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PERFORMING MIND, WRITING MEDITATION

Dōgen's Fukanzazengi as Zen Calligraphy

Abstract

This piece offers an extended visual analysis of the Zen master Dōgen's (1200–1253) *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*, arguing that Dōgen's calligraphy is a carefully orchestrated performance. That is, it *does* precisely what it asks its readers to do: it sits calmly, evenly, and at poised attention in a real-world field of objects (trees, grasses, and so forth). The manuscript's brushstrokes and entire aesthetic layout enact seated meditation. Most analyses of Dōgen's text have focused on its use and adaptation of Chinese source material, its place in founding the school of Sōtō Zen in Japan, and the ramifications of its doctrinal assertions on our understanding of Japanese religious history. Drawing attention instead to the material, aesthetic, art historical, and performative qualities of the text represents a completely new approach, one that foregrounds how the visual and material qualities of this Buddhist artifact are closely intertwined with its efficacy as a religious object. In pursuing this line of analysis, this article participates in the broader ritual turn in Buddhist studies while seeking to make a particular intervention into art historical qualifications of Zen art.

IN THIS ARTICLE, I will try to make two interventions into our current understandings of Zen calligraphy (calligraphy written by Zen monks). The first has to do with definition and scope. I want to redefine the qualities of Zen calligraphy beyond the spontaneous and splashy forms of composition typically associated with this writing style, to now include deliberate, erect, stable, and legible characters that are well-paired with the paper's underlying imagery. The *Fukanzazengi* falls into a completely different genre of Zen writing from the sorts of expressive and creative manifestations, much-favored in museum exhibitions, in which dynamic interpretation is paramount. Instead, the *Fukanzazengi* is a pedagogical and didactic guide in which legibility is crucial, the function being to teach adherents, clearly and methodically, how to do seated meditation. In support of this assertion, I offer an extended visual analysis of the performativity of the manuscript's calm and measured calligraphy (fig. 1).¹ Dōgen's treatise was part of an explosively popular new genre of meditation texts, which were in high demand both in Song China (960–1279) and in Kamakura Japan (1185–1333). On the whole, I agree with Stephen Addiss's strict definition of *zenga* (Zen art) as "the brushwork of leading Zen monks or occasionally of other monks and laymen who have studied Zen deeply enough to be imbued with its spirit."² But I want to expand our notions of what that "spirit" might be and how it might manifest itself, materially, as calligraphy.

The second intervention that I will assert has to do with the materiality of the text—the very particular things that this manuscript version of *Fukanzazengi*



1

1
Opening lines of the Tenpuku manuscript (1233) of *Fukanzazengi*. The Edo era mounting, with gold and silver threads, is visible at the top, bottom, and right-hand edges. Note the centrality of the pine motif. When fully extended, the scroll measures 28.6 x 318.5 cm. Dōgen, *Fukanzazengi*, opening lines. Eihei-ji, Japan. Ink on paper. Artwork in the public domain

performs in and through its physical substantiation. Reading the artifact closely with an eye toward its material performativity will inevitably, for some readers, raise the question of authorial intention. In its barest form, the objection to a materialist mode of reading comes down to the question of authority. Where do author-ity and authenticity lie—with the author or with the object?

To clarify my position, allow me to sketch some potential replies to this query, which has been the subject of rich debate over the last half century.³ At the risk of oversimplification, the debates pertaining to authority have moved through four theoretical stages. The oldest principle, informed by Romanticism and the belief that the artist, in the moment of creation, experienced a moment of insight or genius, places authenticity squarely within authorial intention. In this reckoning, it is the job of the scholar (whether editor, interpreter, translator, curator, or art historian) to get as close as possible to this original insight—to clear off any later accretions, to clarify obscure points, and to introduce the artist, through her or his works, as a person of genius.

The New Critics offered a radically different approach, articulated primarily in terms of literature but later extended to other art forms. In this second theoretical stage, the artist is forgotten, and the artwork is primary. In literary terms, the text exists only as words on a page: it hangs together as a discrete unit and provides all the clues (however hidden) for its own correct interpretation. Some have called this a “hermetic” approach, in that the artwork is viewed as sealed, self-sufficient, and related only to signs.⁴

Post-structuralist and deconstructive theory offers a third stage, in which not only the artist’s authority is eschewed, but so is the idea that there could be any single correct interpretation of a work of art. In this view, the artwork takes on a life of its own as soon as it enters into circulation, and we are free to make of it what we will, even to read it against the grain for whatever playful possibilities might be extracted. It is the job of the scholar to refresh and remake the artwork with her or his reading. Here, the locus of authenticity shifts to the receiver (viewer or reader) of the artwork.

Most recently, a sociological approach has emerged. This fourth stage attempts to harness the energy and interpretive freedom of the deconstructionist mode

while recognizing that there are some limits to what was historically possible and giving some weight to social context and plausibility. Here, it is the job of the scholar to imagine a range of possible meanings in an artwork, and then to suggest which of these would have been more probable at various junctures (the time of creation, for instance, or at an important moment when the artwork was used in a specific way). As Peter Shillingsburg has put it, “The richness and complexity of a text ... is more fully experienced by contrasting the text as a product of a partially known (that is, constructed) past with the text as free-floating in the present, or as it seems to have been experienced at significant moments in intermediate times.”⁵ DF McKenzie calls this a “secular” approach, insofar as it is open, social, and admmissive of historical context.⁶

In the pages that follow, I adopt a thoroughly sociological approach. I prefer to place more weight on the material end of the scale and less on the authorial. Consequently, over the course of this essay, I will ground questions of authenticity and authority primarily in the manuscript at hand. But, it is not an either-or choice: we need not choose between the materiality of the manuscript to the total exclusion of its purported creator and wider social context. While admitting that it is impossible to know exactly what the creator (in this case, presumably Dōgen) intended, we can at least sketch the contours of what would have been possible, plausible, or expected in Dōgen’s time and at various intermediate points thereafter, such as when the Japanese government declared the manuscript a national treasure.

In this article, I offer an extended visual analysis of the manuscript *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*. I argue that the calligraphy and its interplay with the paper on which it is written can be read as a carefully orchestrated enaction of mind. Following my analysis, I situate Dōgen’s handwritten treatise in three sociological contexts—two historical and one contemporary—to bring to light the performative dimensions of his calligraphic work. First, I consider the very broad cultural understanding that one’s handwriting was a direct reflection of one’s level of spiritual attainment and emotional state of mind. In the classical East Asian cultural sphere, a calligraphic artifact was considered a tangible point of contact with the composer’s mind and body. Second, I provide a brief account of classical and medieval Japanese Buddhist cultures of religious writing, which conceptualize the human body and written text as lying along a shared material continuum. And finally, I examine the modern culture of art historical analysis and museum display, which have overwhelmingly framed Zen Buddhist writing primarily in terms of spontaneity and boldness. These three approaches allow me to highlight the performative aspects of calligraphy as understood in Dōgen’s day and age, while suggesting reasons why that performative valance has been illegible to the modern art world, which has otherwise been quite open to, even celebratory of, Zen calligraphy.

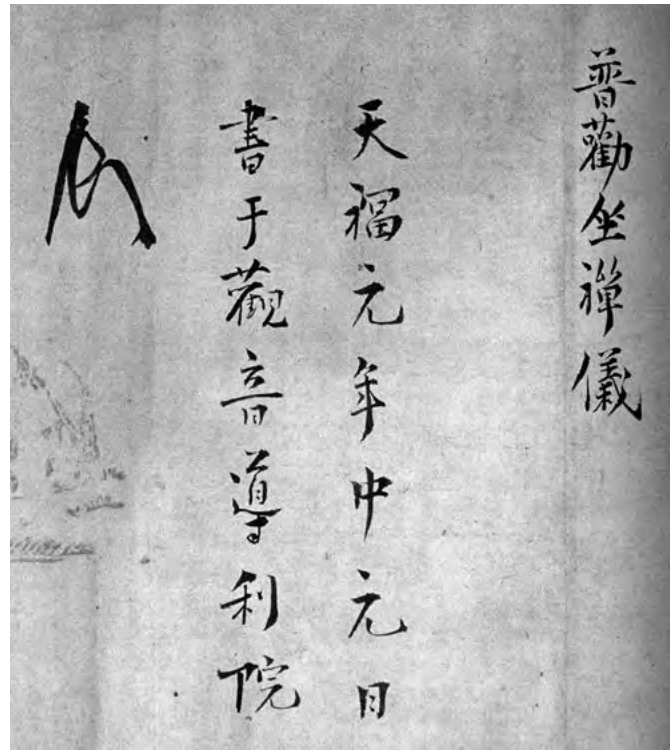
Moving from Moment of Creation to Moments of Interpretation: Introducing the Manuscript

