INTRODUCTION

Balloon Ride

The year is 1861 and technology is in the air. Two bearded Westerners in frock coats stand before a hillside, gazing toward a hot air balloon in which a third figure stands aloft holding two flags. A white, two-story building lies directly below the balloon, its lower story almost swallowed up by the slope of the hill. A scattering of clouds in the sky above and leafy treetops in the distance complete the picture. I begin with this scene, which appears in a woodblock print by Baisotei Gengyo (figure 0.1), less for the spectacle of the flying machine it presented to the Japanese populace, than for the interconnected verbal, visual, and print regimes it represents during the interval between the American mission to Japan (1853–1854) and the dawn of the Meiji period (1868–1912). It sets the stage for this book to undertake a media history of modern Japanese literature and visual culture.

That the picture appears to float is due not only to the balloon, but also to the perspectival techniques of “floating pictures” (uki-e) that came into vogue in the woodblock prints of the late Edo period, derived in part from the illusion of perspectival depth in Dutch copperplate engraving.

1. Baisotei Genkyo (1817–1880) was best known as a book designer who collaborated with writer Kanagaki Robun. He also designed the title page of Hiroshige’s 100 Famous Views of Edo after the artist’s death.
There are further indications of Baisotei’s desire to layer the print with multiple signifiers of Western art and writing technology. As Julia Meech-Pekarik explains, “to enhance the foreign scene, the artist provided a frame in imitation of an oil painting; some versions even have wax rubbed onto the surface in imitation of an oil painting.” On that ornate, floral border of the print is also the title *Shashinkyō fusenizu* (Camera: A hot air balloon picture). This instance of bricolage situates the print squarely in an epistemic shift that occurred from the 1850s to 1870s. Many of the artists who pioneered the use of Western styles of oil painting and draftsmanship also comprised the first generation to experiment with a host of intermediary genres that emerged from late Edo to early Meiji. They mixed and matched elements of woodblock prints, oil painting, lithography, typography, painting, and photography.

Previously utilized to express the idealized essence of things rather than to capture the actuality of their external appearance, the concept of *shashin* (photography) and cognates such as *shasei* (sketching) and *shajitsu* (realism) would emerge within a new field of media concepts and practices that also radically redefined linguistic and literary discourse. It was part of a new signifying constellation that coalesced during the Meiji period and centered on *utsushi*, a term that contains the multiple meanings to write, copy, trace, inscribe, and project.

By the early 1860s when Japanese woodblock prints were picked up by the Impressionists in France and England, Europeans had already begun to create Japoniste styles in imitation of floating world prints (*ukiyo-e*), including the joyful mangling and spurious invention of Chinese characters as an atmospheric effect. In Japan, meanwhile, where access to images of European and American modernity were gleaned only from a small store of paintings, prints, and illustrated books, alphabetic writing could still be rendered as gibberish so long as few were literate in the strange, sideways written script. Baisotei was thus in good company when he printed the name of the balloon in capital letters across its midsection.

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3. See Kinoshita’s *Shashingaron* (On photographic-paintings) on the diversity of intermediary genres such as painted photographs, silhouette and shadow drawings (*kage-e*), and so-called “camera” kabuki actor prints (*haiyū shashinkyō*), which despite their ostentatious reference to photography, in fact combined elements of Dutch glass-plate and Japanese woodblock print styles.
as “СНИТСТUTION” instead of “CONSTITUTION.” The disordering of Roman letters and inclusion of what appears to be a Cyrillic И were simply mistakes of his incomplete alphabetization. His print is based on an illustration in the travelogue Futayo gatari 二夜語 (Two nights’ tale, 1861) by Katō Somō, a member of Japan’s first embassy to the United States. As Meech-Pekarik reveals,

On June 14, 1860 the Japanese embassy to the United States had paid a visit to the Philadelphia Gas Works to witness the ascent of two large balloons; the Constitution was piloted by Professor T. S. C. Lowe of New York and the other by Professor William Paulin of Philadelphia. . . . Ballooning had been popular in the West since the experiments of Montgolfier brothers in 1782, but the first balloon voyages in Japan did not take place until 1872, when three navy balloons were sent up in trial flight at Tsukiji in Tokyo.4

Comparison to the original illustration, which also clarifies the mystery of the two indeterminate flags as American, leaves no doubt as to the provenance of Baisotei’s model.

