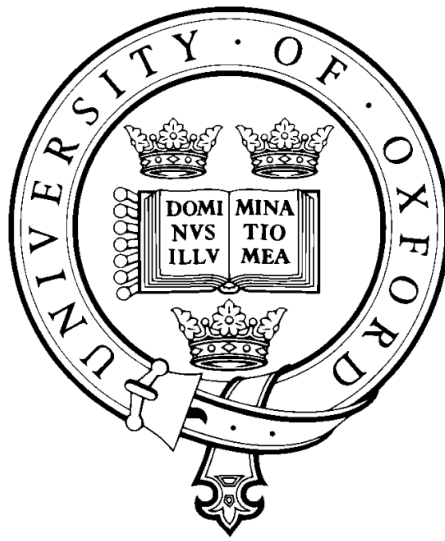


The Art of Blotting
Alexander Cozens's *New Method* as Intermedial Practice



A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Vol I: Text

Short Abstract

This thesis examines the work of British landscape painter and drawing master Alexander Cozens (1717–86). Its focus lies on the interactions between different media—such as painting and printmaking as well as image and text—in the work of this artist, both on the level of artistic practice and conceptual thought. I argue that such interactions are the context in which Cozens’s unusual blotting technique, and its theoretical claims about artistic creation and pictorial composition, took shape. Utilising the concept of artisanal epistemology, the thesis demonstrates that Cozens’s theory of blotting emerged from both his intellectual engagement with contemporary aesthetic debates *and* his practical engagement with different media—both of which were shaped by issues of intermediality.

The thesis begins with a close reading of Cozens’s theory of blotting as articulated in *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (1786). It demonstrates Cozens’s reliance on empirical epistemology in defining the blot as entirely abstract in form. The second chapter juxtaposes the theory with the practice of blotting to show that Cozens’s ideas on the subject changed over the course of his career, from his first publication in 1759—*An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landscips*—to the *New Method* of 1786. Chapter Three traces in detail Cozens’s practice as a printmaker, arguing that his theoretical conception of blotting was conditioned by his practical engagement with different printmaking techniques. The final chapter returns to the theory of blotting and considers it as a technique of pictorial composition that marked a profound departure from earlier notions of invention in painting. Together, the chapters offer not just a new interpretation of Cozens’s remarkable œuvre but provide a case study for future research on the theoretical potential of prints in shaping art-theoretical debates.

Long Abstract

This thesis examines the work of British landscape painter and drawing master Alexander Cozens (1717–86). Its focus lies on the interactions between different media—such as painting and printmaking, as well as image and text—in the work of this artist, both on the level of artistic practice and conceptual thought. I argue that such interactions are the context in which Cozens’s unusual blotting technique, and its theoretical claims about artistic creation and pictorial composition, took shape. Utilising the concept of artisanal epistemology, the thesis demonstrates that Cozens’s theory of blotting emerged from both his intellectual engagement with contemporary aesthetic debates *and* his practical engagement with different media—both of which were shaped by issues of intermediality.

The first chapter discusses the theory of blotting through a close reading of Cozens’s most famous publication, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (1786). Following the order of the text, I discuss, among other points, issues of chance and the aesthetic potential of abstract shapes, the purpose of blotting as a method of inventing ideal landscape compositions, and the cognitive mechanisms that underlie the blotting technique. I focus on issues of formalism and highlight Cozens’s remarkable conception of the blot as an abstract arrangement of form. The chapter also addresses apparent ambiguities within Cozens’s text which have, at times, led scholars to dismiss the radical abstraction Cozens ascribes to the blots. I resolve these ambiguities through a detailed analysis of Cozens’s reception of John Locke’s theory of ideas from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates the radical formalism and sense of abstraction with which Cozens conceived of what he called a ‘true blot’.

The second chapter, in turn, juxtaposes the theory of blotting and its radical formalism with the practice of blotting. The chapter presents a survey of the surviving blots, situating them within the wider developments of Cozens’s practice as a teacher, artist, and author. This reveals not only that Cozens defined different types of blots but also that his practice of blotting changed over time. By comparing Cozens’s earliest publication, *An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landscips* of 1759 (which is here discussed in detail) with the *New Method*, as well as their associated blots, I argue against a literature that claims that the blotting technique was fully developed by 1757. In fact, my analysis demonstrates that Cozens’s conception of the blot, and the purposes and goals of the blotting technique, changed fundamentally. My survey, moreover, makes visible the ambiguous relationship between blotting as it was presented in Cozens’s publications and the material evidence of the surviving blots. Indeed, most of the surviving blots

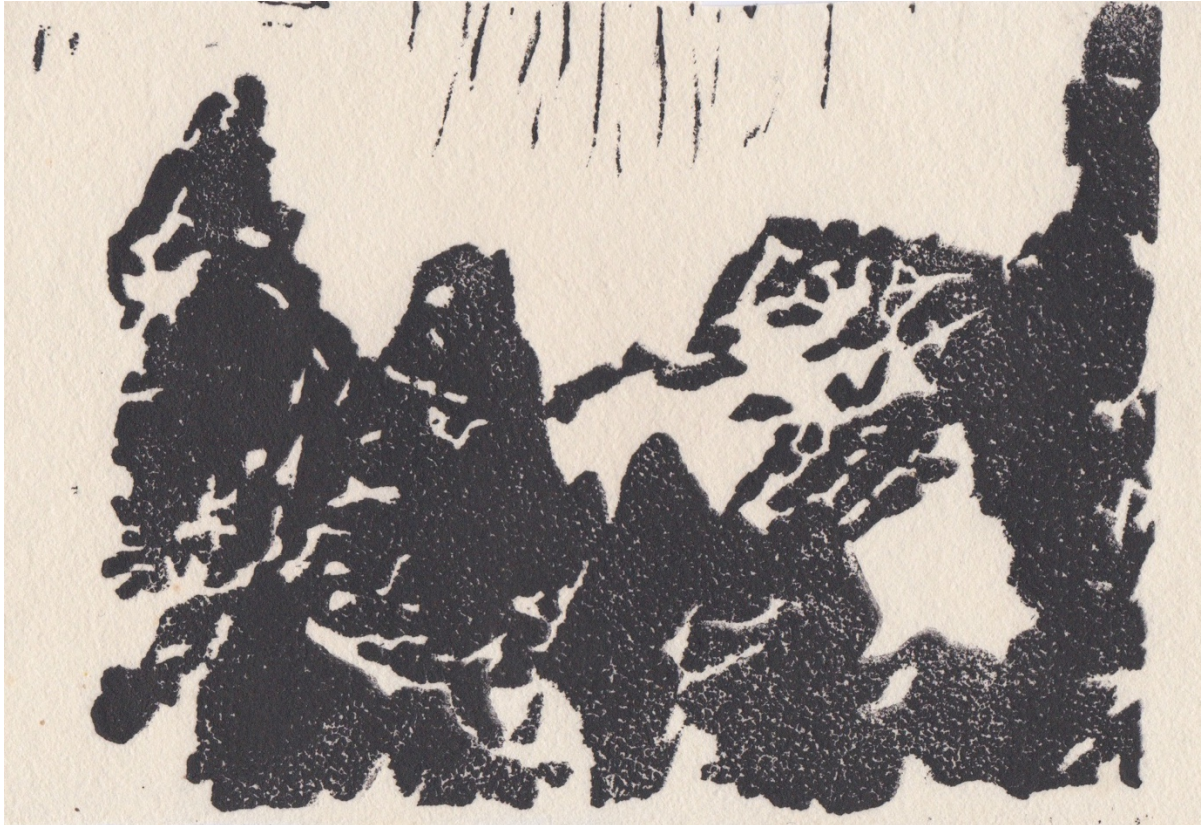
do not fully align with how Cozens presents them in both the text and illustrations of his treatises. Some of this can be explained by his ideas shifting over time and by the fact that blotting existed along a spectrum of abstraction and representation. However, by closely examining the *Essay's* text and illustrations alongside their preparatory blots, I demonstrate that Cozens was curtailed in visually articulating blotting accurately by the limitations of the printmaking technique he employed in illustrating the publication. Indeed, it was in response to the visual idiom of line etching that he adapted the *Essay's* definition of what a blot was.

The third chapter continues this line of reasoning by considering Cozens's practice of printmaking more closely. A first section surveys the artist's engagement with prints and printmaking beyond his publications—during his own education in London and Italy, as a collector of prints, and as a teacher. The focus of the chapter, however, lies on the protracted publication history of the *New Method* and Cozens's search for a printmaking technique that allowed him to print blots. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that the lack of a tonal printmaking technique led Cozens to abandon his technique of the 'light blot' when preparing the *Essay* for publication in 1759. When publishing the *New Method*, in 1786, Cozens faced similar problems. Although a first draft of the publication was ready by 1773, it took Cozens thirteen more years to finally publish his treatise. The delay, I argue, was caused by his search for a suitable technique to print the blots, which he eventually found in lift-ground aquatint. By comparing the draft and published version of the *New Method*, I demonstrate how his conception of the blot changed in response to his experimentation with aquatint. Thus, although aquatint enabled Cozens to articulate his ideas visually, his experimental engagement with the technique also came to shape the way he theorised the blots. Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that his idiosyncratic use of sugarlift aquatint facilitated Cozens's gradual shift towards a more radically abstract conception of the blot.

The fourth chapter returns to the theoretical context of blotting by situating the technique within shifting theories and practices of invention. It considers blotting as a departure from early modern theories of intellectual invention that rely on the trope of *ut pictura poesis*, and, instead, posits it as a practice of pictorial composition. While intellectual invention regulated a painting's narrative subject matter, pictorial composition emphasised its formal arrangement and visual order. Pulling together ideas developed across the previous chapters—the concept of ideas as images, the intertwined nature of theory and practice in the development of Cozens's thought, and the importance of printmaking to the emergence of Cozens's abstraction—the chapter argues that, in blotting, a new way of understanding images emerges: one that emphasises

visuality and pictoriality, and one that clearly distinguishes images as a semiotic system that is fundamentally different from text.

Taken together, the chapters offer not just a new interpretation of Cozens's remarkable œuvre but, by applying the concept of artisanal epistemology (the idea of making as a mode of thinking), they provide a case study for future research on the theoretical potential of prints and printmaking in shaping art-theoretical debates.



A blot printed in linocut by the author, 2020.
After Alexander Cozens, 1786.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is about a very unusual way of making images: Alexander Cozens's technique of blotting. A 'blot' is a quick dash of ink on paper that maps out a basic composition and that can be refined into a more finished landscape image later on. The purpose is to free the artist's mind from the details of the landscape, and to bring into focus the bigger picture instead. It is not dissimilar to the way my supervisors—Prof. Hanneke Grootenboer and Prof. Geoffrey Batchen—encouraged me to write this thesis: quickly sketching out a first draft, worrying about the details later. Rather than listening to them, and Cozens, I foolishly followed the multitude of eighteenth-century drawing masters who insisted that all the details be delineated precisely before they are put together to form a larger composition. If I have learned anything in the process, it is that writing is much easier when you start with a blot. My foremost thanks, thus, is to my supervisors who encouraged me to blot and whose unwavering support saw me through the process of researching and writing this thesis. I am especially grateful to Hanneke for her probing yet supportive questions that made this a better thesis than I would have been able to write otherwise.

I would also like to thank Kim Sloan for her generosity and kindness in sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm for all things Cozens with me. Kim supported me as a master's student when I first became interested in Cozens, and later shared her unparalleled knowledge of British drawings with me when I was the Anne Christopherson Fellow at the British Museum. Her guidance showed me the value of looking alongside thinking. In this thesis, I have attempted to combine my theoretical interests with the more object-centred empiricism that governs the print room, paying close attention to how theory and practice intersect and inform each other. It is a privilege that, in January 2024, I was able to follow in Kim's footsteps as the Curator of British Drawings at the British Museum.

The bulk of this thesis was written during my time as the Getty Paper Project fellow at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and after taking up post at the British Museum. I thank my colleagues at both institutions for their generous support during this time. I am especially grateful to Hugo Chapman, Mark McDonald, Connie McPhee, Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, as well as my fellow Met fellows Danielle Canter, Olivia Dill, and Joseph Henry. In New York, I also thank Armin Kunz for his advice on print-related matters, but more so for his friendship and Rhenish sense of humour. Equally, I would not have gotten through the process of writing this thesis alongside my full-time work at The Met and the British Museum without my brilliant writing partners Megan Metcalf and Anya Perse.

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The AHRC's International Placement Scheme allowed me to spend five productive months at the Yale Center for British Art, whose unique intellectual environment provided the time,

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Among my friends, the late Nicholas Stogdon deserves special mention. A scholar and collector, Nick's knowledge of prints was equalled only by few. He was generous and kind and always enthusiastic in his support of younger scholars. It was a great shock when Nick died unexpectedly in Spring 2024, almost exactly five years after we met.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My father, my brother and sister-in-law, as well as my nephews and niece have all supported me in their own way. I thank Dr Sean Breslin for his love and support, but especially his patience and sacrifice. Above all, however, I want to thank my mother, Janet Zanier Pitcher, who is a model of determination and unfaltering fortitude, and to whom I dedicate this thesis in admiration, gratitude, and love.

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Introduction

A wide expanse opens before our eyes (fig. 1). Interwoven patches of dark and light zigzag into the distance. To the left, close to the foreground, parallel brushstrokes create a rippled, watery surface. Further right, the ground seems more solid. Here, alternating sections of deep black ink, blank paper, and a brownish-grey middle tone cut into each other. Staggered one behind the other, they suggest a slow ascent into the background where a darkly inked hill rises gently on the right and slopes off abruptly towards the left.

Looking closer, we see the dark grey and brown ink pooling and smudging, bleeding into the lighter fissures. Throughout the image, different tones are layered to evoke depth and volume. These layers are set against the lines and dabs that structure the image by marking its planes. The lines and dabs are crisper than the washed tonal layers and rendered in thick ink that appears somehow sticky. Beyond the hilly horizon, the sky is divided into a lighter zone to the right and a darker one to the left. An evenly shaded blanket of clouds is animated by small openings to the top and patchy hatches to the bottom. It seems as though the light is just about to break through from behind the clouds.

Zooming out again, we note that the sheet on which this view unfolds is pasted onto a paper mount and framed with four rectangular pen lines, the innermost band of which is filled with a solid grey wash. In the lower left corner, the mount is signed in the artist's hand. The signature identifies this imagined view as a work by the British landscape painter and drawing master Alexander Cozens (1717–86). While this technique of mounting watercolours is typical for Cozens, and indeed was common practice in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the work itself occupies a somewhat unusual position in the œuvre of this artist.¹ Cozens—a well-known figure in the history of eighteenth-century British art, but less so beyond—worked mainly as a drawing master, teaching the sons and daughters of the wealthy upper and middle classes how to draw, paint, and etch landscape images. He also painted and exhibited landscapes in both oil and ink wash and wrote several art treatises and drawing manuals. Most of his exhibited paintings in oil are untraced, but over five-hundred ink wash landscapes, drawings, and sketches, as well as his notebooks and publications, survive in public and private collections across the United Kingdom and North America. The landscape just described, however, is unlike most of Cozens's other works. Though iconographically consistent with the rest of his œuvre—pooling smudges

¹ On the display and framing of watercolours, see Jane Bayard, *Works of Splendor and Imagination: The Exhibition Watercolor, 1770–1870*, Exh. Cat. (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1981), 26–27; and Pippa Mason, 'The Framing and Display of Watercolours', in *Watercolours from Leeds City Art Gallery: One Hundred Watercolours from the Collections of Leeds City Art Galleries* (Leeds: Leeds City Art Galleries, 1995), 28–36.

of ink and layered brushstrokes create a view that is as desolate as its finish is rough—the work’s technique is unusual. The richly inked black lines and dabs that structure the image are printed. In fact, what at first glance appears like one of Cozens’s many ink wash drawings isn’t a drawing at all. It is a touched-up print; a hybrid, first printed, then drawn.

An engraved number 16 in the upper right corner identifies the print as plate sixteen from Cozens’s best-known treatise, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, published in 1786 (fig. 2).² Comparing the two images, the plate looks emptier than the touched-up version, yet it appears also less desolate. Tiny flecks of ink punctuate the image with a kind of flickering restlessness. The lines and dabs which previously created a sense of solidity now appear unstable, as if a nervous tremor had guided the artist’s hand. We can still identify this image as a landscape; but the absence of interwoven washes and the succession they suggest makes this an altogether more difficult task. The washes and smudges that Cozens added to the print create depth and dimension. Thus, they transform the print’s two-dimensional net of lines, dabs, and flecks into a receding vista, allowing the landscape to unfurl in three dimensions, and into the background, before the viewer’s eyes. It is through the additions of the brush that the abstract marks of the print become intelligible. Meaning emerges from the collaborative effort of printed lines and added washes.

Only three other examples of touched-up prints by Cozens are known today, making them somewhat atypical of the artist’s work.³ However, they draw attention to what I argue is an important but previously overlooked aspect of Cozens’s work. Their hybridity reveals a productive interaction between different media and techniques and invites the viewer to look for similar instances of interaction in other areas of Cozens’s practice and thought. The printed lines and added washes prompt us to ask: what function and meaning did different media have in Cozens’s practice and theoretical writings? How did they come to interact? Did they influence each other, and how? And how did such interactions impact the development of Cozens’s artistic practice as well as his theoretical understanding and rationalisation of it?

Visiting any prints and drawings study room and going through the solander boxes of Cozens’s works reveals that throughout his career the artist experimented with a wide range of

² The *New Method* bears no publication date but has traditionally been dated to 1785. A recently discovered publication notice, however, clarifies that the treatise came out only a year later. See *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 10 April 1786; quoted in Susan Sloman, ‘A Complete Copy of Alexander Cozens’s *An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landscips, Intended for Students in the Art*, and Sample Designs for Cozens’s *Treatise on Perspective and Rules for Shading by Invention*’ (Unpublished manuscript, 25 July 2018), 6. I thank Susan Sloman for sharing her research with me.

³ One is at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 06.1042.17. The other two entered a private collection after being sold at Christie’s as a pair of drawings. They have since been identified as touched-up prints; see Sloman, ‘Cozens’s *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*’, 1. For the sale, see Christie’s, London, 7 July 2010, lot 374, <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5334398> [last accessed 21 October 2023].

media, including drawing in graphite and pen and ink, painting in oil and ink wash, and intaglio printmaking.⁴ Some of his earliest surviving works, created during a two-year stay in Italy during the mid-1740s, betray an acute interest in different graphic media and show the artist trying out different techniques and styles—some linear, some painterly—to explore the varied aesthetic effects he could generate with them. Not dissimilar to the touched-up print, in several works of that period distinctions between media blur: drawings employ the graphic syntax of printmaking, whereas etchings are hatched as if they were drawings or on-the-spot sketches.⁵ In this thesis, I demonstrate that such interactions or moments of blur can be found throughout Cozens's practice as an artist, teacher, and writer about art, and that they shaped not only his artistic practice but also his theorisation of it.

A notebook from the same stay in Rome, for example, shows that Cozens was deeply interested in understanding and systematising the processes that created the various effects he was exploring.⁶ Step-by-step lists are jotted down alongside sketches, obscuring the before and after. It becomes clear here that making and systematising (or theorising) unfolded in parallel. This is also visible in the *New Method*, which forms the focus of my thesis. Here, the printed illustrations enabled Cozens to articulate more clearly the theoretical ideas discussed in the text. Moreover, the process of making the prints and his engagement with different printmaking techniques, I argue, guided his theorisation of the processes of artistic creation the text presented. Printmaking and other media, techniques, and practices, as well as the intermedial relationship between them, afforded him an epistemic framework within which the theorisation of his practice took shape.⁷ Making, for Cozens, was an epistemological operation.

Taking Cozens as a case study, this thesis raises broader questions about the relationships between different media, and between theory and practice, in eighteenth-century art and artistic debates. The intermediality of Cozens's œuvre—both in practice and thought—serves as an entry point into debates about the relationship between image and text, between prints and other media, and about the role of practice in the theorisation of art. Against prevailing models of art theory that tended to separate practice from theory in order to intellectualise and ennoble the work of the painter, Cozens's work betrays an acute understanding of the ways in which making

⁴ This experience can be recreated digitally by browsing the online collections of, for example, the [British Museum](#), [Tate](#), the [Yale Center for British Art](#), or [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#).

⁵ See for example at the British Museum: *Landscape with rocks and stream*, pen and black ink on paper, 122 x 189 mm, 1746, [1867,1012.15](#) and *Castel Sant'Angelo*, etching printed on paper, 270 x 373 mm, re-published 1801 by J.P. Thompson, [1852,0214.78](#). Andrew Wilton suggests that *Castel Sant'Angelo* may have been etched *en plein air*, see Wilton, *The Art of Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, Exh. Cat. (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1980), cat. 3. He also discusses the attribution of the print.

⁶ See Yale Center for British Art, [B1978.43.166](#).

⁷ I rely here on Pamela H. Smith's concept of 'artisanal epistemology', which I discuss in detail below. For making as an epistemic framework, see also Christina Neilson, *Practice and Theory in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Verrocchio and the Epistemology of Making Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

and thinking are not just linked but inextricably intertwined. As such, Cozens's ideas present a profound departure from the ways in which early modern theorists imagined theory and practice to interact. Ultimately, it reveals the incongruity between the ways in which artists made art and the ways in which theorists, often artists themselves, conceptualised it.

A New Method

The thesis takes as its focus Cozens's *New Method*—the 1786 publication from which the source image for the touched-up print was taken. In this publication, Cozens presented a technique of designing landscape images he called blotting. The *New Method* invites its readers to daube and smudge ink onto paper, moving a thick brush swiftly across the sheet to create what Cozens calls an 'artificial blot'⁸ (fig. 3). The purpose of the blot is to map out the basic structure of a composition while leaving out the finer details. The blot is the first of three steps in the *New Method's* process of image creation. Like the print of plate 16, it requires further touch-ups and refinements to become fully legible as a landscape composition. In a second step, the blot is worked into a more clearly defined sketch (fig. 4). To do this, a sheet of tracing paper is attached to the blot. The artist then defines the blot spatially by dividing it into foreground, middle distance, and background, tracing the outlines of the blot whose smudges shine through the semi-transparent paper. Once the spatial structure of the landscape is defined, vegetation and other geographical features are added. The third and final step sees the sketch transferred to yet another sheet of paper or canvas where it can be further refined into a finished ink wash or oil painting (fig. 5).⁹

This was unusual in several ways. Over the course of the eighteenth century, drawing had become an important and widespread cultural practice. From around mid-century, it became an integral part of a young person's education among the upper and middle classes, and the number of drawing masters in London increased rapidly. While it was still quite rare to learn how to draw in the 1750s, by the 1780s it was widespread, and by 1800 learning to draw had become ubiquitous, before being made compulsory for all schools in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Students learned to draw by copying illustrations in drawing manuals, small books of

⁸ Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Composition of Landscape* (London, 1786), 6; reproduced in Paul Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens. With a Reprint of Alexander Cozens' A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (London: Black, 1952), 165–87 (without plates). The plates are reproduced fully in Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache: Introduction à la 'Nouvelle méthode' d'Alexander Cozens* (Montélimar: Edition du limons, 1990), 465–84, pl. 1–28.

⁹ See Rule III–V in *ibid.*, 23–31.

¹⁰ In 1800, Joseph Farrington recounted that in 1754 there had been only around five or six drawing masters, while by 1800 there were hundreds. See Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 23. On the rise of drawing instruction, see also Kim Sloan, 'The Teaching of Non-Professional Artists in Eighteenth-Century England' (London, Westfield College, University of London, 1986).

prints, and the works of their teachers until they were ready to draw directly from a model or from nature (e.g. a figure, a still-life, or a landscape). Repeated copying until an illustration was drawn correctly honed the students' skill in holding their pen or pencil, taught them to draw straight lines as well as curves and circles, and, ultimately, prepared them to assemble these individual elements to form figures, animals, or landscape scenery.¹¹ With blotting, Cozens followed a fundamentally different purpose. Encouraging students to use a thick brush to daube and smudge ink on paper, the blotting technique departed from these prevailing pedagogies of art. The technique was intended to augment students' abilities to compose their own original landscape designs, without worrying too much about correct drawing of the details, which could be supplied later. In this sense, the *New Method* is more accurately described as a manual of composition or invention rather than a manual of drawing. According to Cozens, drawing was a technical skill that anyone could learn with practice and patience. Composing original—i.e. imaginary—landscapes, by contrast, was a more difficult task that required artistic genius—or the right method, such as blotting.¹²

In his departure from traditional teaching methodologies, Cozens received a somewhat mixed reception. He was ridiculed as the 'Blotmaster-General to the town'¹³ and blotting was described as a 'peculiar'¹⁴ process. In his history of watercolour painting in England, the engraver and illustrator William Henry Pyne (1769–1824) criticised methods like blotting, and the drawing masters who employed them, for what he perceived as the detrimental effects they were having on the state of landscape painting in Britain. Pyne dismissed techniques like blotting as 'quackery', claiming that they had led to a 'perversion of style' and the widespread degeneration of British art. Techniques like smudging, sponging, and blotting had replaced 'correctness of drawing' and 'precision of touch' with 'incoherency and scrawling'. Students were taught from the 'ending' of an artistic education, with drawing masters 'pretending to teach them composition, light, shade, colouring, and effect, without the previous study of drawing a correct

¹¹ Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters, c.1600–1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000); Scott Wilcox et al., *The Line of Beauty: British Drawings and Watercolors of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2001). See especially Kim Sloan's chapter "'The Draughtsman's Assistant': Eighteenth-Century Drawing Manuals', in Wilcox et al., *Line of Beauty*, 186–91. For European drawing books, see Maria Heilmann et al., eds., *Punkt, Punkt, Komma, Strich: Zeichenbücher in Europa, ca. 1525–1925*, Episteme der Linien (Passau: Dietmar Klinger Verlag, 2014); Maria Heilmann et al., eds., *Lernt Zeichnen! Techniken zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1525–1925*, Episteme der Linien (Passau: Dietmar Klinger Verlag, 2015). On drawing as a cultural technique, see Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). See also Susan Owens, *The Art of Drawing: British Masters and Methods since 1600* (London: V&A Publishing, 2013), chaps 1 and 5.

¹² Cozens, *New Method*, 14.

¹³ Edward Dayes, *The Works of the Late Edward Dayes: Containing an Excursion through the Principal Parts of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, with Illustrative Notes by E.W. Brayley; Essays on Painting; Instructions for Drawing and Coloring Landscapes; and Professional Sketches of Modern Artists* (London, 1805).

¹⁴ Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters, Who Have Resided Or Been Born in England: With Critical Remarks on Their Productions* (London: Leigh and Sotheby, 1808), 119.

outline or a single lesson on perspective, or any one grammatical trait of the art.’ Comparing students’ skills in music with their skills in painting, Pyne lamented: ‘the half-accomplished sylphs play like angels, and paint, or rather smudge, like chimney sweeps.’¹⁵

While this critique was long taken as evidence of a broader rejection of methods like blotting among contemporaries, research has shown that, by the end of the eighteenth century, such techniques had become increasingly popular.¹⁶ It was precisely their ubiquity that irked critics like Pyne. Shortly after Cozens’s death, in 1794, Ferdinand Becker (fl.1770s–1825), a drawing master in Bath, advertised lessons in landscape drawing using ‘a new mode to facilitate the art of drawing and assist natural genius by blots’, which he claimed to have invented himself.¹⁷ Similarly, in 1805 Mary Gartside (1755–1819) published a method of painting flowers with blots she had been using in her teaching.¹⁸ To students, blotting and similar methods offered an easy and playful way of creating landscape compositions in broad brushstrokes. Doing so would have presented a welcome alternative to tedious hours of copying from prints and drawing manuals.¹⁹ As Kim Sloan has argued, ‘drawing master[s] had to make it fun and easy to learn to draw’ if they wanted to attract and retain students.²⁰ It was precisely this change in the way students learned to draw, from copying to composing, she argues, that led to the ever-increasing popularity of drawing lessons and amateur art practice in the second half of the eighteenth century.²¹ That blotting was indeed meant to be fun is also evident from the *New Method’s* recommendation to practice blotting as a form of amusement, making several blots at a time whenever the artist feels inspired.²² Similarly, in another publication, *The Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head* (1778), Cozens hoped that his instructions ‘may be entertaining to the lovers of art, and perhaps not unedifying to practitioners.’²³ Blotting was popular because it was a fun and entertaining activity. Not dissimilar to other artistic pastimes, like cutting silhouettes or pressing flowers, it

¹⁵ For Pyne’s criticism, see Sloan, *A Noble Art*, chap. 5. See also Ephraim Hardcastle (William Henry Pyne), ‘The Rise and Progress of Water Colour Painting’, *Somerset House Gazette, and Literary Museum; or Weekly Miscellany of Fine Arts, Antiquities and Literary Chat* 1, no. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 (1823): 65–67, 81–84, 97–99, 113–14, 129–33, 145–46, 161–63, 177–79, 193–95.

¹⁶ Kim Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens: The Poetry of Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, 91–94.

¹⁷ Sloan, ‘Teaching Non-Professional Artists’, 161 and appendix A.

¹⁸ Mary Gartside, *An Essay on Light and Shade, on Colours, and on Composition in General* (London, 1805); *An Essay on a New Theory of Colours, and on Composition in General* (London, 1808); Alexandra Loske, ‘Mary Gartside: A Female Colour Theorist in Georgian England’, *Journal of Art History and Museum Studies* 14 (2010): 17–30; Raphael Rosenberg, *Turner – Hugo – Moreau. Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, Exh. Cat. Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle (München: Hirmer, 2007), 47–53; Sloan, ‘Teaching Non-Professional Artists’, 240. Like Cozens, Gartside struggled to print her colourful blots and thus hand-coloured all printed copies of her treatises.

¹⁹ Sloan, ‘Teaching Non-Professional Artists’, 239–42.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 239. For a critical discussion of the term ‘amateur’, see Hannah Lyons, ‘“Exercising the ART as a TRADE”: British Women Printmakers, c.1750–c.1850’ (Ph.D., London, Birkbeck, University of London, 2021), chap. 5.

²² Cozens, *New Method*, 24.

²³ Alexander Cozens, *The Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head* (London, 1778), 1.

appealed to an increasingly bourgeois culture of home entertainment and parlour games among the growing middle classes.²⁴ Ultimately, Pyne's criticism and ridicule should be considered a response to these methods' success rather than a reflection of how Cozens's contemporaries thought about them.²⁵

The Theory of Blotting

What further distinguished the *New Method* from other contemporary drawing manuals was the fact that it theorised the blotting technique. Where most manuals presented practical, step-by-step instructions or offered illustrations for copying, Cozens put forward an ambitious and unusual theory of blotting, proposing, as noted, a method of invention rather than drawing. Across twenty pages of discursive text, ten pages of step-by-step rules, and forty-three illustrated plates, the author explained how he had developed the technique, what exactly a blot was, how it was made, how it could be incorporated into the artistic process, and how an artist might benefit from using it. This was complemented with a discourse on the role of blotting in artistic invention which embedded the technique within wider contemporary debates about cognitive psychology, empirical epistemology, and art theory.

The purpose of the technique, the reader learns in the introduction, was to stimulate the artist's imagination in inventing original compositions of landscape that adhered to prevalent concepts of ideal beauty based on the principle of judicious imitation. Such a landscape could not be achieved by drawing directly from nature in pursuit of topographical accuracy.²⁶ Instead, ideal beauty was realised by creating general representations of nature, i.e. abstractions that stripped individual nature of its particular characteristics to reveal its underlying general or ideal form. In its general character, ideal beauty was equated with universal truth in so far as it reflected God's plan of Creation. In depicting this ideal beauty, art thus had the capacity to inspire viewers to contemplate universal truth, and thereby elevate their minds and fulfil its humanistic purpose for the moral edification of society at large.²⁷

The prominent place Cozens affords to this discussion of the aesthetic purpose of blotting in the genre of ideal landscape painting right at the beginning of the text indicates the importance these ideas held for him. While blotting was a popular, and, towards the end of the century,

²⁴ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 92; Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 41.

²⁵ Sloan, *A Noble Art*, 147–52. Greg Smith has moreover shown that the criticism levelled against techniques like blotting also stemmed from an underlying anxiety about the status of watercolour painting within an ever-shifting artistic domain as well as the social and economic status of the watercolour painter within a hierarchy of media sanctioned by the Royal Academy that regarded watercolour as inferior and commercial. See Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760–1824* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

²⁶ Cozens also warned against copying the works of the old masters, as I discuss in Chapter One.

²⁷ See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of these ideas.

increasingly widespread technique, the theory of blotting proposed in the *New Method* also demonstrates the high ambition Cozens had for his publication. With it, he hoped to traverse the at times fluid but generally disparate worlds of amateur education and the more exalted spheres of academic art theory as it was being debated and practiced in institutions like the newly founded Royal Academy of Arts.²⁸ Indeed, in his conception of painting for the public good, Cozens aligned himself closely with the political ideology of the Academy's president, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), who, in his programmatic *Discourses*, had defined the societal function of art in exactly the same terms. To Reynolds, ideal beauty reflected God-given, universal truths whose contemplation in a painting was the artist's contribution to an improved and moral populace, following the doctrine of civic humanism.²⁹ As with the *Principles of Beauty* mentioned earlier, Cozens's goal for the *New Method* thus was to appeal to amateurs and professionals alike. By couching his technique in terms of 'high art', to use an anachronistic term, Cozens hoped to legitimise theoretically a technique most readers would have associated with the polite drawing room rather than the artist's studio or academic lecture hall.

Cozens's broad agreement with contemporary aesthetic and art theoretical debates, both in the *New Method* and in his artistic œuvre, has been explored in detail over the past forty years. In 1986, Kim Sloan was first to discuss blotting as part of Cozens's concerns for the theory of ideal landscape painting as it informed his practice as a landscape painter and teacher.³⁰ Her analysis was expanded upon by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn's extensive study on the *New Method's* intellectual dimensions, in which the author linked the treatise to prevalent theories of invention, academic idealism, and the role of genius in artistic creation.³¹ Meanwhile, Charles Cramer focused more narrowly on the ways in which the *New Method*—like most British thinking about art in the eighteenth century—relied on the empirical epistemology of John Locke (1632–1704).

²⁸ This ambition is further evidenced by the fact that Cozens exhibited there regularly and applied twice, but ultimately failed, to be elected for associate membership: in 1778, when he won only two of a total of forty-two votes, divided among nineteen candidates, and a year later, when his vote count increased to three out of forty-one votes, divided among eighteen candidates. See Richard Stephens, 'The Minute Books of the Royal Academy under Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1768–92', *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 81 (2019): 154, 163. For Cozens's exhibition record, see Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work, from 1769 to 1904* (London, 1905), 188; idem., *The Society of Artists of Great Britain 1760–1791, The Free Society of Artists 1761–1783: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from the Foundation of the Societies to 1791* (London: Bell and Sons, 1907), 66. On the precarious status of watercolourists and drawing masters in the RA more broadly, see Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist*, 16–17, also chaps. 2 and 3.

²⁹ Reynolds develops this view across several of his *Discourses*, but it is discussed most thoroughly in *Discourse IX*. See Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

³⁰ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*. She argues, however, that although Cozens's œuvre is to be situated in this context, audiences likely would have been more interested in the practical applications of blotting rather than its theoretical dimensions.

³¹ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*. See also Alexander Cozens, *A new method of assisting the invention in drawing original compositions of landscape* (1785), ed. Paola Lavezzari, *Fonti per la storia dell'arte* (Treviso: Libreria Editrice Canova, 1981). Lavezzari includes a critique of Lebensztejn's psychological and, at times, anachronistic analysis. Sloan, too, is sceptical of the relevance to contemporary readers of the aesthetic and psychological origins of the blotting technique as explored by Lebensztejn; see *Poetry of Landscape*, 83.

Cramer emphasises, for example, Locke's distinction of particular and general ideas and shows how that distinction mirrored the difference between particular and general nature. These nuances informed contemporary landscape painting in its pursuit of general, idealised views of nature over the depiction of topographical sites. As such, blotting, to him, is a 'technique of generalization' consistent with the intellectual and aesthetic aims of British academic classicism.³² Taken together, these scholars present Cozens not as the 'Blotmaster-general' whose students 'smudged like chimney sweeps' but as 'a moral landscape painter, an early, extremely successful exponent of the sublime, and an important writer on the theory and practice of art,' to use Kim Sloan's words.³³ Ultimately, blotting was conceived of as not just a fun exercise for amateur artists but as 'an aid to painting in the grand style with the eventual aim of improving the progress of humankind.'³⁴

And yet, although I principally agree with the conclusions that have resulted from these attempts of locating the *New Method's* theoretical commitments within their historic and intellectual contexts, in my view, there is a distinctness about blotting that has been glossed over by earlier scholars. Take, for example, Cozens's remarkable evocation of chance. Throughout the text, he repeatedly emphasises the part accidental, part intentional nature of the blot. 'An artificial blot', he writes, 'is a production of chance, with a small degree of design'. The 'attention of the performer must be employed on the whole, or the general form of the composition, and upon this only; whilst the subordinate parts are left to the casual motion of the hand and the brush.'³⁵ Thus, while the 'general form of the composition' is intended, the smaller, subordinate parts are accidental, caused by casual movement of the hand (i.e. movement that is *not* directed by the mind) and the material agency of brush, ink, and paper. These smaller, accidental parts, moreover, are entirely 'rude and unmeaning'.³⁶ In their abstract meaninglessness they hold a suggestive potential that serves to inspire the artist's imagination in interpreting the blot as a landscape formation. As in the touched-up print mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, meaning is created in a secondary, interpretive act that transforms abstract shapes into representational landscapes.

Cozens justifies this partial reliance on accident by referencing Leonardo da Vinci. In the *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo described the imaginative potential of mouldy stains on old walls and of the hidden faces, animals, battle scenes or even whole landscapes that could be

³² Charles A. Cramer, 'Alexander Cozens's *New Method*: The Blot and General Nature', *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (1997): 112–29. He also discusses blotting's reliance on principles of associationism.

³³ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁵ Cozens, *New Method*, 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7. On the concept of 'material agency', see 34–40.

discovered in them when looking closely. Both in the case of Leonardo's stains and Cozens's blots, accidental shapes suggest representational images to the artist in search of inspiration. As I discuss in Chapter One, readers of the *New Method* would have recognised its title as a direct quotation from an oft-quoted passage in the *Treatise*, in which Leonardo presented the potential of chance images as 'a new method of assisting the invention'.³⁷ This passage is quoted in full later in Cozens's text.

In an influential article on the intellectual history of chance images, Horst Janson reveals a longer European tradition that recognised the suggestive potential of abstract shapes in chance images and images made by nature, such as clouds or the patterns and striations of stones.³⁸ Within this trajectory, that extends back into antiquity and forward into the mid-twentieth century (when Janson was writing his article), Leonardo and Cozens are just two examples of a wider fascination with natural or accidental images. However, despite their similarities and despite this wider history, Cozens's approach departs significantly both from Leonardo's 'new method' and other instances of accidental images. Whereas Leonardo relies on the purely accidental encounter with mouldy stains, Cozens emphasises that one of the great advantages of the *New Method* over the *Treatise* is its capacity for creating accidental blots on purpose and with intention. Indeed, whereas the other examples discussed by Janson, and re-examined by Lebensztejn, rely on the accidental occurrence of chance images, the *New Method* aims to systematise and harness chance into an intentional and controlled artistic process. Cozens explains that, without the accidental occurrence of mouldy stains, Leonardo's method would fail.³⁹

Cozens's reference to Leonardo likely served to position blotting within a longer tradition of artistic practice and thought and to legitimise the role of chance in the process of blotting by invoking the authority of one of the greatest inventors and artists of all time.⁴⁰ Although the

³⁷ Leonardo da Vinci, *A Treatise of Painting*, quoted in *ibid.*, 5. Without page number.

³⁸ H.W. Janson, 'The "Image Made by Chance" in Renaissance Thought', in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss and Institute for Advanced Study, De Artibus Opuscula, XL (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 254–66. See also Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, chap. 7; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 54–111; Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002). Lebensztejn largely repeats Janson's analysis but updates it with some contemporary examples that harness aleatoric principles in artistic creation. He cites several manuals of musical composition that relied on the rolling of dice to enable amateur musicians to compose their own minuets, marches, and waltzes. One of the most famous among them is Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel*. However, such compositions consist of set pieces of musical motifs that are selected by the cast of the die and then combined into a composition. As such, they are similar not so much to blotting but to popular games like the myriorama or endless landscape. While Cozens had explored such combinatory possibilities of composition in drafts and letters related to an earlier publication, *The Various Species of Landscape*, ca. 1770, this element was not included in the *New Method*. On musical composition, see Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 137. On the myriorama, see Ralph Hyde, 'Myrioramas, Endless Landscapes: The Story of a Craze', *Print Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2004): 403–21.

³⁹ Cozens, *New Method*, 6.

⁴⁰ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 114–15.

passage was widely known, it is unclear that his contemporaries were as enthusiastic about the aesthetic potential of accidental shapes as Cozens. In fact, although Janson outlines an important intellectual background for understanding the role of chance in blotting, such historical precedents provide little insight into how chance and accident in artistic creation were viewed in the more immediate context of British academic theory of the mid- and late eighteenth century. Indeed, in the *Discourses*, Reynolds had made it clear that the creative act should ‘always [be] clearly deliberate and conscious, operating according to a rational and discoverable pattern.’⁴¹ Invention was conditioned by the erudition and industry of the artist, not the suggestive potential of accidental shapes. Chance had no place in, and in fact directly contradicted, the academic art theory that otherwise formed the contours of Cozens’s aesthetic thought. As such, it highlights that, although Cozens drew heavily from a wide range of theoretical ideas in formulating the *New Method*, his theory of blotting ultimately reformulated these ideas in idiosyncratic ways. To my knowledge, no other comparable manual of drawing within the academic paradigm utilised chance in the same intentional and peculiar way as the *New Method*.

Another surprising and, in my view, distinctive aspect of the *New Method* is the remarkable formalism Cozens ascribes to the blots. At several points in the text, he defines the blot as an abstract configuration of form. The blot presents ‘a hint, or crude resemblance of the whole effect of a picture’.⁴² Its purpose is to give ‘an idea of the masses of light and shade, as well as of the forms, contained in a finished composition.’⁴³ Following Cramer, this emphasis on rude masses can be understood as part of the blot’s function as a ‘technique of generalization’. As noted earlier, writers like Reynolds mobilised Lockean distinctions between particular and general nature, as well as concepts of abstraction, to theorise the intellectual aims of their art. A painting was to depict general rather than particular nature to stimulate the contemplation of general ideas and universal truths. As a technique of generalisation, the blot helped to map out a landscape image in broad strokes, indicating masses of light and dark, which would then be worked up in iterative steps of refinement. The ‘classical tenor’ of this process, according to Cramer, inheres in Cozens’s emphasis on the ‘general whole’. As such, in its formalist abstraction, the blot represents the very rough and general idea of a landscape composition rather than a particular topographic site. Generality of ideas thus was mirrored in generality of

⁴¹ Robert R. Wark, ‘Introduction’, in *Discourses on Art*, by Joshua Reynolds, ed. Robert R. Wark, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), xx. Towards the end of *Discourse II*, Reynolds lists the ‘fanciful images that are sometimes seen in the fire, or are accidentally sketched upon a discoloured wall’ among the many sources of inspiration an artist might fill their mind with, as observed by Leonardo. To him, they rank just below ‘bad pictures’, however, and are not intended to aid the process of invention. See *Discourses on Art*, II, ll. 366–80. Later, in *Discourse XIV*, he describes Gainsborough’s gestural facture as seemingly being rather ‘the effect of accident than design’ (ll. 357–74).

⁴² Cozens, *New Method*, 8.

⁴³ Ibid.

form. Similarly, to Reynolds, the generality of the idea on an intellectual level was mirrored in its formal rendition or visualisation on canvas. Emphasis was to be placed on the general forms of the whole rather than the details: ‘The detail of particulars, which does not assist the expression of the main characteristic [sic], is worse than useless, it is mischievous, as it dissipates the attention, and draws it from the principal point.’⁴⁴ According to Cramer, it is this emphasis on generality, its ability to draw attention to the principal point or general whole, both in terms of content and form, that renders the blots an expression or tool of ‘classical ideality’.⁴⁵ Thus, although their emphasis on rude masses make the blots sound and look rather modern, and although it seemingly contradicts the polished and rational linearity that might be expected of the academic classicism that the *New Method* broadly adhered to, blotting, according to Cramer, can nevertheless be situated squarely within British academic classicism.

Although I find Cramer’s interpretation of blotting as a technique of generalisation compelling, I am sceptical that it can fully account for the blot’s ‘odd formal appearance’.⁴⁶ Indeed, what Reynolds imagined as a composition’s general whole was very different from the ‘rude and unmeaning’ abstraction and formalism of the blots. For Reynolds, generalisation implied the rough sketching of a generalised form. Cozens, by contrast, embraced pictorial abstraction more fully. To him, the blot is an abstract pictorial structure: ‘an assemblage of dark shapes or masses made with ink upon a piece of paper, and likewise of light ones produced by the paper being left blank.’⁴⁷ It unfolds as a duality of abstract ‘shapes or masses’ of dark and light, which together form a unified whole. The image thus derives its logic not from a delineation or figure, set off against the picture ground (not even if it’s a very rough sketch), but from the interplay of light and dark, of positive and negative form unfolding as one unified whole across the flat surface of the picture plane. It is unclear how Reynolds’s generality could accommodate this more radically formalist pictorial abstraction.

Perhaps because he is unable to fully resolve this issue, Cramer proposes to shift attention away from the blot as a ‘final formal product’. Instead, he focuses on ‘the blot as a stage in the overall process’, at the end of which stands a landscape painting that is traditional both in its intellectual aims and its form.⁴⁸ However, and somewhat surprisingly, Cramer remains unclear about how, precisely, the blot functions in this process and in the act of invention. How does it, for example, differ from a sketch? A generalised landscape could easily be achieved with a rough sketch without risking particularities to interfere in the creative process, as recommended by

⁴⁴ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, XI, ll. 53–60; quoted in Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’, 120.

⁴⁵ Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’, 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 7.

⁴⁸ Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’, 114.

Reynolds. A blot is not technically necessary. What is it, then, that the blot achieves that the sketch cannot? I will return to this point later, but, for now, these questions highlight the incompleteness of Cramer's analysis. Ultimately, although Cramer successfully broadens our understanding of blotting by relating it to questions of epistemology, general nature, and academic classicism, the 'odd form' is not fully accounted for in terms of its role in the artistic process he aims to illuminate.⁴⁹ Whereas, for Cramer, the blots' formalism is simply an aftereffect of generalisation, I argue that it is the creative and cognitive mechanism on which Cozens's technique of invention is fundamentally based.

As stated, I principally agree with the different attempts of understanding the theory of blotting through the lens of contemporaneous art and art theory, as they have been advanced by scholars like Sloan, Lebensztejn, and Cramer. And yet, the blots' partial reliance on chance and their commitment to formal abstraction suggest a distinctness that seems to have been glossed over in previous scholarship. By drawing on precedents and comparative examples, scholars have widened the contextual framework in which blotting took shape. However, this approach risks rendering the *New Method* simply a product of its 'contexts' rather than the choices of its author—as if Cozens was merely responding to these contexts rather than being an active participant in the process of shaping them.⁵⁰ In my view, this approach has obscured the originality of Cozens's ideas. Although the *New Method* certainly drew heavily from a wide range of contemporary ideas, it also, I would argue, reformulated them quite radically and from a highly original perspective.

One of the reasons scholars have focused on blotting's 'historical anchorage', as Cramer puts it, was to counter a phalanx of anachronistic assessments of blotting that foregrounded the seeming modernity of Cozens's evocation of both chance and abstraction. 'Cozens's work, it seems, is so theoretically and formally suggestive', Cramer observes, 'that at any moment, with or perhaps without the intention of the art historian, it evades the context of its own culture and turns up in other centuries and other places.'⁵¹ Indeed, the blots have been compared to the gestural drippings of Abstract Expressionism, modernist exploitations of chance and Surrealist automatism, and even Chinese ink painting.⁵² Meanwhile, the process of interpreting ink splashes

⁴⁹ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁰ Lebensztejn, for examples, is not just disappointed but 'disturbed' by how easily the blots' formalism, abstraction, and accidental nature—which seemed so unusual at first—can be integrated into, and explained with, contemporary aesthetic thought. See *L'art de la tache*, 377.

⁵¹ Cramer, 'Alexander Cozens's *New Method*', 113.

⁵² Laurence Binyon, 'Alexander Cozens and His Influence on English Painting', in *Exhibition of the Herbert Horne Collection of Drawings, with Special Reference to the Works of Alexander Cozens*, ed. Burlington Fine Arts Club, Exh. Cat. (London, 1916), 5; Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 11, 60, 64; Édina Bernard, 'Alexander Cozens (1717-86): Imaginaire, Théorie et Modernité dans l'Art du XVIIIe Siècle en Angleterre', *Etudes Anglaises* 41, no. 4 (1988): 457, who writes that Cozens 'annonce l'art abstrait, le tachisme et même le surréalisme du XXe siècle'. Matthew Gale

as landscape compositions seems reminiscent of early twentieth-century Gestalt psychology and Hermann Rorschach's inkblot test.⁵³ Cramer's move away from the form of the blot to the process of blotting was an attempt to counter such anachronism. And yet, the resulting emphasis on the contemporaneity of blotting, to my mind, has had the effect of foreclosing any investigation of blotting's modernity that moves beyond the superficial and purely phenomenological comparisons with Abstract Expressionism or the Rorschach test.

By contrast, this thesis offers a re-examination of the *New Method* that recognises blotting's debt to prevailing academic thought whilst revealing the ways in which the technique reformulated some of its core ideas. Blotting, I argue, presented not only a new and more abstract method of sketching or drawing; instead, it re-imagined the process of artistic creation and invention in ways that were radically different from how it was conceptualised in academic discourse. Academicians like Reynolds understood invention as an intellectual act in which an idea, usually taken from the accepted canon of classical imagery and subject matter, is formed in the mind and then materialised by drawing on paper or canvas. For Cozens, in contrast, the act of invention takes shape primarily in the material process. While intellectual invention takes subject matter or issues of representation as its starting point, blotting begins with abstract pictorial form and visual order—with the 'ending' of a composition, in Pyne's words. Meaning and interpretation are added only in a secondary step. Thus, implicit to Cozens's re-conception of invention is a different understanding of what an image is and how it is thought to create meaning: by virtue of its medium-specific visuality and pictoriality rather than by taking external subjects or narratives as its guide. What comes to the fore in the blots is what I call the 'self-assertive image', an image that is derived from pictorial and visual concerns, and that severs its relationship to text. An image that is aware of its 'iconic difference' and thus embodies a kind of pictorial turn *avant-le-lettre*.⁵⁴

describes Cozens as 'the blot man', whose 'concern to render assemblages instantaneously, through subconscious thought, in some ways parallels the free association and automatism evident in the works of Surrealist writers and painters, and later Abstract Expressionist artists'. See Gale, "'Watercolour": Alexander Cozens, Aka the Blot Man', 4 May 2011, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/alexander-cozens-118/watercolour-alexander-cozens-aka-blot-man> [last accessed 7 October 2024].

⁵³ Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 6th ed. (London and New York: Phaidon, 2004), 151–58.

⁵⁴ On the concept of iconic difference, see Gottfried Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2017); Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild? Bild und Text* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1995). See also Birgit Richard, 'Gottfried Boehm. Die ikonische Differenz ist eine Grundüberlegung zu der Frage, wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen. Ein Gespräch mit Birgit Richard', *Kunstforum INTERNATIONAL* 190 (2008): 130–40. For English summaries of the central arguments of German *Bildwissenschaft*, including iconic difference, see Horst Bredekamp, 'A Neglected Tradition? Art History as Bildwissenschaft', *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 3 (2003): 418–28; Matthew Rampley, 'Bildwissenschaft: Theories of the Image in German-Language Scholarship', in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley et al., Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 4 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 119–34; David Craven, 'The New German Art History: From Ideological Critique and the Warburg Renaissance to the Bildwissenschaft of the Three

I develop my argument in close conversation with, and by putting into dialogue with each other, the work of Werner Busch and Raphael Rosenberg, two German-speaking scholars whose contributions to the study of blotting have received virtually no reception in the English-speaking literature. This is an unfortunate oversight, especially as they have been careful to balance the emergent modernity of the blots with the goal of historicization. In *Das sentimentalische Bild: Die Krise der Kunst im 18. Jahrhundert und die Geburt der Moderne* (1993), Werner Busch has interpreted Cozens's œuvre as part of wider transformations in eighteenth-century art. Art of this period, he contends, was characterised by an increasingly self-reflexive engagement with its own art historical past and its modes, conventions, and traditions of creating meaning. Against the backdrop of the classical academic tradition, artists became aware of the historicity of their practice and its conditions and possibilities of creating and communicating meaning through the medium of painting. Busch traces this awareness of historical difference across the five classical genres, showing how artists consciously engaged with and, ultimately, transformed the compositional, iconographic, and formal conventions these genres demanded. The result, he argues, was the deconstruction of the classical genres, their traditional hierarchy, and their iconographic and compositional conventions as frameworks of meaning.

In a chapter on landscape painting, Busch demonstrates how new interests in the historical and subjective experience of nature, and the individual's place within it, could not be adequately addressed with the classical norms of the genre. The heroic and pastoral landscapes of the seventeenth century, as exemplified in the works of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, relied on the depiction of classical narratives or idealised landscape typologies to express universal human experiences. By contrast, Busch shows that, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the natural form itself came to be regarded as an expressive carrier of meaning. Cozens's landscapes, for example, were meant to evoke subjective emotive responses in their viewers, not by representing a historical or mythological narrative but by virtue of their authentic rendering of nature and natural phenomena. Although Cozens did not discuss the theory of the sublime in the *New Method*, like Edmund Burke he believed that different natural forms could evoke specific passions or sentiments. The rugged irregularity of mountaintops could be experienced aesthetically as surprise, terror, or melancholy, while a vast and open landscape might inspire the contemplation of public happiness and liberty.⁵⁵ Thus, although Cozens's landscapes were conceived of in adherence to the public function of academic painting, as discussed earlier, the way they achieved its goals marked a decisive break from the classical tradition that was largely still being advocated for in academic discourse.

Bs', *Art in Translation* 6, no. 2 (2014): 129–47.

⁵⁵ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 56.

Importantly, Busch argues that these transformations inhere not simply in an iconographic departure from the canon of classical imagery but that they took shape as a more fundamental deconstruction of what he calls the syntax of painting. Cozens's artistic process, for example, constitutes a disruption of earlier modes of image creation insofar as his landscapes evolve from formal considerations rather than as imitations of visible nature. Following the classical principle of mimesis (or 'imitatio naturae'), painters sought to visually approximate natural forms with pictorial means, for example when drawing from nature. Cozens went the opposite way: his artistic process is one of gradual revision and refinement in which representational form is derived from abstract shapes. As Busch demonstrates, this can be seen in several of Cozens's publications. One example is the diagrammatic renderings of trees and clouds that can be inserted into a landscape composition and whose abstract graphic notations need to be reworked to approximate more naturalistic forms (figs. 6 and 7).⁵⁶ It is also visible in blotting, where abstract shapes attain a more fundamental function. As explained earlier, the blots' abstract marks are themselves meaningless but have the potential to suggest ideas.⁵⁷ Meaning crystallises, not in the act of blotting, but in subsequent steps of interpretive refinement. The production of ideas, Busch stresses, is thus moved into the artistic process itself. In following this procedure, Cozens's practice marks a 'complete break with the classical model of ideas' whereby an idea is formed in the mind and then materialised on paper or canvas.⁵⁸ Busch concludes that 'shifting the production of ideas into the artistic process itself severs once and for all the link between the idea and the classical thematic tradition, be it of a Christian, mythological, or historical nature.'⁵⁹ Ultimately, he identifies, in this break with the classical model, the end of the classical image (which was understood to create meaning by virtue of certain fixed conventions, such as iconographic motifs or compositional structures) and the emergence of the modern image; i.e. an image that is self-reflexively concerned with its own modes and possibilities of creating and conveying meaning. Inherent to this, Busch argues, is the recognition that 'one and the same pictorial mark can be recognised as part of both a picture's spatial illusion and its flat surface

⁵⁶ The *Trees* were published in 1771. A re-published set from 1 January 1786 was bound into a copy of the *New Method* at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Jc49+785C. The clouds, too, had been completed in the early 1770s, though no published version is known today. However, they are mentioned in the manuscript of an earlier draft of the *New Method*, titled *A New Method of Designing Landscapes by Invention Described in a Set of Rules* and dated 1773 at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, MS 72 F 35. They were later included in the *New Method*. On the diagrammatic nature of these patterns, see Werner Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild: Die Krise der Kunst im 18. Jahrhundert und die Geburt der Moderne* (München: C.H. Beck, 1993), 337–42; see also Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 46–51. As Oppé and Busch emphasise, these diagrams are based on carefully observed natural phenomena, which are then abstracted and translated into the graphic syntax of drawing for the benefit of the amateur draughtsman.

⁵⁷ See Chapter One.

⁵⁸ Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 349. My translation.

⁵⁹ Ibid. My translation.

pattern.⁶⁰ Signifier and signified are understood to be separate, and both can be experienced aesthetically and as carriers of meaning. Cozens's œuvre, Busch argues, is a turning point in this trajectory in that it emphasises the artist's ability to create meaning not just via representation but via artistic form.

We can push this argument further by applying it not only to the small accidental forms of the blots but also to the formalism of the blots' intended general whole. Indeed, although I fully agree with the conclusions of Busch's brilliant analysis, his argument can be strengthened by considering blotting and the blots' overall form alongside shifting concepts of pictorial composition and invention. Indeed, although Busch (like Cramer) offers a useful reconsideration of Cozens's place in eighteenth-century British art, he still does not quite succeed to explain the abstract formalism of the blots' general whole and its purpose within the artistic process.

In a fascinating and rich study, Raphael Rosenberg explores pictorial abstraction in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art, tracing in greater detail than Busch the emergence of the aesthetic reception of abstract form.⁶¹ Like Busch, he demonstrates that, in the eighteenth century, art theoretical interest departed from questions of mimesis—in which a painting was seen primarily in relation to visible nature and judged for the persuasiveness of its imitation—and instead turned towards questions regarding the relationship between viewer and work and the viewer's affective experience of art. Gradually, an understanding emerged that such affective experiences were guided not only by an artwork's representational subject but also by its formal qualities. Increasingly, there was a theoretical recognition that pictorial elements like line, composition, and colour could be experienced for their intrinsic aesthetic value and affective potential. For example, in William Hogarth's (1697–1764) *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) the drawn line and its shape were considered to carry aesthetic value beyond whatever it was they delineated. Subsequently, lines came to be seen as not only beautiful but also meaningful. According to William Robson's drawing manual *Grammigraphia* (1799), perpendicular lines signified 'truth, determination, inflexibility, gravity, power' whereas horizontal lines expressed 'tranquillity, repose, expansion and equality'.⁶²

Building on research by Michael Baxandall, Hans Körner, and Thomas Puttfarcken, Rosenberg also analyses the aesthetic and affective experience of pictorial composition and visual order.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid. My translation.

