

FRANÇOIS JULLIEN

Translated by JANE MARIE TODD

The Great Image Has No Form, On the Nonobject through Painting

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Pablo Picasso to André Malraux: "You're the Chinese one, you know Chinese proverbs. There's one that says the best thing ever said about painting: one must not imitate life, one must work like it."

Contents |

List of Illustrations ix

Translator's Note xi

Preface xv

Web of Texts and Corpus xxi

- 1. Presence-Absence 1
- 2. From the Foundation-Fount of Painting 15
- 3. Vague-Drab-Indistinct 27
- 4. The Great Image Has No Form 43
- 5. Theory of the Sketch 59
- 6. Empty and Full 75
- 7. Not Quitting, Not Sticking 91
- 8. Quitting Form to Achieve Resemblance 105
- 9. The Spirit of a Landscape 121
- 10. On the Truth in Painting 141

viii Contents

- 11. Gaze or Contemplation? 159
- 12. Peindre n'est pas dépeindre 177
- 13. Ink and Brush, Form and Color 193
- 14. What Does Painting Write? 209
- 15. Image-Phenomenon: Painting Transformation and Life 227

Glossary of Chinese Expressions 241 Notes 249 Index 255

Illustrations |

Following page 104

- Taoist Temple in the Mountains, attributed to Dong Yuan (907–60)
- 2. Spring Morning, by Guo Xi (1020-90)
- 3. Detail of Spring Morning
- 4. Fall Colors in Quehua, by Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322)
- 5. Landscape with Pure Sound, by Shitao (1640-1718)
- 6. Detail of Landscape with Pure Sound
- 7. Young Singer, by Jin Shangyi, 1984

Translator's Note

All passages quoted from Chinese sources are my translation from François Jullien's French version. Many of these texts have not been translated into English. More than this, however, one of the concerns that runs through Jullien's study is the difficulty of translating Chinese into European languages without "Westernizing" or "ontologizing," and his own translations strive to avoid that tendency. I have therefore endeavored to render his versions as closely as possible. I did consult and benefit from the following English translations (I know no Chinese):

Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi]. Wandering on the Way. Trans. Victor H. Mair. New York: Bantam, 1994.

The Complete I Ching [Book of Changes]. Trans. Alfred Huang. Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2004.

Confucius. *The Analects*. Trans. Raymond Dawson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Lao Tzu [Laozi]. Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way. A New English Version by Ursula K. Le Guin. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997.

Shih-T'ao [Shitao]. *Enlightening Remarks on Painting*. Trans. Richard E. Strassberg. Pasadena, Calif.: Pacific Asia Museum, 1989.

The Teachings of Lao-Tzu: The Tao Te Ching. Trans. Paul Carus. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Waley, Arthur, author and trans. The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought. New York: Grove, 1958.

Chinese works are cited by chapter or section number; readers who wish to consult published English translations may therefore do so without too much difficulty.

When the author quotes a French translation of a work originally written in English or in a European language other than French, I have substituted the quotation from a published English edition and have replaced the author's source note with a citation to the English-language edition used. In cases where a translation is unavailable or the quotation is very brief, I have translated the quotation from the French. All quotations from texts written in French are my translation.

The expression I translate as "foundation-fount" is fond(s), which combines two French terms, each with a wide range of meanings. Fond means, among other things, "bottom" and "foundation"; it is also contrasted to forme in the form/content binary, and to figure in figure/ground. Au fond or dans le fond means "fundamentally" and au fond may also mean "deep down." Une boîte à double fond is a box with a false bottom. The fonds de bouteille are the dregs at the bottom of a bottle; fonds de café are coffee grounds. Grands fonds are the ocean depths.

Fonds, in addition to being the plural form of fond, is a singular noun whose primary meaning is "fund" or "capital." Fonds de terre is real estate, fonds publics government stocks. A library collection is also called a fonds, and the term can be used more generally to mean "source" or "resource." Although the English "fund" once meant "font" and still means "a supply of material resources," "a reserve of intangible resources" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary), its connotations are too monetary for this context. Jullien defines fond(s) as "à la fois fond et source, fons et fundus" (both ground and source, source and ground; p. 18) and often pairs the term fonds with words alluding to its liquidity: amont, résorber, irriguer, découler (upstream, resorb, irrigate, flow). Hence "fount," which Webster's defines as "a reservoir for liquids" and, most pertinent in this context, as "something that resembles a spring or reservoir: source," is particularly felicitous.

The French word *esprit* also posed some difficulties. In addition to meaning "spirit" as we understand it, *esprit* signifies "mind." The adjective *spirituel* refers both to religious or supernatural matters and to ideas or mental processes. Jullien's use of the term veers now toward "soul," now toward "agency of thought." At times I could not avoid using "mind," but I translated the term as "spirit" whenever possible, even in some situations where the word "mind" would be the more expected choice. This may constitute a point of resistance in understanding the translation, since speakers of English do not ordinarily think of the "spirit" as having the capacity for thought, nor do we consider ideas as belonging to the realm of spirit (as opposed to the realm of matter).² But such is in fact the French view. Hence it is not entirely accurate to say that *esprit* means both "spirit" and "mind"; rather, the capacity for thought is understood in French to belong to the "spirit dimension." As a result, it is more jarring to attribute an *esprit* to a landscape than to attribute it a "spirit."

A similar, though less extreme, problem arose with *le vide*. The French term means "emptiness," in opposition to *le plein*, "fullness," but it is also the word used to translate "void" or "vacuum" as that concept is developed in early Greek thought. Since Jullien's discussion of Chinese art theory and of Greek philosophy is conducted in French, his text gives the impression that Aristotle and the *Laozi* are somehow talking about the same thing. This impression is lost in English (the *Laozi* speaks of "emptiness" or "empty spaces," Aristotle of "the void"), though of course the two concepts are related.

I hope that readers will see these difficulties not as a particular short-coming of my translation but as an opportunity to meditate further on translation issues generally, as they arise even *within* what Jullien terms "the great European language."

Preface |

In this book, I set off in pursuit of what on principle it is pointless to pursue and what cannot be conceived, since my object is the nonobject: [that which] is too hazy-indistinct-diffuse-evanescent-con-fused to keep still and isolated. This nonobject sinks into the undifferentiated and, as a result, cannot be fixed or represented, cannot have the consistency of an in-itself, cannot be composed of "being." It cannot be sharply delineated as a *Gegenstand* that "stands before" the Eye or Mind. It is [something] we constantly experience, leading us back to the indefiniteness of the foundational, but which science and philosophy left behind early on in their haste to treat things logically, to constitute a "this" that could be manipulated by thought, with the aim of replying to the question: "What is it?"

I am attempting to gain access to that unobjectifiable "fount of things," which, once abandoned by science and philosophy, is so difficult to retrieve in the nets of the great European language. My starting point is the rich critical literature that the Chinese xvi Preface

literati devoted to painting for over two millennia. Their painting was dedicated to figuring the unfathomable within the line, or the Fount through form. The Chinese literati were able to produce such paintings and to reflect on them because they relied on the notion of a continuum of existence and its immanent "way" of coming into actuality and receding. They relied, that is, on the tao of the Taoists. Hence when we patiently make our way through these ancient treatises on the art of painting, we are invited to explore the gap opened in the ontological status of form as it couples with matter and in-forms it, as well as in the logical bias in favor of determination and in the so-called aesthetic aims of representation. What we perceive, subtly at first, is a number of little tremors, unexpectedly shaking the foundations of our thought. Gradually we observe that these tremors, moving deeper and spreading wider, allow us to catch a glimpse along the fault lines of another way of engaging in thought. This way is no longer based in Being or in God. Through it, the elucidation of things comes about without a wrenching violence. Burying and unearthing—catching and letting go—occur in tandem, like the great process of existence. Instead of awaiting the unveiling of Truth by the bright light that constructs perspective.

The paintings these treatises evoke also make us eminently sensitive to this other possibility of thought, exploiting its coherence to produce effects that we need only consider to become open to the possibility, to delight in it, to share it.

Hence, when I am led methodically to explore the gap, I do so not to construct separate worlds and make China serve the role of the "other"—liberating or compensatory, always more or less suspect. Rather, I use it as an opportunity and as a means to return to the unthought. The question raised by philosophy is, in the first place, how to approach and catch hold of that on the basis of which we think, that which is upstream from us or under our feet, and which as a result we do not think. Standing back from one's own mind—isn't that always the most difficult thing? In traveling through China and becoming unstuck from the things that make us cohere, we will re-create a certain itinerary and a certain pathway of thought.

In this case, the journey to China is a roundabout way of disinterring buried possibilities, of reopening understanding.

It's about what I can never say, can never separate out and advocate. It's "about," and therefore can never be properly referred to: I can neither

Preface xvii

describe [it] nor conceive [it] but can only circumscribe [it]. Hence I move in circles. From the beginning to the end of this book, I will deal with the same thing—the foundational—returning to it constantly; but it is never the same. Through successive excavations and ground clearings, displacements and intersections, each new development will pick up on the previous one but will modify the angle of approach and thus offer, all along the way, any number of facets and means of access, from the nonseparation of presence and absence (chap. 1) to the indifferentiation between image and phenomenon (chap. 15). Chapter 8, which deals with nonrepresentation, marks the midway point and initiates our return journey. The *Laozi* is invoked before it, the *Zhuangzi* after.

In fact, to gain entry to the possibility of a way of thinking, could we proceed in any other way than through gradual assimilation (along with the disassimilation of our own terms and assumptions), given that every continuous discourse is imprisoned in its tautology and becomes impervious to the work of difference? More than exposition or explanation, what is needed is a certain process and a certain journey, unfolding as organized detours. We will leave off, only to approach again farther along, moving from one port to the next. Hardly will we have set foot ashore than we'll be on our way again.

I may have unfairly piled up a large number of texts, since this study too has several foundations, draws from several founts, has several false bottoms. Its task is to open them to one another and allow them to communicate. The great image has no form, says the *Laozi*, setting us on the path toward that enigma and, in compelling us to interpret, guiding us toward its self-evidence. The "nonobject" calls into question the status of representation and invites us to conceive of the undifferentiating within the differentiated. Total vigilance is required to deal with Chinese painting and thought without slipping into subjectification and smugness, fusional thinking and mysticism, the flip side of our rationalist cognition. In the end, the work of de-ontology requires us to clear a path in language toward the *de*-, no longer the *de*- of completing, fulfilling, achieving full essence (constituted as the *self*- of self-consistency), but rather the *de*- of undoing, of sinking under and withdrawing, returning to the undifferentiated: of de-picting, de-representing.



Web of Texts and Corpus 🛮 🧗

This book is only a chapter and has no conclusion. It forms a nodal point in the body of my work.

On the basis of the Chinese literature on painting, I return to the question I asked from the opposite direction a number of years ago, in *The Impossible Nude*. How—that is, according to what theoretical conditions—has it been possible to *posit* an object of perception, simultaneously isolate it, immobilize it, and abstract it in a stable and definitive form? I also follow the thread of an earlier book devoted to "blandness" in Chinese thought and aesthetics, going back to the stages before or after the actualization of form (or of flavorfulness), when that form is barely sketched out or has receded, when differences blur and, as a result, we are no longer deprived of their disjunction. In exploring the value of the sketch and of withdrawal and their implicit richness, this study of *de*-representation logically intersects the analyses I conducted previously in the field of literature, in *La valeur allusive* (The allusive value) and in *Detour and Access*. In particular, *The Great Image*

Has No Form, in introducing the problematic of painting, continues and develops chapter 13 of the latter work.

Because the question of the sketch makes it possible to conceive of the plenitude of the incomplete, to grasp how emptiness is needed for fullness to exert its full effect, I also return to the issues considered in my *Treatise on Efficacy*, on the effect's conditions of effectiveness and on the desaturation necessary if an effect is to be produced.

In terms of form and painting, I therefore address the same problematic of dis-exclusion that I attempted to construct in *Un sage est sans idée* (A sage is without ideas). The sage is the one who does not become mired in any thought and does not exclude any thought. He thereby protects himself from partiality, thus preserving his availability. Similarly, the great image is the one that does not become mired in any form and maintains various compossible forms, protecting itself from the anecdotal and preserving resemblance without resembling, so that it can paint the availability of the foundational.

Finally, I continue my previous efforts to step outside the concept of time and the great existential drama it organizes. In order to draw out the elements of "living," I have explored the capacity of the moment and how it varies depending on the circumstances. I turned away from the Greek logic of perception to explore, in China, a logic of respiration. As it happens, that unobjectifiable quality that the Chinese literati's brushes drew out from painting's fount of immanence, and from which forms unfold—becoming new again by alternating between emptiness and fullness—is, fundamentally, nothing other than the power of transforming "life." Taking-giving back, as painting in China invites us to do—"taking" form and "giving it back" to the undifferentiated fount—is the very movement of that respiration leading to renewal.

The major Chinese writings on painting comprise the corpus for this book:

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Zong Bing (375–443). "Hua shanshui xu." L.B., p. 583.

Wang Wei (415–443). "Xu hua." L.B., p. 585.

Fu Zai (eighth century). "Guan Zhang yuan wai hua song shi tu." T.H.L., p. 68.

Wang Wei (699–759). "Shanshui jue." L.B., p. 592; "Shanshui lun." L.B., p. 596.

Zhu Jingxuan (ninth century). Tangchao minghua lu. T.H.L., p. 74.
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Zhang Yanyuan (ninth century). *Lidai minghua ji*. Beijing: Zhongguo meishu lunzhu congkan, Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963.

Jing Hao (tenth century). Bi fa ji. T.H.L., p. 250.

Shen Gua (1031–1095). Mengxi bitan, chap. 17, "Shu hua." S.H.L., p. 230.

Guo Xi (1020?-1100?). Linquan gaozhi. S.H.L., p. 3.

Han Zhuo (eleventh century). Sanshui chun quanji. S.H.L., p. 63.

Mi Fu (1051-1107). Hua shi. S.H.L., p. 112.

Rao Ziran. Shanshui jiafa (Hui zong shi er ji). S.H.L., p. 223.

Su Shi (Su Dongpo) (1037–1101). See *Su Shi lun wen yi*, ed. Yan Zhongqi. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1985 [abbreviated *L.W.Y.*]; and *S.H.P.*, p. 213.

Guo Ruoxu (second half of eleventh century). *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, ed. Mi Tianshui. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000.

Tang Zhiqi (about 1620). Huishi weiyan. C.K., p. 106.

Shi Tao (1641-1717). Kugua heshang huayulu. C.K., p. 146.

Tang Dai (first half of the eighteenth century). Huishi fawei. C.K., p. 235.

Shen Zongqian (about 1781). Jiezhou xuehuabian. C.K., p. 322.

Fang Xun (1736–1799). *Shanjingju hualun*, ed. Zheng Zhuolu. Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962.

All the other texts, including major authors (Li Rihua, Bu Yantu, Jiang He, and so on) are cited from L.B. or C.K.

The following abbreviations are used:

- L.B. Zhongguo hualun leibian, ed. Yu Jianhua. Zhonghua shuju.
- C.K. Hualun congkan, ed. Yu Anlan. Zhonghua shuju.
- T.H.L. Tang wu dai hualun. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997.
- S.H.L. Songren hualun. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000.
- S.H.P. Songren huaping. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999.

For the *Laozi* and Wang Bi's commentary on it, I use *Wang Bi ji xiaoshi*, ed. Lou Yulie (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980). I use Guo Qingfan's classic edition of the *Zhuangzi*, *Xiaozheng Zhuangzi jishi*, 2 vols. (Taipei: Shijie shuju).

Superscript letters refer to the Glossary of Chinese expressions near the end of the book.

Presence-Absence

1. "The mountains in rain or the mountains in fair weather are easy for the painter to figure," a Song Dynasty critic laconically remarked. They are easy to figure, I assume, because they lend themselves to prominent and standardized strokes. These motionless, more or less codified tableaux would be like the Épinal images of the natural world. "But should fair weather tend toward rain, or should rain tend toward the return of fair weather . . . : refuge taken one evening amidst the fog ... when the whole landscape vanishes in confusion-emerging-submerging, between there is and there is not—that is what is difficult to figure"a(Qian Wenshi, L.B., 84). In this case, "easy" and "difficult" are a conventional way of designating opposite ends of the spectrum and of indicating in which direction the art of painting is oriented. Rather than figure states that are distinct—in both senses, sharp and in opposition, rain / fair weather—the Chinese painter paints modifications. He grasps the world beyond its distinctive features and in its essential transition. Each aspect implies the other, even when they are mutually exclusive, and one is discreetly at work

even as the other is still on display. Behind the curtain of rain sweeping the horizon, one already senses, by the breaking light, that the inclement weather is going to lift. In the same way, fair weather soon sends out a few precursory signs that it will be clouding over.

The landscape chosen is not from the Midi of France, with its defined contours, its distinct shadows, where the slightest aspects stand out and draw attention to themselves. This is not a Greek landscape where, in a luminous transparency, the forms of things stand in sharp relief and make us believe in an identity of essence: petrified by the sun, they convince us of the fixity of paradigms. On the contrary, the revelatory landscape is an afternoon gradually growing dim, when, in the transition from day to night, forms acquire haloes and turn dark, gradually become indistinct. As the rising haze obliterates the ridges and the whole landscape begins to sink into penumbra, these forms, in becoming indistinguishable, call on us to go beyond their temporary individuation and return to the undifferentiated fount of things. If such a painting is judged more profound because it "goes beyond the surface of things," as Qian Wenshi later says, it is because it paints the real in a phase where, no longer standing apart, it reveals the foundation of any stance apart. This kind of painting was also called "difficult" because, to paint the indistinctness of the transition, it must give up the power of description and injunction possessed by signs. Instead of being taken over by things, it paints their effacement; instead of presenting them to the gaze, it turns them back to be resorbed.

Evening and the return of fair weather, then, are not anecdotal. As the distinct grows dim and the salient recedes, they grant access to the phase when determination becomes open once again, when it gestures toward relinquishing its hold. Presence is diluted and permeated by absence. Since things no longer attract attention, no longer even stand forth, the painter paints the world emerging-submerging—it is said—not quiescent. He paints it coming out of the original confusion or sinking back into it, following the great respiratory alternation, breathing in and breathing out, that brings the world into existence. He does not aspire to immobilize it as Being and to determine it as object. He paints it between "there is" and "there is not," you and wu. In other words, the "there is" and its negation no longer stand in tragic opposition; they agree at the fundamental level and communicate. Between the "there is" that takes over presence and its complete dissolution in absence, the painter grasps forms and things surging up and fading away at the same time. He paints them on their way, not in relation to the category of being (or nothingness) but as a continuous process.

That is why, for the masters living under the Song Dynasty, a time when landscape painting definitively took root in China and enjoyed the favor of the literati, the haze, wisps, or storm clouds so often invoked are also not at all anecdotal. In coming about "between," in washing over the outlined forms and dissolving their borders, they turn things evasive, begin to obliterate them, and open them onto their absence. Of the various genres of painting, it is the landscape painting that "offers an inexhaustible pleasure," and, says Mi Fu, "landscapes of mists and clouds . . . are especially beautiful" (S.H.L., 211). Dong Yuan's mountain landscapes, in which "peaks appear and disappear" and "clouds and mists now reveal, now conceal" (ibid., 131), are particularly extolled. The Dong Yuan in my home, Mi Fu goes on to note, is a misty landscape unfolding breadthwise: "The mountain's skeleton becomes clouded, then clears, the tips of the branches jut out, then disappear" (140). More generally, Tang Zhiqi (C.K., 108) says that Dong Yuan's paintings are defined by their "as-ifthere-were-as-if-there-were-not" quality. This aspect of his paintings alludes to what is usually taken for the very essence of his art: the rejection of all artifice in favor of "naturalness" and "truth" (tian-zhen). In misting over the treetops and mountain peaks, in capturing things emerging from their primordial indifferentiation or sinking back into it, Dong Yuan offers up for view a sparse—and as a result, distilled—presence, one liberated from the opacity of things and their objective determinations. In painting between "there is" and "there is not," he grants access not to what "things" might be in themselves—the "in-itself," the essence—but to the process in constant transition that ceaselessly brings about and at the same time covers over.

The art of painting the four seasons will confirm that this constant transition tends to obliterate exclusive determinations, that nothing as a result coincides completely with "itself," and that there is thus no self-identical entity to erect into an essence or from which to constitute an object. And yet, if there is one set of terms to which the Chinese tradition and its pictorial art have become methodically attached, it is the set designating the seasons. Beginning with the earliest texts in the *Book of Rites*, the seasons have provided the most general rubrics for organizing difference. In this world without a structuring cosmogony, a world that leaves little room for revelation, it is the seasons, with their systematic oppositions and correspondences, that serve as a framework for the specification of things. But, as noted in the *Shitao*, one of the finest Chinese treatises on painting (chap. 14), there is also the winter that does not correspond to its season, as in these verses: "Snow is rare—cold is missing from the

sky / The new year approaches—the days grow long." Even though it is the middle of winter, "it is as if the idea of cold were missing." And that is also the case for the other seasons. The *Shitao* leads us to suppose that it is the role of painting and poetry to indicate how much the required evocation circumvents the expected specification and unsettles it. That is why it is up to painting and poetry to deploy preferentially these indistinct atmospheres, "half light, half dark," showing each time, even in the most minor sequences, the passage and transformation from one to the other, from darkness to light: "A shred of cloud: the moonlight is hidden / A ray of setting sun: the rain—at its edge—it's bright." Both painting and poetry also have a marked preference for atmospheres that "seem" both one and the other, "at once light and dark": "Not waiting for the sadness of declining day / the sky on the horizon has darkened slightly."

No determination divides day and night; one emerges from within the other. The quality withdraws as soon as it comes forward, immediately, or rather, at the same time. Painters and poets in China do not paint distinctive, much less disjunctive, aspects. In reality, they do not paint things to show them better and, by displaying them before our eyes, to bring forth their presence. Rather, they paint them between "there is" and "there is not," present-absent, half-light, half-dark, at once light-at once dark.*

2. Presence-absence: the two terms are not destined to remain separate. "To be or not to be": in the end, the question dissolves. Both the vertigo inspiring metaphysics and the pathos to which existence falls victim dissolve with it. For does not European thought owe part of its originality, or let us rather say, its historiality, in any case an essential part of its inventiveness (which elevates it to the sublime), to the gap, and hence the tension, it has introduced between the two? Presence/absence: relentlessly, intensely, European thought ripped them apart, passionately

By way of example, Wang Shizhen (Daijingtang shihua, 3, "Zhu xing," §5) cites lines such as these:

Sometimes seeing a boat go by
In the fog, beyond the water and the clouds

Or:

The sun rises—no one encountered; The yard is full of the bell's voice in the wind.

^{*} Poetic expression was also conceived in China as the art of dissolving presence into absence. In receding, the dissipated and unlocatable presence is able to move beyond itself; it surrounds indefinitely. It becomes, in the literal sense, an "ambience."

exploiting the productivity of that rip until it turned into the abyss. From there it devoted itself to the beatific cult of presence, even as it developed a tragic art of absence. European thought expects no less than happiness and truth from presence, from intimately penetrating it or unveiling it from a distance; it makes the reign of presence coincide with plenitude. Were it only to strike us in a flash, presence would illuminate and fill. In the event of a face-to-face encounter, a miracle occurs—ec-stasy, epopteia, par-ousia ("outside oneself," "turned toward," "next to"). All the same, presence can grab hold by focusing its attention only because a segregation has come about within the disseminated and the diffuse, only because a choice has been made to erect "being" outside the flow of the indistinct and the confused, to isolate it, circumscribe it, and even display it prominently in its very absence. Tragedy is born with the advent of the alternative, just as desire condenses and intensifies as a result of exclusion and rejection—there is "desire" only for what is absent, marked and recognized as absent, as Socrates takes care to remind Agathon. In introducing lack, the withdrawal of Being or God, that absence elevates us to Love, the great European myth if ever there was one. Absence sharpens and diversifies the faculties, which in Europe are defined by how they compensate for that absence, once sense immediacy has been left behind. To remember is to make the past "present" by resuscitating it. To imagine is not only to conceive but to look at something with the mind's eye as if it were present (René Descartes). And, as Immanuel Kant tells us, "re-presentation" (of self), the most general term-Kant uses the Latin expression, whose untranslatability we will ceaselessly perceive once we get to China—is the very operation of the mind.

In the name of what, that is, by relying on what, have we been able (or obliged) to isolate the part of presence that might come to light? In the word presence we hear essence, being. Presence, prae(s)-ens, is what "is" (in front of); and absence is what has withdrawn and seceded from the "being-there" of the living being. The fascinating upsurge of European metaphysics can be attributed, first and foremost, to the separation of "presence" from "absence," their adversative split from the diffuse and disseminated flow of things, a separation that, in its foundation, leads back to that of "being" and "nonbeing." Metaphysics stems from that discrimination-disjunction. In any case, the destinies of essence and of presence became joined. As Martin Heidegger has shown, the Greeks, unbeknownst to themselves, understood the determination of essence as presence, ousia as parousia. Heidegger leads us to reimagine that determination, detecting in it a starting point for thought. The living being is

grasped in its being as "presentness," is understood in reference to a precise mode of time, the present. "Presence" simply constituted a clearer formulation of the meaning of essence. As a result, presence necessarily called for the construction of an ontology to designate the legitimate source of that (self)-consistency, which thereafter loomed over the flow of existence. European thought has been historially indistinguishable from that consistency.

I have begun to speak of presence as of one of the great phantasms of the West, one of the phantasms that constituted the "West" (and might therefore give new meaning to that dubious designation), because it seems to me that this phantasm is as existential, so to speak, as theoretical. Witness the fact that the philosophy of presence is found not only at the foundation of ontology; it also dwells in the heart of our theology. Ontology characterizes Being as presence ("essence"), and theology is the request for Presence ("God") even more than for Sense. Prayer turns that request into an imploring plea. Within European "ideology"-I see no way to avoid calling it by that most general of terms, as a way to capture the mythological fold within it—the vocation of Christianity is unique. It aspires not so much to promise presence, as religions of salvation are commonly called upon to do, as to begin to realize it, in a miraculous "already," by inaugurating an end to waiting for "kingdom come." With the exile from Paradise, presence was lost. But the particular logic of Christianity, through its succession of mysteries, is to make God present again among men. In the Incarnation, God became man in the flesh. The logic of Christianity is to make him present within the deepest part of man, through transubstantiation, the Eucharist: This (here) is "my body and my blood." I will remain present among you before passing away, Christ announces.

Once presence became inscribed as an absolute ideal, it proved to be quite a long task to call it back to earth and secure it there. Hence the European spirit, in forming its consciousness and its *Bildungsroman*, conceived of itself in large part as a reacquisition and deliberate elaboration of presence. It captured and constituted presence through the protocol particular to the outcome to which spirit diligently applied itself in the modern era, which is called "experience," *Erfabrung*. As G. W. F. Hegel recalls in his summation of its history, spirit worked to reconcile these two worlds that stand so patently in opposition, the otherworldly and the world here below. Spirit was torn between "this presence," to be constituted from dispersed phenomena in order to promote the intelligible; and the presence of divine essence, an "other-worldly presence, so to

speak," toward which the gaze forever slid longingly, across the "thread of light" attaching it to heaven.*2

3. Dong Yuan's landscapes, "emerging-submerging," "between there isthere is not," distance us both from the miracle (of presence) and from the pathos (of absence). They open onto a beyond, or rather onto a near side, of ecstasy and tragedy. Oddly enough, as these landscapes have begun to show, China stood apart from the adventure of the European spirit. It did not take the path of ontology, did not aspire to reply to the concern about identity, to ask "What is it?" (ti esti). It also did not develop a theology, in order to dogmatically replenish lack with an absence that would otherwise be acknowledged to be unfathomable. It did not worship presence either in terms of "Being" or in terms of "God." As for Being, we know, and "know well"—but to what extent do we know that knowledge?-that classical Chinese does not possess a verb denoting "being," only the copula function and "there is." No semantic sedimentation has occurred around the notion of being, and we will never be able to fully assess the repercussions for the formation of Chinese thought produced by that sidestepping or even bypassing of Being.

In their religious practices, moreover, the Chinese early on granted priority to procedures codifying sacrifice rather than the invocative power of prayer. They were more concerned with ritual formalism and its regulatory function than with the mystery of presence. In the *Analects* (3.12), it is said of Confucius: "He sacrificed to the dead as if they were present; he sacrificed to spirits as if the spirits were present." Unlike Chinese commentators, attentive to the personal investment of the one making the sacrifice, I shall focus particularly on the discreet potential of that "as if" in the canonical formulation. Confucius does not count on a mystery (miracle) of presence; he does not expect parousia or epopteia. But Confucius is also not skeptical; he does not doubt presence, which would be another way to set it apart and elevate it. Quite simply, Confucius does not become attached to it—he does not even isolate it as a definite modality—but envisions it in the vague mode of *as if*. Similarly,

^{*} Hegel, though calling for that transcendence, remains faithful to the great European discourse of revelation, which makes spirit's destiny appear to it. Indeed, where else would he find his concept? The tone remains apocalyptic: in leaving behind "the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now" and the "nightlike void of the supersensible beyond," consciousness "steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111.

the Song Dynasty master paints his landscape in the tonality of as if, in the mode of appearing-disappearing, at once "as if there were" and "as if there were not."

That is precisely what may be expected from Dong Yuan's paintings. In resorbing the sharp and tragic opposition between there is and there is not, they suspend in the same gesture the isolation between being and nonbeing, locating themselves on the near side of mutual exclusion. They suspend as well the great battle of faith and the denial of faith. In so doing, Dong Yuan's paintings rediscover a continuous, progressive, nondisjunctive weaving of the course of things; they indiscriminately mingle presence and absence, vague and diffuse. Indeed, from within the European tradition (and "tradition" reappears in that regard), we find ourselves—in language first and foremost—atavistically and menacingly bound by that isolation and that battle. In other words, I expect Dong Yuan's paintings to open a nontheological, nonontological means of access. (But it is tricky to describe this means of access in the terms of our theoretical apparatus as it has developed, and that is why the paintings are our guide here.) To use the most evasive of terms-that very evasiveness reveals the profound equivalence between them, since they open equally onto that fundament—they will grant us access to what we are accustomed to call "things" (but not the object), or the "world," or "life."

4. Consider the following precept, which is one of the "secrets" of the art of painting transmitted under the authority of Wang Wei in the eighth century and constantly repeated since:

Of the pagodas whose rooftops vanish into the sky, one need not have the rooms at the base appear: it's as if there were—as if there were not; either high or low. (L.B., 592)

The precept assures us that presence as well as absence is envisioned in the vague mode of "as if," which puts the two terms on equal footing and greatly reduces the boundary between them; and that therefore, no object is peremptorily there—fully deploying its presence and drawing attention to that presence—for the eye or for the mind. Wang Wei later says that "for haystacks and levees, let only half of them be seen; for thatched cottages and huts, show only a section of wall or a cornice."

Although these recommendations are given as practical advice, it would be wrong to see them as merely procedural. As a later theorist advises (Guo Xi, 25), the purpose of showing these elements of the landscape only halfway, or in an even more fragmented state, is not to augment their figurative import by creating a sparseness or a stippling effect. Naturally, "if you seek to make the mountain look tall, do not show it in its entirety, since it will be lacking in height; if mists and clouds encircle its foothills, then it will appear high." Similarly, "if you want the water to flow far into the distance, do not show its entire course"; otherwise, the sense of distance will not be visible. But in each of these cases, it is not so much a matter of making figuration more expressive through the power of ellipsis as, more essentially, of removing anything prosaic from it, of promoting its value and elevating its register thanks to the communication established between presence and absence and the interaction resulting from it. The literati painter in China constantly exploited that principle: whatever the reality evoked, it had only to be permeated by absence to emerge distilled, emancipated from whatever was keeping it sterilely shut up within itself, freed from the obstinate tautology in which it was absorbed, thereby giving access to the profundity of things. That submersion in absence, far from rendering reality unreal or phantasmagorical, increases its quality and capacity. "When a mountain is totally visible," Guo Xi continues, "not only will its tall silhouette not elegantly stand out, but how could it be distinguished from the figuration of a mortar for pounding rice?" "Similarly, if the entire course of the water appears, not only will it not meander off into the distance, but how could it be distinguished from the figuration of an earthworm?"

In opening things onto their absence, in painting them only indexically so that they appear "present-absent" at once, the painter cuts short the exacting realism of the object. In making presence evasive merely by interrupting the line, he suspends, and even holds back, any reifying attachment to it. At least let us say it that way to start with, in what is still a conventional and merely privative manner. What this points toward in a more internal sense proves to be difficult to grasp in Western terms, if we are to avoid falling back immediately—by renouncing the pure exteriority constitutive of science—into the inconsistency of a subjectifying formulation, subjectifying because it is no longer woven from matter and the vivacity of the world. Hovering between psychologism and mysticism, subjectification is the only remaining inverse to the

constituted status of the object, once the relation established with that object is no longer one of perception, of "inspection" by the mind, and of cognition. And yet precisely, Chinese thought escapes both subjectification and objectification, and that is what I find most valuable and most productive about it—well, not so much *about* it, to tell the truth, as in that reversal effect. Chinese thought de-subjectifies as much as it de-objectifies and thus allows us to clear a path in language and to dissolve these opposites.*

The Shitao leaves no doubt about the spiritual dimension—I will return to this term—of what would otherwise be solely a matter of technique or craft. This truncated, interrupted figuration comes from a "world" emancipated from the power to impede and bog down, to which the opacity of things can be attributed. According to the Buddhist expression, we have liberated ourselves from the veil of "dust" and "vulgarity," which are a source of filth: this is a purification exercise. In landscape painting, the Shitao notes (chap. 11), the mountains, water, and trees "are rendered up only in part," "amputated as they are at both ends." "So that, with every movement of the brush, and in every place of figuration, there is nothing that is not abruptly cut short."dThe treatise immediately adds that you cannot gain access to that art of sudden interruption unless you possess a brush that is "absolutely free and easy." You need a brush that is so unencumbered, so untethered that, breaking free from the exacting, obsessive power of presence, it constantly pulls figuration out of the mire and helps it move beyond itself.

* Descartes posits this from the outset and in the most general manner: "In cognition there are only two points to consider, namely: we who know and the objects that are to be known" (Regulae, beginning of rule 12). The subject/object relation is at once totalizing and sufficient for establishing a map of knowledge. It is connected to the point of view in representation, which constitutes the idea as an image in the mind (Third Meditation, $\S15$).

This is also the view posited at the beginning of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, which establishes necessary links among four terms: cognition, representation, the object, and experience: "For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience?" Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 41.

What follows is only a rereading of these initial, constitutive, formulas from the outside, from China.

That is also why the structure of "emerging-submerging," "appearingdisappearing," is commonly pointed to in Chinese treatises on painting as that which deploys the entire landscape and confers its profundity on it. It is not only mountaintops that clouds veil and cast down into the undifferentiated; woods, paths, and waterways are also covered over. "Groves and springs vanish-shine through" (Jing Hao, T.H.L., 257). Note that the order of the terms—disappearance precedes appearance, the end comes before the beginning-emphasizes the continuity of the process. Water is painted "meandering and discontinuous" along its course, "sinking under-resurfacing" (Guo Xi, 25; Han Zhuo, C.K., 36). The path should "come out and go back in," "come up and sink down," and in that way the landscape will be internally "permeated" by a sense of distance (Rao Ziran, S.H.L., 224). It is obvious that the alternation between "going in" and "coming out," "coming up-sinking down," in which the tracing of the path consists, makes the landscape breathe as one. We will gradually come to measure the extent to which this system of respiration, in opposition to the ontotheological choice of Greek thought, contributed toward structuring Chinese thought. This system is precisely what obstructs the cleavage between presence and absence, by promoting transition. "Going in" governs "coming out," and vice versa; inspiration and expiration, through the transfer of air, constantly communicate with each other. Above all, expiration is already implicit within inspiration; breathing in implies breathing out. Instead of categorically setting up presence and absence as opposites, expiration and inspiration govern each other and indefinitely allow passage. The disappearing-reappearing path in Chinese painting, far from serving to construct the painting's perspective by designating a vanishing line by virtue of which the progressive and proportional diminution of objects would be rendered, serves rather to unfurl a landscape in continuous renewal. Indeed, the variation creating respiration, between presence and absence, will never stop unfolding (Rao Ziran, ibid.). "Either the path breaks through from below the trees, then a waterway surges up anew" and cuts it off; "or a large stone blocks the way and interrupts it, but here it gradually reappears on the hillside"; "or it is veiled by the hill, but human figures will then serve to point it out; or, when it approaches dwellings, bamboo and trees will serve to conceal it." Rao Ziran concludes that one thereby achieves "a world without end." This is a Chinese way of saying that in this spiritual (jing)f"world," presence and absence mingle continually, and that presence, far from aspiring to stand apart from absence, extends further and becomes distilled by virtue of it.

5. Painting, therefore, tends not only toward making visible, or more visible, but also toward covering over and "concealing." The painter is as likely to hide things away, "block from view," as to show. The "Theses on Painting," which tradition attributes to Wang Wei, sets out a whole series (*L.B.*, 596):

The sides of the mountain, the clouds block them from view; the stone walls, the cascades also block them; towers and other buildings, the trees block them as well, and the paths, men block them too.

This amounts to saying that fading out and vanishing cannot be attributed only to the effect of distance, that they come about not only at the limit or edge of the landscape, in the sense that, as he had already noted, "men in the distance are without eyes," "trees in the distance are without branches." Rather, the obstructed-blocked-concealed is at work in all the elements and serves methodically to cover them over. Painting "despises the superficial and the obvious," according to one principle (C.K., 266). That is why the painter adds on to forms and "protects" them, if only with a bit of foliage, which then plays the role of cover, similar to that played by mists and clouds with their power to "interrupt" at the landscape's points of articulation. An atmosphere of "indetermination" and "infinity" emanates from that which is "profoundly concealed," covered over to the point of being "unfathomable."

It is not at all surprising that the painter takes on the invisible. Has not that aim always served as a provocation to painting, pushing it to its limit? We are provided further food for thought about the nature of that invisibility, however, when we consider that it is something "hidden," that, as a result, the painter paints simultaneously in the mode of the "obvious" and the "concealed," the "patent-latent" (xian-yin),8 and that, in his figurations, he constantly mingles the visible and the invisible. In fact, "if there are more hidden places than obvious ones" (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 116), the "interest-flavor" of what he paints is less limited. Indeed, "above one level, there is still another level; just as, within these successive levels, there is another level that is hidden." Beyond the beneficial disproportion between the two, it is above all the correlation that counts, however, since they are called on to cooperate in rendering presence-absence. Their inseparability lies in that correlation, just as it requires them to work out their complementarity. I do not believe, as some have interpreted this passage,3 that the obvious invoked here can

be reduced merely to meticulous, detailed painting resulting purely from artisanship and depreciated precisely as such. In this reading, the elliptical movement of the literati painter's brush would stand opposed, and be considered superior, to that obvious artisanship. Rather, in order for there truly to be a painterly work, the figuration of both the obvious and the hidden are necessary and imply each other (cf. *Shitao*, chap. 1). "The one apt to conceal," "is not concerned about not making manifest," just as "the one apt to manifest" "is not concerned about not keeping concealed" (Tang Zhiqi, *C.K.*, 116). We already know that, in principle, "if someone gives precedence to the obvious, without concealing, it is weak and superficial," but, if someone "conceals" without really "knowing how to conceal," "interest evaporates just as inevitably."

If the visible and the invisible, the hidden and the obvious, are the two copresent and correlated factors between which the process of painting unfolds-its two poles as it were-it is because, in the eyes of the Chinese, it is from these two factors that the great Process of the world flows. In that respect, Chinese painting is directly connected to what I shall call—since I am compelled to set aside the term metaphysics—the original philosophy of the Chinese (see Bu Yantu, C.K., 300). In fact, physics as much as metaphysics is at issue, because, once again, the separation between the two is not operative. The yin and yang factors, opposite and complementary, are at the beginning of any reality, and the "way," or tao, is born from their alternation—"one time yin, one time yang" ("now yin-now yang"), in the canonical formulation. Hence it falls to the yang to promote the "obvious," its role being to deploy and to "display outside," whereas the "hidden" is the yin, the yin factor's role being to "enclose within figuration." Since these are the basic terms that have never varied in China, we can begin to deduce how and why the invisibility that Chinese painting authorizes is not metaphysical. It is not on the order of the intelligible, is not cut off from the visible and different in nature from it (noeton/oraton). It is rather the portion of the concealed and covered over that accompanies—like its flip side—any manifestation.

In as much as it is "internal," that hiddenness (whose foundation is without foundation), a source of mystery and therefore of attraction, is that which, veiling the figuration of absence, enriches presence by liberating it from its sterility, opens it wide, stretches it, gives it weightiness. Let us render it in the register of the Chinese imaginary (Bu Yantu, C.K., 301–302). A dragon seen from head to foot has no charm. But, if its body is "hidden in the clouds," if only a "patch of scales" is visible, or only "half its tail" is hanging out, if we cannot consider it in full, that dragon, both

"hidden and manifest" to the point of being "unfathomable"h—we no longer know whether it is there or not there, present-absent—is inexhaustibly enthralling. The Chinese literati, trained for the step-by-step arguments of their exam essays, cultivated the art of these analogical series. That "crouching but leaping" dragon, at once "manifest and hidden," is compared to a scholar who does not display his virtues but demonstrates them liberally when the opportunity requires; or to a beautiful woman who, rather than display her charms on the main square, lets half her face be caught in a mirror at a crossroads; or to a woman briefly glimpsed leaning on a balustrade, lost in thought; or to a dwelling that, rather than being fully exposed on the main road, is protected by a surrounding wall, revealing only bits of the roof through the foliage; or to a garden that, instead of having its beds laid out in tight, well-ordered rows, lets a few flowers peek out above a wall here, a branch between the rocks there. That presence, which withholds instead of displaying, which turns inside out to become absence instead of putting itself forward, unfurls sporadically thanks to its evasiveness.

Bu Yantu concludes that this is even more the case for an entire landscape. Above all, "blank spaces" must be left at the joints and folds where "hills form into chains and intertwine," where "rocks and cavities open up and close again," "where trees mingle," where "houses pile up," where "the path meanders," where "the bridge is reflected in the water." These must not be filled and "obstructed." It is especially at these points of concealment and confusion that presence must give way to absence, that the visible turns inside out to become the invisible. As a result, "between mist and gleam," "brightness and dimness," in the indistinct play of shadow and light, the atmosphere becomes indefinitely charged. Then, Bu Yantu concludes, "when one contemplates, there is no form, but when one examines, there is coherence." At once "there is" and "there is not": there is no form to contemplate, but there is coherence to examine. We need to keep this formula in mind. It invites us to perceive figuration by returning to the hidden source of the visible, upstream from form, at the foundation-fount of painting from whence the first and unique stroke wells up.

From the Foundation-Fount of Painting

1. The history of European art, and of its painting in particular, can be read in an epic mode. It presents itself as a series of experiments in which each new arrival in the arena tries to push the limits of the discipline further. Pliny the Elder, who gave the first assessment of the painting of classical antiquity, tells its history as a linked chain of acquisitions and discoveries. So-and-so went further, so-and-so further still. Polygnotus of Thasos, says Pliny, was the first to paint women in transparent clothing; Parrhasius the first to make his figures proportionate, the first to render the details of facial expression; and so on. In the silence and perseverance of the workshops, where a monastic submissiveness reigned, procedures and imperatives were discreetly transmitted well beyond the master's lifetime, to such a point that Giotto's blue continued to haunt later generations and Peter Paul Rubens's manner can still be detected in Paul Cézanne. Even so, Painting, in the way it assumes the role of—sets its heart on being—the hero of Art and Truth, likes to declare itself revolutionary and to glorify its inventions. At its most vehement moments—whether in Renaissance

Italy, where the rules of perspective were methodically established to respond to the new norms of truth, or in twentieth-century Paris, where even more method and systematic thinking were devoted to destroying that same perspective, again in the quest for more "truth" - new watchwords were forged, theoretical writings produced. These manifestos marked an epoch and established the break, or at least programmed it. Not that the new arrival (brush in hand, facing the canvas, ever adopting a more modest form) really believed he was more advanced than his predecessors. But the break announced forced him to project himself forward and break off from a tradition he felt it his duty to despise as much as to admire. In that sense, the European painter increasingly resembles the scientist and the philosopher, who constantly say no to what has come before, even to their own prior selves. That painter increasingly dreams of remaking painting each time, as people not long ago wanted to remake the world, to "burn down the Louvre" as Cézanne said (though he never stopped going back to it), to start all over again from zero.*

The history of Chinese painting—which is the only art history comparable to the European both in its length and in its dynamism and richness—presents itself in an entirely different manner. Not that it aspires to immobility, or that anyone could naïvely believe such a thing. It is only when you look from a distance or without paying enough attention that you can delude yourself into thinking that those silhouettes over there don't move or that China is "motionless." But over the course of many centuries, until the forced encounter with the West, Chinese painters refrained from talking about breaks and even more about renunciation and revolution. Not, there again, that Chinese painting is so well-behaved and conformist or lacks a certain inventiveness; but, like the civilization to which it belongs, it is viscerally attached to celebrating heritage and filiation. Having always glorified the origin of its power as a mystery, Chinese painting, moreover, does not question what it has to do, has no doubts about its purpose, and does not dream of viewing it as an enigma. It therefore does not feel called upon to find new solutions by overturning precedents so as to get at and "ensnare" what is true. Chinese painting so loves to conceive of itself in terms of a steady and majestic maturation process that nothing seems able to mark an ep-

^{*} One must "kill modern art," said Picasso, and even "kill oneself if one wants to keep on doing something." Pablo Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, ed. Marie-Laure Bernadac and Androula Michael (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 148.

och in it, to establish a break between the before and the after. Painters love to integrate into a controlled, well-ordered, and convergent (zhu liu)^a course even the most unusual and extreme temptations, which often date back more than a millennium. They borrow from artists who reproduced trickles of water on the support, or cracks and bumps lifted from a wall in ruins (Guo Nuxian, Song Di); or from those who, quite simply abandoning the brush in their rapture, laughing and singing, joyously spattered ink onto silk by whipping about their hair (Wang Mo).

Seen in retrospect, however, Chinese painting has evolved in profound ways over the course of its history and has even undergone radical transformations. Its initial aim was monumental-ornamental: frescoes were commissioned for the walls of temples and palaces. From there, painting developed into an art reduced to the narrow surfaces of silk and paper on which the painter improvises, guided only by his inspiration and solely for his own pleasure, the same way he writes a poem. It went from a craft whose task was to represent prominent personalities, thereby keeping their memory alive and transmitting their example, to an art that privileges the landscape as a whole, that no longer depicts in the strict sense but rather attempts, by capturing the original energy in its lines, to apprehend and reproduce the great life principle of the world. This was called literati painting and it experienced an astonishing period of growth under the Song and Yuan Dynasties, beginning in the tenth century. The shift from one form of painting to the other involved not only the support or the technique but also the social status of its practitioner. In the process, the very meaning of the act of painting was completely called into question. Yet it was not until the later periods that painters gave up embracing the example of the first masters. Under the Song Dynasty and even later, they continued to praise the moral purpose of painting, as if they had never broken away from it (see Guo Ruoxu). Indeed, they even appealed to it first and foremost. "I have created nothing," said Confucius, who has been cited ever since as the great originator of Chinese civilization: "I have only transmitted."

2. It was under the Tang Dynasty, in the eighth and ninth centuries, that, notwithstanding a lack of new theories and proclaimed breaks, such a shift became more pronounced. Wang Wei, the painter-poet who recommended painting "as if there were—as if there were not," has remained one of its mythic representatives. And in the tenth century Dong Yuan, who painted mountain peaks "emerging-submerging" between the clouds, was one of the first and most magnificent painters to fully realize

the potential of that shift. A contemporary of Wang Wei (Zhu Jingxuan, 25, T.H.L., 75) states without preliminary justification: "Painting is the sage." Might that not presuppose that painting, having broken free from the strictures of artisanship, now partakes in the invisible dimension of the great process of things - of which the sage was traditionally considered an integral part—and possesses the same absolute status as he? The text continues: "For it goes to the far reaches of what Earth and Heaven cannot attain and makes appear what the sun and moon do not illuminate." From these traditional formulations, now applied to painting, it is at least clear that this art is acknowledged as a power of exploration or manifestation surpassing the limits of the sensible world and integrating the invisible into itself. Indeed, in previous centuries some had already celebrated painting's capacity to embrace the infinite within its cramped space. The painter can make the limitless variety of beings and things rise up within the spirit simply by manipulating the clump of ever-so-fine hairs in the brush, can hold thousands of li in the palm of his hand by deploying the capacity of a single "square inch," the symbolic measure of the surface of silk or paper (or of the human heart). A more notional conclusion follows, and may serve as a definition of painting. As the painter "transfers spirit by determining concrete materialities, and as his delicate ink falls on virgin silk," "what has figuration is, as a function of that, established" and "what is without form is, as a function of that, engendered."b

Here, then, two matrix-terms of Chinese thought, opposite and complementary, are placed side by side in a parallel formulation, but this time with respect to painting: you xiang, what possesses a figuration, and wu xing, what has no form. In other words, the visible and the invisible form a binomial. At the same time, the two verbs employed discreetly allow a difference in phase or level to appear between the two terms. What possesses a figuration manifests itself as a physical founding or "establishing," whereas the without-form does so in a preliminary manner, as pure "engendering." Hence, taking into account both that parallelism and that difference, we are led to imagine the overall operation performed by painting as a return to the original phase of the Withoutform, which constitutes the foundation-fount from which the deployment of figuration flows, coming into actuality. The foundation-fount: both ground and source, fons and fondus. It is the Without-form—so it is said—that serves as the foundation-fount of painting. Indeed, though it will henceforth be posited as self-evident that painting "consists of the figuration of forms" (xiang xing; see, for example, Tang Dai, C.K., 235), "what has form must rest on the without-form" and is led to "take its model" from it. Hence the without-form does not merely precede what has form as its starting point and origin, but is its operative, generative fundament; what has form proceeds continuously from it.

Although "what has form is easy to imitate," the theorist immediately adds, the foundational without-form is "difficult to apprehend." I therefore return to the question I left unanswered at the end of chapter 1, in order to shed light, based on the evolution of Chinese painting, on both its general and its founding character. How are we to understand something whose form we cannot "contemplate" but whose "coherence" we can "examine"? Or, to put it differently, what is the nature of the withoutform on which pictorial form depends, on which it "rests," and which it is inclined to imitate? That invisibility of the foundational cannot enjoy an ontological status since it is "without form" and, as a result, does not give rise to the determination of essence, or eidos. At the same time, since it lies at the source of the visible and serves as the guide for its coming about, that without-form is not the formless. It cannot be considered simply a-morphous or null or "gaping"; it cannot be considered chaos.

3. From its opening words, the Laozi calls that undifferentiated Fount of the invisible, from which forms and beings continually proceed and to which they return to be resorbed, "the unnamable." Of all religious people and of all philosophers, it seems to me that the Chinese Taoists, in thus conceiving the tao, are those who assume the least, construct the least, in conferring an overall coherence on the phenomenon of life. I believe that is also what constitutes the force of their thought and explains why, far from losing its relevance, it is now experiencing a revival. The formulas of the *Laozi* designate an origin for beings and things that does not appeal to faith, or count on the persuasive force of a deduction, or rely on the particular framework of a (mythic) history or cosmogony. In their conciseness, they have a radicality that allows them to evade the cleavages and elaborations of metaphysics. The Taoist thinker is content to elucidate, without articulating further, simply laying things out, without violence. The Taoist absolute is not God because there is no need to credit it with existence as a Person, or even as an agency, and the function of the absolute is confined to "imitating" what "happens to be so on its own" (Laozi, §25): in other words, the natural. The Taoist absolute is also not Being since it escapes any determination as essence and vanishes—the Laozi constantly warns us of this—as soon as specifications, which themselves lead to disjunctions (that of "being/nonbeing" in

the first place), make an appearance. But it is the "way," the tao, because forms and beings, in rising up and receding, in "coming into actuality" and "turning back," follow the path of that immanence:

The Without-name is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, what has a name is the mother of all existents.

Hence, from the first words, a roadblock stands in the way of the opposition between being and nonbeing, since any distinction between "there is" and "there is not" now refers only to different stages in the coming about of the process of things. "There is" and "there is not" (or the "beginning" and the "mother") "have a common origin, even if their name differs," and that shared origin expresses the foundational kinship between what has come into actuality and what has not, or between any differentiation and the Undifferentiated. Wang Bi (third century) comments: "All that there is has its beginning in the there-is-not; that is why, at the stage when there has not yet been actualization and [that] is without name, it [the undifferentiated fount] has the value of the beginning of all existents." The Laozi itself says explicitly that this primordial "there-is-not" of the undifferentiated fount is not nothingness. It is rather that from which particular individualities constantly proceed, all the while becoming differentiated. The *Laozi* makes this "there-is-not" the starting point of knowledge (\$40):

In the world, all existents are born from the there-is, and the there-is is born from the there-is-not.

"Painting is the sage," Zhu Jingxuan had said. That is because, in its figurative process, painting has the same aim as the sage: to deploy the tao. As Chinese painting evolves, the more it breaks free from the function of representation, the closer it moves to that aim and the clearer that aim becomes. If the painter accomplishes an act of "wisdom" by painting mountaintops emerging-submerging in the mist, or treetops protruding and receding, or a path coming in and going out, rising up and sinking down, it is because, rather than paint things as objects, "thrown ahead" and pinned down as presences so to speak, determined by perception and specifiable by the understanding, he captures them in keeping with the logic of immanence that makes them appearing-disappearing. In his drawing, he encompasses the entire process—the tao—that brings them into existence. The *Laozi* (§2) also says, "The there-is and the there-is-

not engender each other." If we understand it properly, that reciprocal action suffices to take away the distinctiveness of the there-is of presence. This presence, having barely come forward, is already inhabited by, drawn to, its absence. In opening an escape route for forms, in making them indistinct and plunging them into confusion, the painter does no more than make visible that reciprocity which is constantly at work. He deploys existents until they are penetrated by the invisible and makes forms, in their very foundation, gain access to the dimension of indifferentiation from which all differentiation proceeds. If, as they say, the painter paints between "there is" and "there is not," or "as if there wereas if there were not," that "there-is-not" (wu) is clearly the opposite of a negative. It is not on the order of nonbeing or nothingness. It is the Fount of immanence from which "there is" can come about by becoming distinct—just as a line can ap-pear, a form ex-ist.

The painting theorists under the Tang Dynasty traditionally expressed the moral importance of painting and stated that the purpose of painting was to serve as an example. Painting "brings about education-transformation [of mores], aids in the establishment of human relationships." But alongside that formula, they added a second and parallel purpose, which also became canonical. Painting "explores" (or "fathoms") the "latentsubtle" (Zhang Yanyuan, Wang Wei, Han Zhuo, and others). The term latent (you) expresses the withdrawal into absence, the sinking down into the stage of confusion and hiddenness, whereas the term subtle (wei) expresses invisibility-intangibility (see Laozi, §14) at the stage before the actualization of forms and their differentiation. We must refrain from allowing the meaning of all these terms to diverge toward Western language, in that they do not found a body of knowledge in the effusiveness of a mystical relationship (Western language was fashioned to impart knowledge or to express love). For let us not forget that the Laozi is, in the first place, a treatise on strategic behavior. We have hardly begun translating and already we must take care to correct for that effect: "For the art of landscape, the style is flat and bland, its logic hidden and mysterious: through countless modifications-transformations, in the figuration of scenes of the four seasons and of the atmosphere, composed of wind and clouds, by exploiting the resources of ink and brush, [painting] explores down to its foundation the marvelously natural coming about outside the latent" (Han Zhuo, S.H.L., 63). Miao, fone of the key words in the Laozi, which is usually translated as "marvelous," expresses the ineffable success of that which, from the foundational "there-is-not," is constantly produced by pure immanence (cf. the "host of miao," zhong

miao, Laozi, §1). The only expedient I have found is to render it as an apparent oxymoron, "marvelous-natural." Similarly, I cannot translate the following expression, culled from the Shitao (chap. 15), except by providing a cumbersome gloss: "Painting, distilled [jing means choice grain, quintessence, spirit of wine, and so forth] from the reifying opacity of presence, and acceding to subtlety-invisibility [that of the great process of transformation: wei], penetrates the unfathomable."

4. Critics and theorists of painting in China took pleasure in evoking the artists' eccentricities, drawn from the old Taoist fount (these traits rapidly became conventional, however), showing how the artist attacked his work in an uncontrollable, solitary outburst, which was the gage of his authenticity. The contemporaries of Zhang Zao (late eighth century) in particular vividly portrayed the meaning and effect of the impulse that inspired him (see Fu Zai, a contemporary of Zhu Jingxuan, T.H.L., 70). Carried away by his natural bent, suddenly overwhelmed by an entire world of thoughts, he brusquely demanded silk from his hosts. He presented quite a spectacle to his entourage: seated, his legs spread, his clothes gaping open, breathing hard, his mind becoming unhinged. The sight of him was as terrifying as "lightning shooting through the sky" or "a whirlwind rising up." The brush "flies," ink "spatters," as if the hand holding the brush "will break in two" at any instant. Amid separations and reunions, in confusion and indetermination, strange configurations are suddenly born. But finally, "the pine trees have their bark wrinkled with scales, rocks rise to dizzying heights, water flows pure and transparent, and the clouds melt together in the distance." The painter then casts away his brush and stands up: "In response to which, on all sides, it's as if the sky were becoming clear and serene again after thunder and rain, as if one were seeing the fundamental nature of things." When one considers the art of Zhang Zao, the critic concludes, "it is not painting, but truly the tao itself." When he is at work, it is certain he has dropped all artifice: "His internal stirrings mingle with the original transformation, and all existents are in the receptacle of his soul, not in his ears or before his eyes."

That last sentence sums up what may constitute the essence of painting. It expresses how, unlike in a skilled-cunning mode of painting, the painter's intentionality (his yi)^h reverts to the primordial phase of the undifferentiated fount (here, the notion of ming)ⁱ to reconnect with the great process by which beings and things come about and undergo transformation. If this return upstream does not occur, there is no "painting." Or rather, true painting "is no longer painting," strictly speaking, in that

it does not stem from a particular initiative and skillfulness. It is rather the tao itself, coming about sponte sua and, as such, becoming impersonal and inclusive in the process. There is no better way to say that painting opens on the world's secret and allows it to appear. It consists, not of depicting and representing what is before one's eyes, perceiving it as a spectacle, but of reproducing, on the basis of the impulse of the spirit embracing the emotionality of the world, the process that, from the undifferentiated fount—like virgin silk or the whiteness of the paper—prevails on beings and things to deploy through a gradual differentiation, until they are born in their natural forms. Painting is to be conceived in terms of a taoic, and no longer mimetic, logic, and that is the difference we will have to explore at length. To paint is to return to the "source" of "phenomena-figurations" (the same notion, xiang) from which the real, the line drawing, constantly flows in coming into actuality. "Since you like to paint landscapes of clouds and forests," the Old Man of the Stone Drum Parade teaches the neophyte, "you must shed light on the source of the figuration of things" (Jing Hao, T.H.L., 255). Paint the tree, not as an object perceived in front of you, not as its features present themselves to view, but as it "receives its nature," by reproducing the logic of immanence that gradually fosters its growth, from unformed to formed, until it finally brings it to completion with these particular features, as this "so." In other words, it is only in going back to the starting point of that emergence process, outside the "confusion-indifferentiation" of the invisible, that there is effectively a possibility for "creation" (ming-zao, Shen Gua, S.H.L., 231).

I know of no other way to interpret this expression from the *Shitao*, which I at first stumbled over (there are few commentaries on it, and Pierre Ryckmans, the French translator, has nothing to say): the painter, it is said, "is receptive to things in such a way that it is without form" (and, in parallel, "he manages forms in such a way that it is without trace"; chap. 16). Shitao insists elsewhere (chap. 4) on the respect the artist must have for that receptive capacity: if he does not honor it, he "forsakes" and mutilates himself. But why is he receptive to "things" (the term is extremely general) "in such a way that it is without form" (the relationship being consequential)? As I understand it, the painter must be receptive to things at a stage prior to that when they display and impose their forms, before they have become objective and characteristic: at a stage when, emerging from the invisible-undifferentiated fount, they are in the process of taking form and coming into actuality. If there is receptivity, it is because he apprehends them in the genesis that leads them

to deploy in that way in order to exist (that is why receptivity is primary, the *Shitao* says at the beginning of the chapter: "if you know, and only then are receptive, that is no longer receptivity"). If, instead of limiting himself to present sensations or anxiously eviscerating that perception to analyze its structure, the Chinese painter "honors" a receptivity that takes him back to "latency," to the stage of the "subtle" or of withdrawal, that receptivity will make him embrace the ascent of the visible outside the invisible fount, and it is that process that he "paints."

5. Shitao is usually acknowledged as one of the greatest theorists of Chinese painting, undoubtedly because, even more explicitly than his predecessors, he was able to connect pictorial practice to the fundaments and imperatives of the literati's thinking. In its conciseness, his language assumes a radicality that rescues fertile intuitions from the boredom and laziness in which the tradition inevitably allows them to sink. His treatise, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, is the endpoint in the evolution of Chinese painting, but not yet a slave to the constraints and platitudes of orthodoxy. Yet this Shitao, who ironically took the nickname "Bitter Pumpkin" and was bold enough to openly expound his positions, a rarity in China, based his entire thinking on a single experience: that of a first stroke that, as it emerges and lengthens under the brush, "opens" the original indifferentiation and gradually makes it come about (see chap. 7). In a state of amazement, he tirelessly considers that passage from the formless to form—the most simple form, consisting of a single segment, but one that is already complete and contains in itself all possible forms (yi hua). This first stroke progresses continuously on the sheet, reproducing along its course the uninterrupted process of the "creation-transformation" of things. In this stroke, you see something of the visible pierce through from its invisible fount. Above all, because the tracing of the line remains fundamentally one, it forms a transition between the original "there is," the Without-form of the undifferentiated Fount (which Shitao, in the spirit of Taoism, calls the "Great Simplicity," tai pu, or the unseparated, hun-dun), and the proliferating "there is," which constitutes the diversity of forms and the continual renewal of the concrete. At the junction between the two, it is both the stroke of emergence and of ascent, at the starting point of every variation of later lines, and of submersion and return, with all previous lines culminating in it, becoming confused and losing their individuality. In that respect, it returns to the stage of the elementary or "simple," to which Taoists, who advocated a "return" to the natural, were so attentive. As such, the

first stroke is the bearer of "wisdom" because a differentiation begins in it—but also recedes—a differentiation that would otherwise have gone on proliferating forever, to the point of exhaustion.

But where, more precisely, does that first stroke's function as intermediary lie, and what sense are we to give to its "oneness"? Even though it falls to this stroke, by virtue of its actualization, to bring the world out of the original indifferentiation, the stroke itself is not yet differentiated. All in all, it remains identical to itself as it is being traced, giving rise to no modification, and it is only from it, after it, that the figurative transformation will begin, in order to paint the infinite diversity of the world. By this fact alone, it links us directly to the undifferentiated Fount, without any loss of the primordial within the multiple. To those who might be astonished that Shitao grants the first stroke such a power of revelation or incarnation—to come back to our own terminology—and even invests it with a mediating function in relation to the absolute, let me remind them of the strange imaginings our own thinking relied on to conceive of the Origin. Then imagine a world of the spirit like that of China, haunted by neither God nor Demiurge, a world that did not invent any great cosmogonic framework for itself or grant any great credence in the story of Creation. It is then the fate of that first-unique-brushstroke to take the place of all those more or less fabulous spectacles. It even dispenses with them and dissipates them. It reduces them to the "simple"—one stroke suffices. It is the sufficient, emblematic figuration—there is no longer anything anecdotal or tragic about it—that which constitutes the "mystery" of any coming about, but only because it is absolutely natural.

That is how the treatise opens. That first stroke, not yet undergoing differentiation, unique as a result, which is one and which expresses the "one" simultaneously, is "the fundament of all there is," "the root of all phenomena-figurations" (chap. r). Whatever the subsequent proliferation of forms and things, whether an artist is to paint "the dazzling variety of landscapes or people," the "particular nature of animals and plants," or the "angles and proportions of stretches of water and pieces of architectures," if he does not penetrate more deeply into their points of coherence, does not completely deploy their dispositions, it is, in the end, because he has not yet mastered the "immense reach" of the single brushstroke. That stroke is the first step in any apprenticeship, just as it is its final outcome. That single stroke "contains within itself all existents" and thus possesses the "fullest power" of deployment (chap. 4). It governs their endless differentiation, just as it "completely gathers up"

within itself "what is outside the farthest distance" (chap. I). There is no better way to express its absoluteness. Whatever "the incalculable number of brushstrokes" a painter will ever be able to make, there is not one "that does not begin" with that first stroke, not one "that does not end" with it. It is the alpha and the omega of painting.

But people ordinarily "do not realize this," Shitao acknowledges with his first words. That "operation" "manifests itself at the level of spirit" but remains "buried" in the human gesture (chap. 1). It is even that ordinary immanence—that immanence of the ordinary, a simple brushstroke which, as the ancient Chinese texts constantly advise us, most easily escapes consciousness and usually goes unnoticed. Hence men project that One outward and venerate it at a distance, in the great pageant of religion or as a primordial-ever-fleeing-concept of philosophy. And, Shitao tells us, that plenitude of the One, which constantly exerts its attraction on the spirit, achieves its realization and execution entirely—and as if stripped bare—in that first line, that of a simple stroke. Without further mythological fabrications or metaphysical trappings, it reaches its full realization in that first or last stroke I draw, if I myself comprehend everything it comprehends within itself. In bringing forth that first, not yet differentiated, form, and in resorbing all forms into its nonindividuated line, it serves as a marker of the tao. In that way it succeeds in expressing the absolute, by whatever name it is called, which, as we all know, here and there and since time immemorial, is inexpressible.

Vague-Drab-Indistinct

I. I admit it, I have set off on a rather strange undertaking. To what extent is it even conceivable? At issue is nothing less than an attempt to undo the very thing by virtue of which the European language has so forcefully been shaped, to such an extent that it now imposes its categories on the rest of the world. I seek to unpack and dissolve the opposition between presence and absence, or life and death, or—and this opposition goes hand in hand with the others and reinforces them—between subject and object.*

* Hegel: "Among the countless differences cropping up" at the most immediate stage of knowledge, when consciousness has barely opened itself to the world, "we find in every case that the crucial [difference] (Hauptverschiedenheit) is that, in sense-certainty, pure being at once splits up into what we have called the two 'Thises,' one 'This' as 'I,' falling to one side, and the other 'This,' as object, falling to the other" (Phenomenology of Spirit, 59 [translation modified—trans.]). How are we to conceive in the most general manner, not only the relation of cognition—as Descartes and Kant understand it—but, more radically, the very activity of consciousness, except as "the relation of the Ego and the object to each other"? (G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophical Propaedeutic, ed.

