Research and Contribution

The all-male kabuki theater played a central role in the cultural and media landscape of early modern Japan, roughly from the early seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. In a somewhat different way, it has remained important in modern and even contemporary times, and has retained a strong presence in the new media of successive ages: kabuki actors were featured on Japan's first record, its first radio transmission, and in its earliest films and its first television broadcast. Yet as significant as the kabuki theater and its actors have been to Japan's media history, they have figured hardly at all in treatments of that history in English- or Japanese-language scholarship. This project, tentatively titled *Kabuki Actors, Print Technology, and the Theatrical Origins of Modern Media*, addresses this lacuna, using the figure of the star kabuki actor to probe the connectedness of early modern and modern mass media. The manuscript is divided into two parts: In Part I, I show how in the early modern period woodblock printed works imbued actors' bodies and voices, as well as the music of the stage, with communal meaning that could be passed on and preserved even in the absence of the actor or the stage. In Part II, I explore profound continuities between the functions of early modern woodblock print and those of modern mechanical media, while also showing how new technologies began to change the manner in which actors' bodies, voices, and the theater itself existed as embodiments of cultural meaning.

Basically, I regard woodblock printed books, actor prints, photographs, records, typeset scripts, and films as a media context, external to the theater, that gives rise to what Brice A. McConachie calls a "theatrical formation": a collaborative elaboration of a historically specific sense of the theater and its culture. In the early modern period, long before the emergence of mechanical recording technology, public fascination with actors and the theater more broadly turned woodblock print into a vehicle for the production and circulation of *experiences* of actors—their bodies, their voices, their stage presence. I thus start out by showing how woodblock-printed theatrical materials shaped the ways in which people watched, listened to, and imagined kabuki performance. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, modern media were mobilized to serve the same fascination with actors and the theater; over time, however, the new technologies led to a deep transformation in the way actors' bodies, voices, and kabuki theater were understood by making it possible for machines to record what people had formerly remembered, with print as an *aide-mémoire*.

Previous treatments of woodblock print in Japan have centered on information networks and social change, entering into dialogue with Elizabeth Eisenstein's influential *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, which portrayed print as a major instigator of cultural transformation that promoted "typographical fixity" and the standardization of information. If we move away from a focus on the effects of mass-dissemination to consider the medium itself, however, woodblock printing—which was almost always used to produce a facsimile of a handwritten manuscript—holds little in common with movable type, which replaces the manuscript with a textual surface created using reusable type. Woodblock print enabled, with relative ease, a seamless fusion of text and picture, constantly putting new images of actors into circulation in popular prints, books, and various other forms of theatrical ephemera using recognizably stylized "likenesses" (*nigao-e*) of their faces. The use of actor likenesses made it possible for audiences to recognize depictions of actors from the seventeenth century, whose faces had never been recorded in prints from their own age, or to enjoy *gōkan* (similar to modern graphic novels) featuring actors who had already died. In Europe, scripts printed and circulated in moveable type established the centrality to theater not of the actor, but of the script and playwright. In the case of early modern kabuki, theaters actively worked to keep scripts out of circulation, suppressing literary modes of reception in order to privilege the position of the actor.

At the same time that it facilitated the interweaving of image and text, woodblock print also came to serve as a medium for the conveyance of aural information. Building on work in manuscript studies, I propose a new understanding of the calligraphic hand in woodblock printing as *printed handwriting*: styles employed by professional copyists that were specifically associated with particular genres, and in some cases were expected to evoke in readers voices and sounds from the stage. For instance, in one spread from Ryūtei Tanehiko's bestselling *gōkan A Kabuki Prompt Book* (*Shōhon jitate*, 1815-31), a character hears the *nagauta* song *A Bell of Damnation* (*Muken no kane*) coming from a passing boat. The

text of the song, marked in yellow in figure 1, has been written out in a distinctive style suggestive of a musical practice book. Connected to the popular practice of chanting music from the stage, the style of the hand, in a sense, imports aural memories of the song into the printed text.

Part 1 of my manuscript explores these issues of visuality and aurality in woodblock printing as it came to function in the context of early modern kabuki culture. Chapter 1 "Stage Gender, Stage Body: Print and the Making of the Kabuki Actor," shows how cheaply printed images of kabuki actors and books about them participated in the construction of the actor's body, and specifically created what I describe as a "stage gender" for female-role actors. Female-role actors in kabuki have been theorized in Western scholarship as an almost uncannily perfect instantiation of the performativity of gender. I move away from the focus on the actor's performance to show how printed works that conditioned knowledge of the actor's body manipulated the *viewer* to regard the female-role actor in ways that rendered off-stage gender and sex largely irrelevant.

Chapter 2, "Voice Made Visible: Actors' Voices in Woodblock Printed Texts," explores the process by which "printed handwriting," as part of a broader culture that linked print with vocalization and musical practice, preserved and transmitted actors' voices and music. My investigation focuses on illustrated works called *parrot stones* (*ōmuseki*) that excerpted famous lines from plays, pairing the lines with the faces of the actors who spoke them, and on "voice imitation" (*kowairo*) books. Chapter 3, "All the Text is a Stage: The 'Actor Function' in Early Modern Literature," brings the discourses on sound and aurality together to propose a new understanding of early modern literature. I present the idea of "literature of the voice" to connect popular literary works from the late 18th to early 19th century (*gesaku*) with performance genres such as kabuki and oral storytelling (*yose*). Reworking Michel Foucault's concept of the "author function" as a form of knowledge that organizes people's experience of literary fiction, I propose that we think of much early modern fiction in terms of an "actor function."

