

‘Immanent’ Visibility and ‘Transcendental’ Vision in Japanese Calligraphy

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Abstract. The premise of the approach in the present paper is the interpretation of Japanese calligraphy as an artistic act and the reception of the calligraphic work of art as the object of the aesthetic relation. By combining the theoretical analysis of the main artistic functions of calligraphy –as both a representative and an expressive art – with the practice of calligraphic art, the present endeavour aims to identify the factual and artistic poetics of this visual (pictorial) and verbal art. As such, our study focuses on the particularities of the calligraphic work of art, given by its means of existence: its object of immanence is concurrently a physical and an ideal object (through its linguistic scriptural contents). In our analysis, the Japanese calligraphic art becomes the object of a reading that exploits the Western and Eastern aesthetic poetic theories, in an attempt to explore this art’s means of existence, functioning, and reception, by revealing its *calligraphicity*, or its artistic-aesthetic quality. As a reflection on the relation between the image and the word, and on the coherence of the vision triggered by it, based on the characteristics of the visible, our study is an original approach that analyses and interprets the vocabulary and the formal style of a unique artistic field that begins with a linguistic expression, as a means of representation, and culminates with an abstract form of expression, as a means of presentation.

Keywords: Japanese Calligraphy, *Autographic* and *Allographic* Art, *Calligraphicity*, *Immanence*, *Transcendence*.

[es] Lo visible inmanente y la visión trascendente en la caligrafía japonesa

Resumen. La premisa de investigación en el trabajo *Lo visible inmanente y la visión trascendente en la caligrafía japonesa* es la interpretación de la caligrafía japonesa como *acto* artístico y la recepción de la obra caligráfica como *objeto* de relación estética. Combinando un análisis teórico de las principales funciones artísticas de la caligrafía en su calidad de arte representativo y expresivo con la práctica del arte de la caligrafía, el presente enfoque tiene como objetivo identificar la poética fáctica y artística de este arte visual y verbal. Por consiguiente, nuestro estudio pone énfasis en la particularidad de la obra caligráfica manifestada a través de sus modos de existencia: su objeto de *inmanencia* es tanto un objeto físico como un ideal (por su contenido lingüístico-escritural). En nuestro análisis, el arte caligráfico japonés se convierte en objeto de una lectura que valora las teorías estético-poéticas occidentales y orientales, en un intento de explorar las formas de existencia, funcionamiento y recepción de este arte, revelando su *caligraficidad* o calidad artístico-estética. Reflexión sobre la relación entre imagen y palabra y sobre la coherencia de la visión que ésta desencadena en torno a las propiedades de lo visible, nuestro trabajo es una investigación inédita sobre el análisis y la interpretación del vocabulario y del estilo formal de un entorno artístico único, que parte de una expresión lingüística como modo de representación y culmina en una forma abstracta de expresión como modo de presentación.

Palabras clave: caligrafía japonesa, arte *autógrafo* y *alógrafo*, *caligraficidad*, *inmanencia*, *trascendencia*.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. Japanese calligraphy as an artistic act. 3. Conclusions. 4. Written sources and bibliographical references.

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1. Introduction

Having entered the third millennium, humanity is going through an era in which experiencing great speeds

(with respect to transportation, information, etc.) has become vital to everyday life. The century of velocity, however, by imposing speed as a measurable value, whose records mark not only the history of the evolution

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of the machine, but also that of the human³, has inevitably brought forth the problematics characteristic to a horizon of existence defined by misleading technology: language seems to have lost its force of utterance, often transformed into an automatism that seeks to flatten the expression, and the image seems to have forgotten how to stand out as a force, as an abundance of possible meanings. In the “civilisation of the image”, in a context in which the contemporary individual is bombarded with so many images that one finds oneself unable to distinguish between the direct experience and what one sees on the television or on the computer screen, the future of the individual imagination becomes truly problematic, by legitimising the fear pertaining to the way in which the power to evoke images *in absentia*, in the human mind, will continue to develop. In a society flooded by prefabricated images, in the cycle of conferences planned for the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures at Harvard University, during the 1985/1986 academic year⁴, Italo Calvino (1923-1985), justly moves *visibility*⁵, together with *lightness*, *quickness*, *exactitude*, *multiplicity*, to the list of values that need to be salvaged for the third millennium. As he openly states, he does so in order to provide a warning regarding the danger of losing a fundamental human faculty that resides in the strength to focus vision with one’s eyes closed, to unshackle colours and shapes from the black *alphabetical characters* (emphasis ours) on a blank page, *to think in images* (emphasis ours).

As a cultural object, the alphabet has always been (and forever will be?) the support of a reading that activates the visible (through sight) and the vision (through interpretation), imposing a certain reception that is tributary to the combination of experiences and information, to different readings and to the imaginative power of each receptive viewer. Concurrently embodying knowledge and action, the use of alphabetical characters or of logographic characters becomes a permanent testimony to the remembrance of a seminal moment in the history of humanity, when writing served certain magical practices. Writing, one of the most important forms of human communication that, through convention, relates a set of visible marks to certain levels of language, contains, in its history, two great directions: the Sumerian and the Chinese writing. The Sumerian writing, also known as the Cuneiform script, a symbolic writing used in the eighth millennium BCE, gradually transformed, from a pictorial form, into an increasingly conventional one, and it reached the pinnacle in the invention of the Greek alphabet, which is considered the great accomplishment of the logical and scientific Western culture⁶. At the dawn of its civilisation, as Plato (427-347 BC) mentioned in the Dialogue *Phaidros*⁷, Western culture

perceived writing from a bivalent stance: on the one hand, with joy for the fact that the cure for oblivion was discovered, as well as that for ignorance and, on the other hand, with certain reservations, considering it a bad omen for humankind, through the forgetfulness that it would instil into the souls of those who would learn it, thus weakening their ability to remember. In the centuries that followed, the attitude continued to be dual in the European space. By identifying, in the alphabetical combinatorial capacities, a possibility for immediate communication, established between all existing or possible things, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), for instance, in *Saggiatore* (1623), expressed his superlative appreciation for the alphabet, considering it *the greatest human invention*⁸, namely an unequalled means of making different combinations out of only twenty measly characters on a sheet of paper that can communicate to anyone, no matter how far in time and space, one’s most hidden thoughts. However, to the antipode, in an irreconcilable parallelism, the trend generated by the idea of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign noted the infinite gap between the linguistic experience and the sensory experience, the word’s impossibility to contain the visual image.

