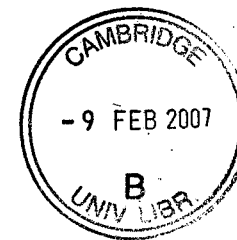


A THEORY OF /CLOUD/

Toward a History of Painting

Hubert Damisch

Translated by Janet Lloyd



STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 2002



Our Sheet's White Care

Une ivresse belle m'engage
 Sans craindre même son tangage
 De porter debout ce salut
 Solitude, récif, étoile
 A n'importe ce qui valut
 Le blanc souci de notre toile

A lovely drunkenness enlists
 Me to raise, though the vessel lists,
 This toast on high and without fear
 Solitude, rocky shoal, bright star
 To whatsoever may be worth
 Our sheet's white care in setting forth
 —Stéphane Mallarmé, "Salut"
 (trans. Henry Weinfield)

In the Service of Clouds

The present work has so far concentrated on the relation between signs and representation in the pictorial context inherited from the Renaissance. The word *sign* has been used in its twofold (and possibly contradictory) sense of (a) a signifying unit, detectable as such on a figurative two-dimensional surface, and (b) a symptomatic feature through which the representational process, the *theater* of which painting at that time appointed itself to be, revealed itself in the very way that it was organized. We have seen what implicit structure these relations manifested, given that

representation was in principle linked to the order of signs, and signs in their turn acquire their representativeness from the representation itself. However historically verifiable it may be, the fact that visual representation, in painting, is prior to the discursive variety is first of all a logical matter. Representation only exists as such if it presents itself as the representation of a representation, by means of a characteristic duplication that operates at the level of signs as well as at that of a "code" that ensures, thanks to its demonstrative nature, that the representational process is governed by certain rules. As for signs, while it seems that what they forfeit in semiotic meaning they gain in representational meaning (since imitation appears to win out over convention, and illusionism over "arbitrariness"), the symbolic shift caused by the introduction of the perspective regime, and the consequent opening up of the field of substitutions, definitively restored them to a discursive role. At the limit, a sign was denied all transitivity. Brunelleschi's experiment reduced /cloud/ to an effect of reflection, a mirror image engineered within the figurative field by dint of a material artifice. But the significance of that reduction is twofold, both rational and symptomatic: it was at once a consequence and evidence of the institution of perspective space as the *theoretical* space of (re)presentation. Far from illusionism (the limitations of which are clearly detectable here) being a principle of the system, it now appears as an effect of it, which is dependent upon the representational structure. This means that, even within the system of representation, the use of icons borrows not so much from mechanisms of illusion as from the lateral relations established between an iconic element and any other elements with which it may be associated on the figurative plane; and if that element can be seen as a symptom, that is not so much on account of its referent as because of the position and functions allotted to it in the system, insofar as the latter defines a specific field of production, historically dated and geographically localized.

The same logic that led Brunelleschi on principle to exclude "real" cloud from the domain of what is "depictable" dictated the use of the graph in order to get around the constitutive closure of the system, and to loosen its constraints, if not to mask the formal contradiction that was its mainspring. That was the situation up until the day when, ideology having finally come to terms with the theoretical implications of the geometrization of space, representation became able to accommodate the introduction of clouds, as a pictorial accessory, within the figurative framework

regulated by the perspective regime. The same /cloud/ that, for Correggio, had served to "designate" a necessarily closed space would be used by the Venetian artists and landscape painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to give space the "quality" of indefinite openness. And as for the storm-laden skies that Ruysdael was to paint above the Haarlem plain and the dawn clouds that adorn the mythological landscapes of Claude Lorrain, they would no more undermine the consecrated representational order than would the massed clouds among which the figures of Tiepolo play, or the misty distances and evanescent perspectives of a *fête galante*. By taking in the element that used to constitute the negative connotation of its closed nature, representation was to demonstrate both the extent of the system's possibilities of adaptation and also the ambivalence of its formal potentialities.

If /cloud/ thus marks the closure of the system, it does so in opposition to the formal principle by which signs are governed, through its lack of any strict delimitation, as a "surfaceless body." But, as has repeatedly been pointed out, nothing could be more mistaken than to attempt to justify its pictorial fortunes on the grounds of a so-called thematic and/or plastic *nature*. In as much as it features in the figurative tissue, both because of its appearance and because of what it signifies, /cloud/ has no reality apart from that assigned to it by the representation. Does that mean that it simply has a use value, so can be classified as a *tool*, in an instrumentalist perspective?¹ Thus posed, in the terms and from the point of view that are those of thought about signs, the question cannot be given a simple, unequivocal answer: in a figurative situation regulated by the perspective model, the cloud element fulfills a number of easily identified functions. But the functional nature of a *sign* does not suffice to justify its value as a theoretical index any more than it exhausts the efficacy of the *figure* at the level of a signifier (on the sign/figure opposition, see Chapter 1, pp. 14 ff.). If /cloud/ assumes a strategic function in the pictorial order, it is because it operates alternately (or even simultaneously, if one takes into account the difference between the levels where it might come into play: its integration may skip a level), now as an integrator, now as a disintegrator, now as a sign, now as a nonsign (the emphasis here being placed on the potential negativity of a figure, on whatever in it contradicts the order of the sign, the effect of which is to loosen the hold of the latter). It may operate as an integrator to the extent that in a given situation it takes on a transitive

or commutative force, guaranteeing the unity of the representation by the means peculiar to a sign and in conformity with the system's norm. Alternatively, it may operate as a disintegrator, insofar as, ceasing to operate as a sign and affirming itself as a figure (in the sense already explained), it seems to call into question, thanks to its absence of limits and through the solvent effects to which it lends itself, the coherence and consistency of a syntactical ordering that is based on a clear delineation of units.

This ambivalence of the sign—which reflects and duplicates that of the system—illuminates its fortunes: /cloud/ served a wide variety of purposes, ranging from those of a purely signaling and descriptive nature to constructive, or even destructive, ones. At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and within the framework of a method explicitly defined as productive, it was to serve new ones. *A New Method of Assisting Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, published in 1785 by the Englishman Alexander Cozens,² set out to be strictly mechanical in principle, borrowing nothing from imitation of the masters or of nature, since it was founded solely upon the potential *information* to be derived from stains and blotting: "To sketch . . . is to transfer ideas from the mind to the paper . . . to blot is to make varied spots . . . producing accidental forms . . . from which ideas are presented to the mind. . . . To sketch is to delineate ideas; blotting suggests them."³ Understandably, the repertory of cloud formations has a special place in this collection. Suitably enough, Cozens's method *caused much ink to flow*. Yet, however intolerable it may have seemed to academic minds, on account of its manifestation of an intrusion of chance automatism, or even shapelessness, into the pictorial field, the method involved no real theoretical break with the past. In principle, it was no more scandalous than Leonardo's or Piero di Cosimo's avowed interest in traces of humidity or sputum left on walls. Gombrich certainly realized that Cozens's schemata and the interpretations that he proposed derived, at least in part, from a well-established tradition according to which Claude Lorrain was the unchallenged master of the genre of landscape.⁴ In the mark that a sponge leaves on a wall, just as in ever changing cloud formations, people see whatever they wish to see: configurations of their desires, images from their theater of life, signs of their culture.

"THE MARVELOUS CLOUDS"

"Et qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?"

"J'aime les nuages, les nuages qui passent là-bas,
les merveilleux nuages . . ."

"And what do you like, extraordinary stranger?"

"I like the clouds, the clouds passing over there,
the marvelous clouds . . ."

—Baudelaire, *L'Etranger*

By getting clouds to serve ever more uses, art was risking having the situation turn to the advantage of the very element that it had so far seen fit to use as a tool, an instrument at the service of representation. And that is indeed what happened in the nineteenth century, according to the formula to which Ruskin reduced the pictorial production of his time: "the service of clouds."⁵ It is an astonishing expression that, for the first time, explicitly recognized the precedence of the symbolic order and the nonfunctional character of the signifier that, in truth, is here still presented beneath an emblematic mask: the mask being, precisely, *cloud*, which painters, who had exploited it for so long, now set themselves to serve. Was not "cloudiness" the distinctive characteristic of "modern" landscape painting?⁶ At the time when Ruskin set about writing his *Modern Painters* (around 1840), the interest in the sky manifested by English landscape painters such as Prout, Fielding, Harding, and, above all, Turner seemed to be unequivocally justified. According to him, modern painters surpassed their predecessors in the art of landscape painting, breaking with the academic tradition that recognized as its masters Poussin and Claude Lorrain; and to a large extent, the reason for their superiority was the "truth" of their skies, truth in which cloud certainly played a part. But the justifications that he produced in support of his thesis were still borrowed from the order of representation, if not from the register of what was signified: each individual can enjoy and profit from the spectacle or "scenery" of the sky,⁷ a spectacle that is there for all to see; and nothing testifies better to the power of God than the *system of the firmament*, a system conceived, it should be emphasized, no longer in astronomical terms but in meteorological ones, and in which cloud was presented to the sight of men in the same way as air is presented to their lungs.⁸ The painters of the past were able to express the *quality* of the sky, but did not seize upon its truth, for they did not perceive the calculated

connection between the blueness of the atmosphere and the whiteness of the clouds, the regulated setting in which clouds were distributed in three different regions, *three scenic systems*, each of which corresponded to a specific formal datum: a central region, the only one to which earlier painters (in particular the Flemish) had paid attention; an upper region that Turner made his favorite domain, opening "to the world another apocalypse of Heaven";⁹ and finally a lower region, that of rain clouds and mists without form or consistency, where modern painters excelled.¹⁰

But, as Ruskin later acknowledged (in a curious pseudo-scientific digression, which, as we shall see, set the seal on his critical remarks), there were negative as well as positive aspects to the service of the clouds. The very formula connoted the moderns' taste for open expanses, without limits or frontiers, their desire for liberty and a nature free from the rule of man (as was also testified, at another level and in another context, by their attraction to *ruins*, where the built-up constructed order had abdicated, just as compositional order appears to disintegrate amid the clouds). Similarly, their love of mountains was closely linked to their love of cloud, since the sublimity of the former was enhanced by the presence of the latter.¹¹ In short, the formula "in the service of the clouds" indicated a secular vision of the spectacles of nature ("Whereas the medieval never painted a cloud but with the purpose of placing an angel upon it . . . , we have no belief that the clouds contain more than so many inches of rain or hail").¹² Modern painters were interested in the perceptible aspect of clouds, their objective configurations, the effects of mists, the appearance of things seen through the screen of atmospheric formations. But there was another side to this interest. Whereas the painters of the past had sought for stability, permanence, clarity, the modern spectator was invited to take pleasure in obscurity, the ephemeral, change, and to derive the greatest satisfaction and instruction from that which was the hardest to fix and understand: wind, light, cloud shadows, and so on. As Ruskin was to write in 1853, the service of clouds was a formula that could unfortunately be used to characterize modern art in its most negative aspect. Did not much of the mystery cultivated by his contemporaries proceed from a desire to "speak ingeniously of smoke" that Aristophanes had long since denounced in his play entitled *Clouds*? According to Ruskin, Aristophanes was the only one of all the Greeks to have spoken ill of clouds, and also to have made a careful study of them (but where does that leave Aristotle and Epicurus?). Sub-

servience to whatever was transient, uncertain, and unintelligible certainly also made itself felt at the level of composition (as was proved, according to Ruskin, by the importance acquired in landscape painting by the sky, to which the foreground was now subordinated, for the latter would be made darker in order to emphasize the whiteness of the clouds). But it also affected drawing: medieval painters drew with the greatest care and in great detail, whereas for moderns painting "is all concerning smoke": only this was really *drawn*, so everything remained vague, insubstantial, imperfect.¹³

Under the heading "ancient" Ruskin continued to lump together the painting of the Middle Ages, that of the Renaissance, and also the tradition linked with the academic interpretation of the works of Poussin and Claude Lorrain. At the same time, it was without reservation that he admired the art of Turner, which seemed to him to demonstrate the superiority of the moderns in landscape painting. For he classified *the truth of the heavens* among the most important "truths" that art had to understand, even more important than the truth of color, which he judged to be secondary to the truth of form. And if it is difficult to establish in what "the truth of clouds" consists, that is precisely because they can assume the most diverse forms; but it is also the reason why a study of clouds can be so profitable:

If artists were more in the habit of sketching clouds rapidly, and as accurately as possible *in the outline*, from nature, instead of daubing down what they call "effects" with the brush, they would soon find there is more beauty about their forms than can be arrived at by any random felicity of invention, however brilliant. (my emphasis)¹⁴

This may be regarded as an implicit criticism of Cozens's technique: for why, after all, seek from chance what nature dispenses, indubitably with a design, with such generosity and in ways that so wonderfully combine both mystery and beauty?¹⁵

Mystery:¹⁶ this appears to be the specific characteristic of Turner's art, which is differentiated from all other art by its seemingly uncertain execution, to such an extent that this painter often appears to be the primordial representative of "cloudiness" and of the "vagueness" so characteristic of a whole section of the painting of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ "Every one of his compositions [is] evidently dictated by a delight in seeing only part of things rather than the whole, and in casting clouds and mist around them rather than unveiling them."¹⁸ Now, Ruskin must have perceived that, from the point of view of the masterpieces of Italian art and the works

of the Pre-Raphaelites, this was something of a paradox: for is not "great drawing" clear and precise, and does it not aim for a clear delineation of forms? In contrast to Turner, whom Ruskin, despite everything, continued to regard as the strongest personality of the age, the Pre-Raphaelites—the greatest men, *as a class*, that modern Europe had produced in the arts—celebrated the veracity of light and were unanimous in condemning fog and all illusions based on "haziness." However, the debate that divided the partisans of cloud (Copley-Fielding and others) from their opponents (Stanfield, Harding), a debate that Ruskin could not ignore, was by no means new. It was, to repeat, in a different context, the debate that in their own day set Correggio and the Venetians, Rubens and Rembrandt, in opposition to painters of the Raphaellesque tradition and, in general, to all those who held indistinctness in horror and saw themselves as the champions of clear vision and "an endless perspicuity of space."¹⁹

"Truly, the clouds seem to be getting much the worst of it; and, I feel, for the moment, as if nothing could be said for them. However, having been myself long a cloud-worshipper, and passed many hours of life in the pursuit of them from crag to crag, I must consider what can possibly be submitted in their defence, and in Turner's."²⁰ These lines convey Ruskin's perplexity following his discovery of Italian art and the art of the Pre-Raphaelites. But his defense of Turner proves, even in the contradictions into which it leads him, that the author of *Modern Painters*, at the end of the day, jettisoned none of the ideas that he had nurtured before his travels in Italy. In the first place, clouds exist; whether one likes it or not, nature has decided that it be so, and a landscape painter ignores them at the risk of falling into mannerism. In the second place—and this was a fundamental rule of Ruskin's aesthetics—"there is no excellence without obscurity."²¹ "Mystery includes not only the partial and variable kind that clouds and mists serve so well, but also the kind that is continuous, permanent, and that corresponds, *in all spaces*, to the infinity of things." The Pre-Raphaelites, like Turner (who, Ruskin insists, is "their true head"), are themselves full of mystery and suggest more than what can be seen. For the fact is that there is no absolutely clear and distinct perception: what matters is knowing where the mystery begins, "with the point of intelligibility [varying] in distance."²²

Distance, visibility (and the effects of atmospheric perspective, and the notion of a "point of intelligibility"): there is nothing new about Rus-

kin's field of thought if you compare it with, say, that of Leonardo. The pictorial problem (not to mention the "aesthetics") with which he countered the academic tradition, far from introducing new developments, on the contrary marked out most precisely, with its paradoxical economy, the point at which theory was exhausted, and at the same time revealed the dead ends into which it led. The problem was really that of linearity; and here too cloud operates as an indicator. In absolute terms, no "cloud" can be drawn with a pointed instrument. Only a brush, used as delicately as possible, is capable of *expressing* a cloud's "edges" and textures in all their variety. Does this mean that Ruskin, at the conclusion of his enquiry, ended up accepting the very "effects" that he had condemned at the start? Not at all, for he is careful to explain that, faced with the task of *engraving* a cloud, an artist whose execution is delicate and careful will be able to obtain a good approximation to a *painting*; and as for drawing, a thick lead pencil is all that is needed, for this lends itself, when used at a slant, to rendering shadows, just as, when used as a point, it can be used for drawing lines.²³ The reason why cloud does not encourage drawing is not so much its shape, but rather its instability and evanescence. It is possible, at a pinch, for an artist to draw a cloud before it is dissipated or transformed; but if he sets out to reproduce the ordering of a whole sky filled with clouds, he must be content with a few hasty lines, and later finish the sketch from memory. And it was precisely Turner's prodigious memory that gave him his unequalled mastery in the rendering of skies. "Other great men coloured clouds beautifully; none but he ever drew them truly: this power coming from his constant habit of drawing skies, like everything else, with the pencil point."²⁴

As used in Ruskin's text, the term "cloud" has an ambiguous status. (Sometimes it designates the meteorological phenomenon that modern painting established as its favorite referent; at other times it is used as both a distinctive image and an effective emblem, at points where symbols and imaginary representations overlap.) Bearing this in mind, it is not hard to see how cloud serves as a touchstone (to use a paradoxical expression) by which to judge the truth of a painting. For Ruskin, "truth" implies veracity in the restitution of a natural fact. This, unlike imitation, may be achieved by means of signs and symbols that take on a predetermined meaning even when they are not *images* and are not created in order to resemble particular phenomena.²⁵ This covert play—in which Ruskin is not the only critic to indulge—with the idea of substance and form, things and signs, imitation

and representation, is characteristic of a particular critical method and accounts for both its detours and its reversals. This too can be verified, once again very simply, by considering the example of *cloud*. Where clouds in paintings are concerned, we have seen how Ruskin can be led into difficulties through having failed to elaborate an explicit theory of how iconic signs relate to their referents. When it comes to "real" cloud, he pretends that he is incapable of explaining it. Why is fog so heavy, and why are masses of even the most colossal clouds so light? What makes clouds float in the air? What is the explanation for the fact that vapor distributed in the air becomes *visible*? Above all, what can be said of the shape of clouds ("How is a cloud outlined?").²⁶ When the question is formulated like this, it proceeds from a certain confusion between the *signified* and the *referent* and between sign and substance. According to Ruskin, there are no answers to these questions. Nevertheless they increase the pleasure that is derived from "mystery." Similarly with the movement of clouds:²⁷ it cannot be explained, except by theories about electricity and the infinite, which nobody understands at all.²⁸

The reference to the infinite that is introduced by the subject of skies and cloud is by no means fortuitous: it shows the extent to which Ruskin (if not Turner himself) remained a prisoner of the tradition of thought that stubbornly strove to set in opposition the scientific geometrical and abstract infinite (usually interpreted in a *privative* sense) and a pictorial and expressive infinite that religious and/or metaphysical ideology could accommodate. Is not the "expression of the infinite" the first thing to consider when judging a painting, even in its details? Is that not the proof of Turner's excellence, Turner, whose *blue*, even a tiny portion of it, is always "infinite," always of incommensurable depth and expanse?²⁹ But one has only to analyze the means by which he achieved this to discover that Turner's art is still governed by the same rules as the art of his predecessors: even clouds have to be put into perspective; and if one pretends that they present a flat basis, it is easy to set in place a grid (or checkerboard) that will show how they should be disposed. The wind may introduce an apparent confusion (as it did in Leonardo's painting), but nonetheless, perspective provides the rule for any sky arrangement, whether it be a rectilinear system or, as is more frequently the case, a curved one (Figure 6b). It is because painters are ignorant of perspective and the rules of proportion that stem from it that they fail in "the expression of buoyancy and space in the sky."³⁰

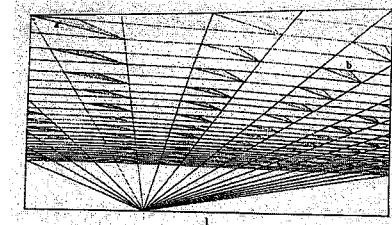


FIGURE 6A. Ruskin, *The Perspective of Clouds* (rectilinear), from *Modern Painters* (London, 1855), vol. 5.

