

CAMBRIA
SINGAPORE
WORLD
SERIES
華語語系
世界系列

WINNER OF NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

Gao Xingjian

AESTHETICS AND CREATION



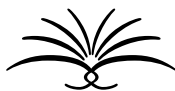
TRANSLATED BY MABEL LEE

GAO XINGJIAN
AESTHETICS AND CREATION

GAO XINGJIAN
AESTHETICS AND CREATION

TRANSLATED BY
Mabel Lee

Cambria Sinophone World Series
General Editor: Victor H. Mair



C A M B R I A
P R E S S

Amherst, New York

Copyright 2012 Cambria Press

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior permission of the publisher.

Requests for permission should be directed to:
permissions@cambriapress.com, or mailed to:
Cambria Press

University Corporate Centre, 100 Corporate Parkway, Suite 128
Amherst, NY 14226

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gao, Xingjian.

[Essays. English. Selections] Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics
and Creation / Gao Xingjian; translated by Mabel Lee.

pages cm – (Cambria Sinophone world series; series editor: Victor H. Mair)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60497-836-0 (alk. paper)

I. Lee, Mabel, translator. II. Title.

PL2869.O128A2 2013

895.1'352—dc23

2012043741

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Mabel Lee	vii
Chapter 1: The Position of the Writer	1
Chapter 2: The Art of Fiction	21
Chapter 3: The Potential of Theatre	41
Chapter 4: The Aesthetics of the Artist	65
Chapter 5: Another Kind of Aesthetics	89
Chapter 6: Dramaturgical Method and the Neutral Actor	159
Chapter 7: Concerning <i>Silhouette/Shadow</i>	179
Chapter 8: Environment and Literature	189
Chapter 9: Ideology and Literature	207
Chapter 10: After the Flood	221
Chapter 11: Freedom and Literature	227
References	237
Index	241

INTRODUCTION

BY MABEL LEE

AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF GAO XINGJIAN'S FICTION, THEATRE, ART, AND FILMMAKING

Born in 1940 during the Japanese invasion of republican China, Gao Xingjian received his formal education under the People's Republic of China that was established on 1 October 1949. When the totalitarian decade of the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 with the death of Mao Zedong, Gao Xingjian was amongst a cohort of young unpublished writers to suddenly rise to prominence. In his first book, *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (A Preliminary Exploration into the Art of Modern Fiction; Guangzhou: Huacheng, 1981) he drew on examples of the great writings of China and Europe to support his claim that human qualities should be restored to characters in literature. Whereas older Chinese intellectuals were still reeling from the trauma of severe physical and psychological abuse perpetrated against them for more than a decade, Gao Xingjian had the audacity to criticise the hero or villain stereotypes demanded of socialist-realist propaganda literature that was designed

to educate the masses. The heroes were to provide exemplars for the masses to imitate, and the villains were to teach the masses how to identify “criminal” behaviour in people, so that such people could be immediately reported to the authorities. The book earned him celebrity status in intellectual circles, a status that was consolidated when his plays *Juedui xinhao* (1982; tr. *Absolute Signal*, 1996) and *Chezhan* (1983; tr. *The Bus Stop*, 1996; also tr. *Bus Stop*, 1998) were staged before wildly ecstatic audiences at the People’s Art Theatre in Beijing.

The sensational staging of *Absolute Signal* was reported internationally by foreign journalists who were in Beijing to observe the unfolding of events as China emerged after many years of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world. However, though the Cultural Revolution had ended, the custodians of China’s socialist-realist literary and art traditions continued to wield power at the highest levels of the nation’s cultural and propaganda infrastructure. In “Geri huanghua” (1991; tr. “Wilted Chrysanthemums,” 2006) Gao recalled that in early 1983 he was summoned to appear at writers’ rallies where he was denounced as the “insignificant author” of a booklet that was causing young writers to deviate from the nation’s socialist-realist traditions. A number of veteran writers spoke out in his defence, and the meetings failed to achieve the expected outcome. Thus emboldened, Gao went on to stage his second play, *Bus Stop*, which was banned after the tenth performance. With the passage of a few months, the arbiters of cultural policy had gained the necessary backing at the top political echelons, and Gao Xingjian heard from reliable sources that he was to be sent to some labour camp in Qinghai Province for reeducation. He did not wait to be sent but immediately fled Beijing, remaining away for several months until the campaign had run its course and it was safe for him to return. His short-story manuscripts, which had been shelved in the interim, were released for publication. However, during the staging of his play *Yeren* (1985; tr. *Wild Man*; 1990) at the People’s Art Theatre, actors were individually cautioned against performing in any future Gao Xingjian productions. In 1986 his play *Bi’an* (1986; tr. *The Other Shore*, 1999) was stopped during

rehearsals, and the publication of a collection of his short stories was blocked. In Beijing the authorities continued to pursue a vendetta against him, but at the same time his plays began to find audiences in Yugoslavia (1984), England (1987), Hong Kong (1987), and Sweden (1987).

At the end of 1987 Gao relocated to Paris, where he began to work feverishly to recoup the lost decades of his creative life. He found new publishers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and to date he has published a total of seventeen plays, a large number of which have also been published in other languages, including English, French, Swedish, Korean, and Japanese, and have been staged in various countries on five continents. Since 1992 he has personally directed several of his own plays, the most ambitious being his grand opera *Bayuexue* (2000; tr. *Snow in August*, 2003), which involved Peking Opera performers, a symphony orchestra, percussionists, and a choir; it was staged in Taipei in 2003 and in Marseille in 2005. Also of note is that he directed the production of his play *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end* (1998; tr. *Weekend Quartet*, 1999) at Comédie Française in 2003. Gao has seen the publication of his autobiographical novels, *Lingshan* (1990; tr. *Soul Mountain*, 2000) and *Yige ren de shengjing* (1999; tr. *One Man's Bible*, 2002), that of his short-story collection, *Gei wo laoye mai yugan* (1989; tr. *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather*, 2004), and their publication in French, English, and Swedish, as well as in numerous European and Asian languages, Arabic, and a number of Indian languages. Gao's artworks have also flourished, and he has held fifty major solo exhibitions throughout Europe and in various cities in Asia and the United States, the most recent being *La Fin du Monde* (Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, 2007), *Between Figurative and Abstract* (Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 2007), *Depois do dilúvio* (Sintra Museum of Modern Art, Lisbon, 2008), and *Gao Xingjian* (iPreciation Gallery, Singapore, 2010). His exhibitions have been accompanied by the publication of catalogues. At present he is devoting much of his time to innovative filmmaking, an ambition he harboured since the early 1980s, when he was still in Beijing. His films *Ceying huo yingzi* (*Silhouette/Shadow*, 2006) and *Honghuang zhi hou* (*After the Flood*,

2008) now tour alongside his art exhibitions, and his third film, *Mei de zangli* (*Requiem for Beauty*), is scheduled for completion with a cast of thirty performers in 2013.

For political reasons Gao Xingjian has been airbrushed out of existence in China since the early 1990s; nonetheless, he has succeeded in establishing his credentials as playwright and director, novelist, artist, and filmmaker in the international world. His literary endeavours were most significantly acknowledged by his winning the 2000 Nobel Prize in literature, and recently his multidisciplinary achievements were acknowledged in 2008 in a citation presented at Italy's La Milanese in the presence of other distinguished Nobel laureate guests of honour, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, and Elie Wiesel. His achievements are driven by strong creative impulses and a powerful intellect; informed by a profound understanding of literary and art traditions and practices of both China and Europe, Gao defines and actualises a unique aesthetics that lies on a trajectory located between the two.

Creative endeavours derive from the aesthetic actualisation of an individual's psychic reality. Bestowed at birth in the form of intelligence, creative talent, curiosity, and imagination, as well as emotional tendencies and personality traits, psychic reality is not static and develops as a result of external stimuli in the form of life experiences. These also include education and the insights that emerge continuously from that background, as well as from exposure to various forms of aesthetic creation, such as music, poetry, fiction, essays, theatre, and the visual arts, which can also induce thinking and deep reflection. From scattered references throughout Gao Xingjian's autobiographical novel, *One Man's Bible*, it is possible to ascertain that he had access to many experiences that nurtured his inherited creative propensities within both a Chinese and a European context. He grew up in a middle-class cosmopolitan background in republican China during the Japanese invasion, and because he was a sickly child, his mother took responsibility for his early education. He learned to read and write so quickly that his

mother assigned him the task of keeping a diary instead of doing regular textbook homework. As a child he joined patriotic drama performances, and he also often saw traditional Chinese opera performances. At home he enjoyed playing the violin and listening to Western classical music, and being a precocious reader he combed through the family library reading anything that interested him, including books written for adult readers. The family library also contained many publications (some in Chinese translation) on European art and literature; he became infatuated with the brilliant colours of the European masters and began to save his pocket money to buy tubes of oils for his own paintings.

By the time he was a young teenager, Gao Xingjian already had aspirations to become an artist, and he began formal training in oil painting to enhance his chances of being admitted to an art college. However, with the passage of a few more years, the prospect of painting propaganda posters for life led him to enrol instead at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute. He graduated with a five-year major in French literature in 1962 and was assigned work as an editor and translator at the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. As an undergraduate he read a shelf of books each week from the library collection of French literature, as well as French translations of world literature, while at the very same time censors all over the country were removing Chinese-language writings from library shelves and replacing them with books to educate the population on how to think and behave in China's new revolutionary society. Gao's reading ignited in him a strong impulse to write, even though he had to hide all of his writings because they did not conform to the established guidelines. At the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution he burned a suitcase of unpublished manuscripts rather than see his "politically incorrect" writings discovered by marauding Red Guards and used as criminal evidence against him. During the Cultural Revolution, after fleeing for his life from a May Seventh Cadre School, Gao spent a number of years in a remote mountain village, working first as a peasant and then as the village teacher. He continued to write in secret, but only after designing ingenious strategies that would allow him to hide at great

speed what he was writing. He bore witness to the dehumanising impact of terror on the population and on himself during the Cultural Revolution, and he found that it was only through writing—expressing himself in language—that he could affirm his existence as a human being with the faculty to think and feel. The Cultural Revolution drew to an end, and he was able to return to his workplace in Beijing in 1975.

In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, Nietzsche fever spread through the Chinese intellectual world. Mao Zedong's social engineering blueprint for the population had denigrated the individual to the status of a nut or a bolt in the nation's great socialist machinery, and Nietzsche's superman philosophy was seen as a formula for reasserting the worth, autonomy, and will of the individual. China had encountered Nietzsche fever for the first time during what was designated by later historians as the May Fourth era (1915–1921). Europeans stationed in China were recalled at the outbreak of war in Europe, and Japan immediately moved to assert its claims on China's territorial sovereignty while European warships were conveniently absent from the region: 1915 marks the year in which Japan presented its Twenty-one Demands to China and also the beginning of fierce nationalism, student activism, strikes, and nationwide mass protest movements. On the understanding that former German-held territories in Shandong Province would be returned to China, the Chinese authorities sent 140,000 Chinese labourers to help the Allies in the war against Germany in 1917. The victory of the Allies had raised Chinese hopes, but at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, it was revealed that a secret pact amongst the Allies had already decided that those territories in China were to be handed over to Japan. When the news of this betrayal became known, mass rallies and protest demonstrations erupted in Chinese cities; nationwide student-activist liaison networks were also established. On 4 May 1919 thousands of students from Beijing's universities and high schools, joined by student activists from other cities, marched to Tiananmen Square to demand that China not become a signatory of the Treaty of Versailles and also that the pro-Japanese ministers in the government be punished. Mounted soldiers

with bayonets disbanded the marchers. Although hard-core activists continued to organise sporadic protest movements, these inevitably resulted in imprisonments and sometimes death. Since the late nineteenth century Chinese intellectuals had been fighting to establish democratic institutions modelled on England and later on the United States. Having been sold out by the Western democracies that they had for so long worshipped, many Chinese intellectuals turned to the Russian model as a means of saving China from Western and Japanese imperialism. For patriotic reasons, many intellectuals also came to be convinced that organised collective action was necessary. Historians locate the end of the May Fourth era in the year 1921, the year in which the Chinese Communist Party was established and when greater efforts were made to strengthen the Chinese Nationalist Party.

China's humiliation by the industrialised capitalism of the West and Japan dated to the middle of the nineteenth century, and during the New Culture Movement of the May Fourth era, Nietzsche's superman empowered Chinese youth to seize the mantle of authority from their elders, whom they held responsible for propagating moribund cultural practices that impeded the modernisation of the nation necessary for it to enjoy status equal to that of other nations around the world. Confucian society was a clearly demarcated hierarchical, male-dominated society in which a person was hostage to the dictates of his or her superiors. Although barely understood, Nietzsche became a mantra for Chinese youth, who demanded the total trashing of traditional culture, including the literature and the classical language in which it was written. Lu Xun (1881–1936) emerged as leader of a younger cohort of writers who laid the foundations of China's new literature, which was written in the vernacular language, modelled on modern Western writings, and dealt with contemporary society. Inspired by Nietzsche, many of these writers believed that their writings would help change society. However, the older and wiser Lu Xun knew well the fate of Russian writers after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and having experienced the ecstasy of writing two books of short stories and a book of prose poems, he resolutely allowed

his creative self to suicide in order to commit his pen to politics. Lu Xun's heroic sacrifice for the nation was inspired by his Confucian upbringing and by the ideology of Nietzsche's superman.

Nietzsche's major works in Chinese translation were published in Hong Kong in the late 1980s, and Gao Xingjian read all these prior to leaving China. He developed a profound loathing for Nietzsche, and he indicted Nietzsche's superman philosophy for inflating the individual's ego that made rational thinking impossible. The individual could be deluded into believing that heroic actions could save the world, and symbolic totems—such as the nation, or even those as noble as democracy—could mobilise individuals into taking collective action. To become part of a collective meant that leaders had to be followed. What if the leaders were incompetent, sought publicity, and had no strategy for success? Would this not lead to the destruction of many members of the collective? In Gao's view Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God had spawned countless lesser gods, like Mao Zedong, who believed he could remake the population according to his social-engineering blueprint, and like Chinese writers, who were deluded into thinking that their writings could save the nation. Gao further asserted that Nietzsche's debunking tradition had activated a political dynamic of continuing revolution that had turned the creative realm of literature and the arts into a battlefield. These issues are raised in his controversial play *Taowang* (1990; tr. *Escape*, 2007), which censures the 1989 military crackdown on student protesters in Tiananmen Square but also critiques the actions of the student leaders. He attacked Nietzsche by name in his essay "Bali suibi" (1990; tr. "Parisian Notes," 2005) and followed this with a more strident attack in "Geren de shengyin" (1993; tr. "The Voice of the Individual," 2006). Thereafter, Gao's indictment of Nietzsche would appear in virtually all his discussions on literature and art, including his Nobel lecture, "Wenxue de liyou" (2000; tr. "The Case for Literature," 2006), and the two essays "Ling yizhong meixue" (1999; tr. "Another Kind of Aesthetics," 2013) and "Zuojia de weizhi" (2005; tr. "The Position of the Writer," 2010), which appear in this volume.

In “The Position of the Writer” Gao Xingjian rejected the commonly held view that Nietzsche represents the beginning of modern literature and argued that it is Kafka who created an exact portrayal of modern humanity’s true predicament: that in all social relationships, including family relationships, the human being is insignificant, in fact nothing more than an insect. Gao Xingjian noted that Kafka had recognised that those trumped-up utopias of his time were like the fortresses of his novels: it was impossible to get into them. He was also painfully aware that Kafka was writing at the beginning of the twentieth century and that a century later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the situation for the individual has worsened: the autonomy of the individual has been progressively eroded as each person vanishes into obscurity within one or another group identity. Gao contended that it is only in serious literary creations that transcend financial gain and politics and do not follow fashionable trends that the voice of the individual can be heard and that the individual can preserve independence and integrity. But such a frail person with neither power nor capital is much the same as an insect in present times. Nonetheless, people are different from insects because they have the capacity to think, and he warned that the individual must be aware of this and be able to exercise this capacity to think. He is adamant that creative activities should neither be tied to the “war chariot” of politics nor succumb to market trends and fashions. The stance he adopted in literary and art creation is born of many years of struggle to win the right to freely express his creative self, and he will brook no compromise.

The thrust of Gao Xingjian’s creative endeavours has always been to produce works that will in the first instance gratify his own aesthetic sensibilities. By asking probing questions, such as what sparks the creative process, and by examining the creative process itself and the actualisation of a creative work, he has arrived at new ways of understanding narration, performance, theatre, and the visual arts that he has applied to his creations in these different genres. During the process of creation, Gao’s psychic reality is not a conglomeration of random

creative impulses: these impulses are supervised by what he posits is “a third eye,” one that is both dispassionate and critical. Before proceeding to write or paint, he listens to selections of music that transport him to a transcendental state. His childhood love for Western music has continued, and Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Shostakovich, Messiaen, Gorecki, Messiaen, Schnittke, and Glass are amongst the composers whose works he has chosen to induce the appropriate mental state before he starts writing or painting. At times he has also used recordings of funeral dirges sung by a *bimo* priest of the Yi nationality that he had made during his travels along the Yangtze in the early 1980s. In the essays of *Aesthetics and Creation* and in his earlier collection, *The Case for Literature*, Gao has detailed the specific procedures he adopts for achieving this transcendental state.

Gao Xingjian had aspired to excel in oil painting from his childhood years, but two trips to Europe changed his mind. In 1979 when he travelled to Europe for the first time, he saw the original works of the European masters that he had for so long admired: da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Rembrandt, Ingres, and Delacroix at the Louvre, and Courbet, Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Van Gogh at the Musée d’Orsay. On a second trip to Europe in 1980, he revisited the Louvre and the Musée d’Orsay and also visited the art museums of Rome, Florence, and Venice. On his return journey he conceded that he would never be able to paint anything comparable in oils and resolved instead to explore the expressive potential of Chinese ink paintings. In the past Gao had experimented with Chinese inks, and the very few early works he has retained demonstrate a clear departure from traditional Chinese expressive ink paintings. For example, his *Study #1* (1964, 32 × 22cm), *Study #2* (1964, 20.5 × 31cm) and *Nude #1* (1978, 49 × 39cm) are all depictions of the female body created with a minimal number of calligraphic brushstrokes. When he travelled again to Europe on a DAAD fellowship to Germany in 1985, Gao took along a large number of his ink paintings, all of which he sold. This encouraged him to arrange a solo exhibition of his paintings in the foyer of the People’s Art Theatre during the staging of *Wild Man* in

1985. Years later he described his paintings as “between figurative and abstract,” as indicated in his essay “Juxiang yu chouxiang zhi jian” (2007; tr. “Between Figurative and Abstract,” 2007) in the catalogue for his exhibition held at the Snite Museum of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, in 2007.

Gao’s relocation to France took place with relative ease. He was fluent in French, and he was reasonably confident that he would be able to earn a livelihood by selling his ink paintings. His techniques are based on those used in Chinese calligraphy and traditional expressive painting, but he has successfully incorporated elements of European oil painting and black-and-white photography: it is texture that fascinates him. An external source of light is essential to producing the textures of oil painting, but because his art depicts images of the inner mind, whatever his mind focuses upon is bathed in light from an internal source. Through the power of suggestion, Gao’s artworks also capture sensuousness and at times movement. Movement in art can of course be captured in his films, which he calls “cinematic poems.” *Silhouette/Shadow* is shot in colour and allows him to indulge in textures, especially that of old buildings and rubble. This is an autobiographical work that focuses on Gao as artist and play director during 2003, which was designated Gao Xingjian Year by the City of Marseille. The film is unique in that picture, sound, and language components are provided equal status, so that no one component dominates all the time. Each component is allowed to take centre stage while the other two elements act as accompaniments. Footage of natural scenery and the female form is juxtaposed with his paintings, and the likeness is startlingly real. In *After the Flood* Gao’s black-and-white paintings are projected onto a screen in front of which a team of six male and female performers dance. Speech is dispensed with, and it is solely the movements and gestures—including facial expressions—against the backdrop of the paintings that graphically transmit the sense of abject terror and utter hopelessness when human beings are confronted with large-scale natural disasters.

Whereas his artworks and films are not (or virtually not) language dependent, the larger part of Gao Xingjian's creative endeavours does employ the Chinese language. Following the publication of his novel *Soul Mountain*, he wrote "Wenxue yu xuanxue: Guanyu *Lingshan*" (1991; tr. "Literature and Metaphysics: About *Soul Mountain*," 2006), in which he stated that being "a product of Han Chinese culture," he had wanted to write a novel and to write it in Chinese. However, he found that the Chinese written language had lost its musicality because it had become riddled with "undiluted Western morphology and syntax." He attributed this deplorable state of the language to the linguists who had standardised the Chinese language by explaining it in terms of Western morphology and syntax, the writers who had unwittingly imitated poor translations of modern Western authors, and the literary critics who had promoted these poor translations as a "modern" literary style. To find an uncontaminated form of the language, Gao turned to oral folk literary traditions and practices, as well as to various local dialects. His search also took him to the writings of Feng Menglong (1574–1645) and Jin Shengtan (1608–1661), whom he declared "masters of language." For him Feng Menglong used the living language in his writings, and Jin Shengtan made the dead language of books come to life. Gao further observed that read aloud, Jin Shengtan's narrative language "resonated" and was "infused with movement and flowing rhythms." This made him realise that sound is the "soul of language," and he resolved to restore the musicality of the sounds and rhythms inherent in the tonal nature of the Chinese language in his writing. To this end, Gao devised the strategy of first drafting his chapters on a tape recorder while listening carefully, and only afterwards converting the sentences into written text.

In the same essay Gao also explained his unique fiction aesthetics, which is based on his analysis of the inherent nature of language. Stream of consciousness in Western literature begins with a subject, and as the writer captures the psychological processes of the subject, there is a resulting flow of language. From this, Gao suggested that the language of literature could be regarded as a "flow of language."

Significantly, he had observed that by changing the pronoun to *you* and *he*, he could endow the subject with different angles of perception, so Gao made this changing of pronouns the linguistic structure of *Soul Mountain*, a work that he describes as a “long soliloquy” in which the pronouns keep changing in a “flow of language.” The third-person *she* is the male subject’s thoughts regarding the opposite sex. Gao has asserted that the purest spirit of Chinese culture is embodied in Daoism and Chan Buddhism, and that this is demonstrated by their clever play with language. In acknowledging the insights he has gained from *Zhuangzi* and the Chinese translation of the *Diamond Sutra*, Gao stated that though his perceptions are those of a person living in modern times, it is this particular spirit of Chinese culture that he seeks to recapture in modern language. He also stated that although he is intent on writing something fresh and innovative, he rejects the modernist stance of trampling on literary antecedents and the uncritical negation of tradition. He acknowledged that he has gained insights from Pu Songling (1640–1715), Shi Nai’an (c. 1296–1371), Cao Xueqin (c. 1715–1763), Liu E (1857–1909), Tolstoy (1828–1867), Chekov (1860–1904), Proust (1871–1992), Kafka (1883–1924), and Joyce (1882–1941), as well as from some French *nouveau roman* writers, but stated categorically that this does not stop him from searching for his own mode of narration. In fact, he categorically rejected theories of fiction on the grounds that he knows of no “good” writer who has benefited from theorists. For him, they only formulate models and create fashions. He further argued that the notions of plot and characterisation are merely popularly agreed-upon concepts, and that the structure of fiction is spontaneous and the unique creation of the author. In other words, his novel *Soul Mountain* does not conform to the traditional practices either of China or of the West.

Based on Gao Xingjian’s three trips along the Yangtze in 1983 and 1984 (the longest of which covered 15,000 kilometres), *Soul Mountain* incorporates Chinese indigenous narrative traditions into a modern Chinese novel that is informed by modern Western literary novels in its concern for tracking the psychological activities of the protagonist, who is none

other than the author himself. His sustained use of pronouns in this 563-page autobiographical novel has no antecedent in Chinese or Western writings. He had written *Soul Mountain* to experience the joy of writing—in other words, the exhilaration of translating into the Chinese language nonverbal psychic reality, providing it with aesthetic actualisation.

In “Xiandai hanyu yu wenxue xiezuo” (2001; tr. “The Modern Chinese Language and Literary Creation,” 2006), written in 1996 but published five years later, Gao noted that writing is first a search for the music of language and only then a search for content, characters, structure, and thought. In preparing to write, he chooses music that he wants to hear. It is music that allows him to enter a mental state for writing, and when the right language has been found, the sentences become audible, and flow like musical phrases independent of thought. Having experienced the musicality of the language of Proust and Brecht (1898–1956) in their writing of psychological perceptions, Gao too seeks to achieve musicality in the Chinese language in writing about his own psychological perceptions. What became clear to him was that any language involving sound must be actualised in a flow of linear time, just as in the case of music. But whereas music and drama can be polyphonic, this is not possible in fiction. Nonetheless, he maintains that in certain linguistic contexts it is possible for the writer to create meanings beyond words—that is, to create a tension that can induce a feeling, a mood, or a psychological space.

In “The Modern Chinese Language and Literary Creation” he also detailed the linguistic measures that he employed to purify the Chinese language in his writing. For those familiar with the Chinese language, such measures bring his written language close to the spoken language and eliminate many superfluous elements that had come into being with government measures to standardise the Chinese written language from the 1920s onwards. In striving for succinctness and clarity, he eliminates adjectives and other attributives where possible, separating into short sentences any components that clutter up the principal clause. He also

discards all nonessential elements in sentences, such as adverbial and verbal suffixes, and he strives to make every Chinese character function to its fullest potential. If a monosyllabic verb can replace a disyllabic verb with the same meaning, Gao will use the monosyllabic verb. On the premise that writing, reading, and the actualisation of language are all psychological activities, and that to observe and comment on an object are not passive acts, he has argued that a person is not like a camera, which does nothing more than mechanically release a shutter or lens. The eyes of the person behind the camera are constantly choosing images, adjusting the focus, and the line of vision and focus is always shifting. If one uses language to describe an image in front of one's eyes it is a process, even if it is a so-called objective description. In the eyes of a living person there are no purely objective images, and even if the person is supposedly detached, there will be feelings, and an image will evoke responses. To capture an image in language is complex, and because the process relies on language, the writing includes naming and making judgments and associations. Gao noted that seventy-seven of the eighty-one chapters of *Soul Mountain* are devoted to such observations, and that it was his intention to find a form of Chinese language that could express the psychological processes involved.

In the same essay he states that to use language to capture mental images is even more difficult; because mental images are more ephemeral than anything observable in the external world, pursuing these in language is virtually impossible. This is why he does not describe dream states but only deals with the "impressions left by dream," which he arranges into a flow of language. He cited chapter 23 of the novel as an example of such impressions. He argued that literature is a way of describing human existence, so it is necessarily associated with human feelings. If the language of literature is devoid of human feelings and is only form for the sake of form or language for the sake of language, it will be an empty linguistic structure that over time will become a pile of linguistic garbage. In contrast, though ancient Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, Cervantes's (1547–1616) *Don Quixote*, Dante's (c. 1265–

1321) *Divine Comedy*, Goethe's (1749–1832) *Faust*, Kafka, and Joyce all employ different linguistic forms, they remain testimonies to human existence, and the writings of Li Bai (701–762) and Cao Xueqin continue to evoke feelings in the people of today.

Gao Xingjian was resolute in his quest to capture the music inherent in the tonal nature of the Chinese language in his writing, and the language of his novels *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible* virtually pulsate with poetry. Inspired by European developments in fiction as a genre in modern times, Gao was equally determined to depict the psychology of his characters; in fact, in these two companion novels he was intent on exploring his own psychology, and both novels are structured by the changing of the pronoun. Women of course occur in these novels, but they are never the focus, and he views the women in the novels as composite fictional representations of women he has encountered in life. There is no attempt to explore the psychology of the women; only vague suggestions appear. However, he has used the psychological magic of changing pronouns in a number of plays that do focus on the psychology of women, and he is helped in this genre by the fact that female performers can be used. As a male writer, he is keenly aware that he can provide only a man's view of a woman's thought processes. Whereas Gao is able to use the pronouns *you* or *he* to distance himself as the author and to examine a man's psychology, even if the man happens to be himself, to use *you* to depict a woman's inner world would be too close to the male author. In his play *Sheng si jie* (1990; tr. *Between Life and Death*, 1999), by ingeniously creating distance between himself as the male author and the woman depicted, he boldly took up the challenge of writing about a woman's psychology. A female performer acts the role of the woman, but she preserves her status as a performer throughout. A female dancer performs the woman's different psychological states, and a male performer acts the roles of the man, a ghost, and an old man. It is only "the female performer acting the role of the woman" who speaks throughout the whole play, and she refers to the woman in the role that

she plays as *she*, saying of the woman, “she says,” “she thinks,” she feels,” and so on.

Gao Xingjian’s creative explorations are fuelled by an insatiable curiosity about human psychology and behaviour, as well as by the challenge of transforming his insights into various genres of literature, art, performance, or film. The essays presented in *Aesthetics and Creation* testify that he has the courage of conviction to argue the case that beauty and aesthetics are essential in the creative arts, even though many may deem these irrelevant and passé in the fast-changing times of the present globalised world.

– Mabel Lee

University of Sydney

GAO XINGJIAN
AESTHETICS AND CREATION

CHAPTER 1

THE POSITION OF THE WRITER

I was invited by National Taiwan University to present a series of lectures on literature, theatre and aesthetics. “The Position of the Writer” was the first of these. The second was “The Art of Fiction,” the third “The Possibilities of Theatre,” the fourth “The Aesthetics of the Artist,” and the fifth a conversation in which I responded to questions that had been raised. Because I had not fully recovered from my illness, I was unable to make the long trip and instead presented the video lectures that I have now revised and written as texts for publication.

In considering the “position” of the writer, I am concerned with the position of literature in contemporary society and with the writer’s relationship with society and the times. Of course, this is a huge topic, and my view is simply one way of looking at it, purely my choice as an individual, and writers will make different choices because each has a different view of literature. That different views lead to different choices is in fact not a dialectical issue about what is right or wrong. However, during the past century the interference of politics in literature changed this garden of free thought into a battlefield, and relentless debates spread from the West to the East and from Europe and America to the

Third World, so that no place has had the good fortune of remaining unscathed.

There is no need to detail the anguish and torment experienced by literature and writers during the twentieth century, which has just passed, because even in the present reality the rampage of politics has not abated but on the contrary has infiltrated all aspects of cultural life via the media. The interference of politics is to be found in cultural institutions and cultural policies of government, and even common cultural activities cannot escape political and party-faction bias. The virtual identity card the writer must have is political correctness and class identification, and weighing heavily on his or her person is the intellectual burden of twentieth-century ideology. Furthermore, so-called literary trends—actually political trends—constitute a tight band of curses that restricts both literary creation and literary criticism. That literature became involved in politics is in fact the invasion of literature by politics. Of course, it could also be said that writers became politicians and used literature as a tool for social criticism and the promotion of politics or, it could be said, to serve politics. But like the two sides of a coin, whichever way one looks at it, politics invading literature or literature engaging in politics is a literary landscape without precedent before the twentieth century.

Up to that time there had been writers with ties to politics and even to political authorities, although they did not use their literary creations to promote politics. However, from the beginning of the twentieth century the widespread propagation of Marxism and the rise of the communist revolution deeply influenced generations of intellectuals, and writers naturally were amongst them. Literature that has humanity as its objective regards social relationships as innate to humans, but it is politics that best embodies the starkest modes of social relationships. Everyone was swept into politics and moreover could not escape from politics, and the political stance of a literary work became the primary criterion for literary criticism. Marxism's materialist view of history and litera-

ture turned literature and the arts into tools of social criticism. This was not ordinary social criticism and would more accurately be described as a war of attrition against capitalism that was used for exposing the capitalist class and promoting the proletarian revolution. This sort of ideology did not collapse and dissipate together with the fall of the Berlin Wall but is deeply entrenched and continues to this day. On a recent trip to England I encountered a journalist who was shocked to hear me say that literature is divorced from politics, independent of politics, and beyond politics, reflecting that this trend of thinking is still fairly popular amongst many intellectuals.

The page has turned for the twentieth century. Communist totalitarianism in the USSR and Eastern Europe has disintegrated, and though China's totalitarianism remains intact, the market economy has fully opened up, so it may be said that the communist utopia has been thoroughly smashed. The more-than-a-century-long war of attrition against capitalism has failed to arrest the spread of capitalism; instead rampant globalisation is heralding the steady victory of capitalism, and neither ethical judgment nor political criticism can eliminate or block this irrefutable reality. The communist utopia promoted by Marxism was not able to reconstruct society and instead has become historical sedimentation before its time.

Literature in essence is divorced from utility. But under a totalitarian dictatorship it is politics that prevails over literature and writers: the writer must be subservient to politics, otherwise he will not be able to write, not have the means to survive, and could even lose his life. The writer's situation in the democracies of the West is much better, and one can write whatever books one wants and pursue whatever literature one wants, and as long as one does not depend on it for a livelihood, freedom lies in one's own hands. The problem is, there are very few writers who actually enjoy such conditions because the laws of capitalist profits similarly apply to literature. If writers do not submit to the pressures of the market but persist in not following the fashions and do not

today to readers, they too will find it hard to survive. The pressure of globalisation on serious literary creation continues to increase unabated. And in democracies, politics also interferes with literature so that it is quite difficult for a writer who is unaligned with either the left or the right to have his or her voice transmitted in the media. In the West, the writer may enjoy freedom of expression and freedom to create, but the freedom to publish what is independent of politics has limitations.

In their quest for freedom of literary creation, writers travelled abroad from communist totalitarian countries to live in the West, but having extricated themselves from the oppression of a dictatorship they immediately found themselves enveloped in another kind of politics: so-called political pluralism is also a form of narrow ideology. When such perspectives are used to evaluate literature, the rich connotations of literature are buried in another political language. If the writer does not seek consciously to avoid these political labels, but uses these to increase sales, it will be a case of escaping one kind of politics and falling foul of another kind, and the casualty will still be the writer's work.

Having penetrated every pore of every level of social life right through to the public media, politics deeply scarred twentieth-century literature and continues to affect people's thinking. The morally indignant literature that trumpeted politics has long since vanished, but to purge literature of political control has not been as easy. How the writer today can transcend political advantage, transcend the market, remain unwaveringly independent, and be able to speak out in his or her own voice is precisely the issue I would like to address.

This of course is not impossible, but if the writer is committed to protecting his or her independence as an individual, I believe this requires first abandoning some delusions and fantasies. Take, for example, the writer who is the spokesperson of the people, which is an illusion manufactured by politics. The old term "the people" has been used throughout history by ruling monarchs and by the twentieth century was already a cliché. All political authorities speak in the name

of the people, and even communist totalitarian and fascist dictatorships are implemented in the name of the people. But where can this vacuous “the people” be located? In real society there are countless people with all kinds of pressing needs, including the need for freedom of thought, yet these all vanish into nothing behind this abstract façade of “the people.” If writers do not want to be connected with the political authority or stand at the rostrum to help in the election of a political party, then there is no need to flaunt themselves as the spokespersons of the people. Otherwise, the authentic voice of the individual is lost in political verbiage, and the writer becomes a political megaphone: literature is sacrificed when it is hitched to the war chariot of politics.

The writer is not a prophet and is not obliged to fabricate beautiful fairy tales, or to make promises about tomorrow to the people or chosen people, and the writer is definitely not obliged to produce an illusion of a utopia to incite the masses to follow into war upon the world. Furthermore, in the century that has just passed all this has occurred many times.

The writer is not the saviour of the world, and although such Nietzschean superman images were common in the twentieth century, the writer is not capable of shouldering Christ’s mission. Because God was dead, it was possible for countless people with a bloated self to pose as saviours of the world. It would be more interesting to view the romanticism of Nietzsche as literature instead of philosophy because the exaggerated image of the superman replacing the martyred Christ of tradition is a unique creation. Yet this does not truthfully portray people and is simply the hallucination of a philosopher. The true situation of people in modern society is not as Nietzsche claimed but as depicted by another writer, who also wrote in German: Kafka.

Kafka was silent because he was not able to publish his writings during his lifetime, but he had a profound understanding of twentieth-century humankind’s predicament in the modern industrial society. Popular literary histories of today commonly regard Nietzsche as the beginning of twentieth-century modernism, and it is as if modern literature began

with Nietzsche. In fact, it would be more correct to locate Nietzsche at the end of nineteenth-century Romantic literature; Kafka, instead, should be accredited with declaring the birth of modern literature. Kafka created an exact portrayal of humanity's true predicament in modern society. In all social relationships, even family relationships, a human being was no more than an insect, insignificant and pitiful. Individuals are incapable of controlling their own fate and even less so of dominating the world, yet inexplicably it was thought to be otherwise. Kafka recognised with great clarity that those trumped-up utopias were like the fortresses of his novels, that entry was impossible.

It was at the beginning of the previous century that Kafka foretold humankind's plight in modern society, yet in present times humanity is still in the same unfortunate predicament. Individuals have become more and more frail, their autonomy has progressively eroded, and the individual person is disappearing into various group identities. Within the huge social machine, culture has become a commodity in the face of the all-engulfing market, and the media no longer have true independence because of political ramifications. It is very hard for anyone to speak out in the voice of the individual, to speak out in his or her own voice instead of using words that are connected to some kind of politics. Only in serious literary creations that transcend profit or loss, that transcend politics, and that do not follow fashions is this sort of voice possible, and the individual is able to preserve independence and integrity. This voice of the individual is of course exceptionally weak, but it defies hype and is a person's true voice.

A frail person not belonging to a party or faction and not involved in politics has neither power nor capital and is more or less the same as an insect in the huge social machine of the present; yet people are different from insects because they have the capacity to think. But independent thinking and reflection are not endowed at birth and must come later with the gradual awakening of consciousness. The humanism that came after the European Renaissance in literature and the arts used the

light of rationality to pierce the ignorance of medieval times as well as the constraints of religion and summoned forth that individuated, physically healthy and morally perfect “Man.” But having gone through the romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that man who had sought to return to nature entered modern industrialised society and discovered that the idealised individual, too, was merely an abstract notion.

By the twentieth century, calls for basic human rights had become either shouts for revolution or empty words, but faced with political power and the market, this free and independent individual turned out to be weak and wretched. Society has never delivered on human rights, human dignity, and freedom of thought and expression without a charge, and the rational voice of humanism was completely drowned in the reality of commercial transaction and political gain.

Where are people’s authentic voices to be found? Literature. It is only literature that can speak about the truth of human existence that politics is incapable of addressing or reluctant to speak about. The nineteenth-century realist writers Balzac and Dostoevsky did not pose as saviours of the world, nor did they see themselves as the spokesmen of the people or the embodiment of righteousness—for after all, what is righteousness? They simply narrated reality, neither setting forth an ideology to criticise or judge society nor fabricating a blueprint for an ideal society. And it is precisely writings such as theirs that by transcending politics and ideology have provided truthful portrayals of humanity and society, revealing entirely both the dilemmas of human existence and the complexities of human nature, and that viewed both from an intellectual or aesthetic perspective have long stood the test of time.

In contrast, twentieth-century revolutionary literature attracted a group of talented writers and poets, most notably Gorky and Mayakovsky, but with the collapse of the communist revolution people simply lost interest in their songs of praise for the communist revolution.

Such was the fate of their writings, and the writers themselves also died in obscurity. The new society that had been shaped with the hammer and sickle turned out to be even more inhuman and impoverished than the old society. In today's China and Russia the passion for ideology has been usurped by the worship of money, and this is precisely how history mocks people.

The writer does not need to be a warrior, or to see the purpose of literature as the criticism and reform of society. Writers will of course have their own ideas about politics, but they do not have to write these into their literature. If writers can clearly understand the true position of the writer in present society, they would best return to speaking in the voice of the frail individual, because this is the authentic voice of the individual devoid of any artifice. Without considering whether this voice can reach others, at least one will be able to say to oneself that one does have this need to listen to one's own voice. This inner need is the primary impulse for writing, and it springs from perceptions that originate from a person's real feelings and experiences.

That many limitations are imposed on the individual by society is of course not something that began today. The individual is always bound by social conditions within any collective, and for the individual to speak in a voice that is not drowned out by the chorus of the multitude or by the utterances of the authorities is inevitably a challenge, yet it is by challenging one's reality that the individual's own existence is affirmed. And this is precisely what literature needs to articulate, so in this sense literature is not a weapon of criticism but merely a testimony. The writer is a witness to the times in which he or she is located. The lifelike testimonies bequeathed to humankind by literature are more truthful than the histories written by political authorities. This is because successive political authorities edit and revise history according to their political needs, so that under each political authority the official history inevitably undergoes a face change. However, as soon as writers publish a work, amendment is not possible, so their undertaking on behalf of

humankind is naturally much more reliable than official histories that are closely linked to the interests of national ruling authorities.

Literature is divorced from political authorities and popular tastes. Affected by popular tastes and fashions, the market is governed by the laws of consumption. In contrast, serious literature does not toady to the masses, nor is it produced to satisfy market demand—so transmission is problematic. In the first place, such writings are not profitable for the publisher, so publication is difficult. It is not a secret that best-sellers must resort to commercial hype. Popular cultural consumption of course includes literary works, and as in any period there is a difference between popular culture and serious literature. Present society is much the same, except that commercial hype is carried out on such a massive and global scale that nowadays releasing a bestseller is just like releasing a film, and not only local audiences and readers are targeted. Usually national borders are crossed, and the book is released in many languages. The literature of this enormous cultural production enterprise cannot be condemned because readers have different tastes, and their different needs generate corresponding writings. Anger and blame will not save literature.

In the first half of the twentieth century, writers could still form associations, raise their own capital, pay for their own publications, be responsible for their own profits or losses, and in this way make a living from writing. However, doing this today would virtually be a tale from the *Arabian Nights*. If writers do not understand market movements or follow the fashions, and if they disregard popular tastes, they will find it impossible to make a living, so to devote oneself to writing this sort of serious literature must be considered an indulgence. Yet the value of this sort of literature lies in its remoteness from all lies, in its not conjuring up fantasies, and in its manifestations and revelations about the true predicament of human beings and the problems confronting them. Of course, it will make people feel uneasy, but it will induce them to think.

Some intellectuals are clamouring again for the reconstruction of utopias and even summon forth the ghost of Marx. They do not see that to be without an ideal or a utopia is in fact a good thing and that this allows people to think more clearly. Confronted by present society and the absurdity of humankind's predicament, if individuals suddenly realise that they want to win the dignity and independence of being human, they will feel unbearably alone. In this age of the present, politics and the media have become more and more noisy, but people are lonelier than in any previous age, and this is also the true situation of the modern human being. The solitary individual who becomes aware of his or her own existence will want to speak out in his or her frail voice despite being situated within the problems of society, and this requires strength. This strength primarily stems from the self-belief of writers, and they must believe in the need for the existence of this kind of literature, otherwise it would be impossible to persevere with this kind of writing.

It is thus predetermined that this must be a kind of cold literature because it is not used to expunge pent-up anger. The writer must dispatch momentary impulses or feelings of frustration before he can focus attention on the world. Commitment to this sort of writing requires a pair of lucid eyes or, one could say, a pair of cold eyes in order to dispassionately observe the living phenomena of the boundless universe.

Such a writer of course does not set out to be a celebrity of the times but will locate himself at the margins of society, and this is a prerequisite for this kind of writing. Only a modern-day recluse keeping some distance from society can maintain clarity in observations of the surrounding world and also gain abundant mental energy for introspection on humankind's anxieties, worries, and delusions.

Under totalitarian systems such a choice is not allowed and often must be made at the cost of property and life. Under democratic systems such a choice is also difficult, because left or right factional politics leaves little space for choice. Key factors are whether the writer can transcend actual

profit or loss, remain unperturbed, and endure the loneliness. When political storms totally engulf society, as during the twentieth century, when two world wars and global communist revolutions brought chaos and civil war, fascist fanaticism unleashed its mighty roar over the dust. At that time the individual was like a grain of sand in a storm, and whether he or she would have the capacity for independent thought was a stringent test.

In this new century humankind has not abolished war and violence, and human rights and social justice remain beautiful but hollow words. Democracy is the only choice for humankind because there is simply no better alternative. In democracies social ailments are either addressed or slowly resolved by relying on a change of government after a five-year term, but although social equity remains a vote-buying catchword and is promised by political parties in election campaigns, it has never been honoured. There is absolutely no need for writers to wave a flag and shout alongside political leaders to brag that they are carrying out a mission, like reforming the world, that lies beyond his or her abilities or even those of national leaders. To demand that writers act as the conscience of society can only strangle literature.

The writer stands solitary and alone, making lucid observations that replace emotional outpourings and that also transcend moral judgments of good and evil. In other words, a writer must have a pair of cold eyes in his or her observation of society. This is how the world is, and it will not change simply because someone wants it to; while observing the external world, a writer also scrutinises the inner mind of human beings.

Sartre famously said, "Others are hell." He called out for literature to engage in social criticism, but he forgot to look back upon humanity itself. Undoubtedly, for him the self too was hell. When revolutionaries and rebels overthrew the old world they did not have time to recreate themselves, so disaster stemming from the unlimited bloating of the self has plagued modern society. While criticising society one must focus on humankind itself to find out about the innate nature of the human

being, and this is precisely the purpose of literature: to come to an understanding of the world, and then, looking back, to deepen one's understanding of humanity.

