Drawing from Observation

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It's late afternoon in a big city train station. My sister and I hurry through the crowds toward our train. There are only three minutes left before departure time. "There it is, platform two, and that must be our train." As we board the train, we spot some empty seats at the end of the car, and quickly claim all four of them: two for us and two for our shopping bags, purses, and coats. "Phew, we made it," Eleanor says as we collapse into our seats. After a day of sightseeing, shopping, and an extended conversation along miles of city streets and parks, we both welcome the hour-long train ride home. As the train fills with last-minute passengers, my sister and I chat about our day. Then, as the train pulls out of the station, our conversation gradually subsides and the city disappears into rolling countryside.

As I gaze out of the window, images of the day superimpose themselves on the view. One image in particular holds my attention: afternoon in one of the city's museums. I decide to visit the Oriental section. Thinking I will find myself almost alone here, I am astonished to see dozens of young people perched on tiny folding stools or sitting on the floor quietly drawing the statues and porcelain. I am even more astonished by how absorbed they are in this activity. Just think: a few rooms away the tourists file by one object after another, pausing only momentarily, usually to read a label. What a contrast to these students who while drawing look at one object all afternoon. Is this what drawing allows one to do, to take the time to "stand and stare?" (Davies, 1920, pp. 376-377). It's not long before I too open my drawing book.

This image recalls another one, in another city, on another weekday afternoon. A group of adults are seated comfortably in an old house that is now a museum of modern art. Their heads move up and down; their hands, holding pens or pencils, move slowly across the paper. Many of these people have taken time away from their jobs, families, or studies to be here to draw from observation. Looking around, I am suddenly struck by what an extraordinary activity this is, this making of marks on paper to correspond with what one sees. Extraordinary because it seems so completely without any practical use; couldn't one do the same, or better, with a camera? Why would professional artists, as some of these people are, want to practice drawing when much of what has appeared in contemporary galleries over the last 40 years seems to

have little if any relation to the practice of naturalistic drawing? How do artists, whether professional or amateur, experience drawing from observation? What is it about drawing from observation that would prompt people to set aside several hours a week for this activity? What is it about the drawing experience that distinguishes it from photography, from painting, from looking?

Does Drawing Require a Specific Place and Time?

I would like to draw my sister as she sits there opposite me on the train. When will I have an opportunity like this again? I'll wait a few minutes though. If I start drawing Eleanor now she is sure to notice and we'll both feel self-conscious; I'll wait until she begins to read. Before I know it though, my hand is groping around in my pack sack in search of my drawing book and pen. I can't wait to draw! Smiling to myself, I recall the advice of an art teacher years ago: "Carry a sketchbook with you at all times; you never know when you might want to draw."

Taking this advice, I find myself drawing in unexpected situations: a bank line-up, a supermarket check-out line on Saturday morning, an airport departure lounge in the middle of the night, and now here on the train. In each of these situations, I am waiting for something else: a line-up to move, a departure announcement, the arrival of our train at its destination. I draw to pass time, to spend my time well. Then, while drawing, crowds become individuals, faces lose their anonymity, and suddenly the monotony of a beige interior fascinates my gaze. I am no longer just waiting, and the uneasy feeling of being here only for the sake of going somewhere else disappears. No longer restless, I settle into my seat or find the most comfortable way to stand. Waiting time, passing time, becomes drawing time. Now with pen in hand I survey my fellow passengers: is there a face here that invites me to draw?

As I look around the train, however, everything serves to remind me that this is not a place designed for drawing: the rhythmic motion of the train that promises a wobbly line no matter how carefully I hold my pen, the precarious balance of my drawing book on my knee, and my constant awareness that the people around me do not share my interest in drawing. Moreover they may not want to be drawn or even to be looked at. Here both hand and eye are limited; yet more often than not I find myself drawing in a place that was not intended for drawing.