Ultimately, the specifics of time and place were of lesser importance so long as a broadly Western or “Dutch” sensibility was imparted. In the lower right-hand side of the frame, in a third authenticating mark is the artist’s signature, Baisotei geboku, or Baisotei’s playful ink. This connects it to the episteme of the Tokugawa floating world in which amateurs held up exotic curiosities to the reading and viewing public. Baisotei’s lettering, moreover, reveals a naïve fascination with the opacity of foreign scripts. The misspelled Constitution hovering in the air—a term doubly signifying the fundamental laws and principles by which a nation-state establishes itself, and the written record of said laws and principles—effectively underscores a political watershed that had yet to be enacted on Japanese soil. The result instead, apropos of the Tokugawa floating world’s playful brush with Western modernity, is the floating signifier of nonsense letters on a floating balloon in a floating picture. Nor is it the only instance of writing scrambled and set adrift. The man’s coat incorporates into its floral pattern a motif of letters that includes another И and B, an upside-down А and Т, and a backward С in the

center. Another row of letters run along the hem: a backward D, an E, an L, an upside-down P and V, and a final, indistinct letter. Their phonetic value is beyond the point, however, as they are purely decorative.

How quickly things would change in the years to come. A new investment in the transparency of phonetic scripts arose in the Meiji period as language reformers sought to mend the fragmented polity of Tokugawa Japan into a single, cohesive people (kokumin) united by a common national language (kokugo) and script (kokuji). The latter category applied not only to kana and roman letters, but also to experimental scripts, most importantly the shorthand notation (sokki) adapted from Western models and used in an effort to seamlessly record and transmit between spoken and written Japanese. A series of simple lines and loops that mapped onto phonetic values and could be written efficiently and accurately, shorthand was the consummate manual transcription system of the nineteenth century. It was no coincidence that in English it was dubbed “phonography” by its inventor Isaac Pitman, some thirty years prior to the invention of Edison’s phonograph, or that in mid-1880s Japan, it earned the moniker “verbal photography” (kotoba no shashinhō). In a fitting resonance with the constellation of utsushi, practitioners of shorthand coined the catchphrase “to write things down just as they are” (ari no mama ni utsushitoru) to describe its high fidelity recording.

Initially introduced for the civic purpose of recording political speeches and the conduct of the state, shorthand was to garner more public attention when it was applied in the mid-1880s to the transcription of rakugo and kōdan, two types of popular theatrical storytelling. It was in this capacity that the serialized, shorthand transcribed pamphlets for Sanyūtei Enchō’s Kaidan botan dōrō 怪談牡丹燈籠 (Ghost story of the peony lantern, 1884) enabled for the first time a form of unvarnished vernacular writing, the forerunner to what became known as genbun itchi, meaning literally, “the unification of speech and writing,” or as I will refer to it hereafter, “the unified style.” By dint of its origin in new forms of verbal and visual media capture, this literary mode was imbued with new qualities of indexical mimeticism. As I further argue in this book, it should accordingly be called “transcriptive realism” in recognition of its link to shorthand and the constellation of utsushi.

The genealogies of modern Japanese literature that commence with Tsubouchi Shōyō’s literary theories in Shōsetsu shinzui 小説神髓 (Essence
of the novel, 1885) and Futabatei Shimei’s “first modern Japanese novel,” *Ukigumo* 浮雲 (Floating clouds, 1887), have long signaled *The Peony Lantern* as a source of fleeting inspiration, but have otherwise bypassed shorthand’s compositional strategies and critical appraisal by Shōyō and others, leaving it to haunt the margins of the canon as a ghostly remainder. While “writing things down just as they are” would become the compositional imperative of modern Japanese realism from the literary sketching (*shasei-bun*) movement initiated by Masaoka Shiki to modern novels by Kunikida Doppo, Shimazaki Tōson, Tayama Katai, Natsume Sōseki, and many others, its media-historical basis would be forgotten, lost, or marginalized by successive generations of writers and scholars. Here, however, by building upon recent scholarship in media studies and media history, I seek to reestablish the nascence of modern Japanese literature and visual culture from within a field of techniques and technologies of writing.