The gift of writing was received by the Eastern culture in a completely different way. In its desire to take part in the inner nature of things, in the belief that the exterior characteristics of objects and phenomena are merely obstacles that hinder the immediate discernment of the truth, it considered writing and, more precisely, calligraphy, to be an active philosophy, a sacred practice, “an integral art” (*un art complet*)⁹ through which humans can become completely fulfilled. As opposed to the alphabet, which developed a linear form of representation, the writing system proposed by the Chinese logographic characters, since they are not conventionalised signs, represents a unique balance in the history of writing¹⁰: the Chinese characters can easily transform into “a means of transmission and registration of thought”¹¹, at the same time remaining graphic signs with a very high imagistic potential. The history of the Chinese writing begins in 1400 BC, in East Asia (during the Shang Dynasty, 1600-1046 BC), in the form of oracular inscriptions on turtle shells or on animal bones¹², which, according to the legend¹³, were created by a mysterious four-eyed person named Cang Jie (Thang-Hsieh) and, which, according to the same legend, were inspired by the traces left by the birds in the sand. In this geographic space, the strong link between writing and

⁸ Galileo Galilei, *Saggiatore* (1623), quoted in: Calvino, *Six Memos...*, 36.

⁹ François Cheng, *Vide et plein. Le langage pictural chinois* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 76.

¹⁰ Shutaro Mukai, “Characters that Represent, Reflect, and Translate Culture – in the Context of the Revolution in Modern Art”, 57-84, in *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture*, ed. Yoshihiko Ikegami (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 1991), 72.

¹¹ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London-Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979), 19.

¹² Kyunoh Ishikawa, *Taction. The drama of the stylus in Oriental Calligraphy*, trans. Waku Miller (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011), 22.

¹³ H. E. Davey, *Brush Meditation. A Japanese Way to Mind & Body* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 15.

³ Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1985-86* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1988), 37.

⁴ Italo Calvino died suddenly in September 1985, before holding the public conferences, which were published posthumously.

⁵ Calvino, *Six Memos...*, 74.

⁶ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 29 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1993), 1025-1075.

⁷ Plato, *Phaidros*, trans., preliminary clarifications and notes Gabriel Liiceanu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 143.

religion seems incontestable; it is believed that writing appeared when human beings felt the need to communicate with the divine: “They served largely as means of expressing queries to a deity on high.”¹⁴

If, in Egypt, abbreviated paintings were used to represent sounds, the Egyptian hieroglyphs having later been transformed into the alphabet through an “acoustic (aural) transliteration”¹⁵, in East Asia, the Chinese characters still mean stylized paintings used as paintings¹⁶, or, in other words, stylized paintings of things or the concepts they represent, while remaining paintings of sounds¹⁷. This is an eloquent case in the history of humanity that hinders the understanding of a language in the absence of writing, the particular influence between the two thus changing the usual referent-signifier-signified relation¹⁸. In the absence of a complete hierarchy, the meaning, the sound and the object, behaving as functional actors in a “spatial theatre”, overlap and, in such a language, can be juxtaposed into a single feature transformed into logographic characters.

The unity between painting (image) and writing is a feature that is common to all civilisations, from the dawn of their existence, a fact that the East developed, refined, and conserved; even today, the Chinese characters constitute not only a support, but also an opportunity for spiritual meditation. The Chinese writing was then borrowed by other East-Asian cultures; in fact, for the aforementioned civilisations, it is a type of “graphic thought”¹⁹. Being less close to the represented objects, as is the case of the Egyptian writing, since it is a rather simplified image whose significance is shown through suggestion or imagination, the logographic writing, although seemingly derived from painting²⁰, is more and more widely believed to have downright founded it.

2. Japanese calligraphy as an artistic act

The birth of Japanese calligraphy is connected to the sixth century, when this art, which had appeared from the deconstruction and reconstruction of the Chinese characters, gained its own style, strongly stylized, its most beautiful accomplishment being the creation of the *kana* syllabaries. By the seventh century, in the Japanese language, the *Manyogana*²¹ syllabary had been compiled, its name given after the most famous use connected to the collection of *Manyōshū* poems, from the eighth century; the syllabary represents an inventory of *kanji* (the Japanese denomination of the Chinese characters), selected

and used exclusively phonetically. Moreover, the *kanji* further represented the basis on which, in the Heian period (794-1185), the most simplified characters from the *kana* syllabaries were created²², obtained from the graphic deformation of the current Chinese characters.

If, in the West, writing became synonymous with memory, with the fight against oblivion, in the East Asian culture, writing, in its calligraphic form, was transformed into an attempt to know the world and thus, at the same time, it became an antidote for the ruthless passing of time, freezing the moment. Moreover, in the East-Asian cultural space, calligraphic writing occupied the place held by music in the Western culture of the alphabet²³; calligraphy works, seen as open musical phrases, were interpreted as “music for the eyes”. A Chinese character, through its graphic quality, activates a rhythmic form²⁴ that bears its own significance, becoming a visual sign that, while representing a concept, also allows for the direct recognition of a symbolic thought²⁵. This is a graphic quality that the art of calligraphy generously exploits, revitalising the functions of the sign, liberated from its object.

The calligraphy of East Asia is considered one of the fine arts²⁶, the twin sister of painting, through the miraculous origins of both in the olden times: the painter and the calligrapher use the same materials (rice paper, a round brush made out of animal hair and black coal dissolved in water in the form of ink), the brush technique has, in both cases, many common aspects and, last but not least, they are both judged based on the same criteria of the strong or subtle emphasis in the rhythm of the brushstrokes²⁷. The black brushstroke and the white space, the two formal elements of the calligraphic art that has, for centuries, held the imagination of East Asia captive²⁸, create a simple, yet profound and subtle art, tributary to tradition without obstructing originality.

As a means of expression, like other visual arts, calligraphy could be part of the category of the type of communication that uses instruments as extensions of the body, giving birth to a particular type of expression: the brush is the instrument that, directly and indirectly, establishes the connection between the calligraphers and their environment, as the paper offers them the “space” necessary for the act of creation to occur. Due to the fact that it presents spiritual and philosophical aspects that are quite difficult to be truly understood, East Asian calligraphy has always been seen by the West as an “esoteric” subject rather than a graphic art, but the birth of avant-garde calligraphy (*zan'ei shodō*) in post-World War II, a genre in itself, comes close to some aspects of twentieth century Western pictorial art²⁹.

¹⁴ Davey, *Brush Meditation*..., 24.

¹⁵ Davey, 249.

¹⁶ Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 19.

¹⁷ Recent research in the field shows that the Chinese characters are merely associated with a phonetic basis and do not express ideas through their visual form. See Yuehping Yen, *Calligraphy and Power in Contemporary Chinese Society* (London-New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Le langage, cet inconu. Une initiation à la linguistique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), 79.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Genève: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1970), 117.

