

Ink Wash Virtualities. An Album of Works by Pan Gongshou

Rob Shields (University of Alberta), Ge Zheng (Sichuan University)

Abstract

This study considers virtuality in ink wash paintings with a focus on two late, Qing dynasty works from an album by Pan Gongshou (c. 1790). We examine the painterly devices by which a liminal, virtual, “as if” space is constructed as a “realm” or world in which the viewer is synaesthetically absorbed. Drawing on previous studies of spatiality, and on Callois and Turner, we theorize this spatialization of nature as psychanaesthetic and liminoid. Landscape in this tradition is not a pure creation of the human gaze, nor a representation of material elements and topography, but rather a synthesis of representations of the material world with a virtual “realm without self” as proposed by Wang Guowei (1877-1927 CE). Virtualities are intangible but “as if” real. They supplement and interrogate the material elements that are explicitly represented. They change the meaning or sense of what is represented and they create affective qualities and a sense of the passage of time that interpellates the body and mind of viewers, ‘bringing them into’ the painting.



Figure 1. Leaf of an Album of Landscape Paintings, Pan Gongshou, c.1790, Qing Dynasty, Album. Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta 2010.16.1

This study considers virtuality in Qing Chinese ink wash paintings with a focus on two Qing dynasty works from an album by Pan Gongshou (c. 1790) in the Mactaggart Art Collection at University of Alberta. The opportunity to collect these was in part afforded by the relative lack of

interest in the works in China during the years of the Cultural Revolution and also the marginalization of landscape paintings of the Qing period (1636~1912CE) in international art collecting (Elkins 2010). We examine the painterly devices by which a liminal, virtual, “as if” space is constructed as a “realm” or world in which the viewer is synaesthetically absorbed. Landscape in this tradition is not a pure creation of the human gaze, nor a representation of material elements and topography. Rather a sublime loss of critical distance is linked to the represented elements to absorb the viewer into what the early twentieth-century Chinese scholar Wang Guowei proposed as a “realm without self” and which has been echoed by the French sinologist Isaac Julien (Jullien 2009; Wang 1908). We contribute an examination of the manner in which this is done in the form of “virtualities” in ink wash paintings. Virtualities are intangible but real. They supplement and interrogate material elements that are explicitly represented. They change the meaning or sense of what is represented and they create nonmaterial, contextual or affective qualities in the works. We also speculate that these create an inclusive quality. This is a space that interpellates the body and mind of viewers, “bringing them into” the paintings. These are at the heart of a geometry of gazes and relations which compose the visual experience of a virtual world or realm.

Ink Wash Traditions

As background to our discussion of virtualities and spatial relations in the ink wash tradition, we introduce this painting tradition in its historical relation with a series of dynasties over in 1400 years. Chinese landscape painting takes two main forms, ink wash (primarily using black inks) and often more coloured, freestyle painting. Some of the most famous examples of ink wash from the sixth to fifteenth centuries are landscapes: so-called mountains and rivers paintings. Brushes and brushwork have evolved and been passed down for capturing particular features and elements such as stone or flowers. As actually real stones or flowers are expressed in brushstrokes that are figurative gestures, they are idealized and abstracted. The brushstrokes are true to the visual experience of these objects, they evoke their presence but do not simply reproduce them.

According to the mainstream study of Chinese art history, researchers such Li Zehou argue that it is from the middle Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) that ink wash painting of landscapes shifted from being a background for figures to become an independent theme (Li 1981, 166). The Chinese landscape painting tradition developed over a number of millennia beginning in the Tang Dynasty and flourishing in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) with later artists not only emulating but mastering the styles of previous masters.

Brush painting was an art of the elite. Some historians have considered the ways these paintings represent social relations. For example, small figures in the landscape (“点景人物” “*Dian Jing Ren Wu*”) develop during the Tang Dynasty (618~907 CE), the Five Dynasties (907~60 CE) and Ten Kingdoms (902~79 CE), these figures and the composition of landscapes gradually became more an ideal picture of social life. During the Northern Song Dynasty (960~1127 CE), the characters in the paintings tended to be stylized. For example, artists such as Fan Kuan (950~1032 CE) and Guo Xi (about 1000~about 1090 CE) seem to present figures as if they are

symbols of different social types and their activities.¹ Figures are very small, playing the role of embellishment to make the idealized landscape or view complete and perfect.

