I want young people starting out in painting today to observe what is being done by handwriting instructors; these men start out by teaching the form of letters which the Ancients called “elements,” and then they teach the syllables and finally the composition of words. May our own painting students follow this rule in order to learn how to paint . . .

—Alberti, Treatise on Painting

When I write the word “wine” in ink, the ink does not play the main role; rather, it allows for the durable inscription of the idea of wine. Thus ink functions to guarantee us of a permanent supply of wine.

—Paul Klee, Theory of Modern Art

Instead of adopting a head-on approach to the relationship between writing and drawing—an approach which would inevitably include the all too commonplace etymological consideration of graphein—I will introduce a third term, color, in an effort to analyze the intersecting, triangular relations of writing, drawing, and color. Such an approach seems particularly appropriate since the drawing/color relationship is also a well-known pairing, with a historical significance all its own. By introducing a third term into these dualistic relations (color with respect to drawing/writing and writing with respect to drawing/color), I hope to expose and perhaps challenge the arbitrariness and artificiality of such binary divisions and regroupings (text and image, painting and . . .).

Let’s start with a first configuration—a banal one which initially might seem a bit obvious. Generally speaking, drawing and writing alike appear to involve the exclusion of color. When one thinks about drawing, one thinks about black pencil, charcoal, stump, graphite—not colors. Colored pencils always strike one as somewhat childish

1. The case of watercolor and pastel is doubtless somewhat unusual; if art historians tend to associate them with the art of drawing, the fact remains that they scarcely look like drawing, in many cases, the common ground is much more the supporting material—paper—than the drawing itself.
[but why!], just as a box of water colors always seems somewhat puerile, and both lack the seriousness, and obviously the blackness, of drawing. And so drawing is done, preferably, in black, in black on white—just like writing. Whence the common ground between the two media: the exclusion of color.

Like drawing, writing—at least printed writing—favors black and seems to exclude color. [But what of writing done by hand? Don’t people write in blue, at least as often as they write in black? When I was a student, the ball-point pen was forbidden—it was said to corrupt youngsters’ impressionable handwriting—and the ink pen was required, blue more often than black. As for the color red, it was reserved solely for the teacher’s corrections. One underlines in red, one “highlights” in yellow, but one writes in blue or in black. The latter two are not, however, interchangeable. For all official correspondence, French etiquette requires that one write by hand—the typewriter and the computer being too “impersonal”—and in such instances, black ink is a must. I am not certain why it is impolite to write in blue, but I myself have internalized this rule, and feel compelled to use black for a considerable portion of my correspondence.]

Am I losing myself in specious considerations? I do not know, trying as I am to understand this colorless kinship between writing and drawing. After all, one does not tend to write with colored pencils and use a variety of colors, unless one is trying to venture into the domain of art and to give writing a plastic dimension that it does not usually have. As for drawing with colored pencils, it must be understood that such activity does not even qualify as drawing. Rather, it is an enterprise that almost negates drawing as such: “I know it’s drawing, but come on!”

One writes, like one draws, in black on white. “C’est écrit noir sur blanc”—Robert [It’s all there in black and white], as the expression goes, designating something that is clearly visible, undeniable. There is thus a certain visibility or clarity of the written word, and drawing shares these qualities. Indeed, in terms of clarity, the contrast created by black letters on a white page or background is optimal. Chevreul studies this issue in his famous treatise: De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs (1839), in which he evaluates different possible combinations of colored printer’s ink and paper. As one might expect, he concludes that the standard combination of black ink on white paper is the most satisfying one, in terms of both readability and ease on the eyes (and in determining these things he makes a distinction between
reading for short periods of time and reading for long periods of time).²
The preference for black on white established by Chevreul finds fur-
ther justification in a property which he attributes to color, and which
is the most interesting of his findings: "a property possessed in variable
degrees by colours,-viz.:: that of leaving upon the organ which has
perceived them during a certain time the impression of their respective
complementaries." Such an impression, however, can only confuse
things and make reading uncomfortable: "It is clear that the more
durable this impression is, [all] other things being equal, the less the
organ will be disposed to receive distinctly new impressions, for there
must necessarily be superpositions of different images, as in the mixed
contrast, which, not being coincident, will tend to render the actual
effect less marked than it might otherwise be," [Chevreul, §519, 126].

Thus, Chevreul presents as harmful to printed writing the very
property which plays a central role in any work involving color—and it
is with this observation in mind that a whole generation of painters
will invoke Chevreul's law. As we have seen, the demand for clarity or
immediate legibility, which color contradicts or compromises, is a
trait which drawing and writing have in common. Clarity must, how-
ever, be understood in two senses: the clarity of drawing and writing
which are readily distinguishable from their background, and the clar-
ity of a lucidly expressed thought.