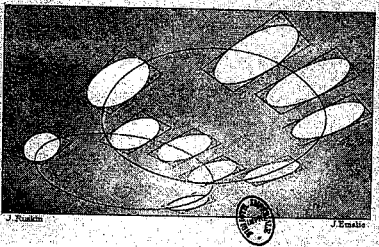
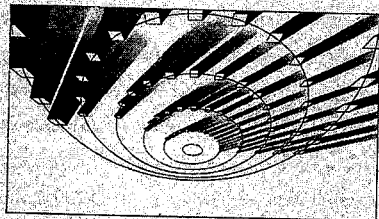
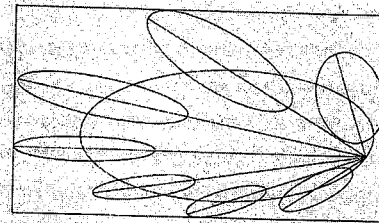
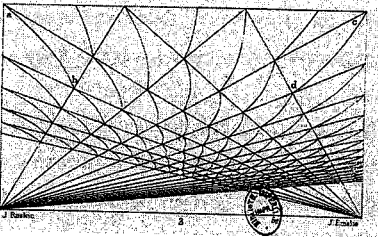
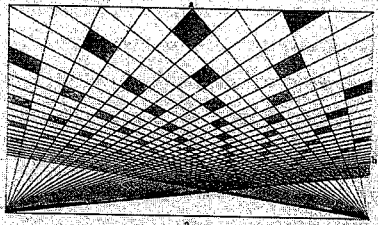


FIGURE 6B. Ruskin, *The Perspective of Clouds* (curvilinear), from *Modern Painters* (London, 1855), vol. 5.

The desire to include in his admiration both the art of Turner and that of the Pre-Raphaelites thus forced the ideologist to show his hand: behind the screen of mists and clouds, the paramount excellence of linearity remains assured, even in the functions allotted to the code that constitutes the best guarantee of its privileged position. "In the service of the clouds": for Ruskin the formula has the force of, not so much a program, rather a statement of fact. Far from introducing new theories, it reiterates the institution of perspective, with a warning note: this "service" must not be carried to such extremes that the system would destroy itself by renouncing its regulatory principle.³¹ On the contrary, what it must do is accommodate itself to extending to the sky, until then treated as a back cloth, all the principles of organization that apply for the scene itself (although historically, as we have seen, the sky or "roofing" was converted into a checkerboard before the ground ever was). The schemata of celestial perspectives sketched by Ruskin are still governed by the traditional *point of view*, and the diminishing effect that they impose upon the clouds according to their position on the checkerboard is in keeping with traditional practice. After all, academicians were taught to exploit the shadows cast upon the ground by *clouds that themselves remain outside the framework of the representation*, in order to reinforce the effect of depth that is obtained, in a landscape, by means of perspective of one kind or another.³² Initially, cloud had only found a place within the system thanks to a forcing of its principles and a slackening—in truth more apparent than real—of the formal constraints that regulated the functioning of the system as such. But such was the flexibility of that system and so extensive were its powers of adaptation that, at the very moment when it was about to be fundamentally threatened, it appealed to that very element, as both a syntactical tool and a factor of illusion, in order to preserve the coherence of representation that was governed ever more strictly by the regime of perspective.

METEOROLOGICA

But we need to return to the reasons that led Ruskin, on the pretext of raising those questions, to confess, somewhat complacently, his claimed inability to assimilate the progress of modern science.³³ Since the beginning of the century, the observation of the sky and atmospheric phenomena had been attracting renewed interest. As early as 1817–22, Goethe, in a series of studies and even poems, was paying homage to the Englishman

Luke Howard, who had written an essay on the scientific classification of clouds,³⁴ in which he allocated them to three zones or layers, just as Ruskin was to later. At the time, this work was regarded both as a first attempt at explanation, prediction, and *deduction* and also as the source of a number of poems, sketches, and paintings that took cloud as their referent but to which Ruskin, curiously enough, paid no attention. They included Goethe, Constable (see Plate 7a), and the Norwegian Johan Christian Dahl, to say nothing of Shelley's admirable poem.³⁵ Kurt Badt seems to have overestimated the direct impact of Howard's studies (of which Constable, for his part, appears to have been totally unaware),³⁶ and posed the problem of the relations between art and science purely in terms of "sources" and "influences." Nevertheless, he correctly perceived the reasons for the objective convergence that is noticeable, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, between the works of meteorologists and certain pictorial and poetic works, which, although they do not strictly speaking constitute a "genre," nevertheless certainly represent, among the general and individual works of the time, a group with an autonomy and specificity of its own.

Both the studies of Constable and the observations that Luke Howard's work prompted Goethe to make emphasize the temporal circumstances affecting phenomena. Constable himself was always careful to note on the back of his studies not only the date, but also the time, the place, the temperature, the direction of the winds, and so on.³⁷ The synchronic view of the Renaissance was now replaced by a diachronic if not historical view (see Howard's idea of "a history of climate"). It was all a matter of understanding the temporal development of the natural phenomena that occur in space. (Constable, who wanted landscape painting to be *scientific as well as poetic*, congratulated Ruysdael for having managed to produce a history—in the new sense of the term *natural history*—and for having understood that what he was painting and the landscape itself were the product not of the imagination but of a *deduction*.)³⁸ But the interest in clouds was not solely a response to new scientific or theoretical preoccupations. It also fueled romantic reveries on the part of Baudelaire as well as Goethe, on the infinite, the far distance, the indeterminate, and the powers of that which has no form. Kurt Badt appositely notes that in nineteenth-century painting /cloud/ occupies a place comparable to that held by draperies in fifteenth-century Flemish painting. His remarks prepared the way for the "exercises in shapelessness" that Valéry attributed to Dégas, considering the

idea to be rather "da Vincian": by shapeless he did not mean that which had no shape but things whose shapes elicited in us "nothing that made it possible to replace them by an act of drawing or clear recognition."³⁹ A cloud is not a reducible form; and that was precisely why Goethe, for his part, considered it a special sign of the *Unvergänglich* (the imperishable), the relationship of reciprocal engendering that incorporates all things—including the I that knows—within the infinite cosmos, which was the subject of *Naturphilosophie*: "As I have perhaps paid too much attention to the study of geology, I am now tackling the domain of the atmosphere. *If it were only to discover how one thinks or may think, that in itself would be a considerable profit.*"⁴⁰

Insofar as meteorology as conceived by Luke Howard and his contemporaries was claimed to be a primarily descriptive science, founded upon the observation and classification of phenomena, it is understandable that it overlapped, even in some of its graphic productions, with the work of landscape painting, painting that Goethe wished to see learning from rational knowledge: he even had the idea of producing a new art founded on science (*die Hervorbringung von neuerer Kunst aus Wissenschaft*).⁴¹ But it is the strictly phenomenological, *nontheoretical* nature of this "science" that explains its attraction for a thinker such as Goethe, who was eager to condemn the materialist bases of Newtonian science and, following Schelling, defend the rights of a "speculative physics" (see his *Farbenlehre*). "Man must seize upon everything with his eyes [Alles muss der Mensch mit Augen fassen]."⁴² The reason why Goethe, like Ruskin, pays attention only to the external aspect of phenomena is, quite apart from the fact that the rights of "mystery" are thereby preserved, that the "meaning" of those phenomena is more important to him than their *structure*. The science that both men were opposed to was that of the physicists who, following Newton, claimed, for example, to reduce light to a material process, whereas colors, like sounds, are *sensations* and as such are linked to the "animal frame," sensations that cannot be explained and can only be studied by a *moral science*.⁴³ Meteorology, conceived as a strictly phenomenological, nonmaterialist discipline, thus comes to the aid of a symbolic, if not mystical, interpretation of natural phenomena (as we shall see in Carl Gustav Carus and even Constable). That it does so is really not particularly surprising when one remembers the place given to these same phenomena in the great materialistic texts of antiquity. The fact is that *explanations* for how "clouds may form and

gather either because the air is condensed under the pressure of winds, or because atoms which hold together and are suitable to produce this result become mutually entangled, or because currents collect from the earth and the waters,"⁴⁴ or for many other reasons—such explanations put a stop to all mythological digressions. Lucretius's admirable pages on the system of the sky (*ratio caeli*) were designed solely to deliver mortals from fear of the gods, which stemmed from their ignorance of causes. Neither the lightning that flashes when clouds produce many fiery atoms,⁴⁵ nor the thunder that is produced by thick clouds massed at a great height⁴⁶ are created by the gods. "Exclusion of myth is the sole condition necessary; and it will be excluded if one properly attends to the facts and hence draws inferences to interpret what is [invisible]."⁴⁷ However, both Goethe and Ruskin, each in his own way, strove to restore, in opposition to materialist science, the rights of myth and ideas, if not those of religion and of the "invisible," conceived in a mystical fashion.⁴⁸

In Lucretius's materialist text, the formation of clouds provides a rough illustration of the process by which the atoms that move about in the void come together. "Clouds mass together when in the space of the sky above a number of flying bodies have come together, which are rougher and though they are entangled with very small catches are yet able to hold together in mutual attachment."⁴⁹ In this context, the distinction between the visible and the invisible implied no ontological difference. It was simply a matter of a *threshold*: "When the clouds first take their being, before the eye can see them, all thin, the winds drive and carry them together to the mountain tops. Now at length gathered together in greater mass and packed together, they are able to show themselves."⁵⁰ But Ruskin could not bring himself to accept such a notion, attached as he was to "mystery," to such a degree that, even when he himself had suggested the idea that cloud might be composed of spherical molecules held together by attraction,⁵¹ he rejected it immediately, declaring that there was no solution to the problem of its *visibility, color, and outline*. What these problems allow us to glimpse, even as they mask it, is the very question of the signifier in painting, a question that Ruskin, for his part, systematically strove to conceal *beneath a mass of clouds*. Far from pondering upon the historical and theoretical reasons for the invasion of the pictorial field by cloud, and for painters entering into the service of cloud, he was to be found trying to explain this state of affairs indirectly and rather late in the day by a radical

change in the aspect of the weather, a change indicated by the appearance in the European sky of a type of cloud formerly unknown. The two lectures that he gave in 1848 on the "storm cloud" in the nineteenth century marked a break with the traditional equilibrium of the "system of the firmament." In contrast to the text of *Modern Painters*, those two lectures manage to displace the question of the relation between the signifier and the signified in painting, and instead refer it to what is claimed to be a natural reality, itself defined in terms that are nothing if not scientific: in the face of encroaching darkness and increasing nebulosity, what consolation does materialism offer? Once again, the ideological function assigned in this context to *cloud* is unmistakable: we have seen how, far from invariably encouraging a systematic deconstruction of the perspective order, the invasion of the canvas by clouds in many cases on the contrary sanctioned a series of effects that, despite a superficial muddling of the geometric coordinates, strengthened the hold of that order, at the same time continuing, in conformity with the fundamental purpose of the classical system, to mask the *real* substratum of the painting, namely the surface upon which the images were inscribed. The resolutely antimaterialist tenor of Ruskin's text lends emphasis to the contradictory nature of the "service of the clouds": the very /cloud/ that, in the figurative context governed by the perspective model, seemed linked with the sensible component of the painting, its materiality, or even with color as opposed to delineation, turns out to function as a screen designed to mask the reality of the signifying process for which, in the symbolist period, it would even present itself as a fantastical substitute.

THE WAGNERIAN "IDEAL"

In truth, through the contradictions as much as through the pessimism evinced by many pages of *Modern Painters* and the aging self-taught expert's digression on the "storm cloud," and through his admiration for Turner and, conversely, his criticism of the facile nature of "haziness" and the attractions of "smoke," objectively Ruskin played a role in the debate that constituted the culmination of the quarrel that dominated the end of the century. This was the quarrel over Wagnerism. When Nietzsche, after a long "convalescence," decided to break with Wagner, his recovery took the form of a choice: a choice that rejected the dampness of the North and the mists of the Wagnerian ideal and opted instead for the *limpidezza* of the air of hotter countries and *gaya scienza*; that is to say, not only lightness,

wit, fire, and grace, but also the *grand logic*⁵²—and above all opted for a *different* art, “an ironic, light, subtle, divinely relaxed, divinely artificial art which, like a clear flame, spurts forth *in a cloudless sky!*”⁵³ This justification of *an art without clouds*, an art for artists (but not an art for art’s sake) takes on its full significance when compared with the Wagnerian endeavor, which, in contrast, was committed to a search for effects, *expression* at all costs:⁵⁴ this put music at the service of the *stage*, of “total” theater, and of the public common to all the arts. In the sense that it has been said that the perspective regime involved the “neutralization” of the substratum of painting, this project implied as its precondition the neutralization of “the technical seat of the music,” the organism that produces the sounds (i.e., the orchestra), which, in Bayreuth, was positioned below the stage, in a “mystical abyss” the function of which was to separate “reality” from the “ideal,” and to make the action on stage seem to take place in an indefinite faraway place.⁵⁵ Now, the scenic effects sanctioned by this neutralization of the material productive source of the music were not unrelated to the effects aimed at by those who specialized in a certain kind of pictorial “haziness” or “cloudiness.” For the fact that the orchestra was thus hidden from sight transformed the floor of the real stage into “a mobile, flexible, malleable, ethereal surface, the fathomless basis of which was the sea of feeling itself.”⁵⁶ Nothing intervenes to block the view of the stage that the spectator enjoys from his seat, and his gaze encounters nothing but

a space that somehow, thanks to an architectural artifice, floats between the two prosceniums, presenting what seems to be a distant image with the inaccessible air of an apparition in a dream, while mysterious music, like vapours rising from the sacred bosom of Gaia, beneath the Pythia’s throne, rises like a spirit from the “mystical abyss.”⁵⁷

It is possible to glimpse how the specifically musical features of Wagnerian opera—the “infinite” melody, devoid of “fixed points,” in conjunction with the chromatism into which the system of tonality dissolves⁵⁸—could be worked into what Wagner hoped would be a total representation, which incorporated all the various arts that were called upon to combine as the *means* to effect its realization. In a spectacle designed as much for the eye as for the ear,⁵⁹ similar means produced similar effects and these reinforced one another: the tonal disarray engendered by a succession of “vague” chords was increased by the collapse of the ground on which the story was unfolding, a collapse engineered by all kinds of optical proce-

dures.⁶⁰ The important thing was that all specificity, all reality, all *materiality* should be denied to the means that combined to produce a work of total art—denied to the music, which was so spiritualized that it seemed like a “vapor,” and likewise to the very painting of the scenery, which Wagner nevertheless regarded as “the ultimate and perfect conclusion of all the plastic arts” and which he thought should provide a model for the scenery for the dramatic art of the future, in which it would represent “the background of nature.”⁶¹ The neutralization of the technical instruments that produce sounds is simply the most striking indicator of a process of idealization that culminates, in *Tannhäuser*, with the Venusberg scene in which the fairylike nature of the apparition is underlined by means of transparent curtains painted with clouds, which are lowered one behind the other so as to obscure the outlines of the painted scenery of Wartberg that is set up at the back of the stage. In such a stage set, in which the painter-decorator is amalgamated with the operator of mechanical apparatuses, clouds—by seeming to dissolve all outlines—procure “the mysterious effect of distance.”⁶² Chromatism—which René Leibowitz identified as the element that destroyed the system of tonality, and which he never ceased to exploit from within,⁶³ in the same way that *color* works within the system of linearity—implies a considerable extension of the universe of musical sound. (Wagner himself compares this to the extension of the world at the time of the great discoveries and to the replacement of the closed sea of the ancients by the limitless ocean).⁶⁴ In the same way, “cloudiness,” in which the contradictions of a culture still, in the last analysis, governed by the system of linearity are at once perceptible yet cease to be operative or productive, sanctions a series of effects that suggest that the framework of the representation is indefinitely extendable. But whereas chromatism (from the Greek *khrōma*, color, musical tonality) raised a series of questions of *form* that the musicians of the twentieth century, following Schönberg and Webern, were to work at and endeavor to resolve,⁶⁵ “cloudiness” in painting on the contrary represented a negation of the whole formal problem, if not a flight into the “ideal” similar to that which Nietzsche detected in Wagner. In a reversal that is in no way dialectical, the very element that in the classical context was an indicator of the materiality of the pictorial signifier, now served to reinforce the reigning idealism and functioned as the operator that transformed the scenic reality into an *image*.⁶⁶ Now we must find out whether, in a completely different context, that of the painting of the Far

East, the "service of clouds" did not take on a quite different meaning and at the same time have a far more radical effect. As we shall see, the digression should make it possible to introduce the question of modern painting in terms that are truly dialectical and materialist.