²⁰ In the beginning, the East Asian painting was monochromatic, using the same black ink as the art of calligraphy.

²¹ Ishikawa, *Taction*, 158.

²² Christopher Seely, *A History of Writing in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 59-80.

²³ Ishikawa, *Taction*, 3.

²⁴ Mukai, “Characters that Represent...”, 77.

²⁵ Mukai, 65.

²⁶ Shigeto Tsuru and Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan. An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995), 155.

²⁷ Michael Sullivan, *The Book of Art. Chinese and Japanese Art*, Vol.9 (Bergamo: Groliev, 1994), 266.

²⁸ Christine Flint Sato, *Japanese Calligraphy. The Art of Line & Space* (Osaka: Kaifusha, 1998), 1.

²⁹ Tsuru and Reischauer, *Japan*, 157.

In the European fine arts, the search for forms that would “induce” the intimate substance of a thing began with Kazimir Severinovich Malévič (1879-1935) who, in a religious upsurge meant to reveal a hidden world, found the supreme intensity in “absence”³⁰. The search continued in this cultural space with Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)’s “cosmosophy of colours”, in which, if white is “absence and absolute silence”, black is “nothingness”³¹, and with Pierre Soulages (1919)’ “calligraphy”, in which black is a colour that is overflowing with strength³². One important conquest of the Western abstract art is, in fact, the discovery of black, which had, until then, been rejected by traditional painting, being viewed as noncolour. The richness and the varieties of expression which black holds were, however, for East Asia, a “discovery” that had occurred millennia before, due to the representation practice of the logographic characters made with a brush, a practice that was seen as a union between humans, nature and divinity, between the world of matter and the world of the spirit³³. As a monochromatic art, the East Asian calligraphy scrutinizes and explores the experience through a motion from the exterior inwards, becoming a direct revelation of the abstract nature of the cosmos, seen in terms of certain fundamental essences:

Literary composition needs several characters to complete the meaning [of a line], whereas calligraphy can reveal the mind with only one character. This is certainly the ultimate attainment of economy and simplicity [in art].³⁴

An attempt to translate the Japanese words *shosha* (書写) or *shūji* (習字) and *shodō* (書道) into a Western language would result in one and the same term: ‘calligraphy’. The *shosha* or *shūji* calligraphy implies learning to write the Chinese characters and the *kana* syllabaries with a brush, as a subject included in the school curriculum; the calligraphy class is integrated in a tradition according to which every Japanese person must write with a brush throughout their school education³⁵. However, the *shodō* calligraphy is, as the logographic characters that make up the word show, ‘the path/ way of writing’ (書 = to write + 道 = path, way), or, freely translated, ‘the path/ way of writing towards writing as an art’. A begin-

ner in the study of calligraphy is required to follow the rules (*shūji*), while the initiate is encouraged to surpass them (*shodō*). In other words, the former must focus on the representative phase (*shūji*) of this art, while to the latter, the land of the expressive (*shodō*) is revealed. Expressivity, among other things, also implies finding the right face for the logographic sign and giving it the correct shape through a brushstroke that can either *breathe life* into the character, or *poison and kill it*³⁶. The relation between the two terms, *shūji* and *shodō*, is nothing more than the representation of a forked significance: while *shūji* would call upon learning, *shodō* would designate the act of creation in itself³⁷. Each graphic sign bears the load of an entire literary and legendary patrimony, which the calligraphers can oppose, but could never ignore, because this heritage remains present both in their spirit, and in that of the viewer, as an indirect imaginary³⁸, offered by the culture, be it mass culture or any other form of tradition.

Although the calligraphed linguistic scriptural element initially corresponds to a real element, it is considered³⁹ that, before the graphic writing itself, there was, in the East Asian cultural space, a marking system based on strings that were carved and encrusted with stones; this type of writing was, undoubtedly, in the beginning, part of the magic rituals in which the signs were seen as talismans that proved humans’ reign over the universe. Somehow becoming a practice that activates the sacred, writing, particularly writing with a brush, receives specific attributes, narrating or translating reality in an individual way, since the Chinese pictorial sign is, at the same time, a textual one – its decoding requires the viewer to comply with a process in which different forces converge. The sinuous *kana* courses, which draw, brushstroke by brushstroke, their seething or soft curves, or the strength of the *kanji*, which, even reduced to the symbol of their own logographic characters, always keep something of their original vitality, animate the rice paper in an artistic search. A sudden change, accompanied by a variation in the size of the character or in the dimensions of the brushstroke of the logographic sign generates a unique calligraphic work of art. The brushstroke, as a base unit of calligraphy, becomes a part of a composition in which all brushstrokes, following a syntax specific to this art, form phrases that converge into a text that tells a story. The motion of the brush that leaves dense and hollow traces in its path in a calligraphic work of art can be analysed based on several criteria: *depth* (characteristic to the clerical script), *speed* (characteristic to the cursive script) or brush *angle* (characteristic to the semi-cursive script)⁴⁰. Hence, the aesthetic dimension of calligraphy is created, which, historically speaking, begins from the cursive script – free and impulsive

³⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *The art of the icon: a theology of beauty*, trans. Fr. Steven Bigham (Pasadena: Oakwood, 1996), 65.

³¹ Alain Besançon, *The forbidden image: an intellectual history of iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 346.

³² Marcel Brion, *Arta abstractă [Art abstractă]*, trans. Florin Chirițescu, pref. Balcica Măciucă (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1972), 241.

³³ Brion, *Arta abstractă*, 241.

³⁴ Chang Huai-kuan (Hsü Chen-e et al. eds., *Li-tai shu-fa lun-wen hsüan [Anthology of essays on calligraphic art]*, Shanghai: Shanghai Shu-hua, 1979), 209, quoted in Yu-kung Kao, “Chinese Lyrics Aesthetics”, in *Words and Images. Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting*, ed. Alfreda Murk and Wen C. Fong, 47-90 (Princeton-New York: Princeton University Press-The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 75.

³⁵ Rodolphe Diot, “Calligraphie et enseignement scolaire – autour de l’ère Taishō”, in *Japon Pluriel 10 L’Ère Taishō (1912-1926): genèse du Japon contemporain?* Actes du dixième colloque de la Société française des études japonaises, ed. Yves Cadot et al. (Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 2014), 135-144.

³⁶ Ojio Yūshō, *Hitsudō Hiden Shō [The Secrets of Calligraphy]*, quoted in Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Center for Japanese Studies, Michigan: The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1991), 182.

³⁷ Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art...*, 173.

³⁸ Jean Starobinski, *L’Œil vivant II. La Relation Critique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1970), 194-195.

³⁹ Kristeva, *Le language...*, 84.