Taoist thought targets that opposition through its evasive formulations expressing the evanescence of the tao. That is what Dong Yuan paints, shrouding mountaintops in mist, making paths come out and go back in, treetops protrude and recede. Existence (ex-sistere), as the word itself says, is truly a proceeding forth from the source and a surging up. It is, in fact, an emergence from the undifferentiated fount. Individuation acquires form, traits come into actuality, something of life takes on characteristics. As emotions-dispositions well up reactively and spread throughout the world and within one's deepest self (the same Chinese term, qing, is used in both cases), these configurations vibrate continuously. Something of spirit becomes distilled and concentrated (jing-shen) within that energy: something of thought appears. There is a corresponding and parallel collapse into "death" and a return to latency, when forms dissolve, features blur together, life comes undone, grows silent, and undergoes transformation. No tragedy there. Death is resorption. If the Chinese painter paints not some particular view but an entire landscape simultaneously emerging-submerging, appearing-disappearing, he does so to shake the beholder free from the cramped enclosure of an ego-subject constituting an autonomous fate for itself vis-à-vis the consistency of objects. The painter thereby invites the beholder to reinscribe his individual existence within the continuous course of the great process of the world, envisioned in its phenomenality as simple partitive: something of existence, some existence, a piece of existence, as we would say some water drawn from the sea, something of the sky or a piece of sky glimpsed between rooftops. We certainly perceive, here and there, under the cliff, a few discrete human figures forming a scene for a moment, carrying wood and driving a mule. Over there on the beach, others are pulling in a net-but they are barely discernible on the scroll, or at least do not grab our attention. They blend into—become con-fused with—the landscape.

Michael George and Andrew Vincent, trans. A. V. Miller [New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 55).

The journey through Chinese painting and thought leads the European spirit to stand outside that fall, which is already that of immediate knowledge, knowledge of the immediate, in accordance with the two disjunctive sides of subject and object—in-itself and for-itself, consciousness and self-consciousness, certainty and truth, which European philosophy will later constantly mediatize.

The journey through Chinese painting and thought, in other words—and this is the key aspect of this detour—commits us to finding a new starting point for the development of a "phenomenology" of spirit, and hence to conceiving of it differently.

That evasiveness, dissolving the opposition between presence and absence, which is the only possible way to characterize the tao, is designated as such in one of the first paragraphs of the *Laozi* (§4). The tao is "empty," devoid of differentiating marks but, starting from it, a certain effect constantly does its work, a certain reality arises, but without ever becoming saturated or exhausted. As such, it is the foundationless fount from which everything emerges, or rather seems to emerge:

Unfathomable! As if it were the ancestor of all existents.

That fount can be apprehended only as it blurs, or resorbs, what is prominent-distinctive-engrossing: these terms intersect. In other words, it can be apprehended if we know how to

blunt the sharp edges unravel the skeins even out the light make dust cohere.

In expressing the return to the undifferentiated, these equivalent expressions, hardly distinguishable from one another, lead us to envision the existence of the tao in the vaguest way, in the uncertain mode of "as if," and not as an overt presence-absence:

Submerged! As if perhaps it exists.

As if it "exists" or "is there" (cun as opposed to wang,d cf. Laozi, §41). Let us properly understand the image underlying these exclamations: the tao, buried, is perceived as the hazy bottom (fond) of a deep body of water we gaze into from above. We perceive only indistinctly, we are never sure we really perceive it. It most assuredly diverges from the category of being-presence, since it is doubly marked, by indetermination and by contingency ("as if" does not connote an appearance duplicating and corroborating being; it expresses indistinctness, not illusion). It also blocks the way to theology, or rather—and this is more radical—sets aside the possibility and neglects it, finally pushing the idea of god farther downstream, making genealogy extend further back:

I do not know whose son he is, he resembles the ancestor of god(s).

The tao is the original, but the origin itself is hazy, with no single point of reference forming a beginning, no primordial ancestor acting as agent. There is no "In the beginning was . . . ," Am Anfang war . . . How—that is, on the basis of what status and appealing to what logic—is it possible to conceive of the hazy? And does not haziness introduce a hindrance in the effort to read? Granted, it is perilous to strain these evasive formulas by binding them too closely to questions of philosophy, precisely because they are deliberately evasive, because they are careful not to construct and define; they seek to escape specifications and to express the indeterminate. That does not prevent these formulations from branching out, working in harmony, and intersecting along the chain of these aphorisms. In that way, they weave a coherence that can be formulated (though not as an argument) and even produce an understanding that can be elucidated, though this understanding works against any clear distinction among living beings, and is an understanding of the vague and evanescent. There is room between the two extremes—(suddenecstatic) intuition and methodical understanding—for a clarification that, advancing by turns and variations, becomes stronger and more distilled, following the progress via entrenchment that constitutes wisdom. And just as determination is required to progress with an "always-more" in view (more potential, more knowledge, more to be had), indetermination is led to resume, to pursue, and to work, but by reducing, abandoning, breaking off, emptying out, withdrawing. In that way, something of pure existence (as an expression of immanence alone) can become visible, relieved of all logical and theoretical padding. This is what Taoist thinkers are trained for. Wherein does the vague nature of that "as if" lie? In the fact that the fundamental course of things, always proceeding on its way, uninterruptede (\$6), does not stand apart from itself; as a result, it is "unnamable" (§14). It lies in the fact that, in its continuum, the course of things constantly con-fuses presence and absence, emergence and resorption: "This means there is not, but existents proceed from it: this means there is, but one sees no form in it" (Wang Bi commenting on Laozi, \$14; cf. \$6).

Such is the invisibility of the foundational. It does not stem from a different state of reality, from the supersensible real. Rather, at the far edge of the sensible, it is that which, having resorbed all differentiation, is no longer concretely apprehensible and therefore proves to be evanescent. Two invisibilities are to be distinguished: on one hand, there is the invisible of the intelligible, an invisibility that is different in its essence from the visible, like the Greek *noeton* in opposition to *oraton*; on the other,

the invisible of the imperceptible, which lies along the continuum of the visible, with the visible dissolving into it. God or Ideas are absolutely invisible but essentially in existence (de deo; quod existat), whereas the tao is at the limit of the visible and "as if" it existed. That invisibility of the foundational is something so "fine-grained" that, in looking at it, "we no longer perceive it" (or "we do not see it adequately," §35). It is so "subtle" that, listening to it, "we no longer hear it." It is so "slender" that, touching it, "we no longer hold it." This means that we cannot "inquire after it all the way" and that seeing, hearing, and touching, escaping the specification of the different sense organs, become indistinguishable. Not being itself differentiated, this invisibility is not "clear above" and "obscure below." And, since individual existents recede back into it, to the point of no longer being "existents," it can be called "the configuration without configuration" or "the image [or figuration] without particular existents." In its "evanescence," the Laozi (\$21) adds, there is something of the "image," just as, in its "dimness," there is something of "existence." That is why this undifferentiated fount of the invisible can be the source of all figurations possible; why this without-form is nevertheless not formless; why, though it offers no form to "contemplate," it nevertheless provides a certain coherence to be "examined," and the painter can extract from it—from its fount—a power of infinite figuration.

2. How is it possible to figure that indifferentiation of the tao, which makes it hazy, dim, evanescent? In other words, how are we to render that indistinctness from which the distinct constantly proceeds by standing apart, how are we to show that indetermination, which is the foundation of all determination possible? The invisibility of the undifferentiated Fount, since it does not lie on a plane apart from the sensible, is not cut off from it, does not have the status of intelligible essences, cannot be expressed as an analogy, symbolic in its scope, drawn from within the concrete. Since it "is" not, it is also not representable, not even by means of transposition or vivid imagery. It is not the (Platonic) Good, dominating the world of Ideas by means of its transcendence and symbolized by the sun (the sun, "son" of the Good by virtue of resemblance within the sensible, and yet hanging over the sensible). Indeed, the Laozi has just said: "I do not know whose son it is." The only way to characterize it, as a result, will be to evoke it escaping characterization; the only way to determine it will be to produce indeterminate determinations of it. If we are to render that hazy foundationality of the tao merging presence and absence, we will have to show things barely forming

outlines of their traits, or not even deigning to appear, or already in the process of coming undone, sinking down, growing dim. The tao is not apart from things—it is not Being—but is rather their disappearing-appearing course. To render its evasiveness, we will have to evoke things, not in the objectifying plenitude of their presence, which fills the gaze with their distinctive traits, but on the edge of their invisibility, on the threshold of their emergence or resorption. In short, the only way to characterize that foundational haziness will be to work against characterization and de-characterize; the only way to paint a picture will be to de-pict.

The *Laozi* overtly raises the problem of how to paint the unpaintable (§15). One suspects that the Taoist sage is "unknowable," he whose "marvelously natural" (naturally marvelous) "subtlety" is "unfathomable" because it allows the spirit to "communicate" freely through the entire process of things instead of confining the spirit and fastening it to particular individuations that cut off its reach. He is not unknowable from a psychological point of view, of course; he is unknowable because, like the tao, he escapes the specification from which limitation arises. That is why, says the *Laozi*, one cannot characterize him except "by straining," in an indirect way:

Hesitating, as if he were setting out on a river in winter; irresolute, as if he feared his neighbors on all four sides.

Here, the comparison does not aim to render convincingly, thus allowing us to see better, which is how comparisons usually work. It does the reverse: it aims to make less precise. Instead of focusing on determination and permeating us with its presence, it tends on the contrary to detach us from the order of "there is" and to make us return upstream from its actualization. It tends, in short, to suspend and hold back the (ontologically) determining character of any discourse "on" the tao. Of this man hesitating to step out onto the frozen river, we see only his indecisiveness and lack of expression. Of the man anticipating being attacked from all sides, we as yet see only his expectation, not knowing which way he will turn. In both cases, the image serves to express in a sensible manner the absence of sensible marks. It is the same with the comparisons that follow:

Reserved as a houseguest dissolving like ice near the melting point

holding on to his fundamental virtue like wood in its raw state, wide open like the valley and murky like troubled waters.

Solemn reserve, and a roughness that preserves the foundational, both express something that refrains from becoming visible and does not yet stand apart. Melting ice, a valley opening wide, and the murkiness of troubled waters express the other extreme, that which is becoming undone and losing specification. From each utterance the depicting aspect of picturing is immediately withdrawn. Each utterance does not picture but de-picts. The de- here signifies not completion but the reverse: effacement, undoing. Or rather, it signifies not so much the opposite as withdrawal. It does not signify an act of disfiguration aimed at shattering representation and emancipating its object—since we are still so attached to the object—thus reauthorizing the unusual. Instead, it signifies, from within figuration itself, a silencing and softening of representation's power to figure. Here, whether these traces hold back instead of moving outward, or merge together and recede instead of bringing forth, they are antitraces taking one to the brink of the undifferentiated.

The *Laozi* presents a portrait by diametrically opposing two registers. One register is characteristic of the projecting—and as a result superficial—stage of actualization, taken to its apogee; the other of the retracting, hence profound, stage of de-individuation returning to the undifferentiated (§20). Other people are "exuberant," as if in celebration; I alone am "gloomy" and as yet give no "sign," like "an infant who has not yet laughed," or like someone who is "worn out" and "does not know where to go off to." Others are "brimming over," I alone am "forlorn"; others are "brilliant," I alone am "dim." The liveliness of the others stands opposed to what they see as my "depressed" state; the plans they are making contrast sharply with my "exhausted" look. Against the volubility of all that makes a show of things, all that bustles about, the undifferentiated fount of the tao can find expression only inexpressively: as drab, insignificant, lackluster.

3. The gloomy-forlorn-dim, or the drab-insignificant-lackluster, are not designations of an Ego-subject, despite the backing given them by this portrait, which presents itself as a self-portrait. Nor are they qualities of things, attributions and specifications. But these terms are uttered in sequence, all on the same plane, in such a way as to dispense with the differences among them, so that we no longer grab onto any one of

them in particular. They join together and merge to paint the foundation of the world, on the near side of any specification. Nothing is as yet protruding-grasping, nothing stands apart, and consequently nothing attracts attention. It is before subject and object have separated from each other, establishing by that face-off the plane of cognition, before presence and absence have become opposites, creating the great drama of the life and death of existents. Such is the tone of the foundational. It is with that tonality—diluted ink oscillating between pale and dark, but without any colors—that the literati painter paints his landscape. The forsaken-drab-wilted, like the calm-detached-frugal, "are difficult dispositions to paint," notes one of the first theorists of the Song Dynasty (Ouyang Xiu, L.B., 42). And, when the painter succeeds, "it is not certain that those who contemplate his painting will realize it." They will realize it, in fact, only if they know how to detach their spirits from the entreaties of all that shows off and presses upon them, to which the spirit is usually a slave; only if they open their spirits beyond—or rather, this side of—the undifferentiated Foundation-Fount of the tao, learning to savor its "blandness" and "flatness" (see Laozi, §35).* Consider speed—that of flying or walking animals, for example. It is an easy thing to perceive, Ouyang Xiu continues, because it attracts our attention for only a moment and the differences are obvious. But "the harmony of what remains vacant and available," and a "grave and serene tranquility," are difficult for the painter to figure because there are almost no external signs of them and, inasmuch as they close off all distinctions, they approach the undifferentiated.

Hence the "dim," the "drab," the "indistinct," linked together in a single intuition, are the "world" of painting (Li Rihua, *L.B.*, 132). But if the "soul" has not "opened up" enough when loosening its grip, or is not "vast" enough when extending its reach, to penetrate to that stage of the foundational, "it will not be easy for [the soul] effectively to reach this world." All the efforts made to "fill" and "apply oneself" will remain disassociated from such an aspiration. Yet we must still distinguish between

^{*} Beyond/on the near side of: while metaphysics is a philosophy of the beyond, longing for the "Out There" (Plato-Plotinus's epekeina) and even for farther than the out there ("outside the world"—ektos kosmou—is the Good, is God), Taoism is a philosophy of the near side and is conceived as a return—via regression (cf. the image of the Mother or the infant)—to the "root stock," the foundational (ben, gen). By cutting out qualities, eliminating specifications, resorbing differences, it reunites with the "spontaneously so" (ziran) of the "natural."

the haziness of evanescence, which dilutes presence-absence and brings to light the indifferentiation of the foundational, from a haziness that is only the effect of disorder, interference, or inconsistency. Let us not forget that the foundational is plenitude. While the invisibility of the without-form may not offer forms to be contemplated, it nevertheless provides a coherence to be examined. As Li Rihua says elsewhere (L.B., 756), even if the ink pours out like a mist when it encounters silk or paper, even if it spreads out into a halo, the depth that it reveals thereby, a depth that may "seem unfathomable," can still be "analyzed in great detail." When that haziness of the ink exploits its power for diffuse saturation and is not the result of a lack of skill, it succeeds in "making emergence-submersion appear" and thus achieves completely, by itself, the great process of existence. This occurs without "sculpting" leaf by leaf, or figuring things one after the other, as artisan painters ordinarily do in seeking meticulously—narrowly—to render particular existents.

I said previously that Chinese criticism was allusive and that it left these notions vague. But we also find the reverse, didactic expositions argued like a school lesson (Bu Yantu, C.K., 280). Question: If we follow the argument to its logical end, must we not paint "without ink" to render that undifferentiated fount? The proposition seems commonsensical: ink and brush "can paint what has form" but "cannot paint what is without form." They can paint "fullness" but not "emptiness." Within a landscape, the light shining through the mists, and the shadows cast by clouds, are in continuous modification: "now [it] disappears and now appears, now is empty, now full, now there is and now there is not." [All that] "is vague and without determined figuration." Thus, to paint that "indistinctness" of the "appearing-disappearing," the master replies, the ancients devoted all their attention to developing the art of "inkless ink" and "brushless brush." Let us be clear: it is not that they completely gave up the ink and brush, but that they used a wash so diluted, so close to the dry-pale end of the spectrum, that it approximates the white of the paper. It is so dim that it almost fades away altogether. Hence the painter pictures while de-picting: in using that "inkless ink" and that "brushless brush," that ink grown pale and that barely-painting brush, he paints between form and without-form and renders the evanescence of the foundational.

I anticipate the objection: Must we resort to that philosophy of the Undifferentiated to achieve that capacity for haziness as effect? Might not that effect be recognized as such, independent of any choice related to the nature of the "foundational"? After all, "one finds indecisive strokes in Poussin's last work, *The Flood.*" These "flaws," writes Chateaubriand,

which one might wish to attribute to an old man's trembling hand, "make the great painter's masterpiece even more beautiful." An admirable "tremor of time!" Like the true artist he is. Chateaubriand is sensitive to the possibility opened by the abandonment-renunciation of precise brushstrokes, but he does not pursue that remark, twice made in passing in his Life of Rancé. For him and for the intellectual tradition to which he belongs, the value of the indecisive, which creates the dim and the hazy, does not correspond to any essential expectation. Can it take on meaning and if so, to what extent? The fissure introduced in the ontotheological base of determination leads to no discovery regarding the logic of the Undifferentiated, and that trembling of the hand, which makes the stroke less precise, remains purely an artistic shimmering. As such, it speaks to the artist's imagination, even tempts him somehow with transcendence, but it contains no revelation and carries with it no recommendation. Although confidently pointed out for the effect it produces, it is hardly subject to theoretical examination. Hence, in (classic) European painting, dimness and haziness are usually limited in their use to the figuration of distance. And even then, like Leonardo, theorists usually rely on a physical rationale to legitimate it, with science (physics), as one might expect, taking the place of metaphysics (rather than the reverse). At a distance, "there is much air between the eye and the object seen and so much air impedes the clarity of form of these objects"; therefore, "indicate small figures but do not finish them in detail." And again: "Things sharply outlined should be those near at hand, and the indistinct, that is, those with unclear outlines, should be represented as in distant places."1 That indistinctness, since it is only a blurring of borders or is understood only as a lessening of the need for them, does not have the function, on its own, of opening onto the Fount of the world and of painting. Far from calling into question the realism of the object, it responds to the necessity of the laws of perspective: it still stems from a truth of perception and its purpose is to confirm it.

Chinese theorists, conversely, developed a detailed typology of blurry distances and of their modalities for indetermination and dimness (Han Zhuo, S.H.L., 67–68). Sometimes "the riverbank is close and the water flows wide, the space is empty with mountains in the distance": that is the sparse distance. Sometimes, "mists and clouds create indistinction and, on the other side of the river, one has the impression of no longer seeing anything": that is the blurry distance. Sometimes, "the landscape is at once extraordinarily entrancing and subtle-evanescent": that is the concealed distance.

4. Descartes asserted that the distinct serves as the gauge of truth, "that the things we conceive very clearly and distinctly are all true," in the oftquoted formula. Even though this is one of the first principles of philosophy and serves as a foundation for modern reason, I find it increasingly difficult to persuade myself of its validity. Does that mean that the unclear and indistinct would necessarily be "false"? Is not the "true" in that case too scandalously narrow to allow us to inquire into the foundation of things? Descartes continually and methodically pairs the two terms, "clear" and "distinct," and "clear" always comes first. Despite the power of inspiration accorded to the mind, however, it appears that clarity and the assurance of the reality of existence stem from the operation of distinction and separation. The idea I have of my mind is incomparably more distinct than the idea of a corporeal thing, and the idea of God is incomparably more distinct than that of my mind. It follows from that single fact that the idea of God contains "more objective reality than any other." Descartes can therefore legitimately assert (in the Third Meditation) that it is true that "God is."*

If there is one choice that has constituted philosophy throughout its history, has even constituted the communality of that history—but to which, I admit, we pay little attention because it is so deep-seated, assimilated, commonplace, in short, so self-evident—it may very well be that choice in the first place. In choosing to think distinctly, I think separable-identifiable objects clearly lining up "before" my mind—this before forms a stage and makes them "stand" (Gegen-stand)—and I reject as unthought the indistinct or the undifferentiated. That is the strongest filiation existing between Plato and Aristotle and it unites them against the danger represented by the thinkers of mobilism, condemned (by the principle of contradiction) to being unable to say whether "it is so" or "it is not so," "without which there can be nothing determinate." At the end of the history of philosophy, to restore the authority of science and the concept, Hegel attacks the "empty profundity of the undifferentiated," which he

^{*} The clear and the distinct have the power to "persuade" the mind, says Descartes. That persuasion is related to truth, whereas the "muddled" partakes of "nothingness." We suspect that what Descartes imagines distinctly is, in the first place, invariable quantity, magnitudes, shapes, in short, essences and mathematical concepts.

It is true that the *fuzzy* thinking of the *Laozi* is not persuasive (*persuading* is one of the great theoretical phantasms of the West). It functions in a different way: in confounding, it elucidates. In any case, I know of no great Chinese thinkers who were inspired by mathematics.

attributes to the romantics and even to Schelling. As a defender of determinateness, *Bestimmtheit*, which in this case means the limit by virtue of which the essence is grasped (*horos*), Hegel can naturally feel only a holy horror at that monotonous—"monochromatic"—absolute, which can only be that of abstract universality and which condemns philosophy to an edifying and prophetic tone (the same tone I was afraid of lapsing into earlier, when I translated the Taoist thinker into the European language). The adversaries Hegel denounces are precisely those who, muddling the specifications of thought, want to make the dissolution of the differentiated—or rather its "resolution" in the "abyss of vacuity"—pass for a speculative method. In short, they present their Absolute as the darkness where "all cows are black" or, as we would say, all cats are gray. Such is "cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity." Consider the consequence: because determinateness has been set aside, we must also realize that, however religious a person might be, he can now say "anything at all" about "God."

China, especially Taoist China, chose to conceive of the indistinct indistinctly, and that is why it conceives not Being or God but the tao:

There is reality indistinctly arising [or "arisen"], born before Heaven and Earth Silent! Unfathomable! (Laozi, \$25)

In my view, Robert G. Henricks is wrong to translate this line into English as: "There was something formed out of chaos." In spite of himself, and despite what the Chinese says here, he is led to reontologize, to re-Hellenize. The Chinese, in choosing to think the foundational, think it as indifferentiation. I draw at last two consequences from this fact. First, we can now understand why Taoist thought did not develop into a history, in the way that we have a history of ontology, and why it tirelessly returns to the formulas of the Laozi. Even a thinker as ingenious as Wang Bi can do no more than comment on them. Not only are they matrix-formulas, there is no passing beyond them. Since they designate the indistinct, or rather the undifferentiating, all one can do is unpack them and do variations on them-as Wang Bi does-without ever saying anything more than that indetermination via entrenchment. The Laozi is extraordinarily brief, five thousand characters. No one will ever be able to say more. At the same time, it is not a revealed—hence definitively fixed—text such as the Bible or the Koran. Second, China never separated "literature" from "philosophy," as we continually did at least until the modern age (our modernity lies in part in that effort to return to and repair that rift).

Once philosophy had chosen the clear and distinct, literature became, by way of compensation, the realm of ambiguity. Philosophy is an enterprise to determine essences, which can be contradicted dialectically and transcended, abolished in order to be conserved (Hegel reminds us that what is characteristic of the determined is its absolute anxiety about not being what it is), but not dissolved and blurred. Therefore, it sometimes falls to poetry, at its most profound (by virtue of its indetermination), to think the other. In China, conversely, poetry, and especially landscape painting from its very beginning (Gu Kaizhi and Zong Bing in the fourth and fifth centuries), are directly linked to the conceptions of Chinese—and notably Taoist-thought. Wang Wei said he was predestined for painting, though he is better known as a poet, and there were many thinkers who painted. Emperor Huizong painted. Wang Fuzhi painted. Indeed, though I cannot conceive and explain the undifferentiated any further without facing the obvious risk of losing it, I can paint it as a landscape — by letting forms recede, by painting with pale ink, by shrouding the horizon. I need only a spot of ink nebulously soaking into the silk to figure it.

5. But to what extent can philosophy understand it?—by which I mean, understand it in a manner that effectively accounts for it and is permeated by it (inhabited by it)? Must we not gain greater familiarity with it? Otherwise, we will simply be embracing exoticism. Again I anticipate the objection: Am I not myself attributing a lofty role to Chinese thinking, that of systematically pointing out the unthought of the West? Chinese thought supposedly undoes the dualities of the West: it did not develop an "unhappy consciousness"; it did not set the infinity of life and of the subject against the finitude and determination of the being-there of things. Having removed Chinese thought from the infinite ramifications of its context, hence from its common ground (that which is internal to language in the first place), I am obliged to make its coherence available to the outside world, which can be done, explicitly or not, only vis-à-vis European thought, since I myself speak the European language. That immediately creates the illusion that I have gone over "to the other side," since that coherence proves to be overdetermined in turn. And, since the rift will continue opening endlessly, it will likely be impossible to remain on both sides at once. So I inevitably create the impression that I am celebrating the "other" thought (that "prophetic" tone again!) or, at least, somehow, unawares, preferring it. "Otherwise, why are you interested in it?" they'll say. "It's clearly because you want to borrow from it." In reality, what "interests" me is the richness of each of these

philosophies, the Chinese and the Greek, that results from their respective biases, which I try to bring to light. What interests me is how they illuminate each other, each revealing the *unthought* of the other. Since I am not inclined to assume that the minds or mentalities of the Chinese are different from those of the Europeans, much less that there is a difference of nature, what matters to me is the shared experience—or the experience that might be shared—that becomes available as a result of the diversity of coherencies elaborated and by the very gap between them.

The expected benefit of that scrutiny is the most difficult thing to obtain: the ability to stand back from one's own thinking, which might, for example, gradually make it possible to say "Europe" or "China"—or "European thought" and "Chinese thought"—without these being lazy formulations. Above all, it is the ability to understand why, in choosing to think the distinct, and in conceiving of the invisible as something intelligible that possesses the status of essence and archetype, Europe was able to develop the conditions for infinite theoretical knowledge. Or to understand how, on the basis of ontotheology, exploiting the potential of formal models (mathematics is operating in the background), it invented science, physics in particular. In recent centuries, it is physics that has abruptly changed the world around us. But China, which made so many technical improvements, did not fully develop natural science, because it did not impose mathematical concepts and models on nature. Europe, conversely, was uncomfortable thinking about aspects of experience that evaded the force of its theoretical designations and undermined its demarcations, and was ill equipped to address them.

Following the path of the indistinct that has just opened before us, let me use the example of "air" or "atmosphere," in the sense that someone has an "air" about him, or a place, party, or landscape has a certain atmosphere. In literally designating the air or mist "around the sphere," the notion of atmosphere also connotes presence, but a diluted and vaporized, nondelimited presence, an ambience, surroundings (of things or of the subject?). This means that, in the case of "atmosphere," the transition from the physical to the figural is desperately impoverished, is only a makeshift solution for expressing indetermination and hardly leads us to conceive of the notion.* Obviously, experience also imposes that notion

^{*} Cézanne: "I saw a Flaubert tone, an atmosphere, something indefinable . . ." (in Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne*, new ed. [Paris: Cynara, 1988], 133). The statement ends there, with ellipses, Cézanne can say nothing more about it.

on us, and in a sense we cannot do without it; even so, the concept of atmosphere was condemned to remain weak within European thought, given that, unlike the activity of cognition, "atmosphere" could not be conceived in terms of the opposition between the objective and the subjective. It is an influence that emerges from beings and things and is valid only by virtue of the impression it produces in us: it e-manates or im-parts and hence circulates inseparably between what is neither "that" nor "us" anymore, something that, as a result, cannot recede into a "what," not even the "I don't know what." Indeed, an atmosphere is diffuse, disseminated, dispersed, elusive. Its presence cannot be isolated into determinate elements, it is both sparse and undelimitable. Above all, it is not assignable. Evasive, evanescent, it can be analyzed not in terms of presence or essence, but only in terms of heaviness or valence, ex-haling, in-fluencing, in a nonontological mode, between "there is"—"there is not."

But is not the wind like that? As it happens, "atmosphere," associated with the "wind" (feng) as an endless force of dissemination and animation, is one of the richest notions of Chinese thought, and one of the most ancient. The first rubric of the oldest literary text from China, the Shijing, is "Regional Winds," Guo feng. No one can see the wind but we can perceive its effects; "when the wind passes over, the grass bows down," says Confucius (Analects 12.19). It penetrates stealthily and diffusely, slipping through the narrowest fissure (see trigram xun in the Book of Changes, chap. 57); there is not one notion to express it but a whole range of "wind" binomials. "Teaching-wind" (feng-jiao) connotes the moral atmosphere of a country; "stage-wind" (feng-jing) the lively and gay atmosphere of a landscape; "attitude-wind" or "bearing-wind" or "manner-wind" or "behavior-wind" (feng-zi, feng-yi, feng-du, feng-cao), the particular atmosphere emanating from a person. There is also "spiritwind" (feng-shen), "feeling-wind" (feng-qing), "resonance-wind" (feng-yun), "color-wind" (feng-cai), "flavor-wind" (feng-wei), g and so on. "In paintings of scenes of the four seasons, the flavor-wind is not alike," we read at the beginning of chapter 14 of the Shitao. Every school of Chinese thought ceaselessly exploited the imaginary of wind to conceive of the nonontological status of the efficacious-evanescent. Whereas ontology rests essentially on a gesture of assigning (in both senses, attributing and determining), the unassignability connoted by the wind makes it the privileged motif for expressing that which cannot be reduced—the "that" of "that which" is already saying too much—to an individuated, stabilized presence. The wind is truly the invisibility at the limit of the sensible that makes us experience the sensible. Its influence is all the more profound

in that it has no opacity; its reach and penetration are all the more vast in that, itself dissipated, it cannot be completely identified. Since it holds something of the undifferentiated within itself, it will naturally serve as a figure for the unobjectifiable.

The Chinese also conceived of atmosphere through another pairing associated with the wind and explicitly linking the visible to the invisible: "breath-image" (or "breath-phenomenon," qi-xiang). h As the energy of the undifferentiated fount comes into actuality and takes form, that image (phenomenon) spreads as a breath-atmosphere. Wang Wei points to it as a principle (L.B., 598): "When you contemplate painting, you must look first at the breath-image"; then at the tonality, clear or murky, lucid or cluttered; then at the relation structuring the major and secondary mountains; and so on. Apprehension, moving from atmosphere to the yin or yang tonality of the landscape, then to the structuration of reliefs, proceeds from the more general-evanescent to the more tangible and rigid. "Landscapes are great things. When we look at them, we must place ourselves at a distance to contemplate them. Then only do we perceive, in a single sweep, the breath-image emanating from the tension-forms of the landscape" (Guo Xi, 6). These notions composing the atmosphere express the same gradation, but in reverse. At the lowest level are forms (xing), the most tangible level but the most limited in effect. Then come the tensions that permeate them, conferring dynamism and vitality (shi) on them. Finally there is the breath-image emanating from it overall (qi-xiang). The breath-image breaks free from the mire of forms and unfurls figuration beyond figuration, or rather upstream from it, opening it to the undifferentiated and making it available as the "great image."

The Great Image Has No Form

1. One question has incessantly haunted modern painting-for the last century, let us say, since Cézanne—and to a certain extent has even constituted its modernity. It has become increasingly more explicit since the advent of cubism and early abstract art. Among many other formulations, it can, I believe, be expressed as follows: How to conceive of and produce an image that is not limited by the individual (or better, individuating) character of form? Of any form, whatever it might be. Indeed, every form becomes individualized as it comes into actuality. It cuts off other forms, sterilely cleaving to itself, blocks out other points of view, other possibilities. The practice of perspective in particular has come under indictment because, in claiming to render the real at its most complete, that is, in three dimensions, it fails quite simply because it chooses to perceive from a single point of view, and to paint from a single side, the dimension of coexistencethe coexistence of various points of view and various sidesthat makes reality hold together, co-haere, and that constitutes

its "coherence" in the literal sense. Only that dimension is true, says modern painting: the others, coordinated by perspective, are only a montage. Henceforth, the dream will be of an image that, even as it figures a certain form (in order to be an image), is not constrained by the particular, hence exclusive, character of that form. Or how to paint—that is the problem painting now faces—while keeping form available, without slipping into complacency or indulging in the artifice that arises as soon as one privileges a single aspect?

The modern painter, in liberating himself from the demands of representation, does not, of course, just paint anything at all. As he confirms every time he takes his pencil or brush in hand, "anything at all," in painting as in life, does not exist. The painter painting—the painter insofar as he paints—certainly always paints a form, but he no longer wants to be held back by the anecdotal character of that form.* Or rather, he no longer wants to be swept away by it. That is too easy. He no longer wants anything to do with the never-ending "once upon a time ..." that every picture seems to expound on. Although the motivation behind that "once upon a time" is forever arbitrary, it manages to make this form impose itself—inspire respect—to the point of making us believe in an identity of essence. Hence, even as the outline of a form emerges, even as a figure comes into actuality, the painter will be careful not to let himself be confined to the cramped quarters of a single point of view, will not limit himself to painting from only one side. This means that, even as the form arises, it refrains from giving rise to the quintessentially metaphysical operation of disjunction: to be so, or not so. Why should this "so," emerging from the brush, come about only at the expense of other "so's"? Why can it exist only by relegating all the others to the void? Picasso, it appears, paints drinking glasses, even paints them exhaustively, without losing anything of them. He displays them from various angles: from the front and the side, from above and below, all at once. "On one hand, there was a perfect circle, as if we were peering down at the glass; on the other, the lovely dancing-girl curves that a glass shows when looked at from the side." In Georges Braque's landscapes, houses rise up frontally, their windows properly aligned, while at the same time we perceive their flat roofs from a bird's-eye-view. Beyond the walls, we can even see the peaceful garden to one side, even though the walls are there to conceal it.

^{*} Braque says the essential on the matter: "The painter does not attempt to reconstitute an anecdote but to constitute a pictorial fact." Georges Braque, *Le jour et la nuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 13.

At least one thing is certain in this increasingly overt rejection by modern European painters of everything that used to constitute painting. In that long, even interminable, "assassination of painting," which systematically and exhaustively exploited every one of its resources, it is the individualizing consistency of the object that is in question. That object reveals its essence as each motion of the brush specifies it, and the painter's labor, in characterizing the object more meticulously, gradually eliminates all other possibilities of being until it makes the object appear as if that object could be nothing but itself: this one, as it is perceived in this place, from this angle, at this instant, and even in the haziness of this light. In that respect, the impressionists were still on the side of the object's realism, which they merely refined. Modern painting, we hear over and over, has worked to turn away from that status of the object. In doing so, it supposedly breaks free from representation and its ontological backdrop. But what does turning away mean, and what does that turn inaugurate—what is it tending toward? How can we gain a footing in that otherness being uncovered, and is the word "break" strong enough to express it? We cannot merely make the allegation that the modern painter is an antipainter, even though he has overtly sought to be provocative and scandalous; or that modern painting works against classical painting, is intent on undoing it, even though its inventiveness, at least at the start, lies in its rejection of its past. If what is called "modern painting" has not simply been the subject of manifestos or provocations but is in fact being painted, it is because it experiments with the effects or possibilities of the "real" that have not yet found a name for themselves. They are anonymous because, so far, they have gone unsuspected or have lain fallow. It will be difficult to name them because their naming cannot come about in the great ontological language. That, at least, we know already. In this sense, painting has been a step ahead of philosophical thought during the last century. Looking back, we can no longer doubt it. Let us note that those who lived during that time made no mistake about it: these young people, said Edgar Degas of Braque and Picasso, definitely want something more than painting.

Philosophy has been anxious ever since. It can no longer be on familiar terms with painting, can no longer consider it an ally that illustrates philosophy's mimetic conception of the relation to the world. Philosophy now finds itself driven to cross-examine painting. That is because, at least since Maurice Merleau-Ponty, philosophy has sensed that painting is engaged in an exploration that escapes its mastery, something it

fumbles to grasp and even fails to conceive. Philosophy is in for a painful awakening. Could it be out of step? Could it have fallen behind? Philosophy sleeps late, like Minerva's owl; it begins its flight at gathering dusk. If it is to rise from its bed and reflect on what has happened, philosophy too must break free—and more viscerally perhaps than it has previously done—from its own habits, especially those it can no longer perceive. But philosophy's means of expression is closed on itself, unable to experiment and dissolve ideas, as the painter's "making" does. Philosophical thought readily uses ideas to protect itself, while painters are wary of them, and experimentation leads and even compels painting to make discoveries. Philosophy is deprived of the adventurous fumbling of the hand, torment and opportunity at once, that makes the painter always try again and take ever greater risks.

2. The importance of the Laozi, though indirect in that respect, is that it takes us back to a place before thought branched off into ontology. Modern painting, in its way and from its own side, has also noisily worked to lead us away from that branching-off spot. Under the word tao, which serves as a signpost at that juncture, the Laozi constantly points toward a modality of the real that, remaining upstream from any actualization and opening onto the undifferentiated, is not yet in the grip of disjunction. In this phase, when individuation has not yet formed completely, when its identifying traits have not become concrete, the "so" being roughed out remains open to other "so's" and communicates with them, holds onto plenitude. Such is the profundity of the hazy-indistinct-evanescent. The "haze" under which the foundational appears to us is a haze of nonexclusion, and the Laozi brings it to the surface to guide the spirit toward a freer capacity for existence. It is in "turning back" to this stage of the foundational that you will be able to evolve most freely, that life will become "livable" and full again. That is what this extremely brief treatise on wisdom constantly tells us in its maze of laconic formulas. It is laconic not because the author savors obscurity but because the formulas themselves retain the conciseness of that place upstream. If they said more, if they were more precise or more elaborate, they would play into the hands of specification and thereby lose what they have to say. Whichever way you turned, you would find yourself facing the same walls erected by the diverse, rigid, and sectarian aspects of things. Your potential would wither away, fatigued by the incessant acts of demarcation, since you would always be a slave to them. Life would be torn to pieces and stolen away by their exclusions.

To return to the tao, as the *Laozi* recommends, is thus to return to the foundational, where nothing is obstructed by specification, where the determining character of form has not yet come into play, and where haziness, between there is—there is not, is the very tonality of existence. That, at least, is how the *Laozi* formula that I chose as the title for this chapter (and for this book) has traditionally been read:

The great image has no form. 2(\$41)

Wang Bi tells us, in formulas that sweep through his commentary from beginning to end, "if there is form," there is separation; and if there is separation, then things are either one way or another ("if it is not warm, it is cool," "if it is not hot, it is cold"). That is why, if the image takes (an individuated and concrete) form, "it is no longer the great image."

This formula comes at the end of a development that elevates us far above ordinary judgments by teaching us to perceive the tao paradoxically, as the opposite of what it appears ("the luminous tao is seemingly dark," "the advancing tao is seemingly retreating," and so on). This formula is further clarified by two previous ones, which adopt the same formal structure: what is "great" is "without." Since it refuses to develop an argument, the *Laozi* cannot examine things more thoroughly except by looking at them from different angles:

The great square has no corners
... the great tone makes only a tiny sound,
the great image has no form.

Understanding comes from what is not made explicit. We compare and note the points of convergence: hence this series of formulations. "The great tone makes only a tiny sound" means that, as Wang Bi has just said, "greatness" lies in avoiding the loss via disjunction that accompanies any coming about. As soon as "sound" is produced, it is divided up or separated into the notes of the musical scale. If it is not one note that is emitted, it is necessarily one of the others. The "capacity to govern the whole" (Wang Bi) that prevailed before sounds could be distinguished from one another is thereby lost. And since the individuation of tone becomes a reality through the isolation of a particular and characteristic sound, the sound produced is no longer anything more than that. It is confined to being only itself and to competing with all the others, both shut off in its opposition and valid by its difference. In response, the

Chinese musical tradition, inspired by the *Laozi*, will celebrate the great tone of "silent music." Inasmuch as this silent music is not yet broken up into distinct sounds—one in opposition to another—it allows them to coexist and maintains the full harmony among them.

It is easy to understand that, as our own Scholastic formula puts it, any determination is negation. As a result, if we refrain from determination, we also refrain from slipping into exclusivity. But what about the previous formula? What does it mean that "the great square has no corners"? Could it be that, in overtly contradicting its square nature, the square would imperil any ordering of forms and things? No, the Laozi is not nearly concerned enough about formal rigor to take pleasure in contradiction or to call for a revolt against logic. If it dissociates the great square from its squareness, it does so to make us sense the reductive character of its form, of any form, of this square that, dully coinciding with itself, is only a square. In clinging to its identity, confirmed in its status as a square, this pure "square"—this square square—shows that it is cramped for space. It shows it is small. What constitutes the "great" square, in contrast, is the fact that it is not enslaved and limited to its nature as a square. It is not called upon to transcend its squareness, following a dialectical development of essence, possessed by the gnawing anxiety of the foritself (a substance established as a subject and unequal to itself). Rather, the determination in the square refrains (upstream) from getting mired in the determination of essence—attribution—and remains "vague" and available. Hence the square cannot be restricted or compelled by what constitutes the particularity of its form. The square's form becomes emancipated from form instead of allowing the specifying-objectifying character of form to operate. We might ordinarily think that a square, by virtue of its straight and prominent corners, rather than being completely rounded off, is of a nature to "cut sharply." But Wang Bi comments laconically, "square but not sharp. That is why it is without corners."

It belongs to the tao not to let the sharpness of determination come into play. This is suggested in an earlier formula that is part of the same development:

The level way is seemingly bumpy.

That is because "the great level way" of the tao, Wang Bi comments, "in conforming to the particular nature of existents," "does not remain attached" to that level character to the point of "cutting off" everything

in existents that goes beyond. What that nonattachment expresses in its way is that the tao does not get mired in any of its determinations. If there is form, it must not be uni-form. Of course, if the great way is level, it is all the easier for it to promote viability, as it is called upon to do. But this quality has no predicative function; it is not constraining. As such, it does not become arbitrary, which would entail no longer respecting the variety of beings and things and obstructing the level viability of the way. Like the Lesbians' ruler made of lead, whose very flexibility, according to Aristotle,² made it able to measure exactly the contours of stone, the level, even way of the tao, because it embraces all beings without partiality, does not impose an egalitarian norm. To denounce the obligation (in the literal sense: obligation binds us, "attaches" us, says Wang Bi) that determination forces upon us, the Laozi incessantly takes us back to the "indistinctness" and "haziness" of the foundational. And the "great image" will liberate us from that obligation by serving as an image for the foundational.

3. "The great square has no corners," the Laozi says. It seems to me that this is the non-Greek formula par excellence, defying the authority of the logos and of geometry. It also best expresses—best brings about the brimming over that resorbs the object. In raising questions about that initial "great," the formula points toward its escape route from the outset. Indeed, what is "great" when the tao is at issue, whether in the case of the "great image," the "great tone," or the "great square"? We suspect, in keeping with the de-ontological perspective we draw from the Laozi, that "great" cannot be a predicate. It is not that the tao "is" great or "greater than." But, just as one can characterize the Taoist sage only by "straining" and can picture him only by working against determination and de-picting him, it is by "straining," the Laozi says, using the same expression, that I "call" the tao "great" (\$25). In addition, the greatness by which I evoke it, far from constituting a stable attribute, is cast aside as soon as it is advanced. It is as elusive as it is allusive; barely enunciated, it is already subject to denunciation. The formula, in fact, is in a state of constant modification:

Straining, I call it great great is called [signifies] departing departing is called [signifies] far away far away is called [signifies] coming back.

Meaning is transferred from one term to the other, with each term opening onto the next. Since meaning does not become immobilized in any of the terms, step by step it makes them equivalent. First, Wang Bi tells us, I choose the greatest designation for the tao and I name it "great." But as soon as one becomes attached to that "great," there will necessarily be "separation" (between the great and what is not great), and the great will have limitations set on it. As meaning falls to pieces, we can no longer say "all the way" what constitutes its "greatness." That is why "great" is called or signifies "departing": the tao works in every direction, "and there is nothing it does not reach." Hence "departing" means "far away." But, far from becoming disseminated in the endless transformation of things ("it does not follow where it goes," is Wang Bi's ingenious gloss), the tao maintains its unitary consistency. Hence the "return" to the foundational. In this continuous transformation, the qualifying terms do not function as "terms": that is, they do not delimit and "terminate" meaning. Rather, they relay it. In this series of relays, no term, strictly speaking, moves beyond the previous one; none says anything more than what precedes it. Each term merely retrieves what was getting lost in the previous one, rescues it from the determination in which it was becoming mired. It de-termines the previous term in reverse. (De- is being used here as a privative prefix, in the same sense that we earlier used the verb "de-pict.") In so doing, each term suspends specification, endlessly deferring it, and keeps the meaning open.

Whether one calls the tao great, or whether one is dealing with the great image, everything indicates that "great," used in that way, cannot be the opposite of "small." We can even say that the tao partakes of the "small," just as we saw it could be called "great." The tao will be called great because, located upstream from the actualization of things, it spreads in every direction and cannot be limited or confined: "The great tao inundates everything / it can go right and left" (\$34). And also because all existents, in becoming disindividuated, in receding, turn back to the foundational, which limitlessly receives them—just as the waters of streams and rivers pour into the ocean. According to Wang Bi's commentary, the tao continuously brings to life, "but without taking credit for it," and endlessly elevates existents, "but without claiming mastery over them," because it is "ever without desire" and does not seek to "spread over them." In that respect, since the tao refrains from any hegemonic expansion, it can be "named" and classified "within the small." In fact, what allows us to call it "great" is the fact that we can say both that it is great and that it is small. In this sense, "great," whether referring to the tao or to the great image, signifies that which embraces the various possibilities and contains every angle of vision within itself. "Great" means that which is open to both one and the other, that which does not exclude. This term interminably expresses the coexistence upstream from what, in coming into actuality, undergoes differentiation and comes to stand opposed to itself. "Great," in short, expresses the plenitude of compossibility. It is when the "great way" is "lost" that one begins to separate and specify, begins to differentiate virtues, to separate "humaneness" from "justice," and so on (§18). But, so long as the tao is preserved and greatness prevails, these qualities, instead of being accentuated, remain blurred. They are indistinctly part of "nature" and cannot even be perceived as qualities. Parallel to "haziness," which expresses the indetermination of the foundational, the "greatness" of the tao or of the great image connotes the de-termination that most amply embraces determinations and con-fuses them. "Great," in the end, is valid as the least reductive name, the one that specifies the least, restricts the least, closes off the least.

If "great," in embracing the most, differentiates the least, it is logical that "great" on its own dissolves any relation of resemblance (to anything at all in particular). At least, it "seems" to dissolve:

Everyone says my tao is great, it seems not to resemble; it is only because it is great that it seems not to resemble; if it were to resemble, it would have long ago become smaller. (\$67)

Any resemblance is a resemblance to something (particular) and assumes a (determined) aspect. Resemblance presupposes both individuation and specification, and that is why, as soon as there is resemblance, there is a loss of greatness, reduction to the differentiated. Similarly, as soon as something resembles and becomes a particular image, it can no longer be the great image. I believe, however, that the *Laozi* does not remain at that point. Word for word, it is said that the tao is a "non-resembling semblance." It is no more devoid of the possibilities of resemblance than it is reduced to resembling, and such is the "great image." We were previously reminded that, in its "haziness," there is something of a particular existent (§14). Although it cannot be constrained by resemblance, it also does not exclude it; it makes resemblance evasive. In that sense, it is less

a quality (acquired or not) than a capacity (constantly at work). Since that resemblance remains virtual and cannot become more precise, its faculty for resemblance is not an attribute expressing a definitively acquired result (see how, in that picture, the velvet on the gown glistening in the light is a perfect likeness!). That faculty is rather a function and, as a function, it must always begin its work anew. Does that velvetiness resemble a wisp of cloud, or the beating of a wing, or the texture of skin? Or . . .? Therefore, unlike previous translators, I choose to give a strong sense to that "non-resembling semblance" (translating the three words, si bu xiao, precisely). At the same time, I allow the formula its "greatest" meaning. The great image of the tao seems not to resemble (such is its haziness). And it seems without resembling: its resemblance remains open because not limited in an exclusive manner to anything in particular. Its imagistic power deploys "though it has no form," deploys all the better, in fact, inasmuch as that power does not get mired in any form.

After all, when it comes to the image, power is always at stake. An image's worth lies in its power. The great image of the *Laozi*, because it resembles without resembling, hence excludes nothing from its *semblance*, is led to receive and to "image" most amply, which makes its imaging power all the "greater." The formula is not merely political. Nor can we simply invoke a shamanistic backdrop to Taoism and speak of magic, not even the "magic of images."

Hold the great image in your hand and the whole world comes to you. (§35)

That "great image" is the "mother" of natural images, Wang Bi goes on, such as the configurations of stars in the sky. That "great image," in short, is to be conceived as an image-making matrix. Nothing is as yet separated or opposed in it; it is capable of welcoming all existents in its semblance and con-tains each equally, from its place upstream, "without inflicting injury" on any of them. As a result, the great image has the power to make "the world come to it." What is the nature of that power to draw things to it, what is its ascendancy? Surely it cannot be a power of attraction (operating by force), even less a matter of seducing or inducing, the way music or good food "stops passersby" (§35). On the contrary, that image is said to be "bland," resorbing every engaging-excluding determination within it, just as it is hazy. But since, according to Wang Bi's excellent gloss, it "seemingly targets nothing in particular," you cannot come to understand its usage (its operation, yong) "all the way." The great image

of the tao does not represent, since then it would necessarily have to represent something particular. It cannot even be determined in its capacity to resemble. But by virtue of opening (to the undifferentiated), it remains constantly operative. It does not "target" anything. In its "haziness," it does not accentuate anything precise; it does not aim for any effect. As a result, the effectiveness belonging to it as an image is infinite. Its ascendancy spreads by itself, immanently, just as ascendancy has always been described in China: diffusely, without anyone realizing it, without exerting any constraint and without encountering any resistance. Its power lies not in obtaining (it aims for nothing), even less in compelling (it forces nothing) but—like the wind—it is composed of steadiness, influence, unassignability, and consequently, inexhaustibility.

4. That is why the Chinese painter prefers to paint mountains. It is not only that mountains structure the landscape through hierarchical oppositions, the dominating summit versus the foothills. Above all, it is from the infinite variations of mountainous forms piercing through the clouds that the landscape constantly rises up as it emerges from the invisible—the relief of the landscape is that emergence—and as it conceals the invisible. It is from the mountains, says the painter Guo Xi (17), that "the buried treasures of Heaven and Earth" are drawn. These treasures are hidden in the mountains, "in caves haunted by immortals and saints." The "blurry massiveness" of the mountain is the Fount of immanence, and the lifelines of its ridges, irrigating it with their "veins," transmit the cosmic "pulse." The mountain is the image-making matrix of every landscape, and the painter ceaselessly exploits its resources. No one can know this "natural marvel" "all the way": the mountain is this inexhaustibility. The mountain contains in itself—holds together—the profusion of the world. Without mists and clouds, Guo Xi continues, it would be "like a springtime devoid of vegetation." Without the waters that run through the mountain, it would be "unappealing"; without the paths crisscrossing it, the mountain would not be "animated"; without the woods and forests, it would not be "living." From below, we can look up toward the summit, conferring "a lofty distance" on it. Its aspect is then limpid and luminous. Or, standing in front of the mountain, we can examine its backdrop, conferring a "profound distance" on it. Then its aspect is heavy and somber. From the nearest mountains, we can contemplate the far-off mountains, conferring a "level distance," and their aspect is both bright and dark. These perspectives intersect in the mountain. The mountain is all of them, can be looked at from every angle.

When the Chinese painter says from the first that "the mountain is a great thing" (Guo Xi, 22), is it clear that "great," far from being flat description, must be understood in the sense of the "great image." Its greatness lies in the fact that it does not have one form but, as the Shitao says (chap. 9), "ten thousand"—like the "ten thousand" things within the tao. A mountain is without form in the sense that it contains countless forms, with no single one predominating. Its greatness thus lies in the compossibility of the foundational, its relief constantly outlining forms and variations on them. Consider the concomitant diversity of the mountain. Its "form," says Guo Xi (22), tends to rise up "eminently" and to stand "arrogant," to "open itself" generously, to "crouch down," to "establish itself" well, even to "flaunt itself." Its form tends to be massive, or haughty, or inspired, or grave and solemn. By the variety of its propensities, it may shift its eyes back and forth and give a bow in greeting; it may have what it needs to cover itself above and to rise below, to support itself in front and to lean back behind. It can gaze down from above as if to inspect and can look around below, as if it were about to take command. The consistency proper to the mountain lends itself to all these possibilities. In the end, such is the "great" being constitutive of the mountain.

Just as I use the terms "con-sistency" and "con-formation," I translate as "con-stitutive being," rather than simply "being," what in Chinese originally meant "body" (the term subsequently took on a philosophical meaning correlated with "functioning": ti / yong). In this way, I use to advantage the cum—"with" or "together"—which makes that "that" hold (itself) together. A body is that which holds (itself) together. Indeed, the mountain, by virtue of its con-formation, is precisely what makes the diversity of the landscape hold together. In that way, it keeps within itself, in its greatness, a certain compossibility of the tao and of its "great image." Not only does it make the waters and mists, the woods and paths hold together, not only does it make the most singular forms coexist in its mass, in its uniqueness it also lends itself to the most contrary aspects. Such is its countenance-capacity (con-tenance): this term momentarily blurs the oldest of our oppositions, that between the physical and the psychic, since in French we can speak of the contenance, the capacity, of a receptacle, or the yield of a plot of land, or we can speak of a person's contenance, his countenance. We can say that a person prend contenance, by which we mean that he composes himself, adopts a certain demeanor; or that he perd contenance, loses his composure. Incidentally, a possibility opens thereby in our language that we will have occasion to exploit again. The mountain, as it happens, far from being reduced to an object of perception under our motionless gaze, can be considered from the point of view of "location," or "spirit," or "transformation," or "humaneness," or "activity" or "repose" or "harmony," and so on (*Shitao*, chap. 18). It is "educated" by virtue of its refinement, "bellicose" in the way it bursts forth and leaps wildly, "dangerous" because of its bluffs, "dizzying" by virtue of the heights it reaches, "immense" in its jumble of things, and "small" because of its proximity. What could be surprising about that? The "great" mountain is also "small," depending on the angle from which it is viewed, just as the great tao can also be classified as small.

To paint the mountain will be to paint it as a "total" (bun)d image, in its plenitude and compossibility: "high-low," "great-small," "turning toward-turning its back," and so on, rather than to paint merely "three or five mountaintops" scarcely filling the page (Guo Xi, 18). To paint is not to apprehend the mountain "in one locale" and from a "single corner" (Shitao, chap. 6). It is to paint the mountain after climbing many a hill and sketching many a varied mountaintop, after having one's fill of hikes and vistas, after letting the infinite forms and resources of the mountain ripen in one's spirit (Guo Xi, 17). Otherwise, the painter will always figure, from start to finish, one and the same mountain, one and the same summit, as if they all came from the same mold (Shitao, chap. 6). That uniformity reduces the image to only one image, exclusive and sterile, and as a result anecdotal. That uniformity has lost the "greatness" of the "great image."

And yet, when I look up toward the mountain, do I not see a single mountain form? In considering that summit before me, do I not see a single aspect of the summit? That is a misunderstanding, Guo Xi tells us (14): the mountain seen from up close is "so"; seen from farther away, "a different so"; and from an even greater distance, "yet another so." As we move away, each "so" is different and "the form of the mountain alters with every step." Similarly, the face of the mountain is so; the side, "a different so"; the back, "yet another so." "The form of the mountain is to be seen on each of its faces." To paint the great image of the mountain is to deploy all these many "so's," without any excluding any other. Hence, says Guo Xi, "it is the form of one mountain and, at the same time, of tens and hundreds of mountains."e Does that mean that the form of the great image thus obtained would be synthetic, as translations of this passage lead us to believe? "A single mountain unites within itself the aspect of several tens or hundreds of mountains" (Vandier-Nicolas); "one mountain contains in itself . . ." (Lin Yutang).³ I find the terms "unites"

and "contains" at the very least ambiguous. The Chinese says precisely: "at the same time," "equally" (*jian*, in the sense that the Mohists speak of an "equal love" of all men, *jian ai*, that is, with no privileging of some over others). Such is the form of one mountain, Guo Xi says of the great image of the mountain, and at the same time—"equally"—of many other mountains. The unity in question is not synthetic (it does not fuse together) or symbolic (it does not subsume, our ontological method), but *taoic*, in the sense that one aspect does not exclude another. It is one and "at the same time" the other. At the same time that it is "so," the "other so's" are possible and, thanks to the compossibility of its "so," the image remains available, its resemblance remains open. The "so" of the image is no longer individual-accidental: it is no longer anecdotal.

5. Between dissolution into the invisible fount and apportionment into the partiality of the visible, a narrow path takes shape, a path whose tricky requirements these treatises on the art of painting describe to us. On one hand, inasmuch as the painter paints forms, which are always individual and as a result singular, he must avoid jumbling them together; on the other, inasmuch as he is in search of the great image through these forms, he must avoid mutual exclusion. To paint will therefore be to paint something of the differentiated, but that differentiation keeps the indifferentiation from which it proceeds active within it. To paint will always be to paint a certain diversity, but at the same time that diversity will have to show the equivalence that makes it communicate with itself and binds it.

Consider, for example, the mountain and the ocean, which various bodies of literature throughout the world have shown to be metaphors for each other. Each certainly has its specificity (see *Shitao*, chap. 13): the ocean possesses its "vast breaking waves," the mountain, in contrast, its "hidden recesses." Whereas the ocean "engulfs and disgorges," the mountain "bows and bends low." The ocean can "manifest a soul," the mountain can "pulsate." At the same time, one serves as the image of the other: hence the mountain "with its chain of overlapping peaks, its ridges upon ridges, its secret valleys and deep precipices, its sheer cliffs, its mist, fog, and dew, its smoke and clouds," is like the ocean and its breaking waves. Like the ocean, the mountain engulfs and disgorges.⁴ "All of that is not the soul that the ocean itself manifests" and yet, it is in that respect that the mountain "occupies" what constitutes the ocean. The Chinese says literally that the mountain "lives on its own at the ocean." Since the same

is also true of the ocean vis-à-vis the mountain, if you "succeed as regards the ocean," the *Shitao* concludes, "but fail as regards the mountain," or vice versa, you "lose your way in apprehending them." For as I apprehend them, the painter says superbly, "the mountain equals the ocean" just as "the ocean equals the mountain." It is in this "mountain-ocean" mode, in this equivalence between the mountain and the ocean, that I "know," and such is the aptness-richness that constitutes my apprehension.

Even as each has its own inclination, the ocean can be related to the mountain and the mountain to the ocean. Each lends its qualities to the other and it is because they decompartmentalize that I grasp them. How far can we push the figuration of that permeability of things, pouring one sort of thing into another, without compromising the things' specificity from whence visibility emerges? In terms of method, would you not be obliged to transcend that specificity of things once you had mastered it, in order to return through it to the undifferentiated? Fang Xun, a theorist writing shortly after Shitao, developed this thought in the form of advice addressed to the painter: "When you paint clouds, they cannot resemble water, and when you paint water, it cannot resemble clouds" (57). That principle is very "subtle" and the apprentice setting to work cannot afford to neglect it. "But once this principle is well assimilated, you will no longer wonder whether it is clouds or water: wherever the brush leads, if intentionality considers it a cloud, then it is a cloud, and if intentionality considers it water, then it is water."

Chinese theorists of poetry express the same idea (Chinese pictorial theory was inspired by poetic theory). First, they divide poetic meaning into the direct and the indirect, the figurative and the nonfigurative (following the traditional categories fu-bi-xing). Then, when the poet has reached the pinnacle of his art and the poetic motif has achieved its full density, poetic expression is "very empty and very alive," "buried deep and abundantly rich," "as if it were far away and nearby at the same time." "It is then possible both to see an image there and to see no image" (see Chen Tingzhuo).⁵ That semantic multivalence of the poetic motif corresponds to the polysimilitude of the pictorial motif. The apotheosis of art, achieved by decompartmentalizing specificities and transcending constraints, is the same in both idioms. There is certainly a specificity of aspect, which through individuation produces the sensible. All the same, it does not become the fixed, ontologically attributed determination of the in-itself and of essence. (That fact troubles our own ontology, without even having to critique it.) That is why specificity can be

transcended as intentionality chooses—the intentionality of the painter or of the beholder—without slipping into illusion (appearance as opposed to "truth") and de-realizing reality.

It appears that the Chinese commentators of our time have fallen under the influence of European mimesis, without even analyzing that influence. The globalization of thought, which began long ago, has pressed everything into the mold of European categories. Hence the translations of this passage that I consulted, even those into "modern" Chinese, not only do an injustice to the classical text but arrive at a meaning that is hopelessly trite. That very triteness should have at least been jarring. Finally, at the end of this process of transcendence, the translation goes, "if making clouds is what is on your mind, then you will have clouds, and if making water is what is on your mind, you will have water."6 The other version of the same treatise, however, should have put translators on the right track, since it adds: "If, after long practice of spirit and hand, you spontaneously follow your intentionality to produce a dynamic composition, there is no longer nonresemblance." There is no better way of expressing the idea that, at this stage of the great image, resemblance is no longer constraining—constraining because its specification has been blocked and it is exclusive as a result—but indefinitely open and available.* Semblance in itself lends itself to endless deployment, welcoming each new request and growing richer at will. Such is the value of the sketch.

* E. H. Gombrich's comments about the discrimination in ambiguity implied by the pictorial illusion is a good illustration of the gap between the multivalence of the Chinese pictorial motif and the necessary exclusion on which representation rests in classical European painting. Take, for example, the famous image that looks like a duck's head facing one way, a rabbit's head the other. "True," Gombrich tells us, "we can switch from one reading to another with increasing rapidity; we will also 'remember' the rabbit while we see the duck, but the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly we will discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time." Art and Illusion (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 5. The "great image," by contrast, blurs that alternative with the Taoic idea of compossibility, which "haziness" displays, in such a manner that one no longer excludes the other, since both open onto the undifferentiated.

Standing in the background of both the painter and the poet in China is the sage. Whereas the good man, we have been told since antiquity (cf. Zhongyong, §20), works relentlessly to progress, meticulously performing each act of virtue one by one, the man further along, who has reached the stage of wisdom, converts that effort into spontaneity and thereby achieves the ever-changing balance of regulation that constitutes the tao, while behaving as he likes (by following his "heart's desire"; Confucius, Analects 2.4), no longer subject to constraint.

Theory of the Sketch

I. When theorists want to mark a clear break between modern painting and everything that precedes it, one of the traits they often point to is modern painting's reassessment of the complete, and, as a result, the new status and possible value granted to incompletion. Modern painting is frequently free and easy, even negligent, and sometimes takes an insolent pleasure in flaunting that attitude. It has given up on the idea of the finished, it says, because it considers it the death of inventive genius. The finished is the fallout produced by the fervor of creativity. "Finishing off" a canvas is like finishing off a person, said Picasso: it kills the painting.* Might finishing, which we take for an imperative, be an

^{* &}quot;Have you ever seen a completed painting? A painting? No more than anything else. A curse on you if you say you've come to the end. Complete a work? Finish off a canyas? What foolishness! Completing means putting an end to an object, killing it, taking its soul, giving it a puntilla, finishing it off as we say here, giving it the one thing that's most distressing for the painter and for the painting: the coup de grâce" (Picasso, Propos sur l'art, 164). And also: "You don't do a painting, you do studies, you're never done getting there" (ibid., 176).

all too convenient way of acquitting oneself? Modern painting is fearful about seeming to be perfect, undoubtedly because it realizes that perfection runs counter to the work's qualities and dulls them. In closing off the paths where the work is at work, the act of finishing tones down what is most virulent and effective about it. The work falls into a slumber upon being finished, it luxuriates in the comfort procured by its gradual certainty about itself. And yet the only thing that really mattered was to put painting to the test once again, to push it beyond what it had already achieved, and to make an effort. Only that effort, that testing, is authentic, and only it is to be retained. The uncompleted work remains alert, on the alert; but by completing it—folding it up—you make it inert. All in all, there is something ridiculous about that certificate of achievement ingenuously awarded to the finished (and which, Cézanne said, attracts only "the admiration of imbeciles")—as if to have done something you need only have finished!

The choice to keep the work in its rough state, to regard what is commonly known as the sketch, not as a study or a preliminary drawing but as a full-fledgedwork, even fuller than the completed work would be—this is not just an act of defiance. It shakes to the foundation our understanding of what a work is, of what-makes-a-work. Completing is somehow experienced as getting stuck, entrenched, bogged down, because we are supposed to conceive of the work from the other direction, rising fresh from its bed, as an effective coming about. The sketch keeps the work as close as possible to its invention, in the tension of that springing forth. Ever since Malraux adopted Charles Baudelaire's profound comment about Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, 1 it has served as a preliminary formulation for the modern way of thinking about the sketch: "A work that's done is not necessarily finished, a work that's finished is not necessarily done." Now that doing has broken free from the finished, the work has left conformity behind and returned to its true calling. No longer a predictable spectacle or a grand ceremonial, it is an attempt under way, rigorously effective. The work is called to order. The sketch does not only raise the question of what the work loses in being completed, or of why, as I continue to paint and come to an end (I terminate, determine), the work becomes not more done but undone. Even more troubling-and I shall return to this point—it raises the possibility that, as I conscientiously take pains to "finish," I may not even have begun.

The notion of the sketch as full-fledged work radically modifies the categories the work puts in play, in the first place because the sketch requires us to regard it, no longer as a state, a result, but as a moment

in a process, the optimal, preeminent moment, something to be kept suspended. But even more may be at stake than the risk of losing by completing. In revealing to us the power of incompletion (or by revealing the fact that plenitude is not completion), the sketch makes us feel the infinite richness of the indefinite, or the fecundity of the beyond and of possibility—in short, what we ordinarily understand as the powers of the virtual. It reminds us that the work is always in advance of itself and does not coincide with its "being," just as the real party happens before the party and just as there is more joy in waiting. But the work does more than that. Above all, it forces us to think about how much lack and hollowness must be implicit in the work if it is to come about, how much of a void there must be if the work is to remain active and continue to make itself felt. It teaches us that the work also proceeds by omission and that this omission, far from being something to fill in, is constitutive. It even teaches that the work, to truly be at work, must in some sense give up its "work" label, give up looking like a "work," must leave itself behind instead of flaunting itself.

That suspicion about the work—about the work of the work—could easily be taken as symptomatic of an anxiety we call "modern" and of the insidious and provocative way that such anxiety plays up the negative. But it is in the nature of the symptom to guide us toward the power of the repressed. For the past century, painting in Europe has set about to show that there can be a perfection superior to perfection, namely, the perfection of the imperfect. But hasn't everyone always known that—and by "always" I mean since there has been art and painting? I am astonished to see how that recognition of the sketch's superior value has been constantly on the prowl throughout the history of Western painting, even at times making histories and theories come unhinged. But of course, that recognition, having no strong argument in which to take root, unable to flourish in the light of day, intervenes only as an aside, a remark, a secret. As Malraux noted, for the last several centuries painters have chosen to keep their rough drafts and sketches in their possession—as if they were setting aside the most precious things for themselves—while sending their finished canvases to the Salon, destined for the bored admiration of museums.

Consider the level of naïveté—simulated, perhaps—in this confession by Pliny, which deserves to be heard in its entirety because, in what it leaves out, it says it all: "Another most curious fact and worthy of record is, that the latest works of artists and the pictures left unfinished (*imperfectasque tabulas*)... are valued more than any of their finished paintings....