Li argues that the main reason why Chinese landscape painting matured in the Song Dynasty was the rise and solidification of the landlord class. Compared with the aristocracy, the ideal life of the landlord class was closer to the nature of the mountains and forests. The widowers, travellers and fishermen in these paintings are the idealized embodiment of secular life (Li 1981, 167). Contemporary scholarship argues that these painted characters are not odes to labour, but ideal figures that cover up the pain of feudal exploitation ((Li 1981, 168–69)).

By the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the economy prospered. Some merchants and farmers became part of the ruling class with a totally different background than the aristocracy and Literati, or scholar-officials, of the Song Dynasty. Intellectuals' pursuit of the Dao had moved from a focus on the macro-social ideal to the individual. Painters cite and refine a millennium of codified practice with materials that improve but are nonetheless standard – lampblack ink, unsized paper or silk, goat or other natural brushes. From the perspective of representation, the characters in the painting become the protagonists of their space. Humans stand at the active centre of this spatialisation of nature. Introducing this term, allows us to highlight the casting of the world as a culturally significant milieu, in which activities are deliberately positioned, spaced, and assigned to places, increasing their distinctiveness. Perhaps the figures are also placeholders for the viewer themselves, spirited into the picture and the visual geometry embedded into the compositions? Cahill's influential history dates the later phase of classical Chinese painting to Kublai Khan's Yuan dynasty (1279-1368CE) and the Ming dynasty (Cahill 1976). Later painters rediscovered and revalued Song and Tang painters' works (Fong 1992). Elkins calls the Yuan painters a “renaissance” that recovered remnants of an admired past. This historical awareness was also part of social and political projects (Elkins 2010, 68).

The style moved away from realism to emphasize brushwork in deliberate strokes and the evocation of the spirit of a scene or subject. In so doing, the works aspired to be more than believable representations; they sought to compress an experience such that the works became immersive simulacra. This is an historical innovation in the relation to representation which rather than simple presentation of a mimetic likeness, offers an alternative world, what Wang Guowei called a “realm” (Jiang 2010; Peng 2010; Zhang 2008, among others) and Baudrillard referred to more recently as a hyperreality (Baudrillard 1990). Rather than these representational elements, our focus is on the inclusion of non-representational elements and the compositional geometry of the works. In Li Zehou's analysis, ink wash landscapes represent an empathetic landscape with an “ambiguous imaginary” of nature. This landscape painting tradition is concerned with producing the sensation of “seeing a general significance,” rather than realistically representing specific objects and an actual place or view in the painting. Therefore, they have more freedom of imagination. The relationship with nature is idealized in the contemplative landscapes of the mountains and landscape tradition (Li 1981, 171–73).

1 Fan Kuan's (c.960-1023CE) Song Dynasty painting “Travellers Among Mountains and Streams” (“*溪山行旅图*” “*Xi shan xing lu tu*”) is a good early 11th-century example (see Taipei Palace Museum 2020). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fan_Kuan#/media/File:Fan_Kuan_-_Travelers_Among_Mountains_and_Streams_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

A main theme of the art historical research has drawn on the European and American tradition of spatial analysis of the scenes that are depicted, sometimes setting up analysis in relation to rules of one-point perspective. In this respect, Elkins has argued that the existing historiography of Chinese paintings both inside and outside of China is heavily coloured by Orientalizing and exoticizing biases of art history that have been disseminated globally (Binyon 1923). These narratives preferred to see the most ancient works as the highest form and later works as a decadent or imitative styles (Elkins 2010, 18). For example, Elkins argues that they import European-American, modernist, art historical tropes and themes in analyses which blur stylistic or structural features (such as the planes and geometries of paintings) with the historical artists' intentions and goals. However, imputing intentionality has been heavily critiqued in literary and cultural theory.

