

François Berthier

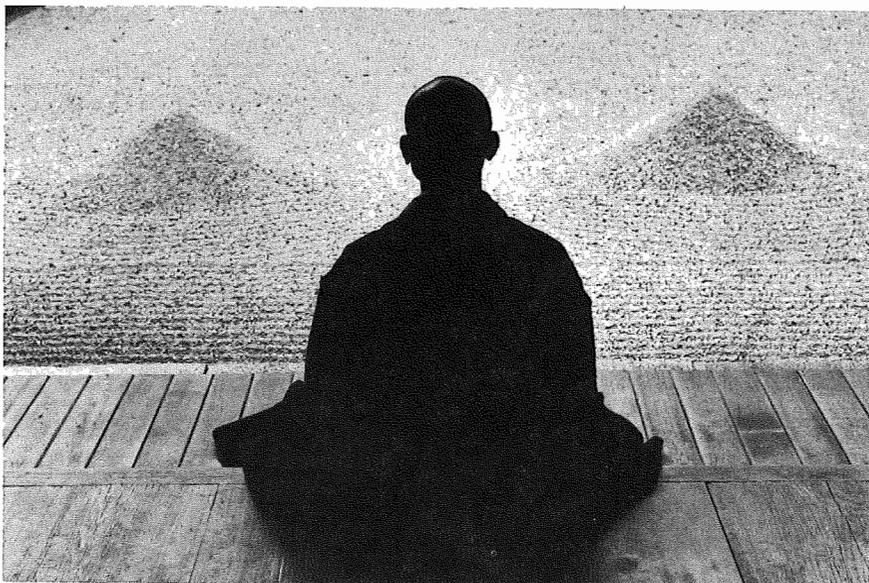
THE JAPANESE DRY LANDSCAPE GARDEN

Reading

ZEN

in the Rocks

TRANSLATED AND WITH A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY BY GRAHAM PARKES



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The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden
A Philosophical Essay by Graham Parkes

Saihōji—recently better known as Kokedera, the “Moss Temple”—lies nestled against the hills bordering Kyoto on the west, and harbors the oldest surviving example of *karesansui*. When visiting the dry landscape there, the best strategy (after the obligatory calligraphy and chanting of the *Heart Sutra*) is to take up a position at the rear of the phalanx of visitors as it makes its way around the famous pond of the lower garden. This will allow one later to linger awhile in undisturbed contemplation of the upper garden, after the others have moved off down the hill to the main temple buildings and exit. From the steep path that leads up to the garden, one sees to the left a magnificent group of rocks

floating on a bed of moss and arranged in the “turtle-island” style, evoking the Daoist Isles of the Immortals. This group was probably set originally on a sea of white gravel, which was dispersed and covered by moss during a period when the temple grounds were left derelict.¹ It is a wonderfully down-to-earth rendering of the paradisaical Chinese *topos*. The angular shapes of the rocks together with their arrangement, which leaves spaces among them, make for a composition that looks perfect from whatever angle it is viewed.

The turtle-island group is like an overture to the main body of the work, the “dry cascade” (*karetaki*) in the uppermost part of the garden. Here fifty or so rocks in three tiers descend the hillside, evoking a waterfall deep in the mountains. Most of the rocks are covered with lichen and surrounded by “pools” of moss. They are bordered by some moderate-sized trees, several of which describe graceful arcs over the edges of the arrangement. The moss, together with the lichen that clothes the rocks in varying thicknesses, offers a remarkable array of colors: browns, dark grays, mauves, oranges, and many shades of sometimes iridescent green. A few miniature ferns and a scattering of dead pine needles add contrasting touches. The warm colors of the moss pools stand out against the cooler hues of the bare stone, and when wetted by rain all the colors become impressively more saturated. If the sun is shining, its rays filter through the trees and highlight different elements of the composition differentially. When the branches sway in the wind, light and shade play slowly over the entire scene, the movements accentuating at first the stillness of the rocks. Further contemplation

brings to mind Zen master Dōgen’s talk of “mountains flowing and water not flowing.”²

In corresponding natural settings—what the Japanese call *shōtoku no sansui*, landscape “as in life”—adoption of the appropriate perspective can reveal rock configurations of remarkable beauty, in which all elements are in proper interrelation. The viewing area at the foot of the dry cascade is now quite restricted, allowing minimal variation of standpoint, but the composition is nonetheless breathtaking in its “rightness.” Not even Cézanne, that consummate positioner of rocks in relation to trees—albeit in two dimensions—could have effected a more exquisite arrangement. Cézanne’s work is invoked by the younger of the two female protagonists (both of whom are artists) in Kawabata’s great novel *Beauty and Sadness*. The older woman, Otoko, has proposed a visit to Saihōji in the hope that she can “absorb a little of the strength [of this] oldest and most powerful of all rock gardens.” But the experience turns out to be unexpectedly overwhelming. “The priest Muso’s rock garden, weathered for centuries, had taken on such an antique patina that the rocks looked as if they had always been there. However, their stiff, angular forms left no doubt that it was a human composition, and Otoko had never felt its pressure as intensely as she did now. . . . ‘Shall we go home?’ she asked. ‘The rocks are beginning to frighten me.’”³ What is it about the power of this garden that makes it so disturbing that it verges on the frightening?

The hill behind the upper garden is named Kōinzan, after the mountain hermitage of the Tang dynasty Chan

master Liang Zuozhu, and so some commentators claim that the tiers of rocks evoke the steep path leading up to his temple, and represent more generally the difficult ascent to the summit of Zen teaching and practice. Others see it as merely the remains of an actual series of steps leading to another building in the temple—as something crafted, but not really a work of art at all. Since the lower garden is known to represent the Pure Land (*jōdo*), the Western Paradise of Amida, and the upper garden the defilement of this world (*edo*), yet other scholars see the “turtle-island” group of rocks as evoking Mount Hōrai and the dry cascade as a way leading out of the world of defilement.⁴

Whatever the significance of this earliest example of the *karesansui* garden—and we shall be returning to it for a discussion of its unsettling atmosphere—several of its features point us back to China. And given the enormous influence of Chinese ideas and practices on the development of garden making in Japan, we do well to begin by reviewing that history.

Rocks and Stone in China

Few civilizations have revered stone and rock as greatly as the Chinese (though the Japanese are foremost among those few). A cosmogonic myth from ancient China depicts the sky as a vast cave, and mountains as fragments that came loose from the vault of heaven and ended up on earth. These huge stone fragments in falling through the air became charged

with vast amounts of cosmic energy, or *qi* (*ch'i*), before embedding themselves in the earth.⁵ As in other places, there is prehistorical evidence in China of cults in which stone plays a key role. But China is distinguished by having records of rocks being arranged (in emperors' parks) dating back over two thousand years.⁶ At first a prerogative of the imperial family, enthusiasm for stone and the mineral kingdom then spread to the literati, and it endures in the culture to this day.

By contrast with our sharp distinction between the animate and inanimate (with rocks falling on the lifeless side of the divide), the ancient Chinese world view understands all natural phenomena, including humans, as being animated by the psychophysical energy known as *qi*. This energy, with its polarities of *yin* and *yang*, ranges along a spectrum from rarified to condensed—forming a continuum, by contrast with our dichotomies between matter and spirit or physical and psychical. Rather than positing a world of reality behind and separate from the world of ordinary experience, Chinese thought has generally sought to understand the transformational processes that underlie the current world of appearances. Chinese medicine, acupuncture especially, is predicated on the idea of balancing *yin* and *yang* energies within the body, and harmonizing the flows of *qi* constituting the human frame with the larger cosmic circulation of energies outside it.

The two great powers in Chinese cosmology are those of heaven and earth, the prime manifestations of *yang* and *yin* energies. In this sense rock, as earth, is *yin*; but insofar as

stone thrusts up from the earth in the form of volcanoes and mountains it is considered *yang*. In relation to the basic element of water, which is *yin*, rock in its hardness again manifests *yang* energy. The poles of *yang* and *yin* also connote “activity” and “structure,” so that the patterns that emerge from the interaction between heaven and earth are understood as “expressions of organization operating on energy.”⁷

John Hay’s monograph *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth* takes its title from two texts cited in an entry on stone from an eighteenth-century encyclopedia.

The essential energy of earth forms rock. . . . Rocks are kernels of energy; the generation of rock from energy is like the body’s arterial system producing nails and teeth. . . .

The earth has the famous mountains as its support, . . . rocks are its bones.⁸

What is significant here is not so much the idea of rock as bone of the earth but of stone as a concentration of earth’s “essential energy.” Rocks are also called “roots of the clouds,” an expression deriving from the mists that surround the collision of water with rock, and from the vapors that gather around the peaks of mountains or enshroud the tops of cliffs and ridges. Some of the rocks most admired by the Chinese resemble clouds, and in landscape painting mountains are often depicted not so much accompanied by clouds as themselves looking like heaps of cumulus.⁹

The science that deals with our relations to terrain and environment is called *fengshui*, usually translated as “geomancy” (earth divination), though the literal meaning

is “wind water.” The aim of *fengshui* practice is to ensure that the places in which one lives and works, from residences and gardens to offices and workshops, are set up in such a way that one’s activities are harmonized with the greater patternings of *qi* that inform the environs. François Jullien writes eloquently of the “lifelines” (*shi*) that geomancy detects in the configuration of terrain. Drawing on a classic text by Guo Pu from the fourth-century, he writes: “Let us experience ‘physics’ as the single ‘breath at the origin of things, forever circulating,’ which flows through the whole of space, endlessly engendering all existing things, ‘deploying itself continuously in the great process of the coming-to-be and transformation of the world’ and ‘filling every individual species through and through.’” This “vital breath” is itself invisible, though discernible in the contours of landscape. Not all places are alike: they differ according to the patterns and concentrations of the energy flowing through them. Since this *qi* is also what animates human beings, people living in sites where the circulations of the vital breath are more intense will flourish more energetically: “By rooting one’s dwelling here rather than elsewhere, one locks into the very vitality of the world [and] taps the energy of things more directly.”¹⁰

Since rocks of unusual size or shape are special conduits or reservoirs for *qi*, beneficial effects will flow from being in their presence. The garden thereby becomes a site not only for aesthetic contemplation but also for self-cultivation, since the *qi* of the rocks will be enhanced by the flows of energy among the other natural components there. In a work called

Eulogy to the Lodestone, Guo Pu wonders at the inscrutable operations and interactions of the phenomena that *fengshui* tries to fathom:

Lodestone draws in iron, Amber picks up mustard seeds.
Energy invisibly passes. Cosmic numerology mysteriously matches.
Things respond to each other, In ways beyond our knowing.¹¹

Chinese thought is especially fond of analogies between microcosm and macrocosm, so that the sense of correspondence between rocks and mountains runs deeper than mere symbolization.¹² Mountains as the most majestic expressions of natural forces were regarded as especially numinous beings: Five Sacred Peaks stood for the center of the world and its four cardinal points. Rocks were thought to partake of the powers of the mountain less through their resembling its outward appearance than for their being true microcosms, animated by the same telluric energies that form the heights and peaks. The identity between rocks and mountains is emphasized in numerous treatises on Chinese landscape painting, or *shanshui* (literally: “mountains waters”). The introduction to the famous twelfth-century treatise by Du Wan, the *Yunlin Shipu* (Cloud Forest catalogue of rocks), begins: “The purest energy of the heaven-earth world coalesces into rock. It emerges, bearing the soil. Its formations are wonderful and fantastic. . . . Within the size of a fist can be assembled the beauty of a thousand cliffs.”¹³ This idea that the beauty of the macrocosm is concentrated in the microcosm will become a major principle in the art of the rock garden in Japan.