Now if there is one aspect of drawing upon which critics and artists
are constantly insisting, it is that drawing allows for the clear expres-
sion of thought. This conception is, moreover, shared by those who
defend color against drawing: Roger de Piles, for instance, states that
"l'on appelle dessin la pensée d'un tableau"3 ["drawing is the thought
of a painting"], and explains that "[le dessin] représente la pensée de
tout l'ouvrage avec les lumières et les ombres, et quelquefois avec les
couleurs mêmes, et pour lors il n'est pas regardé comme une des par-

². "Contrast of tone is the most favourable condition for distinct vision, if we
consider White and Black as the two extremes of a scale comprehending the gradation
from normal Grey: in fact, Black letters upon a White ground present the maximum of
contrast of tone, and the reading is done in a perfectly distinct manner, without fatigue,
by diffused daylight, affording the proof of what I advance." M.-E. Chevreul, The Princi-
ples of Harmony and Contrast of Colors and Their Applications to the Arts, ed. Faber
contemporary terminology, Chevreul's "contrast of tone" would actually be "contrast of
lightness" [contraste de clarté].

³. Roger de Piles, Cours de peinture par principes [1708] [Nîmes: Editions Jac-
queline Chambon, 1990], 150.
ties de la peinture, mais comme l’idée du tableau que le peintre médite,” [de Piles, 79] drawing “represents the thought upon which the work as a whole is based, with its light and its shadows, and sometimes with its very colors. For that reason, drawing is not held to be one of the painting’s components, but rather the idea of the painting that the artist has in his mind.”] Obviously, this statement assumes that drawing provides not only the sketch of a painting, but also the painting’s very essence, that drawing—not color—gives painting its great, forceful, over-arching lines. One might even go so far as to say that drawing, according to this definition, encompasses all aspects of a painting, including its color.

A drawing done in black, with its clear vision of the “idea of a painting” also relies on the complicity between the idea and the hand and between the hand and its tracings. Such a notion also reinforces or overdetermines the relationship between drawing and writing, as if there were some kind of correspondence between the hand and the mind, or, as de Piles writes, between “le caractère de la main” [the hand’s character] and “le caractère de l’esprit” [the mind’s character]:

On connaît de qui est un Tableau comme vous connaissez de qui est une Lettre que vous recevez d’une personne qui vous a déjà écrit plusieurs fois. Et il y a deux choses qui font connaître ces sortes de lettres, le caractère de la main, et celui de l’esprit.—Il est vrai, interrompit Damon, que sans ouvrir une lettre, l’on juge souvent de qui elle est par le dessus.—C’est justement comme vous jugez des Tableaux, dit Pamphilie.4

You know who has done a Painting just as you know who has written a Letter you receive from someone who has already written to you several times. And there are two things that enable you to know or to recognize such letters: the character of the hand, and that of the mind.—It is true, interrupted Damon, that without opening a letter, one often determines who sent it by the outside.—That is exactly how one judges Paintings, said Pamphile.

And de Piles adds that the hand’s character “n’est autre chose qu’une habitude toute singulière que chacun prend de former ses lettres, et le caractère de l’esprit est le style du discours, et le tour que l’on donne à ses pensées” [is simply a unique and individualized habit that dictates how people form their letters, and the mind’s character is the discur-

sive style, the turn of a phrase that people use in expressing their thoughts.]

There is thus a sort of truth of the hand, which never lies and which reveals the state of mind of the person who is writing or tracing—a truth of the hand which drawing and writing have in common. This privileged relationship between drawing and the hand helps to explain the frequency with which the medium is compared to writing. Matisse, for example, speaks of the exhausting work he does in order to let himself be penetrated by his model’s essence or character, by the model’s human expressiveness and by “all that can only be expressed by drawing.” Only after making such an effort is he able to take up the pen with some measure of confidence: “J’ai alors le sentiment évident” [I now get the distinct feeling], “he continues.”

que mon émotion s’exprime par le moyen de l’écriture plastique. Aussitôt que mon trait ému a modelé la lumière de ma feuille blanche, sans en enlever sa qualité de blancheur attendrissante, je ne puis plus rien lui ajouter, ni rien en reprendre. La page est écrite; aucune correction n’est possible.6

that my emotion expresses itself by means of a plastic writing. As soon as the zealous stroke of my pen has shaped the light of my white page, without taking away the latter’s tender whiteness, there is nothing more I can add or take away. The page has been written; no further correction is possible.

And so we have a toned down analogy with writing, if we take into consideration, as Matisse invites us to do, the whiteness of the background (which has become [a] common place), and the unwillingness to repent (“the page has been written”). There thus emerges a sort of ethics of drawing, which forbids the use of an eraser, and which re-


quires drawing to show everything without dissimulation, without cheating, without trickery. This notion recalls Ingres's famous, oft-quoted assertion that "le dessin est la probité de l'art" [drawing is the probity of art].

