

Hyperion Volume II, No. 4 (December 2007)

Water Ambient Through Water

Georges Seurat: The Drawings

by Mark Daniel Cohen

Why Serra Matters

Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years

by Mark Daniel Cohen

Nietzsche and the Future of Art

by Friedrich Ulfers and Mark Daniel Cohen

a review of

'Verwandt-Verwandelt'

Nietzsche's Presence in Rilke

by Angela C. Holzer, Princeton

Nietzsche: A Selection of Poems

Translated by Mark Daniel Cohen

Renati the King

A Play; Intro by Rainer J. Hanshe

by Gian DiDonna

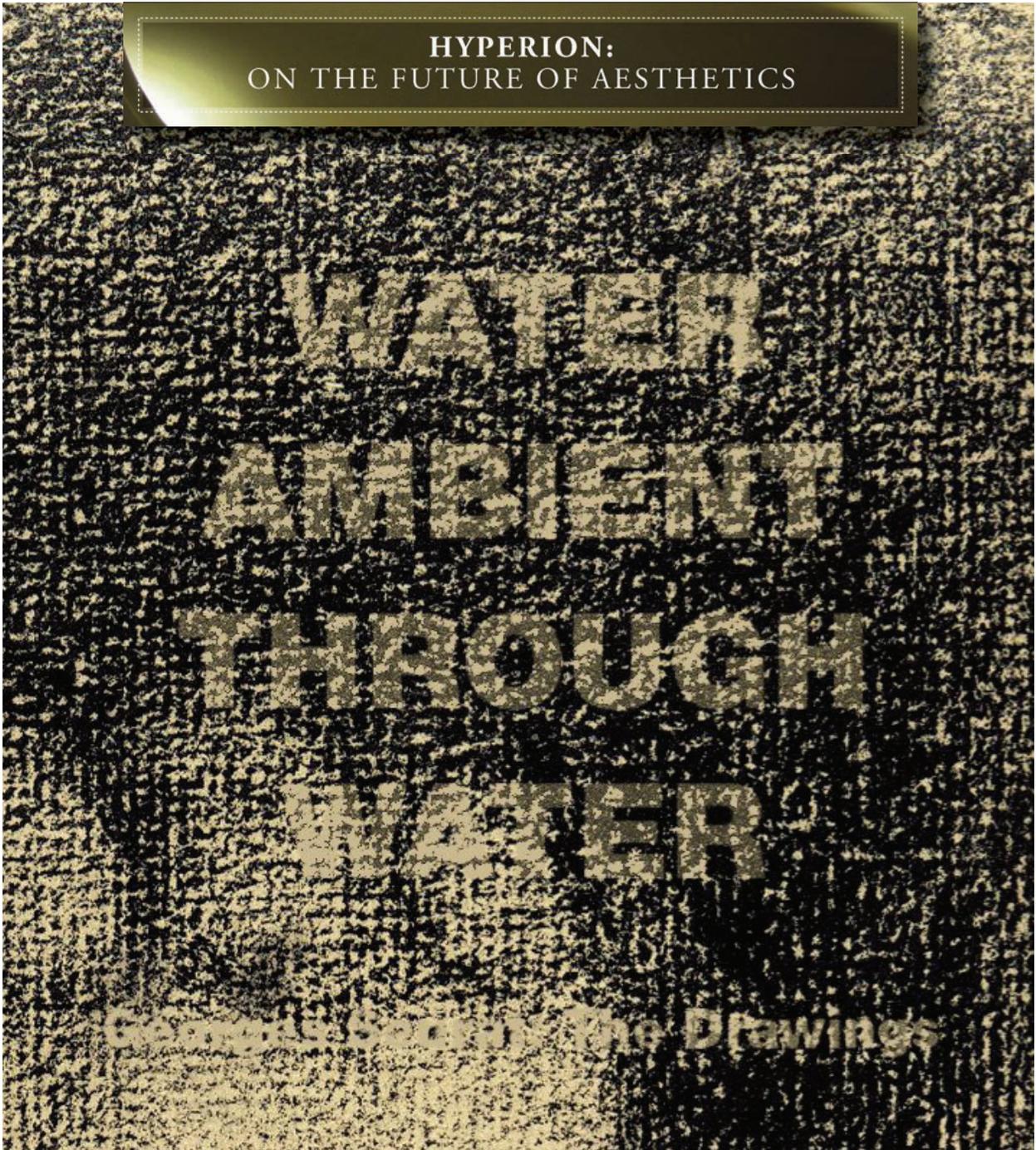
Water Ambient Through Water

by Mark Daniel Cohen

Georges Seurat: The Drawings

Hyperion, Volume II, issue 4, December 2007

**HYPERION:
ON THE FUTURE OF AESTHETICS**



Georges Seurat: The Drawings
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
October 28, 2007 – January 7, 2008

by Mark Daniel Cohen



| What we were water ambient through water.