Against the lingering ambiguity and play of signifiers in Baisotei’s balloon ride, an unprecedented shift toward new standardizing measures of time, space, and language, as well as a profusion of new media systems and technologies, redrew the boundaries of perception and lived experience from the 1870s to early 1900s. These developments had profound consequences for inculcating national subjectivity and training a modern outlook onto the world. Thereafter, whether in literary or visual terms, a copy would first and foremost be evaluated according to its indexical (calculable/measurable) relation to external phenomena. As art historian Satō Dōshin maintains, “For realism to truly become established, quintessentially nineteenth-century factors were needed—a standard of values different from idealization, beautification, or deification; a recognition of reality as it is and the power to ‘see’; and a new belief in one’s visual abilities.”5

We should not be misled into thinking that any form of media capture restores presence by representation, and language is no exception. Miyako Inoue provides a brilliant précis of commonsensical notions of language as a natural and innate conduit. According to such views,

Language is a transparent medium, purely and exclusively referential in its function, according to which nothing comes between language and the world; that is, there is an exclusive and context free, one-to-one correspon-

dence between sound and the word, word and meaning, and language and the world. Language reflects what is already out there—always one step behind the world, docilely ratifying and confirming it. Such a realist conception of language is inherently ideological because it effaces the semiotic work of language in actively mediating and producing what is seemingly merely given, reversing the order of things as if the world existed as it is without the mediation of language. Linked up with the regime of modern power, language serves to turn things, categories, events, and ideas into a fait accompli. 

Effacement of the medium, or writing under erasure: although her words were not written with Meiji-era literary, linguistic and visual discourses in mind, they accurately describe a central belief that the invention of a new, transparently mimetic national language and script could serve as the basis for the realist novel and other contemporary genres. Memory of the medial processes would prove short-lived on any number of counts. By the early 1900s, the shorthand transcription of oral storytelling would recede from memory as younger writers simply embraced the unified style as a fait accompli in its own right. Eventually the question of national script would lose its equal status, too, and be subsumed into the field of national language. In other ways to be described later in this book, a literary canon was invented by future generations of scholars at the expense of these and other aspects of media history. It is therefore fitting that we begin at a point where matters of writing technology were still up in the air, prior to the moment when forgetfulness could set in.

Systems of Writing Things Down

This book investigates the discursive transformations that reshaped the literary, visual, and linguistic landscape of Meiji-era Japan (1868–1912). The critical approach of this book is principally indebted to the pioneering work of German media theorist and literary scholar Friedrich Kittler. Kittler adopts Aufschreibesysteme as the term of his methodology, which

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means “notation systems,” or more literally, “systems of writing down.” It was a neologism originally coined by the judge Dr. Schreber in his published memoirs, which were famously analyzed by Sigmund Freud. Kittler repurposes—or rather, restores to—the term its fullest significance, by using it to designate the proliferation of writing technologies and their effects in modernity.\textsuperscript{7} Since the German term has no direct equivalent in English, Kittler’s English translators have rendered it “discourse networks,” and I make use of this critical, if not precisely synonymous term, at key junctures throughout my argument. As Kittler rightly observes, the discourse analysis developed by Michel Foucault takes as the limit of humanistic knowledge the primary medium of storage and retrieval available until the advent of modern media in the nineteenth century, namely the monopoly of print.\textsuperscript{8} By contrast, discourse networks calls attention to material deployments of writing through channels of recording and transmission that are not limited to what Marshall McLuhan called the “Gutenberg Galaxy.” Moreover, where discourse analysis implies objects that can be extracted from archives, as per Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge, the concept of discourse networks offers a far more encompassing approach to identifying the often-fleeting traces of media.