Literature does not use criticism as a substitute for knowledge. Given that even the meaning of language has been deconstructed in the domain of postmodernist linguistics, to subvert and criticise is often nothing more than a gesture or something done merely for show.

It is impossible to recreate the laws of social change or humankind's inherent nature. No one foresaw that the collapse of the Berlin Wall would bring to an end the communist bastion of the USSR and Eastern Europe, and no one anticipated that the fragmentation of the Western bloc at the end of the Cold War would immediately cause an economic crisis. Subsequent globalisation plans were initiated to benefit the Western nations, but no one foresaw that these would instead promote rapid economic development in Third World countries and not arrest the decline in Europe. Western commentators have repeatedly predicted the collapse of China's totalitarian rule, but the opposite has occurred, and contrary to repeated predictions in the Western media, the phenomenal rise in China's economy has not led to political democratisation. These important developments, which have taken place in the world within the short space of twenty years, were totally unexpected.

One can only continue to question one's knowledge of the world, and this is also the case with regard to knowledge of humankind. Knowledge of humanity can never be exhausted, so how can one talk about reforming human nature? Who can play the role of the Creator to recreate humanity? In the twentieth century the myth about new people and the new worlds created by violent revolutions were equally terrifying. If humanity is unable to understand itself, how will it be able to understand the world? In the chain of history the individual can only continue to seek to understand the existential situation of humankind itself.

Literature is a testimony left on the existential situation of human beings. The writer does not need to make moral or ethical judgments, and does not assume the role of judge and adjudicator on morality. Both literature and history may be said to be testimonies that record the experiences and feelings of human beings. However, today people know little about the political history of ancient Greece, and only the history specialist carries out research on it, yet there are many people with knowledge of Greek literature.

Each dynasty, political authority, or party will write history to suit its own self-interests, thereby confirming its power in the service of politics. The history written by political authorities follows the changes in political authority and is constantly revised. But there are forms of history that cannot be revised, and these are the creations of writers. This history is more truthful than the official history written by the authorities. Although fabricated, as long as the narrative deals with the true circumstances of human existence, the knowledge provided endures. The excellent literary works from ancient times to the present have not vanished with the passage of time but instead shine as crystals of human culture.

Literature differs from history in that it writes about the history of the individual and the history of the human soul, documenting an understanding of the world and of humankind itself: this understanding of the human world may be called consciousness. The self and human nature cannot be recreated by the individual, but the writer can document experiences, and this is the beginning of literature. In this domain, it should be said the writer enjoys limitless freedom.

However, this freedom is limited solely to what he or she writes, and if the writer surrenders this freedom to an authority in order to secure benefits—straps it to the war chariot of politics or sells it to the market by pandering to popular tastes and large sales—this freedom instantly vanishes.

The sort of writing that transcends profit is inherently unencumbered, and the imagination can race freely like the heavenly horse through the sky. Its value lies in whether it grasps the truth of human life because it is truth that is the most fundamental criterion of literature.

In modern and contemporary times political correctness has long since replaced ethical judgments. So-called political correctness is merely a sort of temporary equilibrium between the interests of authorities and powers in an actual social relationship at a given point in time. If the equilibrium tied to the comparative strength of the authority is destroyed, then what is right today will be wrong tomorrow, and as time passes and the location shifts, literature that follows this sort of political correctness will simply turn into a heap of waste paper.

Literature transcends practical profit-and-loss relationships. The writer confronts the truth of human life, and there is no need to manufacture any other criterion. Whereas the philosopher sets out to create a perfectly comprehensive explanation of the world—in other words, to locate the world in a thought system constructed by concepts and logic—the writer returns to the truth of human life in order to understand actual experiences of separate living individuals. Literature is not the vassal of politics, nor is it a philosophical explanation, but instead it must eradicate all isms and other interferences. The highest form of literature strives to approximate truth, and it may also be said that literature's ultimate quest is to understand truth.

Literature induces all sorts of thinking about society and human life primarily because the experiences in the writer's life are integrated into the literary images of a work. However, writings transmitted over the ages from ancient times to the present have stored their authors' penetrating insights on people and the world, and such authors are at the same time thinkers of their times. Yet writers differ from philosophers in that the thoughts they express must be converted into the thoughts of the characters of their works, and the characters' experiences in specific situations. Aristophanes's mockery of Socrates is not at all dated, and the

profoundness of Shakespeare's revelations about human nature is still unparalleled in the work of any philosopher.

Literature is like a long river with an endless source, and writers are solitary travellers who are perpetually exploring and searching for the true picture of humankind's physical and psychological world, and it is this that they strive to express. This too is an endless road because the understanding of the world and of human beings provided by literature likewise has no end.

The literary revolutions and revolutionary literatures of the twentieth century continually announced the death of the old world order and its literature. Class labels were stuck upon literature, and it was classified as progressive or reactionary. *Progressive* or *reactionary* were names forcibly applied to history by historical-materialist ideology, but the long, endless river of history is not affected by its being known as progressive or not progressive. However, it is hard for one to say how much present literature has progressed when compared with that of ancient Greece, or how much the innate nature of human beings has changed. As long as human society exists, literature's understanding of humanity itself and its understanding of human society will also continue.

No one can presumptuously say that literature is dead. Nonetheless, the postmodernist deconstruction of literature did turn thought and meaning into games of semantic analysis, and this was fashionable for a time. But what was subverted was not social reality; at most it was nothing more than intellectual posturing that failed to leave behind any enduring works worth reading.

No matter how human society goes on changing—modern or post-modern—the predicaments of humankind in society will not vanish, and the need for human beings to understand themselves will not change. As for the writer, who is a solitary traveller walking alone, it is hard to tell whether he is progressive, yet he must continue along the road, and

generation after generation of writers undoubtedly will continue to do so. The value of literary works manifests itself gradually in the long river of time. Literary works may be regarded as testimonies to their times but even more, they are testimonies of human life that transcend time.

The writer is not merely a witness to the times in which he is located; he is at the same time a creator, and his testimony passes through a light filter as he writes with an eye for what is aesthetically beautiful. Literature relies on aesthetic judgments alone, and brought into the writer's works these aesthetic judgments replace ethical or political value judgments of right or wrong and good or evil. Moreover, this aesthetics transcends practical benefit. The writer uses a third eye that overrides the self, and it can be called an intelligent eye. In other words, it is awareness, a form of lucid cognition. It is of course subjective, but it does possess an aesthetic filter. Through such a viewing, what emerges is beautiful or ugly, noble or poetic, tragic or comic, ridiculous or absurd, lofty or despicable, laughable or hateful, and gives rise to sentiments such as pity or sympathy, grief or happiness, and even scorn and humour. The conditions of human existence are viewed differently from writer to writer, and a myriad of portrayals is possible, ranging from Balzac's human comedies to Kafka's modern allegories and Beckett's absurdist plays, or written as Proust's paradise lost or Eliot's waste land. This subjective aesthetics is also manifested as an artistic form that is totally the writer's creation; it is sublimated by passing through the writer's subjective filtering lens.

Literary creation is actualised during the aesthetic process. Aesthetic feelings differ from person to person, and each writer brings unique colourings that are related to family background and life experiences, upbringing, personality, and temperament, as well as to psychological state during creation, all of which are infused into the work.

The writer converts subjective experiences of an individual into a work, although critics of later generations may often refer to him or her as a mirror of the times or as a spokesperson for the national culture.

However, what is interesting about the writer and the work itself is not the characteristics of the times or the imprints of a race. The works left by writers of any age are unique, being the works of the individual. Moreover, the works cannot be duplicated because the creation of literary works is highly serendipitous. That such works are widely referred to as the products of an age or a race is grossly inaccurate; they can only be referred to as special cases that occurred by chance in a particular race at a particular time. It is fortuitous that a particular nation in a particular age actually produces such writers and such works, that a solitary traveller has left a series of indelible imprints for that particular race at that particular time. Successive political authorities have fallen, and eras in the long river of history have gradually become dim, yet such writers and their works stand out to illuminate the conscience of humankind.

Human civilisation has a dual history: the history of change revolving around national political authorities, and the history of cultural thought. The former is accompanied by incessant war and regards the conqueror's military success and rule as glorious achievements. Qin Shihuang's grave and Napoleon's victory arch are such relics of civilisation. However, individuals have written the history of cultural thought. Writers and intellectuals at particular times may not have had the freedom to write and could have offended the powerful and noble through carelessness and ended up becoming recluses, going into exile, or even losing their lives. The fate of writers from ancient times to the present has changed very little. The homelands of writers from Qu Yuan in Asia to Dante in Europe and to Joyce and Beckett in modern times did not possess the social conditions that would have allowed or accepted their writings.

The writer has no need to take pains to identify with a race or a nation. Territorial or cultural identification inevitably comes from political need and is like the manufacture of all sorts of identification to bring more people into a common interest group when political parties are formed. Humanity's territorial and cultural identity comes with the person, and there is no need to stress this, especially in the present age when commu-

nication and cultural transmission is so easy and there is not a single thinking person who has not accepted some degree of multicultural influence. Writers do not need to assume the role of spokesperson for a nation or a race, and it would be best that they saw themselves as citizens of the world and spoke in the voice of the individual that is more authentic and real.

The works left by the writer may bear traces of a particular national culture, but what is interesting in the works are their uniqueness and newness. If a writer fails to articulate something that previously has not been articulated or fails to express fresh feelings and thoughts and only identifies with a certain cultural tradition, the work will be very much like a tourist advertisement and will be very boring.

Poets and writers of different times bring different experiences and use different means to deepen and enrich one's understanding of humanity. The aesthetic experiences from ancient Greek tragedies to China's Tang poetry, from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to Goethe's *Faust* and Cao Xueqin's *Dream of Red Mansions* do not replicate one another. These experiences, derived from the individual, are written in different languages, but transcending national boundaries and time they have become humankind's shared spiritual wealth. This is owing to the interconnectedness of human nature, and as long as people have had some rudimentary education, they will have the propensity for mutual communication, feelings, and understanding. The writer transposes his aesthetic experiences into his works, and a sympathetic reaction is aroused when the reader of later times encounters these works. Further, supplemented by the reader's own experiences, association and reflection are produced. It is in this way that the works left behind by a solitary individual have been transmitted to successive later eras, transcending national boundaries, transcending national cultures, and transcending languages. This is the enduring achievement of the writer.

When the writer recognises the predicament of the individual in society as well as his own limitations, makes choices according to his

capabilities, and remains resolutely independent, he will not find it hard to win an abundance of freedom in the realm of literary creation that he controls. The writer emerging from the miasma of twentieth-century ideology no longer needs to attach himself to politics because literature is an affirmation of humanity's awareness of his own existence and basically transcends practical benefits. And this has always been so.

30 July 2007

Paris

CHAPTER 2

THE ART OF FICTION

Fiction is generally regarded as a genre that cannot be without a story and characters, and indeed these are prerequisites for traditional fiction. But rather than discussing the writing methods or techniques of traditional fiction, I intend to use this opportunity to consider how fiction can be written otherwise than by telling a story.

Fiction underwent an evolutionary process from the telling of a story to the creation of characters, so it is worthwhile surveying the history of fiction. From *Journey to the West* and *Water Margin*, to *One Thousand and One Nights*, to Rabelais's *Gargantua and Panagruel*, and even to Dickens and Gogol and Hugo, fiction fell within the framework of telling a story, and though these works contained some vivid characters, it was in plot that they excelled. Then a shift of emphasis away from the intrigue and variation of the plots to the portrayal of characters made plot secondary, and the creation of characters with striking personalities came to be pivotal in the art of fiction. With Cao Xueqin's *Dream of Red Mansions* in Asia and from Balzac to Tolstoy in Europe, fiction sought to reproduce real society's multitude of vibrant denizens, so the plot weakened to make way for depictions of the environment and the context of life. Such realist fiction provided broad vistas of social life and created lively

images of numerous characters with unique personalities. The depiction of social life also became less important, as in Dostoevsky's writing, in which the personalities of the characters became more complex, schizophrenic, and depressive; or as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, in which the characters' inner worlds with their secret contradictions are reflected through a multiangled lens. Yet unable to make a break from the plot, these works remained traditional fiction: there had only been a shift of emphasis from the plot to the creation and portrayal of characters.

In twentieth-century fiction there was an important change in the narrative language of what is generally known as *modernist fiction*, what I prefer to call *modern fiction* because of the label's greater inclusiveness. Prior to that the author was an omnipotent narrator who was hidden yet knew everything about the external world and the inner mind of the characters and who spoke in the measured and leisurely manner of a storyteller. Fiction writers of the twentieth century raised a new question—namely, who is the narrator? The question about the narrator immediately led to another question: From which angle does the narration occur? The dominance of questions about the narrator and the narrative angle marked the emergence of modern fiction.

Fiction writers abandoned the widely used practice of omnipotent narration and chose a specific narrative angle: the narrator could be a certain character in the book, and the narration in the book would be through the eyes of that character. The author was further concealed, not allowed to make random comments or criticisms, and thus made a complete withdrawal from the book. Only the characters in the book were allowed to speak for themselves, and this was a major change. Of course, there were many ways of writing to achieve this change. Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner each used different methods, but they shared the common characteristic of adopting a particular subjective narrative angle, usually the narrative angle of a character, and observing through the eyes of the character to experience the character's feelings. So the conventional story and plot of fiction became even less important, and

how the narrator narrated became the new issue in the writing of modern fiction.

The creation of fiction first required selecting a narrator, so what eventually emerged was narrative language, and the art of fiction lay in how an appropriate narrative language could be found, thereby relegating conventional plot and character to secondary positions. Nonetheless, there had to be at least one character, and the way this character spoke was the key to fiction creation.

French *nouveau roman* appeared in the 1950s, and critics subsequently designated these works postmodern. Some later-generation *nouveau roman* writers went further and turned fiction into intellectual discussions, and by overturning story, plot, and characters and deconstructing the narrator and narrative language, they turned fictional creation into an intellectual game. Fiction thus was transformed into a text about concepts.

Roland Barthes's notion of the death of the author was extremely popular for a time, and his method of explaining literary texts became a compass for the writing of fiction. However, the emergence of this sort of metafiction in fact subverted fiction. Because any text could be called fiction, the art of fiction was transformed into the conceptual analysis of fiction. That fiction had been reduced to this, of course, was related to the ideology behind so-called modernity. The introduction of social revolution and historical evolutionary theory, with its continuing revolution and perpetual overturning into the domain of literature and the arts, led not to creation but instead to the withering and annihilation of art and literature. Once fiction turned into an intellectual game that could be written in any manner, it lost its social and human consciousness and could not leave behind anything worth a second reading. Instead, there was only a widespread proliferation of vacuous deconstructionist literary theories everywhere.

A baseline exists for innovations in the art of fiction, and that is the narrative language. If the narrative language is removed and fiction becomes an intellectual game or the actualisation of concepts devoid of living human feelings, then the impulse to create fiction as well as interest in reading it is lost, and this can only be the end of the road for fiction.

Fiction can evolve, and the possibilities for artistic expression can be continually explored, although there is an indispensable precondition, and that is the narration of fiction. Whether it was the traditional omnipotent narrator or a specific character narrating, as soon as the narrative language is activated, there must be a subject. An interesting phenomenon is that in any language of the world there are three basic pronouns, *I*, *you*, and *he*, so in other words, is the narrator “I” or “you” or “he”? And there is no other option. These three pronouns do indeed have the plural forms *we*, *you*, *they*. However, these are public words or a form of political speech within a collective, and the fiction writer does not assume the role of public spokesperson and does not have to speak on behalf of a certain collective, political party, class, race, or nation. The writer of fiction must return to the voice of the individual, so both plural pronouns and the absence of pronouns are of no practical use. For example, what is the subject in the sentence *Xiayu le*? Clearly, it is the sky that is raining, but in Chinese the subject is dispensed with, and in English or French the subject becomes a neuter general word. Furthermore, *dou shuo* such and such means “everyone says such and such,” so naturally it is impossible for unspecified individuals and general words to undertake the narration. In fiction there must be a choice amongst the pronouns *I*, *you*, *he*, even if the narration is from the perspective of a specific character. This is an additional limitation in the narration of fiction.

For the first-person pronoun *I* to be used in narration is a common narrative method. Fiction is not autobiography, although autobiograph-

ical fiction today is fairly popular. However, generally the first-person pronoun in fiction is not the author but a fictional character.

In the 1950s the French *nouveau roman* writer Michel Butor wrote a novel in the second-person pronoun *you*, and at the time it was a pioneering work. The second-person pronoun *you* could be either the protagonist or the reader. Having been placed in the situation of the character, the reader perceives events from the perspective of the character during the process of reading: it will be as if the reader is the character. This is the magic of the second-person pronoun.

The second-person pronoun can also be the external projection of the narrator's ego; in other words, it can act as adversary when the narrator engages in interior monologue. The second-person pronoun facilitates this sort of interior monologue, which is commonly found in plays and is also appearing as a narrative method in fiction.

The third-person narrating subject *he*—although not the omnipotent narrator who appears in traditional fiction—can also become the viewpoint of the protagonist, but this involves a hierarchical change in which the subjective narration changes to the third person. This subtle change must have a definite reference; in other words, it requires first that a base be established. If initially the subject *I* is used as the narrator, when the narration changes to the third-person *he*, while still referring to the same character, *he* then becomes the object of focus of *I*, or becomes the projection of *I*. So *I*, as well as *he*, represents the same character yet can engage in dialogue: *he* becomes the object that *I* is considering, and the thoughts of the character do not require the intervention of an omnipotent narrator.

From this it can be seen that once a certain narrative angle has been established, the narrator of the work of fiction, usually the protagonist, can also assume three different designations as the subject—I, you, he—and constitute different levels of narration. Following this, it is found that different levels of narration lead to different psychological levels. Human

consciousness is actualised through language, and cognition of the self cannot be divorced from language. It is through the three persons of the subject—three different positions—that the so-called self is confirmed.

By establishing the subject as *I*, the adversarial projection of *I* becomes *you*, and the externalised projection of *I* becomes *he*, so the narrative language of fiction introduces three different pronouns to designate the one character and leads to a new and multifaceted understanding of a human being's self. What is interesting is that these three levels of cognition are present in all human languages, indicating that these three pronouns transcend ethnicity and language group and reflect a deep structure of human consciousness.

If three different pronouns are introduced into the narration of the one character, the character fragments into the different pronouns, and *I*, *you*, and *he* become the structure of the novel, replacing the usual story and plot. This also allows for the introduction of the character's thoughts so that discussion, reflection, contemplation, memory, dream, and hallucination can all intermingle and so that the literary form, too, can change freely because the flexibility of the structure allows the blending of prose and poetry into the narration.

My novel *Soul Mountain* was precisely such an experiment. It broke through conventional patterns and moulds for fiction yet tenaciously defended the narration and retained firm control of the narrative viewpoint of the characters simply by fragmenting the protagonist into three different pronouns. However, the various females in the book are all denoted as *she*, thereby constructing a composite female image, or what may be called multiple variations of the female. And this, too, is derived from the viewpoint of the male protagonist in the book. It is difficult for a man to fathom women and a woman's inner world, so this multiple-identity *she*, intermingled with the male imagination, fluctuates between reality and nonreality and becomes even more indefinite.

A person's cognition of the external world and other people can never be divorced from a subjective viewpoint. The world and human events inherently lack meaning; meaning is conferred by human cognition. The difference between the narration of the novelist and the commentaries of the philosopher lies in the latter's direct reliance on thought, whereas the novelist's cognition of people and events cannot bypass the characters created, and it is through the eyes of the characters that the writer must bring forth the characters' real perceptions. The thoughts embedded in the novel must be revealed through the experiences of the characters, otherwise they will be nothing more than propaganda or preaching. And what is even more interesting is that the thoughts articulated in the novel must, through a character's experiences, transform feelings into a thought process that is tinged with the protagonist's sentiments, and it is in this way that the novelist presents the thinking of living people and not abstract theories.

Soul Mountain deals with the animal and human elements concealed in exorcist masks, the psychological basis for curses and shaman art, the internal dynamics of storytelling, and the formation of linguistic consciousness, all of which transcend the general boundaries of fiction. However, with the help of this understanding of narrative language it was possible to introduce and accommodate them in the book.

In my other novel, *One Man's Bible*, the *he* chapters and *you* chapters alternate, weaving together the memories of the same character and his situation at present and dispensing with the subject *I*. This was not just because of the special structure of the novel but also because when it came to writing about the red terror of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China, the individual's self had been strangled by the totalitarian dictatorship. In this dialogue between *you*, who had luckily survived, and *he* of the past, time sequence is not a concern, and fragmented memories could come and go in an instant, giving great flexibility to the writing. The pronoun-based structure made it possible to avoid lengthy narration of the protagonist's complicated experiences in China's grotesque

social situation, and immediately allowed *you* of the present and *he* of the past to engage in dialogue. Poetic chapters and prose chapters are placed alongside one another, enabling readers to emerge for a respite occasionally from those suffocating times.

On the other hand, in my short story "Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather," the first-person narrator, *I*, sinks from the present into memories, evoking all sorts of associations that are undifferentiated from dream and inducing the inner mind to talk in dream. *I* becomes two, bringing *you* into being; so *you* and *I* are able to engage in dialogue. All this occurs in the flow of the narration.

Finding a narrative language to express the ephemeral changes of a character's inner mind was a problem. When traditional fiction wrote about a character's psychological activities, the omnipotent narrator intervened and commented, but this interrupted the progress of the story. In writings such as Stendhal's, psychological analysis was introduced into the narration. However, this sort of analysis meant retaining the omnipotent narrative angle so it could not be too long, otherwise the writing was cumbersome and reading it tedious. In writing that tracks a character's mental activities without disrupting the narrative, cognition of the external world and the feelings of the inner world are integrated into the narrative language, so that even reflections on the external world constitute a simultaneous act of subjective cognition. A special narrative method was needed, and modern fiction's stream of consciousness was an artistic search for this. Such writing brought together in a unified flow of language the perceived external world and psychological activities.

Fiction from Proust to Joyce and Faulkner had the same thrust of trying to capture the rich and subtle perceptions of a character's inner mind and of searching for a narrative language that closely approximated psychological truth to accurately reveal the process of psychological activities. Unachievable by intricate wording or meticulous description, the extent of artfulness in language had never existed before these

writers for precisely expressing a person's large range of complex and ephemeral perceptions of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, as well as for accommodating memory, imagination, hallucination, and dream all in the process of narration.

A language that actualised the flow of consciousness had to be found. But in the process of writing fiction, it was soon discovered that language could not capture these ephemeral and complex sensory perceptions. Speech and writing are a linear flow, whereas perceptions can have multiple sites, arise simultaneously, multiply, and spread and are totally random. However, narration in language must be brought into the flow of linear time; one sentence must follow another, and each sentence must be organised according to grammatical rules in a fixed word order—so the narration of fiction must also accept these restrictions. Language must be actualised in a linear flow, and this is also true for speaking, writing, and reading.

Language can convey meaning and allow human beings to communicate with one another because it possesses a public aspect when it takes shape: information that cannot be conveyed is filtered out. If the signs issued by people within a certain social collective come into widespread use, the language patterns resulting from this filtering process—that is, the vocabulary and grammar—become that society's shared accumulated culture. As an artist in language, the writer can strive for fresh expressions, but cannot overturn morphology and syntax. And even if one creates new words, it must be on the basis of vocabulary in common use and within the limits of what others will understand. Writers cannot rebel against language rules built over the history of human society; otherwise, they will not be understood, or else it will be a secret language not intended for others to understand. To write sentences that are not understood is of course possible, but when the meaning of the sentences is understood only by the writer, it is a secret language or code that has nothing to do with literature and needs no further discussion.

The communication of language meaning relies initially on words—a vocabulary established through the experience of repeated confirmation—constructed into sentences according to a generally recognised morphology and syntax. The actualisation of an individual's thoughts must also agree with grammatical rules, for otherwise there is chaos. Language must be within the flow of time and must follow grammatical rules in order to convey meaning. If expressions of the subconscious or preconscious are not organised into sentences but are simply words or groups of words or strings of utterances not structured into some sort of meaning, naturally these cannot be conveyed to others but can only constitute muddled ravings. The writer must revert to lucid consciousness when seeking to grasp and manifest the psychological activities of the subconscious. Therefore, this sort of raving is of limited use, and although fragments may be selected, it cannot replace the narration of fiction.

Stream of consciousness is indeterminate and vague, and in creating fiction the writer needs to find his or her own method for using it in narrative language, and what is actualised can be only a linear flow of language that cannot contravene established grammatical structures. Even if it is the manifestation of psychological activities from the subjective angle of the protagonist in fiction, the narration must nonetheless revert to lucid thinking. The articulation of dream, hallucination, and the dim impulses of the inner mind, or even of ephemeral feelings and images, must all be contained in sequential sentences. Linguistic tracking of psychological activities must pass through a grammatical filter, then a time-sequence funnel, and the string of sentences obtained would more accurately be denoted as a flow of language.

This flow of language used for tracking psychological activities clearly cannot be achieved through conventional methods of narration, description, or rhetoric because they are too regulated, and it certainly cannot be achieved through old sayings and allusions. Capturing these perceptions requires avoiding old sayings and allusions, avoiding existing patterns

of writing, and searching for fresh narrative methods and a more vibrant language. This requires returning to the source of language—that is, when constructing a sentence, one must listen intently to the language of the inner mind, even if it is not spoken aloud, because this sound of the language is linked to the words and sentences and is the starting point of language. The basic substance of language is sound. At this point, it is necessary to draw attention to the common misconception that the written language is the same as the spoken language. Spoken language precedes written language. Written language constitutes the written traces left by language sounds: language is always with sound. The birth and evolution of language are always linked to human sounds; what is of interest is first the sound of language, and it becomes language only when this human sound is endowed with meaning. If the written characters and words—the symbols of language—are severed from the sound of language, the language will perish.

The narration of fiction must revert to language with sound; in other words, the narrator must begin with a language with sound, one that is alive and can be spoken, and this cannot be achieved with mere rhetoric and literary form—quite the opposite: literary form and rhetoric often lead to specific prose styles. Only when writing an ancient tale is it acceptable to occasionally borrow a literary form with an established style. It is important for the creator of fiction to search for fresh and vibrant language, and it is the spoken language of everyday life that is the basis of fiction creation. Of course, the spoken language is not the language of literature, but the creations of the fiction writer penetrate real-life experiences via the spoken language and makes use of living language material to communicate unique and fresh perceptions.

The musical feel of language—that is, its musicality—refers not only to the sound of the language (for example, the four tones and the level or oblique tones of Chinese words) but refers also to the language mood and rhythm linked to specific psychological feelings. The art of narrative language is also manifested in language mood, and this is audible

and, moreover, not endowed with only one rhythm. Language moods and rhythms keep changing with the emotions. And this is the living language that is much sought after by fiction writers.

Writers must each have their own individual language, and each work of fiction will have different language moods and rhythms that can be heard by both the writer and the reader. In searching for this sort of language, it is important first to concentrate and then to listen intently. This does not mean only describing the character's lovely face and smiling countenance but also requires focusing one's gaze inwards and listening intently to what is uttered by the inner mind. Otherwise, it is impossible to enter the deep consciousness of the character, and only a commonplace description will result.

The writer looking for a tone of language will have an attitude towards the object of narration, even if the narration is from the perspective of the character and relies on the perceptions of the character. The writer must have a definite attitude towards the narrator in order to maintain control of a certain tone of language in the narration. The character's tone of language is manifested through the author's attitude about that character, and if the writer fails to capture an appropriate attitude, the writing will not go smoothly and could even end with disaster. In other words, the writer has failed to gain a good grasp of the character. The more intricate work of the fiction writer involves finding a suitable attitude towards the character, and this attitude will continually evolve in tandem with the narration; at times ridicule, at times sympathy, humour, or pity will be infused into the writing.

The author's attitude towards the character does not derive solely from a certain sentiment, but at the same time it is aesthetic, and all sorts of aesthetic values—tragic or comic, absurd or funny, beautiful or ugly, noble or poetic—stem from the author's attitude. This attitude also allows the author to keep the necessary distance from the character, and prevents the possibility of slipping into sentimentalism or emotionism. Fiction differs from poetry in that the latter derives from subject-

tive expressions of the poet, but if fiction were also to give vent to the emotions, people would find it intolerable and impossible to read. Through intent listening and observation, the fiction writer creates a distance from the characters, and thus gets rid of the author's unnecessary narcissism and self-pity.

When a person listens attentively, the omniscient self begins to purify itself. The outpouring of emotion must be abolished from fictional narration. Especially in modern fiction, even if the narrative language begins from a specific subjective perspective, even that of the first-person pronoun, the author must maintain a distance from the character and not become emotionally involved. The less the fiction writer expresses of the self, the more he distances himself from the self, and—even when writing about his own experiences—he must create a distance so that he will be able to listen intently and observe. In other words, the author must purify himself and extricate himself from the total chaos of the self to allow for lucid thinking. And using a pair of wise eyes, or what might be called a pair of neutral eyes, he will be able to concentrate and listen as he immerses himself in the character's inner mind and grasps the right tone of language to manifest the feelings of the character.

To listen or to look are mere actions that have no other implications, but in highly concentrated observation and intense listening, the attention of the observer endows the object with meaning. This form of observation brings with it aesthetic judgments. The poetic sense in fiction is not a result of the expression of feelings but derives from these observations of the author. Under this form of concentrated gaze, even a marsh can have aesthetic implications.

Language is not simply a tool for conveying meaning. At the same time, language is also purposeful activity and is permeated with the intent of the speaker. The narrative language of fiction likewise must have concealed but strong intent, and that is the author prompting the reader's sympathy—and thereby conveying the author's feelings about his character.

The function of language is to suggest, not describe, and strictly speaking, descriptions are merely rough approximations. Overly detailed descriptions cause the object depicted to become less clear, and this is because of the inherent nature of language. Language, unlike painting, cannot reproduce detailed images of still objects or persons. In language one can only say this is a tea cup or add a few qualifications by saying that it is a white porcelain cup, but to go on to describe the shape, lustre, and texture will make the writing clumsy, and people will not want to read it. It is impossible for language to accurately paint an object or a person's face because words are the basic units of language, and words are concepts. Words are already abstractions of things. The word *cup* is an abstraction of the function of this container, and making all sorts of qualifications does not constitute an actual cup. It is through concepts that language evokes people's existing perceptual experiences, so to explain the difference between purple-red and bright red to someone who has been blind since birth is impossible. However, if the person became blind after having had visual experiences of colours, the situation is completely different.

Language evokes experiences via words and sentences, and in the narration the fiction writer suggests past perceptions experienced by the reader. While the author is listening intently and observing, what is important is not description but finding an expressive mode—that is, the right narration that will evoke people's experiences and produce associations.

Consider, for example, describing the dream world whose intangible mental images are inherently ambiguous. The once-popular method known as automatic writing attempted to record the dream world and obtained nothing more than some fragments of words and sentences. Usually descriptions of dreams can never be anything more than a few sketchy snatches. Psychoanalysts have obtained accounts of their patients' dreams, but it goes without saying that these accounts are doctor-induced, so the patients' accounts have been shortened a great

deal. It is virtually impossible to give an accurate account in language of the dream world, and this is because the boundless chaos of the conscious and subconscious of the dream world cannot be accommodated in sequential sentences. What can be narrated must, after waking, consciously be ordered and placed into grammatically acceptable linear word order. If fiction writers want to relate as precisely as possible the dream world of their characters, they must find a narrative mode, and flow of language is the narration most closely approximating dream. What is important is not description but the process of the telling, so it is best to resort to speech when dealing with the inner mind, which eludes description.

With memories, finding an accurate narrative mode is difficult, too. When people look back on the past it inevitably bears sentiments of the present and could be grief tinged with homesickness, frustration, or anxiety, and these psychological elements will colour and change the images in memory. The fiction writer must separate the telling of events and the narrating of the character's memories: these are different levels. The latter will have retreated to the psychological level and in fact is a recreation of past circumstances that are coloured by sentiment. Especially when memories are derived from the narrator's perspective, the thoughts produced by both memory and wish are often chaotically interwoven.

It is the same with impressions. Indeterminate by nature, these are further contaminated by psychological elements, so a direct mode of narration is clearly inappropriate. Instead, it would be best to borrow the help of narrative sequences and to add colouring during the process of forming the sentences. Such sentence structures differ from normal descriptions, and they are nonjudgmental.

Even observation is a process because the concentration and focus are continually shifting. Thus, relating an observation with accuracy is not simply a matter of providing what is seen but similarly must rely on a flow of language that is actualised in sequential sentences. Furthermore,

narration is a form of purposeful behaviour that is actualised within time, and this determines that the language of fiction is not the same as scientific language. The latter is established on the basis of categories and concepts and uses logic and rationality as the basis for analysis, evaluation, explanation, and deduction—and is language demanding that time be discarded. In contrast, the language of fiction is every instant inextricably bound to the perceptions and psychological activities of the characters and is constantly actualised during the process of narration. The art of fiction, finally, is actualised in the narrative language. Through revisiting narration and further study, a new realm for the creation of fiction will open up.

Although the narration of fiction is founded on perception, thought is not discarded. Yet this sort of thought is not purely rational. The thoughts expressed in fiction must be via the personal experiences of the characters because to relate it directly would end up as preaching. Fiction avoids sentimentalism, and the preaching of thought is taboo. When the art of fiction turned from story and plot to the inner world of characters, the thinking of characters became more and more important, and many pages and whole chapters could be devoted to interior monologue. However, fiction cannot be written up as a work of thought. When revealing a character's thoughts, the fiction writer who is bound to the circumstances of the character must find a suitable mode of narration that will make the thoughts emerge as the inner experiences of the character. The changing of pronouns in this sort of interior monologue possesses special meaning and is not simply a narrative technique.

Fiction is different from drama, and in plays monologues can be made very lively by the performance of the actor. However, fiction relies only on narration, and if there are interior monologues they must be converted into false dialogues—for example, between the first-person pronoun *I* and the second-person pronoun *you*. Once the two levels of the inner mind are separated, thinking will have a basis on which to develop. As these two types of introspection turn into a dialogue, the reflections

of the self become lively, and with layer upon layer of breakthroughs and progressive deepening, the process of thinking also is precisely manifested.

If one proceeds further and uses the second-person *you* to narrate and externalises the character's ego as *he*, then *you* and *he* will be distanced. This focus will make the train of thinking clearer, and this form of distanced observation will simultaneously possess aesthetic significance. In manifesting thought, the fiction writer differs from the philosopher because what is related is not strictly rational and at the same time is infused with aesthetics.

As far as the fiction writer is concerned, deliberation does not rely on the assertion of maxims and aphorisms. Philosophical deliberations are abstract, without person, and the person deliberating is not confirmed. The fiction writer is exactly the opposite because both deliberation and thought must be induced in a character at a certain time, in a certain place, and when the character is in a particular frame of mind, and this narration constitutes the present action of the character. In other words, the articulation of thought in fiction is not divorced from perception and must constitute a link in the character's life that unifies perception and thought in the character's experiences.

Fictional narration of sensed perceptions and past experiences goes further to expand into an interactive dynamic between a person's inner conscious and subconscious. When an appropriate mode is found for articulating the character's thoughts without loss to the infectious power of fiction, the process of deliberation and the formation of thought can be introduced into the literary genre of fiction.

In *Soul Mountain* there are chapters concerning the birth of myths, legends, and folksongs, explanations of allegories, lamentations on history, definitions of fiction, implications of pronouns, and analysis of the self. Once this plethora of deliberations on the deep structure of human culture had been connected with the protagonist's circumstances,

only a suitable narrative mode was needed for inserting the thoughts evoked into the novel.

Such deliberations of course are not the same as a scientific treatise and do not require logic and verification but, on the contrary, must eliminate these because what the fiction writer must ascertain is how to enter into the process of deliberation and thought production. The understanding arrived at in fiction travels a path moving in the direction opposite to that of the philosopher's path.

The art of fiction must be linked with aesthetics and not simply provide an understanding of it. On encountering what is happening to a certain character, the author cannot refrain from making aesthetic judgments. Initially, these stem from emotions—such as liking or disliking, liking yet disliking, being amused or sad, feeling pity and yet more so sympathy or hate—but at the same time there can also be entry into the higher aesthetic levels of comedy, pure theatre, or tragedy, the noble or the absurd, the funny or the humorous. When focusing and listening to the characters, the author will give such aesthetic judgments, and moreover, these will be realised in the narrative language of the fiction. Hence fiction is also a unity of perception and aesthetics.

The aesthetics of fiction can also gain entry to the spiritual realm via the perceptual level. The realms attained in poetry can likewise be attained in fiction. The frog appearing in the snow in *Soul Mountain* constructs an image, and this sort of enlightenment is similar to a Chan Buddhist realm. Perception can transform into enlightenment, thought can be sublimated into the spiritual, and conscious observation and contemplation of existence do not lead only to religion but can also lead to aesthetics.

By becoming fully immersed in discovering the functions of language from the subconscious and the preconscious to the conscious, from the mental to the spiritual, from nonlanguage information to supralanguage spiritual enlightenment, it seems that the writer will find the language

for expression. It is in this respect that the linguistic art of fiction is far from exhausted, and it is in this that its magic lies.

Indeed, writers of fiction cannot reform this perplexing world, nor can they change people or their innate nature. They merely provide perceptions that mock or contemplate those in the predicament while presenting an aesthetic judgment. In doing so, they gain pleasure and spiritual release and give readers something interesting to read.

This understanding can come only from the individual and is actualised in the unique language of the author, a language that the author has worked hard to create. A fiction writer provides a rich world that is actualised through language. Historicist analysis often claims that certain societies, eras, or political and economic conditions determine the kind of writer that is produced. However, the fiction writer does not emerge as a necessity for any era. Instead, writers each have their own individual circumstances, their own innate abilities and their own perspectives and modes for dealing with the world. How they deal with language and their unique perception of the world are linked, and these are infused into a work along with their aesthetic perceptions. Fiction is the creation of the individual fiction writer, and its significance does not lie in commonality or identification—for example, race or national identity, cultural or even political identity. Rather, its significance lies in its uniqueness: the creations of fiction writers are distinctly separate, and the more outstanding the writer, the more unique the work. This is the quest of the fiction writer, and all fiction writers seek to find their own unique form of narration. A history of literature is written like this, and so is the history of fiction.

Writers of fiction leave individual footprints in history, and it is meaningless to call them progressive or reactionary; historicist judgments as to whether they are modern are also meaningless. Postmodern is not necessarily more progressive than modern, and it is not the case that revolution is certain to bring progress or that the realism of the nineteenth century is superior to the romanticism of the eighteenth century.

Historicist judgments of fiction writers are inevitably bound to politics and ideology, and fiction writers must slough off such externally imposed burdens and, returning to the art of fiction, search for their own unique language that will enable them, as accurately as possible, to relate their perceptions of the world. This boundless search has no direct links with the methodologies of science but instead is simultaneously manifested as aesthetic interest.

30 August 2007

Paris

CHAPTER 3

THE POTENTIAL OF THEATRE

In modern and contemporary theatre the director's position far outranks that of the playwright. The directorship system emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, and through the twentieth century the director gradually took over the lead role from the playwright in contemporary theatre creation. European theatre prior to that was the theatre of the writer. Established patterns for actor performance existed, and whether a footstep should be light or heavy was decided entirely by the playwright; new topics, fresh ideas, and theatre forms all came from the script. However, traditional Asian theatre was the theatre of the actor, and what people saw was the superb performances of actors. The scripts were invariably traditional plays, and these were seldom changed. When the Western director system emerged, to begin with here too it was performance that was valued, so the technique and profession of acting became a consummate art.

Following the Second World War, the appearance of absurdist plays gave impetus to the rise of avant-garde theatre. Then by the 1960s the director's position became progressively more important, whereas the playwright's became progressively insignificant. This was because it was mainly the director who had completely redefined the aim of perfor-

mance art, of the theatre, and even of theatrical art as a genre. Technical innovations in stage equipment, sound, and lighting also greatly helped the director's recreation of the script, and whether a classical or contemporary work was chosen, it would be staged according to the director's formula. The search for performance form meant that any literary text that arrived in the director's hands could be brought onto the stage. So if playwrights fail to produce some fresh ideas about the art of theatre or to find new forms of theatre expression, it seems as though they will simply be reduced to supplying literary plays in the same way scriptwriters do for films.

The playwrights of the present who want to restore vitality to the domain of theatre creation must reacquaint themselves with this ancient art form as well as search for new possibilities from within the internal mechanisms of theatre, and this is the very topic I wish to address.

The theatre of the absurd was flaunted as antitheatre; in other words, it subverted traditional theatre. The story and plot essential in plays of the past were completely discarded, the characters were divested of any individuality and became mere ciphers, and theatrical conflict constructed between characters also vanished. All that remained were words that were spoken on the stage—that is, a whole lot of talking. The incidents and theatrical actions that were indispensable in traditional theatre were also totally eliminated. All that was left was a text that could be written up in any manner because the director would rearrange it so that there could be a performance. The rise of avant-garde theatre that largely came about at this point then proceeded to redefine theatre by constantly introducing nontheatrical methods, making changes to the theatre space, or proposing new theatre concepts. However, it is not my intention to summarise here the history of experimental theatre in the latter half of the twentieth century.

My searching in theatre, however, begins from a different background. Quite to the contrary, I do not refute traditional theatre, and though I fully endorse the premises of traditional theatre, I set out to reac-

quaint myself with possibilities inherent within this art itself. First, I pose the question *What is theatricality?* Because it is on this basis that theatre constitutes an independent art form. The traditional understanding was that a play must have at least one connected series of movements. Contradictions and conflicts arise between a number of characters, resulting in a stream of incidents that build to a climax and then a conclusion: a single story threads through the whole play. This is the case in the plays of ancient Greece, as well as in China's traditional opera and Japan's Noh and kabuki. The singing or chanting of songs and poetry without a connecting story would not be theatre but simply a series of performances.

An even fresher understanding came about when the idea of theatre as action evolved into that of theatre as a process. It was the French playwright Antonin Artaud who first proposed this after seeing Balinese opera from Indonesia. The Polish playwrights [Jerzy] Grotowski and [Tadeusz] Kantor afterwards emphasised this idea and, moreover, realised it on the stage with their creations. They mostly started from the perspective of the director, embodying it in the performances that they presented.

Playwrights who also have this sort of understanding will discover a new realm for writing plays. In fact, any movement looked at in slow motion or magnified will be a process. If a play is written solely about a certain process, there will be no need to create conflicts or construct events and even subtle psychological activities—as long as the process of these activities can be performed on the stage—can constitute theatre. Such an understanding greatly expands the subject matter and expressive potential of theatre. For example, when approaching death, a person's mental activities at this critical juncture will be enough to write a play about. Such states of mind and even certain situations can be theatre, as long as these can be presented as changing within a flow of time.

Following this line of thinking, it can then be found that change may also be theatre. Change from one state to another, stretching and going slack or rising and falling, likewise, also possesses theatricality. Furthermore, contrast can construct theatricality: two different factors, two unrelated characters, and two series or two groups of events can possess theatricality without constructing conflict, and they can even move in tandem or intersect. My *Wild Man* is this type of polyphonic theatre. A scholar's research on the ecology and the media's investigations on the wild man intersect and move forward without the two constructing any conflicts, yet theatrical tension is sustained throughout.

Theatre can also be discovery or surprise. When the piece of red silk is lifted, the egg has turned into a hen, or when the gun is fired, the woman in the box vanishes. Magic is fun and rich in theatricality, and public performances excite even when audiences know what will happen.

By reacquainting myself with theatricality, I was able to confirm that theatre was movement and this led to the understanding that theatre is process, change, contrast, discovery, and surprise, all of which are intrinsic to the art of theatre but which have often been overlooked and forgotten in contemporary plays. Instead of wearing oneself out to introduce nontheatrical methods in order to bring about theatrical innovations, one would do better to reexplore what is inherently vital to this ancient art.

There is no need to reiterate that theatre is art in the theatre. But what is theatricality? However, to ask this question again—and, moreover, to confirm it—raises new issues for the creation of contemporary plays. Theatre does not need to replicate real life on the stage: authenticity is unnecessary on the stage. Audiences go to the theatre to see actors present a performance, and performance in itself is not reality; moreover, naturalist performances are not particularly interesting but are in fact usually dull and boring.

The stage is essentially a specifically constructed environment. On the stage the actors do not need to present portrayals of real life: it is the performance that the audience comes to see. Theatricality does not attempt to conceal that it is the actor's public performance in the theatre. Both Italy's impromptu comedy and Asia's traditional opera rely on public performances to attract audiences. Theatrical art has always been like this, but the realist plays that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century completely blurred this understanding of theatre. If instead of relying solely on stage words, modern theatre mobilised all available performance techniques and included in theatre creation the performance methods of song, dance, masks, face make-up, magic, and acrobatics, it would be wonderful theatre. This full affirmation of theatricality would of course lead once again to a form of omnipotent theatre and would require omnipotent actors.

