

Beaufort Scale of Wind Force

Force	Knots	Km/h	Description	Specifications for Use at Land
0	<1	<1	CALM	Calm; smoke rises vertically
1	1-3	1-6	LIGHT AIR	Direction of wind shown by smoke drift; but not by wind vanes
2	4-6	7-12	LIGHT BREEZE	Wind felt on face; leaves rustle; ordinary vane moved by wind
3	7-10	13-19	GENTLE BREEZE	Leaves and small twigs in constant motion; wind extends light flag
4	11-16	20-30	MODERATE BREEZE	Raises dust and loose paper; small branches moved
5	17-21	31-39	FRESH BREEZE	Small trees in leaf begin to sway; crested wavelets form on inland waters
6	22-27	40-50	STRONG BREEZE	Large branches in motion; whistling heard in telegraph wires; umbrellas used with difficulty
7	28-33	51-62	NEAR GALE	Whole trees in motion; inconvenience felt when walking against wind
8	34-40	63-74	GALE	Breaks twigs off trees; generally impedes progress
9	41-47	75-87	STRONG GALE	Slight structural damage occurs (chimney pots and slates removed)
10	48-55	75-87	STORM	Seldom experienced inland; trees uprooted; considerable structural damage occurs
11	56-63	103-117	VIOLENT STORM	Very rarely experienced; accompanied by widespread damage
12	>64	>118	HURRICANE	—

THE WORK OF WIND: AIR, LAND, SEA

Volume 1

The Work of Wind: Land

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workofwind.ca

the work
of WIND
AIR
LAND
SEA

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New
Chapter
2017 and Beyond



**THE WORK OF WIND
AIR, LAND, SEA**

Volume 1

**The Work of Wind
Land**

co-edited by Christine Shaw
& Etienne Turpin

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THE WORK OF WIND: AIR, LAND, SEA

In 1806, the British sea admiral Sir Francis Beaufort invented the Beaufort Scale of Wind Force as an index of thirteen levels measuring the effects of wind force. It was first used for the practical navigation of nineteenth-century ocean space; through a system of observation, wind speed was measured by observing how it composes at sea (for example, waves are formed) and decomposes on land (for example, leaves are blown from trees, chimney pots lifted, houses are destroyed).

Across a variegated set of curatorial and editorial instantiations developed by Christine Shaw in 2018/19, the Beaufort Scale of Wind Force becomes a diagram of prediction and premonition in the context of accelerating planetary extinction. *The Work of Wind: Air, Land, Sea* appropriates the Beaufort Scale of Wind Force as a readymade index for curating a site-specific exhibition in the Southdown industrial area of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, and a publication divided into three conjoining volumes. The project is extended by the *Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, a public program and broadsheet series.

While the title might suggest a weather project, it is not about wind but of wind, of the forces of composition and decomposition predicated on the complex entanglements of ecologies of excess, environmental legacies of colonialism, the financialization of nature, contemporary catastrophism, politics of sustainability, climate justice, and resilience.



Fig. 1. Anonymous,
Favonius (West Wind),
colored engraving (n.d.).

Cold Wintry Wind

Allen S. Weiss

I have long wished to organize a museum exhibition entitled *Atmosphere*. It would not be centered on immateriality (*Les Immatérielux*, Centre Pompidou, 1985), nor on pure color (*Azur*, Fondation Cartier, 1993), nor would it be a study of formlessness (*L'Informe*, Centre Pompidou, 1996), but would rather offer an investigation of the borderline between abstraction and figuration, of the point at which objects disappear into smoke and smog, images emerge from fog and mist, scenes are formed and deformed by wind, rain, and snow. Even more fundamentally, it would examine the iconographic instability between figure and ground, and the ambiguous relationship that links material surface and visual illusion.

During the turbulent decade of the 1960s, the painter and sculptor Jules Olitski suggested an act of elegant aesthetic provocation, extraordinary in its simplicity and profound in its ramifications. He claimed that the ideal work of art would be to spray the air with a can of aerosol paint such that the color would remain suspended for a certain amount of time, an ephemeral three-dimensional Olitski in the sky. The breeze would make of this painting a kinetic sculpture, or a quasi-cinematographic abstraction. This proposal evoked the ambiguities and hybridizations of the arts in 1960s New York: simultaneously proto-cinema and performance art, pastiche of action painting and avatar of minimal art. The dissipating colored cloud, a fragile and fleeting presence, vanishes into thin air, highlighting the role of mutability and transience in art. However briefly, the atmosphere is revealed as subject and medium, figure and ground, drawing and support. We realize that pure transparency is tantamount to invisibility, and that the visible is ambiguous, a function of the inmixing of translucency and opacity. When the ether is troubled, it becomes atmosphere, a veritable labyrinth of vision. Olitski's gesture is emblematic of his entire oeuvre, often characterized as atmospheric blankets of colored spray. It could also serve as an emblem of the exhibition *Atmosphere*.