This ethical dimension places drawing and writing in opposition to color, which is conceived of as unstable, immoral, and deceptive. For instance, it seems significant that when the author of an art anthology introduces the subject of color, he defines it in contrast to its age-old rival: "'Le dessin est la probité de l'art.' La couleur en est le charme et la séduction—une personne sage doit s'en méfier, comme d'une sirène" [Drawing is the probity of art. Color is art's charm and its seduction—a siren of whom the prudent person should beware]. In the face of color's seductiveness, a concept to which we will return, the probity of drawing is affirmed, as is the probity of writing and of all that they both reveal. Thus, a certain truth of the pen stroke would stand to reinforce the analogy between writing and drawing.

The truth of the pen stroke that manifests itself in drawing has long been construed as fidelity to the idea which drawing aims to express—as if there were a perfect equivalence between drawing and the idea, established by the intermediary of the hand. In addition to its fidelity, obedience, and honesty, good drawing must possess one other characteristic, common to all good servants: discretion. It is in reference to this characteristic, in fact, that Rodin proposes yet another analogy between drawing and writing, and particularly literary style:

Il en est du dessin en art comme du style en littérature. Le style qui se manie, qui se guinde pour se faire remarquer, est mauvais. Il n'y a de bon style que celui qui se fait oublier pour concentrer sur le sujet traité, sur l'émotion rendue toute l'attention du lecteur.

L'artiste qui fait parade de son dessin, l'écrivain qui veut attirer la louange sur son style ressemblent à des soldats qui se pavaneraient sous leur uniforme, mais refuseraient d'aller à la bataille, ou bien à des cultivateurs qui fourbireraient constamment le soc de leur charrue pour le faire briller, au lieu de l'enfoncer dans la terre. Le dessin, le style vraiment beaux sont ceux qu'on ne pense même pas à louer, tant on est pris par l'intérêt de ce qu'ils expriment.  


The same principle holds true for drawing in art and for style in literature. Style that bears the marks of affectation, that puts on airs in order to call attention to itself, is bad. Style can only be good insofar as it allows itself to be forgotten so that the reader will focus on the work's subject matter and emotional content. The artist who shows off with his drawing and the writer who seeks praise for his style, are like soldiers who would parade around in their uniform, but refuse to go into battle; they are like farmers who constantly polish their plow to make it shine brilliantly, instead of digging it into the ground. Truly beautiful drawing and style are those which one does not even think to praise, so taken is one by what they express.

It would be banal to repeat the saying that style is above all a "poinçon servant à écrire [an engraver’s point for writing]—and therefore an instrument common to drawing and writing—were it not for Rodin's agricultural metaphor that absolutely insists on such a comparison, with his emphasis on the plow's shiny brilliance (do we not speak of a writer's "brilliant" style?). As for the military metaphor, it says exactly what it means: drawing and style alike are soldiers who should serve their army rather than "parade around." In clear contradistinction to drawing, however, color is a bad soldier that does parade around, showing off instead of being content to serve, seeking to show its own brilliance. Color, in other words, tends to express itself.10

Perhaps now we are beginning to sense the reason for the longtime complicity between drawing and writing: both efface themselves for the sake of that which they seek to express, whereas color resists being reduced to such a function. In this light, the artists' and critics' frequent analogies between drawing and writing can be seen to derive from a desire to emphasize drawing's instrumental function: drawing as an instrument of the hand whose tracings are governed by the dictates of the idea, drawing as a faithful and trustworthy intermediary. It is as if drawing, like writing, has to be as discreet as possible, in order to convey meaning effectively. The signifier should be transparent, so that it in no way detract from the signified.

This notion finds confirmation in the theories developed by Charles Blanc in the second third of the nineteenth century, particularly in his eloquently titled book, Grammaire des arts du dessin (1867). The analogy with alphabetical writing, and its attendant

10. Such is not, however, Rodin's position—which is in fact a rare one for his time, since he places color on the same level as drawing. At the end of the above-cited statement, he adds: "de même pour la couleur" [the same holds true for color].
"grammatical" rules, becomes even more explicit in the introduction to Blanc’s subsequent work, the *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*. Blanc’s position is important and symptomatic because it figures a whole classical tradition at the very moment when this tradition, which subordinated color to drawing, was being challenged by the Romantics, the Orientalists, and then the Impressionists, all of whom assign a central role to color. Charles Blanc’s work thus constitutes a turning point of sorts, and it is for this reason that his conception of the relationship between color and drawing deserves examination (such examination appears all the more important, in fact, when we realize that his thought influenced a considerable number of painters). "Tout dessin," Blanc explains

est l’expression d’une pensée ou d’un sentiment, et par cela même il est chargé de nous faire voir quelque chose de supérieur à la vérité apparente, lorsque celle-ci ne révèle aucun sentiment, aucune pensée. Mais quelle est cette vérité supérieure? Elle est tantôt le caractère de l’objet dessiné, tantôt le caractère du dessinateur, et, dans le grand art, elle est justement ce qu’on appelle le style.

