knowledge of a faraway land, oceans apart from where their children now live? This predicament surrounding a generational cultural lag is vaguely analogous to the struggles between a parent who migrates to a new world and a child who grows up as a first generation citizen. In such cases, the gap of sociocultural knowledge sometimes obliges that roles be reversed for the sake of common survival.¹⁴⁴ Since technology is a form of cultural articulation, I argue that this is a question of cultural transition, and not merely a matter of technological capacity.

Since the collapse of social distance is at stake, at the risk of reducing Tomoaki and Yuki's multifold dilemmas to a one-dimensional discussion, I will identify a single defining characteristic that they subscribe to when marking adult-child boundaries. Drawing from phrases relayed to me, notwithstanding the danger of oversimplification, I view this boundary operating between two poles: one pole being socioculturally ingrained and incorporated, the other being socioculturally clueless. As I said, it is

¹⁴³ A May 29, 2007, *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper article reports that, according to research conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 64% of the population between ages 19 and 19 in Japan named *keitai* their primary instrument for web-assisted communication. The same article indicates that since *keitai* can no longer be discussed in terms of its telephonic function, the readers must assume that *keitai* has indeed attained a singularly pivotal status in these children's lives as it allows them to do many things: they can text one another; read news, blogs and *keitai* novels; update and exchange information at various social networking sites; write a blog; and shop on and offline (most microchip installed *keitai* function as a wallet or train pass).

¹⁴⁴ An article appearing on October 12, 2009, in the *New York Times*, health section is such an account, in which certain behavioral changes in the new "generation" of children are noted and compared to the nostalgia a new immigrant might have about her or his children being born and raised with a different world view. The article, "18 and Under: Texting, Surfing, Studying?" is written by Perri Klass, M.D. Comparing her own study habits to an expressed criticism about children's "multitasking" study habits, she soberly wonders, "Is this the slightly suspect nostalgia of the immigrant for the lovely but already mythological terrain that she herself has left behind?"

essentially a question of acculturation and a perceived level of maturity measured by children's performance. Considering that adults are in the position to teach children how to "read between the lines" in order to respond in a socioculturally sensible manner, a teacher's sensitivity to the virtue of sociocultural boundaries reveals more than just pedagogical concerns. The insistence on respecting boundaries also exposes, quite paradoxically, a commitment to the social mediation protocols and sociality considered "proper." The concern for the students is not ill placed: there is a hidden danger of criminality in the virtual world. But how can we understand the defensiveness of these well-intended teachers and their unease with the idea of children exercising their full-fledged *keitai*-user capacity? Neither the threat of collapsed distance between public and private nor the democratizing force of digital technology that flattens out a teacher-child hierarchy seems as disturbing as the actual inversion of their social roles. For instance, children's participation in a *keitai*-mediated social sphere is increasingly at odds with their alleged "clueless" status. Tension appears to be rising around the discrepancy between theory and reality. Although their age and lack of life experience theoretically put children under adults' tutelage, in reality children hardly need adults' guidance to be fully functional in a *keitai*-mediated virtuality. As a matter of fact, it is the digitally "clueless" adults who find themselves ever more in need of mediation by their children. But it is precisely because of web anonymity and the semblance of adulthood that autonomy in the decorporealized virtual world offers, that adults insist that children benefit from guidance on sociocultural communication protocols in the real world.

Tomoaki and Yuki's concession to submit themselves to relentless text messages from students is understandable. They would rather let their public responsibilities spill

over infinitely into the comfort of their home and sanctity of their personal lives than to face the sinister consequences of not “giving an inch.” Yet, they remain unconvinced of the presumed benefit of diminishing relational distance between teachers and students. By trying to tailor a mode of engagement to the students’ media receptivity, they wonder if school is inadvertently overreaching itself, and doing more to debunk the idea of teaching children altogether. Even among fairly liberal-minded teachers, such as Tomoaki and Yuki, the loss of the traditionally observed confines of public and private is disturbing. Their reluctance to yield to emerging *keitai*-mediation protocols, however, should not be regarded as an indication of a bygone idealism that has no place in today’s teacher-student dynamic. The schoolteachers’ refusal to let go of the sociocultural mediation protocols embedded in the real world strikes an intriguing accord with the observation made by Pierre Clastres concerning the relationship among the Guayaki Indians and their chief. In a poignant account of a severely decimated, poverty-stricken indigenous tribe of South America in the mid-1960s, Clastres considers the potency of sociolinguistic distancing and the eloquent political performance by the figure of authority (i.e., emphatic communication). His recounting revolves around the chief’s attentive visit to the members of his estranged tribe at a relocation camp. When delivering news concerning the fate of his tribe under the oppressor’s control, upon each visit to the household, the chief engages in a prolonged, painstaking conversation with those who have elected him. This, Clastres informs us, is not due to a lack of information among the tribal members. Quite the contrary, he warns us, the Indians know exactly what is going on, since the announcement by the governing body at the camp is always made with the help of capable translators. But, the chief must make the rounds in

agreement with the obligations prescribed by the position and power previously entrusted in him by the people. It is “as though only his [the chief’s] word could guarantee the value and truth of any other speech.” The chief is “obliged to speak” and is merely “reasserting his ability to exercise the function that had been entrusted to him,”¹⁴⁵ even despite the fast-approaching dissolution of his group and his own status. Each act of intervention and mediation is thus an explicit performance of his stature as well as an entitlement to the resources, knowledge, and responsibility. What this account conveys is that cultures frequently specify the way in which information concerning the collective is generated and circulated; a spatially, physically, and linguistically articulated formal distancing is a universal practice that effectively maintains order within a society.

At Tomoaki and Yuki’s schools too, whenever an official announcement is made, a teacher-student communication formality follows. After the school principal notifies teachers, each teacher returns to his or her respective homeroom to relay the message, which is sometimes simultaneously circulated via a printed communiqué. Per the established dissemination route, teachers initiate the contact and transmit information. In return, students are expected to pass on the information to their parents after they are properly assembled and informed by the teacher. Just as the chain of command stipulates a top-down communication channel, a unilateral transmission of a school communiqué from teacher to students must be preserved in order for the teacher to remain the figure of authority in the classroom. If the agreed communication channel should be scrambled and the contact is made in reverse fashion, it must be done discreetly without upsetting the order. If not, the very premise of the relationship is suddenly open to dispute. The advent

¹⁴⁵ Pierre Clastres, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, trans. Paul Auster (New York ; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books Distributed by MIT Press, 1998), 103-8.

of *keitai*-mediated communication at school seems to have instigated precisely an inversion and reconfiguration within this teacher-student dynamic. The new *keitai*-dictated communication model has effectively compressed, if not collapsed, the distance between teacher and students. Some reconfigurations were done in the interests of providing administrative efficiency and convenience, but in a small margin of social interactions where formality is abandoned, there are unintended consequences.

Silent Tentacles

In order to understand the nature of changes in the teacher-student dynamic and the sociocultural repercussions that *keitai*-mediated communication practices have entailed, I want to return to the moment of inversion in the structure of social relations mentioned above, which according to Tomoaki and Yuki occurred when their schools changed a policy regarding distribution of homeroom class communiqué (*gakkyū tsūshin*). Instead of circulating paper-based periodic class communiqués, the school decided to transmit more frequent digital updates via *keitai* mail service directly from teacher's *keitai* to the students and parents. It is important to bear in mind that the potency of emphatic communication lies not in its formality alone, but also in the act of reasserting identity and reestablishing a social relationship by an individual on whom the obligations to fulfill are incumbent. Once the logistics were taken care of, having securely circulated the teacher's *keitai* mail address (for text messages) and compiled the ones of students and parents', transmitting a communiqué became effortless. With one push of "send to all," information, even a last-minute announcement, could be circulated from the comfort of a teacher's home. But by the time the digitally mediated triadic relationship between teacher, student and parents was established, the very premise of the classroom dynamic

and communication formality was irreversibly reconfigured. The ease of having a direct one-on-one communication connection via *keitai* introduced a far less structured two-way transmission, and precipitated the onset of a text-message bombardment on teachers. Incidentally, the level of intimacy offered by the singularity of *keitai* ownership augmented the personal quality of correspondence, making *keitai*-mediated text-message communication more desirable among students.¹⁴⁶ The decision intended to streamline teacher's administrative responsibilities by exploiting students' *keitai* availability did much to remove not only the social but also the psychological deterrence that used to prevent students from contacting a teacher at two in the morning.

The teachers' misfortune is partly the result of decreased parental scrutiny, or any other outside intervention for that matter, into *keitai*-mediated correspondence. By virtue of its size, mobility, and singular ownership, the *keitai* is frequently compared to an extension of a user's self and a prosthetic instrument that mirrors his or her interiority. As one might rightly surmise, the repercussions of a compromised social mechanism of deterrence are far more profound. Even if we were to limit our analysis to something as modest as a phone conversation, we can see that the removal of a third-party intervention has a significant social impact with regard to the way we relate to one another. For example, Yuki remembers being mortified by her father's accidental interception of a phone call from her male classmate, which prompted an impromptu interrogation from her father and guileless teasing from her sibling. Placing a phone call to what today's teens pejoratively call *ieden* (*ie* = home, *den* = phone; a home landline) used to make people a little nervous. There was always a chance that someone besides the intended

¹⁴⁶ John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

recipient might pick up the phone, which would most definitely result in the need to engage in a complex social interaction. A caller might start the conversation with a morning greeting, followed by something like “I am sorry to bother you at such an early hour of the day.” After that, a proper self-introduction must be delivered before the caller can request to speak to an intended recipient. At any given moment, the caller might be compelled to engage in small talk with other family members. If a proper display of courtesies is absent from the initial address, the caller could earn an unfavorable reputation. Alternatively, the caller could also win parental approval if he or she manages to demonstrate proper use of honorific language and the appropriate inflection. The need to display a degree of linguistic respectfulness and acoustic amiability can be quite crippling, especially if he or she lacks the experience. But since *keitai*-mediated connection renders almost all telephone conversations and transmissions exclusive and personal, there is no longer the possibility of having to deal with an unforeseeable third-party interception or facing with one’s own social ineptitude in placing a phone call.

Then there are parents to consider. It is one thing for a class communiqué to be left under a pile of school handouts and forgotten. It is quite another for a digital class communiqué to be received, skimmed and deleted clean from *keitai* memory. Or worse, not received at all. The difference is temporal in its transmission and technological in its reception. The problem is, with some parents, the simple act of receiving a class-communiqué has become a task requiring a little more technical savvy than they are capable of furnishing. Despite the promise of a digital democracy, for some parents information has indeed become more precarious to obtain. This is the reason why the older analog generation, with a mix of admiration and disdain, refers to the digital

generation as a “thumb-tribe” (*oyayubi zoku*). To the untrained eyes and fingers, manipulating the *keitai*’s multifunction keypads is a challenge. In this day and age, keeping abreast of the changes that are automatically incorporated or activated on one’s digital media device, or making full use of customizable services and applications that are also subject to continuous updates and improvement, has become a central activity and mark of identity. Knowledge concerning which programs to be activated and deactivated, and which applications to be turned on and off symbolically corresponds with the competence of one’s *keitai*-portal communicability. While the purpose of a class communiqué remains unaltered as a dispatch from school, to some adults the communication path has become laden with minor logistical obstacles and psychological impediments. If a teacher’s *keitai* address is not correctly registered, an otherwise helpful filtering service on the parents’ *keitai* will bounce the class communiqué. And there will be a broken communication link.

In addition to the loss of built-in mechanisms that used to inhibit the compulsion to place calls irrespective of time or place, the expanding digital network has facilitated a dramatic increase in text-message traffic. Those who are digitally connected deal with an inundating volume of information via *keitai* (or PC) on a daily basis. By contrast, those generally recognized as “technologically challenged” experience a distinct breed of dissociation and exclusion. The current parallelism between the two technologically divided generations lends itself to the question of communication protocols I touch upon momentarily through the analysis of the *ieden*. While watching an episode of *Sazae-san* (one of the most beloved national Sunday evening pastime activities in Japan),¹⁴⁷ a

¹⁴⁷ Comic strip creator Hasegawa Machiko first published *Sazae-san* in a local newspaper in 1946. *Sazae-san* revolves around the main character, Sazae Fuguta, who is a daughter, wife

tangential thought occurred to me: why is *Sazae-san*'s *ieden* near the front door? Then I thought, when did my family's *ieden* move from our hallway to our kitchen, and then to the dining room before finally being placed in an adjacent living room? Though this may seem like slightly facetious conjecturing on my part, the sense of solidarity *Sazae-san* elicits among Japanese viewers is akin to Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined community. Arguably, watching the half-hour program on Sunday evening is a cultural institution of sorts in Japan. Considering the enduring popularity and fan loyalty, *Sazae-san* is not at all a flippant way to think about the evolution of the *ieden* and presumed communication protocols and sociality.¹⁴⁸ Seeing *Sazae-san*'s *ieden* located in the hallway near the entrance jogged my childhood memory. Looking back at the spatial designation of the *ieden* at houses of my family and friends, the tacit social significance of the *ieden* was almost self-evident. (See the layout of *Sazae-san*'s residence in the appendix). Even today, the place of the *ieden* at someone's home (or at least where the phone jack was initially wired and installed) could reveal approximately when the house

and mother in a post-WWII middle-class Japanese household. Hasegawa wanted her comic strips to depict the everyday affairs of Sazae's two-family, three-generation household, which was a typical arrangement at the time, and successfully enabled *Sazae-san* to embody the image of the modern Japanese family in post-WWII Japan. Many viewers did identify with the family troubles, socially conscientious topics and timely satirical criticism of the Japanese government. The animated comedy series has been shown on TV since 1969 and is still aired today every Sunday from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m.

¹⁴⁸ In fact, *Sazae-san* has been a serious subject of scholarly inquiries among the scholars of modern literature, sociology, architecture, and many journalists in Japan. See Shunsuke Tsurumi, and Shinji Saito, eds. *Sazae-san no "showa"* (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2006). *Matamata Sazae-san o sagashite (Looking for Sazae-San Once More)* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Publications, 2007).

was built. Until the late 1970s or early 1980s, just like in *Sazae-san*'s home, the *ieden* used to be customarily placed somewhere near the entrance of a house.¹⁴⁹

Since the *ieden* was the only other formal gateway, save for the front and back door, to the public or outside world, it made sense for it to be physically near the entrance. When the cordless phone was introduced in the mid to late 1980s, the *ieden* made a dramatic move into the intimate domestic space of the kitchen, dining and/or living room. Though the *ieden* may have still required some aspects of ceremonious phone courtesies, the advent of the cordless *ieden* greatly diminished the discomfort of having to perform and be overheard by family members who eavesdrop on the conversation. As I said, an *ieden*-mediated phone conversation was a self-consciously social act in which one's level of cultural adeptness was frequently put to the test. With a cordless phone, as long as the timing of a phone call could be prearranged, those socioculturally challenging moments could be avoided. Maiko, a 19-year-old female university student, remembers those uncomfortable moments when she used to talk on the *ieden* in the presence of her parents. "I couldn't talk freely, you know. Because I *know* that my dad was listening, though he pretended not to hear me, especially when I was on the phone with a boy!" I have known Maiko practically all her life and her earnest protest against her father made me laugh. Maiko rarely uses the family's *ieden* now and is constantly texting with her friends—even throughout the family dinner. Her texting is done with such stealth that if you are not paying close attention, it is hardly detectible under the dinner table. Compared with

¹⁴⁹ The same could be observed in the layout of a household of another popular animation series, *Chibi-maruko-chan*, which was originally aired in 1990 about an ordinary girl named, Maruko, in suburban mid-seventies Japan. On the one hand, *Sazae-san* is still to this day 'the classic' portrayal of a middle-class Japanese household to this day, yet one cannot deny the obsolescence of its family formation and lifestyle. On the other hand, the topics covered and sociocultural references made in *Chibi-maruko-chan* are reminiscent of my own experience growing up in Japan in the late 1970s.

the overt sociality demanded by the *ieden*, the *keitai* is conspicuously antisocial in the sense that it is self-sufficient, needing nobody else other than the very people involved in private correspondence to acknowledge the importance. When I sat down with 43 high school seniors in the suburbs of Tokyo to talk about their *keitai* use and their relation to *keitai*, I came away feeling that the days of *ieden* communication were indeed over.

Those crippling fears of not knowing what to say, when to say it and how to say it on *ieden* are hardly present among the students with whom I spoke. Not only do they rarely use their own *ieden*, they hardly ever call their friends on their *ieden*.

Maiko's mother, Toyoko, told me that she used to learn a lot about Maiko from talking to her friends when they called her at home. She would quietly ask herself if Maiko's friend sounded nice or rough, bashful or poised, quiet or high-spirited. "From a tone of voice, tempo, intonation, and inflection of speech," Toyoko explained, "I used to be able to tell a lot about Maiko's friends: where her friends' parents must be from, what kind of family her friend must have grown up in. ... that kind of stuff. Most of it was my hunch, but I felt like I knew many of them even before I met them in person. I also knew a lot more about Maiko and her relationship with her friends just by listening to Maiko talk." Toyoko softly added that she used to feel confident that she would be able to detect if there was any bullying among Maiko's friends.¹⁵⁰ I asked her if she missed talking to her daughter's friends or was worried about not knowing who Maiko's friends were.

Toyoko answered, "Oh, you know, Maiko does more thumb-talking [i.e. text messaging]

¹⁵⁰ Daily media coverage on cyber-bullying and "guerrilla websites" collectively known as "secret school sites" (*gakkō ura saito*), where much of cyber-bullying is said to happen, amply provide Toyoko reasons to worry for Maiko and her well-being at school. For example, there was a special report on cyber-bullying in a popular weekly magazine, AERA in 2007 Taisei Saito, "Bousou suru keitai, gakkou ura-saito, oya mo kyoushi mo shiranu ma ni -- (Cell Phone Accessible Secret School Sites Gone Out of Control: Beyond Parents and Teachers' Knowledge)," AERA 15 (2007): 16-19.

than actual mouth-talking these days [big laugh]!” But ever since Toyoko read a newspaper article about the invisible dangers in cyberspace, she had become more aware of her own technological impasse.¹⁵¹ “I don’t know anything about *keitai*! All the talk about the latest styles and services, I can’t keep up with any of it. It gives me vertigo just thinking about them!” Toyoko is frustrated because she wants to protect her only child but feels that she cannot. At Toyoko’s home, the *ieden* still sits in the living room where the family gathers. But it had stopped ringing for Maiko a long time ago, depriving Toyoko and her husband of the chance to carry out unsolicited interrogations and playful prying. In the post-*ieden* era, Toyoko has no recourse against the invisible tentacles that extend out from cyberspace, past the porous boundaries and into the heart of the intimate space of her family, to try to snatch her child away before her untrained eyes.

Prosthetic Self and New Digital Sociality?

Now that an inversion has taken place inside the school and the invisible digital tentacles have made physical boundaries almost irrelevant at home, what lies ahead? If a formalistic social distancing is no longer receptive to the spatiotemporal experience and social relationship among the digital generation, then what is the protocol consistent with the new media landscape? A thriving *keitai* communication has so far given unique prominence to a *keitai*-specific text-message protocol, which subsequently adds strains to the already shifting adult-child dynamic.¹⁵² According to Mihoko,¹⁵³ a product designer

¹⁵¹ The article Toyoko referred to, though she was unable to recall the date, was in the *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper and was written by Professor Shimoda, an advocate of media literacy and awareness in Japan.

¹⁵² In discussing adult-child dynamics, the teacher-student relationship is by no means the only relationship affected by the emerging etiquette. Nevertheless, since the objective of my research was to address the “irreconcilable” techno-generational gap, I naturally gravitated toward where it was most pronounced and enthusiastically discussed.

in her mid-30s at Panasonic Corporation whom I came to know during my preliminary research an unspoken rule called “immediate response” (*sokuresu*) was being worked out by summer 2005 among junior and senior high school girls for what constituted an appropriate text-message response time. This “immediate response” is an abbreviation for “three-second immediate response time” (*sokuresu san-byō*). It is a small detail that may have been overlooked but greatly contributes to the obsolescence of socioculturally prescribed boundaries. The so-called *sokuresu* is shorthand for comparable response time protocols that are observed in varying degrees by *keitai* users in Japan.¹⁵⁴ The pressure not to miss a window of opportunity to get connected with friends, and in many cases business partners or clients, has taught *keitai* users to text their responses at a staggering speed while making the best use of colorful, animated emoticons, secret shorthands and a built-in automatic word-prompting function on their *keitai*.¹⁵⁵ The desire not to disrupt the continuous flow and circulation of digital texts also urges them to devise ingenious ways of circumventing socially awkward moments of nonavailability and

¹⁵³ Mihoko’s extensive work experience in the Japanese and European *keitai* market has time and again supplied me with invaluable insights as to the direction in which the *keitai* manufacturers and market are headed, and her astute observations never failed to stir me to ask questions I may never have come up with on my own.

¹⁵⁴ Responding immediately to a text message received also carries a connotation of responding “in time.” A report by DoCoMo Mobile Research Institute shows that 30 minutes is considered the maximum interval permitted before the absence of reply becomes “rude” by 85% of the *keitai*-clad schoolchildren in Japan (see more discussion at: <http://internet.watch.impress.co.jp/cda/teens/2008/01/24/18216.html> last accessed on May 15, 2013). The sensitivity to time was a universal concern among the people with whom I talked, interviewed and worked during my fieldwork, regardless of their age, gender and/or *keitai* adeptness or dexterity. Of course, what they meant by “being timely or responsive” differed, but knowing how long one can wait before one’s response turns “rude” was considered a critical social skill, worth paying close attention to. In case of an unfortunate delay, a measure is promptly taken to ameliorate the possible adversity and ill feeling.

¹⁵⁵ I will discuss this function in more detail in chapter four, as it merits a separate, more thorough consideration and analysis.

nonresponsiveness. The tactfully inserted “current status” in the text is an emotional buffer that can be used to forestall unwanted future accusations.

Sachi, a third-year high school student, emphasized in all seriousness that this was an extremely rudimentary ground rule. If her non-responsiveness is misinterpreted as unwillingness to reciprocate in a friendly text-message correspondence, it can lead to a misunderstanding and gravely misplaced antagonism. In order to avoid such a plight, she sends text messages continuously and strategically. For instance, she texts her boyfriend before a Physical Ed class to let him know that she will be unavailable for the next 50 minutes. In return, Sachi’s boyfriend texts her before he goes off the grid, such as before going to take a bath. If she knows that *keitai* reception will be bad while underground, she will text her friends with whom she is text messaging while walking or riding an aboveground train that she will soon be taking a subway. Sachi’s constant preempting makes sense only if an unannounced, unaccounted for, and/or unusually extended absence from the communication grid raises, as she insists, suspicion and/or unwanted jealousy among her boyfriend and friends. Intermittent moratoriums happen throughout the day, and Sachi does not “send to all” her text messages before going off the grid, but the flow of digital text is carefully managed. At the heart of this is inchoate protocol.

During my occasional lunches with Mihoko, she told me that some teenage couples attending different high schools exchange on average 40 to 50 text messages a day.¹⁵⁶ Admittedly, the frequency with which teenage *keitai* users reciprocate text messages differs. But, the uniform manner in which text messages across generations

¹⁵⁶ According to a *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper article published on May 29, 2007, 30% of junior and senior high school students in Japan exchange, on average, more than 41 text messages a day. Another 19% exchange 11-20; 18% exchange 6-10; 15% exchange 21-30; and, finally, 10% exchange 1-5.

anticipate the question of “what are you doing?” by offering an unsolicited “situation report,” present location, estimated time of arrival, or plans for the next few hours suggests a discernible *keitai*-specific sociotextual consciousness. Mihoko sympathized with teenage girls who mutually compel one another to remain extremely vigilant to what she considered to be a painful level of self-consciousness. Not only were the girls pressured to conform to the aforementioned *keitai*-specific response time, but also they tried their best to avoid composing messages that could risk being misconstrued. But the peer pressure is not limited to girls. Kentarō, a high school senior, told me unabashedly that he had been late to school more than once and would risk being late again in order to retrieve his *keitai* accidentally left at home on a busy morning. When I asked him if he would try spending a day without his *keitai*, he flatly refused to entertain the idea. I pressed on: “C’mon, it’s just for a day.” He stubbornly shook his head and said, “No, my net-self (*netto-nai no jibun*) will die.” Upon solemnly saying this, he bashfully smiled and added that he was joking. Nonetheless, he insisted that being disconnected was not an option because he would be completely “out of sync” with his friends. Like Mihoko and her coworkers, marketing researchers at major *keitai* manufacturers are keenly aware of the intimate relationship that students like Sachi and Kentarō have with their *keitai*. The amount of resources devoted every month to compile information through teenage focus groups is astonishing, Mihiko revealed to me. But it is not just *keitai* manufactures that pour money into demographic analyses of consumption trends and behavioral patterns. *Keitai* manufacturers often collaborate with related industries in order to further embed *keitai* in *keitai* users’ vibrant social lives, creating an impressive feedback loop between the users, manufacturers, and consumer industries.

The *keitai* as a unique intersection of a quotidian socioeconomic life became incontestable when numerous names given to different makes and models, such as *picchi* or PHS (Personal Handyphone System), *mobairu* (mobile), *serurā* (cellular phone), or *keitai-denwa* (portable phone), were altogether abandoned in favor of *keitai* (portable) in the late 1990s.¹⁵⁷ As intuitive and apt as the sound of the word *keitai* is, the move successfully did away with other names that made *keitai*'s identity ambiguous. No longer identifiable by its telephonic function, the *keitai* has assumed its current prominence as something you carry and communicate with while on the move.¹⁵⁸ *Keitai* exuded confidence. It opened itself to new social imaginings and potentials of “virtuality.”¹⁵⁹ Quickly catching on to the emerging trend, campaign advertisements and sales tropes celebrated the virtue of ubiquitous connectivity, always-on-the-go availability, and streamlined one-on-one accessibility. Adjustments made to the rapidly developing digital media environment within the public's day-to-day context were gradual at first. Some changes were intuitive and increasingly indispensable, while other digital interfaces may have elicited nervous reaction and frustration among novice users. However, *keitai* has gained a quality akin to an external hard drive or a USB flash drive where private affairs

¹⁵⁷ I have asked around to assess the veracity of the claim expounded in the book by Hidenori Tomita, Tomonori Okada, Norihiko Takahiro, and Misa Matsuda, eds. *Pocketto-beru/keitai-shugi! (Pocket-Bell/Keitai-Ism!)* (Tokyo: Just System, 1997). The general consensus was that they themselves started using the word, *keitai*, exclusively after NTT DoCoMo's release of the *i-mode* in 1999.

¹⁵⁸ A poll cited in a *Yomiuri shimbun* newspaper article appearing on July 22, 2007, shows that 44% of *keitai* users answered “Hardly or Never” to a question of “How many times a day do you use the actual telephone function on your *keitai*?” as opposed to “Always or Most of the time” to the question of “How often do you use your *keitai* for sending text message?” In addition, 49% of *keitai* users' average time spent on *keitai* “telephone conversation” was less than five minutes.

¹⁵⁹ Again, my use of “virtuality” is in line with Samuel Weber's re-reading of Gilles Deleuze as discussed in his article, Weber, “The Virtuality of the Media.”

are digitalized. Whether via *keitai*, iPhone, or an iCal type of scheduling function in the digital device, many people have decidedly forgone the effort to *remember*. Instead, they seem to have readily acquiesced to *forget*, knowing that *their* memory in a digital device is safely stored away for future retrieval. They are not wrong. Their trustworthy devices do send them reminders about a doctor's appointment, a meeting with a client, and dinners with family and friends. But, this blind dependence on digital memory and anticipatory forgetting is remarkable.

Kentarō is not an anomaly. Out of the 43 high school seniors I talked to, only a handful bothered to remember more than three or four phone numbers: those of their own *keitai*, their parents' *keitai*, and their *ieden*. Many had great difficulty remembering their best friends' *keitai* numbers, and all agreed that the loss of their *keitai* would trigger what they perceived to be the dissolution of their personal integrity. Without a *keitai* connection, their online self and offline self would suffer equally.¹⁶⁰ Since their *keitai* is their primary depository (many share a personal computer with their parents and siblings at home) for friends' numbers, pictures taken with *keitai*, games and music downloaded from *keitai* websites, and other digital information sent and received via *keitai*, the loss of their *keitai* would constitute a loss of their digitally converted self, which is inescapably intertwined with their lives in the flesh. Since retrieval of data on *keitai* requires minimum dexterity on the *keitai* keypad, there is no more finger-activated "muscle memory" either. But something Osamu, Kentarō's classmate, said under his breath made

¹⁶⁰ The questionnaires and follow-up interviews I conducted with the help of senior class homeroom teachers at the high school in Tokyo show that the biggest nuisance of losing their *keitai* has nothing to do with the function of a phone *per se*. They were most concerned with not being able to 1) make themselves available to their friends, and 2) call their friends because they only remember by heart a handful of phone numbers, including those of their parents' *keitai* and their *ieden*.

me ask this: “Is there any difference at all between a handwritten note and text message?”

To my surprise, almost everyone in the class excitedly talked at length about the distinction between the two forms. Some even attributed the time required to write by hand, as opposed to by *keitai*, to the “weight” (*omomi*) and “warmth” (*atatakami*) the handwritten text duly imparts. Others pointed out that unlike handwritings through which the writer’s “character” becomes embodied, digital writings bear no discernible personality, and these students dismissively said, “[It] doesn’t matter who types the message on *keitai*, it all comes out the same!” Finally, there was a big round of applause and good-natured teasing when one of them triumphantly declared, “Text message is for casual romance, handwritten letter is for love!” Could it be that the big advocates of instantaneous digital connection like Sachi and Kentarō are more wedded to the poetic romanticization of the handwriting than the “analog” generation make them out to be? Was Tomoaki right to contend that his students’ writings mirrored their mind?

Disorder of the Mind

Neither the origin of “Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind” nor how it came to be an oft-repeated mantra among teachers is clear.¹⁶¹ But its routine reiteration by draconian schoolteachers seems to have ingrained the link so deeply that it has become a familiar moral reprehension speech. The forged affinity between the script and mind also generated a corollary association between the righteousness of one’s life and the script, as in “Disorder of the script, disorder of life” (*moji no midare wa seikatsu no midare*). Of course, the romantic temptation to treat script as something that the author

¹⁶¹ However, already in the early Meiji era education manual, there is a clear emphasis on teaching children how to write. Also see Raja Adal, “Japan’s Bifurcated Modernity: Writing and Calligraphy in Japanese Public Schools, 1872-1943,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 2-3 (2009): 233-47.

imparts and the tendency to attribute a penman's orthographic propriety to moral integrity are observed globally to a varying degree.¹⁶² What is distinct is the condition in which script is profoundly linked to a penman's moral disposition and has earned unequalled importance as a curious site of corporeal disciplining within the educational setting in Japan.

There is precedence for the present intergenerational quarrel over orthographic propriety and the propriety of the mind and body of a national subject. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, parents and schoolteachers who first noticed the use of *maru-moji* (or *hentai shōjyo moji*)(Fig. 2) among teenage girls were scandalized at the sight of the deformity. As the names given to the scripts—*maru-moji* (*maru* = round) (*moji* = letter) or *hentai shōjyo moji* (*hentai* = modified/ varied) (*shōjyo* = girl) (*moji* = letter)—suggest, the exaggerated roundness and deliberate distortion applied to each stroke were seen to embody the girls' childish desires to visually render themselves cute through the script, at the cost of becoming illegible.¹⁶³ The visual discord struck by the script was so great that many adults viewed it as a cultural affront and subsequently treated it as a sign of degenerative ethos among teenage girls. In fact, human resource personnel who reviewed job applications bearing *maru-moji* script went so far as to pronounce the script socially unfit, and whoever subscribed to such defiant forms of communication as unsuitable for

¹⁶² Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990)., Crain, *The Story of a: The Alphabetization of America From the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter*.

¹⁶³ Please see Kazuma Yamane, *Hentai shoujo-moji no kenkyuu (Study of Deformed Girl Scripts)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986).. In addition, there was a species of writing popular among teenage girls in the 1990s called *hetauma*. For more on the discussion of the changing writing aesthetic trends and subjectivity, see *Hetauma sedai: choutai hetauma-moji to 90nendai wakamono-ron (Hetauma Generation: Theory of Elongated-Bad-Looking Script and the Youth in the 1990s)* (Tokyo: PARCO Publications, 1994).. See figure 3 (of the chapter three) in the appendix.

company life. Despite the quality of private introspection associated with the act of solitary reading and writing, practices of reading and writing constitute culturally defined communication. The distortion was thus deemed a rebellion against the community norms and the illegible script a symbolic act of refusal. The question of the legibility of *maru-moji* script was never just about readability. Rather, the concern was conflated with the question of the writer's moral disposition toward the community. Although a few scholars offered alternate "scientific" theories to explain the nature of distortion by extending the investigation to particular sociohistorical contexts and technical innovations, such as the introduction of the mechanical pencil and a horizontal writing practice,¹⁶⁴ *maru-moji* was never free from morally invested criticism and scrutiny.¹⁶⁵

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that the reading and writing practices manifested in high literacy rates and written proficiency among the people have historically provided a rhetorical backbone to a discourse of national prosperity and cultural integrity in Japan. Though the issue of the script and the mind was never as unequivocally laid out as in the case with *maru-moji*, a series of political struggles, technological advancements and sociocultural movements during the late nineteenth

¹⁶⁴ Uozumi, *Gendai hisseki-gaku jyoron (Introductory Theory of Contemporary Graphology)*. Kyuuyou Ishikawa, *Tateni kake!: yokogaki ga nihonnjin wo kowashiteiru (Write Vertically!: Horizontal Writing is Destroying Japanese)* (Tokyo: Shouden sha, 2005).

¹⁶⁵ Some scholars have considered the ramifications of *maru-moji* use among female teenagers with regard to the questions of "gender identification" and "feminine subversion" in the past. My focus in this chapter, however, is on the noticeable discursive currency that "the disorder of the mind" exerts vis-à-vis the discussions of orthographic propriety, independent of class or gender differences. The "deformity" in question, I suggest, bespeaks the "national" investment in the status of proper writings among its population, which in turn reflects its desire to contain the seemingly subversive monstrosity seen to exist in the "digital" technologies. Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran, and Lisa Scov (Curzon & Hawaii University Press, 1995); Laura Miller, "Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media Assessments," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2004): 225-47.

century in Japan entailed a few profound paradigm shifts that are nonetheless relevant to the present focus. Historian Nagamine Shigetoshi emphasizes the development of the railroad and freight train distribution network in the 1880s as a singularly momentous event that catalyzed the birth of what he calls the “reading citizen” (*dokusho kokumin*) in modern Japan.¹⁶⁶ With the formation of the “reading citizen,” Nagamine elaborates, a new practice of silent reading became the standard. The timing, of course, coincides with a literary movement known as the “unification of written and spoken Japanese” (*genbun it’chi undō*), which effectively shaped a distinctly modern reader visuality,¹⁶⁷ literary sensibility and subjectivity in Japan.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, the vigor of the unification movement also centered around the effort to overcome boundaries imposed by the prevailing literary aesthetics at the time, while trying to collapse the distance between spoken and written Japanese.¹⁶⁹ Does this sound familiar?

¹⁶⁶ Shigetoshi Nagamine, “*Dokushokokumin*” no tanjyou: *Meiji 30nendai no katsuji medhia to dokusho bunka (the Birth of the “Reading Citizens”: Print Media of the Meiji 30s and Reading Culture)* (Tokyo: Editor School Publication, 2004). Needless to say, James Fujii’s idea of “intimate alienation” complements Nagamine’s theorization effort. James A. Fujii, “Intimate Alienation: Japanese Urban Rail and the Commodification of Urban Subjects,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1999): 106-33. A similar trajectory of cultural changes and emergences of new literary genre can be traced in Europe by reading Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century*.