During the half millennium since the European Renaissance, "atmosphere" has suggested the very essence of transparency, or at least translucency. The evolution of optical and representational techniques privileged the clear and distinct forms of linear perspective, to the detriment of atmospheric effects. Canvas and page disappear to permit the image to appear. The contemporaneous "atmospheric perspective"—which might well have contained a vast range of effects—was reduced to its most impoverished form: the loss of detail in the distance accentuated by a slight amount of haze, attenuating color, outline, and contrast. For the most part, the atmosphere became invisible, ideal, cleansed of all imperfections, and pictorial transparency was epitomized by a realm of objects such as window panes, mirrors,

glassware and bubbles, signs of both painterly virtuosity and human vanity. It was with photography and film, as well as the nineteenth-century novel, that atmosphere finally found its realist and historicist dimensions.

Film theorist Annette Michelson evokes Olitski's gesture as she recounts an amusing tale of trying to choose the cover image for an exhibition catalog on experimental film. A friend suggested that she use the shot of an empty film frame in the shape of a screen, to which she replied: "But then, whose frame or screen is it to be? To which film-maker do I go, to Brakhage, Snow, Jacobs, or Frampton? To Breer, Mekas, Kubelka, Sharits?"¹ This was written in 1978, at the height of the theoretical concern with the material specificity of the artwork, and the wealth of iconoclastic richness revealed by Michelson's options was meant to stress the fundamental equivocation between projection as event, image as illusion, and screen as object. We were already deep into an epoch where silence, the blank page, the imageless film frame, the white canvas, and the empty gallery signaled the crisis of the art object, so it should not be surprising to find more than a hint of Zen in so many works of this epoch, through such artists as John Cage and Nam June Paik. In fact, the iconographic ambiguity of emptiness had been an issue in Western art for centuries, going back to Baroque painting, where the pure transparency of the cloudless azure sky evinced a form of dematerialization, an imagination without images that reaches towards infinity, towards the very incommensurability of God. The metaphysical declension from blueness to discoloration to infinite depth to void is an instance of iconoclasm at the very core of the image, serving as an unfathomable symbol of transcendence. It results in what philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes of as an "absolute intimate sublimation."²

In the East, the situation was always diametrically opposed. The theory and practice of painting and drawing in Southern Song Dynasty China—a golden age of Chinese painting, which was to become a major influence on Japanese art—celebrated the myriad effects of indistinctness, incompleteness, suggestiveness, allusion. Here, the material representation of atmosphere is the white canvas or page. This effect is beautifully demonstrated in Gary Snyder's book *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, the frontispiece for which features an early twelfth-century Northern Song Dynasty scroll, "Streams and Mountains Without End," of which he writes:

The space goes on.
But the wet black brush
tip drawn to a point,
lifts away.³

In classic Chinese art, the artist first learns to draw stones and rocks, much as the Western artist begins with the human figure and face. Following Taoist cosmology, the rock is seen as a dynamic entity, as François Cheng explains, writing of mountains in Chinese culture:

Moved by breath, nourished with fog and wind, it is capable of metamorphosis.
Poets and painters baptized it with the beautiful name, "root of the clouds."

1 Annette Michelson, "Paul Sharits and the Critique of Illusionism: An Introduction," *Film Culture* (1978), 84.

2 Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes: Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (Paris: José Corti, 1943), 17; see also Allen S. Weiss, "Dematerialization and Iconoclasm: Baroque Azure," in *Unnatural Horizons: Paradox and Contradiction in Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 52–5.

3 Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996), 154.



Fig. 2. Ajiki Hiro, *Cold Wintry Wind*, 2013. Ceramic guinomi, h. 54 mm. Courtesy the author.

4 François Cheng, *Souffle-Esprit: Textes théoriques chinois sur l'art pictural* (Paris: Le Seuil/Points, 2006 [1989]), 166.

5 Charles Baudelaire, "Le port," in *Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1975 [1869]), 344.

6 It is astounding that in the most detailed work on the topic, Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du nuage: Pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), no consideration is given to specific cloud types.

7 D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), 393.

8 Cited in Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Art*, trans. Mark Treharne (London: Reaktion, 2002), 24; this is the essential study on the subject. For the background of such studies in Gestalt psychology, see Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). In a very different context, that of the psychopathology of expression, the subject is also treated in Hans Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, trans. Erik von Brockdorff (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1968 [1922]). Concerning the dream stone pictured here, the landscape is clearly swept by a rather strong wind moving from left to right.