Drawing is a reduction of visual art to its essentials, a drawing perhaps of the principle of art itself down to the essentials. Its character is the character of art distilled, stripped down to its purest form, to its clearest rendition—to the thing itself. Cleansed to the merest of its means, it is the thing laid bare. To discover what typifies the aesthetic—what constitutes the distinguishing aspects of the artistic provocation, of the lyrical amplification, of the singing of existence—one may study what constitutes an adequacy in the practice of draftsmanship. What a drawing is, is what art does.

For drawing is art done without the assembled technology, without the machinery for the transposition of gesture into something other than gesture—into color, or volume, or stage-set environment. It is the artist left strictly to the artist's own devices, to personal wherewithal, reliant on the thinnest of mechanisms for the laying of the hand—capable, if capable at all, through a stick of burnt wood, or compressed graphite, or medium stained into tones. A drawing is the closest thing to the artist laying hand to the atmosphere—to figures cut in the air. A drawing is merely what the artist does—there is nothing more available to help.

Nothing but gesture, but a drawing is clearly more than merely gesture, and so the gesture is not merely its literal self. This strikes to the core, for in its essential nature art is, and hence drawing is *in extremis*, an alternative to literal-mindedness. Art is an alternate form of thought, another manner of perception and conception, other than the normatives of quotidian/utilitarian negotiation. It is what I once heard love defined as being—a special appreciation. Nothing artistically perceived, conceived, and stated is literally intended, or to be more precise, literally significant. The aesthetic quality of any conception and expression is in the other-than-literal aspect of the statement—in the added substance of it, the superfluous part, the unneeded detail, unneeded for anything but the art of the thing. The art is in the extra resonance.

It is thus that drawing is not to be defined as a copying. It is not concerned with a fidelity to nature, not with a literal rendition, a literal recomposition. Drawing is a composition, a coalescing, of an initial, an anterior stance. An incipient composing, a drawing is then not a matter of realism, not a manner of it. In fact, the devotion of good drawing dissolves the distinction between

realism and abstraction, for if one pole of an opposition is eliminated, both go, each being defined by the other. The very issue of realism is an irrelevance. The art of the drawing lies elsewhere.

Drawing is then definable only in terms of drawing. It is a thing *sui generis*—a thing unto itself, reducible to nothing else, built out of nothing else. It is a result of, an exercising of, a distinctive capability, a unique endowment to see, to conceive—to appreciate. It is a talent, if you will.

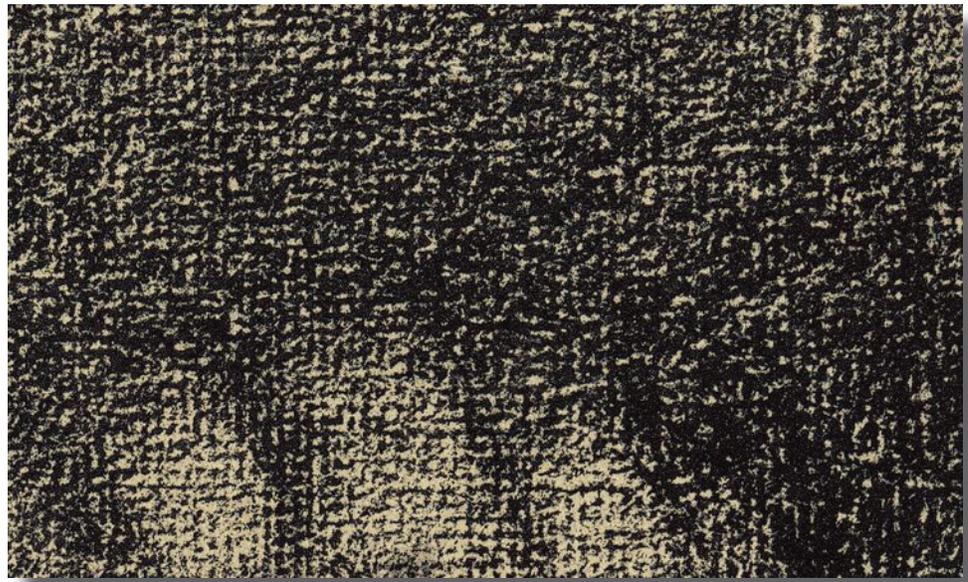
And it is something of astonishment to see the real thing. To witness an authentic drawing is like hearing music in virtuoso performance. One is confronting something almost inhuman, something of the essence of what is human but in the purity, the absoluteness, of its rendition, so far past the range of our ordinary natures, a commission so much beyond the limits of ordinary action, it seems nearly alien to us—a thing so purely us that it is nothing like us. Of our natures and yet nothing of our natures—the difference between the representative and the exemplary. There is something shocking in it. We are, in our potential, more than we know, and drawing is our potential realized on its own terms. Drawing is what we are—amplified to the increment of astonishment. Which is to say, merely, that a drawing is an act of love.