The Hieroglyph of Breath

And with the hieroglyph of a breath, I wish to recover
an idea of sacred theater.

—Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre de séraphin*

Huang Dachi had a face that was as fresh as that of a young boy.
Mi Youren, at over eighty years of age, had preserved the clarity
of his mind, with no sign at all of degeneration. He died after
suffering no illness. That is because the clouds and mists
in their paintings sustained them.

—Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Hua yan*

CHINA AND ITS CLOUDS

Except for the anachronism, and disregarding the prophetic utterances of Ruskin, it is tempting to assemble beneath the banner of an identical taste for cloudiness not only the "volatile" landscapes of Turner and the vaporous stage sets of Bayreuth, but also the monochrome landscapes of Song and Ming China and the Japanese paintings of "Zen" inspiration, with their monochrome mountains and forests drowned in mist and consumed by clouds. But an anachronism it would certainly be, since Chinese and even Japanese painting remained virtually unknown in the West even when European culture, tearing itself away from the "mists of the Wagnerian ideal" and the "lies of the grand style" (Nietzsche) was beginning to look toward other skies, in the first instance those of the Far East.⁶⁷ The prints that then appeared on the market provided the Impressionists and their contemporaries with many *hints* regarding the arrangement of a page, the way of rendering forms and the framing of figures. But, as Henri Focillon has stressed, Impressionist painting differed radically *in its matter*, which stemmed from the juxtaposition of dabs of color, from Japanese engravings, where flatness reigned (to the point where Japanese art came to be used as an argument by those who, breaking with Impressionism, were to advocate, following Gauguin, the separation of forms and the disjunction of lines and colors).⁶⁸ Whistler was perhaps to be the sole artist, working

with color that had nothing heavy about it, to translate some of the elements of Japanism in his nocturnes and in the terms of a *taste* (but with the theoretical connotation that Mallarmé's version of "Ten O'clock" attaches to his name): he worked with an interplay of full spaces and empty ones, high horizons, compositions on several rising levels, separated by banks of mist, like those of, for instance, Hiroshige's *Stations of the Tokaido*.

But Whistler's art, all a matter of suggestion, "cloudiness" that does not speak its name,⁶⁹ was to have no follow-up. And despite the many pervasive resurgences, even today, of the moment of European taste to which the nocturnes discreetly testify, there is no historical justification for pressing on any further with a comparison with the pictorial tradition of the Far East. Does that mean that the comparison might be shifted to a theoretical level, that of the tasks imposed upon Western art by the exhaustion of the classical system of representation? It is indeed very tempting to draw a parallel between the reversal illustrated by Ruskin's formula, which placed modern landscape "at the service of the clouds," and what at first sight appears to be one of the most constant features of Far Eastern art and even of the Chinese painting that the West was now beginning to discover and in which "views of mists and clouds" seem to have occupied a privileged position (see Plate 7b).⁷⁰ Certainly, as early as the eleventh century, Mi Fu, in his *History of Painting*, underlined the great antiquity of the "concept" of clouds, when writing about the views of mists painted by Dong Yuan, which were then very much in vogue and in which the hard forms of mountains were now veiled, now unveiled, while the tops of trees now appeared, now disappeared, as the mists now lightened, now darkened. All this Dong Yuan painted without resorting to any artificial ploys.⁷¹ In the eighteenth century, the *Jie zi yuan huazhuan* (Teachings on painting from the garden the size of a mustard seed) described clouds as "the adornment of the sky and the earth, the embroidery of the mountains and the waters," and on that account compared them to the quotations of poetry that writers used to make their style more powerful. In fact clouds constitute a *recapitulation* of the landscape: "For in their elusive emptiness, one sees many of the features of mountains and water courses hiding there. That is why we speak of mountains of clouds and seas of clouds."⁷² As for the *Comments on Painting*, by Shitao (between 1710 and 1717), they seem to provide the key to the use of /cloud/ in landscape painting: in a landscape painting that succeeds "in getting at the principle of the universe," the form and impulse of which

it expresses, "rivers and clouds, thanks to the way that they are gathered together or dispersed, *constitute what binds it together*"; "the Sky embraces the landscape by means of winds and clouds, and the Earth animates it by means of rivers and rocks."⁷³

To judge by the letter of those texts, in the paintings for which they propose a theory /cloud/ does not seem to figure as a recurrent unit that can be precisely identified, circumscribed, or even localized. Buddhist painting, whether Chinese or Japanese, regularly made use of *cloud* as a support or vehicle, drawn with a precise outline the curve of which in many cases evokes the silhouette of a dragon or a fish with a long tail, upon which a bodhisattva is seated, Amida descends to earth together with his escort, or an *aspara* is borne aloft. And some scholars have detected in the *yun jian*, the "collar of clouds" embroidered upon the robes of the Chinese emperor, a vestige of an extremely ancient cosmic symbol that marked the threshold of the heavens, at the extremity of the axis of the world, in accordance with a schema that also cropped up in the medieval Western world.⁷⁴ But that iconography (and all the coincidences and affiliations that are sometimes claimed to be established, at this level, between European art and Chinese art) are of no account at all compared to the extremely original theoretical status that Chinese treatises assign to cloud: that of an element or principle which, depending on whether it is gathering or dispersing, constitutes in its "elusive emptiness" the *bond* that ties together the landscape where it interconnects, even as it hides, "the lines of the mountains" and the "water courses." In the representational system of the European Renaissance, cloud at the very outset presented a problem, as is shown by Brunelleschi's demonstration. But all the indications are that the extent and, even more, the nature of the specifically pictorial functions imparted to mists and cloud and—as we shall see—their cosmological connotations suggest that Far Eastern painting, on the contrary, regarded this element both as a particularly prized motif and as a particularly prized principle. Even where it is introduced into a picture by mechanical or conventional means, in the West cloud marks the limitations of a representation that is governed by the finite nature of linearity. Beyond a certain point, a proliferation of clouds, more or less deliberate and controlled, seems to be a symptom: it signals the beginning of the dissolution of an order (but not its *deconstruction*). In other words, at first sight the Chinese system appears to function, practically, in a fashion that is quite the opposite to that of the Renaissance

system, for it seems to begin and find its way forward at the very point where the latter meets its limit, its closure. That is perhaps a superficial impression that may mask questions thrown up by even a rapid and superficial examination of Chinese works, both practical and theoretical, in the pictorial domain. (But the purpose of this digression through China and its "views of mists and clouds"—which cannot be avoided at this point—is simply to make it possible to pose the question of the conditions for a possible theory of /cloud/ that is *general* [and not just *local*, geographically and historically speaking] and through that to a general theory of painting itself.)

THOSE WHO DRAW CLOUDS AND THOSE WHO BLOW THEM

Yet, *in its treatment*, Chinese /cloud/ at first sight appears to relate to a problem that is not all that different from that which the present work has attempted to define in the Western context.

To paint clouds, one uses only pure colour. When one looks at them, they seem to mass together. It is preferable not to draw any lines in ink. When, in *qing liu* landscape paintings,⁷⁵ one draws fine lines, the [clouds] must be in harmony. So one uses dilute ink to trace [their outlines: but perhaps that addition is not really necessary] and one tints them with blue.⁷⁶

The advice of *Mustard Seed* seems perfectly clear. Cloud, as Aristotle established, has more to do with color than with line, insofar as the latter creates *figures*. If the method for suggesting depth dictates the use of lines, however fine, then /cloud/ must be outlined in dilute ink, and even those faint lines may subsequently be sprinkled with powder, as the ancients taught:

The Tang painters had two ways of painting clouds. The first is known as *chui yun* (literally: the blowing of clouds). It consists in painting silk with a light coat of white. This way of doing it corresponds to layers of clouds floating in the wake of the wind; it is light and pure, people like it; it is extremely graceful. The second method is called *goufen* (literally: tracing with powder). In these *jin bi* landscape paintings,⁷⁷ the ink strokes are covered with powder. Marshal Li the younger often used this method; it produced a very powerful effect. This increased the richness of the painting.⁷⁸

Does this mean that in China, as in the West, /cloud/ defies the order of linearity, and that the way in which it operates in landscape painting

can be defined and appreciated in terms of the drawing/color (if not the "linear"/"pictorial") opposition mentioned at the beginning of the present work? Does it mean that Chinese painting (and here we should bear in mind the *resistance* that European landscape art encountered in its early days) proceeded from the very element that was supposed to be excluded in the West, and—as seems to be indicated by the privileged place assigned to "views of mists and clouds" in the Chinese hierarchy of pictorial forms—exploited that which was suppressed in Western painting, of which it would thus seem to constitute as it were a *negative* and also a necessary theoretical complement? Expressed in that form, the proposition is not tenable given that, even in China, the traditional classification of schools of painting was massively dependent upon the opposition of drawing and color: "The *Huainanzi* says: 'The people of Song excelled at drawing, and those of Wu at painting with colors.' Is that not the truth?"⁷⁹ As early as the Tang dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries), during which pure landscape painting became definitively established, a distinction that was to provide a framework for all "histories of painting" was introduced between the "Northern school," that of professional painters, who were inevitably traditionalist and whose "blue and green" mode was, right down to the nineteenth century, to represent a kind of ideal, and the "Southern school," that of amateur painters, scholars who, using ink in a spontaneous and liberated way, were a few centuries later to become the apostles of monochrome landscapes, in opposition to the academicians. Now, despite its borrowings from tradition, the theory of painting expounded not only by Mi Fu's *Huashi* but also by Shitao's *Comments*, and to a lesser degree by *Mustard Seed* was produced solely by scholars.⁸⁰ It tells us nothing about paintings in the official style, which are characterized, *even in their drawing of clouds*, by clear and precise outlines and a technique in which color is used—seldom in an indiscreet fashion—to supplement the drawing. Of course, set out in this categorically geographic form, the opposition is only useful as an indication: it does not explain the real, historical evolution of Chinese painting. However, the theoretical debate about /cloud/ is illuminated by the rivalry between, on the one hand, an orthodox if not academic art, committed to the strictest linearity and, on the other, painting that explicitly sets out to be transgressive. (There are countless anecdotes about the practitioners of *po mo*, "spattered ink," and *yi pin*, "painting with no constraints": one artist would spread out his scrolls upon the floor and bespatter them with blots

that he would then turn into landscapes by adding the odd stroke here and there; another would use his pigtail as a paintbrush or would paint with his back turned on his work, or in a state of intoxication or trance, and so on.)⁸¹

THE BRUSH STROKE

In reply to a painter who boasted in Zhang Yanyuan's company that he could paint "blown clouds" (ninth century), the latter retorted:

The ancients have not yet achieved perfect skill in the painting of clouds: scattering on a piece of silk light [specks of] powder blown there by one's mouth is called "blowing clouds." Clearly, it seizes upon a natural principle. But although one may call it a wonderful solution, nevertheless there is no sign there of any brush stroke. So it cannot be called painting either. It is impossible to copy.⁸²

That last remark reveals Zhang Yanyuan to be a believer in an eclectic academicism that insisted upon scrupulous imitation of the models and masters of the past, thereby certainly complicating the task of experts and "connoisseurs."⁸³ The scholars resolutely opposed such a conformist attitude.⁸⁴ It was not that they defended originality at all costs, only the rights of *transformation*, freedom, the need for a painter who studied the ancients to make changes, *conversions* ("If there are rules, there must be change. . . . The minute one knows the rule, one must endeavor to transform it").⁸⁵ To be sure, individualistic professions of faith abound among the painters and calligraphers,⁸⁶ and Shitao himself insisted that "it is by oneself that the Rule must be established." However, the desire for originality, and the wish to owe nothing to anyone but oneself were affirmed within a predetermined, already established field: that of *painting*, in the sense of a specific practice the principle and basis of which lay in the *brush stroke*. It was a principle, a basis that was discovered in a breakaway from knowledge that was a slave to imitation; and it led to a return to sources in a quest for the supreme rule that was born from an absence of rules and that encompassed a multiplicity of rules.⁸⁷

The primacy of the brush stroke was, after all, enshrined, right from the start, in the definition of painting imposed by the very use of the character *hua* 畫. According to the *Shuo wen jie zi*, a dictionary that went back to the first century (c. 100) and that provides the etymology of characters, the character *hua* is a complex one, a compound of two graphic ele-

ments that, taken separately, constitute the characters *yu* 聿, derived from a hand writing with a stylus, which took on the meaning of "brush," and *tian* 田, an image of a plot of land crossed by furrows. The meaning of "to paint" is thus to trace with brush lines that give the outlines of forms just as paths mark the edges of fields and fix their shape. That certainly seems to be the meaning understood by *Mustard Seed*: "The *Shuo Wen* says: painting is made up of limits; it resembles the paths that delimit the fields."⁸⁸ From there, it is but a step to declaring that Chinese painting only exists thanks to its graphism,⁸⁹ and that lines or, to be more exact, *outlines* dominate Chinese painting from start to finish of its history;⁹⁰ and it was a step that Western art criticism took without bothering much about the pertinence of the categories that were imposed by the culture, if not the ideology, from which it stemmed. It is true that theory—and not just academic, traditionalist theory, but even that of the "amateurs," the scholars, which culminated in the concept of the "unique brush stroke," *yi hua* 一畫 that governs Shitao's system—denies the name of "painting" to any practice where the "brush stroke" plays no part, starting—as we have seen—with the technique of "blown clouds" and that of "spattered" ink. It is furthermore attested that Chinese art criticism considered the first Western oil paintings imported into China to be heterodox. But the absence of precise details as to the nature of those paintings is telling: should we take it that the Chinese connoisseurs were united in their condemnation of not only Turner but also the Pre-Raphaelites, Ingres, and Delacroix? When posed in those terms, the question reveals the *limits* of the system of thought according to which Western criticism operates. For clearly, the connoisseurs of Ming China would no more have accepted as painting a panel of figures delineated as precisely as those of Uccello than they would a fresco by Masaccio in which forms are defined by more strictly pictorial means. Outlines, surfaces, even limits (in the sense in which, in Alberti's theory, outline is limited to the surface that it *denotes*)—those categories can guarantee no grip upon a practice that, in truth, is regarded from the point of view of *productivity* rather than from that of its products, a practice dominated not by lines—as an overhasty analysis would have it—but (as the texts make abundantly clear) by *brushstrokes*.

FLESH AND BONES

"The ancients say 'having a brush, having ink.' Many people do not understand those two characters. If one only has outline, without a method of brush strokes, that is called 'lacking a brush.' If one has a method of brush strokes but no nuances [literally, no light and no dark], one can indicate neither what is exposed to the light, nor what is the opposite, nor the shadow of cloud, nor what is brilliant, nor what is dark: this is called 'lacking ink.'"⁹¹ The *brush* and the *ink* are the two notions, the two categories to which Chinese criticism most often resorts in order to assess the value of a painter: "Once you have the brush and the ink, you are a master; to have the brush but not the ink is a mistake; to have the ink but not the brush is also a mistake."⁹² In other words, neither the ink nor the brush can be reduced to elements, formal components that are identifiable as such: rather, at this stage in the analysis, they correspond to complementary productive principles whose relative usefulness is measured by the extent as well as the nature of the effects that they engender in practice. "The brush serves to position forms, the ink serves to differentiate shadow from light."⁹³ Despite appearances, that opposition does not duplicate the opposition between line and color, as used ideologically in the West. For whereas in the figurative tradition of Europe, line, frequently in covert ways, assumes most of the semiotic functions conferred upon the painted image (outline *denotes* figures, while color is just an extra), Far Eastern painting imposes a radical theoretical shift that involves, first and foremost, relinquishing the notion of *outline* and at the same time any idea of classifying pictorial aspects either under the heading of line (or figures) or under that of color ("graphism" or "tonality").