9 Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Dover, 1964 [1906]), 40. There is a tendency among art historians to cite Marcel Duchamp's claim that it is the spectator that completes the work of art, though he is only one of the more recent theorists to make such a statement.

Constantly transformed by the energy of the ground and the sky, it offers multiple facets and incarnates multiple attitudes: placidity and torment, tenderness and savagery.⁴

With changes in perspective and lighting, framing and climate, rocks and mountains change their physiognomy at every instant, and are thus as fluid as water. It is, of course, the wind—often symbolized by the celestial dragon—that effects this fluidity, so beautifully expressed by Baudelaire's phrase, "the mobile architecture of the clouds."⁵ However, given the crucial role played by clouds across centuries of representational painting in the West, it is curious that art history has paid so little attention to the specific forms of clouds (clearly delineated in standard meteorological typologies since the early nineteenth century), as if the differences between *Altostratus translucidus* and *Altostratus radiatus* or between *Stratocumulus opacus* and *Stratocumulus cumulogenitus* were of no iconographic consequence.⁶ The formation of clouds bespeaks the aerodynamics, as well as the poetry, of the wind.

We may remember D.T. Suzuki's comment, referring to the effects of moonlight: "The Japanese are lovers of softness, gentleness, semi-darkness, subtle suggestiveness, and everything in this category."⁷ Vagueness, ambiguity, amorphousness, indeterminacy: as for Leonardo da Vinci finding armies and forests, faces and figures in a blazing fire, in clouds, or in a splotch of paint on a wall, Japanese aesthetic vision embodies an imperative toward figuration, as with the "dream stones" that inspired Chinese painters by revealing the threshold between figuration and abstraction, or as the Chinese would say, between order and chaos. One eleventh-century Chinese painter, Sung Ti, proposed setting a piece of white silk in front of a dilapidated wall:

Then, morning and evening, you should gaze at it until, at length, you can see the ruins through the silk, its prominences, its levels, its zigzags and its cleavages, storing them up in your mind and fixing them in your eyes. Make the prominences your mountains, the lower part your water, the hollows your ravines, the cracks your streams, the lighter parts your nearer points, the darker points your more distant points. Get all these thoroughly into you and soon you will see men, birds, plants, and trees, flying and moving among them.⁸

Psychologically, one would speak of *pareidolia*, the perception of pattern in random data, like the man-in-the-moon (which is certainly culturally inflected, for the Japanese rather see a rabbit-in-the-moon), illusions that speak to the imperative to visual order and meaning that Gestalt psychologists understand to be the fundamental function of perception. An acute manifestation of this phenomenon permits the Japanese connoisseur to discern landscapes on ceramic surfaces where the Westerner might find but a beautiful abstraction. As Okakura proclaims in *The Book of Tea*: "True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally completed the incomplete."⁹ In traditional Japanese art, the ratio between illusion and allusion, between the seen and the evoked, between the visible and the invisible, is guided by the sense of *anji*, that suggestiveness which catalyzes the emotions and incites the imagination. The operative Japanese term in his context is *miegakure*, the

alternation between revelation and dissimulation: depth is not determined by mathematically organized perspective, but through obfuscation and occultation. Such is a primary pictorial effect of atmosphere.

In China and Japan, not only do calligraphy and figurative ink drawing share the same page or scroll, but at times they are even indistinguishable. The freely formed Japanese cursive or “grass” script may suggest imagery, and in any case the shape of the drawn bamboo leaf—the most commonly represented botanical subject—closely resembles that of a modulated calligraphic brushstroke. Needless to say, any curve of such a brushstroke, the slightest bend in such “grass” or bamboo, suggests the course of the wind. The ambiguity of the image is complicated by the heterogeneity of the surface, as the white background of page or scroll variously appears as material support or representational space, depending on the disposition of the writing or drawing. The white page may represent haze, fog, mist, snow, sky, or just pure depth, often indistinguishable from each other. Wind as transience, marking the immediate passage of time; wind as transfer, indicating movement across space; wind as articulation, creating depth through motion; wind as transcendence, connecting this world with the beyond. Here, whiteness may be background or foreground, figuration or decoration, earthly or ethereal. It is here that perspective and atmosphere at times combine to suggest the inexpressible feeling of Zen emptiness: to be well practiced in seeing the fullness of the world on the emptiness of the paper.