There is something of astonishment, and the evidence of the gesturings of love, in the exhibition of the drawings of Georges Seurat at the Museum of Modern Art. Covering the entirety of Seurat's career, the exhibition includes 138 works, the vast majority of them drawings (119 out of the more than 500 he created, according to press materials distributed by the museum), ranging from examples of his academic training, dating from 1875, to drawings done in the few years before his death in 1891. Included along with the drawings are a handful of paintings, several sketch books, and a letter.

Many of Seurat's drawings were done as studies for his large-scale paintings, several oil studies for which are interspersed among the drawings, helping to orient those that are pertinent. But the far larger number of the drawings were done as independent works, executed apart from plans for the paintings. Or, more accurately, they for the most part were done to the purpose of developing a distinctive technique, a drawing technique, that has everything to do with Seurat's primary achievement: the painting style for which and by which he is known—pointillism.

Of course, the majority of the drawings are those one knows to come for—the works in Conté crayon. Developed in the late eighteenth century, Conté crayons are a relatively waxy drawing implement made of, initially, graphite or charcoal mixed into a wax or clay binder. Seurat's use of the implement is distinctive and masterful to a degree not seen before or since among the principal populating figures of art history. Seurat did not so much sketch with the tool as use it to hone darkness and light. His technique was to stroke

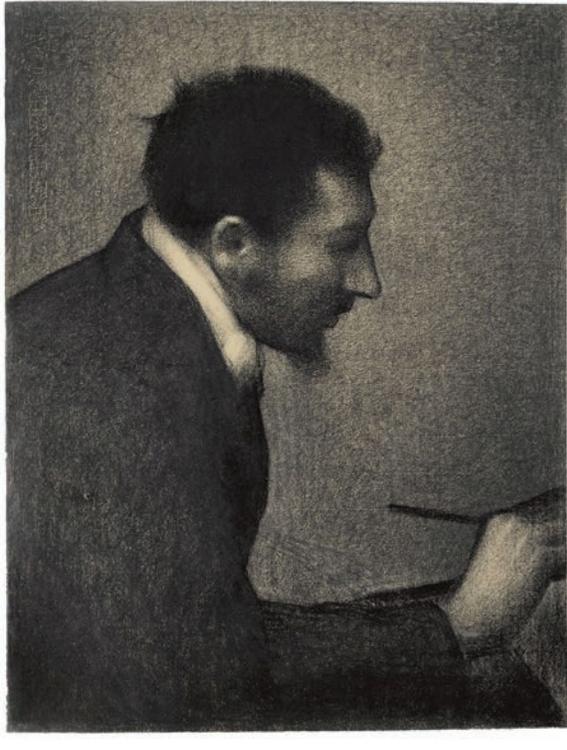
the surface of the support with varying, intricately modulated degrees of pressure, rendering an unbroken field of grey that densified continuously across the surface, moving restlessly from light to dark to light. Working on Michallet paper—a paper with a “heavy” tooth,



a rough surface—the crayon picked up and emphasized the texture of the paper, precisely what it is its virtue to do. The tonalities of the drawings shift constantly from a black so heavy as to eliminate any visual sign of the tooth (at the greatest pressure), through varying shades of grey that are ridged and intricate with the paper’s terrain, to a nearly pure white (at the lightest pressure). The elements of foreground and background are configured by the modulations of tone. They are not outlined, not defined by evident, denoted edges. Rather, they form before the eye through modulations of shade that have been cast among a continuous field of modulating shade. The figures are not in a literal sense “drawn”—instead, they emerge out of the darkness. They virtually coalesce out of the rendered black, congeal out of a continuity of densifying and rarefying extension—they arise, apparently, out of what they are implicitly and necessarily a portion of.