¹⁶⁷ My use of “visuality” here is inspired by Norman Bryson’s meditation on the modern gaze in the book, Hal Foster, ed. *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*, vol. 2, Discussions in Contemporary Culture - Dia Art Foundation (The New Press, 1988).

¹⁶⁸ Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). Incidentally, Hyōdō offers a refreshing alternative to a formation of “imagined community” through auditory experiences among the masses in and around the time of the formation of modern nation state in Japan. Hiromi Hyoudou, *Koe no kokumin kokka (Voice of the Nation-State Japan)* (Tokyo: Nihon Housou Kyoukai Publishing, 2000).

¹⁶⁹ Ai Maeda, *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*, Asia-Pacific (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

Let me qualify this tentative analogy between the unification movement and *keitai* reading and writing, if the latter can be called a movement. While the writers who desired to unify spoken and written Japanese by reducing linguistic discrepancies compelled the unification movement, *keitai*-mediated reading and writing practices are being defined by *keitai* users, who are unconsciously collapsing the distance between the real self and virtual self while simultaneously obliterating the distance marked by sociocultural boundaries through digital writing. That is to say, on the one hand, aspirations shared by those involved in the early modern literary movement were to establish a more intimate identification between the writer and the script by way of removing the distance created by two separate regimes of representation (spoken and written Japanese). On the other hand, concerns about *keitai*-mediated reading and writing practices among the Japanese youth suggest that the perceived collapse of spatiotemporal distance within the virtual world is contributing to young *keitai* users' failure to register palpable distance as well as differences inherent in the real world. The problem therefore is not so much about the writer's conscious effort to identify with the script, but rather the writer's inability to undo identification with digital writings so that various articulations of sociocultural and spatiotemporal distance in the real world can properly register and be reflected. In other words, the problematized disorder of the script in the present moment is not strictly a question of writing, but of the disorder in the writer's relation to writing and the world. In short, it is a question of mediation.¹⁷⁰ Some argue that by virtue of the prosthesis-like

¹⁷⁰ A theoretical framework with which I am addressing the question of the subject/writer's identification through language and the space of mediation here is, of course, inspired by Jacques Lacan's meditation on "the mirror stage" and an intimate relation between the structure of language and the unconscious—neither of which is possible without a space of mediation, which can be as tangible as a distance between the mirror and the subject—See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic

intimacy a user develops with his or her *keitai*, *keitai*-mediated writings naturally lend themselves to generating private, insular and incoherent thoughts that fail to take into account that writings are collective and public in nature. Others point to a flourishing democratic web forum, one based on egalitarian blindness to sociohistorically constructed attributes and physiognomic characters as the source of such confusion.¹⁷¹

In recent years, Habermasian notions of the public sphere have undergone rigorous reconceptualization to better address issues specific to the conditions of a digital communication network.¹⁷² The virtual world is a hard-to-define, precarious space that offers a false sense of security and privacy. It consigns available data to an infinitely growing storage space, with a powerful search engine, where private property rights are becoming even harder to define and protect.¹⁷³ However, the major concerns among the politicians, schoolteachers and parents in Japan are not of *netizens'* political autonomy or creative potentiality, but rather of an intergenerational media literacy gap (which is

Experience,” in *Écrits : A Selection* (New York. London: W.W.Norton&Company, 2002); Jacques Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, Or Reason Since Freud,” in *Écrits : A Selection* (New York; London: W.W.Norton&Company, 2002).

¹⁷¹ See detailed discussions on the formation of the public sphere and the privileging of a certain blindness that gave rise to an idea of autonomy in man. Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992). Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass. Cambridge, England: MIT Press; Polity Press, 1989).

¹⁷² Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York, Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by MIT Press, 2002). Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 385-97. Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, “Mobile Transformations of ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Life,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 107-25. Vicente L. Rafael, “The Cell Phones and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Phillipines,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 399-425. Toshiyuki Inoue, and Org Jinguumae, “2channel sengen: chosen suru medhia (Declaration of the 2channel: Media That Provokes),” (2001).

¹⁷³ Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

another word to describe a discrepancy in the mediation protocols between the “analog” and “digital” generations) and an alleged moral decline among the digital generation. For now, instead of trying to collapse the distance created by two languages (written and spoken Japanese), our lives are increasingly mediated by two regimes of representations (the real and the virtual), and *keitai*-mediated reading and writing are fast closing in the gap.

From Tuning In To Signing In

The collapsing distance between the real and the virtual might explain some confusion, but what may be a more productive approach is to engage with the very question of distance and mediation. How does the problem of distance or the act of distancing become entwined with a question of disorder of the mind? If deformity of the digital writing is not a manifestation of disorder, then what is the nature of disorder in the *keitai*-mediated digital writing and reading? Can it be fully explained by the existing discourse of “the disorder of the mind”? By insisting on the question of distancing and mediation, I want to further the discussion about emerging *keitai*-mediated communication protocols and to explore the generative forces behind the new technology and subjectivity. Since the act of writing often assumes a relationship where something or someone is being addressed, the question of what or who informs the way in which distancing becomes articulated. Analyzing the link between communication media and disorder, John Durham Peters offers an insightful observation: “Media programming and advertising are increasingly personalized. The divide between interpersonal and mediated communication is blurring. ... What was once mad or uncanny is now routine: hearing disembodied voices and speaking to nobody in particular. ... We are now facing new

disorders of address.”¹⁷⁴ Taking off from Peters’s postulation that “Pathology reveals normality, in some way, each format or technology of communications implies its own disorders.”¹⁷⁵ I want to inquire into *keitai*-mediated communication-specific expressions of disorder. To do so, I will juxtapose two sets of crime letters that captured national attention.

The first set of crime letters was composed by a then 14-year-old boy who single-handedly killed and injured a handful of children in Kobe in 1997. Protected by the Juvenile Act, he remains anonymous and is referred to as Sakakibara Seito (his self-chosen alias) or *Shōnen A* (Boy A). The second set of crime letters was a group of digitally uploaded postings by Katō Tomohiro, a recently unemployed, 25-year-old. Katō drove a two-ton rental truck into Akihabara on a Sunday during the *hokōsha tengoku* (street mall), killing a half-dozen people and critically injuring a dozen more in the early summer of 2008. During both investigations, insofar as the crime letters embodied the mind behind the moral deviation and transgression, the police, criminal psychologists and social critics spent time combing through the content of the writings left by the two in order to locate the source of disorder. Since Katō’s online postings were digitally composed, graphologists who made constant media appearances in 1997 were nowhere to be seen or heard in 2008. There was another notable difference: nobody could ascertain to whom Katō was addressing his writings. Or more accurately put, Katō’s online postings were addressing everyone and no one in particular at the same time. Similar to crime letters of the previous era, such as those composed by “the Mystery Man with the

¹⁷⁴ John Durham Peters, “Broadcasting and Schizophrenia,” *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 1 (2010): 123-40, 138.

¹⁷⁵ Peters, “Broadcasting and Schizophrenia,” 124.

21 Faces” in 1985¹⁷⁶ and Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989, which directly confronted a victim’s family, a company headquarters, an authority figure or well-known mass communications institution, Sakakibara deliberately addressed a general public and demanded that his inner thoughts be taken seriously. The compulsion to locate the source of Sakakibara’s “disorder” was so great that even after his arrest, professional writers continued to analyze and discuss Sakakibara’s script extensively. Some even publicly praised “the poetic eloquence and maturity of the writing”¹⁷⁷ in Sakakibara’s diary. Compared to Sakakibara, Katō’s postings were meek and evasive, almost fearful of direct confrontation with the world. Instead of demanding that he be heard, Katō feebly signed in to unload his anger and despair to a virtual net community, which in the end was buried in a morass of digital information. Surrounded by faceless, nameless readers, Katō ended up merely muttering to himself in flickering digital script. I juxtapose these two cases not simply because, in both instances, the outbreak of senseless violence captivated the media or because the reasons for their crimes resonate depressingly with each other in their opaqueness. But precisely because of the similarity, the difference is striking and altogether illuminating. The way Sakakibara and Katō each confronted the world seems to instantiate each one’s disposition to the world, which is one way of measuring their distance from and to the world.

As far as the execution of a theatrical crime (*gekijyōgata hanzai*) went, Sakakibara exhibited masterful manipulation of the police investigation and mass media.

¹⁷⁶ For a brilliant analysis, see Marilyn Ivy, “Tracking the Mystery Man With 21 Faces,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 1 (1996): 11-36.

¹⁷⁷ Yumiko Iida, “Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s,” *Positions* 8, no. 2 (2000), 444.

He was notoriously successful in orchestrating a series of ghastly attacks on his victims with timely dispatches of handwritten oracular letters, which incited a sense of fear and incompetence in the nation by making a mockery not only of the struggling investigation, but also of the nationwide media-led profiling effort.¹⁷⁸ A conventional hermeneutic detection was in place: the police carefully searched clues in what little there was left to call physical evidence. From figuring out the symbolic implications of Sakakibara's use of red ink, a possible folkloric reference to a pinwheel drawn on the corner of the letter, to seeking expert opinions of graphologists in the effort to predict his next move, the police tried desperately, by reading his script, to read into Sakakibara's mind. When the arrest of a junior high school boy finally made news in the summer of 1997, the police tried everything to keep the swarming mass media at bay.¹⁷⁹ But, the fate of Sakakibara's family was at the mercy of prying eyes. Fearing for the family's privacy and welfare, especially that of his younger siblings, the police quietly relocated the family to an undisclosed address. When Sakakibara's school picture was leaked to the media a month after the arrest, it sparked what was to become one of the most heated controversies of the era over the principles of the Juvenile Act vis-à-vis the victim's family's right to know and confront an accused assailant. The grieving families of Sakakibara's young victims demanded full transparency in his court proceedings and sentencing criteria; all the while the rest of the country coped with the unfathomable malice unleashed by a child

¹⁷⁸ “Hankou-seimei to bukimina yokoku Sakakibara Seito karano tegami Kobe shougakusei satsugai (Crime Letters and Ominous Warning - Letters From Sakakibara Seito - Kobe/Elementary School Killing),” *AERA* (1997).

¹⁷⁹ Roughly four months after the arrest, the court ruled him to be committed to a juvenile psychiatric facility either until he was 23, or until further notice depending on his progress. Sakakibara's whereabouts after his eventual release from a psychiatric institution in January 2005, remains highly confidential to this day.

who had been considered “normal” (*futsū*). Sakakibara’s wishes came true. He came to publicly embody the plight of Japan’s Lost Decade and, figuratively speaking, everyone was tuned in for his broadcast.

When Sakakibara’s parents published a much-anticipated memoir in 2001,¹⁸⁰ there was hope for social restitution. By reading the book, people hoped to gain intimate knowledge about Sakakibara’s childhood and his family dynamics so as to put an end to the moral quagmire and to recuperate from a sense of uncertainty brought on by the lack of explanation. Given the risk of exposure, Sakakibara’s parents decided to confront the public as *chichi to haha* (father and mother). By then, the demise of Sakakibara’s family had resulted in a national crisis over the putative monstrosity of children. Addressing themselves through socially defined familial designations, *chichi to haha*, the parents assumed unequivocal responsibility for the unnamed but unambiguous *ko* (child)/Sakakibara. Despite the singularity of a presumed relationship and the event, because *chichi* and *haha* are inherently anonymous and universal classifications whose social obligations outweigh the importance of unique individual attributes, *chichi* and *haha* suddenly took on an undeniable plurality. Complex emotions and obligations prescribed to the universal roles of father and mother were readily recognizable. When Sakakibara’s parents confronted the world as a socially culpable pair—*chichi to haha*—and not as separate individuals, they urged tens of thousands of other mothers and fathers with teenage children to identify with them. With an uncanny plasticity that was tantamount to an empty signifier, *chichi to haha* went through an unlikely metamorphosis.

¹⁸⁰ “*Shounen A*”: *kono ko wo unde. (chichi to haha) kaikon no shuki* (“*Boy A*”: *Having Given Birth to This Child (Father and Mother) Memoirs of Repentance*) (Tokyo: Bunshuu Bunko, 2001).“

Instead of highlighting their differences, *chichi to haha* established a compelling, albeit disconcerting, parallelism with other families across Japan.

For all the hope for closure, the memoir hardly offered anything to abate the confusion. Pronounced distress over the parents' inability to offer a conclusive account as to how exactly a supposedly "normal" child turned "monstrous" aroused a haunting self-doubt among parents of similar-aged children about their own child rearing skills and disciplining rules.¹⁸¹ In a book pithily titled, *Tōmei na sonzai no futōmei na akui* (*Opaque malice within a transparent existence*), released shortly after the Kobe incident,¹⁸² a popular social critic, Miyadai Shinji, revisited many of his previously published polemics against the characteristic social ills of *nyū taun* (a systematically developed satellite /housing town around major cities in Japan; "new town") and *kihaku na (ninngen)kankei* (thinned-out [human] relationship), as if to drive home the points others made about the latent "monstrosity" within the normality of Sakakibara, and his all too commonplace home environment and childhood.¹⁸³ Yet, a relentless, almost obsessive, attempt to figure out what made him so 'monstrous' has persisted to no avail, casting long, dark shadows over the decade to come in Japan. All through the

¹⁸¹ For a thorough discussion on the question of 'monstrous child' and the role 'child' plays during the post-bubble era in Japan, see Andrea Arai, "The 'Wild Child' of the 1990s Japan," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2000): 841-64. Arai, "Recessionary Effects: The Crisis of the Child and the Culture of Reform in Contemporary Japan." Marilyn Ivy, "Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessionary Japan," *SAQ* 99, no. 4 (2000): 819-40.

¹⁸² Shinji Miyadai, *Toomei na sonzai no futoomei na akui* (*Opaque Malice Within a Transparent Existence*) (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1997).

¹⁸³ See Andrea Arai's discussion on parental "disciplining" in her article, "The 'Wild Child' of the 1990s Japan." For a detailed analysis on a "thinned-out relationship," see Yumiko Iida, "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," *Positions* 8, no. 2 (2000).

investigation and trial, Sakakibara remained a highly public figure because he and his actions demanded that the public take him seriously.

The post-Lost Decade criminal type, in comparison, seems to evade and defy the scope of criminal detection and investigation conventionally practiced in the previous era. The rules of the game have changed as the field migrated into a cyberspace where “the unrelenting flood of numbers, codes, and letters is popularly seen as replacing real bodies and real persons, threatening to make both obsolete.”¹⁸⁴ In want of around-the-clock cyber-agents to successfully scour suspicious activities, and whenever necessary, appropriately intervene in real time; cybercrimes in various disguise are on the rise. Tapping into temporal delays, glitches caused by incompatible systems, semiotic discrepancies prompted by deliberate phonetic and character substitutions, and fraudulently acquired web addresses for dubious transactions (commercial or otherwise), cunning web users capitalize on structural weaknesses and technological limitations of the surveillance programs in order to fly under the radar. In a new media frontier, a vacuum left by ghostly shells of bodies provides perfect camouflage for escaping accountability. Without the mark of familial designations or affiliations that socially and physically anchor people, bodies behind the pixelated images too have become harder to get a read on.

On June 8, 2008, shortly after the *Chūō Dōri*, one of the main streets in Akihabara, Tokyo, opened for Sunday shoppers and strollers, Katō Tomohiro’s truck accelerated toward an intersection and ran over a half-dozen pedestrians congregated there. As soon as the truck came to a complete stop, Katō proceeded to attack on foot. With a dagger

¹⁸⁴ In his discussion, Seltzer makes reference to Frederick Kittler’s book, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*; Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture* (New York and London: Routledge), 17-18.

knife in one hand and another stashed away in an ankle sheath, he made a beeline for scattered crowds in a roaring frenzy. Until his eventual arrest in a deserted alleyway, Katō repeatedly lunged at a dozen people, managing to leave seven people dead and 10 critically injured. But no one knew at the time that the unfolding mayhem on the street was only half the story to be told on that day. When asked by the police to explain his crime, he muttered, “*Daredemo yokatta*” (“Anyone would have been good.”). Since several other twentysomething men had carried out killing sprees in the preceding months and had muttered the same phrase, the police nearly ruled the incident a variation of such crimes. But when, on Katō’s confiscated *keitai* web history, the police found an astronomical number of postings to an online bulletin board days before the incident, the media perception of him changed dramatically. Everyone wanted to read what Katō had written online. As if to respond, newspaper articles reproduced much of his online postings and arranged them in chronological order to show the progression of his moral demise. Although most of his postings consisted of disgruntled diary-like entries that were typically indulgent of self-pity and self-despair, his unsociable passivity occasionally turned to sharp aggression toward those who criticized him for wallowing in his girlfriendless, socially neglected status. During those confrontational moments, the conflicted self-abjection and deep-seated resentment Katō harbored toward his parents and society at large came to the surface.

Considering the prevalence of *keitai*-facilitated web writing, such as blog writing, anonymous bulletin board posting and online social networking in Japan,¹⁸⁵ neither

¹⁸⁵ According to figures released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in July 2008, one out of every 7.5 people in Japan has his or her own blog sites and one out of every 42 people actively maintains his or her blogs. In a matter of three years, the number of existing blog sites in Japan has increased by 33 times.

Katō's routine visits nor frequent posting in and of itself proved his latent criminality or "disorder" of the mind." What was deemed pathological was the excessive preoccupation with which Katō frequented some of the websites and the copious amount of writings he produced, as if to take an indiscriminate, anonymous audience called "Internet community" into his confidence. Transmitted this way, Katō's online postings between mid-May and June 2008 amounted to a staggering number of more than 3,000. Once the police analyzed the content of the postings published between June 6 and June 8, the investigation uncovered a disturbing truth about the *keitai*-network community's capacity to exacerbate social disconnect. Despite all the unambiguous telltale signs of impending violence, the ominous writings published by Katō remained in full public view for days without ever being successfully brought to the attention of the proper authority. This, the police felt, was highly disconcerting from a public safety standpoint. Can any viewer and Internet user be held accountable? According to a bulletin board web log, on Friday, June 6, two nights before the attack, Katō first signed in at 1:44 a.m. After that, he continued to publish his postings at varying intervals—2:48 a.m., 2:54 a.m., 3:10 a.m., 5:04 a.m., 6:41 a.m., 7:06 a.m., 11:01 a.m., 11:14 a.m., 1:09 p.m., 2:39 p.m., 2:42 p.m., 7:27 p.m.—and finally broke off at 8:49 p.m. The last entry for that day relayed his excitement over having outsmarted an existing regulation against purchasing combat knives in Japan. Instead of placing an order online, which would have required Katō to leave traces of his transaction by forcing him to register personal information (name, home address, phone number, bank account, etc) at the store website, he chose to travel all the way to a military-supply shop in a nearby prefecture. Despite the cost of the travel, having managed to buy five daggers in cash without arousing the store clerk's suspicion, he was

proud of his accomplishment. On June 7, he signed in again to send out intermittent dispatches on the final preparation for the fateful day: he cashed in old video games for 32,000 yen (approximately 320 US dollar) in Akihabara and made an arrangement for an early truck pickup.¹⁸⁶ At 5:21 a.m. on the morning of the attack, Katō signed in and uploaded the first of 30 messages to be published that day. For the next seven hours, by way of live *keitai* broadcasting, Katō chronicled his procession from Shizuoka to Akihabara with logistical status updates and self-parodying running commentaries. At 12:10 p.m., Katō signed in for one last time to deliver the final announcement, “It is time” (*jikan desu*).

Some media commentators later speculated that Katō’s compulsion to share his intimate soliloquies was a painfully awkward attempt to connect with people. As Katō himself admitted, ashamed and angry with many of his unfulfilled promises, he began fantasizing about exacting revenge against the society that reduced him to live, what was in his mind, an inconsequential and expendable life. With a precarious temp job and a large debt he had incurred by having squandered money on expensive cars, he saw little prospect of gaining financial stability. Katō altogether seemed to have lost sight of a socially meaningful existence for himself. Still, he wanted people to notice, and above all, care about him. He wanted to have relationships, but he could not confront society. He hoped that the virtual world would provide him with what he could not have in the real world: intimacy and camaraderie brought on by a collapsed social distance. Hence his disappointment when he found little support from the Internet community. The more he

¹⁸⁶ Katō initially wanted to rent a car for Sunday, but none were available. He then tried to rent a four-ton truck, but his request was denied because he did not own a credit card. In the end, he made arrangement for a two-ton truck. In his bulletin board posting, he bitterly recounted this exchange at the rental office and concluded that this was typical of his life, “Of course, I am not considered socially credible” (*dōse ore wa shakaiteki shinyō nashi desuyo*).

provoked his fellow internet users to engage in a dialogue and relationship with him, the further away he drove them from him. Interestingly, during the interrogation, the police learned that Katō deliberately wiped clean his contact list, email communication history, and mail inbox from his *keitai*, stripping it/him of any traces of social relationships he had with people outside the virtual world. Knowing Katō's insatiable desire to overcome distance and connect with people, it is ironic to see that the distance was what sequestered him to a lonely life and at the same time inspired him to seek companionship in the virtual world. So why dissociate himself from the existing social relations in the world by removing contact information from his *keitai*? Was Katō trying to hide behind the consolation of web anonymity even after having left the virtual world?

In remembering Katō, his former coworkers and school classmates made repeated reference to his emotional volatility and social marginality, which made their relationship difficult to sustain. As media coverage portrayed Katō as an unsophisticated, self-alienating loner who was plagued by despondency and poor socioeconomic circumstances, the more he began to look like a poster child for the post-Lost Decade era of hardship and digital criminality. In fact, Katō's profile could not have been more convincing. His antisocial behavior was interpreted as befitting of someone who could not connect with people despite the instantaneous connection and infinite wireless connectivity made available by the *keitai* network. The abundant postings Katō left on the web suggested that his preferred choice of engagement with the world was through online anonymity, and that he actually found comfort in the obscurity of the network community behind which his identity could be concealed. Katō seemed to manifest everything the analog generation feared and found perplexing. As a matter of fact, a tentative correlation

between Katō's sociopathic behavior and the socioeconomic predicaments of 2008 was raised on the day of the crime by the then chief cabinet secretary, Machimura Nobutaka, at an emergency press conference in which he addressed the need not only to reassess regulations concerning temp workers' benefits and working conditions but also to improve the online content surveillance system.¹⁸⁷

With the "stranger's intimacy" harbored by web anonymity,¹⁸⁸ the police needed to grapple with the nature of digital network community. Katō resented the fact that he was spending most of his time alone in what he described as the "2D [two dimensional] world," that is, a simulated, depthless, virtual world. Muffled by the inflammatory remarks he left on the bulletin board, neither his hope for a meaningful relationship (human connection in flesh) nor echoes of his tormented soul seemed to have reached anyone within the digital network community. In the end, it was, in Katō's own words, in the "3D [three dimensional] world" that Katō first sought a meaningful social existence and connection with people (in the flesh). But it was the failure to define a satisfying existence and connection with users (in pixilated letters) that ultimately pushed Katō over the edge. Let me return briefly to the Kobe incident to draw a comparison. Insofar as Sakakibara addressed his letters to the widely recognizable bodies of media authority and state institution, he was attempting to have a dialogue with the society at large. Admittedly, the Kōbe incident was a national event, and families across Japan tuned in to listen to the stories of Sakakibara. Whenever and, more importantly, whomever

¹⁸⁷ As if to anticipate Katō's dreadful incident that took place in June, online article of a monthly journal, *Nikkan Gendai*, ran an story focusing on a series of "random" killings carried out by disgruntled "youth" who, upon arrest, utter "anybody would have been good" (*daredemo yokatta*). "Zokuhatsu suru "daredemo yokatta" satsujin no haikai (What Lies Behind the Succession of "Anybody Would Have Been Good" Killing-Spree)," *Nikkan Gendai* (2008).

¹⁸⁸ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

Sakakibara and *chichi to haha* addressed, one could imagine a parallel relationship and the same struggle in any family in Japan. This way, the kind of simultaneous reading activity Benedict Anderson once invoked was very much alive. With the Akihabara incident, the audience to whom Katō addressed and confided in remained elusive and dispersed, obscured behind a pixilated screen. By the nature of *kaitai* broadcasting, Katō shared his most private, darkest thoughts with everyone and nobody at the same time. There was no “national” audience, but only a “community” from which he gradually felt no longer welcome.

The Akihabara incident bears another significance. It forced the nation to come to grips with the disturbing truth about the *keitai*-mediated world. An existing web content-scanning function intended to intercept and inspect the information circulating in the online network could not sufficiently locate a source of social disturbance or apprehend a suspect as a preemptive measure. In the course of the investigation, the police learned that a handful of conscientious *netizens* who read Katō’s postings did in fact contact a cybercrime call center commissioned by the National Police Agency, as well as their respective web providers’ offices, to report their suspicion. But by the time workers at these offices got around to checking the recorded voice messages on Monday morning, Akihabara was already a crime scene and a site of mourning. The regrettable timing of the incident aside, the fact that the *netizens*’ diligence was not reciprocated by the prompt removal of Katō’s postings or his precautionary arrest sent a message that the police were still operating under an outmoded “analog” premise. The real cause of a delay in discovering Katō’s postings was, however, a technological limitation determined by the capacity of the present surveillance system. The syntactical capacity of a policing

program designed to scan and find keywords that are considered harmful has not yet attained the level of sophistication matching the linguistic subtlety and discursive coherence distinctive to human interactions.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, too many words send out flares to make this program a reliable technique of keeping a close tab on the activities among Internet users. These days, not a day passes without overdramatized exclusives in the news about precarious temptations and dubious online solicitations to which digitally wired children are interminably exposed.¹⁹⁰ No sooner does the boundary between a real and an imagined danger blur than the danger begins to feel somehow more imminent and ubiquitous.

Haptic Literature

Because I have spent most of this chapter discussing schoolteacher and adults' handwringing about the future of Japanese youth, techno-social generation gap and Japan's post-Lost Decade socioeconomic predicaments, in order to shed light on more positive, generative possibilities of the evolving media landscape, I want to share my observations on a series of experimental art installations held under the title of *Bungaku no shokkan* (*Haptic Literature: Intersection of Text/Media Art*, title originally appearing in both Japanese and English) at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography

¹⁸⁹ Especially chapter 1 "Dances with Machines," is informative in thinking about the difference between people and animals, which incidentally is still what currently separates people from machines. Rodney Allen Brooks, *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).

¹⁹⁰ Hirotugu Shimoda, *Keitai riterashii: kodomono -tachi no keitai denwa/intaanetto ga abunai!* (*Keitai Literacy: Watch Out for Children's Cellphone and Internet!*) (Tokyo: NTT Publication, 2004).

between December 2007 and February 2008.¹⁹¹ As the title suggests, the purpose of each installation was to bring literature and sense of touch to an intersection through a collaborative work between a visual media artist and a writer. Each piece was designed to question our deeply habituated reading practice and to challenge the readers-cum-visitors to engage with a new digital media landscape in a more tangible manner. Instead of leaving the labor of reading and the pleasure of taking a flight of fantasy solely in the hands of readers, the creators took active roles in manipulating literary scripts and texts to bear different visual permutations of three-dimensional existence. Hence, some texts were digitally projected in animation. Others appeared and disappeared on the screen according to the tempo dictated by the mimicked movement of a writer's invisible hands on a computer keyboard. Through ingeniously crafted digital interface, each installation urged the readers-cum-visitors to explore the unprecedented literary experiences. By so doing, they also constituted an indispensable segment of a feedback loop that completed the installations. That is to say, reading happened collaboratively between the art piece and the readers-cum-visitors whose movement of bodies in an exhibit hall introduced three-dimensionality to texts/scripts. It was as if texts/scripts that were usually confined in a two-dimensional space of a flat surface were finally liberated from the spatial captivity of two-dimensionality. In a way, three-dimensional texts/scripts were trying to embody mediation inside a spatiotemporal depth of the "real" world. Confronted by the texts/scripts that occupied the space and time of the "real" world in a three-dimensional form, the readers-cum-visitors were compelled to engage in a three-dimensional space of reading, which I tentatively call *sympathetic reading practice*. Insofar as this sympathetic

¹⁹¹ *Haptic Literature* (Kodansha/Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2007); "Haptic Literature," *Gunzō* 63:1 (2008): 5-60. See also some images from the exhibit in Appendix section at the end of the dissertation (Figure 4 and 5 of the chapter four).

reading is contingent on a further blurring of a distinction between the real and the virtual world, it is almost reminiscent of a sympathetic magic. In the next chapter, I take the idea of sympathetic reading as a point of departure to inquire into how various permutations of collapsed distance inform the possibilities of reading and writing in the future.

Chapter Four: *Kanji no yure* – A Space of Indeterminacy

“Like the experience of listening to tinfoil records, the experience of listening to a nickel-in-the-slot phonograph is difficult to recover, largely because the issue of mimesis is so vexed in hindsight. It is impossible to gauge precisely the extent to which listening to a record of ♪ was experienced as ♪ and as a representation of ♪, for instance, and how much listening to such a record was an experience of mimeses, of listening to a representation of ♪ or its performance, with the many and complicated parameters available to representational forms: material, authorial, semiotic, and so on. Was the phonograph making music, or was it (just?) playing music? To what extent was mechanical reproduction at transparent re-production? While it can readily be supposed that listening to a record of ♪ was experienced as ♪ *and* as a representation of ♪, the balance and interplay between the coeval alternatives, real and representational and performative, must have a purchase of the moment, a matter of locality as well as shared cultural practice, and can hardly be accounted for completely by studies of that later construction, “acoustic fidelity.””¹⁹²

Maejima Hisoka’s daring 1866 appeal to the rapidly declining Tokugawa Shogunate to abolish the use of *kanji* provides an especially befitting historical opening to this chapter as it rightly anticipated much of the problematics Japan was to confront with regard to *kanji* and generations of writing technologies. Ever diligent and visionary Maejima who later founded the Japanese postal service insisted that the mastery of *kanji* took too long to be a practical, democratic method of inscription, which he attributed to a somber delay in the formation of a modern nation-state.¹⁹³ Hence, he proposed to replace

¹⁹² Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 50.

¹⁹³ I visited the Communications Museum located in Ōtemachi, Tokyo in the summer of 2010. The Postal Museum housed inside the Communications Museum has a permanent exhibit hall dedicated to Maejima Hisoka’s contribution as the “Father of the Japanese Postal Service.”

the existing writing system with a phonetic-only writing system. The fundamental issue Maejima took to task had less to do with the poetics of composing official texts in *kanji*, and more to do with the politics deeply embedded within the privileging of *kanji*, upon which established sociocultural value and politico-economic structures depended at the time.¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, what Maejima could not have known was how much his radical proposal would resonate a century later among struggling electronic software engineers in Japan.

Since Maejima's attempt to transform Japanese writing system did not come to fruition during his lifetime or thereafter, the inability to produce Japanese-language-capable typewriters was said to severely hinder Japan's endeavor to modernize its infrastructure and compete in the emerging econo-geopolitical world, which was led by the West whose economic prosperity and dominance was credited to the presence of typewriters and professional typists in the office. Those in the trading and manufacturing industries were quick to recognize the promise of efficiency and competitiveness in operating either mechanically or *electrically*—the electronically engineered office appliance was yet to be within a realm of possibility—especially with regard to processing an increasing volume of information. Installing an automatic or semi-automatic apparatus that was capable of reading and writing information in the face of growing demands of corporate management seemed imperative to their survival and

His biographical information can also be obtained at the Postal Museum website at http://www.teipark.jp/display/museum_shozou/museum_shozou_04.html (last accessed on May 15, 2013)

¹⁹⁴ Nanette Gottlieb(Twine), "Toward Simplicity: Script Reform Movements in the Meiji Period," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38: 2 (1983): 115-32; Nanette Gottlieb(Twine), "Standardizing Written Japanese. A Factor in Modernization," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43:4 (1988): 429-54; Nanette Gottlieb(Twine), *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991).

eventual success in an expanding world economy. Yet, not only the businessmen, but also the engineers were painfully aware that *kanji no yure* and innumerable homonyms (especially of homophones) in Japanese posed a major technological impediment to producing a viable data-processing mechanism and software for a Japanese-language office environment. Building an appliance that could satisfactorily handle conventional requirements of Japanese composition known as *kanji kana majiri bun* (漢字仮名交じり文, sentences composed of combinations of *kanji* and two sets of phonetic syllabaries) meant that it worked out problems involving an intricate conversion of phonetic letter input to *kanji* output as well as securing an adequate memory for storing thousands of *kanji* in everyday use. Overcoming these technological challenges was thought to be nearly impossible.¹⁹⁵ In fact, some decided to circumvent the problem of *kanji no yure* altogether by abandoning the ambition to devise an appliance that successfully resolved these issues, and opted for the next best pragmatic choice. In the 1920s, a group of innovative businessmen of the *Kanamoji-kai* (the Association of Kana-Letter) independently commissioned the Underwood Typewriter Company in New York (which was later purchased by Olivetti in 1959) to engineer a phonetic-letter-based mechanical typewriter, known as the [*kata*]/*kana* typewriter. The purpose of this enterprise, which coincided with the motivation behind the *Kanamoji-kai*, was to alleviate an expanding volume of administrative burden by instituting a standardization of administrative work

¹⁹⁵ According to a Japanese historian, Raja Adal, the inventor Sugimoto Kyōta introduced the first Japanese typewriter in 1915. The typewriter had 2300 keys in the main tray and 800 keys in side trays, allowing an operator to compose sentences with a combination of *kanji* and *katakana*-syllabary. A notable difference between this particular writing instrument and typewriters popularized in the West is its lack of “keyboard.” Sugimoto’s typewriter is more accurately described as a writing apparatus with a single handle. An operator steers it across the surface of two different trays containing keys in order to pick out types, and subsequently pushes down to punch in types one at a time. “Typing” executed on this apparatus, therefore, does not require separate movement of fingers as a normal typewriter with keyboard would.

through the *kana* typewriter.¹⁹⁶ *Kana* typewrite was to “do away with *kanji*,” as it were, by typing everything in *katakana* syllabary. Therefore, in essence, the *kana* typewriter was no different from its English counterpart. There were 45 *katakana*-syllabary, standard punctuation marks, Arabic numerals (0-9), and Japanese voiced/half-voiced consonant marks on the *kana* typewriter keyboard whereas an English typewriter had English alphabets (26 lowercase and 26 capital letters), Arabic numerals, and standard punctuation marks. The *kana* typewriter followed exactly the same architectural logic of direct correspondence between a key and a symbol (phonetic syllabaries and punctuation mark), aided by the shift key without the capacity to edit or store memory.

Although I may appear to needlessly belabor the finer points of the technological development of the *wāpuro* and the compositional mechanisms surrounding *keitai* at times, I do so because I think it is important to foreground the sociocultural ramifications of *kanji no yure* to understand what a feat it truly was to overcome the technological and aesthetic impediments *kanji* had presented.