This is not to say that Kittler’s methodology is antagonistic to archival research or the representational codes that authors and texts lay bare. On the contrary, \textit{Discourse Networks 1800/1900} sets up parallel instances of the discourses of Romanticism and Modernism in formation, whose constituent parts depend less on a particular genius for their creation (Goethe and Nietzsche, respectively), than a vast rearrangement of writing technologies, social relations, educational institutions, and the apparatus of the state. If I may take the liberty of borrowing from David Wellbery’s impressive synopsis of the German episteme of 1800, he observes of the conventions for Romantic poetry, universal alphabetization, and other means by which national subjectivity was inculcated that

\textsuperscript{7} In a 2006 interview with John Armitage, Kittler summarizes Schreber’s psychotic worldview as follows: “By appealing to the notion of \textit{Aufschreibesysteme}, the madman sought to imply that everything he did and said within the asylum was written down or recorded immediately and that there was nothing anyone could do to avoid it being written down, sometimes by good angels and occasionally by bad angels” (\textit{Theory, Culture and Society}, 18).

\textsuperscript{8} See Kittler, \textit{Gramophone, Film, Typewriter}, 2–3.
they are discursive facts, nodal points in a positive and empirical discursive network, functions in a system of relays and commands that has no center or origin. As such they do not disguise a reality that is anterior to them and from which they would spring; they produce reality by linking bodies (e.g., the eyes and ears and hands of children), to the letter and to instances of power. Soon this system develops its own theory (a linguistics of the root and the verb), its own imaginary (Poetry as translation of the language of nature), its own protocols of reading (the Romantic hermeneutics of the signified). It realizes itself across institutional reforms (from primary schools to university lecture halls), it is codified in laws (the Universal Prussian Law of 1794 mandates both authorial copyright and maternal breast feeding), it shapes careers (as the new genre of the Bildungsroman reveals).9

National particularities aside, this model is not structurally very different from what transpired in late nineteenth-century Japan. Certain pathways and conduits that developed in the Meiji episteme closely track or run concurrently with developments in Germany and elsewhere in the West. Meiji Japan witnessed an array of national, imperial, and international standardization movements—temporal, spatial, and linguistic—in tandem with the new media technologies that increasingly redrew the boundaries of daily life across the globe. It likewise presided over the creation of a national postal service that regulated the sending and receiving of all written messages, including those conveyed via telegraph; national language and script reforms, including experimental phonetic scripts such as shorthand notation; and new categories of literary realism that culminate in the modern novel. While Kittler’s study has not yet been translated into Japanese, in critical writing about it, media studies scholar Tamura Kensuke chose to render the phrase “discourse networks” as kakikomi shisutemu, which literally means “systems of writing down.” While this is an acceptable alternative, a more precise translation that does justice to the media-theoretical language rooted in the actual terminology of the Meiji era would be utsushitori shisutemu, which recuperates the catchphrase “to write things down just as they are.” Indeed, the fact that this catchphrase insistently recurs across such a variety of texts and contexts is the mark of an episteme where writing, writ large, makes its presence felt everywhere.

The title of this book, *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan*, is accordingly dialogic. It extends in the direction of both characterizing material conditions of writing and elucidating the self-reflexive, generative process of writing about technology in literature and visual culture. Working between these two levels, we see for the first time where the primacy of authors and texts, so often assured by canonical approaches to Japanese literary studies, takes a back seat to media as imbued with agency. Until recently successive generations of scholars were taught to read authors and texts in an almost purely exegetical capacity that gave little consideration to the vast enterprise of excavating media history. Against the grain of canonical genealogy, the media-historical origins of Japanese literary, linguistic and visual modernity not only demand their own archaeology; they also require that we resituate familiar authors and texts that have been thoroughly naturalized/nationalized as relays in media concepts, practices, and processes.

*The Paper Trail*

Media history has always had a larger intellectual foothold in Japanese-language scholarship of Japan studies than its North American counterparts. Kono Kensuke, Komori Yōichi, Kamei Hideo, Li Takanori, and many others have made invaluable contributions to historicizing the role of media concepts and practices in Japanese modernity. While I am deeply indebted to their respective analyses, which I have done my best to incorporate throughout this book, several differences distinguish my approach from previous scholarship. The early chapters in particular examine the standardization movements and new techniques and technologies of writing in Europe and North America that parallel, overlap, or in some cases are in direct dialog with the modernization and modernity of Meiji Japan. Without these distinctions in place the materiality of discourse networks fades into the background and can remain only at the level of metaphor in the pages of literary texts.