What is impressive and masterful here is not so much the idea of this technique—the thought of doing it at all—as the execution. The idea of “painting” with a drawing implement—of working continuously across a surface, of “painting” the surface with an unbroken laying on of medium—is, itself, not unknown or less than obvious. What is visually stunning here is the combination of elements in the technique, the application of the idea of “painting” on *this* drawing paper with *this* drawing tool. The visual complexity of the continuous tooth of the paper in varying densities is entirely different in effect from the “painting” (with any medium) of a smooth surface of varying hue or tone. If one looks carefully, if one looks properly, what one sees first is not urban scenes or entertainers in a café or picnickers by a lake. What one sees is the intricately textured modulating field—with a keen eye, what one sees is the tooth, in a dance of structure. What Seurat has rendered is not so

Close-up of Seurat's drawing textures
from Georges Seurat, *The Echo (study for Bathing Place, Asnières)*, 1883
Conté crayon on paper, 12 5/16 x 9 7/16 inches (31.2 x 24 cm)
Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Edith Malvina K. Wetmore
(Shown in full on last page.)



Georges Seurat, *Aman-Jean*, c. 1882–83
Conté crayon on paper, 24 1/2 x 18 3/4 inches (62.2 x 47.6 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Stephen C. Clark,
1960 (61.101.16)

much figures and settings as the paper itself, as an apparent physical reality, as an evidently thick fact, and, from that vision of continuity, figures and objects and settings seem to form.

At their best, these drawings have an apparent reality of their own, an apparent reality in that third sense: not as physically and evidently (evident immediately to the eye) real instances of worked paper (their literal factuality), and not as evident simulations of images one might have seen in reality, as reproductions of something that could have been observed on its own (their representational factuality), but as objects themselves of an imagination, as dreams made objectively real, as visions congealed, as something subjective become something objective, something conjured by the spell of art. Three distinct things superimposed—the referential simulation, the composing elements of paper and pigment, and the envisioning of the mind emerged from the mind.

At their best, these drawings have a near photographic conviction and power of simulation, so effective, at least with regard to the texturing of visuality, is Seurat's technique at fulfilling the second function of the rendition, that of representation. In photographs, as in the reality that greets the eye, nothing is outlined, with such an intricate degree of absence of outline that normative visual reality is virtually defined by the lack of the bounding line. It is this fact as much as anything else that gives photography its assumed and apparent extent of "realism." In works such as *Aman-Jean*, c.1882-83, as much as one knows the work and knows that it is a drawing, as often as one has seen it or reproductions and knows (one thinks) better than to be taken in, upon seeing the thing in the "flesh," one believes one is viewing a photographic image, one believes one is viewing a "shot" taken of reality, which one is, as much as if one literally were witnessing that other artificiality of photography. With *Embroidery (The Artist's Mother)*, c.1882-83, the texturing is precisely right, but the figure of the women sewing is too abstracted, too boxy and simplified and unlikelike (as is often the case with Seurat) to carry the conviction of the unprepared gaze, the conviction that one is seeing or as good as seeing the real thing. But this is as unlike a drawing, or a nominal work of handmade art, as it is unmediated reality, and what one is convinced of, despite what one knows (which is what conviction means), is that this is some third thing, some thing brought straight from the mind and dropped like a pollinating germ into the precincts of our otherwise common and, for some,

uncommonly tedious, natural habitat—something of the imagination made tangible fact. This drawing is like nothing else, except its kin.

And so, this and its kin, most of the works that occupy this exhibition, are as unlike drawing as they are unlike all else. And so, we are compelled to ask: just what do we have here and just what is it worth? How are we to judge it? How are we to comprehend or recognize its indispensability, to determine if it has indispensability? It is a question that confronts all avant garde art, and a question that remains with us now particularly, after a century and more of artistic adventure, and as we continue to wrestle over the worth and inheritance, over the implications of the advent, of abstract art, the mode which these drawings and the paintings to which they contributed did much to bring about.