Part II of my manuscript, "Theater in the Age of Moveable Type, Photographs, and Sound Recording," examines the shifting media landscape in relation to kabuki theater in the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods. Chapter 4, "Kabuki Actors in Photographs, Postcards, and Moving Pictures," traces the gradual replacement of actor prints (*yakusha-e*) as a genre dependent on recognizable likenesses by photographs of actors, often circulated as postcards. Scorned as "dirt kabuki" (*doro kabuki*) by star actors, early-twentieth century moving pictures undermined the stardom based on lineage that woodblock printing had enhanced, promoting instead peripheral actors who agreed to be filmed. I show how the increased visibility accorded to the actual bodies of actors slowly chipped away at the system of representation that had allowed actors to exist as communally constructed, conceptual bodies in the early modern period. Chapter 5, "Making Voices Ephemeral: Actors' Voices in Sound Recordings," delves into the storyteller Sanyūtei En'u I's (1860-1924) repeated early-twentieth century recordings of his imitations of the voices of Meiji stars such as Ichikawa Danjūrō IX and Onoe Kikugorō V, whose own voices were recorded but lost. I argue that in contrast to the early modern period, when the voice of a star kabuki actor was a shared cultural property that was recalled by looking at woodblock printed texts, sound recordings ended up adulterating the "pure" memory of the voice as they came to replace woodblock texts. In a strange way, voices became more ephemeral with the advent of mechanical recording. Finally, Chapter 6, "Moveable Type and the Muting of Modern Literature," serves as a conclusion that shows how in the modern period an awareness of materiality, sound, and voice gradually ceased to be part of the reception of texts. Focusing on kabuki and rakugo transcriptions of plays and performances, as well as closet drams and novels by intellectuals published by newly established printing houses, I analyze the desire to expunge the corporeal presence of the actor from texts in relation to a newfound faith in the authenticity of linguistic signs.

This project brings together theater and performance studies, media and technology studies, sound studies, and literary studies to understand the socially realized structures of visual and aural reception in early modern and modern Japan. It is an attempt to rediscover the rich soundscapes and embodied knowledges that took form in early modern texts relating to kabuki theater, and to tie this new understanding of early modern print culture to the study of modern media.

Method and work plan
I spent the past three summers examining early modern prints, playbills, scripts, theater-related books, musical texts, and voice practice books at archives in Japan. I have completed initial research and drafts of all three chapters in Part I, and have delivered lectures based on them at Northwestern University, Cambridge University, UCLA, the annual meetings of the Associations for Asian Studies, and The Japanese Society for Theater Research. During the funding period, I plan to focus on archival research on actors in modern media—photographs, postcards, sound recordings—necessary for the second part of the book.

Given a year of funding from the NEH fellowship, I am well positioned to finish a draft of this book. I plan to spend six months at the Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum, where I will be able to benefit from the expertise of Professor Kodama Ryūichi—one of the world's foremost experts on kabuki theater and early media in Japan and Vice Director of the Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum. Once I complete my research in Japan, I will return to the US to concentrate the remaining six months of the funding period writing the three chapters of Part II and editing the drafts of the first section. I plan to schedule a manuscript review at my institution at the end of the funding cycle to receive feedback from scholars in the field.

Competence, skill, and access
This new project is an outgrowth of my first book, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*: f*rom the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost* (Columbia University Press, 2016), which received the 2018 John Whitney Hall Book Prized and Honorable Mention for the 2017 Barnard Hewitt Award for Outstanding Research in Theatre History. In *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, I presented a bold reinterpretation of the entire history of kabuki, challenging decades of scholarship that has positioned it as a subversive form. While this first book centered on the stage, my current project focuses on the connection of the kabuki theater to the early modern print culture and, beyond that, Japanese media history. I am confident that the skills and knowledge I acquired while writing my first book—the ability to do detailed archival research on Japanese theater, literature, legal history, and visual and sound technology, and the ability to analyze the materials I find—will make it possible for me to research and write this book. Furthermore, I have established a special arrangement with the Waseda University Theater Museum that allows me direct access to their archives, which hold most of the resources that I need. I plan to take full advantage of this affiliation to complete my research and a first draft of the entire book during the term of the fellowship.

Final product and dissemination
My research will result in the publication of a book consisting of six chapters in two parts, written in a style accessible to a broad audience with an interest in Japanese culture, theater, literature, and media.

Part I Woodblock Printing as Visual and Auditory Technology
Chapter 1 Stage Gender, Stage Body: Print and the Making of the Kabuki Actor
Chapter 2 Voice Made Visible: Actors' Voices in Woodblock Printed Texts
Chapter 3 All the Text is a Stage: The "Actor Function" in Early Modern Literature

Part II Theater in the Age of Moveable Type, Photographs, and Sound Recording
Chapter 4 Kabuki Actors in Photographs, Postcards, and Moving Pictures
Chapter 5 Making Voices Ephemeral: Actors' Voices in Sound Recordings
Chapter 6 Moveable Type and the Muting of Modern Literature