What is it like to draw in a place that is designed for drawing? Is such a place really the most conducive to drawing from observation? An image of a studio comes to mind, the place where I attend a weekly life-drawing class: if ever there was a place designed for drawing that is it! I remember the first time I went there. Several flights of stairs, long hallways, and small passageways lead me to a large room in an old college building, all the more intriguing for being so difficult to find. "Is

this where the life-drawing class is held?" I ask a man who is sharpening his pencil with the utmost care, while the shavings float freely to a welcoming floor, already grayed by years of charcoal dust and pencil shavings. I need not have asked: of course this is a studio! A quick glance around the room reveals that this is a studio intended for drawing from observation. Evening light pours in from outside through three large windows. Inside a woman adjusts a spotlight while another arranges colorful cushions and covers for the model at one side of the studio in front of an old fireplace. An array of still-life objects and some forgotten pencils decorate the mantelpiece. Scattered around the rest of the room is an inviting clutter of easels, high stools, and straight-backed chairs. The once white walls are covered with drawings, tracings of the room's activities. Some of these are placed carefully, but most seem to have been hung in a hurry at any angle, to be looked at from a distance.

Some time later I am comfortably settled in this studio. My sharpened pencils are ready and waiting at arm's length just beneath the old chair I have chosen. My neighbor has offered me a pile of magazines to put under my feet so that my drawing pad now rests on my thighs at an angle that slopes toward, rather than away, from my head and hands. The woman behind me stands at an easel, while the man beside me sits in a chair and holds a large drawing board almost vertically on his knees with one hand. As the model takes her first pose I sit up straight in my chair. I marvel at how still she sits and how unself-consciously she receives the gaze of 18 pairs of eyes. As all eyes focus on her, the studio is filled with silent watchfulness. Only the screech of a felt pen across a paper threatens to disturb the quiet room.

Beside the model a kitchen timer methodically ticks away the passing seconds, as hands grasping pencils, pens, charcoal, and conté rush across papers: "faster, faster," I urge my pencil, "this is only a three-minute pose—no time for details." Continuing to draw, I am suddenly aware of how long these three minutes are for the model as she sits on the floor hugging her knees, enduring the slow passing seconds. I am aware too, of how it feels to sit like that: how the back is strained, where the shoulders are tight. I feel her pose in my own body and I draw, not "the model" but the strains and tensions, the sheer endurance of this woman's pose, as if drawing from inside the body. Even more than the ticking timer, her face shows when the time is nearly over. My drawing is finished, but I can't allow myself to stop before the time is up. I must continue, I must keep moving my pencil—along the aching edge of her back once again. I feel obliged to fill the entire three minutes as if I would lose something, miss something, if I stopped early.

How strange, when I draw in other situations I have no sense of finishing a drawing either early or late. But here in the studio the duration of my drawing must conform to the ticking of the timer. Not only the duration of this particular drawing, but the duration of my drawing session must conform to the schedule of the weekly life-drawing class: every Thursday at eight, regardless of whether I am inspired or indifferent, I draw. In the studio, with the door firmly closed, surrounded by artists, model, easels, and paper, I am bound to draw; there is nothing else to do here. When I draw at home, however, drawing time is time taken, sometimes stolen, from other times: from cooking time, writing time, conversation time. The time that I spend drawing at home is anytime and part of everyday time. There drawing time comes and goes between other times: two hours of drawing time includes watering the garden and stirring a soup. Are these really interruptions? Two hours in the studio, however, is time exclusively for drawing: Thursdays from eight to 10 is time cut off from other times, time set aside for drawing.

The studio permits me to stare wide-eyed at the model: she is there to be looked at, to be drawn; I am there to draw from observation. On the train, however, my fellow travelers and I are here to go from one place to another. We may read, talk, sleep, or even draw as we move along, but that is not our purpose in being together. To draw one of the passengers, I must sneak a look at my "model," a quick clandestine glance. I must not be seen staring: that would be impolite and out of place on a train. I cannot stare openly for long seconds, even minutes on end, as I do in the studio. Is looking at others with prolonged intensity so unusual that we are permitted to do so freely only in a special situation, in a studio?

Drawing in the studio is ruled by stillness as well as quiet: the model is utterly still, while those who draw her move only their head and hands; the rest of their bodies are almost rigid. On the train, everything is in motion: the passengers move and sway with the motion of the train. Without warning, the man I have begun to draw folds his newspaper differently and thus holds his head differently—I am obliged to turn the page and begin another drawing. My pen makes a bumpy ride across the page as the train makes a bumpy ride through the countryside.