The Tenpuku-bon⁷ manuscript of *Fukanzazengi* (普勸坐禪儀, hereafter *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*, 1233) is one of the few extant examples of Dōgen's calligraphy (figs. 1, 2, 4, 6a, 6b). This is somewhat odd, for Dōgen (1200–1253), founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen Buddhism, was an incredibly active producer of literary, philosophical, and religious works. One recent scholarly tally credits the monk with perhaps half a dozen ritual manuals, a collection of doctrinal essays, several volumes of collected sayings and commentaries, more than six hundred sermons, and numerous poems in both Chinese and Japanese.⁸

Nevertheless, extant examples of his calligraphy are rare for a variety of reasons. A huge amount of his time was taken up with temple administration and, in most cases, he seems to have entrusted his chief disciple and successor Koun Ejō (1198–1280) with creating written copies of his teachings. Furthermore, Eihei-ji, Dōgen's headquarters, has "always been poor, geographically isolated, and without extensive land holdings or wealthy patrons,"⁹ meaning that Dōgen did not receive commissions or demands for his calligraphy in the way that many of the more urban-centered monks of the Rinzai and Obaku lineages did.¹⁰ Eihei-ji was hard-pressed financially for several centuries and would not have had the preservation infrastructure necessary, or perhaps the institutional predilection, for maintaining samples of Dōgen's writing—at least, not until a series of able administrators, beginning in the 1600s, institutionalized regular memorial services in Dōgen's honor, thus securing a funding stream for major architectural renovations.¹¹

In an authorial model of analysis, the manuscript of *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen* is thus a rare and precious glimpse into the calligraphic practice of this highly influential Zen patriarch. In the centuries after Dōgen first composed it, the essay itself assumed a foundational importance for the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism as the founder's first systematic presentation of his lineage's most central emancipatory technique: seated meditation. For all of these reasons (authorial, material, and historical), the scroll, maintained now at the Eihei-ji temple storehouse, was designated a Japanese National Treasure (*kokuhō*) first on March 11, 1941, and then reconfirmed on March 17, 1952, following the postwar revisions of the national treasures laws, as part of a highly politicized project.¹²

In terms of its semantic content, the essay is generally analyzed as consisting of three parts. The opening portion, a broad statement concerning the Zen approach to Buddhism, relates how the discipline of seated meditation was practiced by the Historical Buddha and was introduced to East Asia by Bodhidharma (fl. sixth century), the legendary Indian monk identified as the First Patriarch of Zen. The second section details methods for performing seated meditation. This portion, which



2

2

Detail of the closing lines. The third line from the left gives the date of composition: First Year of the Tenpoku Era, Fifteenth Day of the Seventh Month (*Tenpoku gan'nen chūgen no hi*), while the penultimate line provides the locale: "Written at Kannon Dōr'in," a hall within the Kōshōji temple complex. The final squiggle, which looks a little bit like a moon rising between two mountain peaks, is Dōgen's signature. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Tsunoda Tairyū

relies heavily on Chinese source texts, repeats a standard tripartite movement, beginning with directions for bodily comportment and then considering breath regulation and management, before briefly touching on this physical regimen's effects on the mind.¹³ Finally, the closing section speaks succinctly but ecstatically of the benefits of seated meditation, which is said to bring bodily relaxation, an invigorated spirit, calmness, peace, and joy.

Dōgen and Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen:

A Brief Historical Sketch

Dōgen was born just after the New Year in 1200 in the imperial capital at Heian, now the modern city of Kyoto. After consulting with his mother's brother, the monk Ryōken, Dōgen climbed Mount Hiei, headquarters of the Tendai Buddhist establishment in Japan and a major monastic training center, where he became a low-ranking monk at the tender age of thirteen. An intellectually gifted young man, he read widely and was not afraid to ask pointed questions of his teachers. Unable to find satisfying answers on Mount Hiei, he began a period of wandering; in 1223, he undertook the dangerous sea journey to Song China. Dōgen eventually attached himself to Rujing (如淨, Japanese: Nyojō), thirteenth patriarch of the Caodong (曹洞, Japanese: Sōtō) lineage of Zen Buddhism. In the seventh month of 1225, Rujing confirmed Dōgen's enlightenment experience. Dōgen continued to study under his master for almost two more years, eventually receiving dharma transmission in 1227.

Shortly after Rujing's death, in the fall of that year, Dōgen returned to Japan. In 1233, Dōgen attempted unsuccessfully to found a monastic training center at Kōshōji—the first independent (non-Tendai-affiliated) Zen monastery in Japan. He preached "a message of the universality of enlightenment for all those who

practice ‘just sitting’ (*shikan taza*), including women and laypersons.”¹⁴ In 1243, Dōgen relocated yet again, this time to a remote, mountainous area several days’ journey from any of the major political centers of Japan. He would go on to establish a comprehensive monastic training center in the Sōtō tradition at Eihei-ji, a function that the temple maintains today. Monastics follow closely the various dictates first laid out by Dōgen, beginning with his crucial essay *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*, which has assumed a central place in Sōtō liturgy and is recited daily following evening meditation.

The Tenpuku-bon manuscript includes a headnote identifying Dōgen as the author and an endnote dating the composition to the fifteenth day of the seventh month of 1233, which would have been the last day (*gege*) of the traditional three-month summer meditation retreat (*ango*). Scholars therefore have suggested that the manual “was connected with this retreat and reflects [Dōgen’s] meditation teachings during the preceding months” and that it may have been presented “to one of the more important persons participating in, or supporting, the 1233 summer retreat.”¹⁵

While the contents of the essay circulated in other, revised formats (both oral and written), little of the transmission history of Dōgen’s 1233 manuscript is known. The manuscript disappeared from the public eye for several centuries; most likely, it was being passed down within a particular family or lineage as part of a private collection. The calligraphy resurfaced in 1922 when it was exhibited at Tokyo Imperial University. At some point in the intervening years, likely during the mid- to late Edo period (1600–1868), the scroll had been mounted on thick, durable paper. A colophon written on the mounting identified the manuscript as being the “authentic brushwork” (*shinpitsu*) of Dōgen and further stated that the scroll had been donated (presumably to the Eihei-ji treasure house) by calligraphy expert Kohitsu Ryōhan (1790–1853). The box and mounting paper are quite elaborate, with gold and silver foil, fancy decorated paper, and the like, suggesting that, by the Edo period, Dōgen’s writing was being treated not only as a fine example of calligraphy but as a relic of the founder. Indeed, Kohitsu Ryōhan’s note on the box lid labels the item an “authentic trace” (*shinseki*) of the Zen master Dōgen (普勸坐全儀 道元禪師御真蹟).¹⁶

Dōgen wrote the *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen* in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*).¹⁷ The treatise is quite compact: seven sheets of paper glued together to form a single roll of some 881 characters in length (equating to just under four pages of double-spaced English prose), an economy of expression achieved through terse description and telegraphic allusions to other texts. Dōgen employed the easy-to-read *kaisho* (regular) script that was common in the Song period and composed on a lightly decorated paper thought to be of Song manufacture. The paper is yel-

lowish in color, indicating that it had been treated with a bark-based insecticide.¹⁸ Throughout the Song, state-sponsored sutras, written with a standard fourteen characters per line, were generally produced on high-quality paper treated with an insecticide that turned the paper yellowish. Dōgen's use of this type of paper is one material register of the essay's intended function as sacred text. Background motifs in the paper are pastoral in nature, including a pine tree, some grasses, orchids, peonies, chrysanthemum, and grazing horses.

Visual Analysis: Calligraphy Enacting Content

Dōgen's essay opens with a snare, a puzzling series of questions that engage the sort of mental gymnastics and linguistic sparring commonly seen in Zen literary culture.¹⁹ I provide a typographic transcription, following the line breaks in Dōgen's manuscript, for the benefit of those who may wish to correlate the translation to the calligraphy. The passage quoted here comes just after the treatise's title (普勸坐禪儀) and the attribution of authorship to Dōgen (入宋傳法沙門道元撰, "composed by a *sramanera* [monk] who transmitted the Dharma by traveling to Song [China]"). The essay begins:

原夫道本圓通爭假修證
宗乘自在何費功夫況乎
全體迥出塵埃孰信拂拭之
手段

Fundamentally speaking, the basis of the way is perfectly pervasive; how could it be contingent on practice and verification? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted; why should we expend sustained effort? Surely the whole being is far beyond defilement; who could believe in a method to polish it?²⁰

In short, the essay questions why meditation is necessary if the enlightened mind is always already present. A curious way to begin a meditation manual, but Dōgen's point seems to be that, though there is but a "hair's breadth" between the availability of an enlightened mind and the realization of that availability, only continued practice beyond enlightenment prevents this tiny gap from becoming a great chasm, "like that between heaven and earth."²¹ In the lines that follow these opening sentiments, the calligraphy reinforces and enhances the semantic content, executing a chirographic performance of the logical conundrum it introduced.

