CHAPTER III

From the Enlightenment to Impressionism

Everything loses its shape, even the shapeless.

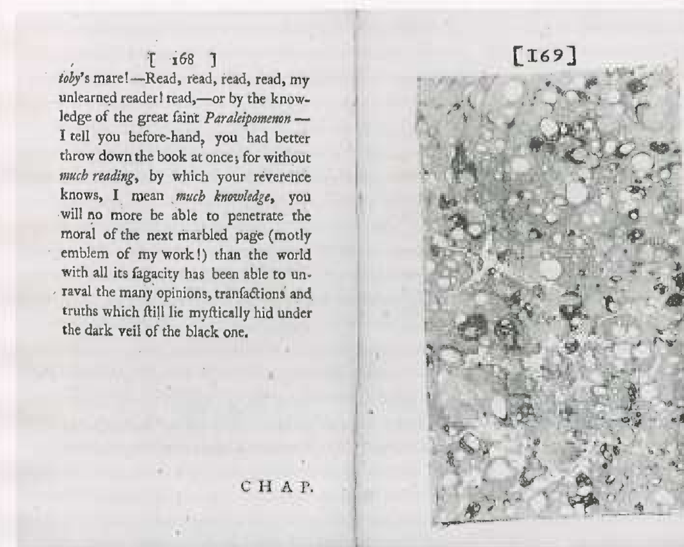
Victor Hugo, *Les travailleurs de la mer* (XXII)

Despite the emphatic contrast the Enlightenment drew between reason and illusion, the increasingly enhanced prestige given to the imagination as a creative force, linking the subject to the external world and enabling the artist to imitate *natura naturans* rather than *natura naturata*, also became evident during the eighteenth century. The quest for new 'correspondences' and connections with the world could base itself on the natural sciences, or seek to find examples or origins of non-rational modes of knowledge in childhood, 'primitive' cultures, dreams, hallucination, or even in madness. The experience of imaginative perception, particularly in relation to fortuitous images, was frequently cited as evidence of the power of the imagination, occasionally associated with the notion of a secret language, attractive precisely because it is indecipherable. The active reception of reader or viewer was also promulgated and stressed by writers, in both their literary work and in their new role as art critics.

James Engell has given a brilliant exposition of the way this concept of the imagination was promoted. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Leibniz was critical of Lockean empiricism, which saw the mind as a *tabula rasa* acted upon by sensory impressions, and he uses the interesting image of the suggestions an artist derives from his raw material: just as a piece of marble has veins and cleavages in it that lend themselves to the sculpting of particular shapes, so each mind has its own predisposition that lends itself to specific thoughts and feelings. The mind also has an 'active power', the imagination, which allows it to act upon innate ideas and upon sensations, and to these Leibniz adds the 'insensible perceptions' that link the subject to the physical world and form the basis of 'pre-established harmony'.[1] The British advocates of associationism and the theoreticians of Genius contributed in turn to a development that led to German idealist philosophy. Here, the imagination gradually ceases to figure as a passively receptive faculty ordering and combining objective sensory data, and becomes a creative force in its own right. So Tetens, who distinguishes three levels of *Vorstellungskraft* (literally 'the power of mental representation') can write that 'the psyche cannot only place and order its representations as does the curator with a gallery of pictures, but is itself a painter, and composes new paintings'.[2] For Kant the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) is 'the faculty of intuitions *a priori*' and informs our very perception of the world, introducing 'into appearances that order and regularity which we name nature'.[3] In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), he states that 'beauty is not a property of the object considered in itself', and that aesthetic judgement corresponds to 'a subjective finality based on the free play of the imagination'; this applies both to the natural world and to the work of art, and Kant mentions the special pleasure given by objects that are in a constant state of change, like smoke from a chimney or a running stream, in which the enjoyment is less to do with what the imagination can grasp (*auffasst*) than with what gives it the opportunity to create (*zu dichten Anlass bekommt*).[4] Fichte takes Kantian idealism to extremes, declaring that 'all reality is ... simply the product of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*)', although he also attributes to the imagination the ability to synthesize the subjective and the objective, self and non-self, by 'floating' and 'oscillating' dialectically between these two poles.[5] Finally, Schelling maintains the absolute unity of mind and nature. He too distinguishes three levels or 'powers' of the imagination, from sensory perception, which he sees as 'productive' (*produktive Anschauung*), through to the 'artistic or poetic faculty' (*Kunst-* or *Dichtungsvermögen*) by way of consciousness or intellectual intuition; each of these levels subsumes or incorporates those that precede it, and aesthetic contemplation (*Kunstanschauung*) can be defined as 'productive perception repeating itself to the highest power'.[6] In this way he formulates one of the central aesthetic conceptions of Romanticism, to which Goethe, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Coleridge among others subscribed, and according to which art needs to imitate not the external appearances of nature but rather 'the eternally creating primal energy'.[7]

Among writers of the period it is Sterne and Diderot who give freest rein to the use of unbridled fantasy (to all appearances at least) and an appeal to their readers' imagination. Their art of digression (figured in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760–67) by a series of abstract lines in a random pattern) and their addresses to the reader are well known; echoing Montaigne's formula about speech, Sterne defines writing as a conversation: 'The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.'[8] Among the visual elements with which Sterne lards his text – black pages, sentences replaced by asterisks, blank pages, as well as the abstract lines and the famous flourish traced by Corporal Trim's stick as an expression of the advantages of celibacy – there is one page covered on both sides with marbled paper (illus. 19), different in each copy of the original edition and defined by Sterne as the 'motley emblem of [his] work'.[9] Marbled paper, which at that time was handmade and very much sought after,[10] is one of the semi-random designs (usually non-iconic) used for principally ornamental ends, like the coloured gems and burr-wood features used in cabinet-making. Its 'emblematic' value for Sterne probably lay in its suggestiveness and variety as an excellent way of figuring the subjectivity of each individual reading of his book.[11]

In Germany Lichtenberg indulged the 'free play of the imagination' when he evokes in his *Aphorisms* the 'vast crowd of the strangest, funniest faces' observed in 1770 on a white wall through the material on his bed canopy. He likens them to heads by Hogarth and to his own attempts at caricature, evokes Leonardo's advice, and subtly notes the metamorphic nature of this imaginative perception and the blend of activity and passivity it presupposes: 'When I made out a head, I would take a mouth to turn it into an eye, and immediately another head would loom up, smiling at me or grinding its teeth, then a third head would mock me, and a fourth one would stare at me sarcastically.'[12] The recognition of the subjective nature of perception and aesthetic contemplation finds its counterpart in the analysis of amorous sentiment. At the end of the eighteenth century Chamfort denounces the falsity of the maxim 'the most beautiful woman can only give what she has' by retorting that 'she gives exactly what you believe yourself to be receiving, since in this matter it is the imagination that creates the value of what is received'.[13] In *De l'amour* (1822), Stendhal puts forward his theory of 'crystallization' by making a comparison between the way in which a young Bavarian officer adorns a beautiful Italian woman with the qualities he is seeking and the way in which the bough of a tree, stripped bare by winter, appears covered in 'diamonds' in



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toby's mare!—Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read,—or by the knowledge of the great saint *Paraleipomenon* — I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without *much reading*, by which your reverence knows, I mean *much knowledge*, you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motly emblem of my work!) than the world with all its fagacity has been able to unraval the many opinions, tranfactions and truths which ftill lie myftically hid under the dark veil of the black one.

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19 A double-page spread from Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London, 1761), vol. III, chap. 36.

the Hallein salt mines near Salzburg.[14]

The problematics of the natural image is found in the work of the Romantics, where it is seen as a sign of transcendence that is sensed but ungraspable. Novalis evokes this in the most eloquent way at the beginning of his poetico-philosophical essay *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1798–9): 'Men follow different paths. Whoever follows and compares them will see strange figures forming; figures that seem to belong to the great coded writing we encounter everywhere: on wings, on eggshells, in the clouds, in the snow, in crystals, in the shapes of rocks, on frozen water-surfaces, inside and outside mountains, plants, animals, men, in the brightness of the sky, on discs of glass or pitch when they are rubbed or touched by hand: in the filings around a magnet, and in the strange circumstances brought about by chance ... We glimpse in these things the key to this prodigious writing and its grammar; but what we glimpse is reluctant to assume a fixed shape and seems to resist becoming an ultimate key to things.'[15] Coleridge, who represents the culmination of the developments described by James Engell, amalgamates a reading of Leibniz with his reading of German Idealist philosophers and Platonist sources.[16] In his epistolary essay *Of Thinking and Reflexion* (1821), he states that he is scarcely able to look at a fine view, a mountain landscape or a magnificent painting 'without abstracting the lines with a feeling similar to that with which [he would] contemplate the graven or painted walls of some temple or palace in Mid-Africa – doubtful whether it were mere Arabesque, or undeciphered characters of an unknown tongue, framed when the language of men was nearer to that of nature – a language of symbols and correspondences'.[17] His disciple De Quincey, with the help of opium, resuscitates 'a state of the eye generally incident to childhood, or exalted states of irritability'; this 'creative state of the eye' enables him to experience visions that he compares to the grandiose and shifting city in the clouds described by Wordsworth, not without suffering 'the tyranny of the human face' and fearing, in connection with fluid obsessions, that 'the sentient organ project itself as its own object'.[18]