Such equivocation between abstraction and figuration also exists between non-linguistic, non-figurative traces and calligraphy, as artist and critic Takiguchi Shūzō explains: “[W]e naturally look for signs within what at a glance appear to be automatic and abstract lines.”¹⁰ Of the three types of *kanji* (Chinese characters used in Japanese)—block, semi-cursive, cursive—the cursive form, likened to wind blowing through grass, is extremely fluid and frequently characterized by a reduction of brushstrokes often tantamount to abstraction, so that a *kanji* normally consisting of a dozen strokes might be drawn with only three or four, making it illegible. One occasionally sees, in Japanese museums and temples, visitors before certain calligraphic scrolls tracing *kanji* in the air, trying to figure out the word represented by the all but abstract brushstrokes. The very fact that such calligraphic strokes are likened to swaying grass already suggests a level of equivocation—a form of visual metaphor—where the borders between abstraction and figuration, drawing and writing, imagery and decoration, are undecidable.

In the West, it was not until the Romantic revolution at the dawn of modernism that artists would valorize the full pictorial force of such equivocal effects, and also fully appreciate drawings in themselves as an art form that leaves much to the viewer’s imagination, in contrast to finished paintings where every detail is precisely established. It is at this moment—in the early years leading to Impressionism, most impressively in the work of Turner—that atmosphere would become visible, substantial, transformative. Smoke, fog, mist, haze, steam, rain, snow, clouds, wind, floating dust, excessive light, even air pollution—phenomena that simultaneously make the ether visible and render things indistinct, even invisible—all trouble our vision and transform our view of the world. The concrete effects of atmosphere, as well as visual pathologies that create all sorts of optical distortions and illusions, would become

10 Doryun Chong et al., eds., *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945–1989* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 76.



Fig. 3. Ajiki Hiro, ink on wood, tomobako. Courtesy of the author.

prime aesthetic material. Represented in its sundry splendors by the Impressionists, decades later late modernist and postmodern art would utilize smoke and fog, light and dust, mist and wind, in their material reality to directly constitute the work of art: the ether made visible, sensible, nearly palpable.

Such figuration of obscurity is partly psychological and subjective, the result of impressions and associations, since the perceptual gestalt tends towards recognizable forms; and partly cultural and conceptual, since perception is informed by cognition, as ancient visual templates, structured visual cues, and the weight of commonplaces all inflect our vision. These “commonplaces” are sometimes poetic, sometimes banal. Kawabata Yasunari, in the preface to a book by the landscape painter Higashiyama Kaii, recounts his reaction to having seen the famous Three Pines at Kanazawa, one of Japan’s great natural sites, celebrated in painting and poetry through the ages: “They struck me to the point that I wondered if there existed a comparable beauty anywhere in the world. I was overwhelmed with thanks for that state of mind among the Japanese that would not hesitate to consecrate centuries to transmitting the beauty of a single tree.”¹¹ In reading this, we need imagine all those celebrated places (Mount Fuji foremost among them), things (most famously the moon), and even sounds (the sempiternal wind through the pines) either transformed into poetic imagery or devolving over time into commonplaces. The latter are not simply banal truisms, as colloquial usage suggests, but also *loci communes*, forms of proverbial wisdom, the stuff of which art is made. We both see and see according to a work of art. Much the same may be said for nature, which not only constantly reveals its ever-changing beauty, but also teaches us—as objects vary in changing light, unstable meteorological conditions, and seasonal transformations—how to employ its forms and their metamorphoses. Every aspect of nature evokes specific emotions and poetic allusions, as geographer and Japan specialist Augustin Berque explains: “Rain, for example, is quite other than a mere precipitation of water (its objective form). A certain rain will only fall during a certain season, or even at a specific moment of the day, because it is inseparable from an entire world of sensations, emotions, and evocations whose more or less codified associations relate it to a certain landscape.”¹² And of course, not only do different sorts of rain evoke different emotions and allusions, but they also, like the light of the moon, attenuate visibility so as to create an ambient vagueness and suggestiveness. Much the same may be said of the wind, though this too is culturally determined.

* * *

Le Trémountano, le Tèms dré, le Mountagniéro, le Ventouresco, l’Aguérou, le Cisampo, le Loumardo, l’Auro-Bruno, le Leventas, l’Auro Rouso, le Levant-Eissero, le Marin Blanc, l’Autun, l’Auro Caudo, le Miéjour-Eissero, l’Embat, le Marin, le Vènt du Bas, le Fouis, le Vènt Larg, le Garbin, le Vènt di Damo, le Pounent-Labé, le Rousaù, le Narbounès, le Travesso, le Mango-Fango, le Cers, le Mistrau, le Vènt d’Aùt, le Biso, l’Auro Drécho. These are the winds of the Provençal wind rose, read clockwise following the points of the compass. Most famous among them is the infamous Mistrau, or Mistral, known to have driven many mad.¹³ One will also note the presence of the

11 Yasunari Kawabata, “L’image de Kyôto—tout au fond de mon coeur,” preface to Kaii Higashiyama, *Les quatre saisons de Kyôto*, trans. Ryôji Nakamura and René de Ceccatty (Paris: Le Seuil, 2007 [1969]), 9.