The calligraphy in these next lines moves smoothly over the background motif of the pine. A traditional symbol of longevity and steadfastness (because of its

evergreen needles), the pine also evokes a common pun in Japanese, in which *matsu* can mean both “pine tree” (松) and “to pine for, wait for, or long for” (待つ). There is a sort of playfulness here, a productive and performative tension among the material image of the pine in the paper, the potential dual valence of the word *matsu*, and the doctrinal import of Dōgen’s assertion that seated meditation is itself a “dropping away of body and mind [in which] your original face will appear,” something that is, he insists, “never apart from this very place” (大都不離當處). In fact, the characters for “this very place” (當處, fig. 1) are carefully brushed directly on top of the pine tree’s knotty root, suggesting in this layering the intricate intertwining of desire for that which is already present, available, and manifest.

Continuing this purposeful interplay, the character for “hair’s breadth” (毫釐) not only might invoke the sense of “a minute amount” but also alludes to the small tuft of hair (*byakugō* 白毫) that marks the Buddha’s so-called “third eye.” The downward sweeping motion of this little wisp of hair transports us from the solid, reassuring darkness of the evergreen to the wide-open white space immediately below and to the left of it. This area highlights the devastating chasm that gapes before us “like the gap between heaven and earth” (差天地), the calligraphy for which is suspended in this negative space.

The composition goes on to make even fuller use of the craggy pine, the main trunk of which articulates organically, like a spinal column, the flexed S-curve that is capable of supporting a relaxed but upright posture. Moving from the trunk to the small, scraggly offshoots on its left and the adjacent white space, we see the phrase “Once the slightest like or dislike arises, all is confused and the mind is lost.” The words translated as “like” and “dislike” (違順纔起) carry secondary connotations of order and error; they also refer to Buddhist teachings about how the desire to be near to what one likes and distant from what one dislikes is the root of suffering. The habit of picking apart the threads of “like” and “dislike” is, Dōgen suggests, a mind-entangling predilection, something he indicates visually by brushing those words directly on top of the scrubby leaves and tangled brush of the pine’s secondary or false trunk. Pursuing these tangles brings naught but confusion and, sadly, “the mind is lost” (失心): again, the calligraphy hangs in that open, chasm-like white space that yawns between heaven and earth.

This is a masterful opening, not only in semantic and doctrinal terms but equally at the material and performative levels. We see the manuscript playing, intensively and pointedly, with the material interface of paper and ink, thereby emphasizing the interpenetration of semantic content (how to meditate) and physical container (the paper).²² If Dōgen’s point is that the enlightened mind is here and now, the wonderful calligraphic dance brings attention to the sensory nature of that here and now: the root of the issue is that we pine for what we already have. Through the

calligraphy, the composition pulls the pine from background (motif in the paper) to foreground (the crux of Dōgen's teachings) and insists on the material situatedness of the meditative experience. This complex interplay with the pine root can be understood to rehearse, at a material and compositional level, the import of Dōgen's teachings on seated meditation. It establishes the interpretive framework for the essay.

Following this knotty philosophical beginning, a major portion of the treatise seems remarkably straightforward, quotidian, and matter-of-fact: a basic how-to manual. But the deep evocation of the opening lines should alert us to other instances in which the ink and paper do as Dōgen's words and phrases instruct. Dōgen tells practitioners to find a quiet room, eat and drink moderately, and sit on the floor on a comfortable cushion. In fact, the lengthiest section of the essay comprises a detailed description of posture:

When you sit, spread a thick mat and use a cushion on top of it. Then sit in either the full cross-legged or half cross-legged position. For the full position, first place your right foot on your left thigh; then place your left foot on your right thigh. For the half position, simply rest your left foot on your right thigh. Loosen your robe and belt, and arrange them properly [or "neatly" 齊整]. Next, place your right hand on your left foot, and your left hand on your right palm. Press the tips of your thumbs together. Then straighten your body and sit erect [or "upright" 正身端坐]. Do not lean to the left or right, forward or backward. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel. Press your tongue against the front of your palate and close your lips and teeth. The eyes should always remain open. Once you have settled your posture, you should regulate your breathing.²³ Whenever a thought occurs, be aware of it; as soon as you are aware of it, it will vanish.²⁴

Dōgen's concerns here are with the embodied qualities of balance, alignment, and steadiness. An intensive, proprioceptive awareness of the body's placement in its environment is, Dōgen insists, the only place to begin.

The brushwork for the entire composition does precisely what this portion of Dōgen's treatise asks of its addressees. Consider the use of space, the placement of ink on paper. Dōgen did not rule or grid out his paper ahead of time, so the number of characters per line is not rigidly fixed but ranges from ten to fourteen (compare to fig. 3). There is some top-to-bottom compression toward the middle of the treatise, in contrast to the several lines at the beginning and end whose characters enjoy a bit more room. But there is no cramping. Likewise, the vertical columns hedge



3

3

The calligraphers for this lavish production of the *Lotus Sutra*, which features calligraphy done in gold pigment atop indigo-dyed paper, carefully lined out the paper ahead of time, marking off equal top and bottom margins, brushing each character inside a notional grid, and ensuring that each full line of script contained the same number (seventeen) of characters. Edo period (1666), Freer Gallery of Art, F1962.27

somewhat to the right toward the bottom of the paper, as is the tendency with right-handed writers. Again, though, the shift is minimal, and the overall impression is of balance and calm.

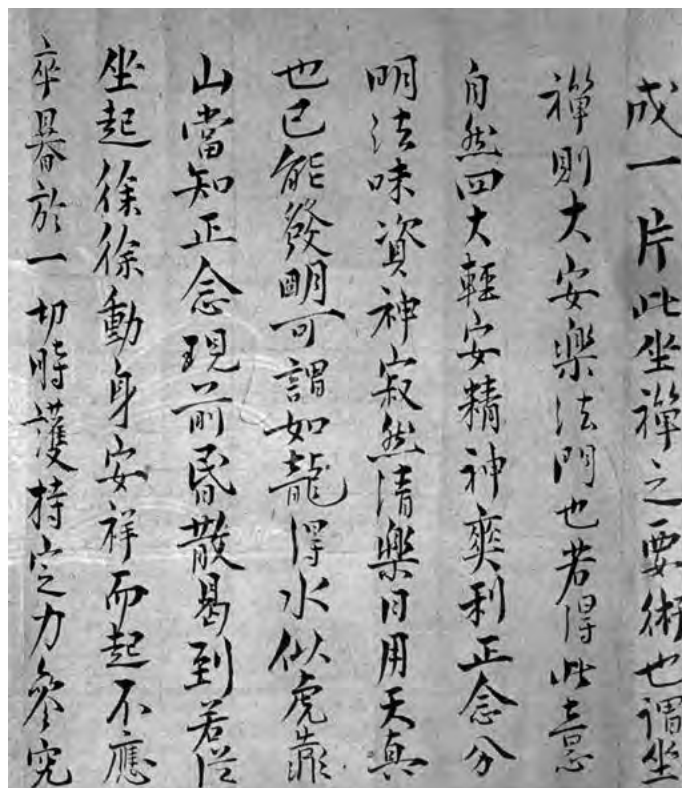
A materially attuned reading of the manuscript suggests that the calligraphy does what Dōgen claims the practice of seated meditation does. Consider, for example, the chirographic performance of these lines:

If you grasp the point of this, the four elements of the body will [simply] become light and at ease, the spirit will be fresh and sharp, thoughts will be correct and clear; the flavor of the dharma will sustain the spirit, and you will be calm, pure, and joyful. Your daily life will be your true natural state.

若得此意
自然四大輕安精神爽利正念分
明法味資神寂然清樂日用天真
也²⁵

In other words, Dōgen claims that if one “grasps the point” of seated meditation—if one does it according to the method he has described—then its benefits will manifest naturally. The individual characters, written in the *kaisho* script, are easy to discern: they are “fresh and sharp,” “correct and clear.” Visually, there is a sense of relaxed heaviness or groundedness to these lines. The top margin is generous in contrast to the lower margin, where the lines of written characters stop just short of the paper’s edge. The writing does not float or waver on the page. Rather, the columns of writing are firm without being rigid and have a strong seat. They are upright without being tense. They are, I would argue, a “daily life” example of the “true state” that Dōgen is both describing and enacting.

Dōgen employed this compositional aesthetic throughout the treatise, with some minimal, relaxed variation. The spacing between columns is greater at the beginning and end of the essay, growing slightly more compressed toward the middle. The visual appearance again is not so much of crowding (as if the calligrapher were concerned he might run out of paper, for instance) as it is of a sort of settling



4

4

Excerpt from the middle portion of the *Fukanzazengi* manuscript. Part of the passage reads, “When you arise from sitting, move slowly and arise calmly” (坐起徐徐動身安詳), the calligraphy for which is, fittingly, brushed atop the loose and relaxed grasses that form the background motif in the paper.