Wen Fong uses the spatial conventions of ink wash paintings to categorize them into stages of development, tied together by the idea of a continuous ground plane. In the first stage, the foreground, middle and background are pictured, scattered separately from bottom to top of a blank two-dimensional surface. "Each mode of representation corresponds to a way of seeing. Archaic graphic conventions reduced, transposed and re-created nature" (Fong 1969, 393).

In the second stage a more detailed sequence of overlapping planes shows the background rising up from the foreground so that a hill behind rises out of and above a hill or feature in front, for example (Barnhart 1970; Han and Teng 1978; Fong 1992) This conveyed a greater sense of recession in depth and three-dimensionality although the different planes are not physically integrated into a single milieu (e.g., Fan Kuan's iconic "Travellers Among Streams and Mountains"). In these "composite[s] of additive images" (Fong 1992, 93). There is a sense of a kind of backlighting that thrusts the mid and foreground forward, visually – a kind of intervening mist from which the monumental background of mountains rises. These discontinuities in the images are evocatively described by another major historian, Hay, as "a highly compressed reservoir of entropic space, so full of energy that it lifts the mountain toward the heavens" (Hay 1988, 31). In such a spatialisation of nature, the blank spaces or "neutral areas" (Han and Teng 1978) in paintings such as Fan Kuan's support a sense of change and dynamism on the part of the objects that are depicted (Hay 1988). As a *yin-yang* dynamism, features of the landscape emerge from blank areas that may be mists or indeterminately large expanses. In a description that sounds almost as if it is of fractals, Hay argues that space in these ink wash paintings is not a "geometrical space" ruled by points, lines, planes, and angles that form a consistent framework for a composition and which can be extracted like a diagram.

[That] is fundamentally different from a space -- which may perhaps be considered algebraic -- in which nuclear relationships spread out through expanding equations, capable of generating systems of endless complexity in which the compressed potentiality at the core can still be identified at its outermost limits. Geometrical space, we might say, is projected; what I am calling algebraic space is propagated. Distinctions of object and subject, the duality of mass and void, the systematic objectification of optical perspective, and the directional illumination of light from a single source all have to fight for existence within algebraic space, whereas geometrical space, optically delineated, entails a quite definite kind of hierarchy (Hay 1988, 31).

In the third stage (1250-1400), a single plane consolidates the stretch of landscape from foreground to background on a continuously receding ground plane (Fong 1984:21). However, this is deceptive: Törmä cites a manuscript of Wilfrid Wells in which he proposes that European viewers of “Chinese painting should reverse their viewing habits” (Törmä 1999, 126).

If the higher hill is not added behind the lower, but the lower hill is pasted to the base of the higher, the picture does not recede into the distance like European painting, but emerges from it; and the ground surfaces are not turned up toward the back to show themselves clearly, but turned down toward the front for this purpose; the zig-zags do not lead our eyes into the distance, they lead our eyes out of it. The whole conception is in fact fundamentally different. The Chinese artist drew the landscape to him; he did not push it away. His perspective did not rise; it fell (Wells n.d.).

Approaches such as Wells and Hay emphasize a semiotic structure that is conceptual, dynamic and emerging. They do not approach ink wash paintings as developing toward a realist, mimetic representationalism. Such an image could be understood as similar to looking out a window at a landscape that recedes from the viewer, whose position is in the foreground and centred in the image. The position of the viewer is given pride of place in the analysis and is implied in perspectival compositions. By contrast, many Chinese ink and wash paintings are handscrolls that are unrolled to reveal a scene from one side to another rather than in a single overall image.

Törmä challenges Fong’s geometric analysis by questioning whether a continuous ground plane is so obvious in paintings that feature mountainous landscapes and notes that there is also a play of contradictory elements in Yuan paintings. While they typically have a form of spatial recession, the brushwork can be borrowed from earlier periods to convey meaning related to the conventions of those styles or to achieve a specific illusion. The ink wash paintings defy rather than confirm the historicizing categories that divide the representation of space across dynasties. They don’t follow a form of the arrow of progress or development. Rather they form cycles of citation, revival and experiment (Törmä 1999, 133).