This kind of theatre obviously does not rely solely on the director's arrangements but requires that theatricality be sufficiently emphasised in the writing of the play. The play cannot be merely a text of dialogue and soliloquy; it must also provide suggestions for performance. In writing what is to be spoken onstage—what a character says is what the audience hears—the play establishes prompts to create theatre atmosphere. My *Snow in August* was written as this kind of omnipotent theatre, so the dialogues, soliloquies, asides, solos, duets, and choruses, as well as the actor's performance, which takes into consideration body build, footwork, and dance, are all worked out in the play. And make-up, change of expression, magic, and acrobatics too are already contained in the play.

My emphasis on theatricality can be seen in my early plays from *Bus Stop* to *Wild Man*. The actor at times overrides the character to directly address the audience, and this communication between the stage and the audience is prearranged in the play. My later plays *Hades* and *Of Mountains and Seas* are much more rowdy and tell of events that take place

from hell to the heavenly palace, so the creation of theatre atmosphere had also to be incorporated in the design of the plays.

This reacquaintance with theatre, of course, broke through the confines of lounge-room theatre and also liberated theatre from the narrow framework of imitating scenes from real life. There is no reason why contemporary theatre cannot broaden its thinking and look back to epics and myths.

Wild Man is divided into three musical movements, and the thirty different scenes include folk songs being sung in fields, performers reciting, exorcists dancing to expel drought, shamans chanting, the thoughts of an ecologist, the investigations of journalists and the media, the separation of a husband and wife, a wedding in a mountain village, and even a child dreaming. Spanning prehuman history down to television programmes of today, the play can indeed be considered full of variety. Once the theatre has been reconfirmed as a space in which actors perform before an audience, and the stage as a hypothetical environment, everything becomes possible in theatrical expression. It requires only that there be a connecting thread in the play: in *Wild Man* it is the ecologist's random thoughts and musings that thread through the entire play. This flow of consciousness has enormous freedom, and intersected by a complexity of polyphonic constructions, the play is somewhat like a symphony. Finding it impossible to divide the work into the scene sequences of conventional plays, I decided to write it up as three musical movements.

My play *Hades* borrows from the old tale about Zhuangzi testing his wife. I discarded the socioethical and the religious elements contained in the traditional Chinese opera to create a large-scale exposé of the absurdity of hell, rewriting it as a grand opera with singing, dancing, and acrobatics, as well as making provisions for a choir and symphony orchestra. I fused a traditional Chinese opera with European opera and dance drama and, moreover, did not simply provide the literary text of a play.

My other work, *Of Mountains and Seas*, writes of myths from China's upper antiquity. The myths preserved in the ancient text *Classic of Mountains and Seas* are fragments, and restoring the mythology of China's upper antiquity was a difficult and prodigious task. Informed by the mythological, archaeological, and historical research findings of a large number of scholars, I proceeded to sort and untangle these fragments, getting rid of the footnotes from generations of feudal ethics as well as modern ideologies, and from time to time making up parts of that hopelessly confused conglomeration of myths from the different tribes scattered in the Huaxia region of remote antiquity. My intention was not to rewrite the old stories but to restore them, just as if I were putting together the fragments of an ancient Greek urn. It was with this in mind that I wrote this grand opera, and there had to be a narrator to pull the threads together, to act as the storyteller.

Unlike in fiction, the narrator in a play must rely on performing before an audience and both narrate and perform. There is no need to conceal the storyteller's status as actor, and the narrator is also a character in the play. It was Brecht who reintroduced the narrator into modern plays, and the alienating effect of his narrative plays was ideologically driven to arouse a socially critical consciousness in the audience. In Lao She's *Teahouse* the storyteller is written into the play with a role, and he both presents the story to the audience and moves amongst the characters. The narrator can create distance between the stage and the audience, as well as establish direct communication between the two, depending on how it has been arranged in the play and by the director. Narration can be transformed into a powerful device in theatre, and there can be many new ways to reintroduce narration into the play that can lead to yet another kind of performance. I will discuss this in detail further on.

The playwright must be familiar with theatre and must understand performance; otherwise the play that he writes will constitute only a text. And innovations in theatrical art ultimately must be realised on the stage by the performance of the actor. If the impetus given to the writing

of plays from becoming reacquainted with theatricality and the sense of theatre is taken further by also becoming reacquainted with performance art, and the two are linked together, even more interesting prospects are provided.

The ancient art of performance is generally acknowledged to be a dual relationship constructed by the actor and his role. Playwrights from Diderot to Stanislavsky and even Brecht, all believed this to be so, even though each had different theories and methods for dealing with that relationship. The prevailing realist performance demands that the actor strives to live in his role to the smallest detail, and this is represented by Stanislavsky's method. The expressionist method is another. Taken by Brecht to its greatest heights, this method emphasised that the actor on the stage acting his role was expressing his role. So of course the actor did not have to be the same as the character, and it was possible to use all sorts of exaggerated performance strategies.

Close scrutiny of actor performance in traditional Chinese opera and Western plays reveals that in the person of a mature and talented actor there was another concealed layer of relationship: there was not merely a relationship between the actor and the role, but between the two there was a medium concealing the seeds of a performance method. Awaiting further exploration is what I have called the tripartite nature of performance.

Before the actor emerges in the role there is a process that is usually overlooked. If one analyses traditional Chinese opera performances, this can be seen with greater clarity. In the actor's daily life he has a voice, intonation, and bearing that he is accustomed to, so before entering the role he must first purify himself by cleansing himself of his usual voice, intonation, and bearing and focus his energies on preparing to enter his role. Of course, in realist performance this process often escapes detection, but it becomes clear by observing at close range a Peking Opera performer, especially when it is a man acting the role of a woman. Take, for example, the Peking Opera performance artist Mei Lanfang acting a

young woman or an imperial concubine even after he has turned fifty. As he applies make-up, warms up, and practices his singing, he is purifying himself, ridding himself of his male status and entering the state of mind of the neutral actor. The process is similar to the preparation of athletes at the start of a race; consciousness of self is discarded as the athlete enters a combative mode and listens for the pistol to fire. When the actor warms up by walking around backstage before going onto the stage, he is cleansing himself of his habits in daily life and entering a neutral state. At the sound of the gongs and drums, he walks onstage to the beat, but the process of his change of status is not completed until he faces the audience, strikes a pose, and speaks with the status of the character. It is only at this point that he is in the role before the audience. The striking of a pose is of utmost importance, because it is the first time the actor communicates face to face with the audience. Aided by his physical and psychological movements, the communication conveys meaning, namely, "I of this instant am here to make this role presentation of this character for all of you to see!" A talented actor is able to conquer the audience because he is fully aware of his own performance and is able to control it.

If this neutral actor status is affirmed on the stage, the actor is not the everyday-life *I* who faces the audience or the everyday-status *I* on the stage acting as the equivalent of the character *he*, and he is highly focused and mentally prepared as he enters the performance. At this time, the consciousness of self has transformed into a third eye that observes and modulates the performance of the actor, who has become *you* and has thus gained an abundance of freedom on the stage. This state is like that of being the storyteller, who at any time can enter the character he is talking about and immediately act the role in the book. Yet in a flash he can return to his status of storyteller, all with great freedom. The storyteller faces the audience, and as soon as he strikes his wooden clapper and utters the words, "Members of the audience!" he becomes totally focused; his eyes burn with energy, and his tone of voice and his move-

ments possess rhythm and beat, and he is already not the same person he is in normal life. This is the state of the neutral actor.

By affirming his neutral actor status on the stage, the actor gains enormous freedom, and he can at any time enter or exit the role he is acting. And when the playwright writes a play on the basis of this knowledge, it can lead to a fresh way of writing plays and also provide performance art with a space not fully explored in the past.

When the actor on the stage strikes a pose before the audience, a communication with the audience occurs in an instant. If the play is able to prolong this process, to provide the actor with ample time and space, how the actor goes in and out of his role is intriguing. When the person acting does not conceal his actor status, he will be publicly acting his role, as well as showing how he is acting his role. At that particular time the actor has an attitude towards the role he is acting that determines the strategies he uses for his presentation, and these presentation strategies also constitute a performance. To begin with, the actor must have ample psychological space, and the play must provide for this performance space. This allows the actor to adopt a certain attitude towards the character, mocking or sympathising with him, poking fun at or pitying him, or sometimes being stern with or teasing him. After the presentation the actor can also solicit the reactions of the audience: "Members of the audience, did you like my performance?" Or, "As a performer, how else can I repay the audience?" At this time the silence or laughter of the audience is closely related to the actor's performance. The actor on the stage at this time has not simply developed a relationship with the character he is acting, but through the character he acts or as the actor, he is communicating with the audience. This dual relationship has always existed in theatre, but on the whole it has not been emphasised or written into plays as a theatrical strategy.

With the establishment of the status of the neutral actor on the stage, the precondition exists for posing new questions regarding dramaturgical methods and performance methods. Generally, the creation of

characters in plays depends mainly on the words spoken on the stage: dialogues and monologues all come from the mouths of the characters and are always spoken in the voice of the first-person *I*. Now if what is spoken onstage is changed to the third-person *he*—both in dialogues and monologues—everything is transformed into a narrative, and the distance between actor and character is immediately established. The actor on the stage will also of course be able to talk about his character, whether or not he is acting, and he will be able to enter or exit his role with great ease.

This was how my play *Between Life and Death* was written. From beginning to end it consists of a woman's monologue, and the third-person *she* is used throughout, so that the person facing the audience is not the character in the play but a female actor narrating before others, presenting and performing her character.

When pronouns replace the characters, the characters are externalised as *he*, and this extends the distance between the actor and the character and gives ample space for the performance. The actor is not required to strive to be true to life in the role but instead turns the character into a puppet that he can control. When the character becomes the third-person *he*, the actor is like a puppeteer pulling strings. He does not need to conceal his status as actor, and he will put on a performance for the audience in which he is able to fully exert himself in presenting his character to everyone. Herein lies the art of the actor: it is to his performance that the audience submits.

This sort of play, of course, is not limited to dialogue and monologue, and numerous performance strategies can be introduced into the play. For example, in *Between Life and Death*, there is also a man who says nothing but appears throughout the play. He changes according to the woman protagonist's mental state. At the beginning he is a clown who sometimes becomes a demon, and finally he becomes an old man walking very slowly and echoing the woman's loneliness. This image of a continually changing male is obviously no longer a character from a traditional

play but merely a projection of the woman protagonist's state of mind that could be regarded as the reverberations of the woman protagonist's mental state or a kind of reference or contrast. In this way, the actor playing the male role has much space to explain and elaborate. Occasionally, a female dancer also appears who likewise does not speak on the stage. At times she is a young girl, at others an old woman nearing death; at times she is a female demon or a nun, and she even turns into a heap of clothes. Again, these are projections of the female protagonist's inner mind. The actor who performs the male figure can be a clown, a dancer, a stilt walker, magician, or acrobat: all of these are possible. The nonspeaking male or the female dancer can of course improvise dances and weave through the female protagonist's narration. This will not disrupt the development of the play and if well executed, will enhance the play.

Transforming the onstage words into the third-person *he* is a complete break with the traditional method of writing a play, and using pronouns instead of characters transforms dialogue and monologue into theatrical narration. If the onstage words are changed to the second-person *you*, dialogue and monologue can be converted into a form of fake dialogue. This *you* becomes a nominal partner in conversation, a partner who in fact is a projection of the self. The subtext of onstage words that are impossible to articulate in realist plays can thus be fully expressed. This is extremely useful in revealing the experiences of the character's inner mind and instantaneously converts invisible psychological activities into onstage visible actions. When the actor resorts to *you*, it is the character speaking out thoughts, and this places the audience in the position of the character, inducing the audience to adopt the perspective of the character while experiencing what the character is experiencing then and there.

In the play *The Man Who Questions Death*, two actors act the same character, and each is designated *you*: one actor is the person in the play, and the other actor is articulating aloud the thoughts of the person in the

play. This kind of fake dialogue performed by the two actors becomes a distinctive stage form and creates a powerful theatrical breakthrough in which thoughts mutate into action. Basically, they are merely thoughts, but on the stage these turn into a life-and-death battle.

In my play *The Other Shore*, the dialogue between Man and Shadow also consists of thoughts spoken out aloud, but through the two actors who act Man and Shadow, it is possible to construct duets in both song and dance. In the first half of *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, the male protagonist and female protagonist at times separately change from the first-person *I* to other pronoun designations. When the man changes to the second-person *you*, the woman changes to the third-person *she*. In the second half, after the game of death, the man uses the second-person *you* throughout, and the woman uses the third-person *she* throughout. It is entirely like a dialogue between two deaf people and takes to an extreme the feeling of loneliness, of the two not being able to communicate. This objectification and alienation also develops this male and female couple's story into a symbol of modern human relationships.

The play *Nocturnal Wanderer* goes a step further, and when any of the characters speak they address *you*. Whether it is the protagonist *you* or the characters the protagonist encounters in dream, all willy-nilly point to *you*, causing you who are sitting in the audience also to feel the same pressure. Although what is presented onstage is a nightmare, everyone has had nightmarish life experiences, so as soon as the actors refer to you in the audience, the audience is also dragged into the situation, and the predicament therefore becomes even more threatening.

To replace characters with pronouns does not mean that the characters in a play are thus simplified by becoming a certain personal pronoun *you*, *I*, *he*. This *you*, *I*, and *he* are not mere signs; instead, they cut into the experiences of the character from different angles to reflect different facets of the character's inner mind like a prism, each facet comparing itself with and referring to the others; so by changing the pronoun, a

person's complex inner world, which is normally hard to present in a play, is transformed into clear and powerful stage images.

There are four characters in *Weekend Quartet*, and in the different scenes each of the characters take turns using *I*, *you*, or *he* to speak as subject. By just creating a series of permutations and combinations, interacting and complex relationships are formed, as well as the complexities of each individual character. When the same character uses the first-person *I*, it is a normal performance—that is, his role. When the second-person *you* is used, if there is another character present, this *you* then refers to the other character, but if he is alone, this *you* is a projection of the self, and it is an interior monologue.

The same character can also speak using the third-person *he*, and in this case it is an observation of the self, revealing a state of mind. There are three perspectives to each character that separate different facets like a prism.

Moreover, the dialogues between different characters and the monologues of the inner mind of each character also incorporate changes of pronoun—*you* to think, and *he* to observe and narrate—so the four characters are like four musical instruments and are structured into counterpoints as in a musical composition.

Human relationships, in fact, are often like this, if the unspoken thoughts and feelings of people's inner minds were to be individually exposed. This would not be possible with traditional dramaturgical methods and performance methods, but once the status of the neutral actor is established on the stage, the problem is resolved. The actor can instantly emerge from the first person, change into the pronoun *you*, and enter another psychological level or use the third person to tell about the character being acted. Neutral actor status is a stable coordinate signifying that any entry or departure will always return to neutral status and thereby provides a basis for this dramaturgical method.

Of course, instead of a quartet, a duet or a trio can also be written. As long as one character's location in reality is confirmed, a basis is established for installing other imaginary or fabricated characters that can either proceed in tandem or intersect onstage. Strategies for constructing theatre, such as contrast or counterpoint, discovery or surprise, can be fully exploited; in performance multiple levels and counterpoints will also be possible, and as a result the dramaturgical method can have many variations and be greatly enhanced.

The tripartite nature of performance—from self to neutral actor status to character—coalesces as three pronouns because these pronouns are constructed on three levels of human consciousness. Consciousness is formed through articulation in language, and these three levels reflect deep structures of the consciousness. It is only with these three levels that the human consciousness becomes discerning, and as these levels serve as coordinates for one another, discernment becomes lucid. Otherwise, the state of the inner mind is merely a totality of chaos, and there is no possibility either of discernment or of narration, and a person will be oblivious of having a self.

Through the establishment of the neutral actor status, these three pronouns allow the layers of human consciousness to be seen clearly on the stage. In most plays the subtext of onstage words—that is, the unarticulated words of a character's inner mind—can only be intuited even in the most brilliant of performances. On a big stage, conveying these inner mind activities to the audience is difficult, so simply a subtext is not enough. The establishment of neutral actor status provides a new performance method for turning people's rich and forever changing psychological activities into visible stage images, and it also suggests another dramaturgical method.

What is important to this playwriting method is not narrating a story or constructing a plot; instead, it focuses on how to present the inner-mind experiences of a character. In the first instance, this sort of play provides a setting, situation, or environment that everyone is likely to

have encountered—for example, a bus stop. My first play, *Bus Stop*, is an assortment of people waiting at a bus stop and tells about things everyone has experienced. Starting from daily-life experiences, it begins with a certain situation everyone has probably encountered and then progresses to personal experiences and perceptions that everyone has to some extent had, and once this starts there is no stopping—but then human life is often like that.

If the method of writing a play is merely a technique, an idea, a clever trick, it cannot serve as a model. However, if the method of writing a play derives from a writer's life experiences, it is a kind of understanding, and even if it is a framework and form for artistic creation, it is still interesting. A playwright's search for theatrical forms derives from his understanding of life.

Waiting is a situation regularly encountered in life. Nightmares are similar, and no one can escape them. And life can often suddenly become like a nightmare if a person becomes trapped in a difficult situation and there is no hope of escape. *Nocturnal Wanderer* deals precisely with this issue. Everything is going all right for this person when his act of kindness rains calamity upon him; threatened and controlled, the more he struggles, the deeper he sinks. Kafkaesque nightmares in actual social life are in fact very real. Although the protagonist is walking in his sleep, the human relationships he encounters all around are quite real. Indeed, this allegory is a fairly universal portrayal of modern humanity's existential predicament.

Reemphasising the hypothetical nature of the stage and the fabricated nature of performance is not only manifested in performance and directing arrangements but is also written into the play. In other words, theatre is restored to being fully theatre—that is, omnipotent theatre. The stage is purged of the trivia of daily life that does not need to be imitated and is also purged of assorted clutter, so that maximum space is left for performance.

Every object on the stage is indispensable, and it is only the use of the objects that is of interest. Objects, like the characters of the play, should come to life on the stage. The playwright endows with life the objects that appear in the play and these, just like people, have roles in the play.

There are two skulls at the front of the stage in *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, but these could be replaced with wooden clappers because in the play there is a monk who chants sutras but does not speak. The ceremonial always involves toying with some object, and a wooden clapper resembles a skull but is less likely to offend. In the second half of the play, after the man and the woman have died, these gruesome skulls—do not be concerned about whether it is in the imagination of the man and the woman that they had killed the other party or whether the skulls symbolise death—are stark symbols highlighting the psychological desolation lying beneath the frivolity of the male and female protagonists.

In *Between Life and Death* the dismembered arm and leg of a shop model that drop from the air underscore the disintegration of the inner mind of the female protagonist. The small log cabin on the stage evokes childhood memories, but once it collapses there is a return from the delusion of memories to reality.

Props and scenery are not merely stage ornamentation. If they work collaboratively with the performance of the actors, these objects constitute mobile components of the play and are indispensable. They will have both significance and expressive power and, moreover, construct the unique landscape of the play, become visual images of the inner mind.

A character's inner mind experiences have been transformed into visible stage images, mental images have been transformed into the scenery of the play, anxiety and bewilderment have been transformed into movement, and through the performance of the actor, the hypothetical and theatrical nature of theatre have been confirmed; nonetheless, even if the play is a total fabrication, audiences will be convinced, provided the play has captured people's authentic experiences.

Plays were originally for the entertainment of adults. When children play games they are always imitating adults, but when adults entertain themselves, there is no need for them to imitate children. Setting out to replicate real life on the stage will always be a sham, but if the function of theatre to entertain is retrieved, the art of theatre will provide entertainment and aesthetic fulfilment.

Poetic sense is also a sought-after realm in theatrical art. However, poetic sense in theatre is different from the poetry of literature. The expression of emotion in theatre is often disastrous. It disrupts the progress of the play and can be boring. Excessive emotion and hysteria are even more intolerable. What should be understood is that poetic sense in theatre often does not rely on language for the release of emotion. Whereas poetry needs only to go through language for expression, poetic sense in theatre mainly relies on the performance of the actor and, moreover, must be realised in a process under specific circumstances.

If the expression of emotion is not embedded in the movement of the play, it will remain a literary strategy, just like an image. The images created by words and phrases in poetry are normally static but can leave an aftertaste, and when reading poetry the reader can summon the imagination to ponder these images. But in the theatre, the fleeting images of words and phrases cannot conquer the large audience. Without a fresh theatre form, words and phrases cannot move an audience. Signs and symbols are also static and have conventional popular implications within a specific cultural structure. They can serve as stage scenery with decorative significance but cannot be structured into theatre. Symbols in theatre likewise must be realised in the action and process of theatre. In other words, poetic sense and the symbolic must be pregnant in the action and process of theatre. Otherwise, they will be like signs stuck onto the play script or on the stage equipment, insubstantial and just for show, incapable of constructing theatre.

Yet poetry, even modern poetry, can be brought into plays and introduced into theatre. The play *The Other Shore* testifies to this. If one says the other shore is simply a poetic symbol, then going to the other shore is an action. “Go to the other shore, go to the other shore!” In the play when the group of young actors shouts this as they charge in a frenzy towards the imaginary other shore, this process that threads through the entire play—moving to the other shore (change, surprise, and discovery, getting lost, fatigue, dejection, astonishment, indecisiveness, and weariness) and returning to reality—is capable of structuring a modern epic drama.

Based on a *ci*-poem by the woman poet Li Qingzhao of eleventh-century Song Dynasty China, *Variation on “A Slow Slow Tune,”* was rewritten as a modern dance piece. A guide for composing the dance was achieved by lengthening the original poem’s rhyme scheme into four different motivations for dance. Dance cannot be separated from movement, and in entering dance through poetry or writing poetry for dance, the pure expression of emotion should be avoided. Instead, movement should be introduced into the poetry, and the inner impulses of the body should be activated by feelings. It is only in this way that emotion can be released in dance—that is, by uniting physical expression with the vocabulary of the dancer’s body.

Ballad Nocturne was also written for dance theatre but adopts the form of poetic drama and uses the third-person *she*. The lengthy monologue that lasts virtually from beginning to end, however, adopts a narrative tone. Narration is basically a literary method, the language of fiction. The narration of fiction is not necessarily poetic, and this form of narration that is usually prose often cannot be presented on a stage. Of course, an actor can publicly recite any prose, but reciting is quite remote from theatre. The difference between the recitation of fiction and the narration that theatre can accommodate lies in the former’s being limited to narration and the latter’s turning narration into the action of the characters of the play.

Dance is the twin sister of poetry. There is no prose-derived dance, and poetry is present even in comedy-style dance pieces. This is because dance movements always accompany feelings, and though rhythm gives birth to feelings, they always remain some distance from the poetic.

When dance is used to express emotion, it is poetry entering conventional dance modes, and this is induced by the dancer's subjective feelings. But there is another kind of poetry that derives from observation of the self, and is focused, unemotional, quiet, silent, and concentrated observation of the movement of the body, or listening intently to the sounds of the inner mind. Somewhat like deep thought and meditation that attains another realm, the poetry of this sort of observation is unlike the subjective release of emotion; it others the self, distances and elevates the self into a consciousness that enables it to observe its own bearing and actions.

Ballad Nocturne has as its starting point the use of this third person both to focus on the character's inner mind and to narrate. This narrative poem uses a female actor as the narrator, whereas two female dancers are projections of the experiences of the character's inner mind, and their dance likewise does not display emotion. Onstage is also a male musician who does not speak but only plays his instrument. Narration and dance are in tandem, and the music accompanies the dance while also constructing a duet with the narration. The narration, dance, and music proceed from the onset of night to dawn, structuring the journey of an inner mind that is accompanied by constantly changing mental images projected on the backdrop. This is a recent play of mine that has yet to be staged.

My play creations on the whole do not overturn the traditions of this art form, but instead begin with a reacquaintance with and an adequate affirmation of this art's inherent laws, which have existed from ancient times. For me change does not imply the negation of antecedents.

Art is ennobled by virtue of its creation, and new concepts, new forms, and new methods generally have been proposed in two ways. One of these is rebellion, rebelling against tradition, overthrowing antecedents, and travelling on an antagonistic road to bring about change. In the twentieth century, which has just passed, such art revolutions were so frequent and familiar that many art historians wrongly thought that art innovation was possible only through revolution. However, I maintain that art creation has another more universal law, one that is not premised on overthrowing and overturning. Instead, it requires probing deep into a genre's history and the basis for its existence, exploring what possibilities can be discovered in this art form and proceeding to develop these possibilities by injecting fresh perspectives and providing new content and new forms.

It is only by using another perspective to observe that it is possible to discern unusual aspects that are hidden in something. The artist cannot be the Creator and create a new world, but he is capable of forming his own unique understanding of the world and moreover of finding a suitable form for presenting it.

My quest in theatrical art is not antitheatre, nor is it to introduce nontheatre strategies into theatre. And it does not set out to redefine theatre. Throughout, it is linked with the performance-art basis of the genre and has as its point of departure the performance of the actor. Therefore, my plays are devoid of linguistic games and semantic analysis, do not toy with the rhetoric of pure literature, and reject any concept that cannot be presented in a stage performance. It is with the premise of reaffirming theatricality and the sense of theatre that I explore innovative possibilities for this ancient art.

My play creation has taken two directions. One of these deals with epic poems and myths from the beginning of cultural history and historical romances. Of the former there is *Wild Man* and *Of Mountains and Seas*, and of the latter there is *Hades* and *Snow in August*. The first two plays set out to create theatrical narratives on the formation of a

collective subconscious over a long period of human culture because the mythology and epic poems of the ancient Huaxia have been largely lost. This may be seen as forgetting the sheep when repairing the enclosure, but it at least provides an interesting Eastern comparison to the myths and epics of ancient Greece. The latter two plays provide explanations that transcend religion and ethics in Daoist and Buddhist historical romances without arbitrarily altering the original stories. Both sets of plays search for a new understanding that is based on a respect for cultural history. The theatre performance and theatre form accordingly propose a return to the omnipotent actor and omnipotent theatre.

The other direction of my play creation deals with contemporary issues, and the emphasis turns to people's inner minds. The stories and plots of traditional drama disappear, plots become optional, and it is the process of psychological activities that is presented. So the personality of the character is replaced with the changing of pronouns because people's responses in specific situations are the most important. Thus, invisible psychological experiences—state of mind, emotions, and thought—are transformed into visible stage images, so that the activities of the consciousness are presented as theatre revealing the predicament and anxiety created by modern humanity's existential condition.

For theatre to have resounding performances yet fail to leave behind a play is very much to be regretted. In this sense, theatre must have plays and not be satisfied with simply staging performances. Theatre needs playwrights because not all theatre is popular entertainment. If the playwright is not content only with pleasing the audience and has something to tell, then the theatre is the ideal platform.

From the theatre of ancient Greece to modern theatre, outstanding playwrights have struck deep chords in the complexities of human nature and the many dilemmas of human existence, and as thinkers of their times, they have used theatre to voice thoughts that could not be openly expressed. In fact, they have all been thinkers of their times.

However, compared with their philosopher contemporaries, playwrights may be said to possess an additional dimension of artifice, or one might say they have the advantage of being able to cast aside political and ethical taboos by speaking through their characters on their understanding of society, the times, and life. The political authority, morality, and fashion of those times and places may have long vanished, yet in a different time and place the vitality of their plays remains undiminished, and the plays can be endlessly repeated on stage. Moreover, entrusted to the images of the characters, the thinking in the plays remains vivid and cannot be matched by religious preaching or direct propaganda. Whereas for later generations the writings of philosophers have significance only as intellectual history, these works of drama continue to move different generations of audiences.

Indeed, playwrights and plays that can withstand the test of time are like needles in the ocean, but those works that can be salvaged are gold. I believe this to be the quest of all playwrights committed to the creation of serious theatre, although not all of them will necessarily achieve this goal. Nevertheless, what harm is there in striving, and even if a work is not transmitted to later generations, at least it will win the pleasure of being spoken on the stage in front of people, and it will be much more interesting than speeches at political gatherings.

1 October 2007

Paris

Note. This essay is the third in a series of videotaped lectures presented at National Taiwan University.

CHAPTER 4

THE AESTHETICS OF THE ARTIST

The aesthetics of the artist that I talk about is comparable to the aesthetics of the philosopher. Aesthetics has always been the concern of the philosopher, and since ancient Greek times it has been an integral component of philosophy. From Plato and Aristotle down to Kant and Hegel, aesthetics had dignity and status as an indispensable and important branch of philosophy. The first stage of aesthetics was metaphysical speculation that probed the innate character of beauty—that is, discussed the notion of beauty. From the European Renaissance to German classical aesthetics was the second stage of aesthetics, during which the perception and evaluation of beauty were discussed and which could be referred to as the stage of cognitive theory in aesthetics. However, around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a change occurred in aesthetics owing to a change in philosophy, central to which was the key figure Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein changed the metaphysics and cognitive theories of philosophy into semantic analysis, and by using linguistic concepts and logic for philosophical analysis, he eliminated the traditional questions of philosophy and replaced philosophy with linguistics. Aesthetics was not exempt, and aesthetic questions, too, were transformed into linguistic questions.

From the twentieth century on there were philosophers who began to propose the termination of aesthetics, the deconstruction of aesthetics, and even antiaesthetics, but the methods they applied were logical deduction and linguistic analysis, so aesthetic issues and methods remained in the domain of philosophy. Artists seldom came forward to discuss solely aesthetic issues. If artists talked about their work, they would mostly talk about artistic ideas and creative methods but would not talk about aesthetics from a philosophical perspective. So aesthetics was left in the domain of the philosopher, and artists did not come forward to question this situation.

This aesthetics of the philosopher would best be thought of as annotations to aesthetics. Whether it was the speculation of metaphysics or the logical analysis of semantics, all research on aesthetics ranging from issues to definitions was constructed on categories, concepts, and grammatical notions that turned beauty and art into discourse and theories that had nothing to do with artistic creation.

The aesthetics of the artist that concerns me is the aesthetics of creation, and its perspective is totally different from that of the philosopher. I proposed this type of aesthetics, which is different from the philosopher's, in my work *Another Kind of Aesthetics*. This aesthetics is established on creative experience and not speculation, is narrated and not deduced, is nonhistorical and of this instant, is of the individual and nonmetaphysical, is not satisfied with theoretical constructs, and—driven solely by the search for artistic creation—aims at activating direct perceptions that lead into artistic creation.

There are two categories of writings that discuss art. One category is that of writers or artists expressing their thoughts on the act of creation. Tolstoy's book *What is Art?* is such an example, and it discusses ideas on art or, one could say, the conception of art, although Tolstoy himself did not label it aesthetics. The other category—for example, da Vinci's *Notebooks*—discusses the creation and techniques of painting and can be thought of as art-creation methodology. Another such book is

Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane*, which discusses theories of abstract painting and of course can be regarded as an artist's work on aesthetics. There are other examples. Eisenstein's discussion of cinematic montage—his theory of editing cinematic frames—was a creative method that transformed cinematic technique into an art genre, and Brecht's *Theatre Gadgets* expounds both his art theory and methodology. Writings such as these explore the aesthetics of the artist.

The artist's aesthetics differs from the philosopher's in that it directly activates artistic creation and investigates how to induce the birth of beauty, whereas the philosopher's aesthetics explains completed artworks—that is, it annotates actualised beauty. The philosopher does not investigate how beauty is produced but merely defines beauty or, one could say, looks for standards to assess and establish criteria for beauty. In contrast, the artist's aesthetics moves in a completely different direction and investigates how beauty arises, the conditions under which it arises, and furthermore how to capture and actualise beauty in artistic creation. Thus, there is a vast difference between the creative aesthetics of the artist and the explanatory aesthetics of the philosopher.

The aesthetics of the artist differs from the aesthetics of the traditional philosopher also in that it cannot be deduced by philosophical methods. Through metaphysical speculation and logic and relying on reasoning and concepts, the philosopher defines, names, judges, and explains beauty and art and in so doing achieves intellectual gratification, and indeed attains a certain understanding of aesthetics and art. All this is very interesting, but this theorising is quite remote from artistic creation. Moreover, as explanations progress it becomes even harder to capture beauty, and instead beauty escapes between the words of the explanation.

Philosophy investigates abstract beauty, whereas beauty for the artist is always concrete and must be verified in a work. There are infinite variations of beauty in art, so definitions of abstract beauty are of no use to the artist, and to use philosophical methodology to probe beauty can

result only in an explanation; it cannot induce beauty or guide artistic creation. The aesthetics of the artist works in the opposite direction to activate the birth of beauty: it investigates what conditions produce beauty or what new possibilities exist to stimulate fresh artistic experiences, so that when these are introduced into suitable forms, new directions in artistic creation will open up. This sort of aesthetics is not the same as contemporary reception aesthetics, which is still the aesthetics of the philosopher. Reception aesthetics investigates how the viewer or reader shares the artist's aesthetic experience after beauty has been actualised in a work, then sets out to explain the artwork by resorting to a great deal of theory.

However, theory is not enough for creative aesthetics, and there must be a return to the practice of artistic creation to evoke authentic aesthetic feelings: what is emphasised is the birth of sensuousness. An artwork, whether visual or audio, must be sensuous: music and painting are both sensuous. An abstract sound or abstract image does not exist; nor is there abstract beauty. Even in the case of abstract painting, there is still an image; it at least must have form, and form is concrete.

Pure abstract form is a concept, and concepts are useless to the artist, but underlying this concept there are countless different forms. Even when an art image is abstracted to a form, the abstraction is still concrete. Abstract painting may be considered comparable to the images of figurative art because the most simple form in an abstract painting—for example, a circle—still has definite space, colour, brushstrokes, and material textures, all of which are sensuous and can arouse specific feelings. In contrast, pure form can only be geometrical concepts, like words in language.

The artist who is not content with the explanation and discussion of concepts must return to perceptions, return to human feelings. Direct perception and the subconscious are similarly important in art creation, and in this the so-called phenomenal and metaphysical of philosophy are of equal status, as are thought and perception that too are not differenti-

ated by the one being superior to the other. Yet in philosophy perception is ranked lower than thought, at a level preceding thought, and there is a cause-and-effect sequence. Cause and effect and logic are essential for philosophical reflection, but for artistic images they are meaningless because in the process of creation the artist evokes feelings that are of this instant. Can this art image engage someone in dialogue? Can it move one? Does it provoke in one pleasure or disgust or aesthetic judgments? All this occurs at this instant.

In art creation the psychological activities and psychological mechanisms of perception and emotion are not of the levels understood and analysed by the philosopher or the psychologist. The philosopher and the psychologist investigate biological and psychological mechanisms, including the instinctual responses of organisms, but such basic psychological activities are remote from the complexities of art creation.

The artist's aesthetics that concerns me springs from sensuousness and perceptions, from the emotions, and even from the subconscious: it springs from these psychological activities to capture the birth of beauty. Beauty cannot be separated from the person of the perceiving subject, and aesthetic feelings and emotions likewise come from this person. Whether objective beauty exists is merely a philosophical question that has no meaning for artistic creation.

The aesthetics of the artist does not need to discuss metaphysical beauty. What is important is to investigate the conditions that produce beauty, and it is the subjective experience of the artist that predetermines the perception of beauty. And the perception of beauty differs from emotion because it entails an aesthetic judgment. Emotions are spontaneous, whereas aesthetic perception simultaneously has the capacity for movement and to a large extent is determined by the viewer's attitude, and what is pleasing is not necessarily beauty. Beauty must be endowed a specific form by the viewer before it can be realised, and the creation of the artist is the transposing of aesthetic experience into a specific art form.

1. BEAUTY CANNOT BE DEFINED

In their definitions of beauty philosophers have presented various ideas along with their justifications, but these are at best a family of theories that are never quite right. In any case, these metaphysical speculations are meaningless for the artist. Beauty is not dogma, and when abstract thinking is introduced, beauty absconds. As creators of beauty, artists must first evoke aesthetic perceptions and then actualise the development of beauty in their works.

Defining beauty is unnecessary and, furthermore, impossible: at best it can be described, but never adequately. This is because beauty has countless forms that are forever in a state of flux and continual change. Existing patterns of beauty are of little interest to the creator of beauty and can only be a reference, a link in the reference series of humankind's cultural legacy. Successive generations of artists will continue to discover and broaden the knowledge of beauty, and it is inconceivable that the framework of existing ossified definitions will restrain them.

Beauty is infinitely charged with vitality, and manifested in this instant it is inseparable from the perceiving subject. It is only when the perceiving subject is present that there can be aesthetics. Aesthetic activity is a matter of this instant, and beauty is always directly perceived, alive. Only abstract concepts are confined to frameworks.

Yet beauty can be captured and replicated. Aesthetic perception is ephemeral, and the artist must engage in artistic creation to actualise beauty in a work. For the artist beauty is not a concept but a live bird that must be captured and placed into a form; otherwise, it will fly away and the work will not be successful.

The ephemeral and ever-changing beauty of this instant can be replicated and recreated. The beauty framed within a work can reappear. Beauty can be replicated. A replica conveys the beauty of the original, and even if it cannot equal the original work, the beauty is present and

can be captured. Under the influence of a work, other works can be produced, so beauty can be perpetuated, and predecessors' perceptions of beauty can be perpetuated in the creations of later generations of artists. Beauty can thus constitute a cultural legacy that can be preserved and perpetuated in later generations. Whereas aesthetics derives from the subjective experience of the artist and is produced here and now, through the artwork it can be transmitted to later generations, and it therefore transcends time.

2. THE PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY COMES FROM THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The perception of beauty comes from the individual's subjective experience, and the artwork to a certain extent of course can be treated as object. During the process of appreciation, the interaction between the appreciating subject and the object, the work, will produce new interpretations. However, the first birth of beauty takes place when the individual aesthetic experience of the artist is infused into a work, and only then does the work become the object. The individual-based nature of aesthetics decrees that the perception of beauty will always embody human feeling and human nature.

Unless intellectually disabled, people who have received a certain amount of cultural education will have the capacity to perceive beauty. This is the accumulated result of human civilisation over a very long time, and animals do not possess this capacity, which is a natural endowment unique to humankind. Beauty is an individual's subjective experience, but it can be communicated; at times there may be obstacles, but communication is possible. The possibility of communication demonstrates that although beauty is a subjective experience, it is not arbitrary and it has an independent reality. This reality is verified by the aesthetic experience of others, and it is this that allows beauty to be transmitted.

Leaving aside the subject who is engaged in the appreciation of beauty in order to discuss the objective nature of beauty is of no interest to the artist. And whether objective beauty exists in the natural world and discussions on the innate nature of beauty likewise are of no interest to the artist. Even the appreciation of nature is determined by the perceptions of the person appreciating it, and the natural world itself has no meaning divorced from the appreciating subject, just as the objective world essentially has no meaning, and any meaning it does have is derived from human cognition.

It is the same with the appreciation of beauty. Even when painting from life and confronting the same natural scenery or still object, different painters will see it differently and, using different painting methods, will obtain different views and forms; there will also be significant differences in the treatment of colour and light and even greater differences in artistic expression.

What is significant for the artist is his individual aesthetic experience and how he can transpose this experience into a unique artistic expression, and this impinges upon his creative methods and techniques. However, the communication of the aesthetic experience does not require words, and the artist does not need to concern himself with this. To explain and comment on a work of art is not the work of the artist and can be avoided.

3. APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY IS NONUTILITARIAN

The aesthetic here and now is nonutilitarian, and aesthetic evaluation follows later. The perception of beauty and aesthetic evaluation are related but are two separate things. The perception of beauty is born here and now: it is dynamic, directly perceived, passionate, and transcends morality or utility. Aesthetic evaluation comes from predetermined standards that are linked to religion, ethics, customs, and even politics. In recent times ideology has been introduced into it: Hegelian aesthetics

established a precedent, and then Marxism linked aesthetic judgment to ideology as a universal principle. Politics thereafter was introduced into art creation, and political discourse permeated everything: such was the unique situation of the twentieth century.

Prior to that Western art was profoundly influenced by religion, and human beings wore halos in art. However, after the Renaissance people gradually got rid of their halos, and secular art replaced religious art. In the East religious and secular art occurred simultaneously, although China's ethical teachings exerted some influence on art. However, unprecedented in human cultural history was the bizarre situation of the twentieth century when, shackled to politics and ideology, art became a tool of political propaganda and ideology, and aesthetic evaluation was replaced by ideology.

The appreciation of beauty basically stems from the individual perceptions of the subject who is appreciating beauty and is closely linked to the person's emotions, personality and interests, and the subject's aesthetic evaluations generally transcend practical utility. However, the values established by certain publicly endorsed tastes at specific times are able to influence the individual's aesthetic evaluations. Artists live in their times and will also be influenced by the popular values of their times, so to transcend publicly endorsed tastes and fashions is not easy. However, artists who have their own unique creations must transcend such publicly endorsed and popular aesthetic evaluations to discover fresh beauty with unique and penetrating eyes. And they must also find the right art form to transform their aesthetic experiences into visible art images.

This power of discernment and creative talent derives from the artist's notion of art and methods of creation, and these cannot be provided by the aesthetics of the philosopher; they can emerge only from the artist's own unique understanding as an individual.

Likewise, as to whether the artist's creations will be able to transcend practical utility is also decided by the individual artist. Even when fashion envelops the market and politics engulfs the land, the artists who remain unmoved and persevere will turn out to be the ones to create new aesthetic values and the ones written into the history of art.

4. ART AND INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY ARE UNRELATED

There is no need to evaluate art with instrumental rationality. Science came about because of rationality, and thinking that is based on logic and the law of causality is indispensable to instrumental rationality. Innovation and replacement in science and technology continue; knowledge keeps expanding by the day, and capacity growth keeps escalating, but there is not a definite connection between the developmental laws of science and technology and the history of art.

Rationalist paintings were influenced by instrumental rationality. In figurative painting there was perspective methodology, and in abstract painting there was geometrical abstraction, and even common scientific knowledge and simplified technical products were introduced into art creation and have transformed art into games and toys. Sometimes industrial design is brought into art, as an even more postmodern fashion. But the artist is not obliged to accept such influences; moreover, art innovation and creation generally are not helped by instrumental rationality and do not rely on industrial art and technology simply because art creation is not the same as the manufacture and production of industrial art.

Using the evolutionary theory of scientism and the natural sciences as the standard for aesthetic evaluation may be considered an epoch-marking feature of the twentieth century, but I shall not go into whether it was a malaise of the times. Art in fact transcends judgments, such as whether or not it is progressive. It is an irrefutable fact that science and technology progress with the passage of time, and in every gener-

ation there is innovation and no regression, and stagnation results in elimination. In the twentieth century the rapid progress of science and technology further accelerated, yet art did not evolve because of this accelerated development. Looking back on the history of art during the past century, it seems that the exact opposite occurred. Art has been expressed as continual simplification, conceptualisation, mechanisation, and commercialisation, and it is hard to say how much more progressive twentieth-century art is compared with that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or even that of the Renaissance—not to go into whether it has mutated or degenerated. The laws of development for science and technology do not work in the domain of art creation.

It seems impossible to know where laws of change in art are to be found. The history of art creation during the past century at least shows that the theory of evolution cannot explain the laws for change in art. And if art creation is guided by instrumental rationality, human content will be removed from art. The patterns of art production that came into the art world with the flood of scientism have made art creation less and less interesting. The artist must exit the modern superstition of scientism in order to regain creative vitality.

5. DISCARD HISTORICISM

For the artist to preserve creativity in art, it is essential that both historicism and historical determinism be discarded. Historicism places art and artists within the confines of the times. So-called tides of the times have become irresistible laws, and the artist's creative individuality is sidelined. Historically determined laws, in fact, are merely laws determined by some sort of ideology, yet they have been treated as the dictates of the times. Modernity is precisely this sort of inviolable standard, and to be otherwise is to be judged backward or old-fashioned. The negation from the social criticism of the beginning of the past century and the overturning of art itself in the 1960s and 1970s went further,

to overthrow for the sake of overthrowing, so that only what was new was good. By the end of the twentieth century, art had vanished and had turned into putting on a show, furniture design, and fashion posters, and the endless defining of art concepts had turned into sayings that were even made into merchandise displays. And it is precisely this sort of historicism that has been used to write chronicles of art.

If painters want to devote themselves to visual-art creation, they must discard this view of art history and totally ignore such chronicles. When modernity has transformed into ossified historicist principles and is dogma, then the artist must unhesitatingly discard it.

Art creation always occurs here and now, and—vibrant and effervescent—the creative experience transcends all else and has no preexisting principles. If while creating artists think about how they will be evaluated after death, it is unlikely that they will be able to throw themselves completely into a work. Artistic creation and historical time are unrelated, and this kind of historicist writing is transformed by the creations of the artist.

Artists infusing their aesthetic experience into a work are in a state of high excitement; they are ecstatic, and have total disregard for historical correctness. At such times fresh perceptions emerge, then unexpected discoveries and surprises, and as soon as the right form is found for actualising these in a work, that work will transcend time.

When people are moved by an artwork, it also occurs here and now. Whether it is an ancient Greek work from three thousand years ago or one by a contemporary unidentified artist, there is a direct communication between the art images in the work and the viewer, and commentaries and explanations can either be present or not. The attraction of the art image will transcend words, evoke direct perceptions in the viewer, and cast aside concepts and ideology.