The reason is that in these we see traces of the sketch and the original conception of the artists, while sorrow for the hand that perished at its work beguiles us into the bestowal of praise."2 The sketch (liniamenta) stage, Pliny tells us, ushers us into the arcana of creation, brings us to the source of the work. And his "sorrow," though rather theatrical, nevertheless clearly imparts the fact that lack is operative. In the West, lack complies with the expectations of rhetoric, winning the public's favor, the bestowal of praise. Note that, as when the Chinese evoke the training painters undergo, it is the latest works attributed to the old masters that are at issue. After completing so many finished works that brought them renown, these masters declare their freedom and cast aside perfection and workshop norms. Now doing as they like, they paint only to paint, that is, to put the powers of painting to work once again, wishing each time that these powers will be even more radical. They do not paint to paint well, with everything that "well" implies in terms of the intolerable strictures imposed by diligent work. Having reached the pinnacle of his art, the painter confines himself to blotches or inventive, inchoative brushstrokes, ridding himself of all the extras: he will be careless about filling in. As Pliny says of Apelles, he knows how to "lift his hand from the painting." Did not Leonardo, who surpassed everyone else in the art of representation, also leave room for the non finito and for the sfumato, left indistinct? Even his Mona Lisa is unfinished. Giorgio Vasari, echoing Pliny's sentiment in his description of the "perfect manner" in painting, enthusiastically praises shapes "hovering between the seen and the unseen." And the aged Titian redid his Nymph and the Shepherd more than fifty years later, this time leaving it much more hazy. The new scene is to be contemplated from afar. His contemporary, Daniele Barbaro, refers to "the soft disappearance on the horizon of objects from our view which [are] and [are] not,"4 bringing to mind the formulations of the great masters of the Song Dynasty. Then there is Rembrandt, and Velázquez with his long brushes. In short, somehow, one day or another, late in life, all the great painters made the same confession as Pliny.*

^{*} Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, for example, elicited mixed feelings in his contemporaries simply because he did not finish. Denis Diderot said: "The painter has for a long time never completed anything, he no longer takes the trouble to make feet and hands. He works like a bon vivant who has talent, aptitude, and who is content to sketch his thoughts in four strokes of the brush" (Salon de 1761). But Vincent Van Gogh, in a letter to his brother, Theo, recognized incompleteness as the painter's great merit: "I enjoyed immensely what [Goncourt] says about Chardin's technique. I am more convinced than ever that the true painters did not finish their things in the way which is used only too

2. Given the fact that this incompleteness, beginning with the earliest painters, did not fail to beckon and that people knew its seductive force, to what can we attribute the repression of its power for so many centuries by the imperatives and rigors of the finished? Some will look for a culprit close at hand and appeal to the Western sociology of painting to explain it: the abbots and princes of yesteryear and, even worse, the bourgeois of modern times did not pay top price for paintings that painters did not take the trouble to finish. Moreover, you do not display a sketch, and let us not forget that paintings in the West are made to be displayed: people put them in gilt frames. The sketch, having cost so little effort, could not be valuable. And since the sketch is not made to be shown, you would have to be a mighty lord indeed to find it advisable to acquire it regardless. As a mark of what? In the classical age, only gentlemen or "courtiers" would venture to celebrate sprezzatura.*

But there are theoretical reasons for filling out the sketch and covering it up with the picture, and they lead us back to ontology. Only the completely determined form, our early philosophers tell us, is fit to serve as a model; only it constitutes essence. The "term" in "determined" (in the sense of "completion") is at once "sovereign power" and "goal" (in the Greek language, telos carries both meanings within it). The completed form also functions as the desired end. Although Aristotle's conception of potential may come close at times to the notion of process, potential remains governed by and subject to the completely realized and definitive—"enacted"—state of the form. In general, the Physics tells us, since what is engendered is imperfect and progressing toward its principle, "what it comes to last in its own genesis precedes it in the order of nature."5 Hence it is the final form that draws the entire previous development to itself, and the principal cause is the final cause. Biology tells us it is genesis that accounts for the thing engendered, not being that accounts for the processes of generation. In other words, it is not the

often, namely, so overdone that you can burrow your nose into it." *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh, with Reproductions of All the Drawings,* 3 vols. (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978), 2:431 [translation modified—trans.].

^{* &}quot;A single line which is not laboured," said Baldesar Castiglione, "a single brush stroke made with ease, in such a way that it seems that the hand is completing the line by itself without any effort or guidance, clearly reveals the excellence of the artist." Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 70. Such praise of a naturalness approaching nonchalance sounds like it was lifted and translated from one of the Chinese literati's notes on brushwork, right down to the notion of the painter's "intention."

embryo that accounts for the man, but the man who, having become an adult, will explain the embryo. As a result, only the finished, completely determined form, only the form that has left behind the uncertainties of genesis, is knowable. Only it can fully exist. It is no longer becoming; it "is."

Under the reign of that completed and determining Form-as-end, any value to the sketch is usually acknowledged only as a concession and in a roundabout way. The science of perspective usually serves as the pretense for making that acknowledgment. Science confirms that our eyes cannot discern things clearly at a distance; such things remain indistinct. Hence there is something to be gained by leaving them sketchily drawn. Distance can thereby be converted into an artistic effect. Vasari wrote that "all things which are far removed . . . have more beauty and greater force when they are a beautiful sketch [una bella bozza] than when they are finished." In the classical age, theorists acknowledged the sketch's value in the context of opposing styles. As befitted the times they lived in, when the reign of the ego-subject was becoming definitively established, they appealed to a psychological viewpoint. Roger de Piles contrasts the "polished" style, which "completes and illuminates everything in detail," to the "firm" style, "which brings the work to life and makes its flaws forgivable." The polished style errs in no longer leaving "an opportunity for the beholder to use his imagination." The imagination "delights in discovering and completing what it attributes to the painter, even though in fact it comes only from itself."8 The Comte de Caylus, good disciple of La Rochefoucauld that he was, even makes that argument in reverse, adding a further psychological nuance.9 These rather nonchalant "loose threads" of the artist, which can be compared to the hints or "unspoken words" that are the pleasure of conversation, that "lightly finished" brushwork of certain painters and the "deftness of their instrument," bring the beholder's vanity into play unbeknownst to him, since he believes he is feeling and imagining on his own what the sketch has, in fact, just suggested to him.

In any event, classical reason, on the basis of its theory of faculties, attributes the power of the sketch to the imagination. The incompleteness of a portrait by Thomas Gainsborough can contribute toward creating a "striking resemblance" to the model, says Sir Joshua Reynolds, because the sketched-in features have sufficiently transmitted the effect of the whole and "the imagination supplies the rest." E. H. Gombrich draws a conclusion from that assessment, clarifying that the function that has now fallen to the imagination is projection. If there is any value

to the sketch, it lies in the pleasure the beholder feels in responding to the artist's suggestion. And, since the share of work that the artist means to entrust to the beholder has become increasingly great, the sketch is fully attuned to the overall evolution of modern art.

The subtle power of Merleau-Ponty's thought, here as elsewhere, is to dissipate—under the intricacies of his phrasing, which manages to bring a more radical experience to the surface-something that, though not false, has been too neatly categorized by thought. On the whole, thought touches only the topmost strata. Let us therefore return to the original experience of perception itself, which pictorial expression only prolongs. The incompleteness of the sketch is justified, Merleau-Ponty tells us, because perception itself is never complete. "It gives us a world to be expressed and conceptualized only through partial perspectives, which our own world spills over on every side."11 In short, the sketch is justified because we always perceive only sketchily. A different logic of communication corresponds to this insight. The usual notion of perception as objective proof imposing itself on the senses is destroyed. As a result, the "indirect idiom" of painting no longer needs to rely on a "preestablished nature" that assumes an already given, constituted object, which signification could do no more than approximate. It is signification itself, associated at an earlier stage with the activity of perception and indissolubly linked to it, that constitutes the object and "inaugurates" it. Rather than mark a break constitutive of modern art, the incompletion characteristic of the sketch is the very truth of painting, now embraced without concessions. Through painting, incompletion reveals the conditions—the lack and fissuring—that bring meaning into the world.

Let us consider what these analyses leave unanalyzed, what they remain silent about. The psychological point of view explains with ever greater subtlety the subjective operation that accounts for the pleasure that lies in contemplating sketches. The phenomenological point of view shows that the incompletion of the sketch is rooted in the very structure of our being-in-the-world. But neither of these viewpoints accounts for what constitutes the efficacy of the sketch as a full-fledged work, or they do so only in a roundabout way, identifying it as the source of pleasure or the necessary condition of meaning. But the sketch's justification does not lie solely in the pleasure it brings once it is done, nor can it be understood merely as a more suitable—because less entrenched—vehicle of signification. For anyone aspiring to account for the sketch as full-fledged work from the point of view of its effective coming about and from that of the process the sketch entails, the analyses of the faculty of

the imagination and of the more primordial faculty of perception both seem to fall short. The phenomenology of perception takes us further back, to what anchors the "embodied" subject but does not escape the subject's perspective. According to the first analysis, it is the imagination that completes the unfinished drawing. According to the second, our perception itself remains incomplete, uncompletable even. Neither considers in any detail the fact that the work accomplishes more by not displaying itself, or that the work is more at work precisely when it forsakes itself and does not present itself as a "work." These analyses say nothing about why completion is not plenitude. They do not explain, in short, in what respect the finished entails loss. To elucidate that fertile place upstream of the work, in contrast to the fallout of the finishing touches, must we turn in desperation to a surfeit of ontology, as Jean Paulhan seems to do?¹² Must we take the "meta-" of metaphysics even further, invoking an "other object," an "inaccessible Object"—seemingly "incorruptible" of course—which the painter could only approximate, and compared to which the objects of our everyday perception captured by the painter's brush are only "cracks" and "breaches"?

3. Might we not rather leave behind the ontological fold in order to conceive of the sketch as full-fledged work while no longer crediting the determined form with a fullness of being? More generally, if the concept of the sketch reveals the shortcomings of European thought—I see this as another symptom—might there not be other sources of coherence to make the sketch intelligible, sources we have yet not exploited? To approach the question from the other direction, the reason I look to the Laozi to instruct us about the value of the sketch per se is that the point of view it develops is not that of being and determination but rather of the capacity for arising and obtaining that constitutes the potential at work in the diversity of phenomena and processes (de). The wisdom of the Laozi is to teach us about their non-loss. In designating the moment prior to actualization or individuation as the fertile upstream waters of the tao, the Laozi establishes from the start that the stage of the sketch is that when plenitude has not yet broken up and dispersed; the stage when, having barely emerged, all the possible "so's" have not yet excluded one another. How is it that efficacy is thus contained upstream? Wherein lies the efficacy of the effect? In exploring that effect structure, the Laozi leads us to verify that there is effectively an effect, not at the stage when the effect is completed, but rather at the stage when the effect is still at work, where it still has more to do (more work, more labor). Hence at the

stage when it does not yet appear sufficient or satisfying. Whereas the achieved effect no longer has to make itself felt, whereas it withers away, the full effect deploys on the near side of the effect, before it has established and constituted itself, before it has been recognized as such.

How can we feel the effect of any quality whatsoever, of the "whole" for example, or of the "straight," or of the "full"? Not when "it" is whole or straight or full, since then nothing is left but states, dully displayed before us, which are now only that, and which we do not even perceive (because we are so accustomed to seeing them). They no longer differ from themselves in any way, whereas difference might still instigate their deployment. In other words, when the effect is on display, it gets bogged down. If we begin at the stage of the "partial," 13 however, we can experience all the more completely the advent of the "whole"; if we begin with the "crooked," the advent of the "straight"; with the "empty," the advent of the "full." Hence when the Laozi begins: "Partial, whence whole," "crooked, whence straight," and so on (\$22), these are not paradoxes but simply a reminder of the bollow from which the capacity for full effect comes every time. Conversely, we must not consider the following a mere truism: "If [one has] little, then one receives," and "if [one has] much, then one knows confusion." Far from being moralistic platitudes, this is a warning from the point of view of effect itself. Lack produces the future, and when the effect does not have enough of a future before it, the effect necessarily comes undone. If the Laozi seems to go back and forth between paradox and truism, it does so to free the effect structure from its ordinary state of erosion (unconsciousness). When effects impose themselves on us, they are already devoid of themselves. In the matter of effects, there are only becoming-effects. When the Laozi then warns that "showing off does not make one illustrious" (or "standing out does not make one shine," "boasting does not make one successful," and so on), it teaches us, on the pretext of advising us to be cautious, to separate the effect (as process, which implies development) from the heroism of the intentional and deliberate act, which tends to be grasped immediately. More generally, Chinese strategists tell us that, instead of aiming directly and by name, willfully, for a particular effect, we ought to make it possible for the effect to flow of itself from the arrangements we were able to make beforehand, hence to flow indirectly in relation to any given aim. According to that logic of immanence, we must not aspire to impose the effect, but rather act in such a way that the effect will deploy on its own. We cannot summon the effect to come about, however relentlessly we may try. We need to let it come, just as the hole

is called upon to fill up. The effect lies in that calling effect (it lies in that call for effect).

The strategy, the Laozi tells us, is to keep the effect coming and not let it come about completely. The effect must be sketchy to remain effective. As soon as the effect has come about, has drawn attention to itself, it is lost: "When everyone knows the beautiful as beautiful, then already it is ugly"; "when everyone knows the good as good, then already it is no good" (§2). In the light of the paragraph as a whole, I understand that the effect (of "beauty" or "goodness") that draws attention to itself no longer has any effect—it is out of date. When everyone admires, when everyone recognizes the effect, there is already nothing left to recognize or admire. Thus the Laozi later says that "the effect takes form" but the sage "does not dwell in it," and that "it is only because he does not dwell in the effect" that "the effect does not leave him." That "dwelling in the effect" is wrong because, by attributing the effect to yourself, the way you might occupy a place, you make the effect more precarious, which inevitably gives rise to resistance and rivalries, producing a certain countereffect. But that is not all. I believe it is wrong in the first place because the effect dries up and loses its effectiveness as soon as it is constituted as a "place" that can be possessed, hence delimited, as soon as it objectively shows off as effect.

It seems to me we can read the formula with which the *Laozi* begins—in what is believed to be its original order—in the same way:

Higher virtue is not virtuous, that is why it possesses virtue; lesser virtue does not forsake virtue, that is why it is without virtue. (§38)

Once again, this is not a paradox but a return to the buried source of the effect. The apparent contradiction of the formula contrasts the overt, recognized (and lost) effect with the effective effect. Lesser virtue—or better, lesser capacity (de)—is that which has virtue and effect as an objective and hence cleaves to them. It produces only acts of virtue or isolated effects, all of them intentional. Although they are recognized as such, these effects do not constitute a mode of conduct that generously radiates virtue, or a capacity for effect that is universally and repeatedly at work. That lesser capacity is too painstaking to give the effect a clear enough field to deploy and spread. The effect bogs down and becomes entrenched, and its self-sufficiency dissolves; it can no longer work. That

is, the effect's attachment to itself (it does not "forsake" itself), destroys, by virtue of the effect's self-sufficiency and self-approval, the (infinite) possibility for effect. Conversely, higher virtue (capacity) is effectively virtuous (efficacious) because it does not claim to be so, does not even seek to be so. Rather, forsaking the aim of a particular effect—an aim that always circumscribes—higher virtue lets the effect's fount of immanence operate inexhaustibly, without restriction. The effect that does not show itself as such (as effect) is all the more effective in not being produced (and expended) by name. It remains indefinitely implicit and, working upstream, does not allow itself to be lessened by the rigidity and limitations of the concrete.

Absence, or at least what *appears* absent from the later viewpoint of the definitively actualized, limited, and rigid effect, is thus an integral part of the effect:

Great completion is seemingly lacking, but its use is never used up. (§45)

The commentator Wang Bi interprets this formula in a way now familiar to us, in terms of an availability of the image or of the phenomenon (xiang means both in Chinese). That "great completion" is that which comes about "at the mercy of existents" and does not constitute itself into "one" particular, definitively individuated image. b Since it is not completely individuated (actualized), it "is seemingly lacking" when compared to such an image. Similarly, the Laozi later says, "great fullness is seemingly empty," but "its use is never exhausted," and "great straightness is seemingly crooked." I would add: just look at the horizon the ocean traces far off in the distance. The Laozi also says: "Great agility is seemingly clumsy." Does not modern art frequently makes us feel that way (witness Henri Matisse's "clumsy" bodies)? "Great eloquence seemingly stammers," the Laozi goes on (or, as we say in French, true eloquence scoffs at eloquence). If there is "great completion" of what looks to be unfinished, it is because that completion is always at work, responding to various requests, open to various possibilities, having still more work to do without being hindered by "one" particular completion that would flaunt itself. In "seeming to be lacking," the sketch is truly that "great" completion. That is, it works as compossibility and cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of holding back—in understatement, for example—whereby less is more. It prevails not by virtue of its economy but by virtue of its availability. Nor is it limited to the power of the

virtual. On the contrary, it is the most effective moment in the process and only "appears" to be lacking.

It will therefore be clear why, breaking with an entire tradition of translation (correction), I am not tempted to amend the formula in the *Laozi* following "The great square has no corners":

The great work avoids coming about. (§41)

And why, unafraid of the radicality of its meaning, which in fact is de rigueur here, I do not rush to adopt what is only a weakened version of it: "The great work is completed at night" (wan is substituted for mian). Usually, the resulting meaning is trite: the great work takes a long time to complete. "The great vase is slow to reach its perfection," Liou Kia-Hway and François Houng translate poetically. "The Great Vessel takes long to complete," is D. C. Lau's English translation, adopted by Henricks. Not only is that lectio facilior hopelessly banal, sweeping away anything that might provide food for thought, it also leaves a hole, oddly enough, in the sequence of formulas. The well-established lesson is perfectly integrated into what we already know, thanks to deft variations in the use of the negative. We move from "no" to "avoid" to "limited," then back to "no," reinforced by the concluding "has no form":

The great square has no corners, the great work avoids coming about, the great tone has only a limited sound, The great image has no form.

Philosophy can and must clarify philology in turn, when philology loses its footing and close reading and free interpretation ("far" reading) come to back each other up. If you grant me that, you will no longer hesitate to understand that the completion of the sketch, which appears to be lacking, is a "great completion" inasmuch as it "avoids coming about." In remaining upstream from a definitive actualization, the sketch actively keeps present in the image the fount from which it is painted. The sketch keeps the effect from flaunting itself or getting bogged down, and in so doing grants precedence to the "great image."

4. The notion of sketch has not occupied a significant place within the aesthetic thought of the Chinese literati. We suspect that is because the notion is so self-evident that it has in large part vanished into that

thought, become indistinguishable from it. Why would anyone have to conceive of it separately, granted that one posits—and thinks—a notion only by opposition, carving it out by following the fracture line that separates it from something outside itself? Literati painting as a whole makes use of the principle of the great completion that "appears" lacking, that is, of the great work that avoids coming about. It makes such good use of it that such a principle can hardly be said to have any outside, except that of artisanship as opposed to art (artisanship being reduced to "brushwork" that focuses solely on minutiae, on detail, gong bi). From the viewpoint of literati painting, that is the only opposition recognized as pertinent, the only one that establishes a clear rift. In Europe, similarly, it is when painting resolutely leaves artisanship behind, liberating itself from the control traditionally exerted by guilds—while also affirming it in intense struggle—that it can begin to acknowledge the status of the sketch as full-fledged work.

In considering the historical development more closely, we can confirm that the rise of literati painting in China, along with the selfawareness it gradually acquired, went hand in hand with the discovery of what painting gains by being incomplete. One of the literati who contributed the most toward that turning point is certainly the great master of the Tang Dynasty, the "sage" of painting who surpassed all the other painters both "after him and before": the eighth-century painter Wu Daozi. The critic Zhang Yanyuan (ninth century) has Wu Daozi say: "While others take the trouble to join tightly the edges of the drawing, I leave gaps—which make them sparse—between the strokes." And "while others are preoccupied with resemblance, I despise such vulgarities."14 Two styles of painting are set side by side: the "dense" drawing, which does not show the ends of the brushstrokes but which is energetic and inspired in its sudden outbursts (cf. Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei), is opposed to the "spare" drawing (of Zhang Sengyou and especially Wu Daozi). For Wu Daozi, "one or two brushstrokes" suffices for the image to find its "harmony," for it to "respond" (ying). What, then, constitutes the image's capacity for "harmony," if, as the critic acknowledges, "in leaving space between the dots and strokes of the drawing," you also make "gaps and shortfalls" visible? An effort is made to separate the two levels. He is careful to clarify that, "even though, from the perspective of the brush, it is not complete, the sense-intentionality is complete."e

There can be no coherent conception of the status of the sketch as full-fledged work without a contrast between what is left incomplete, which is on the order of the drawing, and what is achieved all the more

completely, which, though not in the realm of what can be actualized and painted, nevertheless constitutes the plenitude of the painting. Zhang Yanyuan began to give a name to that plenitude: what constitutes the object of that great completion of the sketch, which is not on the order of figuration, is "sense-intentionality" (yi). It will also be called the animating "breath-resonance" internal to beings and things (qi yun). We will later have to patiently consider and explore all these notions in more depth. Jing Hao says of an ink painting by Zhang Zao (end of eighth century) that, while the "breath-resonance" of his trees and rocks is "abundant-flourishing," the "accumulation of ink and brush" on the page is "very limited" (T.H.L., 257). It is said that Zhang Zao used worn-out brushes, or rubbed the silk between his hands beforehand, to keep the drawing spare, but also that he commanded whatever price he named for his sketches. Xie He had earlier said of Wei Xie that, though he did not have "completion" from the point of view of formal perfection, his "breath-resonance" was such that he far surpassed other painters (quoted by Shen Gua, S.H.L., 231). Shen Gua contrasts painters such as Huang Quan and his sons, who became masters in the application of color and possessed a brush so "fresh" and "delicate" that it left no visible traces of ink, to a painter such as Xu Xi, who painted only with an ink brush, "hastily and carelessly," simply sprinkling a little cinnabar and white (S.H.L., 236). But from Xu Xi's painting "a powerful spiritual breath was born," and sense-intentionality gave it astonishing life and movement. Even though he did not have a career at court, he "triumphed from afar by breath-resonance."

This has become a commonplace of the art of painting: "When you paint, there is no need to paint all the way; if with each brushstroke you paint all the way, it becomes common" (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 115). What is left unpainted in the drawing, what, by its absence, makes possible the great completion of the painting, must not be misconstrued, however. "When you wish to paint all the way" but do not "dare," that is nothing more than childishness. But when someone who has achieved mastery of his art and has reached his spiritual peak "lets the spirit pass of itself through the single variation of pale and dark," and when "the spirit reaches all the way," if "he does not paint all the way," it is "perfect."

Chinese painting has not been afraid to be radical on this point or to make painting fall into line with wisdom in order to achieve that radicality. The nonaction recommended to the painter is the same as the nonaction exercised by the sage. The sage of the *Laozi* "does not do," but there is nothing that "is not done." This should also be understood

as "in such a way that" there is nothing that "is not done" (in that logical progression, the same neutral word, er, isignifies both concession and consequence). At the beginning of his last chapter, Shitao directly transfers the capacity of the sage to the painter. The painter "does not do" but, or in such a way that, "there is [something] done," done even more, as a painting. Not only can one "do" without "finishing," as we already know, but there can also be something done, all the more done, without anyone doing, that is, without anyone aiming to do. Instead of having to strain or struggle at the level of the figural and the tangible, the sage and the painter do not need to "act." They move upstream from phenomenafigurations and remain on the brink of their actualization, connected as they are to the fount of effect. Within the unity of the internal void, the spirit governs in advance the entire development of the processes. Similarly and conversely, all the modifications possible are already contained, and even exempted from coming about, in the "unique" brushstroke. The Shitao concludes elsewhere (chap. 12) that, "within the harsh and the rough," one has only to seek an image that is "fragmentary and seemingly in pieces"k (recall Paulhan's "cracks and breaches") in order for art—in the most secret part of itself¹⁵—to be most naturally at work, through that effect of emptiness and nonsaturation.

Empty and Full

1. Inside Saint Peter's in Rome, once you have passed through the heavy bronze doors ... Who does not recall the accumulation of statues, medallions, chests, and tombs, the heaps of gilt and colonnades, mosaics and paintings? Poor Bernini . . . Along the walls, the longest in all Christendom, they tell us, in each niche of the cupola, and even in the vault of the lantern, everything is full to bursting. No space is left vacant for the eyes to roam about as they like, unmolested, nowhere can they forget art and relax. The last time I went through, wandering aimlessly under these vaults, I had the same feeling of intolerable saturation that I had climbing the slopes of the Nikko sanctuary in Japan or visiting all the recently regilded Buddhist temples in China. I do not deny that, taken individually, all these things may be "beautiful" (Michelangelo's famous Pietà, for example). But once again I was struck — to the point of being unable to breathe - by the sense that this fullness works against plenitude, that it seals off rather than opens onto presence, that it blocks instead of showing: in short, that it stands in the way of the very thing—"spirituality," as it is usually

called—that it was its mission to reveal. Let us be brave enough to use the word. But how can we hope to disentangle the notion of spirituality within European ideology from all the ossified spiritualism inside it, which, having dogmatically taken on substance, has made the spiritual rigid and sterile? The term "spiritual" has been covered over by many centuries of smug and self-righteous spirituality (the infamous "spiritual values"). Perhaps there is hope that we can begin to extract it from the mire of thought into which it has sunk by taking a negative path, the path provided by lack and hollowness, by desaturating and emptying out. Perhaps then we can make the spiritual accessible again.

In any case, at Saint Peter's I confirmed two things to which familiarity with the Laozi has made me sensitive. In the first place, all that "beauty," as soon as it flaunts itself, by the mere fact of its self-assertion or self-confirmation, is already ugly. Second, I felt how much emptiness, or lack, one needs for the effect to come about completely, for the full, in other words, to exert its full effect. If that fullness clinging to itself does not contain internal fissures, if it is not inhabited by what it lacks, if it does not pull back prematurely, as the sketch so elegantly does, or if, already somewhat eroded, it does not withdraw, receding, about to depart as it were—the way ruins lead us to nostalgic reveries—it gets mired in its own presence and fades away. It is not only that any presence not permeated with absence turns out to be narrowly confined. Above all, that selfadherence or self-adhesion makes the effect impervious to what inspired it; it becomes dully monumental. Conversely, if the Romanesque chapel with its rough-hewn forms discovered on the far side of the hill, and the Zen garden strewn with a few rocks, "speak to us," it is not only because of their rejection of pomp and their spare, unadorned style. Such words do not suffice. What is (apparently) lacking in them calls out and brings about an effect. What they leave vacant is effective and makes manifest. The emptiness they maintain makes it possible to move about freely and succeeds in *letting pass*. The important thing is not to determine "what" passes—assuming one even could—but to conserve its energy, as physics says, that is, preserve its activity. Or rather, as soon as someone determined it—assuming one even could—the "That" would no longer be fit to move about freely and pass. It would become insistent-consistent, instead of being content to emanate from the fissures. It would become self-consistent, the only self-consistent one: Spirit, God, alias the Great Object. It would consider itself sacred and would immediately begin to saturate—but now from Above, of course—which is something I fear from all ontotheology, whatever one might say about it.

As we might suspect, Chinese theorists of painting, wary as they are of anything that might achieve total realization in a particular form and not "avoid" coming about completely, are inclined to insist on the importance of such nonsaturation, and even to inscribe it at the beginning of their treatises on the art of painting. "There must be emptiness and hollowness above and below, and, on all four sides, there must be spacing letting pass, so that it remains free-clear-at ease" (Rao Ziran, S.H.L., 224). Conversely, if you "overload" the sky and "clog up" the earth so that "the entire painting is full of them," there is nothing left of the "wind"—both emanation and influence—to spread and "pass." The praise of "sparseness" and its capacity to assure "passage" and "communication" aby not sealing things off is only a consequence of what we recognized at the beginning. Any presence that is no longer haunted by its absence gets bogged down, entrenched in itself and, thus isolated, becomes sterile. It reminds us of what Chinese thought has constantly thematized, that there is no activity and, as a result, no possibility of an effect, unless it comes about through exchange and interaction. In the painting Pine and Rocks, the painter, rather than figuring the gnarls on the tree trunk with ink circles, passed a light brush through the large spot of ink, so that, thanks to the empty space left across the drawing, the vital breath^b "circulates and communicates" throughout (Mi Fu, S.H.L., 141). When the ancient masters painted groves of trees, they inserted dead branches to "leave space and allow communication," "the idea being that if you clog things up and everything is full," it becomes difficult, in the absence of "spacing-communication" (circulation), to "deploy a landscape" (Fang Xun, 48).*

When Chinese treatises on painting deal with the empty and the full, they insist simultaneously on two things: on one hand, the technical procedure for producing emptiness within fullness; on the other hand—on the other side—the capacity for animation and, as a result, the "spiritual" dimension conferred on the painting, which constitutes its highest aim. The variation between emptiness and fullness links these two concerns:

^{*} With his painter's eye, Matisse was sensitive to this but did not really analyze the reason: "All the same, I had already noticed that in the works of the Orientals, drawing the empty spaces left around leaves counted as much as drawing the leaves themselves. In two adjoining branches, the leaves of one branch were more in harmony with the ones of its neighbor than with the leaves from the same branch." He added: "When inspiration has taken leave of the object, observe the empty spaces between the branches.

Observation having no immediate, direct relation to the object." Henri Matisse, *ficrits et propos sur l'art*, ed. Dominique Fourcade (Paris: Hermann, 1972), 168.

the effect is produced methodically, but it opens onto the Invisible. From the technical point of view of manipulating the brush, pictorial emptiness is obviously understood to mean what is left blank in the drawing. As such, it is associated with the long-proven practices of the Chinese art of writing, whether with the "dry brush" (ganbi) saturated with only a little ink, or with the "worn" brush, whose sparse hairs leave a blank space in the middle. That "flying blank" (feibai)d left across the drawing by the lively motion of the brush relieves the weight of the figuration and makes the internal energy that deploys it pass through from one end to the other. In literary criticism, that same notion of a "flying blank" will metaphorically serve to evoke the "emptiness between words" and the allusive quality of poetic meaning. When you imagine the "contours" of figuration or the internal "wrinkles" that assure its consistency (see Fang Xun, 53, 54), you immediately find that the current of emptiness communicating within fullness puts a strain on fullness itself and deploys a "potential" that makes the configuration come unstuck. As a result, that current of emptiness frees it from the mire of individuation, from confinement, which would make that fullness anecdotal. If you paint a tree and "it is filled up on all sides," "even if it is well done, you will always have only a single face," a single aspect. When you paint a tree, you need to vary emptiness and fullness, and then, "from the four faces at once," there will be "liveliness in the configuration" (Fang Xun, 44). Even as this variation between emptiness and fullness produces dynamism, it alone renders the figuration as a whole, by preserving something of the invisible within the visible. More precisely, it renders the figuration in the compossibility that constitutes its "greatness," removing it from the exclusivity of what would otherwise be only a particular angle of vision.

As a result, the emptiness of clouds and mists is not only the indistinct beyond into which forms vanish at the horizon; it also permeates the interiority of forms, opens them, aerates them, liberates them, and makes them evasive. The effect of vagueness is not limited to distances rendered in perspective. That act of emptying out purifies as well the innermost part of things, releasing their capacity for aspiration. Let us take a dual observation as our starting point: first, everyone can certainly render the tangible form of trees and rocks; and second, "whether or not the brush attains the hazy distances depends entirely on the clouds and mists." But do we also know that these clouds and mists "connect" and "permeate" the trees and rocks as well, from the inside? "The whole uniting in a single place" of the composition, "the distilled spirit of painting is located there" (C.K., 264). If the mountains, waters, trees, and rocks result from

a "full brush" and the clouds and mists from an "empty brush," "emptiness serves to push fullness about and fullness is also empty." "Communicating therefore through and through" across the painting, everywhere "there is spiritual-animating breath."

2. The question, as a result, turns about and stares us in the face. Why did Europeans not make emptiness and desaturation the source of the spiritual? Why did we hypostasize it, preferring the "fullness" of Being or God? Greek philosophy, as it happens, traces its first gestures back to emptiness, the "void" (kenon). In the first place, that philosophy did not fail to submit the void to the question of "being." Aristotle's first inquiry into the question is whether we must "believe" in the existence of the void or not, whether it "is or is not": the Greek question par excellence, the ontological question. Next, Greek philosophy conceived of the void in terms of the requirement for a theoretical knowledge of nature. The void is envisioned in the wake of the question of place-since it would be that "in which" there is absolutely nothing, like "a sort of vase"—and from the point of view of physics. The void is first invoked to explain the motion of bodies and phenomena such as rarefaction or condensation. Aristotle, conceiving of the place not as a distance but as the limit of the enveloping body, and, understanding the directional motion of bodies in terms of their internal nature alone, concludes that there is no extension or diastema ("interval") other than those of bodies themselves, and hence that the void "is not." To be exact, it has no "place" to be, no reason for being. Would not such an abhorrence of the vacuum, inherited from Plato and, before him, from Parmenides, be rooted in the feeling that there can be no satisfaction for the spirit except through the determination of "being," and hence in the measure of fullness? In the feeling that the void, as a result, is nonsense and that only fullness partakes of coherence? In any case, though Aristotle can accept that nonbeing is mingled with beings at the inferior level of the sublunary world, disseminated among them as it were, he fiercely refuses any analogous concession concerning the void. According to him, not only is the void a lack of being, it is a logical absurdity.

It is not a matter of indifference for the fate of philosophy that the void did not find favor among our earliest philosophers except in the materialist tradition, that of Democritus and Epicurus, a disgraced tradition for the most part, which denies any separate existence to the spiritual and conceives of the soul as corporeal. Democritus and Epicurus need the void, but only within an ontological-physical perspective and

to provide a foundation for their theory of atoms. The void, a place both intangible and immaterial (*locus inane vacansque*, says Lucretius), exists at once as the vacant space between bodies, permitting their displacement, and as interstitial space "mingled with things themselves," thus allowing their penetration, causing their greater or lesser compactness, explaining their greater or lesser density, their greater or lesser weight, and so on.³ Lucretius recognizes the existence of the void, to be sure, but only with respect to bodies. In fact, it is by relying on the void that he can explain that only bodies exist.

Hence the (European) philosopher, when dealing with the void, whether aspiring to demonstrate or to refute its existence, is concerned with proving. To be more precise, he speculates about it. The void is an object of inquiry and debate. It assumes the status of a hypothesis on which the entire system will depend, or conversely, it is rejected for scrambling the coherence of that system. Why does it not occur to the author of the *Laozi*, in discussing emptiness, to inquire into its existence as well; why does he not see any possible question there? Why does he not envision emptiness methodically, in terms of the category of place? Why does he not conceive of emptiness logically, as a condition for the motion of bodies? More radical than the question of what one thinks is the question of what one thinks to think—or does not think to think, does not think to question. The Laozi does not problematize, does not construct or speculate, but elucidates. Instead of aiming to develop a disinterested, theoretical knowledge for scientific purposes, built jointly on perception and understanding—as the Greeks have trained us to do-it has a completely different starting point. The Laozi is founded solely on the advantage we draw from emptiness at every moment, in our activity immersed in the world, which constitutes as such a technicalpractical knowledge, we might say, in any case something different from theoretical knowledge. It is not disengaged from the use of things. It is this knowledge that Heidegger calls "circumspection," Umsicht—as the understanding of "readiness-to-hand"—which guides "manipulation," Hantieren.* Just as the perspective developed by Chinese thought is that

^{* &}quot;The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' [Handlichkeit] of the hammer." That type of being of the Zeug, whereby it manifests itself on its own, and which constitutes its readiness-to-hand, takes us away from the theoretical: "No matter how sharply we just look at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight,

of the capacity at work within the process of things (that of the world as it "goes," as it "works"), the *Laozi* conceives of emptiness solely from the point of view of its efficacy and even proposes to shed light on its inexhaustible resource. It *cannot* inquire into the existence of emptiness because it is constantly experiencing it, prior to any constituted knowledge, prior even to any "question of knowledge," which emptiness is in the process of bringing about:

The thirty spokes converge in a hub: where there is nothing, there is functioning-use of the chariot. (§11)

The emptiness of the hub (*mediolus*, or "little vase") is what allows the spokes to converge, the wheel to turn and, as a result, the chariot to move forward. Similarly, a room is uninhabitable—it is not even a room, strictly speaking—if all its walls are sealed. But make an opening for a door to allow people in and out, windows to look and breathe through, and, as a result of these empty spaces, the room can finally be of use. "Where there is nothing," the *Laozi* repeats, since this observation is insuperable and its formulation invariable, "there is use (functioning) of the room."

3. Let us consider the experience, or the "making," through which human activity, here as elsewhere, began to manifest itself, an experience we are sure to find at the dawn of every civilization: that of fashioning clay—earth—to make a vase. What does this hollowed-out vase teach us? From its characteristic readiness-to-hand, Heidegger will extract the primordial essence of "pro-ducing," bringing forth (*her-vor-bringen*). As a result, following the undeconstructed (undeconstructible?) fold of European metaphysics, he will make it the very modality of *aletheia* as the movement of truth's self-manifestation, inasmuch as, through that vase, "something hidden arrives in the nonhidden." Heidegger, rescuing the vase from vulgarity and the oblivion of Being, elevates it to ontological dignity. The vase holds, collects, and manifests—three verbs inflected by the *aletheia*—the symbolic "Quadripartition": of earth (from which the

by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 98.

vase is made); heaven (toward which it rises); the world of the divine as a result; and the world of mortals, who perform libations with it. In short, the vase organizes the great mythologico-religious scene of humanity. Jacques Lacan, displacing Heidegger's reflection on truth onto meaning, casts this vase fashioned from earth as the signifier's introduction into the world. By virtue of the void it creates, the vase is "pure signifier," since, in its emptiness, it is not the signifier of a particular signified. Hence "emptiness and fullness are introduced by the vase into a world that, of itself, knows nothing like it." Since the void that the vase introduces into the world is only a representation of the essential emptiness from which it is created, the vase is designed to represent "the Thing," the "void in the center of the real."*

But what if the vase, fashioned as it is from earth, were no longer the image of anything and bore no symbolic weight that we had to decipher? What if its emptiness were only utility? Would there still be a "motif" (to develop, to question), and could this vase continue to inspire—to intrigue—thought? To put it another way, I was careful to take a detour through Heidegger and Lacan before—and with the aim of—approaching the Laozi because I felt the need for more complications, the need for a contrasting ground (fond) to play against as it were, as a way of gaining access to something of the simplicity of the Laozi's formula. That something gives rise to no theatricality and refrains from setting up any oppositions or from introducing any tension. As a result, it does not lend itself to a contortion of meaning. It is not inventive. Otherwise, we would run the risk of having no hold over it. For what is more unreadable than the unconstructed, the unrisky, which in this case is something un-"posited," unadvanced, something that eliminates everything "thetic" from itself? The Laozi does not understand the experience of fashioning a vase from earth either in terms of the uncovering of Being or in terms of the breaking and entering carried out by Meaning. (Being and Meaning, or Being,

^{* &}quot;And that is why the potter, just like you I'm talking to, creates the vase *around* that void with his hand, creates it just like the mythic creator, ex nihilo, out of the hole." Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire*, *Livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), "De la création *ex nihilo*," 144ff.

Lacan finishes this development with an odd reference to Taoism, which he conceives as a wisdom of "renunciation" that denounces the harmfulness of work "to such a point that it is just barely permissible to use the vase as a spoon." He therefore has no inkling that the nonaction of the Taoists, far from stemming from a disengagement from the world and from the idea that work is "the source of evil," instead corresponds to a logic of efficacy (valorizing emptiness so that fullness may produce its full effect).

then Meaning, are the two great philosophical and dramatic—but everso-fertile—phantasms of the "West.") From the start, the *Laozi* disengages itself from any capacity on the vase's part to embody our old myth of creation. The vase is invoked neither to promote the living being nor to respond to the enigma of the *nibil* and of the Origin. In its repetitive economy, the *Laozi* formula, slipped as it is between the two examples already quoted, calls for no question, opens on no interpretation. It saves us from (Heideggerian) poetization-sacralization and displays no anxiety about the unimaginability of the Thing and the "hole":

Fashion earth to make a vase from it: where there is nothing, there is functioning-use of the vase. (§11)

The vase is left with its pure readiness-to-hand and, since no other plan extends beyond it or confines it, there is not even readiness-to-hand in the literal sense (the term becomes prosaic). At issue is merely what ensures that, through the void, an effect comes about continuously (discreetly). By virtue of the void that its walls surround, the vase contains and can be of use. In that respect, the vase does not represent anything (on the order of unveiling, or of the signifier). It does not refer to anything else or embody anything, not even Creation. It bears no symbolic meaning and does not enter into the construction or demonstration of anything. It does not give rise to any imaginary *unsticking*. The *Laozi* adheres to that: in becoming hollow on the bottom and opening wide at its lip, the vase can now serve as a vase. That *hollowing-opening wide* adequately defines it. It serves-functions in the same way that the empty space of the hub allows the wheel to turn, or that the empty spaces of doors and windows allow the room to be inhabited.

These are therefore not three images but, at most, three exemplary cases: the hub, the vase, and the room. The *Laozi* concludes with a formulation that would become unintelligible if it were allowed to slip, however little, toward ontology:

That is why, at the level of the there-is, [the vase] has value as profit; at the level of the there-is-not, it has value as functioning-use. (§11)

As Wang Bi explains, what gives the vase value as profit at the stage of the there-is "rests," in all cases, on its value as functioning-use at the level of the there-is-not, just as what has form must rely on the without-form,

as we already know. In other words, in the terms of emptiness and fullness, the "there is not" of emptiness manifests itself as the source of the effect deployed at the stage of the "there is," which constitutes fullness. Let us return to what we know how to form: not two levels of being but two stages of the process of things, the stage of "there is" proper to the particular actualization and that of the "there is not" of the undifferentiated Fount. In the particular profit you draw from the emptiness introduced into the hub (or the hollowness introduced into the earth from which the vase is made, or the empty space introduced into the walls of a room), the Laozi says, you see the capacity for functioninguse (yong)g coming to the surface. That functioning-use is diffused everywhere, hence constantly at work, as the undifferentiated Fount of the tao or Process. When you hollow out a hub, or fashion a vase, or cut out a window, you put to work in an individuated mode the capacity for effect proper to emptiness, which is essentially to communicate and, in so doing—in desaturating—to open wide and deploy. The fully dependent status of fullness thereby comes to light. Not only does fullness come into actuality from emptiness (or fail to come into actuality by remaining within emptiness); it is by virtue of emptiness—and through emptiness by hollowing-opening wide—that fullness can ceaselessly produce its "full" effect.

4. Emptiness proceeds by hollowing out fullness, just as fullness, in turn, is opened wide by the void. Far from forming two opposing and separate qualities or states, emptiness and fullness are structurally correlated; each exists only by virtue of the other. "The there-is and the there-is-not engender each other," says the Laozi (§2). In China, the act of painting will thus consist of that major operation: by hollowing out the fullness of the drawing, the emptiness left vacant on the silk or paper makes the undifferentiated foundation-fount of things appear (returning to the primordial stage of the "there is not"). Conversely, the fullness of the drawing, in coming into actuality as "there is" from the fundamental emptiness, nevertheless continues to spread and deploy, opening wide—rather than becoming fixed and reified—in that emptiness. The formulations on this subject form an interconnected series. One needs both "to seek fullness within emptiness" and "to put to work emptiness within fullness" (C.K., 241). If "you know how to fill what is empty" and "to empty what is full," then there are brush "traces" "filling" the painting, but these traces will nowhere be perceived as "ruts." These traces do not get bogged down or stuck in their own presence. Rather, permeated by emptiness, they remain lively, and they are alive. The critic concludes that, overall, one no longer sees anything but "a spiritual-animated atmosphere" (C.K., 266). In the structuration of thought, that is the essential outcome of the deontologization brought about by emptiness and illustrated by painting. The void about which Greek philosophy speculates makes possible, at most, the motion of bodies (or their greater or lesser weight and density) only on the order of nature and its physical causality—or rather, on what will henceforth only ever be that order. By contrast, the emptiness put to work by Chinese painting breaks forms wide open, desaturates and distills plenitude, and thereby releases something of the spiritual. It opens the natural to the spiritual, and the visible to the Invisible. Yet the Invisible is not supernatural. It is pointless to invoke some ineffable mysticism on that score or get lost in a dubious spirituality, since that spirituality stems solely from the procedures at work—from the lighter handling of the brush and from the greater dilution of ink—and does not come unstuck from them. It does not stem from a phantasm but results from the operation engaged by the gesture itself, proceeding "technically" as pure effect.

Take trees and rocks, for example. "Let the sparse and the dense alternate, let emptiness and fullness engender each other," and you will have grasped the "logic of painting." Since painting is both filling emptiness and desaturating fullness, when trees and rocks "fill" the foreground, you need to employ houses and rooftops to "promote emptiness." Similarly, when mountains and cliffs "fill" the background, you again need to promote emptiness, this time by employing mist and clouds (C.K., 319). It is always the same technique at work, shifting from one plane to the next. That technique of alternation allows the trees and rocks depicted in the front to "gain depth." In such a case, is it still valid to speak of "emptiness," however? Indeed, the theorist notes, the rooftops and houses appearing between the trees and rocks "are also fullness," just as, within the mists and clouds, "there is also fullness." Nevertheless, rooftops and clouds, by creating space between the trees or rocks or mountaintops, hollow them out. Instead of the trees and rocks and mountaintops "clogging up" the painting, filling it with their presence, instead of becoming opaque, the rooftops and clouds permeate them with absence, liberating them from their inert fullness, and allow them to spread, both to emanate and to become distilled.

Emanation-distillation: I embrace these terms, joined together to express their transindividual function of *release*, and hence of transcendence (a "spiritual" function therefore). The capacity for release is

precisely what has been abandoned, hence unthought, by the category of "being." Emptiness, we are advised, is not dully limited to "where there is nothing," confined in its emptiness as fullness would be in its fullness. There is not an in-itself of emptiness just as, thanks to emptiness, there is not an in-itself of fullness. Emptiness is not an entity, not even a negative one (nothingness); it is an operative factor. It is what hollows out—opens wide, thanks to which something of the other emerges from its enclosure and spreads. In mountain and water landscapes, the same theorist notes (C.K., 320), the mountain, the principal element, normally constitutes fullness, and water, emptiness. But in paintings of villages by the water, the water is fullness, whereas the banks and mountainsides are emptiness. Thus, in painting banks that remain vague, barely sketched out—at once "flat and superficial," "distant and bland"—the painter makes the scope and extent of the water more prominent. Because the bank is hollowed out, that "fullness" of water spreads indefinitely.

Let us recapitulate what constitutes the reciprocity of emptiness and fullness, which the art of painting leads us to discover by degrees (see C.K., 482). (1) In the beginning is the dependence of one on the other, fullness proceeding from emptiness. Although "everyone knows" that where there is no ink or brush marks it is empty, no one realizes that "where it is full" "is not separated from emptiness." But just as the brush "begins to come alive" as soon as the brush touches the paper, thanks to the variation of emptiness and fullness, so is it a fortiori for the whole painted "world." (2) That dependence is not external but operative from within, in such a way that the terms exchange places: fullness becomes empty, emptiness becomes full. We "know even less" that "where there is no ink or brush mark," it is "full." Even though the brush has not reached the paper there, sense-intentionality "has already reached" it. Hence, "where it is empty, it is full" and, as a result, throughout the entire body of the painting, "everything is permeated with a spiritual atmosphere." (3) The final result is that each serves the other. Fullness takes advantage of emptiness, which serves as its fount of effect. In the places where clouds and mist veil the landscape, which are taken for emptiness or blankness, we must "realize to the highest degree" that these mists that glide over and spread "serve to carry one's gaze far away," and that, in forming all that blankness, they "borrow from emptiness," but only to "make fullness visible." In floating and flowing through mountains and forests, they bring them into sharp relief, hollow out the valleys, and bring out all the infinite variation that constitutes a landscape.

5. By inscribing the way Chinese painting and European painting have chosen to paint the spiritual, by placing the two face to face, we move well beyond the realm of painting. At issue is the very conception of what we can understand by the term "spiritual" and what we can humanly expect from it. We liberate that term from vague tremolos because we finally grasp it fully from the point of view of that "conception," both in the sense of production and in the sense of intellection (painting, in its practice, connects the two). Painting exploits the resources of figuration or of drawing in order to transcend the limits of the visible and allow the invisible in. In so doing, it does not merely unveil a possible structure of what is called, in the most general terms—at the limit of our ability to articulate—"world" or "reality." It also puts that structure to use, puts it to the test, and experiments with it in a tangible manner. In a manner much more effective than any discourse, painting makes us "touch" the invisible.

But can we deal with the "spiritual" in such general terms? After all, if we were to take an inventory of the various means European painting has used to refer to spirituality, how many would we find? Shafts of light falling straight onto the stooped shoulders of the old anchorite; the halos of saints; the great wings of angels, more or less covered with feathers. The symbolism is conventional and confined to religious iconography. Because the spiritual cannot be directly represented, the fixity of characters and the arbitrary dimensions, or the use of gilt to figure light, or of "dissemblant images," which make any confusion between the human and divine planes impossible, are so many codifications elevating us to contemplation, if not to adoration. In the composition of a painting, the artist may also use a cloud as a veil to isolate some being taken to be invisible—because he belongs to the realm of the divine—from the other characters in the scene. That procedure too is standard (see Gotthold Lessing, Laocöon, chap. 12). In many church paintings, these two spheres are set side by side and divided, like the heavenly and the earthly in classical ontology, between the visible and the invisible, orata and noeta. After the icon was rejected as an artistic mode-painting in the classical age was in the first place history painting that depicted characters—the spiritual found expression in physical features and attitudes, reduced to the psychological. In other words, the soul found expression in the body, the "inside" in the "outside." True to the great European metaphor of body as mirror of the soul, the invisible was no longer depicted next to and disconnected from the visible, but through it: Orpheus is

painted with his face turned toward heaven, his gaze focused, absent from the world and ecstatic. Leonardo da Vinci, not wanting to leave the realm of the spirit to poetry alone, but laying claim to it for painting as well, and considering the art of painting spirituality more essential than that of painting nature, conceived no other way to manifest spiritual activity than to render it by "bodily movements." Could anyone have said otherwise? Will anyone ever be able to say, and especially do, something other than capture one by means of the other ("soul" and "body," "spirit" and "eye")? On this point, Cézanne had nothing more to say.*

All the same, European painting does not remain at that point—has never remained at that point. Working its two resources, form and color, without respite, in order to open them, even force them, beyond themselves, it modifies proportions, stretches bodies, purifies lines, in short, liberates form from the weight and mutism in which an accurate (but impossible) representation would tend to enclose it. By deforming form, that is, by working it against its submission to realism, by emancipating it from any objective reference and making it "abstract," European painting detaches form, promotes it, and spiritualizes it. Cézanne breathes life into his Bathers through the ascending motion of the triangle. According to Wassily Kandinsky, "the more organic form is pushed to the background, the more abstraction moves to the foreground" and gains in spiritual resonance. 6 In so doing, painting is said to move closer to the pure spirituality of music. As for the other resource, color, each releases an inner resonance: yellow "radiates," moves away from the center and toward the eye; blue, by contrast, in its concentric movement, tends to move away. The battle tirelessly waged between heavenly and earthly, matter and spirit, is replicated in the conflict between yellow and blue. The eye "feels stung" by yellow and sinks into blue. Yellow is "shrill" and weighs heavy on the senses, while blue is calm, drawing us toward the infinite. As Kandinsky writes, it awakens in human beings a nostalgia for the Pure and for "the supreme supersensible."

^{*} He even hammers it in with his surly tone: "You don't paint souls. You paint bodies: and when bodies are well painted, shit! the soul, if they have any, the soul radiates and shines through from all sides." Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne*, new ed. (Paris: Cynara, 1988), 164.

[†] Kandinsky is bold in his treatment of the spiritual "in art, and painting in particular." He conceives of the adventurous future of painting even more audaciously, adopting a prescriptive, even prophetic mode. What authorizes him to do this is that, relying on his faith as an Orthodox Christian, he settles comfortably into a position that is impregnable from the start. Far from having any scruples about revisiting our old dualisms, he

By contrast, the conception of the spiritual that emerges from the play of emptiness and fullness within Chinese painting cannot fail to be instructive, since it presupposes no shift of planes and does not appeal to faith of any kind. The spiritual in this case is not the object of a teleological hope or of symbolic enticement. You need only create spaces in the drawing, hollow out fullness and let emptiness work within it, to gain access de facto to something of infinity. h So says the Chinese painter—or rather, so he does. You need not seek to represent the spiritual by invoking a different plane, or even simply to signify it by taking forms and colors to their ever more distant limits. By emptying out fullness-filling out emptiness, you already generate a certain spirituality (the point of view of process and readiness-to-hand always takes precedence). Presence, in becoming permeated with absence, immediately becomes distilled and unravels. It goes from being inert to becoming alert, and that spirituality is concrete, in the sense that it proceeds from a concretion-deconcretion. It is the *upstroke* (*délié*), in opposition to the full downstroke of the brush, which it offsets; it is the diluted (dilué), the ink wash growing clearer, letting the foundation-fount of the foundational better show through.

Since I began by sharing the reluctance I felt in assuming the heavy burden of the term spiritual in the course of this journey, I have been obliged to show how the conception of the spiritual that emerges from the Chinese pictorial practice of emptiness and fullness is radically discontinuous with the metaphysical and religious genealogy characteristic of spirituality in the West. But might all the sublimity of Western spirituality also be unknown to Chinese painting? Since the spirituality produced by hollowing out-opening wide does not stem from a status of Being (of essence or of the soul), which presupposes a shift in plane, but consists wholly in the effect of desaturation and communication it brings about, the aspiration that dwells within it, inasmuch as it opens onto the Undifferentiated, does not deviate from a functional logic of the process of things. As a result, there is not soul but "animation"—thanks to emptiness, fullness breathes. Because emptiness releases things from the field in order to do its work, things are no longer sterilely shut away within themselves but, thanks to their evasiveness, become expansive,

makes it a point of honor to shine them up one by one, to contrast as directly as possible the "pure" and the "impure," the "earthly" and the "supersensible," the "heavenly" and the "human," and so on, definitively casting the darkness of materialism behind him and calling for the advent—of the Soul, of the Spiritual, of the Divine, all synonyms—toward which Humanity has always been progressing.

spread, and carry us off to infinity. That is the very same effect that the spirit sets to work within us, as ancient formulations of Chinese thought already suggest. The activity that defines it is (and is only) "placing in communication," de-opacifying, "permeating," and carrying further.

In proposing an entirely different way of grasping the spiritual, the play of emptiness and fullness points the way toward thinking about what a spiritual atheist might be, that is, someone who does not need to invoke the figure of a theos to find affirmation, who is not holding fast to the supernatural, who, consequently, is not cut off from the tangible and concrete. Our relationship to presence is also colored with ambiguity. For us, the presence that fills is a legacy of ontotheology and presents itself by turns—drawing on the soteriological register—as ecstatic, epoptic, apocalyptic. The Eye sees God within us, "Face to Face"; "being" is there, Dasein. Denouncing that ("bright") presence-parousia, Chinese painting has shown us the flip side, presence as mire, no longer beatific but sterilizing, no longer quenching but asphyxiating. No longer miraculous but lethal. To fill up is to render unbreathable. China has very nearly disregarded the absolute of Love. And, in order to deploy, does not that absolute of Love require onto the ological support transcending the process of things, in Being, the Eternal, the Divine? But, if presence really entangles, if "being" clots, given that everything must remain in process under the reign of the tao, then the prescription—more ethical than aesthetic-in relation to beings and in relation to forms will be neither to confine oneself within presence and being nor to deprive oneself of them. Painting, like wisdom, lies in nonattachment-nonrenunciation. According to a maxim also found in the treatises, painting is neither "quitting" nor "sticking."

Not Quitting, Not Sticking

I. There is a line of reasoning, folded back on itself like a syllogism, that stands in for ontological deduction and manages to determine paradigmatically the possibility of the "great image." In articulating step by step the relation to be maintained toward the form and the concrete, this argument prefigures painting's condition, its ability not to get bogged down and not to leave behind. It was written by Wang Bi (third century) and appears at the beginning of his essay on the *Laozi (Laozi zhilüe*, 195).

Let us recapitulate. It is now established that "that by which" existents are engendered, like that by which effect is produced, necessarily has its origin upstream from the disjunctions of the concrete, from the "there is not" (anything actualized) stage of the undifferentiating-harmonizing Fount of Process. At the limits of the sensible, escaping our perception because it will not come into actuality as one individuation at the expense of another, it is this, as image, that is "without form"; and it is this, as tone, that "has only a limited sound." If the image takes on a concrete-particular form, as we already know, it can no longer be the "great

image." If the tone finds expression as sound, if it comes into actuality and thus becomes exclusive—one note is produced and not another—by virtue of the effect of that disjunction, it is no longer the harmonic "great tone." We must also observe, however, that if particular images do not take form, the "great image" is unable to deploy. If distinct notes are not produced, the harmonic "great tone" cannot come about. As a result, particular images need to take form, but without anything concrete in them "exerting its domination," and then the great image can deploy. Distinct notes need to be produced, but without spirit "digging its heels in," b and then the great tone can come about.

These three moments form an argument. (1) On one hand, the great image that comes into actuality in a concrete and individuated formwhich is no more than that -can no longer be the great image maintaining within itself the compossibility that constitutes its plenitude. (2) On the other hand, the great image cannot do without concrete forms if it is to exist. (3) Therefore, the necessary condition for the great image is that it come about through the concrete, but without allowing itself to be taken over by that concretion of form. Moreover, the spirit, in focusing on and attaching to the great image, must not lapse into partiality and thereby lose the harmonic totality. Beyond their parallelism, form and sound join together to express the condition of availability that produces the "great image" as phenomenon (xiang means both image and phenomenon). If there were something concrete that "dominated" and "took over," the great image would become reified. Correlatively, if the spirit were to "dig its heels into" the great image and "focus" on it, the great image would be swept into a logic of attachment and, as a result, of exclusion. If that particularity were to take precedence, it would make the image anecdotal, and the spirit, in becoming riveted to it, would no longer move about at leisure.

In contrast to an image-phenomenon that would get bogged down in its singular actualization, in contrast to the spirit that would give its allegiance to individual determinations and be grabbed up by them, the "great image" is "on the rise" and expansive. Even as it manifests itself in concrete forms, it remains inhabited by vagueness and haziness, which deploy it indefinitely. Even as the great image figures and shows a particular aspect, it contains many other possible aspects in its fount. In becoming fully realized, the great image remains permeated throughout by the "unfathomable" (xuan)^c virtue of emptiness, opening it partway to the undifferentiated.² Hence it retains something inexhaustibly evasive within its very determination, and its power is diffuse. Indeed, "we

know that the whole world comes to whoever holds the great image in his hands." But, Wang Bi concludes, since the "formless" and "unactualized" fount remains at work through the great image and deploys within it, this whole world that comes to the great image and comes under its influence is unable to "analyze" precisely—which is to say, in this case, concretely—what constitutes its ascendancy.

To paint will therefore be to paint this form-singular as it is-but without becoming dependent on it. This form will not become sealed off and locked away, imposing its facticity, and as a result no one will be tempted to "stick" to it. But no one will have to "quit" that form either, leaving behind its concrete character to reconstruct it on a separate plane, that of the ideal (spiritual) and the symbolic. The "great image" is not the symbol deploying as idea. There is neither adhesion nor renunciation, since both entail sacrifice and operate at a loss (unlike Europe, China did not conceive of the power of tension and of sublime transcendence resulting from Loss). Emancipation from the concrete will follow, but with no abandonment of the concrete; the de-concretion coming about through emptiness and desaturation will not lead to abstraction. If there is transcendence continuously at work through the form, it does not lead to the Other, does not turn us toward a Being or a Truth: there is no conversion. The great image, then, by virtue of the fact that it remains concrete, cannot signify or represent the Spiritual. But since, even while being concrete, it does not get mired in the concrete, it produces, liberates, or rather releases something of the spiritualunderstood as something more vaporous or "quintessential," jingthrough its evasiveness.

This argument is developed just as didactically with respect to painting (Fang Xun, 26). The literati's view is that we are to contemplate a literati painting the way we examine a good horse, that is, by focusing on the level achieved as far as "sense-intentionality" and "vital energy" (yiqi) are concerned. Someone who is merely an artisan-painter, conversely, will most often cling to what constitutes the concrete determinations and the anecdotal, decorative elements, from the whip for flogging the animal to the hair on its hide to the feeding trough and fodder, without in the least rendering the (spiritual) energy animating the steed. If you look at such a painting for any length of time, you grow weary of it. Wang Bi says that, "in using that image of the horse, I myself think": (1) that it is clear that what constitutes the horse absolutely does not consist of these concrete attributes, such as the riding crop or hair; (2) but, if you leave aside all these concrete attributes, including the riding crop and

hair, there is no longer any horse at all; (3) as a result, the spiritual energy animating the horse cannot but be located "between" all these concrete attributes—"riding crop" and "hair," particular as they are—and cannot but pass through them. That energy is released—I return to that term—from their hollowed-out between—from the middle of them.

2. Could a mere preposition ("between") have more philosophical import, by virtue of what it functionally but discreetly articulates, than what we usually recognize as accredited notions? Think of its use in the structuring of Aristotle's inquiries. The Chinese character for that flimsy "between" (in "between the hair and the whip") gives us food for thought, or fodder for dreams: above the two leaves of a gate, closed but not completely side by side, the moon appears (but has become]. Later, the moon will be replaced by the sun. According to the etymological commentary, the main gate has to be closed at night but, though it is closed, you can still perceive the brightness of the moon because there is a median space between the leaves of the gate that allows the moon's rays to pass through. That internal emptiness—opening or fissure—that lets light through is also what allows for play within the very articulations structuring beings and things (the famous Japanese ma). Such is the interstitial void that exists between the joints of a steer's body and which the master butcher in the Zhuangzi (chap. 3.2) marvelously—but also altogether naturally (marvelously because naturally)-manages to pass his knife through without ever encountering resistance, hence without ever wearing out the knife and without ever struggling. But what, precisely, is the nature of that "between," from which we would normally expect so little? It does not strictly separate, as if it were an expression of distance, nor does it mediate exactly, as if it expressed a relationship. The between through which the knife working at the joints runs, or through which the brightness of the stars filters, establishes communication from within and through and through, that is, it maintains that spaced outpassed through interior. It is not compact, closed, huddled up, hence saturated-blocking, but remains available (the other meaning of the Chinese character) and indefinitely open as a result of that vacant space, however small. We need only the slightest crack to catch a glimpse of the light. That "between" is thus not the "between-things," which constitutes the relationship between things and as a result modifies their value. (Braque wanted to paint that "between-things" to give space back its consistency—"Let us forget things, let us consider only relationships"³—since "what is between the apple and the plate can be painted as well," and that "between-the-two" is even "as paramount as what they call the object.") Rather, immanent to the thing itself, that "between" is precisely what deprives the thing of its "itself," or rather unsticks it from that "itself," initiates the thing to its own absence, distends its concretion, and opens up its in-itself. The "between" is that by which the thing breathes, gains its freedom, is irrigated, and allows itself to be permeated.

Neither "without" nor "in" but between: that "between" is the modality of the nonontological. Whereas without makes us abandon the concrete and deprives us of it, and in makes us stick to the concrete and get bogged down in it, between lets us move freely (spiritually) through the concrete and keeps it communicating-operative. Early on, the Chinese treatises on painting gave a name to the virtue of that between, which opens the thing wide from the inside and, allowing passage through it, keeps it deployed. But is it really a name? It does not so much define as, at the very most, invoke, in a mode that proves to be insuperable, what the entire Chinese aesthetic tradition has vied to describe as unanalyzable and hence unteachable, which you can achieve neither by skill nor by training, and which is accessible only through an "intuitive" and silent intimate understanding in your possession (see Guo Ruoxu, 31). It is not really a name but a binomial, implying play between the two terms and letting pass: qi-yun, e "breath-resonance" (or "energy-consonance"). For anyone who is not disheartened at the thought of explicating what immediately becomes consistent (self-consistent) in our ontological language (but must we not find a justification for translating?), "breath-energy" designates in the most general way, as a first term—and even as the first term possible—both that from which beings and things arise and that which animates them. "Resonance" expresses sound's capacity to permeate (in relation to yin, the sound produced), whereas "consonance" emphasizes the harmonic dimension (yun is most often glossed by he). European sinology habitually translates the term as "spiritual resonance," borrowing it from Kandinsky, since it was he who insisted on the "internal"spiritual—dimension—that sounds, forms, and colors all possess. In this case, of course, there is no Soul or Divine to which the notion refers. The concrete or the material achieves its quintessence as a result of the communicating space introduced by the "between": the concrete is refined but not left behind.

In the late fifth century, Xie He erected "breath-resonance" into a principle, which he inscribed at the beginning of his treatise on the art of painting. Later critics tended to separate it more and more from the five principles that follow it, namely: the structuring use of the brush;

the correspondence between figuration and things; the application of colors in accordance with the categories of things; layout and the art of composition; and the transmission of ancient models by copying. This first principle in its entirety is: "breath-resonance," conferring "life and movement." It is on the basis of that effect of life and movement deployed within figuration that later theorists proposed to return gradually to the ineffable principle of breath-resonance, which constitutes the source of that life and movement (Fang Xun, 16). They refrain from making that breath-resonance a substance or principle apart (it does not partake of being but of "function"). "If you have understood what life and movement in painting are," then "breath-resonance can be found there on its own." The essence of breath-resonance is no different from that of life and movement, it is their capacity. Similarly, within that binomial, it is from breath (energy) that one gains access to that impalpable "more" at the far limit of the phenomenal but nonetheless phenomenal, still sensible, that is, to resonance-consonance: "As soon as breathenergy deploys profusely," everything follows dynamically, step by step, without getting bogged down or encountering any obstacle, and "resonance-consonance," on its own, takes on (gives) life and movement in that "between." In the end, there is no more meaningful or analytical conceptual—term to express it than that "between" of internal spacing and opening wide.

Rather than being tempted to confer a separate status on the ineffable, we might, conversely, be led to objectify that de-reifying-and thereby vitalizing-"between" in the most volatile and most distilled things we see and in what most aptly figures the emptiness within the landscape, that is, *in* the "smoothness of clouds" (C.K., 114). But were we to do so, we would again lapse into a reification that would be "laughable" because we would be forgetting that what is called, in the most general terms, "breath-energy" is, in the case of painting, the energy of the brush, ink, and colors all at once, and inspires all sorts of airs, demeanors, and dynamism. It is in that "between"-and I shall return to this-through all these manifestations of vivacity and vitality, however diverse they might be, that spiritual resonance is found, even though we cannot fix it more precisely. "Between" is the mode of unassignability (of evasiveness). Conversely, anyone wishing to reduce that "between" to the whiteness of clouds (even if whiteness embodies it best) would begin to make a thing from the "between" and would immediately lose its animating (because never completely assignable-apprehendable) function.