Daoism as Implicit Content

It is tempting to focus on the social history or on the graphic grammars and techniques of ink wash paintings. However, the objective of Literati paintings was always more ambitious. Historical ink wash paintings were created not only through conventions of visual composition and brush techniques but in relation to Daoism, for which the mountain and river scenes are a foil. To put this simplistically, they evoke a sublime milieu that invites the witness to open themselves out to. This environment or openness is a state of positive existence that is an ideal of the Dao, a calm present. As a totalizing moment, this space or openness offers an essence that transcends the limitations of an individual point of view. These limits are inherent in confinement to a single perspective and to a changeable state or substance that is impermanent. These limits are transcended through multiple perspectives, changing viewpoints and an overview rather than a glimpse from a single point such as the experience of one person.

The compositions reflect such principles. In abbreviated form, we might say that presence involves spatial dimensions of the actual and real whereas temporal dimensions such as the past and future must be made present as virtualities, not just abstractions. For example, one's grasp of present actuality is expanded by attending to the past as not just an idea but an enduring presence and the future, not just as a conceptual goal, but as a set of latencies in the present situation. Total presence amounts to a unity which involves a timeless present. Landscapes offer such timeless scenarios of presence, bolstered by the apparent stability of mountains and the forward going tendencies of flowing water. These are not static scenes. They are dynamic environments whose rushing streams and waterfalls, birds and trees breathe life into the mountain present. These may be appreciated through a form of calm "being-with" such dynamic elements. Ink wash paintings are interfaces to an ontology or realm that transcends changeable material objects in favour of the whole before and after of a situation, environment or "realm." This includes presenting the residual effects of formative events to make the past present, the effects of materials not included in the representation and implicit events latent in the situation depicted that make the future present in the work. We take up the interfacing quality of these works under the rubric of liminality.

Liminality and the Liminoid Experience

In landscape paintings in this tradition, the space where subjects are located could be understood as isolated from the secular world by the mountains and forests. This is a represented space, constructed by the artist. The picture offers a glimpse of not only some place, real or imagined, but an ideal realm. This is not a representation of a specific site or view, but an imagined space, a space of representations, into which the artist beckons the viewer. This is similar to what the University of Chicago anthropologist Victor Turner called "liminality." A limen is a threshold or doorway, that connects and look both inward and outward. Such a virtual and pictorial space is "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969, 94–113) possible states. This can be either a literal transition zone or border, or a liminoid experience, a bit like a Necker Cube or figure-ground visual paradox that is difficult to resolve into a static figure. Turner understands liminality as facilitating transitions between different statuses in the lifecourse, for example, a rite of passage. Liminality is part of the ritual management of virtualities. For example, if one considers a rite of passage such as from youth to adulthood, a spatial procession, a coronation, pilgrimage or a time spent outside of everyday space all enshrine a ritual death and rebirth, leaving one status passing through a liminal zone and re-emerging in new status. The change that occurs is virtual: it is the same body before and after but seen and understood as different. What has changed is qualitative, the virtual components of the material person.

The liminoid stitches together states, stages and positions, allowing transitions and back and forth interactions, a bit like a yin-yang figure. Thus it allows a viewer to smoothly enter the representation of a space, imagining and realizing a painting as-if it was an actual environment. Like putting on clothing, this transition immerses and embeds the viewer in this virtual space which is not the actual space of their body, but a momentarily other-space, a liminal time-out of actual time which subsumes their consciousness of their embodiment. This allows a smooth transition and interfacing between actual and virtual, and more specifically between the present

social spatialisation that often places art in rigorously purified museums and the virtual spatialisation within a work of art itself, in which landscapes and the tableau of inhabitants, flora and fauna form an apparently living realm in which the viewer also stands and breathes.

Rather than aiming at a transparent mimesis of the natural world through rules of perspective, for example, these landscape paintings instead aim to have qualities which arise as a more-than-representational aspect of the works. While they are representations that are virtually but not actually realistic, they are also layered with metaphorical overtones and metaphysical ideas. Going beyond the art historical analysis of the representation of space, the ink wash paintings offer full-fledged spatialisations of not only objects but social and natural relations, values and morals. They are “spaces of representation.” We argue that we find flickering glimpses that alternate between or “entangle” a pictorial representation, material objects in the images, the mystery of several possible meanings based on the visual clues or elements, and a virtual “as if” space.