All drawing is the expression of a thought or a feeling, and as such, its role is to show us something superior to the apparent truth, which often reveals no thought and no feeling. But what is this superior truth? Sometimes it is the character of the drawn objet, sometimes the character of the person drawing. In great art, moreover, this superior truth is what we call style.

According to Blanc, this definition of drawing gives us a clear indication of its origins: "Le dessin est un projet de l’esprit, comme l’indiqué si bien l’orthographe de nos pères qui écrivaient dessein" (Blanc, ibid.) [Drawing is a design, plan or project of the mind, as we can see in the spelling of our forefathers who wrote dessein] This goes back to the Renaissance conception of drawing as idea [the famous designo] which we find in the writings of Vasari: “This design is nothing but a visual

11. Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, 2nd edition (Paris: 1992), III. "Just as the twenty-five letters of the alphabet have been, and will continue to be, sufficient for the formation of words necessary to express all human thought, so too a few elements susceptible to multiple combinations have been, and will continue to be, sufficient for the creation of an infinite number of ornaments."


expression and clarification of that concept which one has in the intellect, and that which one imagines in the mind and builds up in the idea.” 14 In The Idea in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, Zuccari makes this definition of drawing even more precise by elaborating on the notion of an “inner design” (designo interno), which he too identifies with the idea.15

If Charles Blanc’s conception of drawing thus remains marked by Renaissance and classical thought,16 we might nevertheless think that such a view has had its day, and that it is no longer considered valid. However, this is not the case. We can find this very same notion, for instance, in Matisse’s writings: “Dessiner, c’est préciser une idée. Le dessin est la précision de la pensée. Par le dessin les sentiments et l’âme du peintre passent sans difficulté dans l’esprit du spectateur” [Matisse, n. 8, 162]. [To draw is to give a precise rendering of an idea. Drawing is the precision of thought. Drawing transmits the painter’s feelings and soul directly into the viewer’s mind]. Even more recently, conceptual art has once again attempted to radicalize this conception of drawing as the expression of an idea—a concept which has profoundly influenced contemporary drawing and which constitutes two of its great trends.17

But one point is striking in this formulation of the relationship between drawing and writing. For in the above-cited text (“Drawing is a design, plan or project of the mind, as we can see in the spelling of our forefathers who wrote dessein”), Charles Blanc legitimates this conception of drawing by referring not to the Renaissance, but to etymol-

15. As Panofsky notes, “On Zuccari’s terminology it should be remarked that, although . . . he heavily reproached Vasari for using the term ‘idea’ in the sense of ‘imaginative ability’ instead of in the sense of ‘imaginative content,’ he himself uses the term designo [= idea] in exactly the same double significance; he designated the process as well as the object of the act of ‘designing’ as designo,” op. cit., n. 30, 227.
16. In Blanc’s view, drawing encompasses architecture, sculpture, and painting (whereas color is only necessary to painting): “drawing is so essential to each of these three arts that they are properly termed the arts of drawing,” op. cit., 21. Blanc thus stays faithful to Vasari, for whom drawing is “the father of our three arts,” an idea taken up by Le Brun who annexes architecture to the Academy, and who commissions this inscription for the Institute’s pediment: “Ecole de dessin.” On Blanc’s classical tastes, cf., M. F. Zimmermann, Les Mondes de Seurat: son œuvre et les débats artistiques de son temps [Anvers/Paris: Fonds Mercator/Albin Michel, 1991], 28ff.
ogy. It is difficult not to see in this reference a collusion between drawing and writing, especially since the author makes a similar attempt at etymological legitimation in the introduction to his book:

Le mot dessin a deux significations. Dessiner un objet, c'est le représenter avec des traits, des clairs et des ombres. Dessiner un tableau, un édifice, un groupe, c'est y exprimer sa pensée. Voilà pourquoi nos pères écrivaient dessein et cette orthographe intelligente disait clairement que tout dessin est un projet de l'esprit.18

The word drawing has two meanings. To draw an object is to represent it with pen-strokes, patches of light and shadow. To draw a scene, a building, a group is to express one’s thought through these objects. That is why our forefathers wrote dessein, and this intelligent spelling made it clear that all drawing is a design, plan, or project of the mind.

More interestingly still, Zuccari too invokes this “intelligent spelling” in order to justify the Italian designo (a term which lies at the origin of the French dessein/dessin): for him, etymology justifies the proposition that drawing is a sign of divine ressemblance: “designo = segno di dio in noi” [cited by Panofsky, 88] [designo = the sign of God in us]. Without getting into the etymological justification for a link between drawing and the idea, let us simply accept that this argument can help us to understand why color is excluded from such a project; ideas, thoughts, or concepts would seem to be more “naturally” linked to drawing than to color. And this characteristic would seem to bring writing and drawing even closer together, both of them being charged with the expression of thought. To return to Charles Blanc, we find a neat formulation of the problem in these terms: “Je suppose que le peintre étende sur sa toile le ton juste de la chair humaine: ce ton ne nous donnera point l'idée de l'homme, tandis qu'il nous suffira des plus grossiers contours pour nous rappeler cette idée” [Blanc, op. cit., 22] [Suppose that the artist paints his canvas using the very color of human flesh: this color will not give us the idea of a man, unless we have the crudest of contours to remind us of this idea]. Color, unlike drawing, is