Kanji no yure: Woes of Chinese Characters and the Waapuro

Insofar as *kanji no yure* is a spatially conceptualized margin of difference permitted to *kanji*, it becomes manifested as a visual indeterminacy and instability in both reading and writing. For example, although the following three *kanji* 齋, 齋, and 齊 all share the same pronunciation and thus spelling (*sai*) as well as identical meanings one of which is sacred, each character bears a slightly different number of strokes and insists on a formal difference. Since morphological analysis of each formal modification, however illuminating it may be, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will not attempt to delve

¹⁹⁶ Tadao Umesao, *Chiteki seisan no gijutsu (Technology of Intellectual Production)*, Iwanami Shinsho (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1969).

into it. I will note, however, that the question of a distinct visual registry dictated by each *kanji* comes to bear a grave significance most acutely when these *kanji* are used in proper nouns, such as names of people and geographic locations, as a minor negligence can cause a catastrophic instance of confusion. Nonetheless, in most daily context, 齋, 齋, and 齊 can be used interchangeably without serious repercussions. All this is to say that in order for Japanese *wāpuro* to function realistically as a medium of automatic inscription that satisfies the requirements of Japanese compositional style of *kanji kana majiri bun*, all three *kanji* 齋, 齋, and 齊 must be recognized not only as homophones, but also as semantically identical characters while strictly maintaining the formal differences.¹⁹⁷ In other words, a viable *wāpuro* must be equipped with a sufficient amount of memory to store a vast number of *kanji* that follow a similar logic of 齋, 齋, and 齊 as well as a user-friendly recognition and retrieval system for *kanji* via a sensible phonetic-letter/syllabary input method. What further complicates this already rather elaborate process of input and output is an abundance of homonyms, or homophones to be precise, represented in a multitude of *kanji*. A truly operative *wāpuro* should be able to allow its users to spell out *sai* on their keyboard, and the phonetic input (*sai*) must be able to effortlessly yield an adequate list of *kanji* in daily use. That is to say, besides 齋, 齋, and 齊 which share the same pronunciation (phonetic spelling), meanings, and origins, the list should also include *kanji* that share the same pronunciation (phonetic spelling), but different meanings, and origins, such as 際, 再, 歲, 最, 祭, 才, 債, 妻, 彩, 采, 犀, 菜, 賽, 細, 西, 崔, 蔡. The list under *sai*, although not indefinitely, goes on.

¹⁹⁷ Archaic Chinese characters (*kyū-ji*) and simplified Chinese characters (*kanryaku-ji*) frequently fall into the margin of difference as variations of Chinese characters as well.

As you can see, the *wāpuro* is an extremely complicated technological device that warrants a whole book.¹⁹⁸ But for the purpose of my discussion, it suffices to describe the *wāpuro* as something like a hybrid of an elaborate typewriter and a basic computer that has a limited memory for retrieving *kanji* and runs on a rudimentary algorithm developed exclusively for composing Japanese sentences. It is also a stand-alone instrument that allows a user to write, edit (albeit with relative restrictions) and print. It may be useful to remember that unlike regular computers with multiple computing capacities the *wāpuro*'s singular function is to process words—that is, efficiently read and write Japanese. Many different models of *wāpuro* followed the first model with a varying degree of revision and renovation of the retrieval system and capacity for storing information. But it was only after the advent of the personal computer with a substantially improved multifunction computing and memory capacity that the production of the *wāpuro* in Japan was finally discontinued in 2001.

While *kanji no yure* demands an algorithmic fine-tuning, questions of homonyms stipulates that not only data storage and retrieval capacity, but also algorithms installed in an apparatus itself, must reach a level of sophistication that is adequate for managing a complex system of signification. As a result, *kanji no yure* has come to exemplify both visual and semantic indeterminacy surrounding *kanji*. An important point I wish to make is that on the one hand, with the appropriate years of schooling and constant exposure, the capacity to abstract a specific visual registry of one and the same *kanji* from several variations can and usually does become second nature to those who speak, read and write

¹⁹⁸ For a full consideration on the development of information processing devices in Japan, see *Nihon no konpyuutaa hattatsu-shi (Evolutionary History of Japanese Computer Industry)* (Tokyo: Ohm-sha, 1998). On detailed account on the aspect of technological challenges regarding Chinese character input-output and *wāpuro*, please refer to Chapter ten of the book.

Japanese on regular basis. Their eyes can be trained so that they become predisposed, as it were, to overlook certain visual anomalies (variations) as belonging to an accepted spectrum of normalcy (sameness). It is both a culturally specific and habitually acquired knowledge. On the other hand, “machine eyes,” unless explicitly programmed to disregard these variations, are incapable of extracting the sameness from differences since the differences are acknowledged fundamentally as comprising discrete units of information. Hence, 齋, 齋, and 齊, are and always will be registered as different *kanji* with same pronunciation (*sai*) by the machine-eyes just as equally as 際, 再, 歳, 最, 祭, 才, 債, 妻, 彩, 采, 犀, 菜, 賽, 細, 西, 崔, 蔡 will be identified as different *kanji*. Given how many *kanji* there are in regular circulation in Japan—let us not even speculate on the cases of intricate *kanji* that are beyond the parameters of everyday *kanji*—and just how faint some of the variations are, it is no wonder that the space of *kanji no yure* presented itself as one of the most arduous complications for the engineers in charge of developing the *wāpuro* and the Japanese language-capable computer.¹⁹⁹ As for a profusion of homophones, the conversion of phonetic letters to *kanji* needed to be extremely robust and adaptive, which also took time to perfect.

Considering that Henry Mill’s invention of the first mechanical writing machine was in 1713, the October 1978 release of Toshiba *JW-10* (Fig.1 and 2), the very first Japanese electronic word processor, seems particularly long overdue. It was sold for 6,300,000 yen (approximately 63,000 US dollar), and a poster used for marketing the *JW-10* (Fig. 1) looked like a painted picture of a tour de force by a proud Japanese

¹⁹⁹ Hidetoshi Ito, *Kanji bunka to kompyuutaa (Culture of Kanji and Computer)*, vol. 9, Chuukou PC Shinsho (Tokyo: Chuukou Kooron sha, 1996). I must also note that in my discussion, *kanji no yure* also takes into account orthographic variations of *okuri-gana*, as in 行う and 行なう for the sake of convenience.

electronics giant. In fact, not until 1982, when competing electronics company Fujitsu introduced a smaller and lighter electronic word processor with a larger memory called *My Oasis*, did the practical applications in the office become somewhat of a reality. Even then, not only did a price set at 750,000 yen (approximately 7,500 US dollar) stifle regular customers' desire to own, but it also failed to meet the practical demands of word-processing versatility and conversion speed needed in the business world.²⁰⁰ To understand why a Japanese language-capable word processing instrument, be it a strictly mechanical typewriter or an electronic word processor, stubbornly remained well beyond Japan's technological reach a century and a half after the 1873 release of the Remington & Sons retail typewriter, I must offer a little more historical context.

The delay was not due to a lack of knowledge about this remarkably efficient instrument or an absence of desire for a standardized writing apparatus as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The 1868 Meiji Restoration gave way to a great influx of new fields of expertise, technological inventions, and other modern conveniences to Japan, whose population had, for the most part, previously lived in relative seclusion under the Tokugawa feudal system. The Roman alphabet typewriter was among the many wonders imported from the West, and it unequivocally symbolized the technological superiority and underlying rational thinking of the Western world.²⁰¹ The holdup was mostly caused by the aforementioned cultural milieu informed profoundly by the sociopolitical bias associated with the primacy of *kanji*, and the technological limitations that failed to render a multitude of daily *kanji* at one's disposal. During much of the pre-Meiji era, a

²⁰⁰ Kenichi Mori, and Toshiaki Yagihashi, "Nihongo waapuro tanjyo (the Birth of Japanese Word Processor)," (1989).

²⁰¹ Tetsuji Atsugi, "Chiteki seisan no bunkashi: waapuro ga motarasu sekai (Cultural History of Intellectual Production Brought on By the Word Processors)," (1991), 131-3.

child's education was provided either by a community school (*terakoya*-style schooling) or, among the elite class, through a rigorous recitation of the Chinese classics under renowned Confucian scholars. Through the years of learning, the disciples at an elite school were expected to master the formalized aesthetics associated with the Chinese classic literature in the hope of one day becoming excellent poets themselves. According to Naoki Sakai, such impossible-to-attain pedagogical ideals were passionately advocated by prominent eighteenth-century Confucius scholars whose philosophical commitment to locating the source of "Japanese" language and recuperating the primacy of voice had profoundly impacted the subsequent *genbun i'tchi* movement.²⁰² But the protracted period of study necessary to master such a formalized literary proficiency, especially in writing, also meant that there was a great disparity at the level of written proficiency and sophistication across people of different social strata. This was the climate in which Maejima advocated the egalitarian nature of phonetic writing. After all, automatic writing machine based on phonetic syllabaries, such as the Roman-alphabet typewriter, had long proved to be both attainable and commercially successful. With that said, however, the existing record does show that the mercantile population—artisans, commoners, and even some farmers—were literate even in the feudal era thanks to the *hiragana*-syllabary. The level of literary appreciation was relatively high even during the pre-Meiji era, whose population cultivated and enjoyed a wide range of cultural and literary activities.²⁰³

²⁰² Naoki Sakai, *Kako no koe: jyuuhasseiki nihon no gensetsu ni okeru gengo no chii* (*Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse*) (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2002).

²⁰³ Shigetoshi Nagamine, "*Dokushokokumin*" *no tanjyou: Meiji 30nendai no katsuji medhia to dokusho bunka* (*the Birth of the "Reading Citizens": Print Media of the Meiji 30s and Reading Culture*) (Tokyo: Editor School Publication, 2004). Kounosuke Hashiguchi, *Wahon nyuumon: sennen ikita hon no sekai* (*Wahon for Beginners: The World of Books That Have Lived*

This is undoubtedly not to trivialize the discernible gap and distinct style differences between spoken and written Japanese that have persisted to this day. It is said that only after the late-1880s publication of a novel, *The Drifting Cloud* (*Ukigumo*) by Futaba Teishimei did the Japanese literary sphere truly gain momentum for experimenting with a newly discovered “unified language.” As briefly examined in the chapter 3, the movement known as the “unification of written and spoken Japanese” (*gengun itchi undō*) has been discussed as having achieved a unification by restricting elements of solemn phrases that read more like a Chinese classics text than a transcription of colloquial Japanese. The movement is frequently discussed side by side with a movement to abolish *kanji*. Instead, following Karatani Kojin, I want to focus on the emancipatory discourse concerning the Japanese writers who were finally setting themselves free from the dictatorial literary grip of *kanji*; they were beginning to engage with a distinctly modern set of literary concerns and questions of modern subject while hammering out a new symbolic relation. The liberation from the given repertoire of expression and the rigid mode of articulation dictated by the literary aesthetics of *kanji* resulted not only in the disorientation of a subject, but also in the ascendance of a new perspective. A man (after all, the pivotal question lay with a man as a writer and a reader) was suddenly confronted with a world where there was no obvious object of study; no longer subject to prescriptions of either the abstract concepts embodied in *kanji* or a world perceived through them, a writer for the first time confronted a question of objectification. No longer the subject who knew how to “read” the world according to the

Through a Thousand Years) (Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2005); Kounosuke Hashiguchi, *Zoku-wahon nyuumon: edo no honya to hon zukuri* (*Wahon for Beginners Vol.2: Book Making and Booksellers of Edo*) (Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2007). Kazuaki Uozumi, *Gendai hisseki-gaku jyoron* (*Introductory Theory of Contemporary Graphology*), Bunshun Shinsho149 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjyuu, 2001).

ideal represented in *kanji*, he was now able to read and write “spontaneously” through the language, which reflected his own interiority.²⁰⁴

The unification movement coincidentally set in motion the formation of Japanese compositional style of *kanji kana majiri bun*. In the process, a supplementary use of three sets of phonetic letters—*hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries, and, the Roman-alphabets—played a pivotal role in establishing the uniqueness of the Japanese system of signification. (The same cannot be said about the neighboring East Asian countries where Chinese characters are also used.)²⁰⁵ Combining five vowels (*a, i, u, e, o*) with various consonants, the Japanese language has fifty phonetically discernible and transcribable sounds.²⁰⁶ This singular difference, I am trying to demonstrate, lends itself to the visual versatility and playfulness that is at the heart of the deformities such as *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* and its morphing potentialities, which I will discuss shortly.

One might ask, how is the space of *kanji no yure* useful in thinking about *kao-*

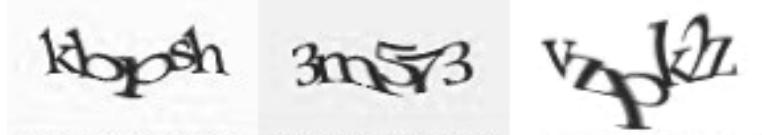
²⁰⁴ Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). Chapter 1 and 2 are particularly informative in thinking about the question of “new fusion” between subjectivity and language.

²⁰⁵ My intention in saying this is to emphasize that each language has a particular figuration of “deformed,” “irregular,” or “inappropriate” writing born out of its distinct sociocultural and politico-historical conditions of possibilities. For example, a Taiwanese friend has told me that the Chinese language has its own strain of “irregular” writing that combines Arabic numerals, *Hanyu Pinyin* and the Chinese characters. By substituting *Hanyu Pinyin* and/or Chinese characters with Arabic numerals whose Chinese pronunciation matches that of the sound of the intended word or phrase, this particular writing not only creates semantic ambiguities but also provides writers’ deniability on the discussion of politically sensitive issues, such as the first and second Tiananmen Square Incidents, both of which the Chinese government is said to strictly censor.

²⁰⁶ Out of 50 sounds, only 46 of them are considered everyday use in contemporary Japan. Strictly speaking, however, if one were to count all the voiced/muddy sounds (*dakuon*), half-clear sound (*han-dakuon*), clear sounds (*seion*), long vowel, fricatives and among other pronounced sounds, there are more than 100 sounds in everyday Japanese language. For a more comprehensive discussion on this topic, see Keizo Saji, and Shinji Sanada, *Onsei, goi, moji, hyouki*, Shohan ed., vol. Nihongo kyoshi yosei shirizu (Tokyo: Tokyo Horei Shuppan, 1996).

moji and other writing deformities? As the example of 齋, 齋, and 齊 [same pronunciation (*sai*), meanings, and origin] and 際, 再, 歲, 最, 祭, 才, 債, 妻, 彩, 采, 犀, 菜, 賽, 細, 西, 崔, 蔡 [same pronunciation (*sai*), different meanings, and origin] has shown, the space of indeterminacy and instability is charged with textual morphing potentials, where innocent mistakes and whimsical confusion occur. Whether *wāpuro* or a Japanese language capable computer, the potency of respective media's recognition and retrieval capacity (for variations of *kanji*) is contingent on a mechanical and algorithmic soundness, which is demonstrated by how well they handle a visual indeterminacy and instability. To put it differently, each medium has a distinct threshold of registering identities and variations. By the nature of productive ambiguities the *kanji no yure* imposes on the practice of reading and writing in Japanese, *kanji no yure* as a concept allows me to examine the labor of visual and semantic abstraction "human eyes" perform. So far, this small margin is what confirms our "human" identity. After typing in all their personal information and before hitting a "place an order" button, many able online shoppers know, without fully understanding the larger philosophical ramifications of judiciously following the instruction to reproduce a strangely warped phrase in a text box, known as a *CAPTCHA*,²⁰⁷ that a famous Turing test is in place to differentiate human eyes from the "eyes" of a machine, which actually operate not on an optic registry, rather

²⁰⁷ *Captcha* is a completely automated public Turing test to differentiate human from computer. It utilizes a combination of half dozen purposefully distorted capital and small letters, that looks something like the images below.



on an entirely different logic of information registry. For now, this is a sliver of space that separates us, humans, from machines, and thus seems like a perfect point of departure for a theoretical meditation on a visual reverberation between a reader/writer's corporeal body and a digitally rendered body on a digital screen. This optical confusion is what initially compelled me to extend the notion of sympathetic magic to exploring the process of sympathetic reading and writing discussed in chapter three. Building on this hypothesis, my argument in this chapter is concerned with the compositional considerations and requirements of Japanese language, such as *kanji no yure* and the automatic conversion function of the "phonetic letters to *kanji*" (*jidō henkan kinō*), as I see them play an important role in shaping the technological conditions of possibility for the *keitai*-specific interface. In the pages to follow, I will demonstrate that *kao-moji*'s mimetic capacity complements the intended *affect* of sensorially charged *gyaru-moji* in *keitai* text messages, and that the point of text-message exchanges is to create a sensation of hearing a girlish voice in *gyaru-moji* and feeling the warmth of a sender's corporeal presence in *kao-moji*. Thinking through the mimetic capacity of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*, I must note that the potency of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* actually depends not only on recipients' successful identification of appropriate gesticulatory, oral and tonal qualities but also on their subsequent projection of emotions associated with the expressions. What this means is that the anticipated "affective" registers of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* can hardly be attained if appropriate emotions are not applied at the time of reading. Naturally, this performative aspect of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* begs the question whether these deformed digital writings either resuscitate or recuperate what has been "absented" from the written texts. I would like to answer the question by first acknowledging that the

emotional properties elicited through these icons, if nothing else, add layers to the text by enriching the “imagined” utterances. As I will show, once *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* enter into the sphere of daily (written) communication, somehow the heretofore-observed icon-less text suddenly feels “lacking.” The question, I will raise then, becomes what is now perceived to be lacking from the ordinary (i.e. *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*-less) texts? Are digitally animated smile of *kao-moji* and exaggerated cuteness embodied in *gyaru-moji* capable of resurrecting the emotion that has been “vacated” from the text, as some of the informants suggest? Or perhaps, the focus of the discussion should shift from the question of textuality and the primacy of voice to that of receptivity? After all, the media receptivity is not only informed by the material and socio-historical conditions, but is also expressed through the broadening spectrum of cultural metaphors. The broadly explored metaphor of sympathetic reading and writing suggested here should be entertained as something that bespeaks the conditions of socio-technological connectivity, and virtual embodiment of the symbolic world in contemporary Japan.

Finally, the spirit of the present inquiry lies in an observation that if the twentieth-century anthropology was concerned with a passage from nature to culture, the twenty-first-century anthropology is informed by sensitivity to the changing nature of the relationship between humans and machines (or technology). The present moment is analogous to an unsettling overture to a new era, where tensions between humans and machines can no longer be subsumed under modernist discussions. As the line between the real and the virtual becomes increasingly tenuous, the mode of existence, especially vis-à-vis the symbolic world, too must reflect the ongoing reconfigurations. By way of listening to my interlocutors’ failed expressions and frustrated attempts at making sense

of the new relations to the world, I want to underline the limits of current discursive capacity as we struggle to articulate new sociocultural imaginations and experiences shared by those who occupy multiple dimensions and renditions of the world. The more evasive the physical presence in the virtual, the more strongly the semblance of corporeality seems to insist on the simulated proximity. This irreconcilable proximity without presence,²⁰⁸ I suspect, is the source of corporeal metaphors abundant in the contemporary Japanese vernacular.

***Keitai*-Novel: Who Is “Authoring”?**

Since the Industrial Revolution, the modernists’ fascination with machines seemed to have existed side by side with a fear of automaticity that presumably robbed human of autonomy and agency by relegating mind and body to the violent dictates of the mechanical imperatives. An uncanny semblance to life realized by automatons especially spurred intense ontological debates while at the same time giving impetus to innovative scientific undertakings.²⁰⁹ These conflicting energies have also been a tremendously fertile ground for inspiring science fiction genre films and literary works that depict permutations of a perfect equilibrium between human and machine and/or a demise of humanity in a techno-ecological dystopia. But, in the late 2000s in Japan, this age-old

²⁰⁸ The term, *proximity without presence*, was first invoked by Professor Ivy in our private conversation regarding questions of online presence and proximity experienced by internet users. The term, however, was originally suggested by William Flesch in his discussion of a cinematic space in the article below, William Flesch, “Proximity and Power: Shakespearean and Cinematic Space,” *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 3 (1987): 277-93.

²⁰⁹ A short story by E.T.A. Hoffman, “The Sandman,” famously captures this tension between Nathaniel, the protagonist, and an automaton, Olympia. In the course of Nathaniel’s courtship to Olympia where his feelings evolve from a seemingly innocent ‘love at first sight’ to a more complicated torturous fixation, the readers not only discover but also experience, figuratively speaking, the effect of Olympia’s uncanny semblance to human. My use of the term “uncanny semblance” is based on my reading of Sigmund Freud’s seminal text, Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Uncanny*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

tension between human and machine was being manifested in a question of *readability* (also interchangeable with a question of *recognizability*) and textual sensibility. Although the *wāpuro* in its nascent form was synonymous with the cumbersome and often inaccurate process of conversion from phonetic letters to *kanji* (most *wāpuro* did not even have a viable “automatic” conversion function known as *jidō henkan kinō*, to speak of at the time), the automatic conversion function progressively improved to the point where the *wāpuro* was able to learn to store frequently used phrases in the right combinations of *kana*-syllabary and *kanji* and prompt users with them when the user inputted a first matching phonetic letter. But as the imperative to engage in fast-tempo digital communication grew, the more afflicted the users of *keitai* and other digital communication media devices became with embarrassing textual oversights induced by a digital prompting. When rereading their own digitally composed messages riddled with syntactically inappropriate phrases and awkwardly converted *kanji*, the users wondered if the failure of their eyes and fingers was responsible for mortifying typos, or whether something else was “authoring” their public as well as private correspondence.

The tension seemed to have culminated when five of the top ten best-selling novels were nabbed by an emerging literary genre known as the *keitai*-novel in 2006. The *keitai*-novels are *keitai*-generated, *keitai*-accessed (uploaded and downloaded), and *keitai*-consumed serial stories, much like *feuilleton*, though the *keitai*-novels have yet to earn recognition as a “serious” literary genre worthy of being published in any major newspapers or magazines. Their signature style—a daily installment of some 200 words of vernacular text over a period of time—requires very little commitment and sustained

attention from readers.²¹⁰ Schoolteachers and parents quickly joined the bandwagon initiated by a few literary critics in denouncing the *keitai*-novel's highly formulaic narrative development, use of clichéd phrases, textual bites that bordered on half-finished sentences, and insular story context. Because *keitai*-novel followed a predictable cookie-cutter story line, the naysayers contested that reading and writing *keitai*-novels was only marginally beneficial to the majority of the *keitai* readers (young female teenagers and male and female readers in their 20s) since "It beats not reading at all."²¹¹

Keitai-novels' immense popularity among the youth notwithstanding, the literary merit of the *keitai*-novel genre was thus quickly discredited as it was deemed to fall significantly short of providing a true literary quality and satisfaction, such as creative agency expressed through refined and/or experimental writing styles. Furthermore, they observed that not only was *keitai*'s susceptibility to interruption and distraction inherently incompatible with a task of cultivating a deeply introspective literary subject, but its superbly competent automatic conversion function of phonetic letters for *kanji*, which is also capable of learning and remembering how an individual user "speaks as well as writes with digits" on a *keitai* keypad, made them wonder where to place the "real" authorship in the prolific *keitai*-novel genre production. As a result, what could have been an auspicious sign of growing young readership in the middle of "youth abandoning the

²¹⁰ At the beginning, each *keitai*-novel writer was obliged to observe a strict word-limit (approximately 200 words), which more or less corresponded to the volume of data-packet-transfer permitted by devices popularly used at the time. Soon the logistical restrictions began to matter less and less as the devices themselves and the supporting infrastructure improved. Today, the concern for a word-limit is given more for the sake of ensuring "read-ability" and a certain sense of readerly aesthetics on *keitai* screens than the ability to upload or download. This suggests that the scale of a medium with which reading and writing takes place warrants our attention.

²¹¹ This was uttered by one of the high school teachers I frequently met for discussing the subject of the "youth abandoning script and letter" during my fieldwork.

script/letter” handwringing has been construed as an ill-fated case of cultural deficiency and lack of literary agency among the digital generation. That is to say, the generational literary clash is unilaterally motivated by the unease found among the self-appointed guardians of “analog” textual sensibility, who regard the emerging digital forms of composition and distribution, to say nothing more of authoring of the content, as destabilizing, if not threatening, the conventional poetics and aesthetics of national literary culture.

Deformity, Perception and Visual Morphing

Incidentally, the advent of a whimsically contorted *kana*-syllabary known as *gyaru-moji* also hit the analog aesthetic nerves around the same time. As the chapter three already examined,²¹² *keitai* text messages have been identified as a breeding ground for new forms of writing that challenge the conventional textual aesthetics and communication protocols. Given the correlation metonymically drawn between deformed writings and the ensuing disintegration of the future national body, deformity associated with *gyaru-moji* was seen to exemplify a deformity distinctly attuned to the available digital technology and media receptivity of the 2000s. *Gyaru-moji* is a type of digital writing that first appeared in the early 2000s in *keitai* text messages exchanged among *gyaru* (teenage girls and women in their early 20s who strongly identify with a young urban consumer pop culture in and around Tokyo). It is characterized by irregular use of phonetic letter fonts that are disproportionate to a conventional sequence of letters, ample

²¹² Chapter three reviewed a deformed writing called *maru-moji* (or *hentai shōjyo moji*), which was very popular among the teenage girls in the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Maru-moji* was notorious for its exaggerated roundness and deliberate distortion applied to each stroke of the handwritten *kanji*, hiragana and katakana syllabary, Roman alphabets, and Arabic numerals. Because of the distortion, *maru-moji* was also criticized as “illegible” and some even characterized as “anti-social.”

use of *kao-moji*, coy language and an unfamiliar assemblage of various glyphs that constitutes a phonetic letter (Figure. 3).

Before making a further analysis of *gyaru-moji*, it is helpful to offer at least a short definition of *gyaru-moji*, *kao-moji*, and *e-moji*. *Gyaru-moji* is a form of writing deformity that not only exploits the operative mechanism behind digital technology, which overlooks both semantic and material contiguity of letters and words, but also attempts to achieve a visual similitude of an original phonetic letter while making full use of an existing array of letter parts, symbols and punctuation marks without any regard to conventional compositional rules. Due to the compositional process in which *gyaru-moji* logic relegates components of a semantically coherent letter and symbol (punctuation mark and glyph included) to parts that are estranged from the original semantic or physical coherence, phonetic letters that should be faithfully transcribing the sounds of phrases, such as “hello” as in ‘*ko-n-ni-chi-wa*’, do not necessarily reflect the sound. *Gyaru-moji* frequently operates on the virtue of a visual similitude of what phonetic letters, if properly transcribed, should look like. As a result, some of the made-up letters whose parts are not originally phonetic letters do not even have a corresponding “sound” to speak properly of, which raises the question of how we can even “read” them.

For example:

1) “hello” (こんにちは) is spelled out as $\supseteq \omega \vee \neg \text{ち} \omega \vee (\cdot \omega \cdot \bullet)$

こ (*ko*) is replaced by a symbol, \supseteq

ん (*n*) is simulated by a symbol, ω

に (*ni*) is replaced with two phonetic letters \vee (*re*) and \neg (*ni*) as shown in $\vee \neg$.

ち (*chi*) is left undisturbed

は (*wa*) is substituted with another letter with the same phonetic reading in a smaller font as in わ, which is embellished with a *kao-moji*, ヱ (・ω・●). This is a fairly simple *kao-moji* that depicts eyes and nose as ・ω・, which is outlined by parentheses on each side as a contour of a face.

2) “I’m sorry” (ごめんなさい) is written as ≡〃 めωナよ±あレゝ*.:° (‘つω*’)°・°.

ご (*go*) is again replaced by a symbol ≡, plus a punctuation mark 〃

め (*me*) is left intact as め

ん (*n*) is again replaced by a symbol ω

な (*na*) is composed of two phonetic letters ナ (*na*) and ヨ (*yo*), amounting to ナヨ

さ (*sa*) is not only substituted with a figure ±, but also the vowel sound of *sa* is purposefully elongated to simulate the sound of a girlish enunciation by adding an extra vowel sound *a* with a letter あ in a smaller font to mimic the long vowel.

い (*i*) is also composed of a letter レ (*re*) and a glyph ゝ shown as レゝ

Similar to the example of “hello,” “I’m sorry” is also accompanied by a *kao-moji* assemblage [*.:° (‘つω*’)°・°]. To convey discomfort and remorse, one of the eyes is covered by a paw-like hand →つ which is actually a hiragana syllabary [つ (*tsu*)] as shown in [つω・].

What these two examples reveal is that unless a reader is sufficiently attuned to recognize ≡ωレニちわ ヱ (・ω・●) as a *gyaru-moji* version of こんにちは adorned with affective *kao-moji*, the whole sequence letters is liable to become *unreadable*, devoid of

semantic significance. Since “readability of signs is a function of their spatiality,”²¹³ disproportionate *gyaru-moji* sentences hover on the threshold of readability. That is to say, the unreadability of *gyaru-moji* and *kao-moji* should not be understood as a question of visual unfamiliarity and subsequent illegibility, but it must be approached as a problem of optical un-receptivity among the uninitiated. The deformity of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* is such that it falls outside of the purview of the reading threshold of the uninitiated. Their eyes arguably fail to “read” the sequence of letters and symbols.

Interestingly, despite the minimum effort spent in depicting the facial features (aside from the two parentheses that outline a face, eyes and nose shown here (• ω • •) and (∩ ω •)), *kao-moji* manages to invoke familiar faces with a surprising level of success. While *kao-moji* is frequently put together by individual users because of its receptivity to a range of customization of particular emotions and idiosyncrasies, *e-moji* is a standardized set of ready-made icons preinstalled in *keitai* or downloaded directly from special websites to one’s *keitai*.²¹⁴ Although *gyaru-moji* is essentially a combination of relatively recognizable *kao-moji* and known symbols readily retrievable via a *keitai* text-message compositional function, the final product is no longer recognizable as a *readable* text for the unaccustomed eyes. Ironically, schoolteachers and parents who were quick to dismiss the literary value (or lack thereof) of the *keitai*-novels, on the basis of a perceived lack of self-actualizing author could not justifiably raise the same issue against the garishly imaginative deformity. Instead, they fell back on a predictable argument

²¹³ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 257.

²¹⁴ Ironically, due to technological incompatibility between a word document on a personal computer platform and that of *keitai*, I am unable to reproduce *e-moji* here as an example.

couched in righteousness, or lack thereof, in a youthful act of disobedience.

But, I want to dwell more on the nature of both visual and textual aesthetic rupture triggered by *gyaru-moji*. Through a digitally mediated series of disassembling and reassembling of parts that are thoroughly unfettered by the conventionally assigned semantic value, *gyaru-moji* has critically deconstructed Japanese writing. I wonder if *gyaru-moji* instantiates a more formally dramatic, if not more fundamental, rupture in the “proper” registry of visual and literary sensibility than the previous forms of deformity by forcefully depriving glyphs of semantic as well as material coherency. Like *genbun it’chi*, are *gyaru-moji* and other forms of digital writings threatening to instigate a paradigm shift by destabilizing the pre-*keitai* era’s threshold for what is readable? Here, by readable, I am specifically interested in the visually registered “textual dissonance” created by the glyphs that are both *unreadable* as a consequence of unrecognizability and unpronounceability. Since the current fear over formulaic *keitai* novels and *unreadable* digital writings perceives automaticity implicit in *keitai* as somehow overwriting human agency and existing symbolic regime, it might be helpful to remember that the advent of the typewriter also once constituted a historic disruption in literary culture in the West. By the sheer possibility of stringing together an unreadable (in a sense of visually legible but unpronounceable) sequence of letters, which is to say writer’s escape from wanting to (?) and /or feeling obliged to compose a semantically comprehensible sentence, typewriters for the first time liberated writings from meanings. As Kittler explains in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, “A spatialized, numbered, and (since the 1888 typewriters’ congress in Toronto) also standardized supply of signs on a keyboard makes

possible what and only what QWERTY prescribes.”²¹⁵ Typewriter generated text could operate on an altogether novel compositional logic, free from the earlier literary protocols and aesthetics, which Kittler identifies as the discourse network 1800. In his attempt to illustrate the typewriter-specific 1900 literary sensibility, Kittler cites a poem entitled, *The Great Lalulā*.²¹⁶ The poem is full of symbols such as semicolons (;) and parentheses (()), and brackets ([]). Not only is the poem impossible to read aloud, but also virtually *unreadable* as in the sense of being unrecognizable as a poem among those who embrace the 1800 literary aesthetics. As if to foreshadow some of the visual cacophony manifest in *gyaru-moji* and *kao-moji*, Kittler observes the nature of pneumatic impossibility of the poem, writing that “Nonsense syllables are the divine punishment that reduces them to a chaos of bodies.”²¹⁷ For Kittler, at stake are the different media and literary sensibilities between the discourse networks 1800 and 1900. He insists that the subject informed by the discourse network 1900 is sufficiently attuned to appreciating the poetics of such an orthodox writing.

If typewriter is for Kittler, *keitai* is for me, and the pneumatic impossibility of *The Great Lalulā* is the very literary threshold through which I can explore the pneumatic (capacity to voice and pronounce) impossibility and mimetic possibility of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* in the digital era. Although I imagine that *kanji no yure* once constituted a critical technological threshold, it no longer poses a threat, since it has already been essentially overcome and incorporated into the body of cultural knowledge and repertoire.

²¹⁵ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Writing Science (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 229.

²¹⁶ Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, 206-64.

²¹⁷ Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, 221.

I might even suggest that the deformity embodied in *gyaru-moji* and *kao-moji* is the new *yure*, the space of indeterminacy and instability. In pushing this theory, we must keep in mind that there is nothing inherently natural about reading or writing. Rather than some atavistic disposition (something under the dictate of unconscious aspects of proprioception), I am more sympathetic with the notion of intense habituation that Brian Massumi discusses as *affect*. In the section to follow, I am going to show that *kao-moji* compels us to experience and learn to appreciate another register of reading through its mimetic enchantment.

Temperature of the Script

When I first met Maki at a book release party hosted by a friend mine at his rare and used bookstore in Shibuya in 2005, she was working as a contest manager for a fast-growing independent publisher called Shinpūsha. Accompanying a soft-spoken poet to the event in an unassuming black suit with a junior colleague by her side, Maki looked poised and professional. So I was pleasantly surprised to see how excited she was to hear my comment on unfamiliar typefaces used in the book. No sooner did I notice the choice of unusually textured paper than she began to gush over how her company was started by an unusually creative man, who had long ago decided that his company's mission was to answer to the needs and dreams of every writer, even if it meant boldly treading on unbeaten paths. To this end, Maki explained with visible pride, Shinpūsha regularly screened hundreds of original works submitted by professionals and amateurs to the office where she was assigned. Since Shinpūsha was always exploring innovative ways of running a book-publishing business, a collaboration with a struggling small independent press in Tokyo, a relatively well-established poet and a young promising

photographer presented itself as one such opportunity worth pursuing. From how people in the audience described the book that night, the experiment seemed to have managed to offer just the kind of refreshing visual, textual, and tactile reading experience Maki and her colleagues had hoped for.

Soon after I learned from my other informants that Shimpūsha had been making quite a stir in the book-publishing and book-retail industry, I also discovered that in recent years the book-publishing and book-retail industry had suffered a bitter disparity between market saturation and a steady decline in the sales of traditional paper-base publication. My bookstore owner friend, Kazuhiro, attributed Shimpūsha's feat to the company's shrewd niche business model. Authors who were awarded book contracts were made to shoulder the cost of publishing in return for professional editing, distribution know-how and a premier spot on the shelf of Shimpūsha's outlet store in the middle of Tokyo's most fashion-forward neighborhood, Aoyama.²¹⁸ Shimpūsha's all-in-one package deal seemed like a perfect alternative to often financially unsuccessful self-publishing ventures or psychologically taxing submissions to and rejections from major publishing firms.