As Henri Focillon has observed,⁹⁴ in the West painting has always fashioned etching in its own image (Ruskin, after all, thought that where clouds were concerned, an engraving could produce a good approximation to a painting). The truth is that, in the last analysis, Western painting has always been conscious of its relation to engraving, a relation that involved not merely reproduction and popularization, but in the first place a translation or *conversion*, for the engraving was expected to convey by strictly graphic methods the essential "message" of the painted image: to return to Rousseau's terminology, the lines of a painting still affect us in an engraving. Indeed, classical European painting was not averse on occasion

to borrowing something of the character of an engraving (even though as Alberti insisted, it was better not to overemphasize outlines). In China, by contrast, the manner of engravers (*ke hua*) was considered by most theorists to be a fundamental mistake where painting was concerned.⁹⁵ Indeed, engraving, even Japanese engraving, could never serve as an introduction to or even a term of comparison for pictorial analysis (whereas Western engraving did find ways of reproducing relief, lighting, etc.). The fact is that Far Eastern pictoriality eludes any *reduction* and cannot be classified in terms of the opposition between line and color. "If one only has outline, without the method of brush strokes, that is called 'lacking a brush.'" There is a dispute about the translation of *lun kuo* 輪廓 (from *lun* 輪, "wheel," and *kuo* 廓, "wide," "to widen": the circumference of the wheel as its rotation carried it away of its own accord). Petrucci favors "outline," Rymans "broad lines."⁹⁶ But the meaning of the passage from *Mustard Seed*, cited above, remains enigmatic from the point of view of Western categories: for it seems that it is not the *brush* but the *ink* that provides the "outline," the "broad lines," the work of the brush being assimilated, on the contrary, to the method of "brush strokes" or "wrinkles" (that is to say, according to the classical definition, that which is obtained by means of a pointed brush wielded at a slant, or the "overpainting added with a dry brush": "They [the broad lines] are added later, so as to break up the volumes").⁹⁷ The ink, not the brush (but nevertheless the ink applied by the brush), makes the forms of the Mountains and Rivers (that is to say the landscape) "expand" (we shall be considering what that means, in a moment). The ink provides the "broad lines," if not the "outline," while the task of the brush (but a brush full of ink) is to determine their lines of force⁹⁸ and, by means of "strokes" or "wrinkles," to suggest the "living depth of things." While the various kinds of "wrinkles" or "strokes" listed in the Treatises ("raindrops," "bushes in disorder," "the peaks of clouds," "whirling water"; and also "the cranium of a skeleton," a "shaving block," "the hairs of oxen," etc.) refer to natural structures and each corresponds to a particular characteristic aspect of a "real" mountain, at the same time those wrinkles and brush strokes have a primarily diacritical, differential, function. "Because the shapes of mountains may take on a thousand different aspects, it follows that the expression of their relief cannot be reduced to a single formula."⁹⁹ The brush derives its expressivity from the differences that distinguish the various types of wrinkles (*hua*, meaning one particular "stroke" among others,

the outline obtained by the brush moving to and fro, used for buildings and for pine trees).¹⁰⁰ But by doing so it frees itself from being in any way subordinated to the order of delineation. As Pierre Ryckmans forcefully puts it (but without drawing all the possible theoretical conclusions),

Once the broad lines have placed the outline of a given object (a stone, a mountain, a tree trunk, etc.), the "wrinkles" are drawn inside the broad lines or lean against them, to describe the relief, texture, grain, luminosity, and unevenness of surface and the volume of the object; *that is to say that, in Chinese painting, they combine the various functions which in the West belong now to line, now to colour, now to shadows, now to perspective, since they describe the shape, matter, lighting, and mass of things, all at once.*¹⁰¹

The function of the brush is thus not to make the outline stand out or to delimit the forms whose structure, or even texture, it is required to express by its own particular means. "Whatever the plastic form, it can always be reduced to the elementary principles that belong to the different kinds of lines and wrinkles."¹⁰² From this follows a notion of form—if that is the right word and if it is acceptable here—that owes nothing to delineation in the Western sense, nor to the Aristotelian distinction between color and figure (since the painting of the "scholars," which is the subject of most of the Chinese treatises on landscape painting, first and foremost among them Shitao's *Comments*, is monochrome painting that uses only tonal differences). Ink and brush are like *flesh and bone*. If the ink makes the forms of the landscape expand, it is insofar as it confers its flesh upon the skeleton that the brush must provide. It fills in shapes, gives them a contour, just as flesh gives a body its "figure." But just as flesh cannot do without bone and bone cannot do without flesh, so ink cannot do without a brush and a brush cannot do without ink.¹⁰³ And it is this that makes the technique known as "blowing clouds" and that of "spattered ink" so aberrant; it is also the reason why such techniques do not deserve to be called "painting." Taken literally, such a technique surely leads to separating what should not be separated and isolating one of the terms of an opposition that makes no sense unless it is presented as *dialectical*, unlike purely formal or analytical oppositions of the line/color, linear/pictorial, or even form/matter type. Ink is not the same to the brush as color is to line, nor as matter is to form; for (and this is the point that needs to be stressed in order to avoid any interpretation of an idealist nature, of the kind that abounds in Western literature devoted to Far Eastern art) bones are no less material than flesh.

'HUA'/DELIMITATION

Painting, which is "made up of limits" and "resembles paths" that limit fields, is nevertheless not a matter of delineation and, above all, is not governed by any predetermined closure (a "path" is not a closure). That, at any rate, is what is suggested by the character *tian* 田, "field," which is one component of the character *hua* 畫 (or, in its simplified form, 画), "painting," if one pays attention to the order in which the strokes that make it up should be traced: according to this order, in the pictorial field "delimitation" assumes a meaning radically different from that which was explicitly assigned to it, from the time of Alberti onward, by European tradition. "Here alone, leaving aside other things, I will tell what I do when I paint. First of all, where I draw I inscribe (*scrivo*) a quadrangle, as large as I wish, which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint."¹⁰⁴ Alberti's window is just one interpretation, among other possible ones, of a pictorial field of the kind that a Western painter begins by circumscribing. The field's opening thus coincides with the marking out of its closure (see Paul Klee: "The scene is the surface or, to be more precise, the delimited plane").¹⁰⁵ Now, *the order of the strokes* that governs Chinese writing on the contrary requires that the delimitation or closure be established only at the last moment (any failure to do this constitutes the equivalent of a spelling mistake): when the whole or a part of a character is confined within a closed space, that space must not be closed until all the strokes within it have been traced.¹⁰⁶ In the case of the *tian* 田 character, one should thus begin by tracing the "left" side of the "field" 丨, then proceed to draw the upper edge and the right-hand side 7 in a single movement; next, one traces within the space thus marked out two strokes forming a cross, beginning with the horizontal 冂, 田; lastly, one "closes" the character by drawing the base of the rectangle 田.

But such a "closure" does not do away with the discontinuous aspect of a delimitation that operates with simple strokes that are *separate*,¹⁰⁷ and the openness of which is maintained, preserved, right up until the last stroke has been completed. In this connection, we may compare the character *hua*, in its simplified form 画, in which a kind of *open* frame duplicates the outline of the field, with the very similar-looking schema that Klee, starting from the position *P*, uses to explain the various possibilities of orientation on a previously delimited flat surface. His schema confers upon

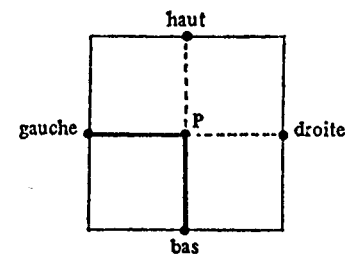


FIGURE 7. Klee, *Figure*, from *Das bildnerische Denken* (Basel, 1956), p. 39.

the surface (*die Fläche*) a material identity in which "left," "right," "top," and "bottom" all appear as attributes. In contrast, the Chinese character forces one to think of the orientation (the definition of the "directions") as primary: within the space, indicated rather than delimited on three sides, and *with the bottom left open*,¹⁰⁸ an initial horizontal stroke divides the top from the bottom, at the same time connecting the left and the right, while the vertical stroke assures the link between the top and the bottom, at the same time marking out the left/right articulation. The priority given to the position of the orients, and first and foremost the division between above and below, or "sky" and "earth," over delineation and the substantial production of a surface as such corresponds to a constant feature of Chinese thought. This is not based upon the principle of identity together with the notion of substance, which is its corollary, but takes as its point of departure *relative orientations* or rather (as the categories *ink* and *brush* clearly show) the opposition of contraries.¹⁰⁹ That is a point made forcefully, in relation to landscape painting, by a passage from *Mustard Seed*, which it is worth comparing to the text of Alberti cited above:

In general, before beginning to paint, it is necessary to reserve the place for Sky and the place for Earth. What do we call Sky and Earth? In a picture of one and a half *chi* [a *chi* is about 35 cm.], the upper part is kept for the Sky, the lower part for the Earth; only in the middle part does one set about determining the landscape.¹¹⁰

The operation by which the painter *sets aside* the place of the sky and that of the earth and inserts the landscape *between the two* does not, it must be stressed, proceed from a division, a partition of the surface conceived in its identity, its substantiality, and as the substratum of the painting. Shitao, too, criticizes the method of three successive planes (a foreground for the

ground, a second plane for the trees, a third for the mountain) and that of two sections (with an intermediate zone of clouds),¹¹¹ for being too close to the system of *cutting the area into pieces*, which characterizes engravings.¹¹² If some kind of delimitation is introduced, its role is not so much to isolate, separate, *define, identify*, but rather to establish a correlation between two terms that it presents as separate only in order to open up a field in which they can interact and in which the dialectical process prompted by their opposition can take place.

OPENING CHAOS

Let us return to the ink/brush pair, which we can use as an example to confirm the aversion in Chinese thought (an aversion based in *language*) to any kind of logical definition following the Western model that attributes a predicate to a subject. Neither the ink nor the brush can be defined otherwise than in their "correlative duality" (which is why it is impossible to introduce or translate those concepts into a Western language except by reducing them to substantial terms that are identifiable as such).¹¹³ As we shall see, the same applies to oppositions of a similar nature that obey the same laws even though they operate at other levels and far more extensively. The relations between the ink and the brush are by no means simple and linear. In fact, the priority of "structure" over "form" (insofar as such concepts are acceptable in the context of a system of thought in contact with which the "entries" that Western thought endeavors to keep open become confused) seems to have been explicitly affirmed at an extremely early date. In his *Guhua pinlu* (late fifth century), Xie He set out a number of principles that lie at the basis of all Chinese aesthetics. The second of these principles concerns the quest for a skeletal framework, using a brush;¹¹⁴ the third concerns the determination of forms and the representation of objects;¹¹⁵ the fourth relates to the application of color;¹¹⁶ and the fifth to the distribution of lines, composition.¹¹⁷ The principles thus lay down that setting in place the skeletal framework should precede the determination of forms. But that does not mean to say that the brush has the slightest *logical* precedence over the ink, even if, as Ryckmans points out, a certain hierarchy, in which the brush is of more account than the ink, may seem to be suggested by the fact that ink is more easy to have than the brush.¹¹⁸ Insofar as it is provided by nature and represents a technical acquisition,¹¹⁹ ink is opposed to a brush, which represents man's contribution (man who con-

trols it) to pictorial production; and it is up to the ink to prepare the way for the *opening up of chaos* that will be accomplished by the brush.¹²⁰ the synthesis between the ink and the brush is realized in the brush stroke—the unique brush stroke, *yi hua*, as Shitao puts it—the variants of which constitute the simplest and most elementary method of handling ink and brush, which represents "the first elementary step in the apprenticeship of calligraphy and painting."¹²¹

"Ease with the ink is a matter of technical training; the spirit of the brush is a matter of life." "To have ink but no brush" means that you are invested with the ease bestowed by technical training, but remain incapable of giving free rein to the spirit of life. "To have the brush but no ink" means that you are receptive to the spirit of life, but without being able to introduce the metamorphoses produced by the ease that results from technical training.¹²² Such is the shift made necessary by the reference to China here that the brush may be associated with receptivity, while ink is associated with invention or rather, as the Chinese text puts it, with *transformation*. But the fact is that painting is a matter not of imitation, but of reception, and is founded on a dialectic of *hospitality*, in which each term successively adopts the position of host (*zhu*) and guest (*bin*), a dialectic that governs the relations between the ink and the brush, and even more profoundly those between painting and the universe, since "the principle of painting and the technique of the brush are nothing other than the inner substance of the universe on the one hand, and its external beauty on the other."¹²³ (But "inner substance" is a particularly ill-chosen expression given that Chinese thought is not familiar with such an expression or even with the notion of "substance," being aware only of interaction, correlations, and implications between terms, between *signs*, and altogether unpreoccupied with the substance that underpins them,¹²⁴ the notion of which, as Granet has shown, merges with that of *rhythm*.) Nevertheless, that inner structure (provided one understands it in a strictly logical sense, and as a principle of the dialectical order) is in no way an intelligible Form, a Platonic Idea. This is a good point at which to condemn the idealist reduction to which virtually all Western criticism systematically subjects both the pictorial theory and the pictorial practice of the Far East.¹²⁵ For instance, Chinese theory does not recognize any separation such as the European "iconological" tradition makes between the "body" and the "soul" of an image (see Chapter 2, p. 51), and at the same time it rejects the copying

or imitation of external appearances. "Resemblance seizes upon the figure (*xing*) and allows the animating breath (*qi*) to escape; truth (*zhen*) seizes upon both the breath (*qi*) and the matter (*zhi*)."¹²⁶ But this breath is not of a different order from that of a figure or matter. It is not a "spiritual" principle. Rather, it constitutes the primary, simple, fundamental element that is the Unique Brush Stroke, which animates what is originally undifferentiated and draws beings and things out of chaos.¹²⁷ Breath (*qi*) is precisely the movement of life (*sheng dong*), which the first of Xie He's principles associates with the harmony (or/and, through homophony, the revolutions) of breath (*qi yun*). And, through one of those reversals that are so common in Chinese thought, it appears to be an effect of the "ink" rather than the "brush"—the ink, the function of which is to "open up chaos" and which is assimilated to "water," the element in which painting finds its "movement."¹²⁸

YIN/YANG

Although the character *yin* may be used by analogy to designate a painting, whereas its primary meaning is "shadow," that does not mean that it is through shadows that a painter sets out to *copy* objects: the ancient fable according to which painting originated in the delineation of a shadow that a body projected on to a wall¹²⁹ only makes sense in the context of an art that serves *mimesis*, that is to say *outward aspects* and, in the last analysis, *outlines*. There are shadows and shadows, as the West certainly recognizes when it uses the expression "*Chinese shadow play*" for a type of spectacle that implies no specular duplication. When a Chinese painter draws the shadow of a bamboo that falls upon a window screen, he does not do so in order to fix its outline, but because that device, which acts both as a mark and as a substratum, produces the equivalent of a painting in which, through abstraction or rather *abbreviation*, the principle of things is made manifest. "How could anyone learning how to paint a landscape act otherwise?"¹³⁰ "For even if, where animals, oxen and horses, are concerned, or people and objects, it is enough to copy what they look like, in landscapes copying does not succeed. In a landscape, the place where creative thought operates is on a higher plane."¹³¹ Or, as Shitao puts it, "the substance of the landscape is realized by reaching the principle of the universe," and that is why, in the hierarchy of genres, landscape ranks very highly. The very term that in Chinese designates "landscape" is made up of two asso-

ciated characters, *shanshui* 山水, "mountain/water," but once again it does not so much indicate "substance," but rather manifests the *law*: a landscape is governed by the same rhythm as the order of the world; like the universe itself, it is engendered by the interplay of two principles, two antithetical emblems, in accordance with the rhythmic concept that governs all Chinese thought, whether mythical or philosophical, the concept that is expressed by the formula *yi yin, yi yang* (literally "one yin, one yang"), which may be symbolized by any *image* that conveys two, contradictory aspects.¹³² *Yin* and *yang* constitute an efficacious pair that corresponds to the classification of all aspects of reality and their universal alternation, for the order of the world results from interaction between the two sets of complementary aspects, according to the rule of bipartition that governs the notion of totality and that, as Granet has emphasized, is utterly dominated by the category of *sex*. Now, the distinction or opposition between the brush and the ink, respectively assimilated to *mountain* and *water* (Shitao: "You must make the ocean of the ink embrace and carry things, and the mountain of the brush set itself up and dominate"),¹³³ is itself determined by that rule. ("The union of the brush and the ink is that of Yin and Yang. The indistinct fusion of Yin and Yang constitutes the original chaos. And without the means of the Unique Brush Stroke, how could one clear the original chaos? . . . The metamorphosis of the One produces Yin and Yang, and that is how all the potentialities of the world come to be accomplished.")¹³⁴

The above observations are by now common knowledge, albeit sometimes misunderstood, despite Granet's decisive analysis. The couple formed by the *yin* and the *yang*, which "evoke [all other emblems, grouped in couples] with such force that they seem to bring them into being, both them and their coupling," wields an authority that is founded upon sexuality. What most frequently prompts Western criticism is the fact that it is an authority that does not lend itself to an idealist interpretation since, as Granet stresses, the two terms "constitute the two antithetical aspects of what we should call matter or substance."¹³⁵ But that applies equally to the ink/brush couple (and "couple" should here be given its sexual connotation). But whereas in Western categories activity (assimilated to spirit or mind) tends to be valued more highly than passivity (linked to matter), in Chinese thought, if the brush is in any way privileged over the ink, it is certainly not the kind of privilege that is associated with the West-

ern "idea." Even to speak in terms of passivity/activity is to go either too far or not far enough: the ceaseless exchange of oppositions and functions (between ink/brush, host/guest, etc.) is characteristic of a type of thought that systematically plays upon opposition as a means of expression, and in which every term needs its contrary if its meaning is to be revealed in all its complexity.¹³⁶

Anyone who can seize upon the sea only to the detriment of the Mountain, or the Mountain to the detriment of the sea, in truth has only an obtuse form of perception! But as for me, I do perceive! The Mountain is the Sea, and the Sea is the Mountain. The Mountain and the Sea know the truth of my perception: everything resides within man, through the free impetus of just the brush and just the ink!¹³⁷

So it is not hard to see that, in landscape painting, copying is not enough. "Painting is not a copy of a preexistent universe, it is itself a universe. . . . Painting is not a description of the spectacle of creation, it is itself a creation in the literal sense of the word, a microcosm the essence and mechanism of which are identical and parallel to those of the macrocosm."¹³⁸ In other words (with the important reservation that Chinese thought is not familiar with the idea of "Creation" in the Judeo-Christian sense of Creation with a capital C), painting does not borrow from the representational order or structure: and it would appear that, in its highest form (landscape), Chinese painting, like Chinese poetry (but possibly unlike Japanese painting and poetry), owes nothing to spectacle, that is to say theaters.¹³⁹ In principle it may be closer to geomancy (*fengshui*), the object of which is to determine the propensities of sites by taking into consideration the water currents (*shui*) and the air currents (*feng*), which are always studied in relation to the mountains.¹⁴⁰ The "field" of painting is defined by a double orientation, the horizontal/vertical, as much as by its "limits" (and has nothing to do with a "scene," in the sense understood by Paul Klee). And the function of a painter is analogous, *within his own field*, to that of the Leader whose primary function is to establish a certain order in space, and whose forays to the four *limits* of the empire correspond to the need to reconstitute its expanse rhythmically, classify its various spaces virtually, and at the same time define the cycle of the seasons.¹⁴¹

You must make the ocean of ink embrace and carry things, and the mountain of the brush set it itself up and dominate; then, their use must be greatly extended so

as to express the eight orientations, the various aspects of the Nine districts of the Earth, the majesty of the Fire Mountains, and the immensity of the Four Seas; and it must develop so as to include all that is infinitely great, and be focused minutely so as to accommodate all that is infinitely small.¹⁴²

Everything, right down to the controlled to-ing and fro-ing of the brush, from left to right, and from top to bottom, and so on must obey the same cosmological determinations as the movements of the sovereign. Epic poetry celebrated the voyages of Qin Shi Huangdi, the founder of the Chinese empire, and those of Emperor Wu, the great sovereign of the Han dynasty. Both endeavored to set the empire in order by building *an immense network of roads* running from north to south and from east to west.¹⁴³

