

Interventions: The Mediating Work of Art

Jonathan Hay

To readers of this essay who are not specialists in Chinese art—the vast majority, I hope—the painting *A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks* (*Qingluan xiaosi*) may be at least vaguely familiar (Fig. 1). This painting in ink and light colors on silk dating from the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) is one of a handful of major early Chinese landscape paintings in American public collections. Much reproduced—indeed, a central exhibit in the modern canon of Song painting—it has long been associated with the name Li Cheng (919–967), a painter of mythical importance active in the mid-tenth century. Today, *A Solitary Temple*, which incorporates an awareness of Li Cheng's art, is generally thought to postdate Li's lifetime. Although its precise authorship is not crucial to the argument I want to make here, in a forthcoming article I argue for its reattribution to Wang Shiyuan (active ca. 960–1006 or later), the most versatile and one of the most prominent among the many painters active at the Song capital of Kaifeng in north-central China shortly before and after the year 1000.¹

I approach *A Solitary Temple* not as an object in a specific medium (ink painting) but as an event that comprises mediations with which the painting also engages reflexively. In my attention to the artwork's mediations and reflexivity, I follow the line of art historical interpretation that emerged in the 1970s, with its tendency to approach the artwork as a site of material and semiotic operations implicating the viewer, both contemporary and later, as active participant.² Most work of this kind, however, including my own prior writing, has explored this dimension of the artwork within the framework of the interpretation of art as a social practice, which over the last thirty years has centrally focused on the issue of representation. Here, on the other hand, I place the focus on mediation itself, denoting the broader capacity of artworks to create transformative linkages between the viewer and the world in which both viewer and artwork operate.³ In one direction, the mediating work that art accomplishes changes the viewer's sense of her place in the world, while in the other direction, the viewer's awareness of the aspects of the world engaged by particular linkages alters what the world is in her eyes. Open in its affective implications, mediation offers no guarantee of pleasure or reassurance.

This dematerializing, event-oriented course implies that *A Solitary Temple* is just as active as its viewer. It also builds on the tendency in recent interpretation to view the objecthood that an artwork possesses—its combination of material thingness and virtual image—as a powerful effect produced by the structure of its mediations. This structure operates on two levels, since the painting, as well as mediating directly between viewer and world, has the capacity to draw in the participatory viewer in such a way as to problematize, and thus mediate, its own mediations. The resulting reflexivity

raises dramatically the stakes of the agency that is distributed among artist, viewer, and artwork.⁴

The process by which *A Solitary Temple* both mediates and questions its own work of mediation specifies its singularity in a way that exceeds the parameters of the interpretation of art as a social practice. The problematic associated with this horizon of interpretation can be defined approximately by the intersection of two axiomatic principles. The first is the broad acceptance by its practitioners of interpretation's need to acknowledge and confront as central the artwork's resistance to interpretative closure—its overdetermined and contingent character; the second is the decision to proceed from the symptom and the aporia. A more fully mediational view of the artwork opens up a related but ultimately different interpretative horizon under which *A Solitary Temple* can be characterized as *individuation* out of a field of linkage it both establishes and questions. This field operates not only in the narrow terms of the social but also in a wider frame that might provisionally be termed ecological, without any clear boundary existing between the two. As individuation, the singularity of any artwork may be understood as the constitution of a node of agency within a network of linkages.⁵

In order to specify the terms of agency of *A Solitary Temple*, my account takes the interpretation through a series of different analyses of the painting in order to build up a cumulative picture of it as event. The account as a whole seeks both to enact the individuation interpretation proposed above and to construct in the process the necessary underlying concept of the artwork as mediational event. I first introduce the painting through traditional art historical methods, noting their indirect acknowledgments of mediation. The next step, also methodologically familiar, presents a symptomatic interpretation that acknowledges mediation more directly. In the following stage, I address the limitations of medium as an unspoken point of reference for the interpretative approaches in the preceding sections and shift the direction of the analysis toward an engagement with mediation on its own terms, with a view to starting *from* its operations rather than finding a way *to* them. I continue in this direction by examining successively the mediating roles played by the ground of the image and by boundary. In concluding, I attend to the painting's achievement of an ultimate coherence and intensity in relation to the complexity of its mediating work. Finally, I explain briefly why I believe it to be important for art history, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to rethink the artwork as the object of its study.

Style, Iconography, and Metaphoric Space

Today, *A Solitary Temple* (43 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., or 111.4 by 56.3 cm) is mounted as a hanging scroll (88 by 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., or 223.5 by 57.7 cm) with a surrounding surface of paper-backed silk that comes very close to the two edges of the painting but extends



I Traditionally attributed to Li Cheng (919–967), *A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks*, Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), hanging scroll, ink and slight color on silk, ivory roller, $43\frac{7}{8} \times 22\frac{1}{4}$ in. (111.4 × 56.3 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Purchase: Nelson Trust, 47-71 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Robert Newcombe)

quite some way above and below. Originally, to judge by its proportions and size, it would similarly have been mounted as a hanging scroll (rather than, for example, as a screen), with the pictorial image directly adjacent to the wall on either side, as seen in a surviving tenth-century hanging scroll excavated from a tomb in northeast China (Fig. 2).⁶ It is important to take the mounting of the painting into account because it makes this a very different painting from the same image, framed in the manner of a Euro-American easel painting—the fate of many later Chinese paintings that found their way to the West. Whereas frames evoke the architectural forms of Western windows and doors, rhetorically underscoring the picture's transversal relation to the wall, the thin paper and silk mounting of Chinese (and Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) hanging scrolls floats parallel to the wall behind it, reinforcing the painting's doubling of the wall as a boundary constituting its own surface environment.

The convention of modern art historical reproduction that crops the scroll to its pictorial image is therefore misleading, because it allows frame-conditioned Western habits of looking to take effect, turning an example of the Chinese category *tuhua* (conventionally translated as “painting”) into a picture. The representation, in other words, should not be seen as windowlike on a Western model; one needs to make a conscious effort to become attuned to the polydirectional play of mark making and imaging across the surface that scroll mounting subtly reinforces. Yet the effect of immediacy created by the way that this particular kind of mounting presents a “slice” of landscape—an effect reinforced by the conspicuous cropping of forms by the right and left edges—resonates with the view through a window in some kinds of Northern Song architecture, as seen in a slightly later Kaifeng painting, *Along the River at the Time of the Qingming Festival* (Fig. 3). Finally, it should also be remembered that, as a hanging scroll, the painting would have been on view only for restricted periods, and then it may not always have been seen hanging on a wall. Paintings were also viewed hanging from a pole, with the viewer holding the bottom of the scroll (Fig. 4). As we shall see, this temporality of the artifact resonates with a temporality internal to the image.

The painting represents a country scene, topographically recognizable as set in north-central China, at the edge of a mountain range, where a Buddhist temple stands on an outcrop beneath a mountain peak. The season appears to be early spring. Although the trees are still largely bare, shoots are starting to sprout from branches and there is no sign of winter's bitter cold. The figures are uniformly dressed in light clothes, and it is already possible to eat and drink with the windows and doors open (Fig. 5). Given the light that infuses the painting (which, following Chinese practice, does not emanate from any fixed external light source), evening seems to be still far off. The donkey rider at bottom left wears a hat to protect himself from the sun. Despite the vibrating intensity of the image, the scene itself is remarkably still—no wind is blowing that would buffet trees or disturb the surface of the water, no birds are seen in flight; instead, water falls and eddies, mist rises. This stillness is echoed in the activities quietly pursued at the restaurants. In the simpler and somewhat dilapidated buildings to the right, travelers seated in ones and twos at the tables eat, converse, or nod off; a female



2 *Lofty Scholars*, before 980, excavated from a Liao dynasty tomb, ca. 980, Yemaotai, Liaoning Province, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 57¼ × 21½ in. (145.2 × 54.5 cm). Liaoning Provincial Museum (artwork in the public domain)

cook tends her stove. The two pavilions to the left, in a much better state of repair, are occupied by scholars; in the nearer of the two, fancy enough to have a calligraphy screen as



3 Traditionally attributed to Zhang Zeduan (active early 12th century), *Along the River at the Time of the Qingming Festival*, detail, ca. 11th century, handscroll, ink and slight color on silk, $9\frac{3}{4} \times 17$ ft. $4\frac{1}{8}$ in. (24.8 \times 528.7 cm). Palace Museum, Beijing (artwork in the public domain)



4 *Early Summer*, from a set of four hanging scrolls on silk probably depicting *The Eighteen Scholars*, Yuan dynasty? Suzhou Museum (artwork in the public domain)

decoration, two scholars are deep in conversation. One imagines the sound of the nearby waterfall, and we must assume that attentive Northern Song viewers would have been able to reconstruct an entire soundscape, including sounds of cooking, scraps of conversation, tinkling bells drifting over from the pagoda, and the birds that the artist did not need to depict. Viewers would have been aided in this by the fact that such soundscapes were familiar from contemporary and earlier poetry.

Breaking the spell, a man arrives from the left riding a donkey, accompanied by servants on foot. In the overall stillness, this arrival registers dramatically as an event that on closer inspection reaches into the area of the restaurants. The servant carrying baggage on a pole who crosses the space between buildings has run ahead across the bridge to announce his master's arrival; in the farther pavilion, a solitary scholar rises at the window, looking toward the arriving traveler as if he is expected or seen as potential company or has been recognized as someone of note. The restaurant's *raison d'être* is the temple beyond—there is no village in view—so one may infer that all the visitors to the inn are on their way to or from the temple, and one might further surmise that they will ascend, or have already ascended, the pagoda to gaze out on the scene we see from its near center. This hypothesis, however, would have to be squared with the fact that although the main door to the temple stands open, the doors to the upper-story balconies of the pagoda are closed; curiously, not a single monk is to be seen.

The stylistic profile of the painting is complex, in line with its historical and political position. It was painted in the wake of an approximately century-long period of experimentation, to which the last great contributor was Li Cheng, that established landscape as the preeminent genre of painting in China, displacing in prestige the figure painting of an earlier era in which icon and narrative reigned supreme. The dominant stylistic note in the painting comes not from Li, though, but from the art of an early-tenth-century artist, Guan Tong, originally from the former Tang capital of Chang'an but active in Kaifeng. From Guan come the crystalline peaks of



5 Detail of Fig. 1, showing the restaurants and associated figures

exposed rock, the repeated lines of barren trees, and the lucid articulation of the relation between fluctuating ink contour and gradated texturing strokes and washes, as well as the signature Guan school motif of repeated short, straight texture strokes (Fig. 6). But Li Cheng's influence can also be seen, in the atmospheric treatment of the heights of the peaks and in the subtle mists lower down, figured largely by the bare pale umber silk, that threaten to turn solid to void. More specific to the painting and its artist is the striking accessibility that pulls a monumental landscape into, as critics of Wang Shiyuan (known as a Guan Tong follower) observed, the intimacy of a scene viewed from one's window.⁷ The accessibility is partly a matter of scenic and narrative construction and partly derives from the orchestration of degrees of sharpness of focus. It, too, betrays a second-generation artist at work, one for whom the monumentality of landscape—as metaphor for a reunified nation—could be taken as already achieved and therefore available for rhetorical use. This is a characteristic that *A Solitary Temple* shares with all the major surviving landscapes of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

A second kind of stylistic specificity is also at work. The artist who produced this painting was a master not only of landscape but also of the painting of figures, animals, and, above all, architecture. In fact, the composition's most striking structural characteristic is the distinctly architectonic approach to the landscape morphology, for which the centrally placed temple complex and restaurants below function almost as an allegory. In a period when few artists mastered more than one or two genres, Wang Shiyuan was famously a master of no fewer than four, with architecture considered to be the area in which he had no rival.⁸ Here he has applied principles of architectural painting—notably, the balancing of oblique vectorlike forces in dynamic equilibrium—to create a landscape whose structural and narrative lucidity is paralleled only in paintings of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.⁹ As one would expect, the architectural elements are handled with extreme precision and specificity. The main buildings of the restaurants are depicted as rustic structures built from rough-hewn logs; more logs with

roughly cut branches sit on the thatched roofs, where they appear to fill some sort of bracing function. In contrast, the apparently spanking-new pavilion additions to the restaurant are depicted in a neat linear style, whose clarity is emphasized by the addition of light color that is continuous with that of the temple; this suggests that we may be expected to understand the temple, too, as being newly built.

The end of the tenth century was a period when Song rulers enforced cultural nationalism as a means to political unity; within the art world, one of the expressions of this policy was the marked tendency of the court to favor as appointees to the Painting Academy artists from other parts of a reunified China, displacing artists hailing from the pre-eminent artist families (to one of which Wang Shiyuan belonged) of Kaifeng, the Song capital that had also been the capital of several short-lived prior regimes over the previous half-century period of the Five Dynasties (907–60). As a result, the north Chinese tradition of landscape painting that is today associated with the Northern Song dynasty was not, in fact, primarily sponsored by the Song court during its first few decades.¹⁰ *A Solitary Temple* is one of a small surviving group of superb landscapes and cityscapes by Kaifeng artists that, on the evidence of Northern Song writing about the Kaifeng art world, found two main markets in the late tenth century: the art collectors among the capital's elite population and the government ministries of the Song state, in which many of the same collectors were active as officials.¹¹ At the very end of the century, however, north Chinese landscape painters came to play an important role in the Painting Academy, and their painting tradition became a major element of court art as well.