By August 2006, Shimpūsha's gross profit peaked at 52 million yen. Maki was becoming ever more busy at work and I began noticing more aggressive advertising campaigns by Shimpūsha in the news media. So it came as a surprise when rumors of Shimpūsha's legal trouble with disgruntled clients surfaced in the fall of 2007. Amid the outward expressions of collegial support and subdued voyeuristic speculation, Shimpūsha

²¹⁸ I might invoke an idea of "premier" in this day and age and gesture toward a very interesting proposition made by editor-in-chief of *Wired*, Chris Anderson, who popularized the concept of 'long tailing' and 'freemia' in 2004. See more at <http://www.thelongtail.com/about.html> (last accessed on May 15, 2013)

finally filed for protection under the Civil Rehabilitation Law on January 7, 2008. By the time a public announcement about Shinpūsha's *de facto* bankruptcy was made,²¹⁹ Maki had already gone without pay for several months, and her daily responsibilities had been reduced mostly to directing the upset clients to the legal department. Maki sensed that something had gone terribly wrong with the company when her department was told to join a new headquarters in one of the most expensive properties in Tokyo. The move felt too rash, too grand, and too unreal. Maki felt that the company was growing too fast, stretching too thin and going astray from the oft-repeated original mission statement. As a friend, I nervously held my breath as I watched the unfortunate chain of events quietly unfold over the next few weeks. For Maki, things became even harder after Shinpūsha held an official press conference. She felt personally responsible for the disappointed contract awardees, as if she had a hand in squashing their dreams. But at the same time, she was angry, and justifiably so, for her company's short-sightedness and lax attitude toward its employees. On January 8, a few days after the first day back in the office in 2008,²²⁰ I sent Maki a *keitai* text message to see how she was holding up. A little after 10a.m., Maki replied with the following message from a deserted office where everyone,

²¹⁹ According to a popular bookstore/book industry-critic, Nagae Akira, with whom I had a private conversation, news of mid-size publisher's bankruptcy in January 2008 were a clear sign of Japanese publishing industry slowly coming undone at the seams. Although the news of Shinpūsha were only ran by major Japanese newspapers on January 7th, there was a series of battles fought by mid to large size publishing and printing firms in Japan against a shrinking paper-base publication market, budget downsize, company merger, inevitable bankruptcy and a mega-size conglomerate's buyout since 1999. Similarly, newspaper report relayed the social critics' bemoaning over another disappearance of a mid-size publisher, *Sōshisha* whose knack for turning an obscure literary title into a national best-seller was all too well known in Japan, merely two days later as the passing of a paper-base publishing.

²²⁰ The first three days after the New Year are still considered by many in the non-service industry to be "holiday." Most state offices and companies begin normal business transaction on January 4th in Japan.

save for a few of her coworkers, either had been already let go or remained on a voluntary extended New Year's vacation.

(original)

おう！今朝から大変よお～ (*_*)
心配してくれてありがとう☆≥▽≤☆
もお会社はめっちゃめっちゃだよお～
q(__ ㄥ __ ||)p なえる

(translation)

Yeah! It's been hell since this morning (*_*)
Thanks for worrying about me ☆≥▽≤☆
My company is totally messed up
q(__ ㄥ __ ||)p sucks

This was by no means the first *keitai* text-message with elaborate *ASCII* art called *kao-moji* (*kao*=face, *moji*=script), I received from Maki.²²¹ But perhaps because of the stress Maki was under at the time and since I was closely involved in her personal life, reading the message felt like having a double vision. I could almost “see” Maki (and her

²²¹ As I have explained in chapter two (footnote 41), *ASCII* art is a graphic design technique that consists of pictures assembled together from the 95 printable characters defined by the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (*ASCII*) from 1963. A detailed explanation can be found at the Wikipedia website at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII_art (last accessed on May 15, 2013). In Japan, *ASCII* art initially appeared on an obscure alternative culture website called 2-channel where heavy internet users frequented. Both *ASCII* art and 2-channel website became widely known when an unlikely love story about a shy 23-year old man rescuing a fellow female passenger from a drunken man on the train surfaced as a book, *Train Man* (2004). Partly thanks to *keitai* manufacturers' effort to provide ordinary *keitai* users with ready-made *ASCII* art in their text message emoticon database, the use of *ASCII* art became popularized. 2-channel now offers a comprehensive *kao-moji-ASCII* art dictionary on their website, which can be accessed at <http://matsucon.net/> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). An example of *ASCII* art shown below depicts two snowmen like figures huddled together out of fear.

(´ω´)・ω´) キャー
/ つ□ \ 怖いー

face) in her choice of *kao-moji*. The first *kao-moji* [(* _ *)] displayed her exhaustion via the closed eyes and tightly pursed lips. Next, in the attempt to assure me of her resilience and relay her appreciation to me, she inserted an exaggerated sparkly smile [☆ ≧ ∇ ≦ ☆]. Finally, to communicate her disgust and disappointment with her company, the last *kao-moji* [q(__ ㄥ __ ||) p sucks] showed downcast eyes with an accompanying expression, “[it] sucks.” While my prior knowledge of her trouble and personality most definitely helped to generate an appropriate context and fine-tune my reception, decoding the *kao-moji* was surprisingly effortless. Her choice of *kao-moji* seemed so natural that they were almost supplemental to the text itself. In fact, when I tried imagining her message without a single *kao-moji*,²²² it felt lacking.

“Lacking?” I thought to myself, stunned at my own reaction. That was the very same word (*sabishii*) that Yōichirō used when he complained to me about *kao-moji*-less text messages he was receiving from his date. Yōichirō whom I know from our childhood and who worked at a major bank in Tokyo, called me one day to ask if I used *kao-moji* or *e-moji* (*e* = picture, *moji* = script) in my text message. In order to understand the gravity of his question, a few basic distinctions need to be reviewed.

Among a few defining differences between *kao-moji* and *e-moji*, the most salient is a compositional one. While *kao-moji* is an assemblage of discrete symbols, and Japanese as well as foreign scripts available in text function installed in an internet-capable *keitai*, *e-moji* is a standard set of emoticon that do not require a similar customization. In fact, a set of *e-moji* found in *keitai* is so standardized that there is very

²²² Below is what the text-message would have looked like without a single *kao-moji*.
 “Yeah! It’s been hell since this morning
 Thanks for worrying about me
 My company is totally messed up”

little variation across different *keitai* models and manufacturers. The next small but crucial difference lies in a display color scheme. Despite an elaborate appearance of *kao-moji*, it is always and only displayed in black and white. In contrast, *e-moji* has always been available in vivid colors of red, blue, yellow, pink, and so on. Last but not least, *kao-moji* takes a lot more time and effort to customize and insert into a text than does *e-moji*, since *e-moji* is retrievable with a mere manipulation of option choices and scrolling on the *keitai* screen. It is important to remember that although users who customize their *kao-moji* are not bound by any prescriptive stipulations, to be effective, *kao-moji* has to be discernible as a simulation or an iconic exaggeration of a known “expression” or “face.” Judging from the popular use of *kao-moji* by *keitai* users across generations and the innumerable permutations of *kao-moji* now in circulation, the freedom to assemble and compose must have been conducive to people’s desires to emulate in varying capacities and with varying success, “faces” and “expressions.”

For instance, as soon as Akiko, a 19-year-old university student, and her friends got hold of their first *keitai* in high school in the mid-2000s, they jointly compiled a list of customized *kao-moji* and stored hundreds of their original *kao-moji* in an easily retrievable memory function in order to speed up their text-message composition process.²²³ But by the late-2000s, *keitai* manufactures not only added dozens of

²²³ Unlike truncation that happens a lot in text-messages in English, such as “LOL” (Laughing Out Loud), “gr8 to c u!” (great to see you!), “IMHO...” (In My Honest Opinion), or “TTYL” (Talk To You Later), which happens for the sake of gaining speed and convenience, in Japanese text-message, similar abbreviation or truncation does not occur, mostly due to different input mechanism of the media device. Where English is phonetically inputted via alphabet, Japanese text-messages have to be composed while using *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana*-syllabary, that are first phonetically input and then converted via auto-conversion function on the device. What does happen, and I will discuss this a little more in detail in the next chapter, is that people sometimes put too much faith in the auto-conversion function which prompts *keitai*-users with the most frequently used words or phrases used in the most recent communication and make

categorically organized ready-made *kao-moji* (happy, angry, sad, disappointed, etc) and animated *e-moji* that twirled and winked, but *keitai*-accessible online websites began to offer elaborate two-dimensional *ASCII* art (including *kao-moji*) and colorful animation that could be downloaded directly into *keitai* text messages.²²⁴

In any case, Yōichirō was troubled by the lack of *kao-moji* in the text messages from his date, with whom he was daily exchanging at least a half dozen messages. On the one hand, the lack of *kao-moji* in text message never really bothered me, or if it ever did, it was not enough to make me want to take it up with anyone. Admittedly though, during my fieldwork, most of the text messages I exchanged were with my family, friends and some informants and they ordinarily contained a few *kao-moji* and *e-moji*. On the other hand, I was fully aware of the implications of the use of *kao-moji* and *e-moji* in the digital messages I received from my informants, and duly noted it as a sign of good rapport and intimacy between us when it did appear in our correspondence. While it is possible to suggest that I understood the subtlety and overall affect of the messages based on the fine distinctions made by the presence and absence of *kao-moji* and *e-moji*, the truth behind the principal decoding logic was a lot simpler: I simply did not expect anyone besides my family and friends to use either *kao-moji* or *e-moji* in their messages. Just as Tomoaki and Yuki (see chapter three) deemed it inappropriate for students to use emoticons in class

rather embarrassing mistakes and produce combinations of *kanji* and *hiragana*-syllabary that do not amount to any meaningful units.

²²⁴ The following websites offer exhaustive compilation of various *kao-moji* in different categories, that are cut-and-pastable to your personal computer and downloadable to your *keitai*: <http://www.facemark.jp/facemark.htm>, <http://www.kaomoji.com/kao/text/>, and <http://kaomojiya.com/> (last accessed on May 15, 2013). According to the web-questionnaire conducted by Oricon Style in April 2007, *kao-moji* in a “smily” category was used most frequently by *keitai* users across generations, whereas *kao-moji* in “cry” and “apology” category ranked in third and fourth on the most frequently used *kao-moji* list as if to show the supplementary nature of *kao-moji* to text-messages.

essays, I also assumed that *neither kao-moji nor e-moji* had any place in “official” communication. I did have an inkling of the nature of Yōichirō’s grievance, but I decided to play the devil’s advocate and asked him to explain why the lack of *kao-moji* bothered him so much. That was when he used the word, “lacking,” not missing a beat to add that he would also like to see more *kao-moji* or *e-moji* in her message. According to Yōichirō, though her messages were never without caring words or affection, the absence of accompanying smiley *kao-moji* or a heart mark in *e-moji* somehow reduced, if not halved, the pleasure of reading them. The more earnestly he tried to express why he cared at all, the more self-conscious he became at making a fuss over such a trivial thing. Yet, despite his better self, he just could not let go. He eventually concluded that “lacking” (*sabishii*) and “cold” (*tsumetai*) were the very feelings he felt toward reading a message sans *kao-moji*, especially when it came from someone whose display of intimacy mattered.

In the end, it was not so much that Yōichirō thought that his date was acting coldly as that he felt her text to be cold to the touch. To my amazement, his sentiment was more widely shared among people across generations than I expected. Throughout my fieldwork, the metaphor of *sensory temperature* (*taikan ondo*) was repeatedly conjured to intimate a varying readerly affect.²²⁵ Just as people and their personalities were frequently characterized as “warm” (*atatakai*) or “cold” (*tsumetai*), their messages, too, were similarly perceived at their fingertips.²²⁶ Meanwhile many resolutely insisted

²²⁵ Although my translation of *taikan ondo* as *sensory temperature* is problematic as *taikan ondo* actually means “corporeally felt temperature.” But because people I spoke to during my fieldwork almost always identified their fingertips through their gesture as the site of received sensation of temperature, I took liberties with the translation in order to convey the implicit meaning of *taikan* used in the context.

²²⁶ I might add here that people’s desire to characterize the writings in terms of ‘warm’ or ‘cold’ is a familiar one. When people in Japan began using fully Japanese syllabary and *kanji*-

that handwritten texts retained a writer's "body temperature" (*hitohada*) best, which invariably made handwritten texts "warmer" (*motto atatakai*) or "hotter" (*motto atsui*) than the printed or pixilated texts. Interestingly, even among the children of the digital generation whom I expected to see troubled by this the least, the allure of handwriting and handwritten text had proven to be so overwhelming that an online blog site called "handwritten blog" (*tegaki burogu*) sprang up in December 2007.

Through word of mouth among teenage and twenty-something Internet users, the website quickly caught on. According to a Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper article, as of January 2010, this website had attracted a total of 400,000 registered users and continued to solicit an average of 30,000 postings a day from its members.²²⁷ What this website offered, and many other social networking sites or blog sites did not, was an option to relinquish a more time-consuming, tedious word-processing operation in which users phonetically spell out words using a *kana*-syllabary or Roman alphabet input setting on their QWERTY keyboard and choose corresponding *kana*-syllabary and appropriate combinations of *kanji* by hitting the conversion key multiple times. Instead, the blog site enabled its members to move a mouse and a cursor just like the point of a pen. Not only

capable electronic word processors to type personal letters in the 1980s, there was much reluctance and dislike among the addressees to receive word-processed letters due to "(the) lack of directness and personal touch of a freshly written letter aimed specifically at one recipient alone... blandness and *lack of warmth* of letters written on word processors." Furthermore, the lack of time committed to the sender by resorting to write not in hand, but by word-processor testifies, or so it was understood, to the decreased amount of commitment and intimacy given to the addressee.... Typed characters do lack the impression of *tangible warmth* generated by handwriting, however bad (*emphasis mine*). Nanette Gottlieb, *Word-Processing Technology in Japan - Kanji and the Keyboard* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 137-38.

²²⁷ A special report on an online "handwritten blog" site appeared on January 3, 2010 morning edition of *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper under the title, "Nevertheless, handwritten is warm." Through the web users' word of mouth since the opening in late 2007, the website quickly gained popularity. See their website at, <http://tegaki.pipa.jp/> (last accessed on June 4, 2012).

did the computer setting give them greater flexibility and manipulation over the speed and movement of the cursor on the screen, but the website also gave them 16 different colors and six varying line thickness to choose from. In addition, if the users so wished, a graphic tablet could be connected to the computer and the attached graphic pen would reintroduce their manual dexterity and art of writing and drawing to their posting. This surprising, albeit not completely counterintuitive, throwback to a highly “analog” adaptation of a digital medium was explained by the company CEO in a newspaper interview: “Handwriting communicates the emotion better, even in the Internet.” The same newspaper article hastened to add that a conspicuous idiosyncrasy born by the writer’s “brush movement” (*fude zukai*) conveyed the writer’s “honest feelings” (*sunao na kimochi*) far more eloquently than other artificially generated text. Although a digital medium did disrupt a traditional hand-eye coordination and physical relation, the digital writing process itself appeared to have sustained a similar hermeneutic impetus for the poetics surrounding handwritten texts.

However curiously the scale of textual temperature is defined, there is an unmistakable correspondence between the spatiotemporal distance among the writing body, the medium of inscription, the process of writing and the perceived temperature of the text. In a nutshell, the more corporeally demanding and physically identified the process of writing, the warmer the subsequently produced texts appear to be. For instance, handwritten notes in pen and pencil are consistently regarded warmer than copies of digitally (re)produced documents. It follows then that the warmer the text, the more emotionally affective and inspiring the reading experience. At the same time, where emotion is not customarily required, such as in official documents and administrative

memos, non-handwritten texts are spared what is usually a disparaging quality of being “cold” (*tsumetai*). On those occasions, standardized hands are not only preferred, but recommended as they are seen to achieve the level of efficiency expected of a rationalized institution. I say the scale is curiously defined because the affectivity is often discussed only in relative terms: the more primitive the process and technique of writing, the warmer the temperature invested in the text. Clearly, the perceived temperature corresponds to the presumed distance between the writer’s body and the text: the closer the distance, the warmer the text’s temperature. It is as if the spatiotemporal proximity between the textual production and reception somehow lends itself to better retain the “bodily temperature” of a writer. However, the desirability of certain types of text also reflects readers’ resistance to standardized hands, not to mention their partiality to the idiosyncrasy of each hand. While it may be antithetical, if not purely oxymoronic, to discuss digital texts using a phrase such as sensory temperature as they are by definition void of materiality and elude tangibility, as far as my informants are concerned, it was nearly impossible not to fall back on the hermeneutic language when describing different readerly experiences of digital texts.

It would be a shortsighted observation if I were to suggest that people are merely recycling a hackneyed expression, because the language of sensory temperature does more than generate a palpable relation to digital text. It inadvertently exposes the paradox and peculiar corporeality immanent in one’s relation to the symbolic world. After all, what better than *kao-moji* figures the return of corporeality in digits? By virtue of mimesis,²²⁸ *kao-moji* compels a recipient to “mistake” the image generated by the

²²⁸Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

assembled scripts for a writer's face. It conjures up, however forcibly and figuratively, a bodily presence of the writer via the decorporealized digital text. In other words, the confusion is visually brought to bear at the interstice between the image simulated via the *ASCII* art and the recipient's willingness to "see" the sender's face. By dictating that the recipient recognizes the sender's face in *kao-moji*, the pixilated scripts insist on becoming more than phonetic scripts or symbols. Consequently, the sum of assembled scripts exceeds the intended readerly affect by transcending into an iconic image, or even better, a digital incarnation of the sender.

It goes without saying that the tendency to anthropomorphize the scripts has a long history. The bodily disciplining required by a respective model of penmanship makes it difficult to ignore the corporeal implication in the text, despite the administrative dictates since the late nineteenth century to standardize the bureaucratic hand.²²⁹ But even with the unmistakable de-corporealization by the digital communication media, the desire to see the scripts as having been endowed with recognizable human attributes is evident as early (or as late, depending on how one might read it) as 1998 when the first mobile text-message service known as *P-mail* was launched by DDI Pocket in Japan.

Until circa 2000, a smartphone was not a common household item. In the late 1990s, high school students, whose *keitai* use in the early 2000s generated much of the current anxieties about sordid digital criminality and the national-cultural futurity of Japan, were only beginning to make the definitive switch from an inexpensive beeper to a Personal Handyphone System (PHS). Although PHS offered very limited coverage and fewer functions, the financial advantages, such as a low initial sign-up fee and an

²²⁹ Jeffrey Masten, et al., *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production*, Essays From the English Institute (New York: Routledge, 1997). John Guillory, "The Memo and Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004): 108-32.

affordable monthly plan, outweighed its disadvantage in the eyes of many schoolchildren with modest monthly allowances. According to Hayamizu Kenrou, a freelance writer and editor, a market shift from PHS to *keitai* in the last few years of the 1990s and subsequent market competition in the 2000s are highly suggestive of the formation of Internet-capable *keitai* culture and an increasingly aggressive business strategy that targets teenage consumers today.²³⁰

“Automatic”

"It's automatic.

When I log in on a *computer screen*,

[there] appear flickering scripts.

[When] I place my hand on the screen,

I feel so warm.”²³¹

²³⁰ Kenro Hayamizu, *Keitai shousetsu-teki (Keitai-Novel-Esque)* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 2008), 36-43.

²³¹ Utada Hikaru was one of the most successful *kikoku-shijyo* (returnee) J-pop singers whose lyric is composed distinctively of accessible Japlish (Japanese + English). The portion of the above-translated lyric in Japanese reads like this, “It’s automatic, アクセスしてみると 映る computer screen の中 チカチカしてる文字 手をあててみると I feel so warm.” A close look at the lyrics of chart-topping popular songs can be surprisingly revealing about the fantasies and desires that capture the audience to which the music appeals. Especially, if one were to pay special attention to the choice of communication medium, one learns a great deal about assumed mode of media sensitivity and relational temporality of depicted in the songs. Though the factual accuracy of each case cannot be argued from a song, that would be a grave induction, but based on the fact that the song wins certain popularity, we might conjecture that the popularity has to do with how well it speaks to the audience’s experiences and senses. An instant popularity earned by the 1998 hit song “Automatic” is not a mere coincidence. To draw an interestingly comparison, approximately ten years before in the pre-*keitai* era of 1989, the biggest hit was a song titled, “Diamond” by all-girls band, *Princess Princess*. They describe a moment of falling in love as analogous to “setting a [LP] needle down” and go on to sing “I want to see the scenery/view that cannot be [made] known [to me] through a *cathode-ray tube*.” The song is generally thought to reminisce about innocence and fun memories of bygone days associated with the decline of the LP while comparing those moments to a sparkling diamond. A reference to a LP needle is, of course, also to invoke the use of diamond for a needle. Prior to the introduction of a liquid crystal display television, a cathode-ray tube, or a Braun tube - named after the German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun who invented the tube - was widely used as a de facto synonymous with TV. The use of ‘Braun tube’ is hardly ever used in circa 2007 Japan, where TV is often referred to by the name of “liquid crystal display” or “organic light-emitting diode (LED).” To those who grew up using “Braun tube,” the terms still is recalled with certain sentimentalism.

Therefore, when Utada Hikaru released her first single, “Automatic,” in late 1998, *keitai* and text message culture at large were still in their nascent stage. With signature Japanese-English lyrics and a catchy tune, Utada sold millions of copies in recording breaking time. As the public quickly learned the details of her family background, she became an instant national sensation.²³² Many knew the melody and could sing along with the memorable refrain, “*It’s automatic.*” Written by then 15-year-old Utada, the song celebrated a saccharine young romance that exemplified the instantaneous connectivity and emotional synchronicity achieved by a continuous flow of telephone conversation and email messages. In retrospect, Utada was arguably a harbinger of a digital generation J-pop singer.²³³ Her famous refrain, “*It’s automatic ... [when] I place my hand on the screen, I feel so warm,*” encapsulated the generation’s emerging sociality and media receptivity, and her music was met with a sympathetic audience whose daily interface with the latest digital gadgets resonated with the textual experience hailed by the song. In sum, the audience was both cognizant of the source of warmth and sufficiently responsive to the suggestion that the warmth could be felt at all. And, for them, the warmth of the flickering scripts was intuitively translatable to the warmth of the sender’s body. Interestingly, the sender is only perceptible through various forms of communicational signals, whether telephone ringers or digital texts.

What interests me about Utada’s song is the nature of this strange confusion between digital bodies and corporeal bodies. If it is indeed the message that makes the girl feel warm inside, why does she feel compelled to reach out and touch the pixilated

²³² Utada’s father is a music producer, and her mother a famous 1970s *enka* singer.

²³³ She was also famously the first pop singer in Japan to pen a daily blog on her official website in 1999.

scripts of all things? How can an inorganic computer screen tempt her to place her hand over it? Even more strangely, whatever the impulses that inspire her to make this intimate gesture, she is definitely soothed by the warmth she feels. What exactly does she think she is feeling? The conundrum concerning the warmth of digits actually begs the question of equal importance, the question of *automaticity* highlighted through the refrain. What does she mean, “*It’s automatic*”? What is automatic? Given the (almost impulsive) nature of the girl’s media reciprocation depicted in the song, I suspect that the automaticity referred to is a kind of automatic response that is deemed involuntary, spontaneous, and nearly mechanical to the stimuli and response. It is as if the automaticity of digital connection, transmission, reception and algorithmic conversion inside the communication media device seeps through the young lovers’ relationship and dictates their automatic attraction to each other. No sooner are the digital signals converted into pleasant beeping sounds, colorful flickering lights, and vibrating sensations, than the communication signals are technologically, physically, and emotionally registered within them. Coupled with a pubescent yearning for love, which in and of itself is a phase similar to a biological device waiting for an activation switch to come on, the level of receptivity to further signals is intensified. The fruition of their romance is inevitable through a multiplier effect of mutual media reciprocity. I am left to wonder, then: if such automaticity is indeed the secret ingredient of a telepathic communication, what roles do the telephone and the computer have left to play in their romance? Does not a telepathic communication eradicate the need for any mediation or symbolic intervention, rendering it the most direct, uncorrupted and desirable form of communication? At which point in time and space does the automatic impetus dissipate? Does the logic of automaticity at

the emotional level work analogously to the logic of signal-to-response ratio inherent to a digital medium? Is there a line that separates man and machine?

Here, I am reminded of Kittler's proposition that the changes in the recording media threshold engender new forms of media receptivity and relationships between the recorded material and people.²³⁴ I argue that the kind of romantic sensibility implicit in the metaphor of sensory temperature bespeaks the conditions of socio-technological connectivity, digital sociality, and the changing media landscape germinating already in the late 1990s, even before the advent of *i-mode*.²³⁵ In fact, it seems to foreshadow the subsequent rise of *keitai* culture and the birth of the discourse network 2000. By "discourse network 2000," I am referring to, among other things, a media receptivity that is not only informed by the material and sociohistorical conditions but also expressed through the broadening spectrum of cultural metaphors. If people were susceptible to feeling the warmth of "flickering scripts" in 1998, how much of a stretch would it be to see a friend's face in *kao-moji* in 2007? Could not the pre-*keitai*-era cultural threshold have been already ripe for a reconfiguration then? The observations and comments made by writers such as Hayamizu regarding the sociocultural implications of a proliferating digital network since the late 1990s are illuminating on this point.²³⁶ Not only are phrases like "*It's automatic*" and "*I feel warm*" consistent with the architectural characteristics of

²³⁴ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Writing Science (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²³⁵ As explained in chapter three, *i-mode* is Japan's first smartphone by NTT DoCoMo. "I" of the "*i-mode*" comes from the first initial of English word, Internet.

²³⁶ Mizuko Ito, et al., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); *Gendai Seikatsu: Denshi shakai no tanjyou* (*Contemporary Life - the Birth of Electronic Society*) (Tokyo: Shoubun sha, 1998); Toru Takeda, *Naze wakamono wa "tsunagari" tagarunoka: keitai sedai no yukue* (*Why Does the Youth Want to be 'Connected'? : Where the Keitai Generation is Headed*) (Tokyo: PHP Publisher, 2002).

the media technologies, but they are also indicative of people's awareness about their psychosomatic engagement with the very medium through which they construct their time and space. What I find most intriguing is the underlying awkwardness of what appears to be an unusually sensuous language used to represent the digital world, which is symptomatic of the paradox I briefly point to above.

Digital Mimesis

We have now gone from the question of automaticity couched within the discourse of rationalization and the dehumanizing process of standardization where human is inescapably pitted against the machine, to a slightly nuanced question of automaticity. Try as they might, people's insistence that they apprehend bodily presence in digital texts invariably arouses unease within themselves. When pressed to elaborate, people often hesitantly concede their logical inconsistencies while steadfastly defending their intuitive prehension toward the digital text. Like Yōichirō who uncomfortably admits to having an emotional reaction to *kao-moji*-less text messages, an uncharacteristic response he is not proud to reiterate, many people find themselves wanting to "feel" something in their electronic messages. All this happens, and this is crucial, *despite* themselves. The logic is not the only thing that exceeds itself. According to this scheme of thing, the medium—*keitai*, has apparently surpassed its capacity too.

If *kao-moji* and the flickering digital glyphs are the digital incarnation of those who transmit signals, what is the role of *keitai* as a medium? No longer operating on the premise of difference, is *keitai* suddenly functioning on the assumption of identity?²³⁷ Are we to understand that *keitai* has somehow transcended its material limitation and

²³⁷ The idea of "identity" I refer to here is inspired by reading Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 2001).

become transparent? Is the sensory experience a sign of a new real in the virtual world? What, then, becomes of a world, as we know it, the one pregnant with infinite possibilities of tremendous play and phantasmagoria? How can people be made equal to digital texts? When all is said and done, *keitai* is still a tool that cannot yet realize the Saussurian vision of two talking heads silently engaging in a continuous loop of mediation.²³⁸ A proposition to occupy the world without a symbolic intervention remains well beyond our reach, and regardless of the veracity of one's textual experience, a digital incarnation is still a digitally rendered simulation, an iconic figure separated from and manipulated by the body located in the matrix of the real (material) world. For now, the confusion I speak of is confined to an instance of a conversion, whether the conversion materializes during the actual transmission of digital signals on fiber optics or registers metaphorically in the language of a resurrection of inanimate scripts to an animated entity.²³⁹ Since the skeletal glyphs in both scenarios begin to take on a life of their own, I seem to be entering into a realm of necromancy and fetishism.²⁴⁰ Apropos the theme of magic, the reservation with which people admit to the disparity between their prehension and symbolic reality seems to point toward the hidden forces that deliver an otherwise inconceivable or irreconcilable reality.

²³⁸ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

²³⁹ Questions concerning what "animates" scripts and text are explored more fully in the next chapter, however I would be remiss if I did not differentiate respective "sources" of animation examined in this chapter and the next. In this chapter, on the one hand, the source of animation is discussed in terms of willing recipients' ocular projection and emotional identification (conflation). On the other hand, the fact that these digital scripts are transmitted through electronic devices makes it indisputable that electric currents are responsible for the actual digital animation of *kao-moji* and *e-moji* on the screen.

²⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

Taking a cue from Walter Benjamin's proposition that the mimetic faculty changes with historical development and rests on the faculty of recognition,²⁴¹ I want to address the questions of paradox and excess as they coalesce around the notion of magic and mimicry.²⁴² Although Benjamin may have been apprehensive about the liquidation of magic upon the formation of language, which he characterizes as "the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of non-sensuous similarity," the sensuous confusion of *kao-moji* and digital glyphs suggests that there is something magical about them. Although *kao-moji* can never be subsumed under a theory of magic or fetish, the confusion concerning *kao-moji*, in which people mistake the relationship with digital scripts for the intimacy they share with one another appears akin to the logic of fetish. But I am as skeptical of reducing it to a variation of fetishism as much as I am hesitant about engaging in a superficial reading of earlier anthropological texts. I doubt that such theoretical segues alone provide a sufficient language or appropriate framework for the inquiry at hand. What *kao-moji* has made me return to instead is a question of glyph and script.

As I reread Benjamin's thesis on mimetic faculty and language, I have come to think that a modified approach to the theories of magic and Saussurian concept of sign, as certain assumptions about both supplement each other, might after all offer a fresh perspective fit to address sociohistorical specificity of *kao-moji* and other digital scripts after all. To begin with, there is a conspicuous lack of *a priori* properties in *kao-moji* and other problematic digital scripts that have been a source of considerable socio-cultural

²⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

²⁴² Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty."

turmoil among educationists and conservative politicians as well as a site of creative production among the Japanese youth, since their appearance in the early 2000s. Each stroke and component that constitutes *kao-moji* and other digital scripts has been picked by *keitai* users to achieve an intentional visual semblance. As such, the laborious composition process required of *kao-moji* and other so-called deformed scripts is indicative of their artificiality and arbitrariness. In other words, the very production defies a romantic notion associated with the perceived integrity of the “original” letter and sound-image Saussure has discussed.

While major *keitai* companies and lay computer users in the past few years have tried to organize the popular *kao-moji* variations according to a dozen recognizable emotions and occasions, their intention has never been to regulate the normative use by containing the pace of proliferation, but rather to make them more accessible and legible to the unaccustomed eyes. Besides, the constant addition and new edition make it virtually impossible to keep track of the evolution and to standardize the form and use of *kao-moji*. Where *kao-moji* differs from the Saussurien notion of sign, it also exploits the potential. For one thing, unencumbered by a voice of authority to dictate a trajectory of development and dissemination, *kao-moji* is not limited by any permutation possibilities. Additionally, *kao-moji* resists becoming a mnemonic possibility, committing the reading experience to an overwhelmingly visual one.²⁴³ In addition, without a prospect of deformity, *kao-moji* is in a singularly privileged position to proliferate almost infinitely. Given the potency of being prolific and unpronounceable, both beyond voice and words, *kao-moji* faintly resonates Lévi-Strauss’s postulation of a formalistic language without content, or something that lacks a self-evident corresponding signified, a prototypical one

²⁴³ *Kao-moji* is also unlike rebus as it cannot be phonetically pronounced.

being the magical word, which Lévi-Strauss referred to as the “floating signifier.”²⁴⁴ Except, *kao-moji* is not in want of a corresponding signified, but of a signifier. This is a critical distinction as it not only brings into focus the written language’s ability to proliferate and disseminate Saussure astutely alluded to, but also calls to mind the famous line from Marx’s thesis on commodity, in which he compares the transformation of labor into a social hieroglyphic. But, before delving into the complex question of glyphs, I want to review a few seminal points raised by James Siegel in his rereading of Lévi-Strauss’ text.²⁴⁵ In it, Siegel examines the instance of sorcery in Africa, and considers the linguistic as well as sociocultural ramifications of an utterance of the magic word. Of special pertinence here is Siegel’s perceptive observation of the performative power of the copula: “The “truth” of magic is the power inherent in language to conjoin.”²⁴⁶ By annihilating heterogeneity and irreconcilability, the copula magically renders discrete entities one and the same, and the unthinkable thinkable. Similarly, inorganic digital scripts take on an organic life when the inanimate writing gives way to an animation prompted by the cognition and prehension. By way of dialectical movement of seeing and not seeing, optical illusion surrounding *kao-moji* seems to conjoin the inanimate and animate, scripts and bodies, and virtual/symbolic and real.

²⁴⁴ Of relevance to this point is found on page 44-46 of James T. Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006). Siegel’s rereading is of Claude L-Strauss, “The Sorcerer and His Magic,” in *Structural Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

²⁴⁵ Siegel, *Naming the Witch*.

²⁴⁶ Siegel, *Naming the Witch*, 46.

I return to the question of glyph by way of Thomas Keenan's rereading of Marx's text on commodity, in which Keenan explores the cognitive labor of abstraction.²⁴⁷ But in so doing, I want to keep in mind Jorge Luis Borges's story "Funes, the Memorious."²⁴⁸ It is a tragic story of a man, Funes, whose exceptional capacity to remember everything affords him the rare pleasure of being able to experience everything as singular and fresh. The price he pays for this extraordinary gift, however, is his inability to overlook the slightest differences between things and events. He is unable to generalize. In other words, he lacks the power of abstraction. Without the capacity to extract essential qualities to form a general idea about anything, heterogeneity can never be overlooked and commensurability cannot be yielded. On the one hand, his inability to accept the premise of a mutual commensurability across things, the very condition that allows us to function in a highly mediated symbolic world, is what prevents him from participating in the same community. On the other hand, he is among the fortunate few who are completely unfettered by one of the most fantastic fictions men concocted, the universal currency, i.e. money. With *kao-moji*, too, there is an element of negation, oversight and confusion that renders glyphs and people commensurable and even identical. But, the identification is contingent on the mastery of mimicry and mistaken identity. Returning briefly to the logic of sympathetic magic as it was often discussed alongside the theme of mimicry, in the most straightforward sense, sympathetic magic operates on the premise of

²⁴⁷ Thomas Keenan, "The Point is to (Ex)Change it: Reading *Capital*, Rhetorically," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily S. Apter, and William Pietz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁴⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes, the Memorious," in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates (New York: New Directions, 2007).

mimicry where “like acts upon like, induces like and cures like.”²⁴⁹ Or, as the famous Sir James Frazer explains, “The most familiar application of the principle that like produces like is the attempt which has been made by many people in many ages to injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him, in the belief that, just as the image suffers, so does the man, and that when it perishes he must die.”²⁵⁰ Obviously, *kao-moji* does not replicate the same thrust of magical power as does sympathetic magic. None of the *kao-moji*, at least so far, are intended to inflict pain or suffering upon the recipient. But like sympathetic magic, the objects are animated and identities are willfully mistaken. According to Marcel Mauss, magic cannot thrive on abstraction, but pivots specifically on “the confusion between actor, rite and object.”²⁵¹ The source of animation for *kao-moji* obviously does not lie in magic, per se. *Kao-moji* are electronically animated. But is that the only source of animation? As I have pointed out earlier, there is a great confusion intended in the use of *kao-moji*, in particular between the sender, transmission/reception and glyphs. Seeing that this confusion is what is unequivocally translated into the popular metaphor of sensory temperature, the warmth is what animates the glyphs, and turns them into something more than avatars, pixilated representations.

Optical Dialectic, *Affects*, and Bodies

If reading and writing is an acquired skill, then I must be able to extend this notion and entertain that the willful optical confusion involving *kao-moji*, too, is a culturally nuanced habituated perspective. Since the potential for *kao-moji* to morph lies

²⁴⁹ Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (London, Boston,: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972), 84.

²⁵⁰ James George Frazer, “Chapter Three: Sympathetic Magic,” in *The Golden Bough* (Sioux Falls: NuVision Publications, LLC, 2006).