Jonathan Crary has stressed the subjective nature attributed to visual experience by the German philosophers and physiologists of the early nineteenth century as a reaction against Newtonian optics and empiricism.[19] In this connection he cites Goethe, early Schopenhauer and Johannes Müller's *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen*, which envisages sensory experiences of light that are independent of external stimuli.[20] A previous work by Müller, *Über die phantastischen Gesichtserscheinungen* ('On fantastic [or 'visionary'] visual phenomena') of 1826, is entirely devoted to such experiences and aims to contribute to a 'scientific and physiological approach to psychology' through a study of 'the sense of sight as it interacts with mental activity'.[21] Among other things, the work deals with hypnagogic visions, which the author tells us he has experienced since childhood, and stresses the fundamentally metamorphic nature of mental images he sees as belonging to the imagination (*Phantasie*) itself and equally present in the other senses.[22] Müller admiringly quotes Goethe, for whom the true poet and the artist must be able, as for Dürer, to externalize their inner images, and in his view, the highest form of imagination, for both artists and scientists, obeys the very same laws as nature.[23] In support of the 'plasticity of the imagination', he relates – without referring back to Leonardo – that as a child he had often observed the battered wall of a house opposite his window, somehow brought to life by 'the imagination's ability to create forms', which made him 'recognize numerous faces'; since those around him denied any familiarity with what he perceived, the experience assumed a mysterious character and subsequently became inaccessible to him.[24]

From the second half of the eighteenth century on aesthetic reflection and the budding discipline of art criticism also came to insist on spontaneity, individual feeling and the spectator's imaginative participation. In *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), Hogarth relates the attractive nature of 'waving and serpentine lines' to what he calls 'intricacy in form', which 'leads the eye a wanton kind of chase' and satisfies the liking of the human mind for action and difficulty.[25] Burke's theory of the Sublime (1757) also stresses the importance of suggestiveness, which can be particularly generated by obscurity, for in art as in nature 'dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are more clear and determinate'.[26] Diderot's mental appropriation of works of art and the way he brings them to life in his *Salons*, thereby risking the reproach of using them as mere pretexts for literature, are well known. Diderot himself is perfectly aware of what he is doing, and he demands of the plastic arts that they should provide the qualities favourable to such an approach. So we find him praising the sketch as something closer to creative energy, the more alive the less defined its forms, and leaving 'our imagination free to see in it what we wish to see, like children seeing shapes in clouds, all of us being children in one way or another'.[27] Romanticism in turn opposes a similar aesthetics to academic norms, and Jules Janin, for example, defends the sketch against 'the officially recognized painting, polished, pretty, perfected, varnished, adorned, publicly exhibited with all the humiliations to which art is necessarily subjected when it seeks to please the crowd', and advises Nicolas Charlet to reject 'logic and perspective' and to leave things in the hands of chance, 'that supreme gentleman of the imagination and the mind'.[28] But this fundamental intuition is not limited to Romantic circles, and Quatremère de Quincy asserts with the utmost clarity: 'Half the power of beauty thus resides in the faculties of the man upon whom it impresses itself.'[29]

20 *Aristocrat believing in the Counter-Revolution/Aristocrat Cursing the Revolution*, French Revolutionary period, pen, ink and watercolour on paper, 12.8 x 10.5 cm.

Image play

The 'minor' genres, in which ambiguity continued to flourish, as I have pointed out, developed during the eighteenth century in response to the demands of a growing public. In the decorative and graphic arts rocaille ornament was combined with the style of Van Vianen to bring about a 'formal muddling' that wavers between a three-dimensional iconic referent (mineral, vegetable or animal) and abstract ornament. In iconographic terms, the capriccio was the genre that, as its very name implies, gave artists freest rein and allowed them to exploit indetermination. Werner Busch defines this as an attempt, destined to failure, to control the imagination and uses the expression 'consciously contrived optical irritation' when he discusses engravings by Tiepolo and Piranesi.[30] We know that Coleridge described Piranesi's *Prisons* to De Quincey as the representations of 'the scenery of [his] own visions during the delirium of a fever' and that the latter saw 'the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction'[31] in the architecture of his own dreams. Serge Conard has spotted several iconic allusions in the plates of *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma* (1762) – a head, a seagull, angels, a phallus – hidden in the plan of the buildings and linked to their functional or symbolic identity.[32] This 'emblematic implication of [the] plan', which has ancient origins, seems to him to regain prominence in the eighteenth century under the influence of interdisciplinary connections and references to figural writing, particularly to Egyptian hieroglyphics. He sees a typical instance of this in the unbuilt architecture of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux whose *L'architecture considerée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation* (Paris, 1804) applies the abstract and polysemic possibilities of engraving to 'architecture parlante', introducing another phallus in his design for a 'house of pleasure' (Oikema), shaping the ideal city of La Saline de Chaux to look like a drop of water, or introducing zoomorphic allusions to the constellations into its surrounding topography.[33]

Conard also alludes to parallels found in popular prints. The French Revolution provided an extraordinary impetus for the publication of engravings; their technical and stylistic quality was uneven, but they were highly inventive on a semiotic level. Among them, in more or less identical form, are several formulae and motifs that had appeared during the Mannerist period, such as the reversible head and the composite head.[34] An example of the first type is the drawing (illus. 20), made popular through engravings, which from one side represents a laughing aristocrat 'who believes in the Counter-Revolution' and from the other a scowling aristocrat (a member of the clergy) 'cursing the Revolution'. The technique is close to that of the Calvinist *Pope/Devil* (see illus. 16) but the expression of the two 'aspects' of the character are more differentiated, the reversible image extends to the headgear/bust, and the frame with its dual inscriptions make the meanings and directions of the image clear. The two faces are 'equally repulsive',[35] but the words 'titres de noblesse' (titles) and 'privilèges' (privileged entitlements) inscribed on the collar and lapels of the civilian dress indicate that the optimistic face takes precedence and that the reverse image – to which attention is drawn by the head of the bird whose wings jut out above and which plays the role of the Capitol geese – reveals the hatred-filled face of the man who opposes the onward movement of history; turned upside down, these inscriptions transform themselves effortlessly into ornaments. Reversible images are linked to the motif of unveiling, which Antoine de Baecque relates to a 'phobia about the mask ... characteristic of the Revolutionary mentality'.[36] But the use of these images is not limited to those in favour of the Revolution; it is also a reaction to the extreme polarization of the political situation.[37]

The same logic (motivated, to a greater or less extent, by ambivalence or complexity) can be seen at work in the composite heads made up of copulating nude bodies and genitalia that were supposed to denounce the dissolute morals of the aristocracy. They no doubt make the statement, as Lynn Hunt interprets it, that the men and women they target are dominated by sexual desire and that their highmindedness (and their high rank) merely hides the lowness of their bodies;[38] but the 'vulgarity' Hunt attributes to the message of these engravings and to their viewers should not hide the fact that this logic of reversibility and revelation, which has such deep resonance in popular culture, is fundamental to the course of Revolutionary feel-

ing with a fine future before it, symbolized for example by Freud's famous Arcimboldo-like caricature. Crypto-Royalist imagery seems in its turn to resort to a new process of dissimulating profiles within compositions expressed in iconography that is far from obvious. Their technique is simpler than the anamorphic portraits of Charles I, but they have a wider expressive range since they introduce a reversibility of figure and ground that deeply affects the status of the image, and this is also to have a remarkable future. Thus we find 'negative' profiles of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette formed by the outline of a funerary urn or, in the case of the engraving *The Weeping Willow* (illus. 21), by the outline of a tree-trunk and its foliage.[39]

This kind of manipulation of an image is not limited to the political context. An anonymous English etching of 1789, for example, depicts two reversible heads facing each other with the dual inscription 'Three weeks before marriage/Three weeks after marriage.'[40] A lithograph by H. Burn published in England by Rudolph Ackermann (illus. 22), probably after Byron's death in 1824, uses the reversibility of figure and ground and the ambiguity of the foliage and the outline of a rock to express the fusion of the spirit of the Romantic poet with the nature of Greece and its political cause. These techniques, which will be systematized in 'picture puzzles' (*images-devinettes*: see illus. 122) can be exploited more allusively in painting. In the *Tomb of Ulrich von Hutten* (illus. 23), for example, the negative silhouette of the three damaged lancet windows, observed by Caspar David Friedrich in the ruins of the monastery church on the Oybin, near Zittau, suggests the upper parts of helmets or human figures evoking the pursuit of the struggle for freedom symbolized by the buried hero.[41]

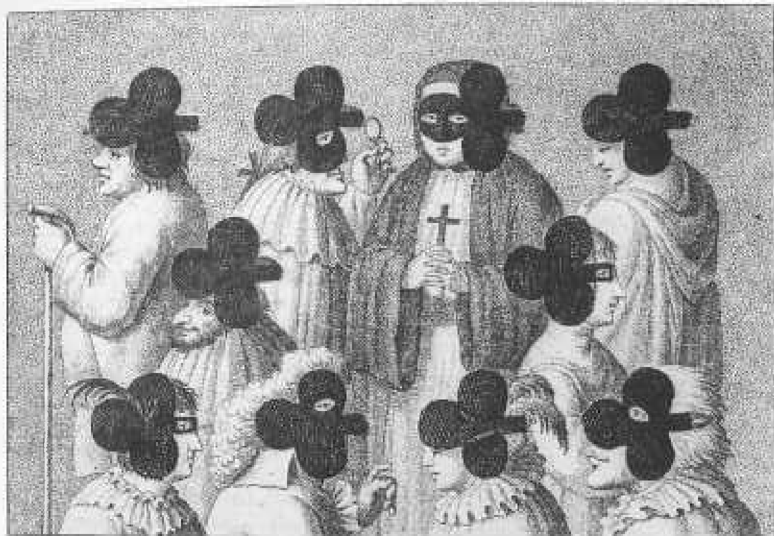
One of the most interesting tendencies in the use of visual ambiguity is the iconic motivation of abstract or conventional forms, which cause the image to oscillate between two registers. This can be seen in 'caricature maps', which, following an older tradition in turn, interpret the outlines of geographical features, and sometimes the way they are related to one another, as characters, animals, objects and actions.[42] The idea also serves as a basis for 'transformation cards', namely playing-cards in which features are integrated into a picture; these were produced in Germany in the early nineteenth century and their use then spread to England, France, Austria, Italy and the United States.[43] The best-known examples, produced as almanacs between 1804 and 1811 by the publisher J. G. Cotta, were probably used more as visiting cards or as love-letters than as playing-cards.[44] The 'sibylline cards' of the 'ingenious draughtswoman' Countess Charlotte von Jennison Walworth[45] play cleverly with the tensions between flat plane and depth, symmetry and variety, and occasionally translate the effects of overlay inspired by the card symbols, stencilled in colour, to create a scene reminiscent of the Venetian carnival (illus. 24). Some of these cards veer towards the grotesque or (more or less explicitly) the erotic.[46] One of their most notable features is that they seem to stem from a society game of the late eighteenth century, and still remaining popular during the nineteenth, in which the various participants pitted their wits against each other to see who could produce the most interesting, amusing or 'artistic' compositions using just the elements of an ordinary pack.[47] The abstract motifs of the card suits against a blank background played the part of the stained wall (though the pattern was regular) for the imagination of each player, many of whom must have been amateur draughtsmen or watercolourists. We may recall how Van Hoogstraeten contrasted the precise vision of the artist with the naive projections of the people. Insofar as they involve the active participation of the viewer and tend to establish an equal (or reversible) relationship between viewer and creator, potential images necessarily question the links between producers and consumers of images. From this point of view, the importance of the non-professional practice of making playful images, of which transformation cards are just one example, cannot be stressed enough.[48]