The early chapters likewise emphasize the extent to which Meiji Japan was in a close exchange of ideas and material culture with the Anglophone world. The incommensurability of speech and writing was
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not only a central problem for Meiji language reformers; it was a central feature of nineteenth-century Western discourse. In the Anglophone world, this gave rise to famous examples such as George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1912), modeled after the irascible grammarian and philologist Henry Sweet (1845–1912). Remediating this gap was likewise the impetus behind experimental phonetic scripts such as Isaac Pitman’s shorthand notation and Alexander Melville Bell’s Visible Speech in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There is an all-too-facile assumption made in Japan studies that Japanese language reforms took place against a backdrop of fully formed or perfected Western languages. Nothing could be farther from the truth. From experimental phonetic scripts to the notion of a unified, vernacular language itself, Meiji reformers were in dialog with, not forever a step behind and struggling to “catch up” to, their Western, principally Anglophone, counterparts.

Last but not least, media history assumes a broader interrogative function than literary history alone. It was Foucault’s radical insight into disciplinary formation that modern fields of knowledge are constituted from without. That is to say, they do not owe their origins to the putative objects they seek internally, but to external causes. Foucault’s response was to attack this silence at the center that establishes myths of continuity and reveals its presence to itself. For proponents of the canonical accounts of the modern novel and the unified style as the basis of national language, their mutual blind spot is a question of scripts: namely, how phonetics were equated by Meiji intellectuals with the most advanced methods of media capture. This book in no way presumes the inevitability of the unified style or its role as the vehicle of realism in modern Japanese literature. Rather, it investigates a wide spectrum of debates and experiments that did not necessarily win the day, but nevertheless had lasting reverberations, and sometimes cascading effects, in the Meiji episteme.

With these qualifications in mind, it must be pointed out that the basic facts about the transcription of Sanyūtei Enchō’s *The Peony Lantern* in Japan are well known and not, in and of themselves, controversial. Scholars and lay readers have long been aware that Tsubouchi Shōyō encouraged Futabatei Shimei to emulate Enchō’s storytelling to achieve a modern style. The catch is that literary historians could always isolate this as an exclusive, one-time event—a strange occurrence, perhaps, but not a decisive turning point, much less an indicator that led to an
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even more extensive groundwork of modernity. Still, even the basic proposition turns out to be somewhat misleading. It was not Enchō’s live performances that Futabatei had to witness in order to grasp his apparent literary genius, but the shorthand transcriptions themselves. This provides an important lesson about media that informs the narrative scope of this book. I do not dispute that authors, innovators, and reformers can actively participate and interact with one another in discourse. Rather, my focus is upon the ways in which media mediate. The very existence of shorthand transcriptions as an object to be imitated or adapted cannot be overstated. In fact, shorthand transcriptions in unison with other systems of writing down provided the means by which verbal, visual, and print regimes could, for the first time, converge into “modern Japanese literature.”

This book attempts to provide a unified theoretical and archival framework for understanding the media history of Meiji literature and culture. The chapters form a logical sequence from the general medial conditions of the Meiji episteme (part I) to the centrality of experimental phonetic scripts and the rethinking of conventional scripts in the debates over national language and script reform (part II), to the emergence of the unified style and transcriptive realism via phonetic shorthand (part III), and their dissemination into modern Japanese literature (part IV). Collectively they demonstrate how a multiplicity of globally synchronic media concepts, practices, and processes were assembled in Meiji. These include standardization movements; the rise of new communications systems such as telegraph and post; the aforementioned national language and script reform; and new literary styles and modes of realism exemplified by writers such as Masaoka Shiki and Natsume Sōseki.

