

# Figuring the Digital Text

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My anthropological research project has been conceived in the effort not only to ethnographically document but also to responsively engage with the overwhelming universalizing logic of technological discourse of new media. I hope to shed some light upon the cultural specificities that are too often overlooked or downplayed as Japan enters headlong into a turbulent transitional period in the early twenty-first century. The transition is technological as well as generational, which I identified as a shift from analog

to digital. By identifying the socio-cultural-historical dynamics involved in a disputed discourse of "national culture in crisis," this project investigates ramifications and articulations of contemporary Japanese culture in order to explore questions of cultural transition, media technologies, and poetics and politics of nation state. In December 2006, I set out to inquire into both the effects of contemporary media technology of reading and writing and the practices of reading and writing facilitated and enabled by

rapidly advancing digital media devices and an infinitely expanding network system that supports extensive use of such devices in contemporary urban Japan since the late 1990s. Within Japan's intensely text and character dominant culture, a 99% literacy rate and high analog writing/reading proficiency have historically and discursively been understood as an index of the prosperity and integrity of the nation. The fragmentation and dismemberment associated with the digital writing/reading is thus often

translated as a failure to maintain the integrity of Japanese texts and characters, which is subsequently apprehended as a dissolution of Japan's national, cultural unity as a whole. The effects and practices are calibrated against the concurrently emerging powerful social discourse about the integrity of, or the loss thereof, a national culture which has been increasingly perceived as under attack by a phenomenon now referred simply as "(the youth) abandoning [of] the print culture/text" ((wakamono no) katsuji banare) among children of 'digital generation.'

For this presentation, I would like to focus on the digital writing and how we might understand the way digital text has been read.