⁴⁰ Ishikawa, *Taction*, 10.

–, passes through the semi-cursive script – natural and rhythmic –, and becomes architectural, equable (block script), covering a time interval from the beginning of the third millennium BC to the third century AD.⁴¹ Through a language of images that can, at any point, turn into a story, the calligraphic imaginary, provoked by a black brushstroke in motion, sees the world through a specific optic and logic that constantly open, through different styles, new paths to explore and new shapes that can modify the image of the world.

As graphic forms that somewhat advert to geometric shapes, with a solidity that can be defined by the law of internal construction, the *kanji* are, in the end, a way of seeing the world, a subtle connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Regarded as an object of reception and aesthetic relation, the calligraphic work of art invites to universal contemplation through visionary intuition. Furthermore, considering the fact that any art is a form of human practice, the attempt to explore the means of existence of calligraphy leads to highlighting the *calligraphicity* of the calligraphic work of art or, in other words, the aesthetic *artisticity* of calligraphy, with an emphasis on the distinction between *to make* and *to create*. Naturally, as a theme subjected to variations, the calligrapher, just like a potter, can also produce objects for which the practical function trumps the aesthetic function, but, given the multiplicity of applications, they rather fall into the category of artistic products, if the distinction between aesthetic and artistic is of a functional nature⁴².

The defence and portrayal of calligraphy as an art and of the calligraphic work of art as an object of relation and aesthetic reception are based on the consideration that here, in the argumentative lines formulated by Gerard Genette⁴³, one can identify an *attention* and an *intention*. If, in the reproduction of the *kanji*, there are conventions that must be followed, the calligraphic brushstroke is unique to each calligrapher. This brushstroke is an expression that is energetic, dynamic and sensitive, complementary and, in a way, defined by the white space. Moreover, the relation between the brushstroke and the space describes a state of profound artistic intimacy, bringing it somewhat closer to the relation of expressive contingency between matter and air explored, in a particular way, by sculpture. Since aesthetic objects are, above all, focus-based *attentional* objects, the aesthetic *attention* – the term attention is used by Genette in symmetry with *intention* –, addresses the visual appearance, the aspect of this object, given that attention is aspectual, oriented towards appreciation⁴⁴. The symptoms of aesthetic *attention* represent, among other things, the multiple and complex references that reunite distinctive means of semantic plurality, as well as ambiguity (multiple denotations coexist) and the figurative trans-notation (the denoted is, in its turn, denoted).

Since aesthetic or taste-based judgement is necessarily subjective (affective-psychological, but not individual), and assessment is constitutively objective, the taste is objectivised through assessment in the form of aesthetic predicates, such as, for instance, *gracious, elegant, fade, vulgar, superficial, classic*, etc. However, the same object can also be an artefact with an *intentional* aesthetic function, and the work of art quality is offered to the reader by the feeling (be it well founded or not) that this object has been produced with an *intention* that is at least partially aesthetic. In other words, from an objective-ontological interpretive perspective, a calligraphic work is a work of art if it is the result of an aesthetic intention, since, from a subjective-functional perspective, it can function as a work of art if it were received as having resulted from an aesthetic *intention*.

The calligraphic work of art imposes a reception that is, in each occurrence, always partial, since no contemplation or reading is sufficiently long or scrupulous⁴⁵ to exhaust the features of a work of art because the functional (attentional or receptive) plurality can never produce the same effect and it cannot bear the same meaning. Moreover, this attentional or receptive plurality stimulates a latent state which later acts through symbolic relevance, the calligraphic art becoming the object of a reading that activates the visible (through sight) and the vision (through interpretation). The poetics of the factual and the artistic, in the case of Japanese calligraphy, can be understood as the active meeting between *attention* and *intention* that accommodates a pragmatic function with an aesthetic one, causing the shift from the embedded class to the embedding class. Regarding the calligraphic work as a work of art, the aesthetic component must be completed by the technical component. Speaking of *rhythm*⁴⁶, for instance, if, on the one hand, the *depth* focuses on the size of the character and on the darkness, or density of ink, (the longer a brushstroke is, the deeper its cut), emphasizing, like two extremes, the force and the brevity of its execution, on the other hand, *quickness* shows the freedom a calligrapher gains with the help of the brush and the creative expression to which it can give rise, restoring the expressive, cognitive and imaginative possibilities to the calligraphic work of art. Moreover, the *depth* points to the *profoundness*, understood as the experience of the reversibility of the dimensions to the means by which the third dimension is created within a two-dimensional calligraphic work of art.

As a *mixed case*⁴⁷, the calligraphic work of art is concomitantly a material work, as an *autographic* matter, and an ideal one, as an *allographic* matter, combining the materiality of the graphics with the ideality of the text. *Autographic* in some of its parts and *allographic* in others, one and the same calligraphic work of art is a graphic work that involves a verbal inscription which exploits the *paratextual* elements that are untransmissible in diction, at the same time appealing to the re-

⁴¹ Kuiseko, *Brush Writing*, 24; Flint Sato, *Japanese Calligraphy*, 13-14.

⁴² Gérard Genette, *L'Œvre de l'art. Immanence et transcendance* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 246.

⁴³ Genette, *L'Œvre de l'art. Immanence...*, 10.

⁴⁴ Gérard Genette, *L'Œvre de l'art. La Relation esthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 8-9.

⁴⁵ Genette, *L'Œvre de l'art. Immanence...*, 239.

⁴⁶ Ojio Yūshō, *Hitsudō Hiden Shō* [*The Secrets of Calligraphy*], quoted in Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan*, 180-181.

⁴⁷ Yūshō, *Hitsudō Hiden Shō*, 32.

sources of the graphic arts (figurative, decorative, connotative) and to resources of the language⁴⁸. When he invokes the characteristics of the mixed works, by giving the illustrative example of the term “calligram”, we believe that Genette refers to the French symbolists, although he does not do so explicitly. They were followers of a neoCratylian poetics⁴⁹ that supports *mimologism* (placed in a direct relation with the imaginary), or the adequacy and the effort to imitate the world by language on different levels, beginning with the letter, the script, the sound and, in the end, the word, morphology and syntax. Mallarmé (1842-1898), Valéry (1871-1945), or Apollinaire (1880-1918) openly admit an inadequacy of language and of the world, and they attempt to elaborate a reformation project, as part of a logic of correction and compensation, through which language can regain its original function of signification. Written between 1913-1916 and published in 1918, not long before his death, the volume entitled *Calligrammes (Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre [Poems of Peace and War])* by Guillaume Apollinaire was considered, even at the time of its publication, one of the most remarkable works that had appeared during the war⁵⁰. The poems, proposing a new poetic form that experiments, among other things, with vertical writing, similar to Japanese writing, as the author himself confesses, are “ideograms” that he “loves” as he would a “novelty of his spirit”, rejecting the accusation of being a “destroyer”. The attempt of creating *something* new, proposed by the French poet, was not based on the destruction of the traditional verse, nor was it based on the destruction of the old schools of fine arts. It was based on “building” the new by “revitalizing” the old⁵¹. His characterization of *calligrams* in terms of idealizing free verse poetry (“une idéalisation de la poésie vers-libriste”)⁵², shows that the French poet always envisioned himself as a “creator” that tried to keep up with his time, in the dawn of a new technological revolution that placed machines of reproduction, like the cinema or the phonograph, in the foreground. The *calligram*, for Apollinaire, seems to be not only a reflection on the relation between the image and the word, on the way in which they emphasise and overshadow each other, but also an analysis of the coherence of this view.