⁶¹ Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*.

⁶² William Robson, *Grammigraphia; or the Grammar of Drawing* (London, 1799), 125. See Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 21–32.

⁶³ Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450*, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Hans Körner, *Auf der Suche nach der 'wahren Einheit': Ganzheitsvorstellungen in der französischen Malerei und Kunstliteratur vom mittleren 17. bis zum mittleren 19. Jahrhundert* (München: Fink, 1988); Thomas Puttfarcken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting*,

As these authors have shown, the early modern period had no theoretical concept of a painting's pictorial composition in the modern sense of its abstract visual order. While medieval and Renaissance artists employed ordering principles like symmetry, subject-related hierarchies, or linear perspective to structure a painting, the concept of pictorial composition—i.e. a painting's overarching formal structure that unified all parts (figures, objects, space) into one self-contained, coherent whole—emerged only gradually towards the end of the seventeenth century in the theoretical debates of the French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. In the *Cours de Peinture par Principes* (1708), Roger de Piles (1635–1709) introduced the concept of the *tout ensemble* (translated as 'the whole together'), describing a painting's superstructural relationships that unified individual elements such as figures, groups of figures, and objects into a coherent whole.⁶⁴ The unifying factor, according to de Piles, was the *clair-obscur*, or the distribution of light and dark (also *chiaroscuro* or, in contemporary English translations, *claro-obscur*), which served to link the subordinate parts into a coherent and harmonious whole. For de Piles, as I discuss in Chapter Four, the *tout ensemble* and *clair-obscur* served the function of *enthusiasm*, the triggering of an affective response in the viewer whose emotions were stirred, not by a work's subject matter, but by the beauty of its *clair-obscur* and the formal qualities of the *tout ensemble*. It was a painting's ability to effect *enthusiasm* that allowed it to attract viewers and engage them in contemplation of its subject. Taking up many of de Piles' ideas, the English portrait painter and art theorist Jonathan Richardson (1667–1745) further explained that the *tout ensemble* and *clair-obscur* not only served to attract viewers but that they, purely by virtue of their abstract pictorial form, already held expressive affective potential.⁶⁵

Rosenberg examines the ways in which artists in the eighteenth century expanded upon these notions. In France, the art theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713–1769) encouraged viewers to observe paintings from afar, focusing first on the 'ornamental harmony' of the colouring and second on the 'effect of the *tout ensemble*' and the abstract character it expresses (such as greatness, splendour, terror, charm, delight, restlessness, simplicity, contempt). Only later is the viewer invited to move closer and inspect the painting's individual parts, its figures and subject

1400–1800 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). See also Paul Taylor and François Quiviger, eds., *Pictorial Composition from Medieval to Modern Art*, Warburg Institute Colloquia 6 (London and Turin: The Warburg Institute, 2000); esp. Thomas Puttfarcken, 'Composition, Disposition and Ordonnance in French Seventeenth-Century Writings on Art', in *Pictorial Composition from Medieval to Modern Art*, ed. Paul Taylor and François Quiviger, Warburg Institute Colloquia 6 (London: The Warburg Institute, 2000), 131–45.

⁶⁴ Although linear perspective performs much of the same function, the way it was theorised did not account for self-contained pictorial composition. On de Piles and pictorial composition, see Puttfarcken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*; more broadly, idem., *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985). The *Cours de Peinture* was published in English as *The Principles of Painting* (London, 1743).

⁶⁵ Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33.

matter, to gain a more differentiated understanding of its meaning.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Joshua Reynolds was inspired by Richardson's writing to study pictorial composition of old master paintings by creating chiaroscuro sketches that mapped the distribution of light and dark across the picture plane.⁶⁷ From around mid-century, Rosenberg shows, normative rules were defined for how a painting should ideally be composed in terms of its chiaroscuro. In the *Analysis of Beauty*, Hogarth explained 'that the pleasure arising from composition, as in a fine landskip, etc. is chiefly owing to the dispositions and assemblages of light and shades, which are so ordered by the principles called opposition, breadth and simplicity, as to produce a just and distinct perception of the objects before us.'⁶⁸ Not only does the distribution of light and dark aid comprehension; it also causes pleasure.

It is easy to see how Cozens's blots can be inserted into this conceptual and visual history of pictorial composition. In the blots, Rosenberg contends, Cozens joined together two 'discursive-visual traditions': the theory of pictorial composition, and the interest in the aesthetic potential of chance images.⁶⁹ While the overall structure, 'the odd form' of the blot, relies on notions of pictorial composition as the overarching formal structure of a picture, the smaller details rely on the suggestive potential of abstract, partially accidental shapes. Although Rosenberg slightly overemphasises the role of chance in blotting, his consideration of blotting relative to notions of pictorial composition is persuasive.⁷⁰ However, a fundamental difference between Cozens and his predecessors eludes Rosenberg: unlike Cozens, they are concerned more with the reception of an artwork and its effect on the viewer rather than with its creation.⁷¹ As a result, Rosenberg, too, considers pictorial composition purely in terms of its affective potential but not as a mode of invention.

However, it was precisely in contrast to classical theories of invention that authors like de Piles had formed their ideas concerning pictorial composition. De Piles was writing against a

⁶⁶ Laugier presented this theory in his posthumously published *Manière de bien juger des ouvrages de Peinture* (1771). Ibid., 34–35.

⁶⁷ Intriguingly, he describes those compositional maps as 'blotted paper'. See Reynolds, 'The Art of Painting of Charles Alphonse Dufresnoy; Translated into English Verse by William Mason, MA, with Annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1783)', in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Edmond Malone, vol. II (London, 1797), 247, quoted in German translation in Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 34, n. 51. On Reynolds's compositional studies, see also Harry Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition', in *Pictorial Composition from Medieval to Modern Art*, ed. Paul Taylor and François Quiviger, Warburg Institute Colloquia 6 (London and Turin: The Warburg Institute, 2000), 172–97.

⁶⁸ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty, Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste* (London, 1753), 106; quoted in German translation in Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 36.

⁶⁹ For Rosenberg's discussion of blotting, see *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 72–84.

⁷⁰ See my discussion in Chapter One.

⁷¹ Only in the early to mid-nineteenth century do authors begin to integrate compositional criteria into the artistic process. Rosenberg lists as examples the writings of John Burnet and Frank Howard, see Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 39–42. One notable exception is Baldassare Orsini's *Saggio sulla composizione della pittura* (1784), which presents normative criteria of how a painting should be composed already around the same time the *New Method* was published.

theoretical tradition that conceptualised painting in relation to poetry. Under the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, painting derived its legitimacy as a liberal art from its structural equivalence to poetry. The analogy depended on the narrative character of both art forms: only if painting depicted a story could it be likened to poetry and be considered a liberal art.⁷² Thus, de Piles's colleagues at the French Académie contemplated visual order as a correlate of the narrative subject matter in a history painting. This focus on subject matter meant that the painter's work was the structuring of a narrative plot and its pictorial implementation in painting, while the viewer was invited to read the painting as if it were a text.⁷³ It was this intellectual invention that distinguished the painter from the artisan and made painting a liberal art. In the *Cours de Peinture*, de Piles refuted the idea of intellectual invention, arguing that, if painting was purely an intellectual art, any learned person could master it. Therefore, in his view, the analogy prevented a true appreciation of the work of the painter.⁷⁴ Instead, painting should be clearly distinguished from other artforms and considered a liberal art on its own aesthetic merit. He defined the *tout ensemble* and *clair-obscur* as pictorial principles that allowed painting to be judged according to characteristics unique and intrinsic to its materiality, visuality, and pictoriality, rather than for criteria pertaining to subject matter (such as the plausibility and persuasiveness of the plot). Ultimately, it was the effect of 'enthusiasm' which, in de Piles's theory, extricated painting from the analogy to poetry. It was precisely *not* by intellectual invention but by its own pictorial means that painting was to be regarded a liberal art.

As discussed, de Piles's ideas regarding pictorial composition were quickly adopted by English theorists and artists, most notably Jonathan Richardson and Joshua Reynolds. Cozens's *New Method* and the practice and theory of blotting, too, fundamentally depended on an appreciation of the ways in which the distribution of light and dark might structure a composition. However, the *New Method* also presented a radical reimagination of de Piles's ideas. For de Piles, as for Richardson and Reynolds, visual order and subject matter remained intimately linked and, indeed, mutually dependent. A subject was chosen and structured according to both narrative plausibility and persuasive compositional form. Only if pictorial structure and subject matter merged into a coherent representation could an invention be judged a success. The blots, by contrast, rested on a mode of invention that was entirely independent from subject matter and instead relied purely on the formal relationship of abstract masses. It was only in blotting that the

⁷² For this reason, history painting was regarded as the highest and truest form of art within the classical hierarchy of genres. For a recent overview of the rhetoric of painting, see Wolfgang Iser, ed., *Handbuch Rhetorik der Bildenden Künste*, Handbücher Rhetorik 2 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

⁷³ For a discussion of the concept of 'reading' a picture, see Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), chap. 1.

⁷⁴ Puttfarcken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 263.

concern for pictorial composition solidified into a method of invention. In making blots, the attention was focused only on formal masses.

This becomes clearer by returning to Busch. Implicit to his argument about blotting's role in the end of the classical tradition is the idea that the technique, as a mode of invention, was a response to the problem of how to structure an ideal landscape that is neither narrative nor topographical but derives meaning from its emotive effect. The heroic landscapes of Poussin were composed like a theatrical stage upon which a narrative scene was choreographed. A story was chosen, and the landscape was then structured around it, so that the narrative could unfold logically, and the viewer could retrace the scene chronologically. Without such a narrative anchor, it was unclear how a landscape should be composed. Blotting presents an innovative solution: if the subject itself does not give indications about its appropriate pictorial form, or indeed if there is no subject in the classical sense, it is pictorial form or pictorial composition that guides the process of invention and artistic creation. What is presented in the *New Method*, thus, is a way of creating images that departs from iconographic and compositional conventions and instead embraces the visuality and pictoriality of painting as both a structuring principle of composition and a mode of invention. As such, blotting brought de Piles's arguments to a radical conclusion. Indeed, while de Piles began to slowly chip away at the prevailing doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, blotting marks its definite end. I argue that, in the *New Method*'s theory of blotting, we can discern a complete negation of *ut pictura poesis*. Cozens's landscapes were to be viewed, not read.

Blotting as Intermedial Practice

The scholarship surveyed here has revealed important insights into the ways in which the *New Method* drew from a wide range of ideas, including British academic classicism, Lockean empiricism, the history of chance images, and the history of pictorial composition. Although this gives a clear picture of the intellectual dimensions of the *New Method*, it nevertheless remains surprising how these different ideas coalesced into Cozens's highly idiosyncratic method of blotting. Indeed, it is still unclear how exactly Cozens came to develop the technique and the theoretical ideas that underpin it. How, for example, did he arrive at his understanding of the blot as an entirely abstract distribution of masses of black and white, a radical elaboration of de Piles's concept of the *clair-obscur*?

In my view, the reason for this gap in our understanding of the technique is that scholars have often isolated the theory from the practice of blotting—considering either the theory or the

practice of blotting but rarely putting the two together.⁷⁵ This approach has yielded important insights and given us a good understanding of blotting. However, I contend that, to fully understand how Cozens came to develop his ideas about blotting as a method of invention and his radical notion of the image as an abstract pictorial structure, we need to turn our attention both to blotting as a practice and to the materiality of the *New Method* as a physical object. In doing so, unexpected observations can be made as many if not most of the surviving blots do not reflect the ways in which Cozens writes about blotting in the *New Method*. Instead of the publication's radical formalism, they present a great variety of different styles of blotting, with some more, others less intentional or accidental.⁷⁶ Only a single known blot—by Alexander's son, John Robert—fully aligns with the formal abstraction that pervades the text.⁷⁷ So how did Cozens come to think about the blots as abstract pictorial compositions anyway? In this thesis, I consider Cozens's engagement with prints and printmaking to answer this question. This engagement, I argue, played a crucial role in the formation and development of both his artistic practice and his theoretical thought. The printed illustrations to his publications enabled Cozens to articulate his ideas about blotting in visual terms. But making the prints, and experimenting with different printmaking techniques, also shaped the way he came to theorise blotting. Thus, by examining the blots and the *New Method* as physical objects, and by analysing how they were made, we can observe Cozens's ideas take shape.

To support my argument, I will juxtapose the illustrations of two of Cozens's publications: his earliest publication, *An Essay to Facilitate the Invention of Landscips, Intended for Students in the Art* (1759), and the *New Method* (1786). I shall analyse in detail the printmaking techniques Cozens used to illustrate the publications—line etching in the *Essay* and aquatint in the *New Method*. My analysis will demonstrate that these two different etching techniques mark theoretical shifts in Cozens's thinking. In fact, although the publications employ the same vocabulary of blotting, their theoretical implications differ greatly. Blotting in the *New Method*, as discussed, relies on the abstract distribution of masses of black and white alongside smaller, accidental forms and their suggestive potential. In contrast, the blots presented in the *Essay* are more thoroughly intentional. In the *Essay*, a blot is more like a sketch in that it delineates a preconceived idea. In the *New Method*, Cozens is anxious to separate the blot from the linearity of the sketch.

⁷⁵ This is true especially for Lebensztejn and Cramer. In contrast, authors like Sloan and Oppé have tended to give only limited importance to the theoretical ambition of Cozens's œuvre.

⁷⁶ Oppé observes this discrepancy but argues that it is caused by conceptual inconsistencies in the *New Method*. The blots are thus taken as a truer expression of Cozens's ideas about blotting, while the text is seen as the product of an undisciplined mind. See his discussion of the *New Method* and blots, in *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 56–70, 100–106.

⁷⁷ John Robert Cozens, Blot for *The Passage of Hannibal over the Alps*, ink and brush on paper, 241 x 329 mm, c.1776, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, [E.243-1925](#) (verso).

Ultimately, the *Essay* adheres to conventional modes of image-creation and meaning-making, while the *New Method* reconceptualises them. As will become clear in my analysis, the two publications have entirely different pedagogical aims. Whereas the *New Method*, as a manual of invention, serves to help readers compose their own original blots, the *Essay*, like a conventional drawing manual, invites readers to copy its printed blot illustrations and rework them into drawings. Original invention, however, is not yet a goal in 1759. This pedagogical shift, along with the change in the way the two publications imagine the process of artistic creation, is both articulated and facilitated by the switch from line etching to aquatint, with its emphasis on tone rather than line. In this way, printmaking played a constitutive role in the formation and development of Cozens's ideas about blotting.

Intermediality and Epistemologies of Making

In examining the practical and conceptual development of the blotting method, I bring together two theoretical frameworks: concepts of intermediality, on the one hand, and epistemologies of making, on the other. Intermediality describes the relationships between different media, while epistemologies of making refers to the idea that manual practices and techniques afford theoretical thought. Each of the two frameworks provides a heuristic tool for linking the practice and the theory of blotting. Taken together, they enable me to examine those linkages more closely.

Intermediality

The concept of intermediality covers a vast field of enquiry about the relationship and interplay between media.⁷⁸ Intermediality conceives of such relationships as ‘a productive collision’⁷⁹ and is sensitive to the aesthetic surplus and meaning that is generated when different media collide. The concept operates on the assumption that a medium's intrinsic characteristics—its mediality or medial condition—shape the meaning it conveys: the medium informs what can be communicated and how.⁸⁰ Moreover, scholars emphasise that ‘media and art forms cannot be

⁷⁸ The literature on intermediality is equally vast. An excellent introduction to the concept is offered in Gabriele Rippl, ed., *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015). Rippl writes from the perspective of literary studies, as do Claudia Benthien and Brigitte Weingart, eds., *Handbuch Literatur & Visuelle Kultur* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014). For introductions from a media studies perspective, see Beate Schirmacher and Jørgen Bruhn, eds., *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media* (London: Routledge, 2021); and Sonya Petersson et al., eds., *The Power of the In-Between: Intermediality as a Tool for Aesthetic Analysis and Critical Reflection* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018).

⁷⁹ Jan Siebert, ‘Intermedialität’, in *Metzler Lexikon Medientheorie und Medienwissenschaft: Ansätze, Personen, Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2002).

⁸⁰ This follows Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum that ‘the medium is the message’, i.e. that all communication is influenced by the medium or device that communicates it. In McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

analyzed in isolation and instead have to be discussed against the backdrop of their medial networks'.⁸¹ Thus, the goal of intermedial research is to reveal how meaning is created 'in/by inter-, multi- and transmedial constellations and cross-medial references'.⁸² To be able to better grasp the diversity of intermedial phenomena, scholars have developed typologies of intermediality. Irina O. Rajewsky has presented one of the most widely accepted models, in which she defines three types of intermedial relationships: (1) Media combinations, whereby two media are combined in an artistic work, e.g. opera, film, or theatre, which combine a literary text with music and performance. (2) Medial transpositions or transfers, wherein an artistic work is transformed from one medium into another, e.g. film adaptations of novels or novelisation of films. (3) Intermedial references, wherein an artistic work employs the formal and structural features of another medium, e.g. filmic sequencing techniques in literature.⁸³ While the term 'intermediality' was developed from the perspective of literary and media studies to describe the interconnected nature of modern media, scholars of early modern history and literature have embraced it to analyse a wealth of earlier material. Rajewsky's category of media combination, for example, can be made fruitful to conceptualise the relationship of image and text in sixteenth and seventeenth-century emblem books. Literary pictorialism, opera, illustrated books, and many more, can be understood as medial transpositions and references.⁸⁴ Although such typologies can be useful to bring a sense of order into a complex web of interrelations, they have been criticised for being too static to accommodate a vast and heterogenous source base of intermedial interactions.⁸⁵ As Gabriele Rippl points out, intermediality not only describes a huge range of phenomena, it has also become central to a wide range of disciplines that are all concerned 'with different intermedial constellations which ask for specific approaches and definitions'.⁸⁶ In consequence, intermediality remains a contested and ambiguous concept that needs to be

⁸¹ Gabriele Rippl, 'Introduction', in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 2. W.J.T. Mitchell writes that 'all arts are "composite" arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media', quoted in Rippl, 'Introduction', 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Irina O. Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* (Tübingen: Francke, 2002). An alternative model was proposed by Werner Wolf, who defines intermediality broadly as any relations between media that are conventionally regarded as distinct, e.g. image and text. For a summary of different typologies, see Rippl, 'Introduction'. Media scholars would object that intermediality applies to all cultural products, not just works of art.

⁸⁴ On intermediality in the early modern period, see Jörg Robert and Wolf Gerhardt Schmidt, eds., *Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit: Formen, Funktionen, Konzepte* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017); Margitta Rouse, 'Text-Picture Relationships in the Early Modern Period', in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 65–81; and Birgit Emich, 'Bildlichkeit und Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit. Eine interdisziplinäre Spurensuche', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 35, no. 1 (2008): 31–56.

⁸⁵ Robert criticises that a typology like Rajewsky's—developed with the specific case of relations between film and literature in mind—necessarily falls short of accounting for the heterogeneity of early modern intermedial phenomena, and 'forecloses an understanding of the continuities, traditions, and genealogies' of both intermedial practice and thought. See Jörg Robert, 'Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit: Genealogien und Perspektiven', in *Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit: Formen, Funktionen, Konzepte*, ed. Jörg Robert and Wolf Gerhardt Schmidt (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 8–9. My translation.

⁸⁶ Rippl, 'Introduction', 1.

adapted to the specific disciplinary and epistemic contexts in which it is applied.⁸⁷ Thus, rather than defining typologies it might be more useful to employ intermediality as a heuristic tool whose ambiguity allows it to stretch and conceptually grasp a wider range of intermedial phenomena. In my consideration of Cozens's œuvre, I therefore propose a broader application of the term that encompasses exchanges both *between* and *within* media—i.e. not only between image and text but also between different visual media.⁸⁸

As noted in the beginning of this introduction, Cozens's practice relied on the back-and-forth between different media and the close examination of the aesthetic effects that different graphic media could generate. Techniques and visual idioms of drawing, hatching, and painting were carried from one medium into the other, testing the ways in which media afforded graphic expression, blurring traditional distinctions along the way. Closely related to this kind of media blur is the practice of copying prints as part of an artistic education. Some of Cozens's earliest known works suggest that prints shaped his drawing practice. As scholars have observed, his earliest works are strongly reminiscent of the Dutch and French landscape prints that were popular in 1720s London, and which likely would have served as models to copy for an artist in training.⁸⁹

Similarly, in the blotting process, different media interacted in varied ways. On a basic level, both the *New Method* and the *Essay* combine text and image to explain the blotting technique. In each case, an introductory essay is accompanied by plates that illustrate the blots. Information and knowledge about blotting thus coalesces in the side-by-side of verbal and visual explication. The plates themselves, moreover, represented a range of graphic media. In the *Essay*, blot-like sketches were juxtaposed with much more finely developed drawings. In the *New Method*, forty-three plates illustrated as prints sixteen ink blots, twenty drawings of skies and clouds, and seven examples explaining the progression from blot to finished composition. In each, different intaglio techniques were employed to render in print these images' distinctive visual effects. While the *Essay* relied solely on line etching, the *New Method* used lift-ground aquatint to print the blots, line etching for the delicate graphite hatchings of the clouds, and finely modulated aquatint tones and mezzotint hatches to reproduce Cozens's polished style of ink wash painting. In making the illustrations, Cozens thus had to translate various graphic media and styles into a differentiated language of print. When using the publications to create their own works, the

⁸⁷ Robert makes this case from the perspective of early modern literary studies. See 'Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit: Genealogien und Perspektiven'.

⁸⁸ Guido Isekenmeier offers a theory of inter pictoriality (in analogy to intertextuality) to describe references between images. However, he does not specifically address relationships between different visual media, such as painting relative to, for example, drawing, printmaking, or sculpture. See Isekenmeier, *Interpiktorialität: Theorie und Geschichte der Bild-Bild-Bezüge* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2013).

⁸⁹ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 8; Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, 9; Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 6.

reader, in turn, had to re-translate from print into blot, sketch, or watercolour. If viewed through the interface of the *New Method* as a physical object, blotting thus can be seen as a haptic process of medial translation and re-translation, both on the part of the author and on the part of the reader: from blot to print to blot again.

In addition to the printed plates, Cozens produced a series of delicately finished, monochrome watercolours that were not directly part of the publication but served to demonstrate and advertise the kinds of landscapes that could be achieved with blotting.⁹⁰ In an advertisement for the *New Method*, Cozens invited potential readers to his studio to view the printed illustration and subscribe to the publication.⁹¹ It is highly likely that the watercolours would have been displayed alongside the printed blots. Three decades earlier, Cozens had employed a similar strategy when he exhibited plates from the *Essay* that he had shaded with ink wash. These were on view at John Boydell's (1719–1804) and William Austin's (1721–1820) print shops, where they served to demonstrate the aesthetic potential that blotting provided and to encourage sales of the publication.⁹² In both cases, by pairing prints and ink wash drawings, Cozens created a sophisticated visual programme that extended his treatises' arguments beyond the publications proper. Moreover, these works added an extra layer to the intermedial experience of the publications. As with the varied types of graphic media illustrated in the publications, meaning unfolded across media.

By being shown in shop windows or the artist's studio, alongside copies of the publication, or intermingled with other drawings, prints, or paintings, the ink wash drawings and shaded prints were inserted into additional intermedial relationships. The ink wash drawings thus point not just to the intermedial dimensions of the publications themselves but also to the intermedial nature of the spaces wherein readers would have encountered them. Unlike twenty-first-century museums that separate paintings and sculptures from drawings, prints, and books, in the public and domestic spaces of Georgian London such media intermingled freely.⁹³ A shop like Boydell's displayed prints alongside the paintings they translated, while a drawing room or library in a town or country house was populated with paintings, sculptures, prints, and portfolios of drawings and watercolours. Cozens's studio, too, would have held a wealth of different kinds of objects in a

⁹⁰ Today at least fourteen survive in public collections across the UK and the USA.

⁹¹ *Morning Herald*, 29 May 1784. Published without citation in William T. Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends in England, 1700–1799* (London & Boston: The Medici Society, 1928), 323–24. The notice is dated 10 April 1784 but did not appear until 29 May.

⁹² Alexander Cozens, *An Essay to Facilitate the Invention of Landscapes, Intended for Students in the Art* (London, 1759), 4. It is likely that the two touched-up prints at Christie's (7 July 2010, lot 374) were part of this programme.

⁹³ The varied intermediality of Georgian art was most recently explored during a conference on *The Intermedial Eighteenth Century: Textual and Visual Arts, 1660–1832*, 14–18 September 2020, Northumbria University and Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, The Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead, organised by Dr Claudine van Hensbergen. Several papers highlighted the intermediality of domestic spaces. On the intermedial nature of eighteenth-century exhibition spaces, see Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist*.

wide range of media.⁹⁴ Such a wider visual network of intermediality would have highlighted to viewers the often-complex combinations, transpositions, and references that shaped intermedial relations. Cozens's publications and their various illustrations would have seamlessly integrated into this intermedial web.

In addition to this material level of intermediality, the *New Method* was also rooted in a visual tradition of intermedial exchanges. The blotting technique was based on a concept of pictorial composition that emphasised a painting's *tout ensemble* and *clair-obscur* as genuinely pictorial means of structuring an image. In his detailed examination of the emergence of this concept, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, Thomas Puttfarken offers a variety of reasons for the redefinition of visual order. He shows that, prior to the mid-seventeenth century, artists employed various other ways of creating and critiquing visual order in painting. One was the bilateral symmetry of late medieval works, which emblematically mirrored the divine order and harmony of the cosmos.⁹⁵ Other modes of visual order included linear perspective and what Puttfarken calls the effect of 'scale and presence'. Both modes created visual order by constructing a close relationship between work and viewer. Linear perspective created a unified geometrical space that aligned the position of the viewer in front of the picture with the pictorial space inside it.⁹⁶ Similarly, the effect of scale and figural presence of the large Italian Renaissance frescoes and altarpieces that Puttfarken analyses integrated viewer and work into one shared space of perception.⁹⁷ The shift away from these structuring principles, according to Puttfarken, can be understood as a consequence of a medial shift in painting. The Italian works whose effects he summarises under the heading of scale and presence were executed as large frescoes or panel paintings. By contrast, the seventeenth century saw an unprecedented increase of smaller easel paintings.⁹⁸ Due to their smaller size, these works did not evoke the same effects of scale or figural presence as their larger counterparts. While large paintings integrated the actual space of the viewer with the depicted pictorial space, the smaller tableau was a closed-off and pictorially

⁹⁴ This can be gleaned from the two posthumous sale catalogues with Cozens's effects. It is noticeable that both sales included large numbers of prints. See *A Catalogue of A Valuable Collection of Finished and Unfinished Drawings Sketches, &c. And Some Pictures, The Works and Property of the Late Ingenious Artist Mr. Alexander Cozens, Dec. Which Will Be Sold by Auction, By Mr. Christie, At His Great Room in Pall Mall, On Saturday, March 31, 1787. To Be Viewed on Thursday and Friday Preceding the Sale, Which Will Begin at Twelve o'clock. Catalogues May Be Had above; and at the Rainbow Coffee House, Cornhill*, Sale Cat. London, Christie's, 31 March 1787; and *A Catalogue of All the Drawings, Studies, Sketches, Prints, Capital Books of Prints, Eighty-Two Valuable Copper-Plates, of His Esteemed Publications; A Small, but Excellent, Library, Among Which Are, Restes de l'Ancien Rome, Par Overbeke, 3 Toms. Statue Antiche, Greche e Romance, 2 Vols. Russia; Bruce's Travels, 5 Vols. Elegant; Johnson's Poets, 75 Vols. Ditto; &c. &c. – A Number of Artist's Implements, and Other Effects, of the Ingenious Mr. Cozens, Landscape Painter*, Sale Cat. London, Greenwood's, 9–10 July 1794.

⁹⁵ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 169.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

⁹⁸ Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, 'The History of Art Markets', in *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, ed. Victor Ginsburg and David Throsby, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006), 72.

self-contained entity that did not ‘reach out’ into the viewer’s space in quite the same way.⁹⁹ In the former, pictorial structure depended on the specific spatial setting, for instance in a church or civic building, whereas, in the latter, pictorial structure followed solely intrinsic requirements of structuring a self-contained image field.¹⁰⁰ Importantly, because of their smaller size, such tableaux were easier to take in at one glance, offering an overview that emphasised visual order and pictorial composition. In addition to Puttfarken’s argument, it is important to keep in mind that this medial shift was concomitant with shifts in spaces and modes of reception. The larger-scale works he discusses were bound to architecture and determined by a specific liturgic or civic function that orchestrated a viewer’s engagement with the work. The smaller tableaux were mobile and painted for a wider variety of often-secular settings, such as the private homes of collectors, the art gallery, or the Académie salons—spaces that presented paintings as autonomous works of art and thus afforded different modes and cultures of reception.

Another major shift in modes of reception, which Puttfarken mentions only in passing but is important to my examination of Cozens’s blotting technique, is the increasing proliferation of prints after paintings.¹⁰¹ The expansion of the art market in the seventeenth century, which led to the greater availability and circulation of panel paintings, went together with an equally large expansion of the international print market.¹⁰² Prints were relatively inexpensive to produce and easy to transport. Quickly, the printed image became ubiquitous, and ‘its use in many areas of life meant that everyone became familiar with it and its many varieties.’¹⁰³ Over the eighteenth century, the increase in prosperity and education of the emerging middle classes stimulated another stark increase of print production and consumption, which led to an even wider dissemination of prints all over Europe and into the farthest reaches of the imperial world.¹⁰⁴ In Britain, the seventeenth and very early eighteenth centuries had been a period of gradual growth and refinement of a market for imported prints, whereas, around mid-century, a native tradition

⁹⁹ On the term ‘tableau’, see Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 3; for its use in French academic debates, see chaps. 8–11; for its adoption in England, see 280–81. For an argument about self-contained painting in the later eighteenth century, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ For the relationship between bounded image field and internal pictorial organisation, see also Meyer Shapiro, ‘On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs’, *Semiotica* 1, no. 3 (1969): 223–42.

¹⁰¹ Puttfarken mentions this twice. First, in his introduction, when he discusses John Ruskin’s rejection of a series of prints after Giotto’s Arena chapel frescoes. Second, in his conclusion, where he asks whether ‘the study of painting in small-scale reproductions ... may inform our expectations and affect and transform our viewing habits.’ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 12, 289.

¹⁰² Antony Griffiths, *The Print before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking, 1550–1820* (London: British Museum Press, 2016), 25, also chap. 13; Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688–1802* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1997), xii.

¹⁰³ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 24.

¹⁰⁴ On the visual articulation of Empire through print, see Douglas Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds: Travel, Print, and Empire, 1770–1820* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2019); and Tom Young, *Unmaking the East India Company: British Art and Political Reform in Colonial India, c.1813–1858* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2023).

of printmaking proliferated quickly. Over a relatively brief period in the 1760s and '70s, London overtook Paris as the centre of European print production, with exports to the continent overtaking imports for the first time.¹⁰⁵

Prints served a vital function in the proliferation of knowledge about the arts. From around the middle of the seventeenth century, engravers began to create prints that recorded the appearance of a painting or sculpture.¹⁰⁶ As original artworks were often difficult or even impossible to access, such prints made artworks more accessible, carrying them over geographical borders and to a wider audience who could not afford to travel or purchase paintings.¹⁰⁷ Antony Griffiths has called this the 'art historian's print', whose purpose was to record the appearance of a painting or other artwork. Artists and scholars built often sizable print collections, in which prints served as 'the reference material of art history'.¹⁰⁸ Artists and critics would turn to the prints in their collection to refresh their memory of works seen earlier, or to study works they might never have seen before. By 1700, it was 'normal to refer to a painter's work by the engravings of it.'¹⁰⁹

Scholars of art historiography have shown that the increased availability of prints and the formation of print collections was essential to the formation of art history as a discipline in the eighteenth century. Ingrid Vermeulen and Kristel Smentek argue that prints facilitated an empirical shift that reoriented the discipline's epistemic paradigm from hagiographic study of artists' lives in the tradition of Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) towards the study of the artworks themselves. Being able to compare large numbers of prints after paintings and other objects enabled scholars like Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) and Jean-Pierre Mariette (1694–1774) to identify geographical and temporal difference of artworks as analytical categories to study and systematise the historical development of art and thereby establish concepts of style and national school.¹¹⁰ Closely tied to such arguments is an understanding that the reception of

¹⁰⁵ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 221.

¹⁰⁶ Antony Griffiths, 'Print Collecting in Rome, Paris, and London in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin* 2 (1994): 44.

¹⁰⁷ A 1767 essay on printmaking explains that 'engraving is of great use as it multiplies the copies of fine pictures and the impressions may be circulated all over the world. This must give great satisfaction to the curious who cannot afford to purchase fine pictures.' Quoted in Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 25. It is also important to keep in mind, as David Alexander emphasises, that there were no public art exhibitions in London before 1760, and so knowledge of the arts was necessarily reliant on prints. See Alexander, 'The Evolution of the Print Market and Its Impact on the Art Market, 1780–1820', in *London and the Emergence of a European Art Market, 1780–1820*, ed. Susanna Avery-Quash and Christian Huemer (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2019), 118–30.

¹⁰⁸ Ingrid R. Vermeulen, *Picturing Art History: The Rise of the Illustrated History of Art in the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Clayton, *English Print*, xi, more broadly 167–180. See also Clayton, 'Reviews of English Prints in German Journals, 1750–1800', *Print Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1993): 137, who writes that reviews of British prints in German periodicals 'reinforce the view that the conventional way of judging a painter was to form an assessment from prints of his work.'

¹¹⁰ Kristel Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham, Surrey, England:

art was mediated through the prints that depicted it. In this context, Geraldine Johnson and Monika Wagner have emphasised that photographic reproductions of art shaped the methodologies and arguments formulated by nineteenth and early twentieth-century art historians like Heinrich Wölfflin, Aby Warburg, and Erwin Panofsky.¹¹¹

Aside from this art historical dimension, little research has been done on how the proliferation of printed artworks echoed back into the work of painters on an aesthetic level. However, the understanding of pictorial composition was linked closely to the ever-expanding print market of the eighteenth century. The black-and-white nature of prints drew attention to an engraved painting's *clair-obscur* while a print's small size emphasised its ability to be taken in at one glance, as one harmonious pictorial composition. Indeed, authors like de Piles, Richardson, and Reynolds were all prolific print collectors and would have developed their art theoretical arguments about the unifying force of the *clair-obscur* and *tout ensemble* in consultation with the engravings in their collections, not much different from how Wölfflin, Warburg, and Panofsky developed their ideas on the basis of black-and-white photography. Richardson's recommendation, for instance, that 'every picture should be so contriv'd, as that at a distance ... it should appear to be composed of masses, lights, and dark' can be understood as a response to a visual paradigm associated with the ubiquity of prints.¹¹² Although more research is needed to understand precisely how the black-and-white of prints may have shaped notions of pictorial composition during the early part of the century, later in the century, the situation becomes much clearer.

The specific make-up of the British art economy meant that painters were increasingly dependent on the income generated by the sale of prints after their paintings.¹¹³ By the 1770s, the situation had been reversed in that paintings were produced specifically for the purpose of being engraved and published as prints.¹¹⁴ While a painting could be sold only once, a high-quality engraving could be sold in runs of up to 3,000 impressions.¹¹⁵ For instance, John Singleton

Ashgate, 2014); Vermeulen, *Picturing Art History*.

¹¹¹ Geraldine Johnson, "'(Un)Richtige Aufnahme': Renaissance Sculpture and the Visual Historiography of Art History', *Art History* 36, no. 1 (2013): 12–51; Monika Wagner, 'Kunstgeschichte in Schwarz-Weiß. Visuelle Argumente bei Panofsky und Warburg', in *Schwarz-Weiß als Evidenz: 'With black and white you can keep more of a distance'*, ed. Monika Wagner and Helmut Lethen, *Schauplätze der Evidenz* 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2015), 127–44. Similarly, Stephen Bann has shown that, by 1890, paintings were judged against the new aesthetic demands of the photographic image. See *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹¹² Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), 114–15.

¹¹³ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 265–67. See also Clayton, *English Print*, chap. 6; and Alexander, 'Evolution of the Print Market'.

¹¹⁴ Clayton, *English Print*, chaps 6 and 7. See also David Alexander, who writes that in the 1780s print publishers began commissioning paintings for the sole purpose of engraving them. These prints 'were not just by-products of paintings, but the primary object of the work'; in 'Evolution of the Print Market', 122.

¹¹⁵ This size of a print run depended on the skill of both engraver and printer as well as the quality of the plate,

Copley (1738–1815) exhibited his canvas of the *Death of Lord Chatham* (1781) purely for the purpose of soliciting subscriptions for a print that was to be engraved after it. At 228.6 x 304.5 cm, the painting, which was displayed in a rented gallery in Spring Gardens, was too large to be attractive for most buyers, and even if a buyer could be found, the work could be sold only once. By virtue of their multiplicity, engravings could generate a sizable income and increase the reputation of both painter and engraver.¹¹⁶

To accommodate this model and cultivate reproduction as a revenue stream, painters increasingly created works so that they would look good in a print. As Christiane Wiebel explains, ‘the reproduced work of art increasingly became the reproduction of a work of art designed for reproducibility.’¹¹⁷ A central aspect in this was the distribution of light and dark, i.e. a painting’s *chiaroscuro*, which, in a black-and-white medium, was of special importance. Although this already likely informed the importance placed on light and dark by the early eighteenth-century painters and writers discussed above, over the latter part of the century the idea that prints shaped the reception of paintings, and especially their distribution of light and dark, became mainstream. The painter Pierre Falconet (1741–1791), for instance, hoping to have one of his paintings engraved, explained that he had ‘composed it in a way that will make it look very well in black and white.’¹¹⁸ Similarly, in 1790, the *Artist’s Repository* informed its readers that:

Chiaro Oscuro seems to have been much beholden to the art of engraving (in which its power is very conspicuous) for its improvement, and perfection: as it was not till after painters beheld their compositions divested of the effect of colours, that they fought for principles, which, independent of that effect, might be efficacious in producing force; but which when they saw reduced to black and white in prints, they adopted into pictures, and studied to obtain a force, distinct and independent of, but which might be allied and assistant as well to colouring, as to composition, and to general effect.¹¹⁹

Thus, by the late eighteenth century, the mediality of prints conditioned the aesthetic choices of painters competing for prominence in the British art economy. The development of pictorial

paper, ink, and press; see Ad Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching 1400–2000: A History of the Development of Manual Intaglio Printmaking Processes* (London: Archetype Publications, 2012), 333, table 6.

¹¹⁶ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 266. According to David Alexander, the print by Bartolozzi attracted 2,500 subscribers and brought in a profit of £5,000; see ‘Evolution of the Print Market’, 121. A print by William Angus after a painting by Daniel Dodd of viewers admiring Copley’s painting in the Spring Gardens exhibition generated further income.

¹¹⁷ Christiane Wiebel, *Aquatinta oder ‘Die Kunst mit dem Pinsel in Kupfer zu stechen’: Das druckgraphische Verfahren von seinen Anfängen bis Goya*, Exh. Cat. (Coburg and München: Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg and Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 14. My translation.

¹¹⁸ Clayton, *English Print*, 227.

¹¹⁹ Charles Taylor, ed., *The Artist’s Repository and Drawing Magazine, Exhibiting the Principles of the Polite Arts in Their Various Branches*, vol. 4: A Dictionary of the most important, and customary Principles, and Terms of Art, adopted in the arts of Design, in their various branches: with explanatory remarks and observations (London, 1790), 46.

composition in the late eighteenth century should therefore be understood more in terms of the intermedial relationship between painting and print, as it was driven by economic as well as aesthetic considerations. The *New Method* is an example par excellence through which we can trace these interrelationships.

Finally, the third dimension of intermediality that frames the *New Method* concerns shifts in aesthetic debates about the relationship between media, especially between image and text. Up until the late seventeenth century, in art theoretical debates, the relationship between image and text had been conceptualised primarily under the structural analogy of *ut pictura poesis*. Painting was understood to create meaning by employing rhetorical devices that had been defined in literary criticism.¹²⁰ Uwe Wirth has described this as a ‘conceptual grafting’, whereby one semiotic system is grafted onto another: ‘Categories, principles and goals of one medium (one artform) are systematically oriented towards the specifications of another.’¹²¹ In the case of *ut pictura poesis*, the rhetorical means of poetry are taken as an analytical lens and aesthetic rulebook to create as well as critique paintings. As a visual means of communication, painting could, for instance, employ an Aristotelian dramatic structure that required a narrative to be divided into beginning, middle, and end. As discussed earlier, this approach became a central compositional device for seventeenth-century painters like Poussin, whose paintings were designed so that a narrative unfolded chronologically before the viewer’s eyes. By the time the *New Method* came out, however, the authority of *ut pictura poesis* had come to be questioned, and poetry and rhetoric were losing their relevance as major referential systems for the visual arts.

Although early eighteenth-century authors still, by and large, maintained the analogy, scepticism of its validity gradually became more forceful as the century progressed. Authors like Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670–1742) and Roger de Piles in France, as well as John Dryden (1631–1700) and James Harris (1709–1780) in England, began to stress the differences between painting and poetry over their similarities.¹²² Based on wider epistemic paradigm shifts from rationalism to empiricist sense perception, art criticism’s analytical-critical focus turned from the representational logic of an artwork’s subject matter to the aesthetic experience it could generate

¹²⁰ For an excellent recent overview of this vast field, see Wolfgang Brassat, ‘Einführung’, in *Handbuch Rhetorik der Bildenden Künste*, ed. Wolfgang Brassat, Handbücher Rhetorik 2 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 1–41. Brassat sketches out both the early modern conceptual history of the analogy and its twentieth-century historiography. For a more detailed discussion, see the contributions by Arwed Arnulf (on *ut pictura poesis*) and Ulrich Pfisterer (on the *paragone*) in the same volume.

¹²¹ Uwe Wirth paraphrased by Robert, see ‘Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit: Genealogien und Perspektiven’, 3, with reference. My translation.

¹²² Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la Peinture* (1715); Roger de Piles, *Cours de Peinture par Principes* (1708); John Dryden, “A Parallel betwixt Painting and Poetry”, in *The Art of Painting*, by Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, transl. John Dryden (1695); James Harris, *A Discourse on Music, Painting and Poetry* (1744). See Arwed Arnulf, ‘Ut Pictura Poesis’, in *Handbuch Rhetorik und Bildende Kunst*, ed. Wolfgang Brassat, Handbücher Rhetorik 2 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 57.

in its viewers. With this reorientation towards the feelings and emotive effects an artwork might evoke, the question of how different artforms could achieve this came into view as well. Thus, over the early half of the century, awareness grew that aesthetic experience was shaped by an artwork's medium and its specific medial logic. Finally, in his famous and influential essay *Laocoon, or: On the Boundaries of Painting and Poetry* (1766), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) drew a categorical distinction between poetry and the visual arts and defined each artform according to its genuine 'means of expression and modes of perception'.¹²³ Poetry, in Lessing's analysis, was defined as a temporal art, whose narrative unfolds as a 'succession of arbitrary signs in time'.¹²⁴ Painting or sculpture, by contrast, were considered spatial arts, whose subject matter was constituted by natural signs organised into space. Unlike poetry, painting and sculpture, thus, could be taken in simultaneously, at one glance.¹²⁵ Following this categorical definition of the specificity and difference of pictorial and textual media, *ut pictura poesis* had come to an end.

However, although authors like de Piles, Dubos, and Harris defined medial difference, they remained wedded to the idea of narrative subject matter in painting. Although a painting could induce pleasure by its pictorial means—as a visual configuration of *clair-obscur* in de Piles's case—the full aesthetic experience unfolded only in the convergence of both visual and intellectual pleasure: from the 'eyes of the understanding' and '[the eyes] of the body', as de Piles put it.¹²⁶ Even Lessing leaves the primacy of narration, and thus of intellectual invention, untouched and conceives of the visual arts as a medium to depict narrative subjects.¹²⁷ Thus, although they distinguish between semiotic systems—i.e. between the *how* of representation—they do not question the *what*. Cozens, with his radical departure from *ut pictura poesis* and his embrace of a medium-specific approach to pictorial composition and invention, did question the *what*, and drew a far more radical conclusion than any of these earlier theorists.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that issues of intermediality—both practically and conceptually—are the backdrop against which Cozens's practice and theory of blotting took shape. Intermedial relationships can be seen to shape the material make-up of the *New Method*; the spaces in which the publication would have been encountered; the visual tradition of pictorial

¹²³ Brassat, 'Einführung', 2. My translation. The literature on Lessing is vast. For an introduction, see Sabine Schneider, 'Die Laokoon-Debatte: Kunstreflexion und Medienkonkurrenz im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Handbuch Literatur & Visuelle Kultur*, ed. Claudia Benthien and Brigitte Weingart (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 68–85. For a more recent discussion, see Avi Lifschitz and Michael Squire, eds., *Rethinking Lessing's Laocoon: Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the 'limits' of Painting and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For a semiotic analysis, see David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹²⁴ Ulrich Pfisterer, 'Der Paragone', in *Handbuch Rhetorik der bildenden Künste*, ed. Wolfgang Brassat, Handbücher Rhetorik 2 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 304–5. My translation.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ De Piles, *The Principles of Painting*, 226–27.

¹²⁷ See Sabine Schneider's discussion of Lessing's concept of the 'pregnant moment'; in 'Laokoon-Debatte', 79.

composition; and the wider aesthetic debates that spelled the end of *ut pictura poesis*. As such, the concept provides a useful framework that links the material practice of blotting with its wider conceptual claims about pictorial composition in painting. Indeed, the relationship between the theory and practice of blotting articulates itself through the relationship between different media.

Epistemologies of Making

My second framework for examining the practical and conceptual development of the blotting method, and for understanding the relationship between theory and practice in Cozens's œuvre more broadly, is the concept of epistemologies of making. This concept—the idea that material practices and techniques of making afford abstract knowledge—has been explored in detail in the history of science. Pamela H. Smith has demonstrated that artisanal practices played an important role in the development of the modern sciences.¹²⁸ In her pioneering study *The Body of the Artisan*, Smith argued that the epistemic potential of artisanal bodily labour by analysing how the use and manipulation of materials and matter afforded artisans a form of knowledge about the natural world that could not be achieved through reasoning alone. Smith calls this an 'artisanal epistemology' and argues that such experiential artisanal practices were central to the establishment of modern scientific paradigms that rely on experimentation and empirical observation.¹²⁹ Thus, her work challenges the traditional view that the conscious mind is the primary source of all knowledge and aims to resolve the traditional hand–mind dichotomy, that 'put[s] theory above practice, abstract thinking above bodily experience, mind above hand.'¹³⁰ Instead, she considers how artisans 'think with their hands'.¹³¹

The concept of 'artisanal epistemology' has been applied productively to art historical study in Christina Neilson's excellent book on the relationship between theory and practice in Andrea del Verrocchio's (1435–1488) œuvre and workshop practices.¹³² Neilson shows that Verrocchio's approach to making—like Cozens, the artist often worked across media, transferring tools and techniques from one medium or material to another—informed the meaning of the objects he

¹²⁸ Smith has published widely on this. See, among others, Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers, and Harold J. Cook, eds., *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Pamela H. Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

¹²⁹ For more detailed definitions of the term, see Pamela H. Smith, 'Epistemology, Artisanal', in *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy* (Springer, 2018); Bert De Munck, 'Artisanal Knowledge and Craftsmanship', in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, ed. Dana Jalobeanu and Charles T. Wolfe (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 121–31.

¹³⁰ Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word*, 3.

¹³¹ Ibid., 3, with literature.

¹³² Neilson, *Practice and Theory in the Renaissance Workshop*. For an historiographic overview of the mind–matter dichotomy in art history, see Charlotta Krispinsson, 'Temptation, Resistance, and Art Objects: On the Lack of Material Theory within Art History before the Material Turn', *Artium Quaestiones*, no. 29 (2018): 5–23.

made. She demonstrates that the materials and techniques Verrocchio used ‘provided him with a hermeneutic framework, one in which he developed a sophisticated system of expressing complex ideas—theological, political, economic, poetic—metaphorically, and that he did this through visual puns on making and his use of materials.’¹³³ Finally, Neilson emphasises that it was Verrocchio’s ‘engagement with matter that led him to realize his ideas (rather than forming them in the mind first)’.¹³⁴

As Verrocchio did not leave any writings in which he theorised his practice, Neilson turns to the objects and ‘the power of techniques and materials as modes of representation and signification’ to explore his ideas ‘instead of locating [them] only in texts.’¹³⁵ Following Neilson in this regard, I similarly consider not just the blots and publications (their texts and images), but also the ways they were made, handled, and used, as sites where meaning is generated. From the perspective of the reader and user, meaning was conveyed not only through text and images but also through the manual engagement with the publications. Placing a sheet of paper over one of the *New Method*’s plates, and then tracing the outlines suggested by the blot, for example, would have been an easy first step in learning to compose from a blot. In this material engagement, the usefulness of the blotting technique would have become more immediately apparent than in reading the lengthy text.¹³⁶ My focus, however, lies primarily on Cozens’s techniques of making as a way of gaining a more nuanced understanding of how he developed his theory of blotting. As noted earlier, there is a surprising incongruity between the extant blots and the ways Cozens explains the blotting technique in the *Essay* and *New Method*, both in their text and printed illustrations. The concept of ‘artisanal epistemology’ suggests that the process of making the illustrations, the techniques and tools he used, shaped Cozens’s understanding of the blotting technique in a way that is distinct from a more theoretical approach revealed in his texts. This distinction is specifically apparent in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I show that the differences between an early draft of the *New Method* and the published version were likely the result of Cozens’s engagement with aquatint printmaking. Although the draft was ready by 1773, Cozens shelved the project, as he was unable to print the blots at that time. Aquatint had only recently been developed in France and, although it was quickly adopted in England, it took until around

¹³³ Neilson, *Practice and Theory in the Renaissance Workshop*, 10.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹³⁶ Smith writes at length about the difficulties of imparting practical knowledge by writing rather than demonstration and/or material engagement; see Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word*. On the epistemic potential of handling prints, see also Susan Dackerman, ed., *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, Exh. Cat. Harvard Art Museum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2011); Suzanne Karr Schmidt, *Altered and Adorned: Using Renaissance Prints in Daily Life* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2011); idem., *Interactive and Sculptural Printmaking in the Renaissance* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017). This inherently interactive and intermedial nature of prints is also emphasised in The Multigraph Collective, *Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Era of Print Saturation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

1780 for the details of the technique to become more widely known.¹³⁷ The fact that he delayed the project (rather than using line etching or another printmaking technique, such as woodcut) suggests that Cozens sought an equivalence between the process of blotting and the process of making the prints. In fact, the prints could persuasively illustrate the blots only if they showed the same swift application of ink that was used to create the blots. Although aquatint allowed him to blot directly onto the printing plate, the sugarlift process he employed required him to perform a series of steps of reversal and similar operations unique to printmaking. These operations, I argue, emphasised to him the duality of black and white, of mark and non-mark, as two constituent and dialectical parts of a single whole. It is this emphasis on the blot as a whole, rather than as a figure on a ground, that altered the theory of blotting significantly between the 1773 draft and the 1786 publication, a time during which Cozens first struggled and finally succeeded to print the blots to his satisfaction. Ultimately, my goal is to show that Cozens's aesthetic thought developed both through his engagement with theoretical ideas *and* through his varied artistic practices in different media—as an intermedial back-and-forth between theory and practice. Implied in my analysis and its specific methodological approach is the idea that artworks themselves hold epistemic value as sites of aesthetic debate, alongside written theory. As such, making becomes a form of knowing, and, as a consequence, aesthetic thought arises from the embodied experience of making.

The (Intermedial) Print as a Vehicle of Thought

In concluding this introduction, I would like to briefly turn my attention to two broader points that emerge from my analysis. As I demonstrate in this thesis, prints and practices of printmaking, as well as their relationships to other media, were central to Cozens's œuvre. Prints directed the way Cozens learned to draw as a young artist, and they continued to shape his work throughout his career. By placing prints at the centre of both Cozens's practice *and* thought, I hope to shine a light on two issues that are only beginning to be examined in print scholarship (and in art history more broadly): the relationship of prints to other media and the role of prints in aesthetic debates and the theorisation of art.

Scholars often emphasise the creative and aesthetic potential that arises from intermedial relationships between painting, sculpture, and other media.¹³⁸ However, prints, in their specific

¹³⁷ On the history of the technique and early secrecy, see Wiebel, *Aquatinta*; Ann V. Gunn, 'Sandby, Greville and Burdett, and the "Secret" of Aquatint', *Print Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2012): 178–80; idem., *The Prints of Paul Sandby (1731–1809): A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2015); Rena M. Hoisington, *Aquatint: From Its Origins to Goya*, Exh. Cat. (Oxford, Princeton, and Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art in association with Princeton University Press, 2021).

¹³⁸ The trope of *ut pictura poesis* was primarily concerned with aesthetic surplus, i.e. with generating new meaning by

mediality, are largely absent from such considerations. Indeed, when prints are discussed in relation to other media, the debate is often centred on their capacity for reproduction.¹³⁹ As noted, all throughout the early modern period, prints played an important role in replicating and disseminating the work of painters. But, from the mid-seventeenth century onward, and especially with the invention of mezzotint as the first tonal engraving technique, so-called reproductive prints became more common.¹⁴⁰ During the eighteenth century, newer printmaking techniques were invented to emulate more accurately the distinct graphic effects of techniques like drawing and painting in different media (e.g. chalk, pastel, or ink and watercolour wash). It has been estimated that in Britain such reproductive prints outnumbered original prints by ‘at least fifty to one’, leading to the period being described as ‘the great age of the reproductive print’.¹⁴¹ In 1767, Antony Griffiths points out, commentators would ‘baldly assert that the purpose of engraving was to make plates after the great paintings that had not yet been engraved’, ignoring the many non-reproductive purposes of the print medium.¹⁴²

One reason for the broad marginalisation of print studies within the discipline of art history throughout most of the twentieth century was precisely this trope of replication, in which engravings and other prints were considered unoriginal copies of an original invention in another medium.¹⁴³ The reproductive engraver was ascribed the status of the copying artisan, while only the painter’s intellectual invention could achieve approbation as an original work of art. Although such a low estimation of the engraver’s work is partly reflected in early modern hierarchies of art (consider, for example, the Royal Academy’s refusal to grant printmakers full membership), over the last thirty years or so scholars have sought to complicate this notion of the reproductive print.¹⁴⁴ They have argued that the concept is an anachronistic

bringing together distinct artforms.

¹³⁹ I focus here on ‘fine art’ prints, or prints that were made within this context, like Cozens’s printed blots. Of course, early modern print culture was much more varied than that, including printed illustrations to technical manuals and scientific treatises, playing cards, almanacs, and even paper currency, to name just a few.

¹⁴⁰ On mezzotint, see Carol Wax, *The Mezzotint: History and Technique* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990); Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques* (London: British Museum Press, 2010); Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*. For an introduction to the ‘reproductive print’, see Rebecca Zorach and Elizabeth Rodini, eds., *Paper Museums: The Reproductive Print in Europe, 1500–1800*, Exh. Cat. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; The Grey Art Gallery, New York University (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2005); and Susan Lambert, *The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings* (London: Trefoil, 1987). For British prints, see David Alexander and Richard T. Godfrey, *Painters and Engraving: The Reproductive Print from Hogarth to Wilkie* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1980). See also Ernst Rebel, *Faksimile und Mimesis: Studien zur deutschen Reproduktionsgrafik des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Studien und Materialien zur kunsthistorischen Technologie 2 (Mittenwald: Mäander, 1981).

¹⁴¹ Richard T. Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain: A General History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978), 10.

¹⁴² Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 25.

¹⁴³ See Jennifer L. Roberts’s discussion in the introduction to her recent study *Contact: Art and the Pull of Print*, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of the precarious status of engravers at the RA, see Sarah Hyde, ‘Printmakers and the Royal Academy Exhibitions, 1780–1836’, in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836*, ed.

mischaracterisation, highlighting that the notion of a print after a painting as a ‘reproduction’ emerged only with the advent of photography. Instead, in the eighteenth century, prints that emulated other media were thought of as translations that adapted an image originally designed in one medium for use in another. The success of the final print was not directly related to the quality of the model but rather resulted from the aesthetic choices made by the engraver in the adaptive process of translation.¹⁴⁵ A good engraving could salvage the defects of an unfortunate composition, while a poor engraving could ruin a good picture. As a concept, translation thus is sensitive to the artistic agency of the engraver relative to the model and captures more clearly contemporary views on the relationship between print and painting. But I would argue that the concept nevertheless perpetuates the same hierarchy that subordinates the print to painting along a binary of copy and original. Like reproduction, translation is a one-way street from source image to translated product. Thus, the concept uncritically retains eighteenth-century prejudices of a hierarchical art world focused on the originality and genius of (all too often male) invention. Ultimately, it forecloses more nuanced considerations of the varied ways in which prints and other media related to each other in the early modern period.¹⁴⁶

Only recently have scholars begun to examine these relationships more closely, conceptualising them as more complex interactions and exchanges rather than one-way reproductions. In an edited volume, entitled *Prints in Translation, 1450–1750: Image, Materiality, Space*, Edward Wouk and Suzanne Karr Schmidt propose a ‘methodological shift in the study of print, from examining the printed image as an index for an absent invention in another medium—a painting, sculpture, or drawing—to considering its role as a generative, active agent driving modes of invention and perception far beyond the locus of its production.’¹⁴⁷ The authors reveal the material, creative, and epistemic values that emerge from the complex and diverse interactions between (both reproductive and original) prints and other media. Although

David Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2001), 217–28.

¹⁴⁵ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 464. See also Christian Rümelin, ‘Stichtheorie und Graphikverständnis im 18. Jahrhundert’, *Artibus et Historiae* 22, no. 44 (2001): 187–200. It is important to note that a systematic study of the concept of translation in debates about the status of prints relative to paintings in Britain is still missing. For an impressive analysis of the historicity of concepts of originality, copy, and imitation, see Maria H. Loh, *Titian Remade: Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007).

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Bann’s landmark study *Parallel Lines* brought into focus the varied relationships between printmakers, painters, and photographers to reveal the productive interactions of different visual media within the visual economy of nineteenth-century France. However, Bann remains indebted to the paradigm of replication and does not consider the aesthetic potential of printmaking itself, and how print echoed back into other artistic practices like painting.