On the blank silk in the upper-right corner of *A Solitary Temple* is the impression of a collection seal of the Northern Song Department of State Affairs (*shangshusheng*) dating from perhaps as early as the year 1083. This seal was probably used by the Palace Library (*bishusheng*), which in 1082 took over responsibility for the portion of the state collection housed in the government offices.¹² The relation between court art tied to the taste of the emperor and art associated with government buildings and collections is tangled and



6 Detail of Fig. 1, showing the central mountain

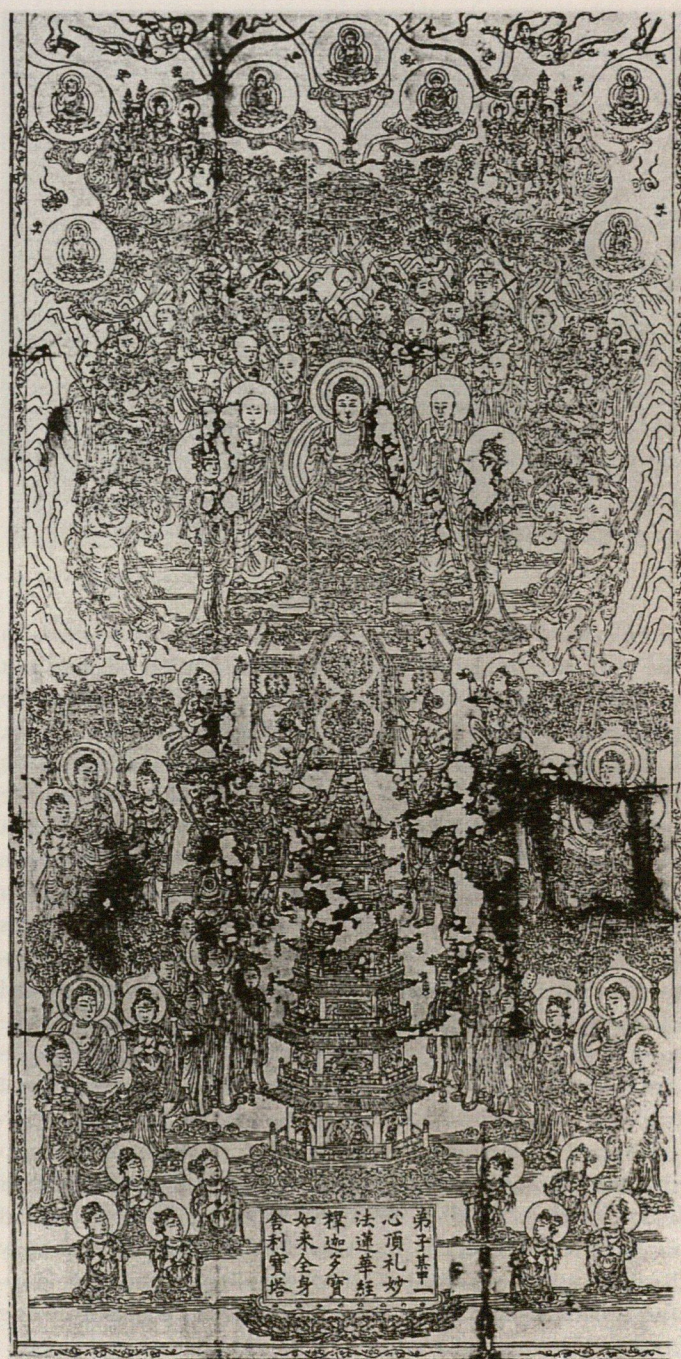
obscure. But the fact that *A Solitary Temple* did not subsequently enter the personal collection of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–26) further suggests that the painting may belong to a history of government art under the Song.

The narrative subject, as we have seen, involves the arrival of a visitor at an inn on his way to the temple complex at the heart of the composition; it is, in other words, a pilgrimage, whether motivated by leisure or religion. The iconicity of the

painting, pictorially dominated as it is by a pagoda, is such that the temple, and even the pagoda, might also be said to be its subject. For a viewer conditioned by the truth claims of photography, it is hard to resist the reality effect produced by a highly developed rhetoric of veracity; in consequence, modern scholarship has often sought to identify in early Song naturalism a protoscientific objectivity of observation.¹³ While this quality is by no means absent from the painting, equally relevant as a general context for naturalism in late-tenth-century China are the very different truth claims of visualization practices associated with Buddhism and Daoism, and of practices of observation associated with Neo-Confucianism, in which vision was variously associated with access to a deeper, normally hidden reality. Under the Northern Song this access came to be aligned with optical experience. Because naturalism, or similitude (*xingsi*), was thus as much rhetorical as objective, landscape paintings appear to have functioned neither as topographic depictions of one specific site nor as the opposite of this, generic representations without real topographic reference. Instead, it is more plausible to understand a painting like *A Solitary Temple* as topographically indeterminate. In this view, the painting was deliberately left open to the different aspects of the knowledge of their visual environment that contemporary viewers would have brought to the painting according to personal interests or context of display.

A good starting point for an investigation of its topographic indeterminacy is the fact that in the entire corpus of Song landscape painting, *A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks* is the only composition that features a pagoda so prominently.¹⁴ Pagodas, variously built of stone, brick, or, as here, wood, were major construction projects, of which the most magnificent were usually initiated under princely or imperial sponsorship. If the painting almost certainly does not depict any single pagoda, it undoubtedly thematizes the new temple construction under the Song following the repression of Buddhism by Shizong (r. 954–59), emperor of the Kaifeng-based Later Zhou dynasty. Many Buddhist sites potentially resonate in the image. Here I focus on a single such resonance—probably inescapable for a Kaifeng viewer—that illustrates the capacity of Song landscape paintings to signify, connotatively rather than denotatively, against the grain of their reality effect.¹⁵

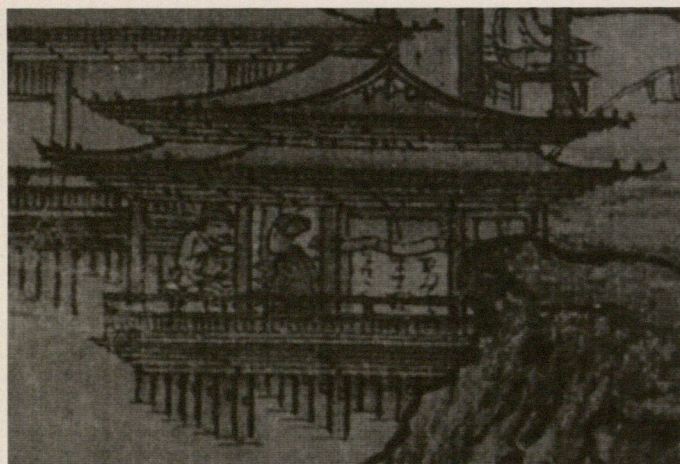
The late tenth century saw two major pagodas built under imperial patronage on the orders of Emperor Taizong (r. 976–97). Only one was a wooden structure, and it stood in the precinct of one of Kaifeng's largest and most important religious sites, Kaibao Temple.¹⁶ The temple, located on a low hill between the inner and outer city walls, owed its greatest fame to its selection by Taizong as the site for a pagoda intended to house a stupa containing relics of Sakyamuni Buddha that had been brought with great fanfare from Hangzhou to Kaifeng following the capitulation of the Wu-Yue Kingdom in 976.¹⁷ Designed by a southern architect, Yu Hao, and constructed between 982 and 989, Fusheng Pagoda was an octagonal structure of thirteen stories, much taller than the one seen in the painting. One of the wonders of its age, it became a defining monument of the city of Kaifeng. Piercing the city's skyline, the pagoda could be read at once as a protective presence, a symbol of the legitimacy of



7 *The Sermon of Sakyamuni at Vulture Peak and the Stupa Containing Relics of Sakyamuni*, ca. 984, woodblock print, 30¾ × 16⅝ in. (77.9 × 42.1 cm). Seiryō-ji Temple, Kyoto (artwork in the public domain)

the dynasty, and a celebration of the final Song reunification of China at the end of the 970s. It continued to play that role until the year 1044, when it was destroyed in a fire.

The arrival in the capital of the Wu-Yue relics was explicitly commemorated in a painting known only from a print produced about 984 (Fig. 7).¹⁸ The image is a complex work made up of two smaller compositions that each take up half of the printed sheet. In the lower half, the eight-sided pagodalike stupa is presented as an object of veneration by an assembly of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, while the upper half of the image depicts Sakyamuni himself preaching the *Lotus*



8 Detail of Fig. 1, showing the pavilion containing the calligraphy screen

Sutra in the Indian mountainscape setting of Vulture Peak. In the year 984, the stupa had reached the capital but had not yet been placed in the crypt of Fusheng Pagoda, since the pagoda was then still under construction. *A Solitary Temple*, which probably dates from the last two decades of the tenth century, is closely related in its symbolic structure to the painting on which the print is based. One way of reading *A Solitary Temple* is as a conflation of the ideas embodied in the upper and lower halves of the print—whose proportions it shares—to form a mountainscape infused with the Buddha's presence. More narrowly significant is the fact that the pagoda in *A Solitary Temple* loosely resembles the eight-sided stupa depicted in the print. In other words, the pagoda in the painting might be said to conflate visually the function of the Fusheng Pagoda with the structure of the stupa it housed after 989. Also worthy of note in this context are the apparently fresh construction of the temple and the additions to the inn below, as well as the relatively early time of day; if coming from the inner city, the traveler would not have had far to go. All of this suggests that *A Solitary Temple* may incorporate a response to Taizong's postreunification glorification of Song Kaifeng using Buddhist treasures from the newly conquered south.

If one takes into account the well-accepted metaphoric identification of Buddhist temples with mountains into which its monks had withdrawn, the apparent contradiction between urban connotation and rural aspect dissolves further. The mountains depicted in the painting have at least two possible topographic referents, both of them relevant to the location of the Song capital. One is the Songshan mountain range to the west of Kaifeng, including the Central Marchmount, one of the Five Sacred Mountains of China. This mountain, according to the Song court painter Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090), was distinguished from other major mountains by its “many fine streams,” a comment that resonates with the presence of no fewer than four waterfalls in the landscape and the lake or river across which we see them.¹⁹ The other possible reference is to the vast Taihang mountain range to the north of the capital, which separated Kaifeng from the most pressing enemy of the Song, the Khitan Liao dynasty. Whether the painter meant to allude specifically to

one or the other mountainscape, or less determinately to both, the temple-mountain metaphor permits a displacement—of urban temple into the wilderness, of the mountains into the environs of the capital—giving rise to a veritable architecture-and-landscape icon in which the protective mountain occupies the geomantically favorable position of symbolic north.²⁰ But again, I want to stress that Fusheng Pagoda and the stupa it enclosed constitute just one set of resonances of the pagoda in the painting; other resonances—for example, with the older pagodas of the Songshan and Taihang mountain ranges—are also accommodated by the image, which in the end constructs its own unique reality of space, place, and time.

As one kind of modern Western viewer, a trained art historian, I have approached the painting initially in a manner that privileges its phenomenology and visual coding. It is important to note that this orientation would not necessarily have been privileged by a Chinese viewer. For a Chinese viewer past or present who possessed a classical education, the first response to the painting might well be mediated instead by her knowledge of poetry, especially the many Tang and earlier poems that describe journeys in the countryside or the mountains.²¹ The importance of this cultural variability of reception was brought home to me when I realized, as I examined firsthand the calligraphy screen in the closer of the two pavilions, that its cursive-script characters would (exceptionally for such a depiction of calligraphy) be legible to a calligrapher, providing a fragment of a text to guide the reader-viewer's interpretation of the image (Fig. 8).

Although lack of time has prevented me from researching the fragment fully—even to decipher it will require specialist skills that I do not possess—its very existence has important implications for interpretation. By the twelfth century at latest it was common for painters to compose landscape images corresponding to couplets taken from Tang dynasty poems, and it would not be unreasonable to assume that the inscribed text shown here would have been well enough known to be recognized, and may also have been drawn from the canon of Tang (and earlier) poetry. Even if the calligraphy turns out to be undecipherable, it still functions as an encouragement to the viewer to bring her knowledge of poetry to bear on the image. Leaving aside iconographic implications that are as yet unknowable, one sees that this complicates the time of the painting, thrusting its contemporary temporality into a relation with the past and creating a textually mediated “anachronic temporality” of the image.²²

Despite the fact that this initial account has largely been oriented toward the objecthood of *A Solitary Temple*, several of the the painting's mediations have indirectly come into view. These include the mediation by the scroll format and the painting's acknowledgment of that format, of the image's physical relation to the wall on which the scroll hangs; by narrative and season, and by architectonic structure and the temple-mountain metaphor, of the relation of the viewer as an urban subject to the natural environment; by evocation of new temple construction and the political transfer of relics, of the relation of Song state ideology to Buddhism, and of imperial to Buddhist subjecthood; by iconicity, of the relation of the Buddhist believer to the presence of the Buddha; by stylistic lineage and the invocation of the literary tradition, of

the relation of present to past; and by poetry, of the viewer's relation to the visual image.

Ink Painting as Social Practice

A different set of mediations becomes visible when *A Solitary Temple* is considered from the standpoint of the social practice of painting. The representational specificity of *A Solitary Temple* has much to do with the alignment the artist has staged between two systems of metaphoric equivalence—the state interpretation of the mountain as visual embodiment of an imperial authority that was not usually directly representable (portraits of imperial rulers were put on public view only rarely) and the Buddhist view of the temple-monastery as a symbolic mountainscape into which the believer could withdraw.²³ So marvelously resolved is the composition that one is, initially, rhetorically persuaded of the imaginability of such an alignment. Sustained attention, however, discloses contradictions that put in question the very coherence of the vision of stability to which the painting is dedicated. The painting fully coheres, in fact, only for as long as the viewer defers serious involvement with either of the metaphoric readings it makes possible. To engage with either one is to realize its disalignment from the other.