If the art of a truly talented artist is infused into an artwork, that artwork that is the carrier will transcend time. Artists have no need to

concern themselves at all with history because history is merely a kind of writing that will be written differently in different historical times and according to different conceptions of history. If artists discard the heavy burden of historicism, they will be totally at ease as they throw themselves into their creation here and now.

6. TO OVERTHROW AND TO CREATE

To overthrow and to create are two separate things. The view that to overthrow is art creation is linked to political revolution. Cultural revolution is subservient to politics and overthrowing predecessors, severing ties with cultural inheritance; art starting from zero or producing zero art is of course very revolutionary. The art revolutions of the twentieth century were deeply influenced by Marxism, and its reverberations continue today in the present century. Political strategies to provoke and overthrow were turned into art-creation methods, and this sort of behaviour has been used to replace art creation. Through the introduction of politics into art, art activities have been turned into footnotes for political activities.

To categorise art as either revolutionary or antirevolutionary is an ideological issue and is not stipulated by art or aesthetics. In times that face the end of art, when anything can count as art and art has turned into nomenclature, what can the artist do? Does returning to form necessarily signify conservatism or the replication of one's predecessors? Has everything to be accomplished in the realm of visual art already been accomplished? Is there still a *raison d'être* for visual art? If artists do not follow the fashions of the times yet remain committed to painting, will they be able to create anything?

7. FAREWELL TO ART REVOLUTION

Bid farewell to art revolution, and look to the future. That there is no utopia is not at all a bad thing. Revolutionary utopias both in Europe and Asia are bankrupt, although there is no shortage of people calling for the reconstruction of utopias. The art revolution has not ended art, and to repeat the overturning of art today fails to draw a response in society and cannot even inspire discussion in small circles of artists. What the solitary artist faces is being manipulated by the globalisation of the art market. The situation for the artist today has not evolved much since the times of van Gogh.

Beckett once made the penetrating comment that humankind was a well with two buckets, one going down to be filled and the other coming up to be emptied, and that this was probably the fate of humanity. Rationality does not exist in the world; it is merely a way of explaining the world, of trying to use a ruler to gauge a world that is impossible to gauge. Absurdity is at odds with rationality and does not derive from philosophical reflection, yet it is the true state of human existence.

Artists must return to their own art creation, return to form creation, return to images. The so-called crisis in contemporary art is an ideologically created anxiety. If artists can make a clear assessment of society and themselves, they will be able to continue painting. Art inherently transcends concepts and ideology and has its own sovereign domain, that of images. Return to form creation, and continue to paint. The domain of art must do away with empty talk.

Since the twentieth century there has been too much talk about what is traditional or innovative and also about what is Eastern or Western, what constitutes national culture or universal values: all of which are debates about concepts. Furthermore, there is the matter of so-called identity, but what does this identity refer to—nationality or nation, racial type or territory? Political authorities need this sort of identification to herd

artists into political camps, so that they can directly or indirectly be made to work for politics.

Artists are independent in the world, and it is their individual perceptions that are valuable. To be able to find a particular artistic expression is of vital importance to the artist, but this can only be actualised in works, and no theory can help.

8. ART IMAGES ARE INDEPENDENT OF LANGUAGE

Art images are independent of language because images transcend concepts and concepts are always an abstraction, and also because words are the basis of language, and words are inherently abstract concepts. If the designated object is square or round, that square or round quality must be actualised by the artist's brush in a concrete picture. The materials and colours in a painting will unite with what the individual artists have in mind, what interests them, and their individual techniques, so that the object will be painted differently by different artists.

An art image, even the most simple of forms, is greater than language. And art depends on form creation and cannot be divorced from form. Form is the language of art, and art images are constructed on the basis of form. Images can be independent and autonomous.

Of course, painting can be influenced by literature, and literary elements can be introduced into painting. A poetic sense and even literary themes can be fused into visual art. But art and literature are not interchangeable, and the artist must find the visual-art language that will infuse literature into visual images.

Art that is transformed into literary commentary is not a superior order of painting. When concepts and language are brought into art—use of form creation for pictorial explanation of ideas or use of written words on a painting—it is the start of a descent into the lair of conceptual art. The end point of conceptual art is replacing images with language,

and the result is the disappearance of art. Ready-made objects are exhibited to pontificate on philosophy, but of course this can only amount to rough and shallow concepts that are like simple intellectual games. And the artist who flippantly seeks to replace philosophy by posing as a philosopher in this way is patently foolish.

9. THE MEANING OF FORM HAS LIMITATIONS

Abstraction in art is feasible, but only to a point. Abstraction in art cannot be taken to the point where it is a linguistic concept, but it can be taken to the point where it remains form, and form is the minimum requirement for visual art. Divorced from form, visual art no longer exists.

The birth of abstract art in the twentieth century was a big turning point in art history. As art continued to gravitate towards pure form, image was progressively eliminated, and form came to gain independent and autonomous meaning. From painting to sculpture, formalism established a new modern art language that replaced image in art. However, visual art's most basic requirement is form, and crossing that boundary could only degenerate to a redefinition of art.

Form constitutes the most basic language in visual art, and there can be endless variations, with a wide range of possibilities offered by configuring, structuring, and even deconstructing. But at the same time it should be recognised that meaning in form is ultimately limited, and minimalist art was a remedy for formalism. After the emergence of abstract art, simple and minimalist visual-art methods again constructed rudimentary images. However, minimalism was still imprisoned in concepts, still a kind of formalism, and restricted the development of visual art.

10. RETURN TO IMAGES AND ESTABLISH ONE'S OWN METHODS

In the domain of art creation, laws that cannot be transgressed do not exist, and the absence of law is the ultimate law that has from ancient times been the unchanging truth for the artist. Artists must travel along their own paths, and even if there are rules they are those established by the individual artists themselves.

If artists want to obtain the greatest creative freedom, they must discard all old regulations and concepts. It is best to be without any isms, to be free of the restraints of ideology, not to be manipulated by fashions of the time, and to be faithful to one's own aesthetic experiences.

Artists, like everyone else, live with constraints in a social environment, and human relationships and society constrain the freedom of the individual. But artists can win enough freedom in the domain of individual art creations, provided that they have the courage and conviction to discard the constraints of political and ethical dogma, custom, and fashion. Ultimately, the freedom to create in art is decided by the individual artist.

Disputes about isms and methods are the business of the art critic, and it is the worst thing for artists to enter into a dispute to argue their case. To begin with, it will destroy their creativity, and it is a trap. If artists fall into it and throw their own art into the dispute, it will be an utter disaster for their work as creators. For artists to win creative freedom it is best that they not become involved in such disputes but instead stand aside and simply follow their own road, leaving it to the media to make comments and to the art market to cause a commotion.

Like anyone else, the artist can also have various psychological problems, and if modern humanity's so-called self is not properly understood the result is total chaos; it is hell. While artists are learning about the world they are at the same time trying to learn about themselves. So it must be with clarity of consciousness that they manage their own creations. By calmly observing the universe and looking within to

inspect the self, artists obtain distinct visual images and see with clarity what they want to express.

11. BETWEEN FIGURATIVE AND ABSTRACT

The simple categories of figurative and abstract derive from concepts, not from visual experience. In visual perception there are factors—such as shape and colour, the amount of light, and the textures of materials, as well as space and degree of transparency, and in addition direction and dynamics—that all act to construct a boundless wealth of visual images. Moreover, looked at in different ways and from different angles, in part or as a whole, the picture is quite different. And when visual perception focuses on a particular small part, the boundary between the figurative and abstract vanishes.

By not starting with concepts and instead relying on visual experience, one will find that observation is a process. The focus in visual perception can be conscious or unconscious, but it constantly shifts, and the distance keeps changing. To use this sort of knowledge in reacquainting oneself with painting, one will discover that the strategies for painting are far from exhausted and that there are still works to be painted in the art genre of painting.

If it is said that the emergence of abstract art mainly resorted to form, that it was a move to geometric form creation, as for example in the three-dimensionality of Cézanne and Picasso, then the abstract lyricism and abstract expressionism of the later period were a move to the outpouring of feelings. However, the main direction in contemporary figurative art is photographic realism that strives for intricate detail: it is objective and eliminates any projection of the emotions. Figurative and abstract, both notionally and in art practice, are clearly demarcated and diametrically opposed. Because this demarcation derives from formalist concepts, it does not correspond with visual experiences and overlooks

the vast realm between the figurative and the abstract, a realm that may or may not be virgin land but that still awaits development.

12. VISUAL IMAGES OF THE INNER MIND

Observation is not simply absorbing pictures of the objective world but is simultaneously an interaction with psychological activities. The act of choosing a view and concentrating on it—that is, focusing on the picture obtained—involves the viewer's interests and aesthetics, and this visual image is a duplicate of the subjective experience. Impressions are not the same as pictures obtained by direct visual perception because they have passed through a subjective filtering lens. The colours in impressionist paintings are brighter than those in natural sunlight because these in fact are interior visual images and not imitations of nature. However, the late symbolists increasingly emphasised colour, and coming to the fauvist Matisse, strong colour contrasts became the main language of painting.

Interior images, like impressions, depend on form, but the latter comes from observation of the external world whereas the former is the result of looking inwards. The inner mind's subtle and ephemeral scenes, which occupy unreal space, are hard to capture, and verging on black or white, the faint colours are elusive. Further, the images are in constant flux and can transform in an instant just as with dream. Surrealist painting deals with the nonrational of dream and hallucination by employing traditional painting language, so the perspectives of distance, the composition of space, the source of light and shadows are all fixed and unchanging. The result is simply the recreation of dream. Is it possible to find a visual-art language to depict with greater precision these scenes of the inner mind?

The ambiguity between the figurative and the abstract conceals a hidden door that once opened takes one to unfathomable depths inside.

13. SUGGESTION AND INNUENDO

Suggestion and innuendo are keys that will open this door. The two main traditional methods in visual art are replication and expression. The former imitates forms, light, colours, and spatial relationships from nature, and the painting language does not allow deviation from this type of replication, even in the depiction of religious subjects. Expression, in contrast, involves subjective experience and the articulation and release of feelings. China's expressive ink painting stresses the appeal of brushstrokes and negates form, and it may be regarded as expressionist painting in the Eastern tradition, whereas German expressionism and later abstract expressionism are manifestations of this method in modern and contemporary art. What has emerged in modern and contemporary art from Duchamp's exhibition of ready-made objects to postmodernist installations and conceptual art, of course, can also be considered a creative method. Then there is collage, the reassembling of existing images to produce new meaning, but because it does not offer a new visual-art language it is a technique rather than a creative method. However, suggestion can be a creative method if it is used between the figurative and the abstract to open up a new realm of form creation.

This sort of thinking first came from the nineteenth-century English painter Turner. His scenes in the mist can be seen as impressions, yet they verge on the abstract: outlines almost vanish, colours are blurred, and there is a sense of transience. The pictures are created from dots, and nothing is painted. Art historians generally treat Turner as a pioneer of impressionist painting and have failed to recognise that the ambiguity and transience in his work lies between figurative and abstract art.

The proposal that suggestion is a special creative method directed at the area between the figurative and the abstract provides dream and psychological images with a more appropriate visual-art language. The associations elicited by ambiguity in visual images closely approximate images of the inner mind: space and depth are inconstant, the source of light is indeterminate, and images are intermingled with feelings. Projec-

tions of the inner mind are more subjective than replications imitating nature and enable the artist to create another nature, one of the feelings and the spirit, and to convert those perceptions into a visible painting.

Innuendo is subtler than suggestion and can more effectively activate the imagination, whether from the artist's perspective or, when the work is completed, from the viewer's perspective. This is because there is space for conjecture and fantasy. This method does not have the randomness and emotional outpouring of abstract expression, and it is inevitably based on images. Yet these images are not those of expressive Chinese ink painting because the appeal of the brushstrokes is not enough to satisfy, and attention is given to form. However, this sort of form creation is subtler and produces pictures without precise details; there can be vague resemblances or blurry shadows. It is hard to take it all in at once, yet it provokes realisations at a deep level and induces reflection, and it is precisely this aesthetic state that is sought in this kind of painting.

14. INTUITION AND STATE OF MIND

Visual art relies on visual images and transcends language, and if thoughts are provoked they are thoughts in the form of images. These thoughts of course can be converted into language and articulated, but because they are primarily a state of mind—moreover, a state of mind that defies naming—it is only with difficulty that these thoughts can be converted into language even to provide some sort of rough explanation. The artist achieves this state of mind through images, and it is also through images that the viewer evokes similar perceptions. This communication does not require linguistic mediation, and appropriate linguistic articulation is often problematical. It is said that some things can only be intuited and not conveyed in language, and this applies to the communication of visual experiences. This communication is not only divorced from language but also divorced from any sign system, including that of form.

State of mind is a special aesthetic experience that derives from a heightened awareness in the artist that both casts aside concepts and transcends the self to observe with a pair of intelligent eyes. This also comes from looking inwards or, one might say, using the heart to look, and the surreal picture obtained can be lonely, awe-inspiring, pure, and remote, or startling.

15. HAVING LIMITATIONS AND NOT HAVING LIMITATIONS

Every art genre has a limitation, and this is a condition for the existence of this genre of art. Literature cannot be divorced from language, fiction cannot be divorced from narrative, and drama cannot be divorced from performance. Painting cannot be divorced from the two-dimensional flat surface that is the creative space. The artist must acknowledge this limitation and within this limitation search for freedom of artistic expression. But freedom is not the goal. Artists fight for freedom in order to realise their dreams in creation; artists must have such dreams—otherwise they can only be artisans.

The lifelong quest of artists is to find a workable art method to realise the art that is in their heart. Whether artists find their own creative method is the key to their achievements in art, and the methods of predecessors and of others can serve only as some form of guide or a reference. To seek possibilities for limitless artistic perspectives and methods within the limited conditions for this genre of art is precisely the work of the artist. The reason artists also reflect on aesthetics and establish their own view and methodology of art is so that they can feed this back into their art practice.

In the nineteenth century, Hegel's philosophy and aesthetics predicted the end of history and art, and the art revolutionaries of the twentieth century repeatedly announced the end of painting, or antiart, or the coming of zero art—yet today so many artists continue to paint silently,

and humankind, with already at least 1,700 years of ancient paintings still has paintings to paint.

24 October 2007

Paris

CHAPTER 5

ANOTHER KIND OF AESTHETICS

This is not an art manifesto. To present a manifesto again today would be to uselessly advertise. You had simply written some notes in your spare time in between painting. It had not been your intention to publish them, and you prefer people to look at your paintings instead of using what you write to verify or explain them. Moreover, is it possible to verify art? Logic and dialectics, grandiose theories, and even ideologies are infinitely remote from art. The very language that is used to explain art has unreliable definitions for words and different interpretations for abstract concepts and lacks the clarity of a stroke or a dot made with a brush. It would be best for you to give up the difficult and thankless project of using language to explain art.

The sunlight on the Mediterranean coast is brilliant, and as the waves of the sea rise and fall beneath your window you can hear the surging of the tide. Your friends had invited you here to write in the tower of this restored fortress dating back to Roman times, so you must leave an essay for them in return.

It was from France that modern art emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. It was also there that Duchamp, who founded contempo-

rary art, first made his home at the beginning of the twentieth century. Also in France, at the end of another century, the debate on contemporary art sparked in 1992 by *l'Esprit* magazine continues even today. Large numbers of articles and books have resulted, and writers, art critics, art historians, philosophers, and the directors of modern art museums and international art exhibitions have all become embroiled in the debate, yet it is only the voices of those most directly concerned—the many artists who have been marginalised by contemporary art—that are not to be heard.

You are an outsider, an exile artist lucky enough to have been accepted by France, where you gained the right to speak freely and won creative freedom. However, you soon discovered that artists here are confronted with a different kind of pressure, one that both parties agree to, and there is no coercion. The artist can choose whether to accept it, so the question is what choice do you make?

You choose the greatest possible freedom under the conditions of society and the times, you choose the freedom not to be concerned with market trends, you choose the freedom not to follow fashionable art concepts, you choose the freedom to engage in the art you most want to, you choose the freedom to engage in what suits your individual artistic taste, so it is very likely you will be an artist who is wrong for the times, and in fact you are precisely such an artist, one who paints works that cannot be included in contemporary art yearbooks. Therefore, you must find yourself another kind of aesthetics to enable you to peacefully transcend the tides of the times.

THE END OF THE ART REVOLUTION

Artistic freedom is essentially not a goal but rather a cognitive need that comes from life. Aesthetic appreciation is also without goal, yet from it humankind perceives its own existence and obtains a certain gratification, and it is generally like this for both the creator and the viewer.

Aesthetic appreciation is not of the future but only of this instant; the future is a historicist need that has nothing to do with aesthetic appreciation.

Freedom in artistic creation likewise is without goal. By endlessly destroying the rules on form upon which artistic expression depends in order to redefine art, by ignoring aesthetics, by endlessly proclaiming the birth of new art, and by being deluded that in future they will be the first, a series of second and third first persons have sought to be God. There have been avant-gardes, endless avant-gardes, in this century—too many of them, and too many Nietzsche-styled artists who have endlessly produced artistically blind masses, so that this sort of art revolution has replaced aesthetic appreciation in art.

Freedom always has limitations, and freedom in art is also like this. Where is the ultimate boundary of art? This is more a question for philosophy than for art. Can the ultimate boundary of art be reached, and can it be crossed? Moreover, what in fact is art?

The reply of American avant-garde artist Joseph Kosuth was that future art would most likely turn into something like philosophy, and the conceptual art designer [Seth] Siegelauab organised an exhibition in 1969 in New York called *Zero Work, Zero Painter, Zero Sculpture*. The new tide of contemporary art moved from France to America, and the American contemporary art authority Harold Rosenberg went further than Duchamp by proclaiming that art today must be reflective philosophy and that artworks do not even need to be produced. Indeed, Duchamp's disciples have been much more radical than Duchamp himself.

Painting from the 1960s was swamped with higher and higher waves of conceptual art, and though many artists continued to paint, they were no longer able to gain the attention of the chroniclers; instead, art that is concepts and art's new concepts majestically dominate contemporary art.

In the 1970s and 1980s painting and sculpture were virtually purged from major international contemporary art exhibitions and replaced with a variety of new art, such as action art, conceptual art, land art, and installations. Postmodernism then, in turn, castigated modernism as the academy and the new avant-garde after the avant-garde again proclaimed the end of painting.

By using art for philosophical speculation artists do not necessarily become philosophers, but they can at least subvert art, and they have succeeded. But in order to subvert an adversary must be found, just as for revolution an enemy must be found, and for revolting against or subverting art, strategies for political struggle were brought into art. When artists entered the battle of views on art, the aesthetic evaluation of artworks was replaced by the endless proclaiming of new concepts, and this, too, was a strategy.

Warhol made an androgynous Mao Zedong on an uninteresting poster, but was his aim to subvert totalitarian politics or to subvert art? No one can say for sure, and this is the clever thing about the strategy. His disciples in China were quick to learn—after all, not a great deal of painting technique was needed—and immediately won over the China market and overseas markets, and they have been selling well for a time. But the subversion of this art often is not directed at society or politics and is different from that of these artists' politically oriented, modernist, avant-garde predecessors whom they oppose and regard as passé.

In totalitarian states the argument over art forms in like manner is driven by politics. Any art form that is not officially promoted can be regarded as politically subversive, and the original meaning of the term is not a part of postmodernist vocabulary. In totalitarian systems, formalism, whatever the form, is the political enemy of the authorities, and can lead to labour camps, imprisonment, or a firing squad. This was the case in the former Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Mao Zedong's China.

In Western societies the emergence of new art forms was to a certain extent provocative, but they were soon accepted by society, becoming fashionable and even features of historical periods. The subversion of art that occurred in Western societies—Dadaism, futurism, expressionism, and surrealism—was linked to a century of revolutions: communist, socialist, anarchist, and Trotskyist. Thus, to a certain extent there were political implications in the art revolutions in these contexts.

After the dismantling of the Berlin Wall the underlying ideological implications for the debate over art forms vanished, but the political implications of certain cultural strategies continued. To put it bluntly, the directions advocated by Western public organisations, such as modern art museums and international biennales of contemporary art, led to debates in the intellectual world that clarified the aesthetic implications of the debates on contemporary art.

When the social and political implications disappeared, it was realised that what had been subverted was art itself and that the artist, too, had been subverted. In the 1970s Beuys had proclaimed that everyone was an artist; godlike Nietzschean supermen artists, followed by Duchamp's ready-made objects and then Beuys's action art, terminated art and artists alike. The writing of this contemporary art history is virtually finished, recorded for posterity, but luckily this is only a particular kind of art history, or rather an intellectual history of art revolutions, because what remains is not artwork but only definitions of art.

In this era that had transformed revolution into a modern myth, revolution undoubtedly became the most powerful superstition. Successive revolutions were launched against art, but by the last couple of decades in the twentieth century, weekly magazines were becoming shorter and shorter, whereas the transfer of media information was becoming faster and faster, like the latest fashions. Every major contemporary art exhibition had to be different, had to have a new theme, and new people had to be found for it, so the lifespan of an artist became increasingly short,

and what remains would best be called catalogues or documentation of themed exhibitions rather than the works of artists.

Art chronicles have replaced art histories, and evolutionary theory and continuing revolution theory are used to present the characteristics of contemporary art, and in these chronicles value is premised on works' demonstrating that they are subversive. The artworks themselves are nothing to look at, can be done by anyone, and seem to be significant only because they have been displayed in museums of modern art in accordance with the rankings of the periodic histories and chronicles. This really must count as a phenomenon unique to twentieth-century art that amounts to the art history of revolution under a certain ideology, but this is not necessarily an art history of the twentieth century.

Art is bigger than concepts, and artworks are much richer than the art histories under an ideology; moreover, art histories can be written up in many ways. However, with reference to these revolutionary chronicles of art in which both art and artists have been subverted, art has become antiart or nonart because the boundaries of art have disappeared and anything can be regarded as art. So the artist's productions accord with various new definitions of art, whereas the individuality and individual style of the artist's creations vanish in this homogenous new world tide; the artist's handiwork is replaced by new techniques and new materials, and artworks are replaced by concepts and ready-made things.

The representation of social revolution in art starting from Delacroix does not have a long history and in fact is quite short when compared with art representing religious and ordinary life. Political tendencies and modernity appeared in art around the end of the nineteenth century: the former was manifested as value judgments on the social dimensions of art and the latter in a new perspective on aesthetics. The disintegration of the communist revolution destroyed the former, and the subverting of aesthetics in this very commercialised society rapidly mutated into fashionable consumerism, and the artist who sinks into this postmodernist consumerist mechanism thereupon turns to intellectual games.

The provocative and the subversive in so-called contemporary art that is neither directed at political authority nor really has anything to do with society, however, is strongly supported and encouraged through the art foundations of public cultural institutions, such as museums of modern art or international financial consortiums. Its popularisation and intellectualisation is endlessly renewed like merchandise in order to keep pace with the information of postmodernist consumerist society. The political, social, and aesthetic rebellion that was inherent in the attack and destruction of art traditions—perpetrated by modernism from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century—have now completely vanished in the wake of commercial globalisation.

But there was no criticism of this sort of contemporary art from political authorities or social pressure groups, and the masses were not concerned either because film stars and popular singers became the cultural icons of modern society. Intellectuals were the only ones to question this sort of contemporary art, moreover, mainly questioning its aesthetics and hence leading to debates in cultural policy. Indeed, this was a reaction to the intellectual crisis induced by the collapse of *fin de siècle* ideology. Confronted by the new twenty-first century, putting aside whether in fact it is new, one cannot help posing this question: Should present day art continue to follow this idea of art?

MODERNITY IS A CONTEMPORARY ILLNESS

It must be conceded that art driven by theories and concepts is a prominent feature of twentieth-century art activities. In the nineteenth century the concern was for artistic method, and before that it was handiwork. Endlessly changing notions of art for over a century dispensed with method and craftsmanship and at the same time purged the literary and the poetic and even eradicated the sense of painting. All that remained was a single aesthetic principle—that is, modernity—to act as the sole criterion for the appreciation of beauty. “New” became the primary

aesthetic criterion, and the principle that only what was new was good came to thread its way through modern and contemporary history.

Indeed, modernity activated many tides in modern art, and once the valve was opened a great force with social, political, and art implications was released. From the 1960s the social and political content gradually weakened, and art revolution had only art itself to subvert, so by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, also on the basis of modernity, so-called postmodern contemporary art had proceeded to declare war upon the modernism that in earlier times had declared war on society and politics.

Modernity's attacks on the social, political, and cultural traditions in modern art dissolved into techniques for promoting the idea that only the new is good in global, commercialised postmodern times, whereas avant-garde art became a global movement that worshipped fashions. The criticism of political authority and society present in early avant-garde art became neutral, vacuous, even games with linguistic signifiers, and what was signified was the disintegration of another principle—namely, so-called art autonomy.

If unique art strategies and artistic expression cannot be found for what is new, then *new* can only be an empty word. The contemporary new does not concern itself with art techniques and artistic expression. What is more, “new” is directed at art concepts, and art images and forms that are visually dependent are discarded; of course, this totally subverts art itself, and all that remain are the exhibition space and the exhibits that are often installations of utterly commonplace ready-made objects.

If artists suddenly set out to establish an unchanging principle, they will have contracted some illness, and this will jeopardise their creations. To sacrifice art for an aesthetic principle is probably as unfortunate as sacrificing one's life for an ideology. Modernity has become precisely such an ossified principle and has turned art into a game of concepts.

The difference between art and game is that the latter requires that a certain number of rules first be established, whereas in art it is impossible for rules first to be established. However, contemporary art first formulates the rules, and the artist plays the game according to these rules, but because of the limitations of these rules of the game, the various games are on the whole very similar.

What has come to be the contemporary art of an integrated world that has lost the artist's individuality is supported by the international networks of government art museums and the art foundations of big supranational financial conglomerates, and although the general public is not particularly interested in this global megapublic art, it is nonetheless the product of contemporary consumerist society. As globalisation of the commercial economy turned people into producers and consumers of merchandise, the integrated world of the art market totally consumed the unique individual creativity of artists.

The fashions promoted by merchandise-marketing strategies must be simple and clear, and instant recognition is a prerequisite. Contemporary art approximates advertisement and subsequently functions as advertisement. Warhol's poster series productions and pop art are both suitable annotations to contemporary art. This society in which merchandise is supreme also uses trademarks as standards for beauty in this period.

The new values validated by the negation of traditional values abolished the sense of the aesthetic, and lacking depth was pure form that relied on concepts, so very simple concepts had immediately to be demolished. Moreover, there had to be endless change, so beating others at being first and not repeating what was passé were essential. There was no time to wait for the artist to think about a work, no space or need for the artist to show creative individuality, and this fight to keep up with fashions quickly evaporated any sign of artistic individuality. The special skills used by the artist in the visual arts were nowhere as convenient as ready-made materials or objects or new industrial arts and technologies. Intellectual capacity replaced the natural talent of the artist, and the artist

was relegated to the position of producer of new but simple concepts of a certain age. There are vast numbers of people who can produce such works, and the international biennales and national museums of modern art send scouts to all parts of the world to select people to produce works according to their predetermined plans and titles. The title chosen is always determined by the director of a new art programme, and so there is wave after wave of new art.

The artist who fails to keep up with the newest wave is backward. And artists refusing to sacrifice their own creative individuality when confronting the hype of this globally integrated art market find it hard to know whether the world has become possessed or whether they themselves have become passé.

Contemporary art has retreated from the individual's appraisal of beauty and, moreover, has disengaged from people's daily lives. It has become a huge decoration for consumerist society and mainly relies on its being kept in modern art museums; it may be thought of as the sole museum culture of this age. If artists also rely on being kept in this sort of museum culture, they are destined to be unable to conceive works of enduring aesthetic interest.

The creative life of the artist becomes shorter and shorter, whereas fashions and changes in concepts become faster and faster, and the new lifespan of art goes by in a flash, not waiting for earlier generation artists to die of old age and be buried, and not even waiting for earlier generations' techniques to mature before replacing them. The periodic change in art was thirty years for the first generation of artists in the twentieth century, as in the case of fauvism, surrealism, and abstract art. Then the new waves after the 1950s, such as pop art and action art, lasted up to ten years. But after the 1970s often these would last only a few years. There was a flurry of surface and support art, land art, invisible art, and installations, and now there is boundary-crossing multimedia, but all that remains is records of the exhibits and a person's name at a certain number of exhibitions. It is no longer possible for artists to

be distinguished by their works, and individuality as an artist has been drowned by the rolling waves of the times. It had not occurred to those Nietzschean supermen artists that by abolishing the traditional value system they had in fact eliminated both the artist and art.

Historicism entered aesthetics, and for art criticism based on this notion of art, aesthetic judgments consisted of chronologies. The immediacy of aesthetic feeling was instantly obliterated, and beauty turned into chronological comparisons of knowledge and texts and the change in concepts, so that concepts of beauty were to be seen rather than beauty.

In this notion of art the word *beauty* was rendered obsolete and considered an interest of the rotten capitalist class or else an ignorant idea held by viewers who were waiting to be educated in new art concepts. What should be displayed in museums of modern art is rubbish, and in fact a large variety of rubbish is put on display, but beauty should be denied entry into a museum of modern art.

Is this an era of madness? An insane philosophy and an insane aesthetics can turn people mad, making the artist shun beauty as if it were some contagious disease, shun feelings and shun what is human and instead accept the material or the vacuous, which amounts to nothing and is nothing. In confronting a white wall with only a signature in the exhibition hall, if you cannot make sense of it and do not say that it is stupid, then you should wait for contemporary art to rid you of your ignorance.

The loss of beauty in contemporary art is also the loss of the human, for the relentless swelling of the material continues until it numbs everyone. That big shoe in Ionesco's play has grown so big that it will not fit into a single room and now fills the world's museums of contemporary art.

Giacometti and André Derain were the first to realise that the endless revolutions in art would lead to the end of art, and by extricating

themselves from the escalating waves of avant-garde movements, they were able to preserve the independence of their individual art. In addition, Balthus returned to classicism and like an old solid reef did not drown in the waves of the times, and Bacon's search for new possibilities and images in painting resulted in his leaving behind works that are worth looking at.

The dominant intellectual trends in art during the past one hundred years made sweeping away traditions the basis for innovation, but this is not a universal law that transcends all time. Art creation has no universal laws, and ultimate laws are impossible. If the cause-and-effect approach in art history overlooks the unique creativity of the artist, it will be a very uninteresting history. Furthermore, the artist's unique creativity is not necessarily premised on the negation of predecessors. The criticism of criticism is a demon circle for spooking oneself: if critics base their criticism on principles they themselves have established, then the criticism will continually fall under their own shadow, and it would be futile to think that there was any possibility of escape.

There are at least two ways in which the artist can make innovations. One involves conceptual changes to create forms with new meaning, whereas the other does not put forth new concepts but instead develops new expressions within existing forms. The latter type of innovation seeks to discover new possibilities for expression within the rules of existing forms and, within the old forms or at their extremities, opens up a new territory whose extremities are likewise inexhaustible. This is precisely why as long as the painter has been endowed with creative ability, the paintings to be painted in this ancient art can never all be painted.

The modernity that once provided artists with creative drive has already turned into empty principles. Being new for the sake of being new can no longer evoke creativity in the artist, and moreover, any traces of that lingering patricide complex have dissipated in the machinery of merchandise innovations.

THE SUPERMAN ARTIST IS DEAD

The superman proclaimed by Nietzsche left a profound imprint on twentieth-century art. Once the artist thinks of himself as a superman, he goes mad, and his bloated self becomes an unseeing and uncontrollable force, and this was probably how art revolutionaries came into being. However, the artist, every bit as fragile as ordinary people, is not up to shouldering the great mission of saving humankind: the artist cannot save the world.

The image of a totally egotistical superman created by Nietzsche was a false image as far as the fragile artist is concerned. Negating all traditional values likewise led to the negation of the self. Modern art revolution's historicism was linked to political and social revolution's materialist view of history, and behind this the godlike individual who had replaced God either had a mental breakdown and went mad or else moved towards Duchamp's irreverence of the world. If the first batch of Duchamp's ready-made objects in the early twentieth century can still be considered somehow to be mocking society, then Warhol's imitation posters in postmodern times can be considered the end point of endless revolutions in art.

A century has passed, and further repetition of this art historicism has failed to lead to Nietzsche's eternal return but instead has become a mockery of the godlike artist. In fact, it was a great mistake to see the final sounds of romanticism as foretelling the modern. If artists fail to recognise the individual's predicament in reality and remains intoxicated with tragic sentiments, their Nietzschean madness in the patent materialism of contemporary times will only appear affected, feigned, hypocritical, and totally lacking the authenticity of Kafka's perplexity and self-ridicule.

The artist does not save the world but merely perfects the self by realising perceptions, imagination, daydreams, narcissism, and masochism, unfulfilled lust, and anxieties in artistic creations. Art would best be

considered the mode of life rather than the religion of the artist, and it is only by not rashly seeking to become a religious leader but instead exerting the self to the fullest potential that an artist is more genuine.

It is without goal that the artist engages in creation, an act deriving from his need for expression as an individual. This virtually biological need becomes a powerful and sustained drive that sets aside all value systems yet does not overthrow them. At such a time art history and aesthetics lie beyond the field of the artist's vision, and even more so the ideologies of the times that from behind manipulate a certain aesthetics or history of art. At that time the artist very likely is mad, possessed by demons, so that the intellect and instincts become fused together. But once the work is completed and calmly scrutinised, it is normal and not at all surprising for the artist to be disappointed or satisfied, or beset by numerous doubts and lose confidence, or feel pleased, or not know what else could have been done and in fact ask what else could have been done.

If artists are aware that they are just as fragile as everyone else, they will lead a healthier life and not stray beyond art to take on invented roles they are incapable of shouldering, such as that of Creator, or this or that kind of revolutionary leader. As the creator of art, the artist's work is always the art being created at this instant, and there is no need to trample on the dead or overthrow predecessors, because art basically is not a battlefield for politics. However, the art history of the twentieth century has been written up like this, and artists should free themselves from the hands of the historian and return to the likeness of a human being and not God.

Anger can come from the poet. However, probably it cannot come from the artist. The vehemence of anger can be expressed in words, but it is form that concerns the artist, and anger can easily cause the artist to lose control of the hand. Picasso's *Guernica* is without doubt a masterpiece of this century amongst paintings with a political tendency, but its sadness at the destruction of beauty is as startling as the sculptures of ancient Greece. The artist's protest against violence is not tooth for tooth

or violence for violence. To dissolve anger into art requires expertise, and the artist must transcend emotional impulses while engrossed in the work. Art is not a tool of protest, and instead it would be more direct and more effective to march on the streets. Political need makes art a tool of propaganda, but the basic nature of art lies in the appreciation of beauty.

The artist is also not a spokesperson for the age. The political activist can take on this role, although in fact no one can speak for the age. At least it is not possible for you to speak for the age. You can at most say what you want to, without the times taking any notice of you.

The artist, too, should not play the role of the prophet because predictions could contain an unknown amount of lies. If artists can leave behind works they should have no regrets, yet as persons they are fragile and live only in this instant. If while creating the artist cannot achieve a certain degree of satisfaction and is afraid of not being able to continue, this is often a narcissistic false image for future creations. The artist in the end is a creator and does not merely provoke society; moreover, there are artists who do not provoke society, and whether one provokes society is not necessarily relevant to the aesthetic value of a work.

The artist is primarily a connoisseur of beauty, whose cognitive make-up cannot be separated from the activities of appreciating and creating beauty, thereby decreeing that the artist is at the same time a creator. The artist's criticism and challenge to society would best be thought of as an aesthetic judgment rather than as something arising from a cognitive state. If another value system replaces the individual's aesthetic judgment, be it a social, political, or ethical value judgment, then the individual as an artist will be dead.

As a creator, the artist will instinctively refuse to be dictated to by others, even if it is the collective will or generally recognised truths. Any coercion or restraint from authorities or from concepts will strangle creativity. Aesthetics for the artist is both philosophy of life and ethics.

The artist as creator must have an abundance of freedom irrespective of how much is provided by society. Being spiritually one's own God requires the establishment of the artist's own religion; otherwise, it will be hard to persevere in the work of art creation. However, unless mad and mentally deranged, the artist must at the same time understand that this does not bring special status and power: that freedom is limited to the artist's own art creations and can only be affirmed through those artworks. Society always restricts the freedom of the artist, so it is inevitable that the artist is always rebelling against something in society.

However, when the rebellion of the artist is co-opted into the actions of a collective that is controlled by certain authorities, there must be compromise and even decline into subservience if social recognition is sought. The rebellion of the artist can operate only when individuality and independence are maintained, and moreover, it must be linked with the artist's creations in order to be of any significance.

If creative individuality is lost while artists are rebelling against society, and if the aesthetic judgment of the artworks are replaced by provoking society, art will vanish and there will only be the clamouring and posturing of rebellion. A creator who becomes one who subverts and uses art to subvert society has never subverted society; instead, while subverting art the creator artist is annihilated.

During the past century God has died, but so too has the artist who placed himself in the role of the superman. The absolute will of the Creator has long since disintegrated in the social mechanism of global commercialisation, and the globally integrated institution of the modern art museum has also dissipated the narcissism of the artist's extreme individualism. The endless staging of new-wave international biennales of contemporary art has turned the artist into a practitioner of the newest concepts and topics in art, and individuality both in the person and the work of the artist has vanished, so that art materialises as a sort of adornment for this public space in consumerist society. In this goal-less marathon to keep up with fashions, artists do not know whether

they will be able to leave their names in the endless stream of new art chronologies, not to mention whether they will leave works worth looking at in future.

Artists who want to escape this incurable contemporary illness as well as to preserve their own artistic independence must return to the individual, return to perceptions, and return to aesthetic feelings that are purely of the individual. This may not be the only means of saving themselves, but they will at least be able to keep their footing. The challenge of the artist to society, finally, is as an individual. When the individual confronts the challenges of society, politics, authorities, trends, and ideology, even if the challenge is doomed to failure, it is an affirmation of the individual's own art, a self-affirming gesture.

THE AESTHETICS OF THE ARTIST

Whether in the East or the West you keep clear of revolutions, including art revolutions and revolutionary art.

If painting a moustache on Mona Lisa's face is not a childish prank, it is to an extent a form of violence. Aesthetic violence is still violence, even if da Vinci's attraction is not at all diminished by people's behaviour in later times.

Art essentially is not a battlefield, but during this century the waves of endless revolution have often turned this peaceful realm devoted to creation into a battlefield by replacing aesthetic judgment with ethical judgment and also political correctness. Ethical issues have no place in art, and art is certainly not judged by whether it is progressive. In addition, art is not a sports competition and does not need to be judged because there is no winner or loser. Artists simply leave behind their works.

Art creation does not require that someone be overthrown, and neither predecessors nor those coming later can overthrow the other. There are

differences in talent, but this is not a matter of who can shout the loudest, and so it is that Georges de La Tour continues quietly to radiate brilliance after two and a half centuries of obscurity.

You have an antihistorical attitude to art. Aesthetics is always of the individual, whether it is the artist creating a work or others viewing it, even if there are similar, almost similar, or different aesthetic tastes. Moreover, aesthetic activities recognise only the instant.

History and artworks are totally different. History can be endlessly written and revised, but an artwork exists and cannot be altered after the artist completes it. An artwork will be evaluated differently according to the time and the people, and this is a function of the times or concepts. Given that this is an era of endless revolutions, it is now high time for overthrowing to be considered as *passé*. Surely it is purely dialectics if the negation of negation is treated as a historical law instead of merely speculative satisfaction.

Indeed, as far as art is concerned, both deduction and speculation are traps. You know well from personal experience that once you rely on language you lose control of the image and become confused about what you are painting. Speculation and dialectics are matters for art criticism, art history, or aesthetics. The artist may reflect while at work, even formulate certain theories, but those will be the theories of an artist and different from the aesthetics spawned by philosophers. They are produced during the process of art creation, as the artist searches for direction in what he is creating, and are not analysis or speculation on a completed artwork that is already a reality in order to extrapolate universal laws and values. Theories formulated by artists are directly related to their own creation and are naturally highly personalised.

What is meaningful for the artist is not to seek identification with others; instead, it is to seek to be different, and creation derives from difference.

Artists do not rashly hope to establish universal aesthetic criteria or a value system, but they also do not need to abide by art criteria or concepts that have been established by others and so lose their own creative freedom. However, artists do have their own aesthetic criteria that are submerged within and that, though they continue to evolve, are so deeply embedded they are not affected by fashions and trends. The interests and aesthetic judgments of artists were formed over many years and not established at random by them as individuals. These have deep cultural and historical dimensions, but there is also a definite universality that allows communication with others, although this sort of communicability is established on the basis of the individual's direct perceptual experiences.

As artists engage in direct observation they will at the same time deliberate, but this deliberation is used for scrutinising and directing their own work and represents a highly personalised theory. Instead of thinking of it as aesthetics it would be best to think of it as the artist's own creative aesthetics that directly points to this instant. At the instant of creation the artist casts aside the philosophy and history of art and totally discards the art criticism, trends in art, and the prevailing ideology that directs these at the time. It is this that defines the creative aesthetics of the artist, and if it is still denoted theory, then it is nonhistorical, of the instant, of the individual, and moreover, nonmetaphysical and sensually and experientially initiated. It is articulated as theory to reactivate creative impulses and yet another return to direct perception and awareness.

Metaphysical aesthetics for the artist can only be a sort of general knowledge, a springboard, but the starting point is still right under the feet. The creative aesthetics of the artist does not resort to dialectics. Artists themselves define the boundaries, and build stairs so that they can climb higher and higher and see further afield in their quest to achieve a direction in their own art creation. The sort of theory that is derived from creative experience is directly described and not deduced, and the satis-

faction of having established a theory is absent, its sole purpose being to find a drive for artistic creation that will evoke feelings, activate direct perceptions, and lead to creation.

BEAUTY IS OF THIS INSTANT

Is there a kind of beauty that is universally acknowledged by everyone? It cannot be said to exist, yet it cannot be said not to exist, for neither can be verified. The perception of beauty is unique to humankind. It varies from person to person and, whether the same or the opposite, results purely from the perception of the individual.

Beauty is directly perceived, not derived by deduction, and both rationality and concepts of beauty are immeasurably remote from beauty. Beauty is of the instant, and this immediacy causes beauty to exist during the time of artistic creation or else during the appreciation of the artwork.

The birth of beauty and the appreciation of beauty are both realised in the present. Initially there is the feeling of beauty, then a judgment, and the judgment results from the appreciation of beauty, the completion of the psychological activity of appreciating beauty. When judgment is separated from this process, abstracted as a value and turned into a concept, beauty will have fled into the distance.

Beauty exists only between the aesthetic object (the artwork) and the aesthetic subject (the artist or the person appreciating the work), and is realised in a mutual relationship; in other words, it is realised in an exchange between the aesthetic object and the aesthetic subject. Discussions about the criteria and value of beauty that are divorced from this immediacy and process concern only the concept of beauty.

Beauty possesses both objectivity and subjectivity. The person appreciating beauty and the aesthetic object may be said to be interacting as subject and object. However, the objective property of beauty cannot

itself be affirmed; it can be manifested only when the person appreciating beauty perceives it. Normally it is concealed within the artwork.

When different aesthetic subjects confront the same artwork, they can have generally similar, not very similar, or conflicting aesthetic feelings, or they can be totally unmoved by it. The beauty in art cannot be verified or affirmed as in the case of scientific laws.

An artwork is an objective existence, and beauty is a latent power concealed within it that is capable of evoking aesthetic feelings in the viewer. Divorced from the person who is the aesthetic subject, the realisation of beauty is impossible.

The creation of the artist infuses his work with this latent power. The artist is the primary creator of beauty, and by resorting to forms and impregnating the work with his aesthetic feelings, he realises his individual subjective experiences through the creation of the work. The process of beauty-creating activity is the same as the aesthetic process of viewing the completed artwork—that is, the beauty that is concealed within the work is discerned. As object the artwork merely conceals the latent force of beauty that must be realised through the human subject.

The creation of beauty and the remanifestation of beauty, when realised through the subject person of the creator or the viewer, are always the acts of separate individuals. The realisation of beauty in art, therefore, is of the present and is also direct and alive. Abstract beauty, like metaphysical truth, is an objective in philosophy but not in art.

The psychological process of aesthetics—that is, the realisation of beauty—is quite different from the evaluation of beauty. Art creation and art appreciation are different from value judgments on beauty for the purpose of establishing criteria of beauty.

The artist of course may be influenced by certain aesthetic views, but when highly focused on the creation of the work that is taking shape in his hands and when constantly interacting with it, his direct percep-

tions will be extremely sharp, so he will often expel all previously held concepts and entrust his direct perceptions to the realisation of beauty. The situation for the person engrossed in viewing the work is the same. At the time, the general knowledge contained in art histories and fashionable aesthetic views are of no help; that is to say, history and the value judgments of the times vanish. Whether the work is appreciated depends on whether the work itself is able to enter a dialogue with the person.