Given the traditional reverence in China for natural phenomena, it is not surprising that Buddhist thought should take a distinctively Chinese turn after being transplanted from India during the first century CE. The legendary patriarch of the Chan (Zen) School of Buddhism, the Indian monk Bodhidharma, by some accounts spent nine years after coming to China meditating in front of the rock face of a cliff. (Buddhist arhats are often depicted seated on pedestals of rock or in caves, and there is a famous painting of Bodhidharma in a cave of rock by the Japanese painter Sesshū.) A significant development took place in the early Tang dynasty (618–907), in which the Mahayana Buddhist extension of the promise of salvation to “all sentient beings,” based on the “dependent co-arising” of all things, was taken to its logical conclusion. A philosopher by the name of Jizang wrote of the “Attainment of Buddhahood by Plants and Trees,” and a later thinker, Zhanran from the Tiantai School, argued that “even non-sentient beings have Buddha-nature.”¹⁴

Therefore we may know that the single mind of a single particle of dust comprises the mind-nature of all sentient beings and Buddhas. . . . Therefore, when we speak of all things, why should exception be made in the case of a tiny particle of dust? Why should the substance of “suchness” pertain exclusively to “us” and not to “others”? . . .

Who, then is “animate” and who “inanimate”? Within the Assembly of the Lotus, all are present without division. In the case of grass, trees, and the soil, what difference is there between the

four kinds of atoms? Whether they merely lift their feet or energetically traverse the long path, they will all reach [Nirvana].¹⁵

The Tiantai School was transmitted to Japan (as Tendai Buddhism) by the monk Saichō, who picked up the line of thinking developed by Zhanran and was the first in Japan to write of “the Buddha-nature of trees and rocks” (*mokuseki busshō*). The seeds of these ideas would find especially fertile ground in the minds of some formidable Japanese thinkers during the following few centuries.

Chinese Petromania and Litholatry

A central feature of ancient Daoist lore was the belief that a race of Immortals inhabited floating islands far in the eastern seas. This occasioned repeated attempts during the Qin and Han dynasties (from the third century BCE to the third CE) to discover these sites and find the elixir of immortality. As mentioned in the main text, rather than going out to search for their islands himself, the Han dynasty emperor Wudi (140–89 BCE) attempted to entice the Immortals by constructing rocky islands of his own in ponds of the palace garden. Since the floating Isles of the Immortals were mountains, they were inherently unstable, so the Lord of Heaven had instructed giant turtles to carry them on their backs to stabilize them. For this reason they are often represented in Chinese gardens as resting on turtle-shaped rocks rather than floating on the sea. Buddhist mythology too was influ-

ential on garden making: the notion of a huge mountain, Mount Sumeru, at the center of the universe and surrounded by mountains separated by oceans, as well as the idea of Amida’s Western Paradise to which true believers would be transported after death, were easily assimilated to the Daoist view of the Isles of the Immortals. Representations of Amida’s Paradise would later become common in Japanese gardens, as would “Shumisen” rocks standing for Mount Sumeru.

A rich merchant during the Han dynasty is remembered for having built an enormous garden renowned for the excellence of its rocks, and whose salient feature was an artificial mountain (*jiashan*) over thirty meters high.¹⁶ This hubris—since in China only emperors and princes were supposed to display their wealth by building parks and gardens—brought dire results: the man was found guilty of “a crime” and executed. Nevertheless, the establishment of private estates gradually became customary, and the merchant’s rock mountain established a tradition in garden making. During the reign of the Wei emperor Xiao Mingdi (early sixth century), a minister of agriculture created an estate known as “Mountain of Bright Beauty”: “He built up a mountain as if it were a work of Nature, with piled-up peaks and multiple ranges rising in steep succession, with deep ravines and caverns and gullies tortuously linked.”¹⁷

In the year 607 the Sui emperor Yangdi built a magnificent park near his capital of Luoyang. He had four enormous lakes dug, and several rocky islands built in each. Although this had been done before, the scale of his project was unprecedented, and Yangdi’s “Western Park” is signifi-

cant because of its influence on imperial gardens in Japan. The first official embassy from Japan arrived in Luoyang in the autumn of 607, and the visitors from the Eastern Islands were in all likelihood shown the Western Park. The earliest mention of a landscaped garden with a lake, adjacent to the Japanese imperial palace, dates from the year 611.¹⁸

The emperor Ming Huang, who ruled China for the first half of the eighth century, was famous for building a garden, located at a hot springs, which contained a lake with a miniature mountain of lapis lazuli in the middle. This style also endured, for when Kubilai Khan (grandson of Ghengis) moved his capital to Beijing several centuries later, he had gardens built and parks furnished with lapis lazuli. Marco Polo appears to have been suitably impressed: "The rock is intensely green, so that trees and rocks alike are as green as green can be, and there is no other color to be seen."¹⁹ It is sad that such monochrome extravaganzas can now be seen only in the imagination.

Shortly before the Japanese Tendai founder Saichō was born, in the year 753, the eminent Buddhist monk Jianzhen (Jpn., Ganjin) finally succeeded, after several abortive sea voyages, in making his way to Japan. He took with him many cultural items from the Tang, especially Buddhist scriptures and works of art, and he was soon invited by the emperor Seimu to establish a Buddhist temple in the capital of Heijō-kyō (the present-day Nara). Among the artisans that accompanied him were said to be garden makers, who will have found the Japanese soil well prepared for their art. The timing was auspicious, since the practice of making rock

gardens attained a special degree of flourishing during the Tang dynasty.

The scholar-poet and high official Li Deyu built a famous rock garden in his estate near Luoyang, in which he arranged spectacular specimens brought in from many different parts of the country. The most spectacular came from Lake Tai (Tai Hu, also known as "Grand Lake") near Suzhou and Shanghai, in the heart of literati culture in the southeast. Li dignified the best rocks in his collection by having the words *youdao* ("possessing the Way") incised on them, and such inscriptions became common practice for enthusiasts.²⁰ The other great rock connoisseur of the period was his rival Niu Sengru, who also built a celebrated garden near Luoyang. The poet Bai Juyi was a friend of both men, and he produced a number of poems celebrating the beauty of their rock collections. The earliest description we have of a Taihu rock, which was to become the most highly prized kind in China, comes from one of Bai's poems.

Its controlling spirit overpowers the bamboo and trees,
Its manifested energy dominates the pavilions and terrace.
From its interior rise quiet whispers,
Is it the womb of winds?
Sharp swords show in its angular edges,
Their ringing resonance clearer than jasper chimes.
Its great shape seems to move,
Its massive forces seem on the brink of collapse.²¹

The geology of the Lake Tai area is remarkable in that the rock there is formed from limestone deposits nearly 300

million years old.²² These ancient formations were corroded into extravagant shapes when the area was covered by sea, and were then worked and sculpted by the action of hard pebbles in the lake during storms. Especially fine specimens of these Taihu rocks—which look like frozen billows of ocean spume, or enormous stone fungi burgeoning into the air, or extravagant coral formations poised in an invisible ocean—would often stand alone as the centerpieces of famous gardens. After being touched up by human hands, they would sometimes be submerged in the lake again until they re-acquired the appropriate patina.

A more prosaic description of Taihu rocks is to be found in Du Wan's *Cloud Forest Catalogue*: "They are hard and glossy, with strange configurations of hollow 'eyes' and twisting peaks. . . . They have a net of raised patterns all over, their surfaces covered with small cavities, worn by the action of the wind and waves. These are called '[crossbow] pellet nests.' When these stones are tapped, they resound slightly. . . . [The smaller ones] may be used in building artificial mountains which, when set among spacious groves, are a magnificent sight."²³ This passage articulates several criteria for fine rocks, some of them distinctively Chinese. Eventually three primary desiderata were codified in the course of the Qing dynasty: *shou* ("leanness"), *zhou* ("surface texture"), and *tou* ("foraminate structure" characterized by multiple holes and openings).²⁴ The "lean" means that the rock should be without any kind of "fat" or excrescences that would obscure the expression of its internal structure or energy. The surface texture was similarly valued as an indication of

the forces that had formed the rock. Foraminate structure was prized for being expressive of the transformations that make up the world as a whole and the interplay of void and form. This last desideratum was not among the features deemed important by connoisseurs in Japan (since nothing like the Taihu type of stone is to be found there).

The Chinese tradition tends to revere nature as "the greatest of all artists," in consonance with the Daoist ideal of *wuwei*: nondisruptive action in harmony with natural transformations. The great artist engages in *dou zaohua*, "plundering [the natural processes of] making and transforming," and takes these creative processes "as his master and teacher."²⁵ But the Chinese art of the garden does not shrink from perfecting natural products when necessary: from the evidence in the *Cloud Forest Catalogue* Edward Schafer concludes that "twelfth-century connoisseurs seem not to have put a premium on 'natural' stones."²⁶

The seventeenth-century garden manual by Ji Cheng, the *Yuanye* (Craft of gardens), offers definite encouragement to improve on nature's work. Simply to move rocks to a garden is already to "denature" them in a sense, but the arrangements are meant to enhance their natural vitality: "Rocks are not like plants or trees: once gathered, they gain a new lease of life." Stone always has to be cleaned after being excavated, but certain kinds of rocks "may have to be shaped and carved with adze and chisel to bring out their beauty."²⁷ Such exhortations to apply the craftsman's tools are rare in the Japanese literature. The *Yuanye* advises that the rocks used for the peaks of artificial mountains should be larger at

the top than below, and fitted together so that “they will have the appearance of being about to soar into the air.”²⁸ Sometimes the effect of these artificial mountains is comparable to that of the Gothic cathedral, where the aim is to counteract the weight of the stone and lend it lightness. Rocks in Japanese gardens by contrast generally advertise rather than conceal their weight, though their placement is often designed to exhibit their vitality in the way they thrust up from beneath the ground.

The best Chinese rock will sound as well as look impressive: when tapped, it should give forth “a clear tone” (reminiscent of the stone chimes used in Chinese court music). A prime example is the sonorous Lingbi rock, which comes from a place called “Stone Chime Mountain.” According to the *Cloud Forest Catalogue*: “When still in the soil, these rocks grow in various shapes according to their size. Some form animals, others mountain ranges with cliffs pierced by cavities. . . . Some shapes are more blockish, while others are flattish, [with patterns] forming clouds, sun and moonlight, and Buddhist images, even scenery of the four seasons.”²⁹ The first distinction is generally applicable, between the “mountain” type of rock (including a kind known as “stone bamboo shoots”) and the “zoomorphic” type (including Taihu rocks). The latter never became as popular in Japan, being domestically rare, nor was the sound emitted when tapped a major desideratum.

During the Song dynasty, an era distinguished by its peerless landscape painting, some connoisseurs of rocks valued them even more highly than paintings. The eleventh-

century scholar-official Su Shi offered a hundred pieces of gold for a miniature rock representing a well-known mountain in Anhui, and famously claimed that the “Chouchi rocks” in his collection were worth as much as works by the master of Tang dynasty horse painting.³⁰ Like many scholar-officials Su was also a poet (under the name Su Dongpo), and a poem he wrote during a sojourn in the beautiful landscape around the sacred mountain of Lushan will later play a key role in Zen master Dōgen’s exposition of his philosophy of nature.

Su Shi’s contemporary, the poet Mi Fu, has been proposed as “the ultimate connoisseur of rocks in all of China’s history.” On taking up an appointment as a magistrate in the Wuwei District, which was renowned for the quality of its stone, he noticed a magnificent rock in a garden of the official precincts. Overwhelmed with admiration, he immediately made obeisance to it, and from then on addressed it respectfully as *Shixiong* (“Elder Brother Rock”). The episode became a favorite theme of painters, who delighted in assimilating the poet’s shape and attire to the contours and patterns of the much larger rock.³¹ The frequent depictions in painting of the isomorphism between human and stone attest to their enduring affinity in the Chinese tradition.