The job of a Western painter, as defined by Alberti, is, by means of a kind of *repetitio rerum* that forms the basis of the representational structure, to establish the scene where a story will then take place (in the same way, as Georges Dumézil has shown, that priests of the Vedic hymns and the Roman *fétales* opened up their perspectives). In contrast, at his own level and within his own field, a Chinese painter, just like the prince or the responsible regent, is the regulator of rhythm, the person who gets the yin and the yang to act in concert.¹⁴⁴ In order to animate space and time, the sovereign has to take up position in the middle of the *Ming tang* and provide the year with its *empty center*.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the painter participates in the metamorphoses of the universe, plumbs the shapes of the mountains and rivers, measures the far-distant immensity of the earth, gauges the disposition of the peaks, and deciphers the dark secrets of the clouds and mists; but he must always return to "the fundamental rhythm of the Sky and the Earth,"¹⁴⁶ and, in order to contribute to their creative work, he must "make up the third": this expression (based on the etymology of *can* 參, "to participate") confers upon the work of the painter its full dialectical significance. *Before beginning to paint*, far from defining the space of the representation in advance, as a finite area, he "reserves" the place for the sky and the earth and, only then, in the middle left empty, decides upon the landscape, which is seen as a resolution of the contradiction of sky/earth and at the same time as a way of passing beyond it.¹⁴⁷ In Western art, the sky and the earth appear as two levels, the one above the other, conventionally defined and identified by a number of accessories (for sky, for instance, clouds, which also make communication between the two regions possible and, on occasion, serve as vehicles for the actors in the *istoria*). In

contrast, in Chinese art, sky and earth constitute two antithetical terms that, through their very opposition, combine to produce the landscape, provided that the painter has been able, with his brush stroke, to seize upon the rhythm in which they interact.¹⁴⁸ This rhythm is not finite, but infinite, for the scope of painting should both "expand to include the infinitely great" and contract "to accommodate the infinitely small."¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the Unique Brush Stroke, which represents the basic unit of the painting, "confers the infinity of the brush strokes."¹⁵⁰ It is a formula that, at the same time, confirms that this is an essentially *productive* idea, the potential infinity of which is deliberately underlined. However, it should not be imagined that, to create a painting, all that is necessary are a few brush strokes, a few marks on a sheet of paper or a piece of silk: if the rhythm of sky and earth is not established *at the very start* (and we now understand the logical function of that "rhythm"), all that will be obtained is a meaningless daubing,¹⁵¹ with no instructive value at all (whereas "among the paintings of the ancients, there is not one that fails to offer encouragement or advice").¹⁵²

CITATIONS

The question of /cloud/ in Chinese painting should be posed in the context of this symbolical logic or *emblematic system* (in the efficacious and productive sense in which Granet understands an emblem) that governs the painting of a landscape and that is summed up in the signifying dialectic between ink and brush. Once we accept that "form" can be conveyed otherwise than in and by "outline" (or outline is understood altogether freely, without reference to delineation),¹⁵³ the opposition that Leonardo draws between solid bodies (reducible to a composition of surfaces) and "bodies without a surface," with no precise or definite limits, ceases to be pertinent in the pictorial order. If the painter's mission is not to capture the fleeting appearance of things, but to seize upon their organizing principle, then clearly, despite superficial analogies, one is a long way away from any kind of "impressionism." And, again similarly, where "space" is concerned, it cannot be claimed that cloud in Chinese painting serves to dissolve the geometric frame and open it up onto the infinite. Chinese painting does relate to a space, but in a very different sense from Western painting, which is always obsessed with the fantasy of *trompe l'oeil* and is constrained by illusion, whether it surrenders to it or, on the contrary, rejects it. "If one en-

gages in painting mindful of its ability to render distance, the picture will not equal the (real) landscape. If, on the contrary, one takes as one's theme the marvelous work of the brush and the ink, the landscape will certainly not equal the picture."¹⁵⁴ All speculation on the status of "perspective" in Chinese painting is pointless given that what the latter pays no attention to is not "depth" (once again, it is quite clear that depth is not necessarily linked to perspective), but submission to a geometric order or the authority of one particular point of view. As Brecht remarks in a particularly illuminating note, "Chinese composition is not affected by the element of constraint with which we are so absolutely familiar. *Its order costs no violence.*"¹⁵⁵ Faced with an unrolled scroll painting, the spectator does not remain in the position of a passive observer. He or she leaps across the space to reach the four frontiers of the world, always responding to the impulses that are received from the antithetical elements that go to produce the landscape. He or she echoes the call of solitude and "responds" to that of the peaks of the majestic mountains and the forests swathed in clouds stretching far into the distance.¹⁵⁶ Cloud may contribute to this "concert," but it should not dominate the other voices or *violate* them as did, in Mi Fu's opinion, the landscapes of the famous Li Cheng: "Painted in very dilute ink, these landscapes look like dream [landscapes]. In the midst of the mist the rocks seem to move like clouds. It is very skillfully done, but there is little truth in the inspiration."¹⁵⁷

Even if, as *Mustard Seed* states, clouds provide a *recapitulation* of painting methods, the purely technical question of how they are "rendered" is less crucial than the logical position assigned to this element in the landscape. According to the "two sections" method, which Shitao criticizes, clouds should be *added* between the mountain *above* and the scene *below*, so as to emphasize the separation of the two levels. This mechanical and conventional division should not be confused with the separation into the sky/earth levels from which Western painting derives many of its effects. It conveys nothing of the interchanges and interaction between the above and the below, the sky and the earth, the mountain and the water, since, quite literally, the sky and the earth have no place in a Chinese landscape, which is established in between the two. The landscape must express the (antithetical) structure and the (dialectical) impulse of the universe by means of a whole series of effects, which Shitao lists.¹⁵⁸ The rivers and the clouds assume a decisive function in such a work, for "in their gathering or their

dispersion they constitute the link," while the sky embraces the landscape with its winds and clouds and the earth animates it with its rivers and rocks, according to the rhythm that accounts for all the metamorphoses of the landscape, and all the reversals and inversions of signs of which it is both the product and the place. In other words, cloud, in these circumstances, does not signify any kind of transcendence. Its function is not solely to emphasize the height of the mountains and the depth of the forests; for it also constitutes one of the elements through which the mountain communicates with its contrary: in relation to the mountain the clouds assume the role that is assigned to water in the mountain (brush)/water (ink) dialectic.¹⁵⁹ Rocks are the bones of the mountains, but waterfalls are the bones of rocks: nothing is stronger than water, for water, in the last analysis, wears away rocks and shakes even the highest mountains (Laozi: "Nothing is more flexible and weaker than water, yet to remove what is hard and strong, there is nothing to surpass it"). Water is like the blood that engenders bones, and like the marrow that nourishes them; a dead bone, one with neither blood nor marrow, is no longer a bone. A mountain with neither water nor clouds is no longer anything but a dead skeleton.¹⁶⁰ And that is why rock is called "the root of cloud" (*yun ben*): the mountain gives birth to cloud; vapor is as it were its breath.¹⁶¹

The clouds are the ornament of the sky and the earth, the embroidery of the mountain and the waters. They are as swift as a galloping horse. They dash themselves against the rocks [of the mountains in such a way] that one hears the noise that they make. Such is the vigor of cloud! In general, when the Ancients painted clouds, they had two secrets.

Firstly, at the spot in the landscape where a thousand peaks and ten thousand precipices gather in great numbers, they would conceal them by means of clouds. The blue-tinged peaks penetrate the sky and all of a sudden scarves of white spread out horizontally, separating them in layers. When the upper part of the mountains pierce through the clouds, their blue tips reappear. As writers say, this is the way to seek calm in precipitation. Using the five colors, this is how to charm the eyes of spectators.

Secondly, at the spot in the landscape where the mountains and the precipices are too few and far between, by using clouds one adds movement. Where there is neither water nor mountain the layers [of clouds] begin. They undulate like [the waves] of the great sea and seem to be formed from mountain peaks. It is the same as what writers call "making citations from poetry so as to increase the power of one's style."¹⁶²

Mustard Seed provides a precise summary of the plastic functions assigned to /cloud/ in landscape painting. Where the composition is too cluttered, cloud makes it possible to articulate it and abbreviate it (this is called seeking calm in precipitation). Where, on the contrary, there is mostly emptiness, cloud serves to introduce movement. And the notion of *citation* makes a timely intervention at this point, for cloud makes *intertextual* exchanges possible between the mountain and the water—thereby imparting to this concept its full material resonance. The water and the mountain exchange their texts (their "characters") and even their *texture*, with the clouds seeming to be both the product and the sign of that exchange.¹⁶³ *Mustard Seed* places the question of clouds right at the end of its list of methods of painting landscapes because, yet again, they provide a *recapitulation*, "for in [their] elusive emptiness one catches many glimpses of mountains and water courses hidden there. That is why one speaks of mountains of clouds and seas of cloud."¹⁶⁴

THE INSCRIPTION OF EMPTINESS

However, "the winds and clouds do not surround all landscapes in the same way, and rivers and rocks do not animate all landscapes following a single method of wielding the brush."¹⁶⁵ This brings us back to the question that was at stake in the debate between on the one hand the "blowers of clouds" and other practitioners of "spattered" ink, on the other those who favored the *brush stroke*. Chinese painting, like Western painting, was familiar with clearly delineated clouds as well as with mists with indistinct outlines. As we have seen, it was a difference in treatment that overlapped with an opposition that made a massive impact on "the history of art" as China knew it. The opposition was between the "blue and green manner" with clear and precise outlines and the *yi pin* manner of the scholars, the "manner without constraints," and in the eighteenth century this was duplicated by another opposition between two styles of landscape painting. The *mi* style was essentially descriptive and punctilious over details, and was favored by Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei, who worked with such care that "one could not see where their lines ended." Meanwhile, the "abbreviated" *shu* style was adopted by Zhang Sengyou and Wu Daozi who on the contrary spaced out their dots and lines so much that completely void spaces appeared ("in this their thought was fully expressed, even though the drawing remained incomplete").¹⁶⁶ The names that tradition links with the two

styles are of artists who were famous for their talent not only as painters but also as calligraphers. The work of painting could not be dissociated from that of writing, which, using the brush and ink as it did, involved the same elements and proceeded from the same dialectic (to such a degree, indeed, that by the Yuan period scholars already preferred to designate painting by the *xie* character 寫, "to write," rather than by the *hua* character 畫).¹⁶⁷ But writing and calligraphy had, even as early as the Han period, been subject to a similar division between the regularity of "correct" (*zheng*) writing, used for official documents, and the cursive so-called grass writing (*cao shu*), the rough style, which was for a long time prohibited and possibly owed part of its success to that disapproval, which, however, became increasingly relative as the years passed.¹⁶⁸

Of course both historical and theoretical consequences stemmed from the fact that, both in the Far East and in the West, painting was linguistically associated with writing: in both, the same word or character (graphein, xie, 寫) was used to designate the two practices. In the West, the paradigm, given that it operated phonetically, led to the pictorial process being analyzed in terms of representation, derivation, *projection* (see Chapter 3, p. 116), on the basis of a structure that was already verbalized and articulated in accordance with the ways of *logos*. In China, in contrast, writing did not lead to a phonetic analysis of language and was not seen as a more or less faithful transfer of speech, and that fact in its turn delivered painting from its dependence upon a preexistent "neutral" totality that claimed to be the totality of all that was signified. In other words, painting was definitively liberated from any dependence upon language, upon *logos* as *phonè* and—with the backing of the argument that a deep connivance running through the entire instituted system linked the lines traced in pictures with the lines traced by writing—it was established at the origin of the interaction from which language, alongside "logic" or "science," stemmed.

Suffice it to note at this point that, where both writing and painting were concerned, cloud was associated with the kind of transgression that is justified by a quest for *spontaneity*: "Calligraphy has the spontaneous [*ziran*]. Once the spontaneous is there, the Yin and the Yang are manifest. Once the Yin and the Yang are manifest, the drawing of forms appears."¹⁶⁹ It was while watching the summer clouds glide by on the wind that the monk Huaisu (eighth century) suddenly seized upon the idea of

the brush and obtained *samadhi* (ecstasy) from ink;¹⁷⁰ and, similarly, it was the views of clouds painted by Mi Fu that revealed the *samadhi* of ink to Dong Qichang, the great critic of the Ming period.¹⁷¹ In his *Hua yang*, the same Dong Qichang declared that a landscape painter "should apply his thought to the engendering of clouds. Colors cannot be used. [The effect] should spring from the purity of the ink, with a result resembling the vapours of breath, which always seem on the point of falling. Only then can one speak of the harmony of the vital movement."¹⁷² One can see how it was that Zhang Yanyuan, while agreeing that through this "wonderful solution" one seizes upon the principle of nature, assimilated those who operated with *spattered* ink or (by virtue of the homophony of the characters) *broken* ink to the "blowers of clouds." And although, as Nicole Vandier-Nicolas observes, it is hard to tell quite what the first masters of water washes understood by this, later texts are perfectly explicit:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, painters who worked with spattered ink first constructed their subject by casting light (*zhao yin*) upon the mountains and the forests. They thus left empty spaces between the forms that they had suggested, so as to allow the breath to circulate throughout the painting. Next, with a few light touches, they made sure that "the empty spaces and the full ones" were connected, and then they animated the whole scene by setting in opposition the blacks made with dry ink and the pale tones treated with ink saturated with water. Once the painting had dried, what remained to be done was to "encage" the darkest points with a veil of pale ink: namely, the mountain summits, the peaks, and even the spaces left empty between the swathes of mist.¹⁷³

So just as *Mustard Seed* declares, it truly is the ink—the ink that differentiates between the shadows and the light—that first gives the "outlines" by "shedding light" on the mountains and the forests. But, once again, that does not mean the ink on its own, without the brush; rather, it means that, in this particular operation, the brush must not be detectable.¹⁷⁴ The endeavor of many calligraphers-painters to allow no trace of their labor to be detectable in the finished work was matched by the painters of views of mists and clouds. However, it is also important to repeat that Chinese painting can by no means be reduced to a more or less pictorial "cloudiness." As we have seen, Mi Fu himself harbored reservations about the landscapes of Li Cheng, painted in very dilute ink. But it was left to an eighteenth-century critic, Tang Zhiqi, to rally to the traditional and *dialectical* concept of landscape painting, and condemn the reduction implied

by procedures that gave precedence to the ink over the brush, to the water over the mountain, and—in the last analysis—to painting over reality:

The *qiyun shendong* (revolutions of breath, movements of life) and vaporous or unctuous effects are not [things] of the same [order]. Sophisticated people are much mistaken when, in connection with those vaporous and unctuous [effects], they speak of the movement of life (*shendong*). . . . Breath can [manifest itself by means of] lines, ink and color. One can also consider its organizational capacities, its strength, and its dynamism. All these have to do with its revolutions. As for the vital movement itself, revolutions of breath [as conveyed by the brush] cannot take its place.¹⁷⁵

All credit to Tang Zhiqi for having made clear the fundamental principle of the Chinese theory of painting: painting should be recognized to be a specific signifying practice. It is on the basis of that specificity, of the *difference* upon which it is founded as a signifying practice, that painting should be considered in its relationship to reality—a relationship of understanding rather than expression, of *analogy* rather than duplication, of *working* rather than substitution. But *working* and *understanding* mean not just a working with and understanding of the ink and the brush. The text quoted above reveals another “trait” that has nothing to do with linearity and that is characteristic of Chinese painting, namely the role that falls to empty space and, through it, to the substratum (or material upon which the picture is painted).¹⁷⁶ “Chinese artists also have a great deal of room on their paper. Some parts of the surface seem unused. Yet they play an important role in the composition. Their dimensions and shape seem to have been planned with as much care as the outlines of objects. In these gaps, the paper or linen has a value of its own. The artist does not wish to deny the surface as a whole by covering it entirely. A mirror in which something here is reflected retains its value as a mirror. What this implies is a happy rejection of the complete submission of the spectator, for he can never be totally persuaded by the illusion.”¹⁷⁷ In the West, the fact is that the brush is called upon to *cover* the canvas, in other words, to make it disappear under the applied layer of preparations, oils, pastes, and varnishes, thereby, at the level of the senses, magnifying the “annihilation” of the substratum that is implied by the perspective construction. Also, in the West, phonetic writing tends to efface its materiality and strive to make itself independent of any substratum in order to operate as closely as possible to *phonè*. In contrast, Chinese painting and Chinese writing always derive part of their

radiance (*shen zai*) from the quality of the silk or paper that is used. Some calligraphers even thought that that radiance should take precedence over the *xing shi*, the material body of the character drawn. So it is even more remarkable to find Guo Xi declaring in his *Linguan gaozhi* that mists and clouds give the mountain its *shen zai*,¹⁷⁸ thereby clearly indicating the link between /cloud/ and the substratum as it is revealed in its specific radiance by the paradoxical *inscription of emptiness* that is authorized by the dialectic between the ink and the brush. (But by the same token, clearly /cloud/, once it assumes this eminently scriptural function, will not necessarily lend itself, on a flat, two-dimensional surface, to being detectable or delimited, as a denoted unit or an identifiable graph: “views of mist and clouds” may well occupy an enviable place in the hierarchy of pictorial forms; but quite possibly the whole of Chinese painting contains not one single *cloud* in the sense in which Ruskin *understood* the word.)

Fabric and Garment

We see then that everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated by the linen itself, as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat. Only it reveals its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar, the language of commodities. In order to tell us that labour creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e., its value, consists in the same labour as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as a value differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and therefore that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value, it and the coat are as like as two peas.