Thus, in one reading, the temple, insofar as it lies in the shadow of the mountain, can legitimately be interpreted as deferring to the semidivine authority of the ruler, reflecting the position of Buddhism in the eyes of a fundamentally Confucian state. This is part of a larger visualization of hierarchy in the painting, in which the populace as seen in and around the inn goes about its business at once in the beneficent shadow of Buddhism (the temple) and under the watchful and benevolent gaze of the state. Richard Barnhart has eloquently summarized the imperial dimension of this hierarchical ideology in early Song landscapes:

Their compositional structure . . . is the very structure of the new empire of Song, with the Son of Heaven represented in the dominant central peak, his ministers and associates in the supportive ranges and hills around the central peak, and the entire vast structure as ordered, clear, and infinite as the great empire of China itself. There is no dust or dirt, no violence or disorder, nature is placid and benevolent, controlled by the power and wisdom of the enlightened ruler who has brought humanity to this lofty condition through wise interaction with Heaven.²⁴

To this symbolic interpretation of the composition one might want to add a temporal dimension. In this spring landscape the water pouring down from the mountains gives the impression of being converted into new growth that will eventually bring the trees into full leaf. With its visualization of seasonal rebirth, the painting functions as a metaphor of dynastic renewal appropriate to an early moment of the Song.

Yet the vision of the Song empire that *A Solitary Temple* articulates has a built-in contradiction, for it is convincing only in relation to the territory that the Song controlled. Until the Treaty of Shanyuan in 1004, Song rulers and their subjects lived in constant fear of invasion by the Liao dynasty of the Khitan, located to the northeast, which handed the



9 Detail of Fig. 1, showing the pagoda mast

Song armies a decisive defeat in 988. The peaceful scene presented to us belies this political reality, which is nonetheless figured in the painting by the mountains that wall off Song prosperity from imminent danger.

Moreover, an interpretation of the landscape as metaphor for Song dynastic order can be maintained only on condition of ignoring one of the most striking compositional features of *A Solitary Temple*: the placement of the temple complex as a whole at the center of the picture surface. The rhetorical means deployed in this placement are those of the religious icon, here exceptionally transposed from the genre of the figural (and also often architectural) paradise composition into the landscape genre, and reinforced by the halolike zone of light-filled mist around the temple. As John Hay has noted, the deployment of landscape forms in the painting gives it a structural resemblance to the Tang-style paradise compositions that continued to be painted all through the tenth century (Fig. 12).²⁵ With the temple thereby presented as both beginning and end of the image according to the anti-narrative logic of the religious icon, the mountainscape can be read as the visualization of the temple, conceived symbolically as mountainscape of withdrawal. But, just as figural icons often include secondary narratives, here the mountainscape also functions as the setting for a pilgrimage that functions in its own right as a narrative metaphor for the pursuit of enlightenment—whose difficulties are announced by the broken bridge. In this second interpretation, the trees and restaurants take on quite different meanings from before: the trees as metaphor for the hardships of withdrawal and self-cultivation and the restaurants as visualization of the “dusty world” from which the Buddhist believer seeks to extract himself.

If these two interpretations—the political and the religious—cannot be held in the mind at the same time, they are nonetheless sutured together in the composition at the point where the pagoda and the mountain are joined (Figs. 6, 9). A jagged downward-projecting rock face looms above and behind the pagoda. Energy spills out in several directions at once from this irregular rock form, and all the restless move-

ment of the trees below is needed to hold it in place. And even this is not enough; it also requires the rising vertical of the pagoda, placed slightly to the left of the vertical axis, which activates the deep structure of the mountain's verticality as a whole. When one looks closely at the pagoda's finial, though, one sees that the stack of tight-fitting metal disks on the lower part of the central mast appears to be askew, as if it had shifted irregularly to the left. Although this effect is illusionistic, helped by the fact that the mast is ever so slightly off the central axis of the pagoda and does not correspond to a real architectural possibility, it disrupts the building's otherwise perfect symmetry. As a result, the finial appears to respond to the force of the jagged downward-projecting rock face behind, like bamboo before the wind. Order is restored by the thin top part of the metal mast—a symbolic thunderbolt—delicately depicted with single brushstrokes.²⁶ The suture is this relation of force between the building at the point of the stacked disks and the rock face, intersecting at an oblique angle the vertical axis of the painting. A suture across empty space, it disturbs the painting's ostensible celebration of the alignment of Buddhism and the state with an intimation of that alignment's fragility.

At least one other consideration deepens the resonance of this resolution-nonresolution. Fusheng Pagoda was brought into existence to house spoils of conquest, relics long associated with the southeast, and was designed by an architect from the former Wu-Yue Kingdom. The final reunification of China under the Song preceded the construction of Fusheng Pagoda by barely a decade and was sealed by the capitulation in 976, a year after the Southern Tang, of the Wu-Yue Kingdom, deeply associated with devout Buddhism. There is thus a sense in which the Song sponsorship of Buddhism celebrated in this painting, which included the construction of the Fusheng Pagoda to house Wu-Yue relics, can itself be said to have been one of the multiple sutures by which a Song nation became possible.

Attractive and necessary as a social interpretation of *A Solitary Temple*, through its double Buddhist and imperial iconicity, may be, it is clearly incomplete, for it leaves the narrative dimension underexplained. The donkey rider is the figure through which the narrative imagination of the viewer is most obviously engaged; one enters the painting through him.²⁷ All of this suggests that this elite male figure may very well have been intended and understood, on one level, as an index of the personhood of the unknown patron of the painting. If that individual cannot now be identified, the type is still recognizable. The figure arriving on his donkey, accompanied by no fewer than three servants on foot, indicating his elevated social status, is watched with more than just casual interest by the scholar in the rear pavilion. The new arrival has two immediate destinies: to join the latter in conversation, a possibility articulated visually by the image of two scholars in conversation in the other pavilion; and/or to continue on his journey, following the path beyond the restaurants that leads to the temple complex. Through these two, entirely compatible, narrative possibilities, the painting presents itself as incarnating the possible experience of an educated man from the class of civil-bureaucratic families (*shi*), conjoining sociability, philosophic or religious self-cultivation, and love of landscape, the last of which, in Song

China, implied an equal connection to history through the associations of place. The painting's narrative, together with the presence of a Song government seal on the painting, strongly point to the individual immediately responsible for the painting's commission as himself a government official. Following a tradition of paintings for government offices that can be traced back to the Tang dynasty, the painting affirms the official's nonstate identity as a scholar by evoking what he would like to be doing if he were not too busy in his government job. In this way, the narrative of the painting gives metaphoric form to the relation between *shi* and the dynasty.²⁸

This relation is also figured in terms of the landscape. Barnhart's account of landscape painting's articulation of imperial ideology left out what was often one of its major visual elements—trees. In a court context these could be the vehicle for a symbolic visualization of the ordered hierarchy of courtiers.²⁹ In contrast, Wang Shiyuan's trees, particularly the twisted trees of the lower half of the painting, are unruly, full of individual energy that only increases where they are clumped together in separate groups and are cropped by the left-hand edge of the painting. In the late eighth century, old trees had emerged as the preeminent pictorial genre for the self-definition of the *shi*, who at that point were still drawn from the great aristocratic clans.³⁰ Subsequently, as painters working in this genre increasingly extended their interest to landscape, during a period when the *shi* came to be drawn more broadly from civil-bureaucratic families, the values associated with depictions of old trees—principally, moral integrity—were absorbed into landscape painting.³¹ The fact that a separate genre existed for old trees meant that the potential always existed within a landscape painting for heterogeneity and tension at the symbolic level. This is the case here, where the unruly trees embody an energy that is pushed to the very edge of—but not beyond—the expected deference to hierarchical dynastic order.

The account I have just given largely expands on and complicates the third of the mediations that I listed above: the painting's articulation of the relation of Song state ideology to Buddhism. In addition to the mediation of this relation by the evocation of temple construction and the political transfer of relics that I noted earlier, one now sees that the composition acts not just to connect imperial and Buddhist subjecthood but also to register doubt about its possibility. The ideological configuration of the painting is further enriched by its mediation of the relation between the dynasty and the *shi* elite. The painting mediates this relation symbolically through the relation of figures and trees to the mountain, with the role of the trees opening up this relation, too, to an awareness of tensions. The prominence of trees in the painting, incidentally, should not lead us to miss the significance of a landscape depicted as largely denuded of forest. By the end of the tenth century, the use of charcoal in the industrial production of iron and, to a lesser degree, ceramics had led to the deforestation of parts of north China.³² If the painting does not depict the chimneys of workshops and kilns, it yet juxtaposes building construction with dwindling timber resources for viewers who, in their own lifetimes, would have seen the capital utterly transformed.³³ Further aspects of the representation bring the nation into play as well. On the one hand, the painting mediates the conflictual

relation between the Song and Liao dynasties by its evocation of a peaceful scene walled off and protected by mountains. On the other, *A Solitary Temple* articulates the investment of the *shi*-staffed bureaucracy in the Song nation through its visualization of a "national" landscape in a northern style more closely associated with the state bureaucracy than with the inner court. In its sociopolitical dimension alone, therefore, *A Solitary Temple* emerges as a highly complex structure of mediation.

The Artwork between Mediation and Medium

The two preceding sections found their way in the end to mediations that produce the objecthood of the artwork as an effect. However, my discussion up to this point has left in place the assumption that because the medium of representation—both at its general level of "painting" and its more specific level of "ink painting in the scroll format"—guarantees the stability of the image and thereby the artwork's objecthood, it therefore provides the most appropriate starting point for analysis. This is an assumption that I now want to place under some pressure.

What are the parameters of painting as a medium of representation generally understood to have been for ink painting in the scroll format at the end of the tenth century? Following a Western model, modern scholarship has largely defined the parameters in terms of cognition and symbolic ordering. The painting mediates the viewer's (re)cognitive relationship to the world by translating perceivable surfaces, forms, and atmospheres into pictorial equivalents that are embodied in an image at once referential and material, an image that simultaneously accomplishes a symbolic ordering. This necessarily involves a semiotic system of reference, in which particular types of marks combined in particular ways connote as much as denote, say, a specific type of rock surface; equally, it includes a relational component, here involving ink, ink wash, light color, and bare silk, without which the texture of experience—near/far, light/dark, moist/dry—could not be evoked.³⁴ This semiotics is aligned with the optical experience of a mobile subject; the image is constructed from "scenes" (*jing*) that flow into each other as the viewer shifts her point of view.

The privileging of ink over pigment stands at one pole of medium possibility for Chinese painting of the time. Ink painting of the kind seen in *A Solitary Temple* accommodates only discreet use of color, usually mixed together with ink but sometimes appearing separately as a light wash or even (though not here) the limited addition of mineral pigments.³⁵ We should not forget, though, that at the other pole of medium possibility the old Tang system of ink outlines bounding highly colored forms had not disappeared; it would have been used, for example, in the wall painting on which the print introduced earlier was based (Fig. 7) and can be seen in a tenth-century tomb mural in Gansu Province (Fig. 12); more germane to the argument here, it also continued to be used for icons and some figure paintings in the scroll format. There existed, too, hybrid modes such as coloristic variants on ink painting proper. Cognitively, ink painting and its variants translate quotidian color perception into a highly artificial and relatively narrow system of conventions,

exchanging inexhaustible differentiation for the possibility of the revelation of preexisting order.

If these are, very roughly, the parameters of the medium of ink painting, what are the parameters of ink painting as mediation? Medium itself is an inherently mediational concept; as a technological means to an end, any medium necessarily mediates between the viewer and the "real spaces" of the world by creating possibilities of other kinds of spaces.³⁶ Yet medium's envelope of mediational possibilities does not extend so far as to include the scroll painting's relation to the wall, which relativizes the medium-based objecthood of the painting. From the standpoint of medium, the painting's negotiation of the viewer's relationship to the wall is secondary, given that it pertains to the scroll format rather than to the painting as pictorial image.³⁷ In this sense, the argument advanced by Wu Hung in his book *The Double Screen* that the medium of painting in China was paradigmatically screenlike is actually an argument about formats and mediation. The originality of Wu's argument is that by demonstrating that the screen was in play as much representationally and conceptually as physically, it reveals the institutionalization in painting's formats of painting's capacity for mediation.

In fact, the paradigm of the screen highlighted by Wu is just one part of the larger question of painting's relation to its immediate surface environment. This surface environment may be a wall or a screen (a portable wall) or the enclosing wall of a bed; it may also, in the case of handscrolls and albums, be a tabletop. It may even be the body and, more particularly, the face, in the case of the fan format.³⁸ Whatever the specific case, painting could not exist as such in China without mediating the viewer's relation to such a surface environment. In *A Solitary Temple*, a dynamic tension exists between two modes of such mediation: one in which the painting disperses the viewer's attention over its surface in resonance with the immediately adjoining surfaces and a second in which it sets up an encounter between the viewer and the mountain and temple that defines a virtual boundary aligned with both the painting surface and the hidden physical surface immediately behind it.

The mediational parameters of late-tenth-century ink painting are closely linked to what might be termed a *gewu* "gaze" that was associated with the *shi* elite. *Gewu*, "the investigation of things," denotes the practice of observation by which human beings gain access to *li* ("natural principle"), the inherent normative patterns of heaven-and-earth. This practice belonged to a larger technicity of power that was oriented toward the harnessing of cosmic force through alignments—here, between the observing individual and the observed environment.³⁹ Because human beings were assumed to participate in a universal dynamic connectedness, *li* was equally relevant to their own being, and *gewu* thus operated across the modern subject-object distinction. Although an influential Song thinker, Cheng Yi (1033–1107), would later interpret *gewu* as a direct, spontaneous process of arriving at the *li* of things, in the late tenth century the mediation of *gewu* observation by inherited cultural tropes was still normative. This can be seen in *A Solitary Temple* in the lingering authority of Tang formulas for motifs and compositional structure.

The *gewu* gaze had an ambiguous relation to hierarchy.