Transformation is also characteristic, in a different sense, of the displays of moving images introduces after the 1780s: 'mechanical spectacles', chambers of optics, shadow theatres, magic lanterns and 'fantasmagoria'.[49] The use and reputation of the magic lantern, which had made its appearance in the seventeenth century, were both ambivalent: it was associated in its dark aspects with devilry and in its lighter ones with the pedagogic virtues of the image; Ségolène Le Men stresses its 'model scope for conceptions of seeing' and describes it as a camera obscura in reverse, projecting images instead of receiving them.[50] From 1798 Etienne-Gaspard Robertson started to present his 'fantasmagoria', optical experiences

21 J. Marchand after J.-B. Coste, *The Weeping Willow*, 1793, etching, 40.5 x 51 cm.

22 H. Burn, *The Spirit of Byron in the Isles of Greece*, c. 1830, lithograph.

23 Caspar David Friedrich, *The Tomb of Ulrich von Hutten*, c. 1823-4, oil on canvas, 93.5 x 73.4 cm.



24 Comtesse Charlotte von Jennison-Walworth, a playing-card from *Transformationskarten von J. G. Cotta für 1805* (Tübingen, 1804), etching with stencil colouring, 6.7 x 9.7 cm.

produced with the aid of mirrors and a projector moving along rails, in the course of which images (mainly of ghosts) appeared in the darkness, approached the spectators, then disappeared. The spectacle exploited both the ambivalence of the process – Robertson announced his intention of demystifying the very illusion he was bringing to perfection – and a taste for 'Gothic' irrationalism stirred up by the Terror; in this way it corresponded to a widespread obsession with 'deceptive appearances' and a need to make the invisible visible, accounting for its immense success in Paris and its emulation everywhere in Europe.[51] In his *Mémoires* Robertson shows himself to be eminently aware of the power of the imagination and the conditions that favour it, attributing to imagination the prodigies and miracles of the past, and mentioning a crowd that assembled in the gardens of the Palais-Royal to see 'a chimney stack casting its shadow in the shape of Louis XVI'.[52]

The immateriality and mobility of these projected images linked them not only with mystical, supernatural and pathological phenomena like visions and apparitions, but more broadly with the inner world of mental images. The same is more or less true of procedures and techniques that, from the 1820s, took advantage of research into the 'after image' and retinal retention, including the kaleidoscope, thaumatrope, phenakistiscope, zootrope or stereoscope.[53] Jonathan Crary, who sees these as the other main source of the artistic transformations of the end of the nineteenth century, points out that the kaleidoscope, the apparatus allowing the greatest freedom to the viewer, also lends itself to ambivalent use as a metaphor: Baudelaire sees it as an image of modern consciousness, and Marx and Engels as an image of the solipsistic illusion with which Saint-Simon is reproached. For his part, Goethe was already comparing the recently invented kaleidoscope to a continuously unfurling mental image of a rose.[54]

Metamorphosis was still practised in caricature, which under the July Monarchy enjoyed extraordinarily widespread growth (supported by the expansion of the press and developments in printing techniques). It lies at the very heart of how caricature functions, setting up a tension between likeness and its absence, and basing itself upon the association of visual ideas, so that from the beginning it has been compared to the mental image and to dream images.[55] This is demonstrated in the famous drawing of Louis-Philippe's face transformed into a pear in four stages, which Charles Philipon produced on 14 November 1831 while on trial for an 'affront to the king's own person'.[56] The success of this 'pearification' was such that it inspired a whole series of variations. This phenomenon was itself commented upon in a lithograph published in *La Caricature* in 1834 (illus. 25), depicting a jester (the personification of caricature, both the genre and the newspaper of that name) calling attention to an exhibition of paintings in front of which a dense crowd is gathered. The paintings depict various objects (including, from top left, a wooded hillock, an assembly of objects, coats of arms and a Buddha), in all of

25 Charles Joseph Traviès de Villers (attrib.), 'Here, Sirs (attributed), is what we have the Honour of Exposing Daily', lithograph from *La Caricature*, no 174 (6 March 1834), 32.4 x 43 cm.

which the king's features are visible; the same is true of the silhouettes of the spectators, whose dress designates various social ranks and trades, with the exception of the fourth figure, a taller and thinner man resembling the crown prince.[57] A commentary with the signature 'Altaroche' takes up Philipon's argument and attributes the two series of likenesses to the 'inquisitorial art' and the 'court preoccupations' of the spectator.[58] So this caricature proposes a *mise en abyme* of imaginative perception, functioning within the picture through the visitors inspecting the paintings, and outside the picture through the spectator who is contemplating the images of the paintings and the visitors. One of the visitors looks out at the spectator and seems to extend to the spectator's world 'the tyranny of the royal face' (to paraphrase De Quincey); the image affirms that perception itself is a matter of likenesses, 'sympathy' or 'empathy',[59] like Erhard Schön's defence of religious images (see illus. 13). Not the least among the interesting things about this lithograph is the way its use of ambiguity shows knowledge of Mannerist antecedents (Arcimboldo in particular).

It is to Grandville that we owe not only the exploration of the narrative possibilities of the logic of metamorphosis, but also the application of it to an unprecedented representation of the genesis and development of oneiric images, in the collection known as *Un autre monde* (1844) and particularly in the two illustrations of dreams published posthumously in 1847 in the *Magasin pittoresque* (illus. 26). The long commentary the artist sent to the editor Edouard Charton makes clear the way these dreams are to be read (from top to bottom following the winding line created by the various figures) and identifies the objects represented with information about the visual and verbal logic that governs their order – for example, the initial murder with

26 P. Soyer after J. J. Grandville, 'First Dream – Crime and Expiation', wood engraving from *Magasin pittoresque*, vol. 15, no 27 (1847), 23.5 x 14.5 cm.

the victim presented as half-man half-tree, is related to the slang expression 'il a fait suer un chêne!'[60] He compares the transformations of the objects to the 'sudden effects that can be experienced by all dreamers', stresses the interest of 'this art of deformation and reformation of signs, the art of transitions that always follow each other in parallel with a moral sense' and proudly asserts 'Never before, to my knowledge, in any work of art, have dreams been understood and expressed in this way'. Stefanie Heraeus has recently agreed wholeheartedly with this and shown that Grandville's work narrowly preceded the pioneering research of Maury and d'Hervey de Saint-Denys.[61] The latter acknowledged as much when in 1867 he likened to another of Grandville's plates one of the forms of 'the association of related ideas' in dreams, that in which 'the evocation of successive reminiscences is linked together solely by similarities of forms perceptible by the senses'.[62]

27 Alexander Cozens, 'blot', plate 37 from *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (London, 1785), aquatint, 24 x 31.5 cm.

From Cozens to Delacroix

Recourse to the accidental image reappears publicly with *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* published in 1785, the year before his death, by the English draughtsman Alexander Cozens. Cozens in fact proposed to give up copying the work of others or even nature itself and to use the 'artificial blot', traced on the paper in brush and ink by 'the swiftest hand', with the paper sometimes screwed up and flattened out again beforehand; this is to be done after the mind has utterly absorbed a subject, but by 'confining the disposition of the whole' to the 'general subject'. Using such a blot (illus. 27) a sketch can be created on another sheet of paper (illus. 28), followed by a drawing (illus. 29), by studying the 'accidental shapes' until 'some proper meaning such as the blot suggests' has been produced. It is important both to preserve 'the spirit of the blot as much as possible by taking care not to add any thing that is not suggested by it, and to leave out what appears to be unnatural', and also to use shading 'to destroy flatness to a proper degree, or to distinguish objects or parts from each other'.[63] Cozens refers back to Leonardo's method but claims that he was unaware of it until he had discovered his own (accidentally); he considers that he has improved upon it insofar as 'the crude forms furnished by [his] procedures are painted deliberately'; but he quotes neither the passage on Botticelli and the squeezed sponge, nor those on the *macchia* and on the *componimento inculto*, which long predate his own discovery.[64]