We are therefore indebted to the virtue of the "between" for the inseparability of the concrete "form" and the "spirit" dimension, the two terms that have served to structure the aesthetic thought of China (I prefer to translate xing-sheng as "spirit dimension" rather than as "spirit," in order to avoid the risk of hypostasizing spirit). The two terms are as structurally correlated as emptiness and fullness, which figure them. Even in the earliest treatises on painting devoted to the art of the landscape, we read that spirit, being fundamentally without tangible "endpieces" that would make it appear, "takes its lodgings" in forms. h "Lodgings" are a temporary, hospitable dwelling place, but not a residence: this is also a way of expressing the idea of not getting bogged down (see Zong Bing, L.B., 583). Conversely, "what takes root in sensible forms," "dissolves something of the spiritual" (or "is dissolved with something of the spiritual") and lets it emanate. The term I translate as "dissolve" means to liquefy—a metal, for example—but also refers to the dissipating of vapors (see Wang Wei, L.B., 585). 4 To maintain the reciprocal relationship between the poles that defines painting, the theorist's recommendation to the painter is thus twofold. First, the painter will have to take care not to get bogged down in "materiality" or in "form," but to keep everything "in flight," "in movement," permeated from within and in communication (Jing Hao, T.HL., 253). Second, as the theorist constantly reiterates (see C.K., 66), the painter cannot "transmit the spirit dimension" without "resorting to form," individuated, singular, and tangible as it is.

3. The painter works between the two poles of concrete form and spirit dimension, as between the poles of yin and yang. The deployment of spirit is yang, material concretion is yin. He cannot allow himself to be caught up by either of them but must remain open to both. That is why the painter will be obliged to proceed by alternation, following the great alternation of the process of the world, day and night in the first place, or summer and winter. Day makes things appear, night makes them disappear. Vegetation flourishes in summer and withers away in winter. The Chinese theorists expressed the idea laconically: to paint is to "take-give back" (qu-yu). Hence they point out, first at a technical level (but precisely, it is characteristic of painting not to separate production and conception), that if the painting has the defect of being "stiff" and carved like a board, it is because the wrist is weak and the brush "numb," and so it "totally lacks taking-giving back." The result is that the forms of things remain hopelessly "flat" and sterile (Guo Ruoxu, 34). Does taking-giving back mean "capturing and rendering the forms of objects," as some have

translated without inquiring further, in which case we are to understand that the painter is supposed to take a sample of that form from his model and restore it on his canvas? But that reintroduces the Western perspective of mimetic representation, which works by transferring form. Once we get to China, however, we leave behind the autonomous consistency of form, and the status of the perceptual object as being dissolves. No, in this case, taking-giving back means that sometimes I "take" from the form and paint it (by figuring) and sometimes I "give it back," holding back my brush and leave the suspensive-evasive drawing blank. Sometimes I take the form by actualizing it and sometimes I give it back to the undifferentiating-harmonizing fount. Sometimes I figure fully and sometimes I empty out. Painting, I picture and I de-pict; I paint and I unpaint. But that is possible only if my wrist has acquired enough strength, if my hand has become sufficiently alert, so that hand and wrist can move effortlessly from taking to giving back - pressing forward and withdrawing—and alternate naturally between them.

Painting, as a later theorist makes clear, requires us to shed light on this "taking-giving back," capturing-leaving alone (Li Rihua, L.B., 131). To paint is assuredly to "take" with the hook of the brush (the shape of the line) wherever there is resemblance of form. As a result, painting consists in that "assertiveness" and "sharpness" of the stroke. Therefore, the complete deployment of the "functioning" at work in painting-since painting operates the way the process of things operates, that is, without our seeing it operatek in its foundation-fount—also requires a free and easy motion. That is why painting valorizes the effects of the diaphanous, which indefinitely lets things show through, or of the discontinuous, which keeps things lively. Li Rihua adds that if you depict with a "straight brush," that is, one that is turned directly toward the object of figuration, the defect of the "stiff" and "tangled" line inevitably results, a compact line no longer allowing anything to pass between. That is why I "give back." As my brush pauses for a moment, sense-intentionality is implicitly contained. Such, for example, are the contours left empty on the mountainside, or the trees whose branches have been left out. Thanks to that "giving back," everything is moving along between the formal and the undifferentiated, both present and absent, "between there is-there is not."

Now that we have reached a mature understanding—and did we not need to take our time in that maturation process?—and we see that "deploying completely," as required by painting and by any process of existence, is to be sought at the farthest reaches of filling and saturating, but

is achieved "between" empty and full, "between" there is-there is not, we still need to think more precisely about what that means and how it is justified from the point of view of the operation under way. If painting, caught as it is between the poles of the formal and the unformed, is an act that constantly holds back in order to be assertive, or turns about on itself in order to complete, makes and unmakes itself at once, that rhythmic alternation is as natural in the eyes of the Chinese as that of day and night, or of respiration. Taking-giving back, painting-unpainting (picturing-de-picting), is like breathing in-breathing out. If there is a "that" which Chinese painting paints, it is truly the primordial "that" of breath-energy, from which the world endlessly comes forth and which animates the world. In that sense, taking-giving back, or "leaving off" and "picking up again," is conceived as similar to the gesture, constantly begun anew, of drawing a line (C.K., 317). If, where it is proper to "pick up again," I do not withdraw the brush and pause for a moment to leave room for emptiness, the painted world is "filled up and clogged." But if, where it is proper to "leave off," I do not let the line run on and do not loosen up, then that world "is not developed."

"Not quitting, not sticking" thus also means "not keeping oneself in check, not letting oneself go" (bu ji bu li). Or rather, it was first conceived in that way (C.K., 256). Tang Dai, a great lover of travels and landscapes, of solitary ascents among misty mountaintops, concludes his treatise on painting with the itinerary for the painter's training. If you want to achieve the highest levels of the art of painting, whether those of the "spiritual" or of the "free and easy," there is nothing to compare with having taken long walks and contemplated a great deal. All these "mental images" serving as material will have become concentrated and purified in your mind. From all that, or rather "from between that," once you have "accommodated it, however little, in your painting," after ample maturation, on your own, you "will reach a world in transformation." Within that mode of "not stifling oneself, not quitting," without being constricted by that accumulated material but also not renouncing it, without the constraint of reference weighing upon you and also without the advantages it might offer you, a higher, "entirely different" atmosphere, at once weighty and distilled, cannot fail to emanate.

The proper conduct and teaching of the sage is that, though reference is at work (forming concreteness), he does not allow himself to be enslaved by that reference and that concreteness; nor does he "bind" himself, hold himself in check, stifle himself; nor does he "leave" and expose himself to failure. He does not cling or give his allegiance or get bogged

down, nor does he break loose or go without: that is what constitutes his availability. The other great Taoist canon of antiquity, the Zhuangzi, posits the ideal of speech as follows: "Without anyone referring, there is reference," but, at the same time, "while referring, there is no reference," m no insistent and particular reference (chap. 2.12). A remark, even as it is articulated, is weighty and yet also remains open. The sage does not say things and makes no injunctions—saying is so pointless for changing the world. He does not seek to convince, and persuasion is Greek. But, in not saying in particular, he lets pass all the better for being evasive—he gives to understand, allows a glimpse, leads others to seek. If he refrains from giving lessons, we nevertheless perceive the infinite incitement concealed in his slightest remark and in all his silence, in the between space left in the wake of his conduct. Let us consider this in terms of the conditions of allusive distance, which I have already described within the context of literary language. There is certainly distance, because the sage does not allow himself to be "bound" by the object of a statement, and he takes his leave from whatever is too direct about reference, and as a result too ponderous, both bullying and limiting. At the same time, there is a constant allusivity, a never-exhausted capacity coming from the fact that the remark, not "quitting," yet also never ceasing to be turned "toward" and to "play" (ad- and -lusio), never leaves off being permeated by what can never be circumscribed, set forth, and designated-ascribed.

Chinese painting has its standard subjects, just as we have ours, especially since painting is an occasion for competitions. But no one in these competitions paints the subject. You do not paint the subject but adjacent to it, and that distance taken from the subject gives you more intimate-because indefinite-access to it. You are never done with being turned toward, and, by the very fact of that distance, with being brought closer to it. That "subject" is no longer an object or even simply a motif, but surrounds us on all sides and, the Chinese say, becomes a jing, a "world." If you are assigned to paint the theme of "the good man finding his joy in the mountain," a classic theme if ever there was one, you will refrain from painting an old man seated on the mountaintop in a contemplative pose, cheek resting on his hand. If asked to paint the theme of "the man of wisdom finds his joy in the water," you will not paint an old man with his ear turned toward a cliff, listening to the water flowing below (see Guo Xi, 17). That would be too descriptive, because sticking too close to the subject and not leaving enough room to imagine or enough desire to pursue further (what is no longer "the" subject). One day, two verses evoking spring were proposed as a subject for a painting:

Tender green at the tips of branches: barely reddens, To stir men, the springtime landscape: there is not need for much!

All the painters in attendance, conscientious artisans that they were, vied to figure vegetation just beginning to take on spring colors, but none was accepted. Then someone began to paint a cottage off in the distance in a rugged landscape, appearing-disappearing under the greenery of poplars, with a lady leaning on the balustrade. And all these "painter-artisans," it is reported, immediately "bowed low" (*L.B.*, 85).

4. Could it be that, because of our theoretical shortcomings and difficulty in grasping the now uncertain status of the work, we have few options left other than to seize on an imaginative vibrato, taking refuge in what is now only a slight brush with presence, and to baptize the work "trace"? That term has been used and abused so often in contemporary discourse, especially aesthetics, that I am hesitant to assume the burden of a ponderous fact that reveals its logic to us: "trace" (i) is commonly used to connote the pictorial work of art in Chinese. Zong Bing (fifth century) says that, even as the spirit "takes its lodgings in forms," coherence "penetrates shadows and traces." In that first treatise on the art of painting, we have already moved from the "traces" manifested by the conduct and teaching of Confucius or Buddha, leading us to meditate on "that by which there is a trace," that is, the internal nature of wisdom, to the "traces" constituted by painting. "Of Guan Tong's authentic traces, I have seen twenty," Mi Fu says in his Notebooks of a Connoisseur, to express the idea that he has seen twenty of his paintings (S.H.L., 146). Indeed, "painters from the past no longer rise from their beds, but the traces of their hands endure" (Fang Xun, 20).

In reality, the designation has become so common that it appears no one has considered inquiring about it. Almost no one has taken the trouble to determine "of what" the painting is a trace in China, or "toward what" the trace takes us, or what transcendence it calls for, or what presence it reveals. Nor is the trace disparaged as being only a "shadow" or "image" asking to be hastily left behind so that we can finally set off toward truth, of which the trace is only a feeble appearance. (According to Plotinus, I must turn away from that sensible materiality, the body of the trace—*ichnos*—"closing my eyes" to flee toward the sanctuary of the Spirit and its invisible beauty). Nor, conversely, is it valorized as the seed that, from such a minimal—seminal—presence, asks only to bear fruit. The Stoics perceive the seed of Providence in the slightest particle

of being; they consider it a trace that leads back to the wholeness of the divine All. And Origen, following the Stoics, gives that seed the status of the letter proper to sacred texts, which, as such, conceals the "traces of wisdom" that inspire said texts. In one way or another, what fascinated us about this concept in the West is that the trace appears to beckon openly even while enigmatically keeping the signified waiting. The trace awakens us to an inviting Presence but does not broadcast it, to a meaning that calls to us, leads us on a quest, and piques our desire but does not reveal itself.

China is not haunted by that hidden God. It has no interest in deciphering the Promise nor has it been anxious about Lack. Hence it has remained indifferent to that hermeneutics of the trace and conceives of the trace in terms of its pure phenomenality, in its mode of appearing, and hence in terms of presence-absence. This means that the reason I have not yet read any commentary in China justifying why the pictorial work (or the written line) is considered to be a trace is that this designation is universally supported by everything that has just been said, which the trace recapitulates in itself. The trace is precisely between the "there is" and the "there is not." Its status is that of the actualized, but from which we disadhere; of the permeated, but to which it is not "stuck"; of the "released" (deployed) but immediately "taken up again"; or of the prominent, visible, even bringing out the visible, but which nevertheless remains evanescent, and as a result is not constraining. It is present but inhabited by absence, and, if it is sign of, it is of taking leave. Both empty and full, concretely formed and evasive, tangible, and yet escaping at the same time.

Traces attest that, between them, through them, there is "passage" and crossing. But because it is simultaneously tangible and evasive, that trace is met with ambivalence as well (as in Greek thought) and invoked throughout the critical literature as by turns defect and positive quality. Since it bears within itself the success or failure of painting, its ambiguity deserves to be made explicit. The trace is not to be conceived from the point of view of meaning, oscillating between its status as shadow, ontological loss, and something that carries within it the rich hope of the seed. Rather, it is to be conceived in keeping with a phenomenality all its own. As a result, the fate of the trace, and the fate of painting along with it, will lie in its sticky, entrenched, inert character, or conversely, in its animated, free and easy, alert character. It is opaque or permeated; it obstructs or allows communication. Either it is only residue, shut away in its concretion; or, by virtue of its discretion, it calls for its own transcen-

dence. It can be both that into which the form, becoming reified, pours; and that to which the form, becoming hollow, aspires. Either something of the trace remains, leaving a blot; or that traced line, so lively, is only a trace. It may be sediment-trace or spacing (communicating)-trace, blotting trace or sketch-trace. If the sensible and the material prevail in form, you stick or get stuck in its trace (Fang Xun, 69). It becomes a rut, and such is the mire-trace (thus, heno connotes ji). Conversely, "one skilled at passing leaves no trace of his wheels," says the Laozi (§27). Similarly, the excellence of painting is to be sought in sense-intentionality, which passes through and confers its vitality, not in the trace left inert on the paper (C.K., 271, or Fang Xun, 13). In even more precise—that is, technical-terms, that trace runs the risk of being the trace of clumsiness, set down by a numb brush, revealing remorse or effort (as opposed to the "hidden touch," which allows a lively drawing without smudges (see, for example, Jing Hao, T.H.L., 257 and the excellent note by Pierre Ryckmans, 119). In that sense, the trace becomes the detritus of form:* "Spiritual resonance is to establish forms by hiding the traces" (Jing Hao, T.H.L., 252). If the painter, as we read in the Shitao (chap. 16), "is receptive to things such that it is without form," he "manages forms such that it is without trace." The absence of traces thus expresses the spontaneous success—because it is lively, free and easy, relaxed—of the drawing: "When the painting reaches the stage where there are no brush traces, it is as if that painting should naturally be there on the paper," or "as if the painting came about naturally on the paper" (C.K., 498).

In opposition to that deposit-trace in which the brush gets stuck, there is the trace that is allusive, succinct, and, as it were, carelessly flung down, because it is not concerned about getting weighed down and lingering in a material form. "In classical antiquity" (conventionally, before painting degenerated), "traces were simple," concise and restrained, on the order of the "limited sound," and sense-intentionality was simultaneously calm and detached (Zhang Yanyuan, 130). As opposed to the rut-trace, this is the "authentic trace" (zhen ji), distilled, "quintessentialized" (jing), "which functions as the "signature" of spirit: "That which

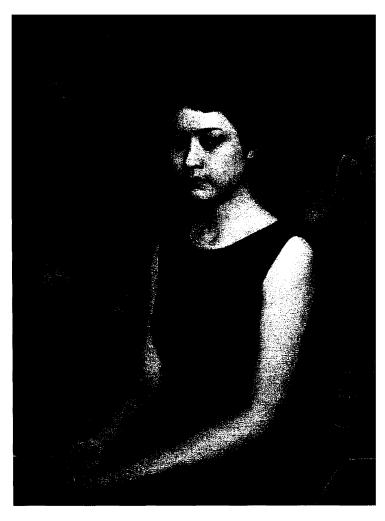
^{*} We find the same negative conception of the trace, in opposition to *sprezzatura*, among our classical painters: "Even painters who paint at a steady pace, Titian especially, finish off their paintings with a few brisk strokes on the bright and shadowed parts, seeking to give an impression of cheerful vivacity that effaces the traces of the patient effort of painting." Marco Boschini, *Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della Città di Venezi*, ed. A. M. Zanetti (Venice, 1733), 11.

fundamentally has its origin in the spirit arises through thought as traceforms," and "since these traces are in harmony with the spirit, they are called the signature" of the painter (Guo Ruoxu, 32).

Far from being the signifying locus of a quest leading to revelation, the trace in which the painting in China ought to consist is the phenomenal site of a transformation: "The world and I meet in spirit," says the *Shitao*, "and the traces undergo transformation" (chap. 8). As soon as there is fertile interaction between me and the world, the traces change from sediment to marks of passage and animation. There is truly *trans*-formation because we cannot adhere and stick to form, and this form is permeated by the fount of invisibility that, in deploying there, stretches it, promotes it, and carries it farther. But we also cannot leave the realm of form, and that is the realism inherent in painting. Without form, nothing could come about, and to paint is always truly "to manage forms." If we "quit" form, therefore, it will only be to better achieve the power of "resemblance" of form—but that resemblance is therefore of the spirit.



Taoist Temple in the Mountains, attributed to Dong Yuan (907–60).
 Museum of the Taipei Palace.



7. Young Singer, by Jin Shangyi, 1984. Exhibition of the Palace of Fine Arts of China (Beijing, Shanghai, 2000).

Quitting Form to Achieve Resemblance

I. The comparatist with a passion for similarities could not dream of a more complete parallelism. We know of few motifs so worn, so banal by now, in the European literature on painting than that of Zeuxis's grapes, reproduced so felicitously by the painter's brush, Pliny tells us, that "birds fluttered down" to peck at them. As it happens, we find the same anecdote, almost in the same terms, in the Chinese literature, and yet we cannot suspect any influence of one on the other. Huang Quan, it is said, painted wild pheasants in a hall of the palace of Shu so well that an eagle, thinking he was seeing living birds, tried to grab them by the neck.

The resemblance achieved is so convincing that it seemingly creates the illusion of truth. These are "lures that persuade the eyes," as has been said about classical painting in Europe, and even birds can be deceived. Might not that veri-similitude in the strong sense, that true-seeming, be the first requirement ascribed to any art of painting, by virtue of which painting confronts the difficulty expected of an art? It is that aspect of painting wherein progress is required, according to Pliny's history, and which we

naturally find again, here and there, at the very heart of painting. Witness that, in a short dialogue from Chinese antiquity—one of the most ancient testimonies we have of pictorial notions in China—when the king of Qi asked a painter what is most difficult to paint, his guest replied that it is dogs and horses because they are what human beings "know well," since we have them before our eyes every day, and that no one can make them completely "the same." Hence the difficulty. Ghosts and spirits, conversely, "not having any form" and not taking shape before us, are "the easiest" (Han Fei, third century B.C.E., L.B., 4). In the earliest Chinese dictionaries, painting is most often laconically defined as, first, "[to produce] resemblance" and to "give form" (cf. Zhang Yanyuan, 2). The first Chinese theorists of painting mention their regret at the fact that "resemblance is not skillful" (Zong Bing, in the fourth and fifth centuries) or speak at times of their intention to "copy" and "imitate" (ni, fang, xiang, xiang, a see Wang Wei in the fifth century).

It is time, therefore, to begin moving closer to what until now we have simply circled around, swept up in the elaboration of Taoist coherencies, something that is, however, at the heart of this study and will therefore have to appear at the center of the book. Why, unlike Greece, did China not develop a theory of mimetic representation to serve as the basis for its conception of art? In Greece, the notion of mimetic representation emerged from the metaphysical perspective of a progressive ontological loss: from the idea of the bed, to the manufactured bed, to the painted bed. That mimesis began to serve as a concept describing the activity of creation in the first pages of Aristotle's Poetics, where painting serves as a model for the theory of imitation.1 At this time, it was first posited that man is differentiated from other animals in that he is "the most prone to imitation" and that this tendency is part of his nature, corresponding to his desire to learn and his delight in learning. Aristotle "posits" this but not really as a "thesis"—rather as a first statement. It would be impossible to return to a place prior to that statement and it would be pointless to try to justify it. From the angle of mimetic production, painting consists of rendering the "form proper" while separating it from the matter with which it is associated in nature, hence of setting forth the formal cause of the object, by rising from the particular to the general (which is what the verb ap-eikazein really means: to pull the image from—form it on the basis of—a model). Since the painter's goal is to constitute essences, painting will be a rigorous intellectual operation with a philosophical aim. As for the pleasure procured by mimetic representation, it too is intellectual, and lies in associating the form created by representation to a natural object we know from another source (it is understood that the painting cannot be the exact replica of that object). Recognizing that object in the painting, I am "astonished" and, at the same time, I "learn." The identification of the model on the basis of its representation rests on a "line of reasoning," *sullogismos*, having to do with what the thing itself is. It always ends in my mind with "look, there it is!" As proof, do we not have the indisputable fact that we take pleasure in looking at the very polished images of things that, were we to see them in reality, would be extremely painful, such as the forms of perfectly wretched animals or of cadavers? This argument by Aristotle will consistently be adopted to justify the art of painting.

The mimetic representation in which the art of painting consists is therefore understood as a duplicating transposition, or a transposing duplication, whose aim is to promote essence on the miniature stage of art, that is, on the canvas. The painting, in other words, is a reflective activity, in the literal prior to the figural sense, and what it reflects is enlightening, which results in a theoretical pleasure. Aristotle posits that reflection, in any case, as what is proper to painting, as if we did not have a suspicion that the mimetic articulation bringing about that enlightening duplication stemmed from a fold structuring Greek culture as a whole, but which, at the same time—but unbeknownst to that culture—turned out to be particular. We suspect, however, that in Greece mimetic representation refers in the first place to the activity of the theater, which is at the heart of the city-state. It is symptomatic that ancient China was completely unaware of the possibility of theatrical performance or representation (opera appeared late in Chinese civilization and was for the most part foreign in origin). And even when the advent of a figurative power among human beings is represented in ancient China, laconic formulas from the ancient Book of Changes (later invoked at the beginning of treatises on the art of painting) simply say that the sage, looking about at the mysterious aspects of the world and meditating on the way they ought to be "characterized in forms," tangibly, "[symbolically] figured existents and their modes of adequation." As a result, on the basis of an opposition between solid and broken lines (- and --), diagrammatic figures in various combinations served to account for the transformative processes at work in the world. By virtue of being traced, they originally belonged to painting as much as to writing ("Great Treatise," Book of Changes; cf. Guo Ruoxu, 12). In this schematization, there is at work no transfer of form proper to the object and separate from its matter, which is the process of mimetic representation in Aristotle's view.

To8 Chapter 8

Consequently, China never conceived of the contemplation of images as an operation of recognition or as the pleasure of recognition. The aim of figuration is not to fix essences but to record a play of energies in continuous interaction, whose coherence figuration unveils and indicates how to use.

Repercussions followed indefinitely, and what at first ran along as a discreet line of cleavage eventually opened into a sharp opposition, even a generalized inversion. Aristotle insisted on the properly human character of the power of representation (man is called "the most mimetic" of animals), whereas Chinese painters were just as intent on making the figurative power of human beings flow from the figurative capacity at work in the world, which human beings merely relayed. These human tracings were descended from earlier tracings that had appeared as omens incrusted in gold or jade, or displayed on the shells of tortoises and the backs of dragons (cf. Zhang Yanyuan, 1). Each time, whether to account for literature or for writing or for painting, the same protofigurations are invoked, emerging from streams and rivers and borne by the elements of the universe. It is these that the first sages identify at the dawn of civilization and which will serve as mediators in relation to a human world charged with making their importance explicit by appropriating and codifying them. As a result, human figurations are inscribed within a genealogy that links them to an entire world of powers that transcends them, just as this world, in turn, is vested in human figurations. Since the process of representation implies breaking free from what one imitates before entering into a relationship with it by erecting it into the position of object, it follows that the Chinese painter will hardly be inclined to represent.² His aim will be, not to become disconnected from nature in order to set it up in opposition to him, but, on the contrary, to reactivate through painting his primordial dependency on nature. Like Aristotle, the Chinese theorist grounds the vocation of painting in a "naturalness." But whereas for Aristotle that vocation is an innate tendency within human beings, manifesting itself from childhood and defining the human being as such, the immanence from which painting draws its origin in China is that at work in the great Process of the world, which exceeds human beings to the point of being "unfathomable" and encompasses all human activity.

Hence, where Aristotle understood the ends of mimetic representation in terms of pleasure and apprenticeship, both warranted by the pure desire to know—a Greek desire par excellence (that which founds philosophy)—China conceived and justified the power of images in a

completely different way. A long string of anecdotes serving as vignettes shows that images, as emblems, possess a power of realization that, like the images themselves, is phenomenal in nature. Partaking in the play of forces at work in the world and embodying them in their figurations, images naturally influence the course of things and events. A certain virtuous vassal, at the fall of a corrupt dynasty, carried away the ancestral figurations to establish the authority of the new prince. A certain prince triumphed over his rivals and was able to assume the throne because he was the first to acquire the tutelary images (Zhang Yanyuan, 3-4). These images, condensing forces that would otherwise remain diffuse, and embodying by their mere existence a harmonic coherence, bear within them a regulatory effect that generates order; and they possess power, including political power. In the same way, it is constantly repeated that images, by transmitting the portraits of virtuous men from one era to the next (and the two functions are not separate), continue to ensure the existence of morality and possess the value of a warning (cf. Guo Ruoxu, 12). In China, then, lying at the heart of the image is not some capacity both representative and cognitive but rather an efficacy.*

2. Will we ever be able to measure how much our theoretical foundations—representation in the first place—are profoundly, albeit discreetly, shaken merely by that avoidance of mimesis? When I speak of measuring, I appeal to the theoretical imagination, because the principle of that rift seems universal and the effect indefinitely dispersed by its repercussions. We are at least beginning to see more clearly, within what is generically—but perhaps wrongly—called "painting," why, when it comes to resemblance, the traditions of China and Europe have had such different developments and destinies. In accordance with its notion of a duplicating transposition whose aim is to promote essence, the Greco-Roman world, then Renaissance Europe, pushed the requirement for resemblance further and further. The passion for it was never satisfied,

^{*} Conversely, at least in these treatises on the art of painting, I do not see any trace of a cult of images such as that which spread in the West beginning with Justinian I. Even the myth of "acheiropoetic" images, that is, those not made by human hands, as that myth took shape in the most problematic case, that of representing God, is clearly different from the Chinese genealogy of the image, because it creates a gulf of transcendence in order to break free from the human plane. In China, figurative power deploys gradually, on its own, from the first natural tracings to their extensive elucidations in writing and painting.

IIO Chapter 8

could never be satisfied. This might mean that the object of resemblance is not a literally imitated nature but a "chosen" nature, at which point art surpasses nature. The other anecdote about Zeuxis is that he borrowed the most perfect features from each of the virgins of Croton, synthesizing them into the canon of beauty. It might even happen that, in a return to Platonism-Plotinism, the object imitated is no longer an object of experience but the internal, immaterial idea that the mind contemplates in its mirror and whose source, for Giovanni Lomazzo, is in God. In a general way, under the reign of Ut pictura poesis, "that painting is most praiseworthy which conforms most to the thing imitated" (Leonardo);3 or, as Vasari said of Giorgione, "so closely did he follow Nature, and so carefully did he imitate her." How much patience, but illuminated by genius, did European painters not expend, how many hopes and terrors did they not invest, to achieve that dreamt-of conformity with the object, whether that imitation, in keeping with our great classic vacillation, was the exact and even scientific imitation of nature or the imitation of ideal beauty? The object of that relentless quest is nothing less than the authentic "in itself," and the status of truth is played out between the lines of the painting.

In opposition—and it is when difference becomes so prominent as to become an opposition that this face-off becomes a stare-down—the Chinese tradition, founded on the status of an image-phenomenon understood as an energetic condensation and as a convocation of powers, early on took its distance from the requirement for resemblance, or at least from resemblance of form. Might that be just a particular branching off from the common trunk of painting? Or has the very domain of painting been overrun to some extent? Or worse, has its logic been thrown off course? That rift anticipates in its way the fertile disarray in which painting now finds itself. Indeed, although I have taken care to indicate the concern for resemblance—as opposed to clumsiness—still perceptible in the earliest Chinese theorists of painting (fourth to fifth centuries), it is true that this concern was already outstripped by the idea of a "spiritual transcendence"-I translate word for word (shen-chao)c-which alone makes it possible to achieve the foundational principle of things and to "deploy" the breath-energy prevalent throughout the world (Zong Bing, L.B., 583). If the painter is able to "imitate" with the "mere tube" of his brush, what he imitates with that conduit is the "being constitutive of the Great Emptiness,"d the nonobject par excellence (Wang Wei, fifth century, L.B., 585). Although I began by citing the anecdote of the eagle and the pheasants as the counterpart to that of Zeuxis and the grapes, it

would be illusory to see the former anecdote as a topos of Chinese pictorial literature in the way the latter remained one in Europe throughout the classical period. Even though it was the painter of the pheasants who made his career at court, literati criticism unfailingly preferred his rival, Xu Xi, who, painting almost without colors and in an apparently careless manner, by that very means prevailed in his "spiritual resonance"—we come back to that term—which was judged infinitely superior (see Shen Gua, S.H.L., 236).

Moreover, however convincing the parallelism with which I began may be at first glance, it is not unambiguous and already portends the cleavage to come. Indeed, in the many anecdotes strung together by Pliny to mark the progress of painting on the path toward perfection by imitation, whether of birds fooled by bunches of grapes or, before them, other birds—crows—trying to land on well-imitated roof tiles, or even of Zeuxis himself misled by the perfect rendering of a curtain he expects to see lifted, the object of resemblance is always only an inert thing, a pure object. Conversely, the resemblance Huang Quan was able to capture was of life: the eagle wanted to grab the pheasants by the neck because it saw them as alive. Hence the requirement for resemblance fixed by one of the first Chinese theorists within the framework of the six fundamental principles of painting (Xie He, late fifth and early sixth centuries) does not lend itself to confusion with what we have usually expected from resemblance in the classical European tradition. Even the order of classification shows this: the principle of resemblance comes third, after spiritual resonance (which dominates all the others), then the structuration internal to the image due to the vigorous use of the brush. It precedes only the prerequisite for color and layout, and the copying of the ancient masters. Even in that first table of principles from early antiquity, it did not come first. Moreover, the painter must not let the correspondence that this principle calls for become stiff and rigid by falling short in the dimension of vivacity: "In responding to existents, figure the forms."e I believe this cor-responding is to be understood precisely in terms of "responding" (ying), that is, in terms of its welcoming-embracing movement, and cannot be reduced to the product, the mere outcome, of conformity. Rather than the imitation of an external object set up as a model and considered only from a perceptual point of view, what is at issue is a power of figuration that anticipates the entreaty emanating from beings and things and joins with them in the internal aspiration that makes them exist, leading them to deploy. That power of figuration acts in the exact same way as the sage of the Zhuangzi, who, it is said, knows how to

"respond" to existents (chap. 22.5) because he is without bias and accompanies them in their ascent, coinciding each time with their individual perspective, which emanates from their nature, "without any intervention of rules therefore."* That "response" is not meticulous but comes about in a movement of spontaneous adherence, following the *sponte sua*, the "on its own," by which the process of the world ceaselessly operates. It is not a canon imposed by things, but proceeds from a complicity that matures over time and wells up in turn. In short, this "cor-responding" is not external, even less normative, but is the most intimate—because nurtured by a silent assimilation—and at the same time reactive.

Hence, in the endless commentaries that these six principles elicit subsequently, the transcendence of resemblance is increasingly invoked by name. Zhang Yanyuan (ninth century), the first major historian of Chinese painting, tells us that, though major works from the past could sometimes "transmit" a resemblance of form, it is "beyond formal resemblance" that we must "seek what constitutes painting" (13). Conversely, in Chinese painting of the present time, which, by rhetorical convention, is more often understood as a time of degeneration, even if the painter achieves formal resemblance, "spiritual resonance does not come to life." As a result, that formal resemblance must not be sought out as such and set forth as a goal, but must flow as a consequence from the pictorial process. If you base the quest for what constitutes painting on "spiritual resonance," "formal resemblance" is then found "between," in the strong sense of that "between"—it deploys through. As a result, the distinction to be made is between simple objects that are inanimate, and as such carry no weight—buildings, chariots, utensils, and so on—which raise no problems as far as imitation is concerned, and that which, endowed with spirit, animated, "requires spiritual resonance to achieve its completeness." If spiritual resonance does not emanate from all sides, "you will deploy the resemblance of form to no avail." Zhang Yanyuan also has the great painter Wu Daozi say that "while a host of others apply themselves to resemblance, I for one am done with such vulgarities" (24). Or, as another, slightly later great painter will remark (Jing Hao, early

^{*} Is that not precisely what Matisse grasped when he began by distinguishing the "two ways of describing a tree"? Either "through an imitative drawing, as you learn to do in European schools of drawing" or "in the Oriental manner": "I was told that Chinese teachers tell their students: 'When you draw a tree, have the sensation of rising with it when you begin at the bottom.'" "Lettre à André Rouveyre sur le dessin de l'arbre," in Matisse, Écrits et propos sur l'art, 166-67.

tenth century), such a resemblance can only be a weak, "makeshift," and rudimentary resemblance, since, in achieving form, resemblance has left behind the breath-energy that fills the form and makes it vibrate (T.II.L., 251), as if only the outer envelope remained after the fruit was gone.

What might the necessary conditions be for an effective resemblance, not one that is external and superficial and clings merely to the "flower" (as Jing Hao says), not one that is simply anecdotal? That resemblance, of course, will have to integrate everything we now know about the "great image." The capacity for resemblance within figuration cannot advance except through resemblance of the whole to the "great tao," that is, to its harmonic compossibility. That figuration then becomes disindividuated enough to let the undifferentiating-harmonizing Fount from which it proceeds appear at its foundation. That "resemblance of the whole" achieved by "blunting the sharp edges"-"unraveling the skeins"-"evening out the light"-"making dust cohere," in the equalizing formulas of the Laozi (§4), will thus be a resemblance through anecdotal and particular nonresemblance. As the line is emptied out and figuration becomes evasive, true resemblance lies in that allusivity to the invisible dimension that permeates the concrete particularity of all the strokes. According to the poem "On Tangible Characterization," explicitly inspired by these formulations from the Laozi (Sikong Tu, Shipin, poem 20), however diverse the phenomena evoked by the images may be, whether the movement of wind and clouds, or the spirit emanating from flowers, or the continuous reforming of waves, or the endless chain of mountains, they will not be depicted in a lifelike manner, that is, in their continuous emanation-transformation, unless they let breath and the spirit dimension pass through them, making them vary continuously and assume new forms indefinitely. Hence, the poem logically concludes, it is precisely only "by quitting form" and liberating yourself from its constraint that you "will achieve resemblance."i

3. There is therefore reason to return to what the earliest formulations concerning painting may have granted too hastily, that, whereas dogs and horses are "the most difficult to paint" because everyone knows their form and the resemblance of form is difficult to achieve, ghosts and spirits "are easy to manage" because no one has ever seen them. On the contrary, is not this world of the invisible and of obscure powers, susceptible to "ceaseless transformations" and "sudden outbursts," which carries us to the brink of the strange and fantastic, "equally difficult to figure"? (Ouyang Xiu, eleventh century, L.B., 42). And let us acknowledge that

this world, having suddenly aroused our terror, calls for a "placid and poised" contemplation and can be grasped in its infinite modifications only with a "simple brush" and by virtue of an "adequate conception."

For more than a millennium, in fact, people reflected on, intellectualized, and purified that notion of spirit and demoniac power. It mutated into the foundational of the invisible and the spiritual, by whatever name it is called, against which painting now measures itself and which it is painting's calling to "resemble." It served as an adage beginning in the Song Dynasty (tenth century). "Whether in writing or in painting, perfect success consists in an encounter in spirit, and it is difficult to seek to obtain it on the basis of tangible forms" (Shen Gua, L.B., 43). "To seek to obtain" remains on the order of the instrumental and the methodical, and is still directed at an object, while "encountering" and "uniting" (hui) extends beyond the perceptual relationship, implies a reciprocal relationship established between partners and no longer a transitive relation, and portends access to an intimate space. Hence, "when people contemplate something painted, there are many who can point out the flaws regarding figuration, layout, or color," flaws that are relatively external all in all, but there are few who know how to gain access to the "foundational principle of things," buried as it is, and thus penetrate to the source of "creation emerging from the indistinct-undifferentiated" (43).

Between the Tang and the Song Dynasties (tenth to thirteenth centuries), the evolution, which had long been gradual, became more pronounced. Once painting, in becoming an art of the literati, more and more overtly took its distance from artisanal practices, not only did the gap definitively widen between formal resemblance and the spiritualinvisible dimension to which painting now claimed to have access, but the two criteria, "resonance" and "resemblance," came to be diametrically opposed. True to that re- of duplication, which turns out to be so different in the two cases, resonance is a prolonged reverberation of an internal timbre, while resemblance is the specific reproduction of external traits. Resonance opens onto infinite vibration, while reproduction soon dries up on the surface. One deploys on its own as a phenomenal process, while the other remains attached to the limitation of a "making" governed by its aim. Hence the following judgment was becoming commonplace: (formal) resemblance is "easy" and (spiritual) resonance "difficult" (L.B., 70). These two principles, resonance and resemblance, even competed with each other: either painting "prevails in resonance" and "loses in resemblance," or the reverse (L.B., 64). Even with respect to simple flowers, there are those who "write the form" and those who "transmit the spirit." A few lines by Su Dongpo, one of the great literati, definitively summed up for ages to come that condemnation of formal resemblance:

Treating painting in terms of formal resemblance: That view is close to childishness; Just as, when someone composes a poem, if it has to be this poem surely you know he is not a poet. (L.B., 51)

Painting took advantage of that rejection of a submissive attitude to resemblance, just as poetry rejected a forced thematization. You must not treat the subject of a poem by name (directly) and be constrained by its motif. Similarly, formal resemblance clasps too tightly, stiffly, in a manner approaching opacity, to something that, at the transition between the differentiated and its undifferentiating fount, is much too evanescent to be achieved—and restricted—within completely standardized forms.

Nevertheless, the Chinese pictorial tradition will never break away from the resemblance of form. Even while advocating a transcendence of resemblance in favor of resonance, it never envisions that this transcendence can lead to dissemblance. It calls for a disindividuation of form in order to return, through it, to the undifferentiated, the Fount of trans-formation, but it imperatively refrains from any deformation that would lead to a blurring of the categories of things and make one doubt their pertinence (Fang Xun, 34). Painting, like the art of writing, valorizes the extraordinary where the liveliness of "breath-energy" is concerned, but not at the level of "sensible traces" (ibid., 80). The form is to be transcended, but it cannot be "modified." For here Chinese painting is suddenly stricken with fright at the sight of anything that would point to a surreality and call into question, however little, the "natural," which in China is only the other name for the operation of the world by self-regulation, and for its "viability." The idea that painting does not promote formal resemblance must therefore be understood "in a living manner," that is, in a way that is itself not formal, too rigid or too literal (ibid., 22, 34). "A cap cannot be taken for a turban, or garments above for garments below, or shoes for sandals, or a cottage for the great hall, or a window for a door." In other words, the painter cannot introduce confusion into what is logically determined by the capacity of beings and things to "work" (yong) and the specification of which constitutes reason

(the Chinese *li*). Do not invent a world other than this one. Do not alter or even disturb its coherence. But join with that coherence through painting. What Fang Xun means when he recommends "not promoting resemblance" is that coherence is not *in* the form, in any case cannot be reduced to it, but "passes through." And to achieve it, you must strive to "promote a resemblance of [in] spirit."

Subsequently, the notion that formal resemblance is something close to a childish point of view, having become a commonplace, gave rise to all sorts of reframings and warnings that blocked the path to innovation. Aside from those who clung on principle to a "constraining resemblance," who were admittedly rare (L.B., 41), or those who maintained that the "model-form" had to take precedence (L.B., 493), an increasing number, though not disputing the basis for that formulation, cautiously reduced its forcefulness and set limits on it. In the first place, that is because, though painting absolutely does not consist of the tangible form, it also cannot completely do without the tangible in order to deploy (Fang Xun, 26). In addition, Chinese theorists were too taken with harmony not to seek a balance between these opposing criteria—not "sticking," they also do not "quit." With the constitution of a pictorial orthodoxy under the Ming and especially the Qing Dynasty (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), the tone tends toward admonishment. Although it was conceded that resonance is truly the supreme value to which painting should aspire, the painter must nevertheless go to "the far limit of formal resemblance" in order then to be able to understand this resonance in his spirit, rather than seek resonance "outside" such a resemblance (L.B., 484). That outside is frightening, and Chinese painting refrains from adventurousness. It refrains from inventing.

If the theorists claimed that resemblance amounts to childishness, they did so to ensure that the person being initiated into painting will take care not to carve objects and not to be constrained and bullied by form. In a beautiful image, they likened the painter thus dominated to someone who "would glue down the pegs" of a string instrument and then "play its strings," which would be unable to resonate. It is proper to let the spirit "move about freely beyond the phenomena" so that sense-intentionality can in turn reach "the center of the circle," which, like the pivot of a door (*Zhuangzi*, chap. 2.5), lends itself to every position and, through that equidistant opening, frees us from reductive angles of vision and disjunctions (*L.B.*, 100). The "beyond," once more, is not disconnected from "phenomena," but detaches us internally from their cramped space. And that availability of the image, which constitutes the

"great image," renders phenomena evasive in order to respect the full play of possibilities animating them and making them vibrate. Hence, we are told emphatically, availability has nothing to do with the way contemporary painters fling down "a few sparse brushstrokes," claiming to have achieved the "simplicity of ancient times"; or worse, believe they are conferring a flavor of evanescent haziness on their painting because their lines are poorly controlled and spill over. Not seeking out resemblance—the formula is definitive—does not mean distrusting all semblance but rather achieving a "resemblance that does not resemble," that is not compelled by (formal) resemblance but deploys indefinitely through form.

4. Is it possible to imagine formulations more carefully balanced and more burnished by use than these, so carefully folded up within the selfevidence they ultimately wove that they evade scandal, risk, doubt, and even the possibility of a simple transcendence? In the mid-twentieth century, the painter Qi Baishi reiterated what had already been said a thousand years before, and which the Chinese will seemingly never tire of saying, in order to feel again how right it is: "The painting of the ancients is semblance without resembling," or "perfect success in painting is between resemblance and nonresemblance." If it resembles too much, "it is attractive in a vulgar way," and, if it does not resemble, "you deceive your world" and "go astray." The philosophy of painting, having found and established its chord, now sounds it one more time, prolonging it indefinitely like a fermata. Having so perfectly joined resemblance and nonresemblance, not giving up any ground, the philosophy closes off any possibility of lack, any vulnerability to breaking and entering, and takes its ease in that back-and-forth movement. These crayfish I paint, Qi Baishi adds confidentially, are unlike those you usually see: what I seek is not "formal resemblance" but "spiritual resemblance," and that is why the crayfish that come from my brush are "alive."

The pictorial philosophy of China, supported as it has been by that regulating idea, seems to have remained stabilized for nearly a millennium in what, to use our own terms, could readily be taken for a sort of Hegelian agreement,* in any case a pre-Kandinskian one, between

[&]quot;In imitation, the conformity to nature is of course of key importance, but what is lacking in works born of imitation is not something secondary, but the essential, that is, the spiritual" [This passage does not appear in the English translation of Hegel's Intro

the acknowledged primacy of the spiritual and the respect for conformity to the object. At least it could be taken for such had we not seen a chasm opening indefinitely before us that makes such a comparison inoperative, at least as set up so directly. That is solely because China did not initially conceive of any theory of imitation; because, as a result, it did not develop a notion of painting as representation; because it conceived of the natural (as sponte sua) but not of "nature" as a preestablished object constituted by the laws of perception, and so on. At the same time, is that not why so-called modern painting in Europe, because it breaks away from the continuous search for an accuracy of vision that would constitute its perfection, an accuracy that has dominated critical discourse from Pliny to John Ruskin, somehow intersects the classical painting of China in its aspirations, given that Chinese classical painting has never based the status of the image on mimesis but rather has grounded it in efficacy?

Let us look from this new angle at what everyone knows. First, modern painting in the West, turning away from a concept of promoting essences, has now become oriented by the concern to engender relationships while conceiving of the painting as an active mechanism. Second, in suppressing modeling and the third dimension in favor of putting surfaces alone in tension, it denies its kinship with sculpture, to which it was congenitally linked within the fine arts throughout the classical era (even for Lessing), and now fancies an intimate analogy between itself and music.* Third and finally, according to the formulations made about it, modern painting does not represent but "presents," imposes nothing but "proposes everything." The painting no longer requires the gaze to submit to its authoritarian totality, but offers a mobile network of pos-

ductory Lectures on Aesthetics—trans.]; conversely, "even if the content [of a work of art] is of a spiritual kind, it can only be seized and fixed by representing the spiritual fact... in the shape of phenomena with external reality." G. W. F. Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 46.

^{*} Let us cite Alberti and Kandinsky, merely to mark the difference: "Both these arts are related and nurtured by the same genius, painting with sculpture"; "The learned and the unlearned praise those faces which, as though carved, appear to issue out of the panel" (Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, trans. John R. Spencer [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966], 66 and 82); "A comparison . . . with . . . music is found to be the best teacher. . . . Music has been the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but to the expression of the artist's soul and to the creation of an autonomous life of musical sound" (Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, "The Pyramid," 40). But there are also major exceptions, Picasso for one.

sibilities whose condition the artist merely brings together and whose meaning, as a result, is not constraining. As it happens, the Chinese tradition, in the first place, not having founded painting on a relationship of reference built on resemblance, conceived its operation as a generic system of interactions. Second, it did not link painting to sculpture but early on conceived of painting in terms of musical resonance. (In fact, that is what initially surprised the Chinese when they discovered European paintings: the human figures were not painted but sculpted!)6 Third, that tradition envisioned the image as an available, evasive-allusive structure, opening on the indefinite richness of the compossible and liberated from preconceived forms. At the same time, however, when China encountered the Western world head-on in the twentieth century, Chinese painters felt obliged to take Western painting into account, even though their Western neighbor's house was already on fire. Not having found any basis, or motivation, or rationale, to get away from the regulation that had supported it so well, China did not know how, or was unable, to produce its own modernity. It was the West that, by invading China, brutally brought modernity to it.

There is thus a disparity in the rate and speed of evolution in the two civilizations, which the history of painting in both places contributes toward clarifying. The discrete transformationism of Chinese culture, smooth and without escapades—at least as it is represented—which accounts for the strength of its tradition, stands opposed to the deliberate rupturalism of European culture, the source of its violent force and its power of discovery.* In China, "very early on," without anyone being able to say precisely when, the requirement for formal resemblance was transcended by gradual distillation and "maturation," but that did not lead to the abandonment of resemblance. By contrast, the history of Western painting is that of successive and spectacular inventions and revolutions, like those of physics, a science to which European painting, since it also deals with "nature," is integrally linked. The Italian Renaissance imperiously fixed the ideal of formal resemblance through conformity

^{*} That is also the case for the history of printing, for example. China gradually improved and perfected it on the basis of seals, steles, and stamps over the course of more than a millennium, without invoking any dates or heroes. But Johannes Gutenberg "invented" the printing press in Europe (later than China and, we are told, under its indirect influence). There is a date, 1434, and the upheavals and possibilities offered were immediately significant: European culture was projected beyond its past. The "Renais sance," the Reformation, and other developments followed.

to a nature constituted by perceptual reason. In opposition, the late nineteenth-century revolution in Paris relentlessly shattered the foundations of mimetic representation in order to exploit the other fertile possibilities with maximum rigor. A whole ancien régime of figuration was overthrown and found itself definitively obsolete. Not only the notorious "imitation of nature" but the "object" itself ended up decomposing (with Paul Klee and Kandinsky). As always with revolutions, it is pointless to insist in hindsight that the painters of the classical era in Europe had already largely liberated themselves from the limits of resemblance, unbeknownst to themselves. It is true that they transposed more than they copied and expressed themselves with their personal style more than they reproduced nature: they too "created" rather then imitated. Nevertheless, at the turn of the twentieth century even more than during the Renaissance, artists of the time had the sense they were dangerously attacking an entire established order and trying out unknown coherencies. And the imperatives were all the more imperious for being risky. In joy and trembling, between fumbling and theorizing, the whole future of art in Europe was placed in peril, but with the promise of new figures of truth dwelling at the heart of its enigma.

The idea of a preestablished nature in the position of object, an idea that grounded the communication brought about through painting in perceptual self-evidence, was violently shattered in the pictorial revolution of the twentieth century. That revolution also condemned "modernity" to the imperious necessity of adventurousness and "creativity," without the handrails or crampons resemblance offered. This development leads us to inquire again, on the other side, into what favored the gradual and discrete transformation of Chinese painting and its transcendence of an objective reference-resemblance. If we admit that, as the Chinese treatises vie to assert, the catalyst for that slow evolution was the landscape, then we must explore in depth why the "landscape" has the particular calling to undo the status of "being" and of the object. We may even go so far as to wonder, in turn, if it was not also the discreet emergence of the landscape in European painting that allowed for a silent maturation of something that later erupted into an ear-shattering revolution.

The Spirit of a Landscape

I. The notion of "landscape" began to be forged in the Renaissance, and definitions of the term hardly varied over time, at least insofar as they stemmed from a defining perceptual experience: the landscape is a "part of land" that nature presents to the eye. Emphasis was sometimes placed on the landscape's rural character, or on the pleasure of that rustic aspect. But in every case, the landscape is a section that vision carves out from the expanse, the aspect of a land that can be embraced in a single look. The "land" itself—pagus—may be on the scale of a town or canton. On this point, all the European languages, whether of north or south, fall into line and converge in their derivation: pays, paysage; land, landscape. The first Italian inventories of the work of the Flemish masters grope about for a term, using paesi, paesetto, pesaggio. We also find Landschaft, Landshap, and so on.

China marks a radical break from that semantics of territory, of specifying part, and of visuality. Whether as a description of "nature," as we commonly use the term in Europe, or of the pictorial genre related to it, in Chinese the word for "landscape" is

"mountain(s)-water(s)" (shan-shui), or "mountain(s) and stream(s)" (shanchuan; a "landscape painting" in modern Chinese can also be expressed as shan-shui-hua). We have a clear sense that this is not just a difference in conception but that the overall approach is different: it does not follow the same fold. We perceive from this binomial that the Chinese, rather than envisioning the landscape from the angle of a species, as power of sight, aspect, and specification all at once, chose to think of the landscape—like any reality—as an interaction between poles, high and low, vertical and horizontal, compact (massive) and fluid, opaque and transparent, motionless and moving, and so forth. "Mountains-waters" symbolizes these dualities that hold the world in tension, and the infinite exchanges that result from them. Hence, far from being conceived as a fragment of land subject to the authority of the gaze and delimited by its horizon, the Chinese landscape puts into play the functional aggregate of opposing yet corresponding elements, and it is that dynamism as a whole, whatever the scale, that the brush will be called on to capture. The Chinese painter, in his most insignificant painting, figures the process of things as a whole, the entire, infinitely diverse play of its polarities. He does not paint a corner of the world. "If your view is limited, what you see is no longer complete." This statement, in the subtle swerve of its meaning, is much more than a truism. As one of the first treatises on landscape painting affirms (Wang Wei, "Xu hua," L.B., 585), in such a case the overall functionality of what you see can no longer make itself felt.

In European semantics, "landscape" is a term of unity and deploys the world in relation to a perceiving function that projects its perspective outward. "Mountains-waters" does not merely express the relationship in full but also dissolves any point of view directed at that relationship. It is no longer the initiative of a subject that promotes the landscape, carving up a horizon from its own position; any consciousness finds that it is implicated from the start in the great play of opposition-complementarity that encompasses it. Rather than a landscape constituted as an object of perception, the term "mountains-waters" expresses immersion—established from the start—in what constitutes the interactive animation of the components of the world. For centuries, Chinese theorists of painting have enjoyed playing in every way possible on these parallels and opposites, with each term implying its counterpart and corresponding to it, as if there never had to be the slightest snag. What characterizes the mountain, as we know, is "greatness" (of the compossible), and what characterizes water, by virtue of its movement, is "life." The water is the mountain's "arteries" and the mountain is beholden to water for its "animation"; the mountain is the water's "face," what makes it perceptible, and water is beholden to the mountain for its power of "seduction." The mountain embraces and structures, and water circulates and flows. When mountainsides are encircled by clouds, the mountain shoots up in "height." The water, which meanders away only to reappear farther off, gains in "depth." And so on (cf. Guo Xi, 22). At the same time, the mountain finds expression through the water and vice versa, permeated as they both are by the same rhythmic pulsing. The waves rise and fall like mountain summits, and the rows upon rows of mountaintops fade away into the distance, without interruption, like waves (Shitao, chap. 13).

As the Chinese conceived it, everything converged to designate the landscape as the unobjectifiable par excellence, and that is why landscape painting so profoundly transformed Chinese painting, turning it away from the concern for resemblance. As that change was occurring at an accelerated pace, the painters and theorists of the Song Dynasty began to feel that a reversal was coming about. It is, in fact, the principal development in the history of painting that they mention: "As concerns the painting of Buddhist and Taoist characters, men and women, oxen and horses, recent paintings are not as good as paintings from the past; but, as concerns landscapes, forests, and rocks . . . paintings from the past are not as good as recent paintings" (Guo Ruoxu, 50). Su Dongpo, one of the great literati, explains the reason: "Men, animals, palaces, and utensils are all constant in form," whereas, "mountains, rocks, bamboo, trees, waves, and fog, though they have no constant form, nevertheless have an internal coherence that is constant" (L.B., 47). If every man depicted necessarily has a head, a torso, limbs, and so on, so that even the slightest detail is imposed by anatomy, a mountain, a rock, and a fortiori a cloud do not, strictly speaking, have a form, since they may have any form whatsoever. In that case, to paint is no longer to reproduce an (external) form, but to grasp the principle of internal organization that makes a rock, whatever its form, have the "coherence" of a rock—that which constitutes its consistency—and a cloud, that of a cloud. In the first case, it is shrewdly noted, the slightest error is obvious, since everyone knows what constitutes resemblance, but "it is self-limiting." In the case of elements of the landscape, conversely, the disparity is so subtle that it can pass unperceived even among intelligent people, but it imperceptibly contaminates the whole and "spoils everything."

When you move from painting human figures to painting landscapes, the demands are more exacting: "In general, for oxen and horses, and for

persons or objects, you have only to copy to capture the resemblance; but for landscape, copying is not successful." In other words, through copying, "that does not come about" (Mi Fu, S.H.L., 132). The landscape no longer required formal resemblance because it was never a particular landscape perceived from a single angle. It was supposed to contain within itself—between "mountains" and "waters"—everything that constituted the endless animation of the world, and it thus necessarily called for a "free and easy" treatment (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 106–7). That is precisely why later painters and theorists granted preference to landscape paintings. Only a brushstroke gushing forth *sponte sua*, from an internal impulse, like the strokes of a lively, cursive handwriting, can fully capture all the dynamism, obliging you to become disengaged from the shattering "pressures of labor" "riveting you to the literalness of the concrete."

Could what these analyses by Chinese painters and theorists so deftly illuminate be valid only for China? Or might not what they describe as an emancipation from the objectivity engendered by the perceptual relationship, an emancipation attributable to the landscape, also be what favored-indirectly, to be sure, and slowly-the gradual evolution of Western painting from the Renaissance on, finally making possible the ferment of the pictorial revolution at the turn of the twentieth century? I would like briefly to test that hypothesis. In fact, there was a "silent transformation" at work, as the Chinese like to say, even in the West. The landscape began modestly as a scenic background, an "horsd'oeuvre"—parerga—serving merely to "illustrate or set off" the history painting, "filling up the empty Corners, or void places of Figures and story," as Edward Norgate said in the seventeenth century. Among the Italians and the French, it then took on the importance of a setting, which Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain magnificently composed. Finally, in the nineteenth century, the accessory turned into its opposite, the painting as a whole. It was an obscure birth without significant dates, and Giorgione's Tempest is only one landmark in that evolution. The landscape was first practiced by minor masters and, according to the historians, its origins are not completely attributable (Pliny mentions a Studius or Ludius who was already painting landscapes of a sort). Little by little, what had been rural backgrounds in the canvases of the masters of Antwerp began to occupy the foreground. But it was in Venice, as Gombrich establishes, that the term "landscape" was applied for the first time. As late as the nineteenth century, the landscape was classified as a minor genre. Nevertheless, as attention—and credit—was still being directed elsewhere, the landscape painting brought about a sub-

terranean displacement that pushed European painting out of its academic framework. In taking its distance from the perceptual logic of a sensation that can be passively organized by reason, landscape painting uncovered the immediate, invasive power of the impression and, in so doing, led the more primordial consciousness of a being-in-the-world to outstrip the visual object. In setting aside the cult of ideal beauty associated with the perfect figuration of bodily forms, landscape painting also makes us experience an infrasubjective communication of emotion through the indefinite network of its vectors. And it creates a certain "atmosphere." In addition, in shattering the self-sufficiency of those paintings whose meaning was conferred entirely by history, landscape painting makes the beholder dream of vague, far-off places, including him in its reverie through its indetermination. From Antoine Watteau's landscapes, awash in nostalgia, to those of Joseph Turner (or François-Auguste Ravier), which paint the next-to-nothing, then to those of the impressionists, the pertinence of resemblance declined and resemblance itself withered away. The object, dispossessed of its constitutive unity and increasingly indefinable, was gradually inundated or it decomposed.

2. What is that strange connection we maintain with a landscape? Why, in visiting it, crossing it, contemplating it, going hither and yon, does that landscape come to inhabit us as much as we inhabit it? Why does the curve of a hill or the edge of a wood so easily become imbued with a tender, not easily dissipated melancholy when we see or think of it again, with reverie casting a mist over its forms? May I at least begin by expressing it that way? For how can we get our footing and cut a path in language to make way for the question, without immediately falling into either the abstract (dull, technical) register, or the vibratory and "poetic," each of them already constituted and compensatory, but also closing on us like a trap? Words become sterile and bog down, they fail to seize hold of the question. But what is that persistent connection, which can make abandoning forever the rural spot where we spent our childhood vacations secretly gnaw away at us and destabilize us like the loss of a loved one? Why are we often ready to leave our work unfinished and go rediscover some river's edge, or some corner of a valley, which we would readily acknowledge is not even particularly unusual or exceptionally beautiful? Why, suddenly discovering it in our memory—but it is much more than "memory" in this case—do we let ourselves be swept away and swallowed up, without even having to leave our desk? What is it in our most intimate thoughts—and which reveals that "intimacy" to us—that

still clings to these unique forms? Or might these forms themselves shake something else loose? What then is that misty-permeating "other," and how are we to approach it? What status should we give it? After all, what philosophy is not inclined to think, or, more exactly, what it senses it is not equipped to think, it readily leaves (not without a certain disdain) to the pleasure of words and to literature, to be rid of it. What conceptual advantage, in fact, could be drawn from otherness? Or may it not rather be that our language from the first gives way in despair when trying to express it, and that the categories that serve as our instruments, forged to give birth to the object, now discover how numb they are? With a few major exceptions, such as the writings of Gérard de Nerval and Marcel Proust, these categories unfailingly lead language to drift by default into the effusiveness of the subjective and the sentimental. We usually have no other option but to reject it as weak thought, or worse, to push it away as shameful. I know that at this point I am close to philosophical impropriety. Will anyone be bold enough to explore the question? Or even to advance it? I'm afraid even expressing it is somehow repugnant to us . . . But where does the "love" and "spirit" of a landscape lie?

In their rigorously factual and denotative exposition, the biographies in the Dynastic Histories of ancient China liberate us in that respect. They felicitously displace the conditions of speech. They cannot be suspected of useless vibrations, since the bureaucrat-biographer merely recorded maxims and comportment. Whatever the nature of words and events, everything noteworthy had to be set down. When Zong Bing (fourth century C.E.) was offered the post of director of records, he is said to have declined with these words, which were judged sufficient: "I have haunted the mountains and taken drink from valley streams for over thirty years." The emperor approved of his response.2 Mountains and streams, mountains-waters—landscape: In what way might that constitute a common fount of experience, or at least of reference, and was the justification so vital? The tone of the response, in any case (what counts here is, in the first place, the possibility of what surfaces and manifests itself in a tone), was neither flat and cold (sententious, sermonizing), nor sentimental and smug, nor even neutral. Because the break between the subject and the object, or the "self" and the "world," or even the (abstract) intellectual and the affective, had not yet come about in that world, and because there was no particular posture into which the remark could slip and become closed off, it was possible to invoke a complicity with "mountains and streams," a complicity that legitimately sustains and even absorbs existence. Every time Zong Bing went off to the hills, the biographer continues without further commentary, "he forgot to return from them," for "he loved the hills and streams and was fond of long walks." With his wife, who shared his "love of landscapes," he climbed the Jing and Wu mountains to the west and the Heng mountain to the south, and decided to build a house there. Throughout his life, he turned down every official post offered him. When he finally did return to Jiangling, he said: "Old age and illness have come, and I'm afraid I won't see all the famous mountains anymore. All I can do now is purify myself internally and contemplate the tao by walking among them from my bed." So "from home he painted all the places where he had gone mountaineering"—altogether new paintings for his time. During the day, lying down and playing the lute, he always faced them, and "those hills" then "responded to him."

That lover of landscapes was himself the author of a "Preface to Landscape Painting" (L.B., 583), written in his old age. This first general consideration of the subject in Chinese is also the best thing ever written about it. I hardly see how anyone could say more than what Zong Bing once said. He viewed the landscape as a manifestation of the absolute and landscape painting as the form of spiritual expression that provided the best access to that absolute. The landscape is the effective and redemptive mediation that connects man to the tao. "The sage, who contains the tao within himself, responds to existents" (or "illuminates existents"), Zong Bing writes by way of introduction, and followers who purify themselves internally are equipped to "savor phenomena." The landscape ("mountains-waters") "possesses a concrete materiality," but "tends toward the spiritual-animated" (qu ling)^d—it rises from one to the other. Hence Zong Bing can state, in a strict parallel:

The sage, by his spirit, teaches the norm of the tao and the follower is able to understand:

the landscape, by its form, makes us love the tao, and the good man is able to enjoy it.

In reading that sentence, momentarily erase from your mind any thought of the otherworldly or of a metaphysical beyond. Do not consider this world, which emerges from the foundational and is in constant renewal before our eyes, as the duplicate of a more essential world, or one that serves as its model. In short, do not let this world be forsaken in the

expectation of an elsewhere, or invaded and governed by the power of God. Once you have understood this, you will discover, as Zong Bing says, that it is the landscape that makes us feel in a sensible manner the internal—invisible—coherence that constitutes the "way" of the world. The landscape makes us feel this coherence by connecting and binding mountains and water, for example, making them react phenomenally within the landscape through the endless variation of its forms, the accumulation of its peaks, and the flowing of its waters. It is the concrete, unique setting for the tao's manifestation. Zong Bing's perspective was already largely influenced by Buddhism,³ particularly because, in his view, every being has the capacity to realize within himself his "Buddha nature," his bodhi. For him, it is through the landscape that the absolute guides us and reveals itself, that it can be "savored" and experienced. In separating out and purifying individuality through the endless sensual delight it elicits, the landscape holds within itself a power to elevate and "transcend" in the literal sense, which leads to the apprehension of "inexhaustibility," the without-foundation (wu qiong), the "great" Fount of immanence. That apprehension finally becomes immediate through the renewing profusion that the landscape displays, but which always slips away once more: the landscape, eternally there, nevertheless varies at every moment of the day and with every change of season.

Painting a landscape, then, embodies better than any other spiritual activity the transcendence proper to wisdom. More than meditation or reading, Zong Bing tells us, landscape painting gives access to the tao, cutting through all these mediations because it directly integrates us into that immanence. Through the recurring motions of the brush, landscape painting also immediately puts us in contact with itself. Although the principles of landscape painting, he concedes, "were lost after the middle period of antiquity," reflective thought makes it possible to "seek them out a thousand years later." And, though the subtle meanings "lie beyond the expressible and beyond the imaginable," the spirit can "grasp them in books." To an even greater extent, anywhere you have personally and ceaselessly "gone and lingered" and nostalgically returned, any place your eyes have "embraced" and to which you are now indissolubly "attached" (chou mou), you can, in that inexhaustible proximity, draw "form for form," and you can figure "color for color." Both the meditative forces of the yin and the eminent ascent of the yang, both the "spirituality contained in the dark valley," the world's womb according to the Luozi, and "the resplendent brilliance of the Song and Hua hills" can by captured by painting.

3. In the background of the awareness that Chinese theorists of painting developed of the unobjectifiable quality of the landscape, there is one fact that is usually passed over in silence because it is so momentous, or perhaps because people were simply afraid to tackle such weighty generalities. In any case, the Chinese, who constantly conceptualized immanence and naturalness, did not conceive of "nature" as a distinct notion, one that confers an objective status on any occurrence lying outside our will, but which, according to Aristotle's distinctions, is not "random." Instead, they conceived of individual nature originating in the Fount of immanence and embodying the process of regulation (xing) in its actualization.^e Or they conceived of that regulating process itself, which engenders without interruption, and called it "heaven" (tian), or "heaven and earth" (tian-di)f-since that engendering comes about by virtue of a polarity and proceeds by correlation. In its phenomenal aspect, they also called it "mountains-waters" (shan-shui) — "landscape." Finally, they conceived of the sponte sua, "so of itself" (ziran). Ziran was finally adopted in Japan and China at the end of the nineteenth century to translate the European notion of "nature." Europeans were able to conceive of "nature" as a single term because they contrasted it to technology (technē / phusis) while at the same time conceiving it, since Aristotle, on the model of technology (even though, as human activity, technē was supposed to imitate phusis). In thus setting nature homologically in opposition to a perceiving-effective subject's initiative, Europeans made it the object of both expertise and mastery. They drew a benefit from that convenient (perhaps too convenient) division: nature is in principle knowable, hence can also be dominated, whereas everything unfathomable was condensed and blocked—economically—in the figure of "God." In classical European science, as we know, the exploration of nature relied on God and was guaranteed by him.*

^{*} For Descartes, the idea of God guarantees the possibility of an objective science of nature in at least four ways, which can be better assessed from the vantage point of China. First, the idea of God, as a complete and independent being, is "the most distinct," hence provides the standard for what is best known and, as a result, serves as an ideal of truth. Second, at a subjective level, that idea confers a stable base of identity to thought and provides a transition between the variable realm of opinion and the constant realm of science. In addition, since God knows everything infinitely, he establishes the possibility of an indefinite, infallible human knowledge. Third, because God is not a deceiver, I can move from the idea of God to the knowledge of material things and I have the notion of the laws that God established in nature imprinted in my mind. Fourth and foremost, the "incomprehensibility" of God's being for human beings climinates

"Nature," separated from the "supernatural," was thus given the job of reflecting the laws established by our minds, and of being objectively governed by them. During the classical age, philosophy, intent on establishing both the universality and the necessity of these laws, gave priority to the task of conceptualizing the necessary conditions for such an objectivity by linking everything given by the senses to the connective power proper to the faculty of representation, a power that operates through the logical forms of the understanding. In that way, philosophy constituted the full variety of sensible intuitions into a true "object" of experience. This was a heroic theoretical advance-heroic by virtue of the wrenching violence it required—which formed the "West" and to which it owes its success. It can be assessed even better from China. There, the distinction between natural and supernatural is not explicit, or at least does not serve as a fracture line, despite the continuous development of Chinese thought. Or rather, it gained favor only among thinkers, such as Wang Chong in the first century C.E., who had no significant posterity, and thus remained isolated. There was therefore little objection to, or even reservations about, the fact that the phenomena composing the landscape open on the "unfathomable" through the play of their polarities (bu ke ce). h But it also means that China developed almost no physical science. By contrast, from Francis Bacon to Descartes, Europeans were pronounced prophetically, but also perhaps too advantageously, "masters and possessors of nature." Indeed, did this choice, which Europe pursued as its legacy from the Greeks, and whose fruitfulness in recent centuries has in fact changed the world, have only entirely enlightening effects? Or rather, in dissipating the shadows of "obscurantism," did it not in the same gesture throw other promising modes of coherence into darkness or crush them under its objectivity and make them unusable? In short, did it not cover up and bury other possible ways of structuring consciousness, which only painting or poetry in their way-ingenious but apart, or as an act of breaking and entering—reactivates in the modern world?