By bringing together different fields of knowledge and different codes of interpreting the world in a multi-faceted worldview, the calligraphic work of art calls forth a communication between the image and the word, in the search for meaning, through the logographic sign. Ernst Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) interpreted the Chinese characters that held the energy of the original language as *a medium for poetry*⁵³, while Ezra Pound (1885-1972) saw, in the force with which these Chinese

characters invoke concrete images, a source of inspiration and a possible source of energy for a new type of poetry. A logographic sign, interpreted as a “moving picture”⁵⁴ that, at the same time, combines “the vividness of painting” and “the mobility of sounds”, can become a “medium” characteristic to poetry. Fenollosa’s attempt to present the East Asian logographic characters— a pictorial sign seen by Fenollosa as a drawing that is similar to a film – to the Western metaphysics and poetic theories tributary to the logos was considered by Jacques Derrida the moment that launched the twentieth century’s “great adventure” known as “deconstructivism”:

That is the significance of Fenollosa’s work. As is well known, he influenced the poetry of Ezra Pound. This absolute-graphic poetry, together with Mallarmé’s poetry, was the first break with the most fundamental of western traditions. And the attractive force with Chinese ideograms acquired from Pound’s writing gained intellectual-historical significance.⁵⁵

By analysing a work’s means of existence, Genette⁵⁶ identifies two categories: *immanent* and *transcendent*. As the first means of existence of a work of art, *immanence* regards the object of which the work consists and, in its turn, it can be divided into a material object (*autographic*) or an ideal one (*allographic*). As a second means of existence, *transcendence* (a term etymologically understood as the overtaking of a limit, as exiting an enclosure) regards all the means through which a work of art surpasses, overflows or plays with its object. Furthermore, the *transcendence* relation between the work of art and its object of *immanence* can be defined in functional terms: the work of art is the *action* made by an object of *immanence*. In other words, if *immanence* defines the motionless work of art, *transcendence* ushers the work of art in action⁵⁷. The relation between the two means of existence is evidently “in a loop”, each willing to shed light on the other, in a complementarity of the problematics of the statute of a work of art and of its function. As an *autographic* work, the calligraphic work of art, a result of a manual transformation practice, guided by spirit and aided by instruments, is a unique object of *immanence*⁵⁸. However, the particularity of the calligraphic work of art resides in the fact that its object of *immanence* is, concomitantly, both a physical and an ideal one; calligraphic works of art, through their scriptural-linguistic contents, are capable of expressing thoughts and emotions through themselves. In the case of the calligraphic work of art, *transcendence*, conditioned by *immanence* (the texture of the manual rice paper, the materiality of silk scroll mandrel), tries to speak of the *calligraphicity* of the product, of what could be regarded as “the process of becoming” in calligraphy, obtained in two stages (*shūji* and *shodō*), of the *mélange* of the black and white (non)colours that create the differ-

⁴⁸ Yūshō, 146.

⁴⁹ The myth of the mimetic motivation of language was approached, for the first time, by Plato in the Dialogue *Cratylus*.

⁵⁰ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Scieri alese [Selected Works]*, ed. Virgil Teodorescu (Bucharest: Univers, 1971), 564.

⁵¹ Apollinaire, *Scieri alese*, 565.

⁵² Guillaume Apollinaire, *Œuvres poétiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1078.

⁵³ Ernst Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 59-80.

⁵⁴ Fenollosa and Pound, *The Chinese Written...*, 63-64.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), quoted in Mukai, “Characters that Represent...”, 72.

⁵⁶ Genette, *L’Èvre de l’art*, 17.

⁵⁷ Genette, 288.

⁵⁸ Genette, 40.

ences, of the size of the six black colours (*dry, diluted, white; wet, concentrated, black*)⁵⁹, of the silent thought of calligraphy. Similar to painting, both being elements of the art of space, calligraphy, in its turn, shares the same principle of harmony and visual balance, since the *kanji* is a copy of nature, the harmony of the logographic sign being, in the end, the harmony of nature. Without overlooking the difficulty of the instituted tradition, calligraphy, as an art of time and space, transforms into a complex pictorial and verbal art, synthesising the functions of a representative and expressive art, through the point, line, surface, light, space, sound, rhythm, motion, time⁶⁰, the calligraphed logographic character thus managing to stimulate not only the sense of sight, but also the tactile sense, by direct touch. The art of calligraphy is, therefore, a pictorial science whose expressive means are the graphic line and the word; it is the science that comes from the eye and that addresses the eye, revealing the path of the invisible doubled by the visible.

Concomitantly image and word, the Japanese calligraphic work of art appeals to the language given by the meeting between visual art and verbal art in order to retrieve the natural simplicity (*soboku*) through sought simplicity (*tanjun*), with the help of two types of imaginative processes: the one which, beginning from the word, reaches the visual image, and the one which, beginning from the visual image, reaches the verbal expression. As knowledge and creation, Japanese calligraphy attempts to bring the surrounding universe closer, through the calligraphic motion of the brush: what is visible becomes the equivalent of what is felt by the calligrapher who thinks in and through calligraphy. Hidden visible and revealed invisible, inexpressible visible and tangible invisible, Japanese calligraphy, through somewhat particular manifestations, reclaims its own imaginary. Through the embedded space and light, the black calligraphic brushstroke on a white paper can make the logographic signs “crane”, “flight” or “spring” visible, while remaining faithful to nature, without copying it: it transcends the apparent opacity of objects or things and, as a body assigned to the eye of the calligrapher, gives a voice to the silence of the thoughts and ideas.