10 Guo Fa (active late 11th century), *Illustrations to the Sudana Jataka*, detail, *Healing the Eye*, ca. 1096, 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (37 × 54 cm). Kaihua Temple, north side of the west wall, Gaoping County, Shanxi Province (artwork in the public domain)

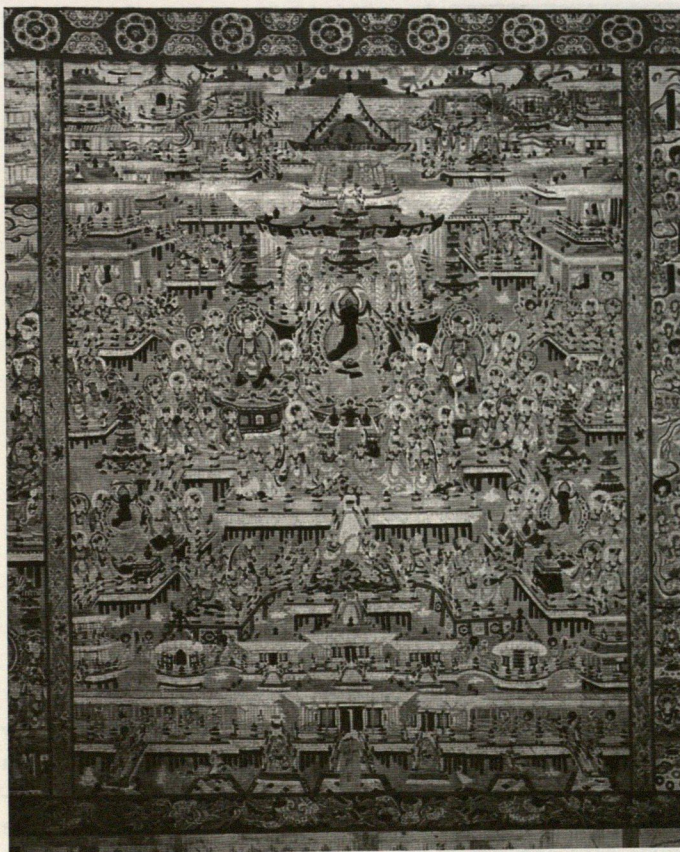
Born of the social transformation of the *shi* in the ninth century, it viewed things (*wu*) as much in terms of specific competences that were dynamically linked to each other as in terms of locations within a predetermined fixed structure. The former aspect is institutionalized in the medium of ink painting by the system of shifting-focus perspective, which ensures a continuum in which space is always structurally temporalized. Here landscape painting broke with the paratactic structures of earlier paintings for temples and tombs; these had accommodated the hierarchical organization of an atomized world by depending on the active participation of the viewer to make drastic shifts of referential parameters. In the new system relations were instead made visibly explicit, providing a visual analogue both to the restructuring of the access to state power around demonstrable competence rather than pedigree and to the new understanding of power in this period as a field of competing social forces. Thus, the naturalism, or similitude, seen in *A Solitary Temple* does not constitute or contribute to a style, as has so often been argued.⁴⁰ It is, rather, a system of visual thought that, following Hubert Damisch's analysis of Renaissance perspective, produces possibilities of subjecthood.⁴¹ The eventual success of landscape painting at court demonstrates that these possibilities were not restricted to the *shi*.

That painting may be mediational in ways that contradict its medium specificity is also evident from *A Solitary Temple's* translation of the Tang pictorial system of color pigments within bounding ink lines into a wholly ink-based system. The evolutionary narrative established in the twentieth century according to which this represented a cognitive advance that rendered the Tang system obsolete obscures the fact that the Tang system survived and flourished under the Song in the format of the temple mural (Fig. 10). In fact, ink painting in the format of the hanging scroll as a public nonintimate art could not ignore the paradigm of wall painting. What it took from the mural and translated into new form was *legibility*. It is characteristic of early Northern Song landscape paintings in the north, where the mural tradition was especially strong, that they retain a clear distinction between line and texturing and clearly contrast light and dark. Only in the course of the eleventh century, as scroll painting became more paradigm-



11 Fan Kuan (d. after 1023), *Travelers by Streams and Mountains*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 81 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (206.3 × 103.3 cm). National Palace Museum, Taipei (artwork in the public domain)

matic for painting in general, did northern painters start to feel fully comfortable with the more amorphously atmospheric renditions that southern painters had explored as early as the mid-tenth century, Li Cheng being the first northern artist to respond to them cautiously. Northern paintings like *A Solitary Temple* or, to take another famous example from approximately the same moment, Fan Kuan's much larger *Travelers by Streams and Mountains* (Fig. 11), invoke the craft and authority of one medium, wall painting, in the establishment of another, ink painting in the scroll format. The operation cuts across the grain of medium spec-



12 Illustration of *Sutra of Brahma's Questions*, ca. 947–51, Cave 61, Mogao caves, west wall, detail of central section, Dunhuang, Gansu Province (artwork in the public domain)

ificity, intervening in and molding the viewer's relationship to the immediate physical context of the built environment.

Equally important is the painting's mediation of the viewer's relationship to history through what might be called image time and its production, via a mechanism of substitution of prototypes, of what Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have termed an anachronic temporality.⁴² In *A Solitary Temple* this occurs visually in two quite different ways. The first can be seen in the relation to paradise compositions noted earlier. The painting translates one pictorial genre into another, substituting for the long-established figurative iconicity of paradise compositions the newer iconicity of a landscape composition, but retaining the older one within the new, thereby guaranteeing both the icon's continued existence and its own secondary authority (Fig. 12). Through this operation, *A Solitary Temple* certainly mediates a relationship to the immanence of paradise, but it also mediates a more general viewing relationship to the Tang past, which, as we have seen, may also involve poetry.

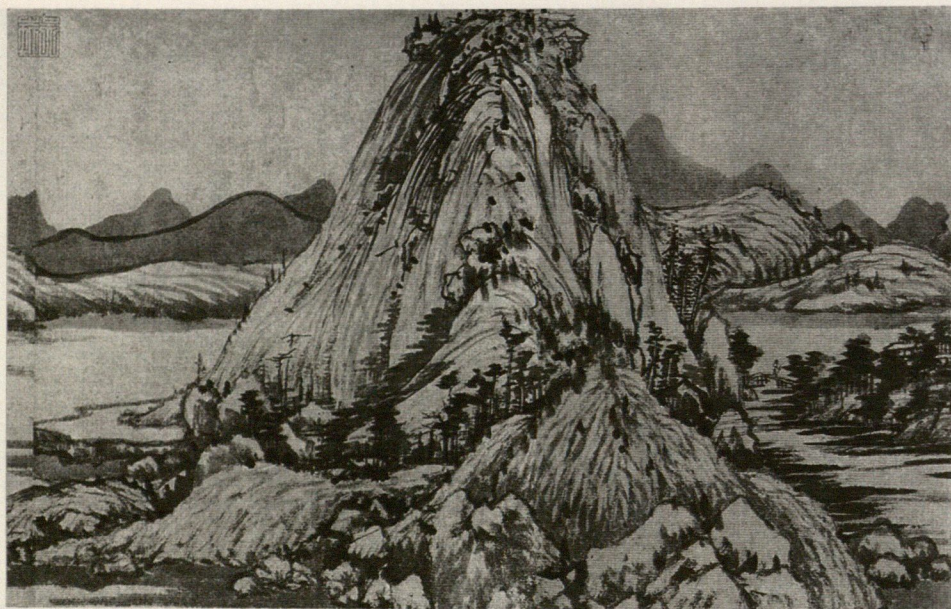
A second kind of substitution in the painting involves landscape alone, and it can be demonstrated only circumstantially, due to the paucity of pictorial evidence. The reality effect of the painting is so convincing, and so few early landscape paintings have survived to provide the composition with any kind of context, that one might easily assume this to be a wholly original landscape composition. However, the recent excavation of an eighth-century tomb mural depicting a multipanel landscape screen reveals how unlikely this is



13 Painted representation of a six-panel screen, detail, ca. 8th century, Lucun Village, tomb chamber, west wall, Fuping County, Shaanxi Province (artwork in the public domain)

(Fig. 13). In just two of the depicted panels one finds several of the basic components of *A Solitary Temple's* composition. Simple as the mural is in comparison with *A Solitary Temple*, it shows that the Song painting in effect incorporates into itself Tang dynasty landscape compositions, possibly even a specific lost composition, and in the process draws on the prototype's authority. In terms of both pictorial genre and composition, therefore, the Tang inhabits the Song; it does not disappear. This, of course, runs counter to the evolutionary narrative of ink painting as a medium, which is built around the principle of obsolescence: here, the obsolete Tang compositions would be said to provide a substructure for the new Song composition, on a model of cognitive evolutionary progress that is too often overstated.⁴³

Clearly, the many considerations I have gradually introduced in my account of *A Solitary Temple* would not have been equally important to every viewer, or to the same viewer at all times—and this is precisely what counts. To become aware of the fabric of potential mediations and of the accompanying provisionality and contingency of the artwork enriches one's viewing experience, making one more aware both of the contingency of the painting's success and of the density of its visual connections to a world beyond painting. One also comes to realize in the process that the normal sense of



14 Huang Gongwang (1269–1354),
Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains,
detail, 1350, handscroll, ink on paper,
1 ft. 1 in. × 20 ft. 10¾ in. (33 ×
636.9 cm). National Palace Museum,
Taipei (artwork in the public domain)

painting as a medium betrays the relationality that gives a coherence to the painting as a mediational event. This happens first and foremost because medium itself is founded on the selective privileging of a few mediations between the artist and the viewer, and between the viewer and the world, that are compatible with the painting's effect of objecthood. I have here highlighted some that are not compatible: the painting's relation as a scroll to the wall behind it; its translations of the Tang system of bounded color and the legibility of the mural into ink painting; its reinvention of the figural icon in landscape terms; and the transmigration into this Song painting of a Tang landscape prototype. A more comprehensive view of the mediational possibilities of the artwork thus tends to relativize the importance of medium. The issue becomes, instead of a sequentially defined premedium, medium, and postmedium condition, that of a generalized mediational condition of the artwork in relation to which medium can be thought.⁴⁴

Ground and Imagescape

If the artwork takes form between mediation and medium, what consequences does this have for our understanding of *A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks* as image? I have already explored above how the image of *A Solitary Temple* is embodied stylistically and iconographically in the medium of ink painting and, following that, how the image, considered symptomatically as social representation, "undoes" its medium. This leaves us with the question of the image's direct relation to painting's mediational condition.

Of all the operations constituting the artwork's recursive structure as event, the one that most conspicuously escapes the grasp of a stylistics is the image's emergence from and reabsorption into its ground. Because a stylistics identifies its analytic point of departure with the necessarily *ex post facto* position of observation of the artwork, it is literally not in the best position to account for the mediating work of the image, which it necessarily objectifies instead.⁴⁵ For a more dynamic interpretation to become possible, analysis has to become

mobile and empathetic, shifting its point of view as necessary between that of the artist and that of the viewer; only then can it seize the image in the full complexity of its temporality.⁴⁶ This mobile stance, it seems to me, has been one of the main achievements of recent art history, independent of the specific interpretative frameworks within which it has been accomplished, and is equally fundamental to any study of the individuation of the artwork.

The "image," of course, has its own paradigms in China; of these, the most important here is certainly *xiang*. *Xiang*, as Stephen Owen points out, "is neither the particular thing (though it may be perceived as immanent in particular things) nor the 'idea' of a thing, but rather the sensuous [visual] schematization of the normative thing."⁴⁷ At the same time, *xiang* is verbal: an intransitive "imaging" as "the process whereby the potential becomes actual."⁴⁸ Here I focus on *xiang* in the latter sense.

To my modern Western eyes, *A Solitary Temple*, even more than most successful Chinese paintings, has a remarkable sense of lightness, of mass that refuses to settle under its own weight, embodied most obviously in the sometimes counter-intuitive vectoral architectonics of the mountainscape, the interplays of solid and void and of light and dark, the rhyming trees and waterfalls, and the mobile point of view. This formal dynamics of lightness and movement—an embodied temporality—is what specifies the artwork's ideology of form as Chinese, distinguishing it from any other. It has been customary to view the painting's subimage field of marks and incident as a means toward this end and, equally, as instrumentally making possible the remarkable space-time continuum. This approach has relieved art historians of the burden of trying to account for the ground of its image directly.

The paradox of the image is that it can appear only by making its ground disappear. For the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, writing about the European painting tradition, the ground nonetheless operates in the image as a kind of force, a pressure on the picture surface.⁴⁹ His formulation, equally apt for Chinese painting, might even tempt us to name

ground differently, as field. Although I will not retain the latter term here, except secondarily, the algebraic overtones of the force field are worth bearing in mind, just as any geometric connotations of ground, in this Chinese context, should be resisted. The most thorough examination of ground in Chinese painting is John Hay's early study of another canonical work, Huang Gongwang's (1269–1354) mid-fourteenth-century handscroll *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (Fig. 14).⁵⁰ Hay there demonstrates that the facture of Huang's painting—essentially, the interaction of ink and paper through the mediation of the brush—far from being merely instrumental, participates in all the same cosmological frames of reference as the work's landscape representation. *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, which is explicitly concerned with the specification of selfhood in the world, dates from the moment when Chinese painters were first exploring the possibility of a type of painting in which the painting surface would accommodate calligraphic brush trace and written sign alongside the pictorial mark in a single fused conceptual space or environment. Elsewhere Hay has tracked the emergence of this possibility in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries under the rubric “the discovery of surface.”⁵¹ What was involved at that historical moment, in the terminology used here, was the surfacing of the ground—in other words, the alignment of the subimage field of mark and incident with the painting surface. *A Solitary Temple*, in contrast, places us at an earlier point, before this surfacing could be imagined.

If Chinese artists and critics had at that point not conceptualized the painting surface as its own environment, this does not mean that they had no sense of the picture as a non- or prerepresentational environment of its own, that is, as possessing a ground. Unlike the reader of this essay, consulting a printed reproduction from which she screens out the material medium specificity and retains the image, perhaps making some attempt in the process to integrate a sense of the picture surface as silk, Northern Song artists and critics would never have lost from view the materiality of the picture as painting and, in this case, as part of a scroll. The paper-backed silk mounting, by its extension of the picture surface above and below and the direct juxtaposition of its image with the wall on the two sides produced a resonance between wall and painting that intensified the boundary quality of the ground of the image. Of this resonance the painting surface proper caught echoes without having the means as yet to participate in it significantly.