Cozens's artificial blot is 'a production of chance, with a small degree of design'.[65] The respective importance and the mutual relationship between these two elements have been widely debated in terms of how 'modern' his method is. Henri Zerner has stressed that its aim was to 'throw onto paper the overall conception of a subject' and has likened it to Baroque sketches.[66] More recently, Charles Cramer has proposed a radically revised interpretation that sees *A New Method* as a perfected expression of the classical ideal, which aims at abstract generalization of nature and, in epistemological opposition to associationism, defends subtractive judgement against the additive method of wit as practised by Sterne.[67] For me, his argument is not entirely convincing. It is clear that the idea of a landscape is present in the production and the interpretation of a blot, and Cozens does not attempt to preserve its suggestiveness in his final drawing: in the example given here, he really is inspired by the detail of his 'accidental shapes', for example in the lowest tuft of foliage, which twists like an arabesque. The way he has distributed mass and organized plane, however, illustrates the retention of only one possibility among many others, it breaks the play of light and reduces the vigorous arrangement of triangular shapes on the left to a humdrum background feature. We may be quite right to prefer his blots to his drawings and, from the aspect that interests us here, to see his method less as an advance on Leonardo's than as a partial restatement of the latter's artistic richness. But Cozens does recognize the power of 'suggestion' and the subjective nature of perception, and in his view the advantage here lies in the fact that 'from the rudeness and uncertainty of the shapes made in blotting, one artificial blot will suggest different ideas to different persons'.[68] Zerner and Lebensztejn have noted that Cozens was perfectly conscious of the value of the 'true blot' – formed for him by the light shapes or masses produced by the blank areas of the paper quite as much as by the brush marks – and that he carefully preserved his blottings (there are as many as sixteen reproduced in his treatise) and was able to regard blotting as a self-justified activity.[69]

Cozens's method touches once again on the question of non-professional image-making that we encountered in relation to playing-cards. It also raises the question of its cultural status. In fact Cozens developed it in his capacity as a teacher of society amateurs, noting that it had a further advantage, namely that 'it is in the power of most capacities to make designs from blots'.[70] If his method earned him a reputation for being ingenious, it also exposed him to much scorn from those who felt they were protecting great art from such procedures: he became known, for example, as 'blot-master to the town'.[71] There is proof from about 1816 that blotting had then become a fashionable game in England; further available evidence might indicate that it was far more widespread and lasting than that.[72]

Imagination, ambiguity and 'chance' are also present (in differing degrees and ways) in the work of great artists around 1800.[73] Fuseli, Goya, Blake and Friedrich all turned towards an inner world situated this side of, beyond or in the shadow of the world of reason.[74] The upheaval of the French Revolution and its aftermath called into question the social conditions and the cultural conventions on which

28 Alexander Cozens, 'sketch', plate 38 from *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (London, 1785), aquatint, 24 x 31.5 cm.

29 William Pether after Alexander Cozens, 'drawing', plate 39 from *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (London, 1785), aquatint and mezzotint, 24 x 31.5 cm.

aesthetic communication is based, and brought about the development of 'private' iconographies[75] that favour ambiguity of subject and treatment. Blake writes that 'Every Eye Sees differently. As the Eye, such the Object.'[76] The emphasis on the subjective nature of seeing and the search for union with creative nature justified the pursuit or the acceptance of chance. So we find David d'Angers dissuading Friedrich from tearing up a drawing on which he had spilled ink and assuring him 'that the blot could be taken to be a bird', and Goya, towards the end of his life, creating miniatures on ivory, spilling a drop of water on the blackened plate, then interpreting the clear, but accidentally produced, shapes.[77] Disaffection with iconographic codes and the need for radical renewal led to a move towards the 'primitive' forms of visual communication. Friedrich Schlegel defined the arabesque as 'the most ancient and original form of the human imagination' (*Phantasie*), and Philipp Otto Runge noted that 'things presently would lead more toward arabesques and hieroglyphs; however from them the landscape would emerge, just as historical painting did'.[78] Dürer's arabesques and Raphael's grotesques are thus emulated in Runge's frames and in Eugen Neureuther's illustrations to Goethe's ballads and romances, in which the movement of the pen fluctuates between ornament and figuration.[79] The metamorphosis of forms links them to a source that is at the same time their essence. Wilhelm Schlegel understands art as 'the expression of the mysterious return towards chaos in labour' and Novalis demands of poetry that 'chaos ... should shine in it as through the regular veil of order'.[80] In 1828 Wilhelm von Humboldt describes the contribution of modern art as the development 'of that which, formlessly and through nuance and gradation alone, maintained by the laws of rhythm and harmony, can act on the imagination (*Einbildungsfraft*) and thus has an immediate effect on feeling'.[81] The notion of art freed from imitation or even representation, as seen in some aspects of the genesis and form of works from this period at the turn of the century, is clear in contemporary writings, particularly in the fields of poetry and philosophy, often in connection with painting and in comparisons made with music.[82] In Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798), a fictitious pupil of Dürer has a friend who urges him to renounce 'exciting stories' and to depict the 'marvellous multicoloured images in the clouds': 'Oh, my friend, if only you could manage to contain in your paintings the marvellous music now being composed in the sky! But you lack the colours, and meaning in its ordinary sense is unfortunately a condition of your art.'[83] In this context, Klaus Lankheit has remarked that one of the conditions of the idea of an 'absolute' painting is the conception of the unity of mind and nature, which 'alone enables one to transcend subjective expression in art and to arrive at a communicable language'.[84] The quest for a universal means of communication, independent of iconographic conventions, is not limited to Romanticism and also finds expression in the shape of a kind of formal and chromatic grammar in the *Essai sur les signes inconditionnels dans l'art*, published in Leiden between 1827 and 1832 by the Dutch draughtsman and printmaker David Pierre Humbert de Superville.[85]

The kind of communication that is sought, however, is far from being always successful and the increasing ambiguity of 'absolute' art can give rise to scorn and rejection. There are several cases in which spectators are reported to have contemplated Friedrich's landscapes upside down, seeing a clouded sky in the sea and vice versa, and Goethe, in later life, is supposed to have said that 'his paintings can be viewed equally well from bottom side up'.[86] An English art critic, writing about one of Turner's works, tells us that it would be 'equally effective, equally pleasing, and equally comprehensible if turned upside down'.[87] Whereas Friedrich is supposed to have been angry at this mistake, there is an anecdote showing that Turner shouldered its implications to the full: when he discovered, towards the end of his life, that one of his landscapes had been hung upside down in an exhibition, he is said to have preferred to leave as it was and to have stated that it looked better that way.[88] So we find that a faulty interpretation and an unrequested positioning of the work of art, both reminiscent of the paradigmatic realization of visual ambiguity represented by reversibility, become part of artistic intention and reveal its flexibility. The anecdote, reported in turn by Richard Muther, Meier-Graefe and others, has become a topos of the legend of modern art and artists, and has most often been used to affirm the primacy of form over representation; we will come across it again in autobiographical form in the writings of Kandinsky.[89]

Turner was familiar with Cozens's work and, according to another anecdote, is said to have asked three children with their hands wet with watercolour wash to run their fingers over the background of a landscape before he completed it.[90] The stupefaction shown by many contemporary commentators on his pictures (in 1843 one of them speaks of 'riddles that none but himself can read')[91] is to do with the primordial part he assigns to colour, to the 'unfinished' appearance of his works (particularly the sketches and the large rough drafts in colour), and to the way he blurs outline, all of which results in multiple possibilities for the organization and interpretation of form. In *Queen Mab's Cave* (illus. 30) it is possible to distinguish vaguely the natural and architectural elements of the setting and the details of some of the figures, such as the arabesques in the bottom right-hand corner, which form a woman's body carried off by a swan and another extended by a veil; but it is impossible to separate the water from the rock or the sky,

30 J.M.W. Turner, *Queen Mab's Cave*, 1846, oil on canvas, 92 x 122.5 cm.

and the iconic and iconographic identity of the details present, like the light-coloured mark in the bottom left-hand quarter or the dark silhouette with a halo above the grotto, remains mysterious – one critic speaks of 'a daylight dream' and of colour 'flung upon the canvas in kaleidoscopic confusion'.[92] These characteristics are not confined to fantastic subjects (the one here is very loosely inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*) but can be found in the whole of Turner's work. His pictures, nature studies or free inventions, tend towards a cosmic totality reminiscent of Leonardo's evocations of a deluge. The 'vortex' that structures them has been compared by Jack Lindsay to scribblings, which become, in the sketchbooks, depictions of entwined bodies; Charles Stuckey has drawn a parallel between this 'vortex' and the meaning of Turner's very name.[93] Ronald Paulson sees Turner's art as 'an attempt to absorb the natural object into the subject' and Werner Hofmann speaks in this connection (as already mentioned) of 'regression to premorphic inchoation' and to indeterminacy.[94]

In 1855 Baudelaire wrote that in Delacroix's work it seems as if colour 'thinks on its own, independently of the objects it clothes'.[95] Thomas Puttfarken has shown that from the sixteenth century in Venice, colourism and *non-finito* have fed a criticism of the theoretical division of the artistic process into distinct stages, particularly the opposition between 'invention' and execution.[96] This development is important for our subject in that it permitted an extension of the conscious use of imaginative perception beyond its initial preparatory stage in creation (the stained wall, the blot) to the entire process, and to the viewer's involvement in it. Delacroix, who claimed to be dominated by the imagination to the extent of being 'shaken like a serpent in the hand of a pythoness', stressed how important it was to maintain this imaginative heat to the very end: 'The execution of a painting must always be close to improvisation, and here lies the crucial difference between the painter's performance and the actor's. The painter's execution will only be a fine one if he takes it upon himself to be slightly abandoned, to make his discoveries as he paints, etc.'[97] This controlled passivity leads him to use expressions significantly close to the language of divination: he speaks of the 'muddled stage of groping for signs' in which he alone can 'detect the omens of something'.[98] Such passivity corresponds to the effect that the work needs to have on the spectator and to the type of communication envisaged: 'Woe betide the person who sees only a clear idea in a fine painting, and woe betide the painting that presents nothing beyond the finite world to a man endowed with imagination. The value of a painting is what is indefinable about it: exactly the quality that escapes precise ideas: in brief, it is what the soul has added to colours and lines so that the

31 Eugène Delacroix, *Study for 'The Death of Sardanapalus'*, c. 1825–7, pen, brown ink and wash on paper, 20.6 x 31.4 cm.