²⁵¹ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 92, 148.

in the reverberations created by the optic oscillation between text/glyph and the (after)image of someone's face, there must have been a perspective that was susceptible or even accommodating to the new form of digital reading/writing and *keitai* literary sensibility. In considering such a sensibility, Henry Smith's analysis of the relation between text and image in the nineteenth-century Japanese popular novel strikes me as particularly suggestive. According to Smith, readers of the popular novels were prescribed by the composition of text and image to follow an unambiguously marked optic pathway, which was not simply bidirectional (from right to left) but multidirectional. The effect of this optical movement was such that I might describe it as optical dialectic. Accompanying pictures for the popular novel were, in principle, intended to be read from right to left, but the sections of text were "carefully indicated by two separate codes, one of matching symbols and the other of Chinese numerals,"²⁵² so that the readers' eyes literally moved from one section to another, crisscrossing images and texts on the two-page spread. Smith aptly calls this "viewing/reading" since it requires readers' guided engagement to be not unlike the viewing of a still-life painting.

Perhaps it is no accident that, despite the changes in the practice of reading and writing that subsequently contributed to the formation of the modern reading subjects in early twentieth-century Japan, some residual forces of reading habit characterized by a dynamic interplay of text and image remain today in something as remote as *manga* reading practice. Whether the subject of inquiry revolves around reading a nineteenth-century popular novel or *manga*, the crucial interface experience that defines the practice seems to be the optic dialectic. Although in theory the optic dialectic occurs on a

²⁵² Henry D. Smith, "Pictured Fiction: Popular Novels of Nineteenth-Century Japan in the Starr East Asian Library," *Columbia Library Columns* 45:1 (1996), 8.

constructed field of vision where resonance between text/glyph and image can proliferate to infinity, in practice it rarely reaches such potential because of physical constraints imposed by predominantly two-dimensional book forms. But now that text/glyph can be electronically animated and however figuratively, endowed with warmth, could there be something more? After all, the experience of the on-the-go *keitai* interface has greatly recalibrated users' understanding of one's physical orientation and temporal relation to the world. To borrow Brian Massumi's word, contemporary *keitai* users are occupying a point of emergence where "expectation and suspense, body depth and epidermis, past and future, action and reaction, happiness and sadness, quiescence and arousal, passivity and activity" continuously converge and coexist.²⁵³ And insofar as the optic dialectic is experienced and communicated through unusual metaphors of sensuous embodiment, *keitai* users are embracing *affects*, which are defined by Massumi as "virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them."²⁵⁴ It is *keitai* user's openness to living in a multitemporal and multidimensional world that permits the optic dialectic to achieve a previously frustrated potential while preventing an ontological crisis from taking over the reading/writing subject.

My observation of *kao-moji* initially led me to wonder if *kao-moji* were compensating for the absence of the sender's body in the text message. But, seeing the extent of attention *keitai* users paid to choosing the right *kao-moji* at the right time, I soon realized that emphasis was on the presence of the body, not the absence. *Kao-moji* served

²⁵³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 33.

²⁵⁴ Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 35.

to flesh out the two-dimensional image. Unlike the identification of bodily presence people once extended to various handwritings, *keitai* users were making a distinct corporeal connection with digital texts. More than once, I witnessed an individual's exasperation because the presence of wrong *kao-moji* literally *dislocated* (*kuruwasu*) the recipient's emotion and disturbed the cadence. Just as each one of us rides a bike with a particular cadence, *kao-moji* too apparently carries a corporealized rhythm. And it is subject to disruption and dislocation. Ideally, the identification with *kao-moji* is so complete, and synchronization of the body so perfect, that *kao-moji* embodies thought and action without delay, altogether dispensing the need for (audible) verbal command. *Kao-moji* may have successfully bypassed the verbal mediation portion by refusing to be read, but it still arrives with a playful chime and coos on *keitai*. It smiles, winks and twirls without a hint of threat by a demonic force that animates the scripts. There is no pretense of possession or spirit medium in the digital scripts, at least not in the same sense as the occult phenomena, like an Ouija board. In fact, animated digital texts are welcomed and enjoyed as if people have always wanted the scripts to smile, dance and sing the songs of endearment and concern at their fingertips.

Letters were once "set in stone" and "inscribed" so as to ensure no further fluidity and movement. As I invoke the notion of magic in the virtual world to consider the advent of animated scripts, I wonder what kind of "body" can emerge in the discourse network 2000. The tone and style of language adopted in blog writing as well as *keitai* novel writing is, strictly speaking, neither orthographically correct written Japanese nor spoken Japanese. While the discussion on "youth abandoning the script/letter" continues to simmer around those who sympathize with conservative nationalists, no call has been

made (thankfully) to reawaken the aesthetics of Classical Chinese once considered the epitome of cultural sophistication. While one is hard-pressed to argue against the fact that *kao-moji* still operate on the symbolic level, insofar as *kao-moji* corporeality reintroduces motion to the static glyphs, it destabilizes the ideological status quo of writings. The unease is partly a knee-jerk reaction to a presumed takeover by the machine; we just might forget who animates what and who simulates whom. The science fiction genre is full of themes of deviously conceived life and the unnatural evolution of entities from inorganic to organic.²⁵⁵ Take for example, *Tron*, *eXistance*, *Neuromancer*, and most recently, *Avatar*: they all thematize a parallel between static organic life and an active inorganic life, where the “real” bodies are defenselessly plugged in and tied down somewhere by strands of sticky cable. If *kao-moji* is not the same fantastic organic body, then what kind of body is the glyphic body? In my reading, the recent hyperbole against the “(youth) abandoning script/letter” bespeaks the anxiety of improper/inappropriate mediation between the body and machine. *Kao-moji* is another example of improper writings as discussed in chapter three. What might be utterly indecipherable and improper to the unaccustomed eyes is an instantiation of self-embodiment in the digital world.

I began this chapter by problematizing *kanji no yure*, and I now end it with a troubled body, which in many ways amounts to the same thing since *kanji no yure*, too, was also a question of formal indeterminacy. Incidentally, the discussion in this chapter is also concerned with the question of voice, especially on the point of pronounce-ability of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*. For the reason that, in scholarly discussions, the primacy of voice is often compared to the immediacy of the utterance, a raw expression of the

²⁵⁵ Of course, occult genre precedes science fiction, such as E.T.A. Hoffman’s tale of “*Sandman*” and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to name just a few.

interior *par excellence*, I wanted to entertain the possibility of unpronounceable *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*. Both listening to and watching my informants grow increasingly frustrated with trying to orally describe *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*, I learned that these deformed writings resisted being pronounced. In so doing, they seemed to have neutralized the primacy of the voice. Or at least, I have been persuaded to look for a way to engage writing bodies that may or may not accompany an audible “voice,” which again, may or may not precede the point of utterance. Although an analogy drawn between the interiority and the text (which, in this context, is a secondary product of an oral utterance) has a powerful hold on everyday discourse, as I hope that the discussion of “Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind” in the previous chapter has amply shown, the un-pronounceability of *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* also manages to dislocate this correspondence by calling attention to the fact that when it comes to these digital writings, it is not the content, but the forms of the letters that upset the “analog” generation. Indeed, it seems that it is a formal body of *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*-syllabry that really matter. In the next chapter, I will examine the corporeal dimensions of reading and writing practices through calligraphy art and the bodies of calligraphy practitioners.

Chapter Five: Breath and Strokes

Animated Reading and Writing Practices

It was an unusually wintry Sunday for late April; Master Sakuta arrived promptly at 12:25 p.m., five minutes before the monthly class at a community center near Shinagawa. As the chief director of *Iroha shodōkai* (*Iroha* Calligraphy Association) in his native city of Osaka and a founder of *Rhythmic Sho* (*rizumikku sho*) style,²⁵⁶ Master Sakuta traveled to Tokyo each month to teach a class composed of two-dozen practitioners of all levels (from beginner to certified master). During each session that usually lasted for three or four hours, he never lost sight of good humor and his instructions were always both precise and insightful. Committed to practicing what he preached, he remained steadfast in showing how *Rhythmic Sho* was done for the benefit of his pupils. Most importantly, Master Sakuta did so with generous use of onomatopoeia that crucially supplemented his teaching of *Rhythmic Sho*. To illustrate how he utilized the affective registers of onomatopoeia in demonstrating brush movement, posture, and breathing, below I will share three exemplary moments I observed on that Sunday afternoon.

²⁵⁶ Unlike other schools of calligraphy that are arguably more concerned with formal aesthetics of letters and less artistically “adventurous,” Master Sakuta’s *Rhythmic Sho* emphasized practitioner’s rhythmic movement of the brush. I will elaborate on his philosophy of calligraphy in the following pages. I would also like to note that regrettably, Master Sakuta passed away on August 17th, 2010 due to a sudden onset of a stomach cancer. His last gallery show was posthumously held from September 9th to 11th, 2010 in Amagasaki city.

First example is taken from the time when Master Sakuta was mentoring one of the older female pupils who herself was an accomplished calligraphy master. Scanning through a several of her compositions, Master Sakuta teased her “not to growl” (*guūutte unaranai*) so much, but instead “(to) try to render the depth of emotion more poetically” (*jyōkan wo motto poethikku ni*) in her brush movement. With an exaggerated slow execution, he applied the first stroke, and reminded her to “take (her) time” (*jiikkuri*), too. Moving his body in unison with his brush as if to dance, he told her to “smoothly” (*suūūutto*) follow the tip of the brush all the way, and to “remain patient and relaxed” (*gaman shite yuūūttari shite*) through and through. Finally, calling attention to the texture of the ink, he declared that her letters were too “dry” (*pasa pasa*), which unfortunately caused the entire piece to become “rough and raspy” (*gasa gasa*). Second case involved a young university student who had been struggling to complete a piece that was as big as three feet wide and two feet tall. Standing side by side with him, Master Sakuta examined several of his compositions affixed on the wall. Right away, he noted that the young pupil had “rushed” (*daāāāatto*) into finishing the piece far too nervously and insecurely. Upon further perusal, he spotted “light circular motions” (*kuru kuru kuru kuru*) and approved a striking contrast his brush movement was making between the circular motions (*kuru kuru*) and “snapping” (*pashi, pashittoshita*) straight lines. At this point, he dipped his own brush in a bucketful of ink, which he sometimes substituted for an ink stone especially when working on a large piece of composition, and paused in order to gather himself for a demonstration. Standing at the bottom of a blank sheet of large *washi* paper²⁵⁷ prepared by the other pupils, he applied his brush first in light circular motions,

²⁵⁷ A kind of *washi* paper customarily used for calligraphy is made from paper mulberry, and is about inch bigger on height as well as width than regular A4 (letter) size paper used in the

and next in more dynamic, sharp angled motions in order to review not only the process of creating the contrast, but also the effect of the contrast he just commended. Returning once again to the pupil's work however, Master Sakuta pointed rather disapprovingly to another section and chided him for having applied too "heavy a swirling" (*guru guru guru guru*) motion. In the end, Master Sakuta stressed that "dragging (the brush) on end" (*zuzuzuzu zuzuzuūūūtto*) is tantamount to a "self-contained movement" (*jiko undō*), which should be avoided at all cost. The third and last instance was prompted by a few practice pieces composed by one of his newly inducted pupils. Sitting across from her at a large wooden table, Master Sakuta laid her work one by one to look for any noticeable patterns and kinks to her brush movement. Then, taking a moment to place a blank sheet of *washi* paper in front of him, he proceeded to demonstrate while directing her attention to his posture. As he applied brush strokes, he warned her "not to raise (the tip of the brush) too abruptly" (*pitto tomenai*), and to "take plenty of time" (*yuūūūkkuri yoyū wo motte*) moving across the surface of the *washi* paper. Upon giving this instruction, Master Sakuta produced both desirable and undesirable brush movements in order to illustrate his point. Eventually, he rose to stand on a bended knee to show that not only did he now have much better maneuverability of the upper body, but also his perspective was advantageously higher and wider, allowing him to "write" better. Urging her to be always mindful of the posture, he stressed the usefulness of "sitting upright with her knee up" (*sukutto katahiza tatete*) and warned her not to "falter" (*furafura*).

office. Depending on the practitioners' level, purpose and budget, they can choose from an array of different qualities and makes of *washi* paper available at calligraphy specialty stores. Generally speaking, a box of one kilogram of midlevel "practice" *washi* paper costs somewhere between 3,000yen and 5,000yen (approximately between 30 and 50 US dollar). Additionally, *washi* paper comes in different sizes and varieties for equally as many purposes and occasions. Some are as thin as tissue paper, while others bear elaborate embellishments and designs, such as small gold leaves, on their paper surface.

The words and phrases in quotation marks above, which are accompanied with italicized Japanese words in parentheses, are my English translation of Japanese onomatopoeia and onomatopoeic use of adverbial phrases Master Sakuta employed in his instruction. Of particular interests to the discussion is such onomatopoeia as *pasa pasa* and *gasa gasa*. *Pasa pasa*, which is translated here as “dry,” is a common onomatopoeia primarily used to describe dry, brittle, bland, and stale texture and flavors. For instance, chapped hands and lips are frequently portrayed as *pasa pasa*, and overstored bread can taste *pasa pasa*. Whereas its voiced version, *gasa gasa*, translated above as “rough and raspy,” is meant to convey a quality of actions and objects that are more coarse, vulgar, and noisy. The notable difference between unvoiced and voiced onomatopoeia in this case is the level of severity it is meant to communicate. Chapped hands and lips can hence become *gasa gasa*, if the lack of moisture and the abrasion caused by the dryness are more severe. Also, if someone were frantically ransacking a closet, the noise would be described as *gasa gasa*. Similarly, *kuru kuru kuru kuru* and *guru guru guru guru* also operate on visual and auditory sensation. While *kuru kuru kuru kuru* carries a connotation of circular action and swirling objects that may be characterized as lightweight, slight, graceful and playful, its voiced version *guru guru guru guru* gives the impression of movements and things being heavier, loftier, more dense and more forceful. Other onomatopoeic phrases Master Sakuta liberally used, such as “slowly and patiently” (*jīkkuri*), “smoothly” (*suūūtto*), “rushed” (*daāāātto*), and “dragging on end” (*zuzuzuzu zuzuzuūūtto*), are in fact adverbial phrases whose vowel sounds have been purposefully elongated to simulate sounds and caricature actions and ensuing sensation.

What is not immediately apparent to the outsider is Master Sakuta's impulse to appeal to so many different kinds of onomatopoeia in his teaching. Granted that Master Sakuta, being loyal to his native Osaka dialect, its "quintessential" manner of speech, and his penchant for harmless bantering,²⁵⁸ did make extensive use of onomatopoeia even in his everyday conversation. The decision to enunciate certain onomatopoeia in conjunction with deliberate execution of brush movement and other bodily expressions was to demonstrate *Rhythmic Sho*. All of these heterogeneous elements of expression were necessary for him to embody the rhythm of calligraphic movement, which was in fact greatly regulated by his breath. As elongated vowel sounds in the adverbial phrases—"slowly and patiently" (*jīkkuri*), "smoothly" (*suūūūtto*), "rushed" (*daāāāātto*), and "dragging on end" (*zuzuzuzu zuzuzuūūūtto*)—show that the time it takes to enunciate each phrase is exactly how long it should or should not take for his pupils to complete their strokes. That is to say, by deliberately drawing out vowel sounds, Master Sakuta tried to create a desirable temporal length that would allow the brush to move spatially. This exhibits a movement across the material (body, air, *washi* paper, etc) that affects a movement across registers. For the pupils who listened to Master Sakuta, an audio register was thus transcribed into a visual register of the brush stroke. Importantly, none of the acts of "translation" (Master Sakuta's instruction to his pupils' execution, audio registry to visual registry, etc.) are remotely possible if the breathing was not in sync.

Therefore it should not come as a surprise that, in the conversation I heard during

²⁵⁸ Although this is an interesting "politico-cultural" phenomenon, I will not go into detail here. It suffices to say that Osaka is sometimes compared to Chicago since it is home to Japan's major comedy/entertainment enterprise, *Yosimoto* Entertainment (*Yoshimoto kōgyō*) just like Chicago is to *The Second City*. Due to the success of *Yoshimoto* Entertainment in Osaka and Tokyo, quite a few number of popular comedians, actors/actresses, and entertainers daily appear on national TV broadcast network, which seems to have positively reinforced a connection between Osaka dialect and its comedic speech effect.

regular practice session and outside the class, I kept encountering a consistent reference to a metaphor that characterized writing as something *animated* by breath. While the source of animation was almost always identified figuratively in connection with the writers as well as readers' attuned perception, the breath was discussed literally as a part of the necessary technique and figuratively as perceptible traces of bodily energy. The calligraphy practitioners insisted that the animation is as intensely palpable to those who are properly trained and therefore receptive to the effect as the breath is legible to those with appropriate reading threshold.²⁵⁹ Right away, the proximity to and immediacy of body implicit in their use of breath brought to my mind Derrida's seminal criticism on phonocentrism. But, in this case, what the practitioners are most concerned about are their brush strokes; the brush strokes are faithful imprints of a continuous flow of their brush movement, and a true reflection of their bodily movement. As far as these disciplined calligraphy practitioners are concerned, their breath dictates their bodily movement. Thus, brush strokes amount to traces of pneumatically channeled energy that course through their body. To them, their bodies are part and parcel of a medium called brush, and it is up to them to find the brush that is suitable for their size, strength, and touch. Through practices, they learn to listen to the brush. And—this is the most contradictory and intriguing part—once the practitioners learn to let the brush take the lead, they will finally be able to write. All of this happens, they insist, only if they know how to breathe.

²⁵⁹ The importance of acquiring and exercising proper breathing technique I discuss in relation to Master Sakuta's *Rhythmic Sho* is hardly a foreign concept among people who practice calligraphy. In fact, in my own past experiences of studying under several different masters, learning to breathe has always been an integral part of bodily disciplining. *Rhythmic Sho* is interesting because its style not only makes an explicit connection between breath and rhythm through onomatopoeia, but also places key emphasis on embodying the affective register of onomatopoeia.

Before jumping into the discussion of the practitioner's breath and calligraphic body, I must explain my approach to this peculiar perceptual and corporeal bias. I have decided to refrain from retracing and revisiting previous epistemological debates that define Japanese *kana* syllabaries and *kanji* as either something akin to a primordial site of "Japanese-ness" and "Japanese culture" or problems of disciplinary difference and issues of linguistics.²⁶⁰ The former is particularly problematic, since its scope of investigation is often too aestheticized and therefore ahistorical, lumping heterogeneity under a convenient trope of ostensible homogeneity of Japanese culture. Although I am skeptical of any conjecturing that somehow espouses an innate Japanese predisposition or a notion of a "Japanese" visual proprioception, I am sympathetic to the idea that a combination of sociocultural and technological conditions specific to Japanese context, primarily the pedagogical methods sanctioned by the state, profoundly contributes to the formation of a certain perceptual bias and corporeal orientation, which I might tentatively describe as *kanji*-specific disposition.

The premise here is that anyone who undergoes an extended period of the Japanese pedagogical style of learning the Japanese language can acquire this visual sensitivity and receptivity. Ideally, after a sufficient amount of bodily disciplining, this visual sensitivity and receptivity becomes part of the individual's muscle memory. Following this hypothesis, I will argue that insofar the present inquiry to some degree relates to body as a form of media that responds to and negotiates with the sociocultural

²⁶⁰ For example, David B. Lurie, "Language, Writing, and Disciplinarity in the Critique of the "Ideographic Myth": Some Proleptical Remarks," *Language and Communication* 26 (2006): 250-69. and Marshall J. Unger, "The Very Idea. The Notion of Ideogram in China and Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 45, no. 4: Winter (1990): 391-411.

and technological milieu,²⁶¹ it should be conceived as something susceptible to training and disciplining under a structured guidance. What this means for children enrolled in Japanese schools is that much of their Japanese language learning/training in a class aptly designated as “national language,” or *kokugo*, takes place in a strict accordance with the *Government Guideline for Teaching* (*Gakushūshidōryō*) prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, or in an abbreviated form in Japanese, *Monka-shō*.²⁶² Ultimately, I will insist that we imagine our bodies as perpetually in dialogue with shifting sociocultural paradigms and in the process of *becoming attuned bodies* vis-à-vis various technological interventions. In this way, bodies are understood as “immanent to” the conditions of a surrounding environment²⁶³ and are always “*in flux*.”²⁶⁴

My primary site of investigation is a monthly calligraphy (*shodō*, 書道) class in Tokyo where I conducted participant-observation for the duration of my fieldwork. The

²⁶¹ In thinking about the relations between body and its material components and the surrounding milieu, a short article by Tim Ingold is especially helpful. Tim Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007): 1-16. Based on my understanding of this article, I see these heterogeneous elements engaged in constant negotiation with one another.

²⁶² For the latest (2011) version of the Guideline with regard to national language (*kokugo*) classes, please refer to the *Monka-shō. Government Guideline for Teaching-Strength to Live*, chapter 2, section 1 on “national language” (*kokugo*): http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/koku.htm#contentsStart (last accessed on May 15, 2013)

²⁶³ Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*, vol. 11, Posthumanities (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Especially pertinent to the discussion here is chapter 5 entitled “Animal Ensembles, Robotic Affects: Bees, Milieus, and Individuation.”

²⁶⁴ The idea of bodies “immanent to” the conditions of surrounding environment, in my opinion, bears affinity to Thomas LaMarre’s discussion on anime machine and its assemblage. I thus owe my conceptualization of “Bodies in flux” to insights of and inspirations from reading Parikka and LaMarre. Thomas LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

monthly practice under the guidance of Master Sakuta usually lasted about three to four hours depending on the number of students attending each class; most of the time, Master Sakuta was joined afterward by the practitioners for tea at a nearby café, and more often than not, for dinner at one of the train hub stations on the Yamanote Line. Not only did the monthly classes provide me with hands-on calligraphic training, but the hours of socialization that extended beyond the scheduled time and space of a classroom also enabled me to engage in many illuminating conversations with the regular followers of Master Sakuta. It was among these dedicated calligraphy practitioners²⁶⁵ I encountered the curious metaphors that characterized Japanese writing as something *animated* by the breath, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Additionally, various other insights I learned from Master Sakuta's instructions and the sustained interactions with the practitioners have inspired me to appreciate calligraphy as a highly formalized practice of everyday reading and writing. Despite the aestheticism and formalism associated with calligraphy, calligraphy is also a hobby not exclusive to a handful of the sociocultural elite. Since the Government Guideline for Teaching designates a handwriting (*shosha*, 書写) lesson not only as mandatory, but also as one of the most important components of national language class requirements, school-age-children in Japan are expected to

²⁶⁵ Some of those who studied under Master Sakuta are themselves certified calligraphy teachers who offered calligraphy lessons either at home or at various forms of local culture centers. The rest of Master Sakuta's "followers" were housewives, office workers, and university students. Unless specified otherwise by instructors, calligraphy classes run by culture centers and elsewhere are designed according to different subject matters (printed style, cursive style, *grass*-style, etc.), age-groups (children or adult), or levels of students (introductory, intermediate, advance, master-preparation, etc.). Master Sakuta's class was uniquely all-inclusive and – comprehensive, where different levels of students worked on different weekly, monthly or periodic assignments of their own designs under Master Sakuta's guidance. Students were expected to choose subject matters (kinds as well as volume of assignment) in consultation with Master Sakuta, and were encouraged to explore and expand the scope of their interests further on their own.

receive fair amount of exposure to and hands-on training in calligraphy throughout the compulsory education.

As soon as children begin first grade, they begin engaging in a daily dose of repetitive handwriting lesson. According to the Guideline, by the time schoolchildren reach third grade, they will have learned by heart approximately 240 *kanji* in addition to two sets of Japanese syllabaries (*hiragana* and *katakana*). Also, by third grade, a weekly “letter-learning” (*shūji*, 習字) class is introduced, and children learn to write according to the “proper” model of *kanji* in the textbook with a calligraphy brush and ink. Throughout the handwriting classes, the emphasis is on students’ proper bodily alignment (how far away from the desk they sit, how to hold a pencil and a brush, how to keep an upright posture while writing, etc) and mastery of the proper forms of the respective sets of Japanese syllabary and *kanji*. Equally crucial to the present inquiry is the priority given to the practice of “reading aloud” (*ondoku*, 音読) of textbooks. Whether it is through a rigorous physical alignment or correct intonation and enunciation, corporeally guided reading and writing practice is deeply embedded in a government-dictated pedagogical structure and is repeatedly strengthened, with a varying level of emphasis and success, as the national norm throughout the nine-year compulsory education in Japan. This, I suggest, becomes the foundation for the subsequent perceptual bias and corporeal orientation toward the symbolic world in the Japanese language.

While the strenuous discipline of calligraphic art clearly prescribes that practitioners learn to forget and abandon their bodies by surrendering to the rhythm of their breath that guides the brush and its strokes, habituated automaticity is very much present in everyday reading and writing practices. I am sure many of us have experienced

a fleeting moment of panic when suddenly caught mid-word, unable to remember the spelling, only to narrowly escape a momentary aphasia by resorting to reading aloud or writing from the top to retrieve a missing sequence. Whether it is with pen and paper or on a computer keyboard, there is no denying that our reading and writing are far more automatically executed than we might be willing to admit. For myself, whenever a word is misspelled, my bodily prehension seems to catch the mistake far more subtly and efficiently than my brain.

Since calligraphy has heightened the mundane automatic and transductive quality of bodily engagement to a level of artistic refinement, worthy of perfection, a significant portion of practitioners' training is dedicated to learning to pay close attention to bodily alignment, psychophysical orientation, and breathing. This ensures that their bodies will become attuned to detect any changes and will respond to innumerable subtle environmental variables, such as the humidity absorbed in the paper, thickness of the ink, pliancy of the brush, and so on, in order to ride the momentum built through intense concentration. Ideally, all of this is to be done without thinking. It is in this stipulation to "let oneself go" where the potency of automaticity or habituated reflex acquired through training becomes fully pronounced. Incidentally, this marks the height of physiological training where the boundary between body/breath and brush becomes blurred, making it possible for the practitioners to describe their writing experience as "brush guided by our breath guides us." I suggest that this sensitivity to a pneumatic rhythm makes a calligraphic body an exemplary site of investigation for *bodies in flux* in experimentally analyzing everyday reading and writing practices in Japan.

Qualifying a body as a pneumatically channeled medium may seem like an

unconventional approach. To be certain, I hardly think that anyone's body can or should be singularly approached as a pneumatically operated entity, no more than should it be described purely thermodynamically, or biologically for that matter. For the sake of convenience, which simultaneously allows me to set a theoretical parameter, I will be focusing on an aspect of body that I think merits being explored as pneumatically channeled. I hope that the decision will become clearer as I broach the question of what metaphorically animates letters, especially *kanji*. The force of animation referred to here should not be confused with machinic animation or animism, though reputable studies on the genealogical significance of *kanji* often trace back to the use of Chinese characters in ancient divination rituals in China.²⁶⁶ The kind of force I am interested in is the one activated by the culturally attuned readers and writers of Japanese, and their capacity to identify and inhabit the imprints left by breath. Again, I am following the metaphoric lead demonstraed by the calligraphic bodies whose pronounced sensitivity and bodily engagement with the symbolic world allows us to recognize a latent pictographic quality of the Japanese language, which is a product of pedagogically instilled perceptual and cognitive bias.

According to calligraphy practitioners, the pictographic and ideographic quality pedagogically linked to *kanji* gives the impression that calligraphy functions in a fashion similar to that of computer language; *kanji* appear to visually enact what they mean.

When calligraphy practitioners view and study calligraphic compositions, if the can

²⁶⁶Tetsuji Atsugi, "Chiteki seisan no bunkashi: waapuro ga motarasu sekai (Cultural History of Intellectual Production Brought on By the Word Processors)," (1991)., and Takashi Kamei, Tokihiko Oto, and Toshio Yamada, eds. *Nihongo no rekishi: gengoga-shi kenkyuu nyuumon (History of Japanese Language: Introduction to History of Linguistics (Supplementary Volume))* (Tokyo: Heibonsha Library, 2008); Shizuka Shirakawa, "Moji seisaku wa souseki no jidai wo mokuhyou to seyo (Letter Policy Must Aim the Standard of Soseki's Era)," *Bungakukai* 60:7 (2006): 122-29.

identify and inhabit the imprints left by the writer/artist's breath, *kanji* and *kana*-syllabaries are said to become *animated*. How exactly does this happen? This question lends itself to a larger sociocultural discussion of "techniques of the body"²⁶⁷ as well as segues into another important aspect of reading, involving semantic conundrums presented by homonyms in Japanese.²⁶⁸ As I briefly addressed chapter one, though it is not impossible, it would be incredibly taxing and almost unmanageable to have to figure out semantically viable clusters of sounds from an endless sequence of *hiragana* or *katakana* syllabaries without the adequate help provided by an ideographic representational capacity of *kanji*. *Kanji* are conventionally thought to assist our semantic comprehension and visual recognition. In other words, our comprehension is contingent on an acquired rhythmic punctuation guided by our breath that reads *kanji*. By identifying our bodies as pneumatically channeled media, we thus begin to see how reading, too, is thoroughly informed by a habituated pneumatic rhythm.

With that said, it is important to underscore that in my conception, calligraphic bodies are no different from the bodies of professional athletes, dedicated musicians, and practitioners of other arts. Insofar as daily training prepares the body to anticipate and respond not only to the known, but also to the lesser known and the unstable, they are equally tantamount to techniques of the body. Where I believe the present exploration of calligraphic bodies adds to the existing discourse is in its preoccupation with breath. It is no secret that, for anyone wishing to develop their craft and become masters in their own

²⁶⁷ Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, ed. Judith Farquhar, and Margaret Lock, Body, Commodity, Text (Studies of Objectifying Practice) (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁶⁸ Kyuuyou Ishikawa, *Nijyuu-gengo kokka Nihon (Double Language Nation State - Japan)*, NHK Books (Tokyo: Nihon Housou Kyoukai Publication, 2000).

right, learning proper form and elementary technique is the first step. While I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Kojin Karatani's thought-provoking analysis on the questions concerning *form (kata)*²⁶⁹ or a meditation on the loss of the archetype put forth by Junzō Karaki and Takeshi Yasuda,²⁷⁰ as aspects of their theses have undoubtedly influenced the way I formulate my questions, their theoretical interventions can benefit from ethnographic material that either substantiates or extends their claims. Just as mastering a form alone is never adequate to generate a genuine visceral and/or emotional response, the source of vitality that brings symbolic representation to life must be located through concrete examples.

Given the changes we have seen in the past couple of decades, ubiquitous wireless network connections and increasing multimediatization have redefined reading and writing practices and experiences in contemporary Japan. One might even caution that the parameters drawn by a conventional regime of two-dimensional representation are no longer fit to qualitatively assess the emerging practices. In this climate, seeing our bodies in a protean form of synchronicity and/or caught in the midst of competing tension and attentions in a surrounding milieu should not strike one as particularly far-fetched. In fact, examples of what I call bodies *in flux* are everywhere in the mundane space of the everyday, whether analogically or digitally mediated. For instance, a recent criminal lawsuit involving imprints of the abused bodies/voices, which I discuss next, reveals that even a *misassigned* corporeal presence has troubling ramifications. In theory, any traces

²⁶⁹ Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

²⁷⁰ Junzo Karaki, *Gendaishi e no kokoromi (Challenge Toward the Contemporary History)* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1963). Takeshi Yasuda, "*Kata*" *no nihon bunka (Japanese Culture as "Form")* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Newspaper Publications, 1984).

of (hand)writing may be regarded as an instance of bodies in flux. Because to study and view a calligraphic composition is essentially to read the breath that guides the stroke, calligraphic bodies epitomize the idea of bodies *in flux*. No sooner is the breath that guides the brush (and, subsequently, the practitioner's body) converted into a stroke than a quick succession of movement follows and culminates in an artistic composition. What is significant about the conversion of energy (breath) into a recognizable manifestation (stroke) is that this very process is comparable to a process of transduction. By definition transduction²⁷¹ assumes a conversion of a physical quantity into a recognizable sign. In calligraphy, traces left by the brush (strokes) are interpreted as signs of intensity and momentum gained and carried through by the practitioner's body (breath). For now, it suffices to say that while the concept of transduction has been highly instrumental in understanding how insects, such as bees, communicate—research that has had very important practical applications and tactical implications for the fields of cybernetics and the US military—it also offers surprising illumination on bodies *in flux*. Just as Master Sakuta's breath underwent a conversion to become a brush stroke, his instruction, too, stimulated a "translation" of an audio registry (onomatopoeia) to visual transcription through his pupils' brush strokes. I am calling these figurations of "translation" as transduction here as they embody a movement across different material components.

With a growing reliance on the auto-conversion function installed in our digital media and other portable communication devices, more and more *kanji* are being retrieved without bodily intervention. In the backdrop of an ostensible "de-

²⁷¹ The definition I refer to here is from the Oxford English Dictionary: "transduction" is a noun form of the verb "transduce" whose meaning is "To alter the physical nature or medium of (a signal); to convert variations in (a medium) into corresponding variations in another medium." It is not to be confused with a theory developed by Gilbert Simondon.

corporealization” of everyday reading and writing practices, I feel it both necessary and constructive to remember that different technologies and techniques require different engagement of bodies. As Thomas Lamarre astutely reminds us through his theorization of the *anime machine*, “A cultural paradigm is, in fact, a techno-cultural paradigm or more precisely, a techno-cultural field of actions potentialized by a machine.”²⁷² Our unconscious, routine reading and writing practices must therefore be considered in tandem with the technological conditions that simultaneously mediate, enable and limit us.

“Stepping On a Letter” (*Fumiji*)

In late January 2007, the online morning edition of the *Asahi Shinbun* reported a lawsuit filed in Kagoshima Prefecture under the headline: “*Man who was forced to step on a letter files a suit against an ex-assistant police inspector at Kagoshima District Public Prosecutor’s Office.*”²⁷³ The expression, “step(ping) on a letter” or *fumiji* (*fumi* “step on” + *ji* “letter”), and the quotation marks placed around it added a markedly scandalous ring to the incident as the semantic of *fumiji* closely paralleled a notorious persecutory measure, known as “step(ping) on a picture (i.e., religious icon),” or *fumie* (*fumi* “step on” + *e* “picture”), used against hidden Christians (*kakure kirishitan*) in exposing their clandestine membership in an unlawful religious group during the feudal

²⁷² See page 95 of LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*.

²⁷³ “”Fumiji” kyōyō sareta danshi ga keibuho wo kagoshima-chiken ni kokuso e (Man Who Was Forced (to) “Step on the Letter” Files a Suit Against an Ex-Assistant Police Inspector At Kagoshima District Public Prosecutor’s Office).” *Asahi shimbun newspaper*, 2007.

era in Japan.²⁷⁴ The recent event was not religious persecution in nature, but it did revolve around a case of police harassment during what was arguably “a torturous interrogation” (*gōmonteki na torishirabe*) conducted by the defendant during the 2003 investigation of a suspected violation of the Public Office Election Law. During a three-and-a-half hour interrogation in which the plaintiff, a 61year old hotel owner in the city of Shibushi, made a voluntary appearance, he not only refused to concede to accusations of bribery in connection with a Kagoshima prefectural assembly election, but also exercised the right to remain silent. This, among other things, severely stalled the investigation led by the defendant, who was hell-bent on extracting a confession and hoping to wrap up the case quickly.

According to the allegations, the coercion of *fumiji* took place soon after the defendant, who later retired from the police force, wrote down the following sentences on three separate sheets of paper: “I have not raised you to be such a [shameful] son,” “I have never agreed to my daughter’s marriage to such a man,” and, finally, “Please return to your usual honest self, grandpa.” Next to these sentences, he wrote the names of the plaintiff’s father, father-in-law, and grandchild respectively. Once theses three sheets of paper, each bearing the names and messages of the respective family member, were placed on the floor, the defendant was said to have proceeded to grab the plaintiff by the ankles and forced him to step on the letters repeatedly. Although the case against the hotel owner was subsequently dismissed due to insufficient evidence, the hotel owner took the assistant police inspector to civil court and won 600,000yen (approximately 6,000 US dollar) in compensation for the acute emotional distress for which he was

²⁷⁴ Ann M. Harrington, *Japan’s Hidden Christians* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992); John Douqill, *In Search of Japan’s Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012).

hospitalized upon release from police custody. Now, the same hotel owner was filing a criminal lawsuit on the juridical grounds of “violent humiliation perpetrated by the special government employee” (*tokubetsu kōmuin bōkō ryōgyaku*).