The studio is a controlled environment: there movement is controlled, sound is controlled, lighting is controlled, the model is controlled—moving only at predictable intervals of three, eight, 30, or 45 minutes. In the train, everything is out of my personal control: not only movement, sound and light, but my "model" in particular is beyond my control, changing his "pose" at a whim; I cannot say "Would you turn your head, just ever so slightly to the left? Yes that's it." And "would

you hold that for a few more minutes?" In the train everything and everyone moves according to wishes other than my own: even my pen is less inclined to do what I wish. And yet is it the very unpredictability of the train, or of cafés, parks or meadows that invites me to draw? It's like a game: how long will that person stay in that pose—turn the page, look the other way, or get up and leave, disappearing altogether? Will a cloud suddenly obscure the sun and change the light that now falls across his face? Will the conversation of other passengers unexpectedly draw my attention away from my drawing? I go to the studio to attend a life-drawing class, to participate in the long established tradition of drawing from life. But in which place really am I drawing from life as it is lived: in the studio or here in the train?

Drawing out of doors, like drawing in the train, is characterized by unpredictability. As I climb a fence to better survey the view and draw, I do not know how long I will stay there or how long I will draw. Drawing in the meadows I have slightly more control over movement than I do on the train. While precariously perched on the fence, I am stationary and the landscape before me is relatively still. That tree will not get up and walk away, but a sudden breeze might blow its branches in a different direction, changing its appearance and character. The same breeze might blow the edge of my paper, curling it over my drawing hand, or blow my hair across my eyes. Unlike in the studio, the quality and direction of light out of doors is completely out of my control. How this landscape changes from morning to evening; how different it appears in sunshine than under rain clouds, billowing blue and gray! As I begin to draw one of the cows in the meadow, I find that she too will not hold a pose and is as unpredictable as the passenger in the train. My own body does not move against my wishes as it does on the train, but the discomfort of the fence on which I sit may make me move sooner than I would indoors.

Drawing in the museum, I am unmoved while my body is bumped and jolted by other visitors jostling for a glimpse of "the original," the painting that I too have come to see—and to draw. But with feet firmly and achingly planted on the museum floor, I am determined to draw until closing time undaunted by the movement around me. Here it is not others who might feel uncomfortable or self-conscious about my looking at them; rather it is I who feel unwanted eyes on me and the intrusive look over my shoulder at my unfinished drawing. Out of the corner of my eye I see the man beside me steal a glance at my drawing, then look up at the painting and back at my work. Unlike on the train, it is not the fact that I am drawing here that becomes the object of an inquisitive look, but what and how well I am drawing. Drawing is part of the museum's ambience; to draw here is to partake in a tradition. Drawing has a place in a museum, but never quite its own place,

always a derivative place, when placed side by side with the old masters.

Does drawing have its time and place only in the specialized atmosphere of the studio or museum? Or is the place of drawing where I find myself drawn to pick up my pen or pencil, whether at home, in a museum, meadow, studio or train? "Remember," I think to myself, "carry a sketchbook with you at all times; you never know when you might want to draw ... and you never know where."

The Surprise of Seeing a Familiar Face

I would like to draw my sister as she sits there opposite me on the train. Draw my sister—isn't it interesting how we are more likely to say "I would like to draw my sister" than "I would like to make a drawing of my sister?" What does it mean to draw someone? What would I mean if I said "I would like to make a drawing of my sister?" That seems to suggest that I would like to make an object, a finished work, a portrait perhaps, something to keep. "A drawing of my sister" separates the drawing from my sister: here is the drawing and there is my sister; the drawing would be a representation of my sister. But no, I do not want to make a representation of my sister. I do not want just a picture of her. After all, I've already done that earlier today. I took a picture of her with my camera in the park. When the film is processed and printed, I will have a picture of Eleanor, something to keep. So if I don't want another picture of my sister, what do I mean when I say "I would like to draw my sister?" This seems much more personal and direct than the thought of making a drawing of my sister. Could this have something to do with the structure of each phrase? In the phrase "to make a drawing of my sister," *drawing* is a noun, the object, and *of my sister* describes the drawing rather than its making. The phrase "to draw my sister" is quite different: here *draw* is an action rather than a thing and *my sister* is the object of my drawing activity. To draw my sister, it seems, is to do something to her. No wonder I hesitate to begin! Is it that I hesitate to make Eleanor the object of my drawing? To draw her, must I see her in the same manner that I would see the interior of the train if I were to draw it? Is she not the subject of my drawing? When we speak of portraits, whether photographs, drawings, or paintings, we speak of the picture's subject.