The two sides of the dialogue require a language of communication, and what communicates best transcends race and nation, language and culture, and history and time; the feelings and consciousness common to everyone make exchange possible and are the basis for art communication between different people. From creation to reception, art is linked to the subjective observation of the individual, yet exchange is possible. The possibility of such communication derives primarily from the capacity for feelings in people and, to a very secondary degree, from the value systems of certain times.

However, if the individual feelings locked in the subject fail to find a language of expression, exchange is impossible. The artist resorts to form precisely because this sort of art language has a definite public nature and is not purely a private, secret language.

If the form the artist resorts to is form that has not been infused with human feelings, it remains form only, and the material also remains material only, and the object also object only, so for it to become an artwork, language has to be added to explain its aesthetic implications. Therefore, this sort of linguistic annotation replaces art and turns it into an explanation.

Painting that relies on written speech to replace the artwork itself is also aesthetically replaced by speech. When art concepts are used to replace aesthetics, beauty is no longer infused by the artist into the work, which instead relies on adding an explanation according to a certain view of art. So the aesthetics of the creator or viewer is replaced by concepts;

beauty either becomes speech or simply vanishes, and the artist is no longer primarily a person who appreciates beauty but the discoverer or producer of a particular art concept or even simply an exponent of art concepts.

That contemporary art abolishes the individual's aesthetic feeling and instead relies on speech is not at all the result of individualism in art creation but precisely the opposite: it is a case of the individual's being obliterated by the fashionable art concepts of the times. The interests and significance of the artist as an individual have been replaced by the changes wrought by modernity.

Once the artist sets out to be the first to proclaim the words of the age and speak on behalf of the age, the most popular language of society must be used, and as the language becomes more common, it becomes more vacuous. In fact, this sort of language has nothing fresh about it and merely strikes the pose of being a speech.

In the creation or enjoyment of art, the individuality and immediacy of beauty makes universal aesthetic judgments impossible. If the artist refuses to drown in the tides of perpetual change invoked by modernity and wants to preserve the uniqueness of his creations, then his individualism and his being denied entry into art chronicles will at least be a means of his self-preservation.

BELIEF IN TRUTH

The assertion that truth is a criterion for aesthetic judgment derives from a certain view of aesthetics, but truth is definitely not a prerequisite for beauty. To assert that truth is beauty is like introducing moral judgments of right or wrong or ethical judgments of good and evil into aesthetics. A person with such a view of aesthetics will establish such associations when appreciating beauty, but in fact such associations do not necessarily exist.

However, in modern times large numbers of artists have repeatedly declared that art is the pursuit of truth, and it became an unshakable criterion of aesthetic judgment; art divorced from truth came to be regarded as shallow and false. However, what in fact constitutes truth is a question fraught with a profusion of responses.

The relationship between truth and the appreciation of beauty at least explains the essential link between art and the real world, and artists with extremely different artistic expressions have rushed to claim that this was the basis for their own method of art expression.

Does truth in art actually refer to the real world or to cognition of the real world? And what sort of cognition is true? Furthermore, the sort of criteria to be used for the verification of truth in art has been an issue of endless debate in aesthetics.

If truth is reality, does this mean that the real people and real objects in reality are therefore art? The ready-made objects and the performance of the artist in contemporary art are certainly most real. Because everyone is an artist, it follows that everything exhibited is art. Of course, this is one view of art, and it can be seen that the truth in art is after all derived from a certain understanding of art.

Modern art theoreticians constantly censured the re-creation of reality in art, claiming that it was not the truth, that the substance of reality had escaped the brush of the realist painter, who captured only a superficial likeness. This sort of popular modern art theory was the basis for formalist and abstract art.

Truth in art can be achieved only by returning to the flat surface of the painting, by eliminating perspective, depth, and shadow and by getting rid of the illusions produced in painting. This was precisely the theoretical basis of modern painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By the 1960s there was another art revolution, and the props for the painting surface and the paint and materials used in the painting possessed greater truth than the images on the painted surface

did. And after that, even painting on a flat surface was considered *passé*, and exhibits had to be real objects. Such theories on truth amount to nothing more than a whole lot of talk.

What, in fact, is truth in art or true art? This kind of metaphysical speculation is actually of no help to the artist. The artist differs from the philosopher in that what he needs is not the truth but rather to believe in the truth; moreover, he must construct his belief in art on tangible perceptions. For the artist, truth is linked to the truthfulness of his art; what the artist needs is a unity of aesthetics and ethics. He would prefer to achieve his belief in truth through real perceptions, and for the artist who is a normal individual this is in a sense a more secure footing in a world that has gone crazy. For the artist to return to the aesthetic perceptions of the individual protects his art and is a means of self-salvation, whereas speculations on truth would best be given back to the philosophers.

Controversies about truth in art will continue, but the artist does not rely on such discussions to search for truth in art. The many truths of the artist are simply the visual perceptions of his own eyes and, like beauty, do not exist in universally recognised standards. And truth is the artist's belief that his own art expression is his indispensable link with reality. In the eyes of the artist, truth is the ethics of the artist rather than something that possesses aesthetic meaning.

Aesthetics for the artist can be without ethical judgments, but truth in art is his unwavering belief, which is more important than his belief in religion or belief in God. Separated from this perception of truth, the artist will not be able to work on his own art. The artist needs to actually feel that his art can capture the world, including his inner world, although each artist will have his own methods.

The method of the artist is both his understanding of the real world and his artistic expression. Debate about which art method or which art expression is more truthful has no bearing on the individual artist

engaged in creations that are not concerned with the separation of superior and inferior or progressive and conservative but rely solely on the talent of the artist.

The distinctions between replication, expression, and manifestation in art methods cannot count as criteria for aesthetic judgments. Using one kind of method to censure another kind of method, or using one view of art to criticise another view of art is significant for art genealogies, but this cannot be equated with the inherent value of the art itself. Courbet and Matisse saw, each with his own eyes, different kinds of beauty, but their disciples remain their disciples.

The artist wants his own perception and expression of the real world, and to construct this understanding and expression on his belief in truth: truth for the artist is akin to sincerity. The sincerity of the art in his hands is the morality that is unique to the artist.

RATIONALITY AND SPIRIT

In modern times when streams of new concepts emerge endlessly, it is as if any new concept or ism can constitute new art once it has united with new technologies and new materials. Various new manufactures have instantly become new waves in contemporary art, and some intellectual games have also quickly become new methods of art creation. However, unless the products of these new concepts and technologies are enormous in size, they are like toys, although they generally do not give the pleasure of toys, and though they simply proliferate science and technology, they are uninteresting. The scientific instrumental rationality that infiltrated art at the end of the nineteenth century had become by the end of the twentieth century increasingly a game of catching up with new technologies and playing with new materials.

Only after more than a century of torment did humankind come to understand that it is impossible to recreate human beings. The changes

science and technology brought have not necessarily resulted in social progress, and art, as is the case with human beings, does not change from day to day. To foist scientific principles on art without at the same time infusing it with human perceptions usually makes it boringly manipulative and so much hype. There are a few exceptions, such as [Alexander] Calder's mobile sculptures, which provide interesting visual images, and [Jean] Tinguely's transmission machines with their black humour that one could say mocks mechanisation, but this is owing to the fact that neither artist is a pure conceptualist.

The photography and cinema that emerged at the end of the last century—from materials, industrial arts, and techniques to the art that arose from these—irrefutably created new styles previously nonexistent in traditional art that, moreover, had been developed by using the methods of the new science and technology. New discoveries in science and technology provided art creation with new possibilities, but these were far from the realisation of art. It was Man Ray's treatment that turned photography into an independent art genre, and it was because of Eisenstein's work in montage that film began to constitute a new art language.

Constantly stripped of methods that it originally possessed, visual art deteriorated as a genre and became impoverished and empty. Photography and film, in contrast, developed into superb art forms probably because, as totally new art genres, they had no traditions to be opposed, so the revolutionary theory of art had minimal impact on them. In addition, to enrich the art language of photography and film there were continual borrowings from the methods of other genres—literature, theatre, music, dance, and visual art—and these were injected into ever-improving techniques to more fully convey people's complex and subtle feelings. The technicalities of these two new art genres required someone's eyes behind the camera making selections, so the individual artist could never be eliminated; and if the seeds of concepts were not filtered into images, they would not pass through, so no matter how the

images of people and objects in front of the camera changed, they could not be eliminated, either.

However, with access to new technologies and new materials, contemporary art treated the application of concepts as the direct realisation of rationality, totally eradicated human feelings and images, and made art the equivalent of design and manufacture.

Rationality of course plays a role in art, but to directly link concepts with art is a shortcut that destroys art and turns the rationality of art into a degraded form of rationality through which art is reduced to simple conceptual analysis.

In the early twentieth century the ideology of science first entered art as instrumental rationality, as creative methods such as cubism and constructivism. Rationality replaced images beginning with geometrical abstractions, then ideas gradually usurped feelings, and by the time of conceptual art human feelings were completely lost, and art became simply the arrangement and explanation of things.

Abstractions derived from ideas and concepts constructed by logic are merely early forms of rationality, but rationality in art is vastly different from the instrumental rationality required in science. Art relies on a rationality that must transcend language and logic, one that has transformed into the artist's inner consciousness and that, modulated by direct perceptions that have been distilled from feelings, takes part in creation. Art is not the direct manifestation of an idea, yet the artist in a hurry to produce something new and different will often take this simple shortcut.

The innovations in contemporary art are like this, and the nonstop redefining of art is the direct use of concepts. If such behaviour and use of concepts do not have socially or politically provocative overtones or do not become news items through the media or through documentation by the organisers in art publications, they are totally meaningless. That such ideas are actually turned into art is not by virtue of the ideas themselves.

Ideas ultimately are just the primary motive for creation, but there are conditions to their becoming art. Furthermore, whereas art relies on ideas, there is a limitation, and ideas alone are not enough. If ideas do not extend beyond ideas and do not transform into something alive that will consume the seeds, then the accumulation of seeds will remain a pile of seeds. Unless one can convert the ideas into interesting images that consume the traces of the original ideas, it will not be possible to leave behind artworks worth a second look.

An idea can inspire an artist, but it can also suffocate an artist. For example, being minimal as a motive for creation can lead to purity in a work, but if being minimal is used as a creative method that is adhered to rigidly and pursued relentlessly, then all that is left will be the idea. Minimalism was thought to be a convenient door, but it turned out to be a mere crack that failed to open up new prospects for the artist.

The rationality in art must mature into a calm and detached vision that will light up burgeoning perceptions hidden in the darkness and disentangle emotions aroused by the creative impulse; only then does it start to solidify, and only then is beauty manifested in images.

Rationality and sensuousness similarly function to direct art. Art creation does not castigate rationality, and both perceptions and the intellect are at work in aesthetics. A person's capacity for perception and comprehension is the foundation of aesthetic activities. That rationality is ranked above perception has its origins in the cognition theories of metaphysics. However, in art creation what is significant is not rational knowledge but how the artist converts perceptions and rational thinking into creative power that, through his or her unique talents, is transformed into artworks.

The process is complex both while the artist is conceiving a work and after he has started to work on it. Moreover, works are not always completed in the first attempt, and often there are many attempts before rationality totally vanishes into the work, having transformed into an

invisible spirituality. Yet this spirituality is manifested as images that are both visible and tangible.

The artist's understanding is not a process from the perceptual to the rational, but from the onset it is at the same time both perceptual and rational, then sublimated and manifested as spirituality. The spirituality of art has no theological connotations. In human nature there is also spirituality, and this can also be manifested in the poetic. An aesthetics based on perception dissolves the initial rationality controlling the artist's creation and leaves pure intellectual speculation to philosophy.

The artist's pursuit of spiritual gratification is the same as the philosopher's pursuit of intellectual gratification. Although neither can leave aside rationality, they head in different directions. Philosophy, indeed, has connections with art, but it does not override art. Philosophy can construct perspectives and methodological theories on art, but it cannot replace art.

Contemporary artists actually want to act the role of the philosopher, unfortunately, proving Hegel's prediction correct. Artists who are deluded by historical dialectics and absolutes will all compete to pose as supermen so that they can be the first to proclaim the ultimate truth on art and bring death to all predecessors. That historical materialism's theory of perpetual revolution would make visual art empty and hollow and finally reduce it to matter was something Hegel had not predicted.

In art creation, rationality and spirituality are at work in tandem, but in the art revolution's drive for popularisation, spirituality was regarded as religious and expelled, whereas materialism's modern religion of commodity worship was invited in. It is hard to think of this as progress in art. Spirituality is not exclusive to God, and even in Renaissance paintings depicting religious subjects, what shines is the humanity of the devotees and not the halo over their heads.

When modern art—whether expressionist or surrealist—reveals the darkness of humanity, the subtle light of the artist's inner mind is preserved, and there is also another light that sheds light on the subconscious. A voyeur is inevitably watching. This observing is the artist's affirmation of self, and it is this awareness of the self that modern humankind ultimately depends upon for spiritual support.

Returning to the spiritual does not intimate a return to theology. This spirituality, even the most impoverished, as in Giacometti's emaciated men and women and in his seemingly self-mocking dog that is skin and bones, still look upon the world in a way that makes people feel uneasy. Unfortunately, in contemporary art this questioning look, too, has vanished. In pop art, the smug look of the fat woman pushing a supermarket trolley can embody either sarcasm or obsequiousness, but as far as interest goes, there is a world of difference between that woman and Giacometti's dog.

If the artist regards art as a spiritual refuge and finds spiritual gratification in art creation, then it will be the artist's protest against the universal commercialisation and materialisation of these times.

VIEWPOINT AS CONSCIOUSNESS

The appreciation of beauty primarily derives from the individuality of the appreciating subject, thereby decreeing that in creation the artist must depend upon the self. However, the self is essentially a chaotic entity, and if allowed arbitrary expression, it would undoubtedly produce unbridled and reckless outpourings. Unless this unrestrained narcissism is controlled by the consciousness, it easily declines into arrogance, posturing, and putting on airs.

This chaotic self can be brought to light only under the supervision of the consciousness. And given that consciousness of the self is grasped through language, self-consciousness therefore can also be regarded as

a linguistic consciousness that can only be realised through the help of language.

The subjective will of the self-conscious is, namely, *I want to do something*. For the visual artist it is *I want to paint something*, and this must rely on visual perception, so it is also *I want to see what I paint*. Looking and painting go together, and as I paint, I see what I am painting. Visual art cannot be divorced from visual perception.

Visual perception tells one what to paint and what not to paint and decides what has been painted well or not. While painting one must be able to see something interesting in order to be able to continue painting. The images from the brush are the visual images of the artist's self, and even when an artist is painting from life, the objects produced by the brush are no longer those objective entities: even if replications, they have transformed into the artist's subjective visual images and are creations.

Replication as a creative method has been replaced by the method of ready-made objects in contemporary art; regarded as obsolete and outmoded, replication has simply been arbitrarily discarded. This is owing solely to the judgment of an aesthetic viewpoint that has not presented new views on the inherent process of art creation.

The self in fact has three different standpoints—namely, those of the three different but related pronouns *I*, *you*, *he*. Is it I who is painting, or you who is painting? Or is it he who is painting? The self of the artist is not a metaphysical issue and must always be manifested as an attitude. Even if the artist himself is not necessarily aware or conscious of it, it is an obstinate attitude that quietly controls the direction of his creation.

The strong narcissism of the romantic artists placed the first-person pronoun *I* at the pinnacle of self-consciousness, whereas the self of the classical artist simply carried out the rules of art and was the artist *he* replicating beauty. Aesthetic feeling rendered in the third-person pronoun can transform into harmony with the universe or the spiritual,

as in the case of the art of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, or it can transform into objectified humanity, as in the case of Renaissance or realist art.

From modern art's expression of the self to the extreme elevation of the self by avant-garde artists, there has been wanton expression. The overflowing chaos of the self in contemporary art was uncontrollable, and salvation was sought from concepts.

For the artist to control the self there is another perspective, that of *you* observing *I* to scrutinise the self, and as if it is *I* observing the external world, so this is not direct outpourings of the self. This kind of perspective is inherent in China's traditional expressive painting, and modernist writers and artists of the West from Kafka to Giacometti may be said to employ a modern formulation of this perspective.

Once *you* detaches itself from the self, both the subject and the object are targeted for observation and scrutiny, and this forces the uncontrollable outpourings and expressions of the artist's blind narcissism to yield to concentrated observation, searching, capturing, or pursuing. While *you* and *I* are eying one another, that dark and chaotic self begins to reveal itself through a third pair of eyes belonging to *he*.

The questions and the dialogues between *you* and *I*—this form of introspection—invariably take place under the watchful eyes of *he*, who is looking inwards. This dividing of the self into three is not metaphysical, nor is it simply a form of psychological analysis, but it is a psychological state the artist can actually attain during the act of creation.

Self-consciousness is actualised through the inner mind talking to itself. The affirmation and recognition of the speech subject is the starting point for observation, and the self-perception of *I* is a position that is determined by *you* and *he*.

The individuality of the art-creating subject decrees that the artist must establish his self-consciousness at a particular standpoint, and the

pronoun's viewpoint is an invisible standpoint that the artist cannot escape. Moreover, the choice and affirmation of the viewpoint lead to different creative methods. Is it a case of *I* who sees or *you* who sees, or is it *he* who sees?

In the object *I* sees there is I, in the object *you* sees there is I, and in the object *he* sees, likewise, there is I: object and I are both present. The object the artist depicts is not the object but something that has been refracted through the self of the artist: it is a creation.

When *you* observes, both the object and I are images seen by *you*. The visual space that is created by the composite and conflated images of the object and I is not real space but has become space in the inner mind, a sort of photo image. It seems to have depth, yet the distance is unfixed and indeterminate or, because of the conflation, has turned into illusory space. Furthermore, the indeterminacy of this space can change according to the changing focus of *you*.

When the artist captures these visual images of the inner mind and fixes them on a two-dimensional surface, the painting that is actualised on the flat surface is neither a direct manifestation of the self nor a replication of reality. Instead, it is a revelation of I, the object on which *you* has focused his gaze. That object bears the imprint of I, yet this I is already externalised.

From the artist's perspective it is revelation, and for the viewer it is discovery. During the process of painting, the artist will from time to time shift perspective from artist to viewer.

A single work can also be structured with the different viewpoints of *you* and *he* or *I* and *he* or *I* and *you*. These variations must be brought into a unified form that is neither diagrammatical nor deconstructed, and doing this is not easy but not impossible. [Le Douanier] Rousseau and surrealism brought reality into dream and vice versa and hinted at this possibility. And some of Chagall's works were already composites of multilayered artistic concepts and of course were also able to

fuse different perspectives into a unified visual-art language without discernible traces of crossing or overlapping.

When the artist is focused on the work that he is actualising, there is another eye observing the artist himself, and an artist with this order of self-consciousness will no longer be merely an artisan.

If transcribing the artist's daily activities is also to count for his being an artist, it is because this third eye has imagined that it will focus on himself and transform him into the artwork. However, the artist focusing on himself is not a video camera, and if this third eye is merely a projection of his narcissism, then the resulting images will be of him but will not be his art.

When this third eye transcends the artist's narcissism and is relatively independent of the artist—in other words, when there is a distance allowing the narcissistic fervour to cool—it will calmly begin to scrutinise the work he is doing. This coldly detached eye is criticising the artist's work: inspecting, deciding to adopt or reject, and the artist creating under the gaze of this third eye will transcend the work of the artisan.

Consciousness is not the same as rationality; it is greater than rationality and to some extent envelopes rationality. Through thought rationality is realised with the help of language and logic. However, consciousness illuminates the chaos of the self and is not restricted by cause and effect, and at the same time both controls and directs a person's behaviour.

Although consciousness emerges from the subconscious, it does not cast aside the subconscious. Instead, merely through modulating the subconscious, it refines and transforms the impulses of the subconscious into creative activities.

It is not easy to distinguish consciousness from direct perception, and if it is thought that direct perception has a sensuous component,

then consciousness has a rational component. Consciousness can also be called introspection, although for the artist introspection does not have an ethical component, and though it is located at the psychological level of sympathy and repentance, it gravitates not towards religion but towards aesthetics.

TIME, SPACE, AND CHAN BUDDHISM

Time and space are important subjects in contemporary art—or rather, are both the object and main expression for that particular category of art that is without subject or forms.

In the traditional art of both the East and the West, there are methods for dealing with time and space, and space is an indispensable prerequisite for forms. Painting is confined to two-dimensional space, and sculpture depends on three-dimensional space. Time is often manifested in the literary: an event occurs at a particular time, and the narrative becomes paintings and friezes—for example, ancient Roman murals or Buddhist stone engravings. Or paintings can come to life through the movement of candlelight, wind, or fire in the replication of a contemporary scene, or through a momentary eye expression in paintings of people. There is yet another solution, one that congeals time into a state, as seen in portraiture, still life, or expressive ink painting. In traditional art, time is attached to image.

Modern painting sought to discover new ways of dealing with space on a two-dimensional surface within the most basic parameters of the genre. Cézanne and Picasso discarded the direct visual perspective of Euclidean geometry, eliminated depth of field, and pioneered cubism, and this was undoubtedly a big turning point in the history of painting.

During that same time, temporal elements came to be directly expressed on a two-dimensional surface. For example, Duchamp's machine overlays or Klee's abstracts are not merely geometrical planes

but possess definite rhythms, and overlapping and movement are present in Kandinsky's point, plane, and line, and there are flashes of movement in Bacon's depictions of people. On the flat surface, space was manifested with precision and clarity, and by using new combinations time was manifested as overlapping and flowing like music yet without departure from forms.

The capturing of space by the artist is different from scientific verification and philosophical speculation. In the eye of the artist space is subjective space and not necessarily related to geometrical or topological space, and there is no need for deduction and proof because it derives from the direct perception and understanding of the artist.

To terminate painting and to make speculations about time and space the subject of art expression has been proposed by contemporary art. Indeed, time has vanished from visual art. In fact, beginning with geometrical abstraction the end of visual art had been reached, and time had ground to a halt. Time went straight on to be treated as a method of art expression, and by crossing the boundary of visual art, it turned into the performance of action art. By crossing yet another boundary, time became the object of art expression that was not music and had to transform into speech. Artists and art critics provided speculations and explications on time and space that were divorced from artworks, if in fact there were any artworks to be seen.

This subversion of visual art inevitably led to its decline into linguistic games. And herein lies the difference between art and science. In scientific research time and space and their mutual relationships do not depend on being spoken about and are not simply definitions and concepts: they have been ascertained by using scientific methods. But in conceptual art, time and space are merely words that are bandied about, and this accounts for the emptiness of contemporary art.

Originally an object does not exist, but if one says it exists then it exists, and if one says that it does not exist it ceases to exist: such is the

magic and autonomy of language. This was introduced into philosophy, and philosophical questions turned into linguistic questions, or linguistic questions turned into philosophical questions, but this has nothing at all to do with the artist. Yet there are artists who want to prattle endlessly about philosophy and linguistics, and even if God does not laugh at them, scholars do.

Except when it is a theological matter, Chan is both a philosophical and a linguistic matter. Chan in art is not something that has arisen only in contemporary art. Moreover, Chan cannot be spoken of and once spoken of no longer exists: it can be comprehended only by direct perception. Because contemporary art relies on language, one can see that it is remote from Chan.

Some of the extravagant prattle in contemporary art has forgotten that empty space in art does not signify the absence of something. This is precisely the spirit that illuminates the artwork and presents an inner-mind state that is experienced by the artist. Time and space in art are codependent on this spirit and different from the temporal and spatial relationships of physics, or from any metaphysical concepts of time and space.

It would be best for you to return to painting. In Chan painting there are various depictions of roundness, as well as diagrams. Emptiness is within the diagram and outside it, and it is both explanation and a spiritual state. If one is imprisoned in the confines of a specified time and space and wishes to achieve autonomy, Chan may provide insights for the artist living in the real world.

Time and space are a fixed element in painting. How can this fixed element be conceptually released and made to come alive so that time and space are alive in the mind and also omniscient Chan? Visual art is about making visible what is not visible.

Space and time in art are in the mind of the artist, and this psychological space and time have endless changes. Finding a visual-art method

that will manifest these as images is what fascinates the artist. Chan is not the absence of everything but a realm in the mind.

In a painting a small cosmos is established that goes past the frame of the painting; the frame merely provides a window. Even if the painter sees the external world through the window, it is at the same time a projection of his inner mind. Moreover, from this window one can see a world that is totally of the inner mind.

The horizon is also subjectively fixed, determined by a focal point according to the location of the viewer. However, the natural world does not exist on that illusory horizon. Whether a horizon exists depends on the location of the viewer.

In the water lilies painted by Monet in his later life, the horizon vanishes, and the scene transforms into a flat surface. It is possible to imagine further horizons or a series of horizons, and it is possible to accept that the painting is a flat surface and to create depths, depths without horizons, or to allow the images to protrude from or sink into the flat surface.

There are many other methods for eliminating the horizon, and in a microscopic or macroscopic view of the world a horizon does not exist. The horizon in fact is an established coordinate, and many other coordinates can be established, but in a painting, a visual limit must be provided; otherwise, it reverts to being flat surface.

You are also trying to find a method to introduce time into painting. The indefiniteness of inner mind images are linked to psychological activities, but because psychological activities are always a process, the flow of shimmering and changing images is hard to capture. To express discovery and change requires finding an appropriate method for form, and this depends on the painting tools and materials. The movement of water and ink creates melodies of such richness and subtlety that they provide huge possibilities for forms by their potential to stimulate and evoke.

Painting also can be a journey in the inner mind. Places reached by the imagination can be manifested in painting, and there can be endless discoveries. The problem is that there must be a return to the methods of form, because if the artist crosses boundaries and tries to compete with the physicist or to replace philosophy, he or she will only eliminate any trace of art, and what will remain is a lot of dry and dull empty talk.

It would be best if you invited back shadows that have been driven from modern painting. If the shadows used in traditional painting to match, compare, or highlight also play a role in the forms, there could be interesting effects. Discarding the ordering of art histories, you consider Seurat's colour pointillist paintings alongside his charcoal outline paintings and find the former too decorative, but the latter has greater purity as painting, even though the method is apparently more traditional. Yet his use of shadows is not merely to present outlines, and perspectives also vanish into the shadows: the shadows, too, are integral to the form. This seems to be a subtle difference, but it does point to a painting language.

If shadows obtain relative independence in a painting, even become protagonists, they transform from being a method for form to being the image itself—in other words, the target or subject of the painting. If the spatial relationships within a painting change so that emptiness becomes solid and darkness assumes indefinite existence, then what becomes empty is bright light. Such images are hard to discover when directly observing the natural world, but in black-and-white paintings they can create a startling space that perhaps can be seen only in dreams. But then, are dreams not scenes of the inner mind?

Changing the normal perception of heaven and earth to one that is upside down, at an angle, or without a sense of gravity can be wonderful.

Trees and rocks vanish and turn into shadows, and rivers too vanish and change into a moving source of light or else of reflected light.

Reverse what is inside and outside, or make it ambiguously inside or outside, so that a door or window will act as a coordinate. But the coordinate does not have to be a door or window, and a river, a shadow, a signpost, and a line can all delineate another time and space yet remain connected to it.

Borrowing certain forms or shadows to establish a coordinate and constructing spatial relationships that cannot be directly observed in the natural world and introducing a sense of temporal movement into the painting can provide new expressions of form, and this is not at all wishful thinking.

When time is made to flow in a painting and is endowed with a certain texture, the flow of time and texture is quite an amazing sensation. When you are moving in the time and space of the inner mind and can manifest this in painting, it will surprise you yourself. The painting surface supplies you with a realm, and you even forget how you produced it. The composition that you rack your brains trying to achieve cannot be achieved by rational construction or semantic deconstruction, yet sometimes unexpectedly it can be revealed through visual-art strategies and is of the highest order.

FORM AND IMAGE

Modern art began with form, but contemporary art removed form, and objects and talk about objects replaced the form that had been expressed in art. The art chronicles for almost a century are a history of formalism, recording when it began and the changes that have taken place up to its death.

The emergence of formalism at the end of the last century began with Cézanne, and this emphasis on form passed through cubism and constructivism before reaching the extreme formalism of geometric abstracts. However, formalism was eradicated after the advent of ready-

made objects, conceptual art, installations, and multimedia. In contemporary art the emphasis on form transformed into pure form: form was self-contained and had no other connotation; form itself was art. So with the finger's pointing for it to be eliminated, the end of art was proclaimed. Structure and the composition of form had replaced the human content of art and gave prominence to the properties of the materials that were used. That formalism had run its course and been replaced by matter was the inevitable outcome of emphasising the autonomy of form. Once form is abstracted in art to the point at which it ceases to be a metaphor for the world, divested of human attitudes and feelings and divested of human perspectives, art is left with no choice but to turn to matter, to borrowing strategies that are extraneous to images, and to resorting to linguistic explanations.

If art is recognised as an expression of human subjectivity, then the meaning of form is of only relative significance. The human content of art primarily derives from human observation, which includes a human viewpoint and feelings. To insist that human elements be abolished from art means that art can only transform into matter.

Form is of course an existing method in visual art. From inception until completion, art creation is a search for form; therefore, form runs through the entire process of creation, right up to the completion of the work. But form cannot be absolutely independent because there is a precondition for the existence of form—that is, image.

Art cannot be divorced from image, and form completes the image, endowing it with style; at the same time form is the visual-art language for constructing image. The emphasising of a certain form can provide a special visual-art vocabulary, expressive method and the entire structure. To say that form is art is like saying that language is style: it is conditional. Whether language or form, if it is divorced from the human feelings the artist wants to express in the work, it becomes a game for the intellect that generally must be simplified and standardised; otherwise,

it will not have the popular appeal of a game and will fail to give the pleasure that draws people to games.

If the expression of colour and form in abstract painting is fused with the artist's visual perceptions and sentiments, it can evoke sympathy from the viewer. However, pure colours without the artist's sentiments, or purely geometrical diagrams and signs must rely on the artist's explanation or wait for the annotations of the viewers themselves: such abstracts may be considered the forerunner of conceptual art.

Purity in art has its limitations. Matisse used purity of colours or lines to create outstanding images, not to eliminate them. The purity served the images, and with a few strategies he went about making endless discoveries. There is Matisse's pure blue with images, as well as [Yves] Klein's blue, that perhaps does have a certain amount of visual-art interest because of the nude body of the person under the thick coats of paint that Klein has covered it in. However, when the image disappears completely, colour can be only decorative, and if the decorative interest also disappears, blue is nothing more than the application of the colour.

Purity cannot be achieved by some simple method, yet purity remains a realm pursued by the artist. There is a need to produce sustained interest so that both life and spirituality will be seen in that purity, but probably the impetus generated by the creative methods of minimalism gravitated towards zero. Yet zero is a concept, and no one can see absolute zero; what can be seen instead is manufactured materials, matter—but no art is to be seen. What zero art creation has left behind is simply some talk about art.

When form became purified to the point of arrogance and became its own objective, formalism had already been infiltrated by concepts, so from minimalism to installation it was easy to accommodate ready-made objects. The linking of matter and concept eventually eliminated form, and art simply became ready-made objects and talk about exhibits.

However, it is form with a condition that the artist pursues: the artist's feelings can be actualised only by finding the appropriate form, and the artwork can be completed only by the actualisation of that appropriate form. It is in reference to this hierarchy that form in art is art. There is an existing premise—namely, that the artist has feelings and he is tormented by his inability to express it. The artist's pursuit of new forms and his latent creative impulse move virtually in tandem, and his being tormented by the need to express these feelings yet not being able to express them also occurs because the feelings and ideas that he wants to express cannot be expressed—or at least, satisfactorily expressed—using existing creative methods and strategies, so there is no choice but to find new forms in order to adequately express them.

Indeed, new forms and new strategies can sometimes be obtained by chance, but chance merely provides the artist with new creative possibilities that are far from mature enough to introduce human attitudes and sentiments. If the results created by chance are immediately explained and treated as a method of art creation, then the traces left by anyone or even formed by nature—as long as they can be replicated—can proclaim a new art. Any form can possess a certain decorative effect, but equating art and decoration is the inevitable outcome of the slippery slope of formalism.

For almost a century most of the huge number of modernist groups that were motivated by modernity treated formalism as the main mode of art expression, and this was because form is ultimately the inner mechanism of art itself. Form itself has a certain aesthetic feeling, even when it is a person who has endowed upon it this formal beauty. The most basic structures of forms, whether geometric or abstract, are forms because of rules; without rules they are not forms, and there is always a picture. When the impressionists and expressionism started expelling literary subjects from visual art, the dot and sprinkle of geometric abstract and then action art finally eliminated the sense of poetry. Modern industrial art and mass-produced new materials were able to speed up the use of

this type of form creation in areas ranging from merchandise wrapping to advertising and from interior decoration to public buildings, so this function of pure form became a most common trademark in postmodern consumerist society. Form became more and more simple, but the decorativeness of form was subsequently eliminated by new materials, new technology, and new industrial art so that it was no longer independent and no longer had any inherent meaning.

FIGURATIVE AND ABSTRACT

Looking back on the art of the twentieth century, one sees that the appearance of abstract art indeed expanded the domain of visual art by providing new strategies and expressions that allowed the visual-art methods of traditional painting—point, surface, line, colour, and comparison of light and dark—to achieve fresh images on a two-dimensional flat surface.

Cézanne, who pioneered modern painting, was the first to demonstrate these possibilities but did so without negating image. At the same time, he made this suggestion: abstract is not divorced from image. However, the abstract artists who later intrepidly arose in large numbers to outdo their predecessor ignored his suggestion. Then, thanks to pure geometric abstract and spontaneous free splash, all that remained was the decorativeness of form, and in the absence of image, help was sought from the properties of colour or of the materials themselves. Yet Picasso, despite his going through a multitude of changes, never deviated from his ancestry and throughout steadfastly preserved image.

Kandinsky and the abstract expressionists also understood that this boundary existed, but this certainly did not mean that all abstracts were paintings worth looking at. Once abstract crosses the boundary and fails to evoke images, it is not able to provoke human sentiments and cannot leave traces of sensuousness. If it is merely form, it must rely on its deco-

rativity or make use of language to explain it. The inherent meaning of such abstracts is very weak.

The work of [Pierre] Soulages is rich with interest because the effect of light can be seen in it, and the visual experience gives rise to associations. In addition, Westerners who do not read Chinese can sense the rhythms embodied in the water and ink of abstract Chinese calligraphy. Image and suggestion are at the soul of abstract painting, and without these there is little difference from pictures provided by scientific technology. Telescopic views of the celestial bodies, meteorological charts, microcosmic photographs taken with electronic microscope lens, and computer-generated analytical charts for mathematics and physics are quite amazing, but they fail to provoke human sentiments and cannot replace art.

While the artist is at work unexpected things can occur, and a picture can take shape to provide the artist with a visual-art possibility. However, chance or accident is not the equivalent of art; otherwise, all traces of the natural world and human action would constitute art, and art would amount to nothing more than nomenclature.

Narcissism is fully inflated behind some of the virtually zero art. There is narcissism in everyone, but at issue is to what degree this narcissism can be managed so that it will not ruin a chance or accidental revelation that can be introduced into art creation.

Form or indeterminate form, regulated or nonregulated, free splash or wash can all serve as visual-art strategies, and so abstract art has enriched the language of painting. Moreover if magnified, the parts and the details of what is figurative approximates the abstract. An absolute distinction does not exist between the two, and there is no need for them to be antagonistic. If these two visual-art languages are melded together, the artist is provided with a broad realm, with the options abstract within figurative, abstract entering figurative, and between figurative and abstract.

To destroy the absolute demarcation between the figurative and the abstract eradicates that ossified concept of periodic art history. The taxonomy of art requires that identification labels be attached to artists, and artists must resist such categorisation. Even within painting, the new possibilities for figurative art are far from exhausted, but the panic to proclaim the end of a certain kind of art is a widespread and trendy illness in modern and contemporary art. Painting definitely has not arrived at the stage of old age and death. Despite its long history, there are still figurative paintings to be painted, and the hidden potential of abstract painting has much yet to be discovered. Counting from the prehistoric murals of the Lacoste Caves, humankind has a painting history of 17,000 years, so how can it possibly come to an end just like that simply because a number of art revolutions in modern times have proclaimed it? This is nothing more than the fabrication and hype of this sort of art revolution.

[Le Douanier] Rousseau and surrealism touched upon the subconscious, which was only just beginning to be understood, but the art methods of surrealism were too traditional and could not adequately reveal the subtleties of perceptions and the processes of experiences. If abstract art is dissatisfied with the autonomy of pure form and instead functions as a method of entering people's inner-mind experiences and capturing those indeterminate ephemeral changes, it can achieve a great deal.

People's desires and perceptions, sentiments and fears, uneasiness and worries can all provoke visual images in the inner mind. Visual art has presented the real world, dream, and fantasy through replication and expressive strategies, and via abstraction it has directly released emotions. However, these fleeting inner-mind images that cut between figurative and abstract or cross between the two are often indefinite, yet their cohesion and tension, shimmering and brilliance are like a house in motion, an abyss cracking open, the pulsating of a womb, sound spreading, edges vanishing. Should art not also probe the interstices of the subconscious and perception?

Inner-mind images that transcend intellect and concepts cannot be separated from sensual experience. And to reach places that cannot be reached by rationality, one can only resort to art. The form of artistic expression, either figurative or abstract, is merely a strategy and does not structure the goal.

THE LITERARY AND THE POETIC

Since the beginning of modern art there has been a constant purging of the literary from visual art, and contemporary art's subsequent purifications have reduced visual art to being a conveyor language for concepts that accommodates even multimedia but totally abolishes the literary. The introduction of religious stories and literary material, as well as description and narrative, into painting were all considered inappropriate to the basic nature of visual art. The literary and the sacral alike were to be wiped out.

Literature and art were originally twin sisters. Scientific methodology and instrumental rationality began to infiltrate art in the early years of the twentieth century, then the use of ready-made materials and modern technology came into being mainly in the latter half of the twentieth century. From [Kasimir] Malevich's pure geometrical abstracts to [Jackson] Pollock's pure abstract expressionism, art was throughout a search for pure visual-art methods, so all that remained was colours and materials. Next there were installations of ready-made objects and explanations of matter, followed by conceptual games, and finally the concepts themselves were self-contained. Contemporary art has totally abolished the literary and the poetic in art—in other words, the human content of art—and instead has introduced language to convey concepts. Language in this sort of art is the same as visual material and does not convey the perceptions of the artist, so the functions of semantics, signs, and grammar are all that remain to construct or deconstruct a heap of matter or material that likewise is devoid of human feelings.

The transformation of art into matter and concepts has robbed art of its attraction and interest, and art no longer causes people to be moved, captivated, startled, or perplexed.

Is there truly no place for literature in art? Is it enough to argue that the literary in art is *passé*? And is it in fact progress when language and concepts are directly introduced into art, and when the literary and the poetic are relegated to positions external to visual art, or has it instead led to the pauperisation and degeneration of art?

To treat form as the sole aim of art—form as self-fulfilment—results from the working of a particular view of art, and it is this sort of absolute formalism that has eliminated even form from contemporary art, so that all that remains is talk.

Literature relies on language, but it certainly is not merely talking for the sake of talking and must always convey human perceptions. Modern literature is also changing, and although story and plot have ceased to be indispensable literary strategies, narration retains a prominent existence in literature that is no longer a direct presentation by the omnipotent narrator who is the equivalent of author, but instead is concealed in a particular specified narrator's perspectives and perceptions so that it is possible to reveal in the narration people's conscious activities, as well as the psychological processes of their subconscious activities.

Modern art does not totally abolish the literary, and even political issues are brought into paintings. Picasso went so far as to paint to a theme in which he used the absurd and the abnormal to proclaim the destruction of beauty while yet betraying his grief at its destruction. Klee's abstract expressionism is also coloured with emotion. And whether in the surrealism of Dali or Magritte, dream and subconscious associations retain a powerful sense of the literary even though they are no longer linked to a plot.

However, contemporary art's purging of the literary has not merely eliminated literary themes and images: like its purging of human content from form, it likewise totally eliminated sentiment and the poetic.

The poetic may be said to be the spirit the artist infuses into his work, but *spirit* again is an outmoded word. So to be more modern, *information*—and if contemporary artists still have works, what information do they seek to convey in their works? No. That again is also passé: contemporary art does not convey anything. However, the artist ultimately is a creator, and even if what he works with is matter, he must still leave behind something apart from his signature. Okay, so what in fact does contemporary art seek to do? No. Contemporary art does not seek to do anything. It simply deconstructs, turns art into nonart and calls it art, or designates nonart matter as art, and most contemporary art is precisely this.

But this is not the kind of art that you want. It would be best for you to return to the literary—that is, return to the human, return to a human perspective: human observation inevitably embodies human feelings. However, human observation is not the same as objective ritualistic documentation because it already is an appreciation of beauty, and aesthetic judgments are naturally involved. People observe because something interests them, and the process of the observation simultaneously is the appreciation of beauty. By painting only those things that arouse his or her interest, the artist creates paintings that are rich in interest. During the time of observation something happens—in other words, observation is also discovery, a departure from habitual and customary visual perceptions and capturing the beauty that is hidden in things, and these aesthetic experiences are what artists infuse into what they are painting.

A return to the literary is not necessarily a return to plot. Literature can be separated from plot but not from narrative, and what has happened or what is taking place is under observation by the narrator. Using a specific viewpoint to observe what is taking place at this instant

of time produces the poetic. The poetic is a form of aesthetic judgment, but the poetic is not necessarily lyrical. Concentrated observation produces the poetic, and beauty is thus discerned, but it is not something that the object originally possesses. Duchamp's urinal is nothing more than a urinal, and if it is to become an aesthetic object, it must be put into a museum of modern art. Its aesthetic value is conferred by the museum because another sort of aesthetics is at work.

Of course, you do not have to retrieve the lyricism that has already been lost, because the poetic requires an endless search for discovery. At this instant of time, as long human beings exist there will be poetry: poetry is humanity's observation of itself; it is the projection of humankind itself. You turn back and look under your feet or observe using the back of yourself as a third eye of consciousness. Even if your focus is upon yourself, the poetic is concealed in this observation. Things are always happening in the world at large, and if this also occurs in an artwork, then more interesting things are divulged, rather than the painting material itself talking and painting.

SEARCHING ANEW FOR THE BEGINNING OF PAINTING

You do not go to the garden of philosophy to pluck fruit or go to other people's homes to chop tall trees, and while you still have the energy you may as well manage your own garden. Speculation for the artist is a slow-working poison, and with more and more thinking the creative impulse is gradually strangled.

If painting departs from visually perceived experiences and gravitates towards speculation, then the starting point of speculation will be the end point of painting. The interest of the artist lies in the ecstasy of concentrated visual observation, and there is boundless meaning in this detailed visual scrutiny. It would be best not to write this treatise on art and instead return to practice, doing what you are best at doing.

In the end you are an artist who is searching for freedom of expression in painting. You acknowledge that there are limitations in this art genre, but you do not want to replicate your predecessors. You are doing what they have done before you, but as long as you do not make exact replicas you can still find something of interest for yourself. However, ultimately, you must search for fresh expressions and interest for yourself in order to stimulate your creative impulses.

You, an artist who is so at odds with the times, might as well acknowledge the limits of painting and return to the traditional two-dimensional flat surface, return to aesthetic taste, to see what else painting can achieve. And your method and practice have been to seek to discover new possibilities within the established boundaries of art.

For example, you place the boundary of abstract painting in the domain of lyrical abstract and abstract expression, so geometrical abstract that transgresses that boundary does not enter your field of vision. Therefore, you eliminate Malevich but affirm Zou Wou-ki. To a certain extent you accept Pollack's free splash but do not regard this action as the goal of art, and you do not use it as performance.

Abstract for you is abstraction that retains image: image does not vanish. Abstraction must not leave only geometrical structures and comparisons of pieces of colour.

When you pour and splash ink, the traces left by this action must interest you, and the images must be able to provoke associations for you; otherwise, you will give up. You do not consider all the traces left by the actions of the artist to be painting.

You acknowledge that at times when the artist is at work he loses control, even if he is an outstanding artist. You do not sign as your artwork all the traces that you leave.

The result of this self-established boundary and self-choice has led to the direction of your art: between abstract and figurative.

For you free splash must have meaning, and the brushstrokes and ink must be of interest—otherwise, it is a failure. Your free splash has become more and more simple, and you cannot bear excessive brushstrokes and ink.

You also do not directly introduce calligraphy into painting. Between these two art genres—calligraphy and painting—you likewise establish your own boundary. You do not treat the writing of script as a visual-art method in painting because the script in calligraphy belongs to language. What you want to express in painting is images that transcend script, so you do not insert ideographic script into painting.

You search after the delight of the ink drops and brushstrokes as you endow these with images that do not distinguish abstract from figurative, that are alike and yet not, so the shapes of people and things are ambiguous, not sketched, and the viewer is left space to make associations.