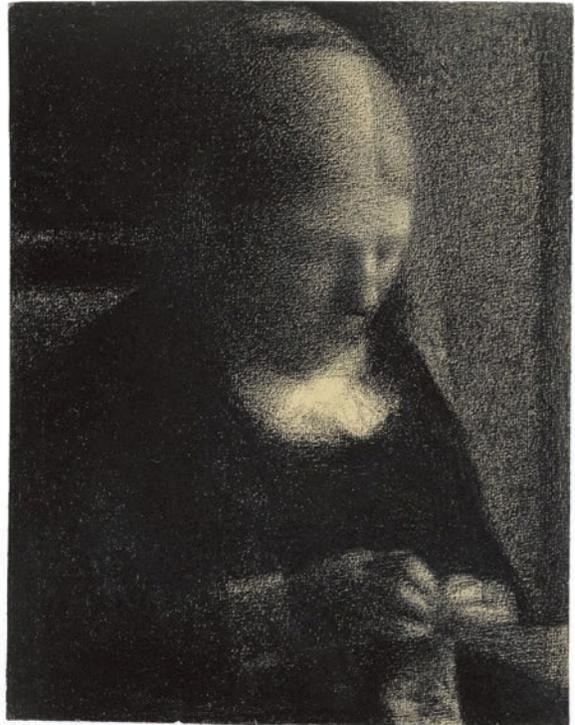
For the fact is, must be, that if one changes the rules of the game, then it is difficult, it is meaningless, for others to subsequently assert the fact of one's doing well at the game, of one's "winning" at the game in some way, and it forces those who later witness one's achievement to seek to devise some standards by which one can be evaluated, according to which one can be lauded to some degree comparable to the dazzle of the accomplishment of what was evidently difficult to do. In short, just what kind of art is this, and is this art at all? For it is irrevocably the case that the mere fact one can do something well does not imply that the thing is worth doing in the first place. That determination still has to be made. What have we got here?



Not everything that is more difficult is more meritorious.
—St. Thomas Aquinas

What we unquestionably have here are drawings, for that is what these literally are—it is what they are in the first sense because it is how they are made, it is the principle upon which they are built. And we must begin with the defining standards of drawing, and for that, we can do little better than resort to the requirements of one of the inescapable masters of the medium, William Blake, who made his principal requirement vocably and ferociously clear.

For Blake, it is the line that is the heart, the very essence, of art, and of beauty.



Georges Seurat, *Embroidery (The Artist's Mother)*, c. 1882-83
Conté crayon on paper, 12 5/16 x 9 7/16 inches (32 x 24 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1951; acquired from The Museum of Modern Art, Lillie P. Bliss Collection (55.21.1)

“

Every Line is the Line of Beauty it is only fumble & Bungle which cannot draw a Line this only is Ugliness[.] That is not a Line which Doubts & Hesitates in the Midst of its Course

The line is the mark and sign of sureness—of thought, of imagination, of the hand in action, directed by the imagination. Hesitation shows, for the smoothness of the line is the result of the unbroken dance of inspired thought. The hesitant line, the broken line, comes of doubt, of falter, of a lack of conviction. It is the mark of the absence of something more significant than mere craft, for craft will not produce it. The beautiful line is the dance of the mind, for all else in art can be manufactured deliberately but the line is more than deliberate—it is certain.

Blake sees the choice in art as falling between two approaches to rendition: the line and the tint.

“

They say there is no Strait Line in Nature this Is a Lie like all that they say, For there is Every Line in Nature But I will tell them what is Not in Nature. An Even Tint is not in Nature it produces Heaviness.

It cannot dance. And it should be noted that the monumental artists of all eras in our tradition can be seen to resort to the line, to the sure smoothness of a defining lineament, at the core of their conception. To take the matter at its height, Michelangelo conceived along an S-curve—it can be seen in every one of his major compositions. The David, particularly—the spine of the figure demonstrates an impeccable S-curve from every angle of observation—a seemingly, until you see it, impossible conception.

But it is, for Blake, the character of the “Moderns” among artists to do otherwise, to prefer otherwise, and it tells us that the movement to the flushing field of tone preceded Seurat and our “Moderns” by the century that separates Blake from them, that the roots of abstraction have longer tentacles and are deeper in the soil of the imagination than we often believe.

“

Moderns wish to draw figures without lines, and with great and heavy shadows; are not shadows more unmeaning than lines, and more heavy?

There is more at stake here than beauty, for beauty has import—beauty has meaning. What is at stake in this is what Blake calls “character,” and character is indispensable to expression, as expression is in the soul of art.

“

But I know that where there are no lineaments there can be no character. And what connoisseurs call touch, I know by experience, must be the destruction of all character and expression, as it is of every lineament.

“

Such art of losing the outlines is the art of Venice and Flanders; it loses all character, and leaves what some people call, expression: but this is a false notion of expression; expression cannot exist without character as its stamina; and neither character nor expression can exist without firm and determinate outline.