My initial response to reading about the police officer’s resolve to extract a confession from a man identified by the police as a “person of interest” was that of disgust. The article prejudiced me to be sympathetic toward the victim and, in return, convinced me of the police inspector’s guilt. I wondered how pervasive the use of intimidation tactics during the police interrogation might be, and how vulnerable the falsely accused must feel behind the closed doors. In short, I seemed to have readily and unconsciously bought into the semantic parallelism that the newspaper article was unequivocally making between *fumiji* and *fumie*.²⁷⁵ The rhetorical force suggested by the analogy persuaded me to think that the cleverly coined term, *fumiji*, succinctly captured the essence of injustice the victim suffered at the hands of the authorities, much the same way the persecuted *fumie* victims did. As I pored over the underlying shared logic that insisted on a sacrilege found in the act of stepping on the letters and that of religious icons, questions arose in my mind. How did the semantic affinity between *fumiji* and *fumie* appear so straightforward that reporters at Japan’s major newspapers (as well as presumably the reader, including myself) needed no more than simple quotation marks

²⁷⁵ Parenthetically I should note that a Wikipedia page on the subject of *kakure kirishitan* (hidden Christians) (<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/隠れキリシタン> last accessed on May 15, 2013) touches upon the practice of *fumie* (<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/踏み絵> last accessed on May 15, 2013). Interestingly, the page explaining a practice of *fumie* also offers a link to the *fumiji* incident under the name of *Shibushi-incident* (<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/志布志事件> last accessed on May 15, 2013), perhaps anticipating the need to redirect the viewers who accidentally open a page about *fumie* instead of that of *fumiji*?

around the word *fumiji* to be convinced of the police culpability?²⁷⁶ And what exactly was the nature of the “violent humiliation” the victim was seeking remuneration for?

When the Tokugawa Shogunate introduced *fumie* as a way of ascertaining membership to a banned religion among suspected feudal subjects in the mid-seventeenth century, carved religious icons (most popularly, pictures of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ) were employed to detect participants’ unwillingness to step on them. Surely, the logic of *fumie* presumed that the hidden Christians would be unable to step on the icons, for such an act would amount to stepping on the face of their savior. It would be blasphemy. The authority was right to count on the piety of the hidden Christians because *fumie* proved to be enormously successful in identifying them. Whether or not these persecuted Christians regarded the icons to be the incarnations of the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ in the literal sense, their reluctance to step on them at least testified to the fact that these icons were deemed sacred and were treated *as if* they were made of actual flesh and blood. One might compare this literal identification (or faithful conflation) to the pre-Reformation era’s orientation toward the Eucharist, where the bread and wine

²⁷⁶ What makes the analogy between *fumiji* and *fumie* compelling, I believe, is partly because something like “sympathetic magic” where one’s wishes come true upon being written down and offered with prayers, as in the case of *ema* (wooden votive tablets) offered at shrines and temples, is a familiar religious motif in Japan as well as elsewhere. I might even suggest that the general public probably accepted the analogy with little or no resistance because the “magical ability” to fulfill one’s written prayers/wishes was already a part of popular culture at the time of the *fumiji* incident. Between 2003 and 2006, one of the major Japanese *manga* magazines, *Weekly Shōnen Jump* ran an enormously popular *manga* series created by Tsugumi Ōba and Takeshi Obata called *Death Note*. The *Death Note* is about a high school boy whose possession a notebook dropped by Death comes into. This supernatural notebook appropriately named *Death Note* grants its holder the ability to kill anyone whose name and face s/he knows by writing down the name in the notebook while picturing his or her face. The series sold so well that not only did the *anime* series air from 2006 to 2007, but also video games were published for Nintendo DS. Additionally, the series was adapted into live-action films and released in June 2006, November 2006, and February 2008 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_Note last accessed on May 15, 2013).

were treated *as if* they were the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Much theological controversy has since focused on how substantially or symbolically this is to be interpreted. History teaches us that some of the most devout Christians managed to evade the fate of atrocity enabled by *fumie* by judiciously subscribing to a survival strategy that insisted on seeing the icons as representations not to be confused with the actual substance, whereas others perished while continuing to idolize them as materializations of the holy grace.

In light of this analogy, what sort of metaphysical debate might we have on the case of *fumiji*? If we were to follow the same vein of logic as *fumie*, we must concede or at least entertain the possibility that the *kanji* (letters) used to spell out the names somehow came to life and were treated as sacred, as if they were the actual body and blood of the plaintiff's family. It could be argued then that the forceful stepping on the letters was bound to provoke a psychological torment similar to the one triggered by *fumie*. But this is already too perplexing. After all, were they not just letters scribbled by a vexed police inspector on a few sheets of paper? While I recognize that the religious scriptures, including various forms of lucky charms, often prescribe a strict adherence to a set of handling instructions, so as not to desecrate them, I find it difficult to reconcile a logical incongruity posed by the presumed sacredness surrounding the letters used to pen the names vis-à-vis the role played by the assistant police inspector. What power beyond that of a local law enforcement officer (within a secular state, nonetheless), did he exert to make these letters *come to life*? Certainly, the hotel owner could not have mistaken the real identities of the symbolic representations. Or could he?

Something else further complicated the matter. It was the nature of the charges

against the assistant police inspector—“a violent humiliation perpetrated by the special government employee.” From the articles, the following facts were indisputable: the plaintiff’s rights were violated during “a torturous interrogation,” and the ordeal characterized by *fumiji* had left him feeling indignant and deeply traumatized. The civil court rightly recognized his suffering, and he was duly recompensed. However, the wording of the criminal charges seemed so specific, and at the same time so vague and open to interpretation, that many kinds of instances of police misconduct could be construed as providing grounds for such an accusation. Though I was intuitively convinced of the validity and emotional gravity of the charges, I remained uncertain as to what exactly contributed to the victim’s feeling of “violent humiliation.” I wondered if it was the *fumiji* itself that scarred the victim, or if it was the physical coercions that led up to *fumiji* that definitively pushed the victim over the edge.

Much of the media coverage regarding both trials highlighted, one way or another, the barbarity of the police intimidation tactics while constantly referring to the case as the “*fumiji* incident.” Even before the final verdict, the focal point of this scandalous event was being formed around the coercion of *fumiji*. Granted, my inquisitive attempt to probe the nature of the “violent humiliation” might have been spurious, but the fact that violence pertaining to *fumiji*, a case centering on nonreligious symbolic representations on a few sheets of paper, legitimately constituted a criminal case deeply intrigued me. Even if the mandate to grant a criminal hearing for this case was issued solely on the basis of the involvement of a local authority figure, in order for *fumiji* to play such a central role in the criminal case, there must be a profound sense of violation (dare I say desecration?) associated with this act.

Insofar as the general public considered the analogy (between *fumiji* and *fumie*) both sustainable and compelling, the source of affinity needed to be identified. Since the imagined sacrosanctity emerged from the act of stepping on letters and religious icons, I deduced, the parallelism lay in symbolic relation to both of them. Ever since the ethical responsibility of the (former) assistant police inspector was entered into the equation, the stakes were raised higher and compounded the issue even more. The defendant's lawyer argued that, in his zeal to be instrumental in the interrogation, the defendant inadvertently overreached. He pleaded with the judge that his client was only trying to be persuasive. In my opinion, this was precisely the problem. The (former) assistant police inspector proved himself to be exceedingly persuasive. His method was so effective that it caused the hotel owner to have a nervous breakdown.

The statement released by the plaintiff makes known that he not only felt shamed by what was being said by his own family members (no matter that they were only *pretend* messages single-handedly composed by the interrogator) but also experienced an excruciating guilt for having dishonored them by stepping on *them*. Hence, it appears that the violence was committed when the (former) assistant police inspector took over the family members' identity (without their consent) by writing down their names and *pretend*-messages *as if* he was the official spokesperson for the family. Consciously or unconsciously tapping into the full potential of the position he occupied as a special government employee, he acted too convincingly as a ventriloquist for the family in humiliating the hotel owner. When I read this passage in the newspaper article, I could not help but wonder whether the hotel owner's sense of humiliation could have been attenuated, or whether it would have materialized at all, had mistakes been made with the

kanji used to spell out his family names. If a wrong set of *kanji* had been used, would the hotel owner still have been able to identify them as *his* family as readily as he did?

Would he have been able to brush aside the interrogator's obvious attempt to manipulate his emotional orientation as an empty threat and rationally convince himself that these letters bore no relation whatsoever to his family? In other words, could he have logically dissociated the symbolic representations of his family from the actual people outside the claustrophobic interrogation room?

For the next year and half, until the final verdict was announced in September 2008, after a review by an appellate court, the news media vigilantly followed the case.²⁷⁷ During this time, the Japanese Federation of Bar Associations also mobilized to educate the public concerning the issue of human rights and tried to raise awareness toward the lack of transparency in interrogation rooms in Japan.²⁷⁸ In the end, the residing judge at

²⁷⁷ ““Fumiji” kagoshima-kengisen jiken de moto-keibuho wo kiso e fukuoka-koken (“*Step(Ping)-on-the Letter*”: Ex-Assistant Police Inspector Indicted in Connection With the Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly Election-Fukuoka High Public Prosecutor’s Office).” *Mainichi Shimbun newspaper*, 2007. ; ““Fumiji” jiken no higaisha ni hatsu no jijyou-choushuu fukuoka-kouken (the First Questioning By the Police on the Victim of the “*Step(Ping)-on the Letter*” - Fukuoka High Public Prosecutor’s Office).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2007. ; ““Fumiji” kyouyou saretu danssei ga keibuho wo kagoshima-chiken ni kokuso e (Man Who Was Forced (to) “Step on the Letter” Files a Suit Against an Ex-Assistant Police Inspector At Kagoshima District Public Prosecutor’s Office).”; ““Fumiji” moto-keikan ni choueki 10kagetu kyuukei (“Stepping on the Letter”-the Prosecution Demands 10months’ Imprisonment of the Ex-Assistant Police Inspector).” *Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper*, 2008. ; ““Fumiji” moto-keikan ni yuuzai “yyouki isshita shirabe” fukuoka-chisai (Guilty Verdict for the “Stepping on the Letter” Former-Police Officer-“Improper Interrogation”-the Fukuoka District Court).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008. ; ““Fumiji” kagoshima-kenkei moto-keibuho ni yuuzai hanketsu fukuoka-chisai (“Stepping on the Letter”: Guilty Verdict for the Former-Assistant Police Inspector At the Kagoshima Prefectural Police-the Fukuoka District Court).” *Mainichi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008. ; 2008, *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, Society; ““Fumiji” sousa moto-keibuho ni nishin mo yuuzai kousou kikyaku (Another Guilty Verdict Upon Appeal for the Ex-Assistant Police Inspector (Who) Forced “*Step0Ping)-on-the-Letter*” During the Interrogation).”

²⁷⁸ In June 2008, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations held a screening of its original documentary film, *Invention of Confession – The Tragedy of Shibushi* as a way of raising awareness for the victims of false accusation and advocating for a better transparency of the

the Fukuoka High Court dismissed the defendant's appeal and sentenced him to ten months' incarceration and three years' probation demanded by the prosecution. In the statement, the judge acknowledged that the coercion of *fumiji* inflicted "sadistic humiliation" on the victim, and condemned the interrogation method as not only having infringed on the victim's human rights, but also having jeopardized the integrity of the police investigation as a whole. During the judge's summation, it became clear that the nature of the allegations— "violent humiliation"—did revolve around *fumiji* whose inherent violence was contingent on the idea of *mitate*. *Mitate* is a Japanese noun form of the verb *mitateru*. *Mitateru* means, among other things, to mimic, imitate, pretend and compare one thing to another. The judge concluded that the pretend messages from the hotel owner's family became doubly and devastatingly potent: first, by convincingly *mimicking* the voices of his family; second, by confronting him while he was forced to *mimetically* "step on" his family's pleas. With that, the analogy between *fumiji* and *fumie* came full circle. The question of *mitate* has an important resonance in *kanji* pedagogy in Japan, which I will examine shortly.

Be that as it may, I was still left with more questions than answers. Are we operating purely on a metaphorical level of association between *fumiji* and *fumie*? At what level of abstraction (symbolic or semantic), were these two words made commensurable? Finally, can we arrive at a better understanding, something more substantial, about our relation to the symbolic world from the operative logic behind this curious analogy? Despite the claims made by contemporary Luddites against the increasing de-corporealization, what this corporeally invested analogy has unequivocally

police interrogation. "Daiyou kangoku "fumiji" - "shibushi-jiken" eiga-ka 23-nichi shisha-kai (Detention, *Fumiji* "Stepping on the Letter"-Film Screening (to be Held) on 23rd on *Shibushi-Incident*)." *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.

shown us is that the trope of corporeality still has a surprising discursive traction and currency in our perception of the world. Yet, the logic of *mitate* alone seems to fall short of providing a plausible explanation for the hotel owner's visceral reaction during the *fumiji* incident. What, then, are the sociocultural and technological conditions of contemporary Japan that inform Japanese relation to the symbolic regime? To this end, I will return to "techniques of the body."

Techniques of the Body

On techniques of the body, Marcel Mauss observes, "Every technique properly so-called has its own form. ... Each society has its own special habits."²⁷⁹ Since the body is "man's first and most natural instrument"²⁸⁰ he explains, "we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions. These actions are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of the society."²⁸¹ To the question of what ensures the successful transmission of "physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions" in each society, Mauss replies that the answer is school, where children's "very strong imitative faculties"²⁸² are fully mobilized. If we accept this postulation, the *Government Guideline for Teaching* periodically released by the *Monka-shō* just might be the template for reproduction and promotion of "physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions" related to reading and writing in Japan.

²⁷⁹ Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 52.

²⁸⁰ Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 56.

²⁸¹ Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 66.

²⁸² Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 54.

Typically speaking, a release of the new *Guideline* is preceded by years of contestation and negotiation over both pedagogical and administrative issues among the committee members, who are made up of present and past schoolteachers, researchers and specialists in education, and ministry bureaucrats. The revision thus reflects not only the contours of the most recent educational policy, but also the most pressing national imperatives. Composed generally of four principal pillars (General Rules, Subjects, Morality, and Special Activities), the *Guideline* itemizes a set of pedagogical targets and the hours required to spend in undertaking specifically designated tasks for each school grade. The latest and eighth edition (since the end of World War II), whose subheading reads “Strength to Live” (*ikiru chikara*), was implemented in April 2011.²⁸³ Under this vaguely defined, all-inclusive dictum, classes devoted to advancing schoolchildren’s proficiency in “handwriting” and “reading aloud” are promoted with foremost urgency within the framework of national language class requirements.

As if to anticipate the concentrated effort to which the first grader are subjected at school, a long-running grade-specific monthly study magazine, such as *The First Graders* (*Shōgaku Ichinensei*) by Shōgakkan Inc.,²⁸⁴ annually publishes a pre-elementary school edition in the fall prior to the academic year, which commences in spring. The special preparatory issue is all about covering the bases. For instance, the issue published in the

²⁸³ An article by Andrea Arai, “Notes to the Heart: New Lessons in National Sentiment and Sacrifice From Recessionary Japan,” in *Global Futures in East Asia: Youth, Nation, and the New Economy in Uncertain Times*, ed. Ann Anagnost, Andrea Arai, and Hai Ren, Contemporary Issues in Asia and Pacific (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), especially between page 187 and 194, offers an illuminating insight into contemporary Japan’s political-economy which has steered the way for adopting a tag line, “Strength to Live” (*ikiru chikara*), by the government.

²⁸⁴ http://family.shogakukan.co.jp/sho1_cover/index.html (last accessed on May 15, 2013).

fall of 2007 employed a globally celebrated *manga* series character, *Doraemon* and his sidekick *Nobita-kun*, to jump-start the mental preparation by addressing the subject of road safety in one of the opening pages, since most children in Japan go to school on foot.²⁸⁵ Other popular *anime* characters also join to encourage the readers to play simple word games and puzzles, using stickers from a separate sheet appended to the magazine. After this fun-packed prelude, “Pre-Elementary Admission Preparatory Drill,” pages with more obvious focus on the pedagogically guided tasks are introduced. The readers are now invited to hold a pencil, using a plastic training device that is also included in the magazine’s “Preparatory Supplemental Package,” and to trace straight, zigzag, and circular lines on the pages. Of the magazine’s total of 96 pages, 35 pages, plus a separate 34-page workbook, are dedicated to providing basic exercises fit for the incoming first grader. The exercises include: identifying and circling the objects with corresponding nouns, tracing the numbered strokes of *hiragana* syllabary, and solving rudimentary counting, addition and subtraction problems.

Particularly notable are the eight pages set aside to give detailed instructions to parents who are presumably overseeing the children’s activities. Besides the pages devoted to the obligatory mention of the pedagogical rationale behind the exercises, there are also pages where the science of bodily alignment is explained with an astounding exactitude through a series of illustrations. The science of bodily alignment is essentially broken down into two components, proper pencil-holding position and sitting position, and each illustration serves to highlight some key features that are instrumental in sustaining “techniques of the body.” Here is what the special edition teaches the readers.

²⁸⁵ *Shougaku ichinen-sei (The First Graders) Nyuugaku-mae no sakidori gakushuu moji kazu kansei tokushuu-gou* (Pre-elementary School Complete Edition on Letters and Numbers) (2007).

As shown in figure 1 in the appendix, a child is encouraged to pick up a pencil using a small training device, called “I can hold it” (*moteru-kun*), while *Doraemon*’s sister *Dorami-chan*, gently looks on. A proper pencil-holding position is physically directed via the device, which must be affixed at a point that is 3.5 centimeters away from the tip of the pencil. Once a child learns to hold the pencil steadily, he or she is expected to hold a pen without the training device. Figure 2 supplies additional instructions on the proper hold as well as five examples of improper hold. The idea is to spot an improper hold at a sufficiently early stage in order to nip a bad habit in the bud. Next on the agenda is learning how to sit properly at the desk, which unsurprisingly goes hand in hand with the proper pencil-holding position. Figure 3 offers a step-by-step instruction on how to sit properly: (1) place a mat (another item included in the “Preparatory Supplemental Package”) and make sure that the line drawn on the mat aligns with your navel, (2) position your right foot slightly forward and keep both of your feet flat on the floor, (3) sit upright, (4) maintain a comfortable distance between the desk and yourself, (5) make sure there is enough room between the back of your chair and yourself, (6) place your left hand on the desk without resting your left elbow, and (7) check to see that your left hand stays behind the position of your right hand at all times. Figure 4 further supplements the direction by showing a proper sitting position seen from the side. Three more *Doraemon* series characters are called in at this point to offer helpful pointers so that *Nobita-kun* (who is to be identified by the reader-cum-practice writer as him or herself) can maintain a proper sitting position throughout the practice. Finally, figure 5 reviews some of the salient points covered by the previous illustrations, and goes on to add the final touch to the instructions: “Keep your arms close to the sides of your body.”

The attention to detail that each instruction demands of children and their parents is quite remarkable. A child must certainly experience a degree of discomfort and constraint from trying to maintain an unfamiliar pose while at the same time attempting to engage in a new activity. Understandably, the question of how closely these instructions inspired by the science of bodily alignment, are followed at home hinges on the parents' studiousness. Though I do not mean to trivialize the much-advocated overall merit of instilling proper forms in schoolchildren, from what some elementary schoolteachers have confirmed with me, the rigor with which these kinds of verbal instructions are translated into physical inculcation inside the classroom varies from school to school, depending on the types and localities of schools among other institutional variables. With that said however, from the moment children enter elementary school until they graduate from high school, schoolchildren are regularly tested and graded on how neatly they write Japanese syllabaries and how accurately they can recognize and reproduce *kanji*. It is worth mentioning that in the context of a national language class where much of the essential *kanji* learning takes place, mastering the techniques of the body entails far more than having to learn to hold a pencil or sit at the desk in a prescribed manner. A preferred pedagogical method in the classroom not only exploits the aforementioned idea of *mitate* by insisting on a seemingly intuitive fusion between pictographic and ideographic qualities of *kanji* through a chain of mimetic association, but also urges the children to inhabit the symbolic representations by rhythmically reciting the order in which each stroke is written.

An all-time best-selling study guide for *kanji*, *Book of Kanji: Learning by Reciting—Shimomura Method*, makes the most of this approach. Although self-effacingly

marketed as an “introductory picture book of *kanji*” (*kanji nyūmon no ehon*) rather than a *kanji* dictionary (*kanji jiten*) or a study guide, the series, the six A6 size volumes (148 millimeters by 105 millimeters, the dimensions of a Japanese pocket-size novel, or *bunko-bon*) of the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grader, have undergone a staggering number of impressions with minimal revision since the first publication in the late 1970s. In conformity with the *Monka-shō*’s list of *kanji* prescribed for each school grade, respective volume offers a systematic way of making sense of the pictographic and ideographic features of *kanji* so that children can rhythmically recite the stroke order and remember the compositions by heart. The author and the creator of the Shimomura-method, Noboru Shimomura, explains in the last two pages of each volume that, instead of “mechanistic and passive” (*kikaiteki de ukemina*) learning, he wants schoolchildren to acquire an “active and constructive” (*nōdōteki/sekkyokuteki na*) habit of learning *kanji*. To facilitate this acquisition process, Shimomura has organized each grade’s targeted *kanji* around a handful of visually recognizable *kanji* components, which I henceforth refer to as pictographically identifiable components of *kanji*. Since *kanji* are fundamentally pictographs, he reminds us, these “iconic” components will only make it obvious to children that compositions of *kanji* are nothing but various combinations of pictographically identifiable components, and are naturally susceptible to his mimetic learning method. Furthermore, he assures us that a rhythmic stroke-order recitation that harnesses a wide range of playful onomatopoeia not only reinforces the aspect of physical inculcation but also helps children visualize *kanji* more easily. Finally, he maintains that his method enables children to build a systematic understanding of *kanji* by placing equal emphasis on pictographic and ideographic qualities of each letter through Chinese

(phonetic reading, *on yomi*) and Japanese (ideographic reading, *kun yomi*) readings of a *kanji*. Interestingly, although Shimomura advises against “mechanistic and passive” learning, his physically engaging method unequivocally subscribes to the benefit of attaining some level of automaticity through the repeated reading and writing lessons.

Let us take a closer look at a few of the examples from the first volume, catered to the first grader. After a brief introduction in which *kanji* are defined as having originated from pictures, Figure A introduces four exemplary cases of evolution for, from the top, eye, ear, nose, and mouth. Each step away from the original picture indicates an incremental abstraction of a *kanji*, however slight. This assumption sets the stage for the rest of the book: the users/readers are expected to identify the pictographic quality of a *kanji*, from which they can form an educated guess on the embedded ideographic quality. It is useful to remember that the evolutionary process of visual morphing repeatedly demonstrated as a self-evident aspect of *kanji* in Shimomura’s volumes assumes the logic of *mitate*. Primitive symbols and pictographs introduced as “origin” are all pretend (*mitate*) representations. Both readers and writers of Japanese are expected to accept the mimetic forms—*kanji*—as natural incarnations of what has been signified.

The explanation for the first *kanji*, 大 (big), covered by the first volume is consistent with the *mitate* logic.²⁸⁶ A doll icon on the upper left-hand corner of a page, which is one of Shimomura’s eight organizing “icons” discussed earlier, means that 大 constitutes a pictographically identifiable component with an ideographic quality of a person. Shimomura hence lays down an unequivocal rule of engagement with *kanji* that says, “We are going to treat each *kanji* as if it is the real thing.” Doubtless, Shimomura

²⁸⁶ Kyuuyou Ishikawa, “Mazu fudeno mochikata wo oshieyo (First, Teach Your Children How to Hold a Brush),” *Bungakukai* 60, no. 7 (2006): 140-55.

also hopes that these organizing icons will help his readers build a systematic understanding of an overall compositional logic for *kanji*. The composition is not only visually *mimetic*, but also inherently sensible. Once the premise of *visual mimesis* inherent to *kanji* has been established, Shimomura introduces multiple possibilities of readings for 大—*ōkii* as Japanese reading, and *dai* and *tai* as Chinese reading—along with most common meanings of 大. Finally, “The Origin [Composition]” and “The Stroke Order” of 大 are explained, using roughly two-thirds of the allotted page. Under a section indicated as “The Origin [Composition],” a series of simple illustrations narrates an evolution of 大: a picture of a man standing with his arms and legs spread apart transforms into a primitive pictograph, which eventually metamorphoses into a current form of 大. “The Stroke Order” dictates the order in which each stroke is written. While it may require some brain twisting to work out the meaning of “big” from the picture of a man spreading his arms and legs, the composition of the *kanji* 雨 (rain) is more visually and intuitively straightforward as a *pretend* symbol. The stroke order are more rhythmically memorable and onomatopoetically susceptible (Figure B). Naturally, some *kanji* are more conducive to Shimomura’s method than others, due to their *mitate*-ability.

Interestingly, when comparing the first grader’s volume with that of the sixth grader, one notices that although pictographically identifiable components of *kanji* equally guide the composition in both volumes, there is an increasing tendency for the evolutionary narrative cited in “The origin [composition]” to take on a morally informed message in the latter volume. For instance, the description of “The Origin [Composition]” of the *kanji* 孝 (to take care of one’s parents) in Figure C reads as follows, “A picture of an elderly person with a cane + a picture of a child = 孝 : [This is because] a child must

take good care of an aging parent. From the picture of a child giving an aging parent a piggyback [ride], the meaning of ‘to take care of one’s parents’ has been derived.” Even “The Stroke Order” supports this message, as it dictates, ... “[Draw] a horizontal line, then a vertical line, and another horizontal line. Write 人. [To complete the *kanji*,] the top section is lifted up by a [bottom section which is a figure of a] ‘child.’” What better place than a primer for *kanji* to start ingraining such morally imbued messages?²⁸⁷ Once a child commits the stroke order and meaning to his memory, the chain of association between the *kanji* and its moral message, disguised as an objective definition, becomes too self-evident to question. *Kanji* learning, then, contributes to the promotion of a proper moral attitude among schoolchildren. Through this mundane but revelatory example, I wanted to acknowledge that insofar as “techniques of the body” demand a mastery of proper forms, there is always room for other socioculturally nuanced ideas of propriety to seep into the inculcation process.

Finger-Dance and Homonyms

The embodied practice of reading and writing set in motion in childhood has lasting ramifications in adult life in Japan. One of the most compelling instances in which the effect becomes manifest is during the first contact between two strangers without the mediation of a mutual friend or a business card.²⁸⁸ Under such circumstances, a self-introduction is often followed either by an impromptu finger-dance, in which the two people trace invisible strokes of *kanji* in the air, or by an obligatory decomposition of pictographic and/or ideographic components of *kanji*, in order to ascertain the right

²⁸⁷ Patricia Crain, *The Story of a: The Alphabetization of America From the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²⁸⁸ Ishikawa, *Nijyuu-gengo kokka Nihon (Double Language Nation State - Japan)*, 16-8.

combinations of the *kanji* that make up each other's name. Sometimes specifying a few of the root forms (pictographically and/or ideographically identifiable components) that are needed to compose the characters is all it takes to figure out the names, whereas other times they have to spend a little more time eliminating likely candidates, since all they have to work with is the sound of each other's name.

To demonstrate, if I were to explain my family name in *kanji*, I might say something to the effect of [*mizu*, as in 'water'"] (水), and *kawa*, as in 'river' with three vertical straight lines"] (川). The last comment is a rather crucial step to eliminate another equally popular Chinese character (河) with the same phonetic reading (*kawa*) and meaning (river). In order to avoid any confusion, I might add that my character for *kawa* is not the one with the "three-water-drop" (*sanzui*) right-hand radical. Generally speaking, specifying which *kanji* compose my family name is easier than explaining *kanji* for my given name, Jun. When I introduce myself as Jun, I am often met with a suggestion of, "Oh, as in 'pure'? [純]?" since it is probably a more commonly used *kanji* for the name, Jun. When I shake my head no, a few more guesses are promptly offered, such as, "No? Ah, perhaps as in 'in the order of' [順]?" or "How about as in 'moisture and rich' [潤]?" Given the plenitude of homonyms in Japanese, *kanji* for my name, *jun*, elicits a relatively wide (though not unlimited) range of possibilities. One of the most effective ways of sorting out candidates is to make a suggestion based on a distinct pictographic or ideographic quality of this mystery *kanji*. Each suggestion is hence accompanied by "as in...?" At some point in this back and forth, I usually offer a detailed dissection of my *kanji* based on pictographically identifiable components—"Well, it is made of 'three-water-drop' (*sanzui*), 'a lid' (*nabebuta*), 'a mouth' (*kuchi*), and *ko* as in a figure of a child

(*kodomo no ko*)”—as I trace each stroke of my *kanji* (淳) in the air. Alternately, I might also offer a Japanese reading of my character, *atsushi*, but this might draw too much attention to my unusually masculine name and create unnecessary excitement. Thus, I often opt to decompose my *kanji* into identifiable components. Rest assured, however, since Japanese nationals are required by law to name their children using *kanji* assigned as “*kanji* for use in personal names” (*jinmeiyō kanji*), the effort to ascertaining the right combination of *kanji* in a person’s name is mitigated to a somewhat manageable level.

Consequently, homonyms are especially problematic when they exist in proper noun forms, such as people’s names or names of geographical location, for there is no predetermined narrative context or predictable semantic logic from which one might narrow down the likely candidates for the combinations of *kanji*. But this too can be overcome as long as one manages to either finger-trace the invisible strokes of *kanji* under the other’s verbal guidance, or visualize the characters successfully by assembling the identifiable components in his or her mind. Yet, in order for this to happen, *kanji* must already exist and be intimately related to as something profoundly corporeal.

A Breath That Animates

So far, my discussion of “techniques of the body” has focused on the role of pedagogical intervention and parental guidance in instilling a corporeal orientation toward *kanji* among readers and writers of Japanese. What is noticeably absent from the analysis preoccupied with the science of bodily alignment, however, is the element of breath, something the practitioners of Japanese calligraphy painstakingly identify as the source of life that animates writing as well as reading.

Broadly conceived, breath is what enables us—pneumatically channeled media—to produce a sound; it is what lets us read aloud. This is an important reminder since literally sounding out the letters and words is the first step to becoming proficient in a language. Also, even when we think we are reading or writing silently, we are never without a voice *per se*. What is more likely is that we have so completely internalized our voice that we no longer need to be conscious of the brain chatter it creates. But our underlying need for a guiding breath seems to resurface whenever we encounter a new, abstract concept in reading, or try to communicate a complicated idea in writing, as we resort to reading aloud with a certain cadence that is more conducive to better comprehension. Perhaps, it is only natural that the national language class prioritizes teaching schoolchildren “handwriting” and “reading aloud” throughout the children’s formative years. The question then becomes, how do the science of bodily alignment and the guiding breath work together to inform our reading comprehension and shape our habituated practice of reading and writing? To pose this question slightly differently, how does a Japanese reader manage to convert ‘sounds’ represented in *hiragana* and *katakana*-syllabary into words and meanings embodied by *kanji*?

In crude terms, both questions are concerned with a reader’s ability to operate at a syntactical level in deciphering semantically viable sentences from a sea of homonyms. Similar to a tedious task of sorting through plausible candidates of *kanji* based on the *sound* of someone’s name, converting phonetically spelled-out Japanese text into an easily comprehensible text composed of the appropriate mix of *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries and *kanji* requires that one not only eliminates semantically unsound phrases and words from the potential clusters of sound, but also focuses on the viable clusters of

sound. As stated clearly in the *Guideline*, “reading aloud” is expected to strengthen a child’s reading comprehension by continually putting his or her semantic and syntactical proficiency to test. To this end, schoolchildren are required to read the assigned texts aloud at school and home in the presence of their peers and family members. The aim of this exercise is for them to become familiar with a variety of words and expressions and to acquire an appropriate rhythm of reading, punctuated by the breath, through repetition.

At this point, an explanatory note on Japanese punctuation marks, or *kutōten*, is in order. According to some scholars of Japanese linguistics, punctuation marks came into existence after *The Analects of Confucius* was introduced to Japan, upon which the need to translate arose.²⁸⁹ Written strictly in Chinese characters, the text called for an invention of supplemental symbols and punctuation marks to assist Japanese readers in understanding the grammatical structure of Chinese language and studying the text.²⁹⁰ Influenced by the subsequent arrivals of foreign texts and *genbun it’chi* during the Meiji era, the punctuation marks were further developed mainly to facilitate a logical coherency and intelligibility of the text.²⁹¹ Since the rules concerning Japanese punctuation marks are not rigorously standardized, writers are free to experiment with different punctuation styles and impose distinct cadences on the text. Some experts even argue that deft writers are able to manipulate readers’ emotional engagement with their text by generating an

²⁸⁹ Yoshifumi Hida, “Kutouten No Rekishi (History of Punctuation Marks),” *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 49-51.

²⁹⁰ Naoki Sakai has famously conducted a both rigorous and insightful study on politico-historical significance of the invention as well as application of Japanese punctuation marks (*kutōten*) in the eighteenth century Japan. Naoki Sakai, *Kako no koe: jyuuhasseiki nihon no gensetsu ni okeru gengo no chii (Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse)* (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2002).

²⁹¹ Saiichi Marutani, “Ten to maru (Comma and Period),” *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 46-47.

unnatural cadence to trigger disquietude and by insisting on a fast-paced tempo to induce a riveting sensation.²⁹² That is to say, punctuation marks are what bind pneumatically channeled, pedagogically trained bodies and Japanese text together in a uniquely corporeal reading and writing experience.

Although strict rules regarding the use of punctuation marks may not exist in Japanese composition, since writers can putatively direct readers' tempo and elicit psychophysical responses by strategically placing punctuation marks, acquiring adequate proficiency in their use is considered a necessary skill. While pre-school-aged children are not expected to read with a right breathing tempo, through a compositional style known as *wakachi gaki* ("written with a space between words") used widely in children's picture books (and later the state-approved elementary school textbooks), they are encouraged to habituate a proper reading tempo as soon as they are able to sit and listen. In sum, *wakachi gaki* instills awareness in young children that a continuous flow of sounds can be broken up into sets of sounds, which are in fact discrete meaningful units, i.e. words. Simultaneously, *wakachi gaki* teaches them about auditory confusion brought on by innumerable homonyms existing in the Japanese language. Since the main objective of the state prescribed, "read aloud" (*ondoku*), lesson is not only to strengthen but also to naturalize the bond fostered between voice and text via the intervention of punctuation marks (*kutōten*) and *wakachi gaki*, it is only sensible to revisit the questions of voice. In this context, what intrigues me is that the suggestion that written (text) is secondary to speech (voice) raises more perplexing issues. If the supremacy of voice is so incontestable, then why is there need for binding voice and text? That is to say, the fact

²⁹² Akira Nakamura, "Kutouten no hyougen kouka (Expressive Effects of Punctuation Mark)," *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 59; Katsuya Mogami, "Hanashi kotoba no ikitsugi to kutouten (Breathing Tempo of the Spoken Language and Punctuation Marks)," *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 68-69.

that “read aloud” (*ondoku*) lesson is crucially tasked with instilling a right breathing rhythm and reading tempo in young children, in reverse manner, suggests that the voice may not be so immediate and the capacity to read with a right tempo may not be so intuitive after all.