The calligraphic work of art accomplishes the paradox of making two divergent paths meet, paths that each correspond to a different type of knowledge: one that belongs to the mental state of a dematerialised rationality, with projected lines and points, and another that tries to create a verbal equivalent of that space. The first is materialised through the image or the visible that gives way to the expression of the senses, in order for them to transmit the imaginative power of the visual language, and the second is fulfilled through the word or the vision, the visible trace connected to the invisible, absent thing. The visible and the vision complete each other through the space left to the imagination, the visual part of phantasy that coexists with the inventive-linguistic rationality. Being an instrument of knowledge, imagination leaves the field of analogies, symmetries, and counterbalances open; the process of associating imag-

es actually constitutes the fastest system of connecting and choosing between the infinite forms of the possible and of the impossible. By exploiting the imagination as a repertoire of the potential, of the hypothetical, of what is not, what never was, and what perhaps never will be, but what could have been, the calligrapher, with the help of *four treasures* (brush, paper, ink and ink stone)⁶¹ creates a weave between vision and motion, the resulting calligraphic work of art being a personal representation of the world: a world of immanence and ideality. The calligraphers enter the visible universe with their visible body, which they draw near through sight, in order to offer it to the world through a calligraphic work of art. The body that sees becomes seen, it is touched by touching; aware of their corporality, the calligraphers will try to transcend it through a personal vision, made in the midst of things, where a visible lets itself be seen⁶². The white of the rice paper, the six black colours, and the brush made of animal hair become the echo of an inner wince of the calligraphers, transferred to the moving brushstroke, in which the viewing eye probably wishes to recognise the similarity with the outside world.

As the painting celebrates no enigma other than that of visibility⁶³, the calligraphic work of art bears within itself the vision that gives the receptor the impression of an immanent visibility. The calligraphic work of art makes visible what the profane vision believed to be invisible. Although it would appear to be two-dimensional, through ink bleeding (*nijimi*) or dry line (*kasure*), the world is recovered in its voluminous tridimensionality. The height and width of a calligraphic work of art are the *diacritic signs*⁶⁴ from which the third dimension, that of *depth*, will derive. A two-dimensional calligraphic work of art becomes a window opened to another universe that guides, polarises the viewing eye towards a vision which it overflies, without a compulsory viewpoint, sharing the contents of an imaginary⁶⁵.

The visible, in a narrow and prosaic sense, shows that, while writing, the calligrapher practices a specific theory of vision: the spirit strolls in between things, in a personal, concentrated vision of the universe. As if through a form-performance, the *kanji* (Chinese character), which was at the heart of things, is now at the heart of the vision, creating “*something complementary*” (*une chose semblable*)⁶⁶, in an adequate similitude, related with respect to genesis and metamorphosis. The logographic sign “crane” is the one that interrogates the calligraphers through glances. The visible is claimed through visible means that make the crane bird appear in front of the viewing eye as light and shadows through the colours white and black, although they are more visual, rather than real. However, the calligraphers live in their fascination, and the gesture of tracing the brushstroke becomes a true revelation, as

⁶¹ Son'en, *Jubokushō* (1352), quoted in Gary DeCoker, “Secret Teachings in Medieval Calligraphy : Jubokushō and Saiyōshō, 2”, *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, no. 2 (1988): 223.

⁶² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 19.

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, 26.

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 45.

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 23.

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 28.

⁵⁹ Cheng, *Vide et plein*, 90.

⁶⁰ Mukai, “Characters that Represent...”, 74.

if it were to exit the object itself. It would appear that the relation between the calligrapher and the visible things thus becomes reversed, the calligraphers ending up with the impression that they are the ones being seen by the things. Actually, in this case, *inspiration* must be taken literally, like the inspiration of the visible and the expiration of the vision, a passionate action that continuously changes the roles in the act of calligraphy. Moreover, the virtual visible that was waiting in the shadows becomes visible through the vision of a brushstroke. Like a type of mirror of this viewed invisible and visible unseen, the calligraphic brushstroke reveals the reflexivity of the sensory it translates and doubles it. As essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible, the calligraphic work of art unravels its own oneiric universe of essences and similarities through silent meanings. It can deceive the eye, instituting a perception in the absence of an object. It excites the imagination of the art consumer, turning *something* that was absent into *something* that is present. The vision becomes a *conditioned thought* (*pensée conditionnée*)⁶⁷, which arises from an occasion created by the calligraphic brushstroke. Calligraphy's means of expression are in the service of a moving brushstroke that subjects the objects to a vision that morphs the world. Nothing is ornamented, since everything tries to recover the perspective in order to recreate the world in the viewing eye, without being conditioned by reflexivity.

The calligraphic gesture embodies technique and inspiration, and the outside world at *the end of the hand*⁶⁸ is seen through visionary imagination, stored in a calligraphic work of art. The calligrapher's vision is not tantamount to a gaze outwards towards a world seen in its physical-optic coordinates, but rather to a *cracking of the skin of things*⁶⁹ towards a nothing that is, concomitantly, the performance of *something* that makes things be things and makes the world be a world. Calligraphy is not a construction or an artifice in an industrial relation with the outside world, but an articulated outcry through which things and ideas are given voice. Once uttered, it awakens the dormant vision from the phase of their pre-existence, recovering lively and active essences. This internal animation, this glimpse of the visible is what the calligrapher seeks in the name of profoundness. The liberation of the brushstroke, its awakening through the motion of the brush makes way for the vision, the dream of the brushstroke that creates its own space, outside and within the common one. This way, the *logos* of the brushstrokes⁷⁰, supported by the captured light and the gained stereoscopic relief, leads to the non-conceptual presentation of the universal being. The brushstroke is no longer a simple positive attribute and a feature of the object itself, but its generating axis continuously doubled by an invisible brushstroke that descends into the visible from that certain *Mu* or Zen nothingness. In Zen, the Absolute is identified with *Mu*, the limitless Nothingness which is entirely non-substantial, and that is why, paradoxically, the individuals can be identical to this Absolute. The

Nothingness surrounds the individuals, the latter being thus able to connect with their own selves⁷¹. The tension between being (*Yu*) and not-being (*Mu*), which governs the human existence, is surpassed by *Mu*, and the Nothingness is the transcendence of the opposition existence / non-existence. *Mu* must not be read as the negation of *U*. Since it is the counter-concept of *Yu*, *Mu* is a stronger form of negation than the simple not to be. Absolutized, it transcends both *Yu* and *Mu* in their relative meanings⁷². In other words, life no longer differs from death, nor does good from evil. In Buddhism, it is believed that life is not superior to death, since life and death are two antagonistic processes that exclude each other, becoming inseparably linked to one another. What Buddhism regards as *samsara* ('transmigration'), or *the wheel of life and death*, is nothing other than the eternal cycle of life and death, with no beginning and no end, through which the past and the future become present, the only moment that can be accepted *per se*. The present, in which one lives, is an essential principle in Buddhism, which concerns each and every individual, and the seekers of consummation must discover, within their own lives, the reflection of the inner light.