In the writings of an eleventh-century polymath, Shen Gua (1031–1095), one finds clear evidence that under the Northern Song the ground belonged to the realm of the painter's “trade secrets.” Shen himself was not a painter-connoisseur but rather an exceptionally astute technically minded commentator who tended to assess paintings by representational effect. Here he comments on two southern landscapists of the tenth century, of whom the elder artist, Dong Yuan, was active in the mid-tenth century and the younger, Juran, about 960 to 985:

Generally the brushwork of [Dong] Yuan and Juran should be viewed at a distance. Their use of the brush is very cursory and, if [their paintings are] seen from nearby,

they may not seem to resemble the appearance of things [Fig. 15]; but, if viewed from afar, scenes and objects are clear, and deep feelings and distant thoughts [arise], as if one were gazing on another world [Fig. 16]. In the case of Yuan's painting of a sunset, it has no merit when seen from nearby; but, if viewed from afar, there is a village half-obscured in the deep distance. In details it is an evening scene, with the summits of remote peaks having just a trace of reflected color. These are its marvelous points.⁵²

Shen's recognition that viewing distance determines the relative authority of ground or image is conditioned by his tendency to reduce the practice of paintings to the production of images. His analysis instrumentalizes the ground of the image, of which he is aware but which he is prepared to dismiss as having “no merit” in its own right.

In another passage, however, Shen's boundless curiosity led him to transmit a painter's view of the question, in the form of an apparently apocryphal discussion between two northern landscape artists of the eleventh century:

Some time past, Song Di [active late eleventh century] once saw a landscape painted by Chen Yongzhi [died after 1034] of Xiaoyao Village, a good painter, and said to him: “Your painting is truly skillful, yet it lacks a natural flavor [*tianqu*].” Yongzhi pondered these words and replied: “It is just this point that has always made me lament that I could not reach [the standards of] the ancients.” Di said: “That is not so difficult. You should first look for a damaged wall, and then stretch plain silk against it. Gaze at it day and night. When you have looked for a sufficient length of time, you will see through the silk the high and low parts, or curves and angles, on the surface of the wall, which will take on the appearance of landscape. As you hold this in your mind and your eyes consider it, the high parts will become mountains, and the low parts, water; crevices will become valleys and cracks, torrents; the prominent parts will seem to be the foreground and the obscure, the distance. As your spirit leads and your imagination constructs, you will see indistinctly the images of human beings, birds, grasses, and trees, flying or moving about. Once they are complete in your eyes, then follow your imagination to command your brush. Silently, through your intuitive apprehension [*shenhui*], the natural scene will be spontaneously achieved, and [hence] it will be unlike the work of men; this is called the ‘live brush.’” After this, Yongzhi made daily progress in his painting style.⁵³

The idea of stretching silk over a damaged wall illustrates the principle that a fully achieved reality effect requires the painter to acknowledge the autonomy of the field of mark and incident relative to the painting's image or *imagescape*, a term I introduce here to underline the image's topological dimension. For Shen Gua, this story may have been of greatest interest for the specific device proposed, but the advice was no doubt intended as much metaphorically as literally.

In light of Song Di's reported comments, one might essay a mapping of the ground of *A Solitary Temple* from which form, image, and metaphor crystallize, and in which all of the



15 Traditionally attributed to Dong Yuan (active ca. 943–58), *Awaiting a Crossing at the Mountain Pass in Summer*, detail, ca. 10th–11th century, handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 1 ft. 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. \times 10 ft. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (49.8 \times 329.4 cm). Liaoning Provincial Museum (artwork in the public domain)

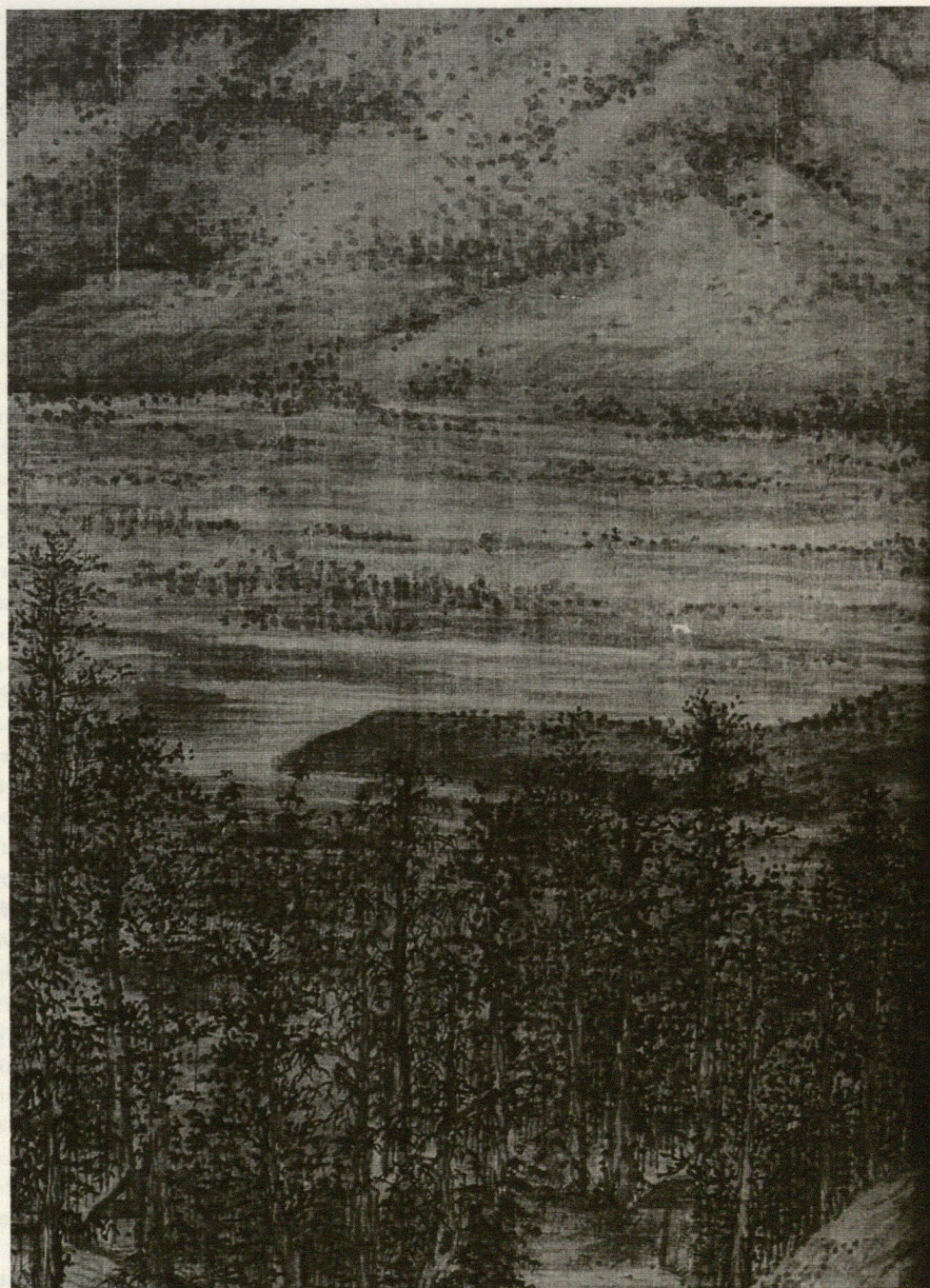
painting's work of mediation is embedded. The topology of this subimage level can be indicated in its broadest lines by a formal description of the painting as nodes of intensity separated by channels of bare or close to bare silk and ink wash. Even if it were elaborated in great detail, though, any such mapping would still amount to little more than a diagrammatic representation in words. The problem is not just the elision of the microlevel where the action is, so to speak, but the fact that one can never separately perceive the whole ground of an artwork. The ground of *A Solitary Temple* corresponds to Song Di's imaginary silk-covered wall prior to its transformation into a painting. An unspoken assumption of Song's attributed comments is that a specific imagescape awaits within what is an already configured field of structuration, to be revealed by the encounter with the artist's imagination. In the case of *A Solitary Temple*, in contrast, ground and imagescape were brought into being simultaneously to create a "mountains and waters" (*shanshui*) painting.

The translation "mountains and waters" betrays a fundamental assumption of the term *shanshui* and the painting genre it denotes: that landscape is a dynamic *interaction* of mountains and waters and, by resonating extension, Heaven and Earth, solid and void, light and dark, the enduring and the ephemeral. It is both characteristic and significant that wherever mountain and water meet in *A Solitary Temple*, they instance this interaction. At the microlevel this occurs, for example, wherever rock extends into the river; to the rock's advance, the river responds with echoing eddies, rhythmic even in the absence of image. On the macrolevel the tempo-

ral register shifts from ephemeral to enduring; the mountains are presented as subtractively in formation from the action of visible waterfalls and river and, implicitly, unseen rain and wind as well, which have left their traces in eroded forms and surfaces. In an age when attention to the temporality of landscape was intense, the diversity and layering of this attention in *A Solitary Peak* is unmatched. Time's traces are visible not just in the mountain's forms and surfaces but also in the denuded peaks, the wind-determined tree shapes, the imperfect state of the less important buildings (contrasted with the splendor of the newer construction), the somewhat dilapidated bridge, and the life-marked human bodies. Correspondingly, the painting's ground extends from the most painstaking build-ups of microfields of texture strokes and ink wash to decisively immediate performances of calligraphic line in the contours, across dozens of intermediary temporalities involving repetition, rhyme, pattern, mutation, and transformation.

Of the numerous places where temporalities of ground and imagescape meet, let me single out two: one repeated in countless variations, the other a singular event. Here representing exposed rock, and there eroded earth, the repeated short texture stroke (*cun*) in its many variations, in pale ink or dark, in combination with ink wash or bare silk, grounds the depiction in a field of potentiality. Not indexical but factual, the *cun*'s very repetition and variation include within themselves the potential of depiction as mediation in a cultural context that assumes structuration to be metamorphic. Contrasting with this, but equally essential to the painting's success, is the disruption of the middle horizontal channel of

16 Traditionally attributed to Dong Yuan, *Awaiting a Crossing at the Mountain Pass in Summer* (artwork in the public domain)



light-filled mist (almost bare silk) by the vertical advance of the pagoda (as quasi-geometric pattern), a disruption that resolves the disjunction between the upper and lower zones and at the same time provides the mountainscape-body with a “heart-mind” (*xin*).⁵⁴

The ground of the image thus serves as more than the latter’s underside, functioning as well to establish connectivity across categories.⁵⁵ Like any artwork, *A Solitary Temple* is a tissue of categories (*lei*), in this case comprising genre specializations, stylistic modes, regional landscape character, “things” (tree types, building types, and so on), forms, texture strokes, and materials. The Northern Song stands out as a period of recategorization in all areas, and painting was no exception, inspiring an astonishingly differentiated discourse. Since painting’s networks of relations depended on

the practical differentiation of categories, not surprisingly it is across the discourse of categorization that an awareness of networking operations most often comes into view. Northern Song texts on painting by painters, critics, and art historians uniformly place at the top of the painter’s tasks the achievement of connectivity.

This theme is usually formulated as “energy resonance” (*qiyun*), an ancient requirement of painting. The locus classicus of the term is a text by the early-sixth-century painter Xie He, where *qiyun* is glossed as “life movement” (*shengdong*) and is stipulated as the first of six “laws” of painting. In John Hay’s exegesis, *qiyun* is visible as “patterns of assonance” that resonate with “the universal, macrocosmic state of energy” in which they are initiated. These patterns, coming into being “in a hierarchy of structural phases,” constitute the revelation

of reality as “the nature of existence and life” through its immanence in representation as image; they also enable imaging to enact reality as process.⁵⁶ In Xie He’s day, the achievement of energy resonance in a painting had been conceived in terms of receptivity to the beyond and a channeling of its powers, but by the period of *A Solitary Temple* that earlier idea had been secularized through the alignment of energy resonance with the “intuitive apprehension” mentioned by Song Di—access to which some critics wished to identify socially as one of the performative competences of the scholar. The art historian and critic Guo Ruoxu, writing about 1080, insisted that *qiyun* is “something that happens without one’s knowing how” and inscribed it within a system of sympathetic resonance linking social condition and artistic achievement: “If a man’s condition has been high, his energy resonance cannot but be lofty. If energy resonance is already lofty, animation cannot but be achieved.”⁵⁷ That the alignment of connectivity with a not fully conscious awareness was already current when *A Solitary Temple* was painted is best seen in writings that address the workings of “spirit” (*shen*). This word had originally meant supernatural spirits, but early on came to designate the imagination as well.⁵⁸ In the latter meaning, *shen* was conceived as movement. Huang Xiufu explained in about 1006, “When the divine [creative] force whirls aloft, thought is joined to spirit. [The painter] creates concepts and establishes substance, and their subtleties combine with transformative powers.”⁵⁹ In this description of painting of the topmost “inspired” (*shen*) class, one sees that the movement of *shen* had to pervade the painting in order to generate energy resonance.

These various remarks from the Chinese past suggest that, from a mediational standpoint, the ground establishes the networked connectivity necessary for the tissue of representational connections to cohere as imagescape. It thereby makes possible the “technology of enchantment” that the anthropologist Alfred Gell has placed at the core of the artwork’s capacity for agency.⁶⁰ Song commentary on network connectivity has a schizoid character, oscillating between discussions of general effect and particular techniques. The above comments on *qiyun* and *shen* fall into the former category and are of a piece with remarks cited earlier on the natural flavor (*tianqu*) that Song Di was said to consider to be lacking in Chen Yongzhi’s paintings. When they discuss techné, however, commentators show themselves to be well aware that connectivity is most immediately a matter of the microenvironment of pictorial incident, that it depends on the artist’s instinctive sense of the rightness of a brushstroke, a tonality, an unmarked space.⁶¹ It is this local dimension—the view from a specific point in the network—that gives the concept potential as an art historical tool, since it deals with what can be directly observed and analyzed.