¹⁴⁷ Edward H. Wouk, ‘Toward an Anthropology of Print’, in *Prints in Translation, 1450–1750: Image, Materiality, Space*, ed. Edward H. Wouk and Suzanne Karr Schmidt (London: Routledge, 2017), 3. Although they still use the term ‘translation’, the authors present a far more nuanced examination of the complex intermedial relationship prints engaged in during the early modern period. Wouk’s introduction to the volume gives an excellent overview. The inherently intermedial and interactive nature of print is also described in The Multigraph Collective, *Interacting with Print*; see esp. the introduction and chapter on engraving (113–125).

the generative agency of printed images has become an important research focus for scholars of the early modern period, the latter half of the eighteenth century remains comparatively underexplored in the field's reassessment of prints and printmaking within wider artistic cultures.¹⁴⁸ For example, the ways in which the new techniques of aquatint and stipple engraving did not just imitate but interact with other media are poorly understood and have not been examined in light of their generative, creative potential.

When it comes to the theoretical potential of prints, our understanding is even less complete.¹⁴⁹ This includes the ways early modern printmakers theorised their own practice; the role printed images played not just in emergent histories of art but also in early modern art theory and aesthetic debates (see, for example, my earlier discussion of the omission of prints in the historiography of pictorial composition); and the ways printmaking might help understand and theorise wider artistic, cultural, and political practices.¹⁵⁰ Douglas Fordham and Jennifer L. Roberts offer two important contributions to the second and third point. While Fordham persuasively argues for the constitutive role of prints in the formation of the picturesque (which he defines as a 'set of material practices' rather than a discursive aesthetic concept), Roberts reveals the complex logic of print to make a case for the medium's theoretical potential beyond the paradigm of replication.¹⁵¹ Importantly, both Fordham and Roberts consider the haptic material engagement with prints and other techniques of image-making as processes that generate and inflect meaning. The formation of what Fordham calls the 'haptic picturesque' relied on amateur art practices that were visually articulated and disseminated through the medium of aquatint prints.¹⁵² It constituted meaning by engaging the viewer in an affective bond with the maker: because audiences knew how to sketch and draw themselves, they would affectively understand how the images in the aquatint travel books before them had been made and could 'imagine themselves physically, phenomenologically, in the place of the artist'.¹⁵³ By

¹⁴⁸ Two current examples are Jamie Gabbarelli, *Sharing Images: Renaissance Prints into Maiolica and Bronze*, Exh. Cat. National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 2018); and Aaron M. Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat: The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2021).

¹⁴⁹ There are some exceptions, but a large-scale conceptual history of prints and printmaking is lacking. See Rümelin, 'Stichtheorie'; Carl Goldstein, 'Printmaking and Theory', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 71, no. 3 (2008): 373–88; and idem., *Print Culture in Early Modern France: Abraham Bosse and the Purposes of Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). As Goldstein notes, the possibility of a theory of printmaking was, and still is, often dismissed due to the lowly status of the practice within early modern hierarchies of the arts.

¹⁵⁰ Several anthologies collect writings of early modern printmakers but do not offer critical engagement; see Norberto Gramaccini, ed., *Theorie der französischen Druckgraphik im 18. Jahrhundert: eine Quellenanthologie*, Neue Berner Schriften zur Kunst 2 (Bern: P. Lang, 1997); idem., *Die Kunst der Interpretation: die französische Reproduktionsgraphik von 1648 bis 1792* (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2003); idem., *Die Kunst der Interpretation: italienische Reproduktionsgraphik 1485–1600* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds*; Jennifer L. Roberts, *Jasper Johns/ in Press: The Crosshatch Works and the Logic of Print* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2012); Roberts, *Contact*.

¹⁵² Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds*, chap. 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 7.

the 1790s, they also would have understood how the aquatints had been created and thus were able to appreciate the processes of translation from one medium into the other that the printmaking process required. Similarly, though focussing on post-war and contemporary American art, Roberts shows that the embodied experience of printmaking not only informed the ways artists created art across media but also how they theorised their practice.¹⁵⁴ She identifies a set of manoeuvres that, like replication, are inherent to printmaking. Her analysis shows that the logic of these manoeuvres—pressure, reversal, separation, strain, interference, and alienation—can be traced across art in all media and that they shaped how artists not just created but also theorised their art. Moreover, she makes a compelling argument for the critical potential of print as a socio-political commentary. The process of reversal, for example, is a fundamental operation of printmaking in any technique. Following Roberts, it acquires critical poignancy in the work of Glenn Ligon (b.1960) and Edgar Heap of Birds (b.1954), whose inverted neon sculptures and road signs force a confrontation of voices about an alternate, non-white American reality both past and present.¹⁵⁵ Ultimately, both Fordham and Roberts reveal the broader creative and theoretical potential inherent to the medium of print and, thus, draw attention to the value of prints and practices of printmaking in the theorisation of art.

As outlined earlier, my own study of Cozens's artistic practice picks up similar argumentative threads by considering how the making and handling of blots, prints, and the physical copies of the *New Method* and *Essay* shaped the theory of blotting. More broadly, my analysis aims to expand upon current research on the intermediality and theoretical potential of prints and practices of printmaking, and to bring British prints to bear on both of these issues.¹⁵⁶ Prints and printmaking, thus, emerge as a site where theoretical ideas were formed and proliferated. As such, my thesis contributes to a small but growing field of scholarship that aims to bring printed images from the periphery to the centre of art historical study and to explore their, yet largely untapped, critical potential.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ On embodiment, see also Kathryn Reeves, 'The Re-Vision of Printmaking', in *Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking: Critical Writing since 1986*, ed. Ruth Pelzer-Montada (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 72–81.

¹⁵⁵ Roberts, *Contact*, chap. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Although there is a vast literature on eighteenth-century British printmaking, British prints have remained largely absent from considerations about the medium's theoretical and intermedial dimensions, Fordham's scholarship being an obvious exception. Esther Chadwick's study *The Radical Print: Art and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2024) was published too recently to be taken into consideration for this thesis.

¹⁵⁷ Fordham and Adrienne Albright wrote as recently as 2012 that the field 'of print studies has been particularly resistant to synthetic narratives and theoretical approaches'; in 'The Eighteenth-Century Print: Tracing the Contours of a Field', *Literature Compass* 9, no. 8 (1 August 2012): 509.

Outline of Chapters

The arguments outlined in this introduction will be discussed in depth in the following four chapters. The first chapter discusses the theory of blotting through a close reading of the *New Method*. Following the chronological order of the text, I discuss, among other points, issues of chance and the aesthetic potential of abstract shapes, the purpose of blotting as a method of inventing ideal landscape compositions, and the cognitive mechanisms that underlie the blotting technique. I focus on issues of formalism and highlight Cozens's remarkable conception of the blot as an abstract arrangement of form. The chapter also addresses apparent ambiguities within Cozens's text which have, at times, led scholars to dismiss the radical abstraction Cozens ascribes to the blots. I show that any ambiguity can be resolved through a detailed analysis of Cozens's reception of John Locke's theory of ideas from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates the radical formalism and sense of abstraction with which Cozens conceived of what he called a 'true blot'.

The second chapter, in turn, juxtaposes the theory of blotting and its radical formalism with the practice of blotting. The chapter presents a survey of the surviving blots, situating them within the wider developments of Cozens's practice as a teacher, artist, and author. This reveals not only that Cozens defined different types of blots but also that his practice of blotting changed over time. By comparing the *Essay* (which is here discussed in detail) with the *New Method*, as well as their associated blots, I argue against a literature that claims that the blotting technique was fully developed by 1759. In fact, my analysis demonstrates that Cozens's conception of the blot, and the purposes and goals of the blotting technique, changed fundamentally. My survey, moreover, makes visible the ambiguous relationship between blotting as it was presented in Cozens's publications and the material evidence of surviving blots. As noted before, most of the surviving blots do not fully align with how Cozens presents the blots in both the text and illustrations of his treatises. Some of this can be explained by his ideas shifting over time; some of this can be explained by the fact that blotting existed along a spectrum of abstraction and representation. However, by closely examining the *Essay's* text and illustrations alongside their preparatory blots, I demonstrate that Cozens was curtailed in visually articulating blotting accurately by the limitations of the printmaking technique he employed in illustrating the publication. Indeed, it was in response to the visual idiom of line etching that he adapted the *Essay's* definition of what a blot was.

The third chapter continues this line of reasoning by considering Cozens's practice of printmaking more closely. A first section surveys the artist's engagement with prints and printmaking beyond his publications—during his own education in London and Italy, as a

collector of prints, and as a teacher. The focus of the chapter, however, lies on the protracted publication history of the *New Method* and Cozens's search for a printmaking technique that allowed him to print blots. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that the lack of a tonal printmaking technique led Cozens to abandon his technique of the 'light blot' when preparing the *Essay* for publication in 1759. When publishing the *New Method*, in 1786, Cozens faced similar problems. Although a first draft of the publication was ready by 1773, it took Cozens thirteen more years to finally publish his treatise. The delay, I argue, was caused by his search for a suitable technique to print the blots, which he eventually found in lift-ground aquatint. By comparing the draft and published version of the *New Method*, I demonstrate how his conception of the blot changed in response to his experimentation with aquatint. Thus, while aquatint enabled him to articulate his ideas visually, Cozens's experimental engagement with the technique also came to shape the way he theorised the blots. Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that his idiosyncratic use of sugarlift aquatint facilitated Cozens's gradual shift towards a more radically abstract conception of the blot. The chapter includes a technical discussion of aquatint and how Cozens came to use it.

The fourth chapter returns to the theoretical context of blotting by situating the technique within shifting theories and practices of invention. It considers blotting as a departure from early modern theories of intellectual invention that rely on the trope of *ut pictura poesis*, and, instead, posits it as a practice of pictorial composition. While intellectual invention regulated a painting's narrative subject matter, pictorial composition emphasised its formal arrangement and visual order. Pulling together ideas developed across the previous chapters—the concept of ideas as images, the intertwined nature of theory and practice in the development of Cozens's thought, and the importance of printmaking to the emergence of Cozens's abstraction—the chapter argues that, in blotting, a new way of understanding images emerges: one that emphasises visuality and pictoriality, and one that clearly distinguishes images as a semiotic system that is fundamentally different from text.

The Theory of Blotting

At first glance, blotting is easy. Take a large brush, dip it in ink so that it is fully saturated, then quickly dash out and smudge some kind of composition onto a sheet of paper. Let it dry, then attach a sheet of tracing paper to the blot. Trace the outlines of whatever landscape formations or objects (such as trees, rocks, buildings) the blot suggests, making sure to divide the blot into foreground, middle distance, and background. You have turned the blot into a sketch. In a third step, the sketch can be refined further into a more finished drawing or painting. You can keep working directly on the tracing paper or transfer the sketch onto a third sheet of paper or canvas. To finish your composition, you need to keep refining the shapes of your landscape and objects. Add lights and shades to create a uniform effect.

Looking closer, however, things get more complex. For instance, what exactly is meant by ‘some kind of composition’? And how does the blot ‘suggest’ ideas? What will the landscape look like in the end? How do a blot and a sketch differ? And, most importantly, why should one use this somewhat contrived process, rather than just draw what’s visible in nature or from the imagination? As a drawing manual, the *New Method* is unusual among contemporary publications for raising, and attempting to answer, these and other questions. With it, Cozens not only presented his method of blotting but also developed a sophisticated theory of it. Alongside practical instructions, he explains what exactly a blot is, how it might ‘suggest’ ideas and stimulate an artist’s imagination, and, ultimately, how it helps amateur and professional artists alike to compose original landscape images. Cozens drew from a wide range of ideas, bringing together the fields of art theory and aesthetics, as well as empiricist epistemology and theories of cognition. Through a close reading of the *New Method*, this chapter provides an in-depth introduction to blotting that situates the practice within its contemporary theoretical framework. I will first briefly outline the structure of the publication and then present a close reading of the text.

The *New Method* can be broadly divided into four parts. First, Cozens gives a twenty-page theoretical discussion of blotting, including a commentary on its purpose, what a blot is, and how blotting stimulates the imagination and thus supports artistic creation. The second part gives five rules across ten pages, with numbered and highly detailed step-by-step instructions on what kinds of materials to use, how exactly to make a blot, how to transform it into a sketch, and, finally, how to work it into a finished drawing. Though more focused on the practice of blotting, the second part also specifies with greater detail some of the things discussed in Part One, and the two should be read in dialogue with each other. My analysis, therefore, will refer

back and forth between the two parts whilst primarily following the structure of Part One. The third part is titled ‘Descriptions of the various Kinds of Compositions’ and provides a numbered list of sixteen compositional types, which are illustrated in Part Four of the publication. The fourth and final part includes forty-three printed illustrations, spread across twenty-eight plates: First, sixteen aquatint inkblots on individual plates, then five plates with four etchings each of examples of skies and clouds. These are then followed by seven more plates that illustrate the progression from blot through sketch to drawing and the different kinds of drawings that can be created from a blot.

In addition to these four parts, the publication also includes several paratextual elements: a title page, as well as a table of contents (titled ‘Index of Particular Passages in the Treatise’) and table of the plates (titled ‘Table of Examples’), which are placed between the main body of text and the plates. These paratextual elements are important in that they frame the work and set up the reader’s expectations. They also give hints about the ways in which Cozens may have hoped his work to be understood and what he thought the important elements were. I will begin with the title page.

Title Page

The title page already introduces some of the central themes that guide the blotting method and frame its theory (fig. 8). The title itself—*A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*—is a partial quotation from Leonardo da Vinci’s (1452–1519) *Treatise on Painting*. This text was posthumously composed from fragmentary notes and published in 1651, with the first English translation issued in 1721.¹ Cozens’s readers would have been able to recognise the title of the *New Method* as an oft-quoted passage in which Leonardo describes the effect that stains on old walls or the patterns and striations of stones have on the imagination. According to Leonardo, by looking closely at such stains, one might discover landscapes, battle scenes, clouds, or even faces.² Similarly, the blots seem to contain hidden landscapes, geological formations, vegetation, and even figures and animals that seemingly suggest themselves to the artist in an act of close looking.

This idea of images that can be discovered in naturally occurring forms appears again in the second of three quotations Cozens chose as epigraphs for the frontispiece of the *New Method*. In

¹ Leonardo da Vinci, *A Treatise of Painting, by Leonardo Da Vinci. Translated from the Original Italian, and Adorn’d with a Great Number of Cuts. To Which Is Prefix’d the Author’s Life, Done from the Last Edition of the French* (London: John Senex and William Taylor, 1721). A recent translation is in Claire Farago, Janis Bell, and Carlo Vecce, *The Fabrication of Leonardo Da Vinci’s Trattato Della Pittura: With a Scholarly Edition of the Italian Editio Princeps (1651) and an Annotated English Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 619–20. Note that the literature commonly translates the title as *Treatise on Painting*, whereas the eighteenth-century translator chose *Treatise of Painting*.

² Leonardo, *Treatise of Painting*, quoted in Cozens, *New Method*, 5–6. Without page number.

a citation from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623), the reader finds images of bears, mountains, and trees taking shape in clouds and vapours:

Sometimes we see a Cloud that's dragonish,
A Vapour sometime like a Bear, or Lion,
A tower'd Citadel, a pendant Rock,
A forked Mountain, or Promontory,
With Trees upon't, that nod unto the World,
And mock our Eyes with Air.³

Both the reference to Leonardo's stained walls and Shakespeare's mocking clouds link the *New Method* to the art-theoretical tropes of 'images made by chance' and 'potential images'.⁴ Cozens returns to the notion of chance several times in the treatise, and his insistence that the blot 'is a production of chance, with a small degree of design' seems to position the accidental as the dominant creative force in blotting.⁵ In both the treatise's contemporary and modern reception, this, at times, has been conflated with randomness—with the idea that the blots' smudges and splashes, like the explosive drips of modernist action painting, are entirely random and accidental.⁶ However, as Cozens emphasises, the blots are made at will, and, as will be discussed in greater detail below, the blot's accidental elements are balanced out by the intention of the artist in making the blot. The blot is suspended between accidental and intentional creation of form, with each playing constitutive roles. Thus, rather than their chance occurrence and their production by natural and therefore seemingly accidental forces, it is the aesthetic potential and suggestiveness of the stains and clouds—their ability to 'mock our Eyes with Air'—that make them comparable to blotting.

In the *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo emphasises this aesthetic potential over the accidental occurrence of the stains and explains that the discovery of faces and battle scenes in stains is rooted in the human ability to see such things in the 'confused mass of objects' the stains

³ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedie of Anthonie and Cleopatra* (London, 1623), IV, 14, 3-8, quoted in Cozens, *New Method*, title page. Cozens cites this as act 4, scene 2, though this is not correct.

⁴ On the trope of chance images, see Janson, 'The "Image Made by Chance"'; and Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, chap. 5. On potential images, see Gamboni, *Potential Images*; and Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 54–111.

⁵ Cozens, *New Method*, 6. On the semiotics of blotches and stains more broadly, see James Elkins, 'Marks, Traces, "Traits," Contours, "Orli," and "Splendores": Nonsemiotic Elements in Pictures', *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (1995): 822–60; Mieke Bal, 'Semiotic Elements in Academic Practices', *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 573–89; James Elkins, 'What Do We Want Pictures to Be? A Reply to Mieke Bal', *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 590–302; and Yannis Hadjinicolaou, 'Blotches as Symbolic Articulation', in *Symbolic Articulation: Image, Word and the Body Between Action and Schema*, ed. Sabine Marienberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 173–203.

⁶ See, for example, most recently, Elizabeth Jacklin, *The Art of Print: Three Hundred Years of Printmaking* (London: Tate Publishing, 2021), 64; see also Gale, "'Watercolour': Alexander Cozens". In *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, Rosenberg also over-emphasises the issue of accident and chance. See also Ian Andrews's recent book on chance, where Cozens is used as an example of an early modern chance aesthetics without any appreciation of how blotting works, see *Chance, Phenomenology and Aesthetics: Heidegger, Derrida and Contingency in Twentieth Century Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 11–13.

present.⁷ By the seventeenth century, cloud images too were considered fabrications of the human imagination rather than actually created by the clouds, or supernatural forces, themselves.⁸ This distinguishes Leonardo's and Shakespeare's conceptions of chance images from those of earlier authors who believed such images to be present in nature and to have been created by nature, which, in turn, was personified as an artist.⁹ Similarly, Cozens's *New Method* mines this ability of recognising representational images in abstract splotches of ink as the underlying cognitive mechanism in blotting and in transforming a blot into a landscape drawing. Yet, the blots are functionally different from both Leonardo's stains and Shakespeare's clouds. While the stains and clouds seem to evoke specific figures, objects, or even narrative scenes, the blots, as this chapter demonstrates, function as a kind of abstract prospectus of a landscape composition as a whole. They portray not only individual objects that might be incorporated into a larger compositional structure but represent both the entirety of a composition and the objects within it. Moreover, while both Leonardo and Shakespeare recognise the ability of the artist to see representational form in abstract stains as an operation of the human mind, Cozens goes much further. Rather than simply describing this mechanism, he explains the cognitive processes that underpin this ability and shows how they can be employed intentionally within a methodical process of composition. As I will show, Cozens achieved this by embedding his theory of blotting within recent empiricist epistemology, drawing especially on the thought of John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–76).

The *New Method's* conceptual framework is further extended by the two additional quotations that link the treatise to themes of invention and the relationship of art and nature. The first of these is taken from Horace's *Ars Poetica* (c. 10–19 BCE).¹⁰ In this epistolary manual on poetic composition, Horace assembled reflections and maxims to advise his readers on questions of artistic content, techniques, and style, as well as on the life of a poet. A foundational text of Renaissance and early modern aesthetic theory, the *Ars Poetica* placed importance on unity, harmony, and proportion, as well as on refinement of diction, verbal elegance, and decorum. Perhaps most important is Horace's influential theorisation of literary invention, which he defines as the correct choice of subject matter and its organisation into a narrative structure. It is this latter aspect of the *Ars Poetica* that Cozens chose to reference on the title page of the *New Method*. Quoting from the original Latin, Cozens writes:

⁷ Janson, "The 'Image Made by Chance'", 261.

⁸ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 95–105.

⁹ Ibid.; Janson, "The 'Image Made by Chance'", 261.

¹⁰ Andrew Laird, 'The *Ars Poetica*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 132–43.

[non fumum ex fulgore, sed] ex fumo dare lucem
cogitate, ut speciosa dehinc miracula promat¹¹

By comparing an eighteenth-century translation with a twentieth-century one, Horace's meaning can be appreciated with greater nuance.

[He meditates not to produce smoke from a flash,] but out of smoke to
elicit fire, that from thence he may bring forth his instances of the
marvelous [sic] with striking beauty.¹²

[Not smoke after flame does he plan to give,] but after smoke the light,
that then he may set forth striking and wondrous tales—¹³

Horace here juxtaposes Homer's poetry—the ideal he recommends aspiring poets to follow—with the works of the Cyclic poets whose narratives he criticises for being too expansive, detailed, and convoluted.¹⁴ Like Homer, Horace argues, the poet should choose a small, manageable subject and treat it well, rather than a large one they might fail to do justice. A simple idea clearly and logically delineated is preferable to a more complicated one that is poorly executed. In the Cyclic poets' case, nothing but smoke arises from the lightning bolt of flashy diction and narrative structure and disperses quickly, whereas Homer's clarity provides a lasting fire. Similarly, in the *New Method*, as well as in his wider theory of landscape painting, Cozens advocates for simplicity of invention. An idea should be formed with clarity in the artist's mind and economically expressed on paper or canvas. In the introduction to the *New Method*, Cozens argued that the biggest defect in his contemporaries' landscape paintings was an inability to select and combine appropriate ideas and subjects, and thus a failure to invent with clarity and simplicity, i.e. according to the rules set out in Horatian aesthetic theory.

At the same time, the title page's third quotation—from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623)—reminds the reader that invention in painting or poetry should remain true to nature.

This is an art
Which does mend Nature, change it rather; but
The Art itself is Nature.¹⁵

In the scene from *The Winter's Tale* (IV, 4) Polixenes, king of Bohemia, and Perdita, a shepherd's daughter (who, unbeknownst to Polixenes, is a royal princess), discuss the grafting, or

¹¹ Horace, *Ars poetica*, 134-144, quoted in Cozens, *New Method*, title page.

¹² Horace, *The Works of Horace, Translated Literally into English Prose*, trans. C. Smart, 6th ed. (London, 1783), 365.

¹³ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 463, http://www.loebclassics.com/view/horace-ars_poetica/1926/work.xml [last accessed 3 April 2023].

¹⁴ For a discussion of this section of the *Ars Poetica*, see Johannes Zenk, 'Selbstdarstellung und Belehrung: Horazens epistula ad Pisones als Beispiel guter und stimmiger Dichtung (Hor. ars 119-152)', in *Adressat und Adressant in antiken Briefen: Rollenkonfigurationen und kommunikative Strategien in griechischer und römischer Epistolographie*, ed. Gernot Michael Müller, Sabine Retsch, and Johanna Schenk, *Beiträge zur Altertumskunde* 382 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 159–80.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (1623), IV, 4, quoted in Cozens, *New Method*, title page.

crossbreeding, of flowers.¹⁶ Perdita rejects the practice as artifice and deception, whereas Polixenes defends it as a way of ennobling and improving plants, making them both more beautiful and more economically useful. This famous scene has long been understood as a commentary on literary debates concerning nature and art, imitation and copying. As Charlotte Scott has argued, it can also usefully be read alongside early modern husbandry manuals, and the attitudes towards human intervention in natural processes formulated in them.¹⁷ According to Scott, Polixenes' defence of grafting and hybridisation reflects arguments for human intervention in nature motivated by both the scientific and economic interests of an emergent early modern capitalism and its aim of 'transform[ing] the land from potential to product'.¹⁸ Authors like the philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626) argued from a materialistic perspective in which nature was governed by mechanistic laws that could be observed and imitated, so that nature ultimately could be improved and even surpassed. Moreover, any human intervention in nature was seen as *per se* natural because humans themselves were of nature, both being created by God. In this line of argument, both art (in the form of the human body and actions) and nature follow the same processes and operations which are intrinsic to the universe. Thus, any human intervention in nature is in imitation of nature's own God-given mechanisms: 'The Art itself is nature'. Like Bacon, Polixenes argues that grafting is natural in that it follows and extends nature's own mechanistic processes, improving it along the way. And like Polixenes, Cozens suggests that art and invention, and especially invention by blotting, are true to nature in that, like grafting, they simply improve on nature by utilising nature's own modes of operation instead of simply copying it. This idea, again, is more fully articulated in the *New Method's* introduction.

Together, the three quotations raise questions about accidental images and the aesthetic potential of abstract shapes as well as the status of art relative to nature. They also address the artist's ability to create natural, i.e. truthful, representations of nature by the power of their own imagination and artistic invention. The quotations firmly ground the *New Method* within a wide intellectual framework of art theory and aesthetics. They also serve to evoke the authority of authors whose works were widely influential and central to early modern aesthetic thought. Due to the widespread cultural reception of both Horace's and Shakespeare's poetry, as well as a general familiarity with Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* (at least among those interested in the arts), just by reading the title page, readers would have been able to grasp these contexts and

¹⁶ For a poetic reading of the graft as metaphor, the relationship between painting and gardening, and Cozens's citation of this scene, see Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 46–48.

¹⁷ Charlotte Scott, *Shakespeare's Nature: From Cultivation to Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), with literature.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

understand the ways in which blotting, though unusual as a technique, was rooted in classical art theory and its aesthetic tropes and debates.¹⁹ Cozens's idiosyncratic engagement with these ideas, however, would have become clear once audiences read along. Indeed, as I argue in this chapter, the blotting technique can be seen as a radical departure from the ideas presented in the quotations. Cozens thus emerges as a writer who was fluent in current artistic and theoretical debates but developed his own original take on them.

Introduction

The introduction expands on these themes and delineates in greater detail the theoretical framework of the *New Method*. Cozens begins by setting out a theory of landscape painting rooted in ideas about invention and imitation that had come to define the relationship between art and nature in European art theory. Cozens introduces these concepts with an adapted quotation from *The English Garden* (1772–81), a popular didactic poem in four books by the amateur artist and garden theorist William Mason (1724–97):

The powers of art and invention, impart picturesque beauty, and strength of character to the works of an artist in landscape painting; as noble and graceful deportment confers a winning aspect on the human frame. Composing landscapes by invention, is not the art of imitating individual nature; it is more; it is forming artificial representations of landscape on the general principle of nature, founded in unity and character, which is true simplicity; concentrating in each individual composition the beauties, which judicious imitation would select from those which are dispersed in nature.²⁰

In this impactful first paragraph, the reader is quickly introduced to a range of ideas central to Neoclassical aesthetic thought, including concepts of invention and judicious imitation vs. copying, as well as notions of general and individual nature.²¹ A landscape painting, the reader

¹⁹ On the reception of the *Treatise on Painting* in Britain, see Geoff Quilley, 'The Trattato Della Pittura and Leonardo's Reputation in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics', in *Re-Reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550–1900*, ed. Claire Farago (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 495–507. The passage was generally known and Cozens was not the only author to cite it. Reynolds, for example, referred to it in *Discourse II* (lines 373–75) as one of many sources of inspiration in nature. For Reynolds, however, images in walls rank lowest in the hierarchy of things that might inspire a young artist's imagination. See Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 86. On the reception of Horace and the *Ars Poetica* in the eighteenth century, see David Money, 'The Reception of Horace in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. Stephen Harrison, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 318–33.

²⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 1–2. The poem was published in four books between 1772 and 1782. Cozens seems to have cited from a new and corrected edition published in 1786 that also included a commentary and notes. For the quotation, see the commentary to the first book of William Mason, *The English Garden, A Poem in Four Books*, 1786, 121. 'Gardening imparts to rural scenery what a noble and graceful deportment confers upon the human Frame: It is not an imitative Art, it is more, it is an endeavour to bestow on each individual Reality, those beauties which judicious imitation would select from many, and combine in one fictitious Representation.' See also Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 61.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of this quotation and Cozens's adherence to Neoclassical aesthetic theory, see Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, chaps 3 and 4. The reference to Mason likely was another way for Cozens to evoke the

learns, is to have picturesque beauty and strength of character, which can be achieved by the means of art and invention. Invention, in turn, entails not copying individual nature but the judicious imitation, i.e. selection and combination, of those beauties which are dispersed in nature. Like Horace, Cozens emphasises the need for unity and simplicity. And like Polixenes, he shows that art and judicious imitation function on the general principle of nature, and thus are both natural and truthful.²²

As Paul Oppé remarked, these ideas were commonplace and Cozens's contemporaries would have required no further explanation to make sense of this introductory passage.²³ Indeed, eighteenth-century readers would have agreed that imitation was a core function of not just landscape but all genres of painting. Imitation, or mimesis, was the principle that negotiated the artist's relationship with nature and the visible world. In imitating the natural world or human actions judiciously, the artist did not simply copy visible reality. Individual or particular instances of nature were stripped of their inessential or accidental qualities through a process of abstraction that served to reveal nature's essential and general characteristics. In his third *Discourse*, Joshua Reynolds (1723–92), President of the Royal Academy, explained that the ability to do so relied on practice. As young artists observed and drew specific objects in and from nature, they learned to distinguish particularities from generalities, and to separate the accidental from the essential.²⁴ Drawing, in this context, was not only a technical skill but an epistemological operation whose repeated application promised to reveal an object's universal characteristics as visualised in its ideal form. Ideal form or beauty was, in turn, directly expressive of a higher 'divine idea', for it appeared 'to be possessed of the will and intention of the Creator'.²⁵ The purpose of art was to reveal this universal truth, and the ability to do so was seen as 'the intellectual dignity... that ennobles the painter's art'²⁶ and 'entitles it to the name of a Liberal Art, and ranks it as a sister of poetry'.²⁷

authority of an author whose views were influential for aesthetic debates in the late eighteenth century. Along with his writing on garden theory, in 1782 Mason re-edited Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*, with a commentary by Joshua Reynolds.

²² The concept of imitating nature as a creative force (*natura naturans*) had been juxtaposed to a concept of nature as an in itself complete creation (*natura naturata*) by Aristotle and had continued to inform how the relation between nature and art was defined throughout the early modern period. In the eighteenth century the concept of *natura naturans* became central as a model for artists and poets, who aimed to imitate nature in its mode of operation rather than describing its form. See Valeska von Rosen, 'Nachahmung', in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft: Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019); Lars-Thade Ulrichs, *Die andere Vernunft: Philosophie und Literatur zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*, Deutsche Literatur, Studien und Quellen, Band 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 214ff., 348–50.

²³ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 57.

²⁴ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, III, 106–23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 127–33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 59–60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 298–301. On the political and ideological dimensions of this claim for universality, see John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press,

In landscape painting, the concept of judicious imitation was what distinguished topography from the more elevated ideal landscape. While copying, or simple imitation, was the basis for topographical landscape paintings that showed specific places (also understood as ‘portraiture of place’), ideal landscape paintings were products of judicious imitation and the imagination. An artist would combine generalised landscape elements to create an ideal representation of nature rather than a topographical view. Such idealised landscapes were rooted in the study of nature but stripped of its accidental details. They showed nature, in other words, not as it was but as it should be. Moreover, applying modes of judicious imitation and idealising invention, landscape painters hoped to elevate their art within a hierarchy of genres that valued intellectual invention higher than simple imitation. Ultimately, the idealised visions of nature that could be achieved through judicious imitation and invention served the goal of art to reveal universal truths through the depiction of ideal beauty. By revealing such universal truths, the artist could elevate the public’s mind from depravity to virtue and thus contribute ‘to the general purpose and perfection of society’ and advance the ‘dignity of [human] nature.’²⁸

It is this doctrine of ideal landscape painting that Cozens subscribes to in the first paragraph of the *New Method*. With just this paragraph, Cozens manages to introduce his readers quickly to a wide range of aesthetic ideas, subtly formulating his own aesthetic goals, and the ambition of his treatise, in the process: to present a technique of creating ideal landscape paintings, based on judicious imitation and invention, that fulfil art’s humanistic purpose and public function of depicting universal truths for the intellectual and moral elevation of the art-viewing public.

After having set out this goal, in the next paragraph Cozens laments the absence of a method or technique to fulfil these theoretical ideals. In his view, the lack of such a method has ‘retarded the progress of [the landscape genre] more than impotence of execution.’²⁹ This method should be ‘an instantaneous method of bringing forth the conception of an ideal subject fully to the view (though in the crudest manner),’ and ‘would promote original composition in painting’.³⁰ It becomes clear here that Cozens sees this not as a problem of technical ability but as one of invention and judicious imitation. Later in the text, he writes that the ability to draw could be acquired by anyone with patience, practice, and the right technique. Original invention, by contrast, is a more difficult skill to master.³¹ The defects in contemporary landscape painting

1986). For a wider critique of claims of universalism during the Enlightenment, see Daniel Carey and Sven Trakulhun, ‘Universalism, Diversity, and the Postcolonial Enlightenment’, in *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 240–80.

²⁸ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, IX, 49.

²⁹ Cozens, *New Method*, 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

resulting from this inability to invent, according to Cozens, are similarity, weakness of character, and a ‘want of nature and originality’. In the next paragraph, Cozens further expands on the reasons for these defects. They may be due:

1. To the deficiency of a stock of ideas originally laid up in the mind, from which might be selected such as suit any particular occasion;
2. To an incapacity of distinguishing and connecting ideas so treasured up;
3. To a want of facility, or quickness, in execution; so that the composition, how perfect soever in conception, grows faint and dies away before the hand of the artist can fix it upon the paper, or canvas.³²

Charles Cramer has shown that the criticism presented here—the inability to distinguish and connect ideas as well as the ‘deficiency of a stock of ideas’—is rooted in the empirical epistemology of John Locke, in particular in the theory of ideas formulated in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).³³ For Locke, ideas are the basic unit or vehicle of thought. He holds that ideas can be divided into classes of simple and complex. Simple ideas are acquired by experience—either by empirical observation or reflection—and are preserved in the memory or store of ideas. The mind is equipped with a set of innate faculties and operations to process the ideas thus acquired and stored. The mind might combine simple ideas into complex ones, compare and relate ideas, or generalise ideas by abstracting the particulars of an idea (such as time and place) to arrive at a general one.³⁴

Similarly, later in the *New Method*, in a somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of Locke’s theories, Cozens explains that observable nature can be divided into several parts, or classes, of gradated size—from small to large, larger, and largest. Knowledge of the parts, or ideas, is acquired by observation, a skill which can be strengthened with exercise. Echoing Locke’s *tabula rasa*—the notion that the human mind at birth is a blank slate or white sheet of paper without innate ideas—Cozens argues that ideas are acquired from small to large and largest in progression from childhood to youth and into adulthood.³⁵ As we age, our attention is drawn

³² Ibid., 2–3.

³³ Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’.

³⁴ The literature on John Locke’s theory of ideas is vast. For an overview, see Vere Chappell, ‘Locke’s Theory of Ideas’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 26–55; and William Uzgalis, ‘John Locke’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2022 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), sec. 2, para 4; sec. 2.2, para 1, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/locke/> [accessed 11 May 2023]. For the abstraction of ideas, see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1706], ed. Roger Woolhouse, 5th ed. (London: Penguin, 2004), 2.11.9.

³⁵ On the metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, see Locke, *Essay*, 1.2.15. On its cultural reception, see Matthew Eddy, *Media and the Mind: Art, Science, and Notebooks as Paper Machines, 1700–1830* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), Introduction; and Brad Pasanek, *Metaphors of Mind: An Eighteenth-Century Dictionary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), Introduction and chap. 6.

from the small or simple ideas to the larger ones, and only once we reach adulthood do we begin to ‘take notice’ of the largest and more complex class of ideas. As in Locke, once acquired, ideas are stripped of their particular circumstances and retained in the memory as general ideas.³⁶ As Cramer has pointed out, it is not unusual that Cozens would draw so extensively from the ideas of Locke. Citing the work of Walter J. Bate and Martin Kallich, he shows that much of British academic art and literary theory was built upon the empiricist epistemology of Locke, Hume, and others.³⁷ For Neoclassical theorists like Joshua Reynolds, this was a way of revising the traditional arguments and goals of the art-theoretical canon, developed largely in Continental academic debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, through the lens of contemporary empiricism, colouring them with a contemporary and specifically British hue.³⁸ It is easy to see how principles of generalisation—general ideas as general nature—could provide an updated explanatory model for an art theory of judicious imitation. Meanwhile, Locke’s emphasis on the act of selecting and combining ideas was mirrored in theories of invention whereby figures and objects are selected and combined to form compositions.³⁹ Discussing examples from the literary canon, like Laurence Sterne’s *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), Cramer shows that, at least for some of these authors, the evocation of empirical epistemology went hand in hand with a broader cultural anxiety about the dangers of associationism, i.e. the ability, or inability, to connect ideas. As the example of Sterne’s titular character Tristram Shandy shows, improperly selected and connected ideas, or the ‘disorderly jumbling’ of ideas, leads to delusion and madness.⁴⁰ And although Cozens is less concerned with such ills, associationism gone awry, to him, is still a problem. As discussed, a poorly stocked store of ideas and the mind’s inability to select, combine, and connect ideas is the root cause of bad painting, resulting in a lack of originality, character, and nature. The *New Method*’s technique of blotting, though itself a seemingly whimsical exercise, is offered as a solution to avoid such errors of the mind.

Cozens returns to the cognitive aspects of blotting only towards the end of the treatise, but a first glimpse as to how blotting might aide these problems and ‘promote original composition in landscape’ is offered in the final section of the *New Method*’s introduction. Here, Cozens turns to narrating how he developed or, in his words, discovered the blotting method. According to this

³⁶ Cozens, *New Method*, 14–15.

³⁷ Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’; Walter J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York and London: Harper, 1961); Martin Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England: A History of a Psychological Method in English Criticism*, Studies in English Literature 55 (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1970). For a more recent assessment of the influence of Lockean empiricism on ‘proto-aesthetic thought’, see Dabney Townsend, *Taste and Experience in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics: The Move Toward Empiricism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

³⁸ Wark, ‘Introduction’, xvii–xviii.

³⁹ In *Discourse II*, Reynolds talks about invention as ‘little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory’. See *Discourses on Art*, II, 82–87.

⁴⁰ Cramer, ‘Alexander Cozens’s *New Method*’, 117–18. See also Locke, *Essay*, 2.11.13.

anecdote, one day, while teaching, he was contemplating ‘original composition of landscape, in contradistinction to copying.’⁴¹ He ‘lamented the want of a mechanical method sufficiently expeditious and extensive to draw forth the ideas of an ingenious mind disposed to the art of designing.’ By chance, he had a soiled piece of paper at hand. Glancing at the paper, he ‘sketched something like a landscape on it, with a pencil, in order to catch some hint which might be improved into a rule.’ Later, he realised that the stains on the paper had influenced him, ‘insensibly, in expressing the general appearance of a landscape.’ Next, he replicated the accident by ‘hastily’ marking a sheet of paper with diluted ink, creating ‘rude forms’ he hoped would have the same effect on his student. The student ‘instantly improved the blot, as it may be called, into an intelligible sketch, and from that time made such progress in composition, as fully answered my most sanguine expectations from the experiment.’⁴²

While it is impossible to determine the facticity of this origin story of blotting, within the argumentative structure of the *New Method* it plays an important role. It is here that the reader is first introduced to the term and concept of the ‘blot’, and to the technique of blotting as the solution to the problem of bad landscape painting and poor invention set out before. Blotting is described as a ‘mechanical method’ and an ‘expeditious’ act. The blot is produced ‘hastily’, ‘draws forth’ ideas, and influences the mind ‘insensibly’. The mechanism of blotting appears as an act of relinquishing control, as something that occurs when we glance rather than look. The reader also gets a first sense of what exactly this glance reveals. Unlike the faces, animals, and battle scenes that emerge from stains and clouds, the blot is expressive of a ‘general appearance of a landscape’. Yet, despite this expressive quality, the blot is not a sketch. It is not yet a fully formed landscape, it just has the general appearance of one. It looks ‘something *like* a landscape’.⁴³ The blot is rude whereas the sketch is intelligible; the blot needs to be improved to become a sketch.

Finally, the section presents the blotting method as an alternative teaching methodology that moves beyond the traditional approach of teaching by making students copy the works of others or draw directly from nature. Indeed, earlier in the introduction, Cozens hypothesises that his contemporaries’ inability to combine ideas and invent original designs may stem from spending too much time copying, both after the old masters and nature, ‘which tends to weaken the powers of invention’.⁴⁴ Blotting, by contrast, promises to teach artists how to compose their own

⁴¹ Cozens, *New Method*, 4.

⁴² Ibid., 4–5. On the accidental nature of this discovery, and the way it anticipates the role of chance in blotting, see Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, 80, 140–41; and Miriam Volmert, ‘Vom “Chaos der Farben” zum blot: Konzepte von Bilderfindung und Gedächtnis bei Alexander Cozens und Samuel von Hoogstraten’, *Flusser Studies* 14 (2012): 18.

⁴³ My emphasis.

⁴⁴ Cozens, *New Method*, 3. Cozens writes that ‘it cannot be doubted, that too much time is spent in copying the

original landscape images by invention. In this context, the anecdote serves to illustrate to the reader how they, too, might improve their practice of composing landscapes by employing the blotting method. They can imagine themselves as the student whose progress exceeded Cozens's 'most sanguine expectations'.

To further contextualise the anecdote, Cozens then turns to Leonardo and quotes in full the passage in the *Treatise on Painting* that inspired the *New Method's* title.

Among other things I shall not scruple to deliver a new method of assisting the invention, which, though trifling in appearance, may yet be of considerable service in opening the mind, and putting it upon the scent of new thoughts; and it is this. If you look upon an old wall covered with dirt, or the odd appearance of some streaked stones, you may discover several things like landscapes, battles, clouds, uncommon attitudes, humorous faces, draperies &c. Out of this confused mass of objects, the mind will be furnished with abundance of designs and subjects perfectly new.⁴⁵

Like the anecdote about the origin of blotting, the quotation of Leonardo serves to introduce the reader to the idea of the blots. Readers learn that blotting is 'a new method of assisting the invention' aimed at 'opening the mind' through the associative and suggestive power of 'confused mass[es] of objects' that furnish the mind 'with abundance of designs and subjects perfectly new.' The similarities between blotting and Leonardo's use of stains are obvious. Perhaps to fend off accusations of plagiarism, Cozens claims that he learned about Leonardo's use of stains only after having employed his own technique of blotting as a teaching method for a long time. He also confidently considers blotting an improvement on Leonardo's stains. In the *New Method*, he writes, the blots are made on purpose whereas Leonardo's stains are to be found in old, mottled walls. Therefore, they are purely accidental, and unreliable. In the absence of stained walls, Cozens explains, Leonardo's method fails.

works of others, which tends to weaken the powers of invention; and [...] that too much time may be employed in copying the landscapes of nature herself.' This contrasts with prevailing pedagogy, whereby students learned to draw by repeatedly copying from prints and illustrations in drawing books. Similarly, throughout the *Discourses*, Joshua Reynolds emphasises the importance of studying the works of the old and modern masters. While he emphasises the importance of copying with 'painful and humiliating exactness' (*Discourse I*, 120) after casts or live models as the only method to acquire the necessary skills of drawing, he rejects 'the drudgery of copying' (*Discourse II*, 129) after other paintings. Instead, he recommends imitation as a kind of active engagement with a painter's work. Specifically, he encourages students to make a competitive copy of an artwork they admire, so as to highlight their own deficiencies and guide them in their acquisition of skill—'indeed a severe and mortifying task'. See *Discourses on Art*, II, 192–210. On drawing instruction, see Bermingham, *Learning to Draw* and Sloan, *A Noble Art*.

⁴⁵ Leonardo, *Treatise of Painting*, quoted in Cozens, *New Method*, 5–6, without reference. Cozens relies on the first English translation of 1721, with slight adjustments for grammar. A more recent translation reads: 'I shall not fail to include among these precepts a new invention for speculation. Even though it may appear slight and almost laughable, nonetheless it is very useful in arousing the ingegno to a variety of inventions. This is it: if you look at stained walls or mottled stones, in them you may be able to see inventions and likenesses of different landscapes, different battles, the dynamic actions of figures, strange facial expressions and dress, and infinite other things, because the ingegno is aroused to new inventions by indeterminate things.' See Farago, Bell, and Vecce, *The Fabrication of Leonardo Da Vinci's Trattato Della Pittura*, 619.

What comes through here is a first glimpse into the balancing of accident and intention that informs not just the purposeful production of blots vs. the chance discovery of stains but runs through the entire text of the *New Method* and is a central mechanism of blotting. This becomes clearer in the next part of the text, where Cozens proceeds to define more clearly what a blot is. Here, the perspective of the text shifts from the intention *to produce* a blot to the role of intention *in producing* a blot.

On Blots and Blotting

The next section of the text, following directly from the Leonardo quotation, begins with Cozens's oft-quoted insistence that 'An artificial blot is a production of chance, with a small degree of design'.⁴⁶ With its ambivalent evocation of both chance and design (or intention), this quotation is just one example of several instances of what at first appears to be an ambiguity about the relative roles of, and relationship between, accident and intention in blotting. Throughout the text of the *New Method*, Cozens offers several passages that seem to highlight the role of intention, only to contradict himself a few lines down with an insistence on the importance of accident. In the rules on how to make a blot, for example, Cozens clearly states that the first step towards the act of blotting—before a blot is made—is to 'Possess your mind strongly with an idea'.⁴⁷ Just a few lines down, he advises readers to crumple up a sheet of paper and smoothen it out again before making the blot. The resulting creases in the paper are meant to disrupt the flow of ink across the sheet, making it pool in unexpected ways and places, thereby creating accidental forms that undermine the intention of the artist. Finally, readers are told that such accidental forms, like Leonardo's mottled walls or Shakespeare's clouds suggest ideas to the painter—'ideas are presented to the mind'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cozens, *New Method*, 6. The term 'artificial' here is meant to distinguish the intentionally produced blot from the naturally occurring stains. Design means a visual intention or model in the artist's mind that precedes material execution, following the semantic tradition of sixteenth-century art theory of *disegno*, and in particular Federico Zuccari's division into *disegno interno* and *disegno esterno* that distinguishes design (mental) from drawing (material). For a discussion of Cozens's use of the terms drawing vs. design, see Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 134–35. For an overview of the concept of *disegno*, see Claire Pace, 'Disegno e Colore', in *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1996); Valeska von Rosen, 'Disegno und Colore', in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft: Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019). For more detailed analyses, see Wolfgang Kemp, 'Disegno. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Begriffs zwischen 1547 und 1607', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 19 (1974): 219–40; Robert Williams, *Art, Theory and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Tecne to Metatecne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 1; Karen-Edis Barzman, 'Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence', in *From Studio to Studiolo: Florentine Draftsmanship Under the First Medici Grand Dukes*, ed. Larry J. Feinberg, Exh. Cat. Oberlin College, Allen Memorial Art Museum (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 37–48; Matthijs Jonker, *The Academization of Art: A Practice Approach to the Early Histories of the Accademia Del Disegno and the Accademia Di San Luca*, Papers of the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome 70 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2022).

⁴⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

These contradictions have informed, and divided, much of the scholarship on Cozens. As Lebensztejn observed, scholars have responded in two ways to these contradictions. They have chosen to emphasise either chance over intention, or intention over chance (while others, I would add, have simply sidestepped the issue by not discussing chance at all).⁴⁹ Horst Janson, for example, in his seminal article on the intellectual history of chance images, emphasises chance in blotting to support his narrative of a persistent interest in natural and accidental images from antiquity through to the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ By contrast, Paul Oppé downplayed the chance elements in an attempt, as both Janson and Lebensztejn believe, to make the *New Method* acceptable to his own notions of ‘serious art’ produced with artistic intent and to integrate blotting within the tradition and artistic practices of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British landscape watercolour painting.⁵¹ Faced with the *New Method*’s contradictions, it seems, scholars have tended to favour selective readings of the text, choosing whichever interpretation

⁴⁹ Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, 131–33.

⁵⁰ Janson closely traces the history of the chance-image topos, and of the recognition of the representational quality of accidental and natural images, from antiquity through the Renaissance and to the eighteenth century, describing different variants of the chance idea and how they evolved. He distinguishes two basic concepts: images made by nature, and images made by an artist, with the intervention of chance. The latter can be found in Pliny’s story of the ancient painter Protogenes, who, exasperated by his inability to paint the foaming chaps of a dog, flung a cloth soaked in paint at his panel, from which a perfect representation of the dog’s foamy muzzle emerged. Representation, here, is achieved by the fortuitous intervention of chance. Among the former are counted images that appear in clouds, the knolls of trees, or in striated and mottled gemstones. These can either be perfect as they are, with high representational accuracy and iconographic detail, or they may need to be perfected by an artist. In *De statua* (1464), Leon Battista Alberti explores the latter, tracing the origin of sculpture to the representational quality of suggestive forms in tree trunks and clumps of earth, ‘which through some light changes could be made to resemble a natural shape.’ While Alberti recognises the artistic potential resulting from such representational quality of natural forms, as Janson argues, his analysis is limited by its application only to the primeval past and the plastic arts. Only in Leonardo is this phenomenon first applied to painting. Janson demonstrates that Leonardo recognises more clearly than Alberti ‘that chance images are not objectively present but must be “read into” the material by the artist’s imagination.’ See Janson, ‘The “Image Made by Chance”’, esp. 261. For a more detailed discussion of this long tradition as it applies to Cozens, see Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, chaps 5 and 7. In regard to Janson’s interpretation, Lebensztejn warns of a teleological and linear argument that sees Cozens as a precursor to early twentieth-century experiments with chance, automatism, and gestural painting.

⁵¹ Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, 131–33. In doing so, Oppé argued against Cozens’s early-nineteenth-century critics who ridiculed him as the ‘Blotmaster-General to the town’ and dismissed blotting and its reliance on accident as quackery, as a ‘fallacious’ method with a degenerating effect on taste and the arts. Lebensztejn highlights the fact that, ultimately, both Oppé and the authors he criticises view blotting from the same perspective, i.e. with the conviction that chance has no place in artistic production and that art demands artistic intent. To Oppé, ‘The presence of an initial idea is the first and chief requisite of Cozens’s blots. The whole argument of the treatise, the essential feature of the *New Method* and of his whole teaching, is that the general idea of the landscape composition should be before the artist when he makes the blot.’ In *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 59. See also Oppé, ‘Fresh Light on Alexander Cozens’, *The Print-Collector’s Quarterly* 8 (1921): 61–90. On Janson’s critique of Oppé, see ‘The “Image Made by Chance”’, n. 53. ‘Oppé himself still found the notion of “landscapes made by accident” so unworthy of serious consideration that he exaggerated the purposeful aspects of the *Method* in an effort to salvage Cozens’s reputation.’ Lebensztejn also notes that Oppé relies on a modern concept of chance, which would have been unrecognisable to Cozens. In the eighteenth century, chance occurrences in the world would have been understood within a Deist conception of the universe which holds that God’s existence can be observed in nature, and that nature thereby revealed the divine principles of the universe. Within this conception, accident is ascribed to those occurrences that humans do not understand: ‘Chance, therefore, does not exist. It is only a name given to the particular effects of universal order by man’s ignorance when he sees his desires thwarted.’ (150) And later: ‘Oppé, in trying to reduce [chance’s] role, may have overestimated its importance, and projected onto the *New Method* the modern conception of chance.’ (152) My translation.

best suited their own intellectual goals.⁵² And it does seem odd: how could a blot be both intentional and based on chance; how can it require ideas whilst also suggesting them?

However, returning to Cozens's text and reading the passage in full, a more nuanced relationship between intention and chance soon emerges.

An artificial blot is a production of chance, with a small degree of design; for in making it, the attention of the performer must be employed on the whole, or the general form of the composition, and upon this only; whilst the subordinate parts are left to the casual motion of the hand and the brush.⁵³

It becomes clear that chance unfolds only in a very limited, tightly circumscribed capacity, and that intention, in turn, is disrupted by accident. What at first appeared as inconsistency and contradiction can be reframed as a careful balancing of intention and chance. Lebensztejn confirms this in his own analysis of the *New Method* by attentively considering the various instances where chance seems to outweigh intention, and vice versa. He concludes that each forms a constitutive part of blotting, yet emphasises that there remains an element of ambiguity that cannot be resolved because the exact relationship between accident and intention, according to him, is never fully explained.⁵⁴ However, I would argue that the respective roles and purposes of both intention and accident, as well as their interplay, can be delineated more precisely if considered alongside the cognitive processes that underlie blotting. In doing so, I believe a more nuanced understanding of the technique will emerge, and resolve some of the contradictions that, at times, have fuelled the more sensationalist readings of the *New Method*. In these readings, blotting appears as an act of uncontrolled randomness—an interpretation that could not be further from Cozens's own understanding of his technique. To do this, I will first consider Cozens's remarkable conception of the blot itself, and then examine his definition of what an idea in blotting actually is. In fact, much of the disagreements between scholars and the ambiguities concerning chance and intention stem from a limited understanding of the various inflections in how Cozens uses the term 'idea'. Lebensztejn, too, misunderstands what it means to possess one's mind with an idea, and what kind of ideas a blot might suggest. Thus, he falls short in giving a complete explanation of blotting.⁵⁵ This chapter presents a more detailed reading of Cozens's adaptation of Lockean theories of ideas and thus offers a clearer sense of

⁵² Kim Sloan and Charles Cramer largely sidestep the issue, focusing instead on Cozens's practice as a drawing master and landscape painter and the epistemological theory of blotting respectively. Henri Zerner, like Oppé, questions the role of chance and emphasises intention in 'Alexandre Cozens et sa méthode pour l'invention des paysages', *L'Oeil* 137 (1966): 28–33. By contrast, those who consider blotting primarily through the lens of chance include Matthew Gale and, most recently, Elizabeth Jacklin, although their analyses remain largely superficial and do not contribute much to our understanding of the function of chance in blotting.

⁵³ Cozens, *New Method*, 6.

⁵⁴ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 154.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 143–45.

the layered meaning of the term ‘idea’ in the *New Method*. This, in turn, will allow us to identify more clearly the specific roles of accident and intention in blotting.

On the other hand, while a re-reading of Cozens’s argument will offer a more nuanced understanding of the roles of chance and intention in blotting, I would also like to push back against the idea that ambiguities or contradictions do, in fact, need resolution at all. Instead, we could consider the balancing of intention and chance, and any resulting ambiguity, as a productive elision—as a blank space in which originality and invention unfold experimentally and intuitively. In fact, what has been overlooked in the literature thus far are the pedagogical possibilities that ambiguity—or openness, in more positive terms—in the text affords.⁵⁶ I would like to suggest that such an openness is not so much the result of authorial slip, but a product of the text’s pedagogical aims. Ambiguity, in my understanding, is a feature, not a bug. Though written primarily for beginners, the publication was taken up by professional artists and amateurs alike, and it seems plausible that Cozens hoped to encourage readers of all levels of skill to incorporate blotting into their practice.⁵⁷ The ambivalence in his text is less a limitation than an opportunity for readers to adapt the technique to their skill level, applying more intention or less. Indeed, in the next paragraph Cozens explains that a blot with too high a degree of intention—i.e. with a ‘superabundance of design’—is simply ‘a spirited sketch’.

In making blots it frequently happens, that the person blotting is inclined to direct his thoughts to the objects, or particular parts, which constitute the scene or subject, as well as to the general disposition of the whole. The consequence of this is an universal appearance of design in his work, which is more than is necessary to a true blot. But this superabundance of design is of no disadvantage to the drawing that is to be made from it, provided it is done with judgment and spirit; for if what is intended for a blot, proves to be a spirited sketch, the artist has only the less to invent in his drawing, when he is making it out.⁵⁸

While such a spirited sketch is not a ‘true blot’ anymore, surviving blots, as well as the illustrations of the *New Method*, suggest that, even among true blots, there is a great deal of variety.⁵⁹ Some seem to have been produced with a greater degree of intention, while others appear less controlled, and, as Oppé confirms, some ‘pass over indistinguishably into mere rough sketches.’⁶⁰ This variability is reflected in Rule III, where Cozens writes that ‘Blots may be

⁵⁶ In Lebensztejn’s analysis the readers and students remain entirely absent.

⁵⁷ On the reception of the *New Method* by professional artists, including Joseph Wright of Derby and John Constable, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 82–87.

⁵⁸ Cozens, *New Method*, 6–7.

⁵⁹ Lebensztejn observes this variance in his discussion of the ambiguities of the *New Method*, pointing to Oppé’s preference for the less abstract ones. However, he does not consider blots that are not related to the publication. See *L’art de la tache*, 134.

⁶⁰ Oppé, ‘Fresh Light on Alexander Cozens’, 77.

made more or less intelligible or correct, to any degree', i.e. more or less intentional.⁶¹ One blot by Cozens's son, John Robert (1752–97), for example, benefited from what could be described as a high degree of accident whilst being contained by a general sense of how the composition should be structured (fig. 9). This is contrasted with the printed illustrations included in the *New Method*, which, according to Cozens, are 'given in this work not in a great degree of rudeness, that they may be the better accommodated to the capacity of beginners.'⁶² Even here, however, there is a range of 'rudeness'. Plate 2, for example, clearly seems to show mountain peaks whereas the subject of plate 14 is much harder to discern (figs. 10–11). Beyond the publication, as I discuss in the next chapter, surviving blots range across a spectrum of intelligibility and rudeness, to use Cozens's terms. Such variance, in turn, is another reason why some scholars, in reading the *New Method*, have tended to emphasise either intention or chance. Some blots do indeed seem accidental, while others are more directly legible as specific landscape images. Ultimately, I would argue that the oppositional nature of intention and chance as it has been discussed in the literature is a false dichotomy. Both are necessary, and both can be up- or down-regulated to suit the artist's individual preferences and goals.

Aside from the part-intentional, part-accidental nature of the blot, what comes to the fore in the passage quoted earlier are the ways in which blotting operates on two distinct but interlinked registers: it comprises a general form as well as smaller parts which are subordinate to the larger whole. One requires the artist's attention; the other is left to the casual motion of the hand and the brush. The relationship between chance and intention thus is anchored in the relationship between the parts and the whole.⁶³ The next paragraph explains in greater detail how these two registers connect. Here, Cozens's radical conception of the blot begins to take shape.

A true blot is an assemblage of dark shapes or masses made with ink upon a piece of paper, and likewise of light ones produced by the paper being left blank. All the shapes are rude and unmeaning, as they are formed with the swiftest hand. But at the same time there appears a general disposition of these masses, producing one comprehensive form, which may be conceived and purposely intended before the blot is begun. This general form will exhibit some kind of subject, and this is all that should be done designedly.⁶⁴

Confirming the previous section, the general form, or disposition of the whole, is intended, while the subordinate parts are accidental. But the passage goes further and introduces the reader to several other important ideas about blotting. The blot, in an echo of Leonardo's 'confused

⁶¹ Cozens, *New Method*, 25.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ This is implicit to Lebensztejn's analysis. See *L'art de la tache*, 141.