—Karl Marx, *Capital*

Throughout its entire history—a history that a pictorial text *describes* within its own order and at its own specific level—Western thought, from Aristotle down to Leonardo da Vinci and to Descartes, has stubbornly rejected the idea of *emptiness*. It has done so through an ideological impulse, which, in its turn, indicates a far more profound rejection, in which—as now, following Althusser's and Sollers's work on Lenin's text, we are beginning to see—materialism turns out to be what that thought has *suppressed*. In the pictorial field such a rejection or suppression finds expression in the “annihilation” of the material and technical substratum of the painted image. And that neutralization or annihilation was accomplished by the

institution of the perspective space in the guise of an objective setting, a perceptible continuum that borrows its substance from light. East/West: as we have seen, cloud seems to fulfill perfectly symmetrical functions in the two systems. In the Western system it serves to conceal the very principle that, in the Far East, it is its function to produce (although one question that remains unresolved is whether it is justifiable to associate under the same rubric, purely on the grounds of their sharing the same *denotation*, elements that, in two such heterogeneous systems, assume values and functions whose symmetry may be no more than apparent). More immediately, however, the digression by way of China has manifested the fundamentally materialist articulation between emptiness and the substratum to which a painting is applied—emptiness acting as the substratum, the substratum acting as emptiness; and at the same time it has revealed the meaning of the work by means of which Western painting has systematically endeavored to obliterate the fact of that annihilation. To take but one particularly revealing example, let us consider *The Dog in the Arena*, one of Goya's bullring scenes in the series of "black paintings" in the Quinta del Sordo. Even when the painting seems to be opening up to admit emptiness, that opening up still obeys the rules of *trompe l'oeil*: the zone that is left empty only presents itself as such thanks to its figures being evacuated and rearranged round the edges of the composition. The impression of "emptiness" obtained in this way is reduced to the effect of a "lack" that simply emphasizes the fullness of the "background" against which the figures stand out. This is in conformity with the requirements of a system that could only produce the scene of the representation by replacing the medieval background of gold by an illusionist space constructed according to the rules of a more or less constraining perspective, *an illusionist space that itself constituted a figure*. The formal coherence of the system was definitely provided not so much by the rigor—a frequently relative rigor—of the figures portrayed but rather by the degree to which the substratum was foreclosed. (That is why it was not until our digression by way of China that we could introduce the word *dialectic*, at last giving it its full theoretical resonance.)

The decisive break came with the last works of Cézanne, in which, in the gaps, in what is lacking in the image, the canvas itself manifests its material nature, while the attention paid to the flat surface of the picture wins out, once and for all, over endeavors to create an illusion of depth. It is through this shift from an *image*, offered to the imagination, to a *picture*,

offered as such to the spectator's perception, even more than through the deconstruction of the traditional space that made that shift possible, that Cézanne's work at the turn of the twentieth century marks a *break*. To be sure, Impressionism, by replacing the in-depth superposition of layers of paint and glaze by the juxtaposition of discrete dabs of color on the flat surface, had already restored a semblance of physical reality to the pictorial surface. (Huysmans even remarked, in connection with Whistler's paintings, that "the canvas is hardly full, here and there it even shows its grain.")¹⁷⁹ But for Monet, a dab of paint was still an instrument used to get forms to dissolve in the atmosphere. It was only with the advent of Cézanne that dabs of paint on the canvas assumed a constructive function.¹⁸⁰ Concerned as he was not to note his impressions, but to transcribe *sensations*, stubbornly pursuing "the realization of the part of nature which, falling before our eyes, gives us a picture,"¹⁸¹ Cézanne finally enabled the letter of the picture to triumph over the cipher of representation. Between the interpretation of the model and its realization,¹⁸² the picture offers itself as a *finite* place of a conversion in which the dab of paint, which repeats that place in its form and position,¹⁸³ presents itself as the operator. A dab of paint, not a line: for the method of construction cannot be reduced to drawing, which only conveys the configuration of what is visible but cannot capture the "reflection," the light that, through "general reflection," envelops things. (But a reservation of capital importance is called for at this point, namely that *light does not exist for the painter* and, from a theoretical point of view, it is necessary to distinguish between *optical* sensations, which are produced in the visual organ and which classify planes according to their degree of relative luminosity, and *coloring* [not "colored"] sensations, that is to say the signs that *represent* those same planes on the canvas, by means of the conversion that Cézanne denotes as a "realization," and that makes it necessary to raise the question of the signifier in painting in theoretical terms.)¹⁸⁴

The radically new relations that Cézanne introduced between drawing and color are such that "the strokes which build up the objects in all their compactness are open forms," the outline of an apple being constituted by "innumerable touches that overlap each other but also slip into the surrounding objects," and sometimes, paradoxically, are to be found outside the apple.¹⁸⁵ But this partly double attention—attention paid to the text of nature, and attention paid to the picture as a text, a text, as Clem-

ent Greenberg points out, whose density in the last analysis predominates over that of the object—also explains how it is that the canvas finally breaks through in the intervals between the dabs of paint applied to it here and there. The *thesis to be developed* is: “whatever our temperament or our power in the presence of nature, to provide an image of what we see, forgetting all that appeared prior to ourselves.” As he grew older, Cézanne was faced with problems that he had not expected and that increased the difficulty of his task: “Now, at about seventy years of age, my coloring sensations which give light are causing abstractions that prevent me covering my canvas or proceeding with the delimitation of objects when the points of contact are tenuous and delicate; *as a result, my image or picture is incomplete.*”¹⁸⁶ Of course, the extraordinarily innovative aspect of Cézanne’s oil paintings and also of the watercolors that he produced in his last years should not be ascribed to any waning in his visual acuity; on the contrary, what is important is that the painter found his diminishing “power in the presence of nature” good reason for allowing free rein to his coloring sensations,¹⁸⁷ in other words, again, to the signs of his optical sensations, thereby opening up the way for *abstraction*, an abstraction that, as he himself said, with considerable *prescience*, broke away both from the annihilation of the substratum of the painting and from delineation, and was the consequence of the dialectical conjunction of color and surface. For at this point there was no question of continuing to try to save figures by means of lines, as the Neo-Impressionists were to: on the one hand the image (but not the *picture*, as the painters who took over Cézanne’s work where he left off were to be keen to show) was incomplete; “on the other hand the planes fall one upon another, and this gives rise to the Neo-Impressionism that circumscribes contours with a black line, *a mistake that should be opposed as strongly as possible.*”¹⁸⁸

It is remarkable that, even as he lamented the infirmities of old age, Cézanne perceived the scale of the break that his work heralded. The idea repeatedly crops up in the correspondence of his last years, sometimes with a prophetic tone (“I am doggedly working, and catch glimpses of the promised land. Shall I be like the great leaders of the Hebrews, or shall I be able to enter it?”).¹⁸⁹ So well aware was he of the altogether transgressive nature of his work in relation to the traditional canons of depiction that he had no hesitation in comparing himself to the painter of *The Unknown Masterpiece* (“Frenhofer, that’s me”), the author of the “fictional picture.”

This “wall of painting,” as Balzac called it, owed nothing to the outward forms of representation and offered nothing to seize upon to any analysis that proceeded from denotation—unless, that is, amid “this chaos of colors, tones, and vague nuances, a kind of formless fog,” the spectator could make out the tip of a naked foot, “a fragment that had escaped a slow, incredible destruction,” as Pourbus did in Balzac’s story and, feeling somehow reassured, cried out, “There’s a woman underneath it all.” The canvases of Cézanne’s last period are certainly not palimpsests; but, as in that “wall of painting,” the unknown masterpiece, the lateral relations between one dab and another, one tone and another, definitely win out over the vertical relation between figures and their referent, the only relation understood by any reading limited to the order of verbal denotation. It is laterality that in its turn establishes itself as the order of *literality*, in which even the “blanks” “assume an importance” (Mallarmé: “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard”),¹⁹⁰ and in which the substratum of the painting becomes the equivalent of emptiness, the same void that constituted a substratum upon which, according to Epicurus, atoms clustered together in variable order and arrangement, “like letters which, although there are not many of them, nevertheless, when they are arranged in different ways, produce innumerable words.”¹⁹¹

Cézanne, who was an assiduous reader of *De rerum natura*, declared that, in order to paint a landscape well, he first had to discover its geological foundations.¹⁹² Accordingly, instead of the studies of skies and clouds of his Romantic and Impressionist predecessors, he produced a mass of studies of rocks, depicted in all their stratification and fragmentation and with all their faults—rocks that he analyses so thoroughly in terms of his coloring sensations that he makes them look like clusters of cloud, thereby reversing Lucretius’s observation on clouds (“Often we seem to see high mountains advancing, trailing loosened rocks attached to their sides . . .”). But this reversal, unlike that implied by the “service of clouds,” carries a truly dialectical impact in so far as Cézanne’s deconstruction, far from following in the wake of a more or less fantastical “cloudiness,” on the contrary produces, as a material component of the pictorial process, the very element that Romantic landscape painting was still endeavoring to obliterate, namely the surface, as the substratum for any inscription and any construction, the substratum as surface, the raw material that it is the job of painting to articulate. The production of that surface, that substratum,

confers meaning upon the interminable theory of /cloud/ in Western painting, and at the same time makes manifest the way that it has been used as a screen to mask a suppression: the suppression of the signifier, the suppression of *painting* as a specific practice, a materialist process of production. It was up to theory, understood not as a procession of works or texts but as a production of concepts, to show how a certain "cloudiness" was used to mask the return of something suppressed that was indicated in the very contradictions of Ruskin's text, and to pinpoint the moment when, in the work of Cézanne, that censorship was lifted. However, as the present text draws to a close, it is important to dispel or prevent any confusion. The substratum, the "canvas" as revealed by Cézanne and set up as a signifier, is by no means a *given fact*, as positivist ideology would have it. (So much is perfectly clear when you reflect, as Meyer Schapiro does, that the prepared, delimited, pictorial flat surface, let alone the free-standing panel, is a relatively recent acquisition in the history of the human race, and that for many thousands of years painting used as its substratum the extremely irregular surfaces of cave walls, sometimes going so far as to exploit certain accidental bumps in the rock, as for instance in Altamira.)¹⁹³ The canvas is the product of a history, the history of Western painting, a history that has yet to be written from a materialist point of view.

In particular, the emptiness that Cézanne resuscitates in his watercolors should not be confused with the emptiness exploited in Chinese painting, which, for its part, is the product of a *different* history, also one that has yet to be written. It is today possible to put forward the idea of such a history and also that of a general theory that would interweave particular histories within a dialectical perspective; and the reason why this is possible is that contemporary painting has developed in such a way that it demands that the task be undertaken. Hence the paradox in which contemporary painting finds its point of departure, a paradox that El Lissitzky expressed in his own way in his lecture "New Russian Art" (1922), when he declared at one and the same time that, since art never evolved, the new pictorial order owed nothing to the past, and also that the flat surface of the suprematist canvas appeared as the ultimate expression of space, the last link in the long sequence of "impressions of space" that constituted that evolution.¹⁹⁴ The infinite white plane of Malevitch, the *finite*, square, or rectangular panels of Mondrian (although now the notions of both the finite and the infinite no longer mean what they did in the context of the Renaissance), appear at once as the direct product of the break made by Cézanne and as the point

of departure for modern painting: painting at last liberated from the clouds that used to burden it. But of course we should also note the returns that cloud made in the Cubist period, as an element used both constructively and as a gap filler in Delaunay's *Windows* and *Towers* and in Léger's *Wedding* (see Plate 8), its recurrence, again in Léger, as a "demystified" object, surrounded by the same outline as a leaf or the handlebars of a bike, a tricky element, to be fixed, as the painter put it, by the metallic structures of his *Builders*; and later, in Liechtenstein, where it appears in the guise of a rent in the continuity of a regular fabric. Nor should we forget the role that it assumed, as a reflection repeated ad infinitum in Monet's series of *Water-lilies* (contemporary with the first compositions of Mondrian), the format of which prepared for the work of Pollock, extended to the dimensions of whatever canvas was able to sustain its impact. But those returns and detours only take on their dialectical meaning in relation to another history, improbable as yet, that of modern art, from which the present study both proceeds and at the same time claims to do no more than mark its threshold. In such a history, painting, to borrow Marx's language at last, would cease to pretend that the sublime reality that the garment confers upon the fabric/canvas can be separated from the latter's more or less stiffly woven body. This history would endeavor to express its thinking in a language other than that of *merchandise*, the language that made Pontormo consider a painting as a kind of woven fabric indistinguishable, apart from the relative value attached to it, from the woven fabric of the canvas itself. This would be in conformity with the principle set out by Marx, according to which all work, in as much as it produces value, can be reduced to one and the same abstract measurement that makes the garment the equivalent of the fabric and the mirror of its value. (In the classical system, the fabric/canvas has a value, a derisory value, only because it is related to the picture painted upon it, a reference that abolishes its materiality, for only the superficial crust that covers it, the clothing that conceals it, is worth something.) The history that I have in mind, because it would be materialist, but qualitative rather than quantitative, and dialectical rather than quantifiable, far from treating pictorial work as merchandise solely from the point of view of the value that it produces, would conceive of it as materially determined, as a specific practice the productivity of which would be measured by the extent of the effects to which it could lay claim in the symbolic order.



PLATE 1A. Correggio, *The Vision of Saint John on Patmos*. The cupola of San Giovanni Evangelista, Parma (Alinari-Giraudon).

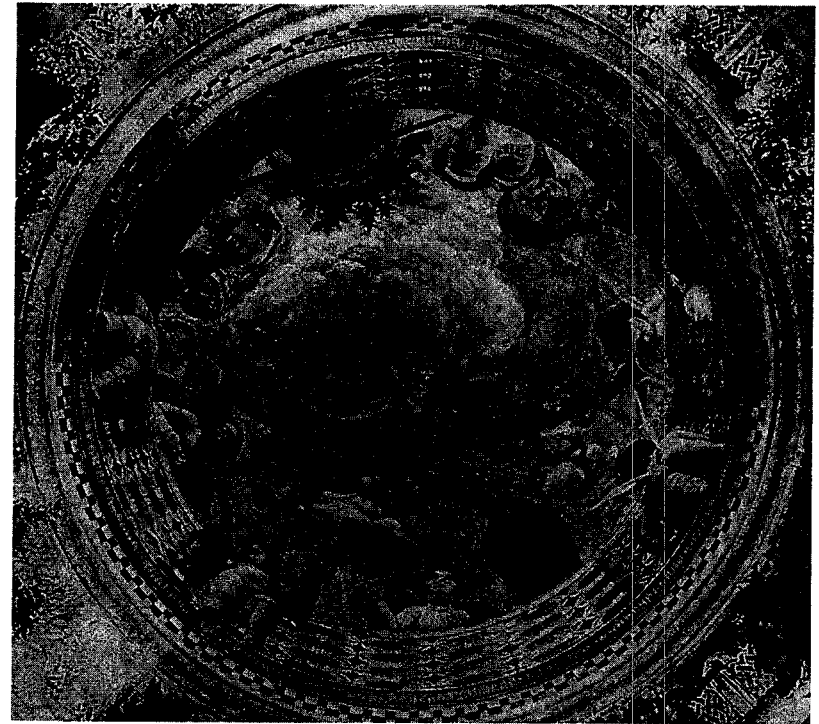


PLATE 1B. Mantegna, lunette on the ceiling of the Spouses' Chamber, Ducal Palace, Mantua (Anderson-Giraudon).

PLATE 2. Zurbarán, *The Vision of the Blessed Alonso Rodriguez*. Academia San Fernando, Madrid (Anderson-Giraudon).



PLATE 3. Mantegna, *The Ascension of Christ*. Right-hand panel of the triptych
The Adoration of the Magi. Uffizi Gallery, Florence (Anderson-Giraudon).



PLATE 4A. Giotto (attr.), *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis*. Upper basilica, Assisi (Anderson-Giraudon).

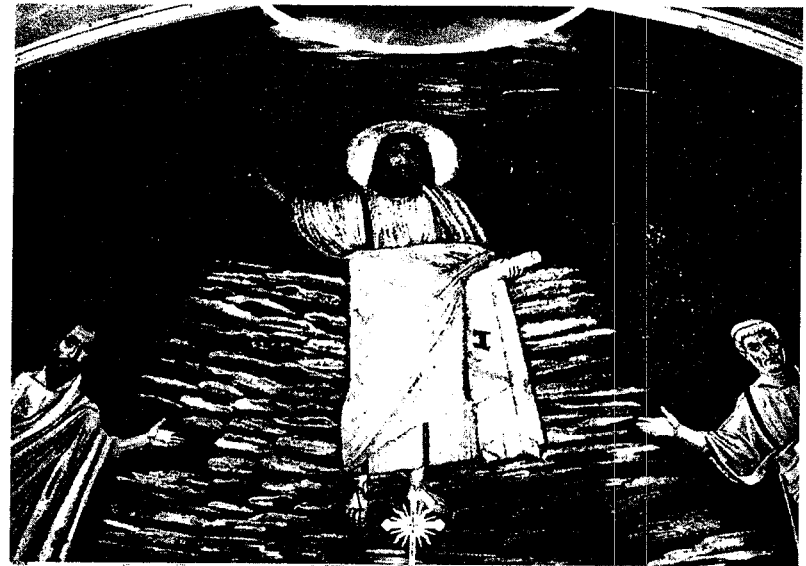


PLATE 4B. Anon., *The Ascension of Christ* (detail). Sixth-century mosaic in the apse of the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome (Anderson-Giraudon).



PLATE 5. Masolino, *The Foundation of Santa Maria Maggiore*. Capodimonte Museum, Naples (Anderson-Giraudon).