What is at stake is more than art and beauty, what is at stake is that which is foundational to character—it is stamina, and clarity, and it is dependent on the “firm and determinate outline.” For it is the product of the dreaming mind, the insightful mind, and it is centered by what the mind does:

“

The want of this determinate and bounding form evidences the want of idea in the artist’s mind, and the pretence of the plagiary in all its branches. How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements?

The idea. To see in art, through art, is to see with the mind’s eye, with the visionary eye—it is to see an idea. And for there to be art, for there to be a vision, there must be an idea. Art is beauty plus the idea, the idea that is beautiful—it is the idea and the beauty that form, that depend on, each other.



The Beauty proper for sublime art, is lineaments, or forms and features that are capable of being the receptacles of intellect; accordingly the Painter has given in his beautiful man, his own idea of intellectual Beauty.

Intellectual Beauty, the beauty witnessed and known by the seeing and incisive mind, is the objective at its height—art at its zenith. And, in the end for Blake, there is something more:



Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.

It is the line, or “chaos is come again.” For not just insight, and imagination, and art are dependent on the bounding line, the sure cut of the clarified mind, but life. Without the bounding line, all that is, is lost. Without the bounding line, the mind itself is lost. Without the bounding line, we are deluded, and we are mad.

Those who have taken proper drawing classes will know that the objective of the exercise of drawing is not to produce the replication, not to accrue the facility for simulating appearances. Plato was right in this, and, without an increment of true irony possible, Nietzsche agreed. The reproduction of appearances is nothing of value in itself and not the point of art—it is mere scaffolding, a means to an end. The objective is to hone the facility for line—to learn to produce a living line, a line that is not just capable of configuring a seemingly living presence, but a line that itself seems sinuously alive, that can configure a seemingly living presence because it is itself seemingly alive. Of course, there is no learning this. Some just can, and most cannot. Most merely scratch away at the paper, evidently hoping that a compounding of many tiny lines, aligned, will produce the smooth cut of something like living tissue—what Blake means by hesitance. It is a talent, if you will. But there is the honing of the talent, the mastery of it, like learning to ride a horse: one does not dominate the line, or succumb to it. One goes the third way: one becomes the line.

Seurat was not adept at the line. There is no smooth sinuosity to his stroke; there is none of that intangible tangibility, none of that living presence in the way he strikes the paper. He has no velocity to his hit. He is frankly ham-handed and hesitant. He scours the sheet. He does not dance the image he makes; he manufactures it. Even his most intricate, photographically

convictional executions of light and dark do not swim on the paper, do not swirl and pulse; they are not fluid. They are staid and serene; they are structures rather than fleeting observations captured. They are architectonic. They are designed, which is not quite the same thing as being drawn.

The quality is oft noted, and it is attributed to his geometricizing his figures. This is of course the case—it would have to be, for the quality is too easy to miss, and thus too hard to claim in its absence. (Perhaps the only major artist who could simultaneously emphasize and bury his geometry was the still master of the mode: Piero. Perhaps the only one who could do geometry subtly.) It is the majority of his renditions: stiff, angular, ultimately boxy figures, unconvincingly set in scenarios similarly simplified and awkwardly rendered. Consider *Nurse*, c. 1882: the wall plaque in the exhibition states “Seurat simplified the figure, rendering it as a series of geometric forms,” and characterizes the nurse’s cloak as “trapezoidal.” *Woman with a Dog*, c. 1882-82, is almost perfectly symmetrical. *Square House*, c. 1882-84, is entirely so, with the overall composition being geometrically regularized, meaning simplified down to uncomplicated forms of plane and volumetric geometry. The road sweeps up to the house as a fanning set of regular curves. Except for the sloping roof, the lines of the house are all parallels and perpendiculars. It is thoroughly unlikelike, not because the lines of life are not geometrically regular, but they, and the line Blake wanted, are more complex, subtler, more writhing. For all the smooth regularity of this work, the smooth lines are scratched together out of small clumsy ones, and there is no rapidity here. This composition just sits—the sure sign of a wanting of draughtsmanship. And it is not quite an irony that Seurat’s smooth lines composed of a multitude of far smaller lines are geometrically less complex than the single python stroke of a Blake or, better, a Michelangelo. As in all the important things, the sureness is all.