As I look out of the window, wondering whether Eleanor will be the subject or object of my drawing, she reaches for her book. I breathe a quiet sigh of relief; soon she will be absorbed in her book and I will be able to draw freely, knowing that she is unaware of being drawn. Like the phrase "to draw my sister," "being drawn" suggests that to draw my sister is to do something to her. Yet hasn't her presence already done something to me? Hasn't her being there, sitting there opposite me, invited me to draw her? When she is at home, far away in another

country, it doesn't even occur to me to draw my sister. Here her presence, her appearance before me has drawn me, pulled me to pick up my pen and sketchbook. In this sense, she is the subject of my drawing.

I have never drawn Eleanor before and I feel something like shyness as I am confronted simultaneously by the blank page in my drawing book and by her face. The blank page is so beautiful in its pristine whiteness, and Eleanor looks so lovely just now, her head held at an angle over the book, her glasses perched quaintly on her nose. What will my drawing do to the paper, to my sister? Why this sudden shyness? I pause, pen poised above the page. This is a familiar feeling. It recalls the time years ago when I was first learning to draw. The hand is momentarily immobilized, gripped by the thought "can I draw this?" The eyes too are overwhelmed by the subject when glancing upwards; then, glancing downwards, I am overwhelmed by the empty whiteness of the paper, which faces me like a field of newly fallen snow. Yet it invites me. Dare I disturb its whiteness? Having faced both paper and subject innumerable times, I coax and cajole hand and eye into cooperation. I tell myself that if it doesn't work out, I can start again, I can turn the page, I can even tear it out! I think of Kandinsky's words: "I have gradually learned not to see the resistant white of the canvas to notice it only for instants" (1964, p. 35).

And so I begin. My hand, holding the pen, still does not touch the paper, instead it begins to draw by circling above the paper. Round and round it goes, finding the shape of Eleanor's head, searching for the right spot on the paper. Strange: no one has taught me to begin like that; it just happens automatically. There, the left side of the paper: that's where the head will be, then there will be room for her shoulder and book on the right. Yes, I think I've got the shape of her head. Now my pen lands on the paper and begins to edge round Eleanor's head. The other passengers, the train, and the countryside beyond blur out of focus and almost disappear. I am oblivious of the conversations of the people around me. I am alone with my sister, my paper, and pen. Starting at her forehead, I draw downwards, attentive to that curving of Eleanor's cheek that is so characteristic of her face. I hold my breath and steal a glance; my pen tiptoes along the page. I blush. I cannot help but feel that my pen, as it touches the page, also touches my sister's face, caressing here, poking there. Is this what it means to draw someone: not only to see but to get in touch with the one we draw? This unexpected intimacy momentarily halts the movement of my pen, but I take a deep breath and continue, around the line of her chin and jawline. Then, instead of proceeding upward to draw the other side of her head, my pen spontaneously takes a detour round the back of her neck and makes a sweeping line along her collar and down toward the edge of her book. As I do so I realize that I am beginning to see Eleanor in terms of

line, my eyes seeking out the most essential and most characteristic lines.

As I pause to see where to go next, I recall for a moment the drawing I made of my nephew. That drawing had begun so differently! Working in pencil, I had started by drawing the oval shape of his head on the paper, in a barely visible line, round and round, until I felt I had the right shape. Next, I divided his face horizontally, finding the place of his eyes, the tip of his nose, the middle of his mouth, and the tip of his chin. Then I drew a vertical line down the middle of his face to act as a guideline. Even in the finished drawing, these initial sketch lines are still visible, a souvenir of my methodical planning. What a different beginning these searching pen lines are that trace round my sister. Whether I draw in pencil or pen, whether I begin with a plan or improvise—drawing a line here then there—I draw, and the person before me slowly emerges on the paper.