18. Charles Blanc, Grammaire des arts du dessin, op. cit., 22–23. According to Bloch and von Wartburg's Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française, the terms dessin [drawing] and dessein [design, plan, project], based on the model of the Italian designo, have only had their modern meanings since the end of the eighteenth century. Before then, dessein was more commonly used than dessin for both meanings.
patently incapable of expressing an idea. To develop this hypothesis further, Blanc proceeds to give the example of the black man, whom he presents in black and white: "Tous les nègres sont noirs, comment les distinguer autrement que par la proportion de leur membres, la hauteur de leur taille ou les lignes de leurs démarche?" [ibid.] [All black men are black: how can you tell them apart if not by the proportion of their limbs, by their height, by the lines of their stride?]. From this he concludes that "la nature s'est donc servie du dessin pour définir les objets, de la couleur pour les nuancer" [nature relies on drawing to define objects, and on color to nuance them].

And so we keep coming back to drawing's power to express an idea—a power which color does not possess. It is hardly surprising, in this context, that Charles Blanc condemns color for not submitting to an instrumental role, and that he exhorts it to remain a slave to drawing.

Le coloriste passionné, avons-nous dit, invente sa forme pour sa couleur: rien n'est plus vrai. Tout, chez lui, est subordonné à l'éclat de la teinte. Non seulement le dessin fléchit, doit fléchir, mais la composition est commandée, gênée, violente, par la couleur. Pour aménager ici une teinte violette qui surexcitera telle draperie jaune, il faudra ménager à cette teinte un espace, inventer un accessoire, peut-être inutile. [Blanc, op.cit., 573]

The enthusiastic colorist, we have said, invents forms for his colors: nothing could be more true. The colorist subordinates everything to the radiance of tints and hues. Color not only requires drawing's submission; it also commands, compromises, and does violence to composition itself. In order to accommodate a violet hue which will offset some yellow drape
draperie or other, it is often necessary to create a space for this hue, or invent an unnecessary accessory for it.

The odd tone adopted by Blanc in this passage can be explained, at least in part, by his historical context: the age of Orientalism and of an ever-increasing emphasis on the importance of color. According to Blanc, color is a force which must be reined in, for "en poursuivant avec passion le triomphe de la couleur, le peintre court le risque de sacrifier l'action au spectacle" [if the painter passionately strives for the triumph of color, he runs the risk of sacrificing action to spectacle.] And here, of course, we are back to the parade evoked by Rodin.

Based on these arguments, we might propose the following hypothesis for the second half of the nineteenth century, if not earlier: the
instrumental function of drawing, and its potential autonomy, must be safeguarded against the threat posed by color. Furthermore, it is in an effort to reinforce this instrumentality, to which both drawing and writing ostensibly can be reduced, that the analogy between the two media develops. Whence Blanc's recourse to literature, this time in an almost pathetic peroration:

De même que les littératures inclinent à leur décadence quand les images l'emportent sur les idées, de même l'art se matérialise et décline infailliblement lorsque l'esprit qui dessine est vaincu par la sensation qui colore; lorsqu'en un mot l'orchestre, au lieu d'accompagner le chant, devient à lui seul le poème. [Blanc, 573]

Just as literature moves toward decadence when images take precedence over ideas, so must art inevitably begin to decline once the mind that draws is conquered by the sensation that colors; once the orchestra, instead of accompanying the song, itself becomes the poem.

Such considerations undoubtedly shed some light on the exact nature of color's "immorality," which consists both in a refusal to submit to discipline and to drawing, and in a willful attempt to be seductive on its own terms. For color is faulted with becoming a sign of nothing other than itself, whereas drawing remains the sign of something else (be it an object, a thought, or anything else that moves the artist). Whence the ubiquitous allusions to and analogies with writing, which is held to be another instrumental mode of thought, obediently submitting to that which it expresses.

This provisional conclusion might rightly be deemed a bit flat and uninspired, if its only thrust were to affirm that drawing and writing are both signs. It might even be accused of neglecting Damisch's famous advice that the question of writing and of the sign be dissociated in any study of the relations between painting and writing. To nuance things somewhat, however, the important point to be made here is that a certain conception of painting which prevailed in the West ever since the Renaissance, depended, if not on the exclusion of color, at least on its vassalization or enslavement. In other words, it was necessary to reduce color's potential autonomy, its refusal to become a sign, a vehicle or an intermediary for other meanings, from the moment that

it breaks free of drawing and is no longer padding, illumination. It is of
course on these grounds, and on these grounds alone, that the analogy
with writing is put into place—it functions to reinforce the role of
drawing.