12 Augustin Berque, *Le sauvage et l’artifice: Les Japonais devant la nature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 24.

13 Honorin Victoire, *Petite Encyclopédie des Vents de France* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 2001), 169.

Ventouresco, the wind coming from Mont Ventoux, that Provençal monolith made forever famous by Petrarch's ascent. Mont Ventoux—from which the wind seems to arise, and where the highest wind speed has been recorded in France—is identified with the wind, as the etymology of its name suggests: *virturi*, *virtur*, *virtius*, *virtios*, *venturius*, *ventùri*, *ventus*, *ventur*, *ventour*, *vent*. It is not surprising that in fact the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, the southern homolog of Mont Ventoux immortalized in Cézanne's paintings and sketches, also originally bore the name not of Victoria but of Venturius.¹⁴ Most pertinent to our context, the mountain and the wind are paradoxically the same, as the name suggests. Mont Ventoux is but the physical manifestation, visible throughout Provence, of that god of the wind that eternally, yet invisibly, torments and punishes the inhabitants of that region. If for the ancient Chinese mountains were the roots of the clouds, Mont Ventoux is but an illusion, a physical memorial, fostered by a now-forgotten god of the wind. "To airy nothing a local habitation and a name," as Shakespeare would say.

Representation of the wind is an issue of localization, of avoiding figurative commonplaces by delineating the actual communal place. Invisible, the wind is manifest in its actions on objects, as well as through the sounds that thus arise. Is it the sea or the wind that we hear in Claude Debussy's *La mer*, the third movement of which is entitled "Dialogue de vent et de la mer" ("Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea"), as we sense the onset of a squall in what moments before had been a calm, almost hypnotic sea? One could test the verisimilitude of this sonic ambience by plotting the progression of these symphonic sketches on the Beaufort scale. The most violent wind evoked would most probably be a gale, for anything stronger would have indicated—according to the descriptions of the effects of stronger winds at sea—the very breakdown of form (for example, "crests of waves begin to topple"), which would have forced the music into different, perhaps atonal, effects. Debussy recycled some of the very same windswept strains for the seventh piece in the first book of his *Préludes*, "Ce qu'à vu le vent d'ouest" ("What the West Wind Saw"), and the fact that this is the most virtuosic of the *Préludes* suggests the difficulty in creating musical representations of the wind. For the wind never really has its own sound, but speaks through the objects it touches. In terms of musical onomatopoeia, while we can identify many of the birds in Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956–58), and we can hear the tinkling fountains in Franz Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Ville d'Este* (1877)—although it is impossible to identify them as precisely the fountains of this particular villa—rare is the wind that can be named in a Western musical composition.¹⁵ While our recording technologies offer the possibility of precisely capturing the sundry sounds of the wind (for example, different species of trees in different types of forests make different sorts of sounds), we do not have a musical, poetic, or literary tradition that cares much for such typologies. When used on land, almost all levels of the Beaufort scale gauge their descriptions to the sound of the wind in the trees, but Western composers do not seem to have the aesthetic inclination to run the sorts of sonic experiments that would make these different sounds available for our arts. The reproductive precision of the finest digital recording technology is of little avail, nor is acute hearing, perfect pitch, or those musical instruments capable of the subtlest imitations of nature. We need await, perhaps, a musician with the

14 Allen S. Weiss, *The Wind and the Source: In the Shadow of Mont Ventoux* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 54–5.

15 On musical onomatopoeia, see Allen S. Weiss, *Varieties of Audio Mimesis: Musical Evocations of Landscape* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2008).

auditory gifts of a Henry David Thoreau, whose *Journals* reveal him to have had perhaps the finest ear for natural sounds, and the subtlest gifts for onomatopoeia—wind included—of his time.

I have spent many summers in the Aubrac, a remote region of low mountains in France's Massif Central at the intersection of the Aveyron, the Cantal, and the Lozère. Rolling deforested high pasture land, with occasional stands of evergreens and the occasional house, the Aubrac is a windy region: La Damo d'Aubrac, le Biso rouso, Lo Drailhèt, le Vent des Cévennes, l'Autun Blanc, Lo Mari, le Soulèdre, le Vent du Midi, le Ben bas, Lo Palangiaù, Le Traverso basso, le Traverso alto, l'Écorche d'Aùt.¹⁶ A mostly silent place (at least after dusk, when the noise of the tractors subsides), two sounds are predominant: the wind, and the increasingly rare sonic charm of the traditional cow bells (*clarines*)—of varied pitch, but not tuned to any scale—still worn by a few herds. Some years ago I was commissioned by the Aporia Trio to compose a work, which became *Sonate pour clarines et trio baroque* (2013), a montaged recording of the cow bells with accompanying instructions for instrumental improvisation. While mixing and mastering the recording, the sounds of distant airplanes and proximate winds were both filtered out. During such an exercise it becomes apparent that each type of tree gives the wind distinctive voice, as does the density of the forest, the lay of the land, and other geographic features. Or should we rather say that the wind gives voice to the earth? Given these considerations, it is clear that each wind passing through every different place will resound with a distinctive tone. Perhaps the aesthetic future of the wind will be determined by electroacoustic music, but in any case, my *Atmosphere* exhibition will certainly have a sonic chamber of the winds.