It is when language fails to narrate for you that you begin to paint, and while painting you cast aside all words and concepts. On completing the painting, you hang it up and scrutinise it at length, and only if you are totally satisfied do you give the painting a title. A title requires much thought, and often it is only barely acceptable. Finding the right words is hard, and for a painting that satisfies a title that satisfies cannot necessarily be found. Such is the limitation of words.

While painting you listen only to music. Bach is always good, [Olivier] Messiaen is also fine, but [Pierre] Boulez does not work for you. The music of [Alfred] Schnittke, [Henryk] Gorecki, and Steve Reich can also engage in a dialogue with you. At such a time the music you listen to must contain no words of singing, and when listening to religious music the singing must be in a language that you do not know.

Sensuousness and even the erotic are perfectly in tandem with the spiritual, and spirituality and human nature are not in conflict and can be incorporated in the one painting. You eliminate from your painting

concepts and viewpoints. If your brush does not turn an idea into sensuousness, it is a failure, and all you can do is throw away the work.

It is when you are not painting and making notes that many ideas come to you, but once you are ready to start painting those notes are put aside, and you simply immerse yourself in music for a long time. Before picking up the brush you do not know what you will paint; you have no rough draft, yet your mind is tranquil. Images gradually emerge from your brush, become clear and precise. At this point you ply the brush decisively. The wet ink on the brush will not allow half an instant of hesitation, otherwise there will be absolute disaster and all that has been painted will be ruined.

While painting you do not give performances because then it would be theatre and not painting. You do not think that the traces left by any action of the artist are art, and you find it harder and harder to tolerate mistakes with the brush. And you chase more and more after perfect beauty, but again this too is being behind the times.

Using the advent of photographic art to announce the death of painting became a big pretext for revolutionising painting. Photography entails choosing from nature and putting it into order. Within the parameters of nature, the angle of vision, depth, distance, and light can be chosen, and there can also be editing and montage, but it is not possible to recreate nature. However, in the case of painting a psychological nature can be created, a journey of the inner mind is possible, and even psychological processes can be expressed. The continuing improvements in photographic art in fact emulate painting, not the reverse, and painting has not at all perished because of the false premises decreed by the art revolution.

The difference between advertisement and painting lies in the former's existing because of merchandise, but painting has its own value. Warhol's replacing painting with advertisement indeed toppled art, but

what was toppled was not necessarily merchandise and advertisement: it was painting that was sacrificed.

If painting returns to reactions to nature, to the human, to the visual perceptions and the inner mind of humans, and to the spiritual, it will be more interesting and much richer than if it relies on commodities and merchandise.

If microscopic or telescopic views of the natural world do not use scientific instruments alone but also involve the human eyes, then the scenery that is seen will be affected by the mental state of the person. The scenery in the eye of the artist can never be completely neutral, so when something observed is expressed it will convey what the observer experiences.

That replication is considered *passé* can apply only to certain old methods of replication. Replication as an art method is neither progressive nor backward, and despite such labels there are still paintings to be painted, even still lifes. Van Gogh, Cézanne, [Giorgio] Morandi, [André] Derain, and Giacometti all went on to produce many paintings, and it is still worth using other perspectives and other methods for replication.

Manifestation has been used to oppose replication, but is manifestation necessarily superior to replication or more modern or contemporary? These are all false questions and unnecessary opposites. The artist does not need to accept such questions, and as far as methods are concerned, there is no such thing as one's being superior or inferior, and certainly no aesthetic value judgment is involved. The key to art lies in the uniqueness of the eye and the talent of the artist, including the expertise he or she uses to actualize visual images.

For the artist today replication, presentation, manifestation, or revelation can constitute the individual's unique method. Moreover, a single artist can use all of these. As far as the creation of the artist is concerned, purity of concept—like a thoroughgoing viewpoint—is without meaning.

Artistic simplicity is not in the brain and is only actualised in the completed work.

It is best to return to painting, return to form, return to images, and not be concerned about whether it is reactionary or progressive. Art will be saved once political evaluations are deleted from aesthetics.

Your water-and-ink painting began with abstracts, but before long you discovered the barrenness of pure abstract. What can be visually perceived in the boundless universe and in the inner world is so immensely rich that to simplify these images until nothing remains but painting strategies, canvas or paper, colours or ink, and at most also the frame—that is, the props and the frame to the painting—is, in other words, to leave behind nothing more than the expression of matter. For the artist this is not liberation; the constraints are greater, and freedom of artistic expression, rather than increasing, has been reduced.

You acknowledge the restrictions on art forms and strive for the greatest freedom within those limitations. The purification of form has made the artist a slave to the properties of matter, so it is matter and not the artist doing the painting. Exploring the properties of materials should offer more figurative strategies as long as strategies are not treated as the objective. Once the artist is satisfied with the possibilities provided by his materials and develops these possibilities, what can he be expected to do but exploit these possibilities in creating his own images?

The artist is restrained in turning these possibilities into artworks because of the art view to be fashionable, to advance relentlessly towards purity, as if to do otherwise is to be not modern enough. This modernity disease that is rampant everywhere often robs the artist of his natural talent and ability, dulls his original aesthetic judgment, and leaves him totally confused. He is unwittingly carried away by waves of fashions and charges about directionless, and after the waves have receded all that is left is an expanse of wilderness.

You must once again search at the beginnings of painting, make your search return to images; but reluctant to return to portrayals of nature, you must follow an opposite course and start from the inner mind to discover a source of light. In fact, while immersed in looking inwards, you find that light can radiate from anywhere.

Inner-mind images lack depth and cannot be obtained by the disassembling and topology patterns of geometry, and always in motion, they must be pursued. Inner-mind images are located beyond physical space but within temporal space, and focusing on or considering them is of endless interest.

Destroy signs, eliminate symbols, and instead go straight to capturing images.

Make chance the rule, and give direction to change.

Movement brings life to painting, and even if it is for an instant, it is still a process.

Turn chaos, too, into a process of change so that it, too, becomes interesting.

Treat light also as the goal of painting; even make it the theme.

Transform the formless into form, and make formlessness a visual-art strategy.

Then regard form as matter to be painted, and treat this matter as a foil for light, a foil that supports light, and make the effect of light predominate so that light is everywhere.

Take form, the simplest of forms—not geometrical, lifeless, abstract point, plane, line, but a single brushstroke, a mass of black dots, an expanse of water stains: give it texture, and it will be interesting; endow it with naturalness, and it will have life.

The absolute divide between figurative and abstract derives from art taxonomy concepts. Expel concepts from painting to obtain concrete forms, forms that are born naturally, forms that are sensuous, forms that are truly wonderful.

Make movement the topic of painting, its changes and contrasts.

Introduce music into painting. Paint what motivates music but not its phrases, and paint the rhythms of music but not its melody and beat.

Use the paint material until it is almost transparent, semitransparent, or transparent so that the texture of the material is revealed, allowing the material to breathe and allowing the nature of painting and the paint material to be interdependent while retaining the texture of the material as well as conveying, via the material, what it is that delights in painting.

Return air to painting, wind to painting, flames to painting, flying to painting, leaping up to painting, and melting to painting.

Paint what is formless, and paint feelings and sentiments.

Paint what has form but do not portray it; instead, endow it with sensuousness. A tangible world lies within the window defined by the frame of your painting, and this window illuminates and extends deep within where there are scenes to behold without end.

Retrieve the literary, which has been expelled from painting, and paint of joy, grief, frustration, uneasiness, and terror.

Paint silence, and paint the depths of the inner mind. Cut through psychological space and paint those ever-changing images that are in the flow of time, images that are subtle but belong to your inner world.

But you do not paint logic, and you banish cunning dialectics.

You do not paint language. In your paintings there is no calligraphy, words, or signs.

Totally eradicate all concepts. Retrieve the spiritual, and paint Chan revelations and other things that words cannot articulate.

Perceptions at the instant of painting are authentic and real, and in capturing these perceptions you cast aside all concepts and history.

Every artist has his or her own view of art, methods and explanations. However, what you consider is the artwork. Explanation merely confirms your experiences, and as soon as language is involved you are constrained by grammar and the logic of thought. As far as art is concerned, explanations always appear arbitrary, partial, and inadequate.

It is only while painting that you experience joy and comfort, and talking about painting always gives you a headache, even if it is about your own painting. It is only when you cannot paint, do not know how to proceed with painting, and lack the impulse to paint, that you talk about it.

You talk about it not to find theoretical evidence for yourself but in order to defend yourself. The rejection of others in the narcissism of the artist inevitably causes talk to be defensive.

However, while one is painting it is impossible to look for an adversary, and while in the act of creation the artist does not have an adversary. It is only when expounding concepts that there is a need for adversaries. If the artist cannot extricate himself from struggles with adversaries, no art will emerge, and this is inherent to the activity of art creation. Art is interesting simply because of what emerges, what is given birth, and does not lie in who is overthrown.

The artist can achieve proper satisfaction only in painting. You can focus for a long time on what you are painting, and bringing it to completion is not easy because you could go on and on painting it. It is direct perception that tells you to stop, or else the very concrete reason that the time has come for the exhibition and you must deliver it to the gallery.

A painting always grows, and this is why you can derive endless pleasure from it. While painting you keep discovering things, and not being portrayal, the painting keeps suggesting new possibilities that are impossible to exhaust. Often it is the painting that leads you in a certain direction and to certain new prospects.

Starting a painting from the centre or from the side is quite different. And going from where it is dark to where it is light or the opposite is also different. Different experiences produce different discoveries. Looking at it from a distance after emerging from somewhere dark, or moving to small details from the total scene is also different. Different ways of looking bring different results.

Meanings gradually emerge, and moreover, other meanings proliferate and must be unified in the painting. It is direct perception that prompts you regarding what will or will not work. And what looks fine one day could very well turn out to be not so the next day. It is only after looking at the painting again and again until it finally stabilises that the work can be considered complete.

Tension is actualised on the painting surface, and slant must be balanced in the painting; otherwise, it will be impossible to hang the painting.

Emptiness likewise can function to balance. Emptiness must also become form—for example, become light or space, spaces on the painting surface, or spaces in the painting.

Your relationship with the images on the painting surface is always changing, going forward or retreating, and distance is continually adjusted. Whether you are scrutinising it at close range or looking at it from a distance, your line of vision is not external to the painting. This is common knowledge in painting, but do you really enter the surface of the painting? If you really enter, the flat surface is no longer two-dimensional yet is still within time. Of course, this refers to perception and is unrelated to concepts and speculations on time. In any case, when

you are in the act of painting or are looking at a painting you do not stand on your head.

THE FUSION OF EAST AND WEST IN INK-WASH PAINTING

Ink can be a black hole in art, and it can suck away all colour and light. You understand the danger you confront and must use water to blend the ink into different shades so that it can express vitality.

Ink has no life without water, and only when it is fused with water are there multitudes of shapes and expressions. However, this visual-art method is only a condition for art and is not inherently art, and you are not content with manipulating ink and water. Instead, through the fusion of ink and water you unite sensuousness and spirit in painting to search for a state of being.

State of being theory has its origins in Chinese traditional art discourse and is an Eastern aesthetic viewpoint. The highest state of being is called empty spirit, and it also represents an aesthetic judgment. But you do not treat this supreme state as attainable in your paintings. According to later generations, Wang Wei attained this supreme state a thousand years ago during the Tang Dynasty, and although none of his paintings have survived, his poetry can definitely be said to have achieved this state of being.

During the seven hundred years of the Tang and Song Dynasties, China's ink-wash painting had already established solid foundations in technique and aesthetics. From some preserved Song Dynasty originals it can be seen that the technique and art of the likes of Mi Fei and Liang Kai had reached supreme heights of achievement. There were some breakthroughs in the Ming and Qing Dynasties but no departure from this general pattern.

Your ink-wash painting does not seek to overturn this old tradition, nor would this be possible. You have merely turned to the West in order

to introduce into your ink-wash painting the textures and sensuousness achieved in that other well-established tradition: Western oil painting. You believe that sensuousness and spirituality can be manifested simultaneously in painting. Visual art lies between figurative and abstract, and this is the position that you wish to find in your painting.

Modern European painting from the postimpressionists to the fauvists was to a certain extent inspired by Asian painting traditions, especially Japanese ukiyo-e painting. There was the abandonment of the perspective methods established since the Renaissance and a return to the flat-surface aspect of painting. And emphasis on the painting became the mainstream of modern painting. Conversely, at around the same time Western realist methods were introduced from Europe to Asia and became the mainstream of modern Eastern painting, and perspective and Western scientific technology alike came to be recognised as progressive markers in art.

Having grown up in China, you are familiar with the flat arrangement of traditional ink-wash painting, but you are utterly fascinated by the shadow and depth of traditional Western oil painting. The time difference between the different cultural traditions has no bearing at all on your visual experiences. You even studied perspective for a time, but the analytical trigonometry involved in working out the visual angle and determining the focal point caused your interest in painting to completely evaporate. Many years later you saw that white goose at the Munch Museum. The goose was far away in the distance, yet it moved towards you no matter how you changed the angle. Only then did you understand that this was the depth that you wanted to achieve in your painting. You subsequently called this false perception.

You were also captivated by colour. But it was not until the end of the 1970s when you saw the originals of van Gogh and Monet that you realised it was pointless for you to go on painting the oil paintings that you had been painting in China. In Paris at this time you saw Zou Wou-ki's abstract inks and Picasso's Chinese ink sketches, so you decided to

return to ink-wash paintings. You did not want to replicate this ancient tradition, but you had seen that the possibilities in ink-wash painting were far from exhausted.

Within the transitions between black and white—from dark to light—created by the ink and water, you not only saw differences in hues but also discovered that the transitions and hue contrasts could evoke the effect of light, thereby creating depth in a painting. This provided a visual-art language previously not pursued in traditional Chinese ink-wash painting, so using light to create depth became the new subject of your ink-wash painting.

A theory called scatter perspective uses Western painting discourse to explain the composition of traditional Chinese painting. Generally it defends tradition, attempting to show that Western perspective is not necessarily superior to Chinese painting, and that the perspective of Western painting in fact existed in ancient China and was far superior. This is a Chinese-style debate on what is traditional and modern, and for the artist it is of no benefit or use. The artist does not need such sweeping explanations but needs to find new turning points within differences between the art methods of different cultures in order to find his own path.

In both China's expressive ink-wash painting and decorative *gongbi* painting, the painting space preserves the flatness, and there is no attempt to turn the whole painting into a visual space for direct perception. In addition, distance relationships in the painting neither determine visual angle nor establish focal point and are similarly pictorial. The blank spaces left in expressive painting are even more random and do not imitate visual experience. Space in traditional Chinese painting would best be thought of as psychological space; the large blank spaces left in a painting are not simply there for writing inscriptions but are essential for lodging the mind's images and for allowing the energy of the ink on the brush to flow. For a painting to be filled is a serious taboo because it prevents the images of the mind from unfolding.

The reproduction of visual experiences found in Western painting is diametrically opposed to China's expressive representation, but this is not an issue of superiority or inferiority in these two totally different views and methods of painting. What is under consideration is the artist's talent and whether he or she is unique in creativity. That Western modern painting had turned to flat-surface painting likewise cannot be regarded as the imitation of Eastern painting traditions because it was inherently based on the formalism promoted by modernity.

You use ink wash to create your direct visual experiences, allowing what is left white to function as light so that the gradations of grey, black, and white turn into a space with depth. This false perspective at times closely resembles photography and appears to be a departure from traditional Chinese ink-wash painting. Yet you do not abandon state of being and still treat constructing state of being as one of the aims of your painting, although not the only one. So the spirit of traditional Chinese ink-wash painting is inevitably embodied in your painting though it no longer has a clearly Chinese feeling.

You depart from traditional Chinese ink-wash landscapes because you seek your own images, which are inner-mind images embodying a state of being but not direct expressions of mental states. Your painting relies on visual experiences, although it does not conform to structural geometry perspectives despite your often treating the inner-mind images concentrated upon as the focal point of the painting.

At present the trends in the West affect virtually the whole world. Even the firmly entrenched art traditions of Asia are not exempt, and when the west wind blows it is much stronger than it is in Europe. As wave upon wave of new Western trends arrive, no matter how hard they try to catch up, Eastern artists coming to contemporary art later in time find it impossible to stop worrying about being backward. The illness of the times in Western contemporary art likewise has infected many artists in the East.

Whereas Western art has been embroiled in nonstop revolution and overthrowing, Eastern art traditions have remained obstinately strong. In the case of the Chinese ink-wash tradition, the aesthetics and methods of artistic expression established in Tang and Song times still have not been overturned. Traditional painting that is meticulous about teachings transmitted from master to disciple and that emphasises the craftsmanship aspect of painting continues unscathed. What is worrying is simply that with the addition of the time lag, what future is there for the Eastern artist as a contemporary artist?

If anxieties are cast aside, they are cast aside. This is a form of Eastern wisdom, and not a game with language. Discard time differences, discard art revolutions and the overturning of art, and also let go of tradition, although this does not mean overthrowing it. Disregard materialist art chronicles; every artist lives in this instant, has a pair of eyes, and also his own aesthetic tastes, so he can use his eyes to the utmost to experience and to observe. The seeds of art creation are embodied in the artist's person.

In this instant there is no tradition and no concern for the fashions of the times. It is one person confronting art, confronting the achievements of human art, then observing himself, looking for his own images and methods, painting his own paintings, and seeing what interesting things he can produce. He leaves evaluations to others; he has very practical solutions.

STATE OF BEING AND SPONTANEITY

In departing from the composition, images, and brushstrokes of traditional Chinese painting, you do not discard state of being. State of being is the psychological state of the artist while painting that is also manifested within the painting. State of being is the spirit of ink-wash painting and is a state that similarly permeates classical Chinese poetry.

State of being is somewhat like the poetic, but it is not lyrical: it is lodging a psychological state within a scene and attaining spirituality through images. State of being in the first instance derives from observation, and the images and the surroundings in the painting do not set out to evoke associations that are concrete; instead, they project one into another psychological realm where there are things to be seen yet cannot be seen in their entirety.

State of being is within the painting yet overflows beyond the painting. The interest and rhythm of the ink and the brush in the painting can be realised in the painting through visual-art strategies. When a person observes, he or she is enticed into the painting and also experiences a psychological state that is akin to that of the artist engaged in the making of the painting.

Images in traditional ink-wash painting that evoke this psychological state are linked to the reclusive spirit of China's ancient scholars and are artistic projections of an interest arising from a certain lifestyle. However, this lifestyle has vanished, and there is no need for you to hanker after a lifestyle that no longer exists because the likelihood of your living as a recluse is simply out of the question. You want to express your experiences of this instant in your painting, so there is no need to replicate the images of traditional ink-wash painting; instead, you must search for mental images and, using your brushwork, reach through your expression the experiences that have been evoked by your observation at this instant.

The artist's primary impulse during the act of creation is the reason for his producing art. Art basically derives from a need of the inner mind, and art's social value and popular evaluations of the times are added only later.

If the artist returns to the creative impulse of the inner mind, form and expression will arise from this inner pulsation. He is an artist because he has the capacity to turn chaotic experiences and impulses into visible

images, turning experiences that others may also have experienced into images and, moreover, giving expression to these. The strength or weakness of an artist's natural gift, talent, and craftsmanship determines whether the artistic expression is adequate, whether it is forceful, and whether it is unique or outstanding.

Abolish fanciful thinking, and preserve the imagination of the artist: is this Eastern wisdom? Anyway, it is ancient and passé. At present the East has gone mad, and until the West comes to its senses, this madness must continue for some time. However, on the Pacific Ocean the post-modernist winds from the West are fiercer than on the Mediterranean Sea because of an anxiety about being passé and backward.

An artist is a frail individual who cannot fight back the tides of the times. If he refuses to be swept away, he has no option for survival but to retreat to the margins of society and calmly observe. This is the only way he will be able to continue doing the things he wants and painting the paintings he wants.

A VERY MATTER-OF-FACT STATEMENT

The political revolutions of this century all came to a sudden end, and the art revolutions associated with the ideology that supported the sociopolitical revolutions confronted a crisis after having overthrown art. As it confronts the new century, where is art headed? Modern and contemporary art chronicles with agendas to overthrow have been written up to the last page, so how can they go on?

As an artist you do not assume the role of a prophet, and having no other option than doing what you are capable of doing, you return to painting. If the artist today wants to preserve independence as an individual, it would be best to move history out of the way so that he will totally relax as he paints his own paintings.

To return to painting is to return to the artist's direct perceptions, to return to feelings, to return to flesh-and-blood existence, to return to life, to return to this moment, this eternal instant of the present.

To return to painting is to return to aesthetics and to bid farewell to conceptual games.

To return to painting is to return to visual perception, to return to sensuousness, and to return to this boundlessly rich and boundlessly vibrant real world that can be perceived.

To return to painting is to return to the human, to return to the frail individual. The heroes have all gone mad. Return to the frail artist, who in these materialist times strives to preserve himself, his struggles, his fears and despair, his dreams. It is only in dream that he belongs to himself, and his imagination is boundless. Return to the clarity he longs for in dream, that lingering beauty, as well as to his grief, his self-torment and self-mutilation, as he sinks into agony in search of ecstasy. Return to his loneliness and fantasising, his feelings of guilt, lust, and wilfulness. He does of course have spirituality, and this is the small amount of consciousness of himself that floats above his subconscious to observe himself.

To return to painting is to return to authentic human experiences, and it is only what the individual can actually feel that is reliable, even if verification is impossible. Unconcerned with the future because the future is that eternal instant that is forever in flux, he tranquilly observes this instant and allows that third eye behind him to observe the shadows he casts in the world.

To return to painting is to be liberated from the mechanism of a blind art autonomy that has led to the disappearance of art, and thereby to win back autonomy for the artist and win back his belief and creativity in art.

To return to painting is not returning to tradition to pick up some forms and interests that have already been given full expression by

predecessors but to return to art, to return right into art to discover possibilities that have not been exhausted and to develop one's own expression.

Return to painting. Paint where painting is impossible, and where it is completed, start painting again.

Return to painting. Search within art to find new possibilities for artistic expression, and search endlessly at the extremities of art.

Return to painting; return to a century earlier to the beginning of modernism and search for another direction.

Return to painting, return to the very beginnings of painting, and recover the lost basis for painting; rebuild your confidence, and paint again.

Return to painting are words unthinkingly blurted out by an artist who has just seen the latest world-touring exhibition of contemporary art in a modern art museum. They are also the words of numerous practicing artists who share the same feelings, as well as even larger numbers of art lovers. These are not words spoken by the countless people of the general public who cannot understand how art can be overthrown and probably cannot understand why art has to be overthrown or indeed who has to be overthrown. They are not the enemies of art, but where in fact are the enemies of art?

To return to painting is to bid farewell to art revolutions and the era that has killed art, and to liberate art from ossified principles left by ideology.

To return to painting is to allow art to come out of the shadows of historicism and empty dialectics so that art can present its original appearance and artworks can be allowed to speak for themselves.

Return to painting, be liberated from empty theory, and return concepts to language. Paint where talking fails, and start painting where talk has finished.

Return to painting is an extremely simple, quite unfashionable but highly matter-of-fact statement.

May 1999

Château de la Napoule

Note. The writing of this work received funding from the Art Bureau of the South of the French Ministry of Culture, which is duly acknowledged here.

CHAPTER 6

DRAMATURGICAL METHOD AND THE NEUTRAL ACTOR

Of all literary genres it is the play that devotes most attention to form. This is because the play does not rely upon language alone but also relies on other art forms—especially the actor’s performance—to enable it to be taken onto the stage for actualisation. The play is simply the master text of this composite art form. During the writing it cannot be just a game with language, and at the same time other artistic elements must also be considered, but once the script is handed over to the actor, that is the end of the matter. A good play will actually have concealed within it hints for directing and performance. There can be no doubt that a playwright with his own ideas on theatre will already have rehearsed a performance in his mind while writing the play. Genet had banned the staging in France of his *The Maids* for ten years probably because at the time he knew of no director who could present an appropriate performance of the play. Brecht played the three roles of playwright, director, and actor himself, and the theatrical form of his narrative plays was derived from his whole set of ideas on theatre. That different plays are presented in different forms is not simply a function of the form itself.

There is a large variety of modern and contemporary Western theatre, and if a certain element of this composite art is to be emphasised, then it is possible to find a certain theatre form. Infatuation with the expression of form and structure can lead to the sacrifice of dialogue, infatuation with sounds can lead to dealing with language as noise, and infatuation with lighting techniques and stage installations can turn the theatre into a place for playing with visual sensations, whereas the actor, in contrast, becomes a live prop or a live puppet in the hands of the director. This is not the sort of theatre that I want.

In my view, amongst the various elements of theatre, it is the actor's performance that is fundamental to the genre. And because language is the most exquisite crystallisation of human culture, why should it be sacrificed just like that? So I persevere in writing plays and, furthermore, write plays mainly for actors to perform.

It is when the actor performs before the audience that theatrical art is infused with life, and this has been so since ancient times. What moves me most about theatre is how actors and the audience engage in lively interaction in the theatre. There is of course nothing wrong with using various modern stage techniques, but if sound, lighting, colour, and stage installations are allowed to usurp the lead role, what one ends up seeing are these new techniques, or techniques manipulated to present certain trendy but simple concepts. However, there will be no theatre to see.

I prefer to return to the basics of theatre, to retrieve the theatricality and the sense of the theatre that are so often lost in contemporary theatre. The writing of contemporary plays has turned into something that can be written in any manner. *Hamletmachine* by the German [Heiner] Müller is such an example, and there are numerous other linguistic games like this, although not created on as grand a scale. It is now a common occurrence for the director to make various adaptations to a poem or a piece of writing and put it on the stage, but it would be better to call this a kind of performance or the staging of a performance; naturally, it is not only theatre that can be performed and that is performed.

Such performances at times can possess theatricality and a sense of the theatre, but more often they are simply public presentations that are even called antitheatre or nontheatre. These of course are perfectly all right but are not the direction for my theatre. I am striving for the exact opposite and must go back to the origins of theatre to search for vitality in contemporary theatre.

Unlike the lyricism of poetry and the narration of fiction, theatricality can be structured into theatre, and since ancient Greek theatre, theatricality has always been considered movement; what this refers to should be the original meaning of the word. However, modern theatre has also construed the clash of intellectual concepts as movement, so that political, social, and ethical issues have all been written into plays. The contemporary English playwright Edward Bond, for example, continues to follow that path. In contrast, China's traditional opera is like Greek theatre and is written according to the original idea of movement. The acting and singing of *The Fisherman's Revenge*, *The Capture and Release of Cao Cao*, and *Yang the Fourth Visits His Mother* are structured on incidents with genuine movement that carries throughout the works. When Western modernist theatre was introduced into China it became spoken theatre, and it was only then that dialogue gradually replaced movement.

The French theatre theorist Artaud advocated a return from language to movement and went further to propose that theatre was a process. This in fact did not represent a departure from the basis of theatre and was a creative interpretation. By extension it could mean that movement was not necessarily required to construct complete incidents and also that even when a part of a movement was enlarged for viewing, it was still a process. In that case even subtle psychological feelings, as long as they were presented as a process on the stage, could be theatre. The theatre of the Polish playwrights Grotowski and Kantor separately affirmed this principle using different methods. On the one hand, through the physical performances of the actors, Grotowski was able to considerably strengthen the tension of psychological processes.

Kantor, on the other hand, transformed actors into puppets, into so many live and moving corpses, but although this did not appeal to me, his use of changing inner-mind hallucinations to replace incidents provided interesting prospects for the writing of plays.

So enlightened, I went on to explore this further. Theatre could be change as well as discovery because change and discovery are similarly inseparable from movement, which could occur during a lengthy process or during an instant. And the process of change that leads to discovery can furthermore create surprise. Therefore, change, discovery, and surprise similarly possess theatricality. Magic can win people over not because the egg takes flight without wings or turns into a duck but because the psychological effect of discovery creates surprise. Contradiction and conflict structured by the movements of characters could create theatricality that through process, change, discovery, and surprise could then be transformed into inner theatricality. As to dramaturgical method, it was not only movement-structured incidents that produced theatre, and moreover, people's inner worlds did not have to rely on conflict to produce theatre. Any small human psychological activity could be theatre, provided it was presented on the stage as process, change, discovery, or surprise. Dramaturgical methods concerned with artistic form could thereby be greatly enhanced; numerous convenient doors could be found so that people's psychological experiences, which are difficult to express on stage, would be given fresh expressive power and could be presented to audiences.

Often emphasised in some contemporary theatre innovations is the art of the director, and a reason why it is hard for a play to be performed again after a performance is because dramaturgical method has been neglected. It is thought that through reliance on the art of the director, any text can be taken onto the stage, but a weak text can only resort to the help and support of stage techniques. Yet classical plays in the hands of any director, with whatever arrangements, are able to produce theatre because theatricality is already inherent in the text of the play.

The new expressive power sought in contemporary theatre, often rejecting the basic for the superficial, seeks help from visual art. But in my view theatre would gain more by learning from music because music is also realised in the space of time and, like theatre, is a process. In particular, some symphonic works possess a degree of theatricality. Apart from linear lyrics, music also has contrastive tension, tension from linear rising and falling, as well as contrasts in polyphonic unity, and if these are also used in theatre they greatly enrich dramaturgical methods. In contemporary theatre, the excessive use of music functions to conceal shortcomings in a play, but seldom is it thought to borrow from the method of music composition to expand the expressive potential of theatre. The contrasts normally adopted in music composition can provide theatre with new territory. If, for example, abstracts stop with linguistic concepts, or images of abstracts from visual art are taken onto the stage, it will merely add decoration to the theatre or else demonstrate or explain concepts, but theatre is much more than this. If through reliance on contrast the abstractions of concepts and images are transposed into dramaturgical method, then they can come to life when the play goes onstage.

Innovations in contemporary theatre do not necessarily have to travel the road of antitheatre or nontheatre, and continuing along that path will undoubtedly lead to a dead end. This is why some experienced modern and contemporary playwrights have turned again to placing value on the written play. They have recognised that the innovations in theatre have not killed off theatre as an art form, whereas those who are fond of calling for the revolution of theatre often only kill off their own artistic life.

The revolution in the concept of theatre must eventually return to the theatre because the audience has not transformed into actors who participate in the performance but remains the audience. Regardless of more and newer stage techniques or more expensive stage installations, without the performance of the actors, it will not take the audience five

minutes to lose all interest. Apart from the aforementioned theatricality, which captivates and must be written into the play, the appeal of theatre still depends on actors' performing to and establishing communication with an audience—that is, on theatricality. And the affirmation of this theatricality also primarily lies in the performance of the actors.

In the final analysis, the composite art of theatre is performance art, so the play, the director, and (needless to say) the stage design, lighting, and costumes are endowed with life only by the performance of the actors. And different theatre perspectives are manifested as different performance methods.

Fundamental to various performance theories is always reference to the relationship between the actor and the role; to put it simply, there are two main groups. One group is represented by the Stanislavsky performance method and lies in how deep the actor can go into the role and live within the role. If the role is equalled, then the performance has reached a realm of perfection. This kind of method seeks to achieve a likeness to reality, a likeness to real life, and leads to realist or naturalist theatre. The other group is similar to the traditional Eastern theatre of the Peking Opera and Japanese kabuki, in which on the stage the actor is concerned with how to act his role while preserving his status as actor. What is emphasised here is not living within the role but how best to act the role. Brecht transformed this Eastern theatre performance into another kind of Western theatre performance method. This emphasised that the actor was someone acting the role and employed various alienating strategies to allow him simultaneously to evaluate his role on the stage, preserve a distance from the role, and appeal to the intelligence of the audience.

Looking deeper into China's traditional opera performance, one finds that between the actor and the role there is a transitional stage and that performance art is not simply a relationship between the two. Before the individual actor enters the role, there is a stage of physical and psychological preparation. He leaves the state of his everyday-life being, purifies the self, becomes physically relaxed and mentally focused, then

prepares to go instantly into the performance: in fact, a tripartite relationship exists. I call this interval of transition—that is, the process of purification of the self—the state of the neutral actor. This understanding of performance art is what I refer to as the tripartite nature of performance: performance lies in how the relationship of the self, the neutral actor, and the role are managed. The relationship amongst the three is not unique to traditional Chinese opera performance, and though they may not have been fully aware of it, I have seen it in some great Western actors. However, this process of purifying the self is seen more clearly by observing traditional Chinese opera actors from the time they are backstage applying make-up to the moment they make their appearance on the stage. On the stage the consciousness of this purified self transforms into a third eye that controls and modulates the performance, and from time to time the actor using his status as neutral actor observes the audience and the role he is acting, going in and going out so that he both experiences and acts. This tripartite relationship threads through the entire performance. My observations suggested that there were many aspects of performance art actually worth investigation, and this was yet another starting point in my investigations in theatre.

I looked again and again for new possibilities in dramaturgical method while also looking for correspondingly suitable performance methods. If the neutral actor state I had discovered in Peking Opera performances was not merely a feeling but could constitute a self-awareness in the actor that could be consciously cultivated and to a certain extent be stabilised and controlled, it could be a reliable basis for entering and exiting the role, controlling and modulating the performance—and thus it could constitute an effective performance method.

The key to this performance method lies in how to maintain control of the neutral actor status, because I as an individual living person and the role are separate entities, and this is inviolable and affirmed in advance by each actor. When the actor is to enter the role there is no need to rush, and ideally there should be a preparatory stage separating the actor and

his role. In the warm-up exercises prior to a performance, in fact, such a space already exists, but actors usually only physically prepare themselves by exercising their limbs or practicing their singing. If these physical exercises are linked to the conscious act of focusing mental energies and the purification of the mind, the actor will achieve the neutral actor state. With a small amount of practice, this state is not hard to achieve, but then there is the problem of how to stabilise and maintain this state right up to the point of entering the role, and some strategies are required for this.

It is not difficult to grasp these essentials from qigong and taijiquan that have their origins in Chinese martial arts, but the difference is that the consciousness of self is not extinguished. Instead, the consciousness of self is refined into a third eye or, in other words, is the lucid observation of one's own body. Before the performance, the actor releases himself from his normal daily-life state and remains in the neutral actor state, body relaxed and mind in a heightened state of concentration, so that he can immediately enter the role.

The problem then is that this detached-from-self observation of one's body is not completed with a single occurrence but must assist the actor in entering and exiting the role during the entire performance. While the actor is on the stage, he is under the surveillance of this neutral eye—that is, the self—as he engages in communication with the role and with the audience. This is a performance that is an enlargement of the actor's inner mind, and what the audience sees is not merely the theatre of the play: the performance of the actor is also theatre.

Under the surveillance of the purified self that is this detached third eye, the actor is conscious that he does not blindly enter the role and that he cannot take liberties either with the performance or with the character's feelings; instead, he firmly grasps and relishes the role. Herein lies his challenge to the role, to mock, to sympathise with, to pity, to appreciate, but even more to scrutinise the role, and through the actor's manipulation of it, the role comes to life. This of course is a truly

exquisite performance full of tension and achieves a level of dynamism that is unachievable in performances based on uncontrolled ranting and raving.

Tripartite performance has been broadly described here, and the performance provided by the method is very rich. But why not proceed further to ask this question: When the actor on the stage communicates with the audience, does that communication originate from his role, or from his status as neutral actor, or from the actor in his normal status as an individual? If on the stage neutral actor status can be maintained, it will not be difficult to realise the changes amongst all three statuses. All three statuses will be collected together at the same time in the one body, and the much more complex psychological changes will also simultaneously induce corresponding physical responses. A good actor always knows that what he wants to convey to the audience must be abundantly clear to be appreciated.

Achieving this sort of performance of course requires some specialist training that will help the actor purify himself. Effective strategies from numerous professions can be found for entering neutral actor state. Normally, training for two weeks will give the professional actor with a solid basis in performance a rudimentary ability to do this. The crucial thing is that during training the actor become fully immersed. The play *The Other Shore* was written with a view towards training actors. The playing with the rope, the observing and looking into the eyes of one another, and the listening intently to music in the play are at the same time physical responses to the other shore of the imagination, and all of these help the actors free themselves from the modes of their daily movements and feelings. This sort of training must gradually reach a high level, and as in athletic training, after crossing what seems to be a barrier, the body relaxes and the mind becomes highly focused: at this time without the actor's being conscious of it, psychological burdens also vanish. The actor confronts the role as a boxer confronts an opponent. As if entering a combative state, by means of the third eye he transforms the

psychological process of acting into a purified self that focuses upon and measures up the role. So even if it is a monologue penetrating the inner mind of the role, the actor is still under the surveillance of the self, and via his body he communicates with the role as if watching how his own body is performing the role. While he is performing, the actor's inner-mind experiences are transformed into observable bodily responses. The role's narration of its inner mind is not reduced to random emotional outpourings by the actor but is a tense, positive, and lively performance. It should be noted that the audience comes to the theatre to see not sentimental outpourings but performance art.

Theatre by definition is false, and when theatre that by definition is false is concocted as something even more false, no one will want to see it. To turn theatre into reality is impossible, and if it really turned into reality it would be disastrous or else quite frightening: at most it can only approximate reality or be virtual reality. Often much effort is wasted in unsuccessfully presenting an illusion of reality, so it would be better to tell the audience clearly that it is false and to invite it to watch how it is being presented as real. Therefore, what the theatre wants to convey is not reality itself but authentic feelings. However, unless these authentic feelings are actually experienced by the actor, he or she will not be able to reproduce them. The actor relying solely on performance techniques will feel hypocritical, and certainly the audience, too, will think this is the case.

What the self of the actor feels during the performance is of vital importance. Performance techniques will not enable an actor to conceal hypocrisy; instead, they do the very opposite, and serve to activate an actor's real feelings. Therefore, during performance, even with the help of the neutral actor state, there cannot be an instant of departure from the feelings of the self. However, these feelings of the self originate not from the chaotic physical body but from the transcendent consciousness of the self that through the status of the neutral actor comes to experience the feelings provided by the role. It is as if this self sees the phys-

ical responses of the neutral actor, and these are precisely the feelings needed for the stage, feelings that can be conveyed to the audience.

The actor who puts himself wholly into observing his performance will experience great ecstasy, and this is the reward for exhausting body and mind in creation. The joy achieved through performance is of course seldom achieved in real life, and it is this striving in performance art that is initiated by this drive to achieve excellence.

This sort of performance, certainly, cannot be used with all sorts of plays. Furthermore, no performance method can be universally applied to all plays. Performance methods are always linked to a certain view of theatre, and to fully present the attraction of a particular performance method requires an appropriate play script: the two are complementary. It is hard to say whether research on dramaturgical method comes first or whether this performance view directs the plays that I write. However, in my case, one thing is quite clear: the plays I write are for performance, otherwise there would be no need to choose this particular genre. It would be possible for me to not consider whether the plays I write will be performed, not to care whether the audience will like them; furthermore, the audience is a collective concept, and there are all types of audiences. I simply treat the audience as abstract because it is required for the writing of this genre. If a play is written not for performance but only for reading, then there really is no point in writing a play because a play has many more restrictions. I cannot write plays without thinking about how they will be performed, and when I am able to raise some new questions, it is quite fascinating.

It would seem that people have not thought about how pronouns in a play can bring new perspectives to theatre, especially how their use can stimulate the performance. Generally, what is spoken on the stage is presented in the first person. Brecht's narrative plays used the third person to draw the narrator into the play, but this usage was not introduced into the dialogue. In Peking Opera there can be asides and interruptions using the third person, but again this is not introduced into the

dialogues of the characters. In contemporary plays, Marguerite Duras has occasionally used the third person, whereas Peter Handke used the second-person pronoun not with the roles but simply for the people in the play to direct abuse at the audience.

Between Life and Death, I believe, is the first play to use the third person throughout in the inner-mind monologue of the protagonist, and moreover, even the dialogue in the play is presented in the third person. This is not just a simple replacement of the first-person with the third-person pronoun, and behind all this is the aforementioned performance method. The woman actor playing the role of the woman protagonist throughout maintains a neutral actor status on the stage, and she can play the role or not play the role; sometimes she plays the role and at other times not. When she plays the role she can either fully play it or play it only to a certain degree, leaving as much as she wants to leave. The role is identical to the projection of the self in her thinking—that is, it is identical to that other image of the self in her inner mind. When in dialogue, the neutral actor becomes the narrator and ceases to play her role. In other words, the narrator instead becomes her role at this point. It is a play worth watching: apart from the monologue that presents the woman protagonist's inner world, the audience also sees the actor playing or not playing, or else playing to a measured extent—and the beauty of her various performances, simultaneously with the play itself, is also theatre. Therefore, the actor who plays the female protagonist does not need to be concerned with the age of the character; it does not matter if it is a young actor or a much older actor, for as long as the neutral actor status has been grasped then the character can be presented convincingly on the stage.

As is the general practice, the male protagonist and the female protagonist basically speak in the first person in the first act of the play *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, but in the second act, the woman uses the third person and the man uses the second person. The performance method of each of these acts is also different. The performance of the first act can be very

natural, but the performance of the second act requires intently listening to the inner-mind voices that have transformed into either the second or third person while at the same time observing changes in the body of the neutral actor that adopts schizophrenic and grotesque stances, including movements like that of a worm.

The changing of pronouns like this is by no means a linguistic game and does have a psychological basis. When the man engages in introspection, he analyses the self as an adversarial other in the person of *you* to lighten his psychological resistance, and when inner-mind monologues occur, they easily turn into the second person. When the woman engages in introspection, she often alienates herself as the third person *she* to be able to disclose the torment she is suffering. When there are monologues or exchanges of the inner mind, the subconscious also reveals these through the linguistic changing of pronouns.

There are many connections between pronouns and people's subconscious, and consciousness of the self cannot be separated from pronouns. As soon as the need to relate arises there must be pronouns. Speech is manifested in pronouns because of the need to identify the subject, and hidden behind is the cognitive angle. It is only when the self is transcended that there is an absence of pronouns. Performance is based on pronouns, unless it is meditation. But during meditation there is actually not an absence of pronouns, but instead a flood of pronouns, because when there are really no pronouns, human consciousness is extinguished. In the play *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, pronouns finally vanish, so speech is no longer possible, and the protagonists turn into worms; the play *Between Life and Death* ends with the absence of pronouns, and this results in an expanse of bewilderment.

The use of pronouns in my plays is of course related to my understanding of performance. And the wonderful thing is that this sort of understanding led to further progress in my understanding of dramaturgical method. Because the self, the neutral actor, and the role are all collected within the one body of the performer, he or she is able to reach

three different psychological levels and also to present these physically. So the role's psychological state of mind, through the three pronouns—in other words, different angles of perception—also has at least three different levels. This provides new possibilities in dramaturgical method. The role that usually appears on the stage in the first person can therefore be divided into three to speak as the three different pronouns, *I*, *you*, and *he*; one character, therefore, has three different psychological states. From the vantage point of different pronouns, how the character perceives the external world is not completely the same. When images of characters are created in the writing of a play, the pronoun must first of all be affirmed: From which angle will the character regard the world that is not himself?

In the play *Nocturnal Wanderer*, the protagonist uses the first person in real life, prior to his wandering in dream. When he comes to wandering in dream the second person is used; moreover, these indirectly quote the first-person pronoun, and other characters basically use direct speech in the first person, so all at once the inner world of the protagonist and the external world constructed by the other characters are distinctly separated. For the protagonist, however, the external world that is directly spoken about is incomprehensible. The protagonist's second-person indirect narration instead more closely approximates this character's perceptions of and responses to the world. The man in this real but at the same time incomprehensible world crashes about everywhere. And this *you*, who is the self of the man's consciousness, is both a person in the play and each person in the audience who has come to see the play. This poses a new question about performance: Is it playing the character *you* or is it looking for a perspective that stands for the audience? In other words, does it shift the position of the audience onto the stage, and conversely, has the audience assumed the burden of the psychological state of the character *you*? Of course, the play can also be performed in other ways.

By studying pronouns—that is, perspective angle—dramaturgical method obtains a better understanding of characters. Generally, interrelationships between characters are always on the same level. But there are at least three different levels to the relationship of a character with others. Interactions between people often are not located at the same level, so deaf-mute dialogues are hardly surprising.

In the second act of *Dialogue and Rebuttal*, the man uses the second-person *you*, whereas the woman uses the third-person *she*. There is the interweaving of two different levels of inner-mind monologues in which communication is impossible, yet is this not a common occurrence in real life? Perhaps the play has simply found a form of theatre that demonstrates this more clearly.

In my new play, *Weekend Quartet*, the four characters are not differentiated into major or minor characters, and each character treats others as the external world. In principle, each character's perception of others has at least three different levels; that is, three pronouns are used as the starting point. Their interactions with one another also take place on these different levels, so how many different perceptions are there of a single event? Has a particular event occurred, or is it conjecture or imagined? Given that it is impossible for anyone to confirm, where is objective truth? And whose truth is this objective truth? Yet each person's perceptions are authentic. People can live only within their perceptions, and it is according to these perceptions that on different levels they either communicate or create misunderstandings. Naturally, there are many different interpretations and performance methods for the play.

It is predetermined that a person cannot know what truth is for others. Moreover, a person's self is in fact also a totality of chaos. However, art must still always have form so that it can be manifested. The characters and pronouns of plays are people, forms manifested in art, and indeed there must be content and, furthermore, performance to achieve realisation on the stage. If it is merely a game of signs and semantics, it will not stand as theatre and cannot have life in the theatre.