To consider the effect of *wakachi gaki*, I will analyze a poem below, taken from a best selling poetry series called *kotoba asobi uta* (playful word song/poem), very much like English nursery rhymes, composed by a famous Japanese poet, Shuntarō Tanikawa. Entitled *Nonohana* (flowers of the field), the piece occasionally makes an appearance in a national language (*kokugo*) textbook and exemplifies the fun of discovering the semantic coherence behind a gibberish-sounding text written exclusively in *hiragana* syllabary in order to enhance acoustic effects and visual puzzlement.²⁹³

When reading the *kotoba asobi uta* series, readers are required to execute a couple of conversions from sound to word/meaning, which largely consists of solving acoustic riddles posed by homonyms. Arguably, overcoming the intellectual challenge presented by homonyms is probably half the fun of reading this series. In order to simulate the reading conversion process that goes on inside the readers’ head, I will first copy the original poem with a phonetic transcription below. Next, I will present the poem using a *wakachi gaki* style. Finally, I will present the piece using a customary *kanji kana majiri bun* (mix of *kanji* and *hiragana*-syllabary) style to show the completion of acoustic-semantic conversion.

1. Original composition –written using only *hiragana* syllabary— the intended effect is strictly acoustic.

²⁹³ Shuntaro Tanikawa, *Zoku-Tanikawa Shuntaro Shishu (Poetry of Shuntaro Tanikawa, Vol.2)*, vol. 108, Gendai-Shi Bunko (Tokyo: Shicho-sha, 1993), 35.

ののはな
nonohana

はなののはな
hananonohana

はなのななに
hananonanaani

なずなののはな
nazunanohana

なもないのばな
naonainobana

Without a space or punctuation mark indicating when to pause for a breath, a string of sounds does not immediately lend meaning to the sentences, or to the readers for that matter. This calls for repeated attempts to determine where the “break”—that is, a pause to breathe—should happen by applying a different tempo and intonation. If and when successful, a reader can finally break the above text down into a *wakachi gaki* style shown below.

2. Written using a *wakachi gaki* style

の の はな
no no hana

1) はな の の の はな
hana no no no hana

OR

2) はなの の のはな
hanano no nohana

はな の な なあに
hana no na naani

なずな な の はな
nazuna na no hana

な も ない のばな
na mo nai nobana

Now that each cluster of sounds has been identified and the meaning of respective words provisionally deduced, all a reader has to do is to assign appropriate *kanji* to words in order to connect “sound” and “meaning” in a more visually discernible manner, as shown in example 3.

3. Composed using a customary *kanji kana majirii bun* (mix of *kanji* and *hiragana* syllabary) style.

野 の 花
no no hana Flowers of the field

1) 花 の 野 の 花
hana no no no hana Flowers in the field full of flowers

OR

2) 花野 の 野花
hanano no nohana Wild flower in the field of flower

花 の 名 なあに
hana no na naani What is the name of the flower

薺 菜 の 花
nazuna na no hana A shepherd's purse (*nazuna*) is a rape blossom

名 も 無い 野花
na mo nai nobana Nameless wild flowers

The last installment completes a conversion of sound into word/meaning. Considering that the use of *hiragana* syllabary is usually reserved for phonetic transcription of the parts of speech, such as particle, suffix, prefix and various conjugation endings for verbs and adjectives, a choice assignment of *kanji* in the text affords intelligibility that is far more immediately and easily register-able through the reader's eyes.

Calligraphic Bodies = *Bodies in Flux*

Now that we have seen how, aided by the breath, sound and meaning/word coalesce into text, I want to return to bodies *in flux* so that I may explore further ramifications of habituated, corporeal automaticity in practice. As suggested earlier, calligraphy urges us to experience the practice of reading and writing as an instantiation of bodies *in flux*, which I argue is a form of socioculturally instilled “techniques of the body.” Calligraphic bodies lend themselves to investigating bodies *in flux* as they produce artwork that leaves legible “imprints” of their having negotiated with changing climatic circumstances (room temperature, humidity in the room as well as in the air, direction and intensity of the sunlight in the room, etc) and conditions of their tools (oldness and newness, dryness and wetness of *washi* paper as well as of brush, viscosity of ink, etc). One might rightly observe that calligraphic bodies emerge only through a continuous dialogue with the elements of indeterminacy and contingency inherent in their surrounding milieus, including their bodies. Insofar as calligraphy is a form of art, practitioners are expected to fine-tune their receptivity and skill through hours of independent as well as guided practice, in the hope of one day becoming so attuned that the material conditions of their surroundings will naturally elicit an appropriate, near-instinctive response, which we may identify as automatic. This begs the question of

authorship in calligraphy, just as much as the writing has been troubled by the advent of the *automatic conversion function* (*jidō henkan kinō*) installed in Japanese language-capable *keitai* and other types of smartphones.

For Nori, a 34-year-old female graduate of a prestigious art university and a certified calligraphy master (*shihan*), it had taken years to see herself as a full-time calligraphy artist. By early 2008, however, with a few gallery exhibits lined up, she was beginning to outgrow her insecurity and find her own ‘voice’ and creativity in a highly formalized art scene. From the color of the ink to compositional finessing, she would talk at length about the abundance of play, elements of surprise and artistic challenges she enjoyed in calligraphy despite all the ‘restrictions’ imposed by the long-revered proper forms. When she began taking a more active role in Master Sakuta’s monthly class as an assistant instructor, a handful of fellow practitioners who knew her artistry in working with tangible material—paper, Chinese ink, brush, stone, textile, and so on—put forth the idea that she design original stone seals for them. Since a formal piece of composition required a seal that completed and authenticated the work, they all needed one that was distinct and complementary. Nori quickly learned how gratifying it was to work within the limitations. In particular, a spatial restraint set by the size of the stone surface, less than half a square inch, demanded her to be creative without sacrificing the legibility of the *kanji* used to signify the practitioner’s pen name. In other words, the challenge of designing a seal obliged her to satisfy two seemingly mutually exclusive objectives: creativity to break free from the conventional forms and conformity to the known parameters of the convention. On the one hand, the integrity of the original forms of the *kanji* must be preserved so as to ensure legibility and propriety. On the other hand, a

degree of aesthetically pleasing alteration must be done to the characters in order for the seal to serve its purpose as a distinguishing mark. Nori felt that the creative challenge posed by this conundrum very much resonated with the principles of calligraphy as art. Although in recent years a younger generation of Japanese calligraphy artists, who had been classically trained and certified, made their names as multimedia collaborators by composing a large piece of calligraphy in public to the sound of blaring music and digital image projections, Nori felt that they unfairly trivialized the need to teach proper forms. She feared that undue celebration of a freestyle composition and media popularization deprived the novice practitioners of a truly fulfilling experience that stemmed from disciplining one's mind and body synchronicity.

Explaining the tempo and temporality of calligraphy, Nori once exclaimed, "Isn't it magical that the time it takes [for you] to prepare your own ink is exactly how long it takes you to prepare yourself mentally?" She added quickly, "Even after you finish making your ink, you will still have to pause intermittently to make more ink. Of course, it's much easier to substitute this cumbersome process with a store-bought-bottled ink, [but] I think you actually need that in-between time when you're not obsessing over every little detail of your composition. Just stare into the tiny little black pond in your ink stone, focusing all your energy into making the perfect ink. ... It creates this rhythm, like ebb and flow of concentration and intensity." Comparing brush and ink to other writing tools, she continued, "When you're using a pencil, your wrist eventually gets tired. The same goes for a pen. Then, there's a computer keyboard. That's a whole different story. The speed with which you compose on a keyboard is so much faster than when you're handwriting. Typing is not only unremitting, but completely exhausting. It's like you're

running on a top speed all the time. Without a built-in moment for a break, you can easily wear yourself out. With that said, of course, in calligraphy, you inevitably begin to lose your muscle and manual dexterity with age. You stop being able to rely on your core muscle to hold your posture when writing a large piece, especially while standing. Sooner or later, you are bound to hurt yourself.... most likely your lower back! That's when you start to *really* feel your age. But, you gotta admit, even the terrible lower-back pain is still so much more satisfying than a nagging pain on your neck and shoulders after a day's of work in front of a computer!" Saying this in one breath, she let out a wholehearted laugh. She eventually concluded with a knowing smile that calligraphy should really be considered a form of "manual labor," which would make teaching proper forms and techniques mandatory for all those wishing to engage in the practice.

In so many ways, Nori was a most loyal and exemplary disciple of Master Sakuta's teaching. Master Sakuta traveled widely and tirelessly. Every summer, he volunteered at his alma mater, International Christian University in Tokyo, to demonstrate in English before a large group of foreign exchange students who took a summer crash course in Japanese. On such occasions, he always brought a few of his best students, such as Nori, as assistants so that the students would benefit from hands-on instruction from them. His English brochure, which Master Sakuta himself composed, defined *Sho* as far more than a "mere calligraphy," but as "the expression of the lines or of the writers' mind." Invoking the old saying, "*Sho reflects* one's mind," he encouraged the novice practitioners to "feel the emotion that went into his work, for '*Rhythm*' is what brings '*Sho*' come to life."

True to his own words, he was a passionate, charismatic performer and a teacher

in his monthly class. Always mindful of the mood the brushstrokes imparted, he was generous with his quick-witted comments when evaluating his students' homework (compositions they prepared at home). If the compositions were done on standard-size *washi* paper,²⁹⁴ the pieces were laid down for his perusal across the floor, which was covered with blue tarpaulin and black felt.²⁹⁵ When compositions were either too big or too long, fellow practitioners helped one another by standing in line to hold the pieces a few meters away from Master Sakuta to provide him a better perspective. As Master Sakuta took time to comment on the vigor and deftness of each stroke, color of the ink, contrasting size of each letter, and above all rhythmic movement of the breath each stroke communicated, he removed some pieces and asked them to realign the pieces in order to narrow down to a few. Only then, did he dip his brush in red ink to begin correcting and showing the essence of what his lyrical, onomatopoetic expressions tried to capture.

Referring to an indivisible correspondence between the work of art and the body of the practitioner through the noun compound *shotai* (*sho* = calligraphy + *tai* = body), Master Sakuta pressed the practitioners to concentrate on the bodily orientation vis-à-vis the paper, movement of the breath and space. For him, the apex of calligraphy art was its capacity to render emotion. The composition had to embody the soul of a practitioner.

Like other forms of brush painting, the speed and pressure with which ink is applied, and

²⁹⁴ The regular *washi* size is 24 centimeters (length) by 34 centimeters (width), but depending on the nature of composition and styles, a myriad of different sizes *washi*-paper are available at the store and upon custom order.

²⁹⁵ Monthly class was held in one of the Japanese-style rooms, rented by the hour, at a community center in the southern part of Tokyo. It was a traditional-banquet-hall-style *tatami*-mat room (the size of approximately 40-50 *tatami*) with low rectangular tables and *zabuton* pillows on which we sat with our legs folded under. The large sheets of blue tarpaulin and black felt were used in order to prevent accidental ink spills from ruining the *tatami*.

the angle in which a brush is stroked, play a role in shaping the artist's distinctive style. Except, calligraphy leaves no room for double-dipping or retouching by the brush. Due to the fineness and transparency of *washi* paper, when the composition is held in midair and seen from the back, any attempt to cover up the initial ill execution is inexorably evident. This is why Master Sakuta obsessed over each "brushstroke and brush movement" (*fudehakobi* and *unpitsu*), as each reflected the practitioner's psychophysical attitude at the time of composition. If there were too much splintering by the tip of the brush or too much splattering of the ink, he would ask the student if he or she was in an irritable mood at the time of the composition. I have heard him say on many occasions, "These letters are too aggressive ... you need to relax more. You know, the letters are irrefutable eyewitnesses to your inner self. There is no use trying to escape from your own writing! Ha ha ha!" Indeed, as far as Master Sakuta was concerned, there was no place where practitioners could hide from themselves in calligraphy. Hence, it was as necessary for practitioners to be able to read these residual traces of their breath and bodily movements, as it was to become better at brush handling. By doing away with logical explanation and operating emphatically on mimetic vocabulary and performance, Master Sakuta tried to communicate how a rhythmic movement could be rendered as a lyrical expression in calligraphic composition. It seemed as if he was literally animating the composition by insisting on reading the invisible residues of breath.

Additional evidence that Master Sakuta took his own teaching to heart was a preparatory step he took before commencing each class. No sooner did he arrive at the classroom than he changed into a pair of jersey pants and T-shirt and had a snack. He liked to recite an old saying, "You can't fight a war on an empty stomach!" The reason

for his wardrobe change became immediately apparent as soon as he started demonstrating and preparing example compositions for students. Although he might simply sit in front of the desk with his legs tucked under when composing a small piece, whenever he was writing a slightly larger, longer piece, he would either sit on the floor with one knee up or kneel to give himself a room to maneuver. And for a really substantial piece, he was known to stand in the middle of the paper with a bucketful of ink on the side and move about as if his whole body became one with the brush. His breathing became increasingly audible and rhythmically forceful, as he danced across a large piece of *washi* paper. Cautioning against a diminishing range of his shoulder and brush movement, he urged all of us to keep in mind that calligraphy was about a fluid movement of the brush, and that its execution hinged on an uninterrupted flow of breath and an unobstructed path of the brush (*fude no tōri suji*). The delicate balance he managed to strike by yielding without losing control of the breath that guided him was stunning, and it convinced everyone of his or her own pneumatic potential and the veracity of the claim that calligraphy is a full-contact writing exercise. It is no wonder that anything materially distracting or unwieldy is preemptively removed from the vicinity of one's work area and that female practitioners are generally discouraged from wearing a skirt when composing a large piece, for fear of the hemline getting in the way of moving freely.

Parenthetically, whenever there are prepubescent children in a calligraphy class, a teacher wonders how their growth spurt will affect their writings. Although some of the more modern calligraphy classrooms are set up in such a way that the pupils sit on chairs, more traditional classes given at individual teachers' homes often require that the pupils

sit on *tatami*-mat floors with their legs folded under for the duration of their lessons, or at least for the duration of a composition. Although the pupils are most likely to be sitting on pillows (*zabuton*), when they experience a sudden growth spurt, especially the pubescent girls, their rapid weight gain is bound to place unprecedented pressure on their legs, making it difficult to remain in the folded leg position. For the lucky few who have until then been able to sit and compose for hours without breaking concentration, even a growing tingling sensation in their legs and numbing pain in the joints can pose a serious disruption. At the risk of belaboring the same point, I will note briefly that calligraphy is hardly the only form of art affected by the growth period, when changes triggered by hormonal factors become pronounced, such as weight gain, height increase, and physical as well as mental maturity. Athletes are often forced to recalibrate their center of gravity and their form, and musicians may outgrow their old instruments or gain better command of their instruments as their reach lengthens and their muscles strengthen. Having to recalibrate one's physical orientation can be a frustrating experience for all those who must acquire intimate knowledge to be able to summon the utmost deftness and efficiency. Since the slightest adjustment to one's physical posture, form and alignment of tools can have a profound consequence, Master Sakuta has always made a point of demonstrating in front of his students, and not being content with giving only verbal instructions.

For instance, during one of the guided practice hours, I was assigned to practice for the first time a style of Chinese characters developed in the Qin dynasty. Since the style was so foreign and I was not sure of the stroke order for some of the characters, I was having a hard time figuring out when to pause for a breath and add more ink. I was

simply unable to regulate my breath, which meant that my body was out of sync with my breathing. As Master Sakuta finished up the first round of evaluation of the students' homework, he came around to the back of the classroom to check on some of the less experienced practitioners, such as myself. When he saw my pitiful attempt, he laughed aloud and joked that my upper torso was so stiff that I reminded him of an upright droid from the Star Wars movies (i.e., C-3PO). Remembering how comically jerky his movement was, I too had to laugh, which simultaneously relaxed my jaw, shoulder, and arm muscles. That was when I realized that I was unwittingly holding my breath while I struggled with the piece! Seeing this, a fellow practitioner chimed in, "Once you grasp the proper form of each character, you should put away the examples [Master Sakuta prepared for you], or else you are psychophysically constrained by the external rhythm [of Master Sakuta] in developing your own. Remember, in this classroom, nobody expects you to write a well-proportioned composition. It's not about the formal aesthetic, but it's the quality of line we're obsessed with. Your lines and strokes have to embody your spirit, vigor, and energy. That's what your composition should be about. You shouldn't spend time staring at the example and worrying about the form; your time is better spent focusing your energy on your own [compositional] rhythm." A master-level practitioner who was sitting by our side, amused by our joshing, gently added, "It's true. Try and relax your shoulder muscle and let your brush guide you. Breathe in deep, and give yourself up to the brush. Just let the brush take you wherever it wants to go (*fude no ikitai tokoro he, nasuga mamani*)." Unfortunately, by this time, I had received one too many instructions and was unable to process them in any productive way. Nori finally stepped in and offered the following tips, "Don't try to write *using* a brush, but write as if

you're being guided by the brush." The active negation of compositional agency suggested by her comment, however counterintuitive, was actually quite liberating. Remembering that I needed to renounce my role as an author and a willful actor while submitting to the will of the brush helped me realize that the question of who or what was in control of the reading and writing had always been troubled by the intervention of different media.

Each chapter of my dissertation is, to a varying degree, an attempt to analyze a pervasive discourse of digital media intervention that has been hastily characterized as a process of de-corporealization. The discourse suggests that "analog" media premise a relationship that revolves around a more immediate material indexicality between the inscription and its medium, whereas digital media operates on the assumption that, because of a binary logic that putatively reduces everything to an algorithm, material indexicality is lost and the layers of mediation are more pronouncedly felt. Because of the ostensible distance created by layers of mediation, which have always existed in different ways, the discourse of de-corporealization has gained currency in the recent era. While I do not presume that de-corporealization has indeed taken place, I expect changes in the way we experience our heavily mediated world. Once we understand that breath is capable of crossing the divide between the organic and the inorganic (as differently demonstrated in chapter three, four and five), we might begin to formulate questions concerning the surface (skin, tactility, etc.) and the interior (muscle movement, breath, etc), and *not* the interiority of readers and writers. As I argued, for Japanese readers and writers to see writing as animated—be it digitally or pneumatically animated in their perception—there must already be a relationship that is prejudiced in a way that insists on

inhabiting the symbolic world in an *animated* way. By attending to the pedagogical methods and everyday practice of reading and writing, I have explored how calligraphy accentuates the immediacy of material indexicality and bears witness to the breath that animated the writings. Paradoxically, I seemed to have arrived at an unlikely conclusion that a scope of investigation I applied via the concept of bodies *in flux* could be extended to help understand the practice of reading and writing in general, keeping in mind that differences concerning how bodies interact with media and how such contacts are registered must be closely observed.

Conclusion

In the past couple of decades, a global franchise called *Book Off* has become a formidable competitor in the used book market in Japan. By streamlining an ironclad method of appraisal that has traditionally reflected respective bookstore owners' idiosyncrasies, niches and levels of connoisseurship observed in a neighborhood such as Kanda Jimbō-chō, Book Off has made it possible for a part-time clerk without any time-period-specific *kanji* literacy or bibliographic knowledge to perform a standardized book appraisal based primarily on the publication dates and popularity of books. That is, Book Off follows a straightforward rule of the more recent the publication the better, and the more popular the item the more expensive. This radical departure from the conventional method of appraisal not only introduced a uniform, nondiscriminatory buying practice, but also permitted mass-produced and -consumed bestsellers with practical applications and time-sensitive contents, genres typically unpopular among the used bookstores, to be integrated into the market.

Toting a slogan that reads "Please sell (us your) books" (*Hon ouri kudasai*) instead of the patronizing tone that echoes a familiar phrase "We buy books" (*Hon kaimasu*), in a well-lit spacious Book Off floor, customers are free to browse any books they want for how ever long their feet can stand. What is more, none of the books at Book Off carries a distinct stale smell associated with used books. In other words, books at Book Off are fiscally conducive to casual consumption, and far more hygienically agreeable. While a routine appraisal at Book Off promotes a liberal re-circulation of

books otherwise pulped or scrapped, it also leads to a surprisingly inconsistent quality control across different branches. Notwithstanding an alleged paucity of “real” literary merit in mass-produced and –consumed books, Book Off has cleverly tapped into the customers’ desires for novelty, timeliness and convenience. It has succeeded in building a business model that exploits a high turnover and relative low cost. Unlike the high-profile antiquarian bookstores in Kanda Jimbō-chō, the very premise of *Book Off* – i.e. an unconcealed conformity to an universal capitalist consumer logic – has allowed its operation to remain free from any pretense or ambiguities about the nature of its business transaction.

Furthermore, Book Off does not discriminate against what have previously been unpopular genres among the used booksellers, such as “self-help” books. In fact, Book Off is even indiscriminate toward signs of wear—marginal notes, highlighted sections and marked-up pages. Since the precept of antique/used book market has always been, the cleaner and more pristine the copies the better, any signs of wear and tear were destined to lower the price, with the exception of annotations left by famous men and women. Nonetheless, Book Off, or at least its appraisal system, seems willing to overlook these aesthetic “defects” in the interests of informational value contained in the book.

In March 2008, while touring a citywide book event in Nagoya, I met a conceptual artist whose day job was a book broker (*sedori*). At the event, he was running two very different stores at two separate locations. The first one was an ordinary used-book stall on a main event floor at LIBRO bookstore, a subsidiary company of PARCO (Saison Group), and the second one consisted of a flimsy bookcase located in a narrow stairway at a newly renovated private home-turned-art gallery. The space at the latter

location, where I met him, was so cramped that every time someone wanted to pass, he had to move up and down the staircase to yield. With no more than a dozen books sparsely displayed on a four-shelf-bookcase, it was not much of an exhibit. As a matter of fact, the collection was so eclectic that it was almost impossible to tell what he meant by the theme of the collection, *Traces of Memory (Kioku no konseki)*. There was nothing remarkable about the collection; at least that was my opinion until I caught the sight of book prices. They were marked anywhere from 36,000 yen (approximately 360 US dollar) to 580,000 yen (approximately 580 US dollar) a piece. Ridiculously expensive for what they were, very “defective” books with readily visible signs of wear and tear. Next thing I noticed was that each book had an unusually lengthy caption explaining at which branch of Book Off the item was purchased, the date it was purchased, the nature of “traces” and “damages” found in the pages, and finally the artist’s observation as to how each form of physical trace bears witness to the previous owner’s private life.

Allow me to indulge in an example.

A caption on the cheapest book, *How to Become Beautifully Slender by Reducing Body Fat*, reads as follows:

“While I find it extremely efficient of her to compile a list of diet-menu based on various criteria and lifestyles portrayed in the book, and I commend her ecologically minded approach to using a back of an already used piece of paper to write down the menu, I cannot help but ask whether she could not have used another piece of paper besides a back of her own daughter’s quiz sheet that reads *Kanae Yogo* [presumably her daughter’s name]. Or perhaps, is this a kind of logic particular to a housewife? Given that she has no qualm about using the back of her own daughter’s quiz sheet and that she places the list back between the pages of the book without posting it somewhere more useful and

accessible to see, I am left to wonder if this woman is a kind of person who grows content with merely having written it down somewhere. To speculate even further, she must have sold this off out of an impulse to clean out the clutter at her home... without giving it much thought. I am almost convinced that little *Kanae*'s other quiz sheets are trapped somewhere in different books she sold to *Book Off*, waiting to be picked up by someone like myself."

Place of Acquisition: *Book Off* Komaki-Chūō Branch/ Aichi Prefecture, Komaki City

Date of Acquisition: 2007, October 13

Note: A sheet of personal reference

Price: 36,000 yen (approximately 360 US dollar)

What is the "value" of such personal information without the artist's facetious conjecture? Even if we were to seriously consider the value of information related to *Kanae* (her name, grade and the test score), it lends itself to no further revelation. Besides, seeing how poorly she did on her *kanji* quiz, *Kanae* may have as well disposed of the quiz in the first place which. Despite that, I think his artwork raises two very complicated but intriguing questions without necessarily answering either of them. On the one hand, by ostentatiously putting an exorbitant price on "defective" goods while at the same time assigning a dramatic narrative currency to the traces left by an anonymous past owner, the artist forces the beholders to confront the precarious nature of the valorization at work in the antique/used book business. His artwork not only foregrounds, but also exploits the tensions between valueless and valuable, and damaged goods and seasoned artifacts. Though his speculative interpretation borders on tongue-in-cheek sympathy, it somehow sufficiently compensates for the lack of value required to sustain the illusion of value. On

the other hand, the personalized stories the artist carefully weaves for each book asks at what point personal memories can be elevated to the status of public records. What makes marked-up book once owned by famous writers more valuable and desirable than the ones “damaged” by anonymous nobody? The value of antiquarian/used books is often teased out by way of genealogical as well as epistemological undertakings that transform personal traces into knowledge and information, worthy of systematic analyses and canonization.

What his artwork does tell us however is that neither reading nor writing happens in vacuum. Rather, it happens in dialogues, whether readers and writers are conscious of the political implications assumed by their points of utterance or not. In this dissertation, I have argued that reading and writing is a particular skill set that gets instilled into young children’s bodies to be continuously trained and to some degree updated. A number of socio, political, cultural, technological factors need to be analyzed in order for a body born out of such “formation” is to be properly understood. To this end, I have explored crises of reading and writing through the concept of threshold. The idea of threshold, as I have explained, is inspired by Friedrich Kittler’s theorization of recording media threshold. In order to work through the specific problems I encountered in my field, I took liberties and expanded on his proposition. Threshold, as opposed to “limit,” suggests a new horizon yet to be encountered as threshold already anticipates a future evolution where changes take place. In the same spirit of hoping for changes (for the better), I have engaged the present with a perspective of the past in mind. This is not to say that I wanted to ascertain teleological trajectory from the past all the way to the present, so that the present is somehow reduced to a riddle that can be solved with a key from the past.

Rather, I have maintained that the contemporary phenomena, whether crises or novel forms of sociality, are better understood as symptomatic of certain socioeconomic conditions, aesthetic discourses, technological obstacles, and errors and confusion, not necessarily all from the past but many arising from the ongoing situations, however tricky such a balancing act may be.

With that in mind, my theoretical approach has been informed by anthropological perspectives on cultural transmission and reconfiguration, new forms of sociality and embodiment, and representation and abstraction formulated through technologies of inscription and simulation. The goal has been to foreground the material specificities of reading and writing media in order to offer more culturally nuanced understanding on the “homogenizing” effect inherent to the digital media technology. By situating crises within the framework of Japan’s post-Lost Decade socioeconomic and media milieu, I have teased out the processes in which socio-technological generation-specific literacy and perception become discursively defined and corporeally acquired. I have also argued that a techno-generationally defined literacy gap repeatedly figures as a site of ideological and aesthetic contention, a mark of technological adeptness and political potential, a space of sociocultural negotiation, and fertile grounds for a new forms of criminality in the twenty-first century Japan. In sum, the crises of reading and writing practices are understood as symptomatic of a burgeoning sense of helplessness and frustration originating in an ostensible media literacy gap between the self-professed “analog” generation and an intuitively tech-attuned youth perfunctorily referred to as the “digital” generation.

At different points in this dissertation, I have broached the questions of voice. Though some chapters (*ore ore sagi* in chapter one, *ondoku* (“read-aloud”) in chapter five) address the issues more directly than others (homonyms in chapter one and five, *kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji* in chapter two, and *kanji no yure* in chapter four), my objective is to demonstrate that the questions of identity and discrepancy are at the heart of heightened anxiety and confusion that characterized the crises of reading and writing in contemporary Japan. For instance, victims of *ore ore sagi* often fall pray to conmen who compromise identities of the victims’ family members by hijacking their voices and dislocating their bodies. When victims’ underlying sense of insecurity toward what they perceive to be a rapidly “technologizing” surrounding works for a conman’s advantage, *ore ore sagi* becomes an enormously successful phishing scam.

At the same time, I have considered the process of translation and transduction across different time, material components and media. In so doing, I have called attention to multiplicities: From failed visual and phonetic recognition of *kanji* in chapter one, visual non-recognition and unpronounceable icons (*kao-moji* and *gyaru-moji*) in chapter four to onomatopoeic enunciation of adverbial phrases in chapter five, the subject under scrutiny here does not correspond singularly to individual interior, body, action, or verbal articulation.

In chapter one, through the discussion of the antiquarian booksellers’ embodied connoisseurship, I raise questions concerning inherent complexities involved in the practices of Japanese reading and writing and a role of state-prescribed *kanji* education in defining a *kanji* reading threshold among the ordinary Japanese. I hope I was successful, to some degree, in showing how antiquarian books lend themselves to appreciating

intertextuality born of layers of mediation and translation. Phrases such as “*bunka isan*”(cultural inheritance), “*kojin to no taiwa*”(dialogue with the deceased), “*senji no nokoshita chie*”(wisdom left by the processors/ancestors) are often employed by dealers and customers of Kanda Jimbō-chō alike when insisting on their indisputable ties to the unified past these relics seem to embody. Not only does such allegiance to the unified past underscore interconnectedness to the presumed “people,” but it also intimates a promise of transparency and immediacy of the messages contained in the objects. By addressing these issues by working around the questions of *kanji*, I have tried to explore the existence of multiple literacies and the processes in which sensorial input can inform individual reading practices. Incidentally, inquiries in to socio-economy of Kanda Jimbō-chō offer a chance to assess from the perspective of the “analog” world the implications of Japan’s turn to digital information society.

Chapter two follows up on the idea of *kanji* reading threshold put forth in the previous chapter. Specifically, I discussed the ramifications of having a *kanji* reading threshold dictate daily reading and writing practices among ordinary Japanese through two major incidents that had captivated the national attention in mid-2000s. The first incident revolves around mis-recognition and mis-transcription of *kanji* used in people’s names amidst the state’s effort to digitize hand-written pension records. The outcome is a colossal failure, wiping out the official records of tens of thousands of individual beneficiary’s lifetime pension savings. The second incident is concerned with a popular phishing scam collectively known as *ore ore sagi* (It’s Me! It’s Me! scam), which has routinely targeted the “analog” generation in the past decade. I argue that the intense media reporting and mayhem it created not only mirrors the “analog” generation’s deep-

rooted anxieties about their digital medial (il)literacy, but also exposes intrinsic ambiguities and uncanniness about audio-registry of identification. I have tried to demonstrate that 1) the first incident should be understood as symptomatic of a growing sense of mistrust in the government's ability to address a growing anxiety about intra-generational mis/dis-communication, and 2) a series of events that culminate into a generation-specific victimhood must be addressed as a sign of an emerging media literacy gap that haunts and torments the "analog" generation who struggles to keep up with technological innovations that continuously challenge the existing sociocultural paradigms.

In chapter three, I explore how a widening media literacy gap between the "analog" and "digital" generations becomes manifested in and outside of school classrooms. By taking a cue from an oft-repeated phrase among schoolteachers, "Disorder of the script, disorder of the mind," I investigate the effects of new media devices in reconfiguring spatiotemporal relations among schoolteachers, students, and parents. I approach both actual changes and morally invested discourse about changes within this three-way communications as moments of negotiation over socio-culturally inflected boundaries and forms of sociality. I suggest that the use of Japanese smartphones (*keitai*) within this three-way communication has irreparably disrupted the existing structure of knowledge production and ultimately inverted the order of intergenerational sociocultural transmission. I also inquire into the assumed subjectivity of a writer, the nature of contemporary media literacy, and an increasingly porous boundary between the public and the private through concrete ethnographic moments.

Chapter four re-evaluates a space of formal indeterminacy inherent to *kanji*, what I refer to as *kanji no yure*. As a spatially conceptualized margin of difference permitted to *kanji*, I have tried to demonstrate that *kanji no yure* not only epitomizes a visual instability, but also performs as a generative indeterminacy in the era of digital reading and writing. Critically addressing the automaticity associated with digital reading and writing, I extend the notion of sympathetic magic in the attempt to offer a theoretical meditation on affective reading and writing in a digital age. Following the proposition that changes in the recording media threshold give rise to a qualitatively different media receptivity and literacy sensibility, I bring to light paradoxical aspects of the peculiar corporeality inherent in people's relation to the symbolic world and at the same time examined the nature of confusion between digital texts and bodies. By showing that media receptivity was not only informed by the material and socio-historic conditions, but also expressed through a broadening spectrum of metaphors, I argue that the metaphor of sympathetic reading and writing reflected the contemporary conditions of sociotechnological connectivity, digital sociality and the changing media-landscape in contemporary Japan.

In my last chapter, I analyze the process of acquiring *kanji* reading and writing threshold by attending to the role of official and unofficial disciplining of bodies. I suggest that the state-prescribed pedagogical methods of instilling proper reading and writing practices in children uniquely contributed to a formation of Japanese language specific perceptual biases and corporeal orientations. Based on the ethnographic findings on a group of Japanese calligraphy practitioners and their bodily engagement, I have attempted to theorize reading and writing practices through the concept of "bodies *in flux*."

In developing this concept, I pay close attention to lyrical and onomatopoetic expressions found in the language of calligraphy practitioners as well as the practitioners' relations to the art of calligraphy vis-à-vis the material specificities of bodies, paper, brushes, etc. Insofar as rhythmical brush strokes and breathing dictate the disciplined body whose goal is to "forget" its body, a concept of habituated automaticity bears a particular resonance in this chapter. In this context, body is defined as one of many variables that completed the execution. Attending to techniques and spatiotemporal experiences of reading and writing mediated by the breath, brush strokes, postures and tactility, I have sought to identify the specific corporeal engagement and affect of Japanese language specific reading and writing threshold.

Each of the five chapters thus examines specific instances of reading and writing practices that have become intertwined with questions of mediation, cultural transmission and anxieties about national futurity vis-à-vis the perceived decline in the reading and writing proficiency among Japanese youth. Through different instances where previously held understanding about national culture, identity, boundaries, and "proper" conducts become either challenged or undone, I have tried to establish that seemingly discrete incidents occurring on different plains indeed coalesce to articulate anxieties about reading and writing practices specific to Japan. While recognizing cultural specificities was integral to this project, I have also kept in mind that similar intergenerational struggles and spatiotemporal negotiations exist throughout the rest of the rapidly digitizing world. I hope that this dissertation has at least managed to lay grounds upon which I may conduct further explorations and analyses in the future.

Bibliography

- Shougaku ichinen-sei (The First Graders) Nyuugaku-mae no sakidori gakushuu moji kazu kansei tokushuu-gou* (Pre-elementary School Complete Edition on Letters and Numbers) (2007).
- Tsurumi, Shunsuke, and Shinji Saito, (eds.) *Sazae-San No "Showa"*. Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2006.
- ““Fumiji” jiken no higaisha ni hatsu no jijyou-choushuu fukuoka-kouken (the First Questioning By the Police on the Victim of the “*Step(Ping)-on the Letter*” - Fukuoka High Public Prosecutor's Office).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2007.
- ““Fumiji” kagoshima-kengisen jiken de moto-keibuho wo kiso e fukuoka-koken (“*Step(Ping)-on-the Letter*”: Ex-Assistant Police Inspector Indicted in Connection With the Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly Election-Fukuoka High Public Prosecutor's Office).” *Mainichi Shimbun newspaper*, 2007.
- ““Fumiji” kagoshima-kenkei moto-keibuho ni yuuzai hanketsu fukuoka-chisai (“Stepping on the Letter”: Guilty Verdict for the Former-Assistant Police Inspector At the Kagoshima Prefectural Police-the Fukuoka District Court).” *Mainichi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.
- ““Fumiji” kyoyou saretai danssei ga keibuho wo dagoshima-chiken ni kokuso E (Man Who Was Forced (to) “Step on the Letter” Files a Suit Against an Ex-Assistant Police Inspector At Kagoshima District Public Prosecutor’s Office).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2007.
- ““Fumiji” moto-keikan ni choueki 10 kagetu kyuukei (“Stepping on the Letter”-the Prosecution Demands 10months' Imprisonment of the Ex-Assistant Police Inspector).” *Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.
- ““Fumiji” moto-keikan ni yuuzai “jyouki isshita shirabe” fukuoka-chisai (Guilty Verdict for the “Stepping on the Letter” Former-Police Officer-“Improper Interrogation”-the Fukuoka District Court).” *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.
- ““Fumiji” sousa moto-keibuho ni nishin mo yuuzai kousou kikyaku (Another Guilty Verdict Upon Apeel for the Ex-Assistant Police Inspector (Who) Forced “*Step(ping)-on-the-Letter*” During the Interrogation).” *Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.
- ““Netto riyō ri fuan” 45% naikakufu-yoron-chousa (45% “Worry About (Their) Internet Use” Cabinet Office Opinion-Poll).” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2008.