Translation from Bielefeldt, *Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 180–83.

The term he translates as “essential art,” *yōjutsu* 要術, could alternately be rendered “fundamental practice” or “crucial technique.” Note that, in general, the fine arts (*bijutsu* 美術) are also understood to be based upon technique, practice, and skill. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Tsunoda Tairyū

in: a bit more openness and space at the beginning and end balanced by a bit more concentration and economy in the body. The calligraphy thus engages in a very subtle expansion-contraction-expansion rhythm, reminiscent of the torso’s movement during calm, steady breathing. Indeed, the typical rhythm for composition in the *kaisho* script is referred to, somewhat onomatopoeically, as *ton-sū-ton*, or stop-move-stop: “One writes in rhythmic alterations of hold-release-hold-release.”²⁶ This rhythm is quite different from that associated with the semi-cursive “running hand” (*gyōsho*) or even more suggestive “grass hand” (*sōsho*) styles, both of which depend more on rapidity and fluidity of movement. By contrast, Dōgen’s calligraphy assumes a relaxed, upright posture such that the body of the essay, like the body of its addressees, feels “light and at ease” (fig. 4).

Finally, the ink gradation is remarkably consistent: thick and dark throughout. There are no sections showing a surfeit of ink, nor are there sections where the brush has clearly begun to dry. We see none of the “flying white” (*hihaku*) technique that is so common to the more dynamic style of Zen calligraphy favored in contemporary art dialogue (compare with fig. 5).²⁷ In the case of the *Fukanzazengi* manuscript, the only places where the calligraphy is thin or the ink comparatively light is when the brush has moved over an underlying design in the paper, as, for instance, in the lines that read (fig. 6):

Verily form and substance are like the dew on the grass, and the fortunes of life like the lightning flash: in an instant they are emptied, in a moment they are lost.

加以形質如草露運命似電光倏忽



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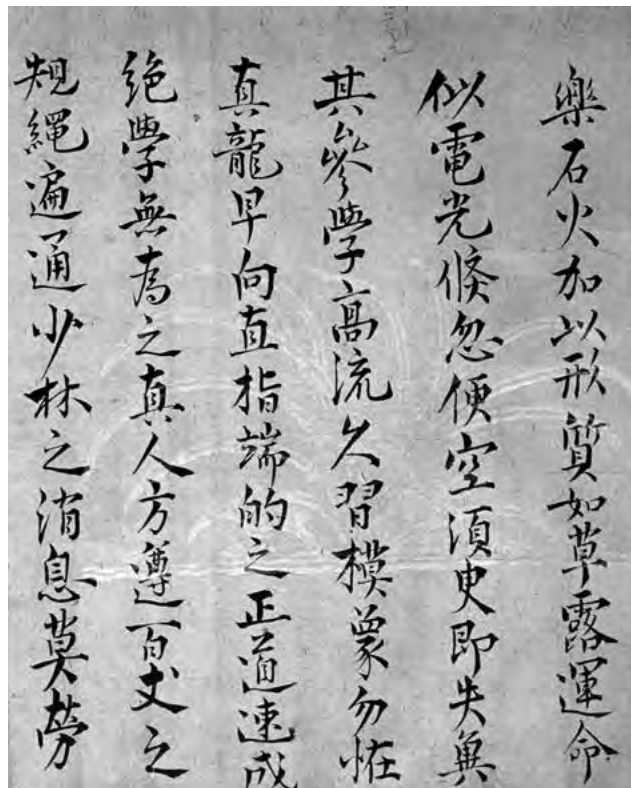
The calligraphy for this couplet, brushed by Mokuan Shoto (1611–1684), shows the fast brushwork, distortion of characters, and dynamic “flying white” (places where the brush tip has split, leaving white spaces within the strokes) that is commonly associated with the phrase “Zen calligraphy” in contemporary Western arts discourse. Freer Gallery of Art, F1975.19

The characters for “form,” “substance,” and “grass,” while clear and easy to read, evidence some spots where the underlying grass motif has shown through the ink, making it appear somewhat lighter in color (fig. 6a). Not coincidentally, the lines reference a core Buddhist image of impermanence (the insistence that things are no more lasting than the dew on the grass) while loosely alluding to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*’s well-known catalogue of metaphors for the human body, comparing it to a cluster of foam, a bubble, a flame, the leaf of a plantain, a phantom, a shadow, an echo, a drifting cloud, and lightning.²⁸ In this portion of his treatise, which comes very near the end, Dōgen stressed the importance of the human body as a tool—a precious, soon-to-perish tool—that is ideally suited for seated meditation. Even in this hortatory moment, however, the brushwork stays consistent: the ink dark, the lines smooth, and the characters clear. This regularity suggests that the calligrapher took pains to maintain the same amount of ink on his brush as he composed and that he re-wet and reformed his brush regularly, probably after every character. Again, the impression is one of slow, methodical, calm work.

In this visual analysis, I have sought to show some of the ways in which the calligrapher (presumably Dōgen) artfully used his materials to perform or enact the essay’s semantic message. Thus far, I have been writing in the context of a larger cultural world, a “period eye,” so to speak, in which my assertions make sense.²⁹ What evidence do I have to offer that this asserted link between calligraphy and the performance of ethical or spiritual attainment would have been active in Dōgen’s time and is not groundless fabrication? And what are the norms and expectations of the aesthetic logic that I have been assuming? In the following sections, I will turn away from a fine-grained visual analysis of this particular manuscript to sketch in the broad brushstrokes of the calligraphic culture in which Dōgen lived and worked. Then, I will contrast this “period eye” with a consideration of the things that the “eye” of the contemporary art world looks for in Zen calligraphy (and does not see in the *Fukanzazengi* manuscript).

Classical Notions of Calligraphy as Evidence of Attainment

The notion that a calligraphic artifact was a tangible point of contact with the composer’s mind and that one’s handwriting was—and was intended to be—a direct



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6A

6

Excerpt from the final portion of the manuscript. In these lines, as in the opening, there is an increased amount of space between each column of text, a subtle opening that may be interpreted as a calligraphic rehearsal of the gentle stirrings and slow movements that precede rising from seated meditation. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Tsunoda Tairyū

6A

Detail from the final portion of the manuscript, which alludes to a well-known Buddhist simile, comparing the brevity and transience of “form and substance” to the “dew on the grass” (in red oval), destined to fade with the morning sun. Here, the character for “grass” (草) is brushed on top of a spear of grass. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Tsunoda Tairyū

performance of one’s character or level attainment is ubiquitous in the classical East Asian cultural sphere. Confucian writings have long asserted that “the human body is at the intersection of the moral and the aesthetic, as the ability to intelligently form habits enables one to become both a good person and a good artist.”³⁰ Accordingly, calligraphy has been used throughout East Asia for well over a millennium as a pedagogical tool to perfect individual character (in the Confucian sense of one’s mental and moral qualities); that is, to display one’s mastery of “ritual decorum” (礼 Chinese: *li*), and, by extension, to evince the signs of one’s “humanity” (仁, Chinese: *ren*). Aristocrats and Buddhist clerics were at the forefront of importing these ideas to the Japanese archipelago and adapting them to the needs of local culture. Confucian manuals concerning letter writing, an important component of which was calligraphy, flooded into Japan from the Nara period (710–784) on and were read eagerly, passed down within families, and stored in temple treasure houses for use by clerics over the centuries.³¹

Letter-writing manuals, which originally pertained to Sinographic courtly correspondence with dynasties in China, represented the first flush of Japanese interest in calligraphy. By the thirteenth century (during which Dōgen was born), calligraphic style manuals (*shoron* 書論) abounded, both in aristocratic lineages and in esoteric and Zen Buddhist settings.³² In addition to extensive commentary on the role of calligraphic practice in spiritual cultivation, these manuals typically attend to material matters (such as the positioning of characters on the page, importance of paper choice, shape of the character, sense of flow between characters and lines, spacing, balance, height and width of characters, angle of the brush, and amount of ink on the brush) as well as physical, embodied ones (the correct posture for the calligrapher, importance of mental concentration, ideal length of time to spend in

daily practice, how to hold the brush, and so on). The manuals commonly assert an equivalence between the calligraphic performance and the composer's heart or mind (*kokoro*). As one manual puts it, "The shape of the character is, in a manner of speaking, a person's appearance, and the vigor of the brush is the expression of the workings of his heart."³³

These ideas quickly matriculated into vernacular culture. Any number of passages from narrative literature (*monogatari*), such as the famous *Tale of Genji* (circa 1000 CE), attest to the importance of one's handwriting in communicating one's aesthetic sensibilities. Such texts assume that aesthetic choices pertaining to paper, ornament, ink thickness, brush, and script style should be understood as expressing fine gradations of the composer's mental and emotional state. Indeed, many scholars have pointed out that "Heian aristocrats' lives revolved around communicating their status *aesthetically*, as expressed in the composition and writing style of poems."³⁴ Similarly, within Zen more particularly, calligraphy—whether exchanged between master and student, bought from a mountain hermit by an urban art collector, or displayed in the meditation hall or tea alcove—has often been viewed as a material instantiation of the calligrapher's enlightened mind.