Like performance methods, dramaturgical methods do not have permanent unchanging laws, yet they do have a definite basis and do have limitations, just as thoughts can be realised only in the framework of language. The boundary between theatre and other performance art is also what limits it. What defines art as art and what defines theatre as theatre are the limitations that must first be acknowledged, and it is only within the area so defined that something is either art or theatre. The problem is where in fact the limitations are. The benevolent person sees benevolence, and the wise person sees wisdom, but my preference is to establish a framework myself and to struggle within that framework to see what else can be achieved within the parameters of the artistic genre of theatre. I find this more interesting than the simple denials of antitheatre and nontheatre. Furthermore, people have already tried antitheatre and nontheatre, but this has not brought about the death of the art genre of theatre.

For the time being I place the limitation of theatre performance within the area of acting. Nonacting performance, such as dance when it is pure physical expression, singing with musical accompaniment, or so-called action art of doing a painting, are all excluded from theatre. Reading aloud without acting I also do not recognise as theatre.

I set my own limitations for a play, and if poetry or fiction is to enter theatre, I must first endow it with a definite theatricality. Otherwise, it would simply be the blurring of literary genres and would just be too easy.

When fiction enters theatre, it undergoes all sorts of revisions, and there are successes as well as failures. What is the key to success? This requires reverting to dramaturgical method. If the required theatricality cannot be achieved in the play, it will be sloppy and weak on the stage and will not work. Such rewriting simply makes use of material from fiction and writes it into a play. But can narration, which is the fundamental strategy in fiction, also be brought into theatre? To phrase the

issue with a greater degree of professionalism, are narration and theatre compatible?

Brecht has already achieved this. His narrator does not take part directly in the events yet is a role in the play; via this narrator with a role, narration entered theatre. Moreover, the narrator is an actor playing a role or else is distanced from the characters and events of the play to form a contrast in order to provide the narration with theatricality. Apart from these solutions, can there be other strategies that will fuse narration into theatre?

In *Between Life and Death*, the female protagonist's lengthy third-person inner-mind monologue contains large sections of narrative that are similar to fiction. If during those times the play does not have two additional nonspeaking roles to mock or cast scornful glances that create contrasts, this sort of narration would certainly be tedious. Moreover, the actor playing the female protagonist is both the neutral actor status narrator and the protagonist, and theatre already exists in this dual-status performance. Of course, many other theatre strategies can be found for bringing narration into theatre.

If the contemporary playwright fails to investigate the various possibilities contained in dramaturgical methods or to understand performance or to set out to become thoroughly familiar with the theatre space, then in this era of the dictatorship of the director, that playwright will be reduced to nothing more than a scriptwriter who merely provides scripts for a director to chop and change, so that what is left is not a play that can be performed again.

As I see it, theatre and the lyrical are incompatible. In the modern and contemporary era, a trace of the lyrical in theatre will unavoidably cause laughter. However, theatre does not banish poetry, and theatre without poetic sense, on the contrary, is not necessarily the highest domain of theatre. The best comedy and farce also contain poetry. Needless to say, the comedies of Shakespeare and Molière were often directly

written as lines of poetry. Genet's gross philistinism is likewise saturated with poetic sense, but the poetic sense of his plays derives not from the lyrical but, on the contrary, from ridicule and humour. Poetic sense in theatre is different from poetry in that poetry is realised solely through expressions, empathy, symbols, images, and associations in language, whereas theatre must be realised through movement, conflict, process, change, discovery, contrast, and surprise. If poetic language on its own enters theatre, even more beautiful lines of poetry would instantly pale and also sever the process of theatre and be intolerably vague and dreary. Poetic sense in theatre is not conveyed through language but, in contrast, is beyond language: it is the result of movement, process, change, contrast, and surprise. If the lines of poetry written into a play are not imbued with these elements that are required for theatre, then they can only be decorative and cannot provide theatre with the spirit of poetry. Therefore, what theatre demands of poetry is often purity and simplicity of language, even meanings not attainable in language that though concerned with one thing speaks of another: the power of language is not in the meaning of words but in the result produced under specified circumstances. Poetic sense in theatre transcends language, is not realised directly in lines of poetry, and can be realised only through performance.

So can modern poetry that is nonnarrative enter theatre? Here are some conditions: first, it must not be purely lyrical; second, it must potentially contain elements required for theatre; third, it must unite with the circumstances and the performance of the play. *The Other Shore* and *Weekend Quartet* are experiments in which I sought to introduce modern poetry into theatre. I regard these as modern poetic plays. The dance work *Variations on a Slow Slow Theme* can also be thought of as a poetic play, and I believe it satisfies these conditions.

There are two art theories. One is aesthetics based on philosophical analysis that satisfies intellectual speculation and that includes Kant, Hegel, and their successors. The other consists of artists' creative theo-

ries, for example, the painting theories of Shi Tao and Kandinsky and the film theories of [Sergy] Eisenstein and [Andrei] Tarkovsky. In theatre there is Brecht—and I, who follow in his footsteps, hope that I have been able to provide some insights to young friends who are involved in theatre.

4 July 1995

France

Note. This text is a revised version of a recorded lecture presented to the Department of Directing of the Hong Kong Performance Institute.

CHAPTER 7

CONCERNING
SILHOUETTE/SHADOW

Silhouette/Shadow will not fit into any existing film classification, and being neither fiction, nor documentary, nor biography, it would best be thought of as a cinematic poem or perhaps a modern fable. It is a film that cannot find its way easily into commercial distribution channels and has been rejected by film festivals, yet it is precisely the film I wanted to make.

I had wanted to make a film for a long time, since the early 1980s when I was still in China. During the renaissance in theatre and filmmaking following the end of the anticulture Cultural Revolution, some young new-generation directors organised a filmmaking conference and invited me to give a talk on French New Wave films. I said everyone had seen the French and Italian movies of the 1960s and 1970s in the archives, so instead I would discuss how I envisaged films of the future to give people something to think about. At the end of my presentation, people joked that these of course would be Gao Xingjian's "tripartite films" of the 1990s. Not long after, I published my first screenplay, *Huadou*. It was a multicamera script for parallel filming, written in three

blocs: for picture, sounds and music, and language. The separation of language from sounds and music made language an independent element in the film, and this made the work different from the usual two-element composition of picture and sound in films.

Film is primarily the picture. In the silent-movie era, piano was used as accompaniment. Later, with the advent of soundtrack films, dialogue, music, and sounds were used to explain the picture. New Wave films and a number of subsequent author films somewhat altered the principal arrangement of the picture. At times, by acting as a counterpoint to sound and picture, either the sounds or music gained a degree of independence, but overall the picture remained the dominant element in film. Sounds and music had limited independence and were used merely to produce special effects: they did not constitute a special film language.

I isolated language from sounds and music because, as is the case with the picture, sounds and music are directly perceived, and they consequently provoke immediate reactions or associations. Language, on the other hand, is constrained by the fact that it can communicate only with those who know the language. Words or phrases are conceptual: they involve a thought process and are therefore abstractions. This applies to any word, even when it designates something specific. For example, the word *teacup* summarises various types of cups based on function, and it is because of associations evoked by the experience of those who know the language that the word confirms what is said about the size, shape, colour, or the material used to make the cup. There is no direct reliance on visual or auditory perception. Moreover, sentences consisting of words and phrases must follow the fixed grammatical structures of the language to construct meaning, and those who do not know the language require translation in order to understand. Both intellect and thought processes are involved in transmitting and receiving speech meaning, but audiovisual art—that is, film—usually overlooks this unique aspect of language. By isolating audio-language from the concept of audiovisual, one creates a third important component for film. What I

call a tripartite film refers to the picture, sounds, and language, each having independence and autonomy, but each complements, combines with, and contrasts with the others to produce new meanings. In this understanding, sounds and language cease to be subsidiary components that are subordinate to the picture. Instead, each of the three can predominate to form a relatively independent theme, and the other two serve to complement or contrast. In this way, film becomes a composite art of all three components and not simply one in which the picture always prevails and determines everything.

Almost all popular films today use the picture to tell a story. Generally, in narrative films, separate scenes explain the story in pictures. The picture is matched with dialogues between characters, and music or sounds are then used to arouse emotions or highlight scenery. Likewise, documentaries present shots of actual places and then add to them explanations and commentary. But I did not want to make that type of film. What I wanted to do was make an art film that would possess greater inherent freedom by fully exploiting the potential of each of the three components technologically available in film.

If picture, sounds, and language each functions to its fullest potential, each no longer subservient to narrating events, each creating its own vocabulary and language, then the film will be able to break away from the current popular mould. With reference to the picture, if it no longer tells a story and if each scene—just like paintings and photographs—fully manifests the charm of plastic art and the meaning of photography, then each scene will be worth savouring and there would be no need or rush to change scenes merely for the sake of explaining events. In this way, each scene is relatively independent and structures its own meaning without the help of either sounds or language. At such times, a soundless screen can be even more interesting.

Making full use of the methods of plastic art, one could then proceed to “view-find” with the eye of the artist—for example, modulating colour contrasts and tones according to emotional changes, or crossing from

black and white to different gradations of colour, even to the point of colour saturation. In addition, the degree of light or dark and overexposure can all constitute the language of film scenes. In fact, precision photography is plastic art. When the camera lens acts like the eye of the artist to film an object, it provides a highly concentrated view. From this, zooming and panning within the scene bring wonders unimaginable in conventional filming. Neither mere camera movement nor montage, this form of observation and the process of observing have a much greater propensity for evoking psychological reactions. This concentrated gaze can constitute a film language rich with connotations, and by changing the line of vision the activated associations are able to transcend the picture. All these techniques increase the capacity of the picture to expand, making it richer in meaning, as well as more independent and autonomous, so that it ceases to be subordinate to situations and events of the narrative that are extraneous to the picture. The dialogues of the characters and explanations extraneous to the picture are also expendable.

When sounds or music are the overriding theme, the picture can be subordinate to the musical phrases, stanzas, and rhythms, and one can feature the same or a similar picture repeatedly. The picture can serve as an accompaniment to either the music or the sounds. A frame may be blank, hazy, or frozen to enable the music or sounds to narrate or engage in a dialogue. In this type of film, sounds of course do not simply highlight the picture and, like music, when fully exploited, can shock as powerfully as the picture can.

When the picture is secondary—for example, in the scene of a desolate sky—the sound of the wind can speak. And put together with sounds that have special meanings, various scenes become secondary. In such instances, the expressive power of sounds will often transcend the picture, giving it astonishing meanings. Because auditory perception is more sensitive than visual perception, it can at times even alter the

meaning of the picture. Stillness or moments of total silence, when used appropriately, constitute a highly versatile form of film language.

The independence and autonomy of audio language in a film is self-evident. But the nature of a film changes radically if one introduces literary devices such as poetry (used as voice-overs), or thoughts, or soliloquy (either used as voice-overs or as internal to the picture). Film is not simply for popular cultural consumption but can also provoke deep thinking and reflection in viewers.

From murmurs and whispers to loud proclamations and even chanting, the language of literature transforms itself in film into human sounds that are more powerful than written words. If the living language of a film can detach itself from being an appendage to the picture, then the reflections and free associations aroused will transcend the boundaries of the picture. These functions of language have yet to be fully exploited in contemporary film.

If writing a screenplay does not entail inventing a story and writing the dialogue and commentary, but can enjoy the freedom of literary creation, then the film genre can be as rich and as varied as literature.

Likewise, the methods of drama can be also used in film. This sort of film does not shun stage acting, and it could even constitute a performance style, although the film would not confine itself to recording only what is staged. As long as this sort of film abandons the practice of imitating real-life scenes and does not set out to create characters, it will be able to free itself from the realistic performances of naturalism. Furthermore, especially when one is writing for the camera, everything becomes magnified, even expressions of real life, so that under such close scrutiny other meanings may emerge. Of course, such a film can expect even more intricate and subtle performances that are closely related to plastic art, and the manipulation of light and colour tones can bring endless transformations to a person's face. Moreover, if one can accommodate the vocabulary of dance—for instance, physique, stance, or steps

—in this sort of film performance, then everything from the look of the eye to the body can construct pictures. When film encompasses within itself literature, drama, dance, painting, photography, and music, it is total art.

For this kind of film, the usual techniques of camera movement—panning, zooming, and montage—are inadequate because one must consider the individual meanings and unique laws of all these diverse elements. The view-finding, scene-splicing, and montage used in conventional narrative films will obviously not work, so writing this sort of screenplay requires searching for new frameworks.

Huadou was my first experiment in China, but my plan to work with a film director eventually did not materialise. Then, at the invitation of a German filmmaker, I developed another project, but again after many discussions it was not filmed. So I simply wrote it up as the short story *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather*, which interweaves dreams, real scenes, memories, imagination, associations, and even an actual television broadcast. My third film project was in Paris. A French film company approached me, promising to provide everything necessary, as well as allowing me to shoot the film. This was how my short story *In an Instant* came into being. I had constructed a series of pictures and images into a cinematic poem, but the company wanted a film on China that would generate a feeling of “foreignness” for Western eyes. That project, too, would only come to nothing, and so I rewrote it as a short story. In the case of *Silhouette/Shadow*, it was “The Year of Gao Xingjian” organised by the City of Marseille that presented me with the opportunity. I had also met two good-hearted friends, Alain Melka and Jean-Louis Darmyn, who were tracking my activities for a short documentary, and it turned out that they were keen to help me make the film I had dreamed of doing for so many years.

The film contains a factual background: the large-scale art exhibition, a play, an opera, and a film scheduled for “The Year of Gao Xingjian.” The artist at work, the play rehearsals, the exhibition, and the stage perfor-

mances are interwoven with the artist's psychological activities during the inception and production of his works—in other words, from reality to imagination—and then the emergence of the works all constitute the film's first level. Real scenes are presented in colour.

The film also shows the process of the artist at work. The original colours of the real surroundings fade gradually as they transform into warm or cold hues according to his psychological state that constitutes the second level in the film. The film crosses over to a third level, as the picture turns black and white when entering the world of the imagination, the pure inner mind. The film oscillates amongst these three levels, discarding totally the structure of a narrative. Using meanings inherent in the picture, music, and language, it evokes viewers' reactions and associations that transcend the factual background. The audience can of course interpret the film according to personal experiences and feelings and treat it as a cinematic poem or as a modern fable.

Music in the film does not serve merely to intensify emotions. Often, it is more important than the picture. Xu Shuya accepted the invitation to compose the music for this film, and his music acts as prompts to the pictures. Confronted by desolate lanes and graves, the music summons forth associations for viewers. The montage in scenes and the reflections in the mixture of ink and water poured onto the ground are created by following the musical rhythms and phrases.

The extract from the modern symphony *Requiem for a Young Poet* by the German composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann consists of noisy chattering in different languages—specifically, the inflammatory speeches of mad leaders or politicians. This is aligned with pictures of a street depicting tall buildings with their doors and windows shut tight, houses and shops overgrown with weeds, as well as barbed wires hung with rags and necklaces. These contrasts evoke powerful associations.

Bach's *Mass in B Minor* is presented in its entirety, but it summons forth thoughts that are no longer of the Christ who suffered for

humankind. The church still standing from Bach's times has turned into another kind of space, and in the painting it is hard to tell whether a person or a bird is on the cross.

The film manifests death in three modes. First, it is visual. Imminent death is like a black shadow, and its coming or going is not as one wills: this is an image of the inner mind. Next, it appears in the theatrical mode. In the play, the deliberations on death are embedded in an endless stream of words, although the mockery and black humour remain within death's jurisdiction. And finally, it appears in the death of the Sixth Chan Buddhist Patriarch in the opera and his ascent unto the sublime accompanied by the chanting of poetry, "Life is a wonderful game!"

Childhood, recollections, war and disaster, love and sex, as well as death, life, and art, existence and nonexistence: between these scenes, there is ample space for viewers to insert their own interpretations. Each event and scene can have many layers of meaning, and the montage between scenes leaves further space for the imagination, just as when one reads poetry. And the sound of poetry external to the picture also provokes flights of fancy or profound contemplation; some viewers have commented, "The film conveys too much information, and it can be watched again and again." Different audiences will have different understandings, and this is exactly how I want people to react to the film.

However, commercial distribution for this film has been a problem. The spread of digital film technology reduced substantially the cost of film production, and it is now possible for people to make films however they like, as in literary creation. But progress in film technology has not brought greater freedom to film creation; instead, the situation has been quite the opposite. Contemporary film has become more commercialised than ever, and in the wake of globalisation, it caters to worldwide mass cultural consumption. Given such conditions, it has become harder and harder for art films to reach viewers. This is not because audiences do not want to see them but because the market mechanism has blocked the distribution channels for art films. From Ingmar Bergman's works

in the 1950s to Federico Fellini's in the 1960s and the subsequent author films, a sustained flourishing of art films lasted until the films of Andrei Tarkovsky during the early 1980s. Thereafter it became extremely difficult for art films to continue, so it was hardly surprising that Michelangelo Antonioni and Wim Wenders proclaimed the death of film as an art form. For contemporary art film to regain artistic freedom, it must go in the direction of small productions and become more individualised.

In fact, all kinds of digitised experimental films have already begun to emerge. As long as experimentation does not limit itself to technical aspects or stop at being conceptual or resort to playing with new technologies and trifles, filmmakers with fresh insights and ideas will not have a problem finding new forms for film creation. This sort of highly individualised film does not depend on the media or the market and does not serve politics. Unswervingly independent and free in its narration, it may in fact anticipate a new era in art film.

7 March 2007

Paris

CHAPTER 8

ENVIRONMENT AND LITERATURE

WHAT WE ARE WRITING TODAY

First of all, I thank the president of PEN Japan, Mr Atoda Takashi, for inviting me to address this grand meeting of writers from all parts of the world who are gathered here in Tokyo. In my talk “Environment and Literature: What We Are Witing Today,” I present some issues and views for your consideration.

The present environment confronting literature is indeed one of many problems in the relationships between humankind and nature and between humankind and society. The pollution of the natural environment is worsening by the day, global warming is troubling the whole of humankind, and although the deterioration of the natural ecological environment has been a common political and media topic for a long time, there is no sign of any effective policies or measures even to slow slightly the deterioration of the very environment humankind relies on for its existence. Instead, the destruction of the natural environment is accelerating.

Likewise, the social environment in which human beings live cannot escape the onslaught of politics and the market economy, and via the all-pervasive media, politics and advertising invade every corner of social

life, so that an uninfected patch of clean land cannot be found anywhere on this vast planet. This is the environment facing literature today, and it could be described as a terrible problem.

Faced with such problems, what can the writer do? Or in other words, can literature change these problems that confront humankind? This is the first question I would like to raise.

Faced with these interminable problems, it must be conceded, the writer of today can really not do anything. Given that literature is invariably the voice of the writer as an individual, what can such a frail individual do but turn to myth and science fiction? Literature cannot recreate the world and can only adopt literary means to tell of the problems of human existence, to bear testimony to the situation of human life. And it is how to tell about the real situation of present day humanity—in other words, first how to understand this sort of situation—that is the work of the writer.

The writer does not enjoy a special status in today's society; he has neither power nor privilege, and unless he throws in his lot with party politics, he is on his own. If he does not have an occupation or is not supported by his own financial means and merely makes a living through writing, will he be able to resist the pressure of the market, and unwaveringly maintain his spiritual independence to write of his observations and thinking in his book? For the writer of today, it is this that is the true and grim reality of his situation.

The literature I am talking about is the type of literature that confronts humanity's real predicament—not the bestsellers listed in the book market. And the predicament of this type of literature is the predicament of today's literature. If today's writer refuses to be co-opted into party politics, to fill the battle ranks, or to act as a bugle player for political authorities and also does not follow the fashions concocted by the market, he must face this obvious reality. At present the predicament

of human life and the predicament of writers and literature are closely linked in this way.

In the social situation of the present, putting aside how the writer will go about changing it, it is difficult to persevere with the sort of writing that, transcending financial gain and resisting pressures and inducements, maintains its spiritual independence. This is what I proceed to consider.

The writer is not a sage; moreover, where are sages to be found? The writer is not a superman, and he is neither Creator nor saviour, and there is no need for him to act the role of spokesperson for the people, the mouthpiece of the times, or the embodiment of social justice. It would be best to leave such roles to the politicians, and there are already too many of these putting on performances every day in the media, like images on a revolving lantern—but they have not saved the world.

Literature cannot change the world, and that it has been turned into an instrument or weapon of war has come about because of political need. When literature intervenes in politics it cannot change politics in the slightest, because politics is a temporary balance between comparative might and advantageous deals, and this is the truth that cannot be hidden behind political talk. So-called political correctness establishes new criteria depending on changes in time and place once this temporary balance is disrupted. The outcome of literature's intervening in politics can only be that literature will work for politics. Furthermore, this real politics is inevitably the politics of political parties. When have writers ever controlled politics? If writers become involved in politics, they become either political decorations or sacrificial objects in political struggles. In the twentieth century, which has just passed, both in the West and the East, in Europe and Asia, this has occurred many times, so there is no need to go into detail about it.

Under totalitarian regimes the type of literature that dares to confront the dilemmas of human existence has always been suppressed, banned,

and stifled. Although former communist-party centralised states today have opened up to the capitalist market economies, this type of literature has not been released from political scrutiny; worse, subjected to the market machinery, it is enduring even greater hardship. In democracies, even if the authorities do not directly control literature, political correctness via ideology nonetheless controls literature. The writer of course can choose whether to comply—however, freedom is never bestowed without a cost, and having to choose freedom or the market is a grim test for the writer. If a writer belongs to neither the left nor the right but is resolutely independent, then he or she must be able to endure the loneliness.

For literature to transcend politics and to be independent and not follow the market is not easy in today's society. Literature also cannot avoid being increasingly marginalised in social life. Literature not only has withdrawn from the news media but also no longer has the attention of the masses. However, what I want to discuss is precisely this sort of literature, which, independent and autonomous, confronts the dilemmas of human existence and is subservient to neither politics nor market consumerism.

This type of literature transcends political benefit yet does not avoid politics, does not intervene in struggles between political powers yet stands aside to calmly observe, and does not make simplistic judgments as to what is right, wrong, or ethical. In any case, nowadays various forms of political correctness have replaced judgments on what is right or wrong and good or evil. Parties and factions establish a political-correctness standard to serve their own interests, modifying it whenever required, and each will claim to be in the right and will always be in the right. Of course, the writer has no need to follow the direction of political winds, and this sort of party weather indicator is right one day and wrong the next in line with struggles for power, so that often before one reaches the end of writing a long novel, this short-sighted value system has totally changed. The writer is not a journalist, and though

news has its value as news it is another matter; regarding this literature that does not enter the media, the writer will naturally make his or her own value judgments.

The writer regards the value judgment intrinsic to literature to be whether it is the truth. Does a work reveal the truth of human life? Do the characters' experiences and feelings convince the reader, even when the characters are fictional? Such judgments are not asserted at random by the writer but are based on a common knowledge of human nature that, transcending practical interest and time, has developed over a long period and can be confirmed by an intuitive knowledge that has been transmitted through the ages.

When writers infuse their work with genuine feelings and perceptions that stem primarily from their cognition of the human world, are there penetrating insights on human life and the dilemmas of human society? This does not depend on talent; rather, what is crucial is whether the writer genuinely confronts the work, abolishes thought of any practical interest, and writes incisively of his or her genuine feelings and perceptions, for doing so unites sincerity and truth into the unique ethics and values required of literature.

For the writer who endorses such ethics and values of literature, nothing is taboo, and having won spiritual independence and an abundance of freedom, he or she will transcend politics, as well as ideology, which provides politics with the principle of sufficient reason.

The twentieth century, which has just passed, was an era inundated with ideology. Ideology replaced the religion of former times and manufactured modern revolutionary myths one after another—from communism to nationalism, revolutions in all shapes and sizes, including revolutionary literature and revolution in literature, which used various moulds to recreate literature, to convert literature into explanations of ideology, and to replace ethical teachings with revolutionary propaganda. As these revolutions collapsed one by one, these myths of utopia,

new people, and new societies disintegrated, and the writings that had advocated mass violence, promoted revolutionary warfare, extolled revolutionary leaders, and hymned revolutionary parties all became waste paper that no one wants to look at. However, the shadows of ideologies once used as the premise for criticising capitalism—from Marxism and Leninism to Maoism—have not dispersed and from time to time still interfere with people's thinking and prevent people from obtaining a clear understanding of the world.

Literature necessarily entails cognition of the real world and must transcend political interest, as well as break out of the thought moulds of ideology. The use of a preconceived utopia to judge existing society and its concomitant social criticism did not end along with communism, and instead the globalisation of capitalism is spreading unimpeded, with the former communist countries even more rabidly pursuing money than the old capitalist countries of the West did. It is not necessary for the world to keep on progressing because the truth as provided by social evolution theory and the materialist view of history is highly questionable.

Where is humankind headed? Ideology cannot provide an answer; nor can philosophical speculation. Literature does not set out to give the world a perfect explanation, and this is precisely the difference between the writer and the philosopher. Whereas the philosopher strives to construct a near-perfect explanation of the world, the writer merely tells about a world that is never perfect. The philosopher meticulously constructs his own thought system, but the writer confronts the vibrant human world and strives to confer upon it an aesthetic expression.

If truth is considered the most basic value judgment of a literary work, then aesthetics is the subjective emotional judgment conferred on the work by the writer to replace judgments of political correctness or the good or evil of ethics. The writer does not make judgments on human life, nor does he set out to change the world; not only does he lack the ability, but the world in fact cannot be changed. Nonetheless, the writer does make certain aesthetic judgments about the characters he creates

that are tragic or comic, or tragicomic, funny, absurd, or preposterous. The writer's feelings for his characters are fully embodied within them, and such powerful judgments accompany the characters for generations, as long as the work is worth reading at a later time, and this does not change according to changes in the political and social customs.

Literature transcends politics and ideology and has its own inherent values and unique aesthetic judgments. This is the rationale for the autonomy and the independent existence of literature, and this has always been the case. That literature became involved in politics and attached to it, resulting in its becoming subservient to it, became a widespread malaise only in the twentieth century. That revolutionary literature brought about a revolution in literature and turned into party-faction literature was the outcome of that specific twentieth-century ideology. European Leninism's so-called literary party tenets changed into Mao Zedong's literature and the arts in the service of workers, peasants, and soldiers in Asia, turning literature into screws in the machine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and writers into party propagandists.

This sort of ideological basis also derives from Marxism. Once the essential character of a human being is relegated to the sum total of social relationships, his or her social status is determined by class relationships. The individual in present society—that is, capitalist society—is alienated and therefore is a political organism. And politics is the centralised manifestation of social relationships. If revolution is recognised as the train engine driving history, it is reasonable that literature should be involved in politics and should clamour for revolution. To criticise capitalism is then the prerequisite for this sort of ideology, and literature recruited for ideology becomes a weapon for criticism.

Following the end of the communist revolution, what remains of this ideology that generations of Marxist intellectuals had carefully constructed is an empty structure of logic with no cognition of real society and humans. Its progeny of continuing revolution, or so-called overturning, failed to shake the present social structure and instead

dispersed into the consumerist market. To overturn is merely a rhetorical strategy that makes use of semantic analysis to dissipate meaning. This kind of intellectual game sometimes turns into something just for show, and it repeatedly occurs in talks on contemporary art and post-modernism to a tedious extent.

Literature does not establish preconditions: it neither sets out to construct a utopia nor treats social criticism as its mission. Literature of course is concerned with society and various social problems, but literature is not sociology. What concerns it are those who people society, and it is returning to people, human nature, the complexities of human nature, and the real dilemmas of human beings that is the aim of literature.

Should twentieth-century modernism and postmodernism with their revolution and overthrow labels also come to an end? These epochal labels can certainly be preserved forever if placed in the materialist history viewpoint that they had helped to construct, but compared with human nature they are only superficial labels. In contrast, human nature is relatively unchanging and can be neither recreated nor alienated. And it is precisely this that constitutes the unchanging topic of literature; the complexity and profundity of human nature, too, is virtually exhaustible.

Literature confronts human beings, individual concrete living human beings, and even when they are fabricated they are derived from the writer's personal experiences and perceptions. Abstract humankind can be left to philosophy. And Humanity with a capital letter is simply notional humanity. Unless a call for human rights is applied to individuals, it cannot be realised in their social environments and will be only the empty words of a sentence. Literature must put an end to such empty words: what it deals with are true human situations—in other words, human dilemmas.

Is a human being capable of comprehending the world? One cannot properly understand oneself and certainly cannot recreate the world.

Kafka first revealed the true dilemma of modern humankind in industrialised society, and later on Camus and Beckett furthered the absurdity of this. Rather than a philosophical issue, whether the world can be explained is a human problem that furthermore is the basic starting point of cognition. It is also the starting point of literature. The rationale for literature is humanity's interrogation of its own existence. Return rationality—or rather, instrumental rationality—to science, and return logic to metaphysical speculation. Literature of course has objectives and methods that are informed by literature.

The inexplicability of human existence for a long time was resolved by religion. The Bible, which is the source of Christianity, certainly can be read as a work of literature, and it is only when read as a work of literature that its profound meaning becomes clearer. And in the East the Buddhist scriptures are certainly works of literature. From ancient Greek myths predating the Bible and *Questions of Heaven* by the exile poet Qu Yuan from the kingdom of Chu, who lived three centuries before Christ on the Asian continent, to the modern fables of Kafka, all explore the world that human beings rely on for existence. Looking back like this at the history of literature, one can see that all these are divorced from practical interest and are humankind's spiritual search, a need of the inner mind.

What does it mean to be human? Whether this can be known is like whether the world can be known, and it cannot be known through reasoning, measured by scientific instrumental rationality, or attained through logical deduction. The unknowable has been called God, who is a humanlike image, or fate, which dictates or determines people's destinies, but nowadays it is called the absurd, and this is the real predicament of humankind. The absurd is not merely a human perception but also a real attribute, and it is predetermined that humankind is incapable of changing its predicament in the real world.

The human being and nature, the human being and society, the human being and unknowable fate—call it God or death—and the extreme limi-

tations of a frail body's life are all beyond the individual's comprehension. And this is a topic that cannot be avoided in today's literature.

A century has passed since Kafka's time, but there has been little change to humankind's predicament. If one applies sociocultural indicators to this postindustrial society—or one might call it an information society—there is no evidence that progress in science and technology has improved the basic problems of human existence. Individuals are increasingly powerless in their life environment. In addition, in confronting the day-by-day worsening of the ecological environment, the raucous cacophony of politics, the all-pervasiveness of the media and the all-intrusiveness of the market and advertising, this pitiful, powerless, and helpless individual is indeed insignificant. So how can the real voice of this insignificant individual be heard?

It is literature, and literature alone, that can give a voice to such an individual and his true perceptions. Politics and ideology will not speak out for him. In every era, based on personal experiences, writers have probed the ultimate meaning of life, and this is an endless road. But it is only when the quest stems from humankind's need for self-affirmation that literature produces this eternal question. Because people are different, each person will have his own answer. Moreover, being *passé* is never an issue, so whether an indication of the times is given is of no relevance, and this is why the history of literature cannot be written as evolutionary history. Literature is neither replaced by political authorities nor eroded by time, so it can be read and reread, and humankind's experiences and the understanding gained from these can be transmitted over generations.

Human communication lies in such bonds of the spirit, and questions on the ultimate meaning—that is, that question of death—affect everyone. Provoked by such questions are unknowable fears that cause one to step back, for this is the ultimate end to what it is to be human. The virtual religiosity of the compassion and humility generated by this are the basis for the birth of religions that bond people and allow

them to communicate. The birth of this consciousness of tragedy—that is, compassion for all of humankind—transforms into an aesthetics that informs literature.

That humanity's cognition is inexhaustible yet ultimately limited appears to be contradictory, paradoxical, but it is better than philosophical speculations and is absolutely real. Where in fact is humankind headed? What is it that awaits? Where will the big question mark land? No one has an answer. Humanity turns to literature because it is only through aesthetics that one can relieve and transcend this anxiety and by so doing affirm one's existence. Tragedy dissolves unresolvable perplexities by the discharging of emotions, and comedy uses laughter to free a person from the hardships of real life.

The person affirmed in literature is made into another person or persons. With the help of aesthetics, the writer transforms his experiences and perceptions into different characters, and by doing this he sublimates his inner anxieties. Literary works are creations neither because they replicate the world nor because they change reality. A human being is not the Creator; there are some things he can do, and other things he cannot. A person can master a craft, and what the writer masters is language. He writes to create an inner world, and by giving full expression to his own cognitive knowledge he affirms himself.

The fairly fresh question of the modern person's awakened self—or one could say, the uncontrolled inflating of the self—has increasingly turned into a major topic in contemporary writing. Sartre's statement that "others are hell" refers to the relationship of humanity and society but fails to recognise that the self in the eyes of others likewise is hell. The total chaos of the self has not only created disasters for others but has often led to the destruction of the self. Freud's revelations about the self did not merely pioneer psychological analysis but also provided modern literature with enormous insights.

Whether one can confront the self and how one confronts the self, like how one confronts nature, society, and the unknowable, are major issues that cannot be avoided by literature. And cognition in literature is primarily established on cognition of the self.

An individual's sense of emptiness and loss, his or her fantasies and anxieties, madness and awareness, loneliness and intuition, are all determined by cognition of the self. Does one have the capacity for introspection, self-ridicule, and self-discipline that will allow one to observe calmly the noisy world's multitudes of complex human beings while at the same time detaching the self in order to observe one's own chaotic and volatile self? The writer must have penetrating and discerning eyes, and through literature, the writer will allow all this to be manifested.

Indeed, the writer is not a sage but an ordinary person, and he cannot avoid human weaknesses and ailments. However, the magic of literature lies in the making of another person during the creative process. This helps the writer become detached, allowing him to observe with an eye transcending himself, a third eye, an intelligent eye, that will inform his writing. Therefore, the creative process of writing literature helps the writer purify his inner mind. This kind of writing at the time, of course, is divorced from any practical advantage but is a need of the inner mind.

This is an era when old ideologies are crumbling into disarray or being liquidated, and this is not a bad thing at all. The world basically has no isms, and there is no need to waste time and energy constructing some new ism in order to foist a new halter on people's thinking. The constraining of thought is anathema for the writer because spiritual independence and literary autonomy are essential prerequisites for creation. Literature is subservient to no one, does not bow to commands whether issued by political authorities, bureaucracies, or political parties in the wilderness, and further, it is not bound to mainstream ideologies or to any so-called alternative political viewpoints. Literature thus constitutes the individual writer's cognition as well as his or her human intuitive awareness. As long as it does not shun the real dilemmas of human

existence and probes the depths of human nature, it will transcend regional and national boundaries, even transcend different languages; it will be translatable and, moreover, transcend national cultures to communicate with the world. That literature possesses inherent universality has always been so, from ancient times to the present, in both the West and the East.

Identifying with a national culture is political talk to bring literature onto the path established by a nation state. The writer is not a public servant of the state and is not obliged to work for the state. National cultures have resulted from sedimentation over lengthy periods of history, and the outstanding creators have been not the big state apparatus but the individual writers and artists of their eras. Oppression that curbs literary and art creation primarily comes from the power of the state. If the state is not accommodating with regard to literature, the writer will have to conform or, in the language of today, exercise self-censorship—and self-censorship is by no means exclusive to authoritarian states. Otherwise, the writer has the option of becoming silent or of fleeing. So it is by fleeing that the writer can save himself. In ancient times there were Qu Yuan in the East and Dante in the West, and in modern times there are countless writers living in exile in both Europe and Asia. Particularly since the twentieth century, there have been large numbers of fine writers living in exile; in some cases it was forced exile, and in others it was self-exile. Joyce, Hemingway, Nabokov did not identify themselves with a national culture, but they all created new classics of world literature.

In present times every single writer has absorbed a variety of cultural influences, and stressing identity with a specific national culture has little bearing on the writer's creations. Literature is not tourist advertisement, and there is no need to adopt this strategy for recruiting readers. The writer is undoubtedly a vehicle for the national culture of his birthplace, but even more important, he is a creator, and he uses his works to enrich and renew that cultural legacy. In this age when information

exchange and cultural dissemination are so easy, no writer will willingly isolate himself within the traditions of a national culture. National and cultural identification merely derive from the political needs of the nation state.

Literature has no national borders, and a literary work does not need a passport. The spiritual freedom of the writer far transcends narrow nationalism and patriotism, and since ancient times, through translations, literary works have formed what is the spiritual wealth of all humankind. In this era of globalisation, when even solely profit-driven capital disregards national borders, literature that essentially does not seek after profit certainly has every reason to look to the world. The spiritual horizon of the writer is such that he is inherently a citizen of the world, and rejecting political authority and state control, he freely roams the skies like the heavenly horse. And this is in fact a basic property of literature.

Literary creation is without doubt the writer's challenge to his social environment, and also, as a human being, his challenge to existence. It is because of this challenge that one develops an understanding of the dilemmas one cannot overcome and leaves behind the imprint of one's existence. This challenge is not rebelling against society, nor is it a cultural revolution to overturn the old world order by overthrowing all predecessors and sweeping away one's entire cultural inheritance. Literary creation does not have to be premised on negation, and those revolutions in literature and art that were all too familiar in the twentieth century should come to an end.

Both renewing and inheriting in literature are basically inseparable: fresh understanding and methods are always discovered in mechanisms contained within literature itself. The superstitious belief in revolution that was manufactured in the twentieth century for a time also subjected literature to continuing revolution, so that literary creation and literary criticism alike were turned into nonstop negations, and the dialectical thought mode of negation of negation was brought into literature. Waves

of specious arguments on the death of the writer and the death of literature also lumped literary innovations and changes into either progressive or reactionary chronicles, or used hypothetical ideas to announce the end of history. These literary views and theories that contained only arguments turned literature into conceptual games and resulted in a variety of game rules but apparently not any worthwhile works.

This sort of historicism is also an ideological product and has nothing to do with literature. The creation of the writer is always of this instant, confronting the works of predecessors as references and invariably referring to them. There is no literature without foundations. The writer confronts literary works of the past, and whether he likes or rejects them, they construct a series of coordinates for establishing his own path. The works of predecessors exist, and there is no need to overthrow them; instead, their works serve as a platform that allows one to go a stage higher to renew one's horizons. Literature is concerned with creation and not manufacturing, so there is no need to retell what others have already presented. Literature is not a battlefield, and the writer is not a fighter, so there is no losing or winning, only the statement of views.

The testimonies left by literature can never be *passé*. If the writer exhausts heart and mind and does leave behind a penetrating portrayal of life at a particular time and place, the work will be enduring. Literary works are more truthful than the histories written by authorities. Those grand official histories are rewritten time and again along with changes in political power, and just as in some game, masks are perpetually changed to legitimise power. However, once a literary work is published, it is not altered because this is the great pact between the writer and history. Humankind is thus provided with a history of the soul that is more truthful.

The present age is one of no isms, and literature with no isms is closer to the basic nature of literature and more closely approximates the reality of human life and human nature. To be with no isms is not to be devoid of thinking, and the writer allows experiences, observations, and percep-

tions to grow into many sensuous images that are greater than conceptual explanations and discussions. It is the work and characters that do the narrating, and there is no need for the writer to become hoarse with shouting.

This is an era without declarations or literary movements, and writers are located at the margins of society in their own corners all over the world. Because literature is marginalised in contemporary society, why not quietly contemplate the myriad phenomena of the universe and entrust one's reflections and fleeting thoughts to pen and ink? The long-suffering world is no longer young, having experienced two world wars without precedent in human history, as well as the disaster of communist revolutions that turned heaven and earth upside down. It should bid farewell to its time of youth and the worship of leaders. This is an era without intellectual leaders, and this is how it should be. The writer has no need to follow the teachings of a leader; he has a brain of his own, and he has no need to follow some philosopher so that he can go crazy and stand on his head. Instead, with his feet on solid ground, he can tell the truth about the many predicaments from which contemporary humanity cannot extricate itself.

Can a person who is perfect of body and mind as called for by humanism be found anywhere in the present age? Moreover, if human rights cannot be applied to the person of the individual, they are only so much empty talk. For the writer, after freedom of life and person, nothing is more important than the freedom to think and to express, but who can confer this freedom upon him? Only the writer himself, and this freedom never comes without a price. It depends on the writer fighting for it, and it depends on whether the choice is freedom or something else.

In this age of rampant material lust and spiritual impoverishment, no one could prevent the outbreak of the global financial crisis, despite the never-ending growth of laws on capital profit—so who will tell the truth of all of this? I believe that only literature can reveal the greed that exists in human nature.

This is a world shrouded in the dark shadows of the last day. The economic crisis and decline of the West show no signs of slowing down, and the so-called newly rising nations simply follow the old circular road of capital accumulation already travelled by the West and do not offer human civilisation any new hope. When the next cycle of renaissance in literature and the arts will come about, no one can say, but I believe that it is literature and literature alone that can provide inspiration. Shakespeare's plays in gloomy England as it emerged from the Middle Ages and Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of Red Mansions* in the muted silence of feudal autocracy in the Great Qing Empire demonstrate that history was illuminated by the chance appearance of two writers. We can only hope that literature will one day perhaps bring light to the perplexing times of the present.

26 September 2010

Note. Speech at the Launch of the Literature Forum, International PEN Congress, Tokyo 2010.

CHAPTER 9

IDEOLOGY AND LITERATURE

During the twentieth century it was an extremely common occurrence for literature to be restrained, controlled, directed, and even generated and judged by ideology. This did not apply only to literary creation, and literary criticism and literary history also often bore the stamp of ideology. It could be said that ideology was a disease of the century that was hard to immunise oneself against, and for writers lucky enough to escape this epochal disease, it meant that their writings were saved and worth reading again in later times.

For a theory or teaching to constitute ideology requires a philosophical framework plus the presentation of a certain worldview with matching values. Amongst ideologies, Marxism undoubtedly had the most perfect structure and the widest influence, and it had a profound impact on generations of intellectuals. Needless to say, it was the official intellectual pillar of the former communist states, but for a time it was also the mainstream intellectual trend in left-wing intellectual circles throughout the world. Liberalism and nationalism could also be turned into ideology and become the thinking and values promoted by political parties and nations. And in the intellectual world, of course including the domains of literature and art, modernism or postmodernism and even so-called

postcolonialism all had the potential of being turned into certain value judgments and even into inflexible dogma.

Ideologies were initially constructed to explain the world and to establish value systems for human society that would provide a reasonable basis for state authorities and social structures. If philosophy is thought of as confined to metaphysical thought, then ideology is connected to value judgments on the structure and the various types of advantages in society. However, literature is the free articulation of human feelings and thought and essentially transcends practical utility, and when writers follow this or that ideological thought trend, they lose their independence in thinking. This was how in modern times literature sadly often lost its autonomy and became an accessory to ideology: literature of the twentieth century has left behind too many lessons for us.

The replacement of religion with ideology was another twentieth-century act of stupidity. Under the banner of rationalism, and making use of utopian dogma that would change the world, a plethora of revolutions incited violence that brought about mass—even national—madness that wrought disasters of massive scale with no precedent in human history. Literature that was brought into the framework of ideology and promoted violence and war, created the worship of heroes and leaders, and extolled sacrifice has now virtually vanished, yet the summons for literature to be actively involved continues. To treat literature as a tool for changing society makes it the same as the preaching of ethics, except that ethics has now been replaced with political correctness. Literature of the present cannot free itself from the fetters of ideology as simply as that, and what is known as being involved means being involved in real politics; this notion of literature is still prevalent in the contemporary intellectual world.

Nowadays it is quite common for intellectuals to discuss politics, but unless one becomes personally involved in politics, usually it is nothing more than empty talk with little impact on the political situation or society. Moreover, real politics today is party politics, and unless intellec-

tuals join a political party and become professional politicians, it will be hard for them to make a difference. For a writer committed to literature who wants to influence politics, it is doubly hard, and this is the awkward dilemma regarding literature's involvement in politics. However, politics is not concerned with this dilemma for writers or even with the ideology of any political theory. Should a conflict arise between this or that ism and the real interests of party politics, the party will either discard the theory or theorists will make appropriate revisions or reinterpretations as required by real politics, so there are constant changes in what is known as political correctness.

The pitiful writer—here I am talking about the writer who uses literature to serve politics—is strapped to the war chariot of politics, no longer in charge of himself but waving a flag and shouting: he has lost his own voice and of course he will not leave writings that will be worth reading later. Even more tragic is that property and life were sent to the grave—the fate of many revolutionary writers who sacrificed literature for the sake of the revolution under the centralised politics of communism. History has not ended, and the future for literature that serves politics in democratic systems is also not necessarily wonderful. Furthermore, literature is not media and cannot be reported on a daily basis, and each political faction with its own mass media to competently present its political views certainly does not expect literature to have any effect. If literature participates in politics, at most it will sometimes serve as mere trimming or decoration in party politics.