Mi Fu was also a painter, and his work resembled the “stone screens” that have long been a common item of Chinese furniture. The veining of the marble used for these screens exhibits “traces of mineral combinations of pure limestone and sedimentary layers of clay mixed with organic

material or iron oxides which the limestone has recrystallized," which produce by way of "natural painting" patterns that look like landscapes.³² Also known as "dreamstones" or "journeying stones," they have always been avidly collected by scholars and officials for the decoration of their residences, and several different kinds are described in Du Wan's catalogue.

As northern Song landscape painting began to flourish in the course of the tenth century, resemblance to depicted mountains became a feature that connoisseurs looked for in rocks. A traditional condition for successful landscape painting in China is *qi yun sheng tong*, which refers to the artist's ability to let his work be animated by the same *qi* that produces the natural phenomena he is painting. So rather than attempting to reproduce the visual appearance of the natural world, the artist lets the brushstrokes flow from the common source that produces both natural phenomena and his own activity. This condition was easily adapted to the art of garden making, where the very elements of the artist's craft are natural beings, which are then artfully selected and arranged in order to reproduce harmonies in the natural world outside the garden within a subtly organized setting.³³ When Song landscape painting reached Japan, it exerted a similarly inspiring influence on garden makers there, especially in their selection and arrangement of rocks.

The emperor that ruled China for the first quarter of the twelfth century, Huizong, was an accomplished painter as well as a connoisseur of gardens. Possessed by a passion for rocks that amounted to obsession, he built a huge park

to the northeast of the capital at Kaifeng in which he constructed several artificial mountains. In one garden an enormous mountain of rocks, with "ten thousand layered peaks" was said to have risen to a height of seventy-five meters. The emperor had a special love of strangely shaped stone (including Taihu, naturally) and filled his park with the finest zoomorphic and anthropomorphic specimens he could find. According to a contemporary account: "They were all in various strange shapes, like tusks, horns, mouths, noses, heads, tails, and claws. They seemed to be angry and protesting against each other."³⁴ What fascinates about such stone is the way natural processes sculpt the apparently most inert of the elements into the shapes of more complex forms of animation such as plants and animals.

At the western entrance to the park Huizong placed a rock some fifteen meters high. "Other rocks on the side had various forms. Some looked like ministers having audience with the Emperor. They were solemn, serious, trembling and full of awe. Some were charging forward as if they had some important advice or argument to present."³⁵ The Confucian tradition is vitally embodied in these principles of arranging rocks in such a way that elemental presences are mimetic of social relationships. (The Japanese will later borrow some of their names for groups of rocks from Confucian social configurations.) Huizong gave names to the most spectacularly anthropomorphic rocks, which he had inscribed on them in gold. Although the park was called *Genyue*, "Impregnable Mountain" or "Mountain of Longevity," the emperor expended so much of his fortune on it that

the extravagance eventually cost him the empire—and all his gardens and mountains with it.

Rock never lost its importance in Chinese culture, being eventually incorporated into the novelistic imagination as well. One of China's best known novels, the seventeenth-century *Dream of Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin, was originally entitled *The Story of the Stone*. The hero Jia Baoyu (*baoyu* means “jade treasure”) begins life as a rock—albeit a talking rock—is transformed into a human being, and later becomes a rock again, who then recounts “the story of the stone.”

If lithomania never reaches the heights in Japan that it attained in China, it nonetheless runs deep, and we shall see many—though not all—of the grounds for enthusiasm over stone prove fertile in the Eastern Islands. Emblematic is a passion for a particular rock—a passion that was shared by two of the greatest figures in modern Japanese history. The warlord Oda Nobunaga was, in his nonviolent mode, a connoisseur of gardens. As such he eventually acquired the most famous stone specimen in the country, the “Fujito Rock,” and when he had a garden made for the last Ashikaga shogun at one of his palaces in Kyoto, he transferred this rock from his own garden with unprecedented pomp. “Nobunaga had the rock wrapped in silk, decorated with flowers, and brought it to the garden with the music of flute and drums and the chanting of the laborers.”³⁶ Toyotomi Hideyoshi, an army commander, later purchased it for the unprecedented sum of “a thousand *koku* of rice.” When

Hideyoshi seized power after Nobunaga was killed in 1582 he immediately had the Fujito Rock transported to his new palace, and at the end of his life he installed it in a place of honor in a special garden he built at Sambō-in. This rock was one of the most valuable items in Hideyoshi's not insubstantial estate after he died.

Japanese Treatises on Garden Making

At first sight the dry cascade at Saihōji gives the impression of being situated in a sacred grove, a place of natural numinosity. The tensions set up by the soaring arcs of the surrounding trees and the angular density of the rock arrangement, between the stillness of the stone and the dynamism of the descending-tiers composition, imbue the site with an almost supernatural power. Anyone acquainted with the indigenous Japanese religion of Shinto is going to feel the presence here of *kami* in high concentrations. As mentioned in the main text, Shinto shares with many other religions a view for which the entire natural world is animated and pervaded by spirits. Rocks in particular were thought to be inhabited by various *kami*, or divinities, and the more impressive ones (*iwakura*) were treated with special reverence as abodes of divine spirits. It was a natural step to then supplement nature by building piles of rocks in order to attract *kami* to a particular place, and these became the prototypes of the arrangements that would grace Japanese gardens in later centuries. Since rocks were regarded as numinous long

before the importation of *fengshui* and garden lore from China, their role in the Japanese garden became ever more important.

The upper garden at Saihōji manifests several antinomies. Although the scene looks natural at first sight, the composition instantiates a highly sophisticated design. Whereas the rocks themselves appear natural, albeit selected for their mainly horizontal shapes, they are in fact hewn (as components of a former burial mound). And as a dry cascade the composition presents, and makes strangely present, water that is literally absent. Several of the larger rocks have vertical streaks and striations, like the “waterfall rocks” (*taki-ishi*) often found in Japanese gardens, where the streaks create the illusion of a cascade. Some water does, of course, run down these rocks in heavy rain, but the mossy ground surrounding absorbs the runoff, so that no actual streams develop to spoil the effect of a cascade that is dry in all seasons.

François Berthier has mentioned what is perhaps the most powerful effect of this garden: if one can arrange to contemplate it alone, on a windless day the almost total silence is occasionally interrupted by the deafening roar of a waterfall that is not there. One is again reminded of Dōgen: “When the voices of the valley are heard, waves break back upon themselves and surf crashes high into the sky.”³⁷ It is perhaps the evocation of an absence through two sensory dimensions at once that accounts for the dry cascade’s strange power. The arrangement of the rocks induces the viewer to see a cataract that isn’t there, and the imaginative projection of downflowing water seems to animate the

motionless rocks with an unsettling movement. The effect is enhanced by the auditory hallucination of rushing waters—a disturbing experience for visitors unaccustomed to hearing things that aren’t there. But it’s reassuring to know that hearing with the eyes is not regarded as abnormal by Zen masters: in discussing the mystery of how nonsentient beings preach the Buddhist teachings, Dōgen quotes from a poem by the Zen master Tōzan Ryōkai who says, “If we hear the sound through the eyes, we are able to know it.”³⁸ (More on this in the last section.)

The gardens at Saihōji are attributed to the Zen monk Musō Soseki (1275–1351), who lived some three generations after Dōgen. (The *seki* in his name is, appropriately, a reading of the graph for “rock.”) Musō wrote a poem with the title *Ode to the Dry Landscape* (*Kasenzui no in*), which begins:

Without a speck of dust’s being raised,
the mountains tower up;
without a single drop’s falling,
the streams plunge into the valley.³⁹

Simply by arranging rocks in the upper garden of Saihōji, the author transforms a hillside into the face of a mountain, and with not a drop of water in sight, cataracts rush loudly down.

Scholarly opinion is divided on the question of Musō Soseki’s authorship of the gardens at Saihōji and Tenryūji, and since he was already in his sixties when he came to Saihōji in 1339, he may well not have had much of a hand in the actual building of the garden.⁴⁰ But given that he had

been working in the field for the previous three decades, it is likely that he contributed much to the design of the gardens at both temples. In any case he wrote eloquently about landscape, and what he says helps us understand the aesthetic effect of the two remarkable gardens whose designs are attributed to him.

Musō was an energetic and charismatic teacher who not only gained a large popular following but also won considerable influence with those in political power. This naturally turned some resentful types against him, and they branded his work with gardens as frivolous and his love of nature as indicating attachment to worldly pleasures. There is a passage in his best-known work, the *Muchū mondō* (Dream dialogues), in which he responds by distinguishing between various attitudes toward landscape and gardens and invoking the example of the poet Bai Juyi (part of whose poem in praise of Taihu rocks is cited above).

Bai Juyi dug out a little pond, planted bamboo at its edge, and loved this above all else. The bamboo is my best friend, he would say, because its heart is empty, and because the water is pure it is my master. People who love a fine landscape from the bottom of their hearts possess a heart like his. . . . Those who experience mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and rocks as the self's original part [*jiko no hōbun*], though they may seem by their love of nature to cling to worldly feelings, it is precisely through this that they show themselves to be mindful of the Way [*dōshin*], and they take the phenomena that transform themselves into the four elements as topics of their practice. And when they

do this aright, they exemplify perfectly how true followers of the Way love landscape.⁴¹

Those who surround themselves with a small landscape in the form of a garden gain nourishment from nature because its self-transforming elements are “the self's original part,” out of which “all things arise.” Through advocating the benefits of communion with the natural world in this way, against criticism from narrower souls, Musō contributed to the increasing valorization of nature in Zen thinking and practice.

The dry cascade at Saihōji is the most famous ancestor of the Zen gardens in the *karesansui* style, even though dry landscapes date back to the Heian period. The earliest surviving manual for garden design is the *Sakuteiki* (Notes on garden making), attributed to the eleventh-century nobleman Tachibana no Toshitsuna. Even though the text deals with the Heian period pleasure gardens of the nobility with their ponds and streams, a section near the beginning contains the first mention of *karesansui* in the literature. “Sometimes rocks are placed where there is no pond or running water. This is called a dry landscape. This kind of dry landscape is to be found at the foot of a mountain, or when one wants to furnish the area between hill and plain one sets rocks in it.”⁴² This sounds much like the dry cascade at Saihōji, which is often seen as the ultimate example of *karesansui* as described in the *Sakuteiki*. (Musō's work there is also regarded as representing a break with the tradition, by inaugurating dry land-

scape as an independent style.) A look at this classic treatise, about one quarter of which is devoted to the topic of rocks, will help us better understand their role in the Japanese art of garden making.

The *Sakuteiki* begins on a note of stone:

When arranging rocks [in a garden], it is first and foremost necessary to grasp the overall sense.

Following the topography of the site and seeing how the pond lies, one must think over the particular aesthetic mood [*fuzei*] of all parts of the place. Then recall landscape scenery as it is found in nature [*shōtoku no sansui*], and—taking the variety of different parts into account—arrange the rocks by combining these impressions.

Take as a model the creations left to us by the masters of ancient times; and, considering the suggestions of the owner [of the garden], you should create by exercising your own aesthetic sense [*fuzei*].

Think of the famous places of scenic beauty in the provinces, and mentally absorb what is attractive about them. The general air of these places must be recreated by modeling their attractive features.⁴³

The garden maker must first of all cultivate a sense of the *genius loci*, acquire a sound “feeling for the place.” The components of the term *fuzei*, which is used frequently in the *Sakuteiki* and later treatises, mean literally “wind” and “feeling.” It thus refers equally to the atmosphere or appearance of the place and to the aesthetic feeling or emotion inspired in the viewer.