⁶⁴ Cozens, *New Method*, 7.

mass of objects', is an assemblage of rude and unmeaning shapes of both ink and blank paper. Devoid of inherent meaning, it is presented as an abstract binary of black and white, of positive and negative form.⁶⁵ These unmeaning shapes of black and white are the subordinate parts of the blot. Taken together, they form larger masses, which, in turn, create a unified whole or comprehensive form. This comprehensive or general form 'exhibit[s] some kind of subject' and is the only part of the blot that is produced with intention. What exactly is meant by subject or idea, however, at this point remains unclear. Nevertheless, it becomes evident here that the blot cannot be understood simply as a kind of roughly sketched landscape or, in formalist terms, a delineated figure on a ground. Instead, what characterises the blot is the effect generated by the interplay of abstract forms, of 'mark and non-mark'⁶⁶, of positive and negative form, and the relation of the parts to the whole.

Cozens further specifies that

The blot is not a drawing, but an assemblage of accidental shapes, from which a drawing may be made. It is a hint, or crude resemblance of the whole effect of a picture, except the keeping and colouring; that is to say, it gives an idea of the masses of light and shade, as well as of the forms, contained in a finished composition.⁶⁷

Earlier in the text, Cozens had already explained that blot, sketch, and drawing are not the same. Here, this distinction is more clearly drawn. Without keeping (i.e. the modulation of light and shade to harmonise the spatial relationship between objects) and colouring, the blot is reduced to its compositional structure or pictorial form and the distribution of masses of light and dark, made up of the smaller accidental marks and non-marks of ink and paper.⁶⁸ In this formal abstraction, the blot crudely resembles the effect of the whole or the comprehensive form of a picture. Cozens further illustrates this with an example:

If a finished drawing be gradually removed from the eye, its smaller parts will be less and less expressive; and when they are wholly undistinguished, and the largest parts alone remain visible, the drawing will then represent a blot, with the appearance of some degree of keeping. On the contrary, if a blot be placed at such a distance that the harshness of the parts should disappear, it would represent a finished drawing, but with the appearance of uncommon spirit.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ On the binary of black and white, and the use of blank space as a constitutive part of the blot, see Lebensztein, *L'art de la tache*, chap. 6, esp. 118–20; Jean-Claude Lebensztein, 'In Black and White', in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 135–37; Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 60–61.

⁶⁶ Lebensztein, *L'art de la tache*, 118.

⁶⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 8.

⁶⁸ Later in the Rules, Cozens repeats his definition of the blot as a binary of black and white, contrasting this with a finished landscape drawing, which is a gradation of shade. This gradation, also called the 'subordination of light' is what is meant by 'keeping'. It is also called 'shading'. See Ibid., 29–31; see also 'Keeping, n.', in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4747924401> [last accessed 27 June 2023].

⁶⁹ Cozens, *New Method*, 8.

In this thought experiment, drawing and blot approximate each other as they are positioned at a distance from the viewer. The drawing is too far away for any of its details to be visible, while the blot is far enough for the harshness of its abstracted and accidental forms to disappear into a sort of blurry myopia. Seen at a distance, the drawing loses definition while the blot loses roughness. As Lebensztejn points out, Cozens here relies on an established trope that recognises the ability of altering a painting's effect through the distance between viewer and work.⁷⁰ The Florentine painter and art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), for example, explained how Titian's (c.1488/90–1576) late paintings could achieve visual legibility only if viewed from a distance. Seen up close, the broad strokes and rough impasto of Titian's handling created a mottled and coarse effect that made it difficult to make sense of the shapes and forms it delineated.⁷¹ Seen from a distance, they coalesced into a legible depiction. Thus, for Vasari, stepping back from a painting was a way of being able to appreciate its representational subject matter. By contrast, towards the late seventeenth century, stepping back became a means of diverting attention away from subject matter and representation and towards the formal effects of a painting, generated, for example, by its chiaroscuro or the distribution of light and shade. In his *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715), Jonathan Richardson (1667–1745) suggested that distance would enable viewers to appreciate the underlying pictorial structure or formal composition of a painting: 'Every picture', he writes, 'should be so contriv'd, as that at a distance, when one cannot discern what figures there are, or what they are doing, it should appear to be composed of masses, light, and dark.'⁷² As with Cozens's drawing and blot, the relative distances enable viewers to perceive either the details of a painting's representation or the pictorial structure of its compositional whole. Moreover, this compositional whole is a formal configuration of abstract masses of light and dark—just like Cozens's blots.

The next paragraph in the *New Method* turns from the form of the blot to the process of blotting. As noted, at several points in the text Cozens emphasises that the blot needs to be worked into a sketch before it can be further refined into a drawing. Following this three-step logic, readers of the *New Method* might imagine the blot as a more rudimentary sketch. As such,

⁷⁰ Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 120.

⁷¹ Ibid., 119–20. Vasari writes that Titian's 'last works are executed with bold strokes and dashed if with a broad and even coarse sweep of the brush, insomuch that from near little can be seen, but from a distance they appear perfect. ... And this method, so used, is judicious, beautiful, and astonishing, because it makes pictures appear alive and painted with great art but conceals the labour.' In Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors & Architects* (1568), trans. Gaston du C. De Vere, vol. 9 (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1915), 173–74.

⁷² Richardson, *Theory of Painting*, 114–15; quoted in Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33, nn. 48–49; also 74, n. 36; see also Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 120. On Richardson's discussion of composition, see Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 164–65.

the blot would simply precede the sketch in a process that graduates from abstract to representational form. However, Cozens is careful to distinguish blotting from sketching.

To sketch in the common way, is to transfer ideas from the mind to the paper, or canvas, in outlines, in the slightest manner. To blot, is to make varied spots and shapes with ink on paper, producing accidental forms without lines, from which ideas are presented to the mind. This is conformable to nature: for in nature, forms are not distinguished by lines, but by shade and colour. To sketch is to delineate ideas; blotting suggests them.⁷³

Blotting and sketching not only differ in their levels of finish; they are conceptually and cognitively inverted operations. While sketching relies on the materialisation of a pre-conceived idea that is transferred from the artist's mind to the paper, blotting inverts this process. In blotting, ideas are suggested to the mind. Moreover, sketching is linear—delineating a figure on a ground—whereas blotting produces abstract shapes and masses of light and dark that together form one comprehensive whole. By associating sketching with the expression of a preconceived idea and juxtaposing it with the suggestive potential of accidental forms, this paragraph ties Cozens's discussion of blots and blotting back into the intellectual and cognitive functions at play in processes of artmaking and invention. If the problem with contemporary landscape painting is an artist's inability to select and combine ideas—as Cozens claims in the introduction to the *New Method*—blotting, which suggests ideas, would seem an obvious solution. As I will go on to discuss, this was a radical intervention in theories of artistic invention.

This returning of the argument to the intellectual aspects of blotting is completed in the final paragraph of the *New Method's* section on blots and blotting. Cozens here draws on the intellectual authority of another author to support his claims. Quoting 'the late Dr. Brown'—likely the Rev. Dr John Brown (1715–66)—Cozens emphasises the blotting technique's purpose and functioning as a method of invention.⁷⁴ Though not widely known today, during the late eighteenth-century Brown was renowned as the author of satirical and moralist essays as well as reflections on the arts, including a comparative history of poetry and music. In the quotation, which may have resulted from personal conversation or correspondence between the two authors, Brown compares blotting with invention in poetry.⁷⁵

"A blot in drawing," says this ingenious Gentleman, "is similar to the historical fact on which a poet builds his drama; in this historical fact

⁷³ Cozens, *New Method*, 8–9.

⁷⁴ On Brown, see William Roberts, *A Dawn of Imaginative Feeling: The Contribution of John Brown (1715–66) to Eighteenth Century Thought and Literature* (Carlisle: Northern Academic Press, 1996). See also Sloan, *A Noble Art*, 159.

⁷⁵ Cozens and Brown may have known each other through their mutual acquaintance William Gilpin. Brown was connected to the Gilpin family from the 1740s and was a tutor to William Gilpin. Cozens, meanwhile, was a tutor to Gilpin's father, Capt. Bernard Gilpin. On Gilpin and his relationship with Cozens, see Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 37–40.

there is nothing but light and dark masses, void of any thing that can be called ordonance [sic] or design; upon this the poet works, producing, by the power of imagination, regular light and shade, variety of corresponding objects, properly grouped and contrasted, with all the character requisite to form a finished poem, or picture, and not less original than if the historical fact had never existed.” He might have added ... and not less natural than if the poem or picture were intirely [sic] historical.⁷⁶

The blot’s light and dark masses, like the fuzzy outlines of a historical fact, are presented as the abstract raw material with which the artist begins a composition. In blotting, as in poetry, these light and dark masses need to be worked into regular light and shade, properly grouped, contrasted, and refined ‘by the power of imagination’. Following this process of composition, a poem or picture that works historical fact into fiction is as original as one that is fully invented. Similarly, a poem or picture that’s entirely invented, Cozens adds, is as natural as one based on historical fact. The implication is that blotting can hold its own among other, more traditional and academically sanctioned modes of invention. Moreover, through the comparison between blotting and poetic invention, Brown and Cozens situate the *New Method* within a wider framework of aesthetic debates about the intermedial relationship between different art forms. I discuss these debates in Chapter Four. For now, they give a glimpse into the intellectual ambition underlying Cozens’s thought and his technique of blotting.

To conclude, this second section of the *New Method* has revealed Cozens’s remarkable conception of the blot as an abstract binary of black ink and white paper. The blot shows a ‘crude resemblance of the whole effect of a picture’ by giving ‘an idea of the masses of light and shade’, ‘as well as of the forms, contained in a finished composition.’ Like Richardson’s paintings seen from a distance, the blot visualises a compositional structure of abstract pictorial form. Moreover, it oscillates between intention and chance: the larger pictorial whole is intended, while the accidental shapes—‘produced by the casual movement of the hand and the brush’—suggest ideas to the artist. Thus, blotting exploits the suggestive potential of abstract shapes as a mode of invention.

From Blot to Drawing

The next section of Cozens’s text gives a first insight into how to work a blot into a sketch and drawing. While this somewhat anticipates the more precise, step-by-step instructions in the Rules in the second part of the treatise, it also functions as a transition from the formalism of the blot

⁷⁶ Cozens, *New Method*, 9.

to the role of blotting in pictorial invention and the cognitive processes that enable it. Cozens discusses this more thoroughly later in the treatise.

‘The first operation in composing from the blot’, Cozens writes, ‘is to make out the sketch, by giving meaning and coherence to the rude shapes, and aërial [sic] keeping to the casual light and dark masses of the blot.’⁷⁷ To achieve this, the blot is first structured into the three traditional grounds—foreground, middle distance, and background—so as to create pictorial space and ‘destroy flatness’. (As Cozens explains in the Rules, the blot itself is entirely flat.⁷⁸) To make a sketch, transparent paper is placed on the blot and the forms are traced. Instead of tracing paper, a frame with gauze, placed against the light, can be used. The spatial logic of the image is further enhanced by the addition of shading and keeping, which defines the spatial relationship of the larger masses of light and dark.⁷⁹ Once the spatial relationships have been defined, ‘meaning and coherence’ is given to the smaller accidental and rude shapes. As noted earlier, this is achieved by the marks and non-marks’ suggestiveness, representing ideas of vegetation, buildings, or figures. Meanwhile, later in this section Cozens explains that any part of the blot’s smaller details can be rejected if no sense can be made of them or if any of them seem ‘improper, or unnatural’ within the harmony of the whole—‘in this case imagination leads, while judgment regulates.’⁸⁰ Finally, once the sketch is ‘made out’, the design can be transferred to another sheet or canvas to be refined into a finished work in ink, watercolour, or oil paint.

This process of turning the blot into a sketch and drawing becomes clearer in the illustrations Cozens appended to his explanations. They help to guide his readers visually through the three-step process of blotting. Plate 37 begins with the blot (fig. 3). As Cozens recommends in the Rules, the artist should use a brush ‘as large as can be conveniently used’ and swiftly apply all kinds of shapes using ink prepared according to the recipe provided in Rule I.⁸¹ Mixed from lamp black, gum arabic, and writing ink, this would have been a thick ink. Cozens’s student William Beckford felt this was only useful for blotting, whereas Indian ink was ‘preferable for all other purposes of drawing’.⁸² The choice of using aquatint to print the blots, as I discuss in Chapter Three, allowed Cozens to visualise clearly the most salient features of the blot that he described theoretically in the text of the *New Method*. As a tonal technique, aquatint eschewed lines and thus enabled Cozens to print the full thickness and facture of the brushstrokes,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁹ The term ‘keeping’ denotes the modulation of light and shade to harmonise the spatial relationship between objects, see above and note 68.

⁸⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 12.

⁸¹ Ibid., 20–21.

⁸² For the recipe, see Ibid., 21. For Beckford’s assessment, see the manuscript annotation in his copy of the *New Method*, 21, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Beckford 443.

illustrating the swift movement of the hand across the sheet that blotting calls for. It also easily translated into print the viscous and thick quality of the blotting ink. Meanwhile, due to the specific type of aquatint Cozens used—a lift-ground technique—small particles of the etching ground were broken off in the process of preparing the plate. In this, the technique mirrored the accidental creation of the smaller shapes that is so important for blotting. The smallest of these accidents appear as small specks of white that punctuate the brushstrokes. At the same time, the blot clearly shows an intended form and distribution of masses. Thus, the blot is shown in its dialectic of both mark and non-mark as well as both intentional form and accidental shapes. In each case, two opposites together form one whole.

In plate 38, the ‘rude and meaningless’ swirls and strokes of the blot have been transformed into a landscape composition (fig. 4). Where there was flatness, the image has been structured into intersecting and receding masses that indicate and link foreground, middle distance, and background, as well as left and right. And what previously was an inchoate assemblage of abstract marks, strokes, and spots, now reveals a rocky island with a large tree to the right of the landscape, set within a body of water and against a hilly background to the left. The upward swirls and loops of the brush in the upper centre of the blot now are recognisable as the leaves of the tree, while the upward-directed angular shapes on the right have revealed what seems to be a vegetated mountain or hill.

Next, in plate 39, the reader is presented with further refinements (fig. 5). Whereas plate 38 was still marked by contrasting patches of three different tones of ink—dark, medium, light—as well as blank paper, the landscape in plate 39 looks like it had ink wash applied to even out the tonality of the sheet and refine its representation with shading.⁸³ The island is now more easily legible as rocky and the hill in the background is confirmed to be vegetated. Individual branches of the tree are visible, giving more concrete shape to the depiction.

In the Rules, Cozens explains in detail the process of shading the drawing to create a uniform effect. For this, several layers of gradually darkening ink wash are applied to create a gradation of shades and light. First, ‘the whole landscape [is washed], except those parts which are intended to be in the first degree of light’. A second wash is applied but this time more areas are left out, thus creating a gradient from light to dark. If necessary, the ink can be darkened, and more wash applied. ‘Thus proceed till all the proper degrees of light are left, and consequently all the degrees of shade are performed. In the present sense, it may be said, that all the lights, except the brightest, are degrees of shade; and all the shades, except the darkest, are degrees of light.’⁸⁴

⁸³ As I discuss in Chapter Three, this was achieved through the addition of mezzotint.

⁸⁴ Cozens, *New Method*, 30. Note the way in which Cozens here refers to both the representational as well as the formal aspects of shading. The most important part of shading is its ability to create the general effect, which is also

Through this ‘subordination of lights’ a uniform or ‘general effect’ is created. Although this is not so clearly visible in the printed illustrations, this effect also includes the sky, which is tied in with the landscape via the application of light and shade so as to create one uniform whole. Meanwhile, the clouds themselves have been selected from the twenty examples (plates 17 to 36) and adapted to the landscape to further ‘preserve the ballance [sic] of the composition.’⁸⁵

Upon flipping through the pages, advancing from plate 37 to plate 39, from blot through sketch to drawing, the view that gradually emerges seems almost inevitable. However, Cozens could have easily chosen for the blot to depict something else entirely. The mass to the right of the sheet could easily indicate a boulder or a steep cliff, with the foreground signifying a ravine or valley. Alternatively, the blot could represent an alpine mountain peak, sloping downward to the right, like the many views of the Alps that became increasingly popular during the second half of the eighteenth century. Perhaps this scene could have been made to appear right at the tree border, with an upward-reaching bush withstanding the harsh climate.

Cozens recognised this fluidity of meaning, or polysemy, arguing that a blot could suggest different ideas to different people. This is because the blot’s accidental marks and non-marks are ‘vague and indeterminate’.⁸⁶ The vagueness requires the imagination to interpret the abstract forms and shapes and thus is dependent on individual responses. The blot’s abstract forms carry suggestive potential that activates the artist’s or viewer’s imagination. It is not the stains themselves that show such scenes; it is the human capacity for recognizing abstract forms as representationally meaningful images.⁸⁷ Its vagueness, moreover, distinguishes the blot from the precision of nature. If different people draw from nature, Cozens argues, their drawings will all look similar—an approximation of visible form dependent on individual skill. By contrast, if they draw from the blot, their drawings will all be original, guided by individual responses to abstract shapes that the imagination evokes. Thus, blotting is more effective than nature in assisting invention, for it allows the imagination to fill in the gaps and thus helps ‘to enlarge the powers of invention.’⁸⁸

Moreover, the blot’s ability to draw forth ideas differs not only between individuals. Even the same person may make several different drawings from one and the same blot at different times. Cozens illustrates these principles in plates 40 to 43 of the *New Method* (figs. 12–15). The first plate shows a blot that covers the upper left and two lower quadrants of the sheet in a diagonal

the purpose of blotting.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁷ Lebenzstejn describes this a realist conception of images vs. a projective conception of images. See *L’art de la tache*, 111, 144–45.

⁸⁸ Cozens, *New Method*, 11.

downward swoop from the upper left to lower right and a vertical upward swirl from lower to upper right quadrant. Plates 41 to 43 show three different images based on the same basic pictorial structure, as defined by the blot. In all three landscapes, the viewer looks out onto a mountainous woodland scene with trees and bushes in the right foreground forming a *répoussoir*. The middle and background show vegetated mountain ranges of slightly varied shapes and sizes, creating three distinct effects of spatial recession. Moreover, each image has distinct details that further differentiate the three compositions. Plate 41 has an illuminated left foreground with a seated shepherd and dog, while plate 42 features a lake in that light area and plate 43 has a small waterfall or step in a river along with two deer. Each landscape has vastly different lighting and cloud formations which further differentiate the three images.

This raises the question what the causal link between the blot, sketch, and drawings is, or if there is one at all, given the polysemy of the blots that can suggest different ideas to different people, and even to one and the same person at different times. Similarly, readers might ask with greater urgency how the blots are able to suggest ideas at all, especially given that their abstract shapes themselves are considered entirely rude and unmeaning. While the technical aspects of blotting, and of turning a blot into sketch and drawing, are easy enough to understand, the underlying principles that suggest ideas and allow polysemy are unclear. The next section of the text turns to these questions, discussing in greater detail the cognitive function of blotting.

Drawing Forth Ideas

Here, Cozens more thoroughly discusses the cognitive mechanisms on which blotting relies, explaining how the blot suggests ideas by drawing them forth. Though he is less specific on this, I will also discuss how the ideas that precede the making of the blot are formed in the mind. Cozens begins the section by reiterating the reasons for the defects—the ‘want of variety and strength of character’—he sees in contemporary landscape painting. They are: 1. a lack of original ideas; 2. the inability to distinguish and connect them; and 3. a want of facility and quickness in execution—defects, he claims, that can all be remedied by blotting:

For it increases the original stock of picturesque ideas;
It soon enables the practitioner to distinguish those which are capable of
being connected, from those which seem not naturally related; and
It necessarily gives a quickness and freedom of hand in expressing the
parts of a composition, beyond any other method whatever.⁸⁹

As discussed earlier, in this evocation of a stock of ideas and the artist’s ability or inability to distinguish and connect them, Cozens mobilises the epistemology of John Locke as the cognitive

⁸⁹ Ibid., 12–13.

basis for blotting. Locke broadly distinguishes between two sets of ideas: simple and complex ideas and particular and general ideas. Particular ideas are generalised through a process of abstraction that strips them of their specifics of time and place. Such generalised simple ideas can then be combined to form complex ideas, using the innate faculties of the mind. In an idiosyncratic reading of Locke's typology of ideas, Cozens differentiates between small, large, and largest ideas, which he believes are acquired progressively as we age from childhood into adulthood. 'By this propensity', he writes,

we lay up a store of ideas in the memory, from whence the imagination selects those which are best adapted to the nature of her operations. All the particular parts of each object may not be preserved in the memory, yet general ideas of the whole may be thrown as it were into the repository, and there retained.⁹⁰

The store of ideas is also what enables art criticism. Artworks or performances, Cozens argues, are judged against the ideas each person has saved in their store. These are the 'inward criterion' of all criticism. When viewing an artwork, its objects and figures 'draw forth' ideas from the store, which thus 'become the scale or rule of judgment and taste, by which the operations of criticism are carried on.'⁹¹ Art criticism therefore operates according to a process of matching and judging an artwork with and against the ideas stored in the memory. Blotting exploits the same principle. The blot's accidental shapes 'revive' or 'draw forth' ideas already contained in the artist's store of ideas. An abstract squiggle might draw forth the idea of an oak tree, an architectural feature, or even a figure. It is through the matching of the blot's shapes with what's stored in the memory—i.e. through a principle of resemblance—that the blot suggests ideas and assists the act of invention.⁹² This is also how the blot sustains its polysemy. Since the store of ideas is filled by individual experiences—everyone encounters different views, sights, or objects—the ideas the blot suggests are also different for each individual. Hence, a blot that suggests a seated shepherd with his dog to one person might suggest two deer to the next. Crucially, if the pictorial forms and shapes of the blot have the capacity to revive ideas by resemblance, this means that the ideas themselves are necessarily conceptualised visually, as images. It is only because ideas are conceptualised as images that the blot can draw them forth.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁹¹ Ibid., 16. 'There must be an inward criterion by which they are led to judge and approve. This criterion is the store of ideas before-mentioned, which are in the possession of all who have been used to the proper subjects. Some of these ideas are drawn forth by the merits of such performances as are presented, and so become the scale or rule of judgment and taste, by which the operations of criticism are carried on.' Cozens here relies on Joseph Addison's theory of taste and imagination, which he likely encountered in Mark Akenside's poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) that reformulated ideas Addison had published in a series of essays with the same title in 1712 in *The Spectator*. Akenside's book is included in the catalogue of John Robert Cozens's sale in 1794, at which the content of both his and his father's studio and library was sold. See *A Catalogue of All the Drawings*, lot 57.

⁹² Cozens, *New Method*, 17.

This was not an unusual way of thinking about ideas.⁹³ In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke employed metaphors and analogies of sight and the making and storing of art to explain the functioning of the mind and human cognition.⁹⁴ Ideas are variously described as mirror images, paintings, representations, resemblances, or copies that relate to patterns, appearances, and archetypes in the external world. The mind of an infant is likened to a blank sheet of ‘white paper’⁹⁵, onto which ideas are imprinted. It is also described as an ‘empty cabinet’⁹⁶ that is ‘furnished’ when ideas are let in by the senses.⁹⁷ The mind cannot ‘refuse’ to ‘receive the impressions’ the senses perceive. Once ideas ‘are imprinted’, the mind cannot ‘blot them out’, like a mirror that cannot ‘refuse, alter or obliterate the images or ideas, which, the objects set before it, do therein produce.’⁹⁸

Similar language appears in a section about memory and the retention of ideas. Retaining ideas means keeping them in view, before the mind’s metaphorical eye.⁹⁹ However, because the mind is unable to have ‘many ideas under view and consideration at once’, ideas are laid up in the memory or ‘storehouse of our ideas’. To remember is ‘to revive again in our minds those ideas, which after imprinting have disappeared, or have been as it were laid aside out of sight’. Alternatively, Locke describes the act of remembering as the mind’s ability to ‘paint [the ideas] anew on itself, though some with more, some with less difficulty; some more lively, and others more obscurely’. Remembering is the act of ‘viewing again the ideas, that are lodged *in the memory*’ and ‘bring[ing] in sight, and make appear again’ in the mind ideas ‘without the help of those sensible qualities, which first imprinted them there.’¹⁰⁰ The ability to bring ideas back to sight—the ‘appearance of those dormant pictures’¹⁰¹—depends on the quality of the original impression. A wax seal that has been stamped only lightly will leave only a slight impression and will wear out quickly. Similarly, a slight impression on the mind’s white paper upon encountering an object will leave only a faint image. Loss of memory is an ever-present reality (or danger) and ‘there seems to be constant decay of all our ideas, even those which are struck the deepest’.

⁹³ For an overview of the history and theory of mental images, see Nigel J.T. Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2010, <https://plato.stanford.edu/Archives/Fall2012/entries/mental-imagery/> [last accessed 11 August 2023], esp. para. 2.2.3.

⁹⁴ By the 1720s, the *Essay* had become the main source in explaining the functioning of the mind and role of ideas in cognition. See John W. Yolton, *Perception & Reality: A History from Descartes to Kant* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 45.

⁹⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 1.2.15.

⁹⁶ William B. MacGregor noted that the term cabinet here may refer to a print cabinet in which collectors stored etchings and engravings, often pulling works to compare. Meanwhile, Locke’s composition of ideas bears similarities to the practice of assembling albums of prints by cutting and pasting images to form thematic sequences. See ‘The Authority of Prints: An Early Modern Perspective’, *Art History* 22, no. 3 (1999): 389–420.

⁹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 1.2.15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.1.25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.10.1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.10.2. Emphasis in the original text.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.10.7.

Unless ideas are ‘renewed by repeated exercise of the senses’—i.e. by bringing them back to sight—‘the print wears out, and at last there remains nothing to be seen’, for ‘*The pictures drawn in our minds, are laid in fading colours; and if not sometimes refreshed, vanish and disappear*’.¹⁰²

Despite passages like this one, where ideas are both painted and imprinted, where they are visible or fade away, there has been considerable scholarly debate about whether Locke can or should be considered an imagist—i.e. whether he conceptualised ideas as mental images or whether he simply referred to images and image-making technologies as explanatory models to anchor abstract cognitive processes in tangible material processes that would have been familiar to most of his readers.¹⁰³ What is certain, however (though not always fully acknowledged by some opponents of Locke’s imagism), is the philosopher’s preference for the sense of sight and the virtual absence of any discussion of the other senses and how their perceptions and ideas might be stored in the mind. Towards the end of Book II of the *Essay*, Locke notes that ‘The perception of the mind [is] most aptly explained by words relating to the sight’.¹⁰⁴ The most obvious explanation for the omission of other senses is that storage media for ideas perceived by them simply did not exist. Unable to record experiences of sound, taste, smell, or touch, there were no suitable analogies to draw on.

Moreover, as Nigel Thomas has emphasised, most of Locke’s readers, regardless of his own ambivalence and intention regarding mental imagery, would have understood him to mean that ideas are stored in the mind as images or picture-like entities.¹⁰⁵ For David Hume, for example,

¹⁰² Ibid., 2.10.4-5.

¹⁰³ For example, later in the text Locke compares the mind to a camera obscura, an early-modern optical instrument that allows light to fall into a dark room (camera) through a small hole or lens and projects an inverted image of the external world onto the opposite wall. Reaffirming his belief that sense impressions are the only basis for knowledge and understanding, Locke compares the sense organs to the ‘windows by which light is let into this *dark room*’ of the mind. He writes that ‘the *understanding* is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without; would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them.’ (2.11.17) John Yolton argues that Locke here simply *compares* the mind to a camera obscura (it ‘is not much unlike’), emphasising that ‘He does not say it *is* a dark closet or *camera obscura*’. (Yolton, 106) Locke, moreover, is careful to restrict the analogy to ideas related to sight. Like the image that is projected onto the back wall of the camera obscura, the mind perceives impressions of sight visually. Cognitive processes related to visual sense data thus can plausibly be explained by the model of the camera obscura. However, it is difficult to imagine how qualities or perceptions related to the other senses, such as softness, bitterness, or loudness, could be imagined visually. Yolton argues against an imagist reading of Locke to make an argument for perceptual realism, i.e. the idea that reality can be accessed directly through the senses, whereas an understanding of Locke that argues for perceptions as images would contradict perceptual realism. For a summary of the various arguments, see Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’ and the supplemental bibliography. Alan White and Michael Ayers argue in favour of an imagist understanding of Locke, while John Yolton, Vere Chappel, and John Lyons argue against. See Alan R. White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993); Chappell, ‘Locke’s Theory of Ideas’; John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). More broadly on metaphors of mind, see Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Pasanek, *Metaphors of Mind*.

¹⁰⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.29.2.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’. Yolton, too, acknowledges that several contemporary and later authors did interpret

ideas are ‘the faint images of [sensory impressions] in thinking and reasoning’ while memories are ‘lively images’.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, Thomas Reid’s rejection of the concept of ideas as units of thought was based on ‘the assumption that the philosophers he was criticizing understood ideas to be picture-like images’. According to Reid, mental images ‘are simply not capable of playing the cognitive epistemological roles that his predecessors had assigned to them’.¹⁰⁷

It is easy to see how a reader might interpret Locke to take ideas to be images when his analytical focus lies almost exclusively on perceptions of sight. Moreover, such analogies were consistent with popular conceptions of the mind. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s historical thesaurus defines ‘idea’ as ‘the mental image or notion of something previously seen or known, recalled by the memory.’¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopaedia* (1741) states that an idea is ‘the image, or resemblance of a thing, which, though not seen, is conceived [sic] by the mind.’¹⁰⁹ And later in the century, Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1783) defines ‘idea’ as ‘mental image’, tracing this usage back to the late seventeenth century in the work of the poet John Dryden.¹¹⁰ Image, meanwhile, is defined as ‘any corporeal representation, generally a statue; a picture’, ‘a copy; representation; likeness’, ‘semblance; show; appearance’, and, significantly, ‘an idea; a representation of any thing to the mind.’¹¹¹ Chambers likewise writes that ‘image is also used for the trace, or mark which outward objects impress on the mind, by means of the organs of sense.’¹¹² Given these widespread precedents, it is not surprising that Cozens, too, understood ideas to be images stored in the mind. As an artist, he would have encountered such a concept in concert with his own preconceived notions and experiences regarding the function of mental images in the process of artistic creation. He would have understood mental imagery through the lens of his own thinking and practice as a painter, i.e. as someone who makes images and pictures of various kinds, including blots, sketches, drawings, paintings, and prints.

That Cozens did indeed conceive of ideas visually is suggested at several points in the *New Method*. In an earlier section on the usefulness of blotting, for example, he explains that the

Locke this way, see Yolton, *Perception & Reality*, 49–51. He discusses Isaac Watts, *Logick, or The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth* (2nd ed., 1726); Peter Browne, “Sense, and the Ideas of Sensations”, *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding* (1728); and Zachary Mayne, *Two Dissertations Concerning Sense, and the Imagination* (1728).

¹⁰⁶ Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, quoted in Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Idea, n.’, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8089470004> [last accessed 11 August 2023]. See also a discussion of this usage in Yolton, *Perception & Reality*, 42–43.

¹⁰⁹ Ephraim Chambers, ‘Idea’, in *Cyclopaedia, or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London, 1741); quoted in Yolton, *Perception & Reality*, 101.

¹¹⁰ Samuel Johnson, ‘Idea’, in *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, Explained in Their Different Meanings, and Authorized by the Names of the Writers in Whose Works They Are Found* (London, 1783). An assessment of this is complicated by Locke’s frequent mixing of metaphors, at times even within a single sentence, see Pasanek, *Metaphors of Mind*, 6.

¹¹¹ Samuel Johnson, ‘Image’, in *Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹¹² Ephraim Chambers, ‘Image’, in *Cyclopaedia*.

technique is a

considerable improvement to the arts of design in general, for the idea or conception of any subject, in any branch of the art, may be first formed into a blot. Even the historical, which is the noblest branch of painting, may be assisted by it; because it is the speediest and the surest means of fixing a rude whole of the most transient and complicated *image of any subject in the painter's mind*.¹¹³

While this association of blotting with history painting is another rhetorical move to argue for the technique's seriousness as a method of invention, the paragraph also offers a glimpse into how a blot is formed.¹¹⁴ As we have seen, the first step in blotting is to 'possess your mind with an idea'. Here, Cozens explains that this intended idea or conception exists in the painter's mind as a transient image that needs to be externalised and fixed on paper quickly, as a blot. When Cozens writes that the first step in blotting is to 'possess your mind with an idea', this idea takes the shape of an image, an internal representation of a landscape composition.

Cozens does not directly explain how such an image is formed in the mind. However, within Lockean epistemology, and Cozens's idiosyncratic reading of it, two principal possibilities emerge. As discussed earlier, Locke distinguishes between simple and complex ideas. Simple ideas are, on the one hand, the sensible qualities of objects encountered and perceived by the senses (such as colours, temperatures, density, weight), and on the other, they are those ideas the mind receives by reflecting on its own operations (such as perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing).¹¹⁵ All thought and understanding is based on these ideas and the innate operations the mind performs on them. By combining, comparing, and separating simple ideas the mind can 'make at pleasure new complex ideas'.¹¹⁶ An apple, for example, is a composite of sensible qualities regarding its shape, weight, density, surface, colour, smell, taste. The faculty that enables the combination of the apple's various constituent qualities or parts is called the 'faculty or power of composition' and is 'theoretically infinite'.¹¹⁷ Individual complex ideas can be further combined to form complex collective ideas. Locke provides the example of 'man' combined with the number 1,000, which results in 'a collection of men' or 'army'.¹¹⁸ Or, to stay with the apple example, a combination of apple and tree might form the idea of an apple

¹¹³ Cozens, *New Method*, 10. My emphasis.

¹¹⁴ Though there is no firm evidence of Cozens himself ever using the blotting technique to compose a history painting—although he did exhibit several in the 1760s—the inscription on John Robert's blot identifies the composition as a depiction of *The Passage of Hannibal over the Alps* (fig. 9). The blot very likely served as the basis for a large oil painting John Robert exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776. While the painting today unfortunately is lost, J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) later praised it 'as a work from which he learned more than anything he had then seen.' C.R. Leslie, *A Handbook for Young Painters* (London, 1855); quoted in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 109.

¹¹⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.1.3–4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2.2.2.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 2.12.2.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2.24.1.

tree. Further combined with a large number, it might result in orchard. At the same time, although the senses may perceive apple as round, red, waxy, and sweet smelling, the mind registers the composite as a whole or complete entity. It perceives the apple as an apple, not as its constituent qualities that then need to be put together in an additional cognitive step. Ideas that are not perceived but formed in the mind by composition are similarly conceived of and stored as one complete whole.¹¹⁹ In summary, following Locke, the mind *perceives* both simple and complex ideas (e.g. apple and orchard) but can also *form* complex ideas from perceived simple ideas (e.g. combining apple with tree and a large number to form orchard). Similarly, Cozens's subjects and ideas that precede the making of the blot can be understood both as composites (or, better, compositions) of complex ideas and as perceptions of collective complex ideas. I will first discuss the formation of idea-images as compositions of complex ideas (or constituent simple ideas).

As Cozens emphasises in the introduction to the *New Method*, to form a landscape composition, individual ideas are selected from the memory 'such as suit any particular occasion' and are then connected or combined.¹²⁰ Following the logic of Lockean composition, individual landscape elements such as trees would be combined to form the more complex idea or image of a forest. Similarly, according to Cozens's gradation of parts from small, to large, larger, and largest that populate the store of ideas, small parts or ideas would be combined into progressively larger units. Small ideas might be leaves, branches, and the trunk and crown of a tree, and might be combined into the large idea of a tree. These, in turn, might be combined into the larger idea of a forest. The largest idea, finally, might be a composition of a more expansive landscape with a forest to one side and other landscape elements, perhaps a mountain, to the other. Within the context of pictorial composition, such a combinatory or composite way of image creation intuitively makes sense as it mirrors the additive process of drawing whereby a blank sheet of paper is gradually populated with trees until a forest emerges, and whereby individual smaller parts are integrated into a larger coherent whole or overarching composition.¹²¹

On the other hand, an idea of a mental image of a whole landscape composition may also enter the mind by sense perception. Just as Locke explains that complex collective ideas may be acquired by sense impression (e.g. army or orchard), Cozens argues that the different classes of ideas can be observed in nature, including the largest, which represents 'whole compositions' or

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 2.

¹²¹ However, it might be easier to compose the larger ideas first and then populate them with details. So even though the process is additive, it is not linear in the static way that the Lockean epistemological model suggests.

complete views of a landscape rather than smaller parts or constitutive elements.¹²² Importantly, according to Cozens, only ‘general ideas of the whole’ are retained in the memory, but not ‘the particular parts of each object’.¹²³ As in Locke, the parts or simple ideas, once joined together, become subsumed within the whole. As stated, an apple is perceived or imagined as an apple, not a composition of qualities of red, round, waxy, sweet-smelling. In the same vein, the idea that is retained from observing landscapes, according to Cozens, is of the largest idea of the overarching structure of the landscape as well as the distribution of the large parts within in it, but not their precise delineation, particular nature, or smaller details.

Locke does not discuss in detail how the mind combines ideas or recalls them from the memory, though this capacity was generally attributed to the imagination.¹²⁴ In line with the theory of ideas as images, the imagination was understood as the faculty that enabled the mind to create mental representations either by composition or by reactivating ideas stored in the memory by ‘paint[ing] them anew on itself’.¹²⁵ In Johnson’s dictionary, imagination is defined as ‘the power of forming ideal pictures; the power of representing things absent to one’s self or others’, while Chambers writes that the imagination ‘consists in the power which the soul has of forming images of objects’.¹²⁶ In the *Essay*, Locke is wary of possible errors that occur when the imagination combines ideas incorrectly. By forming mental images that have no resemblance to external reality, the imagination has the potential to mislead the mind by prompting it to mistake falsehoods for truths. As such, Locke sees the imagination as a potentially dangerous power that may lead the mind down the path of untruth and, ultimately, madness.¹²⁷ By contrast, later writers like David Hume recognised the faculty as a central mechanism of human cognition.¹²⁸

¹²² Cozens, *New Method*, 14–15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁴ See Thomas, ‘Mental Imagery’; Timothy M. Costelloe, *The Imagination in Hume’s Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

¹²⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.10.7.

¹²⁶ Samuel Johnson, ‘Imagination’, in *Dictionary of the English Language*; Ephraim Chambers, ‘Imagination’, in *Cyclopaedia*.

¹²⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.12.2; 2.11.6; see also 4.7.16. The power of composition and association are seen as dangerous because the imagination can create them without reference to what exists externally. However, without an external referent, the mind is unable to determine the truthfulness of its ideas, which are true only if they conform to ‘patterns’ that exist in the external world. When the imagination departs from these external patterns, this poses the risk that the mind mistakes falsehoods for truths. This, in turn, is the source of madness, which emerges when the mind falsely combines or associates ideas and, as a result, is unable to distinguish what’s real in the external world and what are fabrications of the imagination. Madmen ‘do not appear to me to have lost the faculty of reasoning: but having joined together some ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for truths; and they err as men do that argue right from wrong principles. For by the violence of their imaginations, having taken their fancies for realities, they make right deductions from them’ (2.11.13).

¹²⁸ Although Hume never directly theorised the role and functioning of the imagination in the human mind, Timothy Costelloe has recently argued for its centrality to Hume’s thinking. Analysing several of Hume’s publications, Costelloe traces the imagination’s role across several areas of Hume’s thought, including his metaphysics, his moral and political theory, the theory and writing of history, theories of religion and philosophy, as well as aesthetics and poetic creation. The most central texts for my purpose here are *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738) and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). See Costelloe, *Imagination in Hume’s Philosophy*.

Unlike Locke, who only implicitly attributes the ability to form compositions or compound complex ideas to the imagination, Hume directly addresses the faculty:

Nothing is more free than the imagination of man ... and though it cannot exceed that original stock of ideas, furnished by the internal and external senses, it has an unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction.¹²⁹

Due to its ‘unlimited power’, the imagination is free to create even ideas that have no external referent, such as ‘winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants’ or that ‘confound nature’.¹³⁰ While, for Locke, this ability to mix ideas freely is a slippery slope to untruth and madness, Hume regards it more positively. So long as it adheres to rules and principles of logic and association, such as resemblance, contiguity of time and place, as well as cause and effect, the imagination is free to mix and match as it pleases.¹³¹ Similarly, what for Locke is dangerous and a threat, for Cozens presents an opportunity for the imagination.

In this emphasis on the imagination’s creative power, Hume conforms to more widely held assumptions about the ‘fusion of the imagination with creativity and artistic production’¹³² that departed decisively from the limited scope Locke afforded the faculty. In his recent study on the imagination in Hume’s philosophy, Timothy Costelloe discusses the imagination’s role in Hume’s aesthetics, demonstrating that, for Hume, the imagination enables both artistic creativity and audience receptivity of artworks. On the one hand, the poet exploits the productive and combinatory power of the imagination to create artificial fictions of poetry. The audience, on the other hand, derives pleasure from an artwork because the imagination enables readers or viewers to judge the work (its plausibility, imitation, logic, etc.) against the ideas stored in their own minds.¹³³ As Costelloe points out, Hume here relies on the writing of poet and essayist Joseph Addison. Addison had argued that the pleasure of art consumption stems from the resemblance between the ideas represented in an artwork and the ideas in the beholder’s mind or store. The ‘greater the resemblance of copy to original, the more intense is the pleasure that results.’¹³⁴ In the *New Method*, Cozens mobilises the same principle when he writes that art criticism operates on the ‘inward criterion’, whereby artworks are judged for the degree of resemblance between the ideas they represent and those the viewers store in their minds.¹³⁵

In academic theories of painting, the image-forming ability of the imagination could easily be

¹²⁹ Hume, *Essay*, 5.10, quoted in *ibid.*, 16.

¹³⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.3.4, quoted in *ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17–19.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁵ Cozens, *New Method*, 16. See above, note 91.

integrated into earlier debates about the role of mental representation in artistic invention. The Italian renaissance concept of *disegno* has a complex and varied intellectual history, but broadly speaking it described the ability of the artist to perceive and abstract general and ideal form from individual nature. Through observation and study, the artist abstracts the general from the particular and forms idealised mental representations of nature, which are then delineated by drawing on paper.¹³⁶ The strength of the *disegno* found expression in the precision and decisiveness of the contour of the drawing and was believed to express universal truths contained in the general nature of God's creation. The concept of *disegno* was reformulated in eighteenth-century writings like Reynolds's *Discourses*, and especially in his notion of ideal beauty as the visual expression of divine truth. Both for Reynolds and his Italian predecessors, precise *disegno*, both in the mind and materialised in a drawing, revealed the ideal beauty and divine universal truth of human nature and existence.

Once such ideal beauty was synthesised, individual objects could be combined by the imagination to form mental representations of artistic inventions. In his fourth *Discourse*, Reynolds explains that invention is the ability of forming a mental image and then representing or materialising this image on canvas.¹³⁷ In the second *Discourse*, he explains that the artist's ability to do so resides in the capacity to select ideas from the mind's store and combine them into a coherent whole, a process governed by the imagination.¹³⁸ Similarly, the German painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–79) argued that an invention in painting was a mental representation in the painter's mind before it could be externalised on paper or canvas, 'as if he had actually seen, or as if he still had before his eyes, the subject that his imagination or his verve propose to render'.¹³⁹ Again, it makes sense that a painter would imagine a scene visually, composed according to the rules of painting, before making a drawing.

For Cozens, the imagination plays a dual role.¹⁴⁰ On the one hand, as I have shown at the beginning of this section, the accidental shapes of the blot 'draw forth' ideas stored in the mind by activating them through resemblance. The decision as to which ideas are drawn forth and

¹³⁶ Wolfgang Kemp's article is still one of the best overviews of the conceptual history of the term. See Kemp, 'Disegno'; see also Barzman, 'Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno*'; and Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From *Technè* to *Metatechnè** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 1. On the Venetian variant of *disegno*, see Thomas Puttfarcken, 'The Dispute about *Disegno* and *Colorito* in Venice: Paolo Pino, Lodovico Dolce and Titian', in *Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1400-1900*, ed. David Ganz et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 75–95.

¹³⁷ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, IV, 36–40.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 18–72.

¹³⁹ Anton Raphael Mengs, in a letter to Don Antonio Ponz, quoted in Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 70. My translation.

¹⁴⁰ Lebensztejn fails to acknowledge this dual function of the imagination. In his reading, the imagination comes into play only in the interpretation of the abstract shapes of the blot. He ignores the imagination's constitutive role in forming the mental image that precedes the blot. Cramer, likewise, does not discuss the details of how empirical epistemology informs blot formation.

which are not is regulated by both the imagination and judgment. In composing a landscape drawing from a blot, the ‘imagination selects those [ideas] which are best adapted to the nature of her operations’.¹⁴¹ Any smaller details can be rejected if no sense can be made of them or if any of them seem ‘improper, or unnatural’ within the harmony of the whole—‘in this case imagination leads, while judgment regulates.’¹⁴² On the other hand, the imagination also directs the formation of the mental image that precedes the making of the blot, both in terms of the selection of ideas from the memory and their combination to form more complex ideas.

The way Cozens imagines what this mental image looks like differs significantly from both Reynolds and Mengs. While Mengs, in the tradition of Vasarian *disegno*, emphasised the clarity and precision with which an idea was to be delineated in the mind until it has been faithfully executed, Cozens conceives of mental images non-figuratively, in terms of the same kind of abstract formalism with which he describes the blots. They are abstract, not figurative. The way he discusses the combination and perception of ideas, for example, structurally mirrors the way he defines the blots. As emphasised earlier, in the work of Locke, combined ideas appear as a complete whole. Although this whole theoretically can be broken down into its constituent parts, once the different qualities or ideas have been joined, the mind perceives them as one uniform idea. Like the colour, weight, and smell of ‘apple’, the constituent ideas or parts that make up the landscape—either composed or perceived—are subsumed within the whole. As the mind retains only the generalised or abstracted whole of an idea, the largest idea is retained as one comprehensive form comprised of the general disposition of masses, which, in turn, are composed of the larger ideas. The smaller details are blocked out in focusing on the formal structure of the whole. Similarly, throughout the *New Method*, Cozens defines the blot in terms of the relationship of its parts to the whole. He repeatedly emphasises that ‘the attention of the performer must be employed on the whole, or the general form of the composition, and upon this only’.¹⁴³ The constituent parts dissolve into the larger masses, just as the mind does not break up a complex or large idea into its constituent or smaller ideas. Thus, what’s left in the mind is the ‘general disposition of the masses, producing one comprehensive form, which may be conceived and purposely intended before the blot is begun.’¹⁴⁴ This general form will exhibit ‘some kind of subject, and this is all that should be done designedly.’¹⁴⁵ Moreover, at several moments in the text, he cautions his readers not to pay too much attention to the constituent parts. A blot ‘in which too much attention has been paid to the constituent parts’, is not a true

¹⁴¹ Cozens, *New Method*, 15.

¹⁴² Ibid., 12.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

blot but a spirited sketch.¹⁴⁶

Further clues that Cozens conceived of mental images in this formalist way can be found in the ‘Descriptions of the various Kinds of Composition Landscapes’, annexed to the rules. Here, Cozens lists the sixteen types of landscapes that are illustrated in the plates, and which may (but do not have to) be used as the basis for making one’s own blots. Most of the landscapes are described in abstract terms, with emphasis more on the formal arrangement and distribution of objects or parts than on their representational content or subject matter. Number 3, for example, consists of ‘groups of objects on one hand, and a flat on the other, of an irregular form next to the groups, at a moderate distance from the eye’, whereas number 11 includes ‘objects, or groups of objects, placed alternately on both hands, and gradually retiring from the eye. The horizon above the bottom of the view.’¹⁴⁷ The way these are written emphasises their form rather than their representational content, describing the objects’ or groups’ spatial relationships, their position on the picture plane, and within the pictorial space. Representation is achieved only at the secondary step, when the blot is taken to draw forth ideas from the memory. This is suggested in number 6 on the list of compositions: ‘A single or principal object, opposed to the sky; as a tree, a ruin, a rock, &c. or a group of objects.’ What is described here is an undefined object, an abstract mass, set against a sky. Only later does the artist determine, by the blot’s ability to draw forth such ideas, if this object represents a tree, a ruin, or a rock. Cozens explains that one blot may suggest different ideas, not only to different people but even to the same person at different points in time. In this context, he recommends artists to ‘make not only one or two blots’ but ‘a number at a time’—‘by way of amusement’—in order to build up a collection so that they always have several blots at hand to choose from should they feel inclined to make a drawing.¹⁴⁸ With such temporal distance and the disruption of the artistic process—from compositional idea in the mind to its materialisation and refinement on paper—the causal relationship between blot and drawing is thrown into question. In fact, this disruption is plausible only if the idea that precedes the blot is conceived of as an abstract formal arrangement of masses of light and dark. Even if a mental idea was precisely delineated in the way Vasari, Mengs, and Reynolds believed, the temporal distance would make the mental picture fade away. One would have to view it again to fully remember the initial idea in all its details.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁹ The fading away of ideas, as discussed, is precisely one of the problems blotting is meant to address. An idea needs to be dashed out quickly lest it ‘grows faint and dies away before the hand of the artist can fix it upon the paper, or canvas.’ (*New Method*, 3) In fact, Hume argues that ideas combined by the imagination are especially prone to fading since impressions of the imagination are weaker and less lively than impressions of the senses. See Costelloe, *Imagination in Hume’s Philosophy*, 28–29.

That blotting encourages such formal abstraction is demonstrated in Cozens's discussion of the benefits of blotting. On the one hand, the fact that blotting is based on universal principles or mechanisms of human cognition means that anyone can use it and that no specific skill is required.¹⁵⁰ On the other, he argues that blotting strengthens ideas and the facility of execution.¹⁵¹ More interestingly, Cozens further contends that the technique is useful not only for those who wish to invent original landscape compositions but even for those who wish to draw picturesque compositions directly from nature. He argues that blotting is 'extremely conducive to the acquisition of a theory', which is 'the art of seeing properly'. At the same time, blotting not only 'affords an opportunity of calling them [the ideas] forth' but 'likewise presents an ocular [i.e. visual] demonstration of the principles of composition.'¹⁵² What Cozens means here is that the same sense of pictorial structure and composition that blotting fosters can be applied when drawing from nature, thus aiding the artist in abstracting details, focusing on masses, and creating landscape drawings according to the rules of picturesque composition. Blotting works as a lens that directs the artist's eyes and regulates visual perception to recognise, in the multitude of objects and parts in nature, those which conform to, or can be subsumed within, the structure of a picturesque and judiciously invented landscape composition. Seeing nature properly is seeing nature as a blot. In the absence of firm aesthetic rules, he argues that blotting achieves this by teaching 'a proper choice of subject, strength of character, taste, picturesqueness, proportion, keeping, expression of parts or objects, harmony, contrast, light and shade, effect, &c.'¹⁵³ Ultimately, he claims, those who are used to composing from a blot are also able to draw from nature, while those who are adept at drawing correctly from nature—i.e. copying nature—have a harder time developing the skill of invention that comes easily with blotting. Drawing from nature does not help improve invention, it only improves skill.

There is a kind of circularity to the idea that the formalism of the blots, on the one hand, is based on perceptions of largest ideas in nature, while, on the other, the perception of nature is directed by the abstract formalism that the blots foster. That Cozens and his students nevertheless thought about the 'art of seeing properly' in this way, is suggested by the blots, drawings, and notes in an album by Henry Stebbing (1752–1818) at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg.¹⁵⁴ In his notes, Stebbing, a student of Cozens, explains that, although

¹⁵⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. Samuel Johnson defines 'ocular' as 'Depending on the eye; known by the eye.' See 'Ocular', in *Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹⁵³ Cozens, *New Method*, 13–14.

¹⁵⁴ See Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 203–4; Kim Sloan and Paul Joyner, 'A Cozens Album in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth', *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 57 (1993): 86–87. The album is registration number H.41594-41794. Unfortunately, the album has not been published, and it was not possible to visit the

the technique was first described by Leonardo and later ‘pursued and improved’ by Cozens, neither of the authors ‘have given the principle [sic] on which it is founded’. This principle, he writes, is

That a landscape or View, may, by omitting the detail of small parts, be resolvable into general masses - & That several Landscapes & Views, by such omission, may be resolved into general masses of the same kind or character. Therefore - / General Masses, by adding different details of small parts, may be formed into different Landscapes and Views. / To exemplify the former of these propositions we have but to discover the face of nature in the morning twilight, when the quantity of light is not sufficient to be reflected from the smaller parts – Thus we have the general masses only of which the Landscape is composed – these general masses may therefore be called the Blot – as the light increases the detail of the smaller parts becomes more and more particular – and this answers to the making out the Blot in the method taught by Cozens.¹⁵⁵

Nature is abstracted to the basic pictorial structure that constitutes the blot. The blot’s general masses of light and dark help turn nature’s unstructured assemblage of particular phenomena into an ideally composed landscape image. This is like the blot itself, which comprises an ‘assemblage of abstract shapes’ that dissolves into the larger masses of the whole. Composing original landscape drawings from nature is much easier once the principles of the blot’s masses and harmony of light and dark are internalised by the practicing artist. Ultimately, the ‘art of seeing properly’ is a mode of viewing nature that is informed by ways of viewing art, with a focus on pictorial composition and the distribution of masses and their ability to structure the image. In viewing nature like a blot, the focus lies on masses, forms, and shapes rather than defined objects like trees, ruins, or rocks.

To conclude, this section has discussed the cognitive basis of blotting. I have shown that Cozens relies on an interpretation of Locke’s work that takes ideas to be entities stored in the mind as images. In blotting, the mind operates with two kinds of ideas: those which are stored in the memory and drawn forth or reactivated by the blot’s accidental shapes via the principle of resemblance; and those which precede the blot. The ideas that precede the blot are those of larger and largest classes of ideas and are formed either by recalling them from the memory (ideas of perception) or by combining ideas into progressively larger classes of ideas (ideas of composition). In both cases, as my analysis has shown, the idea or mental image that precedes the dashing out of the blot is itself an abstract general whole, a distribution of masses of light and dark. It has the same kind of abstract formalism, the same kind of rudeness, as the externalised blot itself. It visualises the same sense of pictorial structure that the blot represents.

collection during my research.

¹⁵⁵ Henry Stebbing, quoted in Sloan, ‘Teaching Non-Professional Artists’, 203–4.

In the mind, the idea is a visual representation of the rude whole—of that which remains visible from a distance when all subject matter, as Richardson suggested, dissolves into masses of light and dark, or that which is visible in morning twilight, as Stebbing suggested. This idea is transient and fleeting, and blotting is a way of fixing it on paper. Once it is externalised, the blot's light and dark masses, like those of Dr Brown's historical fact, need to be shaped into 'regular light and shade' while the accidental details undergo a process of interpretation—of 'giving meaning and coherence' to them—by drawing forth ideas from the memory. Thus, when Cozens asks readers to possess their mind with an idea, it is the abstract form of masses of light and dark they are asked to visualise.

Returning to the earlier problem of perceived ambiguities that have been identified in the literature, the question of how a blot can both rely on an intended idea and have the ability to draw ideas forth can now be answered. This is possible because an idea in blot formation and an idea in composing from a blot are two different classes of ideas. The blot is not an expression of specific subject matter; it is an arrangement of abstract form. While a preliminary idea is present, this idea is itself conceived of visually, as an image. It is a visual idea that determines only the pictorial structure of the final composition, defining the masses as well as the marks and non-marks that constitute the blot. Meaning and coherence crystallise only in the secondary step of interpreting, or composing from, the blot when the blot's accidental shapes draw forth the more specific ideas of objects from the memory.

Much of the existing literature has failed to grasp this distinction because Cozens does not apply his terminology consistently. The term idea, in one instance, describes the individual objects contained in a landscape. These are triggered by the process of recognition; they are 'drawn forth' from the store of ideas or memory by the accidental shapes of the blot. In other instances, idea describes the abstract compositional structure, which is an assemblage of unmeaning form. That is why blotting requires the artist to hold an idea (an abstract pictorial structure) in mind before dashing out the ink that afterwards suggests ideas to the artist. This terminological imprecision has caused confusion and resulted in perceived contradictions, but I would argue that the context of Lockean epistemology and the theory of ideas as mental images enables us to parse Cozens's meaning more clearly than some scholars have claimed.

With the dual nature of ideas thus explained, the inconsistencies scholars have identified in the *New Method* can be resolved, or at least held in suspension. Returning to the question of intention and chance—whether blots should be considered largely intentional or largely accidental—I have shown that what initially seemed like a contradiction can now be understood as a reconciliation of these two different types of ideas. Blotting, ultimately, relies on both

intention and accident—intention in the formation of a ‘general distribution of masses’, and accident in the smaller details that enrich such an image and transform a formalist composition into representational subject matter.

Conclusion

The theoretical part of the *New Method* ends with a two-page discussion of genius and its role in artistic invention.¹⁵⁶ Cozens defines genius in painting as ‘Strength of ideas; power of invention; and ready execution’.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, ‘The principal purpose to which genius is indispensably necessary is, the production of whole compositions new to the performer.’¹⁵⁸ Although Cozens is not explicit on this, blotting is a way of sidestepping the need for innate genius by allowing even those without genius to create original landscape compositions (i.e. compositions that are new to the performer and their audiences). As my discussion of the cognitive mechanisms that underlie blotting has shown, blotting assists all three of these requirements of genius: it supports the strength of ideas and powers of invention by exercising the memory and the imagination’s ability to (re)activate ideas and compose new ones; it also helps ready execution by encouraging the artist to dash out ideas speedily, without overthinking the process.

In this final section, Cozens defines the purpose to which genius is necessary, or at least helpful, as the creation of ‘works transcending in beauty and perfection.’¹⁵⁹ With this evocation of beauty and perfection, the discussion loops back to the intellectual aims of painting laid out in the beginning of the text. Ideal beauty—the ‘divine principle of the art’¹⁶⁰—is the result of judicious imitation, the selection and combination of that which is beautiful in nature, and its depiction in general rather than particular form—all of which, according to Cozens, can be achieved with blotting. Although this theoretical ambition of Cozens’s project, and the multiple ways it draws on contemporary aesthetic theories has been explored in detail by previous scholars, this chapter has outlined more clearly the idiosyncratic ways in which Cozens reformulated these theories to develop and justify his unusual blotting technique. Specifically, previous scholars like Jean-Claude Lebensztejn have failed to recognise the abstract formalism of the ideas-as-images that precede the blot, and thus missed a significant aspect in which blotting

¹⁵⁶ For an overview of the conceptual development of the term, see Wolf-Dietrich Löhr, ‘Genie’, in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft: Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019). For a detailed discussion of Cozens’s use of the term, see Lebensztejn, *L’art de la tache*, chap. 8. Lebensztejn shows that although Cozens uses rather idiosyncratic terms to explain genius, his overall concept conforms to dominant theories of genius, for example in William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767) and Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (1774). See *L’art de la tache*, 162–68.

¹⁵⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, III, 64.

departed from contemporary theory. Similarly, although Charles Cramer has contributed significantly to our understanding of blotting in its reliance on Lockean epistemology, he has failed to acknowledge the visual nature of ideas and the abstract formalism with which Cozens understands them. By contrast, I have argued in this chapter that the abstract formalism that conceives of the ‘true blot’ as an abstract configuration of form was a central mechanism of blotting. Ultimately, however, it remains unclear how Cozens arrived at his radically abstract conception of the blot. In the next chapter, I argue that to fully explain how Cozens came to think about the blot this way, we need to consider the practice of blotting, not just the theory.