Dōgen, the son of a high-ranking aristocratic man, was raised by his mother (also an aristocrat, though of a lower rank) and learned to read and write in the Heian capital, where he would have been exposed to and expected to internalize and master such ideas. During his lifetime, there were heated debates concerning whether or not "distortion" of characters was ideal or unacceptable, whether regular or cursive style scripts should be learned first and when each should be employed, whether the brush should be held at an incline, and so on.³⁵ In choosing to compose *Fukanzazengi* in *kaisho* script on heavy yellow paper with a fully loaded brush, in regular (though not rigid) vertical columns, Dōgen was making meaningful choices, as his contemporaries would have understood. On the whole, the choices visually identify the calligraphy as Zen Buddhist (Zen priests at the time were at the vanguard of important Song styles). But more important than this, the choices the calligrapher made in terms of spacing, ink gradation, placement of characters on the page, and interplay between semantic content and background motif would have been closely examined and analyzed by his peers.³⁶

These notions concerning the performative nature of calligraphy, so ubiquitous during Dōgen's time, belong to a wider constellation of ideas concerning the relationship between the human body and material text. In the following section, I provide a brief account of some ways in which contemporary scholarship has begun to parse through the embodied and performative nature of classical and medieval Japanese Buddhist religious writing.

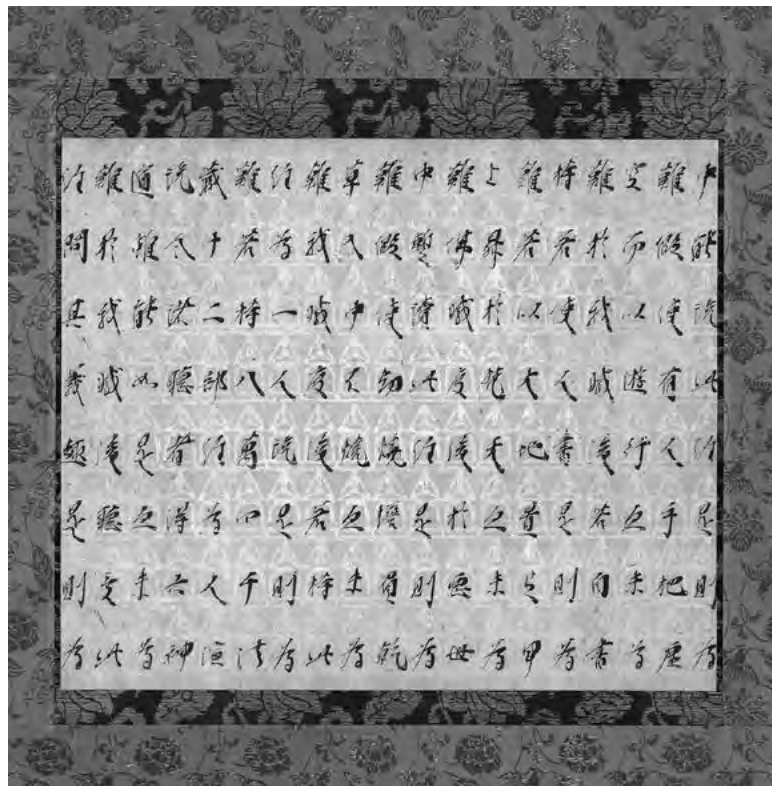
Body and Text as a Material Continuum in Buddhist Culture

In recent years, there have been many scholarly studies attesting to the profoundly material nature of Asian Buddhism, representing a sort of sea change. While it has built upon the foundations of previous philological studies, this research has drawn greater attention to the performative and ritual dimensions of Buddhist culture. Bernard Faure's work on icons and Robert H. Sharf's on relics were early moves in this anthropological turn, which has continued to be a fruitful field of discussion, such as in Brian D. Ruppert's study of Buddhist relics and political power in medieval Japan.³⁷

These material explorations of icons, relics, and statuary also have opened up new avenues for thinking through the ritual uses of Buddhist text. Anne M. Blackburn, for example, has worked closely on ritual aspects of manuscript culture in Sri Lankan monasteries, and Christoph Emmrich has conducted an extensive ethnographic study of sutra repair practices in Newari Buddhism. Paul Copp's study of incantations, amulets, and stone pillars inscribed with sutra text points to the deeply embodied nature of Buddhist ritual and the tight connections between sacred text and devotional flesh. Indeed, Natalie Gummer, in her survey of the ritual uses of Buddhist books, has noted that Buddhist practice tends to fuse the categories of relic, icon, speech, and text: "A relic, whether of the Buddha's body or his speech, is not an inert object, but the potent presence of the Buddha himself."³⁸

Elsewhere, I have argued that, in East Asian Mahayana Buddhism generally and in the Buddhist textual culture of medieval Japan more particularly, we can find almost innumerable artistic genres, manuscript artifacts, ritual objects, and liturgical practices to support the idea that Buddhist texts possess a life force. As a corollary, the human body *is* (or at least can become) a sacred Buddhist text. Compendiums of Japanese miracle tales from the ninth through the thirteenth century speak of fragments of sutras taking on human form, often becoming a young boy who saves an endangered believer from death or dismemberment. Buddhist poems talk about human corpses disintegrating to reveal bits of scripture carved into the bone.

A look at ritual liturgies reveals that sutra copies were widely regarded as bodily relics of the Historical Buddha. Sutra manuscripts were created in which each character was inscribed either inside a reliquary or atop a lotus petal throne—that is, with the calligraphy sitting in the place of the Historical Buddha's body (fig. 7). And sculptures show holy men chanting incantations, each word of which appears, streaming from the tongue, as a fully embodied miniature Buddha.³⁹ Again, as Willa Jane Tanabe's now classic work shows, sutra copying practices in and around Dōgen's time could involve the use of human hair (as a component of the paper or



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Section of “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Note that each character of the sutra is surrounded by a stupa, or reliquary structure, thus equating the written words of the sutra with the body of the Buddha. Japan, Late Heian period (12th century), Freer Gallery of Art, F2014.6.6a–g

part of the brush), blood (as ink), and bone (as stylus).⁴⁰ Sutras and other sacred texts might be copied onto the backs of letters or poems as a way of ensuring the spiritual solace of a deceased loved one.

In other words, the Buddhist culture that Dōgen inherited and the cultural norms by which he and his contemporaries operated assumed many things that bear heavily on the visual analysis I offered above. There was the assumption that form cannot be separated from—and indeed, is partially constitutive of—content (i.e., ink and paper choices matter just as much as grammar and word choices do). There was the notion that a person’s calligraphy correlates to and is a material enactment of her or his spiritual or ethical attainment. And there was the belief that the human body and the written text exist along a material continuum. All of these things tell us that, to understand Dōgen’s essay, we have to pay attention to more than just its words and phrases.

For centuries, *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen* has been taken as one of the foundational teachings of Dōgen, who is in turn the founder of one of the most powerful Zen lineages in Japan. It is hard to think of another piece of writing that would be more fittingly called “Zen calligraphy.” And yet, museum catalogs of Zen calligraphy seldom include any discussion of this sort of regular, clear, balanced composition. Why?

Apprehensions of Zen Calligraphy in the Modern Art World

In many ways, East Asian calligraphy became “Zen”—and, conversely, Zen became accessible widely to museumgoers as a visual product—through its calligraphy, primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. In Japan, much of this conceptual framing took place in the pages of the avant-garde art journal *Bokubi* (The

Beauty of Ink). As Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer has noted, it was in this journal that calligrapher Morita Shiryū (1912–1998), philosopher Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889–1980), and artist Hasegawa Saburō (1906–1957), among others, explicitly positioned premodern Zen calligraphy as spiritualized, sudden, transcendent, prototypically Japanese, and of immediate interest to contemporary avant-garde artists.⁴¹ The aesthetic evaluation of Zen calligraphy as proto-modernist went on to intrigue and markedly influence US artists in the postwar years, particularly those associated with American Abstract Expressionism. These artists found Zen Buddhist aesthetics compatible with “a large range of contemporary intellectual currents valorizing spontaneous expression as the preferred medium of authentic communication.”⁴²

Significantly, this general conception of Zen calligraphy continues to dominate Western aesthetic appreciation (and curatorial framing) of Buddhist-inspired East Asian calligraphy (fig. 8). To cite one recent exhibit, *Brush Writing and the Arts of Japan* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, August 2013–January 2014) described the calligraphy of medieval (12th–16th century) Zen monks as “characterized by boldly brushed characters that break the rules of conventional handwriting conspicuously. What they lose in legibility they gain in sheer visual potency that transcends the meaning of the phrases inscribed.”⁴³ The calligraphy of premodern Zen monks is often curated, annotated, and displayed in terms that strongly resonate with the vigorous abstraction and masculinist distortion that are hallmarks of the experimental postwar art of Abstract Expressionism and related contemporary avant-garde slipstreams.