It is perilous to express it that way, and any unearthing of that kind is suspect, because European thought is so constituted that, as soon as we disengage however little from the aims of science and technology, we

final causes, and the anthropomorphic and psychologizing projection encumbering them, from the study of nature. The field is cleared for the purely explanatory and deductive knowledge of physics.

are condemned to their opposite, the irrational and the intuitive, ecstasy and mysticism. Hegel's indictment of Friedrich von Schelling is played out again each time: without the concept, which is both the tool and the product of that great subject-object construct, the grasp (of the Begriff) is fuzzy. In fact, is anything grasped at all? We will always run the risk of getting entangled in an idiom that is flaccid because truly "without object," weak and falsely poetic, an idiom I have already denounced. And since we set off to discuss the "landscape" without constituting it from an objective-perceptual point of view, are we not sliding closer and closer to that precipice? How can we get, not back to, but upstream from, such a cleavage so that, before the point where we branched off into theorizing, the intelligibilities that science engulfed and finally erased can resurface, without us slipping into what can no longer appear as anything but an inconsistency in our thinking?

Phenomenology tackled the question—and even did it justice. But I am not sure it escaped a strained poetization once it disengaged itself from the aims of science (after Edmund Husserl). It is so difficult to get rid of those handy theories from within our discourse, not in the imagination but in the very operations of thought, so difficult, at least, not to continue to imply them, especially since, in phenomenology, our primordial relationship to the world remains perceptual. And, despite an intense labor of metaphorization, the language to express it proves to be indelibly marked with the stamp of these distinctions. Taking a trip through China is another way to go about it. There, at least, we have available the support of another language and another text, produced completely "elsewhere," at least until the eighteenth century, with no relation to "us" that can be objectified or even suspected. When we can no longer count on the bridges that discreetly connect our languages to one another, when we are forced out of what is so aptly called a "family" of languages, translation—from Chinese into French, for example—brings us face to face not so much with the different as with what can no longer be immediately integrated. It makes us change our tune, in short. It is as if we were dealt a new "hand," or as if one were miraculously handed to us. Something radical reappears in that "black hole" of the crossing.

4. In reading these Chinese treatises, which approach the relationship between painting and the landscape in their own way and with their own conventions, we have a strange experience. Our most common apprehension of our relationship to the world is disturbed, even as we come to recognize what we elucidate with our formulations as truly our own. It is

not so much that we discover a different meaning in these Chinese texts as that, for the first time, we see coming undone the implicit choices that have always secretly guided what constitutes logical organization for us—what could be called the (particular) syntax of thought. We become aware of that disorganization and disruption only by gradually accommodating and reducing the exoticism. It is in the most insignificant turn of phrase, and without warning, that the subject/object relationship is shaken to its foundations. Hence, having patiently descended into the effects of coherence that these painting treatises tirelessly weave, we have reached the point where we can no longer so easily take the "spirit" of a landscape as a simple metaphorical projection of our own spirit. The theme of a communion with nature can no longer be confused with a romantic topos. And when we read that the hills "respond" in echo to Zong Bing, we come to suspect more than a rhetorical personification.

If we put into play the reflexive face-to-face relationship in which we are engaged and attempt to reconstruct the lines of force underlying such an unobjectifiability of the landscape in the Chinese theorists of painting, two orientations initially guide us. The first requirement, which we have begun to see, is that since form "grounds" something of the spiritual in itself, the landscape is called upon to transcend what, in keeping with our European science, we had to conceive as stemming only from the material, from extension, and from the physical. From the Song Dynasty on, this became an adage: "Ordinarily, we know only that man possesses a spirit," "but we do not realize that everything that exists" outside him as earthly reality "also possesses a spirit [dimension]" (L.B., 75). The purpose of the landscape, says Shitao, is to serve-offer-present something of the "animated spiritual." The "spirit" so conceived is not an agency but an operation (of inhalation-distillation) by virtue of which any reality is able to exist. And it is by virtue of the spirit that such a reality, in coming about, is itself a source of effect. The spirit is thus at work in any process of actualization, whether of forms or of thought.

There is no longer a perceived object and a perceiving subject but a correlation and exchange between poles: "welcoming"/ "welcomed." What constitutes the effectiveness of a landscape, in other words, is that the world is no longer approached as the *negative* of self-consciousness, that is, as that from which self-consciousness radically separates itself so that it can relate to it as pure *ob*-ject, as what is "in front of" it. Shitao, at the end of his chapter on landscape painting (chap. 8), says this in the strongest way possible, as if he were at the end of his own journey: "Before I

turned fifty, I had not yet given birth to myself in the landscape. Not that I treated the landscape as a mediocre thing, but I let the landscape exist independently and on its own." But now "the landscape calls upon me to speak in its place." Let us understand: he does not say "I express myself through the landscape," as one might expect from an expressive (rather than mimetic) conception of painting. Rather, it is the landscape that expresses itself through him. The painter's calling is to be the landscape's go-between in the literal sense. We have seen that the figurative process truly begins upstream from man, with natural markings or tracings, and we also know that man's place in the world is where the world becomes conscious of itself through language and makes itself explicit. Hence the landscape "gave birth to itself-metamorphosed in me" just as I gave birth to myself-metamorphosed in it, so that "the landscape and I meet in spirit" (Ryckmans has the landscape meeting "with my spirit," but that is a Westernizing translation). And, as we know, the "traces" are then called upon to "transform themselves" on their own.

A number of European painters, including some of the greatest (Cézanne again), have said the same thing, and often in astonishingly similar terms. I do not suppose that their experience is any different. But do they not often give the impression they are straining the language? Can we even understand them?* At most, we accept what they say so long as it consists of cries of despair or of enthusiasm, which we permit the genius in the thrall of his creation. Ever since Socrates, we have known that the artist is poor at thinking about what he is doing. Otherwise, what he says would be pompous and hence unbelievable. The Chinese literati, however, developed the idea in straightforward terms, with little trembling: "In general, as concerns the landscape painting, you need to reach the emotional nature of the landscape. If you reach it, the mountain

^{* &}quot;The great classical regions as I imagine them—our Provence, Greece, and Italy—are those where light becomes spiritualized, where a landscape is a floating smile with keen intelligence." "Nature seen, nature felt, the one over there . . . (be pointed to the green and blue plain), the one here . . . (be struck his forehead), which must merge together to endure, to live with a half-human, half-divine life, the life of art—pay attention—. . . the life of God. The landscape is reflected, humanized, and thought in me. I objectify it, protect it, fix it on my canvas." "The other day, you were talking to me about Kant. I may be talking nonsense, but it seems to me that I'm the subjective consciousness of that landscape, just as my canvas is its objective consciousness." Quoted in Gasquet, Cézanne (Paris: Cynara, 1988), 132–35. It would hardly have occurred to me to look for this account in Gasquet had I not observed that it is a constant point of reference in Merleau Ponty's L'oeil et l'esprit.

itself achieves the tension in form that makes it able to kiss and embrace, to rise and fall," as if it were "leaping up," "sitting down," "lowering its eyes and lifting them," and so on. "Naturally, the emotional nature of the mountain is the equivalent of (amounts to) my emotional nature" (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 113). Let us remember that the same Chinese word, qing, can express both an internal disposition and an external disposition, both emotion (qing-gan) and situation (qing-kuang); it is equally open to both and connects the two. It was common subsequently to develop such equivalencies: "as for the being constitutive of the mountain," "the rock is its skeleton, the forest its clothing, the grass its hair, the water its blood, the clouds around it its 'air,' and so on" (C.K., 252). This is not just dry metaphorization, despite the clichés these expressions have become. Rather, we get the enduring sense that mountain and man both proceed from the same reality and that, since both thrust equally into that foundation for their existence, any secession, any scission even, between a subject and the landscape it confronts recedes and vanishes away. It is therefore time to return to that foundation-fount. The Chinese call that common fount from which any actualization is born and draws breath, "breath-energy," qi.

5. Chinese thought shows us that, in the entire network of organs and functions that constitutes me, and on the basis of which man strives to build coherence, I can make a different choice than the Greeks concerning my relationship to the world and, based on it, can define what initially constitutes reality. There are two ways in which my existence is continuously connected to something outside: I breathe and I perceive. Now, I can privilege the gaze and the activity of perception, the Greek choice, which led them to grant priority to a conception of reality as an object of knowledge: the mind moves upward from visual sensation to the construction of essences, and vision is corrected, structured, and at the same time transcended by reason. Or I can base my conception of the world not on the activity of knowledge but on respiration: that is the Chinese choice. From the fact that I am alive, breathing in-breathing out, I deduce the principle of a regulating alternation from which the process of the world flows. "Is not between Heaven and Earth comparable to a great pair of bellows?" asks the Laozi (§5). "Though empty, it is not flattened," and "the more you move it, the more it expels." But "the more you speak of it," the less of it you grasp. It will not be surprising as a result that the Chinese conceived of the primordial reality not in terms of the category of being and the relation of form to matter (the Chinese did not conceptualize "matter"), but as "breath-energy," qt^k (f had become f; according to the etymology of the term, steam is being expelled and is rising above the rice as it cooks).

How are we to accept fully, and not only as hyperbole or as an image, that the landscape—"mountains-waters"—grounds something of the spiritual in its forms, or that man finds he is in symbiosis with the landscape, if we do not first perceive man and landscape as both being produced by qi, breath-energy? To do so, let us try a different "physics." One of the first thinkers of the Song Dynasty, who witnessed the sudden growth of landscape painting in China, found the most general terms to express it:4

Breath-energy deploying in the great primordial void rises and falls, and moves unceasingly: such is the mainspring of empty and full, motion and rest, the starting point of yin and yang, of hard and malleable. Floating and rising: such is the limpidity of yang; lowering and descending: such is the disorder of yin. Through incitement and communication, gathering and dispersal, wind and rain, hail and snow are formed: both the flow of the multitude of existents and the union and fusion of mountains and streams. Down to the dregs of wine and the ash of the hearth, there is nothing of that which is not a lesson.

Developed from the ancient Book of Changes, that was the basic teaching of the literati until European ideas reached China. Everything in the universe originates in the same breath-energy, which, thanks to the regulation internal to its two constitutive factors, yin and yang (such is the li), leads to every manifestation of existence, properly arranged. It leads to the infinite diversity of beings, man included, and to their relations with one another and their cohesion within a landscape. On one hand, in its ceaseless motion, breath-energy condenses and coagulates (under the vin factor) and forms constitutive beings, becoming visible by virtue of its opacity; it "engenders men and engenders things," the commentator Zhu Xi explains. On the other hand, but correlatively, breath-energy, in becoming desaturated, distilled, and aerated (under the yang factor), in becoming limpid-invisible, makes all that exists communicate across its animating emptiness and frees it. Such is "spirit"; or rather, since these are two inseparable modes of a single reality (the qi), such is the spirit dimension, whether of man or of landscape.

When the Chinese painter considers the being constitutive of the mountain, he is attentive to that pulsation of energy leading to the configurations of the topographic relief. Breath-energy circulates without interruption through the landscape's lines of force, which the geomancer identifies, and through the human body's energy circuits, which the acupuncturist detects (the same term is used, qi-mo). Following the alternations proper to it, rising and falling, soaring upward or sitting down, the mountain brings about the great respiration of the world. And the painter, communicating with it through his vital breath, grasps it through the alternating motion of his brush. Thanks to the variation of empty and full, the painting breathes as well. Jing Hao uses a decisive formula to describe, not what constitutes the landscape, but from whence its consistency is born and wherein its dynamism lies. Since all forms are permeated by the same breath-energy (T.H.L., 251), the "image-phenomenon" of "mountains-waters" is conceived as a "reciprocal engendering" of the energetic tensions that move through forms and animate them (ibid., 256).

Even the compactness of the rock and the airiness and evanescence of the cloud are not two different materialities, only a difference in concretion. "Clouds emanate from valleys buried deep in the mountains, and that is why rocks are called the roots of clouds." Similarly, when you see clouds amassing around mountain peaks in the summer and assuming strange forms, "it is because clouds are born from the rocks." "A light mist is exhaled from the moisture of the rock, a mist that, in condensing, forms steam; and that steam, in accumulating, forms clouds" (Tang Dai, C.K., 249). The expression "roots of clouds" is thus not a rhetorical figure or even a poetic image; rather, it translates the osmosis that, through the circulation of vital breath, makes all existents communicate with one another and associates them from within. What I previously rendered as "spiritual resonance" (qi-yun) is precisely the resonance internal to that breath-energy. Emanating from the diversity of forms and deploying them from within, it releases their limpid-invisible dimension and opens them to the undifferentiated foundation of the qi.

Conversely, what is characteristic of the object in European thought, what initially grounds its possibility as perception constructed it, moving beyond the ineffable profusion of sense certainty, is that it possesses "properties" as so many different determinations belonging properly to it (*Eigenschaft*). The simple universality of "sub"-stance or "thingness" can be found, self-identical, under these determinations, serving them as a common Here, or medium. From Descartes to Hegel, these properties—whether of a piece of wax or a salt crystal—define the object

collectively as pure matter and posit the One of essence beyond that multiplicity.⁵ And, as these properties move toward the universal, because they are at once sensible determinations and determinations of thought, they offer the foundation on which physics was built in the classical age, radically separating the analysis of the properties of bodies from the realm of the moral and psychological. Res extensa / res cogitans: there is matter and spirit, anchored apart from each other by ontology. A reflecting "subject" handily constitutes itself from them, but, driven back into itself, inexorably finds itself cut off, or rather disconnected, from the world, whatever effort the subject may then make to reestablish its proximity with that world. But the Chinese did not fully bring about that separation, and that is why they developed little in the way of physical science. Since the distinction between physics and ethics was not sharply drawn, the Chinese conceived of the mountain and water that form the landscape not as properties but as "virtues" and "capacities" (de), by which, as in man, breath-energy deploys and is regulated. We might imagine we were returning to a way of thinking that had remained at a prescientific stage and had not reached the age of reason—the first European missionaries, in fact, were quick to believe so—if we did not detect certain effects proper to that conception, which the reflections by Chinese theorists of painting illuminate. It is those reflections that, in conceiving of the animation of things in a manner other than simple metaphorical projection or in a purely poetic mode, made the art of the landscape so fertile. For Europeans, poetry came to compensate (subjectively) for the strict materiality of physics; conversely, the Chinese discourse on naturalness remains unified because poetry and physics are not separated.

Shitao, in discussing these "virtues" or "capacities" of the landscape, concludes his treatise with a chapter that is only marginally readable for us, because it so thoroughly disrupts and covers over the basic distinction from which we learned to approach the world and which is so self-evident to us. So long as we have not made the theoretical effort of imagination necessary to accommodate it, the chapter will have nothing to say to us. Ryckmans's translation barely annotates it at all, even though this chapter is by far the longest in the treatise. When the painter paints, says Shitao—exploring in depth something taken as self-evident in China until the encounter with Europe shook it loose—he assumes a multitude of responsibilities and missions: that of "educating out of darkness" through the movement of the ink, or of "assuring vitality" through the motion of the brush, or of "giving birth" through the landscape, and so

on. In the same way, the mountain, as a great natural process, is entrusted with "responsibilities" or "missions" (the same word, ren), m which are also without end. The mountain "obtains its constitutive being" through its "positioning"; it "offers-presents its animation" through its "spirit dimension"; it "modifies itself in a phantasmagorical manner" through its capacity for "transformation"; and so on. The mountain possesses both the virtue of "humaneness," which educates out of darkness, and the sense of "ceremony" by which mountains show deference to one another according to a strict hierarchy and greet one another respectfully. And so on. The same is true for water: it has the capacity to "flow infinitely" thanks to its virtue; to "keep low" thanks to its sense of fairness; to alternate its tides regularly, thanks to its taoic regulation; to spurt up and splash in the air thanks to its courage; and to control its eddies through a perfect horizontality that is itself attributable to its sense of order; and so on. The same is also true, by correlation, between the mountain and the water, since the purpose of the mountain is to "embrace amply," just as that of the water is to "circulate in every direction." Yet if "the responsibilitiesmissions to be assumed by the mountain and the water do not appear," that circulation and that embrace "cannot deploy." And if they do not deploy, that movement away from darkness (by the ink) and the animation (by the brush) will not be fruitful.

The painter on one hand, the mountain and water on the other, share the same condition, that of assuming responsibilities-missions, and these responsibilities-missions, as we have seen, take turns. The mountain and the water are, like man, "vested" with capacities, since they all proceed from the common Fount of immanence, that is, from "heaven," and cooperate equally in the deployment of the world. We are now in a position to understand a parallel formulation by Confucius in a way that is no longer merely affective but also foundational—that is, in a way that illuminates the Fount. In this formulation, the being of the landscape— "mountains-waters"—is already bound together. The "good man," says Confucius, "finds his joy [in the] mountain," and the "wise man" "finds his joy [in the] water" (Analects 6.23). At the same time, the responsibilities assumed by the mountain and water on one hand, by man on the other, are received each time by the proper party, and are not "transferable" from one to the other. That is why the painter and the landscape are in a partnership and "meet in spirit." The painter, on the basis of his own capacity-fount, evokes the capacity-fount vested in the world, which is condensed in the landscape. He also discovers he is implicated in that landscape from the start and he aspires to return to its source

through the painting and through wisdom. Therefore, any peremptory status of the object facing him loses its standing: priority is given to his connection to the world through breath-energy, and the phenomenon of the image is stripped of its ontological context. What import, then, are we to ascribe to painting? In the first place, can we still speak of "truth" when referring to it? For it seems that everything that needed to be undone in our theoretical imagination (which founded physical science) in order to entertain the possibility of an effective—and not fictive or forced—complicity between me and the landscape can only lead us to undermine the idea of an adequation between perception and object, in favor of an existential fulfillment within the painted landscape.

On the Truth in Painting

1. "A quiet place to nourish his nature, between cultivated land and hills," is where man wishes "to live always." "To walk along, whistling to himself, free and unencumbered, among springs and rocks," is what "always [makes] his joy." These hills, these cultivated fields, these springs, and these rocks are by no means a setting; becoming as they are, they lighten and re-create existence ("re-creation," a somewhat out-of-date yet pertinent word for "recess," marked the rhythm of our childhood). In the chapter on landscape ("mountains-waters") with which he opens his treatise, Guo Xi (eleventh century) immediately raises the question I hesitated to bring up: Where does our "love of the landscape"a-as he invokes it explicitly—come from, and what is its "content and meaning"? He even makes that question the main axis for his meditation as a painter (Linquan gaozhi, S.H.L., 6). Let us begin with that baseline of human experience, the least involved perhaps in any ideological construction, on the near side of the selection and establishment of an order of values, and, it would seem, even of differences between cultures and eras. It is an experience

where everyone can reconnect with something pleasant in his life and rediscover himself: "Fishermen and woodsmen and all those who live away from the world," Guo Xi writes, "are people you always enjoy spending time with; the cries of monkeys and the flight of cranes are something you're always fond of." "Always" or "constantly," because there man expresses his "elementary" nature. In the landscape, he reconnects with the vital and the foundational. This is not ethics strictly speaking but hygiene, though hygiene as ideal ("hygiene" has remained a weak term for us).

This landscape deploys at the borderline of two worlds: on one hand, the world of "dust" and "brouhaha," rejected because of its inanity and its racket, where all is but "chains" and "padlocks," and for which men feel eternal disgust; and, on the other, the world of the "immortals," "lost in the haze and mist," toward which man's feelings always aspire, but without these feelings becoming perceptible. In this age of great political peace, Guo Xi is obliged to add, the good man does not have to withdraw completely from the world and flee, as in the age of the corrupt dynasties, when loyal vassals sought to preserve their purity. Hence the aspiration that leads us toward forests and springs, like the company we dream of sharing with haze and mist, is only "in our dreams." Let them be realized when we sleep, because, in the light of day, "our ears and eyes are cut off from them." But find a marvelous hand and "it makes that rise up in profusion." Without getting off my mat, still seated, I can "explore valleys and springs." The voices of monkeys and the cries of birds "continue to sound weakly in my ears" and the splendor of mountains and the color of waters "delight my eyes with their glistening." How could that "not satisfy the spirits of others," Guo Xi asks rhetorically, and "how could it not take hold of my deepest self"?

If there is one thing the Chinese knew how to express—because they reveled in the mountains and the water and connected their thoughts to them, and because they did not construct the otherworldly or objectify the hereafter—it is how human aspirations could be fulfilled in the land-scape. In reality, the landscape does not so much fulfill these aspirations, as if there were expectation, tension, and captivation, as it eases them. In opting for the "rustic," in an anticultural (Taoist) reaction against the ever-increasing complications of civilization, and in restoring the voice of the foundational, the Chinese opened a space of liberation apart from the political: not the wilds but the society of the natural. The landscape is not really an object of perception: rather, it provides for our inclinations from the start, and, through them, makes us rediscover "simple"

paths of immanence, silencing arbitrary operations. It thrusts our being back to its legitimate inductions, reestablishes its primordial connections. By immersing our being in these countless and constantly renewed circuits of energy, the landscape breaks loose our internal blockages and puts everything that had taken refuge in them back into communication, returning vitality to every organ. Among "the rocks and springs," in proximity to simple beings, existence flourishes and regenerates, the fibers of our being relax, attention is not strained nor does it wander, and the spirit moves as it likes, no longer digging in or becoming blocked. Any focus, whether of desire or of thought, dissolves: we "nourish" our life. Even the transcendence of the invisible is no longer troublesome. It no longer hangs over this world but opens it indistinctly to the unfathomable, just as the forms of the landscape melt away into the distant mist. The Chinese term we are in the habit of translating as "immortals" means simply "men of the mountain" (xian-ren)^c who have disappeared, become lost to our eyes in the mountain's cloud-filled recesses, which constitute its "greatness" and plenitude.

As it happens, a "hand" can produce this world of intimate desire, which has become fluid once more but whose meanings remain distinct. European translators have rendered the line (into French) as "Should it discover a marvelous hand, [these landscapes] will reveal themselves anew,"1 or (into English), "Now a good artist has reproduced it for us."2 But the painted landscape is far from a reproduction or a revelation, that is, a mimetic duplication. The entire logic of this introduction is to evoke the landscape painting merely as a prolongation of the natural process (homogeneous with it, we might say). The "hand," it is said simply, "makes that rise up in profusion," so that, without leaving my mat, I can explore the landscape in depth. There is much more than a nuance at stake in this point of translation. The Chinese theorist of painting does not begin by considering a painter's activity. He begins with the evocation of a world corresponding in every respect to our expectations, which apparently cannot be realized except through and in painting. Through this mode of exposition, any referential relation (between a real world and a painted world placed side by side) is bracketed from the start. The only relation envisioned, because the only one judged effective, is that toward which energy is directed, where capacities can be absorbed and existence deployed. What other pertinence could we count on? In any case, it would inevitably be in excess. Painting does not invent a purely imaginary world of its own, nor does it duplicate the "real" world, by referring to it and representing it; rather, it constitutes itself nearby as a

landscape to be lived, completely open to our perceptions and satisfying our most deep-seated intentionality (our *ben yi*).^c It deploys as a world where vitality breaks free and blossoms, where we again hear the rustling of creatures, subdued and filtered as it were, and where our eyes find their delight.*

In a similar argument, Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty, in his introduction to "Secrets of the Landscape" (*L.B.*, 52), neutralizes any reference to a real world that painting might reproduce:

To originate in the foundational nature of the spontaneously so, To bring about the effect [function] of creation-transformation: on a board a square foot in size to write a scene of a hundred or a thousand li; East-West-North-South: as if before our eyes; spring-summer-autumn-winter are born under the brush.

Three things are thereby confirmed. First, painting is not situated in a face-to-face relation with the world, since anything that would cut us off from that world is deliberately effaced, and the advent of painting is originally inscribed in the naturalness of the process. Second, the painter does not paint one little spot in the world but the universe in its totality, in space and time: the four cardinal points and the four seasons. Third, the painter proceeds not by means of mimetic production but through phenomenal engendering: the scene becomes a reality on its own, "as if before our eyes," and the various landscapes "are born under the brush."

In what Guo Xi says subsequently, we find confirmation that landscape painting does not present itself as the representation of an object

But Leonardo, notes Gombrich (*Norm and Form*, 111), thereby elaborates the "first complete aesthetic theory of landscape painting even before the first landscape had come into existence" in Western painting. Above all, he begins by naming the subject of the creative act, who is elevated to the status of a demiurge: "If the painter . . ."

^{*} In my view, the European text that comes closest to this development is Leonardo's *Paragone:* "If the painter wishes to see beauties which will make him fall in love with them... if he wishes to create desert places, or fresh and shady places in warm weather, he depicts them, as also warm places in cold weather. If he wishes valleys, he makes them also; if he wishes from the high crests of mountains to disclose a countryside and if, after that, he wishes to see the horizon of the sea, he is their lord" (Leonardo, *Treatise on Painting*, 24).

of perception but is conceived as a world to be lived, with any referential relation tending to disappear. We also verify that the satisfaction of inner aspirations, which the painted landscape engenders in us, is particularly profound in that we integrate ourselves into that world, and the point of view that ordinarily constitutes the landscape, and thereby maintains a relative exteriority with respect to it, vanishes. Guo Xi reports that there are some landscapes—"mountains-waters"—you pass through, others you contemplate, others in which you go for walks, and still others you live in. Generally, whenever painting achieves a certain level, "marvelous works" result, but "what you pass through or contemplate does not have the same value as where you take walks and where you live." Taking walks implies both more complicity and more availability than simply passing through; it is not enough simply to create a grid of the various trajectories.* Similarly, living in a landscape calls for a completely different level of immersion than contemplation. "In landscapes that extend over hundreds of *li*, those in which you take walks or those in which you live occupy barely three- or four-tenths of them, but they are the ones you must choose." The distinction between the real landscape and the painted landscape vanishes in the existential dimension proper to any landscape. It is not with respect to what we pass through or what we contemplate (the object opposite us, at a distance), but where we walk, where we live, that the world's embrace of us is most complete, hence its presence in us most intense, and that the vital aspiration at the source of the landscape, through our connection to it, is satisfied.

2. Let us proceed gradually from the most simple to the most complex, from the flower to the landscape. Anyone learning to paint flowers will plant a cut flower in a deep hole and observe it from above, says Guo Xi (13). Thus, he "will grasp it from every side." Similarly, anyone learning to paint bamboo will take a stalk of bamboo and, on a moonlit night, contemplate the shadow of the plant reflected against the wall, so that "the true form of the bamboo will appear." "Anyone learning to paint a landscape—'mountains-waters'—will not proceed otherwise." You must consider the mountains and valleys of "true landscapes" from a

^{* &}quot;Every possible photograph taken from every possible point of view may have complemented one another indefinitely, but to no avail," notes Henri Bergson to establish his conception of intuition with the power to pull you in. "They are still not the equivalent of that three-dimensional copy, the city where you go for walks." La pensée et le mouvant: Essais et conférences (Paris: PUF, 1941), 6:1394.

distance "to grasp their depth" and must take walks in close proximity "to grasp their surface." You must consider the peaks and rocks of "true landscapes" from a distance "to grasp the lines of force," and must look at them up close "to grasp their materiality." Moreover, the cloudy atmosphere of "true landscapes" is different in each of the four seasons: in the spring, it is "soft and melting"; in summer, "rich and dense"; in autumn, "sparse and thin"; in winter, "gloomy and somber." Similarly, the haze and mists of "true landscapes" are distinct in each of the four seasons: the mountains in springtime are peaceful and appealing, and seem to be "illuminated by a smile"; in summer, cool and green, they appear "soaked with water"; in autumn, clear and pure, they appear "elegantly adorned"; and in winter, calm and melancholic, they appear "heavy with sleep."

Why do I speak with such obstinacy about the requirement for the zhen, f the "true" or "genuine"? (That, at least, was the term used to translate "truth" when that notion was imported from the West in the late nineteenth century.) It was believed that the Chinese view is without essences, and, as we have just had occasion to observe, when its painting became the province of the literati, it was conceived less and less in terms of a referential relation to a "real" or even ideal world to be reproduced. Therefore, we have to wonder whether we might not discover in China a different theoretical support for what is conventionally called the "truth in painting" (to borrow my title from Jacques Derrida, who borrows it from Hubert Damisch, who borrows it from Cézanne . . .). The Chinese painter considers the flower from above in order to grasp it in its most universal position, rising up from a depression and opening its petals on all four sides at once. Or he considers the shadow of bamboo as it appears projected against the wall, its tangles distilled, casting its configuration like a working drawing. Or he considers the landscape both from afar and from close up, to grasp both the "depth" and the "surface," the "tension" and the "substance." He does so because, in each case, he is in quest of what, in the anecdotal form of the landscape, contains both aspects and, in binding them together, organically puts forward and articulates what he is painting. He is in quest of what makes the landscape a world in its totality. Through the particular figuration, he seeks to reconnect with the development of breath-energy, deploying the figuration through and through and leading in general to that "so." He does not paint the thing as it appears in its singular form before his eyes, from a given point of view as it constitutes itself as an object of perception. Rather, he explores it in depth and experiences it, in order to extract from it, on the basis of its polarities and in all its dimensions, the con-tenance (both "capacity" and "countenance") that makes for its vitality. In addition, he is interested in rendering the atmospheric conditions of the landscape, the mists on the mountaintops in all their seasonal variations, because he is attentive to the variable dimension and, as a result, to the resource possibilities that all these diverse cases offer. Instead of endeavoring to grasp the individuality of the thing as an in-itself, he aims for the specific and promotes it based on subtle typologies, from which he makes his sample chart. We will therefore say that, in seeking to grasp the overall articulation that serves as a vector to the circulation of energy, the Chinese painter, unconcerned about the essence toward which the object might lead, is, in the process of painting, in quest merely of the internal principle of con-sistency. Correlatively, though he does not conceive of painting in terms of a referential relation by means of which he would represent, it is by virtue of a system of difference that he delves deeper into his apprehension. In Chinese painting, the status of truth is conceived in terms of a logic that simultaneously and productively exploits compossibility (which keeps the undifferentiated fount in communication) and individuation (which promotes the full deployment of its momentary actualization). Truth is not conceived as objective resemblance or as adequation to some external and particular form, established as a model and grounded in Being.

This is only a first guidepost, however. It is true that the Chinese painter does not cling to the singular object offered up to perception. But in distilling the visible as he does to experience it in both its tension and its polarities ("close up"-"from afar," and so on), he is certainly not satisfied with some coherence of painting that would correspond only to itself and would modulate each of its elements, as is now the case in modern (European) painting, particularly abstract painting. What does Chinese painting actually make us know about the world in not representing it, and what of the world does it deliver to us "in truth"? "Let him present himself in person to the mountains and waters to grasp them," says Guo Xi in the middle of this passage, "and then the intentional disposition of the landscape will appear." "To present oneself in person," in the usual Chinese sense of "to attend to" ("his business," ji shi; or "his responsibilities," ji zheng, and so on) means not so much that he physically moves through space as that he makes himself present to, turns toward, makes himself available to, accedes to. Moreover, what I translate as the "attitude" or "intentional disposition" of the landscape (yi-du, yi-tai) is less a projection of the painter's state of mind than the embodiment by the landscape, through a concretion of breath-energy, of a certain spirituality.

The landscape, let us recall, lets the cosmic rhythm pass through its lines of force as if through the arteries of the world, just as it permeates us. And that means that the landscape is vested with "capacities" and, as a result, takes on "responsibilities" or "missions," just as human beings do. The "intentionality" in question, and which in this case is the foundation of truth, does not allow world and subject to be separated. Rather, through the modifications that produce the varying forms of the landscape and that constitute their consistency, these forms, born of breathenergy, qi, bear within themselves yi, "sense"-"intentionality," releasing a certain disposition on the part of the world of wanting to be-wanting to live, through the particular tension that permeates and deploys these forms as propensities (shi in relation to xing). These forms of the landscape have something to say, in short, and that is why they appeal to the painter and give him the task of "expressing in their place." That is also why the painter in turn can be fulfilled by the landscape and can connect his aspirations to it (or why we can do the same through the painted landscape), why he can find sustenance in that fount of immanence, why his vitality can flourish there.

We are beginning to see that this intentionality, which travels through the world phenomenally, condensing breath-energy, which permeates and holds in tension the forms of things just as it stirs human feelings, and which the landscape makes visible through its configuration, is the same intentionality that the seasons convey as a first priority. "In the mountains of springtime," continues Guo Xi (13), "the haze and clouds stretch out in uninterrupted sheets and men are filled with joy; the mountains in summer are rich with shady foliage and men are at peace; the autumnal mountains remain clear and limpid while leaves fall, and men are serious; in winter, finally, the mountains are veiled with opaque fog and men hold their tongues." Up to this point, nothing indicates that painting is at issue. Whether it is an inhabited landscape or a painted landscape, the effect elicited is the same: "Upon seeing that painting, it happens that man engenders that intentionality, as if he were truly in the bosom of that mountain, and such is the intentionality emanating from the painted landscape." Intentionality is set in motion because the landscape invites and incites: upon seeing "the bright pathways amid the bluish haze," you are led to set out on them and "pass through" that landscape; upon seeing "the reflection of the setting sun on the river's surface," you are led to "contemplate"; upon seeing hermits withdrawing into the recesses of these mountains, you are led to "establish your dwelling there"; upon seeing springs spurt up amid the rocks at the foot of distant cliffs, you are led to "take a walk" there. The (painted) landscape, in calling upon us to enter it ever more intimately, even to become absorbed by it (following the gradation already noted: passing through it, contemplating it, inhabiting it, moving freely in it, going for walks in it), in leading us to mingle with it and make our life there, does not present itself as a pure "aesthetic" product, the object of a disinterested gaze. Nor does it presume to be a "beautiful" landscape. Rather, it makes us feel what are deemed to be among the most foundational vital aspirations (Guo Xi [6] has already said that we are "thirsty" for these woods and springs), and offers to ease them through our immersion in its circulation of energy.

At the end of the passage, Guo Xi repeats: "It is as if we were truly present in that place." It would be easy to believe that this "as if" meant that the Chinese theorist is availing himself of the illusion that Western painting has embraced since the Greeks, had he not already done everything to obliterate the separation between the painted landscape and the natural, had he not, in fact, stripped painting of its proclaimed status as artifact. The aim of painting is not to make the object present through perfect resemblance; rather, it acts in such a way that we make ourselves present to (to something that can no longer be an object, consequently, but rather "mountains-waters," the landscape), that we penetrate it and become imbued with it at the same time, thanks to the power of vital mobilization that its configuration possesses. If we pause for a moment to reflect on that fact, we will begin to see everything that logically kept the Chinese literati from laying claim to (or critiquing) painting's power of illusion. Nothing less was needed than all that the Greeks invented: the establishment of a moral distinction between lying and telling the truth (painting "deceives" by misleading—exapatān—says Plato); the ontological separation between nonbeing and being (by virtue of its mimetic status, the image belongs to appearances); an appeal to the rhetorical idea of persuasion (so that the representation is "convincing");* and so on. Let us not forget that, as Gombrich tells us, two factors that

^{*} For example, at the beginning of a chapter devoted to Masaccio, Vasari writes: "Since painting is nothing other than a forgery of everything that exists in nature as it is presented to us, merely by means of drawings and colors," it is "the most astonishing magician; it knows how to persuade us with the most obvious falsehoods that it is pure truth." Quoted in Jean-Étienne Liotard, Traité des principes et de règles de la peinture (Geneva: P. Cailler, 1945).

By virtue of its difference, China allows us to assess the extent to which reflections on painting in the West have been dominated by the articulation of truth, lies, and conviction. From Poussin to Picasso, painting consists of "lures that persuade the eyes";

led Greek art to that pictorial "revolution," led it to seek an increasingly plausible resemblance, were narrative illustrations of epic descriptions and theater sets relying on a *scenographia*—two traditions unknown in China. In short, there is the possibility of illusion in art only if you proceed openly to a duplication of planes (the "real," whatever its status, and the image of the real) and posit a world of essences that the image can simulate (*eidos* becomes *eidolon*).

3. Whether you in fact feel present to the (painted) landscape, whether you feel invited not only to contemplate the river glistening under the burning rays of the setting sun but also to go walking amid the springs and rocks, there, at the foot of the cliffs, depends on the capacity for consistency of the landscape into which the painting immerses you, as the painting endlessly multiplies the angles of view and makes all contraries complement one another: the close and the far away, the bright and the dark, the patent and the latent, the visible and the hidden (Guo Xi, 13). The treatises devoted to the art of landscape, such as the one by Guo Xi, carefully inventory that compossibility. We know there is not an ideal point of view, or even a recommended one, from which to consider the mountain, but that, seen from close up, it is so, when you stand back a bit, another so, when you move back even farther, still another so. Facing the mountain, from the side, from the back: each time it is a different "so." Even as he paints a mountain, the painter "also" paints a great number of mountains (see Guo Xi, 14, and above, chap. 4). But alas, Guo Xi confides, when the bad painters (of today) paint the mountain, they confine themselves to "three or five peaks"; when they paint the water, to "three or five waves" (18). They do not render the inexhaustible diversity that, through a conjunction of approaches and resources, makes the landscape embrace us with its variations of energy and absorbs us into itself. If to paint a landscape is to paint a system of plenitude, then you need human figures "to point out the paths," cottages and temples "to point out noteworthy scenic spots," woods and forests to separate the near and the far by appearing-disappearing, torrents and gorges to distinguish between "the depths and the surfaces" through continuity and discontinuity. In painting water, you need fords and bridges "to provide for human activities," boats and fishing lines "to satisfy human

[&]quot;the artist must know the means to convince others of the veracity of his lies." Picasso, Propos sur l'art, 17.

desires," and thus to anticipate human beings' intentionality, and so on (13–14).

In order for there to be coexistence, there must be no confusion. Compossibility elevates the landscape to variety in the extreme, conferring plenitude on it, so that intentionality is incited to move in that "world" by following its energetic irrigations, and is called upon to "inhabit" that world. In the same way, the painter-theorist of painting is obliged to attend to the individuality of nature and of aspects. Only that individuality can confer existence. It is not that there is a specification proper to the object, but, by proceeding meticulously, with different cases, the painter—like the continuous process of the world—leads us from the Great Void of undifferentiated energy to the most subtle actualization, "in full," of the concrete. The result is another inventory, symmetrical to that of completeness, which is the inventory of differences. The enumeration of the first corresponds to the distinctions of the second. In the classical age, the Chinese treatises of painting were divided between these two registers, associative and selective, organizing the landscape into a singular totality. I have already indicated the reason for this. The Chinese theorist does not subsume diversity under a general essence but orders by constructing a system of variance serving as a framework for difference. That is already the case for the hexagrammatic figures in the Book of Changes. It is that system we also find in the vast Chinese literature of practical treatises, on strategy and "martial arts," or on writing and painting. For strategy, for example, there is a variance in the configurations of the "terrain." The Sunzi lists "nine variables": "low" terrain, "communicating" terrain, terrain that is "cut off from everything," or "closed," or "lethal," or "dispersed," or "light," or the terrain of "confrontation," or of "convergence." There is variance in the forms of the mountain in the treatises on the art of landscape painting: the mountain "stands nobly," or "imposes it arrogance," or "opens generously," or "crouches," or "flaunts itself," or is "massive," or "vigorous." The forms of water may be "deep and serene," or "sluggish and smooth," or "vast like the ocean," or "swirling," or "oily and glossy," or "gushing," or "splashing." The forms of the wind may be "swift," or "violent," or "limpid," or "slight." Clouds may be "light," or "heavy," or "fluffy," or "dense." When Guo Xi addresses how to paint a mountain, he begins by setting up two complementary opposites (yin and yang), marking the two poles between which every possibility is distributed (17). To the southeast, the land is very low, the rainwater washes over it and strips it bare, the layer of topsoil is thin and the waters shallow, the peaks and

cliffs sheer and the waterfalls dizzying. The Huashan gushes forth not from the surface of the earth but from its bowels. To the northwest, the land is rich and fertile, the deep waters follow a sinuous route, the peaks succeed one another in uninterrupted chains. The Songshan rises up from ground level and not from the bowels of the earth. Stretched between the two, "the constitutive being" of the mountain is the system of its possibilities, and the degree of variance between these poles in each case stands in lieu of "truth."

In their meticulous inventory of diversity, the Chinese took the art of nomenclature and typology very far. The good painter is the one who, by enriching his experience, knows how to embrace that diversity to the fullest extent. Even the shortest treatises devoted to the art of the landscape take the form of a detailed list: a ledge at the very tip of the mountain is called dian; a chain of mountains is called ling; when there is an anfractuosity, it is called xiu; a sheer rock face is called ya; an overhanging rock is called yan; a rounded peak is called luan; and so on (see Wang Wei, L.B., 596; Jing Hao, T.H.L., 256; Han Zhuo, S.H.L., 66). For meteorological phenomena especially, the forms and transitions inventoried lend themselves to nuances. For clouds, for instance, there are fluffy clouds, clouds rising from the valley, cold clouds, evening clouds. After clouds comes fog: there is morning fog, distant fog, cold fog. Then comes haze: there is morning haze, and so on (Han Zhuo, 80–81).

To paint, then, is always to choose from within a system of cases, and that system is set out in great detail. To paint a tree, for example, is to paint it as a function of a typology of scenic spots: trees that grow on sheer cliffs have tangled branches; those that grown on hillsides stand tall and straight; those that point toward the sky have many tops; those that are close to the water, many roots, and so on (Rao Ziran, S.H.L., 225). Like the mountain or the water, the tree is not depicted as it is; it exists only by virtue of a catalogue of differences. But although there is not a representation of a tree that the painter has before his eyes, or at least one whose determination leads toward the infinite, there is nevertheless a meticulous observation presented under these rubrics. However far we might be from the European painter who patiently, indefinitely scrutinizes the "being-there" of the thing, inquiring into its being to extract its secret from it, Chinese painting does grasp, with the aid of these typologies, an entire discrete system of coherence.

4. If there is one area of pictorial research that put the Western conception of truth to the test and focused the quest for an objective represen-

tation on that conception, rigorously decomposing and reconstructing the object-research that, as a result, revolutionized painting and appeared first as a triumph of thought, then as its defeat-it is no doubt so-called linear perspective, which in the Renaissance was a science of vision applied to a science of representation. Indeed, in European painting the truth of perception culminated with linear perspective, reducing vision to a mechanism of projection whose construction ultimately led to an exact coincidence between the image in perspective and the image provided by natural vision. Through linear perspective, objects and real space are represented on the canvas following the exact mathematical determination of their form, their dimensions, and their position. The pictorial image is finally "faithful"; the illusion is perfect. At least—but this "at least" is burdensome—if only one eye is open and, situated at the tip of a pyramid formed by the lines of sight (the base of the pyramid is the object to be represented), it looks at the canvas from the same center of vision as the one adopted by the painter, at the same distance, and remains completely motionless.

As we know, these many constraints led modern painting from Cézanne on to rebel against the arbitrariness of that arrangement. Braque's harsh judgment was that "the Renaissance (in painting) confuses staging with composition," and that the verisimilitude it achieves "is only a trompe-l'oeil."3 In fact, the scientist Leon Battista Alberti discovered the basis for a scientific naturalism in perspective that swept away all religious, or even symbolic, hypotheses from the vision of space. In addition, the construction of perspective, by relying on geometry and applying optical laws, corresponded most rigorously to the requirements of classical European science, even becoming one of the basic constituents of its epistēmē. The modern painter, with equal rigor, sets about to shatter that physical conception, which, he claims, sterilizes our experience of space. He wants to return space to its original availability by conceiving it as an infinite power for engendering planes and vectors, favoring copresences through a free circulation of the gaze and systematically deploying axes and potentialities. His aim in disorganizing the artifice imposed by habit, molded as it was on Euclidian geometry, is still a religious epopteia, but one now turned toward the immediacy of sensation and restoring its vertiginous aspect. A painter is in the first place someone who manages to strip away the mental constructions of his gaze and, finally rejecting any reassuring accommodation, dares to "see."4

In terms of their logic, the Chinese remained apart from that battlefield of truth, not having experienced the abstract codification of the

object of perception based on the laws of perspective. As a result, they also did not experience the return of what was repressed in classical science, which, in the modern age, has called for a liberatory and purely relational experience of space, making us "forget" things, in order to consider only "relationships" (Braque). Chinese painting, though it developed continuously over millennia, did not even seem to suspect what was at stake in the dispute. Perspective, as every treatise on descriptive geometry defines it, is the science that teaches us to represent three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional space, so that the image in perspective coincides with that provided by direct vision. Since that tridimensionality constitutes the object of perception, such a quest could not elicit the interest of Chinese painters and theorists. It is not the volume of bodies that concerns them, nor do they wish to render faithfully the structure of an object of perception through the image in perspective. As we have seen, they take care not to confuse sculpture and painting. Rather, they expect the "truth" of painting to come from the painter's capacity to let breath-energy—the bearer of intentionality—pass through the most insignificant figuration. "What do you understand by (external) resemblance and what do you understand by truth (zhen)?" asks the apprentice in one of the finest Chinese treatises on painting, predating by a century Guo Xi's treatise (Jing Hao, tenth century, Bifaji, T.H.L., 251). The old man replies: "Resemblance means to achieve the form and to let breath-energy escape"; "truth" is "when breath-energy and materiality both flourish."k When breath-energy is "lost at the level of the image-phenomenon," "it is the death of the image" (and of its "phenomenon").

If perspective implies constructing the entire vision from a single center at the tip of the visual pyramid, from which the geometrical determination of the vanishing point, the ground line, and the horizon line all follow, that requirement obviously contradicts everything that Guo Xi tells us of the multiplicity of angles of view, which confers consistency on the configuration and contributes toward immersing us in the landscape. In his concern for typology, as one of his many systems of variance, he distinguishes between *three* perspectives on the mountain, which complement one another. Without them, the mountain would lose its plenitude, becoming "superficial" or "close" or "low" (Guo Xi, 24). The mountain has three "distances": when you look up from the bottom of the mountain toward the summit, this is called the "high distance"; when you examine the background from in front of the mountain, this is called the "profound distance"; and when you contemplate the far-off

mountains from mountains close by, this is called the "level distance." In the absence of a common projective construction, each of these perspectives possesses its own tone and atmosphere. The aspect of the high distance is "clear and luminous," that of the profound distance "heavy and dark," that of the level distance "both bright and dark." To continue that catalogue: in the case of the high distance, the forms are extended and loom "dizzyingly." For the profound distance, intentionality finds expression "in the staggering of planes"; and in that of the level distance, it finds expression in fusion and "dissipation into a blur." Depending on the kind of distance, the human figurations are "clear," or "slender and broken up," or "hazy and evanescent."

Distinguishing the close from the far away is a concern of the Chinese painter, but, unlike in Albertian perspective, that distinction does not rely absolutely on a geometrical division of projected space whereby quantities decrease in size proportionally as they move toward the horizon, following the diagonals of a pavement. In order for the landscape to acquire depth and for us to feel we are invited onto its paths and beyond its peaks, it is enough that the distant mountains not be "connected" to the close mountains, or the distant waters to the close waters (see Wang Wei, *L.B.*, 596). To accomplish that, as we have seen, the most suitable and natural thing is to make the paths zigzagging between hills, or the nonchalantly meandering course of streams, disappear and reappear farther on, beyond forests or hills, thus conveying through that alternation the world's breathing (see Jing Hao, *T.H.L.*, 257).

In that gradual vanishing into the distance, the proportions between the figures are not calculated by a common standard (by dividing the baseline of the rectangular canvas into as many standard parts as it can contain), as the mathematical construction of the image in perspective requires, but rather remain relative to the elements of the landscape. Guo Xi, continuing the inventory of the various modes of variance, establishes things roughly and only by calibrating them relative to one another.* The essential thing in decreasing the size of the figures as a way to create

^{*}The mountain has "three magnitudes," Guo Xi explains (S.H.L., 24). The mountain is larger than a tree and the tree is larger than a human being. If the mountain is not several dozen times larger than the tree, it cannot be a large mountain; and if the tree is not several dozen times larger than a human being, it cannot be a large tree. A comparison can be established between the tree and the human being using the foliage, and between the man and the tree using the head. A certain number of leaves can be taken as the equivalent of a human head.

The later theorists note that it is not satisfactory to give fixed, rigidly applied

depth in the landscape is, through a gradual confusion, to make these forms take on the haziness of evanescence, between presence-absence, and to thus open the landscape to its undifferentiated foundation-fount. The far away is rendered dimmer and paler ("the closer it is, the darker the ink," "the farther away it is, the lighter the ink"). According to an ancient formula on the art of painting secretly handed down (and adapted in treatises on poetry, which also increasingly aspired to fade out meaning while opening it on the indeterminate),⁵ "the mountain seen from a distance is without furrows, water seen from a distance is without waves, man seen from a distance is without eyes."

Hence, whether you render the relief of even the most insignificant figuration in the drawing "from far away"—"from close up," or "from the front"—"from the side," or via "concavity-convexity" (ao-tu: "as hollow"—"as protrusion"), there are always two opposing and complementary dimensions. By virtue of their polarity and of their correlation, they confer consistency on the landscape, deploying it not as a plane (erecting the stage and opening it onto infinity), but as tension, playing simultaneously in both directions. These dimensions attract the gaze to the concrete materialization that constitutes the reality of the visible, while at the same time drawing the gaze toward the indefinite distances, where the visible recedes. The landscape is painted as both offering itself and withdrawing; it is experienced, says Guo Xi (25), through that concomitance of "coming"—"going away":

Directly before us, the ravines and the mountains, the woods and the forests curve and tangle together. Through that arrangement, the landscape comes to us; we do not tire of its details and our eyes are satisfied in their quest near at hand. From an angle, the far plane that deploys the mountain chains without interruption fades away. We do not tire of that remoteness and our eyes are open to the far reaches of the vastness.

The landscape is caught in that twin movement of its respiration: advancing and retreating, between the close and the far away, breathing in accordance with the poles of appearing-disappearing, without any presence coming into focus. The very worst thing would be to divide up the space as on an Albertian grid and separate out the planes. Shitao (chap.

I) denounces all the overly scholastic methods that operate by dividing the painting into successive "planes" (land on the first plane, trees on the second, the mountain on the third) or cross-sections (the scene below, the mountain above, and usually trees between the two) because they get in the way of the essential thing. "Breath-energy" is at the origin of any actualization, and it alone can raise the forms of the landscape to the "spirit" dimension by making vectors of intentionality from them. In breaking up the landscape, these planes keep that "breath-energy" from traversing the landscape through and through and communicating continuously across it.

Perspective constructs the object of perception out of lines drawn from the sides of the quadrilateral, which, says Alberti, forms the canvas like an "open window through which we see the istoria." Chinese painting, however, is not constructed as a "canvas," with diagonals converging toward a single vanishing point. The Chinese prefer the scroll, which unfurls the landscape as a continuous process of transition (see especially Shen Zongqian, C.K., 359). On a vertical scroll, for example, the lower half, with its rocks, then its woods, its houses, its paths, and streams, is the gradual "opening," like spring blossoming into the fullness of summer; and the upper half, where peaks complete the drawing and clouds and distant riverbanks empty it, is the "closing," like autumn declining toward the depths of winter, tucking natural vitality away. At a smaller scale, there is no detail of the figuration that does not both "open" and "close"—that does not close the previous line and open the following one, like the "expiration-inspiration of the tiniest instant." Whereas the canvas is a geometrical frame constructed by and for the gaze, the scroll, through its respiratory alternation, invites a different approach: not that of the gaze but that of "contemplation." The two terms are antithetical in this case. Yet we must begin by conceiving contemplation in relation to the gaze, and, as we have done with the spiritual, first remove it from the flat, nonrigorous idealism where I found it.

Gaze or Contemplation?

1. Cézanne is said to have had bloodshot eyes from staring so intently at the dusty fields and ashen rocks of Sainte-Victoire: "They are so glued to the point I'm looking at that I feel like they're going to bleed." To rest them from that strain, he returned to the banks of the Marne and Fontainebleau. The painter stared as if he meant to suddenly freeze—in a "freeze frame"—the continuous film of things. It was as if he could save things from the distraction of the gaze and from their dispersal as things by constantly looking back and forth from the canvas to the motif, that he could raise them to the level of essences—as they are in themselves. In one of Chardin's self-portraits, he is wearing his visor low over this eyes to shield them and to allow the values to be seen more clearly. Poussin called that attentive way of looking "prospect," to distinguish it from the indefinite "aspect" of the thing. Prospect consists of using reason to adjust your eyes, pulling the thing out of its formlessness, separating it out, erecting it, deploying it as "properties" and positing it as an object. The object, it is happily repeated, contains a "secret" about an intimacy of being,

which the gaze wants to find out, and the painter is born from that heroic desire pursued to the point of "torment." In immobilizing the gaze on the object, the painter would like to gain access to something believed to be utterly commonplace, since one has only to open one's eyes. But the more the painting advances, the more he knows it is still impossible for us to manage to "see" it, because we are so prone to cloud over the object with our projections from the start. Not to see the tree, the face, the dog, in terms of a nearly stable typology that is culturally transmitted and hovers like a phantom between our brain and our eyes, but rather, said Cézanne, to see "this" tree, "this" dog, your face.

In this sovereign power conferred on vision, this virtu visiva, as Leonardo called it, we can distinguish at least two things which, from the vantage point of China, we begin to suspect are not self-evident. First, in the West we conceived of painting in terms of an activity solely of the eye (guided by reason), which becomes concentric by looking and working, and whose slightest lapse, said Cézanne, "screws everything up." "But Monet is an eye," he would retort, to cut off any objections.² Second, everyone knows "and knows well" that, in the background of painting, European thought has continued to privilege sight as the means of access to reality and even considers sight the only way to gain access to it. This idea is so familiar to us, and has so often found its way into language, that it is difficult for us to assess it. The eye was called the "window to the soul" (imprisoned as it is in the body) even before painting, in Alberti's opinion, became the window opened by the picture's perspective. European reason, always dreaming of a bright new day and of major disclosures, could conceive of the sudden and imposing appearance of certainty and of the ultimate and immediate access to truth in no other way than through the organ of sight. Vision serves as a touchstone for the internal operations of truth, and it appears beyond doubt (e-"vidence"), as an optimal or even absolute mode of knowledge. Sight is the most intimate way for us to open ourselves to things and to relate to them (in-"tuition"). Although Western philosophy long endeavored to break free from the sensible through thought, it envisioned the culmination of its activity as pure spirit only by and in vision. Uncovering, revelation, epopteia: "In the place beyond heaven," the soul "sees" (kathora). "It has justice and wisdom themselves before its eyes" (Phaedrus 247d). In the dwelling of the blessed, it sees the Form of God, Forma Dei, Augustine later says. European philosophy has worked ascetically to be wary of the visible, but only to better see the invisible.

There is a reciprocal relationship, in fact, between the choice we made in Europe to conceive of nature (or essence) in an objective mode and the fact that we make sight the privileged organ of knowledge, "lord of the senses" and "prince of mathematics," as Leonardo said.³ The parallel between the painter and the poet, or between vision and language, or between the natural signs of painting and the artificial signs of language, permeates the entire classical age. The merit of painting, according to this view, is to reproduce nature with an objective reality that words will never achieve. We have begun to see this in the case of perspective: at the tip of the visual pyramid is the eye, and its projective base constitutes the object. But the same is true for painting in the Netherlands, where the art of perspective was less developed than it was in Italy. In Dutch art, painting was identified with the eye itself rather than understood as a seen world. In deciding to call the image on the retina not imago but pictura, Johannes Kepler connected painting and vision even more intimately.⁴ No longer is painting the image of vision; now vision is already in the image of painting. Ut pictura, ita visio: since visual perception is itself an act of representation, it follows that seeing is (already) drawing. And it is that image, not the image rendered in perspective but the optical image—the world "painted" on the retina—that the Dutch painter paints.

The European consideration of painting has focused on the gaze and, in its quest for greater objectivity, has gone back to how the retina produces sight. It has shown little interest in the necessary condition of painting: not staring at something on the outside but purifying the inside, breaking free from the world and contemplating. The term "contemplation" (recueillement), as opposed to "gaze," should be understood as a conjunction of two meanings: as contemplation of self, freed from importunities and uncleanness, and as a gathering up (the other sense of recueillement) of the landscape within oneself. It is from the angle of recueillement that literati art chose to approach and conceive of painting over the centuries, in increasingly explicit terms. Guo Xi especially calls for contemplation, having only just evoked the "marvelous hand" that makes a landscape to be lived, and one that fulfills our aspirations, rise up before us (6). That landscape has value only if you are internally available: "If you approach it with a spirit of woods and springs, its value is high," but if you approach it with an "arrogant" and "wasteful" gaze, inevitably, "its value is low." In approaching it with a flighty and frivolous spirit, "how could you not muddle the spiritual gaze (spectacle) and taint the limpid wind?" I translate guana indiscriminately as "gaze" or "spectacle"

(it means both), since, in the relation established, the "object" is not completely separated from the subject of perception gazing across at it. Nor has the power of initiative and governance fully devolved to the eye, with the thing seen, standing opposite it, reduced to passivity (never again to be awakened from its eternal sleep as an object, except by the part of our "soul" that we care to attribute to it through personification). Just as I turn my attention to the landscape, the landscape equally "incites" and encourages the "encounter," as the Chinese notion of xing-hui^b expresses it. If we take this idea seriously, rather than considering it a poetic shortcut (but wouldn't that shortcut concede even more?), we will begin to understand that the quality of the relationship resides inseparably in the quality of the two partners. Above all, as we have just heard, I cannot experience the "limpidity" or "purity" of the wind (qing)^c passing outside in the landscape except through the "limpidity" or "purity" of the breathenergy that also irrigates me within and changes into spirit.

Let us puzzle out the formulation at more length instead of sidestepping it, and, to explore what it so subtly disrupts along the way, let us go back to the hidden biases of our thinking. The Chinese painter-theorist asks how, in landscape painting, we can neither muddle the spiritual gaze/ spectacle nor taint the purity-limpidity of the wind. What makes such a formulation almost unreadable once we translate it into the European language is that we have conceived of ethics in Europe—and increasingly so (so much that we have forgotten it)—as separated from the worlds' phenomena and transformations, which are confined to the objective. As a result, nature is envisioned only as matter and force; we have definitively separated physical laws and moral laws; and we no longer speak of the purity of the wind in the way that we speak (or even no longer speak) of the purity of the soul or "heart." We no longer imagine that these two orders can communicate, such a possibility being forever hidden away under science. By contrast, since the Chinese kept the sense of a single capacity for purification-distillation on the part of breath-energy, which ceaselessly animates and continuously promotes the world, at once "outside" and "inside," Chinese morality, partaking in the elements of the world (mountain and water, "landscape," in the first place), remains rooted in the "natural." When we say that the Chinese literati conceive of painting in terms of a moral imperative rather than on the basis of a power of vision, we need to understand that they do not judge painting by its morality, as if the theme tackled or the way it is treated had to edify us, so much as they maintain from the outset that, since painting is born sponte sua from a "spiritual encounter" and a "silent harmony" with

the world, only spirits that have effectively rid themselves of "vulgarity" and "elevated their feelings" have access to it. Of the "six principles of painting," the first, separate from all the others, cannot be learned. The literati insist that this is because it lies in the innate quality of the person: "If the moral capacity of the person is high, the spiritual resonance of his painting cannot fail to be equally so," and "if that spiritual resonance is high, painting is necessarily permeated with life and movement" (Guo Ruoxu, 31; cf. C.K., 271). In that sense, a painting bears the "imprint" of the nobility or baseness of the artist; that quality is truly his "signature."

What was required of the Renaissance painter in Europe? Above all, that he be trained in geometry, Alberti tells us. Secondarily, that he become familiar with the orators and poets to enrich his *inventio*. Beyond the study, labor, and concentration demanded of him, but compensated for by pleasure, he need only be moral enough to be considered respectable and to please his clientele. It was hardly expected that the quality of his painting would stem from a purification of his conscience. Leonardo recommends solitude to the painter, but only so that, in being his own master, he will be better able to stand apart and meditate on his work. The science of perspective assumes that the European painter will become a scientist before an artisan. And, in what is only an apparent paradox, it is in the modern age, once painting was no longer founded on a preestablished nature and no longer trusted so serenely in the objectivity of the gaze, that ethics somehow insinuated itself. Even though the term is now in great part out of date, people are beginning to speak on occasion of the painter's "virtue" and not only of his talent, his passion for work, or his genius. The painter, instead of basing himself too advantageously on truth, will be content to invoke his "sincerity" (Matisse), not as a cult of the individual, as Merleau-Ponty indicated,5 but because, on the contrary, the painting supposedly calls on the painter, wretched as he is, to refrain from intervening in what is assailing him and which he must express. Otherwise, he runs the risk of letting his "paltriness," including that of his reason, seep into the painting. Do not bend the motif to fit yourself, adds Cézanne, bend yourself to fit it. Let it be born and germinate in you: "Hush," in other words, know how to make yourself available, and "be a perfect echo."

2. It is in the developments of the *Zhuangzi*, picking up on the laconic formulas of the *Laozi* to clarify the conversion of the sage as he turns back to the natural, that we find the most fruitful evocation of internal

availability, which alone allows us to apprehend the world. But "apprehend" is already too emphatic, both too hegemonic and too urgent. It still entails too much initiative and "grasping," too much partiality. From now on, it will be a matter of *letting* come—not even a "matter" of, strictly speaking, since in that "matter" there is still too much distance, sharpness, and intention. "When you no longer occupy" your self, says the Zhuangzi, "in your self, forms and things appear by themselves" (chap. 33.5). Obviously, "occupy" circumscribes and attributes a territory to the self, separates "what" you occupy from "what" you do not occupy, establishing, however little, permanence and rigidity. The Zhuangzi teaches us to de-occupy ourselves, but not because the "self" is detestable and we must flee it or ascetically deny it, but because we need to recover from the consistency of the subject, to rid ourselves of it and "forget" it, in the terms of the Zbuangzi-that is the Zbuangzi's principal, systematically conducted philosophical operation—in such a way that we no longer have to posit the world as an object opposite us, to be known and manipulated. Or, to repeat terms already introduced, by undoing the possibility of a nature (as object), it thrusts us back into (reconnects us to) the natural (as process). Once we no longer assail the world with our investigations, the Zhuangzi continually tells us, once we no longer impede it by carving it up and codifying it, once we no longer set it in opposition to itself as a function of our disjunctions, once we no longer contract it with the clenching of our desires, once we stop invading it with our fears and aspirations, [something of the world] comes "to light" on its own. We no longer know "it," but the world "illuminates [itself]." Let us not only emancipate ourselves from all the toolkits of the knowing mind; let us rid ourselves of the desire to know as well. It is this voluntarism that, on its own, encumbers and obscures; it is this desire for truth that, on its own, forms a screen. When you renounce any position as an "occupier" (there is no longer "self" and "other" facing off), no longer orienting yourself or digging in as a result (in one direction or the other), [you are] able to embrace [the world] in every direction—without "direction" or "horizon" (wu fang) e- and solely in accord with the initiative of the transformation under way. "Your movement is like water," continues the Zhuangzi (33.5), "your motionlessness like a mirror"; "you respond like an echo, evanescent as if not being there and calm as if being pure."

Such an availability, disponibilité, lies at the root of painting in China. Dis-ponibilité means that the internal disposition remains open to each new "so" as it hatches "on its own" (ziran), and that this disposition is fluid.

Through the diffusion-diffraction effect of that dis-, dis-ponibilité stands opposed to the rigidity and unilateralism of every "position," which is always more or less delimiting and closed off. The nonobjectness of the landscape, as a result, has to do with the fact that the landscape proceeds from a silent osmosis between outside and inside ("spiritual encounter," "tacit harmony," all the treatises repeat constantly) upstream from any attentive and deliberate perception. In other words, the painter does not approach landscapes as a perceiving subject. It is rather by virtue of the relaxed state of his person, to which he knows how to gain access, no longer urging and no longer governing, that a spirit dimension is released on its own from the materiality of forms. I believe that "relaxed," détendu, is the right term (if we understand the value of that dé- as undoing, just as I earlier used "de-pict," "de-termine," and "de-represent"). Landscapes are attained (and painted), the Chinese tell us, only through an overall dé-tente, relaxation or "untensing," of the person and not through a focused gaze. Anyone who relaxes, se dé-tend, lets the tension of the world pass through him. Hence he gathers it up in himself, contemplates it. The treatises on painting, Guo Xi's first of all (27), develop the notion at great length in these terms. The painter must manage to nurture in his bosom an "ample"-"relaxed"-"cheerful" disposition, and his intentionality must remain "harmonious." Should a spirit be born in him from which "freedom and uprightness," "tenderness and trust," "well up abundantly," the dispositions of men "who laugh and cry," along with all the positions and configurations of things, "will naturally be at his disposal deep within him." Without his even realizing it, they will appear from his brush. His spirit, no longer troubled by care, extends its sphere on its own and can "open itself" (Guo Xi, 36). By contrast, if the internal disposition is "constricted"-"overwhelmed"-"harsh"-"blocked," and is fixed on a "particular corner," how could he describe "the aspects of things" or express "human feelings"?

In contrast to the gaze, which stares and attentively examines the object, the spiritual resonance that confers "life" and "movement" on figurations and, as such, is the foremost quality of painting, "has its root in the carefree wandering of the spirit" (you xin;h Guo Ruoxu, 34). In its element like a fish in water or like man along the tao, the spirit does not fix its eyes: when the Taoist Guo Ruoxu uses the term "carefree wandering," which serves as the title for the first chapter of the Zhuangzi, to express the movements of someone who, free of any aim, no longer submits to any injunction or constraint and flourishes in that fluidity, the

availability he evokes is analyzed from two chief angles, as being without preoccupations and as ambient harmony. On one hand, the painter "makes a complete void" in his conscience so that "mists and clouds and all the brilliance of the world, in concert with the breath-energy that ceaselessly brings to life between heaven and earth," "comes up alongside and gathers around," so that "extraordinary forms spring up" under the brush (Li Rihua, L.B., 131). There is no better way to describe the nonobjectification of the painted. If, however, "worldly cares preoccupy us and internal purification is not completed," we can spend all day facing the hills, or all day copying a painting, and we will never produce anything but the work of an artisan.