Such would have been the lot of color: not to be unique and rare, but
to be subordinate or subject to drawing. To set things straight once and
for all, Charles Blanc puts it bluntly, summing up an entire tradition:
"Non, la couleur n’est pas plus rare que le dessin, mais elle joue dans
l’art le rôle féminin, le rôle du sentiment; soumise au dessin comme le
sentiment doit être soumis à la raison, elle y ajoute du charme, de
l’expression et de la grâce" (Blanc, 23) [No, color is no more unique or
rare than drawing, but the former plays the feminine role in art, the role
of feeling; subject to drawing just as feeling should be subject to reason,
color brings to the marriage its share of charm, expressiveness, and
grace].

In keeping with an age-old division which is still widely accepted
and of which we are not even entirely conscious, color is relegated to
the realm of emotion, sentiment—a position which makes it all the
more incapable of expressing an idea. According to the tradition which
Blanc both summarizes and exacerbates, color is feminine.20 The im-
morality of color is thus also the immorality attributed to woman, and
the same gender coding applies to its wiles, its persuasiveness, its
deceptiveness. In its relation to drawing, color is a mere ornament—
superfluous, but also necessary, added to drawing as a type of supple-
ment.

All of these traits, however, are also those which, as Derrida has
shown in the Grammatology and subsequent works, characterize writ-
ing in its relation to speech (la parole). Such a realization necessarily
brings about a shifting of alliances, if it is indeed true that color shares
common ground with writing! How is it possible, from this moment
on, to insist upon a "complicity" between drawing and writing, aimed
at keeping color in line? Perhaps at this point it is necessary to intro-
duce a fourth term, speech (la parole), in order to obtain an equivalence
which would look like this: color is to drawing as writing is to speech.
Let’s see if this new formula stands up to analysis.

Indeed, it is by no means difficult to show that color, in its relation-
ship to drawing, acts as a supplement, an ornament, something which
is added, and which plays the contradictory role of being simul-

taneously superfluous and necessary. The idea of color as make-up, for example, dovetails quite nicely with Derridean analyses of writing. Besides, make-up, like color, is one of the definitions of the pharma-
kon. In most cases, then, color functions to appear alongside and in opposition to drawing, like a supplement—it serves rather to color in the outlines traced by drawing, or else to enhance them. Obviously enough, this last term is of tremendous interest to us here. Drawing does not exclude color, but demands its subjection or subjugation; color is forced to remain, in keeping with Ingres's orders, the lady-in-waiting, the one in charge of costumes and makeup. In the form of wash or watercolor, for example, color is clearly present, but as a type of embellishment or enhancement. To enhance is to bring out, to bring up, to sublate [relever], "fard qui rehausse l'éclat du teint," Robert [make-up that enhances one's skin-tone]. It is of course in a similar way that writing constitutes the sublation [la relève] of speech.

Furthermore, the privilege which speech enjoys as presence-to-itself, and compared to which writing appears secondary or supplementary, recalls the privilege accorded to drawing as an apt expression of the idea, as the truth of the idea. This parallel is particularly fitting given the fact that the voice has always enjoyed a special relationship with the idea. All one has to do is think of Charles Le Brun, presiding over the Academy as its master, or rather as its "dictator," [L. Venturi]. When called upon to pronounce his verdict on the relationship between drawing and color, he plays skillfully on the polysemy of the word "design" [dessein], insisting upon that "intelligent spelling" which Charles Blanc will later invoke once again:

On doit savoir qu'il y a deux sortes de desseins, l'un qui est intellectuel ou théorique, et l'autre pratique. Que le premier dépend purement de l'imagination, qu'il s'exprime par des paroles et se répand dans toutes les productions de l'Esprit. Que le dessein pratique est produit par l'intellectuel et dépend par conséquent de l'imagination et de la main, il peut aussi s'exprimer par des paroles.

C'est ce dernier qui avec un crayon donne la forme et la proportion et qui imite toutes les choses visibles, jusqu'à exprimer les passions de l'âme, sans qu'il ait besoin pour cela de la Couleur, si ce n'est pour représenter la rougeur et la pâleur.

23. Charles Le Brun, address to the Academy, 1672, cited by Bernard Teysèdre, Roger de Piles et les débats sur le coloris au siècle de Louis XIV, op. cit., n. 1, 178.
It is important to realize that there are two types of design, one which is intellectual or theoretical, and one which is practical. That the first one depends purely on the imagination, that it is expressed in speech and that it is manifest in all productions of the Mind. That the practical design is produced by the intellectual one and consequently depends on the imagination and on the hand. That the latter type of design too can be expressed in speech. It is this second type which, with the help of a pencil, produces form and proportion, and which imitates all visible things, to the point of expressing the very passions of the soul, without needing color to do any of this, except for the representation of redness and pallor.