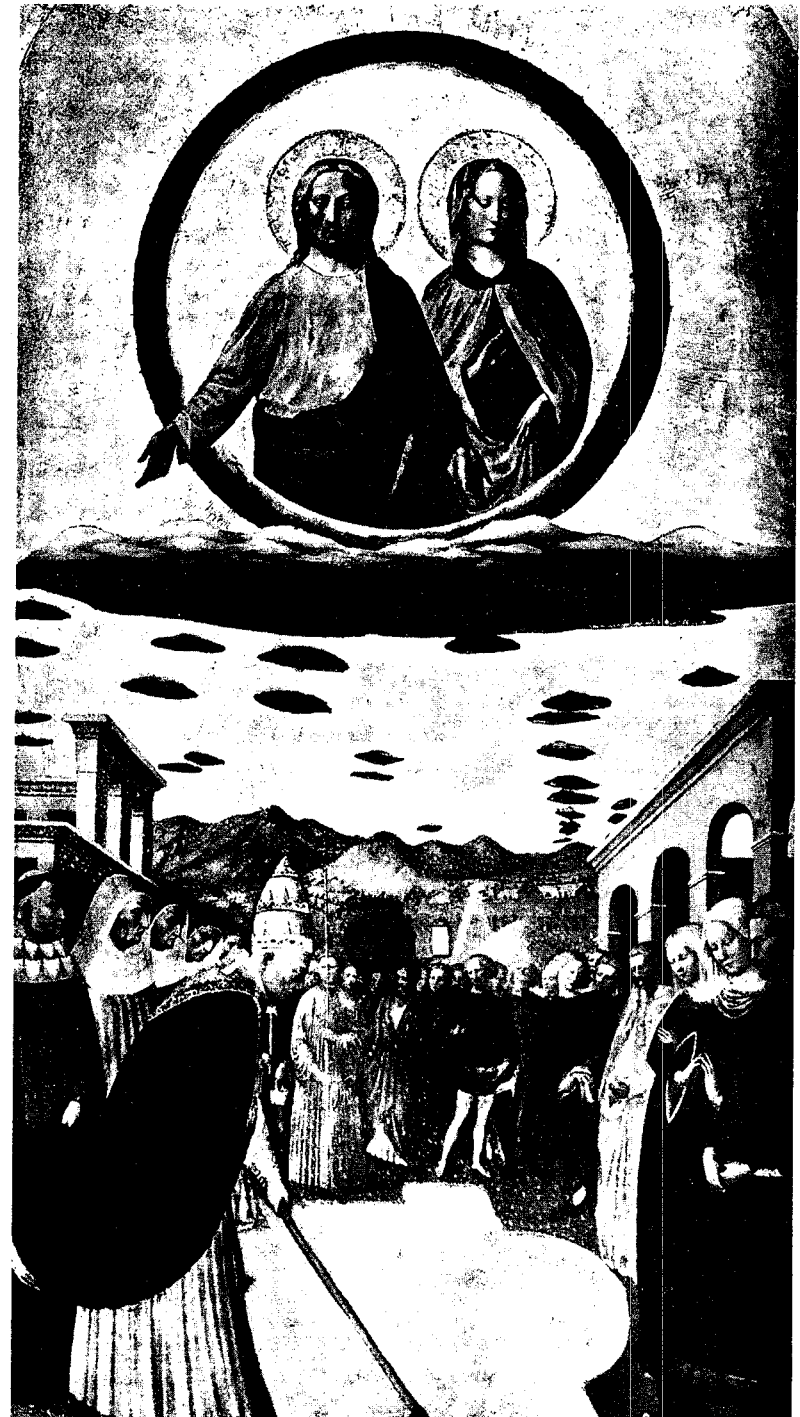




PLATE 6A. Anon., *Jacob's Dream* (Bible, c. 1300). MS 138, fol. 42r, Pierpont Morgan Collection, New York.



PLATE 6B. Astronomer, copyist, and calendar maker (Paris Psalter, thirteenth century). MS a.46185, fol. iv, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.



PLATE 7A. Constable, *A Study of Clouds* (dated 6 September 1882). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

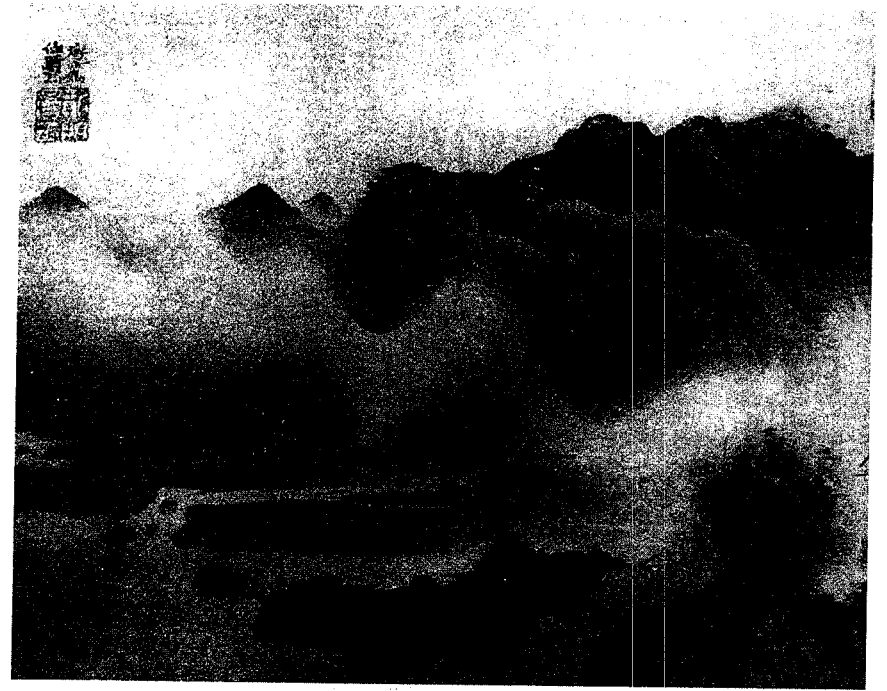


PLATE 7B. Gao Ranhui (attr.), *Summer Mist* (thirteenth or fourteenth century). Traditionally attributed to Mi Fu. Private collection, Japan (Photo J.-R. Masson).



PLATE 8. Léger, *The Wedding* (1911-12). Museum of Modern Art, Paris (Giraudon).

REFERENCE MATTER

CHAPTER 5 *Our Sheet's White Care*

1. As I myself attempted to do in a much earlier draft of the present chapter, "Un 'Outil' plastique: Le nuage," *Revue d'esthétique* (January–June 1958): 104–48.
2. Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Assisting Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, 1st ed. (London, 1785); see Paul Oppé, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens* (London, 1952).
3. Cozens, preface to *A New Method*, cited in Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 2nd ed. (London, 1962), pp. 156–57. On Cozens, see H. W. Janson, "The 'Image made by Chance' in Renaissance Thought," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honour of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), pp. 254–66; and a forthcoming work by Jean-Claude Lebensztjen.
4. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, pp. 157–58.
5. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London, 1855), pt. 4, chap. 16; citing here from the 1856 ed., vol. 3, p. 255.
6. "We turn our eyes as boldly and as quickly as may be from the serene fields and skies of medieval art to the most characteristic example of modern landscape. And, I believe, the first thing that will strike us or that ought to strike us is their cloudiness" (*ibid.*, p. 254).
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 214.
8. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, sec. 3, chaps. 1 and 2. In the last volume of *Modern Painters* (pt. 7, "Of Cloud Beauty"), Ruskin compares a cloud to a leaf that comes between man and the earth, just as a cloud comes between man and the sky.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 218.
10. *Ibid.*, chap. 4.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pt. 4, chap. 15. See Leonardo da Vinci, "Buildings Appear Larger When There Is Mist," in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Edward MacCurdy (London, 1938), vol. 2, p. 324.
12. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, p. 257.
13. *Ibid.*, pt. 4, chap. 16.
14. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 213.
15. "There is not a moment of any day of our lives where nature is not producing scene after scene, picture after picture, glory after glory, and working still upon such exquisite and constant principles of the most perfect beauty that it is quite certain it is all done for us, and intended for our perpetual pleasure"; *ibid.*, p. 201.
16. In the first volume (p. 36) of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin classifies mystery among the six qualities (truth, simplicity, mystery, inadequation, decision, rapidity) of execution.
17. "There are landscapes that are volatized, dawns that fill the sky; celestial and fluvial festivals of a sublime, stripped nature, rendered completely fluid by a great poet." Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris, 1889), p. 202.

18. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 4, pt. 5, chap. 4, p. 56 ("On Turnerian Mystery").
19. For a particularly virulent attitude in this respect, see William Blake, "Annotations to Reynolds," in Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1957), pp. 445–79.
20. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 4, p. 57.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
23. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 115, note.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
25. *Ibid.*, pt. 1, sec. 1, chap. 5 ("Of Ideas of Truth").
26. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 111.
27. "Where ride the captains of their armies? Where are set the measures of their march?" *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 106.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
29. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 204.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 121.
31. It is remarkable that the paintings of Turner in which the dissolution (but not the deconstruction) of the perspective cube is the most extreme are not landscapes, seascapes, or studies of the sky, but interior scenes (see the series of *Interiors at Petworth*, c. 1830, now in the Tate Gallery), in which the cube, without however ceasing secretly to structure the composition, loses all oversharpe shapes. In one famous picture (*Rain, Steam, Speed*, 1844, National Gallery), Turner had no hesitation in associating "service of the clouds" with the emblem of modernity par excellence, the railway, as Monet was to in his Gare Saint-Lazare series, in which the linear structure corresponding to the metal roof is *repulsed*, significantly, by the steam emitted by the engines.
32. "Accidental shadows can also be used successfully, that is to say shadows caused by something outside the picture, provided they look real, as in a landscape, in which clouds naturally produce effects which make certain terrains disappear into the distance." Alexandre-François Desportes, cited in André Fontaine, *Conférences inédites de l'Académie de peinture* (Paris, 1903), p. 66.
33. "It is one of the most discouraging consequences of this work of mine that I am wholly unable to take notice of the advance of modern science. What has conclusively been discovered or observed about clouds, I know not; but by the chance inquiry possible to me I find no book which fairly states the difficulties of accounting for even the ordinary aspects of the sky." Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 5, p. 107.
34. Luke Howard, *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* (London, 1803), reprinted in *The Climate of London, Deduced from Meteorological Observations* (London, 1818–20). See Goethe's two studies on Howard (*Naturwissenschaftlichen*

Schriften) and his series of poems entitled "Atmosphäre," "Howards Ehrengedächtnis," "Stratus," "Cumulus," and so on:

The world which is so great and spreading,
The sky so high and distant,
All this my eyes can take in
But not my thoughts.

To find your way in infinity,
You must first distinguish, then gather things together.
That is why my winged song gives thanks
To the man who distinguished between the clouds.

(from "Atmosphäre")

35. Kurt Badt, *Wolkenbilder und Wolkengedichte der Romantik* (Berlin, 1960).

36. See Louis Hawes, "Constable's Sky Sketches," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969): 344–65.

37. Example: "5 Sept. 1822: 10 o'clock morning, looking south-east. Brisk wind at west. Very bright and fresh grey clouds running fast over a yellow bed, about half way in the sky."

38. In his *Lectures on Landscape Painting*, published by Charles Robert Leslie; see Badt, *Wolkenbilder und Wolkengedichte der Romantik*, pp. 74 and 77.

39. "And indeed, shapeless forms leave no memory except that of a possibility, . . . just as a series of notes struck at random is no melody, so a puddle, a rock, a cloud, a fragment of coastline are not reducible forms." Paul Valéry, *Dégas, danse, dessin*, in Valéry, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, p. 1194.

40. Goethe, letter to Zelter, 24 July 1823, cited in Badt, *Wolkenbilder und Wolkengedichte der Romantik*, p. 19 (my emphasis).

41. See the letter from Goethe published by Carl Gustav Carus as an introduction to his *Neuen Briefe über die Landschaftsmalerei* (1831), in Badt, *Wolkenbilder und Wolkengedichte der Romantik*, p. 36.

42. Goethe, "Wolkengestalt nach Howard" (1820), cited in Badt, *Wolkenbilder und Wolkengedichte der Romantik*, p. 24.

43. See Ruskin, *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century: Two Lectures Delivered at the London Institution* (Orpington, Eng., 1884), pp. 34–35. This is the very subject addressed by Goethe's *Farbenlehre*.

44. Epicurus, *Letter to Pythocles*, in Diogenes Laertius, para. 100, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

45. Lucretius, *De natura rerum* 6.160–61, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1953).

46. *Ibid.*, ll. 246–47.

47. Epicurus, *Letter to Pythocles*, trans. Hicks, p. 84.

48. See Goethe, "Ganymede":

Higher, higher I aspire
The clouds float
Toward me, bowing, the clouds
Toward my nostalgic love
Help me! Help me!
In your bosom? Raise me up!
Intertwining, intertwined,
Up there, on your chest; O all loving Father!

49. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 6.451–54.

50. *Ibid.*, ll. 462–66.

51. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 5, pp. 108–9.

52. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Le Cas Wagner," in *Le Crépuscule des idoles* (Paris, 1952), p. 35.

53. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*, in Nietzsche, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1967), p. 18 (my emphasis).

54. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Considérations*, p. 63.

55. Richard Wagner, "Le Théâtre des festivals scéniques de Bayreuth" (1873), in Wagner, *Oeuvres en prose* (Paris), vol. 11, pp. 170–74.

56. Richard Wagner, "Lettre sur la musique" (1860), *Oeuvres en prose*, vol. 6, p. 226.

57. Wagner, "Théâtre des festivals scéniques de Bayreuth," pp. 174–77.

58. See René Leibowitz, introduction to *Schoenberg et son école* (Paris, 1947).

59. "Only where sight and hearing combine mutually is the true artist satisfied." Wagner, "L'Oeuvre d'art de l'avenir," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 3, p. 137.

60. Richard Wagner, "Opéra et drame," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 4, p. 220.

61. Wagner, "L'Oeuvre d'art de l'avenir," p. 212.

62. Richard Wagner, "Sur la représentation du *Tannhäuser*" (1852), in *Oeuvres*, vol. 7, pp. 215–16.

63. Leibowitz, introduction to *Schoenberg et son école*, p. 59.

64. Richard Wagner, "Une communication à mes amis" (1851), in *Oeuvres*, vol. 6, pp. 57–58.

65. Debussy's *Nocturnes* (in particular the first of them, entitled *Clouds*) occupy a decisive historical position in this respect. In them, breaking away, despite appearances, from impressionism and the attractions of vagueness, Debussy strove to liberate the melodic line from thematic constraints, so that its instability and regulated energy would contribute to define the new musical space as an analytical field, founded on symbiosis, displacement, and transformation.

66. Wagner continually criticized the mechanisms that conferred a *tactile* reality upon the image of the stage, and insisted on the need to isolate that image and get it to emerge in all its essential ideality. See "Un Coup d'oeil sur l'opéra allemand contemporain," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 11, p. 86: "What disgusted me most about

it was the crudeness in laying bare all the mysteries of the scenery to the eyes of those spectators. Some believe that things that can only be effective from a carefully calculated distance must on the contrary be displayed as much as possible in the harsh footlights right at the front of the stage."

67. The very same year, 1888, in which Nietzsche wrote the letter from Turin that marked his break with Wagner, also saw the beginning of the publication, in monthly installments, of *Japon artistique*, edited by Samuel Bing, the future founder of the Salon de l'Art Nouveau.

68. Henri Focillon, *La Peinture au XIXe et XXe siècle, du réalisme à nos jours* (Paris, 1928), pp. 206–8.

69. "Never has painting been so mysteriously discreet, you would think it a piece of silk imbued with deep and pale colors. . . . Whistler's nocturnes are unique in the history of painting and represent in its highest form the art of suggestion or, if you like, the lyrical intimacy of Western landscape"; *ibid.*, pp. 198–99.

70. "The examination and contemplation of paintings [that represent] the Buddha and Buddhist scenes has an edificatory value that places such paintings in the highest rank. Next come landscapes, [the sources] of inexhaustible delights; views of mists and clouds are particularly beautiful. Bamboos and rocks come in the next class, then flowers and plants. As for pretty women and subjects 'with feathers or fur,' they are simply for the amusement of worldly people. They cannot be included among the pure jewels of art." Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 3, par. 158; see Nicole Vandier-Nicolas, *Le Houa-che de Mi Fou; ou, Le Carnet d'un connaisseur de l'époque des Song du Nord* (Paris, 1964), p. 147.

71. Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 3, pars. 19, 21, and 45; also pp. 35–36 and 49.

72. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 3, chap. 21; French trans. Raphaël Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise* (Paris, 1918), p. 173.

73. See Pierre Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao: Traduction et commentaire pour servir de contribution à l'étude terminologique et esthétique des théories chinoises de la peinture* (Brussels, 1970), pp. 63–64.

74. See Schuyler Camman, "The Symbolism of the Cloud-Collar Motif," *Art Bulletin* (1951): 1–9.

75. *Qing lü*: aerial perspective obtained by colors merging from blue into green, with gold and brilliant colors also used, along with very fine lines.

76. Petrucci, *Encyclopédie*, p. 173.

77. *Jin bi*: a technique similar to *qing lü*, but with a more pronounced use of gold.

78. Petrucci, *Encyclopédie*, pp. 173–74.

79. Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai ming hua ji* (annals of celebrated painters in the course of successive dynasties; a work completed in 847), cited by Nicole Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine: Mi Fou (1051–1107), peintre et connaisseur d'art dans la perspective de l'esthétique des lettrés* (Paris, 1963), p. 63.

80. On the aesthetics of the scholars, see Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*.

81. See Peter Swann, *Chinese Painting* (London, 1958). It is in this context that the text of Song Di (in the volume published by H. Giles as *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* [Shanghai, 1905]), cited at note 75 of Chapter 1, should be judged.

82. *Lidai ming hua ji*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 62. The same rejection of heterodox techniques is to be found in the eighteenth century on the part of Zou Yigui. See Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, pp. 46–47.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 132–34. See, for the Ming dynasty, the text of Dong Qichang cited in Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, pp. 34–35, n. 6: "Some people claim that every painter should found his own school. But that is nonsense. To paint willow trees, use the manner of Zhao Qianli; for pines, follow Ma Hezhi; for dead trees, follow Li Cheng; for those various models are eternal and could never be changed; and even if you reinterpret them in your own way, in the essentials you cannot diverge from this fundamental source. It would indeed be inconceivable to presume to creation of your own, scorning the classical rules."

84. "The paintings of Huang Cuan do not deserve to be collected together, they are easy to copy; the paintings of Su Hi cannot be copied." Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 3, par. 108; Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 97.

85. "Antiquity is the instrument of knowledge; to transform consists in knowing that instrument but without becoming its servant. Knowledge that is closely linked to imitating is bound to lack breadth; so a fine man only borrows from Antiquity in order to found something in the present. . . . As for me, I exist through myself and for myself. . . . And if it so happens that my work resembles that of some other master, it is he who is following me and not I who have sought him out." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 3 ("La Transformation"), pp. 31–32. In a similar vein, see *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 10 ("The Talent of Transformation"), and the texts cited in *ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

86. See Mi Fu: "With a single movement, I have swept away the dreadful style of the two Wang [the two most universally venerated calligraphers] and have illuminated the Song dynasty for ten thousand ages." Cited by Tang Hou; cf. Ryckmans, "Les Propos sur la peinture de Shitao," *Arts asiatiques* 14 (1966): 95, n. 4.