work can speak to the soul.'[99] So it comes as no surprise that Delacroix's drawing takes up Leonardo's *componimento inculto*. In a study for *The Death of Sardanapalus* (illus. 31), for example, the line strays, turns back on itself and leaps from one figure to another, uniting in a dazzling synthesis the actors in the drama and their interrelated gaze: the sadistic despot, the hypnotized onlookers, the contorted body of the sacrificed concubine. Here in a nutshell is the amoral violence and the visible anarchy for which the painting was so widely reproached when it was exhibited in the Salon of 1827. If the convulsive energy of the lines in this picture imitate or express a *natura naturans*, it is the inner nature of the deep psyche, the 'utterly black depths to be gratified' alluded to in Delacroix's journal.[100]

Writer–draughtsmen

Right up to the 1880s much of the most radical experimentation in the visual field that concerns us is to be found in drawings made by amateurs, particularly writers. Some of the explanatory factors involved here are to do with characteristic features of the graphic arts. Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846), whose bad eyesight had prevented him from becoming a painter and who became a teacher, critic and creator of stories in pictures, wrote that 'the graphic line, because of its convenient rapidity, its expressive richness, its unpredictable and pleasing chance discoveries, produces admirably fertile invention'.[101] He attributes the creation of one of his characters to 'a completely fortuitous stroke of the pen', turns an ink-stained sheet of examination paper into a drawing, and lets 'scribblings' remain on the paper as the free associations of graphic ideas.[102] So we have scenes (a 'political' discussion), caricatures (the 'soldier on half pay'), observed or invented figures and amusingly monstrous hybrids, coexisting, interacting and engendering each other on the infinitely receptive surface of the blank page (illus. 32). This rambling composition recalls the digressive art of Sterne or Diderot – hardly surprising on the part of the author of *Voyages en zigzag* (Geneva, 1844) – and the drolleries in the margins of medieval manuscripts. The hair of the three male heads at the top of the page is transformed into 'pasture' for horses (through some play on words?), a conversation is being struck up between the tiny characters perched on their heads and the neighbouring figures who have become gigantic, the bonnet of a lady (scolding her servant?) extends itself into a serpent, and the overcrowded tail of the monster at the bottom becomes something like an emblem of the metamorphic powers of line-drawing. There is even a slight hint of the psychological tension of Delacroix's sketch (see illus. 31) in the glance the young woman directs at the exaggerated metaphorical virility of the soldier.

Other factors bring us back to the general conditions of amateur visual creation. Writers rarely have any formal artistic training and can compensate for their limited skill in the field by resorting to the image-making resources of their own materials. So we find George Sand (1804–76) devising a process (illus. 33) that anticipates Surrealist *decalcomania* (see illus. 168); she calls it 'dendrite', borrowing the name given to stones with natural patterns resembling vegetal ramification or certain fossilized trees.[103] The dual referent

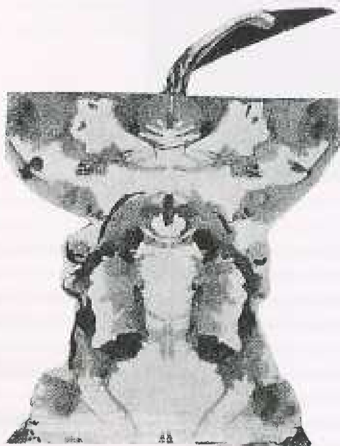
32 Rodolphe Töpffer, *'Pasture, Politicians, Half-Pay Officer'*, undated, pen and sepia on paper, 17 x 28 cm.

33 George Sand, *Landscape*, undated, 'dendrite' (decalcomania) watercolour on paper.

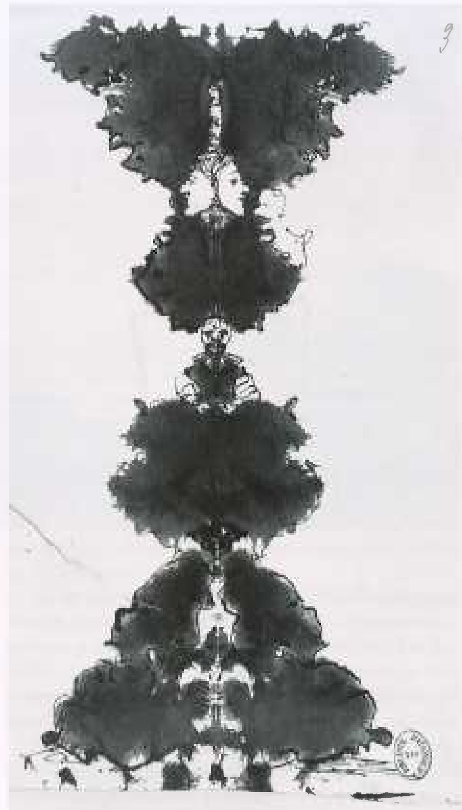
here (illustrating the way the natural image hesitates between icon and index) shows that by interpreting as landscapes the more or less accidental configurations formed when pigments are pressed between two surfaces, she saw herself as following a natural process (with nature following an artistic one). The relative passivity and 'vulgarity' of such methods – it will be remembered that imaginative perception is often associated with childhood and with uneducated people – are also more easily adopted by those who are not concerned with their professional reputation and can devote themselves to image-production as they would to a game (an agreeable game of chance) rather than to a premeditated, regulated activity. Added to this is the fact that, passed around only a limited circle of friends, the unprofessional status of works produced in this way avoids the norms governing exhibitions and salesrooms, a freedom also enjoyed, to a lesser extent, by drawings generally, since they are less hampered by decorum than paintings and

sculptures. Unlike other amateurs, writers often benefited from their close relationship with artists, notably at the time of 'the fraternity of the arts' in the Romantic period. It is also worth remembering, particularly in an age when we use machines to write with, that they used one of the main instruments of drawing, the pen made of goose-quill, reed or metal. Justinus Kerner relates that, when his dwindling eyesight caused him to spill drops of ink as he was writing and to crumple a sheet of paper without noticing, he rediscovered a childhood game that involved crushing berries or even insects to produce images.[104] Victor Hugo refers to 'minor instances of unruliness, which led him to use the feathers on his pen as much as the quill', thus equating it with the virtues of the paint-brush.[105]

As far as potential images are concerned, Kerner and Hugo are the two most remarkable writer-draughtsmen of the nineteenth century.[106] The former, a Swabian doctor and poet born in 1786, devoted himself around the mid-century to the production and interpretation of blots, and in 1857 made a collection of his *Kleksographien* (from *Kleks*, a regional variant of *Klecks*, a stain or blot). This was published by his son in 1890, long after his death in 1862,[107] and contains forty drawings with an introduction and commentaries in verse. Kerner notes that his blots, made symmetrical by folding the paper, liberate the imagination and tells us that they did not arise voluntarily or through his talent, but completely of their own accord.[108] He sees them as 'images of Hades' or 'of hell' representing spirits that were condemned to remain in the darkness of his ink-well until they could use it as a means to make themselves visible, through a process he describes in terms that recall the acheiropoetic image and photography – although here an inverted photograph, since it involves 'writing' with shadow not light. In connection with a particularly repulsive image, Kerner describes the danger of night-time 'klecksography'.[109] Yet there is ample evidence that he interfered with these blots, ranging from retouchings in pen to cut-outs and collages, and the collection shows humour – there is even a 'spirit of printing errors'[110] – and reflexiveness. In the example given here (illus. 34), the ink-well itself has drawn its own portrait and can be transformed, if we turn it upside down as another example of reversible image, into a 'bestial demon'; this transformation is not the only projective reading, and it is possible to discern at one's leisure a chalice, heads, kneeling figures, the male genitals and other features.



34 Justinus Kerner, *The Ink-pot's Self-portrait (Interpreted Blot)*, before 1857, from his book *Kleksographien* (1890).



35 Victor Hugo, *Ink-stain Touched up on Folded Paper*, pen and brown ink, (?)c. 1850, 20.2 x 14.2 cm.

36 Victor Hugo, *Old House*, (?) c. 1855–6, pen and brown ink wash over graphite pencil, black ink, charcoal, gouache, watercolour, golden ink, lace imprint on paper, 10.5 x 12.2 cm.

These 'klecksographies' are the result of a many-sided preoccupation with images and visions. Kerner's son reports that his father knew better than anyone how to 'discover all sorts of fantastic shapes in clouds', and his first book owes some of its inspiration to the camera obscura, Chinese shadow puppets and marionette theatre.[111] His interest in parapsychological and occult phenomena, arising from treatment he had received from a magnetic healer as a child, made him famous thanks to his study of Friederike Hauffe, the 'seeress of Prevorst', a sufferer from nervous disorder who practised divination, used secret writing and prescribed her own treatment in a trance; part of the book he devoted to her in 1829, subtitled *Revelations on the inner life of man and the penetration of the spirit world into our own*, deals with 'spiritual vision' (*geistiges Sehen*) provoked by such objects as soap bubbles, glasses and mirrors.[112] Kerner was a disciple of Mesmer, whose biography he was writing at the time he was producing his 'klecksographies', and he must have been sensitive to the influence of spiritualism, which was very strong in the 1850s and also affected Hugo. His inclination to melancholy, intensified by his later blindness, was a further factor that contributed to his fascination with the supernatural world and the unconscious. This tendency has been diagnosed as 'regression', and in fact Kerner himself connected his method and the images that resulted from it with ontogenetic and phylogenetic origins, in his own childhood and in the childhood of humanity, observing that his blots 'very often present features that go back to periods in the distant childhood of ancient peoples, like idols for instance, or urns, or mummies, etc'.[113]

Kerner claims to have circulated 'klecksographies' from 1850 onwards and tells us that they became a fashionable game. Yet Franz von Pocci, a painter and illustrator from Munich with whom he exchanged blots and appended commentaries, dissuaded him from publishing his collection, with the warning that it 'would be understood only by very few people'; Kerner decided to keep it as 'a curiosity to be shared with friends' and it was not until the more favourable climate of the end of the century that his collection reached a wider public. In 1881, for example, 'images from coffee stains' were circulated in the guise of 'humorous drawings'; these had been created between 1847 and 1865 by the official painter Wilhelm von Kaulbach and two of his assistants as a means of relaxing from the task of painting oil murals in the stairwell of the Neues Museum in Berlin.[114] Gombrich and Janson have suggested that Kerner's blots

might be seen as a link in the historical chain between Cozens's method and the Rorschach test (see illus. 27–9, 150).[115] The first element in this chain of connection is plausible in terms of the society game; but it may only be a thread in the more extensive and more tightly interwoven fabric of widespread popular games that owed their existence to the value Romanticism attached to childhood and imagination. In the case of Rorschach, by contrast, chronological and geographico-cultural proximity makes a direct link more than likely.