The garden maker is encouraged to recall natural landscapes, and indeed the most beautiful among them, in order to understand how something comparable could be effected in the particular site for the garden. The idea is that nature is already a consummate artist, even though we may have to cultivate our sensibility and modify our customary perspective in order to fully appreciate this. There is also an injunction to follow the example of the great figures in the traditional art of the garden, and adapt what one learns from them to the current task. These are two salient features of the East Asian arts generally, where one follows both nature and tradition so as to make a creative contribution in the present. The garden maker is thus supposed to institute two kinds of movement: one in space, whereby the beauty of famous scenic places is invoked in the specific garden, and another in time, whereby the beauty of famous gardens of the past is emulated in the present site.⁴⁴

The opening words of the *Sakuteiki*, “*Ishi o tate . . .*,” literally mean “When placing rocks,” but this locution eventually acquired the broader sense of “When making a garden,” which demonstrates the centrality of rock arranging to the development of that art in Japan. The primary principle to be observed is exemplified in the frequent occurrences of the locution *kowan ni shitagau*, which means “following the request [of the rock].” It is used to encourage a responsiveness on the part of the garden maker to what we might call the “soul” of the stone: the translator refers in this context to the Japanese term *ishigokoro*, meaning the “heart,” or “mind,” of the rock.⁴⁵ Rather than imposing a precon-

ceived design onto the site and the elements to be arranged there, the accomplished garden maker will be sensitive to what the particular rocks “want.” If he listens carefully, they will tell him where they best belong.

For example, under the heading of “Oral Instructions concerning the Placing of Rocks,” the reader (listener) is advised to position first the “master rock” with its distinct character, and then “proceed to set the other rocks in compliance with the ‘requesting mood’ of the Master Rock.”⁴⁶ The vocabulary of rock arranging was quite sophisticated by the time the *Sakuteiki* was written, as evidenced by the large number of terms of art applied to different kinds of stone in this short text. They range from the ordinary: such as *waki-ishi* (side rock) and *fuse-ishi* (lying rock); through specialized terms used in connection with ponds, streams, and waterfalls: such as *namikae-ishi* (wave-repelling rock), *mizu-kiri-no-ishi* (water-cutting rock), and *tsutai-ishi* (stepping stone); to the unusual: *shu-ishi* (master rock), *sanzon-seki* (Buddhist triad rocks), *ishigami* (demon rock), and *ryōseki* (rock of vengeful spirits).

A passage containing advice concerning the arrangement of rocks at the foot of hillsides assimilates them to the animal realm: they should be placed in such a way as to resemble “a pack of dogs crouching on the ground, or a running and scattering group of pigs, or else calves playing beside a recumbent mother cow.” The theriomorphism gives way to personification: “In general, for one or two ‘running away’ rocks one should place seven or eight ‘chasing rocks.’

The rocks may thus resemble, for example, children playing a game of tag.” The dyad of “running” and “chasing” is followed by several others: “For the leaning rock there is the supporting rock, for the trampling rock the trampled, for the looking-up rock there is the looking-down one, and for the upright the recumbent.”⁴⁷

Another passage, in a narrative that may have its source in the Chinese tradition, likens the rocks to more exalted human beings. “One theory says that the mountain symbolizes the king, and water his subjects, whereas the rocks represent the king’s counselors. . . . The weakness of the mountain occurs when there are no supporting rocks, just as the king is vulnerable when he has no retainers serving as his counselors.” There are numerous references to ideas from *fengshui*, mostly in connection with the orientation and flow of streams, but in the case of waterfalls and the rocks around them the imagery is drawn from Esoteric Buddhism. “Achala (the divine Fudō-Myōō) avowed that any waterfall reaching a height of three feet represents his body. . . . [Rocks in] tall waterfalls always take the form of the Buddhist triad, in which the two front rocks to the right and left represent the two attendants of the celestial family of Achala.”⁴⁸ Buddhist iconography often has the god Fudō standing in front of a waterfall, and it has been argued that when the *Sakuteiki* speaks of “natural landscape scenery” this already includes landscape scenery “depicted in paintings.”⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that in sculptural representations of Fudō he is a motionless (though vital) figure surrounded by an

aureole of wildly licking flames—the perfect antithesis of his manifestation in a garden as a fall of water against a background of solid rock.

There is a substantial section of the *Sakuteiki* entitled “Taboos on the Placing of Rocks,” which is full of warnings against violating taboos deriving from *fengshui* practices. But a primary prohibition appears to be grounded more generally in a reluctance (not so evident in the Chinese treatises) to infringe upon naturalness.

Placing sideways a rock that was originally vertical, or setting up vertically one that was originally lying, is taboo. If this taboo is violated, the rock will surely turn into a “rock of vengeful spirits” and will bring a curse. Do not place any rock as tall as four or five feet to the northeast of the estate. A rock so placed may become fraught with vengeful spirits, or else may afford a foothold for evil to enter, with the result that the owner will not dwell there for long. However, if the spirits of such a rock are opposed by Buddhist triad rocks set to the southeast corner of the site, evil karma will not gain entry.⁵⁰

There is a combination of considerations here drawn from *fengshui* (the northeast as the most inauspicious direction) and Buddhism. The author cites a Song dynasty writer who says that in cases where rocks have ended up in a different orientation as a result of having fallen down the mountain-side, these may be positioned in the latter way “because the change was effected not by human being but by nature.” But in some provinces of Japan, the author warns, certain rocks may become demonic simply by being moved. Some configu-

rations are to be avoided because they resemble the forms of Chinese characters with inauspicious meanings (such as the graph for “curse”), while others are to be encouraged for the opposite reason (as with a pattern of three rocks resembling the graph for “goods”—Jpn., *shina*).⁵¹

The misfortunes that will beset the master of the house if taboos are violated are various: he may lose the property, be plagued by illnesses (including skin diseases and epidemics), suffer harm from outsiders, and so forth. Even the women of the household will be adversely affected by transgressions in the layout, as when a valley between hills points toward the house.

A later treatise on gardens, *Sansui narabini yakeizu* (Illustrations of landscape scenes and ground forms), dates from the fifteenth century and bears the name of a Zen priest, Zōen, as its author. Whereas the *Sakuteiki* deals with Heian-period pleasure gardens from the point of view of the aristocratic owner, the *Sansui* manual is based on the experience of workmen “in the field,” and treats much smaller mediaeval gardens designed to be viewed from the building to which they are adjacent—the so-called “contemplation gardens” (*kanshō-niwa*).⁵² About one half of the text is devoted to the topic of rock arrangement.

Whereas the *Sakuteiki* eschews the use of proper names for rocks, the *Sansui* manual speaks in Confucian terms of Master and Attendant Rocks: “The Master Rock looks after its Attendants, and the Attendant Rocks look up to the Master.” The Attendant Rocks are “flat-topped rocks, resembling persons with their heads lowered, respectfully saying

something to the Master Rock.” Of similar Confucian origin are the “Respect and Affection Rocks,” which are “two stones set slightly apart with their brows inclined toward one another,” which are said later in the text to “create the impression of a man and a woman engaged in intimate conversation.” Aside from appellations deriving from the Confucian tradition, another section in the *Sansui* manual with the heading “Names of Rocks” lists dozens of names from the Daoist, Buddhist, and Shinto traditions (the “Rock of the Spirit Kings,” “Twofold World Rocks,” “Torii Rocks” and so forth).⁵³ The *Sansui* manual again issues warnings against breaking taboos, especially by reversing the “natural” or “original” position of a rock, which will “anger its spirit and bring bad luck.”⁵⁴

By contrast with the *Sakuteiki*, the later manual is richly illustrated, with numerous drawings and sketches. The brushwork suggests influence from Song style landscape painting, which was being much imitated in Japan at the time, and some of the techniques and ideas about composing “garden views” and *keiseki* groups (depicting scenery in condensed form) may well be based on Song landscape theories.⁵⁵

One of the most famous Japanese gardens to be influenced by Song landscape painting is the second masterpiece attributed to Musō Soseki, the garden at Tenryūji. On the far side of the pond from the main building there is a dry cascade. Although consisting of fewer elements than its precursor at Saihōji, it comprises much larger rocks of equally exquisite

shape, which are again weathered with bands of lichen that suggest downflowing water. In view of the more open nature of this site—the garden at Tenryūji is a beautiful example of *shakkei*, or “borrowed landscape,” where the composition is designed to include natural landscape beyond the garden—the luxuriant vegetation around the rocks accentuates their stark minerality. Again in contrast with the upper garden of Saihōji, it is also a consummate example of *shukkei*, or “concentrated scenery,” in which a vast scene is compressed into a small space in the manner of a Song dynasty landscape painting.

Although their minerality is set into relief by the surrounding plant life, the rocks that make up the dry cascade look anything but lifeless. Nor is what animates them the minimal accommodation, on the part of these beings that have never known life or death, of the simplest life-forms, lichen and moss. The longer one contemplates them, the more alive they appear with a life all their own. In the course of the sermon that Musō gave at Tenryūji on becoming its founding abbot, he emphasized that the Buddha Dharma (which means both “teachings” and “law”) is to be found not only in sacred scriptures but also in the physical world around us. “Everything the world contains—grasses and trees, bricks and tile, all creatures, all actions and activities—are nothing but the manifestations of [the Buddha] Dharma [*hō*]. Therefore it is said that all phenomena in the universe bear the mark of this Dharma. . . . Every single person here is precious in himself, and everything here—plaques, paintings, square eaves and round pillars—

every single thing is preaching the Dharma.”⁵⁶ Musō is speaking here from a venerable tradition of Japanese Buddhist thinking about the natural world (to be discussed in the last section). The idea that all things expound the Dharma (*hosshin seppō*) is central to Kūkai’s Shingon School of esoteric Buddhism, and Zen master Dōgen is fond of insisting that “tiles and pebbles” are “Buddha-nature” (*bushhō*) just as much as so-called “sentient” beings are.⁵⁷

Even though the garden is designed to be viewed as a scroll painting from the verandah of the main building, it is a pity that visitors are no longer allowed to take the path that borders the pond around to the far side, so as to be able to see the rocks of the dry cascade at closer quarters. Nevertheless the distant view allows one to appreciate the most significant contribution of the site at Tenryūji, which is the mirroring effect of the pond. Only on a very windy day can one contemplate the waterless fall of rocks without being aware of its being “doubled” by the reflections in the pool at its base. The substantial rocks, which seem to descend majestically down the hillside, harboring an invisible cascade, are mirrored by insubstantial inverted counterparts beneath them. But rather than suggesting a contrast between the real and the illusory, the juxtaposition of rocks and reflections somehow evokes an interplay on the *same* ontological level. The natural world and its image, the substantial and its opposite, are both there at the same time. They are both necessary, belonging together: the point is simply to distinguish between them, which one can only do by acknowledg-

ing the insubstantial counterpart even when—or especially when—it is not directly presented in a mirror image.

Stone in the Western Tradition

The Chinese and Japanese understandings of stone considered so far will appear, to a traditional Western perspective informed by Cartesian dualism, as “primitive animism” or, at the very least, crude anthropomorphism. But such a view itself comes from a limited and parochial standpoint. Since Cartesian dualism deflated the “world soul” of antiquity, draining the *anima mundi*, as it were, and confining all soul to a locus within human beings alone, then any apparent animation of nonhuman phenomena must be seen as a result of anthropomorphic projection. The perspective is parochial in view of the widespread reverence for rocks in most other parts of the world. (The Australian aboriginal, Polynesian, and Native American traditions come immediately to mind, but respect for stone seems to come naturally for indigenous cultures.) For those of us that do not subscribe to Cartesian dualism, some such term as “panpsychism” might better denote world views that see humans on an unbroken continuum of “animateness” with natural phenomena. This is not to deny that the Cartesian perspective, insofar as it enabled the development of modern technology, has brought many benefits: it is simply to point out that it is only one perspective among many, however practically efficacious it may be.

It is also a perspective that, through emphasizing our separateness and difference from the natural world, conduces to environmental degradation—and in part by obscuring our participation in the mineral realm.