Despite wide variation in historical contexts and in political and cultural agendas, these three discourses (postwar Japanese aesthetic philosophy, postwar Zen-inspired Abstract Expressionism, and contemporary curatorial language) share certain features. First, each is interested in the performative and embodied aspects of calligraphic practice. While the idea that calligraphy is a visual indicator of embodied spiritual attainment stretches back centuries, the postwar discursive framings of calligraphy mentioned above did something new: they each reclaimed premodern art for contemporary aesthetic ends. Avant-garde artists and critics in 1950s and 1960s Japan, particularly those associated with the group Bokujinkai (Men of Ink), seized on the notion of calligraphic embodiment. They identified the international cache of “the modernity of Zen culture” (and particularly the aesthetics of Zen calligraphy) as a powerful opportunity to reinsert Japan and Japanese artists into the cutting edge of global art development. There was a concern that Japan had fallen behind the pace of the international arts world; by drawing attention to the (proto)modernity of Zen arts, Japanese critics thought Japan might be able to leapfrog its way (back) to the vanguard.⁴⁴



8

This Zen aphorism by Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) exemplifies the bold and dynamic style of Zen calligraphy favored in Western exhibitions. Freer Gallery of Art, F1998.77

For American Abstract Expressionists, engaging with Zen calligraphy as embodied practice provided a way to overcome a Western concern with mass in favor of attentiveness to line. In the words of Mark Tobey, who studied for a time at a Zen monastery in Kyoto, “In China and Japan I was freed from form by the influence of the calligraphic.”⁴⁵ Contemporary exhibition culture often continues this reasoning. Recently, for example, press releases for the very popular traveling exhibition *The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin* praised Hakuin’s work for its “vitality, humor, power, and depth,”⁴⁶ and characterized it as comprising a strikingly modernist “new visual language.”⁴⁷

In yoking premodern art to contemporary aesthetic frameworks, however, all three discourses at times dislocate medieval Zen calligraphy from its historical and soteriological moorings, rendering “Zen” a timeless qualifier. In this usage, the single word “Zen” actually indicates a loose network of sometimes contradictory adjectives: minimal, intuitive (but also at times impenetrable), bold, organic, spontaneous, dynamic, creatively distorted, dramatic, and stretched.⁴⁸

To be clear, my point is not to say that contemporary discourse is wrong, but to say that it is limited and that we can enrich it. Zen-inspired calligraphy in the dynamic, dramatic, distorted tradition is, after all, plentiful, and it has helped ignite wonderful and productive innovations by contemporary artists. But the sudden and the splashy are only part of the wide spectrum of premodern Zen calligraphy. The *Fukanzazengi* manuscript is a particularly useful tool with which to reevaluate the dominant aesthetic judgment of the long postwar period, because its example throws into sharp relief the continuing legacies of avant-garde aesthetics.

The Affordances of Paper and Ink

Art historians typically draw great attention to the material affordances of artistic tools and media in the East Asian calligraphic and painting traditions, which rely upon the application of water-soluble ink to a lightly absorbent surface (generally handmade paper or silk) by means of an animal-hair brush. As Stephen Addiss points out, “There was no way to correct or repaint an unsatisfactory area; unlike oil paint or canvas, a line or color ... could not be effaced or changed.”⁴⁹ These material considerations commonly are understood to engender two somewhat contradictory compositional dicta. First, because no stroke can be undone, composition must be preceded by contemplation, a comprehensive envisioning of the final product. Second, the execution itself must be rapid and spontaneous, free from hesitation.

This conceptualization of East Asian painting generally and Zen calligraphy particularly certainly resonates with the language of postwar Japanese avant-garde calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism. Obviously, there is a cer-

tain amount of overlap or creative synergy possible there, particularly when one emphasizes the rapidity of execution and downplays the contemplative act of mental composition. But the material affordances of brush, ink, and paper can also tip the other way, becoming an invitation to slow down, to be deliberate, and to move calmly. This would be particularly important if one sought to compose (as the calligrapher of *Fukanzazengi* seems to have done) in such a way that each character sits calmly, with a regularity of size, balance, orientation, ink gradation, rhythm, and weight. This regular pattern of calligraphic sitting, like the routines of monastic life that Dōgen advocated, places emphasis on the mundaneness of everyday Zen practice and its lengthy periods of seated contemplation, rather than zeroing in on the breakthrough moments of individual realization or the sudden overcoming of a great doubt.⁵⁰ The calligraphy in *Fukanzazengi* anticipates the creation of a monastic architectural structure (Eiheiji) that affords its intimates the opportunity to “just sit.” At Eiheiji, Dōgen successfully materialized the Zen practices he first conceptualized on paper: to this day, monastics under his direction literally wash their faces, eat their breakfast, read their scriptures, and sit on their meditation cushions in accordance with the dictates of Dōgen’s essay and his later elaborations on its basic teachings.

Conclusion

The calligraphic performance in *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen* represents one particular instantiation of this much larger textual culture, while drawing attention to Dōgen’s deep interest in “just sitting” (*shikan taza*). A major hallmark of Dōgen’s teaching was his insistence that seated meditation was in and of itself enlightened understanding, an experience that he termed “the dropping away of body-mind” (*shinjin datsuraku*). In other words, seated meditation is, in Dōgen’s understanding, not a future-oriented practice, something one engages in in order to one day have an experience of insight (*kenshō*) or enlightenment (*satori*). It is not a sort of striving or grasping, but rather a balanced stillness, a natural manifestation of something that is present already and needs only to be cultivated. Notably, the words Dōgen uses to describe this state of attentive “just sitting” work equally well to describe the calligraphic performance discernible in *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*. Dōgen writes of the body as being composed, relaxed, and upright, moving slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately, rather than with suddenness or abruptness.

Most of these descriptors stand in stark contrast to the adjectival qualifiers associated with Zen in contemporary exhibition settings, which tend to favor the language of spontaneity. The common factor, however, lies in a vigorous embodiment. Incarnation in a human body is, for Dōgen, a crucial factor, which he terms

the “pivotal opportunity” (*jinshin no kiyō*).⁵¹ A gentle rocking right and left on the sit bones, a soft upward articulation of the spine, the balanced deportment of the limbs: these are the same gestures—the same bodily acts—that his calligraphy rehearses and enacts. The insistence of the primacy and vigor of the human body as the performative matrix of enlightening text and enlightened practice is, therefore, a common constituent of Zen calligraphy, whether of the “just sitting” type exemplified by Dōgen or the more sudden, splashy type favored in most contemporary exhibition spaces.

David E. Shaner has contended that Dōgen’s later works move beyond the descriptive work of the *Fukanzazengi* “in favor of describing the experience of zazen itself.”⁵² If we limit ourselves to the semantic content of the essays, perhaps this is an accurate statement. But, as this essay has attempted to illustrate, semantic content (the words of the essay) does not come without a material container (the physical form in which we encounter the words). Paying attention to the calligraphic performance of 1233 reveals that the *Fukanzazengi* is both a description of how to perform zazen and a performance of zazen rendered in a visual medium.