At first I was confronted by my sister and the blank page; now I am confronted by my sister across from me and by my sister before me, taking shape on the page. Looking down at the page, I think, "yes, this is Eleanor's face, gradually taking shape on the paper, this is my sister." As I continue to draw, however, the familiar face, the public face, the face that has been a tourist today, admiring views and old buildings, chatting enthusiastically over coffee fades away. "When drawing a face, any face, it is as if curtain after curtain, mask after mask, falls away," says Franck (1973, p. 91). As my pen edges round the corners of Eleanor's mouth, a sentence I once read resounds in my mind: "you can see someone's face for nine hundred and ninety-nine times, and then see the person's face again, as if for the very first time" (Chesterton, in Halling, 1983 p. 122). Now I see my sister as if for the very first time, across from me on the train and before me on the paper, her vulnerability revealed. Drawing the little wrinkles around her eyes I notice that she is getting older. Yes, of course, my sister has always been much older than me, but I never thought of her as middle-aged or aging. In the midst of looking at her quietly reading across from me,

> suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather before them, or against them coming from what I know not double ground of space, another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it. (Merleau-Ponty, in Halling, 1983, p. 127)

"The contours you have drawn," writes Berger "no longer [are now] marking the edge of what you have seen, but the edge of what you have become ... you ... pass through your subject" (1960, p. 23). Drawing her eyes and forehead it is as if I now see through her eyes; I feel the cares and concerns that she carries around with her: each of her children is

visible in her face. My pen moves slowly, tenderly on the paper. "Is this you?" it seems to ask.

Looking at my drawing, I am taken aback by how old I have made Eleanor look; not just older, but surprisingly different from the sister I thought I knew. Yet this drawing has an uncanny likeness about it. This is not a likeness to the face she usually wears. Rather, the drawing shows a likeness to a face I hadn't seen until now, a face that remains hidden from public view. This resemblance is disquieting—and intriguing. Is this the appeal of portraits? Is this what it means to draw someone: to see through the façade and draw out something of the interior, to show what is usually unseen? "One learns to look behind the façade" writes Paul Klee, "to grasp the root of things. One learns to recognize the undercurrents, the antecedents of the visible. One learns to dig down, to uncover" (Goldwater & Treves, 1947, p. 444). And Beckman says that he is "seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible, like the famous cabalist who once said: 'if you wish to get hold of the invisible you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible'" (Goldwater & Treves, 1947, pp. 447-448).

If I didn't know Eleanor, how would I know that my drawing had a likeness that is more penetrating than a mere likeness to her facial features? Hockney (1987) exposes the ambiguity of what it means to "get a likeness" when he says about drawing his friends and family:

> the more I know and react to people, the more interesting the drawings will be. I don't really like struggling for a likeness. It seems a bit of a waste of effort, in a sense, just doing that. And you never know anyway. If you don't know the person, you don't really know if you've got a likeness at all. You can't really see everything in the face.

Getting a likeness can indeed be a struggle. I look back through the pages of my sketchbook to the drawing of my nephew. I remember drawing him. When I sat down to begin, I thought, "Okay, this will be easy." But it wasn't. A familiar face can be as difficult to draw as the face of someone you've only just met. I thought that knowing him would make it easier. After all, we had just spent the last few days together and I've known him since he was a baby. I thought I knew every look, every aspect of that seven-year-old face. It wasn't until I started drawing him that I realized that I had taken for granted so many things. In my struggle to get a likeness, I discovered that I had to put those things in the drawing. Those little details that I usually don't notice are the ones that actually make the difference, that distinguish my nephew's face from other faces. To get a likeness, I had to look closely at what I usually overlook: the angle at which he holds his head, the length of his nose in relation to the distance between the tip of his nose and his chin. His mouth was particularly difficult to draw: when he's talking or laughing, his mouth looks much bigger, but when he's posing, being so

careful to be quiet and still, his mouth looks different, his whole face looks different.

Drawing Transforms Seeing into "Seeing"

To draw my nephew, I had to see him differently. When Gertrude Stein asked Matisse if when eating a tomato he looked at it the way an artist would, Matisse replied "no, when I eat a tomato I look at it the way anyone else would. But when I paint a tomato, then I see it differently" (Stein, in Edwards, 1979, p. 4). What is that difference? What distinguishes "seeing" a tomato to paint (or draw) it from "looking" at a tomato to eat it?