The biblical passages mentioned by François Berthier concerning the nourishing capacities of stone and the taboo against profaning its naturalness are atypical with respect to the Western tradition in general. The very beginnings of that tradition, philosophically, suggest some parallels with Chinese ideas, but the mainstream soon diverges. Thales, “father of Western philosophy,” is believed to have said that “the entire universe is ensouled,” supposedly on the basis of the dynamic qualities of the Magnesian stone and amber. (Remember how Guo Pu, father of Chinese geomancy, was also fascinated by the properties of amber and the lodestone.) Aristotle remarks that none of his predecessors associated soul with the element of earth, perhaps because of the assumption that “movement is the distinctive characteristic of soul.”⁵⁸ This assumption seems pervasive in the Western traditions, presumably because—except for those who live in regions subject to earthquakes or volcanic eruptions—the movements of earth are difficult to perceive in the short term. While Aristotle was reluctant to attribute soul to what we now call inanimate nature, he did claim that plants are ensouled, and that humans too are animated by the same “nutritive and generative” features of the vegetal soul.

Subsequent Western thinkers have been similarly reluctant to regard the mineral realm as animate, with the exception of a few magically or alchemically inclined philosophers

during the Renaissance. However, certain strains in the Judaic tradition constitute another exception to the general lack of respect for rock. “Rock” is often used as an epithet for Yahweh Himself, to suggest qualities of steadfastness and stability. Martin Buber cites an old Hasid master who said: “When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire in you.”⁵⁹ It may be thanks to the heretical Spinoza that certain elements from this tradition find their way into some post-Romantic attitudes toward the mineral realm. Spinoza’s “pantheistic” notion of the divinity of the whole of nature (*deus sive natura*) was a major influence on a figure who stands at the beginning of an important heterodox line of thinking about rock: namely, Goethe, who had a great interest in geology and mineralogy. In a fragmentary but fascinating piece entitled “On Granite,” Goethe explains why “the presence of rock brings elation and assurance to [his] soul.”⁶⁰

Near the beginning of this unfinished essay, Goethe remarks with satisfaction that “the ancient insight that granite is the highest and the deepest” is confirmed by “every foray into unknown mountains”: “It reposes unshakably in the deepest entrails of the earth, at the same time as its high ridges soar upward, in peaks never reached by the all-surrounding waters.” Against the common assumption of a contradiction between the human heart as “the youngest, most multifaceted, dynamic, changeable, and susceptible part of creation,” and rock as “the oldest, most solid, deep, and

unshakable son of nature," Goethe maintains that "all natural phenomena stand in precise connection with each other." Sitting on a high peak of exposed granite, surveying a vast panorama, he addresses himself as follows: "Here you rest immediately upon a ground that reaches down to the deepest parts of the earth, and no younger stratum, no agglomerated alluvial debris have interposed themselves between you and the solid floor of the archaic world. By contrast with those beautiful and fruitful valleys where you walk on a perpetual grave, these peaks have never produced anything living nor consumed anything living, being prior to all life and above all life." Goethe emphasizes the intimate connection between soul and stone—and at the same time redeems rock from the realm of the dead or lifeless. And when, inspired by granite, he writes of "the sublime tranquillity granted by the solitary and mute nearness of great, soft-voiced nature," he echoes, perhaps unwittingly, East Asian understandings of stone.

Goethe's ideas influenced American transcendentalism, and they are perhaps a factor in the more open attitude toward the mineral world that one finds in Emerson and Thoreau. In a journal entry written while he was in his mid-thirties, Emerson records a kind of death experience he underwent on walking out of the house into a night lit by the full moon. "In the instant you leave behind all human relations . . . and live only with the savages—water, air, light, carbon, lime, & granite. . . . I become a moist, cold element. 'Nature grows over me.' . . . I have died out of the human world & come to feel a strange, cold, aqueous, terr-

aqueous, aerial, ethereal sympathy and existence."⁶¹ The early Emerson is constantly impressed by "the moral influence of nature upon every individual," which he understands as "that amount of truth which it illustrates to him": "Who can estimate this?" he asks; "Who can guess how much firmness the sea-beaten rock has taught the fisherman?" Like Goethe a great believer in the ancient principle that "like can only be known by like," Emerson thinks that the sea-beaten rock can teach the fisherman firmness because it speaks to a rocklike solidity deep within the human soul. This would be the basis for "that spirit which suffices quiet hearts, which seems to come forth to such from every dry knoll of sere grass, from every pine-stump, and half-imbedded stone, on which the dull March sun shines."⁶²

Emerson was one of the first thinkers to appreciate the changes that the then new science of geology was effecting in our understanding of the world. Having invoked in his essay "Nature" the "patient periods that must round themselves before the rock is formed, and the first lichen race has disintegrated the thinnest external plate into soil," he writes: "It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul."⁶³ Long though the way is, it does not leave the granite behind, which persists within, allowing the human soul to participate in the deathlessness as well as the mortality of the natural world.

In our Faustian drive to order the physical world outside us, it is imprudent to ignore the inner world. In a passage from the essay "Fate," which influenced Nietzsche's emphasis on the need for self-discipline and self-cultivation

(and is remarkably consonant with the role of this kind of practice in the East Asian traditions), Emerson writes: "On one side, elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock- ledges, peat-bog, forest, sea and shore; and, on the other part, thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature,—here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man." And just as the Zen Buddhist thinkers urge us to acknowledge our interdependence with natural phenomena, so Emerson offers near the end of his career a similar exhortation, when he writes: "See what a cometary train of auxiliaries man carries with him, of animals, plants, stones, gases, and imponderable elements. Let us infer his ends from this pomp of means."⁶⁴

As Emerson moved away from the Christian and Neoplatonic ideas that informed his earlier thinking about nature, his stance became steadily less anthropocentric and more consonant with the non-Western philosophies in which he became gradually more interested. His younger friend Henry David Thoreau devoted a larger proportion of his energies to thinking about nature, and began from a less anthropocentric starting point than his mentor had done. Although Thoreau's reading in Chinese thought appears to have focused on the Confucian classics, his profound reverence for nature reduces anthropocentrism close to the minimum that is characteristic of Daoist thought. A passage describing sailing down the Merrimack River echoes the emphasis on fluidity that one finds in the *Daodejing* attrib-

uted to Laozi. "All things seemed with us to flow. . . . The hardest material seemed to obey the same law with the most fluid, and so indeed in the long run it does. . . . There were rivers of rock on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was the current hour."⁶⁵

Although his familiarity with Asian thought did not extend to Japan, Thoreau shares the Japanese Buddhists' appreciation of nature as a source of wisdom. Just as the duke in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* found "sermons in stones and books in the running brooks," so Emerson maintained that "all things with which we deal, preach to us." Now Thoreau emphasizes nature as a scripture that can be read: "The skies are constantly turning a new page to view. The wind sets the types on this blue ground, and the inquiring may always read a new truth there." And while he was an avid reader of literature (he took his Homer with him to Walden Pond), Thoreau warns that if we concentrate too much on reading "particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard."⁶⁶

Just as the East Asian thinkers undermined the distinction between sentient and nonsentient beings, so Thoreau extended the domain of the organic into the so-called "inanimate" world. A well-known passage from *Walden* reads: "There is nothing inorganic. . . . The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history . . . but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit—not a fossil earth, but

a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic.”⁶⁷ Thoreau’s emphasis on the vitality of the mineral realm serves to mitigate the effects not only of anthropocentrism but also of biocentrism, in a way that anticipates contemporary “ecocentric” thinking. This line of thought leads on to figures like Aldo Leopold, who expanded the notion of community to include the earth, as a basis for formulating a “land ethic.”

Goethe’s ideas were the source of a parallel (though largely ignored) current of thinking in Germany, through his influence on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schopenhauer recommends careful consideration of the inorganic world, and suggests that we reflect on such phenomena as “the powerful, irresistible impulse with which masses of water rush downwards, the persistence and determination with which the magnet always turns back to the North Pole, the keen desire with which iron flies to the magnet, and the vehemence with which the poles of the electric current strive for reunion.” If we contemplate further “the rapid formation of the crystal with such regularity of configuration,” and feel how “a burden, which hampers a body by its gravitation toward the earth, incessantly presses and squeezes this body in pursuit of its one tendency,” we will understand that the inorganic realm is animated by the same “will” that energizes us, only at a lower degree of “objectification” than in the case of plants, animals, and humans. It is interesting that Schopenhauer should mention in this context the *yin* and *yang* philosophy found in the Chinese classic on change

(*Yijing*).⁶⁸ But the thinker who is perhaps most at home with the idea of our closeness to stone and the inorganic world is Nietzsche, whose understanding of nature was also deeply influenced by Emerson.⁶⁹

With reference to the inorganic as the supposedly “dead world,” Nietzsche writes (in the spirit of Goethe): “Let us beware of saying that life is opposed to death. The living is merely a species of the dead, and a very rare species at that.” He then expresses the hope that human beings will be able to *naturalize* themselves after having “de-divinized” nature. What such a naturalization might involve is suggested by a brief aphorism from the same period with the title, “How one is to turn to stone.” It reads: “Slowly, slowly to become hard like a precious stone—and finally to lie there still, and to the joy of eternity.”⁷⁰

A hint of how a human being might “turn to stone” is in turn derivable from several unpublished notes from this period, which evidence a fascination with the benefits of participation in the world of the inorganic. The following resolution, with its slight Buddhist tinge, exemplifies an apt attitude for viewing Zen gardens: “To procure the advantages of one who is dead . . . to think oneself away out of humanity, to unlearn desires of all kinds: and to employ the entire abundance of one’s powers in *looking*.” And yet this unlearning of desires need not make existence in any way dull: “To be released from life and become dead nature again can be experienced as a *festival*—of the one who wants to die. To love nature! Again to revere what is dead!” We

are able to “become dead nature again” thanks to our physical constitution as living organisms: “How distant and superior is our attitude toward what is dead, the anorganic, and all the while we are three-quarters water and have anorganic minerals in us that perhaps do more for our well- and ill-being than the whole of living society! . . . The inorganic conditions us through and through: water, air, earth, the shape of the ground, electricity, etc.”⁷¹ Thanks to such conditioning—which is precisely the topic of *fengshui*—we can realize our participation in the mineral realm, which is the ground of our feeling of familiarity with rocks.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes of the way that learning transforms us, as nourishment does, but then adds: “But in our very ground, ‘deep down,’ there is admittedly something unteachable, a granite of spiritual fate.” The Japanese philosopher Nishitani Keiji connects this statement with Goethe’s essay on granite, and with the idea of something similarly unchanging deep within the human soul.⁷² Stone always held a special significance for Nietzsche: several significant childhood memories have to do with “digging up calcite” and other rocks on a ridge near his home. He even alludes to a language of stone when he asks, clearly referring to himself: “Is a human being not well described when we hear that . . . from childhood on he experiences and reveres unhewn rocks as witnesses of prehistory which are eager to acquire language . . . ?” And the thought of “the eternal recurrence of the same,” which he regarded as the pinnacle of his thinking and “the highest formula of affirmation that

is attainable,” first struck him near a magnificent pyramidal rock on the shore of a lake in the Upper Engadin in Switzerland.⁷³ The thought that enables the greatest affirmation of life strikes the thinker as he stands by a pyramid-shaped rock, which is “prior to and superior to all life.”

It is not generally known that Nietzsche’s friendship with the Japanophile Reinhard von Seydlitz, who was a great connoisseur of Japanese art, instilled in him a desire to emigrate to Japan. “If only I were in better health and had sufficient income,” he wrote to his sister in 1885, “I would, simply in order to attain greater serenity, emigrate to *Japan*. . . . I like being in Venice because things could be somewhat Japanese there—a few of the necessary conditions are in place.”⁷⁴ One of the things very much in place there is the subject celebrated in John Ruskin’s classic, *The Stones of Venice* (1853), a book that Nietzsche would have appreciated. But if he had fulfilled his fantasy of emigrating to Japan, Nietzsche would surely have found the Zen rock gardens there conducive to even greater serenity.