Japan, to the contrary, has an ancient poetic relationship with the wind, although this does not mean that their typology is any more precise than ours in France, nor that their ecological sensitivity is necessarily any more generous. Quite to the contrary: if a Japanese poem evokes the sound of the wind, chances are that it will be the sighing of the wind in the pines. Indeed, one maxim proclaims that, “inhaling all the wind in the pine trees, the soul is never soiled.”¹⁷ Okakura Kakuzō describes, in *The Book of Tea*, the sonic ambience of a tea ceremony: “The kettle sings well, for pieces of iron are so arranged in the bottom as to produce a peculiar melody in which one may hear the echoes of a cataract muffled by clouds, of a distant sea breaking among the rocks, a rainstorm sweeping through a bamboo forest, or of the sighing of pines on some faraway hill.”¹⁸ We are attuned to this particular, privileged sound, we listen for it at appropriate moments, so it becomes all the more easy to hear, for example, in *Matsukaze* (Wind in the Pines), one of the most famous works for shakuhachi flute, the wind instrument that most sounds like the meteorological wind. I for one would also love to celebrate the distinctive and mysterious sound of the wind in a bamboo grove—with its whistling glissandi punctuated by the “clacks” of the bamboo stalks striking each other—but that would be like contemplating a full Winter Moon, when the appropriately poetic moon to admire is rather the Harvest Moon of early Autumn.

Such commonplaces are certainly mutable, though change comes slowly. As in the visual arts, we should attend to the clues about how to listen and what to listen for, all the while paying attention to the forms and limits of sonic representation. Our

16 Victoire, *Petite Encyclopédie des Vents de France*, 55.

17 Shigenori Chikamatsu, *Stories from a Tearoom Window*, trans. Kozaburo Mori (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1982), 97; note that the author's name contains the word for pine, *matsu*.

18 Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 35.



Fig. 4. Dream stone
"landscape." Courtesy of
the author.