The first chapter examines the late nineteenth-century standardization movements that contributed not only to the consolidation of Japanese national identity, but also to a new metrics of national-imperial time and space. Starting with fundamental concepts of nationalism (Benedict Anderson’s) and technology (Martin Heidegger’s), it periodicizes both gradual changes and sudden ruptures that reshaped daily life and the disparate phenomena that had previously remained either intensely local or unavailable to modern scientifi c methods. The second chapter amplifies this discussion with a study of the discursive networks of telegraph and post, which spread from the capital in Tokyo to the farthest peripheries of the archipelago, the Japanese empire in East Asia, and beyond. It
focuses upon Maejima Hisoka, whose proposal to abolish Chinese characters sent to the shogunate authorities prior to becoming Japan’s first postmaster-general is widely seen as the first salvo in the debates over national language and script reform. The chapter also evaluates Maejima’s contributions to setting up the channels by which writing, print matter, and electronic data could be sent down the telegraph wires. It then surveys the encoded scripts and mechanical processes that recompose writing into a materiality prior to meaning, demonstrating the ways in which not only subjective agency, but the surveillance and control of the state are asserted through their channels. The third chapter provides a comparative analysis of the power of the written word to entrap within the boundaries of national space represented in Meiji by Mokuami’s kabuki play *Shima Chidori Tsuki no Shiranami* 島千鳥月の白波 (Plovers of the island and white waves of the moon, 1881) over and against the conditions encapsulated in Hokusai’s iconic woodblock print *Shunshū Ejiri* 駿州江尻 (Shunshū Station in Ejiri Province, c. 1830) from the collection *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*. At stake are the changing legal, social, and aesthetic codes put into the service of the state to regulate the conduct of its citizens.

The fourth chapter begins with Mori Arinori, for whom a national language and script based upon simplified English suggested the most expedient means of inculcating Japanese national identity and competing head-to-head with the Western powers. It observes how Mori’s 1872 proposal was intimately bound up with spelling and phonetics reform in the Anglophone world. Directing his proposal in English to American scholars while serving as ambassador to the United States, Mori sought to overcome what he called the “hieroglyphic” nature of English spelling as well as the structural inadequacies of contemporary Japanese en route to establishing a modern state. In effect his proposal applied the same principle that comparable measures did with spatial and temporal units; in this case, its aim was to create a more perfectly standardized model of language. Despite the resistance and ridicule Mori endured by Anglophone and Japanese critics alike for suggesting to implement a consistent orthography of English, subsequent efforts to limit and regularize kana, including the elimination of variant forms kana, to limit the number of Chinese characters, and to create guidelines for romanized Japanese were consistent with the fundamentals of his proposal. The chapter concludes
with the philosopher Nishi Amane, who insisted upon the materiality of writing, and specifically that of Roman letters, as the fundamental pre-condition for Japan’s successful assimilation to the discourse of “Civilization and Enlightenment.” Nishi correlated the production of modernity itself with the phonetic technology of the alphabet.

The fifth chapter explores Takusari Kōki’s and his disciples’ adaptation of Isaac Pitman’s shorthand phonography (1882). Known as both phonography and a photographic method of words, shorthand contributed to a vast reorganization of economic, political, and literary activity by means of rapid manual recording and transmission prior to the popularization of mechanical audio-recording devices. It historicizes the origins of shorthand in the West, and devotes considerable attention to the competing theories espoused in Japan, particularly insofar as they point to shorthand’s contributions to the debates over national language and script reform. A central premise of this book is that shorthand quite literally underwrote the unified style, whose ideal was to achieve the interchangeable states of “writing as one speaks” and “speaking as one writes.”