The graphic work of Victor Hugo is infinitely more varied, richer and more complex than Kerner's – indeed, there are few contemporary artists with whom one might not compare him favourably. In Hugo's case, too, graphic activity derived from a passion for the visual world, something that is amply illustrated by his work as a writer. Imaginative perception was at the heart of Hugo's experience, and he was especially interested in ambiguous situations and states that feature an encounter between the real and the imaginary and the ensuing transfiguration. In *Le Rhin* (1842) there is a description of an 'amphibious dream', which occurred during a stagecoach journey at night, and in which the darkness, the coach lanterns, the storm and 'the mind teeming with images' conspired to create an anthropomorphic, misshapen and monstrous aspect.[116] In 1854 Hugo gave a definition of the metamorphosis that occurs in 'half-sleep': 'As I become a thing myself, I feel the things around me becoming beings.'[117] *Les travailleurs de la mer* (1866), in which the hero Gilliat is a 'kind of visionary of nature', shows that such transformation is not an addition but a revelation, the revelation not of something beyond the world but something hidden inside it: 'Nothing supernatural; but the occult continuation of infinite nature ... Sleep connects us with the possible, which we also call the implausible.'[118] The apparent stability of the world is based on perpetual transformation, and the coast of the Channel Islands is subject to 'fainting fits' in the observer's eye: 'As we move close or away, drift or turn, the shore disintegrates: no kaleidoscope is more ready to make things crumble: the aspect of things falls apart then reassembles itself; perspective plays tricks. This block is a tripod, then a lion, then an angel with furling wings; then a seated figure reading a book. Nothing changes shape like clouds, unless it is the rocks.'[119] The return or the dispersion of the present in the potential has a cosmological significance as well as a poetic one: 'chaos is the placenta of the universe'.[120]

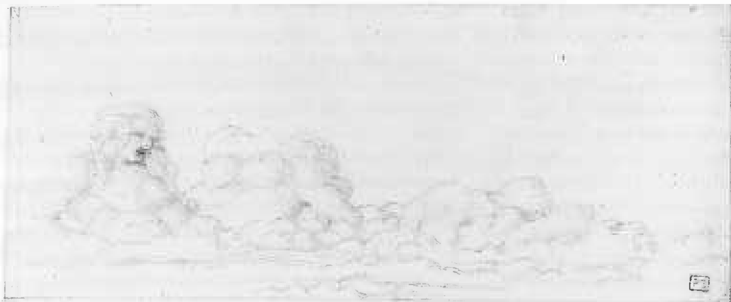
There are sketches on sheets of paper or in Hugo's notebooks that illustrate these observations of transformation.[121] What they mostly contain, however, is the workings of the process itself, using the most unexpected tools and techniques (skewed pens, broken matchsticks, blots, folds, imprints, stencils), especially those that invite chance intervention, notably liquid, the element that was so important to Hugo as an exile on an island. The combination of active and passive in this form of creativity and its demiurgic side have been well described by Henri Focillon: 'Hugo poured out large quantities of ink and coffee and worked with this mobile darkness, which he divided up as he wanted, exploiting the chance workings of catastrophe.'[122] The reference to the use of coffee, which all commentators have emphasized from the beginning, points in my view to an implicit comparison with divination. Apart from the effects of exile, Hugo's involvement with table-turning in Jersey between 1853 and 1854 had a radical effect on his graphics as well as on his literary inspiration.[123] He had, however, begun to experiment with blots and folds towards 1848, before his exile.[124] In an example that is particularly close to Kerner's contemporary 'klecksographies', an alignment of ink blots has been doubled by folding the paper (once or several times), and Hugo has used these accidental symmetrical shapes and retouched them with a pen (illus. 35). Several heads can be seen, or even more complete figures if the black stains are interpreted as clothing, and also something resembling a small dog. Reversibility is exploited vertically, with certain elements appearing only from one of the vertical viewing positions or else transforming themselves according to which side is viewed. The disquieting or grotesque character of the 'klecksographies' is present, but Hugo has greater graphic skill and makes better use of the negative shapes suggested by unblotted white areas on the paper. He also seems less concerned to unify his composition into a coherent figure than to leave it in a state of maximum suggestiveness, in which the viewer will follow rather than retrace the metamorphoses set in play. Later Hugo would refrain from adding anything to certain of his blots or washes, leaving them untitled and without any indication about the angle from which they are to be viewed, and Jean-Jacques Lebel has recently shown, by reproducing them from their different angles, how this fundamental indeterminacy contributes to their polysemous nature.[125] More usually, though, anything is grist to Hugo's mill. A drawing such as the *Old House* (illus. 36) gives us some idea of his technical range. The repetition of the outline of the building, in darkness and light, suggests the stencil technique that must have made him aware of the potential of negative shapes. The bottom right-hand area looks like marbled paper, and the house emerges from it as if it were on a promontory. The house itself illustrates Hugo's taste for medieval architecture, going beyond the picturesque and embracing the attraction of chaos with the aid of time and its destructive effect on form. The surface of the sheet, as in Hugo's folded blots, suggests a space of representation only in the most ambiguous and fragmented way, with a drip of blue forming a gulf between the house and something like its nocturnal double. Is this something seen? An apparition? A dream of matter itself? In the upper part of the drawing, the 'clouds' are images of four-leafed clover from an inked metal filigree that has been applied to the paper.[126] Hugo appropriates this index of an icon by extracting a symbol from it, the letters of his name, important visual actors on the stage of his drawings.

The complex and chequered history of the circulation of Hugo's visual work has been well analysed by Pierre Georgel.[127] To the difficulties arising from the heterodox nature of his art was added Hugo's own deep concern that his art should not compete with his literary reputation. The works of this 'reluctant painter' were created in the first instance 'for friends' and were admired and distributed among his loyal supporters. Nonetheless these friends were enthusiastic and influential, and from the 1860s this hidden side of Hugo's creativity started to become known and gain a reputation: publications included an album of drawings in wood- and steel-engravings by Paul Chenay in 1863, an article by Philippe Burty in 1875 and, from 1876 onwards, the engravings of Méaulle included in the instalments of 'The Illustrated Victor Hugo'. The drawings in the manuscript of *Les travailleurs de la mer* were published in an album in 1882, and after Hugo's death in 1885 his visual work, like Kerner's, reached a wider public with the 1888 exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit and the opening of his house in the Place des Vosges as a museum in 1902.[128] The role and significance of imaginative perception for Hugo was clearly recognized by his early commentators, although they failed to extend their remarks to the effect produced by his work. In his preface to the Chenay album, Théophile Gautier describes Hugo's 'visionary eye', sees him as a man to whom 'the life hidden beneath forms reveals itself', praises his talent as 'both precise and chimerical' and talks of his pen at play 'when no longer directed, scrawling in the margins of a dreaming idea the vague outlines of memories, things half seen through fogs, the chimeras of fantasy and the fortuitous caprices of the unconscious hand'; and Burty, describing a night view of Paris Hugo created between 1848 and 1851, calls it 'half vision, half reality'.[129]

Romanticism and Realism

The posthumous publication of Kerner's collection and the growing diffusion of Hugo's visual work around 1890 are part of a kind of renaissance or rediscovery of Romanticism characteristic of *fin-de-siècle* culture. For a historian of ideas like Henri Ellenberger, Romanticism and its philosophy of nature seem to have disappeared by 1850 and given way to a 'triumph of Positivism and a mechanistic vision of the world'.[130] It is the case that, in many respects, a radical opposition developed between facts and ideas, perception and imagination, nature and mind, human and non-human, subject and object. But this did not develop homogeneously or in a unilinear manner. In his account of the 1859 Salon, Baudelaire saw artists divided 'into two distinct camps: the artist from the one camp, who calls himself a *realist*, an ambiguous word whose meaning remains undetermined, and whom we shall call a *positivist* to better characterize his error, declares "I wish to depict things as they are, or as they would be, without me existing." The universe without man. The artist from the other camp, the imaginative one, proclaims "I wish to illuminate things with my own mind and project its reflection onto other minds."'[131] Pierre Georgel has shown that, in spite of its apparent death-throes, Romanticism was living on and recharging its energies in the course of the 1860s, notably in the circle around Victor Hugo and particularly in the graphic arts.[132]