We argue that ink wash painting aspires to convey a liminoid glimpse of an enhanced vision and being for individual viewers. This is both literally present in the form of poetic text and meditating figures (see Figs. 1 and 2) or pilgrims and figures immersed in a grand setting with a much greater than human scale; it is also implicit in the manner in which the works offer the viewer a vision of a whole realm which those figures could not see from their position. Below we will argue this vision is a visual psychanaesthetic, “out-of-body” experience. Beyond representing, the works are liminoid interfaces to a virtual view of an abstract (sometimes fictional) composition.

Why might the Dao be sought among natural scenes? Rural and mountain environments were natural borders and peripheries of the Chinese empires and historical society. Peaks were reserved for the Emperor’s ritual duties and marked as sacred sites by Buddhist doctrine and tradition. Such environments are thresholds from the everyday spaces of society to both the heavens and neighbouring societies. However even more importantly, these liminal zones, “betwixt and between” the realities of a human, social world and the ideals of culture and nature, are contexts that allow us to transcend the everyday and to think beyond established understandings of physical limits, virtual qualities, practices and types.

The ink wash paintings of the Literati present glimpses of a momentary liminality that is a source of inspiration for viewers. The paintings sublimate a natural and visual scene, investing ink and composition with symbolism that highlights beings that we do not hear and events we do not notice to adjust and expand the anthropocentric epistemology that is rooted in practical engagement with land and ecosystems. The paintings become an opportunity to go beyond the “box” or limitations of everyday life. As such they have a radical potential as well as communicating repressed aspects of our engagement with a wider world of humans and non-humans.

Virtual Elements Within Ink Wash Painting

A variety of techniques draw the attention of viewers and invite them to invest the paintings with their own imaginative resources and powers. Pan Gongshou's Qing Dynasty album of landscape

paintings (Figures 1 and 2). This album is made up of humble and even everyday scenes with accompanying poems that nonetheless aim to capture a special mood or ethos. These Qing Dynasty works cite and mobilize the longstanding tradition and techniques of ink wash painting compositions. However, they communicate a sensibility that is specific to Pan Guongshou's own era.

In this album of landscapes, which reflect the development of coloured inks (Figure 1), several of these works depict the moon as a reflection in the water rather than a direct representation of the moon. At first sight, it appears that the moon is hanging low in the picture. Yet, after comparing several works, it becomes clearer that this is the moon reflected in the water. The actual, physical moon in the sky is absent in the painting. The water surface acts like a mirror presenting a reflection. What is interesting here is not the existence of reflections, but the disappearance of the physical object in favour of its virtual image.

Accompanying poems, epigraphs and even the stamps of previous owners who collected the works mediate Chinese ink wash paintings. The value of some paintings derives from these annotations that provide a history of collections and art appreciation, sometimes by collectors more famous than the artists. In the case of these images, the poems provide some insight into the absence of the moon *per se* in the sky. There are many ways to be absent, such as recalling, waiting, searching, etc. The poem informs the image with a sense of nostalgia and melancholia. This is similar to only seeing a shadow but not the material person or object casting the shadow. The reflection is a virtual image. It is an example of how a larger realm that is not represented, lost or missing but is implied in the image. It is outside the frame of the picture yet is spatialized and made present at least through its effects inside its pictorial space. The moon is absent yet is present through its effects of reflection upon the water. Depicting the reflection of the moon in the water leads the viewer to look again and explore this, much like a *trompe l'oeil* might intrigue or delight:

谢公丝管筵初散， Lord Glee's² banquet music is o'er now,
潘岳秋怀泪转多。 Pan's³ tears roll more in the autumn sigh.
幽梦不成成独坐， My dream broken, I could but sit alone,
枇杷花下奈情何？ How can I rest emotions under the flowers of the loquat?⁴