The Practice of Blotting

When the *New Method* came out, in April 1786, it was clear even to its author that this was an unusual publication. In it, Cozens presented a method of blotting he hoped would help amateur artists design their own landscape compositions. The twenty pages of discursive text discussed in Chapter One laid out the treatise's ambitious theory of blotting. This was followed by ten additional pages of step-by-step instructions, divided into five rules about how to prepare drawing ink and transparent paper and how to make a blot and work it, first into a sketch and then into a finished drawing or painting. But Cozens seems to have thought it necessary to caution his readers, and prefixed a rather apologetic *nota bene* to the catalogue of rules:

N.B. The author is apprehensive that the following rules, in many places, are not so clear and intelligible as could be wished, arising from the difficulty of expressing methods that are new: therefore he is afraid that some explanations are necessary, which he is not able to give in writing.¹

It is unclear if Cozens genuinely thought his explanations unintelligible or if he was hoping to pre-empt any criticism of what readers and critics might perceive as the publication's shortcomings. Or perhaps his admission was simply a way of making a rhetorical claim for the *New Method's* newness when, in fact, it could hardly be described as such. Indeed, most of his readers likely already knew what to expect when they opened its pages. Cozens had been using variants of the blotting technique in his work as a drawing master for over three decades, and had first published some preliminary ideas on blotting in 1759 in a short, two-page pamphlet entitled *An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landskips, intended for Students in the Art*. In the mid-1760s, he began discussing ideas for a new treatise on landscape painting with his students,² and in 1773 a draft of what would later be published as the *New Method* was finished.³

On a more conceptual level, the *nota bene* can also be understood as a commentary on the difficulty not only of explaining new and unusual methods, as well as the ideas and techniques that underpin them, but of doing so in writing. Written language, Cozens seems to suggest, is not sufficient to convey fully how and why the blotting method works. It is only when theory is complemented with practice, or practical demonstration, that the blots' workings become

¹ Cozens, *New Method*, 20.

² See a letter dated 14 August 1766 to his student Sir James Grant (1738–1811), 8th Baronet of Colquhoun, transcribed in Brendan Cassidy, 'Alexander Cozens and the Patronage of the Grant Family: With a Recipe for Varnish and a Treatise on Landscape', *The British Art Journal* 12, no. 3 (2011): app. 4.

³ A manuscript copy in an anonymous hand, likely a student of Cozens's, survives in the Royal Library in The Hague. See Alexander Cozens and Anon., 'A New Method of Designing Landscapes by Invention Described in a Set of Rules' (London, 1773), MS 72 F35, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague.

intelligible.⁴ Again, this might just be a rhetorical move to encourage readers to take lessons with the author, and thus provide added financial gain, but within the larger context of my thesis it also seems to highlight a more general scepticism towards language. Indeed, if we read the *nota bene* as an admission about the limitations of text as a medium to explain complex creative processes, then we might also understand it as a hint at Cozens's broader departure from the logocentrism of intellectual invention towards the iconicity of pictorial composition.

I will discuss these theoretical implications in Chapter Four, but for now I will take the *nota bene* simply as an invitation to consider the practice of blotting rather than its theory. I will offer a corrective to the work of earlier scholars who have largely focused on the *New Method's* theoretical dimensions, as discussed in the previous chapter.⁵ Passing over its purpose as a practical teaching manual, their at times exclusive concern for the *New Method* as a work of art theory, I argue, has improperly narrowed our understanding of the publication.⁶ Instead, by examining the concrete practical application of the blotting method alongside its theoretical formulation, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how the technique functioned, both within the artistic process the *New Method* presents and within the larger context of Cozens's practice as an artist and teacher.

One of the reasons scholars may have avoided discussing the practice of blotting is the poor source base for such an examination. Except for the publication itself, no other texts like letters or notes exist that would give insight into how Cozens used the blotting technique in his own artistic practice. Only one published source comments on Cozens's use of blotting in his teaching at Eton College (though its reliability has been disputed).⁷ In the absence of other written accounts, any analysis of the practice of blotting therefore relies primarily on the remaining blots, sketches, and drawings themselves, by both Cozens and his students. Although these objects present a wealth of information, they have largely been overlooked in most recent discussions of the technique.⁸ Charles Cramer, in his article on the theory of blotting, for example, examines not

⁴ The difficulty of verbalising manual practices has been treated in detail by Pamela H. Smith, most recently in *From Lived Experience to the Written Word*.

⁵ In his wide-ranging discussion of the *New Method*, Jean-Claude Lebensztejn barely touches on blotting as a technique rather than a theory. Similarly, Cramer is interested more in the context of empirical epistemology the *New Method* draws from than the making of blots. See Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*; Cramer, 'Alexander Cozens's *New Method*', 112–29.

⁶ Kim Sloan has also criticised this narrow perspective on the theory of blotting. In *Poetry of Landscape*, she argues that readers likely were more interested in the method's practical application rather than its aesthetic and theoretical implications (82–83). However, the fact that Cozens provided such a lengthy discussion of the theory of blotting indicates that this was an important aspect to him.

⁷ This account by Henry Angelo about Cozens's teaching at Eton College, which I will discuss below, has been characterised as a 'fantastic travesty'; see Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 41. Kim Sloan is more accepting of Angelo's account, see 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 187–94.

⁸ The works of Cozens's students have been discussed in detail by Kim Sloan in her doctoral thesis. See note 14 below.

a single blot, sketch, or drawing and how it might have functioned within the artistic process he seeks to illuminate. Instead, his sense of the blots' 'odd formal appearance' derives exclusively from the printed illustrations of the *New Method*, while his explanations of the technique are informed purely by its text.⁹ By contrast, I believe that closely examining the surviving blots (and related sketches and drawings) alongside the publication will enable us to reconstruct the practice of blotting more accurately than if we rely on the treatise alone. In such an analysis, the objects then perform as the material evidence or index of their own making, allowing us to trace the movement of hands and brushes across paper.¹⁰

This, however, is not without its own problems. In fact, the sheer number and heterogeneity of surviving examples make this a rather tricky undertaking.¹¹ Around 150 blots are housed in public collections, with several more in private ownership. Yet there is not even one full sequence of a blot, spirited sketch, and finished drawing that would fully capture the blotting process as it is explained and illustrated in the *New Method*. And while the text and printed illustrations of the *New Method* present the blots as abstract configurations of form, the extant blots, as indicated in the previous chapter, are far more varied. Many appear like quick sketches—some more, others less representational—with thick black ink or more elaborate layers of wash.¹² Together with the next, this chapter asks how it is that the blots are so much more varied than the *New Method's* tightly-circumscribed formalism suggests, and how Cozens came to articulate the radical formalism expressed in the *New Method* when most of the surviving examples seem more like very rough sketches than abstract ink blots. To clarify this difficult situation, the chapter provides an overview of the material and proposes what I call a chrono-typology of blotting. I will first sort the blots into different types based on style, handling, and materials used. Subsequently, I will examine selected examples more closely to reconstruct the practice of blotting as it took shape over the course of Cozens's career.

My analysis will build on the meticulous research of Paul Oppé and Kim Sloan, whose studies offer excellent examinations of Cozens's œuvre beyond the theoretical arguments of the *New Method*.¹³ Oppé's monograph introduces a wide range of objects from different stages of Cozens's

⁹ Cramer, 'Alexander Cozens's *New Method*', 129. As discussed in the introduction, Cramer's aim is to move away from the abstract formal appearance of the blots, which, in his view, have caused an anachronistic misrepresentation of Cozens's ideas. Instead, he proposes to consider the blots within the larger process of invention. Ultimately, however, he focuses on the epistemological basis of blotting to the exclusion of blotting as a material practice. The same is true for Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 335–54; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 72–84; and Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*.

¹⁰ For a broad discussion of this approach, see Magdalena Bushart and Henrike Haug, eds., *Spur der Arbeit: Oberfläche und Werkprozess*, Interdependenzen 3 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2018).

¹¹ This, likely, is another reason why scholars have shied away from foregrounding the practice of blotting.

¹² This is another reason why an examination of blotting should not rely exclusively on Cozens's published text to explain the practice.

¹³ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*; Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists'; Kim Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*.

career, including blots, sketches, and finished drawings. However, since its publication in 1952, a wealth of new information, archival materials, and objects has come to light. Oppé's understanding of the chronology of blotting, especially, is incomplete. It is therefore appropriate to re-examine the blots with this new evidence at hand. By contrast, in her doctoral thesis, Sloan offers a narrower approach that focuses on Cozens's work as a drawing master and the role of blotting in his teaching.¹⁴ Although this provides important insights into the use of blotting among Cozens's students, she only briefly touches on Cozens's own practice of blotting and discusses just a few of his remaining works (be they blots, sketches, or drawings). Similarly, Sloan's monograph on Alexander and John Robert Cozens discusses blotting only briefly, foregrounding instead the two artists' wider practices and goals as landscape painters.¹⁵

This chapter expands upon these studies by re-focusing our attention on Cozens's blots—by surveying them more systematically than previous scholars and by interpreting them in the light of newer research. The blots will be considered in relation to Cozens's sketches and finished ink wash drawings, as well as his publications, in order to anchor them within Cozens's wider artistic practice and thought. My analysis will not only make visible the diverse shapes blotting could take but will revise our understanding of the chronology of blotting, demonstrating that the technique evolved over time. Indeed, a central goal in this chapter is to argue for a fundamental shift in the blotting technique—from Cozens's earliest blot-like sketches in Italy, to the single dated blot in 1755, and the publication of the *Essay* in 1759 and the *New Method* in 1786. Although most authors acknowledge an aesthetic change (i.e. that the blots became more abstract), the fundamental conceptual shifts the technique underwent over the thirty years Cozens used it have not been fully recognised in the literature. Rather, the argument persists that the blotting technique was 'fully evolved', both practically and conceptually, by 1757, i.e. two years before publication of the *Essay*.¹⁶ Any increasing abstraction, in this argument, is considered as 'merely elaborations' of the same basic method.¹⁷ The aim of this chapter (and the thesis more broadly) is to show, however, that there are key differences in the ways the early and late blots function

¹⁴ She first examines Cozens's own artistic education and then discusses the different types of students Cozens encountered in his teaching and the methods he employed in working with them. These include the orphaned boys at Christ Hospital preparing for seafaring careers; the students at Eton College who took extracurricular drawing lessons for a more rounded education; as well as wealthy private students from the upper classes and aristocracy. By analysing their remaining drawings and sketches, and in some cases blots, she demonstrates that blotting was just one among several (more traditional) teaching methods Cozens employed and that he tailored his approach to the abilities and educational goals of each individual student.

¹⁵ For her discussion of blotting, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 30–35, 82–83.

¹⁶ Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 188; Kim Sloan, 'A New Chronology for Alexander Cozens Part II: 1759–86', *The Burlington Magazine* 127, no. 987 (1985): 355–56. Busch does not distinguish between the two publications, whereas Rosenberg and Lebensztejn see only aesthetic but not conceptual shifts, see Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 335–54; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 72–84; Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, 81, 217.

¹⁷ Sloan, 'New Chronology, II', 355.

within the artistic process and in the ways the technique is conceptualised in the *Essay* (1759) and the *New Method* (1786). It also highlights the different pedagogical goals of the two publications.

Ultimately, tracing the chronology of blotting will help us understand more precisely how Cozens came to develop this unusual technique. It will enable us to ask in the next chapter how he arrived at the remarkable abstraction and formalism with which he described the blots in the *New Method*—even when so many remaining blots do not fully conform to it. Going back to the larger themes of this thesis, another goal in focussing on the practice of blotting is to show that the technique developed not simply as a theoretical proposition, as implied by Cramer and Lebensztejn, but as a material practice that evolved in response to a wider range of both practical and intellectual concerns (including changing concepts of invention, empirical epistemology, and the theory of artistic creation, as well as the experimental artistic practices of sketching, drawing, and painting it was embedded in).¹⁸ In blotting, theory and practice are tightly interwoven; to understand either one, we need to consider both.

A chrono-typology of blots

Typology

On my computer sits a folder titled ‘_All blots’. The low dash directs my operating system to keep the folder at the top of the list, so that I never have to search for it amongst the many other folders in the shared parent folder of ‘Cozens_objects’. ‘All blots’ is self-explanatory: when I set up the folder, I used it to download and store photographs of all the blots I could find online—in the digital collections of the British Museum, Tate, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Yale Center for British Art, and about twenty-three or so other museums, private collections, and art dealers. Quickly, the folder grew to hold just over one-hundred-fifty files. When I open it today, it has a clear structure of various sub-folders with smaller selections of blots chosen for this chapter (‘Blots_chap 2’, ‘Selection’, ‘Probably not’). But, at the beginning, whenever I opened it, I was overwhelmed by the variety I encountered. There I would find small and large blots (distorted by the uniform size of each thumbnail image), blots in light and dark ink, in either black or brown, blots with just ink or several layers of wash and even graphite outlines, very simple blots and more complex ones, blots that very clearly delineated a landscape with buildings or a seascape with ships, highly abstract blots, blots that were mounted and signed and blots that were loose or pasted into albums, and, finally, blots related to Cozens’s various publications—all intermingling.

¹⁸ On reconceptualising theoretical debates as material practices, see Douglas Fordham’s recent study on picturesque travel literature, *Aquatint Worlds*.

Writing about the practice of blotting, I knew I had to sort through this chaotic folder of blots. To be able to examine just a small selection, meant to first consider all of them—to sort, compare, and differentiate. To make this easier, I printed them all out and grouped them according to their visual characteristics. This resulted in fourteen loosely defined groups or types of blots, distinguished by style, handling, or materials used (light blots, more complex blots, black sketches, brown blots, etc.); by their relationship to Cozens's publications (blots related to the *Essay, Various Species of Landscape &c. in Nature* (unpubl., c.1773), *New Method*); or where they are kept today (the British Museum has an important album of blots¹⁹). Although some of the blots cannot be easily categorised (for example, when they display more than one characteristic), even just loosely grouping them helps us gain a birds-eye view of the practice of blotting and the diversity of its results.

That Cozens himself distinguished blots in a similar way is suggested in the *New Method*.²⁰ In the section on the 'discovery' of blotting, he defines two types of blots: those made with light ink, and those with dark or black ink. After using the first type for 'a long time', he writes, 'the method was improved by making [the blots] with black ink'.²¹ Later, in the book of rules, he explains that

blots may be of two kinds; light, or dark ones. /
The first done with a faint degree of colour; the drawings to be made out
on the blots themselves, without the intervention of any other paper. /
The second sort of blots to be made with the darkest degree of ink, from
which the drawing must be made out upon transparent paper.²²

Not only do we get a glimpse of the two main types of blots—light and dark—we also get a sense of a chronological development. Over the course of Cozens's career, blotting changed from light to dark in an attempt to improve upon the technique. Surprisingly, this passage has been largely overlooked by scholars. When examining the blotting technique as it is presented in the *New Method*, most authors do not acknowledge the two different types of blots.²³ Nor do they think of blotting as a technique that underwent significant change. However, as the quotation shows, Cozens himself thought about blotting as both varied and subject to change. It moreover suggests that typology and chronology cannot be separated: different types of blots were

¹⁹ The album contains forty-nine blots of varying degrees of detail and roughness. Most of them are made in black ink. See reg. no. 1888,0116.8.1-49 at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1888-0116-8-1-49 [last accessed 1 May 2024].

²⁰ We find this distinction already in the 1773 draft in The Hague. See Cozens and Anon., 'Designing Landscapes', 9–10.

²¹ Cozens, *New Method*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ Again, Cramer is a good example here of a scholar who discusses blotting without examining any blots.

developed and used at different times. Before I examine the history of Cozens's practice of blotting, I want to consider some of the broader problems with constructing a chronology of the technique.

Chronology

The issue of dating Cozens's works is a thorny one. Only a handful of finished drawings and one sole blot is dated. To complicate things further, the few dates the artist did supply are all from the 1730s to mid-1760s. This gives a relatively good sense of Cozens's early career but makes it more difficult to understand the chronology of his later practice. However, using the known dates as a scaffold, and through visual analysis and comparison of dated to undated works, scholars have been able to establish a relatively secure chronology of Cozens's practice.²⁴ Significant characteristics that help date the drawings are stylistic and iconographic changes as well as changes in the inks, materials, and techniques Cozens used at different times of his career. These can be further supported by paratextual elements like signatures and mounts, as well as archival materials like exhibition records and surviving correspondence with students.²⁵ In terms of style, Cozens's works are characterised by a gradual broadening of his brushwork. While his early works exhibit neatly drawn linework and tight hatching in ink with pen or (from around the mid-1750s) a fine brush, the later landscapes are built up in a more painterly manner from graduated layers of wash and intersecting patches of ink, applied with a larger brush. With this shift towards a more fluid handling and layering of washes, the drawings gain a lightness and luminosity that is absent from the earlier works, which can seem somewhat stilted. Here, Cozens can be seen making the most of his medium, playing with the translucency of his washes and their interaction with the paper. In doing so, these works represent a clear break with the traditional technique of the so-called 'tinted drawing', whereby a pencil underdrawing is coloured-in with watercolour wash and outlined in pen and ink.²⁶ Iconographically, there is a

²⁴ See Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*; Andrew Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*; Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*.

²⁵ Works signed with a simple 'C' in black ink and pasted on a mount with a single black line as a border seem to date from the 1740s and '50s, whereas the dated works from 1760s are signed with 'Al : Cozens' or 'Alex : Cozens'. These often are mounted with a wider border washed in brown or grey ink. Later, the mounts become more intricate with several washed lines in grey ink and Cozens's signature on the mount (rather than on the drawing) as 'Alex' Cozens'. However, there are also examples that contradicts these rough groupings. Some Italian works are signed with both 'C' and 'Al : Cozens' while a very early drawing at the British Museum is signed 'Alex: Cozens 1743' (see reg. no. 1923,1016.2). These exceptions indicate that further study on Cozens's signatures and mounts is needed.

²⁶ On the 'tinted' or 'stained' drawing, see Anne Lyles, 'The Transformation of the British Landscape Watercolour, c.1750–1850', in *British Watercolours from the Oppé Collection, with a Selection of Drawings and Oil Sketches*, ed. Robin Hamlyn and Anne Lyles (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997), 20. On the broader technical changes from drawing to painting in watercolours, see Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist*. On Alexander and

clear break between the classicising Italianate landscapes of the 1750s and '60s and the later works, which often depict more generic mountainous views, expansive valleys, and desolate landscapes. With their pared-back iconography and looser handling, these later works are more imaginative and poetic and less formulaic than the earlier ones.

The blots broadly follow the same trajectory of a gradual loosening in their handling and increasing abstraction in their subject matter. To reconstruct their chronology further, I will make use of the same contextual elements that help date the drawings and, additionally, consider the blots alongside Cozens's published and drafted writings. In her brief overview, Sloan uses the artist's publications as road markers along which to trace the development of blotting: from the relatively detailed sketch-blots in thin strokes presented in the *Essay*, to the rougher and bolder blots related to the *Various Species*, and finally to the abstract dark masses of ink described in the *New Method*. While I broadly agree with this outline, I think it is well worth taking a closer look at the blots themselves and consider more thoroughly their visual appearance and how they were made relative to the publications. As discussed earlier, this raises the surprising problem that not all blots fully align with the ways blotting is described in the different publications. The early technique of the light blot, for example, seems to contradict the sketch-blots of the *Essay*. By poking into such inconsistencies and unexplored gaps, and by closely examining the blots in relation to both Cozens's wider practice *and* the publications, we will be able to outline the development and chronology of blotting more precisely, both on a practical and an intellectual level. Ultimately, this will demonstrate the fundamental differences between the early and later variants of the blotting techniques that this chapter argues for.

c.1746

Sloan traces the beginning of blotting to Cozens's stay in Rome in 1746.²⁷ This period is poorly documented. We know he returned to England in 1746, and that he had stayed for two years, and so must have arrived at some point in 1744.²⁸ But we don't know where he lived or how he supported himself. Only a small number of works from this period are extant: a single sketchbook, now at the Yale Center for British Art, and a small corpus of fifty-two drawings at the British Museum, with another three at Tate and the Harvard Art Museums.²⁹ Although they

John Robert Cozens's role in this, see Isabelle von Marschall, *Zwischen Skizze und Gemälde: John Robert Cozens (1752–1797) und das englische Landschaftsaquarell*, Beiträge zur Kunstwissenschaft 83 (München: scaneg, 2005).

²⁷ Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 155.

²⁸ A note that was attached to the album of his Roman drawings indicates that he returned to England in 1746. Elsewhere he explains that he stayed two years, giving an estimated date of his stay as 1744–46. The note is now mounted separately, see 1867,1012.1+.

²⁹ Alexander Cozens, *Roman Sketchbook*, c.1746, Yale Center for British Art, B1978.43.166. The sketchbook is transcribed in Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, cat. no. 2. It was first published and discussed in Paul Oppé,

only represent a fraction of his output in Rome—which would have been a period of intense and productive work and study—they do offer a fascinating window into his preoccupations and goals at this early moment in his career. In them, we can see the poles of his thinking take shape. On the one hand, the sketches and drawings at the British Museum and elsewhere show the artist as a keen experimenter who came to Italy to perfect his skills and learn new ones. They demonstrate his engagement with a wide range of different media, techniques, and visual idioms: from the slightest and quickest sketches in graphite or ink wash to the most meticulously worked and highly detailed drawings in pen and ink and coloured with watercolour or chalks. These works go far beyond the somewhat hesitant drawings of the 1730s, testifying to his willingness to try out new approaches and techniques. On the other hand, several pages of process notes in the sketchbook at Yale reveal that already at this early point in his career Cozens reflected theoretically upon the techniques he used. Here, the artist jotted down twenty-one different drawing techniques as numbered step-by-step lists, somewhat anticipating the systematic approach of his later publications.³⁰ Together, these early drawings and lists highlight Cozens's interest in experimentation and rationalisation—intellectual qualities that would set the parameters for the rest of his artistic career and shape his writing and teaching.

The drawing techniques presented in the sketchbook mostly use the same basic method but include variations that adjust them for different purposes. Although Cozens's notes are very difficult to follow—they are more *aides-mémoires* than clear instructions—the basic method can be summarised as follows: first the artist makes a graphite sketch from life, which is transferred to a larger sheet at home.³¹ The enlarged composition must be corrected from life before it can be drawn in pen and ink at home. Finally, the drawing is shaded in graphite from life, before being washed with Indian ink at home. If colour is desired, this is to be done with dry colours and

'A Roman Sketchbook by Alexander Cozens', *Walpole Society* 26 (1927): 81–93. For a discussion of both the sketchbook and the drawings, see Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 152–60; and Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, chap. II. The drawings were originally acquired in an album but have since been mounted individually. See reg. nos. 1867,1012.1–52. For a summary entry, see reg. no. 1867,1012.1.

³⁰ Cozens, *Roman Sketchbook*, 4 recto–14 recto, transcribed in Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, cat. no. 2, pp. 19–21.

³¹ Sketching outdoors was not common among English artists during the early half of the eighteenth century, but the Académie Française in Rome encouraged its students to sketch *en plein air*. It is likely that Cozens was introduced to the practice by the French landscape painter Joseph Vernet. A separate note in the sketchbook indicates that Cozens indeed spent his early mornings outdoors sketching and outlining landscapes, which he would rework into more finished drawings in the afternoon. The late mornings were reserved for studying etching and for daily visits with Vernet. See Cozens, *Roman Sketchbook*, 13 recto. On the relationship between French and English artists in 1740s Rome, see Jason M. Kelly, 'Rome and Its British and Irish Artists, 1730–1750' and Lars Kokkonen, "'This so Important Crisis of my Life': Wilson in Rome and the Vernet Effect' in Martin Postle and Robin Simon, eds., *Richard Wilson and the Transformation of European Landscape Painting*, Exh. Cat. Yale Center for British Art and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum of Wales (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 35–51 and 53–69.

leather stumps from life.³² Variations of this basic method include applying shading to the graphite sketch before drawing the outlines in ink, using watercolour wash instead of dry colours, or using coloured instead of white paper. The purpose of these techniques are differences of usage and aesthetic effect: one method is more suitable for detailed topographic notation, another for capturing an overall composition. Others emphasise atmospheric effects of light, dark, and colour.³³ As Oppé describes evocatively, ‘the result is a kaleidoscopic series of variations on the theme of outline, detail, mass, tone, and colour’.³⁴

Both Oppé and Sloan felt that Cozens broadly followed the methods in his notebook. The sketches included in it and the other surviving drawings largely confirm this, with several examples following the basic approach as well as some of its variants. The notebook includes sketches of different states of finish: some are very quickly and lightly sketched (fig. 16), while others are more delicately drawn and squared for transfer to a larger sheet (fig. 17).³⁵ Most follow a linear idiom, but two are shaded with broad graphite hatching to map out the distribution of lights and shade across the composition (figs. 18 and 19). The same is true for the drawings at the British Museum. They range from roughly sketched to highly finished, with several representing intermediary stages of the basic method and its variants. One such example presents a carefully drawn and highly detailed view of a landscape (fig. 20). In the left foreground, Cozens started to trace the outlines in black ink. Another example was fully delineated and then washed rather than outlined (fig. 21). Two of these large, worked-up sheets were squared for a second transfer: the *View of Frascati* at the Harvard Art Museum is based on a detailed drawing at the British Museum (figs. 22 and 23). Another highly finished and squared drawing at the British Museum depicts a tomb by a road, whose finished version is at Tate, titled *In the Farnese Gardens* (figs. 24 and 25).

One technique tabulated in the sketchbook is for painting directly in ink or watercolour wash, without any preceding graphite underdrawing. It would be tempting to see in it a precursor to blotting, a technique that forgoes the initial outline sketch entirely and instead splashes out ink in broad masses. But the way the watercolour method works is fundamentally different from blotting. While the blots are conceptualised as flat masses of dark and light, the method for painting in watercolours divides the landscape into the three traditional grounds. Following established practice, the artist proceeds from back to front, laying down each ground in

³² See Cozens, *Roman Sketchbook*, 7 recto, summarised in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 12.

³³ Oppé, ‘A Roman Sketchbook by Alexander Cozens’, 83.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The pages of the sketchbook measure 185 x 130 mm, whereas the drawings at the British Museum vary in size from c. 101 x 150 mm for the smallest works and c. 242 x 370 mm for the largest.

graduated layers of wash before adding refinements and details in iterative steps from background to middle distance and foreground. By contrast, the blot is meant to be smudged onto paper all in one go. These differences of flatness vs. depth and immediacy vs. iteration mark a clear distinction between the ways the two methods conceptualise the images they create. One is rooted in abstraction, the other in representation. What is more, Cozens may not even have used the watercolour method. No such example survives. Instead, almost all the sketches and drawings from Italy include graphite underdrawing. Even the sketchiest and most blot-like drawings show graphite lines on top of which ink wash was added (fig. 26).

What is perhaps more significant than their exact process is the emphasis on overall composition, the pictorial effects of light and dark, and the importance of mass and proportion that characterises both the lists of techniques and the surviving works. Several examples, regardless of how they were made and the media they use, follow the same principles of dividing the image into a pictorial composition of masses in light and dark. To get these elements right, each of the methods in the sketchbook includes several steps of going back outside to correct the drawing, the distribution of light and shade, and the relationship between the parts and the whole. All these elements would become central to Cozens's thinking about pictorial composition, and it was their design that was to be aided by blotting. Again, however, there are important differences. Unlike the blotting technique, which seeks to assist practitioners in inventing original landscapes, the numbered lists and sketches reveal a fundamental dedication to mimetic representation. By revising and correcting his drawings repeatedly from life, Cozens sought to ensure the accuracy and harmony of atmospheric effects, of the overall landscape, and its detail. Although he certainly took liberties with some of the topography, the overall effect he strove for was one of ideal yet truthful representation.³⁶

Ultimately, it is not in any one of the methods jotted down in his notebook that we can recognise the later blotting technique. Instead, it is Cozens's proclivity for experimentation, his systematising mind, and his sensitivity for pictorial effect, composition, and tone and mass that formed the basis for his development of blotting and that took shape during his early morning outings sketching Italian scenery.

³⁶ See for example his sketch on the verso of page 84 in the Roman Sketchbook. The sketch shows the Arch of Constantine with ruins of the Colosseo on the right and the ruins of the Meta Sudans in the centre. The view is taken from north-west, coming down from the Forum Roman, what today is Via Sacra. The view seems to be adjusted for compositional purposes, as the ruinous edge of the Colosseo would not have been visible in this way. This example shows that Cozens was eager to create a truthful effect rather than a precise topographical record.

While it is easy to recognise in Cozens's Italian works and concerns the basis for the blotting technique, Cozens himself traced its origins to his practice as a teacher. According to the narrative presented in the *New Method*, he discovered the suggestive potential of accidental stains and smudges on paper while teaching a promising student 'of great natural capacity'.³⁷ Once Cozens began making blots by staining paper on purpose and placing them before the student to turn into a landscape, the student's abilities to invent and compose original landscapes increased to such an extent as to exceed their teacher's 'most sanguine expectations'.³⁸ The first blots produced for this purpose were made with a highly diluted ink—'just strong enough to mark the paper'—and constituted what Cozens later called a light blot.³⁹ Like Cozens had done when he himself had discovered the effects of stained paper, the student would draw directly on the blotted sheet to rework the blot into an 'intelligible sketch'.

An early example of such a light blot, reworked into an intelligible or spirited sketch, survives at the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester (fig. 27). This image of a coastal landscape is built up from at least four layers of gradually darkening grey ink. The first two layers constitute the blot, and the third and fourth transform it into a sketch. The first layer of wash is of the lightest tone and applied in broad, horizontal brushstrokes that separate the sheet into a lower and upper half. Another layer of slightly darker ink is applied across the lower half. This is then further defined by two darker tones of ink that are drawn with a thinner brush and transforms the blot into a sketch, delineating a landscape image. The lighter one is applied in horizontal strokes on the lower part of the sheet, creating the effect of rippled water. The darker one is applied in the middle section to delineate topography and architecture. While the body of the blot, in its light grey ink, is washed in one more-or-less even tone, the darker sections are linear and work to imbue with meaning what before is abstract. It is only through these darkly inked, linear additions that the sheet becomes recognisable as a coastal landscape. This becomes more visible by contrasting the upper and lower parts of the sheet: while the dark additions in the lower half clearly delineate the landscape, the light layer of grey wash of the upper half has remained largely undefined. Only the most delicate and somewhat tentative application of graphite outlines shape the flat layer of grey into clouds.

At the bottom of the sheet, the blot is dated '6 July 1755' and signed 'A. Cozens' (fig. 28). This makes it the only known dated blot and an important piece of information in reconstructing

³⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. See my discussion in the previous chapter.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

the timeline of blotting. As noted earlier, we can piece together the chronology of Cozens's activities in the 1750s from a small number of dated drawings and prints, his publication of the *Essay* in 1759, and a handful of scattered archival materials. However, no letters, notes, or other writing from this time exist to help us sketch out his professional and aesthetic preoccupations and thoughts. Upon his return from Italy, Cozens quickly established himself as a teacher. In 1749, he took up post as drawing master at Christ's Hospital, a naval academy for poor and orphaned boys. Sloan has discussed his teaching there in detail and has persuasively argued that his resignation—in 1754—was due not to a lack of success amongst his students but a reorientation of priorities.⁴⁰ Alongside his work at Christ's, Cozens taught wealthy private clients from the upper echelons of society. His resignation letter intimates that this private work increasingly encroached on his time at Christ's, until it became unfeasible for him to remain in post as drawing master.⁴¹ Analysing the work of Cozens's students at Christ's, Sloan has shown that his teaching there was traditional and straightforward. Students learned by copying from drawing books and from Cozens's own works, with a focus on topography, architecture, and similar types of technical drawing that would be required for a naval career. It was his expertise in drawing 'Coasting Prospects' that Cozens had emphasised in his application to the post.⁴² By contrast, with his private students Cozens would have been able to employ a less utilitarian approach.

One of his earliest private students was George Simon Harcourt, Viscount of Nuneham (1736–1809, later second Earl Harcourt). Writing to his sister, Elizabeth Harcourt (1739–1811, later Lady Lee by marriage to Sir William Lee of Hartwell, fourth Baronet, 1726–99), on 14 September 1755, Harcourt expressed that 'of all the masters I have seen & learned of Cozens was the only one that had a taste or thoroughly understood the business he professed.'⁴³ Although no works by Harcourt from the 1750s are known to survive, it is likely that the specific qualities he appreciated lay more in his teacher's sensitivity for composition and effect than in a strict emphasis on correct drawing. Implied in Harcourt's letter is that prior to taking lessons with Cozens he had received drawing instruction from other drawing masters. Therefore, he presumably already was in command of at least the basics of drawing and would have appreciated Cozens's more advanced approach. A letter by another student, from about ten years later, confirms that it was Cozens's 'freedom of Manner' that his students sought to achieve,

⁴⁰ Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 161–71; Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, chap. III.

⁴¹ The letter is fully transcribed in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 27–28.

⁴² His application notice appeared in the *General Advertiser* on 11, 16, 17, and 18 January 1749, cited in Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 161–62.

⁴³ Kim Sloan, 'A New Chronology for Alexander Cozens Part I: 1717–59', *The Burlington Magazine* 127, no. 983 (1985): 75; *Poetry of Landscape*, 29; the letter is transcribed in full in 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 182.

instead of expert delineation.⁴⁴ We know that Cozens used the blotting technique with his students at Eton College in the 1760s, but the 1755 date of the light blot indicates that he had developed the technique already in the previous decade. It is likely that he began using it as part of his teaching practice during the early or mid 1750s. Students would have appreciated the ability to jot down a landscape quickly, with an eye towards composition and effect, that could then be improved and refined—just as Cozens had done in his own practice in Italy. As Sloan has emphasised, this would have presented a welcome release from tedious hours of copying from drawing books which was still standard practice in drawing instruction during the period.⁴⁵

The 1755 blot at the Whitworth is not the only example of this type of light blot that survives. Around forty other light blots are in private and public collections. Among these, one stands out for the lightness of its ink (fig. 29). A first layer of faint wash was applied in broad strokes across the sheet. The grey is so light that it is almost difficult to see against the cream-coloured paper. This was then touched with a marginally darker tone of ink and later revised in pen and ink, and graphite in the clouds. Most other blots, however, tend to be darker in ink and range from simple to more complex and larger compositions (fig. 30 and 31). In terms of their finish, some are extremely rough, others are more delicately handled (figs. 32 and 33). They also vary greatly in size, with the smallest being of a modest size at 90 x 136 mm. One example at Leeds Art Gallery measuring 638 x 467 mm demonstrates that the technique could be, and indeed was, used at a larger scale as well (fig. 34). One group among these light blots is especially significant as it relates to the *Essay* and thus forms an important source in reconstructing how this publication came about (figs. 35–38). Like other examples, blots in this group are built up with several layers of grey wash and a final layer of delineation in dark ink that transforms the abstract shapes into representational sketches. They anticipate the printed illustrations in the *Essay*, and several bear the exact same inscriptions as the plates. One example at Tate, for instance, is inscribed in Cozens's hand at the top right: '1st Stile of Composition' (fig. 36). Another was recently sold through Libson & Yarker and is inscribed '4th Stile of Composition' (fig. 38).⁴⁶ Before I discuss them further, I will provide a more general introduction to the *Essay*.

⁴⁴ Lady Amabel Yorke (later Hume Campbell, Lady Polwarth), cited in Sloan, 'New Chronology, II', n. 10.

⁴⁵ Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 239–42.

⁴⁶ See Libson & Yarker, <https://www.libson-yarker.com/recent-sales/a-landscape-of-the-imagination> [last accessed 11 August 2024].

An Essay to Facilitate the Invention of Landskips, intended for Students in the Art

Publication of the *Essay* was announced in the *Public Advertiser* on 2 March 1759.⁴⁷ This, most likely, followed a period of several years during which Cozens had been using the technique in his practice as a teacher. We do not know the extent to which Cozens employed the blotting technique in his early teaching—if he used it with all or just some of his students. Most likely he adapted his teaching methods to each student's individual abilities and interest.⁴⁸ Either way, it seems likely that the technique garnered considerable interest, and that its success encouraged Cozens to write and publish his first drawing manual. The *Essay* is significant for several reasons. Over the first half of the eighteenth century, drawing books and pamphlets had become widely popular, and when the *Essay* came out, they were available for all price segments and in a range of formats. Along with making drawing instruction more widely accessible, such manuals had the additional purpose of advertising their author's teaching. The goal was to attract new clients—amateur artists who were not content to simply follow the instructions in the manual but wanted to learn to draw directly from a manual's author, and who had the necessary cash to spare.⁴⁹ In this way, the *Essay* presented a taster of what to expect from drawing tuition à la Cozens. While the *Essay* certainly capitalised on this trend, the publication differs from most other manuals of the time. Whereas most publications offered a more general course of drawing instruction, the *Essay* constitutes one of the earliest examples of a manual focused exclusively on the genre of landscape painting.⁵⁰ As such, it catered to a more niche market and reflected the increasingly specialised interests of amateur artists. But the most important element that set the *Essay* apart from contemporary publications was its content. In it, Cozens emphasised invention over delineation and art over skill. As discussed previously, most other manuals employed copying as their teaching methodology. By contrast, the *Essay* focused on enabling readers to invent landscapes from blots rather than teaching them correct drawing technique. The manual would have targeted students like George Harcourt who had already mastered the basics of drawing but

⁴⁷ *Public Advertiser*, issue 7589, 2 March 1759, 4, cited in Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*', 1. The publication notice does not include Cozens's name, and the title given varies slightly from the published title page in using the modernised spelling 'landscapes' rather than 'landskips'.

⁴⁸ In 1786, he writes that the student with whom he discovered the technique was of 'great natural capacity'. *New Method*, 4. Kim Sloan's discussion of Cozens's teaching has shown that this generally was his approach.

⁴⁹ See my discussion of the price of Cozens's drawing instruction below.

⁵⁰ Other early examples include Jean-Baptiste Chatelain, *A New Book of Landskips, Pleasant & Useful for to Learn to Draw without a Master* (London, 1737); and William Austin, *A Specimen of Sketching Landscapes, in a Free and Masterly Manner, with a Pen or Pencil; Exemplified in Thirty Etchings, Done from Original Drawings of Lucatelli, after the Life, in and about Rome* (London, 1757). One copy of Austin's manual at The Metropolitan Museum of Art has the skies sketched in by Cozens in light grey wash (acc. no. 30.49.3). Manuals specialised on landscape became more common towards the end of the eighteenth century, when landscape sketching had become a near universal pastime. For an overview, see Johannes Dobai, *Die Kunstliteratur des Klassizismus und der Romantik in England*, vol. 2: 1750–1790 (Bern: Benteli, 1975), chap. 3.

wanted to progress in their artistic and inventive abilities. Ultimately, it offered Cozens a way of consolidating his reputation as an increasingly sought-after drawing master and at the same time enabled him to make the case for the use of blotting in drawing instruction.

The *Essay* is most accurately described as a short pamphlet. It includes two pages of text, followed by sixteen landscape prints. These are grouped into eight pairs (plates 1–8), each consisting of one etched blot and one etched outline drawing (based on the blot). Only three copies of the *Essay* are known today, and it is unclear how many were printed when it was first published. The first is housed in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, where it is bound in a volume with the text (but not the plates) of the *New Method* and a set of the *Trees*.⁵¹ This copy is incomplete and is missing both blot and drawing of plate eight. A complete copy was sold at auction in 2017 and is now in a private collection.⁵² It has been discussed in an unpublished manuscript by Sue Sloman.⁵³ During my research, I was able to locate a third, previously unknown copy of the *Essay* in the Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library in Antwerp.⁵⁴ Like the one in St Petersburg, the Antwerp copy is incomplete, missing half of its sixteen etchings (all the printed drawings).

Compared to the *New Method*, the *Essay* has received little scholarly attention. Oppé had not seen a copy but had identified the publication in an 1882 sale catalogue.⁵⁵ This was later recognised as the Hermitage copy by Wilton, who, however, had not seen it himself due to the limited accessibility of the Hermitage's collection during the 1980s. It was first reproduced and made accessible to scholars in 1985 by Sloan. Subsequent scholars paid little attention to the *Essay*. Neither Busch, Cramer, nor Lebensztejn considered this publication, whereas Rosenberg discussed it only summarily and as an early iteration of the *New Method*.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Reg. no. H.44752–70. This copy is reproduced in Sloan, 'New Chronology, II'. Its provenance is discussed in Sloan and Joyner, 'A Cozens Album in Wales', 92. See also Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 30–35.

⁵² Dreweatts & Bloomsbury Auctions London, February 23, 2017, Books and Works on Paper, lot 259. The copy is discussed in Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*'. No information about its provenance is known. I thank Nicholas Stogdon, who first discovered the copy, for sharing his photographs with me and for putting me in contact with its present owner.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience in Antwerp, ref. no. lvd: 596676. It has been digitized and is available at <https://anet.be/record/opacehc/c:lvd:596676/E> [last accessed 10 October 2024]. This copy was acquired in 1876 at auction from the estate of Viscount Bernard du Bus de Gisignies, a Belgian ornithologist, palaeontologist, amateur artist, and patron of the arts. Though the *Essay* is not individually listed in the auction catalogue, it likely was included in lots 1087, 1088, or 1089, which comprised loose stacks and volumes of similar items. The name and dates of the sale are inscribed on the title page and match the date of acquisition. For the contents of the auction, see Frans-Jan Olivier, *Catalogue des livres composant la bibliothèque de feu M. le Vte B. du Bus de Gisignies* (Brussels, 1876), 137.

⁵⁵ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 23.

⁵⁶ Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*; Cramer, 'Alexander Cozens's *New Method*'; Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*.

The *Essay*'s short text can roughly be structured into four sections. It begins with the same reference to Leonardo da Vinci's discussion of accidental stains that is also cited in the *New Method*. Cozens confidently defines the *Essay*'s goal as to 'improve upon' Leonardo's technique 'by making those imperfect Forms on Purpose, and with some degree of Design, which otherwise must be catch'd from Accidents'—an ambition he would later repeat in the *New Method*.⁵⁷ The second section explains how to use the *Essay*, while the third offers a 'System of Composition'. This system consists of eight different 'Stiles of Composition' or 'Manners of disposing the principal Objects' in a landscape painting. These are illustrated in the plates and conceptually (though not in their specific types) anticipate the sixteen types of composition Cozens would later define in the *Various Species* and *New Method*. The third section gives directions on how to make one's own 'Blots or black Sketches'. Finally, section four contains an apology for the small size of the *Essay*'s illustrations and a promise to publish, 'As soon as Time will permit', shaded versions of the printed outline drawings.

Scholars have noted a certain lack of discipline in Cozens's writing. Sloan felt that the structure of the *Essay* was illogical and that his instructions 'occur[ed] at unexpected places in the text'.⁵⁸ Indeed, it might seem odd that Cozens first describes how to make a drawing from a blot before he has explained the process of blotting itself. Similarly, the position of the plates seems to be the wrong way around, with the printed drawings appearing before the printed blots (fig. 39). As Sloman confirms, 'In procedural terms the blot precedes the outline, but when bound in quarto book form, as originally advertised, Cozens's line illustrations appear before, rather than after, the blot drawings'.⁵⁹ Sloan speculates that Cozens may have rushed to publish the *Essay* and that the peculiar structure is down to him not taking the time to fully reflect on the usability of the publication. However, I would argue that, to the contrary, Cozens took great care creating a manual that was not only logically structured but one that could actively be used as well as read. Although his prose was not that of a practiced writer, the overall structure of the *Essay* guided its readers through the process of inventing and drawing from blots according to how this process is described in the text.

This becomes clearer when we return to the text. The second section is crucial. After introducing the *Essay* with the Leonardo quotation (which itself receives little explanation) Cozens explains how to use the publication, implicitly outlining its purpose.⁶⁰ The publication, he

⁵⁷ Cozens, *Essay*, 1.

⁵⁸ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 31.

⁵⁹ Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*', 3.

⁶⁰ In the *New Method*, Cozens writes that he encountered Leonardo's discussion of stains only after making blots for a long time. We might speculate if it was not this discovery in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, which had been published in English in 1721, that had factored into Cozens's decision to publish the *Essay*.

writes, consists of ‘rude black Sketches and Outlines’. A clean sheet of ‘thin Post Paper’ is to be laid on these ‘black Sketches’, whose design can then be ‘made out from the Hints which appear through the Paper, and by looking at the same Time on the respective Outline’.⁶¹ To understand this properly, it is best to imagine handling the publication as this makes its affordances become more apparent.⁶² So, open its title page and read through its short text. Then consult the plates. These are bound perpendicularly to the text, so to view them correctly, we need to turn the manual on its side by 90°. Cozens instructs his readers to now place a sheet of thin paper on the blot (fig. 40). The paper obscures the lower half of the manual, while the outline drawing remains visible on top. The reader now is invited to interpret the shapes of the ‘black Sketch’ that shine through their paper and trace them onto the sheet. For beginners, the outline drawing above can serve as a guide, whereas ‘those who have practised Drawing, have no need of the Outline’.⁶³ More advanced students like Harcourt, thus, might disregard the etched outlines and draw their own interpretation of the blot. They might even hone their inventive skills by creating several different interpretations of the same blot. Only at a later point do students graduate to making their own blots by drawing ‘all possible Variety of Shapes and Strokes upon your Paper’, ‘with the swiftest Hand’.⁶⁴ Importantly, Cozens writes that, in making the blot, practitioners should limit ‘the Disposition of the Whole to the general Form in the Examples which you chuse for your Stile of Composition’.⁶⁵ This passage makes clear that students are not directed to create their own original blot designs. Instead, a type is to be chosen from the plates and imitated.

Here, the differences between the *Essay* and the *New Method* become evident. The primary function of the *Essay* is to enable readers to create precise outline drawings from the blots, by comparing them with the printed drawings. This is a process of discrimination whereby the student learns what to include and what to omit, which hints to follow and which to ignore. Making one’s own blots is only a secondary function and is limited to those ‘Stiles’ of blots that

⁶¹ Cozens, *Essay*, 1.

⁶² The concept of material ‘affordance’ has gained renewed attention during the recent art historical ‘material turn’. Originally developed by American psychologist James J. Gibson, the concept states that objects inhere affordances, i.e. that they invite specific activities to be performed with, and in response to, the object. The handle on a coffee mug, for example, is an invitation to lift and hold the mug. As such, the concept of affordance offers a lens through which to analyse human–thing interactions, making it an important concept within actor-network-theory. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Carl Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); for an overview, see also Richard Fox, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, and Christina Tsouparopoulou, ‘Affordanz’, in *Materiale Textkulturen: Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken*, ed. Thomas Meier, Michael R. Ott, and Rebecca Sauer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 63–70.

⁶³ Cozens, *Essay*, 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

are included in the manual. This is why Cozens's instructions on how to make blots are short and only added at the end—they are not the focus of the publication. Thus, rather than attributing the inverted structure of the *Essay* to a rushed and inexperienced author, it is more likely to be an intentional choice that reflects the purpose of the book. In the *New Method*, by contrast, the primary goal is the invention of original blot designs. Outline drawings have been omitted and the reader is encouraged to begin by making their own blots right from the start.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Cozens's explanations in the later publication have been structured into an easier three-step process that begins with blotting.

These differences between the two publications are further highlighted by the types of landscapes that are included in each publication. While the *New Method* places strong emphasis on original invention and includes original landscape types, the 'Stiles of Composition' in the *Essay* are all derived 'from the Works of the antient Master'.⁶⁷ They represent amalgamations of compositions by the great landscape painters of the previous century rather than original designs.⁶⁸ By contrast, the *New Method* aims to liberate practitioners from the strictures of art historical tradition to encourage originality.⁶⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, the very premise of the *New Method* is that copying—both from nature and the old masters—is detrimental to artistic invention. In the *Essay*, this is clearly not a concern yet.

Finally, the publications differ in their practical use. While the *Essay* invites practical engagement with its plates, the *New Method* does not explicitly encourage tracing or composing from its printed blots (though the plates certainly could be used that way). In the *Essay*, the reader learns by engaging with the publication materially and practically, and the *Essay* was to be used as much as it was to be read. It aimed to guide the reader through the learning process as Cozens might do in his lessons, teaching his students first how to improve a blot and turn it into a drawing before encouraging them to create their own blots. When using the *Essay*, readers would start with the first blots, which are notably simple in their compositional design (fig. 41). Once they had mastered them, they would proceed to the later pages of the booklet and its increasingly complex compositions (fig. 42). This way, readers would not only hone their skill in creating outline drawings from blots, but, page by page, they would acquire knowledge of the different types of increasingly complex landscape composition. The *New Method*, by contrast,

⁶⁶ One of the reasons why Cozens may have decided to not include drawings in the *New Method* is that he may have felt that they too strongly influenced his readers' inventions, foreclosing their imagination.

⁶⁷ Cozens, *Essay*, 1.

⁶⁸ Sue Sloman notes that the Stiles, nevertheless, are highly individual and original. She points specifically to the Scandinavian-looking hut in 'Stile 8', which looks so decidedly unclassical and un-English that it would have been a clear marker of Cozens's difference and foreign heritage. See 'Cozens's *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*', 3.

⁶⁹ Whether this is a plausible aim is debatable. Do the *New Method*'s landscape types really move past established landscape formulae?

shifts focus onto the theoretical foundations of blotting and does not give clear instructions on how to practically engage with the publication. In this regard, the *Essay* functions like other mid-eighteenth-century drawing manuals and books that invite tracing and copying, whereas the *New Method* breaks with this method.

I will now return to the blots to further elaborate on my analysis of the chronology of blotting. I have already introduced a group of light blots connected to the *Essay*. Their identification stems primarily from the inscriptions they bear, with one at Tate being inscribed ‘1st Stile of Composition’ and one in a private collection inscribed ‘4th Stile of Composition’ (figs. 36 and 38). Several more are not, or not clearly, inscribed but can be attributed to the group on the basis of style and iconography. They all fulfil the criteria of a light blot, and they depict the two types of landscapes of the ‘1st and 4th Stiles’: in the first case, a coastal view to the left and a body of water to the right (fig. 43); in the second case, a plain with a mountain in the left background (fig. 44). Looking more closely, however, it becomes clear that all of these blots, including the inscribed ones, are variations on the same theme rather than identical designs. In some cases, the land emerges from the water on a steep incline, while in others the horizon is more undulating; in some, the angle with which the viewer looks onto the coast is very narrow, in others it is wide. In two examples it is primarily the tree-like shapes in the centre of the composition that have been modified. But they vary not only between each other, they also all differ from the printed plates of the *Essay*. None is an exact match. In the example of the ‘1st Stile’, the plate is inverted compared to the blots (fig. 41). The coastline swoops along the right side of the image and the water opens to the left. Similarly, in the example of the ‘4th Stile’, the blots approximate rather than precisely match the landscape depicted in the printed plate, even though there is no inversion of the image (fig. 45). The most pronounced difference between the blots and the plates, however, is the respective presence and absence of wash. In the blots, grey wash forms the base layer of a more clearly delineated sketch, whereas in the plates this layer has been omitted. Instead, the printed blots are etched in deep, linear grooves of black ink. Surprisingly, this rather fundamental difference has not been discussed in the literature. Although Sloan considers two of the blots in her discussion of the *Essay*, she does not mention their wash or the incongruity between them and the prints.⁷⁰ Ultimately, to better understand the chronology of blotting and its conceptual changes, we need to ask why the blots and plates are so different.

⁷⁰ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 31.

To answer this question, another group of blots needs to be considered (figs. 46–48). This group of three blots seems to more closely anticipate the etched plates of the *Essay*, not just iconographically but also formally. They, too, omit grey wash and instead consist purely of black ink, quickly applied with a small to medium-sized brush. Like the light blots and prints, they are inscribed in Cozens's hand at the top of the sheet with their appropriate 'Stile of Composition'.⁷¹ Although they also vary from the final designs in the printed blots, they utilise the same visual idiom as the etchings and thus seem to be more directly preparatory of the plates. Returning to the question of how these different types of blots relate, I would like to suggest that we can recognise in them the moment of transition from light to dark blot. In the *New Method*, Cozens explained that he had used light blots for a while before improving the blotting technique by making the blots with black rather than light grey ink. This change of the technique seems to have occurred during preparation of the *Essay*. The repetitive nature of the light blots discussed here suggests that Cozens used them to work out the designs of his different landscape styles—trying out different views, angles, and details until the 'Stile' was to his satisfaction. Perhaps even the 1755 blot is a first elaboration of the 1st Stile whose composition it resembles closely. As he got to the point of preparing the blots for publication, however, Cozens likely ran into problems: how to print the grey wash that forms the base layer of the light blots? In fact, he would have been unable to do so. In 1759, there simply was no suitable technique that would have allowed Cozens to print tone and that he would have been able to apply himself. In the reproduction of drawings, mezzotint and chiaroscuro woodcut were sometimes used to create tonality and print wash-like textures.⁷² But both techniques relied on the highly specialised skills of a professional engraver and woodblock cutter (so-called *formschneider*) and could not be executed by an untrained artist like Cozens. Instead of hiring a professional, which he likely could not afford, Cozens ultimately chose to use line etching to illustrate his publication. Etching had the benefit that it was easy to learn and handle, and that Cozens was already experienced in it.⁷³ It is entirely plausible that it was in response to these technical difficulties that Cozens left out the wash of his early blots. Instead, he applied the etching needle to imitate the brushstrokes of his wash-less blots as short and nervous strokes. Due to the linearity of the etching technique, the blots had to be translated into the linear idiom as well. This forced him to leave out the grey wash and instead etch the darker layer of sketch-like delineation. In preparation for this, he would have produced blots that conformed to these new visual requirements, perhaps to see if the compositional types he had selected still worked. It is in this context that he prepared the dark blots.

⁷¹ Fig. 46, which inscribed '2nd Stile of Composition' (this is crossed out and replaced by '9') resembles the 3rd Stile.

⁷² See my discussion of mezzotint and chiaroscuro woodcut in the next chapter.

⁷³ I will discuss Cozens's engagement with printmaking in the next chapter.

This is not just a question of technique, however. Along with the embrace of etched linearity also came a conceptual shift. The blot itself now was identified, and illustrated, as different from the base layer of wash that needed to be refined with more precisely sketched delineation. Rather, as the wash fell away, it was the topmost layer of dark ink, the sketch, that counted as the blot. The linearity of the etching technique necessitated Cozens to adapt the definition of the blot, and the blotting technique itself, to the linear idiom of print. This is further expressed in the *Essay*'s lack of semantic precision. In the *New Method*, Cozens is careful to distinguish clearly between blot and sketch, which are two discrete steps in the process of invention. In the *Essay*, however, he uses the terms 'blot' and 'black Sketch' interchangeably. A blot is a black sketch, and a black sketch a blot. Ultimately, the semantic difference in how the *Essay* and *New Method* describe and differentiate the blots is indicative of the conceptual differences between the two publications I discuss in Chapter Four. In the *New Method*, Cozens emphasises that sketching delineates ideas whereas blotting suggests them.⁷⁴ In the *Essay*, by contrast, sketch-like delineation is not yet seen as a problem.

1760s

The next phase in the development of the blotting technique to discuss here are Cozens's activities in the 1760s. The decade is marked by his continued success as a teacher and his regular participation in London's new public exhibitions. In 1763, his services as a teacher were advertised in Mortimer's *Universal Director* and, from 1766, he is recorded as drawing master at Eton College, although he likely taught there from earlier in the decade.⁷⁵ A bill from 1764 shows that Cozens charged 5s 3d per lesson plus the cost of materials. Cozens billed the recipient, James Grant, for a total of £62 12s 6d, which roughly comes out to 215 lessons (for Grant and his two sisters) and £5 17s for materials like paper, pencils, inks, chalks, and even a costly 'drawing Glass'.⁷⁶ This equalled roughly £26.90 per lesson in today's currency, whereas the total sum charged was an estimated £6,416 (equivalent to 626 days wages for a skilled tradesman in 1764) plus the additional cost of materials of ca. £599.40.⁷⁷ Although we do not know how long each lesson lasted or what time frame the bill covers, it is likely that teaching just several times a

⁷⁴ See my discussion in Chapter One.

⁷⁵ Thomas Mortimer, *The Universal Director; or, the Nobleman and Gentleman's True Guide to the Master and Professors of the Liberal and Polite Arts and Sciences; and of the Mechanic Arts, Manufactures, and Trades, Established in London and Westminster, and Their Environs* (London, 1763), 8. For a complete list of Cozens's known students, see Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', app. E.

⁷⁶ Cassidy, 'Cozens and the Grant Family', 34, appendix A. The drawing glass alone cost £1 5s.

⁷⁷ For currency conversion, see the National Archives Currency Converter, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/> [last accessed 11 May 2020]. See their disclaimer for the methodological difficulties of converting historic currency.

week would have provided Cozens with a solid income. The same year, in 1764, Cozens moved from the impoverished northern outskirts of London on Tottenham Court Road to the more affluent area of Leicester Fields in the parish of St Anne Soho.⁷⁸ This was a neighbourhood that had become increasingly popular with artists and other craftspeople from the 1750s onward but also counted several MPs and titled gentlemen among its inhabitants. With this mix of members of the commercial, middle, and upper classes, it was a far more appropriate location for Cozens to receive his genteel clients than his former lodgings at Tottenham Court Road, ‘a world which knows more of the interior of the pawnbroker’s shop and the gin palace than of a club or a church; and where poverty is almost hopeless’.⁷⁹ A decade later, in 1774, the annual rack rent value of Cozens’s house on Leicester Street, a relatively modest three-story building with a three window wide façade, was £30 (ca. £2,617.66 to £3,073.87 p.a. in 2017). Unfortunately, no earlier figures are known, but his rate dropped to £26 in 1780 and increased again to £40 in 1784, at which time Cozens moved to 27 Duke Street, St James’s, likely because he was being priced out.⁸⁰ In the mid 1760s, however, he would have easily been able to afford a rate of £30, i.e. only half of what he had charged James Grant for teaching. The move into the more affluent neighbourhood of St Anne thus reflects his growing financial success as an artist and teacher.

Cozens’s teaching practice during the 1760s has been discussed in detail by Sloan.⁸¹ She has shown that his students at Eton College could have expected to be taught both in the traditional way, by copying from drawing books and from Cozens’s own drawings, but also through the blotting technique. Again, it was most likely the more advanced students who benefited most from blotting and its emphasis on composition and effect rather than delineation. One often-cited account of Cozens’s teaching at Eton was published in Henry Angelo’s (1756–1835) autobiography. According to Angelo, Cozens encouraged his students to make blots not only

⁷⁸ His address in 1763 was ‘opposite the Golden Lion, Tottenham Court Road’, as given a subscription notice for a print he advertised that year, see *Public Advertiser*, 17 May 1763; cited in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 39. His new address in Leicester Street, Leicester Fields is listed in the membership records of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce for 1764, see *A List of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. London, July 3, 1765* (London, 1765), 18. Moreover, his name appears in Westminster rate books from 1 January 1774 with his address in Leicester Street, see ‘Cozens, Alexander’, in *Westminster Ratebooks: Property Values of Westminster Electors, 1749-1818*, London Lives, 1690–1800: Crime, Poverty and Social Policy in the Metropolis, ratebook_18-1878 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018, Westminster Archives Centre [last accessed 8 March 2021]).