Ideology basically establishes a theory for real politics, but theory does not determine the real profit or loss or the comparative power controlling politics. Politics is invariably more dynamic than ideology, and it can be right one day and wrong the next but is always politically correct. The writer who adheres to an ideology, or it could be said because he believes in a certain ism, in fact will find his ideals repeatedly abandoned by politics, but his frustration and sense of loss will not result from defects or mistakes in the ideology. Rather than trying to revise a

certain ideology, it would be better simply to serve politics, and this is the inevitable outcome of literature's becoming involved in politics. This kind of literature of course loses the independence and autonomy that is inherent to literature and belongs to party politics.

The writer—here I am talking about writers and poets committed to literary creation and not about political commentators or newspaper columnists, who belong to a different profession—nowadays finds it quite hard to make a living. Not to align with politics and not to bow to the fashions and mass tastes generated by the market but instead to persevere in literary writing must initially come from an inner need that demands expression. In fact, this is actually the original intention of literature, and it may be said that this has been so since ancient times and remains so in the present and in both the East and the West. The kind of literature that transcends ideology and politics and transcends practical benefit is a testimony to humankind's existential conditions and to human nature.

In the globalised times of the present, real economic gains in fact have replaced ideology, or it could be said that ideology is now just some outdated empty talk, at most nothing more than a misleading placard on the political stage, so there is nothing wrong with calling the present a postideology era. Contemporary literature has luckily escaped the fetters of ideology, and if it ignores the fashions generated by the market and dares to confront genuine human problems of the present, then literature will be saved. What this sort of literature seeks of the writer is truthfulness—that is, that the writer not avoid the various real predicaments afflicting human society—and it is this truthful and sincere literature that people of today want.

The end of ideology is not the end of literature, and the end of ideology is not the end of thought. The collapse of a century of utopias should have occurred long ago, and now spiritual impoverishment is shouting out its appeals to literature. Indeed, literature is incapable of saving the world, and the writer is not a saviour; moreover, what he or she must do

is get rid of such an imaginary role and return to being an authentic yet frail individual in order to gain a lucid awareness of the human world.

Literature can only be the voice of the individual writer, but once construed as representative of the people or the mouthpiece of the nation, that voice will certainly be false and will certainly be hoarse and exhausted. The writer is also not the embodiment of truth and righteousness, and his or her personal weaknesses and defects are indeed no fewer than those of ordinary people; it is simply that writers can purify themselves by writing literature. Furthermore, the writer is not a judge and does not rule on what is right or wrong or judge what is moral and just. And he is certainly not a superman and cannot replace God, but it must be conceded that the epochal disease of unlimited inflation of the ego, just like ideology, was all the rage for a time. If the writer of today can abolish such personal delusions and adopt a normal attitude in observing with intelligent eyes the many manifestations of life in the universe while coldly scrutinising his own chaotic self, the work under his pen will be worth reading over and over again.

The writer is an observer of society and human nature. Once he discards practical advantage, casts aside potential psychological obstacles, and has a clear understanding of himself, his observations will be incisive and meticulous, and with nothing taboo, he will penetratingly expose and present the true situation of human life. Literature is not satisfied with documenting real people and events, and the writer's capacity to probe human life and human nature derives from his life experiences. But even more important is the writer's unique, innate capacity both to probe far into hidden depths and to use aesthetic means to linguistically relate the perceptions that have been aroused in him.

The reason why testimonies on human existence left by the writer remain vivid and powerful over time is not purely a matter of linguistic skill but lies more in the aesthetic feeling that the writer endows his or her characters. These feelings are different from simple right or wrong or ethical judgments; they are human feelings infused into the characters.

Of course, these also derive from the writer's attitude towards the characters, and precisely these aesthetic feelings make the characters virtually breathe with life.

Tragedy or comedy, or tragedy and comedy, and even all the human emotions and desires can all be aesthetically manifested. Sad or amusing, absurd or humorous, noble or comic are qualities endowed by the writer, and this aesthetics that is closely associated with the emotions is incomparably richer than rational cognition. And it is this that makes literature different from philosophy. Literature is not an accessory for ideology, and though it does not set out to annotate philosophy, at times it can come to a similar understanding. Whereas philosophy relies on pure rational speculation, the knowledge achieved in literature is always associated with sensuousness and the emotions.

Literature and philosophy both come to an understanding of the world and human beings by different methods, but whether one is superior to the other is not an issue. Both rationality and sensuousness are necessary paths to human understanding. Literature can instigate deep reflection in people because it can reveal the bewilderment and anxiety, the searching and going astray in human life with such incisiveness and can fully manifest the minute details of human nature. This propensity to startle and awaken transcends political correctness and ethical teachings and is far superior to anything postmodernist semantic analysis and word games can offer. Even if the life experience of the writer behind the language of literature is transformed into thought, this must still be infused with the feelings and perceptions of the author or characters, and specific situations in the work also need to be included so that it is not purely the formulation and working out of rational concepts.

There are two types of thinkers: one is the philosopher, who relies on rational metaphysical speculation; and the other is the writer, who relies on literary images. The former can be found in the great thinkers of ancient Greece, and the latter can be found in the writers of tragedy and comedy in Greece of the same era. They each used different methods

to provide later generations with knowledge about the human existential situation (most often dilemmas) and about human nature. In Europe during the Middle Ages, when scholasticism stifled thinking, it was the poet Dante whose understanding of the world and people turned out to be superior. Again, Shakespeare was without doubt the greatest thinker of his time, and Goethe and Kant were likewise brilliant.

Today the tide of postmodern thinking seems to have passed, and facing these bewildering times of spiritual impoverishment, I think, people must look to literature for inspiration. The global financial and economic crisis has projected economists for the first time onto the stage as thinkers, whereas philosophy remains silent. Where is humankind heading? Can human beings predict the future, or will a new set of utopias be established? Or will the cards be reshuffled for another round of semantic games? Whatever the case, literature certainly can to some extent provide an account of the society people find themselves in today.

Of course, literature does not stop at replicating reality. Realist literature was a major literary current, and from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, there emerged large numbers of great writers and many enduring masterpieces. Twentieth-century modernist writings turned to the world of people's inner minds and opened up another area for literature. Rationality could not provide answers for the absurdity of modern society and questions about the meaning of existence, and philosophy had likewise turned away from traditional topics. And literature that replicated social reality turned into revolutionary propaganda under the fetters of ideology. Under present social conditions, can literature still reflect social reality? Of course it can; it is simply a matter of discarding isms, liberating itself from the framework and dogma of ideology, dispelling the preaching of political correctness, returning to the writer's genuine perceptions, and narrating in the individual's unswervingly independent voice. Even if the voice is extremely feeble and not pleasing for the listener, it is a person's true voice and this is its value as literature.

Literature is humankind's affirmation of existence. Although the frail individual lacks the power to change the world, one can speak out about whatever one wants. Of relevance is whether the writer actually has things of his own to say, whether he is not merely repeating the utterances widely broadcast by the authorities and the media. The spiritual independence of the individual is the very substance of literature and accounts for the independence and autonomy of literature. Literature does not attach itself to political power and does not rely on the market, and it is a domain of spiritual freedom for human beings. Though it is not holy, it can be protected from encroachments and constitutes a bit of the scant pride one can have in being human.

Humanity exists in the midst of all sorts of restrictions in society, and freedom is not a right that is bestowed at birth. A price must be paid, conditions exist, and freedom has never come at no cost. But spiritual freedom belongs to the individual, although the individual must choose it, and the independence and autonomy of literature is something for the writer to choose. Spiritual freedom ennobles human beings and is also an attribute of literature.

Literature is the awakening of the individual's consciousness in the sense that the writer is armed with his intuitive knowledge when he observes the human world while scrutinising the self. He infuses his lucid understanding into his work. The individual's unique understanding of the world is undeniably the challenge of the individual to his existential environment. The understanding achieved in a literary work therefore always bears the stamp of the individual writer. It is precisely each of these individual case histories that makes literature full of interest and irreplaceable. Whereas the speculation of philosophy relies on the abstract, literature returns to life, returns to the perceptions of living people, and returns to emotions. In other words, literature starts in places that are unattainable for philosophy, and this sort of understanding cannot be replaced by philosophy.

When classical philosophy set off with its concepts and rationality to construct a system of speculation that would provide a perfect explanation of the world, anything that could not be perfectly explained was left to God. However, there can be no end to what literature can say, and it does not rashly set out to provide a certain worldview; moreover, it is always open minded and fills people's minds with thoughts and endless emotions. In addition, because literature confronts life in its infinite variations, it does not end with the death of the protagonist or the author or with the conclusion of a work.

Every writer presents a unique vision but does not use this unique vision to replace other writers. It is not like philosophy, for which criticism is the premise for establishing a theory that is often promoted as the ultimate and only correct truth. Although postmodern philosophy advocates ambiguity and even the elimination of meaning, it nonetheless is established on the premise of death to all predecessors. Literature is not exclusionist and does not clear a path for itself with criticism; instead, each person says his or her own thing, so there is infinite variety.

Literature also does not take social criticism as its mission, and does not use a prefabricated worldview and value system based on this to judge society. Literary testimonies rely only on aesthetics. Aesthetics primarily derives from human nature and also has close associations with accretions of cultural influences that have taken place over a long period of human history. Moreover, it transcends language types and can be translated and communicated all over the world. The emotions evoked by the aesthetics infused into a work by the writer are powerful and can strike a responsive chord in readers of different nationalities and from different times, making literature a spiritual wealth to be enjoyed by all humankind. Therefore, the aesthetics with which the writer endows a literary work may be considered an ultimate judgment transcending practical advantage, right or wrong, good or evil, as well as social customs and the times. As long as the work continues to circulate in the world, people will continue to read it, and the aesthetic feelings

evoked by this literary testimony will transcend history and survive for a long time.

Strictly speaking, the era has no significance for literature, although each work by a writer to some extent bears the imprint of the times. To divide literature into different periods and different isms is the business of the literary historian but has nothing to do with the creations of the writer. Twentieth-century modernism came into existence following the emergence of a number of works that literary critics grouped together: they were classified as such, and theories were established. This helped literary research but had little to do with the writers' creations. Indeed, there were writers who boasted of being modernist but only after their predecessors and representative works had become publicly acknowledged and familiar—so by gathering under this banner a trend was created. Whether a work has literary value has nothing to do with banners but depends on whether the writer and the work provide a unique understanding and an aesthetic presentation.

Modernity had been extrapolated from vastly different works by a number of modern writers, so it was likely that it would turn into dogma. Indeed, the modernity that became an epochal symbol after the grouping together of some extraordinary writers and writings, by the latter half of the twentieth century had turned into ossified aesthetic dogma. Essential to this dogma was to overturn, so to overturn predecessors was treated as a blueprint, and the negation of negation was regarded as the universal principle that activated history; this became the basic strategy of postmodernism. In the final analysis this has its origins in Marxism, which was informed by Hegel's dialectics. When Marxism was introduced into literature and aesthetics, continuing revolution in literature and art became the way in which the history of literature and art was written.

Divested of the rich content of human nature and emotions, post-modern aesthetics turned into rhetoric and talk, and with semantic analysis replacing aesthetics, philosophy and literature turned into

linguistic games, and meaning naturally vanished. This postmodernist strategy of overturning was not even directed at society, and the problems of human survival and existence vanished into empty language, so all that remained was the empty symbols of an era without writers and without writings.

Literature relies on language, but the language from the pen of the writer is vastly remote from, and certainly has nothing in common with, the research objectives of grammarians and linguists. Grammar and the analysis and description of grammatical structures and functions are concerned with the lowest stratum of language; nonetheless, as in any discipline, such research can lead to endless learning. But grammar is so vastly remote from literature. The language of literature conveys human thinking, emotions, and spirituality and also the rich literary heritage of humankind that is embedded within it. Writers of each era merely strive to create new ways of expression, and in so doing they enrich the language. In this sense the writer is creator and innovator in the language of his or her people.

For the writer, literature constitutes not signifiers but vibrant human voices that contain every human emotion and desire. And when the writer is writing, these voices are alive in the heart and mind. The language of literature can be read aloud and also performed; it is dynamic and can come to life on the stage to resonate powerfully amongst readers and audiences. What the writer creates is a language reverberating with sound; it is not the language that linguistic research refers to or even *can* refer to. The writer does not stop at language that has been used in previous writings; he is always exploring new ways of expression to convey newly discovered perceptions, and his search in the expressive potential of language has not come to an end. This sort of search does not overthrow the achievements of predecessors but is carried out on the foundation of existing expressions.

The postmodern epochal signs announcing the death of the writer most likely have ended, and the literary revolutions that failed to termi-

nate writers have instead come to an end. The writer and literature remain, and history has not come to an end. However, the problem is simply how literature will deal with the modern individual's existential conditions and the dilemmas confronting literature. Will the writer have the courage to present humanity's true predicament, and have writers found a more precise mode of literary expression?

The writer is the creator of literary genres and literary language. Literature is not the writing of facts, and this is the big difference between literature and the recording of history. The writer's perceptions, the genre, expressive method, and style of language all develop simultaneously, and every accomplished writer will have a preference for certain genres and styles. Moreover, associations and the imagination similarly are infused into a work. In each of the genres from poetry, prose essays, and fiction to drama, the writer can still make discoveries; there are no ossified patterns. The aesthetic perceptions that the writer wants to convey cannot be divorced from a specific literary form, and an aesthetics based on pure form is meaningless empty thought; the poetic sense of literature is also like this.

In these times when politics is pervasive and the law of profit engulfs the world with overweening human greed, where can poetry be found? And beauty has gradually become a distant memory. Humankind—I refer not to the humanist concept of abstract “man” but to the disparate individuals of society who never before have been so frail in confronting the loneliness that is human existence. The lonely individual does not lack thinking; his questions on the meaning of existence are more perceptive than at any time in the past, and he sees freedom as an urgent need. It should be said that in no previous period have such large numbers of people devoted themselves to writing. Literature has become something for people to rely on in these times of spiritual impoverishment. There is the hope that a trace of life can be left behind, and this to some extent shows that literature has not perished. As to when there will be another

literary renaissance, this can only depend on historical chance, and literature like fate is determined by disparate chance events.

8 December 2010

Note. Presented at the Seoul International Forum for Literature 2011, The Globalizing World and the Human Community. International Writers' Festival, Seoul, 26 May 2011.

CHAPTER 10

AFTER THE FLOOD

After the Flood is a short film of mine lasting only twenty-eight minutes and that like my other film, *Silhouette/Shadow*, is also a cinematic poem, but it is different in that language is totally dispensed with, and the six dancers and actors in the film do not speak. My black-and-white paintings serve as background to the scenes, and the performers perform before a screen onto which the paintings are projected. It is basically a black-and-white film, and it is only at times when a consciousness of life reawakens that a small amount of pale colour is added.

A number of friends viewed the film in the projection room and told me that they were shaken by it, and the audience at a public screening in the library of the Pompidou Centre also reacted strongly. However, this short film cannot obtain commercial distribution and can only occasionally be screened at art festivals or at the launches of my art exhibitions. Now that this art book is to be published, a DVD of the film has been included, so at last the film can reach viewers who would like to see it.

Made in 2008, the film was unexpectedly corroborated by the huge category nine earthquake off the coast of Miyagi County in northeast Japan, where on television news, monster tides of ink-black howling sea

swallowed heaven and earth like scenes of the end of the world in the Old Testament of the Bible. My large ink painting *End of the World*, which I painted in 2006, shows people serenely facing a black tide rising from the edge of the horizon, and surely also portrays the Japanese victims of the present. And even more incredible is that in the first scene of the film, the dancing is led by a Japanese dancer who has performed many times in plays I have directed.

The film is different from usual disaster films in that it constitutes painting and performance and is devoid of reality. The narrative structure common to film also is abandoned, so each scene can be viewed either as paintings or as photographs that are linked only by movements or sounds. The sounds designed by stage acoustics expert Thierry Bertomeu do not set out to copy the sounds of the natural world, and though composed like music by synthesising and arranging sound matter, the sounds do not construct clear musical phrases, and at most may be considered sounds that approximate music. The sounds do not merely serve to create atmosphere; being also on a par with but independent of the paintings, they serve as a kind of counterpoint. Neither painting, nor dance, nor sound is prioritised; each has relative autonomy, and this is what I call a tripartite film, a cinematic poem with immense freedom that is different from most films that invariably prioritise the picture and use the other elements to explain the picture.

Of the paintings chosen for the film, only six directly manifest disaster; the others have their own individual themes, either the vast cosmos with its undefined space or isolated men and women who manifest certain mental images: these are all visions of the inner mind that are often evoked when one loses oneself in deep thought. There are also more expressive works like *Birth* and *Tranquillity* that verge on the abstract but still retain images. Whether the paintings are more realistic or more abstract, they remain in between the two, and this is the underlying direction of my art and the means through which ample space for the

imagination is provided to both artist and viewers. I give titles merely as suggestions.

In front of paintings like these, the performers can perform with immense freedom as long as everyday movements are not simulated. In a nonverbal cinematic poem of this kind, the poetic sense is manifested through the paintings as well as the performance, so the performers do not need to act specific roles but instead resort only to body movements and expressions. The three dancers and three theatre performers construct a vocabulary that is both vivid and powerful through postures, hand gestures, steps, movements, facial expressions, and even the look of the eyes.

The total impotence of humankind before almighty, unstoppable natural disasters was fully explained in the Bible a long time ago. However, humankind in modern society to an even greater extent faces human-made disasters—those of incessant war and turmoil, the daily destruction of the ecological environment, plus the potential threat of nuclear missiles—and there are no effective mechanisms for avoiding these. In modern times when religion diminishes by the day, people can seek comfort only in art.

After the Flood is also a message. Faced with natural and human-made disasters, solitary individuals, men and women alike, are insignificant, but what distinguishes human beings from vegetation is that humans possess a consciousness. If there is an understanding of what it is to be human, even if one is frail and weak it is possible to live without loss of dignity, and it is this that is the affirmation of the human that is the source of art and literature.

In the history of human civilisation it should be acknowledged that the birth of art precedes that of literature. At first there were the wall paintings in caves by primitive human beings during the Paleolithic era, and only afterwards ballads and epics. Painting and dance are humankind's earliest expressions of art. Thinking in images also precedes language,

and artists have developed thinking in images to great heights; painting does not have to seek to explain history or stories, and it is this school of plastic art that is the most pure. Dance is primarily the expression of emotions and essentially transcends language. The combination of painting and dance in the structuring of scene after scene in a work inherently implies its independence.

The photographs collected in this art book were taken by me with a high-count digital camera during the making of the film; they are not scenes extracted from the film itself and can be regarded as photographic art. In photography the eyes select shots that are limited by the frame; moreover, it is the selection and rejection of an instant, and often there is no time for thinking, so the photographer relies mainly on his or her direct perception of visual images. If the photographer has experience in directing plays and also paints as an artist, the photographs taken will of course have an added dimension of interest.

This small book brings together in a single volume painting, performance, photography, and film, and apart from this preface, it transcends language. Human beings do not think merely in terms of language, and means of artistic expression other than literature can also reveal the life situations of human beings; endowed with aesthetic judgments, the artist's thinking is embodied in artworks. As in the case of literature that relies on language, these aesthetic judgments are subtle, profound, and powerful and similarly are able to express the tragedy and poetry created by the predicaments of human existence.

When the terror and misery caused by natural and human-made disasters are explained through works of literature and art, they are spiritually purified, and poetry is embedded within it. Human beings confronting death and an unknowable fate either return to relying on religion or resort to art, and this is because of a spiritual need. Modern and contemporary human life is increasingly materialistic, practical advantage is pervasive, and spiritual impoverishment has become the universal malaise of the times. Poetic sense and beauty have no place in contem-

porary art, and this is the art that people know. Nonetheless, this book, *After the Flood*, is an appeal for the spiritual, the poetic, and the beautiful.

After experiencing natural or human-made catastrophe, an awareness of life is reawakened in people, and it is precisely the spiritual, the poetic, and the beautiful that symbolise hope.

6 April 2011

Paris

CHAPTER 11

FREEDOM AND LITERATURE

Freedom is a magnificent word, and it is also an ultimate quest for human beings, even if it might not be the only one. However, what constitutes freedom? The freedom I talk about is not philosophical speculation but the possibilities for human action under the restraints of existential conditions in real life. The people I talk about are not abstract concepts but real individuals in real life because this is precisely what concerns literature. Given the individual's numerous predicaments in socialised life, how to obtain freedom—that is, the possibility of choice for the individual in life—has been an important topic in literature from ancient times to the present. From this another topic is produced: so-called fate and whether it can be predicted. This is the general theme of the international research conference on my literary and art creation held at the Friedrich-Alexander University in Erlangen. First of all, I express my heartfelt thanks to the scholars in Germany who have organised this conference. I also take this opportunity to thank the professors and scholars who have accepted invitations to participate and all of my friends here for showing such an interest in my creations.

The philosophical question of what is free and determined unavoidably turns into freedom and certainty in the domain of literature. The

individual living in a specific society is continually subjected to a variety of regulations—from politics, ethics, customs, and religion to family, marriage, and sexual relationships—that impose numerous restrictions on the individual's action. In modern societies since the twentieth century, totalitarian politics and ideology especially have regulated people's actions and, furthermore, have even shackled their thinking. Needless to say, the freedom to speak in public is abolished, and various types of political correctness manufactured by the political authorities and official ideology are used to control the individual's thinking. However, in countries with democratic systems, does the individual necessarily enjoy freedom of speech and thought, and does democracy necessarily guarantee the freedom of the individual? These are also questions that must be discussed.

In the globalised market economy, present democratic politics has not basically changed people's existential problems or endowed the individual with greater freedom. The principles of power benefits and market profitability direct politics and pervade every corner of life via all-embracing mass media strategies, so how can there be freedom for the individual? This eternal problem continues to cause anxiety in people, and my creative works aim to respond to this.

If a writer whose works are banned in a communist totalitarian state flees the oppression of dictatorship, is there any certainty that he will win freedom of thought on arriving in the democratic West or that he will he enter into another kind of politics, one with so-called different political viewpoints? And taking the argument a step further, when an individual flees one kind of political oppression, is it obligatory for him to pursue another kind of politics, even if it is democracy? Now that is an interesting question. But even more fascinating are the following questions: In the present world, is there politics that transcends political parties, and is freely controlled by the individual? And does the individual who does not enter into party politics have the option of transcending this kind of politics? Freedom lies precisely in such choices.

This freedom of choice is not simply a matter of choosing between the political views of different political parties. Can there be choices apart from black cat or white cat and neither black cat nor white cat? And furthermore, can one totally disregard the colour of the cat and take a separate path, thinking independently? In other words, can one transcend the reality of politics to think freely?

However, present ideologies are the same as political authority and deny people this sort of freedom. The dogmas of ideology shackle people's thinking just as much as religious trials and morality sermons in medieval times. In the twentieth century, which has just passed, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, state socialism, and various forms of nationalism have created different models for political correctness to replace the codes of traditional morality and religion. And superstitious belief in the communist revolution and fascism likewise unleashed madness throughout entire races that engulfed the world from Europe to Asia over the past century. That belief still has not totally disappeared.

How the individual resists a trend of thought that engulfs the entire race in order to think independently may be said to be the grim test confronting modern humankind and is also a topic that cannot be avoided by the literature of present times. To be without isms is my reply. The premise for freedom of thought, I believe, is not to choose any ism but instead to cast aside the restraints of ideology.

In an individual's life, freedom is inevitably subjected to a range of restrictions from the circumstances of that life. Apart from political pressures and social constraints, there are various economic and ethical limitations and even psychological uncertainties, and to some degree such existential dilemmas have inevitably plagued people since the beginning of human existence. And freedom has never been a right that has come with birth; furthermore, it cannot be conferred by anyone.

The humanism of the Enlightenment treated freedom as a person's natural right at birth, and this was an appeal for reason. But although

the liberalism of modern times had humanism as its starting point, it utilised freedom and human rights as banners and was an ideology, instead of indicating the true situation of human existence in present times. Freedom has to be fought for by people themselves, and even in democratic societies it is not conferred without cost, especially in the case of freedom of thought. When confronted by practical advantages and the laws of the market, freedom and human rights are often reduced to so much empty rhetoric.

The real question ultimately depends on the choice of the individual: whether one chooses freedom or advantages. And the choice for freedom primarily derives from an acknowledgment of the need for freedom, so knowledge of freedom precedes choice. In this sense, freedom is thus the challenge of one's awareness to one's existence. It is only when individuated life seeks self-affirmation and seeks to affirm the meaning of life that there is this struggle, that there is an awareness of the need and indispensability of freedom.

However, in this globalised age the disappearance of individuality is widespread, and the individual is drowning in the statistics of sociology and the percentages of mass-media opinion polls. The individual cannot hope to influence omniscient party politics, even less to change the world; moreover, all-pervasive market laws have turned people into consumerist animals, and playing the role of supermen saviours of the world has already become an outdated myth. Democratic politics that is premised on the victory of the majority has turned ambitious politicians into vote-seeking movie stars and television celebrities, merely passers-by who change every five years. In the meantime, no country is lucky enough to escape the deterioration of the natural ecology or global financial crises of unprecedented severity. How can the problems of human survival—not to mention the individual's dilemmas—be dealt with?

The conflict between the dilemmas of survival and free will is a perennial topic of literature: how the individual transcends the environment and is not controlled by it. The tragedy and comedy, and even the absur-

dity of the struggle, can be dealt with only aesthetically, but writers through the ages from ancient Greek plays down to the modern novels pioneered by Kafka have in fact succeeded. Some things are achievable by human beings and others are not, and though human beings cannot defy fate, they are able to aesthetically transform experiences and feelings into literary and art works that can even be transmitted to later generations, and in so doing these people transcend both the dilemmas of reality and the times. Therefore, it is only in the realm of the purely spiritual that humankind can possess an abundance of freedom. Literature can win literary independence and autonomy only by rejecting practical advantage, and literature released from political advantage and the laws of the market returns to the original intent of literature.

Literature is essentially humanity's articulation of existential dilemmas and life's anxieties. It refers to separate, concrete, real individuals and not to abstract concepts about people, and it is in this that literature differs from philosophy. Whereas philosophers seek to announce ultimate truths, writers merely manifest the truth of human life, a truth associated with the subjective individual's own vibrant feelings, and because these feelings differ from person to person they can never all be articulated. These concrete and authentic existential dilemmas and the individual's own anxieties are complicated and hard to explain, but they are the questions intrinsic to literature that has extricated itself from philosophy and sociology. Free will primarily derives from an understanding of the self, and when literature transcends social criticism, proceeds to scrutinise the usual chaos of the human self, and tries to sort it out, understanding begins. This sort of understanding can gravitate towards ethics or towards religion, but when it gravitates towards aesthetics it leads to literary and art creation.

This sort of understanding is the awakening of the self, and free will is determined by the awakening of the self. At that time the darkness and light, good and evil, and God and the Devil within the chaotic self all gradually become clear. What directs a person's fate is not solely deter-

mined by one's life environment; it is determined even more by one's understanding of the self. The complexity of human nature definitely cannot be explained merely by judgments of right or wrong or good and evil and shows that understanding the self is an uninterrupted process, that people's feelings and desires ebb and flow until the end of life. And it is this type of human life that literature's understanding confronts.

Using paradox or dialectics from philosophy to analyse this sort of understanding is inadequate. Philosophical methodologies are instrumental rationality and used for speculation, but once introduced into literature and art they often foment disaster. In the twentieth century, revolutions in literature and art and the negation of negation template turned literature and art into political propaganda, or so-called postmodernist subversion made them into explanations of concepts. Aesthetics was dispensed with and meaning abolished, and literature and art even turned into conceptual games.

Binary opposites as a methodology, of course, are useful for certain things. However, things and people are boundlessly abundant, so the choice of either this or that is inadequate for dealing with the multitude of changes in the world. Are there choices apart from antinomy and dialectics? Can another path be taken that is neither this nor that? Taking neither this nor that path does not necessarily lead to compromise or to taking a middle path. The numerous divisions and opposites—such as progressive and reactionary, revolutionary and antirevolutionary, innovative and conservative—that came with the flood of twentieth-century ideologies were used as the prevalent mode of thought and even for making value judgments, and they profoundly interfered with people's thinking.

One divides into two; if it is not this, then it is that: antinomy and dialectics are binary theories that simplify and stereotype things and questions. The evolution of things and the relationships between them are complex and harbour all sorts of possibilities. Even between the poles of obverse and reverse lies a wealth of mechanisms; the problem is how

to discover and control those mechanisms that can be transformed. New understanding and creation come from discovering these mechanisms that are hidden in things and, moreover, from converting these mechanisms into viable methods. Freedom of thought is also like this: if one cannot break with existing patterns and find fresh new expressions, then so-called freedom of thought will still be empty rhetoric, or else merely a whole lot of vacuous talk about overthrowing predecessors in which anger and scorn become substitutes for understanding and creation. That was a common twentieth-century malaise and endures even today.

Laozi's one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to the myriad things is ancient wisdom that can act as a cooling elixir to help people escape the vicious circle of endless revolutions inherent in the negation of negation. To overthrow is not the pattern for the evolution and transformation of things, and the medium between the two is impregnated with mechanisms for producing the myriad things. Freedom of thought is like this, too. Fresh thoughts often are born at the boundary between two things, and the long accumulated history of human culture is the continual discovery of new understanding on the foundations of predecessors. Literary and art creations are also like this.

Ultimate truth is best left to philosophical speculation. For individuated lives, what is significant is affirming the existence of individuated life and the meaning of life because it is this that is the cause of people's anxiety.

Through his research on sex psychology and the subconscious, Freud found a key to unlocking the self that was the cause of people's anxieties, but indeed there were other keys. In Asia of the East, the monk Huineng of Tang China also provided a profound understanding of the self that entailed eradicating the control of the self and resorting to observation. It is possible to use both keys to instigate fresher understandings, and of course there are further possibilities.

Narrations in language are affirmations of the self. What is interesting is that all human languages use as the subject the three pronouns *I, you, he*. These constitute three mutually referential coordinates that make the self's observations possible. Starting off with an awareness of language—that is, with the understanding achieved from the different narrations of the speaking subjects—provides an alternative path. Literature is the epitome of this sort of narration, and moreover, what can be narrated is inexhaustible. What literature provides is unending understandings not only of society but also of people.

Is it possible for the individual to control his or her own fate in modern times when there are so many existential dilemmas? And following this, is it possible for fate or the future to be predicted? And are there new answers to these ancient questions?

Each writer can use his or her own means of replying, and similarly, a single correct answer cannot be obtained. For me the world and human nature cannot be recreated but they can be understood, and this is the propensity of literature that transcends practical advantage. Therefore, although life for writers of this type of literature is generally difficult, there is a need for such writers.

And is it possible for human beings to predict the future? The communist utopia may be regarded as the greatest prediction in human history, and it had ups and downs for less than a century before eventually collapsing. Some intellectuals locked into old Marxism still call for rebuilding this utopia, but it is doubtful that the recreation of such a myth can arouse frenzied waves of the times. Nonetheless, crowd fanaticism can certainly still be reenacted by the manipulation of political authorities. The globalisation of market economies brought about economic crises of an unprecedented scale that was unanticipated by the Western countries promoting the globalisation, and this has led to an intractable decline in Western countries. Who could have predicted that in just the past twenty years, the communist totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would suddenly crumble, that the countries

of Asia would unexpectedly rise, and that the totalitarianism of the big boss China would remain unchanged? Social change is hard enough to predict, and the fate of the individual is even harder.

When the individual is confronted by the all-engulfing fanatical tides of the times, whether it is the violent revolution of communism or wars initiated by fascism, the only escape is to flee, and this must be recognised before disaster is upon a person. To flee is thus to save oneself, but even more difficult to flee are the dark shadows of the inner mind of the self, and if one lacks sufficient awareness of the self, one will undoubtedly first be buried in the hell of the self; right until death one may not see the light. The hell of the self is delusion that can suffocate and destroy a person. However, literature can serve as a sobering medication that will arouse the conscience, promote deep introspection, and help one observe all the phenomena of the universe, as well as awaken people to investigate the darkness of the inner mind. Literature is helped by people's life experiences, but its insights far surpass all prognostications.

4 July 2011

Paris

Note. Presented at the International Conference “Gao Xingjian: Freedom, Fate and Prognostication” held 24–27 October 2011 at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany.

REFERENCES

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF GAO XINGJIAN'S PUBLICATIONS MENTIONED IN THE INTRODUCTION

- Juedui xinhao*. 1982. Translated by Shiao-Ling S. Yu as *Absolute Signal*. In *Chinese Drama After the Cultural Revolution: 1979–1989*, edited by Shiao-Ling S. Yu, 159–232. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996.
- Chezhan*. 1983. Translated by Shiao-Ling S. Yu as *The Bus Stop*. In *Chinese Drama After the Cultural Revolution*, edited by Shiao-Ling S. Yu, 233–289. Also translated by Kimberley Besio as *Bus Stop*, “Bus Stop: A Lyrical Comedy on Life in One Act,” in *Theatre and Society: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama*, edited by Haiping Yan, 3–59. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1998.
- Yeren*. 1985. Translated by Bruno Roubicek as *Wild Man*. In “Wild Man: A Contemporary Chinese Spoken Drama,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 184–249.
- Bi'an*. 1986. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as *The Other Shore*. In *The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*, 1–44. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1999.
- Gei wo laoye mai yugan*. 1989. Selected stories translated by Mabel Lee as *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather*. Sydney: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Sheng si jie*. 1990. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as *Between Life and Death*. In *The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*, 45–80.
- “Baili suibi.” 1990. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as “Parisian Notes.” In *Cold Literature: Selected Works by Gao Xingjian*, 58–75. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005.
- Taowang*. 1990. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as *Escape*. In Gao Xingjian, *Escape and the Man Who Questions Death*, 3–72. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007.

- Lingshan*. 1990. Translated by Mabel Lee as *Soul Mountain*. Sydney: HarperCollins, 2000.
- “Geri huanghua.” 1991. Translated by Mabel Lee as “Wilted Chrysanthemums.” In Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature*, 140–154. Sydney: HarperCollins, 2006; Yale University Press, 2007.
- “Wenxue yu xuanxue: Guanyu *Lingshan*.” 1991. Translated by Mabel Lee as “Literature and Metaphysics: About *Soul Mountain*.” In Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature*, 82–103.
- “Geren de shengyin.” 1993. Translated by Mabel Lee as “The Voice of the Individual.” In Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature*, 126–139.
- Meiyu zhuyi*. 1996. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books.
- “Xiandai hanyu yu wenxue xiezuo.” 1996. Translated by Mabel Lee as “The Modern Chinese Language and Literary Creation.” In Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature*, 104–122.
- Yige ren de shengjing*. 1999. Taipei: Lianjing. Translated by Mabel Lee as *One Man’s Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Zhoumo sichongzou*. 1996. In Gao Xingjian, *Zhoumo sichongzou*, 3–69. Hong Kong: Xin shiji. Published in French as *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end* (Carnières-Morlanwelz: Lansman, 1998). Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as *Weekend Quartet*, in *The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*, 191–253 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999).
- The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*. 1999. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Bayue xue*. 2000. Taipei: Lianjing. Translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong as *Snow in August*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2003.
- “Wenxue de liyou.” 2000. Translated by Mabel Lee as “The Case for Literature.” In Gao Xingjian, *The Case for Literature*, 32–48.
- Wenxue de liyou*. 2001. Hong Kong: Ming Pao.
- La Fin du Monde*. 2007. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag.
- Between Figurative and Abstract*. 2007. University of Notre Dame, Indiana, Snite Museum of Art.

“Juxiang yu chouxiang zhi jian.” 2007. Translated by Mabel Lee as “Between Figurative and Abstract.” In *Between Figurative and Abstract*, n.p.

“Zuojia de weizhi.” 2007. Translated by Mabel Lee as “The Position of the Writer.” In *Chinese Writers on Writing*, edited by Arthur Sze, 118–134 (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2010).

Depois do dilúvio. 2008. Lisbon: Sintra Museum of Modern Art.

Gao Xingjian. 2010. iPreciation Gallery, Singapore.

INDEX

- Absolute Signal*, viii
abstract art, 80, 82, 84, 98, 112,
133–135
actor's performance, 45, 50,
159–160
After the Flood, 221, 223, 225
Antonioni, Michelangelo, 187
avant-garde, 41–42, 91–92, 96, 100,
121
- Bach, 141, 185–186
Bacon, 100, 125
Balthus, 100
between figurative and abstract, 82,
84, 134–135, 146, 150
Between Life and Death, 51, 57,
170–171, 175
beauty, 65–73, 95, 97–99, 102–103,
108–114, 117, 119–120, 132,
137–139, 142, 156, 170, 218, 224
Bergman, Ingmar, 186
Berlin Wall, 3, 12, 93
Bertomeu, Thierry, 222
between figurative and abstract, 82,
84, 134–135, 146, 150
Beuys, 93
Birth, 222
Boulez, Pierre, 141
Brecht, 47–48, 67, 159, 164, 169,
175, 177
Bus Stop, 45, 56
*Buying a Fishing Rod for My
Grandfather*, 184
- Calder, Alexander, 115
- Cao Xueqin, 18, 21, 205
Cervantes, 18
Cézanne, 82, 124, 129, 133, 143
Chagall, 122
Chan Buddhism, 124
Chekov, xix
Christ, 5, 185, 197
cinematic poem, 179, 184–185,
221–223
conceptual art, 79, 84, 91–92, 116,
125, 130–131
creative space, 86
Courbet, 114
- da Vinci, 66, 105
Dali, 137
Dante, 17, 201, 213
Daoism, xix
Darmyn, Jean-Louis, 184
Delacroix, 94
Derain, André, 99
Dialogue and Rebuttal, 53, 57,
170–171, 173
Diamond Sutra, xix
Don Quixote, 18
Duchamp, 84, 89, 91, 93, 101, 124,
139
Duras, Marguerite, 170
- End of the World*, 222
Eisenstein, Sergy, 67, 115, 177
Escape, xiv
empty space, 126
ethical judgment, 3, 105

- expressionism, 82, 84, 93, 132,
 136–137
- Feng Menglong, xviii
- Fellini, Federico, 187
- flow of language, 28, 30, 35
- formalism, 80, 92, 129–132, 137, 152
- frail person, 6
- freedom, 3–5, 7, 13, 17, 19, 46,
 49–50, 81, 86, 90–91, 104, 107,
 140, 144, 181, 183, 186–187,
 192–193, 202, 204, 214, 218,
 222–223, 227–231, 233, 235
- Freud, 199, 233
- Gao Xingjian Year, xvii
- Genet, 159, 176
- Giacommetti, 99, 143
- Glass, xvi
- Gorecki, Henryk, 141
- Greek, 1, 13, 18, 37–38, 41–48, 50,
 55–59, 61–63, 65, 67, 76, 115,
 142, 159–166, 168–170, 173–177,
 179, 193, 197, 199, 212, 223–224,
 230–231
- Handke, Peter, 170
- Haydn, xvi
- Hegel, 65, 86, 118, 176, 216
- Hemingway, 201
- historicism, 75–77, 99, 101, 157, 203
- historical determinism, 75
- horizon, 127, 202, 222
- Huadou*, 179, 184
- humanism, 6–7, 204, 229–230
- ideology, 2–4, 7–8, 15, 19, 23, 40,
 72–73, 75–76, 78, 81, 94–96, 105,
 107, 116, 155, 157, 192–195, 198,
 207–213, 228–230
- In an Instant*, 184
- Ingres, xvi
- ink painting, 84–85, 124, 144, 222
- ink-wash painting, 149–154
- installation, 131
- instrumental rationality, 74–75,
 114, 116, 136, 197, 232
- Ionesco, 99
- Japanese kabuki, 43, 164
- Jin Shengtan, xviii
- Joyce, 17, 22, 28, 201
- Kafka, 5–6, 16, 101, 121, 197–198,
 231
- Kandinsky, 67, 125, 133, 177
- Kant, 65, 176, 213
- Klee, 124, 137
- Klein, Yves, 131
- Kosuth, Joseph, 91
- La Fin du Monde*, ix
- La Milaneseana, x
- La Tour, Georges de, 106
- l'Esprit*, 90
- Liang Kai, 149
- Liu E, xix
- Li Bai, xxii
- Louvre, xvi
- Magritte, 137
- Malevich, Kasimir, 136, 140
- Man Who Questions Death, The*, 52
- Maoism, 194, 229
- Manet, xvi
- Marxism, 2–3, 73, 77, 194–195, 207,
 216, 229, 234
- Matisse, 83, 114, 131
- Melka, Alain, 184
- Messiaen, 141
- Mi Fei, 149

- Michelangelo, 187
 minimalism, 80, 117, 131
 Molière, 175
 Monet, 127, 150
 Morandi, Giorgio, 143
 movement, 43–44, 57–60, 69, 96,
 124–125, 127, 129, 145–146,
 161–162, 176, 182, 184
 Mozart, xvi
 Müller, Heiner, 160
 music, 60, 68, 115, 125, 141–142,
 146, 163, 167, 180–182, 184–185,
 222
 Munch Museum, 150
- Nabokov, 201
 negation of negation, 75, 106, 202,
 216, 232–233
 New Wave film, 179–180
 neutral actor, 49–50, 54–55, 159,
 165–171, 175
 Nietzsche, 5–6, 91, 101
 Nietzschean superman, 5
Nocturnal Wanderer, 53, 56, 172
nouveau roman, 23, 25
- omnipotent actor, 62
 omnipotent theatre, 45, 56, 62
One Man's Bible, 27
Other Shore, The, 53, 59, 167, 176
- Peking Opera, 48, 164–165, 169
 perception, 36–39, 65, 68–72,
 82–83, 107–108, 113–114,
 117–118, 120, 123, 125–126,
 128, 135, 147–148, 150–151, 156,
 172–173, 180, 182, 197, 224
 philosophy, 5, 65–69, 80, 86, 91, 99,
 103, 107, 109, 118, 126, 128, 139,
 196, 208, 212–216, 231–232
- photographic art, 142, 224
 Picasso, 82, 102, 124, 133, 137, 150
 Pollock, Jackson, 136
 Pu Songling
 Proust, 16, 22, 28
 psychological space, 50, 126, 146,
 151
 politics, 1–8, 10, 13–14, 19, 40,
 72–74, 77, 79, 92, 96, 102, 105,
 187, 189–193, 195, 198, 208–210,
 218, 228–230
 political correctness, 2, 14, 105,
 191–192, 194, 208–209, 212–213,
 228–229
- Quatre quatuors pour un week-end*,
 ix
 Qu Yuan, 17, 197, 201
- Raphael, xvi
 rationality, 7, 36, 74–75, 78, 108,
 114, 116–118, 123, 136, 197,
 212–213, 215, 232
 Ray, Man, 115
 ready-made objects, 80, 84, 93, 96,
 101, 112, 120, 131, 136
 Reich, Steve, 141
 religion, 7, 38, 62, 72–73, 102, 104,
 113, 118, 124, 193, 197, 208,
 223–224, 228–229, 231
 Rembrandt, xvi
 Renoir, xvi
 romanticism, 5, 7, 39, 101
 Rosenberg, Harold, 91
 Rousseau, Le Douanier, 122, 135
- Sartre, 11, 199
 Schnittke, Alfred, 141

- self, 5, 10–11, 13, 16, 26–27, 33,
37, 49, 52, 54–55, 60, 81–82, 86,
101–102, 105, 113, 119–123, 130,
136–137, 140, 156, 164–166, 168,
170–173, 183, 198–201, 211, 214,
230–235
- sensuousness, 68–69, 117, 133,
141–142, 146, 149–150, 156, 212
- Seurat, 128
- Shakespeare, 15, 175, 205, 213
- Shi Nai'an, xix
- Shi Tao, 177
- Shostakovich, xvi
- Siegelau, Seth, 91
- Silhouette/Shadow*, 179, 184, 221
- Snow in August*, 45, 61
- Soul Mountain*, 26–27, 37–38
- Soulages, Pierre, 134
- Stanislavsky, 48, 164
- state of being, 149, 152–154
- stream of consciousness, 28, 30
- subconscious, 30, 35, 37–38, 62,
68–69, 119, 123, 135, 137, 156,
171, 233
- superman, 5, 101, 104, 191, 211
- surrealism, 93, 98, 122, 135, 137
- Tarkovsky, Andrei, 187
- theatricality, 43–45, 48, 61,
160–164, 174–175
- Tinguely, Jean, 115
- Tolstoy, 21, 66
- Tranquillity*, 222
- tripartite film, 181, 222
- tripartite performance, 167
- truth, 7, 14, 28, 81, 109, 111–114,
118, 173, 191, 193–194, 204, 211,
215, 231, 233
- Turner, 84
- ukiyo-e, 150
- van Gogh, 78, 143, 150
- Variations on a Slow Slow Theme*,
176
- voice of the individual, 5–6, 8, 18,
24, 211
- Walcott, Derek, x
- Wang Wei, 149
- Warhol, 92, 97, 101, 142
- Weekend Quartet*, 54, 173, 176
- Wenders, Wim, 187
- Wild Man*, 44–46, 61
- Xu Shuya, 185
- Year of Gao Xingjian, The, 184
- zero art, 77, 86, 131, 134
- Zou Wou-ki, 140, 150
- Zhuangzi*, xix
- Zimmermann, Bernd Alois, 185