If we look at the picture carefully, we see a man sitting in a house, looking out the window. With no doubt, he can see both the reflection on the water. The presence of the moon via reflection at the same time as its absence makes the painting more interesting. If we allow ourselves to assume that the person sitting inside is ourselves, the poem suggests that if we feel suffering and cannot go to sleep, we may turn to look out of the window. It is late and the autumn marks a time of natural pause. The flowering tree is precisely synchronized: loquats are unusual among fruit

2 Lord Glee: the title Lingyün Hsieh (385~433CE) inherited from his grandfather. Hsieh, once the Prefect of Yung Chia, was a high-born poet, Buddhist, idyllist and traveller, famous for landscape poems in particular. The painter compares his feelings to the noble sentiments of Xie.

3 Pan Yue (247~300CE): Also known as Pan An, writer and politician of the Western Jin Dynasty (266~316CE). He is honoured as "the most beautiful man in ancient China" and killed because of political conspiracy. Pan implies a pure beauty of sadness and melancholy.

4 Translations of poems by Zheng Ge with the assistance of Prof. Wang Ying, CIAS Beijing.

trees in that their stiff white flowers appear in the autumn or early winter and the fruit is ripe in the spring. Moreover, the trees and their fruit have a rich historical symbolism of the quest for immortality; that is, in transcending the flow of time. The giant loquat tree blocks the view but there are little sparkling reflections on the water through the leaves. We surely know that it is just a virtual reflection of the moonlight. The moon cannot be held or grasped, just like a sad event people cannot change. It seems the painting has a subject, the man sitting there, but the absence of the physical moon implies something lost in the world which makes him melancholic, and this meditation on duration and time's passage is the more profound subject of the work. Another leaf in this album (Figure 2) includes a poem about loneliness:

巖桂紛紛月滿樓， Osmanthus trees flourish on the cliff and moonlight spills over the
pavilion,
披帷獨坐思悠悠。 I sit alone in curtains my thoughts expand.
無端牀觸頻年夢， For no reason I touched dreams held in my heart for years,
寐歷山泉枕畔流。 The spring flows by the pillow in my dreams

These paintings both use the same motif of the moon on the water and share the same melancholic affect and sense of absence. But the dreams in these two paintings are different. In Figure 1, the man cannot sleep so he doesn't complete his dream and then sits to think and to contemplate the moon outside. But in Figure 2, we are told that the subject firstly meditates facing the moon in the water; afterwards he goes to sleep and dreams of the mountain spring flowing by him. After the lunar reflection, the dream in the poem is a second layer of virtual "as if" worlds or realms. These virtual images expand the space of the painting, creating a set of virtual representational spaces that resonate with each other. Inside is linked to outside, dream to perception, the actually real to the virtually real elements such as the reflected moon. The text does not explain but expands the image by emphasizing before and after relationships and the flow of time. Further adding to these layers and the liminoid flickering between the layers, all the paintings are after the styles of other historical painters. These are recreations of paintings with the artist's feelings and imagination added. The citational relationship both embeds the images in traditions and expands their ontological dimensions, adding the historical reference works to their qualities.



Figure 2. Leaf of an Album of Landscape Paintings, Pan Gongshou, c.1790, Qing, Album. Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta 2010.16.1

Recent European reflections on this theme include François Jullien’s contrast of Renaissance painted representation with the focus on space of representations, or a “realm without self.” Chinese Literati painting involves a preoccupation with the undifferentiated “foundation-form” of existence (Jullien 2009). It is important to recognize that Jullien builds on an approach developed in China by Wang Guowei (1908-9) that itself synthesized European and Asian sources a century earlier (see other comparisons e.g. Pan 2005). Jullien has been critiqued as using historical Chinese painting and thought as a foil to examine the limits of globalized Greco-Roman and European thought from the outside. He highlights the contrasts and differences between these traditions such as European “Being” versus Oriental “Existence” (Jullien 2015). However earlier, Heidegger and Derrida had critiqued the limits of grasping Being through objective presences only. “Presentness” associates essences with things at the moment, with presence. The Greeks understood this as *parousia* (presence); “essence as presence” (Heidegger 1962, ss.149, 189; Shields 1992). As Derrida notes, this epistemological tradition must conceptualize anything else as absence, “nothingness” or “nowhere.” Paradoxically, absence or *ousia* (absence, essence) can only be thought or represented in the form of a “present-absence,” an absent thing or the concept of absence, zero (Derrida 1970). For Jullien, Chinese paintings of the sort we are considering here capture the emergence of things and states in the form of “non-objects” (Jullien, 2009) which we have argued are intangibles and qualities as theorized in the literature on virtualities (Shields 2006).