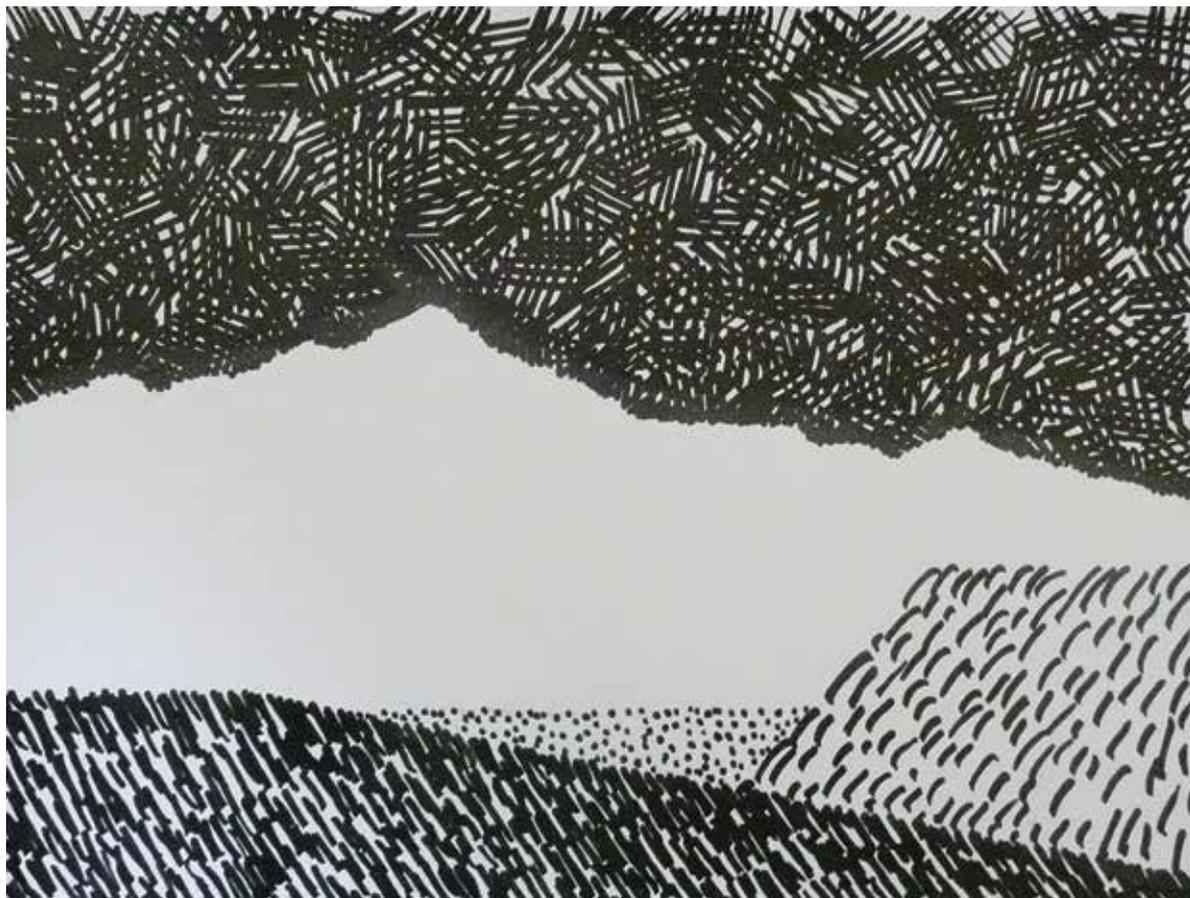


Fig. 5. Bernard Pagès,
Mont Ventoux, 2005.
Ink on paper. Courtesy
of the author.

epoch, however, has its surprises, its occasional shocks of recognition, its paradigm shifts. A few years ago, I walked the paths of Daitoku-ji—that temple complex in Kyoto where the *wabi-sabi* tea ceremony was perfected, and where so much of the great traditional art of Japan is still to be found—not intent on visiting any particular sub-temple that day, but just to seek the pleasure of quietude. Wind swept the fabulous pines to be found there that early winter day. All of a sudden, the artificial squall of a gas-powered leaf blower blasted the air.

The Japanese tea ceremony, in its modern (that is, late sixteenth-century) origins under the most celebrated of tea masters, Sen no Rikyū, is a ritualistic performance in a hyperbolically utopian space. The “dewy path” (*roji*) of the tea garden is a liminal environment leading to the miniaturized utopia of the tea hut, a refuge from both the extravagances of court life and from the catastrophic wars that accompanied the unification of Japan. The *wabi-sabi* aesthetic was thus born from a combination of factors: a reaction by the *daimyō* (feudal lords), who had recently gained power, against the extravagances—one might say decadence—of royal court life; these warriors’ attraction to the severity and austerity of Zen practice, one of the major sources of tea culture, which resonated with their militarist sensibilities; and the rough simplicity of the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic, which accorded with the precariousness of life endlessly confronting these generals. This extraordinarily bloody moment of Japanese history (not to mention the fires, earthquakes, and tidal waves that regularly ravaged the country) gave rise to the most delicate and aesthetically sophisticated ritual. Such fragility is summed up by the phrase *mono no aware*, omnipresent in Japanese literature, referring to the melancholy of things passing and the consequent wistful thrill of the ephemeral, famously instantiated by the fall of a leaf or a petal, the melting of snow, the occultation by cloud or fog, or wind sweeping through dried grass, all gently signifying the transience of existence. The wind blowing through the pines—the meeting of the most solid and ancient with the most intangible and ephemeral—is emblematic of this sensibility.

What at its origin was an audacious, intuitive, experimental art form that in its sublime moments could invoke Zen epiphany, the tea ceremony has in its modern manifestations become for the most part a commercialized, rule-bound institution, often more a finishing school for aestheticized etiquette than a form of art. However, there are always exceptions, and in any case the styles and ideals of this ceremony still inform all traditionally oriented Japanese art, architecture, and craft. *Wabi* suggests the positive values of poverty and its attendant aspects of tranquility, solitude, unobtrusiveness, asymmetrical harmony, and elegant rusticity, while *sabi* signifies wear and patination by age and use, as well as rust. *Sabi* consequently denotes a sense of familiarity, continuity, antiquity, and connotes a corresponding feeling of passing, loss, melancholy; by extrapolation, in its extreme instances it evokes bleakness, desolation, extinction.¹⁹ Such is the core of traditional Japanese aesthetics, where the ultimate refinement is the state of being “dried out” or “withered” (*kare*).²⁰ This is the same word used for the dry or “Zen” garden: *karesansui*, literally “dry mountain water,” of which the bald, treeless, and tragic Mont Ventoux is as stunning an example as the beautifully snow-capped Mount Fuji. The highest spiritual attainment is thus in part a recognition of our own mortality, or as Inoue Yasushi expresses

19 Allen S. Weiss, *Zen Landscapes: Perspectives on Japanese Gardens and Ceramics* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 12–7; see also Donald Richie, *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 44–6.