Because of the meeting between the writing hand and the reading eye, the calligraphic art proposes a visual reception of the act of reading, the image that is inserted in the linguistic sphere installs an intermediate level between the word and the thing, between the abstract and the sensible⁷³. There are numerous experiences which a calligraphic work can trigger. It is a certain type of search for spiritual perfection, through which human beings, in their desire to communicate with the divine, aim for the revelation of a hidden meaning, within a destiny of a continuous exorcism of death. This very "love for the abstract" compelled (and still does so today) the Zen Buddhist monks to prefer the black and white painting to the ones in colour, since the art of calligraphy is both a support and an opportunity to meditate for a follower of Zen Buddhism on the way to enlightenment. *Satori*, enlightenment or the awakening of Buddha's consciousness, occurs during an unexpected event, an event that takes place by accident, by chance, only when the spirit is ready to receive it⁷⁴. In and through calligraphy, the attempt to accede the essential is permitted, since life and death have become close, and the human existence is assimilated by the universe. Through contemplation, one can open the secret gate that leads to the absolute path of *karma*, the Buddhist law of causes and effects, the ensemble of physical and mental human acts, and everything they generate. This is an inner reality to which human beings have access through Zen meditation, which brings them closer to the hidden divinity and to infinity. A content that was initially occulted and dis-

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 51.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 58.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 69.

⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 71.

⁷¹ Stephen Addiss, *Obaku: Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, Introduction and Catalogue by Stephen Addiss with the assistance of Kwan S. Wong (Lawrence: Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art, 1978), 31.

⁷² Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 94.

⁷³ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *L'imaginaire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2016), 30-55.

⁷⁴ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1988), 220-221.

tant tries to manifest itself by traversing the path from within towards the outside, from the invisible towards the visible, borrowing the form of calligraphic art. The calligraphic work multiplies the system of equivalences that surpasses the figurative and the non-figurative, in order to break the shell of things, from which, in the end, what Buddhism calls enlightenment will erupt. And, since enlightenment is meant to be immediate and direct, and the imposed path to follow is practice, the exercise of calligraphy becomes a practice and a Zen meditation on the meandering path of seeking enlightenment, on which one tests one's knowledge and surpasses one's own self:

Zen masters never considered their painting to be either abstract or 'art for art's sake', as it is the Zen masters' spiritual zeal which is expressed in their brushstrokes. Reflecting the unique Zen Buddhist vision, spontaneous brushwork can be a path to enlightenment.⁷⁵

The calligraphic work of art, in the end, can be interpreted as a poem of the invisible, of the infinite unpredictable potentialities, a poem of nothingness given by a calligrapher who has no doubt regarding the visible concreteness of the world. The pulverised reality extends upon the visible aspects and everything can transform into new forms through the calligraphic brushstroke. However, the dissolution of the compact structure leads to a relation of parity between the existent and the non-existent, abolishing any hierarchy of powers or values. Moreover, as no calligraphic work closes calligraphy and, in fact, probably no calligraphic work is definitively finished, each calligraphic work of art can create, change, alter, enlighten, deepen or recreate another. Therefore, the titles of calligraphic works of art generally testify to their linguistic contents, as an addition to the image, making way for the dreaming brushstroke to traverse from its own space towards that of the immediate reality and, in the end, the planes intertwine: the visible becomes vision and the vision becomes visible. If, usually, the title, as a *paratextual* element⁷⁶ that is eminently pragmatic, will attempt to seduce the potential buyers by drawing them towards reading, in the case of the calligraphic work of art, it receives not only a function of designation or identification and description, but also a thematic one, as if to avoid overlooking the area of transition or transaction between the text and the image. Although the title can, through a first reading, offer a declared auctorial intention, the physical trajectory to which it invites contains a univocal syntactic component, and the semantic description is plural, inviting interpretation: *what could this calligraphic work represent/mean to the viewer?*

The calligrapher guides the receptive eye through the prosaic-brushstroke and the vision-brushstroke, which the latter interprets as an axis in a system of activity and passivity. Although it would appear to be immobile, the mov-

ing line involves a dynamic meaning that is continuously reassessed, completed, and renewed. The moving line, captured in its advance, multiplies, with each second, the visions that can resonate in the viewing eye, long after the calligraphic work of art disappeared from the retina. The calligraphic work of art relentlessly conjugates the verb "to see", it makes the motion visible, and, simultaneously, it makes the metamorphosis of time visible. The vision it brings to life is not only a certain way of thinking, but also the means through which the viewers, guided by the calligrapher, can come out of themselves, in order to passively or actively take part in the emergence of the spirit. The visible addresses the eye through vision. The image embraces the word and offers to the eye, for contemplation, the moving line that will open the spirit towards the world of objects and ideas. It is as if the calligraphic work of art tries to exit the limited perspective of an individual self, in an attempt to offer a word to the word-less (*crane, flight, spring*), reaching a point of arrival that could test the continuity of forms⁷⁷ and the identification of the self with the nature that is common to all things. Through vision, the contemplating spirit opens the window towards understanding *the crane, the flight, the spring*, or, in other words, the mystery of (not) to be, whose agency allows for the interpretation of an expressive art as a representative one as well, and the calligraphy work below (Fig.1) illustrates this process:

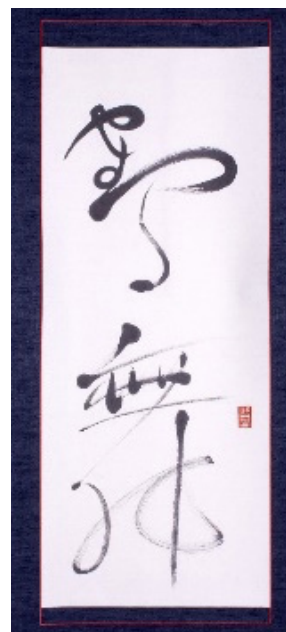


Figure 1. Rodica Frentiu, 鶴舞 (The dance of the crane), Ink on paper, 83.5 x 34 cm, 2007.⁷⁸
Source: Rodica Frentiu. *Une leçon de calligraphie japonaise. A Lesson in Japanese Calligraphy* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2010), 14.

⁷⁵ John Stevens, *Zenga. Brushstrokes of Enlightenment*, Catalog Selections, Entries and Essay by John Stevens, Catalog Essay and Organization by Alice Rae Yelen (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1990), 19.

⁷⁶ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 73.

⁷⁷ Calvino, *Six Memos...*, 98.