Psychanaesthesia in Ink Wash Painting

By providing a virtual moon, whose presence is reinforced by the poetic text, Pan Gongshou deftly supplements the painted representation with an absent presence. This provides an illustration of the entanglement of directly represented presences and implicit absences that, furthermore, extend beyond physical elements such as the moon to include metaphysical elements that also supplement the landscape. This entanglement of presence and absence contributes to the liminal quality of the landscape painting as an assemblage or structure betwixt and between references in which the self might become untethered from the body in a virtual, “psychanaesthetic” realm such as a dreamscape or a metaphorical landscape (Callois 1984).

This is not merely a hallucinographic reading of these images. The virtual “as-if” elements and references that expand the ontology, the “it-ness” of the images, means that they are always “more than” what first meets the eye. While they rely on the viewers’ investment of imagination and attention, viewers are supported by a robust Asian historical and social tradition of interpretation, collecting and appreciation of the transcendental epistemology of ink wash painting. Callois analysis of psychanaesthesia examines the situation where the boundaries of one’s body are felt to disappear or merge with the surrounding milieu. Psychanaesthesia is the technical term for the experience of seeing oneself in a detached manner from outside of one’s body, as in a near-death experience. “De-personalisation by assimilation to space” ((Callois 1984, 30) cited by (Grosz 1994, 47)) supplants the primacy of personal perspective and sensations of duration in favour of a gaze in which the subject is merely a point and not the focal point organizing space. At its extreme, one looks at oneself from the outside, or loses one’s sense of position, fading into the environment. While Europeans such as Callois are fascinated and horrified by this loss of individuality, Callois’ comments align with Daoist principle:

The body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his sense[s]. He [sic] tries to look at *himself from* any point whatever in space... He is similar-not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is "the convulsive possession" (Callois 1984:30 original italics).

In the ink wash tradition, the viewer is asked to renounce their point of view, abandoning themselves to being spatially located by/as Other. “The representation of space is thus a correlate of one’s ability to locate oneself as the point of reference of space: the space represented is a complement of the kind of subject who occupies it” (Grosz 1994, 47).

Our examination points to the importance of entanglement, liminal states, betwixt and between an emergent non-object and a specific object of contemplation. An everyday comparison is a glance, something seen in peripheral vision. These are also similar to a flickering object. A second aspect is the role of virtualities such as the reflection of the moon and other elements that are “as if” but not direct representations of things. Both of these draw the viewer into a space of representations that conveys and immerses the viewer in a realm of emergence, breaking down not only the specificity of objects but blurring the contours of subject-object dichotomies: a situation that of “realm without self.” This extends to the creation of a virtual space that breaks

the “fourth wall” of the painted scene to virtually embrace the viewer, potentially dissolving their point of view into a psychanaesthetic montage.

Engaging the Viewer in the “Realm Without Self”

The way in which viewers are interpellated by the paintings and into the scenes is not simply a compositional trick or effect of a single technique. In our analysis of the Mactaggart paintings, it is an essential component of and the foundational subject of the works. These are Daoist works reflecting different points in the tradition. In these paintings, the superficial theme and representation of the scene are not primarily objective. They are elements in landscapes that have been described as an a-subjective “realm without me” (*wuwo zhi jing* 无我之境) that transcends the position of an individual subject. This is an ethical and aesthetic formulation used by Wang Guowei in *Ren Jian Ci Hua* (《人间词话》) or *World Notes and Comments on Earth* (Wang 1908). In this seminal text, he critically contrasts ancient Chinese poetry concerned with what is usually translated as “the realm of self” on one hand with works concerned with a “realm without self” on the other hand:

There is a realm with me and a realm without me... In the realm with me, I look at things from my sight, so all the things are in my colours. In the realm without me, we look from things, so we don't know what is me and what are the things. 有有我之境，有无我之境……有我之境，以我观物，故物皆著我之色彩。无我之境，以物观物，故不知何者为我，何者为物。(Wang 1908-09, Part 1, section 3, trans. by the authors).