⁷⁹ Edward Walford, ‘Tottenham Court Road’, in *Old and New London*, vol. 4 (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878), 467–80, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol4/pp467-480> [last accessed 13 March 2021]. For a broader introduction to the area, see J. R. Howard Roberts and Walter H. Godfrey, eds., ‘Introduction’, in *Survey of London*, vol. 21, The Parish of St Pancras, pt 3: Tottenham Court Road and Neighbourhood (London: London County Council, 1949), 1–6, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol21/pt3/pp1-6> [last accessed 13 March 2021].

⁸⁰ *Westminster Ratebooks* (as note 78). On his move to Duke Street, see also Sloman, ‘Cozens’s *Essay and Treatise on Perspective*’, 6–7.

⁸¹ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, chap. 4; Sloan, ‘Teaching Non-Professional Artists’, chaps 6–7.

directly on paper, but by applying paint onto the bottom of earthenware plates which would then be stamped onto dampened paper. The resulting abstract ink blot could then be retouched to form landscape compositions.⁸² This would have been highly unconventional both as artistic practice and as a method of teaching. Oppé showed that this section in Angelo's text was taken almost verbatim from William Henry Pyne's examination of the development of watercolour painting in England.⁸³ In this serialised essay, Pyne disparaged blotting and other techniques as 'quackery', arguing that they had led to a 'perversion of style' and the widespread degeneration of British art.⁸⁴ Oppé concluded that the account likely did not reflect Cozens's teaching at Eton accurately and instead simply repeated widespread misunderstandings of both the purpose and mechanics of blotting. But, as Sloan has shown, at least one former Etonian, the art collector and patron Sir George Beaumont (1753–1827), continued to blot until later in life and even seems to have used the quasi-monotype technique recounted by Angelo. A sketch with a view looking out of the entrance of a cave at the Victoria and Albert Museum is based on 'an Accidental blot of Indian Ink on a Palate [sic] Coleorton Oct. 6, 1806', as the inscription reveals (fig. 49).⁸⁵ Unfortunately, no other examples of such stamped blots are known today, and it seems that this type of blot was the exception rather than the rule. Although stamping blots likely was a rare occurrence, what it demonstrates is the ongoing experimental nature of blotting.

Although, according to Angelo, Beaumont was 'the only disciple [at Eton] who could make anything of the matter', another student who embraced blotting to its fullest potential was Henry Stebbing (1752–1818), whose notes on the technique were already discussed in the previous chapter.⁸⁶ An album of eighty blots at the State Hermitage, St Petersburg, shows his extensive practice of blotting.⁸⁷ The album contains different types of blots, including the 'black Sketches' from the *Essay*, the looser ones associated with the *Various Species* (which I will discuss below), as well as the highly abstract masses of black ink on wrinkled paper presented in the *New Method*.

⁸² Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, with Memoirs of His Late Father and Friends, Including Numerous Original Anecdotes and Curious Traits of the Most Celebrated Characters That Have Flourished during the Last Eighty Years* (London: H. Colburn, 1828), 212–16. See also Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 40.

⁸³ Oppé is highly critical of Angelo's account, dismissing him as a gossip and 'general toady to the smart world'; see *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 41–43.

⁸⁴ Ephraim Hardcastle (William Henry Pyne), 'The Rise and Progress of Water-Colour Painting in England, No. VI', *Somerset House Gazette, and Literary Museum; or Weekly Miscellany of Fine Arts, Antiquities and Literary Chit Chat* 1, no. 10 (13 December 1823): 145–46.

⁸⁵ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 48–49. The many surviving sketches and drawings in grey wash by Beaumont, for example at the Yale Center for British Art, indicate that he clearly understood the benefit of mapping out a pictorial composition in masses of dark and light, something that he would have learned by blotting at Eton.

⁸⁶ Angelo cited in *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁷ Unfortunately, I was unable to consult the album myself and it is not digitally available. For my overview here, I rely on Kim Sloan's detailed discussion, which has not received sufficient attention in the subsequent literature. See Sloan, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', 195–205; and Sloan and Joyner, 'A Cozens Album in Wales', 82–87. I thank Kim Sloan for sharing some of her photographs with me.

Sloan observes that the sequence in which the blots appear in the album follows the chronological development of the blotting technique from *Essay* to *New Method* (it is unclear if light blots are included). Each blot is pasted onto the verso of an album page and accompanied by a corresponding drawing that has been executed directly onto the recto of the opposite page. Opening the album and turning it by 90°, the blot thus appears above the drawing, correctly demonstrating the progression from blot to drawing (fig. 50). As Sloan writes, the blots in the album seem to have been produced in groups, several at a time, and were worked up into drawings at a later point, as recommended in the *New Method*.⁸⁸ It seems that Stebbing placed the blots between two pages of the album to trace the basic composition onto the page (recto). He then worked up his tracing in greater detail with pen and ink and pasted the blot onto the opposite page (verso).

In several of the blots, Stebbing utilised the compositional types presented in Cozens's publications, first the initial eight 'Stiles' of the *Essay* and then the revised and expanded sixteen types of the *Various Species* and *New Method*. But he also came up with his own types of landscapes. The blot illustrated in fig. 50 shows a highly abstract blot on crumpled paper that does not conform to any of the sixteen types of landscapes illustrated in the *New Method*. While the blots in Cozens's publications are relatively easy to recognise as landscapes, Stebbing's own blots are more difficult to discern. The blot in fig. 50, for example, covers the entire sheet. Specific pictorial intention seems absent. Only the inscription on the opposite page titles the image as an 'Idea of y^e March of an army', as delineated in the drawing below. This touches upon the complicated balance between idea and suggestion discussed at length in the previous chapter. Sloan raises this point by considering whether Stebbing held an idea for a composition in his mind before making a blot, or whether some of his ideas emerged only after he made the blots. While she feels that his ideas largely preceded the making of the blots, she also points to some instances where the opposite may be true: these are pairs of blots and drawings that are not inscribed or titled as 'Idea of...' and whose representational quality, therefore, appears to be rooted in suggestion and subsequent interpretation rather than predetermined idea. Moreover, the fact that the blots are so much less easily discernible than those in Cozens's publications, according to Sloan, seems to indicate a greater emphasis on their suggestive capacity than on their function to express a preceding idea. Ultimately, it is difficult to argue either way. However, what the diversity of Stebbing's blots shows, I think, is the flexibility of the blotting technique. It was designed to accommodate a range of different approaches, some that are more clearly expressive of a preceding idea and others that rely more on the blots' suggestive potential.

⁸⁸ Cozens, *New Method*, 24.

Together, the examples of Beaumont's stamped blot and Stebbing's practice of blotting show the ongoing experimental nature of both the technique and Cozens's teaching, which tend to get lost when we consider blotting purely through the lens of the *New Method's* theoretical approach.

Thanks to Sloan's research we have a relatively good understanding of how Cozens utilised the blotting technique in his teaching during the 1760s and '70s, and how different students reacted to and engaged with his ideas. By contrast, we know little about how Cozens employed blots in his own artistic practice during the period. Knowledge of his artistic pursuits comes primarily from exhibition records and the handful of dated works mentioned previously that provide a scaffold for the chronology of his oeuvre. But their relationship to the blotting technique, and to any surviving blots, is difficult to discern.

In 1760, shortly after having been elected a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce, Cozens exhibited two paintings in the Society's rooms.⁸⁹ The show had been organised by a group of artist members and constituted London's first ever public art exhibition.⁹⁰ In the following years, the group broke into separate factions, leading to the establishment of three principal exhibiting societies for the display and promotion of contemporary art: the Society of Artists of Great Britain, the Free Society of Artists, and, from 1768, the Royal Academy of Art.⁹¹ The first exhibition had drawn a crowd of one-thousand visitors a day, and these numbers only increased in the following decades.⁹² It had been set up to promote the commercial interests of artists, providing not primarily a forum for lofty debates about art, but a space in which to connect with patrons and, thereby, to support the establishment of a national school of art.⁹³ These exhibitions had a profound impact on London's artistic life and 'transformed the character of the British art world.'⁹⁴ For Cozens, they provided an opportunity to show his works and share his aesthetic ideas and unusual techniques.

Between 1760 and 1781, Cozens was a regular exhibitor, participating eighteen times and showing a total of seventy-seven works.⁹⁵ The exhibition catalogues document that these were

⁸⁹ Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 36. The paintings were 'A small Landskip' and 'A View on the Tiber', see Algernon Graves, *Society of Artists & Free Society of Artists*, 66.

⁹⁰ This group was led by Cozens's brother-in-law, the republican radical Robert Edge Pine (1730–88).

⁹¹ On the history and politics of these early exhibitions and the foundation of the Society of Artists of Great Britain, see Matthew Hargraves, *'Candidates for Fame': The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760–1791* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2005).

⁹² Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists: The Origins of the Royal Academy of Arts in London* (London: Modern Art Press, 2012), 31.

⁹³ Organisers and participants were nevertheless careful to avoid the appearance of overt commercialism.

⁹⁴ Hargraves, *'Candidates for Fame'*, 2.

⁹⁵ Cozens exhibited 43 works at the Society of Artists of Great Britain (1760–71), 23 works at the Free Society of Artists (1761–62), and 8 works at the Royal Academy (1772–81). For the exhibition records, see Algernon Graves, *Royal Academy of Arts*, 188; Graves, *Society of Artists & Free Society of Artists*, 66.

mostly landscapes of different types—historical, topographical, invented—with the exception of one ‘drawing of a head in red chalk’ he showed at the RA in 1778.⁹⁶ Most years, he showed one or two works and in a range of media, including drawing in pen and ink, oil, and ink wash and watercolours. In 1761, Cozens’s oil painting *An Historical Landscape, Representing the Retirement of Timolean* won a prize for best history painting at the Free Society of Artists.⁹⁷ As Sloan has argued, paintings like *Timolean* helped Cozens to present himself as a serious painter of historical landscapes. But the range of media he exhibited, and the different types of drawings and paintings, seem to suggest that he also took these exhibitions as an opportunity to present his other ideas and techniques. The drawing of a head, for example, must have directly related to Cozens’s later publication, *The Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head*, that had come out just ahead of the RA’s 1778 summer exhibition.

Neither the *Timolean* oil nor the head study are known to survive. Meanwhile, the generic titles used in eighteenth-century exhibition catalogues make it extremely difficult, and in many cases impossible, to identify the shown works as any of the surviving drawings and paintings. Cozens’s first exhibited work, from 1760, is titled simply ‘A landskip’, while later titles include, among others: ‘Four drawings of landscapes, in Indian ink’ (1761, FSA); ‘Two large landscapes, in brown; Four small landscapes, in brown’ (1766, SAGB); ‘A landschape [sic] before a storm: in chiaro-oscuro’ and ‘A landschape [sic] after a storm’ (both 1770, SAGB); and ‘A landschape [sic] in chiaro-oscuro’ (1779, RA).⁹⁸ Other works that should be easier to identify via their titles, such as his oil paintings *A View on the Tiber* (1760, SAGB), *A South View of London* (1763, SAGB), and *A View of Capo di Bove, near Rome* (1762, FSA), appear to be lost.⁹⁹

Similarly, it is difficult to identify any of the surviving works as those recorded in the exhibition catalogues. Of the three dated drawings, only one can speculatively be identified with one of the exhibition entries (fig. 51). This work from 1763 is drawn in brown ink and may be one of the ‘Nine drawings; shaded in brown’ Cozens showed at the SAGB that year. Another dated drawing from the same year is an Italianate landscape shaded in grey rather than brown and thus likely was not among those exhibited in 1763 (fig. 52). Even more difficult is attributing the many undated works. Several highly finished drawings most likely were exhibition pieces. A drawing at the Whitworth Art Gallery might be another one of the nine drawings in brown from

⁹⁶ See Graves, *Royal Academy of Arts*, 188. The drawing was to promote Cozens’s recently published *The Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head* (London, 1778) and support his application for associate candidacy at the RA.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of this painting, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 36–39. The painting is lost but would have been a medium-sized oil, measuring 4 x 6½ feet (121 x 198 cm), as per prize regulations.

⁹⁸ Graves, *Society of Artists & Free Society of Artists*, 66; Graves, *Royal Academy of Arts*, 188.

⁹⁹ *A South View of London* was likely painted for a premium. Cozens moreover planned to have it engraved and advertised for subscriptions in the *Public Advertiser*, 17, 19, 20, 14 May 1763, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 39.

1763, or it might have been included among the ‘three drawings of a landscape, in brown’ he showed two years later (fig. 53). Similarly, several other drawings at the Whitworth and Tate are most likely exhibition pieces (figs. 54–55). Stylistically, they are later works that might have been exhibited in 1768 or 1769 as ‘drawings of landscape, in brown’ or ‘two drawings of landscape’. The various large landscapes would have been exhibition pieces, whereas the very small ones in various collections might be those Cozens exhibited ‘two in one frame’ in 1761 (figs. 56–59).

In the early 1770s, Cozens stopped using brown ink and instead exhibited works in great wash or ‘chiaro oscuro’. Several such landscapes from the 1770s survive, though none is dated. Landscapes like a mountain view at the YCBA or a riverbed with mountains at The Met show the broadening of his brushwork and the more subtle shading that distinguishes these later works from his earlier, more tightly worked views (figs. 60–61). The lack of dates and the generic titles in the exhibition records, however, mean that any attribution is purely speculative.

Perhaps even more difficult than identifying such exhibition pieces is discerning the relationship between the finished works and the blotting technique. Among the brown landscapes, a large drawing at the Morgan Library & Museum gives some insight into how Cozens may have applied the blotting technique in his own artistic practice (fig. 62). The drawing depicts a bay with land extending into the water on the left and a repoussoir landscape in the foreground that sweeps up into a mountainous cliff with a ruined castle on the left. A figure is seated on the rocks in the foreground, just right off centre, and three boats sail towards the open sea. The image appears fragmented into two distinct areas, with foreground and background more juxtaposed than unified into one image. The background has a blot-like quality: the land mass to the right and the water of the bay are built up like a light blot, with a first layer of light brown wash that is then refined with darker strokes of the brush. Just a few vertical dashes indicate some kind of architectural feature, perhaps a town or port. This kind of pictorial formula of a land mass extending into the sea, with some architecture and boats, appears frequently in Cozens’s blots and relies on the 1st Stile from the *Essay* (fig. 41). By contrast, the foreground is delineated in greater detail with much darker ink, enriched with perhaps a bit too much gum arabic. The foreground too repeats elements Cozens had tried out in other works. Many of the brown blots show similar compositional elements. Meanwhile, the careful inclusion of the seated figure seems to suggest a more finished quality. The work seems to oscillate somewhere between blot, sketch, and finished drawing.

Given Cozens’s switch from brown to grey ink wash around 1770, the Morgan drawing would have been made at some point in the 1760s and may have been exhibited in 1766 as one of ‘Two large landscapes, in brown’ at the SAGB. While this identification is speculative, what

the drawing reveals is that Cozens continued to use individual elements from the *Essay* not just in his teaching but in his own practice well into the 1760s. He took individual pictorial elements like the background and pieced them together with other landscape elements to create a more complex composition. This kind of mix-and-match approach would later inform his approach to landscape painting that underlies the *Various Species*.

Another painting that can tentatively be considered relative to the blotting technique is the now lost *View of Capo di Bove, near Rome* (1762, FSA). Cozens first made a drawing of the site with the Tomb of Caecilia Metella, a popular archaeological monument along the Via Appia, in 1746 during his stay in Rome. This drawing survives at the British Museum, showing the cylindrical mausoleum and its medieval additions from the South-East, with the outskirts of Rome and the dome of St Peter's Basilica in the background (fig. 63).¹⁰⁰ The same composition is repeated in a large inkblot at The Metropolitan Museum (fig. 64). Here, Cozens applied a light grey wash first, which has since reacted with the paper and created a mottled effect across the sheet. The lower half was then treated with a very faint brown wash before black ink was applied with a thinner brush in swift strokes. These are more deliberately delineated in the depiction of the tomb and become more abstract in the foreground.

According to a note in the album in which the drawing at the British Museum was included in, Cozens had lost his Italian works on his journey back to England, when they fell from his saddle whilst traveling through Germany.¹⁰¹ In 1776, his son John Robert discovered the drawings in a shop in Florence and returned them to his father upon his return to England three years later. In the absence of his drawing in 1762, when he was preparing his oil of *Capo di Bove*, it seems that Cozens recreated the composition from memory and with assistance of the blotting technique. In his preparation of the oil painting, he may have used the blotting technique to map out the composition, perhaps from memory or perhaps from another, now lost drawing. While the exact context and process of its creation cannot be known with certainty, what is significant about the painting, blot, and drawing is the fact that Cozens seems to have employed the blotting technique to compose a topographical view rather than an imaginative one.

Although our understanding of how Cozens utilised blotting in his own artistic practice in the 1760s remains patchy, the examples of the large landscape in brown ink at the Morgan Library & Museum and the blot and drawing of the Tomb of Metella at the British Museum and The Met give some insight into how Cozens employed the blotting technique in his own practice as an

¹⁰⁰ St Peter's is almost 10km away and would have been difficult to see.

¹⁰¹ See British Museum, reg. no. 1867,1012.1+.

artist: by including landscape elements from the *Essay* and by blotting even topographical types of views.

1770s

By August 1766, Cozens was sharing plans for a second treatise on landscape painting with his student James Grant.¹⁰² This was to be a far more extensive and entirely different kind of publication, for which he sent Grant a draft subscription notice.¹⁰³ Provisionally titled *Characteristics of Landscape*, it was not so much a drawing manual as a typology of landscape elements. It was divided into three distinct categories, which, when combined, could generate different kinds of landscape paintings. These categories were titled ‘Composition, Character and Circumstances’. The category of composition consisted of pictorial structures, such as ‘A single object in the foreground’, ‘A Group of Objects in the Middle-Ground’, ‘An Island’, or ‘A Sea-coast / &c &c &c’. In total, there were to be ‘about 33’ compositional types that could serve as the basic structure and subject of a landscape painting. Cozens would continue to use similar compositional types as the basis for the sixteen types of landscape compositions presented in the *New Method*. In *Characteristics of Landscape*, the selected composition was to be combined with one of the seventeen examples provided in the category titled ‘Character’. This describes different landscape features, e.g. ‘Water’, ‘Dry-land Earth or Ground’, ‘Desart’ [sic] or ‘Wild’, but also the emotive response a landscape might evoke, such as ‘Solemn or Melancholy’ and ‘Chearfull’ [sic]. Finally, ‘Circumstances’ were to be added to further define the subject of the painting. These included times of day and seasons, such as ‘The rising sun’, ‘Noon’ and ‘Afternoon’, ‘The setting Sun’ and ‘Night’ as well as ‘Spring / &c &c &c’ for a total of twenty-six types. In its tripartite structure, the *Characteristics* anticipated the *Various Species of Landscape*, which similarly presented a mix-and-match typology that enabled readers to create landscapes by selecting and combining different pictorial elements from a list of options.¹⁰⁴ In the *Various Species*, the categories were reduced to sixteen types of composition (as later in the *New Method*), fourteen ‘Objects’ (rather than seventeen ‘Characters’), and twenty-seven ‘Circumstances’, which also included weather phenomena like fog, rain, storms, floods, and earthquakes. By combining these elements, an artist would be able to generate a staggering 6,048 different landscapes.

No published examples of the *Characteristics of Landscape* survive—neither any text that might have accompanied it, nor the prints that were meant to illustrate it. Of the *Various Species*, only a

¹⁰² Transcribed in Cassidy, ‘Cozens and the Grant Family’, app. 4. See his discussion on pp. 35–36.

¹⁰³ No published subscription notices are known.

¹⁰⁴ On the *Various Species*, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 49–62.

single printed sheet listing the compositional types and a set of sixteen etched illustrations are known. However, eight small oil sketches survive that reflect the combinatorial and compositional principles presented in the treatise.¹⁰⁵ As Sloan has argued, one sketch at Tate is based on composition no. 1 from the *Various Species*, depicting ‘The edge of a hill, or mountain near the eye’ (figs. 65 and 66).¹⁰⁶ This was combined with object nos. 3 ‘Woody’ and 5 ‘Wild’ as well as circumstance no. 20 ‘Before a storm’. In 1770, Cozens exhibited a pair of oil paintings of a landscape before and after a storm. Although there is no firm evidence, it is possible that the work at Tate was one of the two exhibited paintings or that it was a preparatory sketch for a larger oil (now lost).¹⁰⁷ Five years later, Cozens showed ‘A setting sun’, which likely was based on circumstance no. 7.¹⁰⁸ Of the eight oil sketches, three depict sunsets, and at least two are inscribed with ‘Close of day’ or circumstance no. 9 (figs. 67 and 68).¹⁰⁹ As with the previous work, it is possible that one of them was a preparatory sketch for Cozens’s exhibited landscape.

Around the same time as Cozens was painting these landscapes, he finalised a first draft of what later would become the *New Method*. This essay, entitled *A New Method of Designing Landscapes by Invention, Described in a Set of Rules*, is dated 1773 and written in an unknown hand that is not Cozens’s.¹¹⁰ I will discuss this draft of the *New Method* in the next chapter, but for now it is important to show that already in the early 1770s Cozens was reworking his ideas about blotting alongside his work on the *Various Species*. It also shows that, by this time, Cozens’s ideas about blotting had changed dramatically. The text of *Designing Landscapes* is an almost verbatim preview of the *New Method* and therefore ascribes to the blots the same abstract formalism as the later publication and that distinguished it from the *Essay*. Whereas the blots of the *Essay* are more akin to delineated sketches, delineation is rejected outright in *Designing Landscape*, as it is in the *New Method*. It is difficult to ascertain when precisely this shift in Cozens’s thinking took place. But both the text of *Designing Landscape* and the surviving blots of the *Various Species* make clear that the blotting technique had undergone significant changes since his publication of the *Essay* in 1759.

¹⁰⁵ Tate (5), Whitworth Art Gallery (1), Yale Center for British Art (1), Stanford University Museum of Art (1). Ibid., 37–39.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 55–56.

¹⁰⁷ The two entries were shown at the SAGB and recorded as numbers 28 and 29 in the exhibition catalogue, indicating that they were oil paintings and hung together. See Graves, *Society of Artists & Free Society of Artists*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ This was shown at the Royal Academy, where Cozens exhibited exclusively from 1772 until 1781, when he stopped exhibiting work.

¹⁰⁹ These are at the Yale Center for British Art (B1981.25.168), the Whitworth Art Gallery (O.1997.3), and Tate (T08046).

¹¹⁰ Cozens and Anon., ‘Designing Landscapes’. It is possible that the manuscript was copied by one of Cozens’s students from a now lost draft.

The album of blots at the British Museum contains a range of different types of blot. At least four of them relate directly to the sixteen etched landscape types of the *Various Species*.¹¹¹ Several others are similar in style but their relation to the publication is unclear—they may have been variations or different options of compositions but ultimately were not included in the final draft of the publication.¹¹² Each of the *Various Species* blots is made with swift movements of the brush across the sheet, the ink dragging on the weft of the paper, pooling in some areas and barely attaching in others (figs. 69–72). Here, as in the *Essay*, underlying wash is absent. But compared to the blots of the *Essay*, the ink is applied in broader strokes and the images are less easily legible. Ink is applied to map out masses rather than individual forms or lines. In a blot numbered ‘11’, two intersecting mountainous masses make up the composition (fig. 69). Each side consists of lighter and darker areas, the latter of which are blocked out with broad horizontal strokes. While this blot and blot no. 16 (fig. 72) are relatively easy to recognise or interpret as landscapes, the other two, numbered ‘14’ and ‘15’, are much harder to discern. The horizon line in blot no. 15 makes it just a tiny bit easier in that it gives contour to the two defining parts of the landscape—the ground and sky in distinction of each other (fig. 71). The land mass of the composition, however, dissolves into squiggles and hatches. Meaning emerges only through interpretation. In blot 14, this effect is even more pronounced (fig. 70). The absence of any kind of sky or horizon make this blot very hard to recognise as a landscape. Ink is applied largely in interlocking horizontal and vertical hatches. A lighter area to the right of the composition breaks through this pattern with a dynamic downward slope, indicated by just a few thick brushstrokes that curve from the upper right towards the lower left. Again, meaning is as fluid as the ink itself.

The corresponding list defines these compositions as

- 11 Objects, or clusters of objects, placed alternately on both hands.
[...]
- 14 A recess near the eye.
- 15 A composition, not extensive, of various clusters of objects, wherein
no object or cluster is predominant.
- 16 A spacious, or extensive landscape.¹¹³

Yet, while their descriptive formalism gives some sense of the intended landscape type, it remains difficult to understand what the viewer is meant to see here. Blot no. 14, for instance, is not much more legible with the added knowledge that it shows ‘A recess near the eye’. Only

¹¹¹ See reg. nos. 1888,0116.8.2, 4, 5 at the British Museum and reg. no. T08000 at Tate.

¹¹² See for example variations of landscape type nos. 3 and 4; reg. nos. 1888,0116.8.20 and 1888,0116.8.1, 17, 40, British Museum.

¹¹³ Reproduced in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 54.

when we compare the blots to the etched landscapes illustrating the *Various Species* does meaning crystallise (fig. 73). Here, the lighter area of the blot turns into a rocky slope that frames the left foreground of the composition. A grassy clearing to the right of the inverted print leads into a forest whose trees—some in the shade, some sunlit—emerge from the blot's vertical hatches of black ink and the reverse of its blank paper. Similarly, composition no. 15 is defined in such vague and formalistic terms that the landscape that might be created with it remains largely undefined. Except for its clear horizon line and mountainous peaks to the right, the meaning of the blot is difficult to discern. In the printed illustrations it turns into a landscape with a small lake in the foreground, several clusters of different types of trees, and farmhouse buildings dotted throughout, set against a mountainous backdrop (fig. 74).

This kind of uncertainty of the blots' linguistic determination is further emphasised in blot no. 11 (fig. 69). Like the others, this blot is identified by a small number '11' in the left upper corner. Next to it, however, are two crossed out numbers '11' and '9'. It seems as though Cozens was not quite sure which compositional type the blot aligned with. Indeed, both no. 11, as defined above, and no. 9—defined as 'Two hills, mountains, or rocks, opposite each other'—would work. In comparing the blot with the etched landscape illustrations, however, it becomes clear that landscape no. 9 is a closer fit (fig. 75 top and bottom). While both types consist of landscape features placed 'opposite each other' or 'alternately on both hands', landscape no. 11 shows a wide and meandering valley whereas no. 9, like the blot, depicts a steep ravine. This variability and interpretive play, of course, is intentional: only through its semantic openness does the blot succeed in evoking ideas in the artist's or viewer's mind. At the same time, this means that, while the etched landscape illustrations serve to visually articulate the vaguely defined types of landscapes presented in the list, they also necessarily restrict the interpretive leeway the blots afford. In a publication about landscape composition and blotting, this would have been problematic, in that it would have undermined the blotting technique's purpose of widening the artist's imagination.

It is unclear if the *Various Species* was meant to include blots or if, indeed, it concerned blotting at all. Perhaps it was intended purely as a work on landscape typology, and in its mix-and-match principles presented an entirely different way of inventing landscape images. Yet, references in *Designing Landscapes* to the *Catalogue of Species of Composition* (i.e. the *Various Species*) seem to indicate that the two publications were in some way connected. One may have been complementary to the other, each discussing different aspects of one larger method of landscape invention. Such a landscape would have been designed by blotting, either by choosing an example from the sixteen types or by creating an original blot. This would then have been

further defined by combining its pictorial structure with ‘objects’ and ‘circumstances’ from the *Various Species*.

On the other hand, by including highly detailed landscape etchings, the *Various Species* restricted the interpretive leeway readers were afforded. By contrast, the deliberate absence of line-etched landscapes in the *New Method* emphasises the later publication’s primary purpose as a manual of invention—to support its readers’ imagination and flexibility in associating and connecting ideas as a way of fostering original invention. It may have been these internal contradictions that prevented Cozens from publishing a work that brought together the mix-and-match typology of the *Various Species* with the blotting technique presented in *Designing Landscape*.

Ultimately, by the end of 1775, Cozens had given up on his idea of publishing such a treatise. On 27 December that year he wrote to Grant that, although he had ‘prospered in [his] business’, he ‘discontinued the work on Landscape for a while.’¹¹⁴ Instead, he began thinking about his next project, the *Principles of Beauty*, which came out just ahead of the RA’s summer exhibition of 1778. This, at least for the moment, marked the end of his thinking about blotting. But in addition to the logical problems of the publication, I would argue that Cozens never published the *Various Species* and the early draft of the *New Method* because he was unable to print the blots the publications required. While he had been satisfied with a compromise in 1759 when publishing the *Essay*, he likely had higher ambitions over a decade later. As became clear, the blotting technique had changed significantly since publication of the *Essay* in 1759. The blots had become broader, more abstract, and less easy to reproduce in etching. The linear strokes required by the etching needle fundamentally contradicted the swift smudging of Cozens’s later blots. As I discuss in the next chapter, it would take Cozens another thirteen years to find an adequate solution to this problem.

Conclusion: The Practice and Chronology of Blotting

While the previous chapter presented a detailed discussion of the blotting technique as it was theorised in the *New Method*, the current chapter has focused on the practice of blotting in its chronological development. We saw that some of the basic concerns of the blotting technique—its emphasis on overall effect and pictorial composition—took shape early in Cozens’s career during a formative stay in Italy in 1744–46. Later, these concerns fed into Cozens’s first publication on blotting, his *Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landskips, Intended for Students in the Art*, from 1759. Cozens began using the technique during the mid-1750s and likely employed it in his

¹¹⁴ Cozens to James Grant, 27 December 1775, transcribed in Cassidy, ‘Cozens and the Grant Family’, app. 5.

teaching at the time. In the context of preparing the *Essay* for publication, a significant shift in his approach to blotting took shape: whereas Cozens's early blots are of the type he would later call a 'light blot'—i.e. a blot with a light layer of underlying wash—the blots of the *Essay* took the form of 'black Sketches' without wash. I argued that this change to the blotting technique was due to Cozens's inability to print wash. Rather, the only printing technique available to him—etching—necessitated linear strokes and hatches to print the blots. Accordingly, although he had used the light blot technique when working out the compositional types, he used the more linear black sketch style of blotting when preparing the etched illustrations.

The next section of the chapter considered the use of blotting in Cozens's work as a teacher and his practice as a landscape painter. This demonstrated that the two most important aspects of the technique as a teaching method were, (1) the experimental approach to landscape drawing it facilitated and (2) the flexibility it afforded students in employing the technique according to their individual abilities. Although it is difficult to precisely trace the impact of blotting on Cozens's own artistic practice, the chapter discussed two examples that utilised the technique. One of them, a large drawing in brown ink at the Morgan, incorporated motifs from the *Essay*, while the other, a blot depicting the Tomb of Ceacilia Metella, applied the blotting technique to map out the composition of a topographical landscape. By using the blotting technique even for topographical views, Cozens's approach to blotting of the early-to-mid 1760s, was far more flexible in its purpose and conceptual goals than the very narrow focus on original invention of the *New Method*. Instead, it could be used to turn a topographic view into an ideal landscape composition.

During the late 1760s to early 1770s, the blotting technique underwent another significant change. Compared to the 'black Sketches' of the *Essay*, the blots became more abstract and less easily recognisable as landscapes. By 1773, the date of a first draft of the *New Method*, Cozens's theorisation of the technique had changed as well. In *Designing Landscapes*, Cozens described the blots as 'a Disposition of accidental shapes, from which a Drawing may be made' and as a 'hint; or crude Resemblance of the whole Effect of a Picture'.¹¹⁵ Whereas in 1759 the blots were considered 'black Sketches', in 1773 Cozens is anxious to distinguish the blot from the sketch:

To design or sketch, is to put Ideas out of the Mind upon Paper or Cloth
&c. in the slightest Manner. To Blot is to throw accidental forms on
Paper from which Ideas are put into the Mind.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Cozens and Anon., 'Designing Landscapes', 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

Later, in 1786, he would articulate the same idea with just a bit more punch: “To sketch, is to delineate ideas; blotting suggests them.”¹¹⁷ It becomes clear here that blotting in the *Essay* and in *Designing Landscapes*/the *New Method* were fundamentally different operations. As I will discuss in greater detail in the next two chapters, this constitutes a fundamental reversal in the ways in which the two variants of the blotting technique conceptualise the artistic process. One is based in externalisation of preconceived ideas, the other on the suggestive power of abstract form. On a more practical level, the two publications also followed different didactic purposes. While the *Essay* was meant to enable students to draw landscapes from blots, the *New Method* placed greater emphasis on originality. With it, Cozens hoped to teach students how to invent original landscapes using the technique of blotting.

Over the course of the chapter, I have discussed a range of different types of blots: first the light ones from early on, then the black sketches, and finally the increasingly abstract blots of Cozens’s later career. I established this chronology primarily by associating the blots with the publications they relate to—the *Essay* and *Various Species*—as well as his sketches and drawings. However, a large number of blots remains that cannot be associated with any of the exhibited landscapes or publications. Their dating, thus, remains fraught. And while they can roughly be dated based on the inks they use, the presence or absence of wash, as well as their style and level of abstraction, it is important to keep in mind that Cozens likely employed different variants of the blotting technique at the same time. As became evident in my discussion of his use of blotting in teaching, he would have adapted the technique to the individual abilities of his students. Some would have found it easy to create abstract blots and turn them into landscapes, while others might have preferred tracing and improving the light blots of their teacher. The fact that Cozens discusses the light blots in the *New Method* also suggests that he kept using the earlier variant alongside, as he writes, the improved version of blotting. Ultimately, this shows that the blotting technique as it was practiced by Cozens and his students was far more diverse, experimental, and flexible than is suggested in either the *Essay* or the *New Method*. In fact, there is a kind of dissonance between the surviving blots and the black sketches of the *Essay*, and the rigid formalism articulated in the *New Method*. Circling back to my introduction, this raises the question of how Cozens came to think about blots in such abstract terms—as entirely abstract configurations of form without inherent meaning? I have already proposed Cozens’s inability to print wash in 1759 as the reason why the black sketches of the *Essay* differ from the light blots Cozens made at the time. The next chapter will consider this possibility by turning to Cozens’s

¹¹⁷ Cozens, *New Method*, 9.

practice as a printmaker. Indeed, Cozens struggled to print the blots. It is for this reason, I argue, that he stopped working on the *Various Species* and *Designing Landscapes* in 1775 and waited another thirteen years to publish the *New Method*.

A *New Method* of Printing

Alexander Cozens is not usually known as a printmaker.¹ Yet, throughout his career, the artist produced numerous prints. Indeed, his earliest known work, from 1733, is a small disc, possibly a worn halfpenny, etched with a landscape on one side and a bearded head on the other (figs. 76 and 77).² Although there are no known impressions of either side, the reversal of the lettering indicates that this small plate may have been intended for printing. Cozens's apparent difficulty in reversing the 's' of his signature would suggest that the coin served as a practice piece—an inexpensive and easy way for the 16-year-old artist to try his hand in a medium he had not quite mastered yet.

Cozens's final work, the *New Method*, was published just two weeks before the artist's death in April 1786.³ Although it is not concerned with printmaking per se, the publication relied heavily on the forty-three printed plates that accompanied the text—as did the various other drawing manuals Cozens had drafted or published at different points in his career, the *Essay*, the *Various Species*, and *Designing Landscapes*. Without their printed illustrations, these publications would have been incomplete and ineffective. In the previous chapter, I argued that Cozens adjusted his blotting technique after being unable to print the light blots of the *Essay*. In this chapter, I would like to propose that the same problem—his inability to print blots exactly as he wanted—also impacted his work on the *New Method* and ultimately led to a thirteen-year delay of the publication. For although the text was drafted by 1773, the publication did not come out until 1786.

The chapter will explore the *New Method*'s protracted publication history, with a focus on Cozens's struggle to find the right technique to print the blots. This, in turn, will be situated within Cozens's lifelong engagement with printmaking. I will first give an overview of Cozens's engagement with prints and printmaking beyond his publications—during his time in Italy, his

¹ So far, Cozens's work in print has received only minimal attention. Oppé and Wilton discuss Cozens's prints only in passing, whereas Sloan considers them briefly as instructional tools in his teaching of amateurs. Meanwhile, Lebensztejn surveys plates of the *New Method*, but does not consider them in the context of the *New Method*'s publication history or how the practice of printmaking may have shaped Cozens's ideas about blotting. Lebensztejn's analysis is repeated by Rosenberg. Alan Shestack published an early article on the plates of the *New Method* but was unaware of the historical development of lift-ground aquatint in Britain in the 1770s. Fordham and Hoisington have recently presented excellent analyses of the aquatint plates in the *New Method*, but do not consider how his practice of printmaking may have shaped his theorisation of blotting. See Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 85–87; Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*; Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*; Lebensztejn, *L'art de la tache*, chap. 10; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 74, 84; Shestack, 'Lift-Ground Prints by Alexander Cozens', *Artist's Proof* 8 (1968): 82–86; Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds*, 37–44; Hoisington, *Aquatint*, chap. 9.

² Museum of London, A24225. Discussed in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 2; and 'New Chronology, I', 72–73.

³ *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 10 April 1786; cited in Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay* and *Treatise on Perspective*', 6. Cozens died intestate on 23 April 1786. An obituary appeared in the *General Evening Post*, 26 April 1786; cited in Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends*, 324.

participation in the commercial print market, and his collecting of prints. The main part of the chapter, however, will be concerned with the publication of the *New Method*, analysing in detail Cozens's use and experimentation with the aquatint technique—a form of etching that allows the printing of tone rather than line. My analysis will show that, on the one hand, the aquatint technique enabled him to print the blots more precisely than line etching had in the *Essay*. On the other hand, I will demonstrate that his idiosyncratic use of sugarlift aquatint also facilitated Cozens's gradual shift towards a more radical conception of the blot. Indeed, some of the changes Cozens implemented in the *New Method* compared to his first draft, *Designing Landscape*, seem to result directly from his engagement with aquatint printmaking.

In making this argument, the chapter relies on the theory of artisanal epistemology and recent scholarship on the theoretical potential of prints, both of which were discussed at length in the introduction of this thesis.⁴ Following the work of Pamela H. Smith and Jennifer L. Roberts, I take Cozens's practices of blotting and printmaking to be manoeuvres in an embodied epistemology. I argue that printmaking afforded Cozens a material site of experimentation and thought in which his ideas about blotting took shape. More specifically, Cozens's engagement with aquatint provided an opportunity to review and rethink the blotting technique through the lens of the technical paradigms of printmaking. Print's mediality highlighted the reversal of, and relationship between, positive and negative form. As my discussion in Chapter One showed, this would become a central aspect of the *New Method's* theory of blotting, as well as its underlying theory of the image.

Prints and Printmaking Beyond the Publications

Although he was never a professional printmaker, over the more than fifty years between the etched halfpenny and the publication of the *New Method*, Cozens engaged with prints and printmaking in multiple ways. Already during the late seventeenth century, the international print market had expanded rapidly.⁵ In Britain, domestic print production increased steadily until, by the 1760s, Britain had overtaken Paris as the centre of European printmaking, with exports outnumbering imports for the first time.⁶ With this dramatic proliferation over the course of the century, prints became integral to the system of the arts in Britain.⁷ Students—both professionals and amateurs—learned to draw primarily by copying their teachers' work, often in print, or the

⁴ See Introduction, 34–36, 39–40.

⁵ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 25, also chap. 13; Clayton, *English Print*, xii.

⁶ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 221. On the expanding British print market, see also Alexander, 'Evolution of the Print Market', 118–30.

⁷ Clayton, *English Print*, introduction. See also my previous discussion in the Introduction, 28–32.

printed illustrations in drawing books.⁸ Susan Owens notes that, in some cases, this led students to use graphic notational systems that were typical of engraving rather than drawing. The lozenge and dot technique (which involved placing dots in the middle of cross-hatched lozenges), for example, came to be used by some, instead of hatching or smudging, to create and enhance tonal shading.⁹

Although we have no information about his schooling or artistic training, Cozens, too, would have learned to draw this way.¹⁰ And, as Oppé, Wilton, and Sloan observed, several of his early drawings resemble the kinds of prints he would have studied and copied as a student.¹¹ One of his earliest dated works, a drawing from 1743 at the British Museum, utilises a system of parallel hatches strongly reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape prints (fig. 78). Such prints circulated widely in 1730s London and would have presented ideal examples to copy directly or emulate in style. In Cozens's drawing, the rendering of clouds and rocks is highly formulaic and follows the pictorial conventions of printmaking rather than of pen and ink drawing. Given the central importance of prints to a young artist's education, it is unsurprising that student work of the period often resembles contemporary prints.

Cozens's close connection to the engraver and printseller John Pine (1690–1756), whose daughter he married around 1752, raises the possibility that he may have been apprenticed in the trade—or even with Pine directly—though so far no archival records are known to confirm this.¹² In 1742, Pine published an engraving after a painting by Cozens depicting Eton College as seen from the east, looking across the Thames (fig. 79).

In 1763, Cozens advertised for another single sheet print, titled *A South View of the City of London, extending from Chelsea to Limehouse: Taken from Dulwich Hill*.¹³ Based on a painting by Cozens, this view was to be etched by William Austin (1721–1820), a drawing master and printseller Cozens had worked with previously on the publication of the *Essay*.¹⁴ The painting had been exhibited as *A South View of London* earlier that year at the Society of Artists of Great Britain. Kim Sloan has suggested that the work likely had been painted for the Society's premium of 50 guineas (or £52 10s) 'For the best Original Landscape on a Canvas'.¹⁵ After the Society's

⁸ On the teaching of drawing, see Owens, *The Art of Drawing*, chaps 1 and 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Cozens's training, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, chap. I; and, in more detail, 'Teaching Non-Professional Artists', chap. 5.

¹¹ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 8; Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, 9; Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 6.

¹² Sloan, 'New Chronology', I, 73.

¹³ See *Public Advertiser*, 17, 19, 20, 24 May 1763, cited in Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends*, 318; and Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 39.

¹⁴ Austin sold the *Essay* in his shop on George-Street in Hanover Square; see the title page of the *Essay*.

¹⁵ Royal Society of Arts, Committee Minutes, vol. 1761-2, 53, 28 March 1762, transcribed in Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 39. In 2017, this would have been equal to ca. £5,380, see National Archives currency converter, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/> [accessed 17 August 2024].

exhibition in Spring Garden closed, the painting could be seen at Batson's Coffee-House, in Cornhill, and subscriptions purchased at 'Mr. Willock, at the Rainbow Coffee-House, Cornhill; Mr. Boydell, in Cheapside; Mr. Austin, in George-Street, Hanover-Square; Mr. Cozens, opposite the Golden Lion; Tottenham-Court Road; and at all the Print Shops.'¹⁶

As discussed in the introduction to my thesis, from the mid-eighteenth century so-called reproductive prints became an increasingly important stream of income for artists whose primary practice relied on other media. Painters became increasingly reliant on the income they could generate by selling prints after their paintings. By the 1770s, paintings were being produced specifically for the purpose of being engraved and published as prints.¹⁷ While a painting could be sold only once, a high-quality engraving could be sold in runs of up to 3,000 impressions.¹⁸ By virtue of their multiplicity, engravings could generate a sizable income and increase the reputation of both painter and engraver.¹⁹ It seems likely that Cozens's *South View of London* was produced for the same purpose: both as a standalone painting and as a print in multiple impressions. Today, neither the painting nor any impressions of the advertised print exist, and it remains unclear if any were etched at all. What this example, along with the earlier engraving of Eton College, shows, however, is that Cozens was well aware of, and eager to exploit, the commercial opportunities the expanding print market offered painters like himself. This is so, even if, ultimately, his foray into the commercial print world seems to have remained unsuccessful.

Italy

The importance of prints to Cozens's practice is also clear in his Italian works. I already discussed his stay in Rome in the 1740s in the previous chapter. The surviving drawings and sketches give insight into his proclivity for systematisation and his concern for pictorial composition and natural effect. But they also indicate his interest in printmaking. Like the drawing from 1743, discussed earlier, several of his Italian works resemble the graphic syntax of prints (fig. 80). Indeed, as Oppé observed, several of the drawings seem to have been produced 'with the copper-plate in view'.²⁰ This is perhaps not surprising, given that, in his Roman

¹⁶ *Public Advertiser*, 17, 19, 20, 24 May 1763, cited in Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends*, 318; and Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 39.

¹⁷ Clayton, *English Print*, chaps 6 and 7.

¹⁸ The size of a print run depended on the skill of both engraver and printer as well as the quality of the plate, paper, ink, and press; see Ad Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 333, table 6.

¹⁹ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 266. According to David Alexander, a print by Bartolozzi attracted 2,500 subscribers and brought in a profit of £5,000; see 'Evolution of the Print Market', 121.

²⁰ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 16.

sketchbook, Cozens declared his intention for the summer to ‘etch much’.²¹ He was to ‘studdy [sic] etching’ every day after spending his mornings sketching from nature and before visiting the studio of the famous French landscape painter Claude-Joseph Vernet in the afternoons.²² Yet, so far, Cozens’s practice of etching at the time has not received sustained scholarly attention.

As with so much of Cozens’s practice, this is due to the paucity of surviving examples. Two plates with Italian views—one of Castel Sant’Angelo, the other of Lake Nemi—were re-issued by the print publisher John Peter Thompson in 1801 (figs. 81 and 82). No contemporary impressions are known, and their attribution is uncertain. Oppé believed both plates to be by John Robert, Cozens’s son, while Wilton and Richard Godfrey attribute at least the view of Castel Sant’Angelo to Alexander.²³ If we accept the latter attribution, the plate would likely have been part of Cozens’s Roman etching campaign. Paradoxically, while many of the drawings from Cozens’s Italian period look like prints, the short and overlapping hatching makes these prints resemble drawings or sketches. The view of Castel Sant’Angelo is a mirror image of its original topography.²⁴ Cozens evidently did not bother inverting the view, and it has been suggested that the plate was etched on the spot—just like the many sketches Cozens produced on his morning outings.²⁵ The left-tilt of the hatches, moreover, is the result of a right-handed artist quickly jotting down a scene—again unbothered by the reversal of the direction of his hatches in print.

But even if we do not accept the attribution, which in my view is highly unlikely, more evidence of Cozens’s practice of etching can be found in several of the Roman drawings at the British Museum. At least seven in the group are coated in charcoal, which was applied in broad hatches across the verso.²⁶ Several of these, moreover, show indentations (figs. 83 and 84). This was a typical way of transferring a design to an etching plate. The verso would be covered in charcoal or black chalk. The sheet would then be laid on an etching plate with a wax ground and the design transferred by tracing its lines with a sharp stylus that would scratch into wax.²⁷ The indentations on Cozens’s drawings are so fine and sharp that the tool he used may have been an etching needle. Yet, considering the absence of any firmly attributed prints from Italy, it remains difficult to determine the extent of Cozens’s early printmaking practice. It seems likely that any etchings he might have made were lost along with his Roman drawings, but, unlike them, were

²¹ Cozens, *Roman Sketchbook*, 7 recto, transcribed in Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, cat. no. 2.

²² Ibid., 13 recto.

²³ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 115; Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, nos. 3 and 4; Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain*, 62.

²⁴ Wilton, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, no. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Unfortunately, 36 of the 52 drawings are laid down on their mounts so that their verso is inaccessible. Several of these, however, have a dark tint that shines through from the verso of the very thin sheets, suggesting that they also have charcoal applied.

²⁷ Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 34.

not recovered by John Robert in 1776. The heavy etching plates, meanwhile, likely would have been discarded upon his departure from Rome.

Other works from this period, as discussed in the previous chapter, show a more fluid notational system that relied on the use of wash to create form and tone. The coexistence of different styles of drawing in his Italian works—one linear, the other tonal or painterly—indicates that Cozens was trying out different graphic media, techniques, and idioms to explore the aesthetic effects he could generate with them. Similarly, his practice of making drawings that looked like prints, and, potentially, prints that looked like drawings, was a way of feeling out the aesthetic possibilities that different media offered. Ultimately, these works prefigure how print would come to intersect with Cozens's practice later in his career: Prints and their distinct graphic syntax would remain important reference points for his artistic practice.²⁸ Moreover, they helped him refine his aesthetic theories and enabled him to share his ideas with the readers of his treatises.

Collecting Prints

Eighteenth-century artists like Cozens participated in the growing print economy not only by making prints and works in other media for reproduction. They also were involved as collectors. As Tim Clayton writes, 'Very few eighteenth-century artists did not form a substantial print collection.'²⁹ Already, in the late seventeenth century, Roger de Piles and other theorists recommended artists to collect prints.³⁰ Print collections would serve as visual repositories of art that enabled artists to acquire a grounding in art history by bringing together the works that were not accessible, dispersed over various collections, immobile, or lost. They also were considered 'one of the hallmarks of cultivated minds', thus raising the status of the painter as a knowledge-worker rather than craftsman.³¹

One of the most famous artist collections of the early eighteenth century was that of Jonathan Richardson. The painter advocated for the collecting of both prints and drawings as indispensable for his artistic practice. Similarly, Sir Joshua Reynolds formed one of the great artist collections of the second half of the eighteenth century. Already during his Italian travels in 1750–52, Reynolds repeatedly compared the paintings he was studying to the prints he had seen

²⁸ On the concept of the 'visual syntax' of printed images, see William M. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication*, Graphic Art 10 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1969), especially chap. 3.

²⁹ Clayton, *English Print*, 45.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Florent Le Comte, *Cabinet des singularitez d'architecture, peinture, sculpture et gravure*, 2nd ed., vol. I (Brussels, 1702), 133–34; cited in Clayton, *English Print*, 42.

engraved after them.³² Upon his return, he began assembling a collection that, by the time of his death, comprised nearly 10,000 works on paper.³³ That Reynolds, too, saw prints as indispensable for an artistic education—not just for the process of learning to draw but for young artists to build up art historical knowledge—can be gauged from his Academy lectures, wherein he would frequently reference works in his collection.³⁴

By comparison to Richardson and Reynolds, Cozens's collection was modest. While his posthumous sale at Christie's in 1787 included mostly works by Cozens himself, a later 1794 sale, in which both Alexander's and John Robert's effects were mixed, included a significant portion of prints.³⁵ In total, the two-day sale included at least 366 individual prints and several albums, portfolios, and 'large parcels of prints'. Among them were twenty-two landscape engravings by William Byrne (day 1, lot 7); thirty sheets from Richard Earlom's prints after Claude Lorrain's *Liber Veritatis* (day 1, lot 8); four framed and glazed views by Piranesi (day 1, lot 46) along with seven of his 'large ruins' (day 2, lot 15); twenty 'fine Italian [landscapes] by Caracci (day 2, lot 9); forty-two etchings by Nicolaes Berchem and '&c.' (day 2, lot 10); and 10 landscapes by Rubens (day 2, lot 16). The sale also contained eighty-two copper plates of the illustrations to Cozens's various publications (day 2, lots 80–89) and, in lot 82, 'Three views in Italy, with some impressions.' These likely are the plates later re-issued by Thompson.

More research is needed to understand how the prints Cozens collected may have shaped his aesthetic sensibilities. The inclusion of prints by Piranesi, however, is an intriguing nod to his own experimental and unusual approach to both printmaking and composition. Moreover, contemporary commentators like William Gilpin (1724–1804) pointed out that the monochromatic nature of reproductive prints sharpened viewers' perception of the distribution of light and dark as a compositional principle.³⁶ The idea that an image's composition could be

³² See his two sketchbooks at the British Museum, reg. nos. 1859,0514.304 and 305. They are discussed in Giovanna Perini Folesani, *Sir Joshua Reynolds in Italia (1750–1752): passaggio in Toscana: il taccuino 201 a 10 del British Museum*, Quaderni 45 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2012).

³³ Donato Esposito, 'The Print Collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds', *Print Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2011): 376–81; Donato Esposito, "'Care, Taste and Judgment': Reynolds's Collection of Works on Paper", in *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Acquisition of Genius*, ed. Sam Smiles, Exh. Cat. Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery (Plymouth: The University of Plymouth, 2009), 102–58; Martin Royalton-Kisch, 'Reynolds as a Collector', in *Gainsborough and Reynolds in the British Museum*, ed. Timothy Clifford, Antony Griffiths, and Martin Royalton-Kisch, Exh. Cat. British Museum (London, British Museum Press), 61–75.

³⁴ Esposito, "'Care, Taste and Judgment'", 106.

³⁵ *A Catalogue of A Valuable Collection [...]*, Sale Cat. London, Christie's, 31 March 1787; *A Catalogue of All the Drawings [...]*, Sale Cat. London, Greenwood's, 9–10 July 1794. It seems that John Robert retained his father's library and print collection after his death. While it is not possible in all cases to distinguish between John Robert's and Alexander's works, a large proportion was by Alexander.

³⁶ William Gilpin, *An Essay upon Prints; Containing Remarks upon the Principles of Picturesque Beauty, the Different Kinds of Prints, and the Characters of the Most Noted Masters; Illustrated by Criticisms upon Particular Pieces; To Which Are Added, Some Cautions That May Be Useful in Collecting Prints* (London: J. Robson, 1768).

reduced to a tonal range of light and dark, or even to a binary of black and white, would become central to Cozens's thought.

Teaching Printmaking

While art students, both those completing a professional apprenticeship or amateurs taking private lessons, would have learned to draw by copying prints, some were also interested in learning how to etch.³⁷ Unlike other printmaking techniques, such as line or mezzotint engraving, which required years of professional training, etching was easy to learn. Over the second half of the eighteenth century, the technique thus became a popular amateur pastime.³⁸ Students would learn to etch from their drawing master. William Austin, the printseller and drawing master who had sold the *Essay* and etched the *South View of London*, for example, also taught etching.³⁹ In his shop in George-Street, in Mayfair's fashionable Hanover Square, students would have been able to buy all necessary supplies, such as copper plates and etching needles. Since Austin owned a rolling press, he likely would have not just taught his students how to etch but also would have printed their plates.⁴⁰ Amateurs, moreover, could have their works published by Matthew and Mary Darly, who also sold a variety of drawing and etching materials in their shop on the Strand alongside instructional manuals for both drawing and etching.⁴¹

Cozens, too, taught etching to at least some of his students.⁴² A letter from 27 August 1768 to John Grimston shows that Cozens procured etching materials for his student and sent them on to his country house.⁴³ With the materials, he also sent a drawing he suggested Grimston might like to etch, now that he had all the necessary tools at hand. No etchings by Grimston are known today, but the British Museum has a series of prints by another student, Lady Amabel Polwarth (née Yorke, later Lady Lucas and de Grey, 1751–1833). Amabel had been taking lessons with Cozens from 1767, and Kim Sloan has argued that it was from him that she had learned to etch.⁴⁴ Indeed, among her prints at the British Museum is a series of small etched landscapes after Cozens's designs (figs. 85 and 86).⁴⁵ Like many of Cozens's drawings, the etchings show

³⁷ For Cozens's use of prints in his teaching of drawing, see my discussion in the previous chapter.

³⁸ See Lyons, 'British Women Printmakers', chap. 5; Lucy Peltz, *Facing the Text: Extra-Illustration, Print Culture, and Society in Britain, 1769–1840* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2017); Perrin Stein, ed., *Artists and Amateurs: Etching in 18th-Century France*, Exh. Cat. The Metropolitan Museum, New York (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); and David Alexander, *Amateurs and Printmaking in England 1750–1830*, Exh. Cat. Wolfson College, Oxford (Oxford: Wolfson College, 1983).

³⁹ Kim Sloan, 'Alexander Cozens and Amateurs Drawn to Etch', *Print Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2011): 409.

⁴⁰ Clayton, *English Print*, 215.

⁴¹ Ibid. For a bibliography of available manuals on printmaking, see Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, app. 4.

⁴² Cozens's teaching of etching has been discussed by Kim Sloan in 'Amateurs Drawn to Etch'. Her discussion serves to be summarised here in order to sketch out the context of Cozens's engagement with printmaking.

⁴³ Transcribed in Kim Sloan, 'New Chronology, II', app. B.1.

⁴⁴ Sloan, 'Amateurs Drawn to Etch', 406–7.

⁴⁵ British Museum reg. nos. 1917,1208.2601–2608; also 1931,0413.323.

architectural features like ruins or temples set in a landscape framed by trees or against the backdrop of a bay. One etching includes a blasted tree, one of Cozens's most-often used motifs (fig. 87). Amabel also made etchings of drawings by her brother-in-law, Thomas Robinson, 2nd Baron Grantham (1738–86), which too are now in the British Museum.⁴⁶ A letter discussed by Sloan indicates that Amabel offered impressions from this series to Benjamin West as a gift for cleaning a painting by him she owned. The etchings are dated 1790 and thus indicate that Amabel continued to etch long after her tutelage with Cozens ended.⁴⁷

Printing the *New Method*

On 10 April 1786, a brief note appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, announcing publication of the *New Method*.⁴⁸ Just thirteen days later, Alexander Cozens was dead.⁴⁹ Plans for the treatise had first been publicised two years prior, in May 1784, when a short notice in the *Morning Herald* invited readers to subscribe to the treatise.⁵⁰ Further advertisements appeared in August, September, and November 1784, promising publication later that year.⁵¹ The book was to include twenty-eight illustrations, examples of which could be viewed at Cozens's home in Soho at no. 4 Leicester Street, Leicester Fields.⁵² The project was delayed, however. Fifteen more plates were added but several remained unfinished until at least the following summer.⁵³ From then on, Cozens's plan experienced further disruption, and, in the end, the artist almost did not live to see his treatise published.

This delay was perhaps not surprising. Throughout his career Cozens had been notoriously incapable of meeting his own deadlines. He frequently apologised to correspondents about his slow replies to their letters and in fulfilling their requests. Mostly, it seems, this was due to him

⁴⁶ British Museum reg. nos. 1881,0108.69–73; 1917,1208.2626, 2627, 2633, 2634, 2636–2639, 2641–43; 1931,0413.330–336.

⁴⁷ They also serve as an example of the important social function of amateur prints within a thriving gift economy, wherein etchings were exchanged as gifts and collected in albums. The most well-known example are Richard Bull's albums of prints etched by his friends and family at the British Museum (reg. no. 1931,0413.1–517). These have been discussed in detail in Peltz, *Facing the Text*; and Lyons, 'British Women Printmakers', chap. 5. Impressions of Amabel's prints were included in the Bull album.

⁴⁸ *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 10 April 1786; cited in Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay and Treatise on Perspective*', 6. This newly discovered publication notice is an important piece of information regarding the history of the *New Method*, which previously had an uncertain publication date.

⁴⁹ *General Evening Post*, 26 April 1786; cited in Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends*, 324.