We have discovered in the ideas of these exceptional appreciators of stone in the West a theme that we shall see developed and amplified in Japanese Buddhist philosophy: the idea that if we attend to the “great central life” of the earth we shall hear some teachings and see some scriptures couched and proclaimed in a language of nature’s own—and in an unexpected eloquence of stone.

Cutting out Dry Landscapes

The best way to approach the rock garden at Ryōanji—a later example of the *kāresansui* style, and for many its highest consummation—is *slowly*, deviating from what is nowadays helpfully signposted as the “Usual Route.” It is such a relief to leave behind the commotion of traffic and bustle of the city, and walk up the cobblestone pathway leading from the street, that one is inclined to head for the famous site directly. But the grounds of the temple as a whole are exquisite, and one could easily spend a day admiring the ponds, rocks, trees, and other vegetation that make up the environs of the dry landscape garden.

To let the rock garden exert its most powerful effect, one does well to experience its context (something to which Buddhist philosophy is always sensitive) by contemplating beforehand the rich profusion of natural—though also arranged—beauty that surrounds it. In numerous sub-gardens handsome rocks stand among elegant trees and bushes, while others lie, apparently slumbering, in sun-illuminated moss that glows green around them. Majestic stands of bamboo sway in the breeze, as if beckoning to shadowy backgrounds. Exotic palms thrust sharply skyward among trees that blossom delicately in the spring. Such profusion intensifies the eventual encounter with the distinct *lack* of profusion at the heart of these gardens, which the philosopher Hisamatsu Shin’ichi has suggested should be called “garden of emptiness” (*kūtei*) rather than “rock garden” (*sekitei*).⁷⁵

Getting back to the “Usual Route”: on climbing the broad and gradual gradient of the steps that lead up to the buildings surrounding the rock garden, one might notice underfoot a variety of exquisitely colored cobblestones. And if the male visitor happens to pay a visit to the appropriate facilities before viewing the garden, he can enjoy from the window a unique preliminary perspective, through an opening in the garden wall, on the group of rocks nearest the far end. (I am assured that the angle of vision from the window of the women’s facilities does not, unfortunately, afford a similar perspective.) This is the time for the returning viewer to prepare to be astonished, on first stepping onto the wooden walkway that runs along the north side, at how small the garden is in area. Although it measures less than thirty meters from east to west and ten from north to south, one tends to remember it as being much larger than it really is. (At least in my own case, in spite of mental preparation each time, I never fail to be amazed upon first seeing it again: its image in memory remains persistently vast.)

At first glance a profound stillness seems to reign within the frame of the garden, a peace that contrasts at busy times with the hubbub on the walkway and, formerly, with the taped and loudspeaked announcements that used to proclaim the place as “the garden of emptiness.” There is also an overwhelming impression, initially, of sparse sterility—until one notices the moss that surrounds several of the rocks and the thin layer of lichen on some of them. Not much life for a garden, admittedly, but just enough, insofar as it provides a striking contrast to the unremittingly inor-

ganic nature of the rest. In summer the bright green of the moss echoes the lush colors of the trees, while in winter its darker greens and mauves match the hues of both the evergreens and the bare branches of the deciduous trees that border the wall. Being surrounded by a sea of gray gravel, the moss emphasizes the effect created by the elements of the garden being “cut off” from the nature outside. Without these touches of green life the place would look quite different—just as the “seed” of white within the black part of the yin-yang figure (and vice versa) perfects the pattern.

The “cutoff” is effected by the magnificent wall that runs the length of the garden and around the west side. The wall is a work of art in itself, though inadvertently so: thanks to its having been made of clay boiled in oil, fantastic patterns have emerged over the centuries as the oil has gradually seeped out. Throughout most of its length, mysterious landscapes have appeared on the wall’s vertical face, suggesting mist-veiled depths, and its exquisitely weathered hues complement the colors of the rocks and moss it encloses. They are like Song landscapes on a horizontal scroll. The “skies” of these landscape paintings are cut off by a shingled roof running along the wall’s length, the angle of which (at around 45°) mediates perfectly between the interior space of the garden and the world outside. The wall thus exemplifies a technique known in Japanese aesthetic discourse as *kire-tsuzuki*, or “cut-continuance.”⁷⁶

The topos of the cut derives from Zen Buddhist thinking. The Rinzai master Hakuin urged his students to “cut off the root of life” through giving up the idea that the self

is real, so that they can then “return to life” with renewed energies. There is a minor instance of this cut in the life-sustaining process of breathing: the moment between exhalation and inhalation, between contraction and expansion, is a moment of “cut-continuance” (at least until the final cut when one breathes one’s last). Another exemplification is to be found in haiku poetry, which often employs what is called the *kireji*, or “cutting syllable,” which effects a cut at the end of a line—and at the same time links it to the next. A consummate example occurs in one of Bashō’s best known poems, which begins

Furuike ya
(An ancient pond —)

and where the *ya* at the end of the first line is a syllable that “cuts” to the next line—in much the same way as a director cuts from one scene to the next in a film, breaking and maintaining continuity at the same time.

At Ryōanji the wall cuts the rock garden off from the outside—and yet is low enough to permit a view of that outside from the viewing platform. This cut (which is itself double because of the angled roof that runs along the top of the wall) is most evident in the contrast between movement and stillness. Above the wall one sees nature in movement: branches wave and sway, clouds float by, and the occasional bird flies past—though hardly ever, it seems, *over* the garden proper. Within the garden’s borders (unless rain or snow is falling, or a stray leaf is blown across) the only visible movement is shadowed or illusory. In seasons when the sun is

low, shadows of branches move slowly across the sea of gravel. This movement tends to accentuate the stillness of the rocks—to the point where even in its absence the rocks themselves seem to be on the move, to be in some sense “underway.”

The garden is cut off on the near side too, by a border of pebbles larger, darker, and more rounded than the pieces of gravel, which runs along the east and north edges. There is a striking contrast between the severe rectangularity of the garden’s borders and the irregular natural forms of the rocks within them. On closer inspection the border on the east side turns out to have a right-angled kink in it, as if disrupted by the powerful presence of the large group of rocks adjacent to it (see figure 16, above). The expanse of gravel is also cut through by the upthrust of the rocks from below, earth energies mounting and peaking in irruptions of stone. Each group of rocks is cut off from the others by the expanse of gravel, the separation being enhanced by the ripple patterns in the raking that surrounds each group (and some individual rocks). And yet the overall effect is to intensify the invisible lines of connection among the rocks, whose interrelations exemplify the fundamental Buddhist insight of “dependent co-arising.”

A related and more radical cut is to be found in the distinctively Japanese art of flower arrangement called *ikebana*. The term means literally “making flowers live”—a strange name, on first impression at least, for an art that begins by killing them. There is an exquisite essay by Nishitani Keiji on this marvelous art, in which the life of one of the most beautiful kinds of natural being is cut off, precisely

in order to let the true nature of that being come to the fore.⁷⁷ There is something curiously deceptive, from the Buddhist viewpoint of the impermanence of all things, about plants, insofar as they sink roots into the earth. In severing the flowers from their roots, Nishitani argues, and placing them in an alcove, one lets them show themselves as they really are: as absolutely rootless as every other being in this world of radical impermanence.

Something similar is going on in the rock garden, insofar as the cutoff from the surrounding nature has the effect of *drying up* its organic life, which then no longer decays in the usual manner. *Karesansui* means, literally, “dried up” or “withered” mountains and waters, but when Musō writes the word in the title of his *Ode to the Dry Landscape* he uses a different graph for the *kare* with the meaning “provisional,” or “temporary.” Being dried up, the mountains and waters of the garden at Ryōanji appear less temporary than their counterparts outside, which manifest the cyclical changes that natural life is heir to. But just as plants look deceptively permanent thanks to their being rooted in the earth, so the impression of permanence given by the rocks of the dry landscape garden—especially strong for the visitor who returns decade after decade, each time feeling (and looking) distinctly more impermanent—is nevertheless misleading. They too shall pass away.

The rocks and gravel are not real mountains and waters: they are just rocks and gravel, even though they are arranged *like* a landscape. Nishitani has emphasized the significance of this “like”ness (*nyo*) in Zen, where each thing,

thanks to its oneness with emptiness, is “an image without an original,” and thus “like” itself alone.⁷⁸ The last stanza of a poem by Dōgen, called “The Point of Zazen,” reads:

The water is clean, right down to the ground,
Fishes are swimming like (*nyo*) fishes.
The sky is wide, clear through to the heavens,
And birds are flying like (*nyo*) birds.⁷⁹

The *nyo* here is the Japanese equivalent for the Buddhist term “suchness”: in its oneness with emptiness, a being is what it is in being like what it is, in its “just-like-this-ness.” The rocks and gravel at Ryōanji, in being like mountains and waters but cut off from nature and dried up, conceal the mutable outward form of natural phenomena and thereby reveal their true form: suchness, as being one with emptiness. More concretely, Nishitani has explained their enigmatic power in terms of their ability to enlighten and teach. “We are within the garden and are not just spectators, for we have ourselves become part of the actual manifestation of the garden architect’s expression of his own enlightenment experience. The garden is my Zen master now, and it is your Zen master too.”⁸⁰ In a chapter of his major work entitled “Voices of the River Valley, Shapes of the Mountain,” Dōgen writes that while we are seeking a teacher, one may “spring out from the earth” and “make nonsentient beings speak the truth.”

It might also help to recall here the well-known description of the course of Zen practice by the Chinese master Qingyuan Weixin: “When I had not yet begun to study Zen

thirty years ago, I thought that mountains are mountains and waters are waters. Later when I studied with my master, I entered realization and understood that mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters. Now that I abide in the way of no-seeking, I see as before that mountains are just mountains, waters are just waters.”⁸¹ The second phase brings the realization that mountains and waters are insubstantial, images without originals, manifestations of emptiness and thus commensurable with any other such manifestations. In the final phase they are experienced as “just mountains” and “just waters”—as before, and yet not quite as before, since they are no longer seen from the anthropocentric perspective but rather in their own uniqueness, just as they are in themselves. In the garden at Ryōanji the rocks are *like* mountains (the likeness being especially striking when they are viewed through binoculars or the telephoto lens of a camera) and the gravel is *like* an expanse of water. The rocks are also like animals, and other creatures besides. And yet ultimately the rocks and gravel are just rocks and gravel.

The more one contemplates this remarkable garden, and especially the interrelations among the fifteen rocks and the five groups, the more profoundly right the arrangement appears. The way this work generates a space vibrant with manifold energies has been compared to the famous black ink painting of the six persimmons by Mu Qi.⁸² There is much to justify the claim that these two works constitute the consummate expression of profound Buddhist ideas in the arts of East Asia.

But there is an aspect of our aesthetic response to these rock gardens that has received insufficient attention in commentaries hitherto: the sense that the arranged rocks somehow “speak to us.” Whereas the aesthetics of Zen rock gardens have been discussed in terms of various concepts and ideas drawn from the Japanese tradition, little has been said about the ontological status of stone as understood in Japanese Buddhism.

Rocks as Sources of Understanding

In order to dispel the specter of “primitive animism” that tends to haunt any discussions of rock as more than lifeless, I shall focus on the two most sophisticated thinkers in the tradition of Japanese Buddhist philosophy, Kūkai and Dōgen. Their philosophies rank with those of the greatest figures in the Western tradition, from Plato and Augustine to Hegel and Heidegger, though only a brief sketch of the relevant, complex ideas can be given here.⁸³ Anyone familiar with the profundity of Kūkai or Dōgen knows that whatever their talk of the speech of natural phenomena may mean, it is worlds away from any kind of primitivism.