This defense of drawing contains a good number of the ideas we have already encountered. First of all, the semantic play on the word “design” establishes a connection between drawing and design while endowing it, by means of a theory/practice opposition, with considerable breadth and legitimacy. Given Le Brun’s intellectualization of drawing, it is clear that the medium indeed depends on the hand, but also on the imagination—just like design. From this it is possible to conclude that drawing and design alike are prone to being expressed in speech, with the latter functioning as the transparent instrument of the expression of thought. But it is clearly assured by the legitimation which states that drawing can take pride in its ability to imitate all visible things, without recourse to color; the latter, an ornament or supplement, added to drawing without necessity, is nevertheless indispensable for the representation of redness.24 Thus, Le Brun’s text sums up much of the thought we have already examined, but with a twist—the difference being its introduction of speech as the privileged expression of design and, consequently, of drawing. Whence the new parallel we have proposed in the form of an equivalence: color is to drawing as writing is to speech.

As a starting hypothesis, then, we might say that speech and drawing alike hold certain privileges: that of the expression of thought, of clarity, of black on white. And, just as writing is considered, in its relation to speech, the “instrument of an instrument,”25 so color, in its subordination to drawing, is also conceived of as the instrument of an instrument.

24. This concession to color has enjoyed tremendous favor ever since Philostrates; most notably, it appears in the writings of Diderot and Charles Blanc. I have discussed this issue in my “Portrait de la couleur en femme fatale,” in loc. cit.

As soon as it is formulated, however, this attractive symmetry calls forth an objection, for it is not certain that speech is an instrument, since metaphysicians have—to go quickly here—thought of speech as the "natural" expression of thought. Drawing, on the other hand, may be constantly defined as the expression of thought, as the accurate expression of the idea, but it also remains an instrumental expression, a trace. Le Brun's "practical design," even if it can be expressed aloud in speech, nevertheless essentially depends on the hand.

Thus, emboldened by this development, and leaving the question of speech aside, we can now approach writing/drawing/color relations from a different angle. Up until now, indeed, we have insisted on drawing's complicity with writing, aimed at keeping color in line, subser-vient. But having taken into account all the traits which unite color and writing—supplement, ornament, seduction—in opposition to the probity of drawing, we find ourselves obliged to reexamine our initial outline, or at least to nuance it. The analogy between drawing and writing, in all the examples we have given, has always relied on the link between drawing and imitation, between drawing and the expression of the idea, and so has sought to establish its legitimacy by means of a certain conception of "instrumental" writing. It is not without interest, however, to note that historically, it is on the very same metaphysical basis that drawing has been promoted, as a supposedly clear expression of the idea, whereas color (like writing) has been consistently reduced to the ambiguous status of the supplement.

Drawing's alleged superiority to color is not, however, necessarily based on imitation, for if one were to take into account this criterion alone, one could reverse the entire argument, as Roger de Piles does in this unequivocal statement: "Le peintre qui est un parfait imitateur de la nature, pourvu de l'habitude d'un excellent dessin, comme nous le supposons, doit donc considérer la couleur comme son objet principal, puisqu'il ne regarde cette même nature que comme imitable, qu'elle ne lui est imitable que parce qu'elle est visible, et qu'elle n'est visible que parce qu'elle est coloriée" (de Piles, 145) [The painter, who imitates nature perfectly and is, we assume, endowed with excellent drawing skills, must therefore take color as his principal object, since he only looks at nature as something he can imitate, since he can only imitate it insofar as it is visible, and since it is only visible insofar as it is colored].

What, then, is the basis for drawing's privileged status, if it is true that color imitates better than drawing? Perhaps a little detour into
semiotics will prove helpful here. In order to transpose the color/drawing debate, we might say that drawing as signifier directly refers or corresponds to the signified [idea, concept], whereas color’s plasticity takes precedence over its iconic dimension. But when we formulate things in this way, the source of the dissymmetry becomes immediately apparent: the plastic dimension of drawing is erased for the sole benefit of its iconic dimension. 26 For drawing, like color, also possesses a plan of expression. In the classical drawing/color debate, however, the two elements are not on equal footing: drawing is not the elementary stroke or trait which constitutes its “plan of expression,” as the semioticians would say, but is almost always conceived of as representational drawing, whereas color is rightly conceived of in terms of its “plan of expression” alone. From this point on, it is not difficult to show that color, deprived of its “plan of content,” is incapable of expressing a signified—a task which drawing accomplishes all the more easily since it has already been posited as a vehicle for content.

The fact that drawing is made up of strokes [traits] 27 suggests another relation to writing, a relation which would also include color, since color too is composed of elementary strokes or traits. And so there emerges, beyond the tired old opposition between drawing and color, another relationship which connect writing to both drawing and color.