The other, complementary imperative is to have a "free and easy" spirit (congrong zide; Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 110). What does being free and easy mean, and is it possible to extract it from a common, atheoretical way of thinking? Are we not ill-equipped to conceive of it, once it does not partake of the register of moral values or psychological faculties (those that philosophy uses to divide things up into a tidy arrangement)? That being free and easy, in fact, is both situational and infrasubjective. Place yourself "opposite a bright window," "at a clean table" (and also in a studio that is well-heated in winter and cool in summer, spacious and profoundly secluded). If Chinese theorists are not averse to providing these prosaic details in order to compose a hygiene of painting, it is because they know that these considerations do not fail to bring about a discreet but decisive conditioning (of the relaxed state), upstream from the power of seeing and thinking, and that our inattention to them is enough to hamper everything.

At the same time, the theorists openly celebrate the need for the internal purification that constitutes painting. Shitao was the first to do so (chaps. 15 and 16). "When man is obscured by things, he keeps company with dust"; and "when he is in the hands of things, his spirit is put through an ordeal." He is led to draw meticulously and painstakingly, and it destroys him. In the same way, in letting his ink and brush be obscured in the world's dust, he encumbers himself and becomes narrow. In the end, he cannot make his spirit "alert." Yet it is that liveliness that does the trick. As Shitao says nobly, "in letting things follow their obscurity as things," in letting "dust commit itself with dust," my spirit is not put through an ordeal. And, when my spirit is not struggling, "then there is painting." In washing off the dust of the world and liberating yourself from its opacity and its grasp—let us be open to what these laconic formulas, tinged with Buddhism, manage to express in a nonpsy-

chological (or nonmystical) way about an internal deliverance from slavery—the painter's spirit, emancipated and unblocked, is returned to its innate liveliness and reconnects with the spontaneity of processes. With nothing further hindering him, thanks to his "limpidity," he constitutes himself as a fount of immanence: "I make the ink move as if it were done and I manipulate the brush as if without acting." Just as the spirit "in its detachment" "is like the original Void," "on the narrow surface [of the painting], a foot square, heaven and earth, mountains-waters, and all that exists rule themselves."

Let us clearly understand the formula: once the spirit does not struggle, once it is no longer tormented by toil, "then there is painting." "There is painting" when the line springs up of itself, thanks to the complete availability that the painter achieves through his contemplation. The European tradition, in fixing on the gaze and constructing it, celebrates painting as infinite toil composed of doubt and tenacity, experiences it as a struggle and as confrontation. To find a way out, it appeals to the painter's inventiveness and genius (the ingenium of Timanthes, in Pliny's day), especially in the modern age, when to paint is to solve a problem that sprouts anew at every instant, at least until, in a turn-about, speed becomes a criterion for the work of art or the trance is considered de rigueur. The Chinese tradition, conversely, is just as intent on conceiving the ideal of painting, like that of wisdom, on the order of the "natural," as what is no longer strained, what does not call for inventiveness. Unlike the European painter, the Chinese painter does not envision painting as a problem and is therefore not in quest of solutions. Even less does he conceive of painting as an endless struggle, or each new canvas as a battle to be waged.* In reality, he does not even see his painting as being confronted with difficulties. There is no true painting in his eyes except one that comes on its own. If painting is in fact "difficult," as Guo Xi acknowledges (27), it is because of all the internal maturation and elevation, relaxation and letting go that is required to gain access to the ease of that letting come.

^{* &}quot;Cézanne's apples are also a battle painting. A line, a color, a canvas, a perpetual battle. The spirit loves laziness" (Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, 174). We find the same thing in Vasari's *Life of Raphael*: "I cannot relate at length the numerous fine devices employed by the artist in representing the [figures] and how . . . he represents grief, fear and death"; "In spite of all his diligence he could never surpass Lionardo." Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. A. B. Hinds, 4 vols. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950), 2:239 and 244.

3. Of the two anecdotes in the Zhuangzi often repeated in the treatises on painting and serving as support for their reflections, the first elucidates internal availability, the second the capacity for concentration. These two qualities go hand in hand. Prince Yuan of the Song Dynasty wanted to have a panel created. A number of clerks presented themselves and, after receiving their instructions and bowing, they remained planted there, "licking their brushes and grinding their ink." There were so many that "half of them were left outside." One clerk arrived late, relaxed, without rushing. After receiving his instructions and bowing, he went back home. The prince sent to find out what he was doing. He had loosened his clothes, stripped to the waist, and was sitting with his legs spread. In short, he had begun by making himself "at ease." "That one suits me," said the prince, "he is a true painter" (chap. 21.7; cited by Guo Xi, 27; Guo Ruoxu, 34; Rao Ziran, 224, and so on). For the second anecdote, it is usually the conclusion that is cited. Confucius sees a hunchback coming out of the woods. The hunchback has been catching grasshoppers at the end of a pole, as confidently as if he were picking them up off the ground. "What skill!" exclaimed Confucius. "Do you have a way, a tao, for accomplishing it?" Here is my way, responded the other: for five or six months, I practice holding balls on the pole, one on top of the other. When I have managed to hold two there, I still miss a few grasshoppers; when I have managed to hold three, I miss only one out of ten; and when I have gotten to five, I catch the grasshoppers as if I were picking them up. At that stage, "I hold my body motionless as a tree trunk rooted in the ground; I hold my arm inert as a withered tree branch." "However vast the universe and however numerous things, I know nothing then but the wings of grasshoppers. I don't turn around or lean over and I won't trade grasshopper wings for all the riches on earth: how could I not catch them therefore?" Turning to his disciples, Confucius (the Confucius of the Zhuangzi) then comments: "If you put to work the aspirations of your deepest being without letting it be divided, you will achieve the spirit through concentration" (chap. 19.3; cf. Fang Xun, 24).

The son of Guo Xi (12) said: My father could set aside a painting he had begun, not even glancing at it for several weeks, because his desire no longer led him to it. If he felt impelled to paint, he forgot all the rest. But should the slightest disturbance arise, he would leave his work on the drawing board, without worrying any more about it. The day he let his brush fall on the sheet of paper, it had to be near a bright window, in front of a clean table. He burned incense all around, had "excellent brushes" and a "marvelous ink" available nearby, washed his hands and cleaned

the inkstone, all "as if to welcome a notable guest." "His spirit unoccupied, his intentionality took its determination and he set to work" (Guo Xi, 12; cf. Guo Ruoxu, 34; Rao Ziran, 223). This relation of availabilitydetermination, availability leading to determination and determination being on a par with availability, truly appears to be the crux of what constitutes painting. The vacuity to which a spirit liberated from all preoccupation (xian) gains access allows for such a concentration of intentionality that it will guide the drawing. As Chinese thought teaches in general, both in the realm of wisdom and in that of strategy, if conditions are arranged adequately, the effect counted on (but not "aimed for," which is too direct) comes about on its own, as a consequence. That result cannot fail: since the effect is already engaged upstream (of the process), there is no longer any seeking to obtain it, unlike in European notions of finality. All risk vanishes; both expenditure and resistance are eliminated. There is no longer a confrontation. That is also why the Chinese painter does not have to "struggle," doubt, or even work. When I have gained access to such an availability, says Guo Xi (27), "on every side, wherever I turn, I encounter the source." Therefore, internal thoughts "do not get used up" and the paintbrush is not "encumbered" (Guo Ruoxu, 34).

When we use the term "spirit" in Europe, or "mind," or "consciousness," or "soul," we understand it as an agency that we personally possess as an essence and which depends for its use only on itself, conferring on us the initiative of a pure subject transcendentally governing its faculties. That is why we have paid little attention to anything like a hygiene of creation. The spirit is a pure spirit, on its own, on principle. As a "thing," the spirit thinks—res cogitans. Thinking is the deliberate operation under its power. When we cannot account for the fact that the spirit is all of a sudden favorably inclined to conceive and create, we conveniently (mythologically) invoke the divine (the Muses), upstream from the Ego-subject and more Subject than the subject. The self "is an Other," a breath-spirit that comes to us from elsewhere. In the beginning is inspiration. But whether to conceive of the activity of the self or that of the world, the Chinese adhere closely to processes. The Chinese term is jing-shen, "purification-spirit (dimension)." The "spirit" is considered less a given faculty than an operation, resulting from a process of refinement-distillation. Jing, which denotes that operation, designates in the first place "choice" grain, top quality husked rice, hence "fine," "subtle," and more broadly, the product of refinement or distillation, the "essence" of a perfume, the "spirit" of wine, sperm: in short, every form and mode of quintessence. Once we have assessed that difference, we

can consider this formula from Guo Xi more closely (10): "You must apply yourself to refining-distilling (jing) in order to unify," because "if you do not refine (or distill), the spirit capacity (shen) is not concentrated." On that basis, the operation of refining-distilling (jing) and the spirit capacity (shen) stand in a relation of reciprocity. Just as we must refine-distill "that" so that the spirit capacity becomes concentrated, the spirit capacity must "dedicate itself entirely" (to its work) so that the refined-distilled character (of the work) "is manifested." Using the old word "quintessentialize" (to distill as a quintessence) for jing, I can summarize: I quintessentialize "that" to concentrate my spirit capacity and, thanks to the concentration of spirit with which I pursue my work, the quintessence of that work appears in turn.

But what is the "that" whose resource I discover in myself and that I refine and distill? I "quintessentialize"—what exactly? It will be clear that this vague referent, or rather this referent left indefinite, can point only to what, in me and outside, indefinitely forms reality: breath-energy, qi. The reason the Chinese were predisposed to conceive a hygiene of creation is that they viewed the soul and body not separately but as a single breath-energy. In coagulating, that breath-energy forms bodies and, in becoming purified, refined, and distilled, it forms the spirit. At the very root of availability, and hence at the starting point of painting, is the "regulation" of breath-energy (li qi) that the painter gathers up in himself. He cannot pay too much attention to that condition from which the entire work stems, as Guo Xi subsequently confirms: "If you accumulate an indolent breath-energy" (leading to inertia) and then you "strain" (yourself), the brush traces will be soft and flaccid and will lack decisiveness. That flaw lies in the fact that you have not applied yourself to "refining-distilling." And, "if you accumulate a muddled breath-energy" and you thereby "blur," the forms will be obscured and tedious, they will not be lively and will lack momentum and joy. That flaw lies in the fact that the spirit has not "dedicated itself entirely" to that work to bring its quintessence to light.

4. From such a concentration is born the painter's capacity to "become one" with [what] he paints, by mingling his "life" with it. But as soon as I repeat this notion in French, the expression again becomes indecisive and slips away. Whatever its pertinence was in Chinese has fallen apart beneath the words, has lapsed into weak thinking. I am afraid we have not yet arrived at the proper language, or at least at the proper logic, and are condemned to being grandiloquent. This theme of a "fusion" in/with

what is no longer an object, since "oneself" no longer posits itself at a distance as a perceiving subject, is not unfamiliar to us in Europe, but it can only be suspect to European reason (reason, in fact, has a hard time expressing it). Beyond its celebration by the romantics, the theme slips disagreeably into ecstasy and mysticism. And that "slippage" will not be rectifiable so long as we are unable to give it a "theoretical" basis, to use our own terminology, like the basis provided by the Zhuangzi in conceiving how the breath-energy that brings me into being is of the same nature as that of the world and can blend with it (beginning of chap. 2, and commentary by Guo Xiang). By means of an overall dé-tente, relaxation or "untensing," of the person, even to the point of dissolution (of self: ta yan), initially by shutting down and "forgetting" the faculties of intellection, [you] are no longer "face to face" with anything, and every "view"point on a "partner" dissolves (the partner is interpreted as the world or as the body, depending on the commentary). With the enclosure that constitutes the individual vanishing, what remains—on the near side of any language and any notion—is energetic capacity gathering itself up (se recueillir), and such is the effective, nonsubjectified sense of the Chinese contemplation (recueillement). In its respiratory effusiveness (er xu), the sage's breath-energy mingles completely with the world's breath-energy in constant renewal. It is "tuned to" it: the Zhuangzi can continue only by evoking music.

In fact, is it not listening rather than seeing that is now at issue? Sight aggressively projects attention outward, whereas listening gathers it up within. Hence when the disciple asks the master in the Zhuangzi the usual question, namely, how to progress, the master recommends a purifying "abstinence." This is no longer the ritual abstention from food and drink but "abstinence" of the "spirit," understood as a constituted, more or less fixed disposition of spirit comfortably managing the world from its point of view, but also, as a result, no longer able to "listen" to the world (chap. 4.1). The Taoist master explains that, as you rise toward internal concentration, you need to listen, not with your ears, but with your spirit; and not with your spirit but with breath-energy, qi. The ears "confine themselves to hearing" and the spirit "confines itself to conforming." The spirit can lead only to an objective adequation with the external world, a sort of rigorous fitting together in the Chinese expression, with the forms and determinations of things, thanks to which the spirit can represent them to itself. But, by moving back inside us to the more primordial, more unappropriated, nonrigid stage of breath-energy, we relate to external realities in an "empty," available way and enter into

a relationship, not of knowledge, but of complicity with them.* In its continual ascent, the actualizing breath-energy, which deploys in external realities as it deploys in us, abolishes the demarcations between them and us, and makes them communicate from within. All in all, the tao is only that "gathering together of emptiness," concludes the *Zhuangzi*, both in and through emptiness, by virtue of which things freely—that is, no longer submitting to the injunction of the spirit—gather themselves up in us (which is no longer "us").

The disciple, Hui, immediately draws this conclusion: "I am not yet able to put that in operation," because "in fact," I am still "myself," by myself (zi). At the stage of "listening" (in accord) with breath-energy, an individuated subject no longer exists. "Had I achieved it, I would no longer be me," or rather, there "would not be me, Hui, any longer." The figure of a self-subject dissolves in an utterly logical manner during this process of contemplation, as the poet Su Dongpo celebrates it with reference to the painter Wen Tong (Yu Ke). I no longer see anything strained, or wavering, in his language (though that aspect inevitably returns in the translation):

When Yu Ke paints bamboo,
He sees the bamboo and does not see the other men;
How could he restrict himself to not seeing the others?
Dissolved, he also abandons his person;
His person in concert with the bamboo transforms [itself]:
Coolness and limpidity inexhaustibly spring up. (L.W.Y., 230)

The painter begins by "seeing," but that initial—or rather triggering—act of seeing is not pursued as a gaze (as "prospect") and is absorbed. The enclosure constituted by the personality comes undone (the expression is repeated in the *Zhuangzi*) because the personality undergoes a process of transformation with what would ordinarily be taken as an object of perception (and "ever since Zhuangzi is no longer of this world," Su Dongpo concludes rhetorically, "who still has knowledge of such a con-

^{*} The critique of objective knowledge is explicitly undertaken by Zhuangzi (beginning of chap. 6). Knowledge is a "source of difficulty": not only is life eaten up by the desire to extend knowledge that on principle is endless, but knowledge also depends on its object to be adequate. And that on which it depends as an object, in this world in continuous transformation, sinking down into the undifferentiated, "is not determined." Hence the pursuit of knowledge is futile.

centration of spirit?"). The Chinese scholar generally tells us, therefore, that we must go back to the dissolution-disidentification of the subject, resorbing the gaze, the necessary condition for painting. Since the mountain is primarily "calm-motionless," for example (*C.K.*, 241), it is proper, when painting the mountain, to "also sink into calm-motionlessness." Anyone painting the mountain must share the state of the mountain's "spirit." Others report (Fu Zai, *T.H.L.*, 70) that Zhang Zao would suddenly start painting like a madman, with such concentration that forms sprang out like bolts of lightning. He had forsaken all art and his intentionality mingled with the original transformation from which the world is constantly born (*yuan hua*)." All beings then lay "in the treasure trove of the conscience" and no longer "before his ears and eyes."

5. All the same, does not the painter paint with his eyes? But what does that with mean in "paint with the eyes," as we would say "listen with the ears" in the case of music, and does it suffice to make painting a visual activity? The question cannot be avoided in the case of China, since it is through a much vaster existential experience, and in keeping with a process of maturation beginning upstream from the gaze and resorbing it, that painting comes into being, as its theorists tell us with increasing clarity.6 "If you wish to steal away their creation-transformation," says Guo Xi of mountains (17), nothing is more "spiritual" than to "love" them, nothing more "quintessential" than to "apply" yourself to them (qin), p nothing "greater" than to "get your fill walking among them" and "looking at them amply." "This is set out and ordered in detail within your bosom" and, "though my eye does not see the silk and my hand is unaware of ink and brush," in complete abandon and freedom, in internal detachment and obscurity, "there is nothing that is not my painting." Note that "seeing amply" (yu kan)q occurs only as the last phase in that process of assimilation deep into the being constitutive of the mountain. That being is captivated by a gradual and overall permeation—diffusion and distillation—until the day when the painter, suddenly grabbing his brush, can render it without resistance, without having to struggle or even hesitate. What does he "steal away"? Not the characteristics of an individual mountain, set out and analyzed by the gaze, but, Guo Xi says at the beginning, the "creation-transformation" of the mountain. This assumes that the painter achieves such an integration with what constitutes the consistency of the mountain that, upstream from its forms, he can connect with their logic of coming about, and as a result with their fount of immanence, and these mobilize him energetically. (As

Paul Claudel put it, let him "co-naisse" the mountain, not in the sense of connaître, knowing, but in the sense of being born with it, co-naître.) That is why the "maturation of the gaze" born of that investment will lead him to render the mountain, not in terms of its qualities as an object, but in harmony with its dimension as process (in formation-variation) and in the "greatness" of its compossibility—without, however, representing it.

Let us ask the question in its most general form. What precisely separates the act of grasping the "creation-transformation," whether of the mountain or of the most insignificant thing, from the act of representing them as a visual object? The most insignificant bamboo shoot, Su Dongpo tells us (S.H.P., 218), contains in itself the entire development of the bamboo's knots and leaves. Whether the bamboo is (later) led to lose its husk or to stand upright like a sword, it already possesses everything at birth. Thus, if people now paint bamboo "knot by knot" and add to it "leaf after leaf," "how could a bamboo be there once again?" Since reality is made up only of a regulated process, the Chinese tell us, to paint bamboo is not to paint it by inventorying its properties as we grasp them, by examining it perceptually, but to paint the coherent process by virtue of which, even in the most insignificant of its parts, a stalk of bamboo becomes bamboo—comes about as bamboo—deploys as bamboo. To paint bamboo, Su Dongpo continues, you must first arrange for "the bamboo to form in your bosom." Then, "seizing the brush and looking with mature consideration," "you see what you wish to paint" and go after it the way birds swoop down on their prey, because your state of maturation is so advanced. But if, in doing so, "you ease up, however little," from lack of concentration, "it's lost." Before casting your gaze on the bamboo, you gather up within yourself, "in your bosom," what constitutes the generative structure of the bamboo. During that process of integration, "seeing" does not make presence rise up, nor does it uncover. Rather, through seeing, a logic of immanence (by virtue of which the bamboo becomes bamboo), which the painter had previously assimilated and brought to maturation, all the while grounding his life force—through relaxation and dissolution of self—in/with what constitutes the bamboo's life force.

Did the Chinese painter never work from life? "I went to the greatest lengths to find extraordinary mountaintops to make sketches of," Shitao confides at the end of his chapter on landscape (chap. 8). And it is true that, as Pierre Ryckmans copiously illustrates, the Chinese scholar liked to travel, taking along ink and brush, to sketch mountaintops, trees, or

clouds on his way. But did that lead him to represent? Rather, I believe that the painter was thereby enriching his experience, both morphological and ecological, of forms and things, so that he would be able to develop the system of variance that then allowed him to produce a group of trees and mountaintops in its greatest diversity as a function of the broadest range of possibilities, and thus to confer on them a maximum of con-sistency (cf. Tang Dai, C.K., 256). According to the valuable efforts at identification to which Pierre Ryckmans devoted himself,7 it appears that the mountains Shitao lists to deploy his typological system of mountains ("Pillar of the Sky," "Shining Star," "Five Old Men," and so on) have emblematic names that can be attributed to a variety of peaks, or which cannot be identified with certainty (chap. 9). It is no surprise that Shitao later writes: "But at the moment of making the ink move over the paper and manipulating the brush," "why wait any longer"-I am translating word for word—"for the sight of mountaintops (and of their furrows)?" After he has copiously sketched with his hand, and assimilated in his spirit, the infinite configurational and structural richness of the mountain (of its "forms" and its "furrows"), what need would there be additionally to "see"—seeing would then be only anecdotal—this mountain, with these furrows? As soon as a stroke falls on the paper, Shitao continues, "the rest of the strokes follow in sequence." As soon as the first principle is mastered, "the ones that follow are added to it." That is, as soon as you begin to paint, since the logic internal to the figurative line is entirely self-sufficient, any supplemental seeing could only do harm to the self-deployment of the coherence under way. "In examining the goingcoming of a single stroke, you gain access to the sphere of a host of principles (of coherence)"; and, merely through the exploitation of that coherence internal to the line, the form and liveliness of the landscape—"mountains-waters"—are also "determined."

Yet the doubt that overwhelmed us regarding the primordial function of the gaze in the case of Chinese painting can no longer be set aside; it shakes the entire edifice of the object to its very foundation. In the first place, to what extent does the scroll hanging on the wall "regard" itself? In what I believe is the first text addressing the question (*L.B.*, 583), the theorist Zong Bing (fourth century) says:

Staying at my place of retreat, I regulate my breath-energy: wiping clean my cup and making my zither sing, I deploy paintings and there face separation; while remaining seated, I explore the distant corners of the world.

He does not say, "I look," as the line is usually translated, but that, having withdrawn to a remote spot, in secret, contemplative, I face the scroll, I am its partner and I respond to it (you-dui). This expression will often serve subsequently to evoke the relationship that the art lover maintains with the painting.* Guo Ruoxu, among others, begins his important treatise as follows (p. 1): each time I sit down in the empty and silent room, I hang a scroll very high against the white wall, and all day long I "dwell facing," "responding" to it, "contemplative." Contented as I am, I am no longer cognizant of the greatness of heaven and earth or of all the complications of things. Even less am I troubled by the contingencies of favor or disgrace in the world of power and profit; nor am I led to speculate on the chances of success or the risks of failure in the sphere of "urgency." Let us note two things about that exordium. First, literati painting is not destined to be exhibited continuously, as the picture is for us, but is selected and unrolled occasionally, depending on the moment (and contributing to the quality of the moment), for oneself or for one's friends. Second, there is no reference here to the eye and even less call for the activity of perception. Rather, because the painting does not "depict" (objects), it is through its internal coherence that the (painted) landscape deploys a certain system of energy into which the spirit, in becoming refined-distilled, can be absorbed.

^{*} This sense of "facing" (dut), which establishes a meditative face-to-face relationship with the painting, is especially well rendered by Fang Xun (41): "Facing the painting of the ancients," "you remain pensive-silent and, meditating on it indefinitely, the spirit has left you," "such is the serenity of painting." The serenity of painting is when, "facing painting" (responding to it), "no anxious thought arises any longer."

Peindre n'est pas dépeindre

1. In what is otherwise a very careful piece of work, the French translator of the Shitao translates the beginning of the chapter "On Groves and Trees" (chap. 12) as follows: "When the ancients painted trees, they represented them in groups of three, five, or ten, depicting them in all their aspects, each according to its own character."1 Let me render the Chinese text accurately: "When the ancients traced trees, by three, or five, or nine, or ten, they did so in such a way that, in one direction or the other, either yin or yang, each should have an aspect proper to it." In the Chinese text, neither the notion of representation nor that of depiction appears. The French translator, it seems, has introduced them to smooth out the formulation, to make the meaning more explicit and to further integrate it with our expectations, thus making his translation more fluent. To that end, he neglects the adversative terms indicating how figuration comes about, as if they were simply idiomatic expressions without importance; conversely, he names the operations involved—"represent," "depict"—that any

act of painting, once it is really trees you are painting, would logically imply, and which thus need to be reestablished conceptually.

Once again, I wonder if, on the pretext of facilitating communication by molding the meaning to fit our conceptions (which have become global, thanks to the now irrevocable success of the Western theoretical toolkit), that procedure does not conceal a difference that there is every interest in resolutely bringing to light, in order to explore its radicality, foster its fruitfulness, and in that way, perhaps, open other paths to painting. Let us shake off that lazy "self-evidence" that spares us any further worry. Shitao does not state, or even imply, that the painter should reproduce trees, taking samples of forms or aspects of the natural world and transferring them onto the canvas or paper, with painting stepping in to duplicate nature, or at least beginning its operation in that way. Far from it. The perspective he develops from the opening of his chapter is that of a logic internal to figuration alone, depending only on it, whose aim is to confer a maximum of tension—and, as a result, of effect—on that figuration. Solely through the relationship of oppositioncomplementarity, which forms a system—"backward/forward, either yin or yang"—each element drawn, in reply to the other, acquires on its own an aspect proper to it (and not, as in Ryckmans's translation, "its" own character, which would refer to a nature-essence). And the subsequent argument confirms that in the painting of trees, everything is directed and coordinated with the aim of producing such a system of energetic tensions: "Through protrusions-recesses, above-below, life and movement are taken to the limit. When I draw pines, cedars, old acacias or old junipers, my method is to group them by threes or fives: their liveliness is that of heroes who stand up and dance, lowering and lifting their heads, crouching or standing firm, undulating and poised."

There is no "representation" inasmuch as figuration is not envisioned in terms of its capacity to refer to (trees "in reality," or "nature"). The Chinese painter's motivation is not to render present (again) some "that"—his figuration does not stand in lieu of. His aim is not to extract a stable and definitive "so" from its indefiniteness as thing, to promote it and reveal it to itself. Similarly, there is no "depiction," since the imperative that drives the painting in this case and leads the painter to paint on is not to render more fully, in keeping with the "de-" of completion, down to the slightest detail, in an ever more meticulous and convincing manner, to the point of "deceiving" the eye (in a "trompe l'oeil," deception of the eye, or rather a "trompe l'esprit," deception of the mind, to cite Picasso's emendation) and thus give the illusion of truth. Rather, in this

grouping of trees, the aim is to increase and condense the vital potential that this figuration is led to embody by systematically developing and varying the play of polarities.

Painting's inclination, according to the Renaissance painter Alberti, is to represent things seen, res visas repraesentare (the expression is already in Pliny 34.88). From this fact, Alberti methodically deduced all the operations that in his view constitute the act of painting, and made them his ultimate aim. It is not only that the things painted and the person beholding the painting seem to be on the same plane and belong to the same definition of space, which, according to Alberti's prescriptions, the window opened by the picture and perspective foster. Above all, because the thing seen occupies a place, the painter must begin by "circumscribing" that place, delimiting its surface by outlining its form.² That form is defined by its referent; it has a model and a previous existence in nature. It is not defined in the first place by the system of tensions in which it is caught and which makes it come about, both animating and deploying it, as is the case for the Chinese painter. The figural elements, the colors, and the movement are given in nature, and the Albertian painter assembles them for the needs of composition by producing equivalents of them (imitari, says Alberti), whose pertinence must be verifiable at every moment. You need only reflect nature in a mirror, the painter's master and guide, and compare it with the painting (Leonardo).*

The European experience of painting in the classical age did not remain at that point. The paintings of the Northern masters did not give precedence to the *istoria*, to which Alberti's imitation through painting was devoted. As a result, they were better able to undertake landscape painting. We need to point out, however, that these masters developed in even greater depth the scrupulous art of "description," as if to compensate for their lesser interest in narration. In fact, it is in Northern landscape paintings that the art of "depicting" reached its pinnacle. If every object in such paintings exposes the greatest surface area possible, rather than being constituted by the single viewpoint of perspective, it was so that the object would be offered more expansively to the gaze. Through

^{*} No one is clearer than Alberti in summing up painting's aim as the representation of objects: "The function of the painter is this: to con-scribe with lines and to tint with colour on whatever panel or wall is given him all the bodies given so that, at a certain distance and in a certain position determined by the central focal point, everything you see appears in the same relief and seems to have the same aspect as the bodies given." Alberti, On Painting, 89 [translation modified—trans.].

the multiplication of its aspects, that object could be reproduced in the most meticulous detail, hence in its full presence, down to the slightest nuance and even, apparently, without arbitrariness. At the time, Dutch scientists, heirs to Bacon, were expecting the observation and recording of visible things to dissipate the mirages of beliefs and interpretations. They maintained that the comprehension of nature came solely from the accurate representation of the images received by the retina. In addition, new instruments, microscopes and telescopes, made available to the gaze different horizons—far away or close up—of which the mind had heretofore had no knowledge or even suspicion. Simultaneously, the painter entrusted the task of reproducing as rigorously as possible through individual portraits—the identity of things to the "loyal hand" and "faithful eye," conscientious artisans. Although representation has never been able to be an exact replica, because it always entails projection and symbolization (as Gombrich reminded us, after many others), we know that modern art defined itself in great part as a break from a mimetic orientation. In the term "depiction," that too comfortable "de-" expresses a loss. That is not so much because of all the detail rendered by depiction but because of the degree of representing-objectifying it entails, all the renunciation that the "de-" of completion involves. Whereas "to paint" can be an absolute verb—"I paint"—"to depict" is necessarily transitive. A "that" is posited in advance, presupposed, onto which the act of painting is folded back and by which it is governed. That act immediately shrinks as a result, becoming both bogged down and withdrawn. Yes, depiction is a renunciation. Let us repeat with Braque: Écrire n'est pas décrire, peindre n'est pas dépeindre. Scription (writing) is not description, picturing (painting) is not depicting.3

De-piction, conversely, which puts the "de-" of undoing to work in the act of painting as the literati painter undertakes it—as we previously said de-characterize, de-termine, de-represent, and also dé-tendre, relax or untense—is the opposite of the completing-enslaving depiction intent on (illusorily) rendering the perceptual truth, a depiction in quest of an ever more rigorous adequation with the object. That de-piction remains allusive, alternating between emptiness and fullness, and does no more than sketch, taking and giving back at the same time, "taking" from forms and "giving back" to the blankness of the silk or paper. It refrains from completing, keeps the painted submerged in the indifferentiation from which it emanates and wherein its animation lies, to which it owes its respiration. In another chapter of his treatise (chap. 7), Shitao uses a formula that already shows the degree to which he has freed the different

elements composing the landscape from their expected status as represented objects. This time, he does not even express painting the mountain or painting the water as a directly transitive relationship. He says to paint "as to the mountain" and "as to the water." The mountain or water or trees or men are proposed to the painting, not as forms and beings proper, but as sources-supports of tension that the painter has the responsibility to exploit following their various modalities. The relation involved is no longer one of determination but rather of *de*-substantialization, with the force of transmission-propagation. Only the animating effect derived from the register of one or another element is to be taken into consideration:

Painting as to the mountain, that confers spirituality; painting as to the water, that confers movement; painting as to trees, that confers life; painting as to men, that confers transcendence.

Whether the mountain or the water or trees or men, the components of the landscape are painted not for their own characteristics and with reference to an essence, but for the de-reifying liveliness that each one, in accord with its own resources and in its relation of complementarity to the others, is able to release. Instead of serving the objective of representation, they contribute to the configurational—energetico-spiritual—system in which, I believe, the landscape of the Chinese literati consists. They do not depict anything concrete (natural-material) but paint concretions (in distillation-transformation). They paint vectors of vitality, not visual objects. And, in painting these elements that compose the landscape, the Chinese literati express the resonance internal to the breath-energy that permeates the elements and of which each element is an individuation. That resonance, emanating from the tension of things and liberated from resemblance, releases—I shall return to this term—a spirit dimension on its own.

2. A large map forms the background for Jan Vermeer's Allegory of Painting, dominated by an emblematic title inscribed in capital letters, to serve as a lesson to the painter: DESCRIPTIO. And in fact, one of the features that most closely links Dutch painting to the art of depiction as regards the landscape is the relation it traditionally maintains with cartography. Specialists in the period tell us that perhaps never before in the entire history of painting have the two realms overlapped to such a

degree. ⁴ Cartographers were also painters (the art of Hendrik Goltzius forms a bridge between them), just as a number of painters were not unacquainted with the techniques of surveying. *Landshap* (landscape) designates both what the surveyor measured and what the artist represented. The practice of mapping and drawing also unites the two. In mapped landscapes, the buildings, cities with their steeples, windmills, clusters of trees, and even the slightest furrows in the ground are so many reference points for drawing the site, and are meticulously recorded. A picture of the "landscape" is a survey of it.

How could we not detect therein a line of cleavage going back to the very beginning of the art of landscape painting? Indeed, in one of the first Chinese treatises on painting (Wang Wei in the fifth century), the literati painter openly takes his distance from cartographical representation. Instead of conceiving painting as a prolongation of choro- and topographical description, he begins by distinguishing painting from cartography (L.B., 585). The mistake made by those who deal with painting, says Wang Wei by way of introduction, is that they do not concern themselves with anything but "aspect and layout." In other words, they confine themselves to the physical conformation. But what the ancients (rightly) meant by painting was not to "draw a map of cities and borders, to distinguish regions and prefectures, to indicate hills and reliefs, to trace lakes and rivers," in short, to establish a map representing a determined site with its points of reference. That would entail remaining true to sterile, dull, objective data. Rather, the purpose of the landscape, as we now know, is to "dissolve" something of the spiritual in it by "taking root in form" (585). As soon as vision is limited by a particular horizon, the landscape becomes "narrow," loses the functional universality that makes it exist, and no longer allows the free interaction from which its "transformations" proceed, "in one direction or the other," horizontally and vertically. What separates the pictorial landscape from cartography and makes it undepictable in the view of the Chinese, is, in the first place, that it is undelimitable. In opening indefinitely its evasive forms, Wang Wei concludes, it brings a "spirit" dimension down toward it. As we have seen (above, chap. 8, sect. 2), the brush may "copy"-"describe," but what it reproduces is "the constitutive being of the original Great Void." Thus, on the limited space of the paper, the most imposing mountains will be rendered schematically by the most insignificant lines: a curve of the stroke will stand for Mount Song, and a lively stroke for Mount Hua. These figurative strokes will be as expressive for the landscape as those of a smile traced by the various components of the face-"eyebrowsforehead-cheeks-jaws"—which let the smile float between them like an emanation. In the energetic conception of the Chinese, a phenomenon exists, not as thing, even less as in-itself, but by virtue of the tension that permeates it and is released by it. As a result, nothing is definitively limited to its concretion. Wang Wei asks in conclusion: Could you not even say that "an isolated cliff, jutting out in its luxuriance, emits clouds" (585)?

The energetic tension passing through form that the Chinese painter tends to paint, rather than simply reproducing morphologically the form's contours, comes in the first place from the fact that this landscape is born from the reduction of an immensity (shi in contrast to xing;b see also Zong Bing, L.B., 583). The landscape he paints is cosmic. And the landscape is not just any form in tension; in Shitao's own terms, it is "the form-tension of Heaven and Earth" themselves in their greatest extension (chap. 8). Since the measure of heaven is "loftiness" and "brightness," and that of earth "breadth" and "density," if the painter does not put in play that double measure of heaven and earth in everything he draws, he will be unable to make the landscape variable even in its unfathomability (Shitao's language borders on the inexpressible: "he will not be able to modify-transform the unfathomability of the landscape"). It is also in deploying that "dimension of Heaven" that the painter can vary the spirit dimension emanating from the landscape, just as it is in deploying that "measure of Earth" that he can make breath-energy circulate like its "pulse," passing through the arteries of the relief.

Where does such a capacity come from? The literal sense of "capacity" should be given precedence here (the capacity of the infinite), before the sense of power or faculty. How could such an immensity, impossible to grasp, be contained in the cramped space of the painting? Shitao tells us (chap. 8) that it would be impossible to look closely at the vastness of the landscape — a territory extending over thousands of li, clouds amassing over tens of thousands of li, "peaks linked together in chains and ridges following one after another"—with one's eyes glued to it: "Even immortals could not fly completely around it." But, "by fathoming it with a single brushstroke," I will be able to embody that infinity and, through that single stroke, will participate in the "promotion-transformation" of the world. Let us understand this difference: the landscape is uncompassable, however persevering the attention of our gaze, but it is "fathomable" with a single brushstroke. Because this first and unique brushstroke continues to bear within it the plenitude of the undifferentiated Fount from which it emerges, and because, upstream from the later

individuations that particularize the line, it still contains all the possible variations to come, or resorbs them in its unity, this stroke is, as we know, boundless in the strictest sense. That is why it and it alone will be "commensurate" with heaven and earth, sharing in their immensity. And, Shitao proudly affirms, in possessing that single brushstroke, I can "string together" both the "form" and the "spirit" that constitute the landscape, can do so from the inside, in a single burst, without any discontinuity between these two aspects.

3. How do we move from one to the other, however, from form to spirit, without being obliged to leave the materiality of one to gain access to the infinity of the other—a problem that still troubles metaphysics? What constitutes "landscape" and which of its visible forms are released, through pure exhalation-emanation, from the spirit—with form, through its tension, becoming spirit? The "spiritual," the Chinese painter tells us, does not require a hereafter or imply any break. On the contrary, it is [that which], across the world, makes the world "communicate" from within and keeps it interacting. Hence, not only are the forms of the landscape evasive, opening onto the invisible through the indefiniteness of distance and the incommensurable measure of the first stroke, they also liberate one another, one by virtue of another, from their reifying opacity. One unlocks another by responding to it, and draws it from its mire. Energy is born from their polarity. In technical terms, the tension within the forms of the landscape comes not only from the fact that they bear immensity within them, but also, in the first place, as the figuration of trees has begun to show, from the fact that these forms require one another, call to one another, and deploy through opposition-complementarity. When he composes a landscape, Wang Wei (eighth century) has no regard for what the visible thing might be outside the painting (L.B., 592). The elements of the landscape fall into order as he evokes them, solely in keeping with the logic internal to figuration, and with no weight given to a referential relation. Everything engenders and highlights everything else, from one stroke to the next. Wang Wei does not represent or reproduce or transport something of the world into the painting because, for him, it is enough to produce polarity to make the painting come about as world from the start. That is because it is always from a relation of polarity, yin/yang, that "the world" is born—that it comes about that "there is" world.

To bring the relation between the poles of the landscape fully into play and to generate the energetic potential holding it in tension and

animating it, Wang Wei follows a dual logic, which the Book of Changes, at the dawn of civilization, highlighted through the relation between two constitutive strokes, the solid and the broken: — and — —. In the first place, he reinforces sameness, just as when, within a single figure from the Book of Changes, two strokes, yin or yang, follow and reinforce each other: = = or =. Hence, says Wang Wei, "on sheer cliffs," it is good to place "an unusual tree." Through this pairing, the effect will be all the more intense. To paint the tranquility of the landscape inviting us to rest:

The landing pier for the ferry; it is proper merely that it be calm; The comings and goings of men: it is also necessary that they be rare.

In the second place, and in parallel, each stroke is placed in tension with its opposite, each opening to the other, as on the hexagram, when the *yin* or *yang* stroke of one of the two trigrams is partnered with its opposite on the other trigram: for example, strokes 1 and 4, or 2 and 5, in the third hexagram, $Zhun \subset \Box \Box$. We no longer read it only linearly, horizontally, but also up and down:

The bridge	under which a sailboat	passes:	it is advisable that it be high;
‡	‡	1	1
the boat	on which a fisherman	is standing:	let it be low and not in the way.

At a larger scale, for a landscape to completely deploy the polarity that makes it dynamic, the painter needs to figure closeness, familiarity, habitation, with paths, villages, and piers; and also sheerness, strangeness, impenetrability, with overhanging cliffs and impassable sandbars. It would therefore be wrong to render that pictorial landscape in a narrative-descriptive mode, as the translators of Wang Wei's "Secrets of Painting" often do, in an effort to connect it with the inventive phrase of European rhetoric, which proceeds linearly and discursively. In so doing, they miss the principle of energetic production and circulation from which the respiration of painting is born. One translation reads, for instance: "The shop sign of a wine merchant is hung high, above the road. The sail of the traveler is lowered," as if this were a picturesque touch.' It is necessary to render this passage while respecting its structural

polarities, to allow the tension between high and low, moving and motionless, earth and water, road and river, hanging and floating, to pass through via the parallelism. The two statements correspond term for term, and that *via* is truly the nonontological mode of both the statement and the painting. I retranslate word for word (dynamically):

The sign of an inn	it is proper	at the side of the road	that it be hung high
‡	‡	1	‡
the sail of the traveler	it is advisable	against the current	that it be bent low.

Even when Shitao says that the landscape is the "tension-form of Heaven and Earth," we should not understand it descriptively. Rather, we should take heaven and earth for the two vested capacities, opposed and complementary, pure yin and pure yang (Qian and Kun, the first two hexagrams of the Book of Changes, and), from which the transformations composing the world ceaselessly flow via interaction. And although features of the landscape, such as its "atmosphere," its "schematic configuration," or its "rhythm," seems unified in their totality, they proceed from polarities that Shitao decomposes each time, in parallel series (chap. 8). Hence the "atmosphere" of the landscape—its "breath-image"—is born from the opposition-complementarity of wind and rain, brightness and darkness. Similarly, the "schematic organization" of the landscape—"bent"-"straight"—is born of the opposition-complementarity of the sparse and the dense, the deep and the far. In addition, the "rhythm" of the landscape is born of the opposition-complementarity of horizontal and vertical, recess and relief; the "spiritual concentration" of the landscape from the opposition-complementarity of *yin* and *yang*, pale and dark; the "cohesiveness" of the landscape from the opposition-complementarity of waters and clouds, gathering and scattering; and finally, the "deployingshrouding" of the landscape—the landscape, let us remember, unfolds dynamically between advance and withdrawal-from the oppositioncomplementarity of "crouching" and "leaping," or "attraction" and "repulsion"; and so on. In more general terms, the loftiness and brightness of heaven correspond, as we have seen, to the breadth and density of the earth. Similarly, the winds and clouds in the heavens correspond to the waters and rocks on the earth (rocks are themselves called "the roots of clouds"). Winds and clouds are an "intertwining" factor, waters and rocks a "vaulting" factor.

I hardly see how anyone could conceive more systematically what I have begun to call—in reference to groups of trees—a system of energetic tensions, by means of which the landscape breathes and from which its vitality comes to it. Even for the most figurative elements of the landscape, or those that might be considered homogeneous, attention will always be given to finding a line of fissure, Shitao tells us, the result being that there is both one and the other—divided between yin and yang - and through opposition-affinity, tension is produced between them. For example, as a simple "shortcut," a procedure condensing effect (chap. 11), if trees are figured standing straight, rocks will be figured leaning, and vice versa. It is not that one or the other naturally (morphologically) stands straighter (or leans more) than the other. Rather, the position of the two groups must correspond, while at the same time standing opposed. Furthermore, the foreground and the background of the landscape will be separated, between the "scene" and the mountain; one of the two planes will remain hoary-wintry, while the other will appear fresh and springlike. The yin will be diametrically opposed to the yang, following the figures of Ascent and Decline, 11 and 12, in the Book of Changes: and). And, where the mountain is empty and remains submerged in indistinctness, without the slightest vegetation, you will take care to add here and there, nearby, sparse willows or tender bamboo, a little bridge, a thatched cottage. Hence, within the yin covering the earth, and still dominated by a deep freeze, a few signs of life are beginning to appear, the renewal of the yang (] Fu hexagram, Return).

We may confirm, then, to what extent composition in painting is beholden to a form both linguistic and semantic, like that conventionally called parallelism in Chinese (I would not venture to say a rhetoric, since that notion is too narrow and too European). Perhaps we should return, upstream from that constitution in language (of the sentence or of painting) to the very structure of language and its grammar, as the prescriptions of Alberti explicitly lead us to do in Europe, a structure that contemporary theorists (Michael Baxandall and Jean-Louis Schefer, among others) have further illuminated. Alberti tells us that, just as those who teach writing teach the characteristics of the letters first, then the composition of syllables, then words and expressions—a method that is valid, of course, only for alphabetical languages, as opposed to Chinese ideographical writing—the painter ought to proceed gradually, from the

point to the line, then to the surface, then to the composition of surfaces into members, members into bodies, and bodies into the *istoria*, which is where the art of painting culminates. Beyond the morphology of surfaces, the composition of figures—whether at the level of members or bodies—respects the rules of agreement, especially of genre and color, and depends on the functions assumed in the action of the painting, just as the nouns, adjectives, and verbs of a Latin sentence are subordinated to syntax by virtue of their declension or conjugation. Then these bodies themselves are rhetorically composed in relation to one another to form a narrative, following the principles of abundance and variety (*copiavarietas*), each compensating for the other, with the aim of moving and delighting (*movere-delectare*).

We have shown that parallelism by itself plays just as powerful a structuring role in the art of composition in China, at least if we understand that such a parallelism, pictorial as well as linguistic, is not confined to effects of balance and antithesis, juxtaposition, contrast, or compensation (with which humanist rhetoric in its oratorical period and Albertian painting, in its play of shadow and light and its reflection on colors, were also familiar). Rather, that parallelism, in deploying its polarities through opposition-complementarity, with each coming about and existing only in relation to the other, produces a self-sufficient organic and functional structure by means of which a world is engendered. The Chinese painter does not find his inspiration in the relation between the parts and the whole—a relation that grounds European morphology—does not move from the letter to the word (in grammar), or from the atom to the body (in physics), or from the point to the surface, then from the surface to the figure (in painting). Rather, he composes correlatively and dynamically. He does so not through "symmetry," to use the old Greek term that makes harmony depend on our two key operations, analysis and synthesis, but as a function of a regulatory and circulatory (respiratory) logic engendering painting as it engenders a world, that is, energetically.

4. Each element of the landscape not only depends on the others through harmony or even attraction, following the laws of affinity, as one expects from any composition, but exists and deploys only in relation to the other. In the same way, in the order of the vital, inspiration implies expiration from the start, and vice versa. Therefore, the nature of each element is relational, constitutively and intrinsically (and not after the fact). Remember that the "thing" in Chinese is called "east-west" (dong-xi), and a landscape "high-low," "moving-motionless," "mountains-

waters" (shan-shui). As a result, the Chinese painter, or at least the literati painter, who is aware of the requirements of his thought, is not inclined to depict. Depicting implies reconstituting the aspect of a thing bit by bit, traveling all the way across it and, to that end, detaching the thing temporarily from others by crediting it with an autonomous existence—flesh, earthenware, or velvet—and locking yourself away with it in its most private place. Might there no longer be an essence, qualities of things, some possible in-itself, the nostalgic seat of ipseity, where the painter's gaze would become so invested that it fades away, even though the painter's mission would be, in returning from beyond appearances as one returns from another world, to bring such elements back to the light and to reveal them? To go back to our starting point, might there not be an essence of the tree, for example, both that gnarled mass stuck in the ground in which the passage of time makes its nest and settles in, and that density-obscurity of matter with its long cylindrical deployment? If, conversely, we decide to abandon secondary qualities to appearances, do not other attributes retain a right of inherence? Does not the sub-stance stand below them, constituting an a priori concept of thought, a "root concept," in Kant's expression, serving to shore up the object?*

At the beginning of his treatise, Jing Hao (tenth century, T.H.L., 250) mentions a young painter who, following a meandering road, comes to a high rocky pass and disappears into a landscape of mists where only the tips of old pine trees are visible. It is not the roughness, or the compactness, or the impenetrability and density that the painter attempts to express as aspects and qualities of his encounter with the trees. It is not even some extracted "wood-matter," hulé, composing its substance. Rather, a larger pine initially stops him, because its trunk with old bark resembling scales, "straddling the void," fervently spirals upward as if "to rest against the Milky Way": it is the "fervor through form" (shi)^d evoking "the taut body of a dragon" (once again) that he wants to capture. And in his eyes, the surrounding trees do not fail to fall in line, following

^{*} It is in this respect that Chinese painting and thought shakes European logic to its foundation: "If we remove from our empirical concept of any object, corporeal or incorporeal, all properties which experience has taught us, we yet cannot take away that property through which the object is thought as *substance* or as *inhering* in a substance." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 45 [emphasis added—trans.].

For Kant, despite his critique of metaphysics, inherence and substance belong to the categories of the understanding and, in that respect, are universal concepts necessary to the mind. But their pertinence dissolves—I believe this point is crucial for philosophy—in the Chinese notion of the "thing" ("east-west") and the landscape.

various polarities: either their twisted roots are coming up out of the earth, or, lying flat, they are blocking a major waterway. Either bent or straight, vertical/horizontal, earth or water: the parallelism of the sentence, in systematically contrasting and correlating the notations, begins to form a world.

Hanging from the slopes—nestling in the banks, ripping apart the moss—splitting the stones.

When the young painter comes back the next day to draw, then, I do not believe he does so to draw from nature, as some have assumed, but rather to practice these various—countless ("ten thousand")—schemata of vitality. As the author of the treatise later explains, the "truth" he attains, far from being that of a resemblance to his supposed model, comes from the fact that "the vital energy then flourishes in conjunction with materiality" and is transmitted through it—otherwise, as we know already, with the loss of breath-energy, comes the "death" of the image as phenomenon.

Later, in more technical manuals, the painting of trees is part of the early phase of apprenticeship because the structure of the tree lends itself exemplarily to the play of polarities. Through it, you learn handily to create tension in form.* These polarities, which include the vaulting and the soaring, are also, as regards the tree, those of "dense" and "sparse," ("thick" and "bare": "if the top is dense, the bottom must be sparse," and "if it is sparse on the left, it must be dense on the right," etc.; Fang Xun, 44–50), "jutting out" and "sunken," "empty" and "full," "regular" and "irregular," "tended" or "neglected," "straight" or "bent" (for the trunk), "pale" and "dark" (for the "dots" on the leaves), "drooping" or "erect" (for the branches: "antlers" or "crab pincers"). Similarly, when you begin the composition and paint two trees grouped together, one of them ought to sink toward the ground while the other turns toward the sky; one ought to be contorted while the other stands straight; one ought to

^{*} Structurally, the figuration of a tree tends to express alternation. But the initial (intrinsic) deployment of the tree, or of its figuration through polarity, is to be distinguished from the simple "movement" in which the art of representation culminates, according to Alberti: "Branches twist themselves now up, now down, now away, now near, the parts contorting themselves like ropes" (On Painting, 81). In particular, Alberti is not interested in the composition of groups of trees, the preferred subject of the Chinese painter because of its wealth of opposition-complementarity.

lean to the left and the other to the right; one ought to have a flat top and the other a pointed top; one ought to have roots and the other no roots; and even, of the two roots, one ought to be above ground and the other sunk into the earth (Gong Xian, C.K., 161). All these procedures engendering opposition-complementarity could easily be taken for an all too mechanical technique, if it were not understood that it stems from a true grammar (of parallelism and polarity) and that the aim is to open the way to respiration in each line through the alternation ceaselessly animating the world. If the treatises go so far as to prescribe introducing dead branches when painting groves of trees—the recommendation is too common to be anecdotal—it is to allow the vitality to pass through that open, aerated space "in communication," and also effectively to create a tension between the "fullness" interacting with the emptiness that these branches create.

The logical conclusion is drawn: it is by "following the tension in form" that we obtain the "image (phenomenon)." We can also verify that the perspective developed by Chinese painting is much more energetic than perceptual-descriptive and appeals to a principle of dynamic mobilization rather than representation, given that it was ultimately led to associate the ancient notion of a driving principle (or mainspring, ji)^f with the different aspects of its creation. In ancient Chinese thought, and especially in the Zhuangzi, this notion marks a starting point for the appearance of the living (see esp. the end of chap. 18). That driving impulse, which proceeds from the vital breath (qi-ji; see Jiang He, C.K., 316), is what allows the painter to manipulate the brush effortlessly; it is what makes the brush move without struggling, so that "where it obtains force" is "precisely where it does not expend force" (Fang Xun, 73). The painter must therefore be careful not to hinder the energetico-spiritual resource of forms, which engender life and movement, so that these forms can be released thanks to that impulse, instead of "sticking" and getting bogged down in their material and tangible "traces" (ibid., 17, 69). That dynamism of the freely deploying line thus becomes a dynamism of the effect, which stirs interest. Where, in more general terms, does the success of a painting come from, if not from the fact that, thanks to the alternations-transformations through which the painting comes about when the brush is uninhibited, the very "incitement generating the appeal" (ji qu, h ibid., 28) ceaselessly varies, deploying in every direction, and thus cannot be ascribed and "localized" in a particular effect? Hence that notion of a driving principle of painting closely approximates the system of energetic principles proposed at the beginning of this chapter,

and, it seems to me, can even serve as a translation of it, since the aspect of circulatory coherence, of matrix-disposition, and of mainspring are all illuminated thereby. When you compose a painting, we are told by this same theorist, who distrusts complete spontaneity of the pictorial process, wherever there is diligence, there are always rules (ibid., 29). But when the work is completed, you no longer perceive anything but a single system (or matrix) of transformation (in transformation: *hua-ji*). In following what that notion of dynamic mobilization brings together from one end of the pictorial process to the other, we easily realize that, between the painter's breath invested in the line and the energy configuration in which the painting culminates, the brush is not only the tool serving to trace the form, but in the first place the conduit and gobetween through which energy is conveyed. Hence Chinese painting will be conceived more in terms of the process of manipulating the brush than in terms of the perceptibility of form.

Ink and Brush, Form and Color

I. If this were a book about painting, I clearly ought to have begun with what functions as the technical possibility and medium of painting: ink and brush, form and color. That is only logical. In particular, I would have reminded readers that Western painters, far from renouncing color, have ceaselessly dreamed of producing new ones from their mortars, expecting the unknown to burst forth as if they had discovered new stars or penetrated new worlds, hoping to passionately explore the mysteries of color and methodically exploit its effects.* Western painters also remain attached to a certain density and compactness of the coloring matter (the covering matter—especially oil paint, since watercolor has remained a minor genre), to which our painting is beholden for the physical consistency and effect of presence and density in the bodies of the objects represented. That is not generally the case in China,

^{* &}quot;Just the same, before I die I'd like to make out what color is." Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, 136.

though the earliest Chinese texts do conceive of painting in terms of an alliance between form and color. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Zong Bing wrote: "Write form from form, paint color from color" (L.B., 583). And of the six principles, the third and fourth deal, respectively, with form and color. Beginning with the Tang Dynasty in the eighth and ninth centuries, however, when painting became the domain of the literati, the "ink wash," especially for landscape painting, was "held to be superior" (Wang Wei, L.B., 592). Contemporaries were aware that this was a decisive shift. Although the principle of "applying colors" in conformity with the "kind of thing" was mastered in antiquity, the "gradations of ink diluted with water" and their "nebulous" effect "first flourished under our dynasty" (Jing Hao, T.H.L., 257). It was exclusively to the ink wash that the Chinese literati assigned the play of variation between pale and dark, dry and wet, "between there is-there is not," to render the evanescent character of things in the process of emergence or resorption. These things, born of the gradual saturation of the silk or paper by the ink, deploy in a haze, and this halo keeps them evasive. Later technical treatises will list six "colors" of ink, but these are "black," "white," "dry," "wet," "thick," and "thin" (Tang Dai, C.K., 242). Sometimes there are only five, to match the other spectrums, with white considered a negative color. The three pairs are complementary opposites that engender each other and, through their alternation between poles, alter the character of breath-energy that ceaselessly comes into actuality, forming beings and things. They either make it more condensed, more opaque, and more material or, conversely, more distilled, hazier, more lively. Depending on the state of dilution of the ink, these gradations foster the continuous transition of beings and things from physical concretion to spirit dimension.

Once again, a difference displaces the self-evidence of our notion of painting, but this time it has arisen by technical means. Just as the ink is not the equivalent of color, even though it takes on "color" through its gradations, in the same way and *in parallel*, the brush is not the equivalent of form, even though it serves to form. In these Chinese treatises on the art of painting, it is the brush, not the form, that is paired with ink (bi-mo). This provides yet another confirmation, if one were needed, that Chinese painting was being conceived ever more consciously, not as a practice of representation that transfers given forms from the model to the support, but as an operation of actualization and engenderment in which what takes precedence is its character as a differentiating process from an undifferentiated foundation-fount, in this case silk or paper. In

this process, the brush is the intermediary more than the instrument. The Chinese treatises express this in their well-worn formulas: the brush "silently harmonizes" with "creation-transformation" and has the same "driving principle" $(ii)^b$ as the tao. It is in the manipulation of the brush that the infinite variety of phenomena is concealed; its movement alone can be credited with sweeping enormous spaces onto the narrow surface of the drawing (Han Zhuo, C.K., 43). In that respect, the brush is truly the conduit transmitting the vital rhythm from its center—the painter's "heart"—out beyond his arm, to meet the reactive materialities of ink and paper. Because the brush is a conduit of breath-energy, the painting deploys in a linked chain of receptivity. The line "receives" the ink, which "receives" the brush, which "receives" the wrist, which "receives" the heart-spirit—"just as Heaven initiates and Earth carries through" (Shitao, chap. 4). Each is an agent that takes up from the previous one. From one term to the next, following these successive vectors, the relation of engendering proceeds through the polarity that unites heaven and earth, one fertilizing, the other giving birth. The first, like heaven, deploys its force of influence and momentum (like yang); the second, like the earth, opens to that passing, leading that force toward its actualization and making it more concrete.

At issue is the brush engendering form, not form itself, substantive and substantial. This fact confirms something that at first seems hardly credible: Chinese painting does not so much aspire to reproduce forms, whether these forms are understood to preside archetypically, in their perfection, over every possible coming about, or to be discovered and determined empirically by visual inspection and selected in accordance with judgment (according to European philosophy's great vacillation about the idea, which Erwin Panofsky has retraced). There is no ideal Form, eidos, shining in the sky of intelligibility whereby art, partaking of that eidos, would rise to the level of Beauty (Plotinus). Nor is there a definitive form that the painter's gaze would patiently attempt to detect and fix, extracting it from the indefiniteness of the thing in order to constitute that thing as a perceptual object. In Chinese, form (xing) is both a verb and a noun, and it is less a question of (ontologically preexisting) forms as of phenomena of trans-formation, in trans-formation, since form is not cut off from the process of its coming about. "Upstream" from form is the undifferentiated-invisible fount, "downstream" the concrete, which becomes visible by undergoing individuation (see "Great Treatise," Book of Changes). The Chinese painter paints that passing, or rather, it is the recurring motion of his brush that, in bringing forms to

the surface, continues that incessant transition. Thus, when Shitao defines painting as what "forms heaven and earth and all existents" (chap. 2), we must understand this in rigorous terms. He does not say merely, or even at all, that painting "characterizes the forms of all the beings of the Universe," as Ryckmans's reontologizing translation has it (29), as if forms had a prior existence. Rather, in literal terms, since the term functions as a verb here, painting "forms" heaven-earth and all existents, holds within itself their capacity for engendering, such that it both gives them form by tracing their outlines and in-forms them by breathing cosmic energy into their lines.

If there is anything that serves as the basis for the Western conception of painting, which it has not left behind—has never even thought of leaving behind—even at its moments of greatest agitation, it is the definition of painting in terms of form and color. There is certainly a tradition in this respect, less in the exemplary continuity that has brought that formula down to us than in the peremptory tone that leaves no room for doubt and sets out a premise. Aristotle states that the mimetic activity of painting can be defined in terms of forms and colors, schema-chrōma (Poetics 47a). The modern painter goes a step further, emphasizing the limit in a restrictive turn of phrase: "Painting has two means at its disposal: 1. Color. 2. Form" (Kandinsky). Braque, returning to the genesis of pictorial creation, says: "The painter thinks in forms and colors."

If we perceive any doubt or fissure in that formula through which history slips back in, it has to do only with the type of relation—subordination or emancipation—that links the two. Since form is produced by the intelligible, whereas color speaks directly to the senses, the classic conception, it may be surmised, submits color to form. Hence painting is one of the "plastic" arts, the arts of modeling and contour. Omnipotent Design reigns over them and imposes discipline, shored up by mathematics. Plotinus even takes color's resorption into form to its extreme when he has the idea, ingenious in its radicality, that color also takes its "simple beauty" from a form that dominates the obscurity in which matter is submerged (Enneads 1.6.3). The moderns move in the opposite direction—it is in that respect, at least in part, that they are modern—liberating color from form and even giving precedence to color. The Fauves celebrate a beautiful summer in the shimmering sun of the Mediterranean, rejoicing in that emancipation (even so, cubism was already sounding Form's call to order). Unlike form, whose nature is abstract, color is born from matter and is an immediate reactive force. As such, it is the primordial source of affect and emotion. Color has the capacity intuitively to place the human soul "in resonance" (Kandinsky). Or perhaps, on the contrary, color is even more abstract than form. Between form and color, in any case, there now lies a dilemma, or at least a tension, and through that fertile contradiction, inspired by it, painting seeks its way: "Matisse—color. Picasso—form."

2. When Kandinsky says that Picasso is form and Matisse color (or when Picasso designates Matisse as the south pole and himself as the north pole), these are two opposing monopolies, risking separation to better venture into Creation. There is nothing to suggest that, of the two paths opened, one is inferior to the other. These two autonomous possibilities of painting stand face to face, magnificent. Conversely, when the Chinese say that a painter has "the brush but not the ink" (Wu Daozi) or "the ink but not the brush" (Xiang Rong), in each case a shortcoming is being pointed out. In one case, the forms appear too naked; in the other, the ink wash has blurred the forms. In one, "the bones take precedence over the flesh," and in the other, "the flesh takes precedence over the bones" (Tang Dai, C.K., 243). By contrast, another painter, Jing Hao, maintains a perfect equilibrium between the two and his "capacity" is "complete." On the pretext of advocating balance and moderation, the literati discourse on painting brings it back to the logic of any coming about, which is straightforwardly expressed in the parallel structure: neither ink nor brush can proceed without the other, and it is from the intensity of the relationship established between the two and from their exchange that the pictorial process is engendered through its own internal dynamism.

The Chinese painter never grows tired of admiring the power of opposition-complementarity constituted as a polarity and released by these two factors as soon as they are paired. As that bipartition of roles is most commonly defined, the brush serves to establish forms and their internal structuration, while the ink separates *yin* from *yang*, shadow from light (Han Zhuo, C.K., 43). Even more elliptically, the brush grasps the form and the ink the tonal variation (Shen Zongqian, C.K., 329). The natural and the human, or the given and the acquired, are thoroughly divided up between them, since ink is "received" from heaven-nature while the brush is "managed" by man (Shitao, chap. 2). Above all, what justifies their pairing is that they operate between complementary opposites, not only the two of them together but each on its own, shifting back and forth between these poles. Just as the ink oscillates between dry and wet, light and dark, the brush moves "in one direction or in the other," between "empty" and "full" (Fang Xun, 32). Hence ink and brush are

inseparable from each other, like the "inside" and the "outside" of the same process (C.K., 282). The landscape itself—"mountains-waters"— displays the organic quality of their pairing. The tip of the brush subtly structures the elements of the relief, whereas the spot of ink, as it spreads, allows the rivers and oceans to extend out indistinctly. Since the art of painting is to expand forms, it falls to the ink to make these forms "blossom" liberally and to the brush to confer "momentum and vigor" on them (Shitao, chap. 17). The ocean of ink "encompasses and carries," the mountain of the brush "dominates and guides."

The correlation between ink and brush is so strong, and the process of painting so well described as a pure phenomenon stemming only from them, that it would be easy to forget the "act" of creation and even the figure of the Painter as author of his painting. Might it not be true, in fact, that when the Chinese painter has finally acquired full mastery of ink and brush, and is no longer "enslaved" by them, he no longer has to "act," as Shitao indicates elsewhere (chap. 16)? Any action could only be an unfortunate happenstance in what ought to be produced solely through the play of the world's factors, in order for the naturalness of the world to be painted "naturally" (in terms of process). Ink and brush, far from being reduced to instruments the painter uses as tools, or merely means required to realize the End of Art (I return to Kandinsky: he uses only the "means" of painting: Color and Form), are posited as agenciessubjects at the start of the pictorial process. It is their correlation that constitutes both the principle and the agent of that process. Shitao begins chapter 7 of his treatise with these words:

The brush and ink coming together such are the two correlated factors of engendering; so long as these two factors are not separated, such is the undifferentiated fount; yet, to introduce an opening in that undifferentiated fount, who can do it apart from the First Stroke?

In the Book of Changes, all existents are born from the two correlated factors of heaven and earth (yin/yun), or from masculine and feminine, by a process of "fermentation" under their "influence-transformation." That is enough to express homologically the idea that the correlation of ink and brush bears within it the self-deployment of the process of painting. To put it in the terms of the two major categories passed down to char-

acterize the European painter's activity, it also shows that the Chinese painter does not see himself as in a position to represent or to create. Let us rather say that a process of figurative engendering is set in motion by him. In these interactions between ink and brush, the more intimate and less deliberate the cooperation between them, the more harmoniously the figurations will be born of themselves. Hence the painter will carefully refrain from interrupting the play of that polarity by gazing at the world as he paints in order to reproduce its objects. And when a first stroke, introducing an opening in the primordial confusion, emerges from the undifferentiated fount to separate out the factors destined for correlation, that single and first stroke already contains implied within it, in its perfection—as Shitao is always telling us majestically—painting's fulfillment. Thus the painting will not remain suspended in the inaugural, inventive idea, between being and nonbeing, with each new stroke running the risk of making everything collapse. The painter will not have to delay as long as possible trying his hand on the virgin backdrop or, conversely, tempt fate with a throw of the dice.

In fact, as if to rescue their conception of painting both from mimetic constraints and from creative risk, Chinese theorists constantly relied on the logic of immanence that Chinese thought has always attempted to elucidate. It seems they would have grown weary of returning to it if they had not felt the need to experience ever more fully, by means of variation, something whose coherence cannot be conceived in notions. Let us say it in the most general way: "pictorial production" is similar to the coming about sponte sua of all existents, whereby forms and figurations come about only through the reciprocal action of the two breathenergies of yin and yang (Tang Dai, C.K., 253). Even "similar" is saying too little: it is not an analogy but a shared process. There is only one way of coming about. According to the formulas indefinitely held in balance by the parallel structure, the penetrating brush is masculine, the ink receiving the brush feminine; the "motion" of the brush is equivalent to the yang factor, the "repose" of the ink equivalent to the yin factor. That is why the brush is superior to the ink and dominates as it deploys it, since yang is superior to yin (in China, correlation establishes the poles of an interaction while at the same time hierarchizing them; heaven—the sovereign—is above / earth—the people—is below). The brush "seizing hold of energy" is the yang factor, the ink "giving birth to radiance," the yin factor. And so on. Does that mean that, since the figurative process is engendered as a function of that interaction, there is no longer any need

for apprenticeship and that the naturalness (spontaneity) of the process spares the painter effort and application? Whatever the art in question, the Chinese, far from contrasting the natural and the acquired, show that this naturalness and ease are the result of intense training—whether to gain access to wisdom or to painting. As Tang Dai says, the natural is the sphere you achieve through the transmutation that comes of long study, just as intensive study is the basis and foundation of the natural. As you train yourself to move the ink and brush according to the rules, you finally reach the point where the rules are no longer an obstacle and figurations form on the surface of the paper following the same phenomenality as within the landscape. In an old and oft-repeated image, they form as naturally as "ripples" when the wind "passes over" (like the brush) and encounters the water's surface (the ink).