The Shingon Esoteric School was the first form of Buddhism to influence the development of Japanese gardens, by introducing mandala and other kinds of symbolism into their construction. In several of his writings, the founder of the school, Kūkai (744–835), effects a bold innovation in Mahayana Buddhist thinking by revisioning the Dhar-

makaya (*hosshin*), which had been previously understood as the formless and timeless Absolute, as the “reality embodiment” of the cosmic Buddha Mahavairochana (Dainichi Nyorai) and nothing other than the physical universe. This means that rocks and stone—indeed all of “the four great elements”—are to be included among sentient beings and revered as constituting the highest body of the Tathagata (*nyorai* in Japanese: “the one come like this”).⁸⁴

Moreover, with his idea of *hosshin seppō* (“the Dharmakaya expounds the Dharma”) Kūkai claims that the physical world, as the cosmic Buddha’s reality embodiment and in the person of Dainichi Nyorai, proclaims the true teachings of Buddhism.⁸⁵ But he also emphasizes that Dainichi expounds the Dharma purely “for his own enjoyment” and not for our benefit (there are other embodiments of the Buddha, the Nirmanakaya and the Sambhogakaya, which take care of that). So even though the cosmos may in some indirect sense be “speaking” to us, it is not doing so in any human language. Speech is for Kūkai one of the “three mysteries” or “intimacies” (*sanmitsu*) of Dainichi, and so it takes considerable practice for human beings to be able to hear and understand the teachings of natural phenomena. To the relief of readers who have struggled in vain to comprehend his formidable texts, Kūkai says at one point that “the Esoteric Buddhist teachings are so profound as to defy expression in writing.”⁸⁶ His teacher in China, Master Huiguo, had told him that “the profound meaning of the esoteric scriptures could be conveyed only through art.” Kūkai often maintained that “the medium of painting”

was especially effective, but he would also acknowledge the art of the garden.

Almost five centuries later, Dōgen (1200–53) develops some ideas very similar to Kūkai’s, though in terms of the Sōtō Zen tradition, of which he is regarded as the founder. Just as Kūkai identifies the Dharmakaya with the phenomenal world, so Dōgen, inspired by the poem of Su Dongpo mentioned earlier, promotes a similar understanding of natural landscape as the body of the Buddha. During his stay at Lushan, Su had experienced an epiphany upon hearing the sounds of a mountain stream flowing through the night. He then wrote the following poem on landscape as the body of the Buddha and the sounds of natural phenomena as an abundance of Buddhist sermons:

The voices of the river valley are his Wide and Long Tongue,
The form of the mountains is nothing other than his Pure Body.
Throughout the night, eighty-four thousand verses.
On a later occasion, how can I tell them to others?

Dōgen cites this poem, which a Chan master authenticated as evidence of Su Dongpo’s enlightenment, in the course of an essay urging his readers to hear and read natural landscapes as Buddhist sermons and scriptures.⁸⁷

Philosophically speaking, Dōgen asserts the non-duality of the world of impermanence and the totality of “Buddha-nature” (the idea of *shitsu-u* as *busshō*). Arguing vehemently against the more “biocentric” standpoint of earlier Buddhism, he claims that Buddha-nature is not just sentient beings but also “fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles” (which are

much in evidence at Ryōanji). Elsewhere he writes that “rocks and stones, large and small, are the Buddha’s own possessions.”⁸⁸ Corresponding to Kūkai’s notion of *hosshin seppō*, Dōgen develops the idea of *mujō seppō*, which emphasizes that even insentient beings expound the true teachings, though in a different way from the sentient. “At the time of right practice,” he writes, “the voices and form of river valleys, as well as the form and voices of mountains, generously bestow their eighty-four thousand hymns of praise.”⁸⁹

As well as hearing the cosmos as a sermon, one can see, or read, the natural world as scripture. Kūkai writes in one of his poems:

Being painted by brushes of mountains, by ink of oceans,
Heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra revealing the truth.⁹⁰

Again, it takes time and effort to learn to read this natural text, but the notion of nature as scripture certainly does justice to the sense we often have that there is something “inscribed” in natural phenomena, and in stone especially, something that means something. Similarly for Dōgen, sutras are not restricted to writings contained in scrolls, since the natural world too can be read as sacred scripture. This is the burden of the chapter in the *Shōbōgenzō* entitled “Sansui-gyō,” or “Mountains and Waters as Sutras.” And in another chapter he writes: “The sutras are the entire universe, mountains and rivers and the great earth, plants and trees.”⁹¹

François Berthier talks about the “mute speech” of the rocks at Ryōanji and imagines their “stifled voice,” which says little but proclaims their silence while enjoining us not

to speak. His original subtitle, *Reading Zen in the Rocks*, suggests that rocks are also inscriptions that can be read as saying something to do with Zen. Our brief consideration of Kūkai and Dōgen suggests that we may better understand the powerful effect of the rocks and gravel at Ryōanji if we take them to be proclaiming the teachings and read them as a sutra revealing the truths of Buddhism. Just as contemplation of dry landscape gardens can enhance one's understanding of Japanese Buddhism, so a sense for the Japanese Buddhist conception of the expressive powers of so-called "inanimate" nature can help us better appreciate the role of rock in the garden inspired by Zen. We can then understand the rocks at Ryōanji as proclaiming the Buddhist teachings of impermanence and dependent co-arising with unparalleled clarity, as exemplifying such notions as suchness and the cut, and as pointing to our "original nature" which may have more rocklike steadfastness to it, at the deepest layers of the self, than we may previously have realized.⁹²

We saw how the Chinese tradition reveres rocks for their age and beauty, and for their being vitally expressive of the fundamental energies of the earth on which we live. Japanese Buddhism adds pedagogic and soteric dimensions by inviting us to regard rocks and other natural phenomena as sources of wisdom and companions on the path to deeper understanding. But nowadays the earth itself is as much in need of saving as are its human inhabitants—and is especially in need of being saved *from* its human inhabitants. To this extent there may be practical and not just aesthetic lessons to be learned from our relations with rock, and

compelling reasons to attend to what Goethe calls "the mute nearness of great, soft-voiced nature" both inside and beyond the confines of the dry landscape garden.

The garden at Ryōanji makes a brief but significant appearance in one of Ozu Yasujiro's best films, *Late Spring* (1949). The father and daughter are visiting Kyoto, and the relevant scene immediately follows one of the most written-about shots in the film: a still life in their room in the inn, in which a large vase stands in front of an oval-shaped window patterned with shadows of slowly waving bamboo. The scene of the garden consists of eight shots, seven of which show the Ryōanji rocks. Within it are seven cuts.

After a shot of the three groups at the far (west) end and a closeup of the group of two at that end (as in figure 22, above), the camera angle reverses, and we see the father with his friend—also the father of a daughter—sitting on the wooden platform with the tops of the same two rocks occupying the lower part of the frame. Two rocks and two fathers. Cut to a closeup of the fathers from their left side, with no rocks in view. But in their dark suits, seated as they are in the classic Ozu "overlapping triangles" configuration, leaning forward toward the garden with their arms around knees drawn up toward their chins, they stay still as two rocks—monumental. They talk about how they raise children who then go off to live their own lives. As they invoke cycles of impermanence, they remain motionless except for the occasional nod or turn of the head. Cut to a shot of the far end of the garden similar to the opening one. Then the

two fathers again, but seen from farther back, so that we also see the two rocks in the garden they are looking at. Finally two more shots of the garden, three groups of rocks seen from the far end and four seen from the east end. Then cut back to the bedroom in the inn, where father and daughter are packing in preparation for returning to Kamakura.

In their brief conversation by the edge of the garden the two fathers do little more than exchange platitudes about family life—and yet the scene is a profoundly moving expression of the human condition. It gains this effect from the assimilation of the figures of the two men to rocks, which seems to affirm the persistence of the cycles of impermanence. Now that they are on film, those fathers will always, it seems, be sitting there, monumental figures overlooking the celebrated rock garden of emptiness.

If when leaving one follows the walkway that leads around the back of the main building, one passes a famous *tsukubai* (a stone water basin of the type used before attending a tea ceremony) bearing an inscription of four Chinese characters that mean, “All I know is how much is enough.”⁹³ Even though the basin was placed in Ryōanji a century or two after the rock garden was laid out there, the dictum seems apposite. For the true appreciator there is hardly a richer experience of nature-cum-culture to be had; and yet the means employed for the work that engenders such an experience are minimal.

One is well advised to linger again on the way out. It is worthwhile, immediately on leaving the main building, to

stop and admire the famous clay wall of the garden from the outside, since it is a work of art in its own right from that perspective too. And again the power of the garden’s effect can be enhanced by experiencing its context after, as well as before, the fact. When one views at leisure the luxuriance of the various subgardens of the temple on the way out with the afterimage of the austere rock garden still in mind, one can appreciate the dual “life-and-death” aspect of reality of which Zen philosophy speaks. It is as if one sees in double exposure, as it were, the life- and deathless source from which all things arise and into which they perish at every moment.⁹⁴

The question of whether there is an “enough” to this kind of experience is one that for me remains open. On every visit to Kyoto I resolve to go to Ryōanji and *not* view the rock garden—thinking such a perverse course of action, or non-action, would be very much in the spirit of Zen. But so compelling is the voice of those rocks, so enchanting the language inscribed on that scroll of gravel, so strong the sensuous attraction of the wall and its manifold cutting, that the resolve remains so far impossible to carry out.

Why should this be? For after attaining a sufficient depth of contemplation of the Ryōanji rock garden, one finds that its image persists, ever accessible, in the memory and imagination. One is always sitting, like the two fathers, on the edge of that force-field of a space. Like the rocks.

20. Like Kotarō and Hikojirō, Saburō is the name of a *kawaramono*.

21. The sand at the Silver Pavilion is granulated granite gathered from riverbeds. The grains are relatively large (between 5mm and 7mm millimeters in diameter), sand from the seashore being too fine to be shaped.

22. The *Tale of Genji* [(by Lady Murasaki)], which was written at the beginning of the eleventh century, is one of the major monuments of Japanese literature.

23. Not to be confused with the famous imperial villa of Katsura in Kyoto.

The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden

1. The suggestion of the scholar Mirei Shigemori, as cited in Pierre Rambach and Suzanne Rambach, *Gardens of Longevity in China and Japan: The Art of the Stone Raisers*, trans. André Marling (New York, 1987), 180. This book contains some spectacular color photographs of rocks in Chinese gardens.

2. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, “Keisei-sanshiki” (Voices of the river-valley, shapes of the mountain). Further references to Dōgen will be made simply by the title of the relevant chapter title of his major work, *Shōbōgenzō* (in Ōkubo Dōshū, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 1 [Tokyo, 1969–70]). I follow, with occasional modification, the translations by Nishijima and Cross in *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, 4 vols, (Woking [Surrey], 1994–99).

3. Kawabata Yasunari, *Beauty and Sadness*, trans. Howard Hibbett (Rutland and Tokyo, 1975), 86–91. (I have changed “stones” to “rocks” in the translation.) On first visiting the dry cascade at Saihōji, I was immediately struck by the similarity with Cézanne’s paintings of rocks, and so was intrigued later to find Keiko, in Kawabata’s novel, compare comparing its power with that of “Cézanne’s painting of the rocky coasts at L’Estaque” (p. 87). Kawabata may not have been familiar with Cézanne’s magnificent canvases of rocks and trees at Fontainebleau, which generate an aesthetic mood much closer to that of the dry cascade.

4. Karl Hennig, *Der Karesansui-Garten als Ausdruck der Kultur der Muromachi-Zeit* (Hamburg, 1982), 111–12; also Irmtraud Schaarschmidt-Richter, *Japanese Gardens*, trans. translated by Janet Seligman (New York, 1979), 180.