Baudelaire himself is an example of this renewal and plays a major part in it. For him the imagination is 'the sovereign faculty', 'an almost divine faculty that perceives first and foremost, outside the methods of philosophy, the intimate and secret connections between things, their correspondences and analogies'.[133] We have seen that he draws attention, in harmony with the theory and practice of Delacroix, to the intrinsically expressive powers of colour and of the arabesque.[134] For him, the 'governing of the imagination' is thus not something limited to the relation between the artist and nature, but extends to that between the work of art and the public.[135] In 1846 Baudelaire writes that 'the poetry in a picture must be created by the spectator ... because it lies in the spectator's soul, and genius consists in awakening it there'; in 1863 he praises Delacroix as 'the most *suggestive* of painters, the one whose work ... forces us to think most, by recalling to memory the greatest number of poetic thoughts and feelings it has previously known, but which seemed buried for ever in the darkness of the past'.[136] The balance between work and spectator affects the critic too, who 'will often appreciate a picture solely through the sum of ideas or imaginings it will bring to his mind', and it acts as a basis for the ideal of a 'poetic criticism', a criticism that will be 'the painting reflected through an intelligent and sensitive mind – just as a fine painting itself is nature reflected by the artist'.[137] Wolfgang Drost has thus been able to place Baudelaire in the development that moves from normative aesthetics to an 'aesthetics of the effect'. Such a development may be compared with a lesser-known episode in the theory of Italian art to which Benedetto Croce drew attention at the beginning of the century. In a small book published in 1868, the Neapolitan critic Vittorio Imbriani wrote that the 'pictorial idea' is a stain (*macchia*). Quoting a painter who sees the best illustration of a book as a fly squashed between two of its pages and referring to images



37 Charles Meryon, *Anthropomorphic Cloud Study (Second Version)*, probably c. 1855–6, pencil on tracing paper, 9.8 x 20.2 cm.

seen on the shaft of a marble column in North Africa, he defines the stain as 'a harmonious blend of tones, that is of light and shade, capable of arousing any feeling in the mind, inspiring the imagination to productivity', and he stresses that it is 'the *sine qua non* of a painting, the essential, indispensable element, which can sometimes make us forget any other absent quality, and which no other quality can replace'.[138]

According to Pierre Georgel, it became clear during the Second Empire that Romanticism showed itself to best advantage in the graphic arts, and it was by re-establishing the merits of engraving that Meryon, Bresdin, Doré and the Société des Aquafortistes once again accomplished the ideal of a 'language capable of expressing the unity of the universe, without letting its contradictory components cancel each other out'.[139] Hugo praised Meryon for solving the problem of the etching, that is to say 'solely chiaroscuro, delivered into its own hands', and recognized in it the central figure in his own aesthetic, the antithesis, which lies at the basis of the dynamics of his graphic work, just as it that was true of Kerner's work in a more modest way and would also be true of Redon's.[140] The development of a 'private' iconography, which started to become apparent around 1800, was pushed to an enigmatic extreme by Charles Meryon and, if the allegorical figures he places in the skies above his cityscapes still remain enigmatic, it is, as Philippe Junod puts it, because the sky acts as a 'projection screen' for him.[141] In his pencil studies and in a version of his *Pont-au-Change* (illus. 37) human or superhuman characters are introduced who, even more than Mantegna's horseman (see illus. 4), seem to be emerging from the shapeless cloud matter as if they were emerging from sleep. The iconographic ambiguity of his work had its admirers, and in 1858 a critic wrote of the *Pont au Change*: 'The mind can lose itself in a series of equally plausible explanations, and the very vagueness of the field opened up to the imagination has something mysterious about it that is not

38 Rodolphe Bresdin, *Branches*, probably 1880–85, etching, 10.5 x 6.9 cm.

unpleasing'. His work, however, was often seen as incompatible with the alleged objectivity of the *veduta*, and this led to analysis of it as schizophrenic, always based, according to Junod, 'on the perception of a rupture between high and low, the imaginary and the real'.[142]

This critical dichotomy remained a problem until the end of the century and resulted in the sort of marginalization that affected both the life and work of Rodolphe Bresdin, who was the epitome of the *artiste maudit*. Bresdin's way of working was to drown his subject in accumulated, proliferating shapes as he engraved, with no sense of distance from it or of perspective. Trees, rocks and clouds are used to animate the natural scene, which seems to evoke Chinese painting with its 'dragon-claw' branches and 'devil's-face' rocks.[143] In a late etching (illus. 38)[144] the branches are the only iconic element that supports and accounts for the pulsation produced by the concentric incisions and amplifies it into a gyratory pattern that works against the limits of the copper plate, a feature that is almost ironically emphasized by the two motionless little birds at the centre of this microcosm. The marginalization of Doré's work has to do with the socially inferior status of book illustration, which Doré tried in vain to transcend. Yet book illustration did allow him to justify his taste for metamorphosis and anthropomorphism, nourished by an exploitation of visual parallels learned from caricature. So animated nature appears as an externalization of a character's visions, as in the illustration to Pierre Dupont's *La légende du juif errant* in 1856. But this visionary form of the picturesque has an autobiographical dimension and meets the *fin-de-siècle* interest in hallucination in Doré's Symbolist interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, which appeared posthumously in 1883. Here, as Ségolène Le Men notes, the features of the interior 'produce a flickering effect adapted to the somnolent state of the character and conducive to visions', taking up 'the hesitation between reality and apparition characteristic of the genre of the fantastic'.[145] In the depiction of the raven perched on the bust of Athena (illus. 39), Doré combines bird and statue in a kind of hybrid, made more solid by the vertical accumulation of the formal rhymes. He makes the blackness stand out against a kind of sectionalized luminous halo (probably a gas lamp with a reflector), suggesting a fan, a magic lantern or a kaleidoscope, in which it is possible to detect the multiple face of Lenore, the narrator's lost love. The absent gaze of Athena, duplicated by the eye-holes in her helmet, is replaced by the ghostly glances of the apparition, indicating a move from physical to spiritual vision or from reason to madness; the whole image suggests a peacock with its ocellated fan of tail-feathers.

By reducing representation to what is visible – Courbet, for example, declared that he would paint angels when he actually saw them – and by reducing the visible in turn to a world without man, to the object without a subject, the Realist programme, denounced by Baudelaire, seemed to aim at an unequivocally transparent version of mimesis that would exclude any evidence of imaginative perception or the use of ambiguity. The matter is in fact rather more

39 (right) R.-G. Tietze after Gustave Doré, 'Perched upon a bust of Pallas…', plate XIV for Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven* (London, 1883), wood engraving, 32.7 x 22.3 cm.

complicated than this. For Werner Hofmann, Realism's 'abstinence from imagination' since Luther actually allows the spectator more imaginative freedom than 'deliberately imaginative products' and leads inevitably to a 'real allegory', to use Courbet's ostensibly contradictory expression.[146] But Zola's definition ('nature seen through a temperament') does give credit to the part played by the perceiving subject, even if it has the automatic nature of a prism. Finally, the search for visual equivalents of reality led the pioneers and staunch partisans of Realism to give priority to the materials and gestures employed in painting and drawing, bringing into play an opacity and suggestiveness that call representation into question.

This is most obvious in the treatment of landscape, where the Romantic feeling for nature survives in various guises. Ruskin defines modern landscape art in the formula 'the service of clouds', and says that his contemporaries have 'some true sympathy with what is vague in nature', which enables them to 'render faithfully whatever can be discerned

40 John Ruskin, *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas*, 1853, pen and ink, wash, gouache and scratching out, 47.7 x 32.7 cm.

in faithless mist or mocking vapours', but which makes them 'uncertain themselves in proportion to the certainty of what they see' and particularly incapable of depicting rocks, the 'careful realization' of which he finds only in ancient art.[147] As a passionate geologist, he took up the challenge and became particularly interested in gneiss, a 'metamorphic' rock in the mineralogical sense, that is one of which the structure has been modified by heat and pressure and has characteristic layering of alternate light and dark colour. His 1853 study (illus. 40) shows that he scrutinized the static surface of the rock in search of former movements so he could retrace their genesis and bring it to life. His animation works from effect back to cause, from appearance back to underlying structure, but it also liberates form and opens it up to multiple suggestions and readings. Scale becomes ambiguous and fluctuating, recalling Cennini's precept and Manuel's drawing (see illus.12), and it is possible to detect in this rock and the vegetation on it bones or teeth, organs, bodies, eyes (the closed eyes in the two horizontal cracks in the upper half of the drawing) or hair. Ruskin was aware of such effects: he recommended the use of moss in depicting forests, or stones for hills, and stated that by examining such

things one would see 'a mountain in miniature ... more fantastic in form, and incomparably richer in colour'; he compared certain gneiss formations to 'knots of passionate snakes' or to human heads.[148] Mountains seemed to him to be 'to the rest of the body of the earth what violent muscular action is to the body', and he defended the superiority of the intuitive understanding of natural processes as expressed in myth and legend against the materialistic theories of science.[149] So the ambition to 'recognize things from their causes', formulated in the seventeenth century by Van Hoogstraeten, is not opposed to the creative imagination, but rather to automatic visual and mental reflexes. For Ruskin, the meticulous observation and representation of the surface of a rock is part of another return to origins, the 'innocence of the eye', which he defined in 1856 as 'a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify, as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight', and upon which the 'technical effectiveness of painting' depends.[150]

41 Gustave Courbet, *Le Gour de Conches*, 1864, oil on canvas, 70 x 60 cm.

Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner have drawn a useful distinction between two types of realism, the realism of the academic *fini* in which the mimetic illusion presupposes an 'idealist' elision of the means of representation, and the 'phenomenological realism' of 'the "unfinished" texture', which involves 'a faithful representation of the process of vision and emphatic sense of the material presence of the work of art'.[151] The second type can be observed in the Barbizon painters, whose unorthodox textures and techniques, conveying sharp and inventive awareness of the artificiality of plastic means, sometimes remind us of the experiments of George Sand and Victor Hugo. The same tension between surface and depth, the medium used and the subject represented, informs Courbet's work, particularly his landscapes. Klaus Herding has noted that in these works Courbet gradually shuns not only local colour but any clear distinction between the various objects in the picture (though human figures are still distinct from their surroundings), and his rendering of the shapeless state of the natural world reaches a degree of abstraction that points to its primitiveness.[152] As with Ruskin's study of gneiss, and as will be the case with Cézanne, the choice of the natural model is essential as a stimulus (phenomenologically) and as a justification (from the Realist point of view) for questioning mimesis. Stone is a privileged motif here and it enables the building of a 'wall of painting', to use Balzac's expression in his staging of a catastrophe of representation, *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (Paris, 1831). Courbet was particularly inspired by complex sites combining rock, water and vegetation, in a closed space in which the sky plays little part (illus. 41–3). These natural sites were connected in his mind with those he frequented as a child, so he could literally return to them as to a source, and they implicitly evoke the human body, particularly the female body.