3. It is undoubtedly difficult to get used to the idea that superiority in the realm of painting lies not so much in the supersharp focus of the gaze and in the elaboration and conception of the mind as, in the first place, in a work of inner concentration, refinement, and purification. Or that its success is not decided so much by the skill and precision of the hand manipulating the brush with the tips of its fingers—having acquired, after much practice, the famous pencil stroke or brush stroke—as by a principle of motion beginning farther upstream and transmitted without loss from the pulsing heart to the tension animating form. In this view, the manipulation of the brush belongs to the same art as the manipulation of ax or knife. The two anecdotes in the Zhuangzi that are regularly cited in treatises on the art of painting leave no doubt about the importance of the language of gesture, linked to breath, which governs painting (Zhang Yanyuan, 24–25; Su Dongpo, L.B., 455; and others). In one of the two narratives, a man from Ying, who was splattered with plaster "in the shape of a fly's wing" on the tip of his nose, asks the carpenter Shi to remove it. Shi spins his ax, producing wind. It is implied that the stain is removed completely and the nose unharmed. The man from Ying does not even flinch (chap. 24.6). The result proves to be impeccable because it is produced without effort, without aim even, as a natural phenomenon (wind), thanks solely to the cooperation and reaction among all the agents, including the "patient" who receives the effect. The other story, developed in one of the most original chapters of the Zhuangzi (chap. 3.2), shows how the mastery of gesture is gradually acquired by abandoning overly crude visuality, and by concentrating and applying the spirit. The butcher Ding carves up a steer in front of the prince in a perfectly melodious manner, moving to the rhythm of a ballet. At the start of his career, he explains, he could not *not* see the steer as a whole. The steer's body still got in the way of apprehending it and his attention became mired in that opacity. But just three years later, he continues, he no longer saw the entire steer. And today, "I encounter with the spirit and no longer look with the eyes." "Knowledge of the senses ends and the spirit wishes to go on." In gaining access to a much more subtle, distilled, internal apprehension, the butcher can rely solely on the natural conformation and attack only the interstices. He does not damage the veins, the arteries, the muscles, or the nerves, and easily avoids breaking the bones. A good butcher wears out only one knife a year because he cuts only the flesh; a mediocre butcher wears out one knife a month because he breaks the bones. But, says Ding, I've been using the same knife for nineteen years, it's been used to carve up thousands of steers, and its blade is still as new as if it had just been sharpened.*

The painter in his art is comparable to such artisans, not because of the meticulousness of the labor required, which the literati painter rejects with disdain, but because he acquires the capacity to produce gestures that completely incorporate the tension and vigilance of the spirit and that, freed from all intentionality governing them from outside, react perfectly to the configuration encountered and flow from it sponte sua. Hence they become inscribed as pure phenomena in the natural world's operations of transformation—coming about. The manipulation of the brush, stemming solely from the correlation of factors it puts into play, becomes emancipated from trial and error, from effort, and the painter no longer has to think about "what" he is painting when he paints. It is necessary to distinguish between, and even oppose to each other, the "concentration" or "unification" of the spirit on one hand and conscious and deliberate application on the other. "Concentration" frees the attention from all parasitism, and hence the effect proceeds

^{*}When Plato's *Phaedrus* (265c) mentions the skill of the butcher who knows how to observe the natural articulations and takes pains not to break any of the joints, he does so in the context of theoretical cognition and to account for the art of the dialectician, who is able to divide up and enumerate by species. Plato directs his attention to the resulting relations among the parts, collected within a unitary whole. The operative gesture and the familiarity with the tool's "readiness-to-hand" (*Zubandenheit*), as Heidegger would say, are not taken into consideration. Conversely, the butcher in the *Zhuangzi*, working at the level of circulatory emptiness, beyond the fullness of flesh and bones, illustrates a principle of non-wear (of vital potential). The blade of the knife, having "no thickness," cannot but move easily, without ever becoming dull.

purely from it, its efficiency stemming solely from immanence. Conversely, conscious application loses the effect at every turn. The most insignificant line emanating from concentration confers the "energy of life" and "is truly painting," while the entire drawing produced by application is as "dead" as a stroke "drawn with a ruler." To translate word for word (Zhang Yanyuan, 24-25): when you let your thoughts develop and manipulate the brush, if you are aware that you are in the process of painting, you then "lose" accordingly as regards the painting; but if, when you let your thoughts develop and manipulate the brush, intentionality is not directed to the fact of painting, that is, is not applied to the painting, then you "obtain" as regards the painting. You are not "blocked" at the level of the hand or "frozen" at the level of the heart-spirit and, "without realizing it is so, it is so." You must be able to "forget the ink and brush," says Jing Hao (T.H.L., 260) for a true composition to be realized. You must unite the two; or rather, one is the consequence of the other. The more "reverent attention" you devote to making your spirit present, since the spirit operates more through concentration-purification (refinement) than through abstraction-intellection (notions), the more relaxed—at ease—you feel when finally, suddenly, you let the brush fall onto the paper (Tang Dai, C.K., 242).

The brush's motion has become completely reactive, hence agile. The painter's spirit contemplates and "listens," no longer with the ears, but with breath-energy. And what does the literati painter grasp and render externally visible through the brush's motion, if not precisely the internal movement by which beings and things deploy and ceaselessly come about and flourish, "without anyone realizing it," until they achieve that "so"? The opposite of that internal movement now seems to be only the opacity of forms, masses, and colors, a spectacle blocking the view of beings and things. That is why Chinese painting is rarely conceived in terms of the category of the act, not even in the superlative (mythological) mode of "creative act," whereby the hand retraces, as a mere executant, what the eye perceives or the mind conceives. It is much more likely to be understood in terms of a dynamic self-deployment. The momentum of the brush corresponds to the growth of the living thing, and the alternating engenderment of its line renders its progress. Hence the painter will master his art when the gestures involved, no longer forced or even guided, recur completely on their own, solely through the play of oppositioncomplementarity, from one end of the drawing to the other. In this, they embody the immanence of the "way" ("One time yin-one time

yang, such is the tao," "Great Treatise," Book of Changes). The story goes that one master's art of the brush became more beautiful after the artist heard the leaping waters of Jia-ling one night; and the momentum of another master's brush became more lively after he saw Lady Gong Sun doing the sword dance (Guo Xi, 17). These stories point to the idea that every engenderment of the line in the art of painting and writing stems in the first place from the integration of a vital rhythm and not from a capacity to represent. It stems from the figuration of a continuous transformation of forms in accordance with the rhythm animating them and not from the reproduction of forms to be contemplated, whether ideal or perceived, given or invented (but always definitive, perfect). In short, they confirm that in China, painting stems more from a kinetic-energetic apprehension than from an aesthetic perception.

Witness the fact that the weaknesses identified in the figuration of forms are compared to flaws whose ultimate source is always a dynamic incapacity of the brush (see the analysis of Guo Ruoxu, 34, which has been constantly repeated ever since). Thus, if the line is "stiff" ("like a board"), it is because the wrist is weak and the brush numb. As a result, the capacity to take and to leave, to alternately grasp form and make it evasive, is entirely lacking, which inevitably leads to configurations of things that remain flat and narrow because of the incapacity to twist or fuse the strokes. If the line is "engraved," it is because doubt remains within the brush's motion, because the heart (spirit) and hand "are at odds," so that angles and dots-so many failures-suddenly appear at the juncture of the figuration's contours. If the line is "knotted," it is because, though you wish to advance, "you do not advance," or because, though you need to loosen up, "you do not loosen up," as if something there were "congesting" and "obstructing," and so the "course" of the line cannot soar.

In reading the *Shitao*, I was at first surprised that, in this precisely constructed and admirably concise treatise, the author chose to devote an entire chapter to "wrist motions" (chap. 6). What relation could that delicate joint at the end of the arm, held nearly still, have to Art? Then it occurred to me that there really is an object there to be described and theorized, and that this chapter must take its place between the chapter on ink and brush (chap. 5) and the one on their correlated functioning (chap. 7). That is because the wrist is the chief articulation, communicating its vital impulse to the gesture. Shitao devotes his attention not to the hand delicately applying the touch of color or roughly hurling

it but in the first place to the wrist, located farther upstream. He does so because the wrist, in its inductive function, is what governs the line by opposition-complementarity. Between the inner pulsation of heartspirit and the hand externally directing the course of the brush, the wrist is the reactive juncture that, through its power of rection, confers the maximum range of variations to the gesture. If the wrist "receives the injunction of fullness," says Shitao, it allows you to "sink in and pierce"; if it "receives the injunction of emptiness," it allows you to "joyfully launch into flight and dance." If it receives an injunction of uprightness, it allows you to paint with the "tip concealed" perfectly in the axis; if it receives an injunction of sloping, it allows you to deploy the stroke altogether obliquely. If it responds to acceleration, the freedom of motion "confers momentum"; if it is obliged to slow down, the courteousness elicited leaves "room for feeling." And so on. In giving rise to variations between "hard" and "soft" (yin and yang), or concentration and relaxation, tight and loose, the wrist is all that is needed to infuse within the line the alternation animating beings and things. And their breathing is born from the wrist's capacity for regulation.

Hence it no longer seems surprising that pictorial activity in China is situated between these two terms, heart (spirit) and hand, moving from inside to outside and linked by the wrist, rather than between eye and hand, two physical extremities linked to each other (the Dutch painter calls for "a loyal hand and a faithful eye"). Nor does Chinese painting lie between Eye and Spirit in a narrow theoretical loop (that is how Merleau-Ponty accounts for Cézanne's art). The labor of painting is the product of a regular rate of speed, not of a contemplation-execution that heroically, or at least tenaciously, confronts the unrepresentable. It is neither ingenuity (of the idea) nor prowess (of the fingers), but skill [entente] in the movement adopted (and also understanding [entente] between capacities) that drives it. When I make a wheel, explains the cartwright in the Zhuangzi (chap. 13), if I go too slowly, the work is agreeable but not solid; if I go too fast, the work is painful and botched ("it doesn't go in"). I must go neither too slowly nor too quickly, "obtaining at hand level" "such that it accords with the heart (spirit)." Chinese theorists of painting, in endlessly repeating this motif, sometimes present it in reverse order, but that changes nothing: the "obtaining" then occurs at the level of heart-spirit and the "response" at the level of the hand following it (Shen Gua, L.B., 43; cf. Su Shi, S.H.P., 219; Fang Xun, 56; and so on). What is important for engendering is not that there be external conformity, whether of the wheel's curve or of the figure on silk or paper, but rather that a regulated impulse be transmitted from the inside and that reactivity alone be at work.

4. As a result, there is truly a question of philosophical import raised by the ink and the brush: it lies in the correlation that makes ink and brush move so easily once the painter knows how to exploit the full force of their propensity. He no longer has to direct them by conceiving-applying himself, but he is also not governed by them, as if the initiative fell to them. He is neither active nor passive, strictly speaking (the Chinese language does not really think in terms of the contrast between these two voices). If we inquire into his subject function, it turns out that the Chinese painter is not so much the inventive author as someone who establishes himself as a necessary condition by the capacity to which he gains access to connect any number of inductive factors together: the landscape traversed by the continuous exchanges between its poles; its implantation in the receptive interiority and the incitement released thereby; and the mobilization of that intentionality in the spot of ink spreading at the impulse of the brush, through the relay of the wrist, and in keeping with the paper's texture. Hence painting, considered to be a common cultural practice, is suddenly marked by a particular choice "concerning the real," in the very principle of its production. (I am attempting to say this in the loosest, most disengaged, least tendentious way possible.) That can be verified not only in painting's inspiration, in its themes and styles, and in what is more broadly called pictorial "language," but even in its process or tao. I prefer to continue using that Chinese term so as not to be trapped by the category of the act (and of creation). Painting shows the (hidden) biases of thought; it shows their singularity at work. In that respect, Chinese painting even provides a privileged test case. It is pointless to claim that this conjunction of painting and thought belongs to the very essence of painting (or is the essence of painting): we still have to acknowledge that the pictorial tradition in China is particularly well equipped to bring to light such a conjunction and to make it explicit. That is why this tradition is undeniably helpful for an inquiry aimed at returning to the near side of the constructions of philosophy (and its ontological manufacture of the "object").

There are at least three reasons why it is so helpful in this respect, which I will briefly recapitulate. First, the Chinese vision of the tao as immanence and regulation has remained stable for more than two mil lennia, though it has of course undergone historical modification (when Buddhism arrived from India, that vision was not abandoned but rather

further elucidated in response). Second, the Chinese pictorial practice has reflected upon itself continuously and from early on. The painter is a scholar whose first calling is to write (hence there is an impressive and very rich critical literature). Third, because the monist and totalizing character of the Chinese conception of the tao entails integrating the diversity of practices and experiences, the Chinese discourse on painting has ceaselessly sought to make explicit the relation maintained between pictorial practice and that all-encompassing "vision" of reality, in order to better understand how to succeed at art. Although that vision is difficult to grasp, both because of its all-encompassing character and because of the formulary nature in which it was enunciated, painting provides us with a sensuous—and even experimental—angle from which to approach that vision. For once, that vision of the world can be immediately experienced, merely because what is at issue is painting, that is, brush movements that I can make at any moment, or in any case traces and figurations displayed before my eyes. We will therefore not have to confine ourselves to reconstructing the notional logic of the "particular" mode of thought of China (every mode of thought is particular, but reveals itself as such only when compared to another). If only because of the difference between languages, such a reconstruction unavoidably retains something of its scaffolding despite efforts at erudition, and remains somewhat uncontrolled. This time, we can also observe that mode of thought at work and verify it through its effects. We can perceive it in the language of gestures it calls for and can practice them. In so doing, we can particularly note how an understanding of the foundation-fount of the real as breath-energy, and not in terms of the category of Being (or under the sway of the notion of God), leads to the production of a respiratory alternation within the line, which is not only a mode of figuration but that by which "life" comes. And precisely because vital energy, in undergoing distillation and refinement, constitutes the capacity of "spirit" in the world and in me, the "spiritual" in painting does not really lie in a representation of the invisible, to which the symbolic would aspire. Rather, it is more like the product of the interaction of ink and brush, once the brush, being not numb but reactive, releases a "resonance" of the line and makes it alert and free and easy.

In a superb parallel construction, Shitao grasped the spiritual quality released by the reciprocal reactivity of the two correlated factors of painting, namely, ink and brush:

The ink, in permeating the brush, leads to alert animation; the brush, in making the ink move, leads to the spirit dimension. (chap. 5) Or, to express this in negative terms: without the "undarkening" by the ink, there will be no alert animation, and, without the "vitalization" by the brush, there will be no spirit dimension. "Spirit" (or "life") is born when the line is freed up, simultaneously unblocked by the brush and de-opacified by the ink. Let us put into play once again the great coupling of mountain and water, "tip" and "ocean," in order to extract the matrical quality contained in that pairing. Within the ocean of ink, "let us establish in a stable manner," through the distillation of its mass, the vaporous refinement that makes the spirit emanate; and, under the tip of the brush, "let us resolutely bring forth," through the force of the stroke, the vigorous engendering that ensures life (chap. 7).

But how am I to know if what I designate so generally, outside myself, as the landscape—"mountains-waters"—possesses the same energeticospiritual structure as that which I set in motion solely by the play of ink and brush? Because Chinese thought makes painting a pathway for exploring phenomena, it necessarily runs into the same problem that classical philosophy in Europe has confronted with respect to painting: How does the mind encounter external reality based on its activity, and how can it be sure that it does encounter it beyond its representations? To approach that question on its own terms, at the level of cognition, classical European philosophy needed nothing less than the guarantee of God (for Descartes) or of transcendental deduction (for Kant) to establish the possible objectivity of the connection between a priori concepts and the "things" outside. According to Kant, although we must admit that my mind and things are in themselves deprived of contact with each other, that is no longer the case once things, precisely, are constituted as "objects" through the application of the categories of the mind, and once the ego posits itself in turn, opposite them, as a cognitive subject unifying all the diversity of sensible intuition merely through the form of its understanding.* At this point, a solidarity is established between my mind and things.

^{*} Descartes's guiding notion is that the thing has an objective or representational reality by virtue of the idea of the thing within the understanding. That idea itself has the status of image of the thing. This notion leads him to posit the existence of God, from which he then deduces the existence of an external world.

Similarly, the notion that the laws connecting the phenomena of nature can cor respond to the legislative activity of the mind operating on the basis of categories such as substance or causality, which is the theoretical core of "transcendental analytics," founds the possibility of physics by explaining how the subjective conditions of thought can

In the eyes of the Chinese literati, it is the engenderment of painting (revealing the "natural") and not the experimentation of physics, which Kant thereby founds (and which constitutes "nature"), that assumes importance. That engenderment makes the mere manipulation of the brush an exploratory experiment into the unknown origin of things. That is because, when I manage to set in motion the opposition-complementarity of ink and brush, I see forms being born on their own and thus test—and find proof of—the polarity from which the world generally (and continuously) comes. In feeling how easy drawing becomes once I know how to let the correlation of ink and brush do its work, I verify the logic of that path of immanence. In observing how I produce something spiritual if the line I draw simply manages to empty out and extend through alternation, I demonstrate that the spirit is not of a different nature from things but is rather the tension running through things that unlocks them, makes them alert, and introduces variations in them. That is why the correlation between ink and brush is sufficient to paint the landscape—not as object but as expansion - and reveals its intimate reality to me. In its gesture, painting makes us discover, just as experimentation in physics does, but differently and on a different plane. Shitao establishes this as the major relationship (chap. 5): "The landscape-'mountain-waters'-and all existents present their spiritual animation to man as a result of the fact that man manipulates that power of undarkening (of the ink) and of vitalization (of the brush)."

That merely relaunches our inquiry, however. My encounter with things and the landscape through the brush makes me communicate with them, "giving birth to myself" in them as they give "birth to themselves in me," as Shitao says, and establishes solidarity between us. If that encounter is not constituted by the subject-object relationship, what can its nature be? It is not a relation of cognition and it is unknown to physics; it places the landscape in the position not of object but of partner. China conceives of that relation in terms of "intentionality"—or at least, that is the notion I began to develop earlier, and which now needs to be justified. For intentionality is what painting would definitively "write," once it is no longer content to be the craft of brushmanship.

have an objective value. That is, they provide the condition a priori for any cognition of objects.

What Does Painting Write?

1. It should come as no great surprise that the painter "writes," since that is what the Greeks expressed from the outset with the term "graphism." Graphein originally meant to cut into a surface with a sharp point or knife in order to trace images or signseikones, semata—that is, to engrave the shapes of forms and letters. In Rome, "to paint" (pinguere) suggested the use of pigments and definitively turned painting toward the adventure of color. Does not Pliny begin his History of Painting as a naturalist, by inventorying pigments? In China, things developed in almost the opposite direction. It was only gradually, and especially from the Song Dynasty on, when literati painting became aware of its originality, that the verb "to paint" (bua, a to trace outlines, to delimit) was increasingly accompanied or even replaced by the term "to write" (xie). The painter no longer found it surprising to say that he wrote rocks, trees, a landscape. The Chinese literati, whether they were tracing the codified figures of ideograms—in a regular script or in a more cursive and spirited style, ultimately leading to "grassy" writing, cao-shu—or the freer figures of hills and waters,

still ground the same ink, manipulated the same pen. The same line segment is the basis for both arts, soaring upward from the beginning to the end of the stroke, in a single sweep and without turning back. That first stroke contains all the others and remains one—remains so from the one (yi hua). It is the "preliminary fundament" of writing and painting, and everything drawn after it, in writing or in painting, will be only combination and variation. Shitao, at the end of his treatise on the art of painting (chap. 17), says that he has also spoken along the way about the art of writing.

In the classical European tradition, the parallel between writing and painting was primarily pedagogical, its aim being to define painting logically on the model of written language. Painting too has its grammar, as Alberti demonstrates; it also requires an alphabet (the different types of lines delimiting the surfaces), a morphology (the constitution of the bodies of the human figures represented), a syntax (the harmony of these bodies with one another), and even—above all—a semantics (the movements of the bodies express the movement of the soul). To respond to the expectations of humanist culture, painting is also obliged to possess its own rhetoric, which unfolds from the level of the word (the flat surface) to that of the group of words (a bodily member composed of surfaces), then of the clause (the entire body), and finally of the complete sentence (it is the composition of the bodies into an istoria that forms the subject of the picture). Systematic as it is, the comparison between writing and painting stems from a concern for method and trains painters in the requirements of compositio. You learn to paint the way you learn to write, namely, by first acquiring all the elements separately, then by composing the "syllables"—connecting surfaces into members—then by assembling the "words" and "expressions," linking the members into bodies and the bodies into a narrative. According to André Félibien, Poussin, in the tradition of Leonardo, further developed the scope of semantics. Just as the twenty-six letters of the alphabet serve to form our words and express our thoughts, the "outlines" composing the movements and gestures of the represented bodies serve to express the various passions of the soul, by showing outside what the characters have in their minds. As a result, to read a picture as it is "written," Poussin will say, is to recognize in each totalizing figure these expressive movements as the unique and rigorous designation of a passion or mental attitude that is easily identifiable. In his Manna, there are the women who "languish," those who "admire," those who "pity," those who act "out of charity" or "great need" or "the desire to gorge themselves," and so on. Reading a picture also means recognizing the totality of the figures composing the canvas, like a narrative statement about history reported in its entirety.

Let us insist on that "like," as Louis Marin has done.1 At issue is always only an analogy between writing and painting, whose aim is to recognize the complexity and rationality of the language of painting and hence to elevate it to the rank of poetry and rhetoric. In China, however, not only is the instrument or intermediary the same (ink and pen), not only do the standard strokes of writing occasionally serve as figurative strokes for mountains, islands, or faces (Wang Wei, L.B., 585): above all, the learning process is the same in both cases. It is always a matter of making the brush "serve" and of not being "enslaved" to it, of knowing how to insufflate rhythmic energy throughout the drawing in order to avoid a numb, entangled, "weak," or "haggard" brush. In addition, the gesture for making the brush tip rise, fall, or pivot, whether one is tracing a written character, or the mountain's texture, or the shape of a rock, or the branches of a tree, is technically the same (Bu Yantu, C.K., 282). "Writing and painting are the two extremes of a single art, and they are accomplished in the same way" (Shitao, chap. 17). Thus, with their first histories of painting (Zhang Yanyuan, 1-2), the Chinese established that painting and writing had the same origin. At the dawn of civilization, the figurative power that is continually at work through the phenomenafigurations of the world became embodied in early emblematic motifs, borne on the shells of tortoises and the backs of dragons. It was then encoded in early symbolic drawings that gradually extracted the universe's secret. At a time when the system of figuration was still "rudimentary," writing and painting "were not yet separate." In the two strokes yang and yin, continuous and discontinuous, solid and broken (- and --), from which the Book of Changes composes its figures—its intention is to explore the coherence of the world's ever-renewing process—the split between writing and painting does not appear. Even when the line, becoming more explicit, diversifies to figure both "meaning" and "form," writing and painting retain the "same constitutive being" "under different names," by virtue of their nature as drawn lines.

In these genealogical reconstructions, some preferred to consider painting primordial, and to see Chinese writing, by nature pictographic before ideographic, as only a derivation (cf. Han Zhuo, S.H.L., 63). Historically, however, painting as an art of drawing developed in China by benefiting from the achievements and innovations of the art of writing.

(Fortunately, Jean-François Billeter has rid us of the term "calligraphy," which is inaccurate in this context).2 Whether it was the technique of drawing with "a single stroke of the brush" (yi bi shu), d linking together figurations without interrupting the rhythmic momentum, or that of the "flying blank" (fei bai), which reveals within the body of the stroke an internal emptiness, aerates the figure and makes it resonate, literati painting readily borrowed procedures from the art of writing, particularly since these procedures contributed to the transcendence of formal resemblance to which painting aspired. Beyond the shared training required, what definitively grounds the union between painting and writing and ensures they have the same "constitutive being"-rather than remaining merely analogous as in Europe—is that they possess in their "body," that is, in their stroke, the same content of energetic breath that ceaselessly animates the world. As a result, both writing and painting are to be found only beyond the tangible traces left on the silk or paper. They are traces permeated by absence, jettisoning both the opacity and the materiality of phenomena. In their figuration and through their tension and wide-openness, they let polarities emanate, invisible, "in spirit."f*

2. We therefore need to be cautious in approaching the major cultural commonplaces. Sometimes, it is when the parallels between cultures are the most literal, when they correspond word for word, when the formulation of one language finds an equivalent readymade in the other, as if anticipating it, that the coincidences remain superficial and imply nothing, concealing contents that know nothing of each other. You thought you had found a handy bridge, but it does not connect; the continents are isolated from each other. As it happens, Simonides, as reported by Plutarch, said exactly the same thing as Su Dongpo in the wake of Wang Wei: painting is a "mute," or silent, poem and poetry is a "speaking," or sound, painting. In each tradition, since only poetry could achieve the distinction of becoming a classic, composed and commented on in antiquity, and since a consideration of painting appeared only later, pictorial theory logically appealed to its elder sister, poetic theory, for its founding concepts, and thus assured its legitimacy as a liberal art. Under the Italian Renaissance and among the Chinese literati of the Song and

^{* &}quot;Had I been born Chinese, I would not be a painter but a writer. I would write my pictures." Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, 161.

Yuan Dynasties, following a similar sociological development, painting relied on writing to wrest itself from its status as artisanship and to give precedence to its spiritual vocation, beyond manual and technical skills.

In Europe, the comparison between painting and poetry, implicit or direct, and constantly repeated throughout the classical age, became fixed in Horace's formulation "Ut pictura poesis." But on what does that comparison rest? The reply takes the form of a chiasmus: it rests on the fact that painting "describes" and poetry "depicts," and that each, through colors and forms, or through names and expressions, "shows the same things." One records the scene on the canvas, the other in "the mind's eye," but the merit of each is to render it vividly, with the greatest intensity and "graphic clarity" (graphike enargeia, said Plutarch). Painting even claims it can provide lessons in that respect. Must not the poet seek to render the spectacle of battle with the same visual vivacity as the painter in his picture, thus making it present to the mind? Not only did Phidias supposedly learn from Homer how to paint Jupiter in majesty; the poet Virgil was beholden to the sculptors of Rhodes for the pathos of his Laocöon. Painting and poetry share the same aim and each is a source of emulation for the other, despite the difference in the means used. That, of course, is because they are both grounded in "imitation," as has been constantly repeated since Aristotle. Both have the job of representing nature, which is understood in the first place as human nature, the nature of men "insofar as they act," hence as subjects of a "history," whether they are painted or described in ideal terms or more realistically—the same categories apply to both poets and painters—that is, whether they are rendered as they ought to be, as they are, or as even worse than they are.

It is fascinating to observe, following the studies of R. W. Lee and Michael Baxandall, which take us through all the topoi of the critical literature (I confess we would likely grow tired of these old chestnuts had we not discovered them from the standpoint of the Chinese difference), how all our classical theorists became locked in the same "self-evidence" (calling that sedimented configuration of thought "nature" or "reason") and hence discussed and argued from within it. Once more it appears strange how, on the European side, the notion of painting submitted—by its own will or by force, in any case systematically—to the assumptions of a purely European invention (which in large part even defined Europe), namely, those of rhetoric. Painting is obliged to respond to the requirement for *inventio* (by giving precedence to history, using a

narrative theme, ancient or modern, profane or sacred), for dispositio (the drawing is to the painting what the plot is to a tragedy, said Aristotle), for expressio, which is analogous to poetic elocutio (the painter's aim, like that of the poet, is to express the particular characteristics and passions of the characters). The same Horatian function of "instructing" and "delighting" is attributed to painting and to poetry; painters are enjoined to unite freedom of imagination and the requirements of imitation, to respect the "proprieties" of dress, age, sex, feeling, and condition, and finally, to aspire to a concentration of effect. A perfect painting, like a perfect poem, is a construct ordered by reason whose most insignificant part is causally linked to the dramatic intention informing the whole, thus to produce emotion.

In developing the parallel between painting and poetry, the Chinese literati did not think to follow any of these paths, where for two centuries, at least until Lessing, Western thought became bogged down. That is because, in the first place, what is called "poetry" (shi)^g in China does not really refer to a descriptive tradition (with the exception of the fu genre, which is usually considered separately) and even less to a narrative tradition like that of Homer, Virgil, and Ariosto. China did not invent the epic. Nor did it rely on mythological sources, such as The Metamorphoses and especially the Bible. In China, the category of poetry essentially corresponds to short pieces in which personal feelings are evoked and disseminated in a discreet but invasive manner, both atmospheric and inaccessible, according to the "wind" code (the first rubric for poems in China is Guo feng, "winds" or "mores" of the principalities; see above, 41). If there is any pictorial expressio analogous to that of poetry, it is not of a psychological nature. It does not come to light through the figuration of bodily motions or facial features; its aim is not to indicate the diverse and standardized feelings of the characters represented. Rather, it is an expressio that gives free rein to the movement of intentionality, which comes into actuality by "taking form outside" (xing yu wai)h by means of visible configurations that advance to welcome that intentionality. These configurations are relieved of any reifying-objectifying opacity because they are also only actualizations of energy. Thus the Chinese theorists borrowed the most ancient notion of their poetics, that of emotional motif, xing, to express how, in reaction to the suggestions of the world, they "confided" their emotion to painting. "The ancients projected their emotional incitement into the ink and brush and took the way [to express it] from the landscape" (Shitao, chap. 18). This landscape is not a description but the sensible and still fluid configuration by which an emotion is released. Similarly, though it is recommended that the Chinese painter, like the Western painter, "read the poets," in the former case it is not so that he will nourish his *inventio*, acquire a greater familiarity with the subject of the fable or history, gain access to a more subtle practice of allegory, or imagine more vividly the passions and feelings to be given to his characters. Rather, his reading is to lead him to inner contemplation and detachment, hence to availability, the reception of the world's incitement, which is the disposition required for taking up the brush. As the painter Guo Xi said:

Often on my days of leisure, I read poems from the Jin and Tang Dynasties, ancient or modern, finding beautiful verses that fully express the things that a man holds deep within and which completely bring forth the scenes he has before his eyes. But if I do not remain peaceful and quiet, calmly seated in front of a bright window, facing a clean table, if I do not burn a stick of incense and allow all cares to dissipate, the appealing meaning of these beautiful verses no longer comes, and their concealed feelings, along with their noble aspirations, are no longer imaginable. How could that meaning-emotionality (intentionality) that makes for painting's vitality be easy to achieve? (Guo Xi, 27; cf. C.K., 264)

That agitated intentionality arises from an interiority that, by virtue of its availability, opens itself to the world's incitement, and in the first place to the seasons, which create infinite variations in the landscape. Invoked in China as the source of both painting and poetry, intentionality turns away from "imitation" from the start, since imitation implies an affective break with the world, a withdrawal from the field of its impulse, an assertion of faculties belonging to oneself alone and of an opposing position. As a result, Chinese painting does not describe (an object) but simply "writes" (meaning-emotionality). Painting, like poetry, gives form to invisible feeling by externalizing it, whether in words or figures, both of which serve as its tangible "traces." The process of each art is on the same order, their vibration shared, and that is why they stand in for each other. Hence I can "grasp the meaning-emotionality of the poem and make it the meaning-emotionality of my painting," says Shitao (chap. 14; Not "I borrow ideas from poetry to make them the subjects of painting," a translation that is much too Western because altogether—divisively—intellectualized).3 As a result, "painting is the equivalent of the sense-emotionality emanating from within the poem," just as the poem

in turn "produces the awakening of the spirit within painting." Painting and poetry do not deploy parallel to each other. Rather, each deploys in a dimension internal to the other and reveals the other more intrinsically. I hardly see how the effective apprehension—beyond any faceto-face encounter—of a shared fount of painting and poetry* expressed as meaning-emotionality, or intentionality, vi, could be pushed further than that reciprocal penetration. This is more than an exchange of attributes, given China's ability to grasp, through its sense of polarities, the degree to which one is always in the other, and to grasp as well the latent fount of both. Witness all the painted landscapes on which poems are inscribed in a lively interaction. Su Dongpo unites in a single formula all the arts of the brush, conceiving them as a single chain whereby each link unlocks and de-termines the previous one; he thus grounds them in homogeneous and continuous variation. As he says in his summation, what the poem "cannot express completely," "overflows" into the art of writing and "undergoes modification" in painting (L.W.Y., 217).

But to what extent can the difference in the idioms used nevertheless authorize painting and poetry to deploy as similar expressions, based on the same source of sense-emotionality? Or, to comply with a poetics of painting, in what respect might the treatment of the intentionality elicited be the same in these two arts? According to Su Dongpo, who was the first of the literati to have given that parallel its full amplitude, to deal with painting in terms of formal resemblance seems like "childishness," but it is equally important, when composing a poem, that it "not necessarily be this poem." By which I understand that it is important not to be restricted by what the poem's subject is supposed to involve (L. W. Y., 234; cf. above, chap. 8). Like formal resemblance with respect to painting, the subject of the poem ought not to weigh upon it as a constraint. The pictorial object and the poetic theme are codifications. The nonobject of painting corresponds to the nonthematization of the poem. Although painting and poetry "obey a single law," Su Dongpo continues, that law dictates that their elaboration come about effortlessly (tian gong)k and that the expression spring up in its "freshness," without burdening a determinate form or bogging down in it—that the expression refrain from insisting. The law dictates that the expression remain available, just like

^{*} The inclusion of both was definitively formulated by Su Dongpo with reference to Wang Wei: "When I savor a poem by Wang Wei, I find a painting in it; and when I contemplate a painting by Wang Wei, I find a poem in it" (S.H.P., 225).

the inner self, allusive-evasive, holding us back from what lies beyond, whether "beyond ink and brush" (bi-mo zhi wai) or "beyond words" (yan wai). The implicit is common to painting and poetry, and that is why both refer to a "content" of intentionality (han yi). **As the Chinese literati so often repeated subsequently (and this time it was the theory of painting that belatedly regenerated the theory of poetry), "wherever sense-emotionality arrives"—as soon as it arrives—it is pointless for the brush, meticulous and prosaic, to "arrive" as well. The painting "gives form" but it lets that form sink back into the undifferentiated; similarly, the poem "articulates," but it refrains from pronouncing too much.

3. Literati painting was defined from the Song Dynasty on in terms of that single concept: it "writes" "sense-emotionality," or what we have begun to call, in order to grasp it in more general terms, "intentionality" (xie yi). Conversely, meticulous painting, in its diligence, is content with "brushwork" (gong-bi)." In painting, the human figures, the buildings, and the instruments easily slip toward an atmosphere of artisanship, but should you bring out your own intentionality and write it, that atmosphere of artisanship disappears on its own" (C.K., 265). In other words, what characterizes painting, what allows it to be assimilated to the art of writing and unites it fundamentally with poetry, is that, even while figuring concrete forms, it cannot "be sought" at the level of the "formal and concrete" (Shen Gua, L.B., 43). Of course, mistakes in figuration, layout, and color are the easiest to point out, but the best paintings are those that show in their composition that they know how to break free from the constraints that govern the order of things when that order has reached the end of its actualization, when it becomes fixed—dries up—in its concretion. The best paintings, through the availability of their configuration, know how to reopen a space beyond the cramped confines, the limitations, and above all the exclusions of the sensible, a space where the world not only becomes desaturated but begins to lose its reality, yet without becoming oneiric. This is not a "dream space," as it has sometimes been characterized in Europe. That expression seems wrong to me. Such paintings liberate themselves from the imperative and restrictive character of form, as when we say of a command, or even of a simple statement, c'est formel (it's categorical). As a result, the spirit is emancipated from the affectations of things and can move "as it will." We know that the seasons serve as a structuring framework for the apprehension of things in China; and yet, when Wang Wei "painted things," it is happily reported, he often brought together peach trees,

apricot trees, lotus, and hibiscus in a single scene. One of his paintings has "banana trees amid snow" (Shen Gua, L.B., 43). Discreetly, gathering into a single intuition what is kept separated in ordinary experience, he gives a glimpse of a more intimate coherence, excavating a yearning for the foundational and liberating us from the categorization of things. He abandons the overly univocal and formal logic of the concrete. Because the tangible-formal is no longer burdensome, "obtaining" operates at the level of the inner self and the painter's hand "responds on its own and in harmony." "Sense-emotionality" need only arrive like a flood bringing vitality for the painting to be "complete." I "gain access" to the coherence internal to the invisible and "penetrate" the sphere of spirit. What finds expression is no longer the cramped intentionality (yi) of an individual affect or a particular and standardized emotion, but an intentionality that emanates spontaneously, indefinitely, through me, from the entire emotional tenor of the world (tian yi)."

As a result, as one adage puts it, "the ancient painters painted intentionality and not form" (Shen Gua, L.B.,43). Form is only a coagulation and concretion of energy, which is fundamentally invisible. The pictorial existence of form, its visible structure, exists only when permeated by the movement of intentionality from which it emerges and toward which it returns, as if to its necessary transcendence. Even more rigorously, painting is intimately related to the poem because the form figured in the painting must be "forgotten" in favor of the significance (also yi) that extends it, just as the figuration of the image in poetry "is forgotten," according to one of the most ancient principles of reading, set forth from the Book of Changes to the Zhuangzi.5 It is not that the concrete figuration in painting or poetry is to be read allegorically, transitively, as occupying two different planes. Nor is it to be read symbolically, with the concrete motif opening onto an infinity of idealities and abstractions. Rather, that tangible mark of the formal and concrete is only the indexical, and above all temporary, emergence of the orientation-signification that passes through it as energy and overflows. As a result, the most difficult intentionality to paint, but also the richest, is the one that does not impose but remains most discreet, stands out the least. In its reserve, it will be all the more profound (Ouyang Xiu, L.B., 42; cf. above, chap. 3). It is not the intentionality of everything that "flies" or "walks" or "goes more quickly or more slowly," and whose form of tension "is easy to see," since it takes on objective form outside. It is the much vaguer intentionality of what remains "detached,"-"free and easy"-"solitary"-"vacant"-"harmonious"-"rigorous"-"peaceful" and whose "scope" extends farther—evasively—the more it withdraws from the world and breaks free of signs. That intentionality refrains from becoming manifest; contained within the inner self, it sinks back into the indifferentiation of the foundational.

The idea that the purpose of painting is to render the invisible intentionality and not form, or that the figure drawing gets its indexical value from a spirit dimension that it tends to "transmit," was greatly favored in China by the claims made about portrait painting (which preceded landscape painting), beginning with the first major painter known, Gu Kaizhi in the fourth century. According to a famous formula, which also became an adage among painters, the capacity to render the spirit of an individual lies entirely in the capacity to orient his eyes and, secondarily, in the contour of the cheeks and cheekbones. This subtle stroke captured in the mass of strokes composing the person is sufficient to render the resemblance as a whole and to convey the inner personality (Su Dongpo, L.B., 454). Anyone doing a portrait, in fact, must refrain from having the model pose, since all these forms, massive and hieratic as they are, are burdensome and remain opaque.* It is even pointless to bother with the entire body. One need only grasp the precise place, particular to each person, where the personality becomes "significant" (expresses its vi: visi). 4 For is it not possible to catch in every physiognomy a point where the significance that holds it in tension surfaces and, disentangled from the encumbrance of forms, gives a glimpse of the most deep-seated movement of its vitality, the most characteristic fold of its intentionality? In reality, ordinary experience has made us all more of less aware of such a point, though we have not analyzed it. By contrast, Chinese pictorial criticism, exploiting the power of the index, has observed it in great detail. If you add "three whiskers" to the cheek of one person or "three light crinkles" next to the eyes of another, as a function of his unique way of lowering his head and raising his eyes, Su Dongpo tells us, these barely visible strokes will succeed not only in making the individual immediately recognizable but also in letting his secret self show through in this inflection characteristic of his vitality. That tiny, barely sketched formality, because it is barely sketched, introduces us into his private

^{*} The pose obstructs. Cf. Picasso on his portrait of Gertrude Stein: "The posing sessions are stretching into spring. But Picasso believes he has failed in his efforts. During one of his violent tempers, he abruptly crases the head: 'I don't see you anymore when I look at you.'" Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, 172.

world. On the threshold of the visible, it is the point of emergence of a whole invisible coherence.

Nevertheless, even while enveloping us in the delicate maze of these formulas, so polished and balanced that they stop all questions in their tracks-questions too harsh where these formulas are concerned-and even though we can hardly imagine what could be added to them, this notion of a transcendence of form somehow still escapes us. It was thematized just as extensively as the doctrine of imitation in Europe, but to no avail: it resists theory. As it happens, the same author, on the same page (L.B., 43; cf. above, 000), presents it in a quotation sometimes as the "spiritual resonance" of breath-energy (qi-yun), and at other times as "spirit dimension" (ru shen).5 He usually obliges us to grope about for it, hunt it down with various terms - significance, emotionality, intentionality—in an attempt to capture that little word yi. We might wonder why he did not seek to clear up and impose order on that field of notions, to elucidate their specific contents and connections. Or, if a single phenomenon is at issue, namely, the transcendence in which form engages to let the immanence of the process of things pass through individual emotion, why does he resort to different terms, if not in the interest of oratorical variation? Sidestepping the lazy answers—those that posit a conceptual deficiency in the Chinese language or an analytical incapacity on the part of the Orient—we will become even more anxious. Might we not be touching on what cannot be constructed on any distinct plan, either logical or mystical? That is why we have barely been able to conceive of it in Europe. Hence it cannot be grasped except through converging approaches and progressive ramifications, through multiple angles and intersecting tracks, produced by piling up and memorizing formulas. The reader who has patiently turned over in his mind these treatises on the art of painting will soon find he no longer feels any haste to mentally construct, abstract, and articulate. At the same time, he will gradually observe the distillation of coherencies that logically privilege either the abandonment of form or the expression of its impulse. "(Spiritual) resonance" is better suited to show the mode of emanation of what is released imperceptibly, spreading "throughout," what is not ascribable; "spirit dimension" tends rather to evoke the unfathomability to which that transcendence gives access and the efficiency at work within the sensible. Li expresses the invisible coherence informing visible configurations; yi designates the mobilizing, emotional-signifying character of what always turns out to be fundamentally only a flow of energy.

4. When judging the labor of philosophy, we give priority to the distinctions it makes, because we find it necessary to first carve up and cleave, in the hope of seizing and building (the concept is "grasped," Begriff). Yet the merit of that tiny word yi is the reverse: its fruitfulness lies in the fact that it keeps unseparated (hence does not rush to "prehend," in the sense of "com-prehend" or "ap-prehend"). It does not completely extricate an abstract plane of meaning from its emotional and volitional roots. In the movement of intentionality, it does not cut off the clarification of intent from its existential orientation, nor the idea from incitement. In short, it does not disconnect thought-feeling-aspiration-life. Calling it polysemic would be insufficient, since we would merely be distributing something that remains upstream of any cleavage, and which cannot be articulated as a plan, into a range of meanings stored in a multiplicity of compartments. "Before Heaven and Earth is the yi." So it was said in the most general way, as the starting point for the incitement-transformation of the world (Bu Yantu, C.K., 287). Yi refers, as if to the source, to that impulse of energy mobilizing from within for the purpose of bringing about, hence able to deploy in the conscious evolution of man as point of view, intention, vision, state of mind, disposition, meaning, desire, and volition all at once. The tension within it varies from mere inclination to concerted application: "having yi" (you yi)t means attentively, on purpose, whereas "following the yi" (shuai yi) means nonchalantly, in one's own way, as one pleases. In the absence of a psychological theory categorizing the agencies and faculties, yi corresponds to vital breath (yi-qi), or to the aspiration of the inner self (yi-zhi), or to affective disposition (yi-xu), or to meaning (yi-yi), or to self-interest (yi-qu), or to aim (yi-zhi), or to tendency (yi-xiang), or to anticipation (yi-liao), or to imagination (yi-xiang), or to thought (yi-si), or to flavor (yi-wei), and so on. If up to this point I have chosen to render it more generally as "intentionality," I did so precisely to take advantage of the return to the primordial, characteristic of the Husserlian approach, and to move closer to the "flow of lived experience" that this approach apprehends at the beginning of consciousness. At the same time, I rely on the broader spectrum already opened by Descartes's cogitatio, as the lived experience of consciousness: I am a thing that thinks, that is, that doubts, conceives, wants, a thing that imagines as well, and that feels. To designate yi in its most general definition as the object of painting, the definition that seals the fate of literati painting, to posit yi, that is, as the only object painting writes, is obviously to make its object the nonobjectifiable, too foundational to

be inscribed in any face-to-face encounter, too fluid to be isolated, opposed, closed off. But that nonobjectifiable thereby relentlessly returns to the original agitation that ceaselessly deploys as realities—gestures, forms, or words, so many figurations—from the invisible impulse.

A single rule has dominated all the treatises on the art of painting since the late Tang Dynasty: that there is *yi* before you take up the brush and that, once the painting has been completed, *yi* remains. An inaugural formula said so of the first major painter known, Gu Kaizhi (Zhang Yanyuan, 23):

The pictorial traces of Gu Kaizhi are taut-energetic-uninterrupted, turning back on themselves or suddenly transcending as it were: their tone and character are both free and easy, their diffusion and momentum are swift as lightning; should yi precede the brush and should yi subsist once the painting is finished: then spirit and energy are complete.

Inserted as it is in this chain, the intentionality that starts off in the painter's spirit and from which he draws the notion of his painting cannot be conceived apart from the energy flow that permeates figuration throughout its execution, and carries it to plenitude. The pictorial process, like the poetic process, deploys as a continuous current going from the initial idea-incitement to its last stroke, and the trace-work continues to vibrate with the tension embodied in its lines. If we read the sequence in reverse (cf. Zhang Yanyuan, 13–14), the formal resemblance that the painting has in view lies entirely in the energy of the brush's motion structuring forms, and is itself grounded in the onset of the current of intentionality, yi. As Shitao repeats at the beginning of his work (chap. 1), from the moment the yi "is clear" and no longer blocked, the brush is completely mobilized and "will permeate through and through," without loss, "all the way."

The aim of the painter's contemplation is nothing other than to liberate that movement of intentionality—which mobilizes the inner self and spreads its impulse via the conduit of the brush, "all the way" through the figurations—from "worries and preoccupations," and from the impediment of the painter's indolence and apathy. But that liberation is the decisive condition. Guo Xi asks (27): If the aspirations of intention-

ality remain "constricted-oppressive-harsh-entangled," "confined to a corner" instead of extending their vitality to the most insignificant line, "how could you write the aspect of things and express human feelings?" Conversely, if intentionality is not blocked, its movement achieves such a power of vision, thanks to the determination by which it operates, that the work, imposing itself on the spirit from the start, is already done before the labor has even begun. In that respect, the painter is said to be like the lute maker who, having found the tree from which he wants to carve his instrument, and guided by his manual skill and by the subtle movement of his intentionality, is "penetrated to the depths of [his work]" to such a degree that, "though the tree is still in the ground and its branches have not been cut," a perfect instrument "already takes shape before his eyes." Similarly, we know that when you paint bamboo, you first need to obtain the "completely formed" bamboo in your bosom, and it is only then that, taking up the brush and looking with mature consideration, you perceive what you want to paint and go after it (Su Dongpo, S.H.P., 218; cf. above, chap. 11). Hence the good painter has no doubt or hesitation in his execution and no need to do a preparatory sketch or draft, which "would chain him down in advance" (C.K., 43, 265). There is one story of which these treatises on the art of painting are particularly fond, because it exemplifies how the vi preceding the brush dispenses with all shilly-shallying and even with all reflection during the execution of the work, because, fundamentally, the vi remains momentum, even as it becomes intellectualized. This is the story of the painter who, assigned to paint rivers and islands for a temple, spends years "managing" and "evaluating" in his spirit without ever daring to take up the brush. Then one day, the accumulated fount of intentionality having suddenly overflowed, he pounces on his instruments and, "his sleeves flying like the wind," "in an instant it's perfect" (Su Dongpo, S.H.P., 233). The work on the temple wall is permeated with such a "tension in its figuration," its (painted) current rages "with such turbulence," that it comes close to "carrying off the surrounding buildings in its wake."

5. Subsequently, you may go on ceaselessly discussing yi, racing endlessly through its effects, but it's no use: you would still like to first categorize it. When you get a foothold in Chinese thought, or when you open yourself to Chinese painting, your spirit senses from the start that the divide between the subject and object is not complete there, or that the world is not treated objectively as a negative in relation to knowledge,

and that the quality of literati painting lies in the way it exploits that nonseparation. But you will not be completely convinced of it so long as you have not identified, for lack of a concept of that nonseparation (it is not so much that Chinese thought is unaware of the possibility of that separation as that it has no interest in supporting it), at least an identifiable site of that inseparability,* in short, so long as you have not experienced it precisely in the vi that painting "writes." In that respect, the term "intentionality," which I have used thus far, still deviates from the Chinese, since, even in its Husserlian conception, intentionality is understood in terms of the European division between subject and object, as "intentional object." This yi of intentionality is properly described as the authenticity of the inner, artless movement (zhen yi) that comes to light in the painter's contemplative spirit and stands opposed to a conscious application in manipulating the brush. Hence, in Li Cheng, "there is much skill but true yi is missing," whereas Dong Yuan possesses a great deal of yi, painting in his own way (see Mi Fu, S.H.L., 211, 214). But in addition, that authentic yi, because it involves an emotional investment, approximates the "ancient yi": unpolished, rough, even careless in appearance because too disdainful to give in to the refinement of the brush and to the facile quality of colors. This yi of intentionality is also that of the brush (bi yu), since the manipulation of the brush is responsible for transmitting the vital impulse. Thus, "if the brushstroke is not blended, they say it is loose and therefore lacking in true yi." Similarly, "if the texture of the ink is not smooth, they say it is dry and therefore lacks living vi" (Guo Xi, 18). But in addition, one also speaks of the yi of intentionality and energy flow with respect to flowers, which are said to be well painted if they display the "floating-moving" character of their "vital yi" (cf. Zhao Mengfu, L.B., 92; Mi Fu, S.H.L., 129, 155). More generally, one also speaks of the yi of the mountain or the landscape: "When you personally present yourself to the mountains and waters to capture them," the "intentional disposition" of the landscape appears (Guo Xi, 13). It is only when "the entire being of the mountain is in total harmony" that "the beautiful yi of the mountain is sufficient" (ibid., 18). When those who contemplate the (painted) landscape cannot use it up by gazing at

^{*} As Hegel remarked, the disadvantage of speaking of the "unity of subject and object" (or of finite and infinite, etc.) is that subject and object still continue to signify what they are outside that unity, whereas, "in their unity, they are not meant to be what their expression says they are." Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 23.

it, when the thought of infinite horizons rises up in them, then you have begun to acquire the "flavor-intentionality" (yi-wei) of the distant summits (Tan Dai, C.K., 248).

Although the Greeks reflected on the souls of plants, and Europeans in the classical age on the souls of animals (Descartes's medicine is still haunted by "animal spirits"), and indeed, though we still sometimes speak of the "souls of things"—"Inanimate objects, do you have a soul?"-"soul" in these instances has always been understood only in a broad, secondary, or vaguely metaphorical sense. That vulgar, nonrigorous usage suggests nothing more than an eroded intelligence that has not yet been completely crushed by science. The poet personifies only after science has dried up the communicative emotionality from which the world comes. "Soul" in the literal sense, in our sense, the sense that religion and metaphysics discuss, a soul capable of knowledge or destined for salvation, is completely different in its status and vocation. Conversely, in literati painting it is truly a single current of intentionality that spreads throughout all existents (the shared realm of the "ten thousand existents," wan wu). What tends toward, in-tentio, in me and in the world is the incitement of the same breath-energy, more or less quintessentialized, of which every visible actualization, every body, every form, is an aggregate. Whatever you paint, says Shitao at the start of his treatise (chap. 1), whether landscapes, human figures, animals, vegetation, or dwellings, "you grasp forms and set tension in motion," "you write life and fathom its intentionality," its yi. That is, sense-intentionality is inseparable from any manifestation of life, just as tension throughout form is always needed to deploy form and bring it into existence. Although the two have sometimes been separated in the technical treatises, the theorists have always taken care to emphasize their fundamental unity. When people in our time paint vegetables or fruit, flowers or plants, says Fang Xun (85), if they set down spots of ink as the hand pleases, it is called writing yi, sense-intentionality (emotionality), xie yi. (This has been translated as "they represent the idea," which is literally false and makes no sense here.) Conversely, if they trace shapes and spread colors with precise brushstrokes, it is called "writing the living," xie sheng. This assumes that "intentionality" means that you act in accordance with the movement of intentionality, and that "living" means that it is by imitating the living that you create "a resemblance to things." Hence the cleavage between the subjective and the objective would finally be complete and, quite logically, the germ of a theory of imitation would appear alongside it. But precisely, the theorist immediately gives up the idea of setting

out on that path and corrects himself: "In which case, you do not realize that, when the ancients wrote the living," it amounted to "writing the living yi of things," "without two formulations being possible." Despite the difference in techniques, "there is still only one logic within things": the yi and the expression of the living become indistinguishable.

One day, Cao Buxing made an ink dot that resembled a fly, and a passing prince thought it was a real fly and tried to bat it away. How could that be possible, asked Fang Xun (85), given that the wings and the feet and all the bodily details were necessarily overlooked? Reply: "There was yi, and that is all."* Whatever it might consist of, yi succeeds in ensuring the ink dot a living physiognomy and thus paints it adequately. What the painter renders through his form, writing yi all along the image traced by the brush, is the phenomenon of trans-forming life. In the end, painting can have no other object. But that object in its very principle, as the Chinese painter ceaselessly explores it, constantly deviates from its limits, de-termines every line, undoes every objectification.

^{* &}quot;It is said that while Giotto was still a boy, and with Cimabue, he once painted a fly on the nose of a figure which Cimabue had made so naturally that, when his master turned round to go on with his work, he more than once attempted to drive the fly away with his hand, believing it to be real, before he became aware of his mistake." Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 1:85–86.

This anecdote, with which Vasari ends his life of Giotto, perfectly intersects Fang Yun's. But in interpreting the anecdote in terms of illusion ("mistake"), Vasari goes no further. He does not see in it a—or rather the—principle that sheds light on painting.

Image-Phenomenon: Painting Transformation and Life

1. It is time to come to a matter that hence far I have only touched on parenthetically: the same Chinese term, xiang, a means both "image" and "phenomenon." What matters is less the semantic fact itself than what makes it possible. The Chinese tradition does not debate the point, has hardly even thought to conceive of it, something that argues in favor of its radicality. In fact, that tradition, having remained so completely in its native context, never ran into any obstacle that would make it suspicious of such a complicity, that would even lead it to notice it. We find no text in these treatises on the art of painting that pauses to consider it, however briefly; this nonseparation simply glides along in its selfevidence. That is enough to alert us that we might finally have found the fold in the Chinese notion of painting. We might have found what has oriented it, what it has not questioned, what it has always sidestepped. At least we can consider that nonseparation a symptom. Since the beginning of this book, I have continually pursued its effects. What we (the Western "we" that is becoming

global) take for a deficiency in logical distinctions may also turn out to be the key to a different intelligibility.

Chinese thought, then, never entirely separates the fact of coming about (as phenomenon) from that of reproducing (as image). In short, it does not set apart a plane of imitation duplicating that of being or the object (dui-xiang, the xiang that means "opposite," "face to face," is the neologism that in the end was used to translate the notion of "object" imported from the West into modern Chinese). That fact is sufficient to cut short any mimetic conception of the image and, as such, could only obstruct the development of a theory of representation in China. From the point of view of China's processes, there will always only be formations surging up within the visible in one aspect or another, phenomenal or imagistic. An image owes its capacity for effective existence to its power to move and incite—as phenomenon. And all the phenomena that form and interact within the world contain in turn just as many inner, matrical, diagrammatic, and programmatic images guiding their actualization (like the figures of immanence - hexagrams and trigrams elaborated in the Book of Changes). As the genealogical reconstructions that inspired these treatises on the art of painting emblematically remind us, the figurative power at work in the universe provided humanity with the first figures and the first strokes, borne by elements of the natural world, and it later fell to the sages to exploit them as images and to make them explicit.

The ancient Book of Changes, which uses the two simplest strokes (solid and broken, continuous and discontinuous: - and --) to compose figures, is considered to be at the origin of painting and of writing. It thus returns us to the point of articulation between the planes of the natural-supernatural (left undifferentiated) and of the human. As a result, it takes us back to the necessary conditions of such a nonseparation of image and phenomenon. In the Book of Changes, this same term, xiang, designates the shapes of stars appearing in the sky-"phenomena" in the Greek sense—and thus serves as a counterpart to xing, the forms that come into actuality and take on opacity on earth. Then, following the hierarchy of these agencies, xiang signifies with increasing abstraction the more initial and structural phase, not yet totally explicit, of configuration (heaven), preceding in that capacity the more material and realized phase of concretion (earth). Simultaneously, in the same text ("Great Treatise"), without marking any break, the term xiang designates the diagrammatic images-trigrams and hexagrams-that the sage traces by combining these strokes to embody the coherence of evolutionary phenomena. Multiple as they are (the "ten thousand xiang," wan xiang), these phenomena constitute the complexity of the situations forming connections in the world. Through these figures, the sage, by integrating the factors and releasing the vectors, is able both to capture their resemblance and to promote their efficacy.

By virtue of a metaphysical decision (and an ontological dependence), which modern painting finally overturned, the term "image" initially directed our minds toward the idea of a duplication: of reproduction, repetition, or representation, whether concrete or mental. In the beginning, the image is reflection, eidolon. But we begin to hear the logic of such a nonseparation in the word "shape," once we have revived its meaning, since we speak both of the shape of the moon or of the various shapes that crystals assume, and of the shapes in a painting. We say that a deal takes shape and that a painter shapes a tree or rock (in Chinese, xiang is both a verb and a noun). This can be grasped even more distinctly in the term "outlines." This word corresponds precisely to xiang, since it expresses the first lines of a thing-situation under development which, as such, constitute its elementary, not yet totally explicit, traits and characteristics, whether of a style or of an aspect. As a result, "outlines" also belongs to a logic of engendering, whether in the case of the image reproduced or of its object. The outlines of a face, of a landscape, or of a drawing indicate something that has only just gained access to the visible, is simply sketched out, in transition from the formless to the formed, and which still consists fully in the movement of its genesis (remember the incompleteness advocated by the Laozi). Already we cannot distinguish between the factor resulting from resemblance and the productive vehicle for coming about.

Let us listen again to how the Old Master of the Stone Drum Parade, in beginning to teach the art of painting, chose to return to that inseparability of image and phenomenon signified by the term xiang (Jing Hao, 251). The old man reminds the neophyte who believes that "resemblance" suffices to achieve "truth" that he must first fully consider the "phenomena" (xiang) of beings and things to achieve both the "flower" (of external resemblance) and the "fruit" (constituted by breath-energy). Otherwise, resemblance, in its superficiality, lies in achieving the material form but abandoning the breath-energy that permeates it and makes it vibrate. The term "vibrate" is not metaphorical here, not more or less aptly poetic, but rather expresses the vibratory phenomenon of reality. If that breath-energy is transmitted only at the level of external manifestation and loses its way when the phenomenality of the image is

concerned, it is the "death of the image"-xiang-and of its phenomenon. The image, the master insists, is at once external manifestation, and as such called on to resemble, and internal phenomenon, which, like any phenomenon, is a phenomenon of existence. It cannot therefore be fully itself—"alive"—except when, far from being cut off from the worldly order of phenomena, it remains inhabited by the same flow of reactivity that, in its course, ceaselessly brings about and also comes about. It does so through breath-energy, which continuously makes the image emanate, just as it continually makes the world breathe. It permeates the traces of the painting just as it passes through the veining of the mountain or the arteries of the human body. This breath-energy makes the fluidity of the ink and the tip of the brush cooperate, just as it makes the mountain and water collaborate within the landscape. And it sets in motion in the most insignificant figuration, as the two factors of any process, both the expansion of the yang and the concretion of the yin, the power of initiative and animation of the one and the capacity of reception and actualization of the other. In the same way as the great process of things ceaselessly alternating between patent and latent, bright and shrouded, the brush forming the image-phenomenon "takes" and "gives back," paints in full and leaves evasive. When it is "true," the image in the painting varies as fundamentally between empty and full as the world varies between appearance-disappearance, emergence-submersion, manifestation and withdrawal.

Since we know that the yi, the current of emotion and intentionality that ceaselessly permeates and incites the world, is itself phenomenal, mobilizing all existence as it does (and, in this capacity, it is neither subjective nor objective; see C.K., 287), we can easily understand that there is no true image, xiang, particularly as landscape, except when that image, remaining connected to breath-energy, lets yi pass through, is permeated and borne by it. Instead of being merely descriptive, reproducing the external features of the scene or motif, the image always conveys in its foundation that inciting flow and is thus an "image of yi," yi-xiang.d It is the image not of a reality reified into a form but of the momentum that brings it about, which is not only the intentional meaning of human beings but equally the tension and propensity of things. We read in the Book of Changes ("Great Treatise") that the sage established the images to express completely the yi, which means that the image has no effective content, that is, no vital component, except when, in its tangible traits, it expresses an invisible aspiration. Even if you want to paint clouds, whether "linked together or concentrated, amassed or dispersed," you must obtain a movement of fluidity and nonobstruction in them such that, in their "free and light" manner, they are a phenomenal image (xiang) whose tension-intentionality (yi) is to "want to fly" (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 120). Similarly, if you paint rain, you must see to it that the woods grow deeper under the screen of clouds and "bear with them the mist and wind, with nothing left of heaven or earth," so that, in that generalized trickling, you obtain an image whose tension-intentionality, yi, is to "want to drip." Far from stemming from some personification of nature as in Europe, where rhetoric reanimated things by way of compensation (attributing to them, always more or less theatrically, the shape of an Ego-subject), that internal momentum expresses the very capacity to come about and deploy through the tension-aspiration at work in any phenomenon. In other words, it is that inciting flow that the image renders at the limit of the visible, springing up from the invisible, toward which it leads rain or clouds, rather than the image seeking to describe and represent. If you want to paint the wind passing through the landscape, Tang Zhiqi continues, you will have to keep from trying to characterize it externally—picturesquely—by making all the branches bend in the same direction. Indeed, even if you went so far as to figure rocks carried off by the wind, you would still not obtain the phenomenon of incitement and agitation that makes the wind. You will still not feel the wind blowing. If you are to feel it, the image must contain internally the "impossibility of facing it head on and resisting it," as a tension running through it and orienting it intentionally (yi)-reactively in relation to this invisible wind. If you wish to obtain the opacity of clouds, you will not do so by making the image black, but rather by playing with a pale ink and making a little brightness appear nearby (to render its progressive quality), not by making the ink fall heavily to cover up and shroud the landscape and thereby depict that darkness, but by setting in motion the capacity proper to ink, in its phenomenality as a liquid body entering into contact with silk or paper, to spread and saturate.

2. If there is one ingenious discovery of which Alberti avails himself, and which bears within it the ambitions of his painting, symbolically prefiguring the constitution of "nature" in the classical age, it is that of the intersection, or veil, a device invented to immobilize and decompose the object (to be painted). I take a frame holding a very sheer, loosely woven veil divided into a certain number of squares by thicker threads, and I place that frame between my eye and the object to be represented, at the tip of the visual pyramid. After plotting the reference points on the

veil, I can always relocate that object, displayed from a determined angle, in the same position, and at equal distance from my sight. The advantage of that intersection is that, in keeping "a thing ever the same before the eyes," it isolates and secures the object, confines it in its presence and determines it in its essence by submitting it to the fixity of point of view.1 The slightest deviation from the established position would render the measurements void, would jumble the lines and shadows. Alberti easily proves that it is technically impossible to reproduce a thing accurately through painting if it does not constantly display the same side, if it changes its position. By contrast, painted things, since they always display the same side, "will more easily match their model than sculpted things." Nothing must move, therefore, neither perceiver nor perceived, so that my gaze can go straight to the object, tirelessly traveling the same distance again and again, without ever venturing to deviate, meticulously carving up the thing and carrying back the object. And, in addition to the value the veil has in clamping down and definitively fixing the living in its net, it possesses the advantage of facilitating a methodical dissection. By dividing up the visible into squares, it makes possible an analytical decomposition, assigning each of the object's respective parts to a precise location, which makes them easier to identify. I can see the forehead isolated in one square, the nose in the next, the cheek in the one beside it, and so on. Are there still transitional zones where the change is barely perceptible, perhaps at the temples, barely suggested convexities where shadow and light mingle indistinctly? To eliminate any haziness and approximation from them, I will go so far as to divide these spherical forms into minuscule squares, as if there were any number of surfaces assembled there. And, even in the variation of these surfaces, I will always mark the middle of the interval with a line to distribute shadow and light more distinctly, to more radically separate day and night, arrested in their course at that instant and defying eternity, even in the most insignificant fragment of each object.

Unless we contrast this methodology to its absence in China, which sheds light on its condition of impossibility, we may never be able to assess adequately what was fundamentally unheard-of and inventive, in any case tenacious, in that desire to extract a unitary object, distinct in its properties, self-consistent and self-sufficient (in the relation of form to matter), entirely disconnected from the perceptual gaze, and always self-identical, at once stable and definitive, and to hoist it up out of the undifferentiated course of things and erect it in its essence. That desire formed European reason itself, and the painter's approach, all in all, is

only an indicator of it. In the classical age, physical science took advantage of that method to constitute "nature." Since Chinese thought had not wagered on Being and conceived of reality only in constant mutation (its first "book," and still its founding book, is the Book of Changes), and since it had not extracted an autonomous subject laying claim to all initiative and supremely organizing the world from its point of view, it is logical that the literati painter chose instead to paint "modification" (bian), diffuse and gradual as it is, constantly open, as a result, to the undifferentiated Fount. The world, emerging-submerging, between thereis-there-is-not, cannot be separated into states—poses, planes, surfaces, objects—by the impulse that continually extends and renews it. In that world without God (Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet said that "the eternal object is God"), even the world of invisible powers is in constant mutation. As the first Chinese history on the subject announces in its introduction, in "fathoming" the zones "of the subtle and latent," the art of painting "explores the modifications of spirits" - which means, if we opt to read the formula in more abstract terms, that the Fount of invisible efficiency, rather than being a stable order, is itself in a state of constant renewal (Zhang Yanyuan, 1). Hence, when you paint landscapes, "changing dispositions-configurations" "come about on their own"g under the brush (Su Dongpo, L. W. Y., 215). That is why landscape painting, freer to move and metamorphose things, whether mountains or waters, becomes the privileged genre (214).

You will paint water, Su Dongpo tells us, not merely as ripples, but rushing in torrents and rising into immense waves, twisting and turning between the rock faces and continuously taking shape as a function of things. That is, you will truly paint it only by "going all the way" and "completely deploying the modifications of the water" (L. W.Y., 188). Painting a thing will consist not of fixing its qualities, but, as we already know, of passing through all its modifications as through so many resources, thoroughly exploiting its variance. The real is thus apprehended not in terms of being and properties, but as *fount* and *capacities*. Where the European painter, in his ambition to represent (objects), comes face to face with the unrepresentable (the sublimity of the storm overwhelming the object in Poussin or Kant), the Chinese painter, according to Shitao, comes up against the "unfathomable" dimension of these endless modifications to which the mountain and water are subject, and which constitute the landscape (chap. 8). As Shitao also says in summarizing the purpose of painting (chap. 3), as if he wanted to rid it of any ontological aim, painting "is the great rule of modification assuring the world's continuance." It is

"the flower and quintessence of the landscape's forms in tension," "the furnace where all things ceaselessly melt down and come into creation, from the remotest times to the present," and "the flow of energies varying their rate of speed between *yin* and *yang*."