87. See Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 1, p. 11.

88. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 12, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 33.

89. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 16.

90. See James Cahill, *La Peinture chinoise* (Geneva, 1960), p. 11.

91. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 13, "Ink and Brush," Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 35.

92. Dong Qichang, cited in Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 46, n. 1.

93. Han Zhuo (twelfth century), *Shanshui chuan quan* (Complete treatise on landscape), cited in Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*.

94. Henri Focillon, *Hokusai* (Paris, 1925), pp. 19 ff.

95. See Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 80, n. 2; Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, pp. 131, 230, etc.

96. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 47, n. 1.

97. See the texts cited in *ibid.*, p. 73, n. 1.

98. *Ibid.*, chap. 15, p. 115.

99. *Ibid.*, chap. 9, p. 71.

100. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, chap. 12. In the thirteenth century, Li Song described meticulous architectural drawings as the "painting of limits," *jiai hua*; see Cahill, *La Peinture chinoise*, p. 54.

101. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 73, n. 1 (my emphasis).

102. *Ibid.*, chap. 6, p. 51.

103. "To have the brush but not the ink does not mean that a painting is literally without ink, but that the wrinkles and washes are reduced to very little; the outlines of rocks are starkly drawn, the trunks and branches of trees stand out harshly, giving the impression of a lack of ink or, as they say, of 'bones predominating over flesh.' To have the ink but no brush does not mean that the painting was truly produced without a brush; it means that, in the tracing of rocks and the painting of tree-trunks, the brush made only light touches while washes were used to excess so that they came to hide the brush strokes and obliterate the presence of the brush. This produces an impression of a painting devoid of a brush; it is what is known as 'flesh predominating over bones.'" Tang Dei, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

104. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1991), bk. 1, pp. 55–56; see Chapter 3, p. 111.

105. "Schauplatz ist die Fläche genauer die begrenzte Ebene." Paul Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken* (Basel, 1956), p. 39. It would be interesting to study how far medieval painting, if not the painting of antiquity, proceeded in the West, as did the later painting of the Renaissance, from a preliminary delimitation of the field or, as Klee called it, the pictorial "scene," for such an enquiry would be an indispensable preliminary to the elaboration of any theory of Western painting as such.

106. See Viviane Alleton, *L'écriture chinoise* (Paris, 1970), pp. 28–30.

107. *Ibid.*

108. In contrast, the base line of the quadrangle (*la linea di sotto qual giace nel quadrangolo*), as Alberti puts it, in Western painting takes on the importance of a *foundation*, since it is on its basis and thanks to its division into equal segments

that it becomes possible to plot out the checkerboard paving that constitutes the "floor" of the perspective construction.

109. See Chang Tung-Sun, "La Logique chinoise," *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (1939); French trans. in *Tel Quel* 38 (Summer 1969): 3–22.

110. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 16, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 44.

111. "The division into two sections consists in placing the scene below, the mountain above, and, conventionally, one then adds clouds in the middle to mark out more clearly the separation between the two sections." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 10, p. 79.

112. "When divisions are made according to the method of three successive planes or of two sections, they seem to ensure that the painting is spoilt. . . . If, in each landscape, one embarks upon a kind of clearing operation or cutting it up into pieces, the result will not be at all alive, for the eye can immediately detect how it has been fabricated. . . . If one paints according to this method of three planes, how can the result be any different from an engraved plaque?" *Ibid.*

113. Chang, "La Logique chinoise," p. 12.

114. *Gu fa yong bi shi ye* 骨法用筆是也, "The law of bones, using a brush" (Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 7), or, as James Cahill translates it, "The Six Laws and How to Read Them" (*Ars Orientalis* 4 [1961]: 372–81): "using the brush [according to] the method for bones." We need not go into the problems posed by the translation of Xie He's "Principles." But it is worth pointing out that the main difficulty encountered by Western specialists who are attempting to produce an equivalent translation in a European language is connected with the recurrence, in many statements, of the formula *shi ye*, which, according to the traditional interpretation, serves simply to identify the principle with its numerical order (see Cahill, *ibid.*; Alexander Soper, "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 8 [1948]: 412–23), while others assimilate it to a copula that gives articulation to the two pairs of characters that are in play in the manner of a definition ("which means," "that is to say"). Thus R. W. Acker (*Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* [Leiden, 1954], p. 4) translates the second principle as follows: "Bare method which is [a way of] using the brush." Quite apart from the fact that Chinese possesses no verb "to be," the difficulty stems from the inability of Western logic to cope with a form of thought that is not familiar with the problem of equating two terms. As Chang Tung-Sun ("La Logique chinoise," p. 10) declares, "a formula such as '*shi . . . ye . . .*' does not signify that anything is identical to anything else and consequently does not constitute a logical proposition such as appears in the Western structure." The point is made simply to underline, yet again, that, quite apart from the problem of the context in which these notions appear, it is impossible to transfer some notions from a Far Eastern text to a Western one.

115. "To draw the forms in conformity with the things" (Petrucci); "responding to things, images depict their form" (Cahill); "Correspondence to the object, which means the depicting of forms" (Acker).
116. "Apply the colour in accordance with the similarity of the objects" (Petrucci); "According to kind, set forth (describe) colours (appearances)" (Cahill); "Suitability to type, which has to do with the laying on of colours" (Acker).
117. "Distribute the lines and give them their hierarchical place" (Petrucci); "Dividing and planning, positioning and arranging" (Cahill); "Division and planning, i.e. placing and arrangement" (Acker).
118. Dai Xi, cited in Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 47.
119. *Meng yang*, "technical training," as Ryckmans translates it (*ibid.*, p. 48). The origin of this concept is to be found in *I Ching*: "The task of the saint is to distinguish rectitude from chaos." From this the expression, in everyday language, comes to mean the basic instruction given to a child beginning to learn to read Chinese characters.
120. See Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 2, p. 27: "Ink comes from Nature, thick or fluid, dry or unctuous, however one wants it. The brush is controlled by man in order to express outlines, wrinkles, and different kinds of washes, as he wishes to."
121. *Ibid.*, chap. 6, p. 51.
122. "Painting results from the reception of ink; ink from the reception of a brush; a brush from reception by a hand; a hand from reception from a mind." *Ibid.*, chap. 4, p. 41.
123. *Ibid.*, chap. 8, p. 63.
124. Chang, "La Logique chinoise," p. 12.
125. When referring to the pictorial practice or the pictorial theory of China, I am, clearly, not unaware of the fact that that practice and—to a lesser degree—that theory have a history, and that it would not be right to set on the same level a painter from the Han period and a Ming landscape painter. Quite apart from the fact that Chinese art is governed by a kind of historicity very different from the Western kind (a subject to which I hope to return), the reason why I here refer to Chinese painting and theory as a whole is simply in order to clear the way for a general theory in which Western art would lose its centralizing preeminence.
126. Jing Hao (?), *Bi fa ji* (Notes on the method of the brush; tenth century), cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 188.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
128. "When tackling the mountain, painting finds its soul; when tackling water, it finds its movement." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 7, p. 57.
129. "A girl, perceiving the shadow of her lover on a wall, will draw the outline of that shadow." Chateaubriand, *La Génie du christianisme*, bk. 1, chap. 3 (a fable taken over from Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 35).

130. Guo Xi, *Linquan gao zhi*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 205.
131. Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 3, par. 24; Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 36.
132. Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, pp. 115-48.
133. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 17, p. 115.
134. *Ibid.*, chap. 7, p. 57.
135. Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, pp. 123-24.
136. Chang, "La Logique chinoise," p. 12.
137. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 13, p. 89.
138. *Ibid.*, pp. 49 and 58.
139. "As men of the past have said, a poem is a painting without shapes, a painting is a poem that takes a [visible] shape. Philosophers have often expounded on this theme and I, for myself, have regarded this as a guiding principle. Thus in my days of leisure I have often meditated upon the poems of the Jin and the Tang, both those of the past and those of the present. Some of these fine lines give perfect expression to the deep activity of man (*fu zhong zhi shi*: visceral activity), others, in ornate fashion, describe the spectacle presented to their eyes. . . . What is the best way to discern the idea by which painting is guided? When everything around me becomes familiar, and my heart and my hand are at one, I can at last freely conform to the rules and discover in all that surrounds me a way to return to the source." Guo Xi, *Linquan gao zhi*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, pp. 195-96.
140. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 118, n. 5. See E. J. Eitel, "Feng-shuei ou principe de sciences naturelles en Chine," *Annales du musée Guimet* 1 (1880): 203-53.
141. The journeys that painters were traditionally expected to make may be compared to the epic theme of the forays made by emperors. The training of a painter is not limited to literary culture and a knowledge of the works of the ancients: "It is also necessary for an artist either in a carriage or on horseback, to make tracks, in his journeys, across a good half of the universe. Only then will he be able to wield the brush." Guo Xi, cited in Ryckmans, "Les Propos sur la peinture de Shitao," p. 112, n. 6. The journeys of Zong Bing (375-443) took him first to the east (the starting point for the activity of Yang, which is linked to the spring), next to the south. Only then, forced by ill health to return home, did he paint the sites that had delighted him on the [four] walls of his room.
142. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 17, p. 115. The eight directions correspond to the eight trigrams in an octagon in the *I Ching*. As for the number five (the five mountains, but also the five elements, the five sounds, the five colors, etc.) situated in the middle of the nine prime numbers (the nine provinces, the nine rivers, the nine heavens, the nine rubrics of the *Hong Fang*, the nine halls of the *Ming Tang*, etc.), it is regarded as the symbol of the Center (see

Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, chap. 3, "Le Système du monde"). In other words, the four pillars and the four cardinal mountains that in nature play a role analogous to that of the leaders of society now seem to be complemented by a fifth, corresponding to the central pillar and assimilated to the axis of the universe. The four (barbarian) seas correspond to the inorganic space that circumscribes the saints. Ibid., p. 359.

143. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 318.

144. Ibid., p. 125.

145. "To enable the sovereign to exercise his central action, it was necessary, between the sixth month, which marked the end of the summer, and the seventh, which was the first month of autumn, to institute a kind of time of rest, counted as one month although not attributed any definite duration. It only possessed an intellectual duration, and this in no way encroached upon the twelve months or the seasons; yet it was far from being of no account: it was the equivalent of a whole year, for within it seemed to lie the motor of the year"; ibid., p. 103.

146. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 8, p. 64.

147. "Lu Chaishi said: Su Wen Chang, speaking of painting, values surprising mountain peaks, steep cliffs, wide rivers, waterfalls, weird rocks, old pine trees, and Daoist hermits and priests. In general, he values a painting onto which the ink has dripped drop by drop, filled with cloud and mist, which is empty as if one could not see the sky, yet full as if one could not see the earth. In those circumstances, the picture is a superior one. These words do not seem to tally with what has been said above (concerning opening up the Sky and the Earth); but Wenchang is a scholar with a free soul. Amid extreme fullness, he had ideas about extreme emptiness. He says 'empty' and 'full': those two words reveal his character." *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 16, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 44.

148. According to Granet (*La Pensée chinoise*, p. 125, n. 3), "the word *jie* means 'articulation,' and evokes the image of a length of bamboo. It designates the instrument used to beat out the rhythm (*the king gets the Yin and the Yang to act in concert by beating the rhythm of the four seasons*) and the divisions of time that serve to space out and regulate the passing of the seasons."

149. "As for the immensity of the landscape: with its land stretching for a thousand leagues, its series of peaks, its ranks of cliffs, even an immortal who, in his flight wished only to take a superficial glance could not take it all in." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 8, p. 64.

150. Ryckmans rightly emphasizes the ambivalence of the sign *yi* — in the concept of *yi hua* 一畫; *yi* means not only "one" but also the absolute One of the *I Ching* (the bar, the original fundamental emblem that, through successive divisions and combinations, expresses the totality of phenomena), the One that, upon being divided, produced the Sky and the Earth. The supposed etymology of the character *tian* 天, "sky," in typical fashion associates the notion of one with the notion of the absolute: 天 signifies extreme height that nothing can surpass; this

character comes from the association of *yi* 一, "one," and *da* 大, "large." Ibid., p. 17.

151. "I have often seen beginners grab a brush and fill a picture with blots and clumsy lines. The very sight was painful to the eyes; one immediately felt disgusted. How could such a picture please connoisseurs?" *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 1, chap. 16, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 44.

152. Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 3, par. 76, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 73. That is something that admirers of Japonism, starting with Whistler, persisted in not perceiving ("We have come to speak of painting that is elevating, of a painter's duty, and of particular paintings that are full of thought"; *Ten O'clock*), thereby clearing the way for an idealist interpretation of Far Eastern art and for the development, in the West, of pictorial practices that claim to be inspired by it (in particular by calligraphy), practices whose function of ideological concealment — by borrowing the outward aspects of Far Eastern practices but obliterating the theory, the "thought" behind them — has by now been fully demonstrated.

153. See the technique known as *yun suo*, "enclosed in cloud," that is applied to the mists that float before waterfalls, half concealing them: "When one paints those clouds, one must leave no trace of the brush and ink. One simply makes an outline with a faint colour, thereby showing the skill of one's hand." Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 161, fig. 77.

154. Dong Qichang, *Bi mo pingmiao*, according to Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 240.

155. Bertolt Brecht, "Sur la peinture chinoise," in Brecht, *Écrits sur la littérature et l'art* (Paris, 1970), vol. 2, p. 69 (my emphasis).

156. Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai ming hua ji*, chap. 6, cited in Shio Sakanishi, *The Spirit of the Brush* (London, 1939), p. 40.

157. Mi Fu, *Huashi*, chap. 2, par. 160, according to Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 149. Li Cheng, *zi* (alias) Xianxi, one of the greatest landscape painters of the period of the Five Dynasties, who died in 967. So many works were attributed to him in the Song period that Mi Fu declared that he would like to write "an essay on his non-existence." *Huashi*, chap. 3, par. 18, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 34.

158. "The wind and the rain, obscurity and clarity constitute an atmospheric mood; dispersion and grouping, depth and distance constitute the schematic organization; verticals and horizontals, hollows and relief create the rhythm; shade and light, thickness and fluidity create spiritual tension; rivers and clouds, clustered together or scattered, create the link; the contrast between crevices and outcrops create an alternation of action and withdrawal." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 8, p. 63.

159. Ibid., p. 90, n. 2.

160. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 3, chap. 18, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, pp. 165-66.

161. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 3, chap. 1, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, pp. 121ff.
162. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 3, chap. 21, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, pp. 172–73.
163. "The Mountain, with its peaks rising one above the other, its succession of cliffs, its secret valleys and deep precipices, its high sharply pointed crags, its vapors, mists and dews, its wisps of smoke and clouds, puts one in mind of the unfurling flow and ebb of the Sea; but all that is not the soul manifested by the Sea itself; those are simply qualities of the Sea that the Mountain appropriates." Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 13, p. 89.
164. *Jie zi yuan huazhuan*, vol. 3, chap. 21, Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture chinoise*, p. 173.
165. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, chap. 8, p. 64.
166. Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai*, cited by Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts*, pp. 154–59. "Once one has understood that there are two styles of painting, one abbreviated (*shu*), the other detailed (*mi*), then one can engage in discussion about it." Gu Kaizhi, *zi* (alias) Chang Kang, was a calligrapher and portraitist of the Jin period (fourth century). Lu Tanwei worked in the fifth century, Zhang Sengyou in the sixth century. Wu Daozi (eighth century), the great ancestor of the "scholars," was famous for the speed with which he worked: he is supposed to have painted from memory, in a single day, a panorama of the River Jialing.
167. Ryckmans, ed., *Les "Propos sur la peinture" de Shitao*, p. 16.
168. Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 16.
169. The text is attributed to the calligrapher Cai Dong (132–92), the inventor of the cursive (*bafen*) style; see Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 55.
170. See *Xuanhe Shu Pu* (a catalogue of the autographs of the emperor Hui Zong, twelfth century), cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 55.
171. Dong Qichang, *Hua chansi suibi*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, pp. 122–23.
172. Dong Qichang, *Hua yan*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 141.
173. Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 64, according to a text borrowed from Shen Zongqian, a calligrapher and painter active in the eighteenth century.
174. "As for spattered ink, that is using ink delicately and subtly without allowing the brush strokes to appear, as if [the image] simply spurted forth." Li Ri-hua, a painter of the seventeenth century, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 64.
175. Tang Zhiqi, the author of the *Huishi weiyan*, cited in Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, pp. 241–42.
176. Translator's note: The French word *trait* can mean either "trait" or "feature" and also "line."
177. Brecht, "Sur la peinture chinoise."

178. See Vandier-Nicolas, *Art et sagesse en Chine*, p. 219.
179. Huysmans, "Whistler," in *Certains*, p. 66.
180. See Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* (London, 1988), p. 4.
181. Paul Cézanne, letter to Emile Bernard, 23 October 1905, in *Correspondance* (Paris, 1937), p. 276.
182. "The reading of the model and its realization is sometimes long in coming for the artist." Cézanne, letter to Charles Camoin, 9 December 1904, *Correspondance*, p. 267.
183. See Clement Greenberg, "Cézanne," in Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston, 1961), p. 55.
184. See Cézanne, letter to Charles Camoin, *Correspondance*, p. 268; to Emile Bernard, 23 December 1904, *Correspondance*, p. 269; also to Emile Bernard, 23 October 1905, *Correspondance*, p. 276.
185. Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne*, p. 17.
186. Cézanne, letter to Emile Bernard, 23 October 1905, *Correspondance*, p. 277 (my emphasis).
187. "I regret my advanced age, on account of my coloring sensations." Cézanne, letter to his son, 3 August 1906, *Correspondance*, p. 281.
188. Letter to Emile Bernard, *Correspondance*, p. 277.
189. Letter to Ambroise Vollard, 9 January 1903, *Correspondance*, p. 252.
190. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), p. 455.
191. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 3.17, cited by Maurice Solovine, in *Episcure: Doctrines et maximes* (Paris, 1937), pp. 118–19.
192. Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne* (Paris, 1926), pp. 117–18.
193. See Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Semiotica* 1, no. 3 (1969): 223–24; reprinted in A. Kroeber, ed., *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society: Selected Papers* (New York, 1994), pp. 1–3.
194. El Lissitzky, "New Russian Art: A Lecture" (1922); see Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (London, 1968), p. 334.