5. See Rambach, *Gardens of Longevity*, 39.

6. See Loraine Kuck, *The World of the Japanese Garden: From Chinese Origins to Modern Landscape Art* (New York and Tokyo, 1968), 39. Also John Hay, *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth: The Rock in Chinese Art* (New York, 1985), 18. Hay's essay in this exhibition catalogue is a magnificent treatment of the role of rock in Chinese culture more generally.

7. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 42 and 50.

8. *The Classical Contents of the Mirror of Profound Depths*, cited in Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 52. The entry on stone is eighty-six-pages long.

9. John Sallis notes the way mountain peaks "gather the elements," although the rest of his erudite study only treats stone as worked, rather than in its natural state. John Sallis, *Stone* (Bloomington, 1994), 16.

10. François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficiency in China*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York, 1995), 91–92, with reference to Guo Pu, *Zangshu* (Book of funerals).

11. Guo Pu, *Eulogy to the Lodestone*, cited in Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 53.

12. See the discussions of rocks in Rolf A. Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford, 1990).

13. Kong Chuan, Introduction to Du Wan's *Yunlin Shipu* (Cloud Forest catalogue), cited in Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 38.

14. See William R. LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought* (Albany, 1989), 183–86, on which the present paragraph is based. (This article originally appeared in two parts in *History of Religions* 13:2 [November 1973]: 93–126, and 13:3 [February 1974]: 227–48.) In an essay in the same volume, Tu Wei-ming discusses the Chinese view of mountains as "ocean waves frozen in time" and rocks as "dynamic processes with their particular configurations of *qi*" ("The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature," 74).

15. Zhanran, *Jingang Bi*, as cited in Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1953), 2:385–86.

16. Kuck, *The World of the Japanese Garden*, 45; Edward H. Schafer, *Tu Wan's Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest* (Berkeley, 1961), 5.

17. Description by Yuan Xuanzhi, cited in Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture* (London and New York, 1978), 155.

18. Kuck, *The World of the Japanese Garden*, 19–22.

19. Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Ronald Latham (London 1972), 127. Some recent historians have called into question Marco Polo's claim to have reached China, but the account of the green rocks sounds convincing, even if it is not firsthand.

20. Schafer, *Tu Wan's Stone Catalogue*, 57 and 59.

21. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 19–21.

22. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 36.

23. Du Wan, *Yunlin Shipu*, cited in Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 22. Hay gives a more complete translation of this passage than does Schafer (*Stone Catalogue*, 52–53), whose edition is a "Synopsis" with commentary. Some of this passage also appears, in a different translation, in Rambach, *Gardens of Longevity*, 42.

24. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 99f.

25. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 84 and note 173.

26. Schafer, *Tu Wan's Stone Catalogue*, 30.

27. Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, trans. Alison Hardie (New Haven and London, 1988), 112 and 114.

28. Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, 110.

29. Du Wan, *Yunlin Shipu*, cited in Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 22.

30. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 60 and 27.

31. Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 32. See also Rambach, *Gardens of Longevity*, 78–79, where there is a reproduction of *Mi Fu's Homage to the Rock* from Wang Gai's *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, and Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 33–35, for three other paintings of this subject.

32. Rambach, *Gardens of Longevity*, 26–29.

33. See Keswick, *The Chinese Garden*, 94–96.

34. From the *Record of Hua Yang Palace* by the monk Zi-xui, cited in Keswick, p. 54.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Cited in Kuck, *The World of the Japanese Garden*, 182.

37. Dōgen, "Keisei-sanshiki."

38. Dōgen, "Mujō seppō" (Nonsentient beings expound the Dharma).

39. Cited in Hennig, *Der Karesansui-Garten*, 195.

40. For details of the disagreement, see Hennig, *Der Karesansui-Garten*, 116–19.

41. Musō Soseki, *Muchū mondō*, cited in Oscar Benl and Horst

Hammitzsch, eds, *Japanische Geisteswelt: Vom Mythos zur Gegenwart* (Baden-Baden, 1956), 158–59. Translation modified in the light of the original and the discussion by Nishitani Keiji in his *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley, 1982), 108.

42. *Sakuteiki*, as cited in Hennig, *Der Karesansui-Garten*, 193 (compare Shimoyama, *Sakuteiki*, 5).

43. Translation modified from Wybe Kuitert's, in his *Themes, Scenes, and Taste in the History of Japanese Garden Art* (Amsterdam, 1988), 55, in the light of the original, in Mori Osamu, "*Sakuteiki*" *no sekai: Heiancho no teienbi* (Tokyo, 1986), 43.

44. See Augustin Berque, "L'appareillage de l'ici vers l'ailleurs dans les jardins japonais," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 22 (2000). Berque argues convincingly that this kind of double movement, in which the elsewhere and elsewhere are invoked in the here and now—*appareillage* means both "installation" and "getting under sail"—is a primary principle of the art of the garden in Japan.

45. Shimoyama, *Sakuteiki*, ix. Yuriko Saito places appropriate emphasis on the importance of "following the request" of the rocks in her essay, "Japanese Gardens: The Art of Improving Nature," *Chanoyu Quarterly* (1996) 83:41–61.

46. *Sakuteiki*, 23.

47. *Sakuteiki*, 24 and 25.

48. *Sakuteiki*, 19 and 16.

49. See Kuitert, *Themes*, 57–58, and note 142.

50. *Sakuteiki*, 26.

51. *Sakuteiki*, 29–30.

52. Kuitert, *Themes*, 137–39.

53. *Sansui narabini yakeizu*, secs. 4, 84, 14, 78, and 31. I follow the translation of the complete work by David A. Slawson in his *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens* (Tokyo and New York, 1987), 142–75. Slawson reads the work's title as *Senzui narabi ni yagyō no zu*, and translates it as *Illustrations for Designing Mountain, Water, and Hillside Field Landscapes*.

54. *Sansui* manual, sec. 12.

55. See Kuitert, *Themes*, 140–44.

56. Musō Soseki, "Sermon at the Opening of Tenryūji," in Ryusaku

Tsunoda et al., eds, *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York and London, 1964), 1:252–55.

57. Kūkai, "The Difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism," in *Kūkai: Major Works*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York, 1972), esp. 151–52; Dōgen, "Busshō" (Buddha-nature).

58. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 405b and 404a.

59. Cited in Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York, 1974), 198. See also her lyrical account of the eponymous substance ("lower than metals and minerals . . . occurring beneath salts and earths") in the final section of *Holy the Firm* (New York, 1977).

60. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Über den Granit," in *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe* (Munich, 1988), 13:253–58. The translations are my own; a freer rendition can be found in *Goethe: The Collected Works*, ed. and trans. Douglas Miller (Princeton, 1988), 12:131–34.

61. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals*, 5:496–97 (1838).

62. Emerson, *Nature*, "Discipline," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York, 1983), 29; "The Poet," 461. References to Emerson will be to the page numbers of this (Library of America) edition.

63. Emerson, "Nature," *Essays and Lectures*, 546–47.

64. Emerson, "Fate" and "Considerations by the Way," *Essays and Lectures*, 953 (compare Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 225) and 1080.

65. Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, "Thursday," in *Henry David Thoreau* (New York, 1985), 269–70. References to Thoreau will be to the page numbers of this (Library of America) edition.

66. Emerson, *Nature*, "Discipline," 29; Thoreau, *A Week*, "Friday," 292; *Walden*, "Sounds," 411.

67. Thoreau, *Walden*, "Spring," 568.

68. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, secs. 23 and 27. My own translation from the original German: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Stuttgart and Frankfurt, 1960).

69. For more detailed discussion, see my essays, "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate: Nietzsche and Emerson as Thinkers of Nature," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43 (1997): 207–40, and "Staying Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche as an Ecological Thinker," in John Lippitt, ed., *Nietzsche's Futures* (Basingstoke, 1998), 167–88.

70. Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, aphorism 109; *Dawn of Morning*, aphorism 541. The translations are my own, but the references to works available in English will be to the aphorism number, so that the passages can be found in any edition.

71. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (Munich, 1980), 9:11[35, 125, 207, 210] (1881).

72. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 231. Nishitani Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara (Albany, 1990), 91–92.

73. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, 8:11[11] and 28[6]; *Miscellaneous Opinions and Aphorisms (Human, All-too-human, vol. 2/1)*, aphorism 49; *Ecce Homo*, “Why I write such good books,” “Thus spoke Zarathustra,” sec. 1.

74. Nietzsche, letter to Elisabeth Förster, 20 December 1885.

75. Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, *Zen and the Fine Arts* (Tokyo, 1971), 88. This interpretation of the garden at Ryōanji in terms of Hisamatsu’s “seven characteristics” of Zen aesthetics is somewhat dry.

76. The following discussion is inspired by Ōhashi Ryōsuke’s treatment of the aesthetic implications of the cut-continuance in his book *Kire no kōzō: Nihonbi to gendai sekai* (Structures of the cut: The beautiful in Japan and the contemporary world) (Tokyo, 1986). There is an excellent German translation by Rolf Elberfeld, *Kire: Das Schöne in Japan* (Cologne, 1994), which is an expanded edition furnished with fine photographs. For a brief account of the idea of “cuttings,” see Ōhashi’s essay “Kire and Iki,” in Michael Kelly, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford, 1998), 2:553–55.

77. Nishitani Keiji, “The Japanese Art of Arranged Flowers,” trans. Jeff Shore, in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds., *World Philosophy: A Text with Readings* (New York, 1995), 23–27.

78. Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, 137–40 and 157–59. Ōhashi discusses the rock garden at Ryōanji in terms of “likeness” in chapter two of *Kire no kōzō*, as well as Musō’s use of the kanji for “temporary.”

79. Dōgen, “Zazenshi” (The point of zazen).

80. Nishitani Keiji, as recounted by Robert Carter in his *Becoming Bamboo: Western and Eastern Explorations of the Meaning of Life* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992), 95.

81. Qingyuan Weixin, *Wudeng huiyuan* (Five Lamps Merged into Source), chapter 17.

82. Dietrich Seckel, *Einführung in die Kunst Ostasiens* (Munich, 1960), 360.

83. For a more detailed discussion, see my essay “Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology,” in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection between Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 111–28.

84. Kūkai, “The Difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism,” and “Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence,” in *Kūkai: Major Works*.

85. For a fine explication of this idea, see Thomas P. Kasulis, “Reality as Embodiment: An Analysis of Kūkai’s *Sokushinjōbutsu* and *Hosshin Seppō*,” in Jane Marie Law, ed., *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington, 1995), 166–85.

86. Kūkai, “Shōrai mokuroku,” in *Major Works*, 145.

87. Dōgen, “Keisei-sanshiki.”

88. Dōgen, “Busshō” (Buddha-nature); “Sangai-yuishin” (The triple world is mind only).

89. Dōgen, “Mujō-seppō”; “Keisei-sanshiki.”

90. *Kūkai: Major Works*, 91.

91. Dōgen, “Jishō zammai” (The samādhi of self-enlightenment).

92. See James Hillman’s eloquent essay, “In the Gardens—A Psychological Memoir,” in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu* (Tokyo, 1998), 175–82. For a corresponding philosophical (but also psychological) treatment of the garden, see chapter 6 of Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington, 1993), esp. 153–72.

93. See James Heisig’s sagacious reflections on this dictum in his essays “Towards a Principle of Sufficiency,” *Zen Buddhism Today* 8 (1990): 152–64.

94. Nishitani writes of the “double exposure” of the life and death perspectives in *Religion and Nothingness*, 50–53. For more on this topic see my essay, “Death and Detachment: Montaigne, Zen, Heidegger, and the Rest,” in Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon, eds., *Death and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 164–80.