In this sense, the “grammar of drawing” is a deceptive notion, for as soon as it posits drawing as the mere expression of an idea, confining it to the level of content alone, and thus neglecting the medium’s constitutive traits or strokes. It is not without importance to note, however, that around 1880 other grammars come into being which act as kind of a crucible for “abstraction,” as do certain grammars of the trait or stroke, which do not deal with drawing, as well as grammars of color. Bourgoin’s Grammaire élémentaire de l’ornement, for instance, defines the elementary traits or strokes of the “graphic alphabet,” and then proceeds to study its “rules of conjugation,” by considering “les figures de l’alphabet <graphique> non plus comme des signes ou des figurations graphiques destinées à écrire les formes comme les lettres écrivent les mots, mais bien comme des figures ou des objects distincts

27. The author is playing on the double meaning of the French word “trait,” which means both “stroke” [as in penstroke] and “trait” [as in character trait].—Translator’s note.
existant en propre et par eux-mêmes"²⁸ [the figures of the ‘graphic’ alphabet no longer as signs of graphic figurations, designed to write forms as letters write words, but rather as distinct figures, objects which exist in and of themselves]. And what is true for drawing also holds true for color. A grammar of color is therefore possible, if it is based on the model of drawing's elementary traits: “As by the deflection of a point in space may be generated all the elementary figures and forms of geometrical and constructive science, so from a like deflection of a spot in place may be generated all the elementary and compound hues of colors; the science which is called Chromatics.”²⁹

Thus, if it is true that color is not drawing's other, relegated to the realm of emotion, beyond language, or, as we might say today, associated with [libidinal] drives, are we not justified in thinking that color has won its “autonomy” only with the help of a “science of painting,” a chromatics, or rather a grammar, which breaks color down into alphabet, syntax and conjugations, in order to establish the rules of its harmony?³⁰

And so the mediation of writing has taught us, at the very least, to relativize the opposition between drawing and color, to emphasize the fact that they are both susceptible to “grammatical” analysis, to a break-down into elementary traits or strokes, which have a notable impact on the development of nonfiguration, both in the decorative arts and in chromatics.

We can find confirmation of this if we take a look at the current situation of the arts. The “eternal conflict,” as Matisse called it, between drawing and color appears to be waning—although not disappearing altogether³¹—in that color on the one hand, and drawing on the other, have both liberated themselves from the once-dominant instrumental-representational function, in order to stand on their own and assert their independent value. Henceforth, any examination of

³¹. There nevertheless remains, beyond the age-old conflict, a lasting trait which is surely one of the main reasons for the conflict, and that is that color tends to parade around, in opposition to drawing. As Titus-Carmel noted: “Tempérer l'éclat de la couleur par le travail de la mine de plomb, la laisser seulement filtrer à travers les mailles de ce filet de hachures grises qui en éteint les feux,” taken from his “Notes d'ateliers [1973–74],” in Le Dessin pourquoi, op. cit., 15.
drawing and writing must no longer posit each medium as an instrument, but rather as a trace (or, to put it another way, no longer as a plan of content, but rather as a plan of expression). It is significant, in this context, that Barthes was only able to address the question of drawing by resorting to the idea that the essence of writing is unreadability.\textsuperscript{32} It thus seems necessary to abandon the idea of writing's instrumentality, so that writing can appear as a trace and so that another connection between writing and drawing can emerge.

Whence the different stakes that surface beyond the instrumental function. Whence also the rediscovery of the value and virtue of drawing as stroke. As Daniel Dezeuze notes, after referring to the work of Derrida and Barthes: "Il y a donc une sorte de procès en défense de l'écriture qui est aussi la défense du dessin" [Dezeuze, 42] [There is thus a sort of trial, a defense of writing which is also a defense of drawing].

The importance that is henceforth attached to the stroke or trait in drawing, and likewise to the spot or patch in color, leads us, in conclusion, to reconsider the element that served as our point of departure: the black/white opposition which we identified as the common ground between writing and drawing, and which seemed to involve an exclusion of color. On this point, too, we must now be more prudent, more subtle. For this construct is based on the idea of black as noncolor—an idea which we must call into question. Just as the black trace acquires a certain legitimacy \textit{[its lettres de noblesse]} when it is freed from a purely instrumental or representational function, so black as a color can affirm itself and triumph. It does so in the work of Matisse, for example—Matisse whose talent, as Renoir once told him, resides solely in his use of the color black \textit{[Matisse, Ecrits et propos, 202]}. Soulages also rehabilitates black, even more brilliantly than Matisse. Even for a painter like Albert Ayme, who does not use black, but sticks to different combinations of the three primary colors, the work of color and its dynamism, are clearly conceived of as moving from white to black—like writing, which is an important part of his art.\textsuperscript{33} From this we might move off in another direction, turning our

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. for example one of his remarks at the round table "La Peinture et l'écriture des signes," in \textit{La Sociologie de l'art et sa vocation interdisciplinaire}, op. cit., 191, and \textit{L'Obvie et l'obtus}, op. cit., 144.

attention to the importance of writing for 'color' painters like Van Gogh or Delacroix, in whose work color indeed seems to go hand in hand with writing.34 In the final analysis, then, the antimony between color and drawing no longer seems so pronounced, thanks to their common links to writing. Henceforth other configurations may be emerging . . .

—Translated by Caroline Weber