20 Louise Allison Cort, *Shigaraki: Potters’ Valley* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2001), 112.

it in his historical novel *Le maître de thé* [*The Tea Master*], through the words of the sixteenth-century tea master Shōō (Jōō): “It is said that the quintessence of poetry is a cold, dry, exhausted universe. [...] I would like that of tea to be similar.”²¹

* * *

I have before me an object that might well have its place in the *Atmosphere* exhibition, a *guinomi* (tall sake cup) by the contemporary Japanese potter Ajiki Hiro, bearing the title “Cold Wintry Wind” (凩, *kogarashi*). Unlike great tea bowls, it is unusual for a sake cup to be given a poetic name, and just as unusual for the *tomobako* (protective box) to be decorated with a brush and ink drawing. Presaged by both the name and the drawing, it is difficult not to see the mottled gray glaze as windswept snow at dusk, with layers of snow building high, the blue and brown marks as shadows in a dense wood, or perhaps the glimpse of a stream in twilight. This work is demonstrative of our quest to determine the limits of iconography in relation to the natural world. However, the title alone should suffice in its evocation of the mood and the scene, so that even my few descriptive words are superfluous, stilling the imagination. To clarify vagueness is to destroy allusion, like translating poetry into prose.

This iconography is in a state of constant transformation, and the invisible often marks the visible. One phenomenon that has for the most part escaped notice in traditional *wabi-sabi* tea culture is the fact that our very concept of nature has recently changed, though more avant-garde forms of the ceremony have indeed begun to factor in these transformations.²² These changes can be summed up by the notion of the Anthropocene, the geological epoch determined by the inexorable impact of human activity on the Earth, contributing to the radical transformation of ecosystems and inexorable climate change. The effects of human activity since the beginning of the industrial revolution have been such that there exists a thin but significant crust of the Earth fundamentally impacted by human activity. Still under debate is the precise origin of this epoch: whether it be attributed to the beginnings of the industrial revolution (and its attendant pollutions) in the eighteenth century, or rather if it is determined by the beginnings of the atomic era. Whatever may be the case, natural phenomena—whether experienced in their aesthetic or ecological manifestations—will never be the same. I offer the following commentary of our still uncharted and newly terrifying meteorological era, following the wind that, soon after the meltdown of the nuclear reactor at Fukushima on 11 March 2011, swept a radioactive cloud toward Tokyo, from Michaël Ferrier’s *Fukushima, récit d’un désastre*:

Rain falls, but it is no longer rain, the wind blows, but it is no longer wind: it bears along with it cesium rather than pollen, whiffs of toxins rather than perfumes. The sea, while continuing to howl, becomes mute with terror. It dilutes as best it can these deadly residues. Impossible to flee. The day is already uninhabitable. Night arrives without bringing forgetfulness, just the fear of new dreams, each one more somber and fetid than the last. Horror is an atmosphere: lost particles, powdery clouds, dubious radiation. We

21 Yasushi Inoue, *Le Maître de thé* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2009 [1991]), 150 (translation mine).

22 As the critique of traditional aesthetic codes has recently accelerated, potters, tea masters, designers, and architects eventually transformed every parameter of the *wabi-sabi*-inspired tea room and its implements, making the tea ceremony once again a truly experimental art form: locating tea rooms in attics, treehouses, balconies, rooftops, greenhouses, and even an Airstream trailer; using unusual materials such as concrete, charcoal, aluminum, steel, titanium, pegboard, plywood, and even transparent glass, plexiglass, and acrylic; and employing new forms ranging from the sleekest manifestations of industrial design to the farthest reaches of pop art extravagance. However, these new aspects of tea are still marginal to traditional forms. See Michael Freeman, *The Modern Japanese Tea Room* (Bologna: Damiani, 2007).

have arrived—or returned—to the meteorological stage of our tale:
we confide our destiny to the wind and the waves.²³

23 Michaël
Ferrier, *Fukushima, récit
d'un désastre* (Paris:
Gallimard, 2012), 245
(translation mine).

Such ill winds are what we now breathe, speak, and sing. There need be a room in the *Atmosphere* exhibition devoted to this latest transmutation of the natural world into an exhausted universe: “Dystopic Atmospheres.” Perhaps—like the rooms devoted to the wind in the pines, the ringing cowbells, and an ocean tempest—it will be a sonic chamber where we shall hear nothing but the minimal, anxious clicks of a Geiger counter.

Authors note: In the body
of the text I follow the
Japanese convention of
citing Japanese family
names first, followed by the
given name.

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