Petra ten-Doesschate Chu has given us an excellent description of the specific qualities of landscape in Courbet's work.[153] For him it is something that perpetually mutates, subjected (as it is in Ruskin) to natural evolution and to human intervention. His unusual painting tech-

42 Gustave Courbet, *Fantastic Landscape with Anthropomorphic Rocks*, 1864 or later, oil on canvas, 87 x 93 cm.

nique, which made much use of the palette knife and occasionally of a sponge, rags or the fingers, his use of an initial dark undercoat and his way of working from dark to light, was intended to imitate the processes of nature rather than its appearance in a way that links it with one of the key concepts of Romantic aesthetics.[154] Courbet was aware of this, and declared that it would not be possible for a mere paintbrush 'to do rocks like that, rocks that have been eroded by the weather and the rain, which have formed long seams from top to bottom'; he also stated that what he did in his paintings is what the sun does in the natural world.[155] So his landscapes can be seen as 'visual metaphors rather than literal translations of natural motifs', and their lack of 'finish' can lead us to think of them as suggesting 'like nature, a stage in an on-going process rather than an ultimate statement'.[156]

How far does this suggestion imply the painter's freedom in relation to his subject and the spectator's in relation to the picture? Unexpected light is thrown on the first part of this question by two canvases first drawn to our attention by Hélène Toussaint.[157] In the first, *Le Gour de Conches* (illus. 41), which depicts a site near Salins, she has detected figures in the rocks, 'a policeman with a kepi on his head on either side of the bridge' and 'a great many human heads scattered about in the composition'. The second, *Fantastic Landscape with Anthropomorphic Rocks* (illus. 42), a composition analogous to the first, is more explicit and arranges the waterfall, rock and vegetation in a way that reveals a whole series of grotesque heads. Charles Toubin, who watched Courbet altering the position of the bridge and exaggerating the height of the waterfall and its volume of water, is supposed to have asked him, 'What about Realism then?' and to have received the laughing reply, 'Oh, these are nothing, mere beauty spots. It doesn't often happen!'[158] Genuine or fabricated, Courbet's reply was astute, because it allowed him to minimize the importance of an obvious departure from the objectivist view of the model and its representation, and at the same time to assimilate it metaphorically into the nature of the model itself, the naevus whose 'beauty' is thus not opposed to 'truth'.[159] Yet the remark cannot really mask the importance of this departure. Even if these canvases represent only the tiniest part of Courbet's output, they are connected with the Mannerist and Baroque anthropomorphic landscape tradition, the roots of which go back, as we have seen, as far as the first appearance of landscape as a genre in its own right (see illus. 10). How far the link is immediate and conscious it is difficult to say, but in the context of Realism it can only have been made obvious in a marginal manner, as something to be laughed at or as something exceptional.[160] But Courbet's vagaries relate to a more diffuse, deeper and probably less conscious sense of anthropomorphism at the heart of his landscape painting, and has to do both with his conception of nature and with his notion of the exchange that takes place between the perceiving subject (the painter, then the spectator) and the perceived object. This is particularly clear in the views of grottoes and springs (illus. 43), which many of his commentators, notably Werner Hofmann, have linked to his paintings of vagina-centred female nudes and to his *Origin of the World* (1866; Paris, Musée d'Orsay). Hofmann talks of a panerotic mode of experience and of a 'return to the womb', noting that 'realism' is transformed into 'symbolism' in this context. Pierre Georgel, who sees the *Origin of the World* as 'a living landscape presented to the spectator-explorer', points out that the river Loue, the 'source' of which is actually the re-emergence of another watercourse that runs underground up to that point, flows round the walls of Courbet's birthplace a short distance away.[161] Michael Fried adds that in the various views made of this site, the painter–spectator is drawn not merely towards the inside of the grotto but receives the water from the source, and these two movements – which may recall extramission and intramission in the theory of vision – contribute to the fusion of onlooker and model alike with the picture itself.[162] Fried does not see these characteristics as the outcome of a conscious intention but as belonging to a more general phenomenon of 'corporealization' in Courbet's representation field.[163]

Impressionism and musicality

As a dominant mode, Realism developed both towards greater 'photographic' illusionism in various forms of alliance with academic or bourgeois decorum, and, among the '*intransigeants*', towards greater pictorial autonomy. Such autonomy, with growing support from the structures of the new market for independent art, saw this as grounds for rejecting representational conventions, putting increasing stress on the subjective side of perceptive experience, and legitimizing the relative dissolution of form and composition. This can be seen in Edouard Manet, particularly in his graphic work (including his interpretation of Poe's *The Raven* in 1875) and in his still-lifes, which are close to the aesthetics of his friend and defender Mallarmé.[164] Impressionism occupies an ambivalent position here. It can be seen as the final embodiment of Realism – it will be criticized on these grounds by Redon, among others – or as the beginning of a shift from Realism to Symbolism, which is how many critics of the 1890s saw it, though by then they were familiar with the development of Claude Monet's painting. Richard Shiff has adopted the second point of view, seeing the 'impression' (in agreement with contemporary psychology) as something preceding the distinction of subject and object and uniting in embryonic form both the subjective knowledge of self and objective knowledge of the outside world.[165] The Impressionists did in fact attempt to give expression in painting to Ruskin's 'innocence of the eye', the 'sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify'. Their claim to express optical reality, before being seen as inadequate or superfluous, was at first rejected out of hand. Louis Leroy, in his famous ironic account of the 1874 exhibition, writes about a Pissarro landscape: '*Those* furrows? *this* frost? ... But they're palette-knife scratchings spread evenly over dirty canvas. There's neither head nor tail, top nor bottom, front nor back to it all.'[166] In humorous, negative guise, we can recognize 'the wall of painting' in its pure materiality, but also the stained wall, the accidental and the reversible image. The ideal of the 'innocent eye' and of the 'impression' is in fact that of raw sensory data before it is analysed and set against mnemonic data. The realization and representation of this ideal are to some extent Utopian fictions and have to rely on deflective means offered by privileged objects and situations – like the water and mist in Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1873; Paris, Musée Marmottan) – which result in feeble identification or fluctuation between competing identifications.

A parallel development is evident in the Aesthetic Movement in Britain, particularly in the work of Whistler,

43 Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Loue*, 1864, oil on canvas, 98.4 x 130.4 cm.

44 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Cremorne Lights*, 1872, oil on canvas, 50.2 x 74.3 cm.

a cosmopolitan artist and a great hawker of ideas. In 1873 Walter Pater closed his study of the Renaissance by celebrating the ephemeral, mobile nature of body and mind: in the face of thought, external objects no longer have 'the solidity with which language invests them, but [are] impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them'.[167] The pursuit of these impressions is akin to the 'regression towards the inchoative' that Werner Hofmann saw in Turner and which is taken still further by Whistler – too far for Ruskin, who was older by this time.[168] All Whistler's theoretical and polemical effort was aimed at devaluing the narrative subject and, to a certain degree, the object of representation, in the interests of pictorial autonomy. Hence the 'musical' and chromatic titles he gave to his paintings. In fact these pursue the musicality of Delacroix and Baudelaire, while his critical attitude to 'anecdote' results in painting that is not aniconic but suggestive and open to metamorphosis. His *Nocturnes* from the early 1870s (illus. 44), which mark a decisive stage in this development, were not painted directly from life but created in the studio, after intense observation, with a rapidity inspired by watercolour technique and based on the use of a very liquid 'sauce'. Like the perception of the subject and its recall, unpremeditated movement of the brush or chance discoveries in the materials used play an important role in these paintings, linked to the affinity with Far Eastern art indicated by the seal-like signature Whistler used. As with Monet, the choice of time and place favours the evanescence and ambiguity of objects. Does the slightly oblique streak ruffling the surface of the Thames represent a wave, a tree-trunk or (more probably) a boat? Are the brushstrokes in the foreground birds or reeds? This semantic unhinging of objects is not the result of carelessness but of aesthetic intention, as is shown by a passage in the '*Ten o'Clock* Lecture' Whistler gave in 1885; in my view this throws direct light on the *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Cremorne Lights*: 'And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings veil themselves in the dim sky, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairy-land is before us – then the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, and Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and master – her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her.'[169]

At the particular time chosen by Whistler, distilled in his memory and set down in his painting, the chimneys on the Battersea side of the river turn into campaniles, the lights of the Cremorne pleasure gardens become those of a palace, and London transforms itself into a Japanese Venice.[170] The special way of seeing things that distinguishes the artist from the common man implies, as it does for Van Hoogstraeten, a knowledge of nature, but above all it implies a disinterestedness that, far from imprisoning nature in objectifiable form, opens it up to transfiguration. The '*Ten o'Clock*' even puts forwards a myth of origins not unrelated to the one in *De statua*: the first artist, for Whistler, is a man who, instead of joining in the hunt or working the land, preferred to stay by the tents with the women and who 'traced strange devices with a burnt stick upon a gourd', a 'dreamer apart' who 'perceived in nature about him curious curvings, as faces are seen in the fire'.[171] So, for Whistler, to understand nature is to perceive it imaginatively. However, the 'strange devices' – patterns rather than drawings, but the word also means 'tricks/ploys' or 'mottoes', and there is also the earlier meaning, 'appearances' – and the 'curious curvings' are more reminiscent of Novalis (and Hogarth) than of Alberti; indeed, they leave the image suspended between representation and abstraction.

Potential Images

Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art

DARIO GAMBONI

REAKTION BOOKS