⁵⁰ *Morning Herald*, 29 May 1784. Whitley published this subscription notice without citation, in *Artists and Their Friends*, 323–24. The notice is dated 10 April 1784 but did not appear until 29 May. Susan Sloman suggests that a printed prospectus may have appeared on 10 April, but no example of this has been found so far; see Sloman, 'Cozens's *Essay and Treatise on Perspective*', n. 23.

⁵¹ *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 4757, 14 August 1784; *Whitehall Evening Post*, 5763, 14–16 September 1784; *St. James's Chronicle, or the British Evening Post*, 3696, 13–16 November 1784.

⁵² It was not uncommon that finished drawings for prints would have been available for prospective subscribers to view at an artist's or engraver's house, as many subscription notices show. See Clayton, *English Print*, 116.

⁵³ Out of 43 plates, only four are dated. They are plate 39: 5 May 1784; plates 41–43: 20 July 1785.

being overcommitted. In August 1768, he wrote to Grimston that ‘the business and appointments [I am] one way or another engag’d in, hardly leave me room to turn.’⁵⁴ But the *New Method* surely would have been different. This was his *opus magnum*, the summary of his life’s work that presumably would have taken priority over other engagements. In fact, during the early 1780s, after a bout of illness and now in his mid-sixties, Cozens seems to have slowed down.⁵⁵ Although he still taught in the royal household until 1784, he stopped participating in public exhibitions after 1781—perhaps to free up time to complete what was meant to be the definite guide to blotting.⁵⁶ Yet, he seems to have struggled to finish the project.

As outlined previously, this was only the last instalment in the *New Method*’s protracted publication history. The draft of the *New Method* was almost complete by 1773 but by late 1775 Cozens had given up on his ‘work on landscape’.⁵⁷ Instead, he focused on another project, the *Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head*, which was announced in March 1776 and published two years later.⁵⁸ The *Principles of Beauty* was an unusual manual that applied the same mix-and-match approach Cozens had designed for the *Various Species* to the painting of female faces. The face was broken up into its constituent elements (forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, chin), which were presented in several variations each. By combining variations of each element, different kinds of facial beauty could be created (majestic, spirited, melancholy, timid, or cheerful, among others). These beauties could then be further embellished with different hairstyles printed on thin tissue paper that were loosely slipped into the book and could be moved around. Cozens may have chosen the subject of female beauty to bolster his application to associate membership of the Royal Academy in 1778 and 1779. He likely calculated that his chance of being successful in his application purely based on his reputation as a landscape painter would be low.⁵⁹ Human beauty

⁵⁴ See the letter in Sloan, ‘New Chronology, II’, app. B1.

⁵⁵ See Mary Harcourt’s (1749–1833) letter to William Beckford (1760–1844) from 4 September 1781 in which she expresses her hope that Beckford ‘will restore [Cozens] to such health ... that I shall have his society some hours of every week in London for many years to come.’ Transcribed in Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 34.

⁵⁶ He was tutor to Prince William (1778–79), Prince Edward (1778–82) and Queen Charlotte (1781–84). As Oppé notes, this was ‘the summit of attainment as a teacher’. Ibid., 39–40. See also *The Royal Kalendar; or Compleat and Correct Annual Register for England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, for the Year 1783; Including a Compleat and Correct List of the 15th Parliament of GREAT BRITAIN, Summoned to Meet for Their First SESSION on the 31st of OCTOBER 1780* (London, 1783), 89. His last exhibited work was a *View in North Wales, taken from Wynstay, the seat of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, Bart*, which was on view at the Royal Academy in 1781. The work had been commissioned by Wynn in 1777 for £15 15s. See Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 82. He may also have been disillusioned by his repeated rejection upon applying for associate membership of the RA.

⁵⁷ Cassidy, ‘Cozens and the Grant Family’, app. 5.

⁵⁸ On *The Principles of Beauty*, see Sloan, *Poetry of Landscape*, 63–69. At least four subscription announcements appeared in various publications between 22 March 1776 and 17 April 1777 (March 22, 1776, *Morning Chronicle*, issue 2133, 22 March 1776; *Public Advertiser*, issue 14542, 11 May 1776; *Morning Post*, issue 1394, 9 April 1777). A year later, on 12 March 1778, the first in a string of at least seventeen notices announced publication (*Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 13 March 1778; *Public Advertiser*, 12, 13, 31 March, 2 April, 4, 6, 19 May 1778, 5 April, 18 May 1779; *Morning Post*, 19, 20 March, 6, 8 April 1778, 10, 19, 22 March 1779).

⁵⁹ See my discussion of the low status of landscape painting within the academic hierarchy of genres in Chapter One, 51.

must have seemed like a subject that was more likely to gain the academicians' approval—regardless of the *Principles of Beauty's* somewhat unconventional combinatorial approach. It thus may have been a calculated step to abandon his work on the *New Method* in favour of the *Principles of Beauty* in late 1775.⁶⁰ However, it seems plausible that other factors were at play as well in his decision to abandon a project that had progressed to the stage where a full draft had been completed. As suggested previously, Cozens likely ran into problems with printing the blots that were meant to accompany the text of his draft, *Designing Landscapes*. He had already struggled with this in the *Essay* in 1759, when he was unable to print the wash of the light blots, and, as a result, abandoned them altogether. In the early-to-mid 1770, he would have experienced the same problems. As the next section will show, even though printing technology was changing and techniques were being developed to print wash, it would take Cozens several years to be able to employ the new technique of aquatint. When he finally did, the result was as idiosyncratic and experimental as the blots themselves. Indeed, with the aquatints of the *New Method* he did not adapt his blotting technique to the restrictions placed on him by the printing technique, as he had done in 1759. Instead, in the *New Method*, he tweaked the aquatint technique—which had been developed to print light washes—to print the expressive brushwork and thick strokes, dashes, and smudges of ink that now constituted the blots.

Aquatint

In the *New Method*, Cozens used a range of printmaking techniques to print different graphic media. The blots were printed in aquatint, while the delicate pencil drawings of the twenty cloud illustrations used line etching. The last several plates that illustrated the progression from blot to sketch and drawing, as well as the different landscape images that could be generated from one blot, utilised a mixed technique that combined aquatint with mezzotint engraving. In my discussion of printing the *New Method*, I will focus on the aquatint technique of the blots and mixed technique of the last few plates. However, Cozens's use of different printmaking techniques shows that the artist judiciously chose methods of etching and engraving the plates that were appropriate for the various aesthetic effects of the different media he hoped to reproduce. As I will argue below, the different techniques afforded him what I call an equivalence of process, whereby he was able to draw and blot on the printing plates as he would on paper, substituting the graphite pencil for the etching needle and the ink-soaked brush for

⁶⁰ His letters to James Grant also indicate that Cozens had received encouragement from his correspondents and students. See his letters from 27 December 1775, in which he explains that he was pursuing the idea 'under the encouragement of my friends, and the most ingenious men of this nation', and from 24 April 1776, in which he thanks him for his approval and 'several usefull [sic] hints'. Transcribed respectively in Cassidy, 'Cozens and the Grant Family', app. 5; and Sloan, 'New Chronology, II', app. B.2.

one steeped in aquatint sugar solution. Indeed, this kind of equivalence of process was seen by contemporary commentators as the great benefit of the aquatint technique.⁶¹

In the world of printmaking, the 1760s were marked by a flurry of activity and invention. The goal many printmakers and inventors shared was the printing of tone.⁶² While mezzotint (ital. half-tint) offered a good solution to print tonal gradations—from deep, velvety black to bright light—the technique was cumbersome.⁶³ It had been invented around one-hundred years prior and was being used successfully to reproduce mainly portrait paintings, a speciality particularly of English engravers.⁶⁴ But it required the skills of a professional, and it was slow and hard work. To create a mezzotint, a so-called rocker (a curved, spiked tool) is moved systematically across a printing plate until the surface is roughened up all over. If inked at this stage, the fully rocked plate will print in a deep black.⁶⁵ Once the plate is ready, the design can be applied by smoothing out the burr with a burnisher or scraper. The smoother an area, the less ink it will hold and the lighter it will print. The design thus is scraped down from solid black into light, a sequence which distinguishes mezzotint from all other early modern printmaking techniques.

Mezzotint was ideal to emulate in print the visual idiom of painting, allowing the engraver to recreate a work's chiaroscuro as well as the appearance of brushstrokes and impasto. It was less suited to the delicate washes of watercolour or ink wash drawings, and neither could it successfully imitate linear pen and ink or chalk drawings. However, with the growing popularity of drawings among collectors, antiquarians, and art historians, the desire to duplicate them in print in a way that acknowledged their distinct mediality grew stronger.⁶⁶ Several methods and techniques were invented to do this. On the one hand, printmakers skilfully manipulated the existing techniques to their full effect. In the 1730s, the printmaker, publisher, and print seller Arthur Pond (1701–1758) published, together with the engraver Charles Knapton (1698–1742), a series of prints entitled simply *Prints in Imitation of Drawings*. The two volumes reproduced primarily Italian old master drawings from their own and their friends' collections, including works by Caracci, Parmigianino, Mantegna, and Guercino. Several drawings from Claude's *Liber*

⁶¹ Antony Griffiths, 'Notes on Early Aquatint in England and France', *Print Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1987): 264.

⁶² Of course, printmakers had successfully used linear techniques like engraving, etching, or drypoint to print tone using shading and cross-hatching. But these were not tonal techniques *sui generis*. Rembrandt's *Three Crosses* or *Entombment* are breathtaking examples of just how effectively tone could be created with drypoint etching.

⁶³ Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking*, 83–87; see also Wax, *The Mezzotint*.

⁶⁴ Because of its popularity in Britain, over the course of the eighteenth-century, it became known as 'la manière anglaise'.

⁶⁵ See figs. 73–75 in Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking*, 84.

⁶⁶ Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 14; Claudia-Alexandra Schwaighofer, *Von der Kennerschaft zur Wissenschaft: Reproduktionsgraphische Mappenwerke nach Zeichnungen in Europa 1726–1857*, Münchener Universitätschriften des Instituts für Kunstgeschichte 6 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009); Rebel, *Faksimile und Mimesis*.

Veritatis were included, for which Pond and Knapton employed a mixed technique. The pen and ink lines of the original drawings were etched, whereas the washes were printed in woodcut.⁶⁷ In a print after Claude's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, Pond and Knapton used two woodblocks to print two shades of grey wash (fig. 88). Similarly, thirty years later, in Richard Earlom's prints (published by Boydell) after the *Liber Veritatis*, of which Cozens owned thirty sheets, the printmaker had first etched the design with simple line etching for the pen and ink lines and then added washes using mezzotint (fig. 89).⁶⁸ Yet, although both approaches offered workarounds for printing wash, they were not ideal. Pond and Knapton's woodcuts lacked the fluidity of the original wash, whereas in Earlom's mezzotints the cross-hatching of the rocked burr remained visible. In order to recreate the aesthetic effects of ink or watercolour wash more accurately, printmakers experimented with new techniques and methods. Although several artists and amateurs had developed aquatint-like processes from the early 1760s, it was the French etcher and painter Jean-Baptiste Le Prince (1734–1781) who is most often credited with its invention in 1768.⁶⁹ Before I discuss the historical development of the technique and its different variants, I will explain the process of aquatint printmaking as it came to be used.

The basic principle of aquatint involves the application of a special etching ground of tiny particles of rosin dust. This can be achieved by gathering the pulverised rosin in a cloth bag and dusting it across the printing plate. For a more even application, artists came to use a dust box, wherein the rosin dust is blown into a cloud that settles on the plate in an even film. The dust is then fused to the copper by applying heat to the back of the plate. Another method, developed in the 1770s, is to dispense the rosin in alcohol and brush it onto the plate in an even layer. When the alcohol evaporates, the rosin particles remain. In the process of etching, the particles act as a resist to the acid. The acid bites the plate around and between the particles, creating an

⁶⁷ Likely taking inspiration from the chiaroscuro woodcut's revival in the work of Antonio Maria Zanetti (1680–1767) and John Baptist Jacksons (1701–c.1780). See Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 79–86; also Evelyn Wöldicke, 'Die Renaissance einer vergessenen Technik: Clair-obscur-Holzschnitte im 18. Jahrhundert' (Ph.D., Berlin, Freie Universität, 2010). On the origins of the chiaroscuro woodcut, see Naoko Takahatake, ed., *The Chiaroscuro Woodcut in Renaissance Italy*, Exh. Cat. Los Angeles County Museum, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2018).

⁶⁸ For a comparison of the two series, see Dawna Schuld, 'Conspicuous Imitation: Reproductive Prints and Artistic Literacy in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Paper Museums: The Reproductive Print in Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Rebecca Zorach and Elizabeth Rodini, Exh. Cat. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; The Grey Art Gallery, New York University (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2005), 101–13. Schuld also discusses the important function such print series fulfilled in the emergence of art historical study over the eighteenth century. The series are also discussed in Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 95–96, 111–14. Importantly, this means that Earlom used mezzotint from light to dark, not from dark to light.

⁶⁹ Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking*, 89–97, here 94. A rich literature has emerged on the history of aquatint, which until not long ago, according to Griffiths, was 'wrapped in obscurity' (see *ibid.*, 92). See Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint'; Wiebel, *Aquatinta*; Gunn, 'Sandby, Greville and Burdett', 178–80; Martin Hopkinson, 'Paul Sandby and the Secrets of Aquatint', *Print Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2003): 380–82; Gunn, *The Prints of Paul Sandby*; and more recently Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds*; and Hoisington, *Aquatint*.

indented net-like structure that, when inked and printed, results in soft tone. Depending on the size of the rosin particles, the tone will appear fine or coarse, with a finer grain creating a delicate and even appearance, similar to watercolour wash. Following the application of the aquatint ground, stopping-out varnish can be used to draw or paint a design. The plate is then etched in acid. The longer the plate is submerged in the acid bath, the deeper the bite will be, the more ink it will hold, and the darker it will print. Tonal variety can be achieved by varying the time different areas are exposed to the acid through the application of stopping-out varnish.

Le Prince's technique involved a slightly more complicated sequence of steps. He first etched the outlines of his design in the normal way by scratching into an etching ground and biting the plate in acid. After this first step, the plate was wiped clean, and a second ground was applied to protect the etched design. Onto this the shading or wash of his design was added using a special ink of lamp black, olive oil, and turpentine. This ink dissolved the etching ground and, after being wiped off, exposed the bare copper. Le Prince then brushed the exposed copper with a sticky solution of soap and sugar onto which he dusted the pulverised aquatint rosin. The rosin dust was fused to the plate before cleaning and biting it in acid as normal.

The technique found only limited success in France—not just because Le Prince closely guarded his secret but also because the delicate grain of his aquatints degraded quickly and thus afforded only small print runs. Instead, it was in Britain that aquatint became popular and was further developed. Peter Perez Burdett (1734–1793) first experimented with aquatint in 1772, but it was the landscape painter Paul Sandby (1731–1809) who improved upon Le Prince's technique and popularised aquatint in Britain.

Sandby pioneered the use of the alcohol-based liquid grain aquatint, which came to be the preferred method in late eighteenth-century England.⁷⁰ But as Antony Griffiths has emphasised, it was the invention of the lift-ground process that was Sandby's most important innovation.⁷¹ Indeed, lift-ground addressed the critical problem of positive-negative inversion inherent to aquatint. Griffiths explains that 'The main difficulty in making an aquatint is that the design on the plate has to be negative, since the areas that the artist paints with his stopping-out varnish are those which will remain white.'⁷² Thus, if a design is applied in stopping-out varnish, it is the unvarnished areas that will print, whereas the varnished areas will not hold ink and remain blank.

⁷⁰ On the difficulty of recreating historical techniques, see also Wolfgang Schwahn, 'Wege und Irrewege – Technische Versuche einer Annäherung an die historischen Verfahren zur Erzeugung von Flächentönen im Tiefdruck', in *Aquatinta oder Die Kunst mit dem Pinsel in Kupfer zu stechen*. *Das druckgraphische Verfahren von seinen Anfängen bis zu Goya*, by Christiane Wiebel, Exh. Cat. (Coburg and München: Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg and Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 43–63.

⁷¹ Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 264.

⁷² Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking*, 90.

Therefore, it is not the design but its negative form that needs to be drawn or painted in stopping-out varnish in order to print the design correctly, in its positive form. Le Prince had already solved this problem with the use of his special ink and the soap and sugar mixture, but his process was unnecessarily complex. Sandby managed to invert the designs with the much easier lift-ground or sugar-lift method. For this, he first covered the copper plate with his liquid-grain aquatint ground, onto which he then painted his design in a sugar solution. After this was dry, the plate was covered with a stopping-out varnish before being submerged in water to dissolve the sugar. The dissolving sugar would lift the varnish off the drawn design and expose the copper plate underneath. The remaining varnish would protect the rest of the plate, exposing only the positive form of the design. The plate was then placed in acid and etched in the usual way.⁷³ As Griffiths notes, this was such an improvement on 'Le Prince's complicated process of dissolving a ground ... that no later artist ever seems to have used it again.'⁷⁴

This was so significant because it allowed artists to draw or paint directly onto the plate much in the same way they would on paper. As such, it answered to the desire of imitating ink wash drawings and watercolours, not only in terms of their aesthetic appearance but also in terms of their material production and specific mediality. It was not just the design that was meant to be reproduced as an image, but the drawing as a material object. The printmaking process was to emulate the process of drawing and sketching as closely as possible.⁷⁵ Indeed, it is this latter aspect that was emphasised by both Le Prince and Sandby. While Le Prince claimed that his method of printmaking 'imitates wash with such perfection that the most skilful artists can be fooled', more consequential to him was the ability to draw directly onto his plate. Speaking of himself in the third person, he wrote that 'most of his prints are composed on the plate itself with the same immediacy and by the same process he uses to make a drawing, that is to say, pen & brush'.⁷⁶ Indeed, he writes, 'One should regard these new prints as real drawings'.⁷⁷ In this context, Le Prince describes his prints as 'dessin-estampes', i.e. drawing-prints. Similarly, Sandby wrote about his new aquatint technique that 'the work is so delightful and easy to me now in the execution I do it with the same ease but with more pleasure than on paper.'⁷⁸

Ultimately, aquatint allowed artists to make prints that looked like drawings and that were made almost like drawings. Woodcut and mezzotint, by contrast, did not. Neither did they

⁷³ Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 264.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Rebel, *Faksimile und Mimesis*, chap. 2. Wiebel also discusses this at various points in her study, Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 14, 89, 91, 96.

⁷⁶ Jean-Baptiste Le Prince in *Mercure de France*, November 1769, 166–68, cited in Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 53–55.

⁷⁷ Jean-Baptiste Le Prince in *L'avant-coureur*, no. 8, February 22, 1773, 113–14, cited in Ibid.

⁷⁸ Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 264.

convincingly reproduce the graphic marks of ink wash, nor did they approximate the process of drawing.⁷⁹ For Cozens, it was precisely this opportunity to blot directly onto his copper plates using lift-ground aquatint that would have appealed to him.

How to Print a Blot: Cozens and Aquatint

Cozens's aquatints constitute some of the most remarkable examples of the technique produced in the eighteenth century (figs. 90–95). In them, shards of deeply etched black ink make up landscape formations, punctuated by flecks of white. The longer you look, the less stable the ink and the landscape become. Suddenly, they break up into their constituent parts—dabs, flecks, smudges—and start flickering across the page, only to crystallise again in the next moment. Thus, the landscape moves in and out of focus, the shards and flecks and dabs dancing across the page in one moment, standing still in the next. Some appear fluid, with individual brushstrokes visible, others are more rigid. In some, a kind of black snow—an accidental side-effect of the etching process called foul-biting—disturbs the white of the paper. An etched frame provides stability by orienting the images; engraved numbers in the upper right corner tell us which way is up.⁸⁰ In their strange and beautiful abstraction, these prints are unlike anything eighteenth-century viewers would have seen before. Ultimately, they make clear ‘that Cozens was as daring an experimenter with acid, grounds and copper as with his inks and paper’, as Oppé put it.⁸¹

Cozens's method of making these striking blot prints has recently been explored by Rena Hoisington.⁸² She explains that, like Sandby, Cozens used a sugarlift process, whereby a blot was smudged directly onto the printing plate using a sugar solution. This was then covered with stopping-out varnish and the plate submerged in water. As the sugar dissolved, the varnish was lifted off, revealing the blotted areas. Hoisington suggests that the exposed copper was then dusted with pulverised rosin before the plate was etched in acid, but it is equally possible, and perhaps more likely, that the aquatint ground was applied to the plate first, before the sugar blot and protective varnish were added. Adding the rosin grains first creates a coarser structure for the sugar solution to hold on to and leads to the kind of serrated or crystalline edges visible in the blots.⁸³

⁷⁹ My own experiments with linocut demonstrate that although I was able to reasonably imitate the granular effects of the ink blots, the slow process of carving the plate was completely contrary to the swift smudging of ink demanded by blotting.

⁸⁰ The numbers would have been added by a professional letter engraver.

⁸¹ Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 69.

⁸² Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 199–203.

⁸³ I thank Ad Stijnman for discussing these questions with me via email, 29 August 2024.

In plates 37–43, Cozens used a slightly more complex process (figs. 3–5, 13–15). The first three of the plates demonstrate the three-step process of revising a blot into a sketch before transforming it into a finished drawing.⁸⁴ While plate 37 is printed in the same way as the other blots, plates 38 and 39 use at least four different, gradually darkening tones of aquatint to realise the complex tonalities of Cozens's sketches and finished drawings. To achieve this in print, the plates would have been bitten successively four times, each time with added layers of varnish protecting different areas of the composition.⁸⁵ Plates 39 and 41–43 were, moreover, worked in mezzotint by William Pether (1738–1821), a professional engraver renowned for his skill in creating effects of light and dark and fine tonal modulation.⁸⁶ In these plates, the burr of the mezzotint was used to add another layer of uniform tone, representing what Cozens called 'keeping'. In the last three, mezzotint is moreover applied to modulate the cloudy skies through selective rocking and burnishing of the plate. As Hoisington writes, the application of mezzotint 'not only enhanced the print's tonal range, it also visually distinguished the 'blot' or 'sketch' from the finished landscape.'⁸⁷

Plate no. 40 uses yet another, even more complicated process. In this plate, the smudges of ink are disrupted by an unusual pattern of vertical and horizontal striations that give the blot a fuzzy appearance (fig. 12). This also makes the brushstrokes more clearly visible than in any of the other printed blots. As Hoisington explains, Cozens here seems to have blotted his sugar solution not onto the copper plate directly, but on a sheet of paper. This he then appears to have counterproofed to the plate by laying the sheet face down on the copper and running both through the press. The blot thus would have transferred in reverse to the printing plate as a so-called ghost. The vertical and horizontal striations therefore appear to result from the chain and laid lines of the paper imprinting onto the plate along with the blot.⁸⁸

There is an unexpected variety across the plates, even between those where Cozens used the same printmaking technique. They vary not just in the fluidity of the smudges, or lack thereof, or in the size and shape of the marks, but also in the quality of the printing of each plate. In some, different parts of the blot vary in the saturation of their ink. Some of this may be to do with defective printing and plate wear. Several of the blots show added repairs to the plates in the

⁸⁴ See my discussion in Chapter One, 64–68.

⁸⁵ As Douglas Fordham observed, the repeated biting of the plates in acid to create successively darker tones parallels Cozens's instruction to use gradually darkening tints when working up a landscape drawing from a blot. See *Aquatint Worlds*, 44.

⁸⁶ David Alexander, 'Pether, William (c.1738–1821)', in *A Biographical Dictionary of British and Irish Engravers, 1714–1820* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2021).

⁸⁷ Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 199.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 203. Lebensztejn had previously conjectured that this effect might have been achieved with soft-ground etching, but this is implausible since there are no physical traces typical of the technique. See *L'art de la tache*, 215. A similar effect seems to be visible in plate 15.

form of cross-hatched line etching as well as mezzotint. This would have darkened the areas that had worn. Other areas look like they may have been bitten more than once. Cozens also seems to have played with the size of his aquatint grain: in plates 38 and 39, the foreground is much coarser, with more white flecks, than the mountain in the background and the surrounding water which have a much more even tone resulting from a finer grain. This would indicate that, at least in this section, he applied an additional coarser aquatint ground after he had blotted the design, as proposed by Hoisington. Similarly, in plate 40, after imprinting the ghost of his paper-based blot onto the plate, he added extra touch-ups in sugar solution, presumably because the counterproof had not transferred the blot fully, as in the lower right.⁸⁹ Due to these variances each plate needs to be assessed individually to determine precisely how each was made. Together, however, they show that Cozens experimented with different methods of mark-making to coax varying effects out of his printing plates.

Some choices, however, are difficult to appreciate. His extensive use of mezzotint in the last few plates, for example, seems technically unnecessary. Fordham argued that aquatint faltered in the last three plates, making Pether's additions in mezzotint a necessity rather than a choice. I would argue, however, that this was less to do with any limitations inherent to the medium than with Cozens's difficulty in maximising aquatint's technical possibilities. In fact, the technique had been intended specifically to reproduce in print the kind of wash technique Cozens had applied in the preparatory works for the final few plates of the *New Method* (figs. 96–98).⁹⁰ The three drawings are highly finished and include Cozens's typical mix of dabs, strokes, and larger washes, as well as his interlacing of light and shade. Given that they are mirror images of the printed plate, it seems safe to assume that they were made in preparation of the printing process, and that Cozens did not invert them before transferring the design to the printing plate. They also were likely meant to guide Pether in his application of the mezzotint. Comparison of the drawings with the printed plates show that he rocked the plate all over to recreate the drawings' 'keeping' and then carefully modulated light and shade before burnishing in the clouds. But these kinds of effects—their marks, tonal effects, and especially the clouds—also could have been achieved in aquatint. While early aquatint had struggled to print delicate tints and even gradation, by the mid-1780s the technique had improved immensely. Comparing the effects Paul Sandby was able to produce, especially in his clouds, seems to suggest that a more experienced aquatinter might have been able to reproduce Cozens's wash drawing more accurately (fig. 99). By contrast,

⁸⁹ Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 203.

⁹⁰ Hoisington disregards these preparatory wash drawings. Instead, she speculates that the plates may have also used a counterproof technique, whereby a blot on paper or perhaps a proof of plate 40 was pressed onto the three copper plates for plates 41–43. But this would have caused a double left-right reversal of the image, i.e. eliminating the reversal between the prints and preparatory works.

Pether's mezzotint brought with it a rigidity that contrasts with the fluidity of Cozens's wash. In some areas, the mezzotint marks are so coarse they are easily visible, even in photographic reproduction. Pether's application here is less accomplished than in his usual works, perhaps because he was working, against his usual practice, from light to dark rather than dark to light.

It is unclear why Cozens did not hire an experienced aquatinter like Francis Jukes who, around the same time, was aquatinting the plates for William Gilpin's second edition of the picturesque tours. But ultimately, his inability to fully realise the technical possibilities of aquatint, and the aesthetic potential it carried, points to his longer struggle to print the plates of the *New Method* in the first place. The next section looks at how he came to use the technique. For although both Fordham and Hoisington have done important work to recover Cozens's role in the development and use of aquatint in the late eighteenth century, neither have considered how he learned to use the technique.

Cozens's Path to Aquatint

By the time Cozens made his blot-prints, in the mid-1780s, aquatint was not a new technique. But the process had been kept secret by its early inventors. Le Prince had guarded his method throughout the 1770s, and only when his health failed and his debts mounted, in 1781, did he offer to sell it to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris. The Académie acquired it a year later, after Le Prince had died, and shared it with its members.⁹¹ Before 1782, however, it would have been difficult to learn exactly how Le Prince had created his 'drawing-prints'. In Britain, the situation was similar. Burdett had started experimenting with aquatint processes in 1771 and exhibited his first sheets at the Society of Artists in 1772. Unlike Le Prince, he was hoping to sell his recipe right from the beginning but struggled to find a buyer. Josiah Wedgwood was interested but ultimately declined, as did Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Banks.⁹² In late 1773 or early 1774, the antiquarian Charles Francis Greville (1749–1809) finally agreed to purchase Burdett's process for £40. When Burdett left the country to flee his creditors later that year, Greville passed the recipe on to his friend Sandby.

Sandby's first aquatints were published in 1775, but he had begun experimenting with the technique as soon as he had been given the method by Greville. His first series, depicting *Twelve Views in South Wales*, was dedicated to Greville and Banks and was based on a tour he had undertaken there with his two friends in the summer of 1773. Although it represented Sandby's first published foray into the aquatint medium, the series was extremely accomplished. In it, he

⁹¹ Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 260. It was finally published in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* in 1792.

⁹² Gunn, 'Sandby, Greville and Burdett'.

skilfully combined the different ways of manipulating the medium—using different sizes of grain, lift-ground, repeated etching with stopping-out varnish. To maximise the variety of visual effects, he also added touches of line etching and mezzotint. Over the next year, he continued to publish landscape series in which he gained even greater fluency with the medium, learning to use it not simply as a way of reproducing in print the marks of ink wash but also as a medium with its own unique technological and aesthetic potential. It was the fluidity and delicacy with which these works transferred into print the visual idiom of ink wash that would have appealed to both Sandby's audiences and fellow artists. Especially the latter group would have been keen to understand how he had been able to achieve such effects. However, like Le Prince, Sandby refused to reveal his process. Not only had he been granted a monopoly by Greville, but his own improvements to Burdett's technique—liquid-ground aquatint and the lift-ground technique—also presented strong incentives to protect the method for his own commercial advantage.

Nevertheless, it seems that he shared his knowledge with at least one aspiring aquatinter, Francis Jukes (1745–1812), whose first aquatints from 1774 reproduced drawings by Sandby. Although Sandby had been central to the development of the medium, he remained primarily a landscape painter and wound down his work in aquatint in the mid-1780s. Instead, it was Jukes who, from 1776, established himself as the first professional printmaker to specialise in the aquatint technique, and thus should be credited for establishing aquatints' economic potential in the commercial print market. Over the late 1770s, Jukes participated in a range of collaborative publishing ventures. One of his signature projects, two views of Somerset House drawn by Jean-Baptiste Chatelain, point to his continued collaboration with Sandby, under whose 'inspection' the aquatints had been produced.⁹³ Despite the increasing professionalisation promoted by Jukes, throughout the 1770s, aquatint remained exceedingly rare in terms of its market share.⁹⁴ Although a growing number of artists experimented with the technique, it would have remained difficult to obtain a recipe. Only in the 1780s did aquatint become more widely used, and in the early 1790s the first manuals that explained its process were published.

It is in this context—of the secrecy surrounding aquatint's development in the 1770s—that Cozens's search for an appropriate technique to print the blots must be considered. In 1773, when his draft was ready, he likely would have already seen examples of aquatint exhibited. Certainly by 1775, when Sandby showed examples of his much-improved process at the Royal Academy, they must have seemed like a revelation for Cozens. However, he would have had difficulty in obtaining a recipe to guide him through the process, leading him to drop the project

⁹³ See the subscription notice for the prints, quoted in Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 178.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

later that year. Indeed, his story resembles that of William Gilpin, who was searching for a way of illustrating his picturesque tours for much of the 1770s.⁹⁵ His manuscripts had been circulating amongst his friends and acquaintances since 1770, and towards the middle of the decade he was beginning to think about publication. In February 1775, his friend William Mason recommended that he ‘call on Paul Sandby ... [as his] new method of Etching ... would suit your sketches admirably.’⁹⁶ However, Sandby declined when Gilpin approached him in 1776. Even George Greville, Charles’ elder brother, was unable to help. As noted, Charles had granted Sandby exclusive use and thus was unable to share the recipe. It would take Gilpin another five years to finally get his hands on a recipe. In 1781, Horace Walpole wrote, seemingly derisively, to Mason that ‘Gilpin would try aquatint if he could learn the secret. I shall consult Sandby ... nay, I believe it is no longer a secret.’⁹⁷ Ultimately, it was George Simon Harcourt—who, along with Sandby, had been a supporter of Jukes’s Somerset House project⁹⁸—who sent Gilpin a recipe, which he himself had gotten from a Mr. Taylor in Bath. Not a printmaker himself, Gilpin engaged his nephew, William Sawrey Gilpin, to prepare the plates for publication in 1782. ‘I am persuaded’, he wrote, ‘that an inferior artist under my own inspection will execute my ideas better, than a superior one at a distance.’⁹⁹ Yet, he was unhappy with the result and felt it necessary to apologise for the subpar quality of his nephew’s illustrations, which ‘were etched by a young man ... who has not yet had experience enough to execute several details with that masterly freedom.’¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, for the second edition of 1789, he hired Jukes.

We do not know how Cozens learned how to etch aquatints and who might have shared the process with him. However, it seems plausible that it was through similar channels as Gilpin. Indeed, Cozens was closely connected with all the persons involved. He had been Harcourt’s teacher, and he had also taught the Greville brothers.¹⁰¹ The latter two had been subscribers to Cozens’s *Principles of Beauty* in 1778 (each for six copies), as had Gilpin, Mason, and a Mr ‘Burdet, Esq’.¹⁰² It is possible that Harcourt helped Cozens out by sharing Mr Taylor’s recipe as he had done with Gilpin, that the Grevilles had softened their stance and shared Burdett’s method, or

⁹⁵ Gilpin’s complicated quest for aquatint is discussed in detail in Barbier, *William Gilpin*, chap. VI.

⁹⁶ William Mason, letter to William Gilpin, 2 February 1775, cited in *Ibid.*, 67. See also Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 195.

⁹⁷ Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 227.

⁹⁸ See the subscription notice for the prints, quoted in Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 178.

⁹⁹ Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 227.

¹⁰⁰ Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 197.

¹⁰¹ See my discussion in the previous chapter. On Charles and George Greville, see Kim Sloan, ‘Cozens, Alexander (1717–1786)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 24 May 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6546> [last accessed 10 March 2020].

¹⁰² See list of subscribers in Alexander Cozens, *The Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head* (London, 1778). It is unclear if the Burdet listed is Peter Perez Burdett. After fleeing England, Burdett settled in Karlsruhe where he was employed by the Margrave of Baden, who, along with King George III and the Duchess of Cumberland, was one of the dedicatees of the *Principles of Beauty*.

that Gilpin himself had shared it.¹⁰³ It is equally likely that Cozens simply accessed one of the recipes that were circulating from the early 1780s. Indeed, by that point, as Walpole had flippantly remarked to Mason, the process was hardly a secret. Griffiths confirms that, from 1782, after the French Académie had divulged Le Prince's method to its members, 'anyone who was sufficiently determined' would have been able to get hold of his method.¹⁰⁴ Finally, however, it is also possible that Cozens came up with his own method. As Christiane Wiebel notes, artists who were already acquainted with other modes of printmaking would have been able to deduce or at least make educated guesses about the aquatint process from the visual evidence at hand. They would have closely analysed and compared available examples with their knowledge of existing printmaking techniques, which in turn would have guided them in their experimentation. According to Wiebel, this prior knowledge opened a space of imagination that allowed them to develop their own aquatint processes.¹⁰⁵

Regardless of how precisely Cozens came to work in aquatint, his practice would have been marked by continued trial and error. In fact, even if he had been given a recipe, successfully using it would have required a great deal of experience and experimentation. Wolfgang Schwahn's experiments in Wiebel's catalogue illustrate quite how difficult it is to recreate such recipes today.¹⁰⁶ Today, as then, this was mostly because the materials used were not subject to norms of substance and purity and because directions were imprecise.¹⁰⁷ Thus, artists would have had to read recipes against the matrix of their experience and skill and try out different tweaks until they achieved the desired result. Indeed, this is exactly how Sandby had developed his process. Even with Burdett's method (and seemingly examples of Le Prince's prints) at hand, he spent four months doing little else than experimenting with the process until he had devised a method that answered to his purpose.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Cozens would have spent significant time experimenting until he found a way to print the blots. It is an intriguing coincidence that some of Sandby's—and Greville's—earliest trials bear a striking similarity with the printed blots: their

¹⁰³ Isabelle von Marschall implies that it may have been Gilpin who shared the secret with Cozens, see *Zwischen Skizze und Gemälde*, 121. In fact, they were well acquainted. Cozens had been a teacher to Gilpin's father, and Gilpin himself owned at least one blot by Cozens, now at the Yale Center for British Art. Although the blot is by Cozens, it has been misattributed to Gilpin B1998.32.10.(11) based on an inscription on the verso with Gilpin's name. Cozens's relationship to the Gilpin family is discussed in Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 37–40. Barbier notes the similarities between Cozens's blots and Gilpin's picturesque sketches at various points in his text, see 52, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 261.

¹⁰⁵ Wiebel, *Aquatinta*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ Schwahn, 'Wege und Irrwege'. Indeed, Cozens's own recipes for transparent paper and different types of inks are far from clear.

¹⁰⁷ Only over the course of the century, with the rise of amateur culture, did it recipes become more exact, even though they still lacked the precision assumed today.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Sandby, letter to John Clerk of Eldin, 8 September 1775, cited in Hoisington, *Aquatint*, 89.

aquatinted areas are deeply etched and inked, with a crystalline and craggy quality to them that is quite blot-like (figs. 100 and 101).¹⁰⁹

Unlike Sandby, however, Cozens seems to have struggled to develop his process. About a decade had passed since Sandby's experiments, and the establishment of aquatint in British print production. By that point, aquatint had become less experimental and was being used mostly for topographical prints in illustrated books.¹¹⁰ Soft shades of aquatint were printed over a line etching and later hand-coloured with watercolour wash.¹¹¹ By contrast, Sandby's important invention of sugar-lift aquatint had largely fallen out of use.¹¹² The examples Cozens saw in exhibitions or print shop windows, or even those he may have acquired himself, thus presented a starkly different aesthetic from what he was hoping to achieve with the printed blots.

That he indeed struggled to find the right technique is indicated by a newly discovered letter published in the popular German review journal *Neue Bibliothek der Schönen Wissenschaften und Freyen Künste*.¹¹³ The letter provides evidence of the *New Method's* early international reception, previously unknown to scholars. It also helps illuminate the final months of the *New Method's* publication history.¹¹⁴ Written by an unnamed correspondent in London, the letter included an excerpt from the *New Method's* unpublished text in German translation, which, the reader is informed, had been communicated to the author by Cozens himself. The translation is closely based on the English text but summarises its wordier sections for clarity and economy. The English word 'blot' is retained as a technical term and not translated, highlighting the unusual nature of Cozens's proposal.¹¹⁵ It is difficult to get a sense of what the reviewer thought of the blotting technique. The only value judgment voiced concerns Cozens's prose (which the author finds 'bad and obscure'¹¹⁶) but there is no assessment of the content of the text. However, the

¹⁰⁹ For the aquatint by Sandby, see Gunn, *The Prints of Paul Sandby*, no. 193.

¹¹⁰ Fordham, *Aquatint Worlds*. On the inextricable links between aquatint printmaking and picturesque travel literature, see Ibid. See also Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint', 262.

¹¹¹ Clayton, *English Print*, 216.

¹¹² Griffiths, 'Early Aquatint'.

¹¹³ Anon., 'Auszug eines Briefes aus London von 11. Jänner 1785', *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste* 30, no. 2 (1785): 319–28. The treatise was also listed in Jeremias David Reuss, *Alphabetical Register of All the Authors Actually Living in Great-Britain, Ireland and in the United Provinces of North-America, with a Catalogue of Their Publications. From the Year 1770 to the Year 1790* (Berlin and Stettin, 1791), 93; and in Carl Heinrich von Heinecken, *Dictionnaire des artistes, dont nous avons des estampes, avec une notice détaillée de leurs ouvrages gravés*, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1790), 410.

¹¹⁴ By revealing the *New Method's* international reception and inclusion in a popular review journal, the letter also gives important hints about the ambitious scope of the project and the expectation for success Cozens would have been justified to place in it.

¹¹⁵ The German words 'Klecks' or 'Tintenklecks' would have been appropriate translations.

¹¹⁶ 'Seine Sprache ist schlecht und dunkel.' See Anon., 'Auszug eines Briefes', 320. My translation.

fact that the *New Method* was included in the *Neue Bibliothek* at all seems to suggest that the editors of the journal thought there was an interest in it amongst their readers.¹¹⁷

Importantly, the author of the letter also commented on the plates of the *New Method*, and thereby helps to further trace the timeline of their production. Although a first plate had been printed in May 1784 (plate 38), around the time the *New Method* was first advertised, the letter confirms that, by January 1785, i.e. shortly after Cozens's proposed publication date of late 1784, only a handful of the other plates had been printed. The remainder was promised to be completed in the following months.¹¹⁸ Yet, at this point, Cozens seems to have been unsure still about the number of plates to include in the *New Method*. While he had originally promised twenty-eight, in the review readers are promised forty. Ultimately, he printed forty-three. The revised and expanded text, which Cozens evidently had shared with the German reviewer, was by contrast, ready.

1773 to 1786

The previous two sections have demonstrated how aquatint facilitated the publication of the *New Method*. Around the time the draft was ready, aquatints were first being exhibited. The technique must have seemed ideal for Cozens's purposes, but due to the secrecy that surrounded it, he would not have been able to deploy aquatint before the early 1780s. Not satisfied to compromise, as he had done in 1759, he put aside the *New Method* in late 1775. Instead, he focused on the *Principles of Beauty*, which, although less well-known today, would constitute the financially most successful publishing venture of his career.¹¹⁹ In the beginning of this chapter, I noted that the *New Method* underwent revisions between its first draft of 1773 and its published version of 1786. This section will review the most significant changes and argue that we should understand them within the context of Cozens's continued engagement with printmaking, and especially with the lift-ground aquatint technique he was experimenting with from at least 1784.

¹¹⁷ English prints and publications were regularly reviewed in German periodicals, especially in the *Bibliothek*. The *New Method*, however, would have presented a rather unusual example of contemporary English publishing in the arts. See Clayton, 'Reviews of English Prints'.

¹¹⁸ See Anon., 'Auszug eines Briefes', 328. Indeed, plates 41, 42, 43 are dated 20 July 1785.

¹¹⁹ At 333 copies sold by subscription, Cozens would have had a turnover of £349-10s plus further income from non-subscription copies. Though it would not have made him rich, £300 was a stately sum. It would have been ten times the annual rack rent value of his Soho house, which was set at £30 p.a. in 1774. See 'Cozens, Alexander', Westminster Ratebooks: Property Values of Westminster Electors, 1749-1818', *London Lives, 1690-1800*, ratebook_18-1878 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, March 2018), Westminster Archives Centre [accessed 8 March 2021]. It is difficult to determine the monetary value of an eighteenth-century publication in today's terms, but rough estimates based on purchasing power would suggest a price of ca. £134 for subscribers and ca. £160 for non-subscribers. On evaluating historic prices, see www.measuringworth.com/defining_measures_of_worth.php [last accessed 9 February 2021].

The draft version of the *New Method*, housed at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, is an intriguing piece of evidence in the timeline of the treatise and in the development of Cozens's thought. The draft is written in an unknown hand, and it remains unclear when or how it got to the Netherlands. It is included in the 1795 library catalogue of the last stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, William V (1748–1806), and thus must have been acquired prior to the stadtholder's exile that year.¹²⁰ The draft closely aligns with the published version, in some cases anticipating the text almost verbatim, but also includes some significant differences. The close correspondence indicates that it was copied from Cozens's own draft. As it is written in the third person—replacing the 'Is' of the *New Method* with 'Mr Cozens'—this may have been one of Cozens's students. Only in one instance does the scribe fall back into the first person.¹²¹

The manuscript includes several references to the 'Catalogue of the Species of Composition'¹²² and 'Book of Skies'¹²³, and points readers to seven examples of blots, sketches, and finished drawings that are meant to illustrate the step-by-step rules of blotting, none of which are included with the draft. The 'Catalogue of the Species of Composition' seems to refer to the landscape types presented in *Various Species*, while the 'Book of Skies' may relate to the sky studies that today survive at Tate and the Hermitage.¹²⁴ There are no known examples of blots or sketches that would illustrate the steps described in the manuscript. However, in May 1774 Amabel Polwarth noted her intention to subscribe to Cozens's newest proposal, of which, according to her letter, examples could be seen at Boydell's. Although she had not seen them herself, her husband had. 'He did not like them at all, but he is no virtuoso, & can find no beauty in great splashes of brown.' In the next sentence, she seems to relate the examples to the blots of the *Essay*: 'Have you seen them, & do you like them as well as the first...?'¹²⁵ We can only speculate if these splashes of brown may have been blots Cozens had hoped to print as illustrations of his first draft of the *New Method*. In her letter, Amabel referred to them as prints, and it seems unlikely that she would mistake smudged blots for prints, given her own experience with etching. No such prints survive, but even if he had made any, these would likely have been etched in a similar way to those of the *Essay*. Regardless of whether the examples were printed or

¹²⁰ Isaac van Cleef, *Catalogus van de achtergelaten stadhouderlijke bibliotheek*, 1795, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, KW 133 B 27, f. 107, nr. 131. The presence of the manuscript in a foreign collection, moreover, underscores the previously unexpected early international reception of blotting that already became apparent through the review in the *Neue Bibliothek der Schönen Wissenschaften und Freyen Künste*.

¹²¹ On page 7, they write: 'To Practitioners in Designing Landscapes, I desire to make this Observations ...' My emphasis. See Cozens and Anon., 'Designing Landscapes'.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 9, 16.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²⁴ These are discussed in Sloan and Joyner, 'A Cozens Album in Wales, Aberystwyth', 87–88, 91–92.

¹²⁵ Letter from 19 May 1774, in County Record Office, Bedfordshire, Lucas Collection L30/9/60/32, transcribed in Sloan, 'New Chronology, II', 356.

smudged blots, what Amabel's letter makes clear is that by 1774 Cozens's plans for publishing the *New Method* had already progressed to the point that he was showing examples in order to encourage sales of subscription tickets. This makes it all the more surprising that he would abandon the project just a few months later.

The main differences between the manuscript draft and the published version lie in their relative theoretical ambition. While the *New Method* presents a highly ambitious theoretical project, as demonstrated in Chapter One, the draft is a more practice-oriented manual. Partially, this is reflected in their titles. The draft is titled *A New Method of Designing Landscapes by Invention Described in a Set of Rules*, whereas the 1786 publication is titled *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*. In its direct reference to Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, the *New Method* situates itself more clearly within a lineage of experimental image-making that would have been familiar to most potential readers. It also places greater emphasis on the aspect of originality in invention. These conceptual differences become more pronounced in the main text, with the *New Method* presenting a much-expanded treatise compared to the earlier draft. In *Designing Landscapes*, the focus lies on the technical aspects of blotting, whereas the *New Method* embeds its practical goals within a much wider discussion of the theory of blotting, the nature of artistic creation, and epistemological theories about the operations of the mind. Although both versions are clear in their purpose to encourage readers to invent their own landscape design, *Designing Landscapes* does not specify this goal as clearly as the *New Method*. Overall, Cozens's prose is less confident, and it is obvious that the published version benefitted from a rigorous editing process.

In *Designing Landscapes*, Cozens begins by laying out what he considers the problem in contemporary landscape painting, namely a 'barrenness of Conception in Composition' which, in his view, is more common than 'bad Execution'. The cause for this is not so much 'a Sterility of Ideas in the Mind, as the want of some Method of bringing them out.'¹²⁶ As such, the first paragraph is similar to that in the *New Method* but leaves out the wider context and root causes of these problems. While the *New Method* embeds the issue within contemporary epistemological theory, *Designing Landscape* jumps straight to the blotting technique, giving just a brief indication of how it works:

His method is this; he first possesses his Mind strongly with some thought or Subject for the intended Drawing or Picture, then takes a Brush dipped in Indian-Ink dissolved in Water and with the swiftest hand he makes all possible Variety of Shapes & Strokes upon a Peice

¹²⁶ Cozens and Anon., 'Designing Landscapes', 1.

[sic] of Paper confining the Disposition of the Whole to the form of the Subject in the Mind. This he calls an artificial Blot.¹²⁷

After arguing for the advantage of his method over that of Leonardo, he further specifies what a blot is. The structure of his argument is much the same as in the *New Method*. In 1773, he defines the blot as follows:

An artificial Blot is a production of Chance, with a small Degree of Design, for in making it, the Attention of the Performer is employed on the Whole, or general Shape only, the Parts are left to the casual motion of the Hand and the Brush.

The Blot is not a Design or a Drawing, but a Disposition of accidental Shapes, from which Designs or Drawings may be made.

It is a hint; or crude Resemblance of the whole Effect of a Picture, that is to say, it gives the Idea of the Masses of Light and Shade, as well as the Shapes contained in a finished Composition.¹²⁸

But in 1786, he seems to have felt this explanation inadequate. Instead, he writes:

An artificial blot is a production of chance, with a small degree of design; for in making it, the attention of the performer must be employed on the whole, or the general form of the composition, and upon this only; whilst the subordinate parts are left to the casual motion of the hand and the brush.¹²⁹

While this sentence was revised only slightly, Cozens inserted two full paragraphs between the first and second paragraphs quoted here. The first one cautions readers that ‘universal appearance of design’ often occurs when the artist directs attention to the particulars instead of restricting it to the general whole. While this is then not a true blot, if done judiciously, it can be worked into a drawing straight away and is not as such a problem.¹³⁰ The second paragraph is more interesting:

A true blot is an assemblage of dark shapes or masses made with ink upon a piece of paper, and likewise of light ones produced by the paper being left blank. All the shapes are rude and unmeaning, as they are formed with the swiftest hand. But at the same time there appears a general disposition of these masses, producing one comprehensive form, which may be conceived and purposely intended before the blot is

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2–3.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁹ Cozens, *New Method*, 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 6–7.

begun. This general form will exhibit some kind of subject, and this is all that should be done designedly.¹³¹

Next Cozens explains that

It was thought necessary to give this particular description of a true blot, in order to compare it with one, in which too much attention has been paid to the constituent parts.¹³²

The last sentence seems to indicate that the two paragraphs were mostly intended to address what Cozens saw as a common problem: a surplus of design and intention in blotting. But they also add another layer of meaning to the definition of the blot. The blot is now not simply ink on paper, but ink *and* paper together in a dialectic relationship as one unified whole. I will return to this in a moment.

Within the flow of the text, the paragraphs also form the basis for what follows and makes it easier to understand. At this point in the *New Method*, Cozens returns to the 1773 draft, combining the two one-sentence paragraphs into one and revising them for a more persuasive read:

The blot is not a drawing, but an assemblage of accidental shapes, from which a drawing may be made. It is a hint, or crude resemblance of the whole effect of a picture except the keeping and colouring; that is to say, it gives an idea of the masses of light and shade, as well as of the forms, contained in a finished composition.¹³³

Similarly, the following paragraph shows most clearly how Cozens's revisions created a more convincing argument and how he utilised them to embed blotting within a wider conceptual framework. Compare the 1773 draft with the published version from 1786. In 1773, he writes that

To design or sketch, is to put Ideas out of the Mind upon Paper or Cloth &c. in the slightest Manner. To Blot is to throw accidental forms on Paper from which Ideas are put into the Mind. /And as Accident is fuller of Variety than Design; so blotting must produce a greater Number of Variations than designing alone. / Designing is the delineation of thoughts, Blotting produces them.¹³⁴

Compared to 1786:

¹³¹ Ibid., 7.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁴ Cozens and Anon., 'Designing Landscapes', 4.

To sketch in the common way, is to transfer ideas from the mind to the paper, or canvas, in outlines, in the slightest manner. To blot, is to make varied spots and shapes with ink on paper, producing accidental forms without lines, from which ideas are presented to the mind. This is conformable to nature: for in nature, forms are not distinguished by lines, but by shade and colour. To sketch, is to delineate ideas; blotting suggests them.¹³⁵

Here, his insistence on the non-linearity of nature is a thinly veiled critique of the theory of *disegno*. Since there are no lines in nature, they are not needed in art. Form, instead, should be built by tonal modulation. As such, it aligns with the general beefing up of the theoretical ambition of the *New Method* compared to its earlier draft.

I will now return to the previous paragraph and its remarkable redefinition of the blot. When Cozens writes that ‘A true blot is an assemblage of dark shapes or masses made with ink upon a piece of paper, and likewise of light ones produced by the paper being left blank’, he makes clear that the creative potential of the blot resides not in the suggestive power of smudged ink alone, but in the interplay of dark ink and light paper, of positive and negative form unfolding as one unified whole across the picture plane. This kind of dialectic relationship, I propose, became obvious to Cozens through his continued experimentation with printmaking, especially lift-ground aquatint, and its native processes of reversal.

The process of reversal in printmaking has recently been explored by Jennifer L. Roberts.¹³⁶ She notes that reversal was common to all early modern printmaking techniques. A design etched or engraved into a copper plate will always print the mirror image of itself. In order to ensure that a design prints a certain way, its reversal needs to be accounted for by flipping the design. This was often done by duplicating a drawing on tracing paper, flipping it on its back, and then transferring the reversed design to the plate. Another way of achieving reversal was by pouncing, a technique whereby tiny holes are pierced through a sheet of paper, tracing the outlines of a drawing. This could then also be flipped, and the reverse transferred onto the printing plate. According to Roberts, reversal is one of several fundamental manoeuvres of printmaking, alongside pressure, separation, strain, interference, and alienation. These manoeuvres are basic physical operations that are native to print and have the potential to ripple out into other artforms like painting, sculpture, and so on. Roberts calls this ‘medium generativity’, meaning ‘a model of embedded material intelligence that assumes that specific ways

¹³⁵ Cozens, *New Method*, 8–9.

¹³⁶ Roberts, *Contact*, chap. 2. On reversal, see also Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 160–62; Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 38–42.

of thinking arise in specific material operations but can then go on productively to perturb other spheres of activity.¹³⁷ At the core, she argues, these manoeuvres reveal print's potential to generate meaning beyond representation, for example through their social and political resonances. (Pressure, for example, alludes to cognates like oppression.) As such, she relies on the idea that physical operations constitute a tacit intelligence with the power to shape thought in much the same way I do in this thesis.

Roberts describes her own experiments with the reversal of printmaking as 'almost like an out-of-body experience' that 'pulls you out of all your habitual postures. It creates an experience of self-estrangement that burrows into the spaces between intention and execution, mind and body, similar to the deep disorientation that a left-hander feels with a right-handed pair of scissors, or that an American feels when traveling in a country where people drive on the left.'¹³⁸ Citing the works of Jasper Johns and Vija Celmins, she argues that this experience of estrangement allows artists to disrupt the technical facility they have achieved in other media. Thus, it creates a sought-out distance to their own work and invites critical reflection.

For professional printmakers, however, the reversal becomes second nature. Although not a professional, Cozens, too, would have been familiar with the effects of left-right reversal. He likely etched often enough to be familiar with the experience, lessening its disorienting impact. In fact, he seems not to have worried about it too much. While reversal was critical for figurative compositions, especially of Christian iconography that ascribed different values to left and right, it seems that it was less important for the depiction of landscape, at least to Cozens.¹³⁹ Several examples discussed in this and the last chapter indicate that he tended not to reverse his drawings before etching and printing their designs.

Once he started working in aquatint, however, things would have been different. Aquatint not only entailed left-right reversal, as did all copper plate printing; it also necessitated positive-negative reversal. By the mid-1780s the technique was mostly being used to add layers of wash to etched outline drawings. For this, stopping-out varnish was applied to protect the non-printing areas of the plate, i.e. the negative form surrounding that which was meant to print. Sandby had invented lift-ground to circumvent this reversal of positive and negative form. This freed him from having to brush the stopping-out varnish onto the negative space surrounding his design. Instead, it allowed a positive design to be drawn or brushed onto a plate that would then

¹³⁷ Roberts, *Contact*, 4. She here argues against Clement Greenberg's influential concept of medium specificity.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³⁹ See the famous example of Rembrandt's etching of the *Raising of Lazarus*, wherein Christ, wrongly, raises Lazarus with his left hand due to the mirror reversal of the plate. Discussed in *Ibid.*, 41; Griffiths, *The Print before Photography*, 35; Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 162.

dissolve the stopping-out varnish coating. This way, a positive form could be applied and printed, circumventing the reversal that was inherent to aquatint.

Although we do not know exactly how or whose recipe Cozens acquired, it is highly unlikely that it was Sandby's lift-ground process. More likely, he would have had to experiment himself, playing around with repeated acts of reversal until he was able to print the blots. This would have, no doubt, highlighted to him the relationship between positive and negative form. Through the experience of self-estrangement, as described by Roberts, his experimentation with positive-negative reversal would have provided him an opportunity to see, experience, and consider the blots through the lens of printmaking—through its unique technical and aesthetic possibilities and restrictions.

Thus, while lift-ground aquatint enabled him to blot directly onto the plate and afforded an equivalence of process between blotting on paper and blotting on copper, it also revealed to him one of the central mechanisms of the blot—the creative potential that was released from the relationship of its positive and negative form as one dialectical whole. By redefining the blot in this way, he mobilised for it the logic of a printing matrix. Both print and blot prefigure the final image as a relationship between mark and non-mark, between printing and not-printing. In fact, Cozens did not distinguish between smudged blot and printed blot. In the 'Table of Examples' of the *New Method*, he titles each plate as '1. A Blot of the first kind of composition of landscape. / 2. Of the second kind' and so on. In the later plates, by contrast, he semantically differentiates the sketches and drawings. While plate 37 is simply described as 'A blot', the others are highly specific in their media description: 'A print, representing a sketch made out with a brush, from the preceding blot' and 'A print, representing the same sketch, made into a finished drawing.'¹⁴⁰ A blot is a blot, whether it's smudged or printed.

Ultimately, it is difficult to pinpoint one exact moment where printmaking and blotting directly inform each other, and what I have presented here is, of course, but one interpretation. Yet, what I think is clear is that prints and printmaking provided an important context for Cozens's practice of blotting. What began as a search for a suitable technique to print the blots ended up, at least to some extent, shaping the way he came to think about blotting. Printmaking provided a mindset and a body-set, to use Jennifer Roberts's term, to rethink the method.¹⁴¹ Moreover, it provided the context for his practice as an artist and teacher—from his own education to his early experimentation with printmaking as well as his collecting of prints and teaching of etching.

¹⁴⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 35.

¹⁴¹ Roberts, *Contact*, 45.

Logos to Eikon: Blotting as Pictorial Composition

To BLOT. *v. a.* [from *blottir*, French.]

1. To obliterate; to make writing invisible, by covering it with ink.
2. To efface; to erase.
3. To make black spots on paper; to blur.
- ...

BLOT. *n. s.* [from the verb.]

1. An obliteration of something written.
2. A blur; a spot.
3. A spot in reputation; a stain; a disgrace; a reproach.
- ...