By way of example, in *A Solitary Temple* one can take two specific problems faced by the artist, those of integrating into the landscape the figures and the architecture respectively. For the first, the solution was relatively straightforward in conception, though not in execution, lying in the deployment, using brushes of different sizes, of the same quality of fluctuating contour line, with its constant changes of direction, in this way forming “patterns of assonance” between figural and landscape form. Buildings, on the other hand,

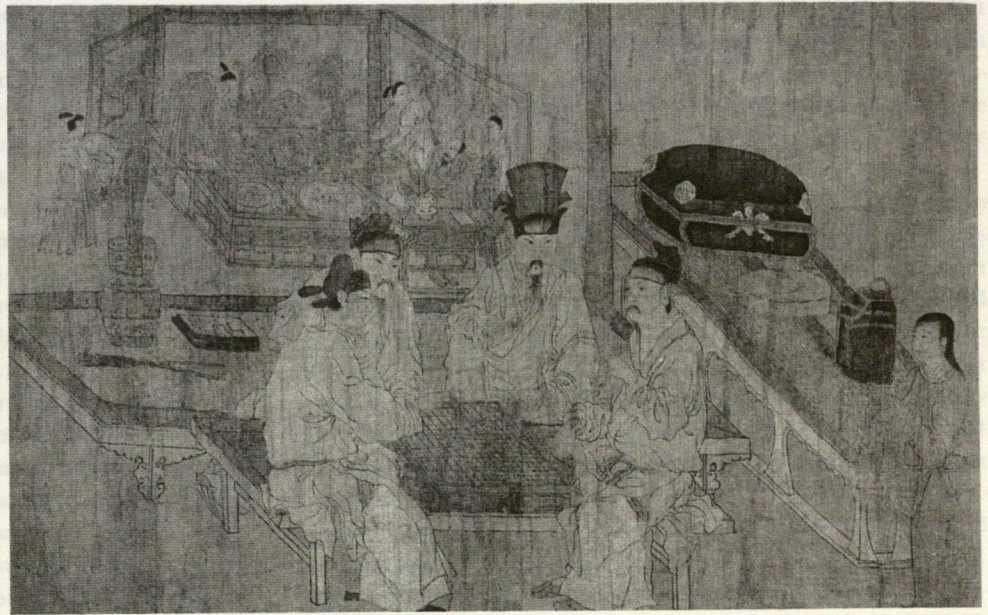
because of their nonorganic character, posed a more difficult conceptual challenge to integration. Here the artist found multiple solutions. One can be seen in the more dilapidated, time-altered forms of the bridge and the main parts of the restaurants: the effects of time gave the artist an opening to introduce the same fluctuating brushwork employed for figures and rock contours. A second solution was necessary for the newer architecture of the pavilions over the water and for the temple, where Wang Shiyuan intensified the repetitive patterning, which sets up a rhythmic counterpoint not with rock contours but with the patterns of repeated texture strokes defining landscape surfaces, the silhouetted configurations of tree branches, the stripes of the waterfall at lower left, and swirling brushstrokes where pilings enter the water. Third, at the level of larger motifs, the stepped arrangement of the overlapping pavilions echoes and flows into the pattern of overlapping outcrops above, just as the flattened frontality of the pagoda similarly dovetails with that of the sheer mountain face behind. Finally, the mountainscape as a whole was brought into resonance with the architecture through the introduction of a nonorganic vectoral geometry.

All these parametric possibilities of connectivity in *A Solitary Temple* are clearly governed by a decorum, or protocol.⁶² To draw on another aspect of Gell’s concept of the agency of the artwork—its distribution of personhood—two personhoods are distributed in this painting via its decorum.⁶³ One is that of the artist, in my view, Wang Shiyuan, a low-level official who was not a court artist and had been famously rejected for an appointment in the Painting Academy, to the outrage of scholar-official connoisseurs.⁶⁴ The other is that of the patron, unknown, but whom we may assume to have been an official at a far higher level than the artist. The combined personhoods of these two men indicate something of the range of the subject position of the *shi* that is accommodated within a single decorum. This decorum governs the painting’s pursuit of order, the detached *gewu* gaze that informs its representation, and the connectivity that makes the painting live. Before this decorum is represented it is performed: *A Solitary Temple* unfolds its multiple mediations by its performance of what it meant in the early Song to be a *shi*.

Boundary and Situation

The implications of the artwork’s mediational condition for the image of *A Solitary Temple* are not exhausted by the role that the ground plays. For the image necessarily crystallizes within a virtual boundary, which it constructs under an epistemic horizon that is part of the painting’s historicity. As we shall see, *A Solitary Temple* also reflexively engages with this boundary, and in the process brings about the possibility of what I shall describe as situational truths.

In the course of his discussion of boundaries in fourteenth-century painting, John Hay cites Jacques Lacan’s evocation of picture making in relation to the scopical fantasy, where Lacan characterizes the fantasy in terms of picture making and likens the surface of the picture to a screen. “Perhaps,” Hay speculates, “we could develop a theoretical frame for approaching fourteenth-century paintings as such a screen, or surface, in which are deposited complex exchanges between self and other, between non-geometrical inner and outer. In which there is, most essentially, a deposit of desire.”⁶⁵ From



17 Traditionally attributed to Zhou Wenju (active ca. mid-10th century), *The Double Screen*, Ming dynasty, short handscroll, ink and color on paper, $12\frac{3}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ in. (31.3×50 cm). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Charles M. Freer, F1911.195 (artwork in the public domain)

this conceptualization of the painting surface as a screen in which desire is deposited, Hay goes on to make a connection to the importance of movable screens in Chinese interiors, and to the more particular phenomenon of paintings of a “screen within a screen.” These topics are taken up at length (minus the Lacanian perspective) by Wu Hung in *The Double Screen*, which explores the screen macrohistorically as a culturally specific paradigm for painting and treats the “double screen” paintings as the culture’s thematization of its own paradigm (Fig. 17). Both analyses are relevant to *A Solitary Temple*, where boundary is rhetorically framed using the trope of the screen, but in a manner that relative to fourteenth-century painting is still submerged beneath a compelling reality effect.

For Hay, in such paintings, “Unlike the perspectival structures of Tang paradises, and indeed in fundamental distinction to them, there is here already an incipient rhetoric of physical surface. The rhetoric is, however, usually submerged or subverted. The distant vistas in such paintings stretch any possible belief in surface almost into incredulity.”⁶⁶ One of the most puzzling features of *A Solitary Peak* finds its explanation in this incipient rhetoric. The artist was unequivocally capable of evoking a tangible three-dimensionality of form in any of the genres of painting represented within this image and, indeed, did so to great effect wherever he wished. It might seem curious, then, that at several key points of the picture he eschews this skill entirely, opting instead to flatten out the motif in question. If it is not unexpected to see this happen in the silhouettes of the distant mountains, it is more surprising to see how far the artist goes in this direction with the four waterfalls that frame the central mountain, one of which is reduced to a striped pattern.

Equally striking, and in the end decisive for the painting’s construction of boundary on the model of the screen (a portable wall), is his decision to push architectural structures in this direction of flatness. The two pavilions built on the water just above the bridge are formulated as tissues of geometric pattern, contrasting utterly with the other buildings

nearby; as for the temple complex, its three-dimensionality emerges only as one gets close to the painting surface; from a distance it exists first and foremost as intimations of a geometric grid. These architectural elements tip the viewing of yet other elements of the painting toward flatness—notably, the repeated groups of trees, the vectoral dynamics of the rock forms in the lower part of the painting, and, above all, the mountain, whose complex structure thereby takes on the compressed depth of field of a zoom-lens photograph.

The result is that for all its “monumental realism,” to cite a stylistic term commonly applied to this and other such paintings, the landscape is at the same time screenlike; its vista crystallizes in a virtual boundary that is not identified with the painting surface but is juxtaposed with it, below it, behind it, much like Song Di’s ruined wall behind the silk stretched over it. This boundary can be wholly inferred, even if, perceptually, it is only unevenly and locally visible. It coincides with the painting’s ground, which, as we have already seen, exists in a privileged relation to the wall on which the scroll would have been hung. Functionally, just as ground makes image possible, so, too, the virtual boundary makes possible the shifting-focus perspective that allows this Song landscape to cohere as a space-time continuum.

Although at a first level simply indicating an artist’s awareness of boundary as a necessity of painting, the screen trope places this awareness in the particular register of the problematization of appearances.⁶⁷ As long as *A Solitary Temple* is seen in terms of its medium specificity, its mediation of the relation between a phenomenal world of appearances and a deeper reality is suppressed by the reification, as representation, of what is actually a moment of visualization and manifestation rendering visible the boundary with the beyond. In other words, in this secularized transformation of a once “magic” screen surface in which forces of the beyond made themselves visible, boundary in painting takes on the power of figuring the truth in appearances, in this case by revealing a landscape’s deeper or authentic reality (*zhen*).⁶⁸ As Han Zhuo (active ca. 1095–ca. 1125) wrote of landscape painting:

"If a painting has reality [*zhen*] . . . , it may be transmitted to posterity."⁶⁹ In speaking of this power of painting in terms of truth I am taking truth in a particular sense, as wholly situational and, one might even say, social, were the opposition of society to nature not an assumption alien to *A Solitary Temple* as a Song painting. In premodern Chinese thought, one finds a word for "a truth" (*yi*) but none for "transcendental Truth." To the extent that truths in appearances are produced by this painting, they are multiple and even contradictory.⁷⁰

The character of the temple as its own mountainscape, for example, is not simply a metaphor; it is actually enacted by the painting, placing *A Solitary Temple* within a history of Buddhist icons. This landscape painting is a new kind of icon, one that makes the Buddha's presence manifest in the environment. No miracle is illustrated, but the proximate availability of a deeper Buddhist reality is visualized for those who have eyes to see. The very reticence of the icon, its refusal to figure the forms of Buddha or bodhisattvas, bespeaks a reflexive awareness of the boundary it makes visible. In this regard the Buddhist dimension of the painting has adapted itself to a Neo-Confucian understanding of boundary. Most pertinent here is, once again, the (re)cognitive *gewu* operation by which "things" (*wu*) were "investigated" (*ge*), with their inherent structural principle being recognized from its immanence as normative patterns.

Fundamental to painting as *gewu* is the interaction between contour-defining brush trace and surface-defining texture strokes (*cun*) and ink wash. In *A Solitary Temple* this interaction has an exemplary provisionality. Because the contour line fluctuates so markedly, it defines the form not essentially but as a moment in its possibilities. The depicted and materialized surfaces, meanwhile, being all differentiation, are similarly temporalized. The provisionality is further intensified by the flexible relation between the two: contour line meshes with texture strokes and ink washes in any number of ways, within internalized parameters rather than obeying fixed rules, as had been the case in earlier painting. The relation consequently takes on such complexity that any instantiation by the viewer has only a relative stability; the painting's imagescape is different at each viewing. All of this belongs to an epistemic horizon that emerged in the ninth century, under which the interaction between a dynamics of linkage and the order of hierarchical structure was immanent in the perceivable world as a logic of appearances. In the painter's enactment of this logic as naturalism or similitude, the deeper reality underlying appearances is never fully given but is left implied. Boundary is constructed in alignment with the parametric constraints and potential of the ground of the image, as the possibility of such implication.

Deeply ideological, *gewu* in itself guaranteed nothing more than the production of an ideological "truth effect." But against this ideological production of *zhen*, what took a painting to the level that justified its inclusion in what contemporaries qualified as the "inspired" category depended on a combination of inexhaustibility as described earlier and risky unpredictability. The latter occurs only when parameters are stretched to breaking point and beyond. What is at stake in such unpredictability is the relation of painting to visibility, that is, the apparent capacity of painting as representation to guarantee the existence of the dynamics of linkage defining

the epistemic horizon of its day. There are three places in *A Solitary Temple* where the parameters of *gewu* are strained to their limits and boundary becomes problematic. The first is the juxtaposition of new with old architecture in the restaurants, which introduces a slight disordering of boundary, almost like a crease; this is the price the artist paid for raising boundary's stakes through the invocation of the screen trope. The second, more dramatic place of disturbance—a veritable implosion of *gewu*—occurs in the bottom right of the painting, where the vectorial spatial dynamics of the rock outcrop lies directly adjacent to the flatness of a small waterfall, and the outcrop appears to balance on one end where it hits the river surface. By pushing imagescape and ground to the limits of their dynamic tension, depiction here makes visible a disjunction and arbitrariness that *gewu* was supposed to dispel. Finally, at the point of suture of pagoda and mountain, the rock surface across which the suture operates threatens to collapse into pure ground, a ground that dissolves boundary; this collapse produces the possibility of the suture.