Seurat is complimented for his geometric regularity, his geometric simplicity, as a move toward the abstracting of the figure, a move toward the invention of, ultimately, non-representational abstraction. But, taking conviction from the complete lack of evidence to the contrary, one is drawn to say that Seurat did not cut his figures, or anything else, with a living, snake-like sinuosity because he could not. His drawing prowess was simply insufficient. And so it would seem, making a virtue of necessity, he found his way through innovation, through invention of means. Much the same could be true, much the same would seem to be true, of a number of the progenitors of abstraction, because, in the sense of drawing being propounded here, they could not very well. The matter becomes clearer if one takes the rendering of the human figure, insignificant as that is aesthetically, as a measure of the ability to cast the line. Cézanne was clumsy with the figure. Monet was far worse, and after a certain point relatively early in his career, he never attempted it again—though in his case, his poor draughtsmanship is compensated by the fact that he

had possibly the largest arsenal of distinct brush strokes in the history of Western painting. Van Gogh had a quiver full of means for rendering in ink, but his handling of the figure was little better than that of Cézanne. There are similar weaknesses with Gauguin, Dove, Malevich, Pollock, and others. With the possible exception of Picasso, it is difficult to think of a major artist who was masterful in the way he could draw and chose, at least on occasions, not to—like a pianist forsaking virtuosity.

There is a self-evident problem with this. While it is certainly possible to transform a necessity into a virtue (to the redemption of us all), it is not quite the same thing to attempt to transform a weakness into a strength. To move away from one's weaknesses is not necessarily to move toward one's strengths. The motion directly away from weakness follows the vector of fear, and capability is accrued by embracing fear, not fleeing it. Emerson: "Always do what you are afraid to do," or, as Nietzsche never quite put it but came close to and would have endowed us all had he: Inability is not an argument.

Heralding one's inability to draw is an excuse, and finding another way is not necessarily to obtain to a better option. Picasso puts it to us: if you can draw, would you, and could you profitably, decompose figuration?

So what have we got with Seurat's drawings? What do they achieve beyond the eschewing of the embarrassment? What more is here beyond the apology they inevitably are?

What we clearly have is an idea, although it may not be the caliber of idea that Blake required, which is to say the drawings may not be art in the sense Blake understood—which is much to say. But the idea here is nothing insignificant, nothing pallid or banal, and that, too, is much to say. It may well make the matter of aesthetics a mere aside, or itself insignificant, or open to redefinition in a meaningful manner, because the intelligence of the idea is a foundational standard. In any field, if the thought is intelligent enough, no other consideration is of significance. If Seurat has changed the rules of the game and thereby said something it is imperative to hear, said something that could be said in no other way, or has not been, then he has implicitly established the standards of judgment by which he can be evaluated, for in the life of the mind, the worth of intelligence cannot be doubted—it is simply the thing done, and done to a higher degree. And all that aside, if he has been intelligent enough, then clearly, on the kind of common sense grounds it is merely ignorant to question, like asking why two plus two makes four, he has done enough. Sooner or later, something must go without question, and in that matter, intelligence trumps aesthetics.

And the thought in these works, the meaning of the vision they invoke, is a substantial one, for it is a vision of an alternate conception of existence, a different conditionality of the extant, of what it means to be, and makes it

possible to be, present. In this, as in all matters of essential conception, of the determining of founding conditions for the thought of anything beyond the essential conception—that which must be thought in terms of essential conceptions, which thereby serve as background conditions out of which all further thought arises as a chemical product of the first conditions or as an emergent property conditioned by them—there is a choice of two. There is always a fundamental decision between clean alternatives, a decision that determines all else for all else will follow from it, and the choice in the question of the nature of the extant is between particle and field. Either all that exists is a collection of particles, of whatever nature in themselves, distributed over an extension, a field—space—or all that exists is a set of configurations of the extension, of the field, composed of the field in some manner of distortion of its extensiveness and composed of nothing else. Either what exists is a rock in water, or it is a whirlpool—of the water, with there being, therefore, nothing but water.

It should be noted immediately—because this is where thought on this matter tends to run off the rails—that such coupled pairs, paired alternatives between which one must choose, can never be uncoupled, not merely as alternatives for the skeletal construction of theory but as components of any theory then constructed. Every theory of the real must contain both particle and field, or else neither, if that is conceivable, because, conceptually, there can be no particles without a field in which they are distributed—otherwise, they would all be in the same place and it would be meaningless to talk of more than one particle, and if that particle has density, extension, then we have just re-created the field and there are no particles—and there can be no field without particles, or at least localizations, points in space (whether occupied or not, but identifiable)—a difference between “here” and “there”—otherwise, everything would collapse down to a point and we would have just re-created the particle in the only meaningful sense in which it is not a field: dimensionless, a mathematical point.