⁷⁸ When I first showed my calligraphy work to master Nishida Senshū (1936-2015), the very first reaction of *sensei* disclosed utter surprise: *I can see the crane!* About Senshu Nishida see 書一戦後六十年の軌跡 *Sho. Developments in the Art of Japanese Calligraphy Over the Last Six Decades 1945-2005*, ed. Tamiya Bunpei (Tokyo: Bijutsu-Nenkansha, 2005), 205, 850. The present study is a tribute to the memory of my *sensei*.

What is revealed is not a simple self, but a self in cohesion with the full void, since any visual *something* is separated and reunited with the universal spirit. Any visual *something* is doubled by an invisible *something* and it is precisely the depth of this hidden dimension of the world that the calligrapher tries to reveal through the motion of the black brushstroke. Calligraphy does not seek the frontal features of the visible, but it tries to reach *the immemorial background (le fond immémorial)*⁷⁹, in which *something* moved, lit up, and the calligraphic work of art is the calligrapher's response to this stimulus: the visible returned to the eye, in order to go beyond it. The visible, that which exists, which can be seen and which makes the calligraphers see themselves, morphs into the vision itself. Being aware of the fact that, in the end, nothing is gained, and that depth, colour, shape, line, motion are all frames of being that work together so as to release the possibility through which all that has already been said may be restated in a different way, the calligrapher offers the moving line as a support for *the speaking thought (la pensée parlante)*⁸⁰. Given that the hand of the calligrapher is "the degree zero of spatiality" (*degré zéro de la spatialité*)⁸¹ and the universe encompasses the writing hand, vision gains the fundamental power of manifesting itself, of showing more than itself: space and light communicate with each other, creating their own imaginary. The calligrapher's vision becomes taste and the meaning becomes metaphysical.

3. Conclusions

You're never too old to learn [六十の手習い *Roku jū no tenarai*], states an idiomatic Japanese saying, its literal translation being 'writing practice [calligraphy] at the age of sixty'. Having been regarded as more than a mere cultural heritage, and justifiably so, until today, calligraphy has found its role in contemporary Japanese society, as a continuously rediscovered art, never having been forgotten. As a traditional art, a "social grace"⁸² and the object of academic research in its homeland, calligraphy is considered an integral part of the Japanese spirit (大和魂 *yamato damashii*). Capable of adapting to the course of the world, calligraphy has, until now, translated the sensitivity of the epoch, since the calligraphic scroll, beyond its ornamental role, preserves a statute and a meaning translated into images and words, while always remaining the same spiritual testimony of another metaphysics. However, in an epoch in which other forms of media overwhelmingly triumph, forms of media that are faster and faster and with a growing range of action, could calligraphy ensure its survival, or will it perhaps be resurrected?⁸³

Considering the fact that the context determines not only the type of artistic function, but also its absence⁸⁴, will calligraphy lose its cultural importance in the post-industrial technological era? Will it manage to think the world through images and words?

However, if science manipulates things, art undoubtedly replaces them⁸⁵. As a writing instrument, the quill has continuously been anthropomorphised by writers in the European cultural space. At the end of Miguel de Cervantes's (1547-1616) *Don Quijote*, through the author's good will, although it had already been hung on the wall, the quill receives (indirectly) the final words of the novel: *Para mi sola nació don Quijote, y yo para él; el supo obrar y yo escribir...*⁸⁶ [For me alone don Quixote was born, and I for him. He knew how to act and I how to write.], and the Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), a Romantic seeking the spirit, rhetorically asked *De ce pana mea rămâne în cerneală...?*⁸⁷ [Why does my quill remain in the ink?]. The two writers show that the traces of the black letters left by the quill on the white sheet of paper had, in the end, given birth to a fictional universe. In the Japanese culture, Murasaki Shikibu (978? – 1016?), in the novel *The Tale of Genji* (源氏物語

Genji monogatari, 1008), considered the world's first novel, naturally placed the brush in the hand of Genji, who was seeking his words for an epistle-poem: 筆を休め休め考えていた。 *Fude o yasume yasume kangaete ita*. [He was thinking while resting and resting the brush.]⁸⁸ Be it a quill or a brush, quill ink or calligraphy ink, all of these utility objects point to the search for an inner energy, for a motion of the mind through handwriting or through the calligraphic brushstroke, which somewhat meets the feeling of unlimited time. In the contemporary culture of the image, although the computer keyboard is at *the end of the hand* daily, and the computer screen replaces the paper, perhaps condoning speed does not negate the pleasures of dalliance that could be taken from handwriting or calligraphic writing. Counting on the image and on the motion that naturally derives from it, on the flow of the imagination that becomes the word, regardless of the European or the East Asian meaning of the term, the imaginary created by the calligraphic brushstroke probably inclines not so much towards multiplying the possibilities of expression, but, paradoxically, towards approaching that *unicum* that is the self of the calligrapher that transmits its inner sincerity directly and that spontaneously discovers its own truth. The calligraphy work below (Fig.2) demonstrates this, in its search for the perfect depiction of the instant moment conducted by blending four *kanji* (Chinese characters), integrated by a harmony that betrays, through one brush stroke, the transience of the moment:

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, 86.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 91.

⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty, 59.

⁸² Cecil H. Uyehara, *Japanese Calligraphy. A Bibliographic Study* (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 11.

⁸³ Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 66-110.

⁸⁴ Genette, *L'Œuvre de l'art*, 287.

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, 9.

⁸⁶ Miguel de Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, vol. 2, ed. John Joy Allen (Madrid: Cátedra, 1991), 577.

⁸⁷ Mihai Eminescu, *Poezii. Proză literară [Poems. Literary prose]*, vol. 1, ed. Petru Creția, (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1984), 107.

⁸⁸ Shikibu Murasaki, *Genji monogatari* (Tokyo: Kawadeshobo, 1965), 92.

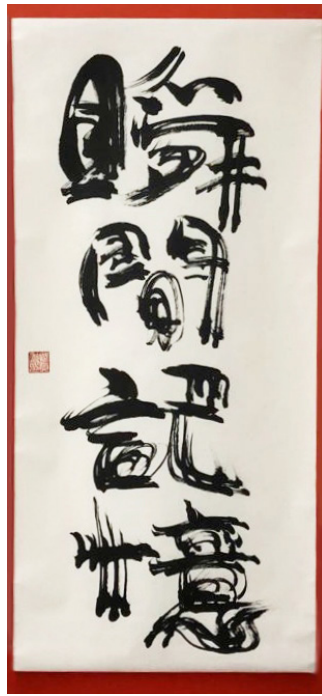


Figure 2. Rodica Frentiu, 瞬間記憶 (The Memory of an Instant), Ink on paper, 112.5 x 52.5 cm, 2014⁸⁹
Source: Rodica Frentiu.

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