Through this problematization of its own boundary, and therefore of its mediational coherence as event, *A Solitary Temple* may be said to constitute itself as its own *situation*. I am borrowing this term from the philosopher Alain Badiou, whose "subtractive ontology" is an ambitious attempt to re-found ontology on the basis of inconsistent multiplicity.⁷¹ In the process Badiou in some ways brings contemporary Western philosophy remarkably close to Song thinking. A theory of being based on inconsistent multiplicity can only be radically situational and temporal; this corresponds rather well to the Song landscape painter's understanding of, say, rockness as having no meaning outside the always unique performances of a more general competence of rocks, with a range of pictorial tropes mediating between the general competence and its unique performance. Rockness would be a matter of *li* ("natural principle") and even *xing* ("individuating nature"). The pictorial tropes of rockness would be defined as *shi*² ("the shape or stance of something with an implicit energy or 'line of force'") and *ti* ("normative form," "embodiment").⁷²

The relevant part of Badiou's argument is his contention that the consistency of any situation is underpinned by inconsistency; one of the capacities of representation is to expose this inconsistency to view, by suspending briefly and exceptionally the state of the situation. The state of this Song dynasty painting's situation is equivalent to the alignment of its ground and its image to form a virtual boundary; as we have seen, though, this alignment is not complete. An event occurs when—or rather where—ground and image are radically misaligned, pulled apart, opening tears in representation that reveal what is uncounted and unauthorized. For Badiou, maintaining fidelity to such an event, by affirming the event's existence and bringing to light unrepresentable contingency, is the process by which a truth is produced in a kind of solidarity between what here would be the art historian and the artist at his most self-challenging. By its glimpses of the arbitrary, *A Solitary Temple* exposes as unassimilable the radical commitment to individual observation that underpinned *gewu* and ultimately made it impossible to align fully the vision of the *shi* class with the vision of the state. It affirms this situational truth by a disruption of the alignment of

image and ground that is necessary for the painting to stabilize *as* representation; splitting apart ground and image as distinct operations, it radically affirms the power of mediation against medium by disclosing the existence of the painting's boundary.⁷³

This analysis parallels the social interpretation offered earlier, which I want to reframe here in situational terms. *A Solitary Temple* may be said to participate in a network of relationships joining Buddhism, the *shi*, and the court in the guaranteeing of social order by the state. The painting, though, is not simply complicit with this state of the social situation; it intervenes actively to generate a degree of doubt by articulating these relationships in a way that affirms the autonomy of the *shi* and lays bare the fragility of the network. The network defines a historical horizon of power relations, which across it enters the painting as boundary. Thus, at the level of boundary, what recent art history has often registered as the contradiction between a discourse and its unconscious can be alternatively described as the exceptional moment when the double-sidedness of mediation exposes its own inconsistency to view, taking cognizance of its own character as situation.⁷⁴

Artwork

My cumulative account of *A Solitary Temple* has so far unraveled separately the varied kinds of mediation that constitute the individuation of the painting. In this concluding section I want to bring these strands together in order to consider, however inadequately, the ultimate coherence and intensity that the painting achieves in relation to its complexity. In the singular economy of this relation lies the painting's achievement. This final approach to *A Solitary Temple* will make it possible for us to confront the painting as *artwork* in a verbal sense—to which I want to give a meaning related to Krzysztof Ziarek's concept of the avant-garde artwork as *force-work*.⁷⁵

The interest of Ziarek's argument for the present far-flung context lies in his redefinition of art "as a force field, where forces drawn from historical and social reality come to be formed into an alternative relationality." Calling "this transformative event 'forcework,'" Ziarek understands it as "a specifically artistic redistribution of forces, in which relations are freed from power structures and the unrelenting, intensifying manipulative drive characteristic of modernity."⁷⁶ At the heart of the artwork as forcework is its fundamental character as a "spatio-temporal and *nonviolent* play of forces," which allows it to retain a relative autonomy from power and capacity for critique.⁷⁷ Drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of letting go/releasing (*lassen*) as disengagement from making/producing (*machen*), Ziarek revises Theodor Adorno's argument that art radically negates the power relations of modern life. He argues that the dialectical model of negation imprisons our understanding of the artwork in a logic determined by power and prevents us from seeing its establishment of an "alternative economy of forces" that is disaligned from both the technicity through which capitalist power relations are effected and the objecthood of the commodity. The notion of forcework is especially appropriate to avant-garde art, where it can be argued to operate in a sense as the program. My proposal here is that the underlying analysis, even if not

the concept itself, can be extended to earlier modes of art making and to art making outside the West, where such a program was unimaginable. It is in recognition of the necessary transformation of the forcework concept entailed by the historical transposition that I will speak of artwork rather than forcework.

The many mediations that I have traced out in *A Solitary Temple* could equally well be described as a play of forces constituting an overall relationality of the painting as an event. In this early Chinese painting, too, relations are freed from power structures, but not in order to generate a space for critique, even if, as we have seen, a limited space of doubt is opened up. Rather, relations are here intensified in a way that brings about an *excess* of force; this excess—this power of the painting itself—has its context not in social critique but in a very different kind of intervention. *A Solitary Temple* embodies the assumption that linkages connect temples and mountains, cities and wilderness, political forces and cosmic energies, socialized bodies and natural forms; these connections were not necessarily harmonious but, in fact, could be disjunctive and even violent. How could artist or viewer have taken *A Solitary Temple*'s vision of peace and prosperity at face value, just a few decades after the end of a long period of civil war, during the closing years of which, in the late 950s, a fierce repression of Buddhism took place, and in a period that had seen or would see the defeat of the Song armies by the Liao in 988? In the field of forces constituted by heaven, earth, and the human in which *A Solitary Temple* intervenes as artwork, earth was understood to be an active participant, capable, when the cosmic order was disturbed, of terrible action leading to hunger, disease, and death. The knowledge of past, and fear of future devastation together constitute the unspoken darkness against which the luminous harmony of *A Solitary Temple* assumes a quasi-*apotropaic* function in the service of (self-)reassurance.⁷⁸

Here the pagoda at the painting's center can guide us toward a final characterization of the painting. Both the Song and the Liao dynasties constructed pagodas that combined sacred function with the pagoda's other ancient function of military watchtower. Such structures did not merely provide symbolic protection but also served to concentrate cosmic forces on the side of the dynasty, in a practice that both the Song and the Liao inherited from the Tang. These forces, especially associated with octagonal pagodas, were most vividly symbolized by the thunderbolt mast seen above the pagoda in *A Solitary Temple*.⁷⁹ In contrast to the productive intensity of real-life pagodas, the painting's redistribution of forces gives rise to a nonproductive intensity that is probably best understood through an analogy with poetry. In the same way that poems were composed to be chanted, a painting of this kind anticipates an actualization by the viewer that gives the artwork a performative dimension. Alien to modern habits of viewing though this expectation may be, we miss something fundamental about the painting if we fail to recognize that *A Solitary Temple* is not just a representation—it is also an incantation. And as incantation it is multilayered, speaking to the social and political situation, yes, and to religious faith, philosophical understanding, poetic insight, and historical self-consciousness as well. As such, the painting embodies an awareness and responsibility that for the Song artist could not

be merely social in the modern sense but necessarily spoke to the role that he and his painting played within a larger ecology of existence.

Ziarek's "forcework" is linked to the social (or society) as a category—and here one could say as a category of Western modernity—into which is built the repression of all the ways in which artistic mediation makes a mockery of the boundary between society and nature.⁸⁰ The particular network of linkages from which *A Solitary Temple* individuates itself as artwork clearly exceeds such a framework. Only by unfolding the complexity of its individuation from a larger field that also includes "nonhumans" as "actants" can we hope to participate in, and not merely confront, an artwork that comes to us from so far away in time and space.⁸¹ Part of what this involves is a recognition not only that the special category of "thing" that we call an artwork has agency but also that the capacity for agency is shared by things of all kinds. For this reason the horizon of individuational interpretation I am proposing here is compatible with the argument advanced by Gell that artworks intervene actively in the world, but not with Gell's insistence that this intervention can be explained as a mediation of social relations.⁸² Similarly, it parts company with the identification of mediation with the social embodied in the project of social art history in which I long thought myself (and largely was) a participant.

Today, as the discipline starts to imagine itself writing a cross-cultural or transcultural history of art, the rethinking of the artwork that would make such a project feasible entails more than just an expansion of the framework of agency beyond the merely social. For we also need to acknowledge the problem of the lingering, though much eroded, authority of the artwork conceived as an object whose perceptual stability can be defined in terms of medium and style. We still have not drawn the full consequences of the radical dematerialization of the artwork in contemporary artistic practice since the 1960s. The contradiction between the authority of the art object and the artwork's dematerialization as artwork cannot be resolved, in other words, by an appeal to historical sequence, along the lines of a modern avant-garde divestment of objecthood, or a medium to postmedium shift. For, as I have tried to show here, the dematerialization of the artwork exceeds its contemporary context and any narrative that would tie it specifically to the history of Euro-American modernity.⁸³

In this essay on a thousand-year-old Chinese painting I have been arguing implicitly that the two contradictions of art history's present situation just mentioned intersect in a reluctance to acknowledge, in either epistemological or cultural terms, the full contingency of artworks in their very structure. By contingency I mean here the resistance to interpretative closure that is inherent in the complexity of the artwork's constitutive correlations, but whose full extent is obscured by the tendency of interpretation to pursue specific agendas under conditions of "methodological eclecticism."⁸⁴ The need today is for a parallaxic framework of understanding—that is to say, a recognition that things are differently situated depending on the position from which they are seen—and this need cannot be answered without a rethinking of the artwork itself in a direction that can accommodate

the parallax. The direction I have proposed is toward an understanding of "the artwork" as "artwork"—an individual event embedded in material thingness and virtual image.

Although I have tried to make a coherent argument in favor of this proposal, I make no claims that the position from which I am operating is itself coherent. Writing on Chinese art as a Euro-American scholar, albeit one partly trained in China, I know that my argument is not entirely free of the assumptions I am criticizing. I am aware, too, of the problem of authority inherent in trying to give voice to a culture to which I do not belong; if I have tried to mitigate the dangers by incorporating into the essay as citations voices from the Chinese past, I realize that the problem remains. Yet discomfort may not be a bad thing here; it is when the encounter with cultural difference becomes comfortable that we have to worry most.

The modern discipline has much to contribute to an art history that would genuinely engage with the art of other cultural and historical situations in their irreducible difference, with all that this implies of their capacity to challenge and upset our assumptions. But it equally has the capacity to undermine such an enterprise by retaining epistemological assumptions that reinforce Euro-American modernity as a privileged position from which to view the rest of the world. Unlearning assumptions and questioning one's own authority and influence do not come easily to any of us. The alternative, however, is worth stating. For is it not the continuation on an intellectual level of a heritage of imperialism and colonialism in which few art historians would want to think themselves implicated?

Where there may be grounds for optimism, nonetheless, is on the side of the epistemic shift toward the primacy of uncertainty, undecidability, inconsistency, and contingency that has slowly been transforming thinking in the humanities since the 1960s—a transformation that is now accelerating as our quotidian experience comes to be affected more and more obviously by the same forces. Out of the desire to belong fully to our historical moment may come something more generous than the continued export of our own enlightened certainties.

Jonathan Hay is Ailsa Mellon Bruce Professor of Fine Arts at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He has published widely on Chinese painting and also on theoretical questions in art history. His current book project concerns Chinese decorative arts in the period of about 1570 to 1840 [Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1 East 78th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021, jh3@nyu.edu].

Notes

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The following list gives the characters of Chinese names and terms used in the text:

bishusheng	秘書省
cun	筓
Fusheng	福勝
ge	格
gewu	格物
jing	景
Kaibao	開寶
lei	類
li	理
Qinghuan xiaosi	晴巒蕭寺
qiyun	氣韻
shangshusheng	尚書省
shanshui	山水
shen	神
shenhui	神會
shengdong	生動
shi	士
shi ^a	勢
ti	體
tianqu	天趣
tuhua	圖畫
Wang Shiyuan	王士元
wu	物象
xiang	心
xin	性
xing	形
xingsi	似
zhen	真