What is at question in all foundational conception is never which of the coupled pair of alternatives to accept and which to reject, but which to make foundational to the other—what is to be explained in terms of what. In the theory of the real, the question is whether particles, or identifiable localizations, exist because the field must be marked in its extension, in order to be a field at all, or whether the field exists because there are, and in order for there to be, particles in distribution, separated by “here” and “there”? The choice regarding the theory of the real, and the determining of the essential nature of the real in theory, is between particle theory and field theory, and we have been battling over it all along—whether we are objects aswim in the universe, or configurations of water, ambient in water. In fact, the alternative can be said to mark one of the “basic” differences between Plato and Aristotle.

What Seurat renders through his absence of the bounding line, and through the density of the figures and settings he is able to evoke in and yet out of the continuum of his modulating shadow, is the visual realization of field theory. Everything that is apparent in his drawings, everything that seems to arise as distinct object, is of a piece, and the piece is the continuing reiteration of the tooth of the paper. It is everywhere, and it is the substance of everything, and every “thing” appears by way of a densification or rarefaction of the inescapable inkling of the texture. All is texture to varying degrees of collection. All is as much the continuum as it is a foreground set against the continuum. And every edge of every apparent object is only, and all the less, apparent—the closer one stands to the surface, the less easily one can determine exactly where any edge is supposed to be, for “in fact,” the edges aren’t there.

And if one looks hard enough, if one looks closely enough, one can see the tragic import in all this. If all is the configuration of the field, and the field is all that is, then nothing exists “in itself”—the square house is not there, not in itself, nor is the woman walking with a parasol, nor Pierrot and Colombine, nor the woman with her embroidery, nor any of the figures, nor any of us. If the field is all that is, then we are not, for we are merely chemical combinations of it or its aspects, or emergent properties dependent on chemical combinations of it (for that is why emergent properties emerge under some conditions and not others), we are molecular agencies rather than atoms, and when the molecular components disperse, as they once began to cohere, and rearrange themselves into other molecular dispensations, everything continues just as it was—except us. And if the aesthetic status of Seurat’s drawings is to be under question, it should be noted that this vision is precisely what Nietzsche informed us in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

And this is precisely the vision that Blake cannot enclose because of his insistence on the bounding line, whereby everything rendered is rendered distinct from everything else—whereby everything rendered is, in fact, rendered. This is precisely the vision Blake wished to rule out through the insistence on the bounding line: “the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.” And so, evidently, man and beast must exist, and so there must be a bounding line to distinguish them, or else “all is chaos again.” That chaos is what Seurat embraced—that chaos is what he saw. That chaos is what he makes us see.

What Blake found absent, the absence that Blake found brings on “chaos again,” is what “man or beast” is: “life itself.” It is life that is his concern; it is the conception that brings about the implicit absence of life, for life is found only in living forms, that is his concern. And thus Blake’s concern is similar to Goethe’s when Goethe opposed Newton’s conception of the world for rendering a vision of the real that omitted life, and unwisely attempted to devise scientific principles that would root the truth of the world in the fact of

life, or at least the facts of human observation—a set of principles meant to generate an alternative to the Newtonian conception. Blake, as well, takes his issue with the Newtonian vision.

“

I know too well that a great majority of Englishmen are fond of The Indefinite which they Measure by Newtons Doctrine of the Fluxions of an Atom. A Thing that does not Exist. These are Politicians & think that Republican Art is Inimical to their Atom. For a Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance a Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else.

But there is something of a mash here. Newton’s “fluxions” was his mathematical method, now called the calculus, which was the name Leibniz gave to it when he devised it at roughly the same time, and the calculus, or fluxions, is the math for calculating “the minutest subdivisions” of any extension—for Newton, the path of an orbiting sphere, broken down by the math to a vector analysis of its precise acceleration at any one, precise moment. In short, the calculus is the math that gives a “slice” of that which is continuous, of a continuum—of a field. The calculus is pertinent to, and thus is about, the mathematical point, and so about infinite divisibility, and it has nothing to do with the indivisible atom—with the particle. And so, Blake and Newton are on the same page on this, a fact that Blake may have better acknowledged with his engraving of Newton. Or, better—Newton and Seurat are on the same page with their unbroken continua, and Blake, with his continuous, infinitely divisible