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NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Steve Heine and Jane Copeland Habegger for early conversations on these topics. Likewise, I am thankful to the two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions for revision.
- 2 Stephen Addiss, *The Art of Zen* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1989), 206, footnote 1.
- 3 The following four paragraphs represent a synthesis and summary of a vast body of scholarly writing that initially developed out of the practice of bibliography and has gone on to inspire important theorizations in the fields of literature and visual arts. While citing all the key texts here would take too much space, some of the major works are as follows: FW Bateson, "Modern Bibliography and the Literary Artifact," *English Studies Today*, 2nd ser., ed. GA Bonnard (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1961), 67–77. [Repr. "The New Bibliography and the 'New Criticism'" in Bateson, *Essays in Critical Dissent* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), 1–15.] René Wellek and Austin Warren, "The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art," *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), 129–45. Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (New York: Routledge, 2002), 9–26. Peter Schillingsburg, "Text as Matter, Concept, and Action," *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991), 31–82. Gerald Bruns, "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," *Comparative Literature* 32 (1980), 113–129. DF McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form," *Book History Reader*, 27–38. For some important articulations of these general theses and important adaptations and reworkings of them in Asian and Buddhist contexts, see Sheldon Pollock, "Literary History, Indian History, World History," *Social Scientist* 23 (October–December 1995), 112–42; and Fabio Rambelli, "Materiality and Performativity of Sacred Texts," *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 88–128.
- 4 D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 37.
- 5 Peter Shillingsburg, "Text as Matter, Concept, and Action," *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991), 31–82.
- 6 *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 37.
- 7 The manuscript is known as the *Tenpukubon* as it was written in the first year of the Tenpuku era (1233–34).
- 8 Heine, "Table of Dōgen's Literary Productivity," *Did Dōgen Go to China?*, 2–3.
- 9 William M. Bodiford, "Remembering Dōgen: Eihei-ji and Dōgen Hagiography," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 32, no. 1 (2006), 1–21.
- 10 Stephen Addiss provides an excellent overview of the complex cycles of obligation and calligraphic production in his *The Art of Zen*. See also Stephen Addiss, "Three Sōtō Zen Responses to the Twentieth Century," *The Art of Twentieth-Century Zen: Paintings and Calligraphy by Japanese Masters*, ed. Audrey Yoshiko Seo (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 108–136.
- 11 See Bodiford, "Remembering Dōgen."
- 12 For an account of this canonization, see Yokoi, "Fukanazazengi goshinpitsubon ni tsuite." Occasionally, other examples of calligraphy attributed to Dōgen will surface, but none of these has maintained the same level of appraisal and authentication. See, for instance, Yoshida

- Shōkin, “Shinkokuhō Dōgen hitsu Sansuikyō ni tsuite” [新国宝道元筆山水経について] (On the new National Treasure: Mountain and Rivers Sutra in Dōgen’s hand), *Nihon Bijutsu Kōgei* 129 (July 1949), 21–23. For a reproduction of some texts thought to be authentic, see Ōkubo Dōshū, *Dōgen zenji shinpitsu shūsei*, supplemental volume to *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1970). Some of the texts in this volume have been contested by Furuta Shōkin, *Shōbō genzō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1972), 17–43. On the evolution of Japanese law regarding national cultural properties, see Noriko Aso, *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 13 In recent years there has been a great deal of fruitful dialogue among cognitive scientists, phenomenologists, and Buddhist studies scholars that delves into the ways in which “bodily movement and the motor system influence cognitive performance – how the body shapes the mind.” Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9. For a succinct overview of this complex discussion, see the summary of the recent NEH Summer Institute “Investigating Consciousness: Buddhist and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives,” electronic resource, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://coseruc.people.cofc.edu/investigatingconsciousness/>.
- 14 Steven Heine, *Did Dōgen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.
- 15 Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 33. According to most traditional, sectarian accounts, Dōgen composed the brief treatise in 1227, immediately upon his return from the Southern Song, as a succinct set of instructions for practicing seated meditation (zazen), a technique he mastered under his teacher Rujing. He supposedly made a clean copy of the essay six years later, in 1233. Contemporary scholarship, however, suggests that there was no 1227 version and that the extant 1233 manuscript is, in fact, Dōgen’s earliest written description of seated meditation. In this reckoning, he composed the text while he was already in residence and directing students in meditation at Kōshōji.
- 16 As cited in Yokoi Kakudō, “Fukanzazengi goshinpitsubon ni tsuite” [普勸坐全儀御真筆本について] (Concerning the Fukanzazengi in Dōgen’s writing), *Shūgaku Kenkyū* 11 (March 1969), 78–90. The multivalent word *seki* generally indicates some sort of material trace. In the case of Zen calligraphy, the material trace is taken to be that of the calligrapher’s enlightened mind. For more on the treatment of calligraphy as a relic in Japanese Buddhism, see Willa Jane Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988). For the relationship between text and relic in early South Asian Buddhism, see Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997). The profession of art appraisal first came into being in Japan in the early decades of the seventeenth century. It was quickly dominated by the Kohitsu family, who were particularly renowned for their evaluations of calligraphy. Indeed, the clan’s professional name literally means “ancient brush” (*kohitsu*). Kohitsu Ryōhan was a leading voice of the family’s tenth generation, and his endorsement of the manuscript signals not only its authenticity, but also its aesthetic value as an example of the calligraphic arts. That he was involved in the movement of the manuscript from some private collection to the Eiheiiji treasure house is in keeping with the general practices of the connoisseurship, authentication, appraisal, and art dealership of ancient calligraphy as it was practiced in Japan during the 1800s. For more on the Kohitsu family, see Komatsu Shigemi, *Kohitsu* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1972). For information on Kohitsu Ryōhan in particular, see Satō Atsushi, “Bakumatsuki no shoga kantei ni okeru ken’i no arika: ‘Kohitsu Ryōhan/ Anzai Un’en kantei ikken shimatsu’ o chūshin ni” [幕末期の書画鑑定における權威のありか：古筆了伴・安西雲煙鑑定一件始末を中心に] (Concerning authority and the appraisal of artwork in the late Edo period: Focusing on the unfolding of the dispute between Kohitsu Ryōhan and Anzai Un’en), *Kindai gasetu* 18 (2009), 114–16. Very little is available on the family in English, though some information can be gleaned from Satoko Tamamushi, “Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the ‘Yamato-e Revival,’” *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700*, ed. Elizabeth Lillehoj (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 53–78.
- 17 For a modern typeset version of the 1233 *kanbun* treatise, which employs some modern simplifications for archaic characters, see Suzuki Kakuzen, Sakurai Hideo, Sakai Tokugen, and Ishii Shūdō, eds. *Dōgen zenshi zenshū* 5 (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1989), 10–12.
- 18 For more on Song dynasty book history and sutra production practices, see Tsuen-Hsue Tsien, *Written on Bamboo*

and Silk: *The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

- 19 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Fukanzazengi* are taken from Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 175–87. Bielefeldt's study includes a very useful appendix in which he provides side-by-side translations of five manuals of Zen meditation: the twelfth-century Chinese monk Zhanglu Zongze's *Chanyuan qinggui* (the oldest book of regulations ordering Chan/Zen monastic life, a section of which is devoted to describing meditation), Dōgen's 1233 Tenpuku manuscript version of the *Fukanzazengi* (the text I am examining here, which draws heavily, in its descriptions of posture, on the *Chanyuan qinggui*), Dōgen's later revision of the *Fukanzazengi* (generally referred to as either the Rufubon, "popular version," or the Karokubon, after the era in which it was composed, 1242–46), and two other texts in which Dōgen describes the practice of seated meditation.
- 20 Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 175.
- 21 Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 175.
- 22 For a detailed account of the complex interactions between semantic content, material format, author, and reader, see Peter L. Shillingsburg, "Text as Matter, Concept, and Action." *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991), 31–82.
- 23 In the later, popular expansion of this section of the treatise, Dōgen added a sentence instructing the practitioner to "take a breath and exhale fully, rock your body right and left, and settle into steady, immovable sitting." The added sentence draws further attention to Dōgen's multivalent sense of the term "pivot." The spine and sit bones provide the physical pole around which seated meditation coheres, while the practitioner's possession of a human body, in a more idealized sense, represents a "pivotal" opportunity to engage in Buddhist practice—the most pivotal element of which is, in Dōgen's view, the seated meditation he is describing. For an English translation of the revised treatise, see Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 175–87. For an alternate translation, see "Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen," *Sōtōshū nikka gongyō seiten* (Sōtō School scriptures for daily services and practice), electronic resource, accessed January 16, 2015, http://web.stanford.edu/group/scbs/sztp3/translations/gongyo_seiten/translations/part_3/fukan_zazengi.html/.
- 24 Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 178–81. I have included an alternate translation for two short phrases in brackets.
- 25 Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, 182. I have added the word "simply" (set off in brackets) to Bielefeldt's translation to account for two characters (自然, "naturally, smoothly, as a matter of course") that he seems to have omitted.
- 26 This descriptive note comes from an interview with Fukushima Keidō, abbot of the Zen temple Tōfukuji. Wirth, ed. *Zen no Sho*, 85, no. 6.
- 27 The technical term "flying white" (*hakushi*) refers to a particular technique in which—because of the brush's speed, the pressure on the brush, or the depletion of ink—the bristles of the brush separate, creating streaks of negative (white) space. It is commonly taken as evidence of rapid, spontaneous, and dynamic brushwork.
- 28 The relevant passage of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* may be found in T 14.475.539b15–21. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku, and Ono Gemmyō, 100 vols., (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–34).
- 29 On the art historical concept of the "period eye," see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 29–40.
- 30 Eric C. Mullis, "The Ethics of Confucian Artistry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (winter 2007), 99–107. See also John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck, *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- 31 For a thorough account, see Markus Rüttermann, "'So That We Can Study Letter-Writing': The Concept of Epistolary Etiquette in Premodern Japan," *Japan Review* 18 (2006), 57–128.
- 32 A brief, partial list of such manuals might include *Kingyoku Sekidenshō* (金玉積伝抄, attributed to Prince Kaneakira, 914–87), *Kirinshō* (麒麟抄, attributed to Fujiwara Yukinari, 972–1027), *Yakaku Teikinshō* (夜鶴庭訓抄, attributed to Fujiwara Koreyuki, d. 1175), and *Jubokushō* (入木抄, composed by Prince Son'en, 1352). For a more complete survey, see Gary DeCoker, "Secret Teachings in Medieval Calligraphy: Jubokushō and Saiyōshō," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, no. 2 (summer 1988), 197–228, and 43, no. 3 (autumn 1988), 259–78.
- 33 The passage is from the *Jubokushō* by Prince Son'en (1298–1356). Cited in Gary DeCoker, "Secret Teachings in Medieval Calligraphy: Jubokushō and Saiyōshō," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, no. 2 (summer 1988), 213. The term *juboku* (入木, lit. "entering the wood" or "penetrating the tree") was sometimes used metaphorically to mean "calligraphy." The term, which