"Shounen A": *kono ko wo unde. (chichi to haha) kaikon no ahuki* ("Boy A": *Having Given Birth to This Child (Father and Mother) Memoirs of Repentance*). Tokyo: Bunshuu Bunko, 2001.

"196 Shin-jyouyou-kanji (Another 196 *Kanji* to *Kanji* Designated for Common Use)." *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2010.

Adal, Raja. "Japan's Bifurcated Modernity: Writing and Calligraphy in Japanese Public Schools, 1872-1943." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 2-3 (2009): 233-47.

Hetauma Sedai: Choutai Hegauma-Moji to 90nendai Wakamono-Ron (Hetauma Generation: Theory of Elongated-Bad-Looking Good Script and the Youth in the 1990s). Edited by Akurosu Editing Room. Tokyo: PARCO Publications, 1994.

Arai, Andrea. "The "Wild Child" of the 1990s Japan." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2000): 841-64.

Arai, Andrea. "Killing Kids: Recession and Survival in Twenty-First-Century Japan." *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 841-864

Arai, Andrea. "Notes to the Heart: New Lessons in National Sentiment and Sacrifice From Recessionary Japan." In *Global Futures in East Asia: Youth, Nation, and the New Economy in Uncertain Times*, edited by Ann Anagnost, Andrea Arai, and Hai Ren, 174-96. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Arai, Andrea G. "Recessionary Effects: The Crisis of the Child and the Culture of Reform in Contemporary Japan." Columbia University, 2004.

Asada, Hiroki, and Asai, Tatsuo. *Furikome-sagi higai no tokusei bunseki (Analysis of Characteristics of Damages Caused by Phishing Scam)* (2008).

Atsuji, Tetsuji. *Chiteki seisan no bunkashi: Waapuro ga motarasu sekai (Cultural History of Intellectual Production Brought on by the Word Processors)*. Tokyo: Maruzen, 1991.

Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson, and Michael Holquist. *University of Texas Press Slavic Series; No. 1*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to An Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Benjamin, Walter. "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, edited by Peter Demetz, 314-32. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.

- Benjamin, Walter. "On the Mimetic Faculty." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, edited by Peter Demetz, 333-36. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.
- Benveniste, Emile. "The Nature of Pronouns." In *Problems in General Linguistics Miami Linguistics Series; No. 8*, viii, 317. Coral Gables,: University of Miami Press, 1997.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Funes, the Memorious." In *Labyrinths*, edited by Donald A. Yates, 59-66. New York: New Directions, 2007.
- Brooks, Rodney Allen. *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
- Foster, Hal, (ed.) *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*. Vol. 2, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture - Dia Art Foundation*. The New Press, 1988.
- Bull, Michael. *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life. Materializing Culture*. Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2000.
- Calhoun, Craig J. *Habermas and the Public Sphere. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- Chartier, Roger. "Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading." *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings* 97:1 (1987): 299-329.
- Chartier, Roger. *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture From the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Chartier, Roger. "Languages, Books and Reading From the Printed Word to the Digital Text." *Critical Inquiry* Autumn, no. 31 (2004): 133-52
- Clastres, Pierre. *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*. Translated by Paul Auster. New York ; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books Distributed by MIT Press, 1998.
- Crain, Patricia. *The Story of a: The Alphabetization of America From the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. 1st MIT Press paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- "Daiyou kangoku "fumiji" - "shibushi-jiken" eiga-ka 23-nichi shisha-kai (Detention, *Fumiji* "Stepping on the Letter"-Film Screening (to be Held) on 23rd on *Shibushi*-Incident)." *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 2008.

- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. 1st American ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Writing and Difference*, 278-94. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Douqill, John. *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival*. North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012.
- "Emergency Press Release: Quest for Resolving an Issue of Unstable Employment." (2008): 2.
- Enmannji, Jiro. *Shouwa wo sawagaseta kanjitachi: touyou kanji no jikenbo (Kanji hat Caused Great Sensation in the Showa-era: A Casebook of Kanji Designated as Daily Use)*. Rekishi Bunka Library. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2007.
- Flesch, William. "Proximity and Power: Shakespearean and Cinematic Space." *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 3 (1987): 277-93.
- Fowler, Edward. *San'Ya Blues: Laboring Life in Contemporary Tokyo*. Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Frazer, James George. "Chapter Three: Sympathetic Magic." In *The Golden Bough*, 15-30. Sioux Falls: NuVision Publications, LLC, 2006.
- Frellesvig, Bjarke. *A History of the Japanese Language*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Fetishism." In *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*. New York: Collier Books, 1963.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." In *The Uncanny*, 120-61. London: Penguin Books, 2003 (1919).
- Fujii, James A. "Intimate Alienation: Japanese Urban Rail and the Commodification of Urban Subjects." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1999): 106-33.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, and Povinelli, Elizabeth A. "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition." *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 385-97.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006.

- Gottlieb, Nanette. *Word-Processing Technology in Japan - Kanji and the Keyboard*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.
- Gottlieb(Twine), Nanette. *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese*. London; New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Gottlieb(Twine), Nanette. "Toward Simplicity: Script Reform Movements in the Meiji Period." *Monumenta Nipponica* 38: 2 (1983): 115-32.
- Gottlieb(Twine), Nanette. "Standardizing Written Japanese. A Factor in Modernization." *Monumenta Nipponica* 43:4 (1988): 429-54.
- Guillory, John. "The Memo and Modernity." *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004): 108-32.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass. Cambridge, England: MIT Press; Polity Press, 1989.
- Halsey, Mark, and Young, Alison. "'Our Desires Are Ungovernable': Writing Graffiti in Urban Space." *Theoretical Criminology* 10, no. 3 (2006): 275-306.
- Hankou-seimei to bukimina yokoku Sakakibara Seito karano tegami Kobe shougakusei satsugai (Crime Letters and Ominous Warning - Letters from Sakakibara Seito - Kobe/Elementary School Killing)*. AERA. 1997.
- Haptic Literature*. Kodansha/Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2007.
- "Haptic Literature." *Gunzō* 63:1 (2008): 5-60.
- Harrington, Ann M. *Japan's Hidden Christians*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992.
- Hashiguchi, Kounosuke. *Zoku-wahon nyuumon: edo no honya to hon zukuri (Wahon for Beginners Vol.2: Book Making and Booksellers of Edo)*. Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2007.
- Hashiguchi, Kounosuke. *Wahon nyuumon: sennen ikita hon no sekai (Wahon for Beginners: The World of Books That Have Lived Through a Thousand Years)*. Tokyo: Heibon sha, 2005.
- Hayamizu, Kenro. *Keitai shousetsu-teki (Keitai-Novel-Esque)*. Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 2008.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *Writing Machines*. Vol. Mediawork, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.
- Hida, Yoshifumi. "Kutouten no rekishi (History of Punctuation Marks)." *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 49-51.

- Hyoudou, Hiromi. *Koe no kokumin kokka (Voice of the Nation-State Japan)*. Tokyo: Nihon Housou Kyoukai Publishing, 2000.
- Iida, Yumiko. "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s." *Positions* 8, no. 2 (2000): 421-64.
- Nihon no konpyuutaa hattatsu-shi (Evolutionary History of Japanese Computer Industry)*. Edited by Information Processing Society of Japan - Special Committee of History. Tokyo: Ohm-sha, 1998.
- Ingold, Tim. "Materials Against Materiality." *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007): 1-16.
- Inoue, Miyako. *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan. Asia--Local Studies/Global Themes ; 11*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2006.
- Inoue, Toshiyuki, and Jinguumae, Org. *2channel sengen: chosen suru media (Declaration of the 2channel: Media That Provokes)*. Bungei shunju, 2001.
- Ishikawa, Kyuuyou. *Nijyuu-gengo kokka nihon (Double Language Nation State - Japan)*. *NHK Books*. Tokyo: Nihon Housou Kyoukai Publication, 2000.
- Ishikawa, Kyuuyou. *Sho to nihonjin (Calligraphy and the Japanese)*. *Shincho Bunko*. Tokyo: Shincho sha, 2004.
- Ishikawa, Kyuuyou. *Tateni kake!: yokogaki ga nihonjin wo kowashiteiru (Write Vertically!: Horizontal Writing is Destroying Japanese)*. Tokyo: Shouden sha, 2005.
- Ishikawa, Kyuuyou. "Mazu fudeno mochikata wo oshieyo (First, Teach Your Children How to Hold a Brush)." *Bungakukai* 60, no. 7 (2006): 140-55.
- Ito, Hidetoshi. *Kanji bunka to kompyuutaa (Culture of Kanji and Computer)*. Vol. 9, *Chuukou PC Shinsho*. Tokyo: Chuuko Kooron sha, 1996.
- Ito, Mizuko, and Daisuke Okabe. "Intimate Connections: Contextualizing Japanese Youth and Mobile Messaging." In *The Inside Text: Social, Cultural and Design Perspectives on SMS*, edited by R Haper, L Palen, and A Taylor, Springer, 2005.
- Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda. *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.
- Ivy, Marilyn. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- Ivy, Marilyn. "Tracking the Mystery Man With 21 Faces." *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 1 (1996): 11-36.
- Ivy, Marilyn. "Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessionary Japan." *SAQ* 99, no. 4 (2000): 819-40.
- Johnson, Barbara. "Writing." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia, and Thomas McLaughlin, x, 486. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Kamei, Takashi, Tokihiko Oto, and Toshio Yamada, (eds.) *Nihongo no rekishi: gengogashi kenkyuu nyuumon (History of Japanese Language: Introduction to History of Linguistics (Supplementary Volume))*. Tokyo: Heibonsha Library, 2008.
- Karaki, Junzo. *Gendaishi e no kokoromi (Challenge Toward the Contemporary History)*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1963.
- Karatani, Kojin. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature. Post-Contemporary Interventions*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Karatani, Kojin. "Nationalism and Écriture." *Surfaces* 1, no. 201 (1995): 1-25.
- Kato, Koichi. *Den-nou shakai no nihongo (Japanese Language in the Electronic Brain Society)*. Tokyo: Bungei Shunjuu, 2000.
- Keenan, Thomas. "The Point is to (Ex)Change it: Reading *Capital*, Rhetorically." In *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, edited by Emily S. Apter, and William Pietz, 152-85. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Kielbowicz, Richard B. "Mere Merchandise or Vessels of Culture?: Books in the Mail, 1792-1942." *Bibliographical Society of America* 82:2 (1988): 169-200.
- Kinsella, Sharon. "Cuties in Japan." In *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, edited by Brian Moeran, and Lisa Scov, 220-54. Curzon & Hawaii University Press, 1995.
- Kittler, Friedrich A. *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter. Writing Science*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Kondo, Dorinne K. *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Kornicki, Peter F. *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History From the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998.

- Levi-Strauss, Claude. "The Sorcerer and His Magic." In *Structural Anthropology*, v. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In *Écrits: A Selection*, 3-9. New York. London: W.W.Norton&Company, 2002.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud." In *Écrits: A Selection*, 138-68. New York; London: W.W.Norton&Company, 2002.
- LaMarre, Thomas. *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription. Asia-Pacific*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000.
- LaMarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Latour, Bruno. "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together." In *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present Vol.6*, edited by H Kuklick, 1-40. Jal Press, 1986.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *Destroying the World to Save it*. New York: Owl Books, 2000.
- Lurie, David B. "Language, Writing, and Disciplinarity in the Critique of the "Ideographic Myth": Some Proleptical Remarks." *Language and Communication* 26 (2006): 250-69.
- Lurie, David Barnett. *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011.
- Maeda, Ai. *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*. Edited by James A. Fujii. *Asia-Pacific*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Kanda jimbo-cho furuhon-ya sanpo (Walk in Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores)*. Edited by Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper Publishing. Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper Publishing, 2004.
- Kanda jimbo-cho koshogai: eria-betsu kanzen gaido (Kanda Jimbo-Cho Antiquarian Bookstores: Complete Guide)*. Edited by Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper Publishing. Tokyo: Mainichi Shimubn Newspaper Publishing, 2005.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2001.
- Marutani, Saiichi. "Ten to maru (Comma and Period)." *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 46-47.

- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation. Post-Contemporary Interventions*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Masten, Jeffrey, Peter Stallybrass, and Nancy Vickers. *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production. Essays From the English Institute*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Matamata sazae-san o sagashite (*Looking for Sazae-San Once More*). Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Publications, 2007.
- Mauss, Marcel. *A General Theory of Magic*. London, Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972.
- Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques of the Body." In *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, edited by Judith Farquhar, and Margaret Lock, 50-68. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor. *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message." In *Understanding Media*, 7-21. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Miller, Laura. "Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media Assessments." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2004): 225-47.
- Miyadai, Shinji. *Toomei na sonzai no futoomei na akui (Opaque Malice Within a Transparent Existence)*. Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1997.
- Miyadai, Shinji, Yoshiki Fujii, and Akio Nakamori, (eds.) *Shinseiki no riaru (Real in the New Millenium)*. Tokyo: Asuka Shinsho, 1997.
- Mogami, Katsuya. "Hanashi kotoba no ikitsugi to kutouten (Breathing Tempo of the Spoken Language and Punctuation Marks)." *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 68-69.
- Mori, Kenichi, and Yagihashi, Toshiaki. *Nihongo waapuro tanjyo (The Birth of Japanese Word Processor)*. Tokyo: Maruzen, 1989.
- Morris, Rosalind. "Modernity's Media and the End of Mediumship? On the Aesthetic Economy of Transparency in Thailand." In *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, edited by Jean Comaroff, and John L Comaroff, 192-214. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Nagamine, Shigetoshi. *"Dokushokokumin" no tanjyou: meiji 30nendai no katsuji medhia to dokusho bunka (The Birth of the "Reading Citizens": Print Media of the Meiji 30s and Reading Culture)*. Tokyo: Editor School Publication, 2004.

- Nakamura, Akira. "Kutou ten no hyougen kouka (Expressive Effect of Punctuation Marks)." *Asterisk* 4 (1986): 59.
- Nakanishi, Hidehiko. *Katsuji ga kieta hi--konpyuutaa to insatsu (the Day Printing Type Disappeared: Computer and Printing)*. Tokyo: Shoubunsha, 1994.
- Nakanishi, Hidehiko. *Honga kawaru!: katsuji jyouhou (Book Will Change!: Cultural Theory of Print Information)*. Tokyo: Tokyo Sogensha, 2003.
- Oguma, Eiji. *1968 I&II*. Tokyo: Shinyosha, 2009.
- Oonami, Aya. "Daini rosu-gene daihassei suru -- shuushoku hyougaki ga mata yattekuru (Looming Outbreak of the Second Lost-Generation: Another Employment Ice Age)." *AERA* (2009): 18.
- Parikka, Jussi. *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*. Vol. 11, *Posthumanities*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Peters, John Durham. *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Peters, John Durham. "Broadcasting and Schizophrenia." *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 1 (2010): 123-40.
- Rafael, Vicente L. "The Cell Phones and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines." *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 399-425.
- Reader, Ian. *A Poisonous Cocktail? - Aum Shinrikyou's Path to Violence*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey, and David Pellauer. Vol. 3, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- "Rou sukunakushite minori nomi tsuikyuu (Seeking High Productivity Without Effort)." *Asahi Shimbun newspaper*, 1984.
- Ryang, Sonia. *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity*. Vol. Transitions, Asia and Asian America, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1997.
- Saito, Taisei. "Bousou suru keitai, gakkou ura-saito, oyamo kyoushi mo shiranu ma ni -- (Cell Phone Accessible Secret School Sites Gone Out of Control: Beyond Parents and Teachers' Knowledge)." *AERA* 15 (2007): 16-19.
- Saji, Keizo, and Shinji Sanada. *Onsei, goi, moji, hyouki*. Shohan ed. Vol. Nihongo kyoshi yousei shirizu, Tokyo: Tokyo Horei Shuppan, 1996.

- Sakai, Naoki. *Kako no koe: jyuuhasseiki nihon no gensetsu ni okeru gengo no chii* (*Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse*). Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2002.
- Sano, Shinichi. *Darega "hon" wo korosunoka (Who Kills "Books")*. Tokyo: President Publication, 2001.
- Satake, Hideo, and Kuniko Satake. *Kotoba no hyoki no kyokasho: nihongo wo shiru, migaku*. Tokyo: Beret Shuppan, 2005.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. London: Duckworth, 1983.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century*. New York: Urizen Books, 1979.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford; New York ;: Berg, 1988.
- Seltzer, Mark. *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Sheller, Mimi, and Urry, John. "Mobile Transformations of 'Public' and 'Private' Life." *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 107-25.
- Shiba, Ryotaro. *Honjyo, fukagawa sampo, kanda kaiwai (a Walk in Honjyo, Fukagawa, Kanda Area)*. Vol. 36, *Kaidou wo yuku*. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Publications, 1992.
- Shimizu, Bunkichi. *Hon wa nagareru: shuppan ryuutsuu kikou no seiritsu-shi (Books Flow: Historical Formation of Publishing and Distribution System)*. Tokyo: Japan Editor School, 1991.
- Shimoda, Hirotsugu. *Keitai riterashii: kodomono -tachi no keitai denw/intaanetto ga abunai! (Keitai Literacy: Watch Out for Children's Cellphone and Internet!)*. Tokyo: NTT Publication, 2004.
- Shimomura, Noboru. *Shimomura-shiki kanji no hon: tonaete oboeru (ichinen-sei)* (Shimomura-style Book of Kanji: Learning Through Chanting (First Grader)). Tokyo: Kaiseisha, 2007.
- Shimomura, Noboru. *Shimomura-shiki kanji no hon: tonaete oboeru (rokunen-sei)* (Shimomura-style Book of Kanji: Learning Through Chanting (Sixth Grader)). Tokyo: Kaiseisha, 2007.

- Shirakawa, Shizuka. "Moji seisaku wa souseki no jidai wo mokuhyou to seyo (Letter Policy Must Aim the Standard of Soseki's Era)." *Bungakukai* 60:7 (2006): 122-29.
- Siegel, James T. *Naming the Witch. Cultural Memory in the Present*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Smith, Henry D. "Japaneseness and the History of the Books." *Monumenta Nipponica* 53:4, no. Winter (1998): 499-515.
- Smith, Henry D. "Pictured Fiction: Popular Novels of Nineteenth-Century Japan in the Starr East Asian Library." *Columbia Library Columns* 45:1 (1996): 5-12.
- Tanaka, Stefan. *New Times in Modern Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Tanikawa, Shuntaro. *Zoku-Tanikawa Shuntaro shishu (Poetry of Shuntaro Tanikawa, Vol.2)*. Vol. 108, *Gendai-Shi Bunko*. Tokyo: Shicho-sha, 1993.
- Entropy, The Society for Studies of. *Jyunkan-gata shakai wo tou: seimei, gijyutsu, keizai (Inquiring into a "Circulatory Society": Life, Technology and Economy)*. Tokyo, Japan: Fujiwara Shoten, 2001.
- Tomita, Hidenori, Tomonori Okada, Norihiko Takahiro, and Misa Matsuda, (eds.) *Poketto-beru/keitai-shugi! (Pocket-Bell/Keitai-Ism!)*. Tokyo: Just System, 1997.
- Umesao, Tadao. *Chiteki seisan no gijutsu (Technology of Intellectual Production)*. *Iwanami Shinsho*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1969.
- Unger, Marshall J. "The Very Idea. The Notion of Ideogram in China and Japan." *Monumenta Nipponica* 45, no. 4: Winter (1990): 391-411.
- Uozumi, Kazuaki. *Gendai hisseki-gaku jyoron (Introductory Theory of Contemporary Graphology)*. *Bunshun Shinsho* 149. Tokyo: Bungei Shunjuu, 2001.
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York, Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by MIT Press, 2002.
- Wataya, Risa. *Insutooru (Install)*. Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2001.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Vol. Routledge classics, London; New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Weber, Max, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York,: Oxford university press, 1946.

Weber, Samuel. "The Virtuality of the Media." *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media and Composite Cultures* 10 (2000): 37-54.

Yamane, Kazuma. *Hentai shoujo-moji no kenkyuu (Study of Deformed Girl Scripts)*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986.

Yasuda, Takeshi. *"Kata" no nihon bunka (Japanese Culture as "Form")*. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Newspaper Publications, 1984.

Yoda, Tomiko. *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004.

Shikiji-subeteno hitobitoni mojiwo (Literacy: Letters to All People). Edited by Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper. Tokyo: Akashi Publishing, 1990.

2008. *Zokuhatsu suru "daredemo yokatta" satsujin no haikai (What lies behind the succession of "Anybody Would have been good" killing-spree)*.

Appendices

Chapter 2: Figure 1. Front of the envelope reads in bold letters “STOP the deposit!

“*Furikome-sagi*” is on a rapid increase!” with a final warning from a watchdog “Be careful of economic crimes!”



Chapter 2: Figure 2. Back of the envelop offers some practical advice how *not* to become a victim of *furikome-sagi*.



Chapter 2: Figure 3. Examples of QR code (to be accessed via built-in scanner of *keitai*)



Chapter 2: Figure 4. Examples of *ASCII* art

Cat

```

      ^ ^
~'____('~')
UU____U U

```

Cat in a box

```

      ^ ^
____/('~')\
| |_____|
| |  みかん  |
| |_____|
\|_____|

```

Chapter three: Figure 1. *Sazae-san*'s family home layout

(<http://www.sazaesanitiba.com/>)

Sazae-san's *ieden* is placed in a hallway, against the wall of a 4.5 tatami-mat room on the right-hand side after entering the house, next to a closet with double doors.



1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

図④ 真性長体ヘタウマ文字

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

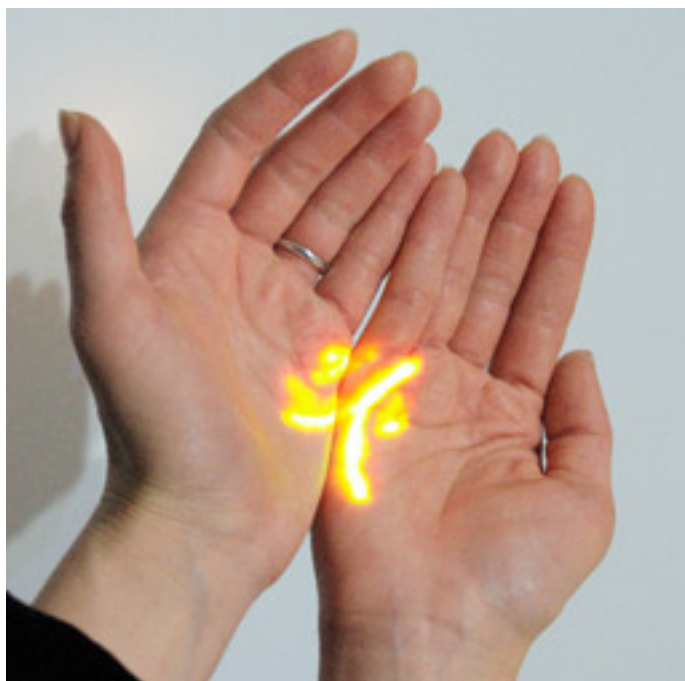
1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

1234567890 さるのこしかけ
ドリー・ムス・カム・トクルー TUGUMI
はと氣づく、突如頭がクリアーになっていた。

図⑤ 仮性長体ヘタウマ文字

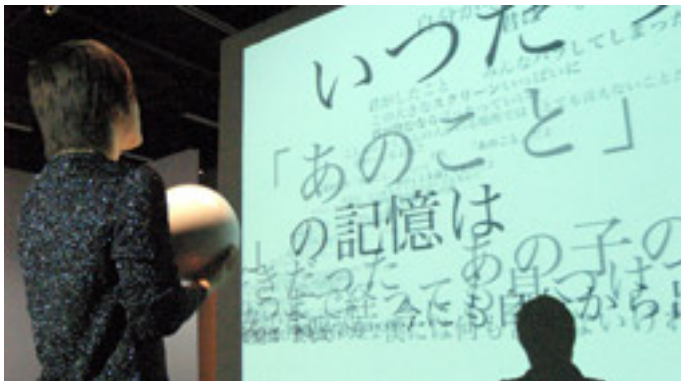
Chapter three: Figure 4. *Haptic Literature* exhibited at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

The Chinese character for “Fire” is projected onto viewer’s hands.



Chapter three: Figure 5. *Haptic Literature* exhibited at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

Viewers are encouraged to move the white ball (seen in the picture) to move texts projected onto a screen.



Chapter four: Figure 1.

Poster of Toshiba JW-10



Chapter four: Figure 2.

Toshiba JW-10 at work



図 1 最初の日本語ワープロ (JW-10)

Chapter four: Figure 3. *Gyaru-moji*

≧ ω に ち わゝ(・ω・●) - Hello(こんにちは)

≧ □ = / ㄣ_φ(・(エ)・。)♪ - Nice to meet you (よろしく)

ナよ あ 1 = ? (° ω ° ★) - What is it?(なあに?)

Chapter five: Figure1.



ドラえもん ふるくで えんぴつ めいじん

きれいな じが かけるように、ふるくを つかって、ただしい えんぴつの
もちかたと かきかたを いっしょに べんきょうしよう!!



①「もてるくん」を
えんぴつマークに
あわせて、えんぴつの
さきから
やく3・5センチ
メートルの
いちに
とりつけます。



②「もてるくん」を
えんぴつに
はめたら、
みぎての
ひとさしゆびと
なかゆびで
はさみます。



③おやゆびを
したから あてて、
ほかの ゆびを
かるく まげます。



※鉛筆の先で手を傷つけないよう注意して取りつけてください。手の大きさにより、取りつけ位置は多少前後することがあります。

ステップ1



「えんぴつじょうずに もてるくん」を
つかって、えんぴつを ただしく もとう！」

Chapter five: Figure 2.



Chapter five: Figure 3.

① マットを つくえに おき、
おへそを マットの ↓ に
あわせて、すわりましょう。

② みぎあしを すこし まえに して
りょうあしの うらを
ゆかに つけましょう。

③ せなかを まっすぐに
のばしましょう。

④ つくえと おなかを すこし
はなして、すわりましょう。

⑤ いすと せなかを すこし
はなして、すわりましょう。

⑥ ひだりての ひじは、
つくえの うえに
のせないように しましょう。

⑦ ひだりては、みぎてより まえに
でないように しましょう。

かきかたの しせいは、
できたかしら？
さあ、かきはじめてね。

どうも！

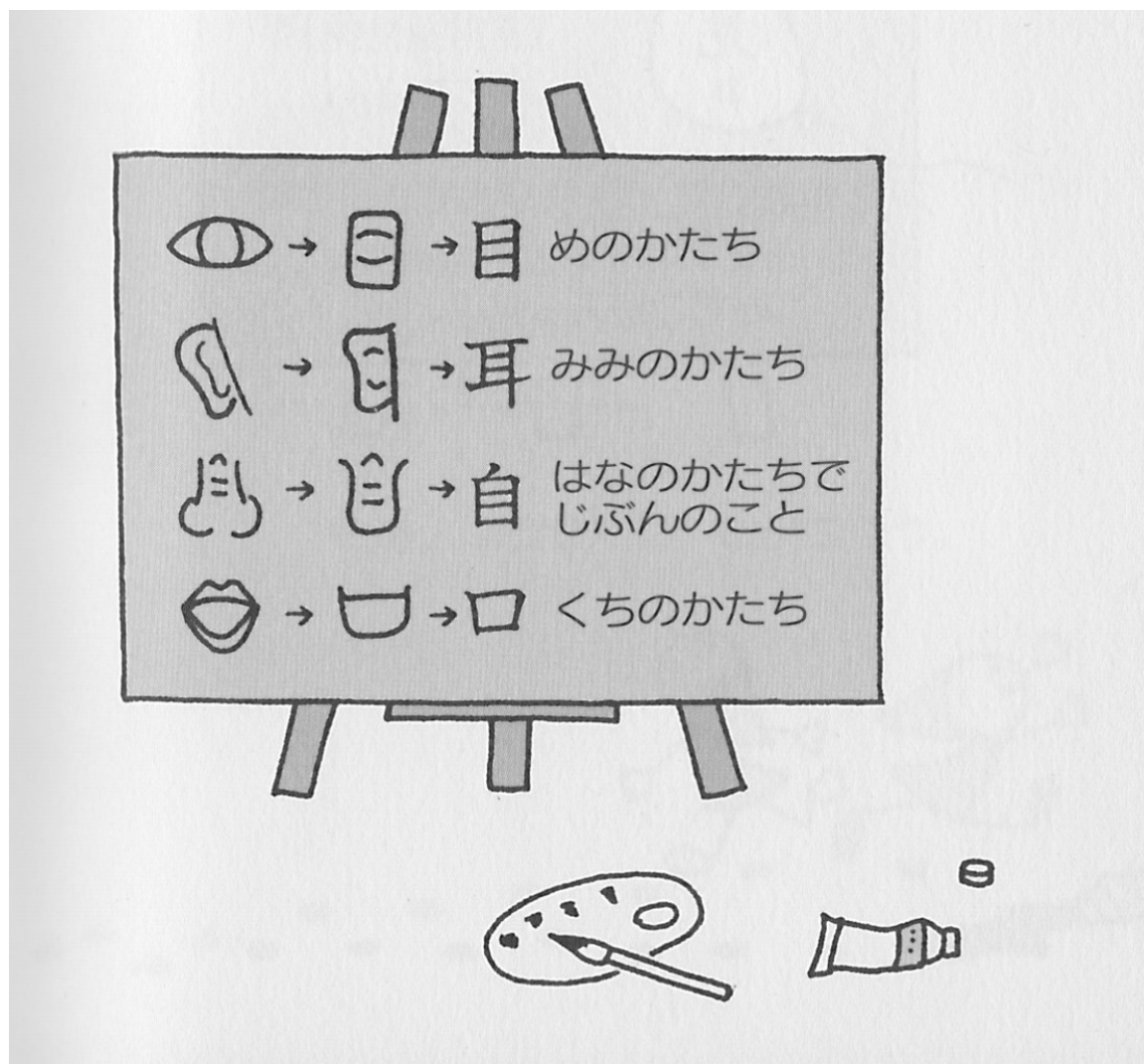
Chapter five: Figure 4.



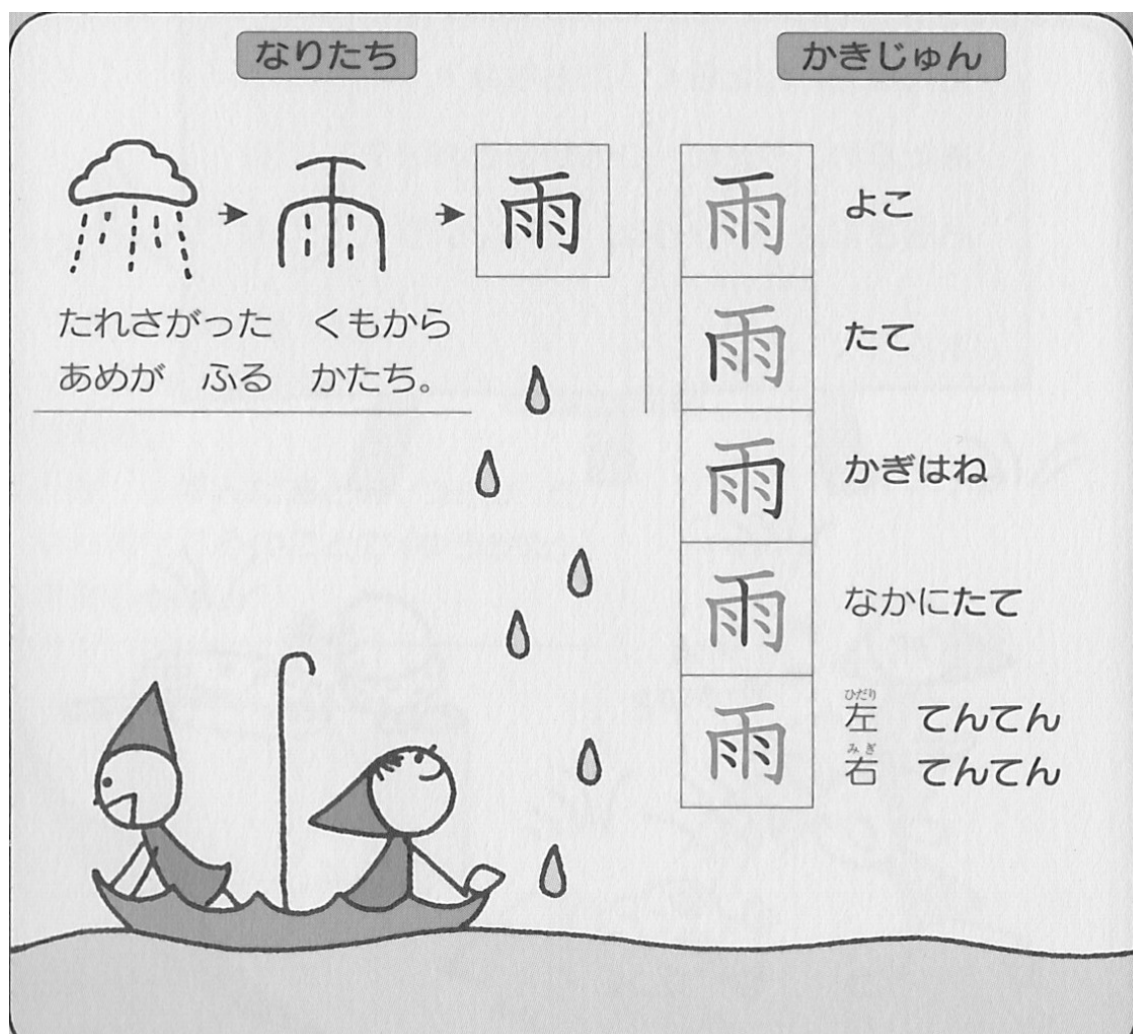
Chapter five: Figure 5.



Chapter five: Figure A.



Chapter five: Figure B.



Chapter five: Figure C.

[22]

子(こ)の部
6画

おん ソン ニュートンは引力の存在を発見した。子ども会を
ソン 存続させる。戸外で思う存分に遊んだ。

いみ ①あること・いること・存在・
現存・実存・残存・生存・存
命・存立・存亡・存否
②たもっていること・保存・

なりたち

土のなかに、根がじゅ
うぶん張っている形。

赤んぼうの形。

子どもがそだつように、
土のなかに張った根は、やがては
芽をだすもとなる。それで〈あ
る・いる・たもっている〉などの
意味をあらわす。

かきじゅん

存 よこー

存 イをかき

存 子をつける

[23]

子(こ)の部
7画

おん コウ 評判の孝行むすこ。この物語の主人公の孝心にうた
れた。父母に孝養をつくす。孝道を守ることはい
つの世も変わらない。二十四孝の話を書く。

いみ 父母をたいせつにすること
*孝心・孝行・孝子・孝女・
孝養・思孝・親孝行・不孝

なりたち

つえをついた年よりの
形。

子どもの形。

子どもは年とった親を
だいじにしなくてはならない。そ
れで、子どもが年とった父母を背
おう形から〈父母をたいせつにす
る〉という意味をあらわす。

かきじゅん

孝 よこ たて
よこで

孝 ノをかいて

孝 下から子どもが
もちあげる