Could this continuous modification that the Chinese painter paints be indistinguishable from the variety—of the world—that the European painter introduces into his painting, like God the Creator, to embellish his earthly paradise? Whether it is bodies or colors, the varietas our humanists recommend as the counterpart to oratorical abundance is a rhetorical principle of composition that enriches description, systematically diversifying the modes of presence and affect and thus making the ordinary sense of the narration more convincing. It is not conceived in terms of the logic of a progressive unfolding. Conversely, the Chinese tell us that only "modification" can assure "continuation" (tong) through renewal while avoiding the depletion of the form and the stroke, because modification continuously introduces alterity throughout the drawing (between empty and full, pale and dark, etc.). Form and stroke, rather then continuing on as a dead drawing, come back to life through alternation.

From a different angle, to "modify" is not to "create," as the term has too often been translated, especially in the Shitao, following a Western interpretation.² Creation, with the gaping dark hole of inspiration and the fascination with the ex nihilo lurking in the background, is the European myth that counterbalances mimesis. The Shitao divides in two the capacity for painting. On one hand, there is the first, simple stroke that, having risen up in a single burst, not yet diversified, is given to us by heaven-nature (the "great" Fount of immanence). On the other, there is the indefinite "modification" of that stroke, which constitutes the deployment of painting. To paint in China is thus not to vest a demiurgical power in yourself by setting yourself up as "lord and creator" of the forms of things (Leonardo),3 but to exploit without respite the resources involved in that single stroke, as the common fount in which man is vested and from which he draws all the other strokes, since, in its perfection, that first stroke contains every possibility. The idea that, in the end, it is the operation of "modifying" that most rigorously defines the painter's activity, just as the course of the world consists of an endless modification, also accounts for all the facts that have heretofore remained scattered: why the wrist, above the hand, is the decisive articulation point, because it is in charge of the impulse for variation; why the theorists of painting constantly recommended that the "course" of the brush never be obstructed but continue to move, borne by alternation, like the great continuum of existence indefinitely renewing itself from one pole to the other, day and night, winter-summer; and even why painters dreamed that their painting would unfold dynamically from a single brushstroke, like the undulating body of a dragon whose coiling proceeds on its own toward deployment (Zhang Yanyuan, 23; Guo Ruoxu, 34). In short, that idea explains why, in Chinese, "painting" could be glossed by its homonym, hua, "transform." Modification-transformation" is the binomial that expresses the continuous process of the world and of painting. In the case of painting, this is not true only of its execution: the painting, once completed, is still perceived as a universal mechanism of/in transformation (Fang Xun, 29, see above, 191).

3. We have opened wide the rift between these respective possibilities, following along more distant paths a Chinese philosophy that early on lost interest in representation because that philosophy refrained from radicalizing the two organic, and intersecting, divides within our spirit: subject/object and image/phenomenon. These are the very same divides of which Western modernity has so violently sought to rid itself, after exploiting their possibilities to the nth degree. In opening that rift, we have continued to call down upon us a certain question central to the essence of painting. It returns, brutal in its legitimacy: In these parallel histories, what generic meaning can "painting" assume, beyond a flat correspondence of category? What meaning can embrace both the free and easy soaring of the bamboo stalk and the face of the Madonna with its fresh rosy tint? Whether the line becomes empty and breathes at the impetus of the brush, or the impasto of the brushstroke infinitely aspires for the downy texture of flesh and renders it eternal, what does painting aim to paint? And can we still speak of painting in generic terms? If you have not given up the idea of providing the verb to paint with a direct object, then corner the painter, call on him-wherever he comes from and whatever he paints, faces, clouds, a kettle next to a pipe, water, a landscape (or squares, or emulsions, or "nothing")—to name what he paints through these various things, if not themselves. He will surely refrain from invoking the "visible," because he is well aware that his labor, once it achieves any degree of profundity, is to make the invisible appear: invisible feelings, or the "soul," or the "spiritual," or "breath-energy," or the continuous transition of existence and its slow incrustation in

things. Nor will the painter say that he paints the "real," since that term has no value, being too contradictory and too polemical from the start. Should the real be located in the "mind" or in "matter"—terms that now seem to be, modestly, only our own—in the massiveness of bodies, or in the iridescence of light, or in the look on a face, or in . . .? Nor will he say that he paints the "true," since that term remains irrevocably equivocal. There is of course truth through adequation, that is, in this case, through resemblance. But Braque also asserts that his fish are true. And for Jing Hao, the "true" is what contains breath-energy. Nor will the painter say he paints the "beautiful," since, despite the claims advanced, it can be at most an effect resulting from painting. The Chinese painter will be unable to designate what painting paints, except with an ultimate term, which no longer refers to anything, does not depend on any other, and turns out to be the foundation of all unobjectifiability, a term from which you can go no further back, and with respect to which-solely with respect to which—we living beings maintain absolutely no distance. He will say it simply in Chinese, with a single word, sheng: "to be born"-"to be formed"-"to be alive."

"Life" is what cannot be deduced or even conceived, what, as phenomenon, neither words nor sounds can apprehend. Literature cannot grasp it, since the literary is oriented toward meaning from the start (whereas phenomenally, life has no meaning). Nor can music, since it is entirely dedicated to capturing intimate-invisible rhythms (whereas life is the aspect of the invisible that ceaselessly comes into actuality and displays itself as visible). The meaning of life is what passes/comes to pass through that individuated diversity, which spreads and, by continuously making that diversity react and find harmony from within - by trans-forming it keeps it alive. The (Chinese) painter is in quest of that organicity of the organic (cf. the notion of li). His paintings are appreciated in direct proportion to their capacity to make something of life express itself between the bamboo leaves or the rock structure, distilling the moment that promotes it and starting to become once more, through that refound fluidity, available and unspecified. Thus, in taking on these configurations, borne as they are by their modification under way, our own vitality expands effusively, blossoms, becomes simultaneously unblocked and regulated.

The continuity and consensus in that respect are astonishing. It is as if the Chinese, so sure of their footing, no longer wanted to attempt anything else and had shut out anxiety, as if the purpose of painting were itself to free from anxiety. With the force of tireless variation proper to the Chinese literati, and because there is nothing outside heaven-nature

for them, and hence no greater mystery than the immanence of life—or rather that mystery is the only one—they ceaselessly returned to it as to the source. The first principle of painting, touching on the resonance of breath-energy, detached from all the others and receding toward the inexpressible, is the principle of the "living and moving," that is, according to a gloss, of a vitality that deploys and renews itself without ever being exhausted (Tang Zhiqi, C.K., 114). The manipulation of the brush, Shitao often says, is charged with bringing to life. In short, the effect of spiritual resemblance (resonance), which transcends formal resemblance, is itself "life" (Qi Baishi, 52). If the literati further explain that painting writes yi, they do so precisely to better highlight, in a less descriptive and more internal mode, the current of emotion and intentionality permeating beings and things and inciting-animating them. By following the veins of the mountain and the arteries of the human body, you can perceive cosmic pulsation, the rhythm of yin and yang. It would be impossible to say more, conceive more fully, or go further back. The whole play of polarities engendering forms by alternation is what produces respiration. And if the great image has no form, it is because its phenomenality remains permeated by that breath-energy that constantly dis-excludes and unmires, that regenerates by inciting communication.

4. In a way, the first term we used to designate painting in Greek already expressed it fully. The painter is the one who "traces"-"writes" something "living," he is a "zō-grapher." Not a biographer: he extracts the character of being (phenomenally) alive $-z\bar{o}\bar{e}$ - from every existent, instead of urging human life in isolation (as bios) toward a promotion of meaning (that is what literature does). His picture, correlatively, is a zographeme, a graphic of life. We know that Plato begrudged painting for being mute and thus remaining shut off from the power of the logos, and especially for being ontologically wanting, in its capacity as image, in relation to the being it imitates (one can imitate "being," but not beingalive). Nevertheless, Plato gave a definition of painting that forms a bridge with China: "In fact, the beings to which painting gives birth have the shape of living beings" (Phaedrus 275d). To translate word for word: "its productions" (ekgona), whatever they may be, painting "establishes them as living." In other words, Plato acknowledges in spite of himself that it is because they are rendered living, and not because they are likenesses, that the beings one paints are the very object of painting. In Cratylus (430d), even though imitation is at issue, Plato laconically compares "names" to "living things," by which he means pictures.

238 Chapter 15

I cannot sufficiently assess the degree to which other paths attempted by European painting, especially the tradition born of the icon which largely inspired the medieval image, distance us from such a quest for the living through painting. European painting is a manifold adventure: we sense this especially strongly from China. It has constantly invested in new projects and taken risks, come undone and moved on, questioned its means and ends and faced the impossible. In its artworks, it knocks down every theory advanced to circumscribe its fate. But I may at least observe that it has periodically used such a reference to the living to construct its history, although that quest is envisioned in a completely different way than in China. It is not inspired by the unitary notion of a breath-energy, which has ceaselessly sustained Chinese thought, and its effort is rather to make the individuating-in-forming momentum of life, the vehicle of spirit, penetrate the "shadows" of opaque matter. By this single criterion, Vasari accounts for the renaissance of painting beginning with Cimabue and Giotto, thanks to the skill acquired by breaking free from the Byzantine manner and its linear and tight style, whether through the velvety texture of the fabrics, the suppleness of movements, or the expressiveness of faces and attitudes. In that way, these painters rendered the living through the illusion of representation, rather than setting in motion the polarity within figuration and there practicing trans-formation, as the Chinese painter does. In the end, what do people say about the Mona Lisa, what will they ever be able to say, except that "the eyes possess that moist lustre which is constantly seen in life," or that her nose "possesses the fine reddish apertures seen in life" (Vasari)? Once again, as in China, the discourse on painting is astonishingly repetitive in this respect, as if it had reached a final stage and, running up against the inconceivable, found itself condemned to hark back endlessly to the same thing. Can anyone ever go back before that "being-alive," before the fact that "there is life"? "They appear to be actual living flesh," Vasari said of Raphael,4 and Vasari cannot imagine any higher praise. When European painting, breaking free from mimesis, worked to desolidify painting from representation, some of the greatest painters did so precisely in order to hold only to life, but a life now disengaged from its referential casing and more internal: no longer as features, flesh, aspect, but as tension, reaction, current. Picasso asked: Do you really believe I am interested in representing two people on this canvas? Rather, beginning from the initial emotion that the sight of them gave me, little by little their real presence became blurry, they changed into fiction, mutated into a problem. They became for me, no longer two people, but a play of forms, colors, within which "the essential was nevertheless preserved," the "vibration of life." 5

In shedding light on such a vibratory nature of the phenomenon, no longer conceiving it as anything but a phenomenon of energy, modern (European) painting underwent the same revolution as modern (quantum) physics, and the two discoveries have gone hand in hand. Philosophy does its thinking afterward. Painting and physics understand each other, especially regarding the operative characteristics of the void, with which China was familiar early on. At the same time, how could modern painting-and it is by virtue of that decomposition of the object that it will finally be called modern-not have been led to embrace the view, so often developed by literati thought, that painting is a process on the same order as the great process of the world? The modern painter, aligning his fate with the classical theme of painting enslaved to nature or transcending it, but always referring to it, shatters that dependence and, abandoning the imperatives of imitation, including the imitation of the ideal, conceives of his work as "parallel to nature" (Cézanne), as an "equivalent" (Picasso) of it, as born "from the technical point of view, exactly the way the cosmos was born" (Kandinsky). As Braque says: "My concern is to make myself at one with nature much more than to copy it." *"Nature," then, is no longer nature objectified by the gaze, but natura naturans, the internal principle of "creation-transformation" (zao-hua), n as the binomial codified in China has it, by virtue of which forms engender and renew themselves. As the Chinese literati say, painting "steals away" that nature, or "goes all the way" to it (Zhang Yanyuan, 14), or is an "integral part" of it (Mi Fu, S.H.L., 124), or, "in becoming immersed in modification-transformation," is "in spiritual competition" with it (Li Rihua, L.B., 756).

As a result, true originality (stemming from audacity, force, inventiveness) reappears on the other side. Strangeness is not so far away (as China) but lies in the history of our spirit. If you are seeking the astonishment that comes from travel, you will better elicit it by revisiting the jointly structured strata, forming a fold, that have constituted the historial base of European reason, from which it conquered the world,

^{*} Picasso to Malraux: "You're the Chinese one, you know Chinese proverbs. There's one that says the best thing ever said about painting: one must not imitate life, one must work like it." Picasso, *Propos sur l'art*, 141.

240 Chapter 15

and which a trip to China restores in their singularity. The fact is, it was possible (that is, conceivable) to isolate and immobilize presence absolutely, focusing it and holding it for completely ascribable as a quality of Being (or of God)—sharp, outside the flow and haziness of "life" in its continuous modification. It was possible to conceive of nature radically cut off from an Ego-subject, constituting bodies, including my body, but subject to laws corresponding categorically to the concepts of my mind. It was possible to "pose" the object at the level of cognition as an object of "synthesis," endowed with properties, thus drawing it away from the indefiniteness of the thing and setting it up in opposition, unitary, and subject to the categories of our understanding, just as the (European) painter makes the nude pose on the dais and abstracts from that nude in order to draw out the pure form, which may be ideal. The reign of the object has resided in the unprecedented audacity from which Europe is so painfully recovering: to have dared think of the world, and of itself in the world, as an absolute negation of self-consciousness. It was an extreme (and heroic) gesture. As an invention, it was just as fascinating in its capacity for wrenching violence, and just as phenomenal in its effect, as that of supposing that the world was written by God in geometrical figures, as classical science assumed, that in this respect it could be completely reduced to models and that, as a result, it was possible to reproduce and predict every behavior in the world through mathematical notions connected by equations and calculations, in terms of physical objects.

Hence, when Picasso refers explicitly to the "Chinese" and says, like the Chinese literati, that one must not "imitate life" but "work like it" (a quotation I use as the epigraph for this book), he grasps a complicity with his prodigious artist's eye. But it is no use: in the end, he does not say the same thing as they. He cannot. Even though he intends to quote the Chinese word for word, and even though his experience may correspond to theirs, the meaning, from within reference itself, comes out completely different. When he says it, he is all the while relying on the very strata he wants to disturb, and on the magnificent ruins of the Great Object. He thus relaunches the spirit toward more risk and adventure. He uses a term for which we have found no equivalent in all the Chinese reflections on painting-not "studying," not "applying oneself"-and which, produced from these strata, carries our entire modernity with it, indefinitely widening the gap between us and the order of wisdom or of the natural, which is forever past. These obsolete terms now make humanity dream of that lost ingenuousness. Picasso says what he says, in short, in order to go on "working."

Glossary of Chinese Expressions

CHAPTER I

- a) Yi chu mo yu you wu jian nan zhuang 一出没於有無間難忧
- b) Feng luan chu mo, yun wu xian hui 峰峦出没雲霧顯晦
- c) Tian zhen 天算
- d) Bi bi chu chu, jie yi jie duan 筆筆處處,皆皆截斷
- e) Yan-ying 格 映
- f) Jing 境
- g) Xian-yin 别能
- h) Yin xian po ce 隐題叵測
- i) Wang zhi wu xing, kui zhi you li 望之望行 揆之有理

- a) Zhuliu 主流
- b) You xiang yin zhi yi li, wu xing yin zhi yi sheng 有象因之以立,赵形因之以生
- c) Xiang xing shi ye, er xing zhe bi ji yu wu xing 象形是也而形者心箱無形
- d) Wu 🛓
- f) Miao &
- g) Suoyi hua ze jing wei zhi ru bu ke ce yi 所以重則精微之入不可測矣
- h) Yi 產
- i) Ming 'F
- j) Xiang 🕏
- k) Shou shi ze wu xing 安事則無形
- 1) Yi hua 🔹

CHAPTER 3

- a) Qing 件書
- b) Jing-shen 精神
- c) Depending on whether one reads qiong 第 or ying 3
- d) Cun 17, wang T
- e) Mian mian ruo cun 諾 縣 若 存
- f) Hu buang 小型外
- g) Feng-jiao 風教; feng-jing 風景; feng-zi 風姿; feng-yi)風儀; feng-du風度; feng-cao 風珠; feng-shen風神; feng-qing風情; feng-yun風韻; feng-cai 風米; feng-wei 風味
- h) Qi-xiang A
- i) Xing 形; shi 勢; qi-xiang 氣 象

- a) Da xiang wu xing 大象些形
- b) Si bu xiao から不. 百
- c) Nai yong zhi bu ke qiong ji 乃用之不可寫極
- d) Hun 🎾
- e) Ruci shi yi shan er jian shu shi bai shan zhi xingzhuang 如此是一山师兼数十百四之形狀

- a) De 🏗
- b) Bu wei yi xiang 不為一象
- c) Wan 12, mian 2
- d) Bi cai yi er, xiang yi ying yan 學才一二,像已應為
- e) Cisui bi bu zhou er yi zhou ye 此難筆不周而意用也
- f) Yi 竟
- g) Qi yun 東背
- h) Shen dao xie bu dao nai jia 神到寫不到乃佳
- i) Er in
- i) Wuweieryouwei 無鳥而有鳥
- k) Sheng la zhong qui po sui zhi xiang 生辣中求酶蜂之相

CHAPTER 6

- a) Shu tong 疏 適
- b) Yi tong shen dan bi kong guo 四項身淡筆空過
- c) Ganbi 乾 筆
- d) Fei bai 飛 白
- e) Shi
- f) Yi xu yun shi, shi zhe yi xu, tong fu jie you ling qi 以虚運實, 富者亦虚,通幅皆有靈氣
- g) Yong [F]
- h) According to the Chinese expression xu er ling 虚中 蜜
- i) Cf. the expression of the *Jinsilu* compiled by Zhu Xi (1, §2): tong yue zhi 「自 智

- a) Si xiang xing er wu wu suo zhu yan 四氟形而物與所主馬
- b) Wu yin sheng er xin wu suo di yan 五青聲而心無所適為
- c) Xuan 🛣
- d) Qu qi yiqi suo dao 取其意知听到

- Qi-yun 桑 稿
- f) Yun A, be 40
- g) Xing-shen H; Ap h) Shen ben wang duan, qi xing gan lei 神本七端, 栖形感類
- Ben hu xing zhe rong ling 本手行者概要
- i) Quyu Is 75
- k) According to the classic formula of the Zhouyi: cang zhu yong 藏諸用
- D Bujibuli 不即(靐)不離
- m) Wu wei you wei, you wei wu wei 幽謂有謂,有謂些謂
- n) Ji 🖈
- o) Hen TE
- p) Fing 精

- Ni 如; fang /为; xiang /象
- b) Ni zhu qi xingrong, xiang qi wu yi 擬諸其形容, 泵其物 宜
- c) Shen chao 神 超
- d) Ni Tai xu zhi ti 提太虚之階
- e) Ying wu xiang xing 應物 象 43
- f) Yi xingsi zhi wai qui qi hua 心形的之外亦其者
- g) Gousi 台M
- h) Jusidadao 傾かれた道
- i) Li xing de si 離析i 得小n
- j) Dang yi shen hui, nan ke yi xing qi qiu ye 當內神會,難可以形器求也

- Shan-shui Li 1k; shan-chuan Li 11]
- b) Jie hao bu zhu xiang 皆毫不著象c) Hao shan-shui 好山水
- d) Zhi you er qu ling 質有而趣置
- e) Xing 付生
- f) Tian-di 天地

- g) Ziran 自然
- h) Bukece 不可测
- i) Jian ling 芳盛
- j) Qing-gan 情感; qing-kuang 情况
- k) & &
- 1) De 德
- m) Ren 1主
- n) Zi 漬

- a) Ai shan-shui 爱山水
- b) Chang
- c) Xian hu
- d) Yuran chu zhi 都然出之
- e) Ben yi 本意
- f) Zhen J
- g) Ze shanshui zhi yidu jian yi 則山水之意度見矣
- h) 71 8/1
- i) Yidu 意度,yitai 意態
- j) Shi 軟, xing 折i
- k) Zhen zhe qi zhi ju sheng 真者象質俱盛

CHAPTER II

- a) Guan 類見
- b) Xing-hui A 🏟
- c) Ling 🧃
- d) Zai ji wu ju, xing wu zi zbu 在己些居, 形物 自訾
- e) Wu fang 基方
- f) Ren xu yang de xiong zhong kuan kuai, yi si yue shi 人須養得胸中電快 意思悦適
- g) Shen pan yi huo 神盘意豁
- h) Fan hua, qi yun ben hu you xin 凡書, 重韻本早遊山
- i) Congrong zide 從落自得
- j) Xian 附
- k) Jing-shen 精神
- 1) Tayan 答為
- m) Er xu 师虚

- Yi ming yuan bua 意冥无化
- Yu duo qi zao hua 数 真 其 传 化
- p) *Qin* **1**+
- q) Yukan 好看
- You dui 选動

- Hua yu shan 重於山; hua yu shui 量於水
- b) Xing 形; shi 勢
- c) Neng guan shanchuan zhi xingshen 能量山川之形神
- d) Shi 教
- e) Sui shi qu xiang 隨勢取象
- f) Ji 機
- h) Ji-qu 梳趣
- i) Dongjing bian-hua, jiqu wu fang 動静變化,機趣與方
- j) Dan jue yi pian huaji 但置一片化橡

CHAPTER 13

- Bi-mo 👙 🛂
- b) Fi 概
- c) Xing Hi
- d) Fu hua zhe, xing lian di wan wu zhe ye 夫童者,形天地萬物者也
- Huazhizuo 書之作

- Hua 📑
- b) Xie
- c) Yi hua 重 d) Yi bi shu 筆書
- e) Fei bai 集台
- Shu hua zhi miao, dang yi shen hui 書畫之妙,當以神會
- Shi 請 g)
- Xing yu wai Tis to 41 h)

- i) Xing 興 j) Ji 寄
- k) Tian-gong 天土
- Bimozhiwai 等學之外; yan wai 言外

- m) Han yi 全意.
 n) Xie yi 實意; gong bi 工業
 o) Tian yi 天意
 p) Wang xing de yi 忘玩得意.
- q) Yisi 意思 r) Qi-yun 杂韻
- s) Rushen > 14
- t) You yi 有意
- u) Shuaiyi 再走
- v) Yiqi 意杂; yizhi 意志; yixu 意绪; yiyi 意 義; viqu 走趣; yizhi 走, 指; vixiang 走. 均; viliao 意料; yixiang 意象; yisi 意见; yiwei 音味
- w) Zhen yi 5 1.
- x) Yi du · 度 y) Xie sheng 富生

- a) Xiang **黎** b) Dui-xiang **對 黎**
- Fan qi chuan yu hua, yi yu xiang, xiang zhi si ye 凡彖傅於華,遺於彖, 象之死也
- d) Yi-xiang 走象
- e) Bian 變
- f) Liong shen bian Is it &
- g) Hua shan shui feng lu, zi cheng bian tai **吉山水雌麓**, 自成变能
- h) Fu hua, tian xia bian tong zhi da fa ye 夫首,天下碧雨之大 法也
- i) Bian-tong 🐉 🧵
- j) Hua 🕏 , bua 化
- k) Dan jue yi pian hua ji 相骨一片化核
- m) Li yun sheng dong 素韻生動
- n) Zao-bua 造 此

Notes |

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

- 1. See his many discussions of Pierre Ryckmans's translation of Shitao, esp. pp. 177–78.
- 2. Note, however, that one of the obsolete meanings for "spirits" listed in Webster's Third is "mental constitution . . . mental powers; intellect."

CHAPTER I

- 1. Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), 25.
- 2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5. [Here and throughout, I have substituted a reference to the English translation for F. Jullien's French source.—trans.]
- 3. See Pierre Ryckmans's note in his translation: Shitao, les propos sur la peinture du Moine Citrouille-amère (Paris: Hermann, 1984), 27.

- 1. Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, trans. A. Philip McMahon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), 185 and 92.
- According to the classical loci condemning apeiron: Plato, Theatetus 183; Aristotle, Metaphysics 1008a.

3. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 9. [The words "empty profundity of the undifferentiated," the reference to Schelling, and the last remark about God do not appear in the English translation of the *Phenomenology*.–trans.].

CHAPTER 4

- 1. Jean Paulhan, La peinture cubiste (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), chap. 2.
- 2. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics 5.10.4 (1137b30).
- 3. See Anne Kerlan, "Traduction et commentaire d'un texte sur la peinture chinoise: Fang Xun (1736–1799) et son *Shanjingju hualun,*" thesis in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Université Paris-7, December 2000.
- 4. Here I follow Pierre Ryckmans's French translation, which seems perfect to me. Shitao, les propos sur la peinture du Moine Citrouille-amère, 99. I diverge from this translation at the end of the chapter, for reasons I have already explained in Penser d'un dehors (la Chine) [coauthored by Thierry Marchaisse (Paris: Seuil, 2000)—trans.], 376ff.
- 5. Baiyuzhai cihau, chap. 6, §26. On this question, see my Valeur allusive [des catégories originales de l'interprétation poétique dans la tradition chinoise: Contribution à une réflexion sur l'altérité interculturelle (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1985)—trans.], 213ff.
- 6. Cf. Zheng Zhuolu's edition of *Shanjingju hualun* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962), 57. Note that the word "making" is not in the ancient text and that *yiwei* has its usual meaning, "consider."

- 1. André Malraux, *Le musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale,* new ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 56.
- 2. Pliny, Natural History 35.145, in The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art, trans. K. Jex-Blake (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1982), 169 [translation slightly modified—trans.].
- 3. On this subject, see esp. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 191-202 [Vasari quoted, 221—trans.].
 - 4. [Quoted in Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 222—trans.].
- 5. Aristotle, *The Physics*, ed. T. E. Page et al., trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford, 2. vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), 8.261a (2:361).
 - 6. Aristotle, Treatise on the Parts of Animals 640a.
 - 7. Cited in Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 193.
- 8. Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* [(Nîmes: Éditions J. Chambon, 1990)—trans.].
- 9. Comte de Caylus, *Discours sur la peinture et la sculpture*, ed. André Fontaine (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1910), chap. 4, "De la légèreté de l'outil," 149ff.
- 10. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert W. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 259.
- 11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le langage indirect," in *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 79.

- 12. Jean Paulhan, L'art informel (éloge) (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 14; see also idem, La peinture cubiste, chap. 1, "D'un monde en lambeaux."
- 13. I translate *qu* as "partial" and not "curved" because only that meaning, contrasting with "whole," is logical in the series and sufficiently different from the following expression. That meaning is attested among ancient thinkers. See, for example, *Zhongyong*, §23 and the commentary of Zhu Xi.
- 14. Lidai minghua ji, 2.2, "On the Use of the Brush in Gu, Lu, Zhang, and Wu"; cf. W. R. Acker, ed. and trans., Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954-74), 177ff.
- 15. In my translation, I am trying to take into account the very pertinent remark by Ryckmans in *Shitao, les propos sur la peinture*, 97, n. 4.

- 1. Cf. Nicole Vandier-Nicolas, Le Houa-che de Mi Fou (1051–1107) ou le Carnet d'un connaisseur à l'époque des Song du Nord (Paris: PUF, 1964), 51.
 - 2. Aristotle, Physics 4.213a-217b.
 - 3. Lucretius, On Nature 1.330-482.
- 4. Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt/M: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 16ff. and 202ff.
- 5. Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, quoted in Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 60, n. 279. See also Lee's discussion, 56–61, esp. 60.
- 6. See Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular (New York: George Wittenborn, 1955), 49 [translation modified—trans.]. See also 43–67.

- 1. Wang Bi's expression echoes that in Confucius's *Analects* (4.10) and is found in Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*, §49. It seems to me that Rudolf G. Wagner, in his scholarly study of the treatise, did not properly grasp the meaning of these formulas: "When the Five Sounds take on notes and the minds have nothing (else) which engages them, then the Great Sound comes about" ("Wang Bi: 'The Structure of the Laozi's Pointers' (*Laozi weizhi lilüe*), A Philological Study and Translation," *Toung Pao*, vol. 72 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 104.
 - 2. See Mou Zongsan, Caixing yu xuanli (Taiwan: Xuesheng shuju), 142.
 - 3. Georges Braque, Le jour et la nuit (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 40.
- 4. Concerning the difficulty of interpreting this formula, see Hubert Delahaye, Les premières peintures de paysage en Chine: Aspects religieux (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981), 118.
- 5. Guo Ruoxu, Notes sur ce que j'ai vu et entendu en peinture, trans. Yolaine Escande (Brussels: La Lettre volée, 1994), 75. Alexander C. Soper translates this simply as "give and take" in *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Council of Learned Societies, 1951), 16.
- 6. See my Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone, 2000), chap. 15.
 - 7. Plotinus, Enneads 1.6.8.
 - 8. Origen, Philocalia 2.4.

- 1. Aristotle, Poetics 48b; cf. also Rhetoric 1.1371b.4.
- 2. I have already raised this question in *La valeur allusive*, chap. 1, "L'oeuvre et l'univers: Imitation ou déploiement."
- 3. Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, 161 [translation modified—trans.]; on that question, see also the classic studies by Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. Joseph J. S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), and Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut pictura poesis*, chap. 1, "Imitation."
- 4. On this image of reaching the center of the circle, which escapes disjunctions, see also my *Un sage est sans idée*, [ou, L'autre de la philosophie (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 137—trans.]. In aesthetics, the image was already used in the first poem of Sikong Tu's *Shipin*.
- 5. See *Qi Baishi tan yilu*, ed. Wang Zhende and Li Tianxiu (Changsha: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1998), 52–53.
- 6. There were of course interactions between painting and sculpture in China, as in the case of the Tang Dynasty sculptor Yang Huizhi, disciple of the painter Wu Daozi and inspiration for the painter Guo Xi. That interaction is also marked in the difference between the pictorial styles of Cao and Wu, which had an effect on sculpture (Guo Ruoxu, 37). But the two arts were not conceived in relation to each other.

CHAPTER 9

- 1. Quoted in E. H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of the Landscape," in *Norm and Form* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 107. See also Gombrich's discussion. 116–20.
 - 2. Cf. Nanshi, chap. 75, and Songshu, chap. 93.
 - 3. Cf. Hubert Delahaye, Les premières peintures de paysage en Chine, 76ff.
 - 4. Zhang Zai, cited as an example by Zhu Xi in Jin si lu, chap. 1, §43-44.
- 5. René Descartes, Méditations métaphysiques, 2; Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, "Perception," 67–79.

CHAPTER 10

- 1. Nicole Vandier-Nicolas, Esthétique et peinture de paysage en Chine (Paris: Klincksieck, 1982), 84.
 - 2. Lin Yutang, The Chinese Theory of Art (London: Heinemann, 1967), 71.
 - 3. Braque, Le jour et la nuit, 15, 40.
- 4. See the excellent analyses of Merleau-Ponty in "Le langage indirect," in La prose du monde, 72ff.
 - 5. Especially Wang Shizhen, Daijingtang shihua, chap. 3.
 - 6. Alberti, On Painting, 56 [translation modified—trans.].

CHAPTER II

- 1. Joachim Gasquet, Cézanne, new ed. (Paris: Cynara, 1988), 101.
- 2. Ibid., 146ff.
- 3. An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci, with a Selection of Documents Relating to His Career as an Artist, ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 51.

- 4. Svetlana Alpers, The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 33-41.
 - 5. Merleau-Ponty, "Le langage indirect," in La prose du monde, 79.
- 6. The more literati painting takes its distance from formal resemblance, the more it restricts the role explicitly attributed to the eye. There is an obvious development in that respect, it seems to me, beginning with the first formulas, like those of Zong Bing (fourth to fifth centuries), who recommends that we "harmonize with the eye" (but also, he immediately adds, "meet in spirit").
 - 7. Ryckmans, Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 72-74.

- 1. Ryckmans, Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 95.
- 2. Alberti, On Painting, 68.
- 3. Braque, Le jour et la nuit, 15.
- 4. See esp. Alpers's excellent chapter in The Art of Describing, 119-68.
- 5. Vandier-Nicolas, Esthétique et peinture de paysage en Chine, 69.
- 6. Cf. Ryckmans, in Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 74, n. 10.

CHAPTER 13

- 1. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 46; Braque, Le jour et la nuit, 11.
- 2. [Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 39-trans.].

CHAPTER 14

- I. Louis Marin, Sublime Poussin (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 23.
- 2. In his excellent L'art chinois de l'écriture (Paris: Seuil-Skira, 1989).
- 3. Ryckmans, Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 104.
- 4. It seems to me that Pierre Ryckmans's long discussion inspired by Qian Zhongshu, demonstrating that "the criteria for poetic orthodoxy are the exact opposite of the criteria for pictorial orthodoxy" (Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 107ff.) sets out a hypothesis that is too ingenious to be true. It is, moreover, superfluous: if we look closely at the painting treatises and at the poetic treatises, it became apparent that the implicit is a value shared by both modes of expression.
- 5. Zhuangzi, chap. 26.13, and "Great Treatise," Book of Changes. On this subject, cf. my La valeur allusive, chap. 6 and Detour and Access, chap. 13.

- 1. Alberti, On Painting, 68-70.
- 2. Cf. Ryckmans, Shitao, les propos sur la peinture, 76, 117, 126.
- 3. Leonardo, Treatise on Painting, 24.
- 4. Vasari, "Life of Lionardo da Vinci" and "Life of Raphael of Urbino," in *The Lives of the Painters*, 2:164 and 223–24.
 - 5. Picasso, Propos sur l'art, 34.

Index |

absence, 5, 7. See also presence-absence absolute, the, 19, 25, 38, 127-28 abstraction, 93, 147. See also modern painting "acheiropoetic" images, 109n Alberti, Leon Battista: on canvas as window, 157, 160, 179; on grammar of painting, 187-88, 210; grids of, 156-57; on painting and sculpture, 118n; on painting trees, 190n; on representation, 179, 179n; on requirements for the painter, 163; science of perspective of, 153-55; veil of, 231-32 Allegory of Painting (Vermeer), 181 Analects (Confucius), 7, 41, 58n, 138 anecdotal, 44, 55-56, 78, 92-93, 113, 146 animation, 77-79, 85, 89, 93-96, 123-27, 132-38. See also life, painting; respiration; vitality Apelles, 62

Ariosto, 214

Aristotle: on the determinate, 37; and final cause, 63-64; on form and color, 196; on imitation, 106-8; nature in, 129; on poetry and painting, 213; on the ruler made of lead, 49; and the void, xiii, 79 art history, 15-18, 43-44, 117, 119 artisanship, 13, 78, 93, 114, 217 "as if," 7-8, 29-31 atmosphere, 40-42 Augustine, Saint, 160 availability: and abstinence of the spirit, 171; Cézanne and, 163; and contemplation, 167; of great image, 116-17; to landscape, 161-62; in modern painting, 153; in poetry, 215; of the sketch, 69, 153; in the Zhuangzi, 164-65, 168-69

Bacon, Francis, 130 bamboo, painting, 145-46, 174, 223 Barbaro, Daniele, 62

Bathers (Cézanne), 88 brushstrokes, 35-36, 78-79, 89, 124, 224 Baudelaire, Charles, 60 Buddhism, 10, 128, 166, 205-6 Baxandall, Michael, 187, 213 Bu Yantu, 13-15, 35, 211, 221 being: in Aristotle, 79; and Chinese tradition, 7; in Hegel, 27n; and lack, 5; Cao Buxing, 226 and mimesis, 149; versus presencecapacity-countenance, 54, 147-48 absence, 4-7; and release, 86, 93; and capacity-virtue, 68-70, 137-38, 183 the sketch, 66; and spirituality, 89-90; carefree wandering, 165-66 and the tao, xxiii, 19, 29, 32, 38; versus cartography, 181-82 "there is-there is not," 2, 20-21; and Castiglione, Baldesar, 63n the vase, 81-83 Caylus, Comte de, 64 Bergson, Henri, 145n Cézanne, Paul: and art history, 15, 16; on between, 3, 94-97, 100-102, 112 atmosphere, 40-41; on availability, Billeter, Jean-François, 212 163; on creation-transformation, 239; Book of Changes: on breath-energy, 135; on the finished, 60; and gazing at the diagrammatic figures of, 107; dual motif, 159-60; Merleau-Ponty on, logic of, 185-87; on heaven and earth, 204; and modern painting of form, 198; on the image in poetry, 218; and 43; on painting body and soul, 88, 88n; the image-phenomenon, 228-29; and on Renaissance perspective, 153; on mutation, 233; system of variance of, the spirituality of landscape, 133n; and 151; on the undifferentiated fount, toil, 167n; on the truth in painting, 195; and wind, 41; writing and painting in, 211; on yi and xiang, 230-31; on Chardin, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon, 62n, 159 Chateaubriand, François-Auguste-René yin and yang, 202-3 Book of Rites, 3 de, 35-36 Boschini, Marco, 103 Chen Tingzhuo, 57 Cimabue (Bencivieni di Pepo), 226n, 238 Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne, 233 Claudel, Paul, 174 Braque, Georges, 44-45, 94-95, 153-54, 236, 239 clouds: and indistinctness, 78-79; kinds breath-energy (qi): versus cartography, of, 151-52, 186-87; and mountains, 182-83; derivation of term, 135; 9, 36, 53, 56, 85-86, 123, 148; and and dividing up of planes, 157; and presence-absence, 3, 11-12; and foundation-fount, 134; and hygiene of rocks, 85-86, 136; yi of, 230-31 creation, 170; versus image, 229-30; color, 88, 193-97 and intentionality, 225; and landscape, competitions, painting, 100-101, 168 134-35, 137, 146; listening with, 171-72; complete, the, 59-61, 63, 66, 70-71 and morality, 162; versus object, 139; concealing, 12-14 and opposition-complementarity, concentration, 200-202 186; and plenitude, 72; versus repreconcretion, 91-94, 136, 218 Confucius, 7, 17, 41, 58n, 101, 138, 168 sentation, 181; versus resemblance, 110, 113, 115; versus science of perspeccon-tenance, 54-55, 147-48 tive, 154; and the spiritual, 135; and Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille, 60 taking-giving back, 99; and technique, cor-responding, 111-12 96; and the virtue of between, 95; and Cratylus (Plato), 237 the wind, 41; of world, 136 cubism, 196 breath-resonance, 95-96. See also resonance; spiritual resonance Damisch, Hubert, 146 brush, 194-96, 202-3 de-, xxi, xix, 33, 35, 50-51, 165, 180

deception, painting as, 149, 149-50n. See also illusion Degas, Edgar, 45 Democritus, 79-80 depiction, 177-82, 189 Derrida, Jacques, 146 Descartes, René: on absence, 5; on the clear and distinct, 37; on God as guarantor of objectivity, 129-30n, 207, 207-8n; on mastery of nature, 130; on properties, 136-37; on subject/object relation, 10n description, 179-82, 213-15 dé-tente (untensing), 165, 171 Detour and Access (Jullien), xxi-xxii Diderot, Denis, 62n disponibilité, 164-65. See also availability distance, 12, 36-37, 53, 64, 154-65 distinct, the, 37, 37n, 40, 221 Dong Yuan, 3, 7-8, 17, 28, 224 dragons, painting, 13-14, 235 Dynastic Histories, 126-27

effect: conditions of effectiveness for, xxii; and emptiness, 80–81, 85; and the image, 109; and lack, 70, 76; and nonaction, 29, 53, 169; and the sketch, 66–67; and strategy, 67–68; and the tao, 53; and vase, 84; and virtue, 69 Epicurus, 79–80 ethics, 137–38

European language, great: and ethics, 162; and French to English translation, xiii; and fusion, 170–71; and mimesis, 57–58; and the nonobject, xv; and the subject/object relation, 27, 39–40; and the unthought, 38–40

eye, 160-62, 173, 204, 253. See also vision

Fang Xun: and breath-resonance, 96; on deformation, 115; on emptiness, 78; on facing the painting, 176n; on the hand, 204; on ink and brush, 197; on the *ji*, 191–92; on modification, 235; on painting clouds, 57–58; on painting trees, 78, 190; on resemblance, 115–16; on sense-intentionality, 93; on spacing-communication, 77; on

tangible form, 116; on the trace, 101–3; translations of, 58; on yi, 225–26
Fauves, 196
Félibien, André, 210
final cause, 63–64
first stroke: absoluteness of, 26; and the infinite, 183–84; and modification, 234; and the original indifferentiation, 24–26; and painting's fulfillment, 199; and spirituality, 184; and wisdom, 25
Flood, The (Poussin), 35–36
flowers, painting, 145–46
foundation-fount, xii, 18–19, 29–31
Fu Zai, 22

Gainsborough, Thomas, 64
Gegenstand, xv, 37. See also object
geometry, 153-55, 163
ghosts, painting, 106, 113
Giorgione, 110, 124
Giotto, 226n, 238
God. See ontotheology
Gogh, Vincent Van, 62-63n
Gombrich, E. H.: on the Antwerp masters, 124; and the duck-rabbit, 58n; and the Greek pictorial revolution, 150; on Leonardo, 144n; and projection, 64-65, 180; on the sketch, 64-65
Gong Xian, 191

great image: availability of, xxii, 117; and concretion, 91–93; and the duckrabbit, 58n; and form, 47; and indifferentiation, 53; and mountains, 54–56; and resemblance, xxii, 113; in sequence of the *Laozi*, 70; and the tao, 51–53

greatness, 47–51, 70–71 Guan Tong, 101 Gu Kaizhi, 39, 71, 219, 222 *Guo feng* ("Regional winds"), 41, 214 Guo Nuxian, 17

Guo Ruoxi: on availability, 168–69; on carefree wandering, 165–66; on history of landscape painting, 123; and incapacity of the brush, 203; on morality, 17, 163; on painting and writing, 107; on painting dragons, 235; on portraits of virtuous men, 109; and the scroll, 176; on taking-giving back, 97;

Guo Ruoxi (cont.) the trace, 104; and the unteachable, Guo Xi: on availability, 168-69; and breath-image, 42; on the brush, 203; on contemplation, 161; hygiene of, 168-69; on letting come, 167; love of the landscape of, 141-42; on "mountains-waters," 123; on multiplicity of angles of view, 151-55, 155n; on painting flowers and bamboo, 145-46; on painting mountains, 53-56; on painting the subject, 100-101; on painting water, 11; on the seasons, 148; on seeing amply, 173-74; on showing things halfway, 9; on straining, 170; system of variance of, 151-52; on viewing landscape painting, 144-50; on yi, 222-24 Guo Xiang, 171 Gutenberg, Johannnes, 119n Han Fei, 106 Han Zhuo: on the brush, 195; on ink, 197; and landscape typologies, 152; on the latent-subtle, 21; on painting distances, 36; on painting water, 11; on writing and painting, 211 haziness: coherence of, 35; of the foundational, 49; and greatness, 51; and ontology, 46-47; of the tao, 30-32, 53; and the Western tradition, 35-36 Hegel, G. W. F.: and the determinate, 39; and presence, 6-7; on properties, 136-37; and revelation, 7n; spirit in, 6-7, 7n; on the spiritual, 117-18n; and the subject/object relation, 27-38n, 224n; on the undifferentiated, 37-38 Heidegger, Martin, 5-6, 80, 80-81n, 81-83, 201n Henricks, Robert G., 38, 70 hiddenness. See concealing Homer, 213-14 Horace, 213-14 horses, painting, 93-94 Houng, François, 70 Huang Quan, 72, 105, 110-11 hub, 81, 83-84

Huizong, Emperor, 39 Husserl, Edmund, 131, 221, 224 hygiene, 166, 170

icon, 87, 238 illusion, 105, 149-50, 153, 178. See also deception, painting as image-phenomenon (xiang), 227-30 imagination, 64-66 imitation: in Aristotle, 106-8; of the Great Emptiness, 110; lack of theory of, in China, 118, 239; of nature, 110, 117n; of the object, 110–12, 120; in poetry, 213-15; versus power of figuration, 111-12. See also mimesis; representation Impossible Nude, The (Jullien), xxi ink and brush, 197-99, 206-8 intentionality (yi), 22-23, 147-48, 151, 154, 215-25. See also sense-intentionality (γi)

intersection, Albertian, 231–32 invisibility: figuration of, 12–13, 87; of God, 31; ontological status of, 19; and spirituality, 85; and the tao, 29–32; thinking the, 40; two sorts of, 30–31; and the visible, 18; and wind, 41

ji, 191–92
Jiang He, 191
jing, 169–70
Jing Hao: on breath-energy, 112–13, 154;
on breath-resonance, 72; on figuring things halfway, 11; ink and brush in, 197, 202; on ink wash, 194; and landscape typologies, 152; on painting distance, 155; on painting trees, 189–90; on polarities, 189–90; and reciprocal engendering, 136; and spirit dimension, 97; and taoic logic, 23; and the trace, 103; on the true, 236; on xiang, 229
Justinian I, 109n

Kandinsky, Wassily: on color and form, 196–98; on creation-transformation, 239; and modern revolution, 120; on painting and music, 118n; prophetic

mode of, 88–89n; and spiritual resonance, 88, 95 Kant, Immanuel, 5, 10n, 189n, 207–8 Kepler, Johannes, 161 Klee, Paul, 120

Lacan, Jacques, 82, 82n lack, 5, 61, 66-69, 76 landscape: emotional connection to, 125-28, 133-34, 141-43; emptiness in, 86; etymology of term, 121-22; and formal resemblance, 123-24; history of, 124-25; partnership with, 132-33, 208. See also mountains-waters

Laocöon (Lessing), 87, 213

Laozi: on beauty flaunting itself, 76; on bellows, 134; compared to Bible and Koran, 38; on emptiness, 80-81; on the full effect, 67-68; and the great image, 47-48, 70; and greatness, 47-51, 70; and haziness, 30-33; and the incomplete, 66, 229; and the invisible fount, 31; laconism of, 46; on the landscape, 128; matrix-formulas of, 38; on nonaction, 72-73; on "nonresembling semblance," 51-52, 113; on not sticking, 91; return to before ontology of, 46; self-portrait in, 33; and the sketch, 66-68; and strategic behavior, 21; and subject/object relation, 33-34; on the subtle, 21; and the tao, 29; and Taoism, 19-20; and thereis-not, 20; on the trace, 103; and the unfathomable, 29; on the unnamable, 19-20; on the unpaintable, 3; on the vase, 82-84; on virtue, 68

Lau, D. C., 70 Lee, R. W., 213

Leonardo da Vinci: haziness in, 36; on imitation, 110; on mastery of things, 234; on mirroring nature, 179; on painting as creating, 144n; rendering of spirituality by, 88; on solitude, 163; and the unfinished, 62; on vision, 160-61

Lessing, Gotthold, 87, 118 Li Cheng, 224 life, painting, 225–26, 236–40 Linguan gaozhi (Guo Xi), 141–42 Lin Yutang, 55 Liotard, Jean-Étienne, 149n Liou Kia-Hway, 70 Li Rihua, 34–35, 98, 166, 239 literature, 38–39, 78, 100, 126, 236 Lomazzo, Giovanni, 110 Lorrain, Claude, 124 Love, absolute, 5, 90 Lucretius, 80 Lu Tanwei, 71 lute maker, 223

Malraux, André, 60, 61, 239n

Manna (Poussin), 210 Marin, Louis, 211 marvelously natural (miao), 21-22, 94 Masaccio (Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone Guidi), 149n Matisse, Henri, 69, 77, 112n, 163, 197 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 45-46, 65, 133n, 163, 204 Metamorphoses, The, 214 Michelangelo, 75 Mi Fu, 3, 77, 101, 124, 239 mimesis: absence of theory of, in China, 106, 108-9; and color, 196; and creation, 234; in Greece, 106-9; and "image-phenomenon," 228-29; and ontological separation, 149; philosophical conception of, 45-46; and Plato, 149. See also imitation; representation modern painting: and availability, 153; affinity with music of, 118; and break with the past, 16, 119-20; in China, 119; and classical Chinese painting, 118-19; and the complete, 59-60; experiments of, 45-46; and individualized forms, 43-45; and the landscape, 120; and the overturning of representation, 229; and philosophy, 38-39, 45-46, 239; and relationships, 119; and revolution, 120; and the subject/ object relation, 235; and the surface, 118; and suspicion about the work, 51 modification, painting, 233-35 Mona Lisa (Leonardo), 62, 238

Monet, Claude, 160

Truth, xvi

morality, 162-63 Phaedrus (Plato), 160, 201n, 237 mountains, 53-57, 85-86, 138, 150-51, 155n, phenomenology, 65-66, 131 Phidias, 213 224-25 philosophy: and painting, 45-46, 239; mountains-waters, 86, 122-29, 134-37, and the undifferentiated, 39; and the 145, 150-51, 186-87 music, 118-19, 118n, 171, 236 unthought, 39, 126, 130-31 physics, 119-20, 130, 208, 233 nature, 118, 129-30, 164 Picasso, Pablo: on color, 193n; on Nerval, Gérard de, 126 creation-transformation, 239; on Nikko sanctuary, 75 finishing off a painting, 59, 59n; form nonaction, 29, 53, 72-73, 82n, 100, 167, in, 197; on killing modern art, 16n; on 169, 200, 205 painting and writing, 212n; on paintnonresembling semblance, 117 ing as deception, 149-50n, 178; on Norgate, Edward, 124 painting life, 238-39; and perspective, 44; and philosophy, 45; on posing, Nymph and the Shepherd (Titian), 62 219n; on toil, 167n, 239n, 240 pictorial revolution, 120, 124. See also object, 8–10, 45, 110, 118, 159–60, 162. See also subject/object relation modern painting Old Master of the Stone Drum Parade, Pièta (Michelangelo), 75 Piles, Roger de, 64 229 ontotheology: as basis for science, 40, Pine and Rocks, 77 129, 129n, 130; and determined form, Plato: butcher in, 201; and deception of 60; and the distinct, 37; and fullpainting, 149; on the determinate, 37; ness of Being, 79, 240; and lack, 5; on painting life, 237; on soul's sight, and Love, 5; and nature, 129; and the 160; and the void, 79 object, 110, 233; and objectivity, 207; Pliny the Elder: on accuracy of vision, and presence, 6-7, 90; and saturation, 118; art history of, 15, 118; on beauty, 76; and the sketch, 66 195; on color, 196, 209; on landscape Origen, 102 painting, 124; on representation, 179; on the unfinished, 61-62; on Zeuxis's Ouyang Xiu, 34, 113, 218 grapes, 105, 110-11 painting, general definition of, 235-36 Plotinus, 101 Panofsky, Erwin, 195 Plutarch, 212-13 Parmenides, 79 Poetics (Aristotle), 106-7, 196 Parrhasius, 15 poetry: and indetermination, 4n, 39, 156; partitive, the, 28 and the indirect, 57; and painting, 212-Paulhan, Jean, 66, 73 17; rejection of thematization by, 115, perception: and landscape painting, 122, 216; and science, 225; as unthought of philosophy, 130 125, 131, 139; and properties, 136-37; versus respiration, xxii, 134; science Polygnotus of Thasos, 15 of, 65-66, 152-54 portrait painting, 219 perspective: and the Albertian veil, Poussin, Nicolas, 35-36, 124, 159, 210 231-32; in art history, 15-16, 119-20; prayer, 6, 7 and distance, 36, 64; and the indispresence, 5-7, 90. See also presencetinct, 64; laws of, 153-55; modern absence indictment of, 43-44; and the science presence-absence, 9-11, 77, 89 of vision, 152-54; and the unveiling of principles of painting, Chinese, 111-12,

163, 194

printing, history of, 119n properties, 136-37 Proust, Marcel, 126 psychology of the sketch, 64-66

Qi, king of, 106 Qian Wenshi, 1-2 Qi Baishi, 117, 237 qing (emotion/situation), 134

rain, figuration of, 231

Rao Ziran, 11, 77, 152, 168-69 Raphael, 238 Ravier, François-Auguste, 125 recueillement (contemplation-gathering up), 161-62, 171-72 release, 85-86, 89-90, 181 Rembrandt, 62 representation: and absence, 5; and formal resemblance, 116; and illusion of truth, 105; and loss of greatness, 51-52; and modern painting, 45; non-constraining, 58; in spirit, 115-17; and translating Shitao, 177-78. See also imitation; mimesis

resonance, 114-15. See also breathresonance

respiration: and breath-energy, 99; versus perception, xxii, 134-35; as structuring Chinese thought, 11; versus symmetry, 188; and systems of variance, 156; and there is-there is not, 2 responsibilities/capacities, 147-48 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 64 rhetoric, 185-88, 210-14, 234 rocks, 85, 135-36, 186-87 room, 81-84 Ruskin, John, 118 Ryckmans, Pierre, 103, 133, 137, 174-75, 177-78, 196

sage, Taoist: availability of, xxii, 99–100; and landscape, 127; nonaction of, 72-73, 100; and origin of figuration, 107; painting as, 18, 20; spontaneity of, 58n, 111-12; unfathomability of, 32 Saint Peter's (Rome), 75-76 Schefer, Jean-Louis, 187

Schelling, Friedrich von, 38, 131 science: and ethics, 163; God as guarantor of, 40, 129, 129n, 130; lack of, in China, 40, 130, 137, 154; of representation, 152-54; of vision, 65-66, 180. See also physics

scroll, 157, 175-76 sculpture, 118, 154, 252

seasons: and figuring transition, 3-4; and landscape painting, 146-48, 218-19; in painting and poetry, 215; as structuring framework, 217–18

sense-emotionality, 215-18 sense-intentionality (yi), 71-72, 86, 103, 225

Shen Gua: on the hand, 204; on painting and poetry, 217; on the seasons, 218; on spirit in painting, 114; on spiritual resonance, 111; on Wei Xie, 72

Shen Zongqian, 157, 197

Shijing, 41

Shipin (Sikong Tu), 113

Shitao: and the animated spiritual, 132; on the brush, 195; on concealing, 13; figuration of trees in, 177-79; figuring the seasons in, 3-4; on the first stroke, 24-26, 183-84, 199; on ink and brush, 197-98, 208; on internal purification, 166-67; on the jing, 22; on "mountains-waters," 123; and nonaction, 73; on painting "as to," 180-81; and painting from life, 174-75; on painting life, 237; on painting modifications, 233-34; on painting mountains, 55-57; and partnership with landscape, 132-33; on poetics, 214-15; radicality of, 24; and receptive capacity, 23-24; on separating out planes, 156-57; on showing things halfway, 10; on spiritual dimension of craft, 10, 206; on system of tensions, 179, 181, 186-87; and the ten thousand things, 54; and the trace, 103, 104; on unfathomability, 183; on virtues/capacities, 137-38; Westernizing translation of, 177-78; and the wind, 41; on wrist mo tions, 203-4; on writing and painting, 211; on the yi, 222

Sikong Tu, 113 single stroke. See first stroke sketch: and the full effect, xxii; as full-fledged work, 60, 65, 71; and incompletion, 59-60; seductive force of, 63; shortcomings of theories of, 65; superiority of, 61 Socrates, 5 spirit, xiii, 114, 132, 169 spirit dimension, 7, 165, 220 spirituality: and abstraction, 88; and atheism, 90; and bodily movements, 88; of colors, 88; and deforming form, 88; and emanation-distillation, 85; and emptiness, 75-78, 85, 89-90; European, 76, 87-88; and faith, 89; in Hegel, 117-18n; and landscape, 128; and overfullness, 75; and the single stroke, 184; and sublimity, 89 spiritual resonance, 110-12, 136, 220. See also breath-resonance sponte sua, 112, 124, 129, 201-3 Stein, Gertrude, 219n Stoics, 101-2 strategy, 67-69, 72-73, 151 subjectification, 9-10 subject/object relation: and atmosphere, 41; in China, 223-25; disruption of, 131-32; dissolution of, 172-73; and European language, 170-71; Hegel and, 224n; and the landscape, 126; in the Laozi, 33-34; and listening, 172; and Taoism, 27-28 Su Dongpo, 115, 172, 174, 212, 223, 233 Sunzi, 151 Turner, Joseph, 125 taking-giving back, xxii, 97-99, 180 typologies, 147, 151-54

Tan Dai: on breath-energies of yin and yang, 199; on "colors" of ink, 194; on the figuration of form, 18-19; on the formation of clouds, 136; on ink and brush, 197, 200, 202; on painter's training, 99; on the yi, 225 Tang Zhiqi: on animation of the world, 124; on concealing, 12-13; on Dong Yuan's paintings, 3; and emotional nature, 134; on the free and easy, 166; on

painting life, 237; and the unpainted, 72; on yi, 231 tao: and the "as if," 29-31; in Chinese treatises on painting, xvi; compossibility of, 54; and the great image, 51-53; greatness of, 48-51, 113; as immanence and regulation, 205-6; and indifferentiation, 31-32; and the indistinct, 38; and the Laozi, 46-47; manifestation of, in landscape, 128; and the origin, 29-30; paradoxical aspect of, 47-48; and the unfathomable, 29 Taoism: and the first stroke, 25-26; and the great image, 52; and the indistinct, 29-32; and inspiration, 22-23; and landscape painting, 39; Lacan on, 82n; lack of a history of, 38; in the Laozi, 19-20; reaction against civilization of, 142; and subject/object opposition, 28 Tempest (Giorgione), 124 theater, 107, 150 there is-there is not, 2-4, 8, 20-21, 99, 83-84 Timanthes, 167 Titian, 62, 103n trace, 101-4 tracings, natural, 108, 109n, 211 translation: of fond(s), xii; of "great work avoids coming about," 70; into modern Chinese, 58; and the unthought, 131; Westernizing, xi, 38, 55-56, 177-78, 196; of xiang, 227-29; of yi, 220-24 Treatise on Efficacy (Jullien), xxii trees, 78, 85, 152, 177-79, 187-91, 190n

Un sage est sans idée (Jullien), xxii unthought, xvi-xvii, 38-40, 126, 130-31

Valeur allusive, La (Jullien), xxi Vandier-Nicolas, Nicole, 55 variance, system of, 151-52, 156, 175 Vasari, Giorgio: on Giotto, 226n, 238; on imitation, 110; on painting as forgery,

149n; on the sketch, 64; on toil, 167n; and the unfinished, 62
vase, 81–84
veil, Albertian, 231–32
Velázquez, Diego, 62
Vermeer, Jan, 181
Virgil, 214
virtue-capacity, 68–70, 137–38, 183
vision, 160–61, 180. See also eye
vitality, 143–44, 148–49, 181, 206. See also animation; life, painting; respiration
void (kenon), xiii, 79–80, 85

Wang Bi: on availability, 69; commentary on the *Laozi* by, 38; and the great image, 47–48, 52, 93; on the greatness of tao, 50; on not sticking, 91; on obligation, 49; and the there-is-not, 20; on the vase, 83–84; on the withoutform, 30

Wang Chong, 130 Wang Fuzhi, 39 Wang Mo, 17

Wang Shizhen, 4n Wang Wei: and the

Wang Wei: and the as if, 8; on breathimage, 42, 182–83; on cartography, 182; on concealing, 12; and dissipation, 97; on imitation, 106, 110; on the ink wash, 194; on interaction in landscape painting, 122; and landscape typologies, 152; on the latent-subtle, 21; on painting distance, 155; painting of seasons by, 217–18; on painting the world, 144; poetry and painting of, 39, 216n; and system of tensions, 184–86; and there is—there is not, 17; on writing and painting, 211

water, painting, 9–11, 57–58, 86, 138, 181, 233. See also mountains-waters

Watteau, Antoine, 125 Wei Xie, 72 Wen Tong (Yu Ke), 172 wind, 41-42, 53, 200, 214, 231 without-form, 18-19, 23-24, 31, 35, 91, 103 wrist, 203-5 writing and painting, 107–8, 209–13. See also rhetoric Wu Daozi, 71, 112, 197

xiang, 227–30 Xiang Rong, 197 Xie He, 72, 95, 111 Xu Xi, 72, 111

yi, 222–26, 230–31, 237 Yuan, Prince, 168

Zeuxis, 105, 110-11

Zhang Yanyuan: art history of, 112; on constant renewal, 233; on creation-transformation, 239; on ink and brush, 202; on the latent-subtle, 21; on natural tracings, 108; on painting dragons, 235; on power of images, 109; on resemblance, 106; on sense-intentionality, 72; on the trace, 103; on writing and painting, 211; on Wu Daozi, 71; on yi, 222

Zhang Zao, 22, 72, 173

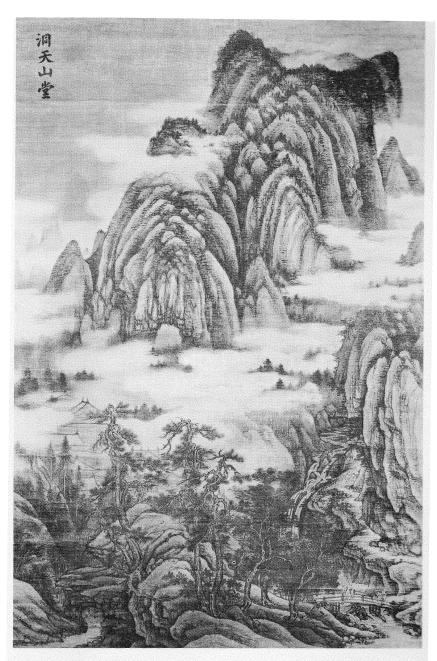
Zhao Mengfu, 224

Zhuangzi: on availability, 163–65; on breath-energy, 171; cartwright in, 204; critique of objective knowledge by, 172n; on the image in poetry, 218; on ji (driving principle), 191; master butcher in, 94, 200–201; on nonaction, 100; on pivot of door, 116; and recueillement, 172; sage of, 111–12, 163; on wind and ax, 200

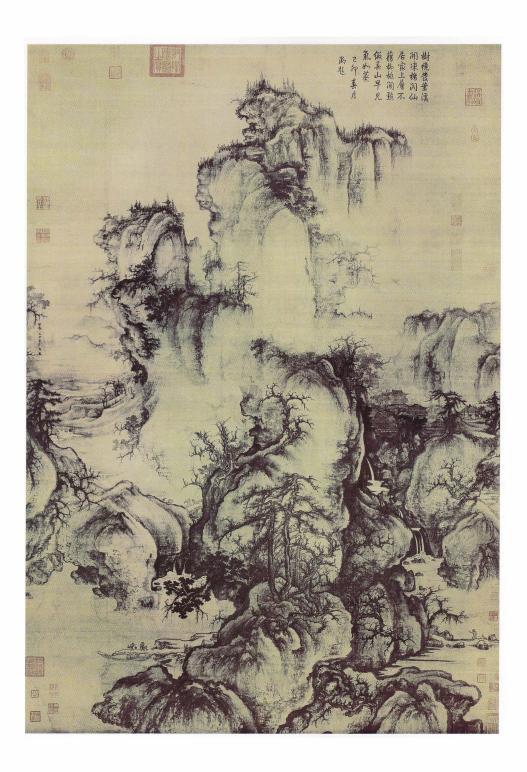
Zhu Jingxuan, 18, 20, 22

Zhu Xi, 135

ziran, 129, 164-65. See also sponte sua
Zong Bing: on breath-energy, 110;
on color, 194; and immensity of
landscape, 183; love of landscapes by,
126-28; on not getting bogged down,
97; on resemblance, 106; and responding of hills, 132; and the scroll, 175-76;
and Taoist thought, 39; and tension,
183; on the trace, 101



Taoist Temple in the Mountains, attributed to Dong Yuan (907–60).
 Museum of the Taipei Palace.



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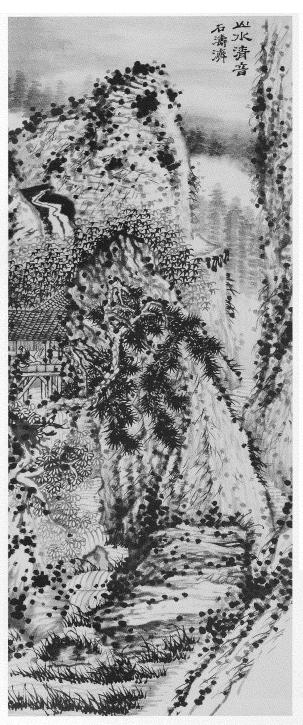
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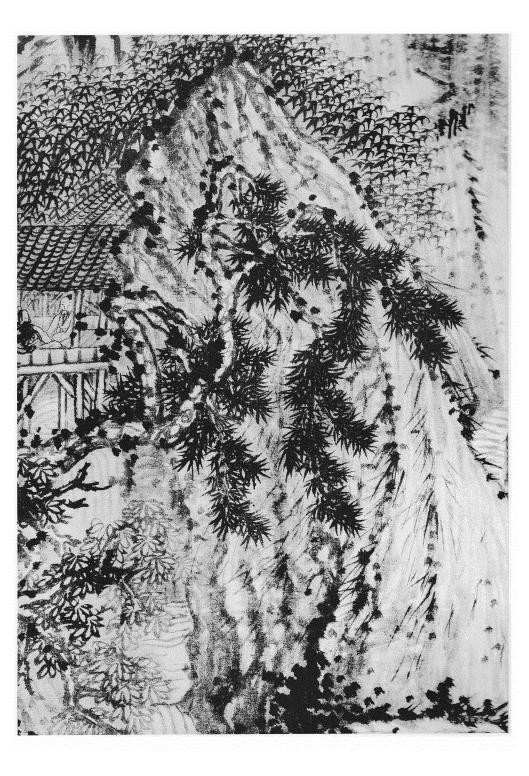


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5. Landscape with Pure Sound, by Shitao (1640–1718). Shanghai Museum.

OPPOSITE
6. Detail of Landscape with Pure Sound.





7. Young Singer, by Jin Shangyi, 1984. Exhibition of the Palace of Fine Arts of China (Beijing, Shanghai, 2000).

The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting

FRANÇOIS JULLIEN

Translated by JANE MARIE TODD

In premodern China, elite painters used imagery not to mirror the world around them, but to evoke unfathomable experience. Considering their art alongside the philosophical traditions that inform it, *The Great Image Has No Form* explores the "nonobject"—a notion exemplified by paintings that do not seek to represent observable surroundings.

In this provocative and vigorous inquiry, François Jullien argues that such artworks grew out of the painters' deeply held belief in a continuum of existence, on which art is not distinct from reality. Revisiting key Chinese works on the theory of painting, he contrasts their nonobjectifying perspective with the Western idea that art remains separate from the world it represents. This comparative method enables Jullien's investigation of the theoretical conditions that allow us to apprehend, isolate, and abstract objects—and effectively lays bare the assumptions of Chinese and European thought.

Revitalizing the questions of what painting is, where it comes from, and what it does, *The Great Image Has No Form* ultimately introduces new ways of thinking about the relationship of art to the ideas in which it is rooted.

FRANÇOIS JULLIEN is professor of Chinese philosophy and literature at the University of Paris VII and director of the Institut Marcel Granet.

JANE MARIE TODD has translated many books for the University of Chicago Press, including *The Forbidden Image*, by Alain Besançon, and Conversations with Picasso, by Brassai.

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Lire