We do not know if Alexander Cozens ever flipped through the pages of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* to look up the terms he was using in his publications.² In it, he would have found several definitions of 'to blot' and 'blot', with examples of how they had been used by the writers of the English canon. While none of the definitions quite capture Cozens's own idiosyncratic use of these terms, they map out the semantic field that readers would have associated with blotting. 'To blot' would have been understood by most as the act of editing text, of covering up the wrong word with a smudge of ink. Johnson quotes Alexander Pope's *Epistles to Horace*, in which the author quips that 'Ev'n copious Dryden wanted, or forgot / The last and greatest art, the art to blot.'³ The third meaning, which, at first, appears closest to Cozens's sense, also relates primarily to text: literally, the writing of it, when it is impeded by the spluttering of an overfull ink pen; and, figuratively, the unpleasant words that blot, or mar, the paper they are written on.⁴ Today, the most common definitions of 'to blot' and 'blot' retain this relation to writing and text. Across various contemporary dictionaries, 'to blot' is defined as drying a wet surface or substance with an absorbent material, such as the wet ink of one's writing, or the

¹ Samuel Johnson, 'To Blot' and 'Blot', *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1773), https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1773/blot_va and https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1773/blot_ns [both last accessed 17 September 2024].

² The *Dictionary* is not listed in the catalogues of his and John Robert's sales at Christie's and Greenwood's.

³ Johnson, 'To Blot'.

⁴ He cites Roger Ascham, a royal Greek and Latin tutor from the sixteenth century, and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. For further historic uses, see *Oxford English Dictionary*.

accidental splotches that might spill from a fountain pen, both of which can be dried with blotting paper.⁵

These definitions do not obviously relate to blotting as defined by Cozens, i.e. the deliberate smudging of ink for artistic purposes. But in a more metaphorical sense they link back to the conceptual underpinnings of the technique. Blotting understood as the ‘obliteration of something written’ evokes the broader scepticism towards language that is also evident in the *nota bene* Cozens prefixed to the rules of the *New Method*. As I discussed in Chapter Two, with the *nota bene* Cozens alerted his readers to the difficulty of explaining new and unusual methods, and, specifically, of doing so in writing. The *nota bene* suggests that written language is not sufficient to convey fully how and why the blotting technique works. It is only when an instructional text like the *New Method* is complemented with practice, or practical demonstrations, that its methods become fully intelligible. As such, the *nota bene* seems to highlight a more general scepticism towards language that hints at Cozens’s departure from the logocentrism of intellectual invention towards the iconicity of pictorial composition, from *logos* to *eikon*.

This chapter returns to these theoretical dimensions of blotting and considers the technique within changing theories and practices of invention. Blotting, as the ‘obliteration of something written’, I argue, constitutes a departure from text, and an embrace of the image, as the guiding principles of invention and composition. The chapter thus examines blotting’s role in what Werner Busch has called the end of *ut pictura poesis* and the emergence of the modern image.⁶ Drawing on the ideas developed across the previous chapters—the concept of ideas as images, the intertwined nature of theory and practice in the development of Cozens’s thought, and the importance of printmaking to the emergence of Cozens’s abstraction—this chapter argues that in blotting, a new way of understanding images emerges: one that emphasises visuality and pictoriality, and that clearly distinguishes images as a semiotic system fundamentally different from text.

I will begin with a discussion of traditional concepts of invention as they were developed, and as they came to be questioned, in art-theoretical debates from the Renaissance to the mid-eighteenth century. Specifically, I will examine the break with the concept of intellectual invention in the writings of French diplomat and art theorist Roger Piles. Against earlier theorists, who had understood artistic invention as a purely intellectual idea—a narrative subject matter formed in the artist’s mind, separate from the craft of painting—de Piles maintained that a painting’s invention was reliant on both an intellectual idea and its visual organisation on

⁵ See various definitions in *Cambridge English Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

⁶ Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*. See my discussion in the Introduction.

canvas through the means of painting. Thomas Puttfarcken identified in de Piles's ideas what he has called the 'discovery of pictorial composition'.⁷ I will then trace these ideas in early to mid-eighteenth-century Britain—in the writings of Jonathan Richardson and Joshua Reynolds—and juxtapose them to the profound pictoriality of Cozens's blots. While most writers embraced criteria of pictorial composition and visual order (such as the distribution of lights and darks, colouring, and the grouping of masses) for the criticism and judgment of artworks, as well as their aesthetic enjoyment, it was only in blotting that they were employed deliberately as a method of composing.

Intellectual Invention to Pictorial Composition

Formal analysis is a central skill in the art historian's tool kit. Its most basic aims are to differentiate representation and form, to understand how an image is structured and composed and how this structure informs the meaning of the artwork beyond the identification of what is depicted.⁸ These aims are reflected in standard definitions of the term 'composition'. While the *Dictionary of Art*, surprisingly, does not include a definition, the German *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft* (a standard dictionary in German-speaking art history) offers four distinct meanings:

Composition refers to (1) the arrangement of colours and forms on the flat picture plane; (2) the distribution of objects (figures, architecture, landscape elements) in the fictional three-dimensional space "behind" the picture plane; (3) the thematic and formal order or connection between individual objects; and (4) the technical process by which the painter organises or arranges the elements of the picture.⁹

Frank Fehrenbach, the author of the entry, notes that the conceptual history of the term developed in reverse chronological order of these definitions.¹⁰ Following this progression, 'composition' was initially understood primarily as the technical process of arranging the elements of a picture. This was described in Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte* (c.1400), which explained, for instance, how to determine the central axis of a fresco using a snap line in order to compose a figure around it.¹¹ Gradually, the term attained a more complex meaning and, in the seventeenth century, came to describe the thematic and logical arrangements of narrative subject

⁷ Puttfarcken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*.

⁸ This applies to both representational and non-representational images. For instance, diagonals are understood to evoke a sense of dynamism, whereas triangular structures impart a sense of stability.

⁹ Frank Fehrenbach, 'Komposition', in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2011), 225. My translation.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 227. For a detailed discussion of Cennini's *Libro*, see Puttfarcken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 49–53.

matter. Ultimately, it was reduced to a painting's flat and abstract visual order in the writings of early twentieth-century formalists like Heinrich Wölfflin, who paved the way for formal analysis. The historical development of these conceptual changes has been explored in detail by Michael Baxandall, Hans Körner, and Puttfarken, among others.¹² As a result, the gradual shift from intellectual invention to pictorial composition (captured in the second and first definitions) is well understood.

As these authors have shown, this shift originated in academic debates about the nature of painting in French art and theory of the late seventeenth century, and especially in the work of Roger de Piles. As outlined in my introduction, Puttfarken has persuasively argued that, prior to the emergence of the concept of pictorial composition, painters and theorists employed various other ways of creating and critiquing visual order in painting. For example, the bilateral symmetry that arose from Cennini's snap line, and that had characterised cult images for centuries before, was understood to emblematically mirror the divine order and harmony of the Christian cosmos.¹³ Other modes of visual order that predate the concept of pictorial composition, according to Puttfarken, include linear perspective and the effects of 'scale and presence'. Both modes created visual order by constructing a close relationship between viewer and work. Linear perspective created a unified geometrical space that aligned the position of the viewer in front of the picture with the pictorial space inside it.¹⁴ It was because of this extension of space that Leon Battista Alberti's (1404–1472) famous analogy of the painting as an open window onto the world made sense. Similarly, the effect of scale and figural presence of the monumental Italian Renaissance frescoes and altarpieces Puttfarken analyses integrated viewer and work into one shared space of perception.¹⁵ This could be achieved by painting figures life-size and by composing a work in response to the architectural space of which it was a part of. In his discussion of Titian's *Madonna di Ca' Pesaro* in S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, for example, Puttfarken demonstrates how the altarpiece is integrated into the architecture of the church, and how its visual order was designed in response to its position in a side chapel and with the goal of pulling in churchgoers from the central nave.¹⁶

¹² Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*; Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', chap. 1; Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*; see also the various chapters in Taylor and Quiviger, *Pictorial Composition*, especially Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition'.

¹³ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137–47. The image is composed in contrast to the established type of a *sacra conversazione*, which is symmetrically arranged and frontally directed to the viewer. The *Ca' Pesaro Madonna* has a highly unusual oblique composition wherein the enthroned Virgin is seen from the side.

The shift away from these structuring principles, according to Puttfarken, can be understood, at least to some extent, as a consequence of a medial shift in painting. The Italian works whose effects he summarises under the heading of scale and presence were executed as large frescoes or panel paintings. By contrast, the seventeenth century saw an unprecedented increase of smaller easel paintings.¹⁷ Due to their smaller size, these works did not evoke the same effects of scale or figural presence as their larger counterparts. While large paintings integrated the actual space of the viewer with the depicted pictorial space, the smaller tableau was a closed-off and pictorially self-contained entity that did not ‘reach out’ into the viewer’s space in quite the same way.¹⁸ In the former, pictorial structure depended on the specific spatial setting, for instance in a church or civic building, whereas, in the latter, pictorial structure followed solely intrinsic requirements of structuring a self-contained image field.¹⁹ Importantly, because of their smaller size, such tableaux were easier to take in at one glance, offering an overview that emphasised visual order and pictorial composition. In addition to Puttfarken’s argument, this medial shift was concomitant with shifts in spaces and modes of reception. The larger-scale works he discusses were bound to architecture and determined by a specific liturgic or civic function that orchestrated a viewer’s engagement with the work. The smaller tableaux, by contrast, were mobile and painted for a wider variety of often-secular settings, such as the private homes of collectors, the art gallery, or the Académie salons—spaces that presented paintings as autonomous works of art and thus afforded different modes and cultures of reception.

Puttfarken also points to the increasing complexity of narrative subject matter as a reason for the growing prominence of visual order in theoretical debates. In order to convey meaning effectively, the often densely-populated works by painters like Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)—which served as the paradigmatic example for discussions of painting in the French Académie through most of the seventeenth century—required that the viewer’s gaze be led through the composition step by step so as to establish a sequence that followed the logic of the painting’s narrative. It was exactly this narrative element of painting that fundamentally shaped the discourse about visual order and pictorial composition.

¹⁷ De Marchi and Van Miegroet, ‘The History of Art Markets’, 72.

¹⁸ On the term ‘tableau’, see Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 3; for its use in French academic debates, see chaps. 8–11; for its adoption in England, see 280–81. For an argument about self-contained painting in the later eighteenth century, see Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*.

¹⁹ For the relationship between bounded image field and internal pictorial organisation, see also Shapiro, ‘Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art’.

Intellectual Invention

The locus for these developments was the French Académie Royale de Peinture and de Sculpture. The Académie had been founded in 1648 to establish a national school of painting and implement a system of the arts that supported the interests and political aims of the absolutist state.²⁰ Set up in competition with the Académie de Saint-Luc (Paris's historic painters and sculptors guild), one of the Académie's central goals was the intellectualisation and theorisation of painting. For this purpose, from 1667, monthly *conférences* were held whose implicit aim was to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of French painting over both the artisans of the guild and academies elsewhere in Europe. Each *conférence* consisted of a lecture, usually dedicated to an exemplary work of art from the royal collection, and the subsequent discussion of the questions the lecture had raised. Lecturers reflected on both practical and theoretical issues that arose from the artworks they examined, while the discussions served to distil rules for painting that would benefit the Académie's students. The *conférences* reflected the diverse opinions of their speakers and respondents. Thus, instead of a coherent and dogmatic body of theory, as they have at times been understood, the *conférences* displayed a great variety of thought on art and art practice.²¹

Although speakers and discussants frequently voiced competing and even contradicting views, they were in broad agreement about the Académie's project of intellectualising painting. Central to this were basic assumptions about the purpose of art within society and the hierarchy of different artforms and genres. Like the Italian theorists of the previous century, the French academicians saw history painting as the pinnacle of artistic achievement, which—in its ability to depict deeds of heroism and the virtue of man, God's most perfect creation—was best suited to fulfil the Académie's intellectual and political aims. History painting, moreover, was a vessel for narrative subjects and moralising thought that allowed painting to take rank alongside poetry as a liberal art. Most *conférences*, therefore, discussed celebrated examples of the genre to determine what kinds of subjects were suitable and how they could and should be represented in painting.

²⁰ On the political context of the Académie, see Jutta Held, *Französische Kunsttheorie des 17. Jahrhunderts und der absolutistische Staat: Le Brun und die ersten acht Vorlesungen an der königlichen Akademie* (Berlin: Reimer, 2001). For a more recent and expansive assessment of the Académie's history and overview of the vast scholarship about it, see Christian Michel, *The Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1648-1793: The Birth of the French School, 1648-1793*, trans. Chris Miller (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2018). See also Hannah Williams, *Académie Royale: A History in Portraits* (London: Routledge, 2017).

²¹ Until recently, the *conférences* have been considered the embodiment of inflexible conservative academic doctrine. However, recent scholarship has presented more nuanced interpretations. The publication of all 388 *conférences* from 2006–15 has revealed an unexpected diversity of ideas that animated the lectures and debates. See Christian Michel, Jacqueline Lichtenstein, and Thomas W. Gaetgens, 'Introduction', in *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, ed. Christian Michel and Jacqueline Lichtenstein (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2018), 1–22. The original lectures are available in an online edition. See Jacqueline Lichtenstein and Christian Michel, eds., *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, 6 vols (Paris: German Center for Art History, 2006–15), <https://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/conference> [last accessed 21 September 2024].

The examples they chose included works by Raphael, Titian, and Nicolas Poussin but also classical sculptures like the Laocoon group.

One often-discussed *conférence* is Charles Le Brun's (1619–90) lecture on Nicolas Poussin's oil painting *The Manna in the Desert* (1638/39) from 5 November 1667.²² The lecture was published the following year by André Félibien (1619–95), historiographer to Louis XIV, who revised Le Brun's original manuscript for publication, putting it into indirect speech and summarising the discussion that followed Le Brun's lecture.²³ Although the lecture was not directly concerned with visual order, it gives insight into the speaker's and editor's implicit understanding of this order and related issues of invention. As Körner has shown, the *conférence* reveals an understanding of the image as a composed pictorial whole that integrates its various pictorial elements into one coherent whole.²⁴

Poussin's painting depicts the miraculous story of the manna from the Christian bible (fig. 102). After fleeing from Egypt, the Israelites were led through the desert by Moses and Aaron. Experiencing hunger and starvation, they prayed to God for salvation. Their faith was rewarded with a flock of quails that appeared in the evening for them to catch, and a shower of manna, a sweet bread, that covered the ground like morning dew when they awoke each day.²⁵ In Poussin's densely populated painting, the narrative is divided into three episodes, each of which is enacted by a group of figures. In the left foreground, a *caritas romana* group of a young woman breastfeeding her mother rather than her child is depicted.²⁶ The brightly lit group serves both as a visual entry point to the painting and as the starting point of the narrative. Opposite, a second strongly lit group collects the manna that has fallen from the sky. Through their strong lighting, the two groups are separated from a third, central group that occupies the middle-ground. Here, several figures bow and kneel before Moses and Aaron, thanking them, and God, for the miracle. Each group represents a distinct moment in the arc of the biblical story: first, the starvation and extreme desperation of the Jewish people; then, the miracle of the manna; and, finally, the identification of the miracle as an act of God.

Félibien's summary of the debate shows that not all academicians agreed with Poussin's approach of showing the three different moments simultaneously. To one anonymous critic, the

²² Discussed, for example, in Held, *Französische Kunsttheorie und der absolutistische Staat*, 93–102; Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 24–32.

²³ André Félibien, 'Charles Le Brun: *The Manna in the Desert* by Nicolas Poussin, 5 November 1667', in *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture pendant l'année 1667* (Paris: Léonard, 1668), 76–107, translated in Christian Michel and Jacqueline Lichtenstein, eds., *Lectures on Art: Selected Conférences from the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, 1667–1772*, trans. Chris Miller (Getty Publications, 2020), 68–85.

²⁴ Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 24–32.

²⁵ Ex. 16: 1–36.

²⁶ This was a common iconographic motif to depict desperation and hunger. See Held, *Französische Kunsttheorie und der absolutistische Staat*, 104–5.

inclusion of the *caritas romana* group violated the principle of unity of action, which demanded that a history painting depict a single, clearly defined moment in time.²⁷ This idea was based on Aristotle's *Poetics* and, under the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, had become an important criterion by which to judge invention in painting from the 1590s onward.²⁸ Following its first introduction to art theory, a history painting—like dramatic poetry—required the unity of action, time, and place. To be coherent in its depiction, a painting should display one principal action, which should occur within a precise time frame and in an appropriate place.²⁹ As it preceded the actual miracle of the manna, the inclusion of the *caritas romana* group, therefore, was deemed incorrect.

Le Brun, however, argued that, to tell a story effectively, the painter, like the historian, could not represent just its ending but, instead, had to narrate 'the entire subject of his history'.³⁰ In his rejoinder, Le Brun evoked a different principle of Aristotelian dramatic theory—the rule that a story should be structured into a beginning, middle, and ending to present a narrative arc. Another academician, likely Félibien himself, concurred.³¹ Only by showing both the misery of the Jewish people, the miracle that alleviated it, and the gratefulness they felt towards God afterwards, all in one composition, could the story unfold its full meaning: to demonstrate the graciousness of God that revealed itself in the miracle of the manna and in the progression from misery to relief.³² Félibien further articulated this view in his introduction to the published *conférences*. Establishing an analogy between painting and dramatic theatre, he explained that 'as in plays, the drama is not in its perfection if it does not have a commencement, a middle, and an end in order to make comprehensive the whole subject of the play'. Similarly, in painting, the inclusion of multiple episodes of a story can help 'to better instruct the spectator' by making clear the causal development of the narrative. 'That is what M. Poussin has done in his picture of the manna where one sees in the marks of famine what the Jewish people have suffered before they received relief from heaven.'³³

This understanding of Aristotelian dramatic theory gave space for greater complexity in the treatment of narrative subject matter in painting. It also raised the question of how an artist

²⁷ Félibien, 'Le Brun: *The Manna in the Desert*', in Michel and Lichtenstein, *Lectures on Art*, 81.

²⁸ The *Poetics* had been rediscovered in the late fifteenth century but had not garnered wider reception until a new edition was published in 1554. Only in 1591, were its principles applied to painting in Gregorio Comanini's *Il Figino, ovvero del Fine della Pittura*. See Fehrenbach, 'Komposition', 227–28; Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 24.

²⁹ A depiction that showed the Jewish people anywhere else than in the desert, for example, would have been inappropriate to the unity of place.

³⁰ Félibien, 'Le Brun: *The Manna in the Desert*', in Michel and Lichtenstein, *Lectures on Art*, 81.

³¹ *Ibid.*, n. 22.

³² Francis H. Dowley, 'Thoughts on Poussin, Time, and Narrative: The Israelites Gathering Manna in the Desert', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 25, no. 4 (1997): 330. Also Félibien, 'Le Brun: *The Manna in the Desert*', in Michel and Lichtenstein, *Lectures on Art*, 83.

³³ André Félibien, 'Préface', in *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, vol. 5, 6 vols (Trévoux, 1725), 313, quoted in Dowley, 'Poussin, Time, and Narrative', 331.

should structure a story to convey it in painting: which moments needed to be included to carry the narrative arc and its underlying meaning, which could be left out? In *The Manna in the Desert*, Poussin had selected three significant moments—before, during, and after the miracle—to demonstrate the divine graciousness of God that led the Jewish people from misery to relief and happiness. Not depicted is the flock of quails that fed them at night. Presumably, the birds seemed less clearly a sign of divine intervention than the manna, considering that they could occur naturally. As such, they did not contribute additional meaning to the subject. It was this selection that for Poussin, as for Le Brun and Félibien, was the true work of the painter.³⁴ Structuring a story into a narrative that could be represented in painting plausibly and persuasively, to them, constituted the act of invention. It was an intellectual task that qualified painting as a liberal art. To argue this point was central to the Académie's project of the *conférences*.

Closely related was the question of how an artist might depict a temporally unfolding narrative in a medium—painting—that could only ever present a single simultaneous view. Indeed, this concern figured prominently in Le Brun's discussion of *The Manna in the Desert*.³⁵ He not only analysed the narrative structure but did so by exploring how it was presented pictorially on canvas. He started out by describing the overall arrangement of the painting, which he systematically broke up into its constituent parts. Under the heading of 'disposition en general', he first discussed the spatial setting of the scene as well as the positioning of the groups in relation to each other and in relation to the disposition of the whole. Here, he pointed to the contrasting figures in the foreground, which imbue the painting with a sense of balance that is enhanced by the landscape formations in the background, which in turn mirror the masses of the foreground. In a second step, he analysed the composition of the groups and how the individual figures relate to each other. He showed that each of the groups consisted of a principal figure and several supporting figures. Only in a third step did Le Brun consider the figures themselves, describing their delineation and proportions as well as the emotions they expressed.

A central concern in Le Brun's analysis was to reveal the structural principles of the composition. He pointed out the larger structural analogies that interconnected the different parts of the painting on a microscopic and macroscopic level: for example, while the groups consisted of principal and supporting figures, the painting as a whole, too, consisted of a centre that was supported by its supporting groups.³⁶ Throughout his discussion, Le Brun aimed to integrate the individual forms with the overarching structure, and identify their effect within the

³⁴ Puttfarcken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, chap. 8.

³⁵ See Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 26–7 for an analysis of the painting's formal composition,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

arrangement of the whole. This he set in relation to the function the different groups and figures assumed in the narrative. Just as the figures contributed to the convincing development of the story, they contributed to the formal composition of the painting to create a harmonious pictorial whole. In other words, the unity of the action found its equivalent in the coherence of the painting's visual order. This methodological approach, as Körner has demonstrated, presupposed a notion of a self-sufficient, internally coherent pictorial whole.³⁷ Only in considering the painting as a complete whole, could the painter conceptualise a relationship between the parts and an overarching structure that organises the whole painting.

Pictorial Composition

For Le Brun, Félibien, and Poussin, the visual order of the painting was motivated primarily by its subject matter. The arrangement of groups, their placement relative to each other and the overarching whole, colouring and the distribution of lights and shade, as well as the expressive qualities or passions of the individual figures all served to convey the intellectual invention of the painter and to support the plausibility and persuasiveness of a painting's plot. A painting's 'disposition en general', therefore, was considered part of, but always secondary to, its intellectual invention. By contrast, in the thought of Roger de Piles, formal elements of pictorial structure attained aesthetic value in and of themselves. In his view, a painting's visual order functioned independently of its subject matter to attract and delight the viewer. In analogy to the unity of subject that guided a painting's subject matter and intellectual content, he developed the concept of the unity of object to denote the harmony of the picture's visual effect. De Piles developed these ideas in the decades following his influential translation of Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy's didactic poem *De Arte Graphica* (1668).³⁸ Over a series of treatises, most notably his *Cours de Peinture par Principes* (1708), de Piles further developed his commentary of the poem into a more systematic theory of painting.³⁹ Ultimately, de Piles transformed du Fresnoy's ideas into a theory of pictorial composition that functioned entirely independent from intellectual invention.

In *De Arte Graphica*, du Fresnoy and de Piles defined a number of formal elements of visual order they saw as central to painting. These included the distribution of colour and light and dark in a painting, which, for them, functioned not just as qualities of individual figures and

³⁷ Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 24–32.

³⁸ Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy, *L'art de peinture*, trans. and annotated Roger de Piles (Paris, 1668). A second and third edition were published in 1673 and 1684. An English translation by Dryden appeared in 1694, republished in 1706. In 1783, William Mason published a new English translation with annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

³⁹ Roger de Piles, *Conversations sur la connaissance de la peinture et sur le jugement qu'on doit faire des tableaux* (Paris, 1677); *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris, 1708), translated into English as *The Principles of Painting* (London, 1743).

objects but as ordering principles of the pictorial whole.⁴⁰ In order to be effective, a painting needed to be disposed in such a way that all its elements formed a harmonious whole. Everything else—design, delineation, and expression of individual figures—was ‘subservient to the overall effect of the whole picture.’⁴¹ The specific skill of the painter, as opposed to the philosopher or poet, was the ability to imagine, or foresee (*prévoir*), this harmonious effect in their mind before its materialisation on canvas.⁴² According to du Fresnoy and de Piles, any learned person was able to invent a subject for painting, but only the painter could foresee a subject’s disposition in this way—as a pictorial whole, harmoniously structured by colour, light, and dark.⁴³

Like Le Brun, the two authors subsumed disposition under the heading of invention. However, while the former insisted on the primacy of intellectual invention, the latter placed greater emphasis on disposition. Good invention was still important, but it was trumped by disposition. Indeed, as Puttfarken emphasises, ‘the success or failure of a picture’ depended on the effectiveness of its visual order. For even a well invented subject might ‘make an ill effect’, whereas an ‘ill invented’ subject could still result in ‘a very good effect’ and please the eye of the beholder.⁴⁴ The purpose of this overall effect or ‘oeconomy of the whole’, as de Piles called it, was to express the ‘quality of the subject’ and to convey ‘at the first glance of the Eye’ the ‘principal passion’ of the painting. For this reason, every element of the painting ‘should contribute to the Passion, so that the Beholder shall immediately be mov’d with it.’⁴⁵ Although disposition, thus, remained wedded to subject matter in its role of expressing the ‘principal passion’, it was not just an aftereffect of invention, as it had been for Le Brun and Félibien. Instead, the harmony of the whole was equal to, if not more important than, intellectual invention.

In the *Cours de Peinture*, de Piles attributed even greater importance to disposition. For this, he further developed the elements of disposition—colour, light, and dark—into more clearly defined categories of painting. Specifically, he distinguished between the general *coloris* of the painting as opposed to the local *couleur* of its objects.⁴⁶ The general distribution of light and shade, the *clair-obscur*, was separated from the particular lights of objects, or the *incidence of light*.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Körner, ‘Wahre Einheit’, 50.

⁴¹ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 264.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 265.

⁴⁵ Du Fresnoy, *L’art de peinture*, quoted in Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 265–66, (quoted without page number).

⁴⁶ De Piles, *The Principles of Painting*, chap. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 220.

In a chapter on disposition, de Piles explains the importance of these elements. On the one hand, disposition entails, among other aspects, the distribution of objects and the grouping of figures in a painting.⁴⁸ As in *De Arte Graphica*, de Piles explains that the distribution of objects ‘contributes to the expression of the subject, gives both force and grace to what is invented, prevents confusion in the figures, and makes every thing in the picture more clear, more apparent’.⁴⁹ On the other hand, disposition encompasses what de Piles calls the *tout ensemble*. The *tout ensemble*, or *the whole together*, results from the different elements of painting forming ‘one poetical whole’. Instead of appearing as separate entities, these elements are inextricably one.

The last point depending on disposition is, *the whole together*, which is the result of the parts that compose that piece; but the whole, arising from the combination of several objects, must not be like a number made up of several unities, independent and equal among themselves, but like one poetical whole [...]: For the effect of the whole consists in a general subordination, where the darks heighten the lights, and the lights set off the darks, and where the merit of each part is founded on a mutual dependence. So that we may define *the whole together* to be, *Such a general subordination of objects one to another, as makes them all concur to constitute but one*.⁵⁰

The aim of the subordination of objects and of the *tout ensemble* is to put ‘all the objects in harmony’.⁵¹ As such, a harmoniously structured painting is a microcosm that mirrors the harmoniously structured macrocosm of nature. Indeed, painting is governed by the same universal principle of harmony that permeates all of nature.

There is a harmony in moral as well as in natural philosophy; in the conduct of human life, as well as in the proportions of the human body; and, in short, in every thing that consists of parts, which, however different from one another, yet agree to make but one *whole*, more or less general.⁵²

And while each object in painting, as in nature, has its own intrinsic harmony,

they must all agree together in the picture, and make but one harmonious whole; ... they must all agree together in a harmony which unites them, and which, out of several particular *wholes*, makes but one *whole* that is general. This is what painting does, by the subordination of objects, groups, colours, and lights, in the general, of a picture.⁵³

⁴⁸ De Piles defines six parts of disposition: 1. The distribution of objects in general; 2. The grouping; 3. The choice of attitudes; 4. The contrast; 5. The cast of draperies; 6. The effect of the whole together. See Ibid., 58–77.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 64–5. Emphasis in the original text.

⁵¹ Ibid., 68.

⁵² Ibid. Emphasis in the original text.

⁵³ Ibid., 68–9.

As an effect of the general lights, the *clair-obscur* served to integrate the individual objects and unify them into one harmonious whole, the *tout ensemble*.⁵⁴ As Körner notes, the linguistic peculiarity of a hyphenated *clair-obscur* (in contrast to the previously common *chiaro e scuro*) is indicative of de Piles's concept of the *clair-obscur* not as a pair of contrasting lights and darks but as one whole.⁵⁵ While the particular lights and darks remained an integral part of painting in modelling figures and objects—and thus imitate nature—the *clair-obscur* and *coloris* as effects of disposition entirely depended 'on the painter's imagination' and served as a means of pictorial composition.

De Piles supports his contentions with a twofold argument. On the one hand, and by extending his earlier argument about the harmony of the *tout ensemble*, he asserts that the principle of the *tout ensemble* and the 'necessity of the *claro-obscur*' build upon '*the general Constitution of all Things*'⁵⁶:

It is certain, that all beings tend to unity, either by relation, or composition, or harmony; and this as well in things human as divine, in religion as politicks, in art as in nature, in the faculties of the soul as the organs of the body. God is one, by the excellence of his nature: the world is one.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the principle of the subordination of objects and the *clair-obscur* are, according to de Piles, effects of the physiology of the eye and the process of visual perception. First de Piles discusses the 'satisfaction of the eye'. He argues that, if presented with a multitude of disorderly sense impressions, the eye becomes overwhelmed trying to take them in all at once. The effect of the painting results in confusion. In order to 'hinder the eye from being dissipated', the painter therefore must organise the pictorial objects in such a manner that they are easily understood, with the principal ones dominating over the subsidiary ones.⁵⁸ Secondly, de Piles relates that the effect of vision is such that the eye at any one time can only focus on the object 'which appears in the centre of vision', i.e. that is positioned directly opposite the eye as illustrated in an accompanying diagram (fig. 103). Objects positioned obliquely to the eye are perceived by peripheral vision and appear blurred. In order to unify the objects and harmonise the visual effect they create, the painter needs to employ the *clair-obscur*:

The faculties of the soul are, at one time, taken up with one thing only, in order to act well; and the organs of the body cannot satisfactorily enjoy more than one object at a time; for if you set many before them at once, they will not fix upon any; and this multiplicity will divide them,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁵⁵ Körner, 'Wahre Einheit', 52.

⁵⁶ De Piles, *The Principles of Painting*, 226–33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 226–7.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 66.

and intirely [sic] take away the liberty of their functions. ... In the same manner, if we present to the sight many objects, distinct and equally apparent, 'tis certain, that the eye not being able to collect all those objects at once, will through their division have some pain in coming to a determination. Thus, in a picture there ought to be an unity of subject for the eyes of the understanding, so there ought to be an unity of object for those of the body. This unity is only to be procured by the knowledge of the *claro-obscuro*, and without it we cannot view an object with any ease or satisfaction.⁵⁹

The *clair-obscur*, thus, functions as a structuring device to create the *unity of object*, just as invention serves to ensure the *unity of subject*. While the *unity of subject* creates intellectual pleasure in the mind, the *unity of object* has the more immediate effect of attracting the eye and affording it visual pleasure.⁶⁰ This notion of an instantaneous effect that strikes the viewer at first glance was commonplace by the time the *Cours de Peinture* was published and served to communicate the principal passion and subject of a painting.⁶¹ By contrast, the effect of the *unity of object* was independent from concerns of subject matter. It was of purely visual nature and depended on an intuitive understanding of the general *coloris*, *clair-obscur*, and the disposition of the *tout-ensemble*.⁶² Moreover, it was not merely an initial effect that would cease to affect viewers once they had been drawn in to explore the meaning of the painting's subject. Instead, by affording the experience of absolute harmony, it was an effect of aesthetic appreciation that continued to affect the viewer independently from subject matter. De Piles elaborates this under the heading of *enthusiasm*.

Enthusiasm is defined as an elevated state of mind that is created by the creative work of the painter and released in the viewer in the act of perception. De Piles writes that the painter should

bring his work to the perfection of enthusiasm; whereas the spectator, without having the trouble to examine particulars, finds himself transported at once, without his knowledge, and, as it were, without his consent, to that degree of enthusiasm, which the painter inspires.⁶³

De Piles emphasises that *enthusiasm* rests on the *clair-obscur*. If employed effectively it 'raises the soul to a kind of admiration, mix'd with astonishment; and ravishes the mind with such violence, as it leaves it no time to bethink itself.'⁶⁴

An important goal of both *De Arte Graphica* and the *Cours de Peinture* was to recalibrate the relationship between painting and poetry that had enabled the members of the French Académie

⁵⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 273.

⁶¹ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 272.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ De Piles, *The Principles of Painting*, 71.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

to argue for the elevated status of painting as a liberal art. The analogy had not just helped raise the social status of the painter; it had also paved the way for a complex and rich theory of painting. For du Fresnoy and de Piles, however, this theory, based on the principles of poetic invention, had obscured the ways in which painting might be considered a liberal art on its own terms—not as an analogy to poetry but because of its genuinely pictorial modes of creating meaning. Central to this, as my discussion has shown, were the *coloris*, *clair-obscur* and the *tout ensemble*. However, it was the effect of *enthusiasm* these elements created that extricated painting from literary theory and the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*:

’Tis therefore to this just and reasonable pitch, that the painter, as well as the poet, must praise his work if he would attain to that extraordinary probability which shakes the heart, and gives both painting and poesy their greatest merit.⁶⁵

Albeit through its own pictorial means, painting, like poetry, ‘has the power to lift us out of our ordinary life and to transport us to a higher experience of an altogether different order.’⁶⁶ For de Piles, then, painting does not draw its merit through the invention of a narrative subject, but through its medial specificity, the effects of which make it an artform equal to poetry. Thus, through *enthusiasm*, painting, according to de Piles, constituted a liberal art in its own right.

Pictorial Composition in the Eighteenth Century

De Piles’s approach to pictorial composition marked a major shift in the concept of visual order. However, as Puttfarken notes, its break with earlier theories of painting—which seems so consequential from today’s perspective—failed to gain acceptance among his contemporaries in France. They criticised his separation of the effect of enthusiasm from a painting’s subject for diminishing the importance of the artist’s intellectual invention. Or they simply folded it into existing concepts of invention. Indeed, for most, de Pile’s concept of the unity of object could easily be reconciled with the Académie’s emphasis on the unity of action or unity of subject. The painting’s emotive effect of the *tout ensemble* was similar enough to the general expression of the subject. Moreover, the formal rules de Piles had defined (such as the demand for a centralised composition, based on the physiology of the eye), were considered as the most effective way to transmit dramatic content.⁶⁷ Later in the eighteenth century, however, de Piles’s distinction between pictorial and textual order would prove immensely influential. As outlined in my introduction, Rosenberg traces de Piles’s ideas in the writings of Marc Antoine Laugier and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁶ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 272.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 279–80. See also his more extensive discussion of the reception of de Piles’s theory of painting in France in Puttfarken, *De Piles*, chap. VI.

others. In his posthumously published *Manière de bien juger des ouvrages de Peinture* (1771), the art theorist encouraged viewers to observe paintings from afar, focusing first on the ‘ornamental harmony’ of the colouring and second on the ‘effect of the *tout ensemble*’ and the abstract character it expresses (such as greatness, splendour, terror, charm, delight, restlessness, simplicity, contempt). Only later is the viewer invited to move closer and inspect the painting’s individual parts, its figures and subject matter, to gain a more differentiated understanding of its meaning.⁶⁸

In England, writers were quicker to adapt de Piles’s ideas. The English portrait painter and art theorist Jonathan Richardson, for instance, ascribed central importance to pictorial composition. In his *Essay on the Theory of Painting* he wrote that

The Composition of a picture is of vast consequence to the goodness of it: ’tis what first of all presents itself to the eye, and prejudices us in favour of, or with an aversion to it; ’tis this that directs us to the ideas that are to be convey’d by the painter, and in what order; and the eye is delighted with the harmony at the same time as the understanding is improv’d.⁶⁹

Later in the text, he clearly echoed the words of de Piles when he stated that a painting’s composition, when viewed from afar, ‘should appear to be composed of Masses, Light, and Dark.’⁷⁰ He further explained that the *tout ensemble* and *clair-obscur* not only served to attract viewers but that they, purely by virtue of their abstract pictorial form, already held expressive affective potential.⁷¹

Richardson’s emphasis on the *clair-obscur* and *tout ensemble* as effects of the pictorial whole found wide reception by later British artists. Joshua Reynolds, who reportedly was inspired to become a painter after reading Richardson’s *Essay on the Theory of Painting*, placed similar emphasis on the overall effect of a composition.⁷² At several points in the *Discourses*, he discussed the harmony and effects of the pictorial whole as central to the management of a viewer’s visual attention. In *Discourse VII*, he writes that ‘A picture should please at first sight, and appear to invite the spectator’s attention: if on the contrary the general effect offends the eye, a second view is not always sought, whatever more substantial and intrinsick [sic] merit it may possess.’⁷³

⁶⁸ Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 34–35. See also Puttfarken, *De Piles*, 134–38.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1725), 118; see also Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33 and Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 282. Richardson’s reception of continental art theory has been explored in detail in Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), chap. 4. Puttfarken suggests that Laugier’s later understanding of pictorial form was shaped by his reception of Richardson’s writings, see Puttfarken, *De Piles*, 136, n. 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33.

⁷² Mount, ‘Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition’, 178.

⁷³ Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, VII, ll. 294–7. He echoes here de Piles’s contention that that a well-disposed picture with bad invention was preferable to a well-invented but poorly disposed one. See my earlier discussion.

Of primary importance to the work of the painter, thus, is the ability to bring together the different parts of painting—invention, drawing, colouring, light and shade—to form one harmonious whole, ‘so that the general effect and power of the whole may take possession of the minds, and for a while suspend the consideration of the subordinate and particular beauties or defects.’⁷⁴ To develop this ability, Reynolds recommends young painters to study the works of the old masters. They should pay attention not just to the delineation of figures or other details but to the general effect of the pictorial whole.⁷⁵ The best way to internalise especially successful compositions of general effect is to ‘make slight sketches of the machinery and general management of the picture.’⁷⁶

Reynolds’s own practice of sketching during his travels in Italy in 1750–52 is well known. Several sketchbooks attest to his artistic interests and ‘the variety of ways in which the young artist was looking at and interpreting the works of art he encountered’.⁷⁷ His sketchbook from Venice, today at the British Museum, demonstrates Reynolds’s interest in the overall effect of the paintings he saw.⁷⁸ Several sketches reveal his desire to understand how the Venetian painters employed *chiaroscuro* to structure their compositions. By mapping out the distribution of the lights and darks across the picture, sketches after works like Tintoretto’s *Miracle of St Agnes* in the church of Madonna dell’Orto flatten the painting to a surface pattern of light and dark (figs. 104 and 105).⁷⁹ Although the figures are still visible, the primary concern is with the painting’s *chiaroscuro*, which dissolves most of the image into masses of abstract form. Decades later, in his annotations to du Fresnoy’s *De Arte Graphica*, Reynolds described his process as follows:

When I observed an extraordinary effect of light and shade in any picture, I took a leaf of my pocket-book, and darkened every part of it in the same gradation of light and shade as the picture, leaving the white paper untouched to represent the light, and this without any attention to the subject or to the drawing of the figures. A few trials of this kind will be sufficient to give the method of their conduct in the management of their lights. After a few experiments I found the paper blotted nearly alike: their general practice appeared to be, to allow not above a quarter

⁷⁴ Ibid., XI, ll. 32–6. See also ll. 260–64.

⁷⁵ Ibid., II, ll. 178–88 and VI, ll. 286–300.

⁷⁶ Ibid. II, ll. 182–3.x

⁷⁷ Mark Hallett, *Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 82.

⁷⁸ British Museum reg. no. 1859,0514.304. The sketchbook has been studied in Giovanna Perini Folesani, *Reynolds in Italia*; Giovanna Perini, ‘Sir Joshua Reynolds and Italian Art and Art Literature. A Study of the Sketchbooks in the British Museum and in Sir John Soane’s Museum’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 141–68.

Reynolds’s compositional studies have been discussed in detail in Mount, ‘Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition’. See also Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, chap. 12; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33–4. On Reynolds in Venice more broadly, see David Mannings, ‘Reynolds in Venice’, *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1244, Art in Venice and the Veneto (2006): 754–63.

⁷⁹ Reynolds, *Sketchbook of Drawings after Old Masters*, f. 66 verso, after Tintoretto, 1859,0514.304. Discussed in Mount, ‘Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition’, 173. See also Reynolds’s sketch after Tintoretto’s *Last Supper* at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in the same sketchbook, f. 40 recto, discussed in Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 285 and Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33–4.

of the picture for the light, including in this portion both the principal and secondary lights; another quarter to be as dark as possible; and the remaining half kept in mezzotint or half shadow.⁸⁰

Reynolds used this method of sketching only during his travels in Italy but, as Harry Mount demonstrates, maintained the same interest in the pictorial effects of *chiaroscuro* throughout his career.⁸¹ Indeed, Reynolds further expressed his understanding of composition as a surface pattern in his *Journey to Flanders and Holland*, posthumously published in 1797 but based on a journey he took in 1781. The text included several descriptions of paintings like Van Dyck's *Christ on the Cross with Saint Catherine*, today in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schoone Kunsten in Antwerp, purely as masses of light and shade (fig. 106).

The conduct of the light and shadow in this picture is likewise worth the attention of Painter. To preserve the principal mass of light, which is made by the body of Christ, of a beautiful shape, the head is kept in half shadow. The under garment of St. Dominick and the angel make the second mass; and the St. Rosaria [St Catherine of Siena]'s head, handkerchief, and arm, the third.⁸²

Here, Reynold's capacity to think of pictorial composition in the abstract is clearly recognisable: Figures are arranged in masses and lit to form 'beautiful shape[s]'. Indeed, earlier, in his eighth *Discourse*, Reynolds contended that such masses of light and dark should be 'of a pleasing shape', whatever they depict.⁸³

Conclusion: Blotting as Pictorial Composition

It is highly unlikely that Cozens ever saw examples of Reynolds's compositional sketches. The Italian sketchbooks had remained in Reynolds's possession until his death in 1792 and were sold

⁸⁰ Joshua Reynolds, 'The Art of Painting of Charles Alphonse Dufresnoy; Translated into English Verse by William Mason, MA, with Annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1783)', in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Edmond Malone, vol. II (London, 1797), 246. See also Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition', 173; Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 33–4.

⁸¹ Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition', 177.

⁸² Joshua Reynolds, *A Journey to Flanders and Holland*, ed. Harry Mount (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44–45; cited in Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition', 177.

⁸³ Ibid. That capacity of *chiaroscuro* to afford visual pleasure was also discussed by William Hogarth. In *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), he explained 'that the pleasure arising from composition, as in a fine landskip, etc. is chiefly owing to the dispositions and assemblages of light and shades, which are so ordered by the principles called opposition, breadth and simplicity, as to produce a just and distinct perception of the objects before us.' (106) Elsewhere in the text, Hogarth 'repeated de Piles's analogy between a composition in which the light and shade is scattered in spots rather than arranged in masses to a gathering in which everyone talks at once.' (Mount, 'Reynolds, Chiaroscuro and Composition', 175.) That he was well-acquainted with de Piles's ideas is, moreover, clear from his satirical print lampooning de Piles's points-based system to rank painters published in the appendix of the *Cours de Peinture*. See Bernd Krysmanski, 'William Hogarths Kritik an der *Balance des Peintres*: Roger de Piles, Jonathan Richardson, Mark Akenside und Joseph Spence im Fadenkreuz der englischen Satire', in *Sister Arts: Englische Literatur im Grenzland der Kunstgebiete*, ed. Joachim Möller (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2001), 51–75.

only in his niece Mary Palmer, Lady Thomond's sale at Christie's on 26 May 1821.⁸⁴ Similarly, we do not know if Cozens ever read the *Discourses* or Reynolds's commentary on *De Arte Graphica*, which had been published in 1783.⁸⁵ Yet, he likely had plenty of opportunities to learn about, and engage with, the ideas presented in these texts. Indeed, it seems implausible that Cozens would not have been aware of the important role *chiaroscuro* played in relation to the effect of the pictorial whole in Reynolds's theory of painting. Cozens's repeated attempts to gain membership of the Royal Academy would suggest that he likely was acquainted with, and approved of, its official doctrine, as formulated in its president's writings. The ambition of the *New Method* relative to the Royal Academy's theoretical project has already been discussed in Chapter One. Moreover, he was acquainted with William Mason, who had translated *De Arte Graphica*, and whose poem *The English Garden* he quoted at length in the *New Method*.⁸⁶

Regardless of exactly how he might have become aware of these ideas, Cozens would have been familiar with the shifting notions of intellectual invention and pictorial composition I have outlined in this chapter so far. The idea that a painting could evoke emotive responses in its viewers purely by the nature of its visual order aligned with his own approach to the emotive potential of landscape painting.⁸⁷ Moreover, the concept of a composition as a purely abstract grouping of masses in light and dark, as I have shown throughout this thesis, was a central principle of blotting. Puttfarken argues that, following de Piles's 'discovery of pictorial composition' and its reception in the work of writers like Laugier, painters reflected more consciously on their use of *chiaroscuro* to structure their works.⁸⁸ However, it was only in blotting that these concerns solidified into a systematic method of composition. Indeed, Cozens's predecessors and contemporaries were concerned more with the reception of an artwork and its effect on the viewer than with its creation.⁸⁹ *Chiaroscuro*, for them, was primarily a category of

⁸⁴ Sale cat. Christie's, London, 26 May 1821, lot 64. See also Giovanna Perini Folesani, *Sir Joshua Reynolds in Italia: il soggiorno romano*, Biblioteca del CURAM 4 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2020), 387.

⁸⁵ The discourses were published immediately after they were delivered, with a copy given to each member of the Royal Academy. A collection of the first seven discourses was published and distributed more widely in 1778. An edited collection of all fifteen appeared in 1797, together with Reynolds's collected writings. See <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/archive/papers-relating-to-reynoldss-discourses> [last accessed 29 September 2024].

⁸⁶ See my discussion in Chapter One. Moreover, for about twenty years Reynolds and Cozens were practically neighbours. From 1764, Cozens lived at No 4 Leicester Street, just off Leicester Fields, while Reynolds had moved into his house in No 47 Leicester Fields in 1760. See Donato Esposito, 'Artist in Residence: Joshua Reynolds at No 47, Leicester Fields', in *The Georgian London Town House: Building, Collecting and Display*, ed. Susanna Avery-Quash and Kate Retford (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 191–210.

⁸⁷ See Kim Sloan's discussion of the emotive content of his paintings in *Poetry of Landscape*, 52–62. See also Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 339–42.

⁸⁸ Puttfarken, *Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 279.

⁸⁹ Only in the early to mid-nineteenth century do authors begin to integrate compositional criteria into the artistic process. Rosenberg lists as examples the writings of John Burnet and Frank Howard, see Rosenberg, *Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, 39–42. One notable exception is Baldassare Orsini's *Saggio sulla composizione della pittura* (1784), which

criticism and aesthetic judgment, by which good paintings could be distinguished from bad ones. Cozens, by contrast, transformed the appreciation of a painting's *chiaroscuro* into a technique of artistic creation and invention.

For authors like de Piles, Richardson, and Reynolds, visual order and subject matter remained intimately linked and, indeed, mutually dependent. A subject was chosen and structured according to both narrative plausibility and arresting compositional form. Only if pictorial structure and subject matter merged into a coherent representation could an invention be judged a success. The blots, by contrast, rested on an understanding of composition as the formal relationship of abstract masses that are 'rude and unmeaning' and, thus, entirely independent from subject matter.⁹⁰ The blots employed light and dark not as means of linking together the individual parts of a picture but to create a binary matrix of black ink on white paper from which an image emerges. For Cozens, the blots' abstract splashes of ink and masses of black and white serve as the starting point of his creative process, whereas for de Piles, Richardson, and Reynolds the painter begins with the selection of a subject, which is then formed into a composition. In Cozens, the abstract marks and shapes of the blot are imbued with meaning only in a second, interpretive step, when the blot is turned into a 'spirited sketch'. The subject comes second.

As I have discussed in Chapter One, for Cozens the abstract forms of the blot-composition are 'seen' as abstract idea-images in the artist's mind. In this, Cozens argues like de Piles, for whom the unity of object is 'foreseen' in the mind of the painter before the composition is materialised in paint on canvas. Again, however, for Cozens this is an abstract and flat arrangement of masses of black and white, whereas for de Piles this image in the painter's mind represents in detail the final composition, including figures, distributed in the pictorial space of the painting, carefully delineated and coloured, and then bound into the whole by the power of the *clair-obscur*. Ultimately, with blotting, Cozens profoundly reconfigured the artistic process: ideas or subjects are not conceived in an act of intellectual invention, or even by the choice of an object, person, or landscape to draw, ahead of their materialisation on canvas or paper; rather, they are 'drawn forth' from the artist's mind (or store of ideas) by smudged ink on paper. In their partial reliance on chance and accident, such as by the folds of the crumpled-up paper, blotting, moreover, releases control over the artistic process. The idea-image in the artist's mind that precedes the smudging of ink is refracted through the folds and creases of the crumpled paper, disturbing the flow of the ink and creating accidental forms.

presents normative criteria of how a painting should be composed already around the same time the *New Method* was published.

⁹⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 7.

As I have discussed in some detail in the introduction, Werner Busch has interpreted this move of the act of invention into the process of artistic creation as an end to the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*.⁹¹ Busch's analysis is based primarily on a comparison of Cozens's blotting technique and approach to landscape painting with the classical landscapes of Poussin and Claude Lorrain. While Poussin builds the landscape around the narrative he seeks to represent, Cozens begins with the abstract blots. Implicit to his argument—though he does not explicitly write this—is the idea that the technique, as a mode of invention, was a response to the problem of how to structure an ideal landscape that is neither narrative nor topographical but derives meaning from its pictorial form and the emotive effect it evokes. The heroic landscapes of Poussin were composed like a theatrical stage upon which a narrative scene was choreographed. A story was chosen, and the landscape was then structured around it, so that the narrative unfolded logically, and so the viewer could retrace the scene chronologically. Without such a narrative anchor, it was unclear how a landscape should be composed. Blotting presents an innovative solution: if the subject itself does not give indications about its appropriate pictorial form, or indeed if there is no subject in the classical sense, it is abstract pictorial form itself that guides the process of invention and artistic creation. What is presented in the *New Method*, thus, is a way of creating images that departs from iconographic and compositional conventions and instead embraces the visuality and pictoriality of painting as both a structuring principle of composition and a mode of invention. As such, blotting brought de Piles's arguments to a radical conclusion. While de Piles had begun to slowly chip away at the prevailing doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, blotting marks its definite end. Ultimately, in the *New Method's* theory of blotting, we can discern a complete negation of *ut pictura poesis*. Cozens's landscapes were to be viewed, not read.

⁹¹ Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild*, 329–54.

Conclusion

In April 1798, the celebrated embroiderer Mary Linwood (1755–1845) opened the doors to her remarkable Gallery of Pictures in London’s Hanover Square. Although not well-known today, the Gallery was an overwhelming success and toured through England, Scotland, and Ireland until it closed half a century later in 1849.¹ In it, visitors could admire Linwood’s needle paintings, which rendered in crewel wool the most famous paintings by leading contemporary and recently deceased artists. Included in the exhibition were examples after Maria Cosway (1760–1838), Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88), and George Stubbs (1724–1806), among others.

Linwood showed at least two needle paintings after Alexander Cozens, titled *Landscape – Sun Set* and *Gloomy Landscape*.² A few years earlier, she had exhibited five further landscapes after Cozens, which, Heidi Strobel argues, were likely based on plates from the *New Method*, of which Linwood owned a copy.³ None of Linwood’s needle paintings after Cozens survive but the inclusion of these works in her exhibitions indicates the lasting recognition that Cozens received into the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ More interesting within the context of my thesis, however, are the multifaceted intermedial relationships the Gallery of Pictures sustained and displayed and within which Cozens’s landscapes would have been viewed. Brushstrokes were recreated in thread, and the accompanying catalogue included poems and ekphrases that situated the embroidered paintings within a wider literary culture.⁵

Instances of intermedial exchange between different artforms similar to those in Linwood’s gallery could be found across many of the exhibition spaces that had popped up in late eighteenth-century London. Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery, for example, exhibited paintings depicting popular scenes from Shakespeare’s plays.⁶ Viewers would have been able to compare

¹ Between 1804 and 1809, the exhibition toured to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Limerick, and Cork. From March 1809, it was shown in Leicester Square, London, until 1849. See Heidi A. Strobel, *The Art of Mary Linwood: Embroidery, Installation, and Entrepreneurship in Britain, 1787–1845* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023). Linwood had first exhibited needle paintings at the Society of Artists in 1776.

² See Mary Linwood, *Exhibition of Miss Linwood’s Pictures* (London, 1798). In a later edition of the catalogue, she wrote: ‘Universally admired for his light and shade in bistre drawings, which are admirable, and his compositions from blots, of which he was the inventor. He was many years drawing-master to the Queen, and retained his high station until his death. / There are five landscapes in the collection, from this master.’ Mary Linwood, *The Linwood Gallery of Pictures in Needle-Work, with a biographical sketch of the painters* (London, 1811), 15.

³ Strobel, *Linwood*, 32. Linwood had also made landscape drawings using the blot method.

⁴ Works by Cozens were also included in an exhibition of British art organised by W.B. Cooke and reviewed in George Brewer, ‘Exhibition of Drawings and Engravings by British Artists, Soho Square’, *The European Magazine, and London Review* 83 (January 1823): 55–58. Cozens is discussed alongside the other ‘mighty dead’. These two examples show that Cozens was not forgotten soon after his death as has long been claimed.

⁵ Linwood, *Miss Linwood’s Pictures*.

⁶ The project included an illustrated edition of Shakespeare’s plays; the gallery of paintings; and a folio of prints after the paintings. See Walter Pape and Frederick Burwick, *The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery*, Exh. Cat. Museum Bochum (Bottrop: Pomp, 1996); Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a*

the scenes and figures in the paintings with the texts they had read or with one of the many stage adaptations they had seen in theatres like David Garrick's on Drury Lane. Boydell moreover published engravings after the paintings for viewers to buy, and it was the sale of the prints more than the paintings that made the endeavour financially lucrative.⁷ Similarly, a viewer in Linwood's gallery might have recognised her needle painting after Stubbs's portrait of the Duke of Marlborough's tiger not just from the original painting, but also (and perhaps more likely) from the immensely successful print after it (figs. 107–109).⁸ In both galleries, the paintings on display were connected with works in other media that circulated across a variety of spaces and formed shared networks of visual and literary culture.

Although Cozens's paintings were not translated into print and, thus, enjoyed less visibility than Stubbs's tiger, his work was part of the same distinctly intermedial artistic culture that informed much of late eighteenth-century British art.⁹ This study has argued that Cozens's work can be understood properly only when considered within this context. Throughout his career, the artist experimented with a wide range of media—drawing, blotting, painting in ink wash and oil, as well as different techniques of printmaking—all of which, I have argued, shaped not just his artistic practice but also his theorisation of it. As I have demonstrated, it was within a complex web of intermedial relationships and exchanges that Cozens's unusual technique of blotting took shape, both practically and conceptually.

The pivot of Cozens's intermedial practice and thought was his lifelong engagement with prints and printmaking. Prints had been central to the young artist's education in London during the 1720s and '30s and during his studies in Italy in the 1740s. They, moreover, formed a visual culture that highlighted to him the importance of de Piles's *clair obscur* for the effect of the *tout ensemble* of pictorial composition. Ultimately, they directly informed his theorisation of blotting. In preparing his manuals for publication, it was the technical possibilities and limitations of the printmaking techniques he employed that both enabled and restricted Cozens's ability to articulate his ideas visually. This is most clearly visible in the rejection of the light blot in the *Essay*, and in the conceptual changes between the draft (*Designing Landscapes*) and published

National Aesthetic (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); Thora Brylowe, *Romantic Art in Practice: Cultural Work and the Sister Arts, 1760–1820*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 122 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chap. 3.

⁷ See my discussion of the print market in late eighteenth-century London in the introduction, 28–32.

⁸ Stubbs painted three versions of this painting, of which two are in private collections and one is at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art. The illustration version is the so-called Mellon version in Virginia, whereas the print was engraved after the so-called Marlborough version, owned by the Duke of Marlborough, Blenheim Palace. See Judy Egerton's lot essay for Sale Cat. Christie's, London, 8 June 1995, lot 64, <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-260346> [last accessed 8 October 2024].

⁹ The profoundly intermedial nature of British art during this period was recently explored at the conference *The Intermedial Eighteenth Century: Textual and Visual Arts, 1660–1832*, 14–18 September 2020, organised by Dr Claudine van Hensbergen.

versions of the *New Method*. While Cozens's technique of blotting in the 1750s relied on what he later called a light blot—whereby a faint layer of wash is applied broadly across a sheet of paper—the technique of line etching did not allow for the printing of tone. This inability to print the wash eventually led Cozens to abandon the light blot in the publication of the *Essay*. Instead, he conceptualised his early blots as 'black sketches'. In the 1770s, the technical limitations of printmaking once more impacted his ability to publish the blotting technique. While the draft for *Designing Landscapes* was ready by 1773, publication was delayed by thirteen years. Only in the early 1780s, was Cozens able to obtain a recipe for the newly invented aquatint technique. As I have shown in Chapter Three, the technical characteristics of sugar-lift aquatint—the various steps of reversal it required—highlighted to Cozens the dialectical relationship of black ink and white paper as one unified whole that in the published text became central to his definition of the blot as an entirely abstract configuration of form.

The different printmaking techniques of the two publications, moreover, mirrored the conceptual differences of the blots. While the linear etching technique was appropriate for the 'black sketches', it fundamentally contradicted the abstract formalism of the later blots as masses of light and dark. Conceptually, the blots of the *Essay* were considered sketches, whereas in the *New Method* Cozens carefully distinguished between sketch and blot. One 'delineates ideas', the other 'suggests them.'¹⁰ As such, the two publications implied fundamentally opposing definitions of the process of artistic creation. In the *Essay*, ideas were formed in the artist's mind and then materialised on paper as 'black sketches'. In the *New Method*, unmeaning forms and masses (based on abstract idea-images in the mind) were smudged onto paper as blots to then suggest ideas to the mind. In the end, it was the material engagement with different techniques of printmaking that led Cozens to formulate his conception of artistic creation not as an act of intellectual invention but as a material process of pictorial composition. The *New Method*, thus, marks a profound break with a century-long tradition of art theory that emphasised the ability of the painter to form intellectual ideas as the foundation of art. Cozens's self-assertive images emancipated painting from other artforms, drawing on the analogy of *ut pictura poesis*.

Finally, this thesis offers not just a re-interpretation of Cozens's technique of blotting and the question of how the artist came to theorise his blots as abstract form. It also provides a case study of the theoretical potential of prints—their ability to shape and participate in aesthetic debates. Although prints and practices of printmaking continue to suffer from their marginal status in art history—and especially within an art theory that was articulated primarily as a theory of painting—my research demonstrates the crucial roles they have played in the theorisation of

¹⁰ Cozens, *New Method*, 9.

art.¹¹ As such, it offers a platform on which future scholarship can build new understandings of the visual culture of the later eighteenth century and beyond.

¹¹ On the marginal status of prints in art history, see the introduction to Roberts, *Contact*.