- originated in the eighth-century calligraphy collection *Shuduan* (書斷), refers to the fourth-century calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之, whose strokes were said to be so powerful that the ink from his brush penetrated the wood on which he was writing.
- 34 Yuriko Saito, "The Moral Dimensions of Japanese Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (winter 2007), 89.
- 35 For a fuller account, see Gary DeCoker, "Secret Teachings in Medieval Calligraphy: *Jubokushō* and *Saiyōshō*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, no. 2 (summer 1988), 197–228, and 43, no. 3 (autumn 1988), 259–78.
- 36 To give one further example, the *Heike Nōkyō* is a heavily decorated, hand-copied sutra set that the powerful warrior and politician Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) dedicated to the Itsukushima Shrine in the ninth month of 1164. In many instances, the composers artfully intertwine their calligraphy with underlying motifs and ornaments on the paper, thus creating extended rebuses, subtle double meanings, partial vernacular translations, and literary allusions. Dōgen's calligraphy in *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen* does not go to this extent, but I offer this example to indicate the general visual-verbal culture in which he was operating. For a fuller visual analysis of the *Heike Nōkyō*, see pages 223–27 of Charlotte Eubanks, "Illustrating the Mind: 'Faulty Memory' Setsuwa and the Decorative Sutras of Early Medieval Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (fall 2009), 209–30.
- 37 Bernard Faure, "The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (spring 1998), 768–813. Robert H. Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," *Representations* 66 (spring 1999), 75–99.
- Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Boston: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2000).
- 38 Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Christoph Emmrich, "Emending Perfection: Prescript, Postscript, and Practice in Newar Buddhist Manuscript Culture," *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Julianne Schober, and Claudia Brown (New York: Routledge, 2009), 140–56.
- Natalie Gummer, "Buddhist Books and Texts: The Ritual Uses of Books," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (2005), 1261–65. The quote is from 1262.
- 39 For a discussion of these examples, see Charlotte Eubanks, *Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also "Reading by Heart: Translated Buddhism and the Pictorial Heart Sutras of Early Modern Japan," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 220 (2013), 7–25; and "Unearthing Practice: Sutra Interment and Fantasies of Resuscitation in Medieval and Contemporary Japan" (forthcoming).
- 40 Willa Jane Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra*. Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
- 41 Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, "The Buddhist Dimension of Japanese Post-War Avant-Garde Calligraphy as a Factor of its Internationalization" (Tokyo: Asian Studies Conference Japan, June 2014, unpublished paper). See also Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, "Negotiating Art Borders: Between Avant-Garde Calligraphy and Abstract Painting; The Role of the Bokujinkai and Other Agents," in *Modernism beyond the West: A History of Art from Emerging Markets*, ed. Munro Majella (Cambridge: Enzo Arts Publishing, 2012), 41–63. Also: "Neuedefinitionen der Japanischen kalligraphie," *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift* n. s. 26 (spring 2013), 29–36.
- 42 Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 22. For an in-depth exploration of the influence of Zen on the US art world, see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 43 "Expressive Art of Japanese Calligraphy on View in Exhibition Opening August 17 at Metropolitan Museum: August 17, 2013–January 12, 2014," electronic resource, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/exhibitions/2013/brush-writing-in-the-arts-of-japan/>. The quote pertains to works of Zen calligraphy in the Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection, many of which have been donated or promised to the Metropolitan. For another example of the degree to which the formulations of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, the concerns of Abstract Expressionism, and the display of the calligraphy of Zen monks remain intertwined, see the essays in Jason M. Wirth, ed., *Zen no Sho: The Calligraphy of Fukushima Keidō Rōshi* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2003).
- 44 This is the general thrust of several articles featured in *Bokubi*. For example, Hasegawa Saburō opens the fifth installment of his survey of

- modern art with a statement “in anticipation of the day when the calligraphic arts will achieve their rightful place in the contemporary international [art] world” (29) and points out the importance of premodern Zen art and architecture in this regard. Hasegawa Saburō, “Gendai geijutsu (5),” *Bokubi* 15 (1952), 29–33. Similarly, Morita Shiryū begins a roundtable discussion of the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art’s 1965 exhibit *The Arts of Zen* with the question, “Why are we six years behind Europe in exhibiting Zen arts [in a modernist context]?” (4) Morita Shiryū, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, Kitayama Masamichi, and Nakamura Nihei. “*Zen no Bijutsu’ ten ni furite: ‘Shūkyō to geijutsu’ o kataru: Atarashii runessansu no tame ni*” [「禅の美術」展にふりて：「宗教と芸術」をかたる：新しいレネッサンスのために] (On the ‘Arts of Zen’ exhibit: Discussing ‘religion and art:’ Toward a new renaissance), *Bokubi* 146 (1965), 4–17. Tellingly, the transcript of the roundtable is preceded by a one-page essay by one of its participants, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, titled “*Zen bunka no kindaisei*” [禅文化の近代性] (The modernity of Zen culture), *Bokubi* 146 (1965), 2–3.
- 45 As quoted in Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations*, 47.
- 46 “Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin at the New Orleans Museum of Art,” electronic resource, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://artdaily.com/news/45166/Paintings-and-Calligraphy-by-Zen-Master-Hakuin-at-the-New-Orleans-Museum-of-Art#.VMJqam-NOSdk/>. The exhibition *The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin*, organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) and on display there February 11–April 17, 2011, also traveled to the Japan Society Gallery (October 1, 2010–January 9, 2011) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, May 22–August 17, 2011). The tendency to associate Zen arts with modernist art movements seems to be more pronounced when the exhibit focuses solely on the work of Zen masters and much more muted when the exhibit covers a broader range of objects. Even here, however, exhibition notes at times draw comparisons between, for instance, the calligraphy of a premodern Zen master (such as Sesson Yubai, 1290–1346) and the Action Paintings of Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock. See, for example, the collectors’ notes for the exhibit *Faith and Form: Selected Calligraphy and Painting from the Japanese Religious Traditions*, which was on display at the Freer|Sackler March 20–July 18, 2004. “Faith and Form: Notes on Ways in Which Japanese Buddhist Objects Convey Meanings,” electronic resource, accessed November 29, 2014 <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/faithandform/essays.pdf/>.
- 47 Doug MacCash, “Paintings by Zen Master Hakuin (1685–1768) at NOMA Friday,” *The Times-Picayune*, February 7, 2011, electronic resource, accessed January 23, 2015, http://www.nola.com/arts/index.ssf/2011/02/paintings_by_zen_master_hakuin.html/.
- 48 The last four terms on this list come from Stephen Addis, *The Art of Zen* (New York: Abrams, 1989). Quoted in *Faith and Form*. These adjectives describe the early Zen calligraphy of Seigan Soi (1588–1661), whose work was featured in the *Faith and Form* exhibition held at the Freer|Sackler (March 20–July 18, 2004).
- 49 Stephen Addiss, *How to Look at Japanese Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated: 1996), 55.
- 50 In fact, in many of his writings, Dōgen frames the everyday and the spontaneous as two sides of the same coin. For instance, the title of a letter (*Genjō kōan* 現成公案) composed in Japanese for an unknown lay believer from southern Japan and dated to the same year as *Fukanzazengi* can be rendered either “Spontaneous Realization of the Kōan” or “The Kōan Realized in Everyday Life.” For a discussion, see Heine, *Did Dōgen Go To China?*, 135.
- 51 Suzuki et al, eds. *Dōgen zenshi zenshū* 5, 12.
- 52 David E. Shaner, “The Bodymind Experience in Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō*: A Phenomenological Perspective,” *Philosophy East and West* 35, no. 1 (January 1985), 17–35.