- Jonathan Hay, "Painting, Prisons, and Pagodas at the Early Song Capital," forthcoming.
- See, for example, on Chinese pictorial art, A. John Hay, "Huang Kung-wang's 'Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains': Dimensions of a Landscape" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1978), and several articles cited below; Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visibility in Early Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Jonathan Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).
- For a study of the role of mediation in one direction of recent art history, see Gail Day, "Persisting and Mediating: T. J. Clark and 'the Pain of the Unattainable Beyond,'" *Art History* 23, no. 1 (March 2000): 1–18.
- Although it does not play an explicit role in the argument that follows, the starting point for the theoretical reflections in this essay was Niklas Luhmann's radical rethinking of medium in mediational terms in *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- The term "individuation" is used by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze to denote a process of the contemporary world by which, under conditions where power operates through the control of information, actors are constituted not on the model of the individual human subject but as nodes of agency (access to information) within a network of relations. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177–82. See also Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, "Protocol, Control, and Networks," *Grey Room* 17 (Fall 2004): 21–22.
- Although the Yemaotai tomb is datable to about 940–85, the painting may predate the tomb by some decades. The mounting is a crude version of the mountings likely to have been found in Kaifeng during the same period. See Yang Renkai, "Yemaotai diqihao Liao mu chutu guhua zonghe yanjiu" [A Comprehensive Study of the Ancient Paintings Excavated from Liao Tomb no. 7 at Yemaotai], in *Yang Renkai shuhua jianxing ji* (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1998), 40–59.
- See Liu Daochun, *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown: Liu Tao-ch'un's "Sung-ch'ao ming-hua p'ing,"* trans. Charles Lachman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 60. In the Chinese context the analogy between pictures and windows had none of the geometric associations of perspective and cartography operative in early modern Europe.
- See the entries on Wang Shiyuan in *ibid.*
- As noted by Peter C. Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 55, nos. 1–2 (1995): 94–95.
- Chen Baozhen, "Cong Nan Tang dao Bei Song—qijian Jiangnan he Sichuan diqu huihua shili de fazhan" [From Southern Tang to Northern Song—the Development of Painting in the Jiangnan and Sichuan Regions], *Taida Journal of Art History* 18 (March 2005): 155–208.
- See Liu Daochun, *Evaluations*; and Guo Ruoxu, *Kuo Jo-hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih): An Eleventh Century History of Chinese Painting together with the Chinese Text in Facsimile*, trans. Alexander Soper (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951).
- Laurence Sickman and Marc F. Wilson, "A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks," and Wai-kam Ho, "Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain," in *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980), 13–19.
- James Cahill, "Some Rocks in Early Chinese Painting," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 16 (1962): 77–87.
- The title is unlikely to be original to the painting.
- For a full discussion of the contemporary architectural resonances of the depicted temple and pagoda, see Hay, "Painting, Prisons, and Pagodas."
- Kaibao Temple had several other claims to fame in the late tenth century, including the fact that it housed the Examination Office that was in charge of organizing the civil service examinations.
- Du Benli, Gao Hongzhao, and Bao Chengqun, *Dongjing menghua* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1993), 136; and Zhang Qifan, *Song Taizong* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1997), 239.
- This is one of three prints that were discovered sealed within a Buddhist statue of the same period now in the Seiryō-ji in Japan. One of the others is after a painting by the great court artist Gao Wenjin (active late tenth century).
- Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 166.
- On geomantic siting, see A. John Hay, "Huang Kung-wang's 'Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains.'"
 - My thanks to Wen-hsin Yeh for bringing this point home to me.
 - Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, "Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005): 403–15.
 - On the accessibility of imperial portraits under the Northern Song, see Patricia Ebrey, "The Ritual Context of Sung Imperial Portraiture," in *Arts of the Sung and Yuan: Ritual, Ethnicity, and Style in Painting*, ed. Cary Y. Liu and Dora C. Y. Ching (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 68–93.
 - Richard Barnhart, in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, by Yang Xin et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 100.
 - A. John Hay, "Surface and the Chinese Painter: The Discovery of Surface," *Archives of Asian Art* 38 (1985): 110.
 - As Marilyn Gridley writes, in her detailed study of the protective function of Song and Liao pagodas, "The mast, which pierces the dome and the umbrellas of the pagodas, is symbolic of the vajra spike or thunderbolt with which Indra fixed the world mountain at the beginning of the world." Gridley, "Protecting the Kingdom with Sumeru at Fangshan" (paper presented at "Conference on Mountains and the Cultures of Landscape in China: Tang Dynasty, Five Dynasties, Song Dynasty," University of California, Santa Barbara, 1993).
 - The donkey rider, a recurrent theme in Song painting but one that can rarely be given a specific interpretation (for the difficulties, see Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon"), might even be taken as a self-conscious acknowledgment of the painting's openness to different interpretations. I am grateful to Michele Matteini for this suggestion.
 - This would be an appropriate theme for Wang Shiyuan, who was a low-level government official himself and is known to have enjoyed the active support of prominent officials. See Hay, "Paintings, Prisons, and Pagodas."
 - As famously expressed in a passage attributed to the northern landscapist and court painter Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090). For a translation, see Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 153.
 - On the social transformation of the *shi*, see Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 32–75.
 - See Kiyohiko Munakata, "The Rise of Ink-wash Landscape Painting in the T'ang Dynasty" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965).
 - I owe this observation to a 1993 lecture by Richard Barnhart at the University of California, Santa Barbara. See also Robert Hartwell, "A Cycle of Economic Change in Imperial China: Coal and Iron in Northeast China, 750–1350," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10 (1967): 102–60.
 - On the late-tenth-century transformation of Kaifeng, see E. A. Kracke Jr., "Sung K'ai-feng: Pragmatic Metropolis and Formalistic Capital," in *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China*, ed. John Winthrop Hager (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), 40–77.

34. Cahill, "Some Rocks."
35. In this painting, light washes of orange brown and blue appear to be restricted to the figures, architecture, and distant mountains.
36. David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), 68. For another relevant discussion of medium, see Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: Time in the Art of the Sixties* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 51–52.
37. Reproductions in histories of Chinese painting almost never include the mounting, just as those in histories of European painting generally exclude the frame.
38. Fans of the period were not in the folding format but were circular, with a very long handle that bisected the fan.
39. In using the word "technicity" I have in mind as a point of comparison Krzysztof Ziarek's explanation of technicity in a modern context: "technicity is what makes technology possible. Heidegger defines technicity as a mode of revealing, a certain manner of disposing or 'tuning' (*stimmen*) relations, which tends to disclose what is as intrinsically calculable and as an available resource." Ziarek, *The Force of Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 62.
40. For a discussion of similitude as part of a dialectic of style, see Martin Powers, "Discourses of Representation in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century China," in *The Art of Interpreting*, ed. Susan C. Scott, Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University, vol. 9 (University Park, Pa.: Dept. of Art History, Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 89–129.
41. Hubert Damisch, *L'origine de la perspective* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), translated as *The Origins of Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994). See also Hubert Damisch and Stephen Bann, "Hubert Damisch and Stephen Bann: A Conversation," *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 2 (2005): 155–81.
42. Nagel and Wood, "Interventions: Toward a New Model."
43. For the cognitive evolutionary argument, see its many articulations by Wen C. Fong, most recently in these pages: "Why Chinese Painting Is History," *Art Bulletin* 85 (2003): 258–80.
44. In *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), Rosalind Krauss argues for a redefinition of medium in contemporary art in nonmaterial terms—medium as recursive structure—and for the postmodern emancipation of this nonmateriality. This shift creates a "post-medium condition" in the special sense that the conventional association of medium with a material support no longer holds.
45. For a contrasting argument that reasserts the methodological primacy of the style concept, see Richard Neer, "Connoisseurship and the Stakes of Style," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Autumn 2005): 1–26.
46. The bracketing of style in so much art history since the 1970s reflects this imperative, breaking silently with the attempts of writers of the generation of Otto Pächt, Hans Sedlmayr, and Meyer Schapiro to reconcile this mobility of analysis with a stylistics.
47. Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 587.
48. A. John Hay, "Values and History" pt. 1, "Hsieh Ho Revisited," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 6 (Autumn 1983): 82.
49. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Image—the Distinct," in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 7–8.
50. A. John Hay, "Huang Kung-wang's 'Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains.'"
51. A. John Hay, "Surface and the Chinese Painter"; and idem, "Poetic Space: Ch'ien Hsüan and the Association of Poetry and Painting," in *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*, ed. Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 173–98.
52. Shen Gua, *Mengqi bitan*, trans. Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 119.
53. Ibid., 121–22.
54. For the idea of rocks and mountains as paradigmatic bodies in China, see A. John Hay, "The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?" in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
55. I borrow the term *connectivity* from systems theory and cybernetics, where it describes the potential capacity for dynamic linkage within a system.
56. A. John Hay, "Values and History in Chinese Painting" pt. 1, and pt. 2, "The Hierarchic Evolution of Structure," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 7–8 (Spring–Autumn 1984): 103–36. I am here glossing Hay's own dense paraphrase of Xie He's first law.
57. Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, trans. Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 95–96, trans. slightly modified.
58. On *shen*, see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 590.
59. Huang Xiufu, *Yizhou minghua lu*, trans. Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 101. For a more famous articulation of this idea, by Guo Xi, see *ibid.*, 156.
60. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 73–95. See also Matthew Rampley, "Art History and Cultural Difference: Alfred Gell's Anthropology of Art," *Art History* 28, no. 4 (September 2005): 524–51.
61. See, among many possible examples, Guo Ruoxu's comments on brushwork in Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 97.
62. On the concept of protocol in relation to connectivity, see Galloway and Thacker, "Protocol, Control, and Networks." The term *protocol* comes from computer science: "Put simply, protocols are all the conventional rules and standards that govern relationships within networks" (8).
63. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 96–154, 221–58.
64. See Hay, "Paintings, Prisons, and Pagodas."
65. A. John Hay, "Boundaries and Surfaces of Self and Desire," in *Boundaries in China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 155–57. I have not attempted in this essay to address more generally the relevance of Lacanian theory to the problem of mediation, which would require a separate study.
66. Ibid., 165.
67. Among the other boundary tropes that accomplished this function in Chinese art is that of the mirror. See Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 238–316.
68. Some of the earliest screens in China were used by Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) rulers. Their depictions of auspicious images, immanent manifestations of the forces of the beyond, functioned as an art of political authority. This type of screen survived into late imperial times in the form of screens decorated with dragons or waves that stood behind the imperial throne.
69. Han Zhuo, *Shanshui chunquan ji*, trans. Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, 185, trans. modified.
70. Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 594–95.
71. Alain Badiou's major work is *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), just published in English under the title *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005). For a general overview of the different aspects of his project, see Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. and ed. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004). Several critical discussions of his work now exist, including those collected in Peter Hallward, ed., *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004); and *Polygraph* 17 (2005), a special issue on Badiou.
72. For these definitions of Chinese terms I have drawn on Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 587–92.
73. Badiou might describe this as "forcing" its own "unnamable" as painting. Alain Badiou, "What Is a Poem? Or, Philosophy and Poetry at the Point of the Unnamable," in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 16–27.
74. For the symptomatic model of interpretation, see Georges Didi-Huberman's brilliant discussion of the underside of the image, including his analysis of its irruptions into the imagescape—irruptions that he variously names *pans*, "rends," "sovereign accidents," and "material singularities." Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image: Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990), trans. by John Goodman as *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).
75. Ziarek, *The Force of Art*, 19–59.
76. Ibid., 7.
77. Ibid., 22.
78. The painting here transposes onto a psychological level what had once been a "magic" function of art. On this function, see Kiyohiko Munakata, "Concepts of *Lei* and *Kan-lei* in Early Chinese Art Theory," in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 105–31.
79. Gridley, "Protecting the Kingdom with Sumeru."
80. For a critique of society and nature as categories, see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); and idem, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).
81. "Nonhuman: This concept has meaning only in the difference between the pair 'human-nonhuman' and the subject-object dichotomy. Associations of humans and nonhumans refer to a different political regime

from the war forced upon us by the distinction between subject and object. A nonhuman is thus the peacetime version of the object: what the object would look like if it were not engaged in the war to shortcut due political process. The pair human-nonhuman is not a way to 'overcome' the subject-object distinction but to bypass it entirely." "Actor, Actant: . . . Instead of starting with entities that are already components of the world, science studies focuses on the complex and controversial nature of what it is for an actor to come into existence. The key is to define the actor by what it does—its performances—under laboratory trials. Later, its competence is deduced and made part of an institution. Since in English 'actor' is often limited to humans, the word 'act-

ant,' borrowed from semiotics, is sometimes used to include nonhumans in the definition." Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 308, 303.

82. Gell, *Art and Agency*.

83. As Nagel and Wood, "Interventions: Toward a New Model," have shown, Renaissance artworks were already dematerialized in important ways.

84. The term is Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's, from his assessment of the current state of art historical methodology in *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Buchloh (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 22.

Response: Shifting Biographies, Shifting Temporalities

Patricia Berger

I want to argue for the nonexistence of Li Cheng.

—Mi Fu (1052–1107), *Huashi*¹

A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks (*Qinghuan xiaosi*) in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, is one of the most familiar paintings in the Chinese canon, often used as a starting point for a discussion of the classic landscapes of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). As Jonathan Hay observes in the first paragraph of "The Mediating Work of Art," this unsigned hanging scroll has long been associated with the artist Li Cheng, but, he adds, even if it "incorporates an awareness of Li Cheng's art, [it] is generally thought to postdate Li's lifetime." In a longer study soon to appear in *Artibus Asiae*, Hay has reattributed the scroll to the "ruled-line" (*jiehua*) architecture specialist Wang Shiyuan, who was active during the years just before and after 1000 in the Northern Song capital at Kaifeng. Here, however, his concern is not with authorship so much as with the painting taken as "an event that comprises mediations with which the painting also engages reflexively." With this choice, Hay aligns himself with the ranks of social historians of art, who have puzzled over the ways in which art might be understood not to mirror the society within which it is made so much as to interact with it dialectically. This approach views the work of art itself as continually generating and inhabiting new contexts (and where painting-as-text and its context are increasingly blurred); it sees art as radically contingent, forever in dialogue with its larger environment and fluid in its affect. To this end, Hay explores *A Solitary Temple* from numerous angles: as material object and visual code, as embedded in a social practice of painting, as reflecting recent political and religious events, as a semiotic system of reference, and even—most strikingly, to my mind—as a Buddhist icon enmeshed in a web of Confucian commentary.

What Hay leaves for his second study (which I eagerly await) are the implications of *A Solitary Temple*'s assumed authorship. Yet the traditional attribution of the painting to Li Cheng, whose eye and hand it was thought to embody since at least the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), is as striking as any of the other modes of mediation he raises, in that the act of attribution—whether accurate or merely hopeful—speaks directly to the painting as an event that continues to unfold long after its original audience has left. For if we accept A

Solitary Temple as the product of an artist—Wang Shiyuan or anyone else—who was aware of Li Cheng and his reputation, then we have to ask what he knew about the work of this famously elusive painter or under what circumstances of reception the painting he made might later have been accepted as a work of Li Cheng's own hand. What, in other words, did it mean to produce a painting in the style of Li Cheng at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries? And what did it matter who the author of such a sublime painting might be?

By the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, a hundred years or so after Hay says that Wang Shiyuan painted *A Solitary Temple* and one hundred and fifty years after Li Cheng's death, the latter had achieved the status of painting sage among Northern Song connoisseurs. If we can trust contemporaneous observers, Li Cheng's authentic works were already extremely rare. Though the *Xuanhe huapu*, the imperial painting catalog compiled during the Xuanhe era (1119–26) by officials at the court of Song Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–26), lists 159 works under Li Cheng's name, only four were accepted as authentic by the artist's granddaughter, who came to court at the invitation of Emperor Renzong (r. 1023–64) to identify her grandfather's true works. Mi Fu (1052–1107) recorded this unusual event in his *Huashi* (History of Painting), where he also made the startling claim that he wanted to "argue for the nonexistence of Li Cheng." This conclusion, effectively staged as an art historical comparison of real and fake, comes at the end of a long peroration in which Mi asserts that of the three hundred works attributed to the master he had seen, only two were authentic:

I have seen only two of Li Cheng's landscapes: one of pines and rocks and one of a landscape. The four-scroll painting of pines and rocks came from Sheng Wensu's collection and is now in my studio; the landscape is at the priest Baoyue's place in Suchou and is a profoundly refined and uncommon picture. The pines are straight and vigorous; their branches and needles are bushy and shade-filled. The small Chu-shrubs are rendered without any superfluous brushwork that would make them look like dragons, snakes, demons, or spirits. The large pictures that are in the collections of noblemen these days resemble the signs