The sixth chapter analyzes Alexander Melville Bell’s Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabetics, which was taught to Isawa Shūji directly by Alexander Graham Bell in 1878, and Isawa’s subsequent adaptation and promulgation of Visible Speech. Isawa’s applications of Visible Speech were integral to his implementation of national language education in the normal school system begun under Mori, including instruction for the deaf, disabled, and dialectically disadvantaged, and the earliest establishment of colonial education in Taiwan. Visible Speech for Isawa was ideally intended to regulate and advance the new concept of a unified Japanese national language (kokugo) at the center of an imperial system in East Asia. It was not Isawa’s intention to create a hybrid or synthesis of colonial tongues or writing systems; rather, it was to maintain standardized modes of speech that could be taught to colonizer and colonized alike using Visible Speech. Japanese would thus become the hub by which each colonial language could maintain unilateral relations independent of one another. Although never put into practice in this fashion, Visible Speech is nonetheless revealing of the extent to which an imported, adapted phonetic script besides shorthand was advanced in the name of the Japanese imperial project.
The seventh chapter contextualizes the cognate constellations of concepts and practices of *utsushi* across painting, photography, and literature. It also carries out three close textual readings: in the visual regime, it focuses upon Ernest Fenollosa’s polemical attacks in his presentation “*Bijutsu shinsetsu*” (The truth of art, 1882) against the word-image relations in literati art (*bunjinga*) en route to enforcing Western disciplinary boundaries. In the verbal regime it considers the accommodations made between *rakugo* and *kōdan* storytelling and shorthand notation evident in the prefaces, illustrations, and other framing devices of transcribed stories. Lastly, in the print regime it concludes with an analysis of Yano Ryūkei’s political novel *Sēbe meishi keikoku bidan* (Illustrious statesmen of Thebes, 1883–1884). This best-selling text, which was set in ancient Thebes and strove to represent the possibilities of political transformation espoused by the People’s Rights Movement, was also a striking demonstration of the possibilities of shorthand for reconceptualizing the relations of political thought and literature. While Yano employed a mixed style based on classical Japanese grammar, he also enlisted the participation of two shorthand reporters to transcribe the two volumes of the text. In the first edition, the second reporter Wakabayashi Kanzō assisted Yano in providing the reading public with an afterword that demonstrated shorthand alongside kana-only and mixed kanji-kana scripts. In less than a year’s time, Wakabayashi would also participate in the transcription of Enchō’s *The Peony Lantern* and write a preface of his own alongside one by Harunoya Oboro, the pseudonym of writer and literary theorist Tsubouchi Shōyō.

The eighth chapter examines the three canonical texts typically placed at the forefront of modern Japanese literature: *The Peony Lantern*, *Essence of the Novel*, and *Floating Clouds*. Despite the rhetoric of a transparency bordering on hallucinogenic mimesis put forth by shorthand practitioners and early literary theorists, the status of the represented text vis-à-vis an original presence or site of enunciation was constantly fraught with the ghostly interference of the medium. This is not to replace one origins narrative with another in an endless regression toward ever earlier, but never quite definitive beginnings, but to reassess the archival and methodological underpinnings upon which the very concept of a canonical origin is secured. It is also to challenge the hermeneutic effects that proceed from the canonical trajectory: while many authors and texts retain their
national-literary stature, the horizon of their legibility is irrevocably transformed.

The ninth chapter examines various writings from Masaoka Shiki, from his early iconoclastic attacks against conventional _haikai_ poetics and reform of haiku and tanka to literary sketching in prose. I use the title from Shiki’s early collection of essays, _Fude Makase 筆まかせ_ (Scribblings, 1884–1892) as a point of departure and organizing trope that locates his work in the discursive ruptures and peripatetic movements that led to experiments with transcriptive realism in the unified style. Yet I also wish to account for Shiki’s back-and-forth dialectics of life and literature, blood and ink. There is a conceit upon which scholars depend, the Romanticism of excavating the archive, which will yield from its dusty crypts every secret thought and feeling of its authors and texts as a consistent and coherent system of meaning: the text of life. Shiki plays into such a conceit as a paragon of Romanticism on several levels. His obsession with writing things down, a mania that we might diagnose as _Aufschreibesysteme_, was “inherited” by Naturalist writers in the late 1900s after his death, which recast physical and psychological phenomena in a scientific, or at least social Darwinian, perspective. There was also the matter of his tuberculosis, which manifested around 1895 and grew steadily worse, with a prolonged period of deterioration from 1898 to 1902. In spite, or perhaps because, of his physical debilitation, Shiki’s experimentation with literary form and style continued unabated.

The final chapter explores Sōseki’s _Wagahai wa neko de aru 我輩は猫である_ (I am a cat, 1904–1906), which was at once the apotheosis of the unified style in the modern novel and its most compelling critique. Drawing upon the full complement of discourse networks at his disposal by the turn of the twentieth century—shorthand, literary and artistic sketching, other media technologies, and the production of humanistic knowledge in general—Sōseki calls attention to the limits of representation, recording, and transmission through the medium of a cat. With its feline amanuensis constantly disrupting the narrative flow with reflections upon the medium of writing itself, this text exemplifies the discourse of transcriptive realism whereby the modern self is always preceded, if not in fact constituted, by a scene of writing.