The latter “realm” or situation refers to a state where the artistic conception blends the body and the whole in one psychanaesthetic totality. Wang Guowei continues,

The realm is not only the scenery, but also the realm of joy, anger, sadness and happiness in people's hearts. Therefore, those who can portray the scenery and true feelings are said to have a realm. 境非独谓景物也，喜怒哀乐亦人心中之一境界。故能写真景物真感情，谓之有境界。(Wang 1908-09, Part 1, section 6, trans. by the authors).

Wang Guowei's early twentieth century synthesis of Western and Chinese approaches and his conception of *wuwo zhi jing* as the “realm without self,” as the realm in which the human self withdraws and suspends its primacy, allows a broader focus on non-human (Wang 1908-09; See also Chen 2009; Ke 1994). Such a blended, transcendent state is neither an equilibrium nor a material reality but a composition of the viewer and image into a totality that is both an imagined abstraction and “as if” real, or what we have called “virtual” (Peirce 1958). Unlike an abstraction or pure idealization, virtualities are ideally-real or intangible. That is they are not “things” in the way that an object can be encountered or weighed. However they are fully real and are known through their effects. Examples include many assemblages or aggregates such as a community, a group or a mathematical set. The elements or members are actually real but the ontology of the set itself is an ideally real: a virtuality. These are causative in that they participate in chains of cause and effect and have impacts. Known through its effects, the virtual is intangible and appears to fit well with Wang Guowei's notion of “realm” as a liminal conjunction creating a

momentary space betwixt and between the world imagined in representation and the lived embodiment of the viewer. This liminoid bridging constitutes a realm.

Virtualities are awkwardly expressed in the positivistic bias of much contemporary language and thinking which focuses on “just the facts” and dismisses other elements as extraneous idealism, fictions or mere talk. However, following Wang Guowei, one finds in Chinese ink and wash painting a subtle mastery of composition that integrates the virtual with the material and abstracted narratives. These works function as representations of a place and time and as reflections on representationality and the arc of interactions that create an eddy or moment in time.

Pan Gongshou’s album presents something more than pictures of place, space or topography. The images transcend their representational status to offer virtual “as if” objects and spaces into which viewers’ subjectivity is blurred and their distance from the painting and the objects it presents is elided to draw them into a “realm without self.” As seen in these works, this interpellation takes place through specific painterly devices such as visual metaphors and puns. These are at the heart of a geometry of gazes and relations which compose a situation or “realm.” For Wang Guowei, this flickering, yin-yang synthesis of the realm with and without self, constitutes a landscape.

The text injects non-visual and temporal senses into the work, such as memory, smell and sound. This is both explicit in references to music or flowers and implicit in references to non-human nature such as trees, plants and birds. Text assimilates a processual narrative to the representation of a moment, expanding it out from a modern snapshot (even a snapshot of a mood) to a specifically Chinese sense of occasion that includes how the moment emerges and flows onward as a durational experience. One might even speculate that this could be called an ancient form of immersive art that long predates cinematic, installation-based and virtual genres.

In Chinese ink wash paintings, everyday reality is a visual metaphor for a virtual space of representations that is created through the painter’s skilled mediation of the viewer and the representation. Rather than focusing on the representation, we have attempted to show how these works break up the direct relationship between the material things and the viewer through liminality, psychanaesthesia and virtuality. They build up a supplemented, liminal “realm without self” that reflects and extends the viewers’ world or “realm of self.” This creates a new spatialisation, a liminal space of representations in which the viewer is psychanaesthetically drawn outside of themselves. In the paintings, presences and absences in their flickering quality, oscillate between realism and a virtual landscape of relations into which the viewer is also positioned and immersed.

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