I remember buying pears to make a still-life arrangement for a drawing class. I was the only customer in a small fruit and vegetable shop. "Good morning," the grocer said. "Good morning," I replied, "I'd like a dozen pears—but do you mind if I choose them myself?" "Not at all," the grocer responded politely, although I knew he was restraining himself from his usual practice of selecting and weighing fruit for his customers. Then, as I spent about 10 minutes choosing pears, I could feel the grocer's perplexed and questioning look. "Why is she taking so long," he might have thought, "it's just a matter of choosing between Bosc and Bartlett, ripe or unripe." To my eyes however, the pears were no longer Bartlett or Bosc, but a splendid array of yellows, greens, and golds, round shapes and long shapes, tumbling over one another.

How to choose? I want 12 pears to draw, 12 pears to draw my students' attention. I pick up one pear after another, hold it momentarily, feel its particular weight, shape, and texture in the palm of my hand, then turn it over, studying its colors and contours. This one? Yes, I'll take this one with its stem turned to one side and the bulge on the other side that makes it look as if it's shrugging its shoulders. That one as well: speckled and yellow here, still green there. And so it goes for another 10 pears.

Buying pears to eat is quite different: "I'd like a dozen pears, please—yes Bartlett, four of them to eat in two days and the rest for the weekend." There is no need to choose them myself, to hold them one by one in my hand to see their individual colors and shapes. When I buy pears to eat, I look at them as a grocer would: that is why I leave it to the grocer to select the pears. An artist's eye isn't necessary when looking for pears to eat; it's a matter of a dozen Bartletts, four of them almost ripe.

What does it mean to see with an artist's eye? Seeing lettuces is not unlike seeing pears or tomatoes. You may have looked at hundreds of lettuces, but, as Franck (1973) writes, "start to draw one and you realize the anomaly of having lived with lettuces all your life but never having seen one, never having seen the semi-transparent leaves curl-

ing in their own lettuce way, never having noticed what makes a lettuce a lettuce rather than a curly kale" (pp. 26, 27). While drawing, not only do you see "what makes a lettuce a lettuce" but continue drawing and you see as well what makes this lettuce unique, how the leaves of this lettuce curl in their own particular way, unlike any other lettuce. While drawing, you see how this vegetable, fruit, plant, person, or animal before you is unlike any other. Henry Moore writes about drawing sheep that, "at first I saw them as rather shapeless balls of wool with a head and four legs. Then I began to realize that underneath all that wool was a body that moved in its own way and that each sheep had its individual character" (Franck, 1981, pp. 100-101).

As the train slows down to approach a station, images of sheep, lettuces, and pears dissolve and my reflections are pulled back to the train. Books are closed and bags are reached as some passengers prepare to leave. Then with a final squeak of the wheels, we are all jolted back in to our seats, abruptly returned from our conversations, newspapers, books, thoughts, and reflections to the train and our fellow travelers. I close my drawing book, exchange glances with the other passengers and a few words with my sister. We peer through the window to the train station, notice the name of the town, the time, the travelers, and trains. Then with a shout, a whistle, and a slamming of doors we resume our journey. The steady motion of the train and the evening light over the countryside lull me back into my reflections.

When we stopped at the train station just now, I looked at the signs, I looked at the people. How did my looking there differ from seeing my sister while I was drawing her a few minutes earlier? In the station, I looked at the sign momentarily just long enough to decipher the place name. To do this I overlooked the color, size, and style of print, just as I usually overlook the details of Eleanor's face. I can instantly recognize my sister in a crowd just as I can recognize the name on a train station sign.

What distinguishes the look that "sees" from the look that merely recognizes? When I looked at the people in the train station, I recognized men, women, children, students, workers, and business people, but I did not study the details and proportions of faces, bodies, postures, and gestures that distinguish one person from another. I did not wonder about their lives. Rather I looked and merely saw travelers coming and going. In the commotion, my eyes were drawn momentarily here and there to a child playing, a greeting, a farewell, a last-minute run for a train. Is recognition the look that sees just long enough to attach a name, whether Bartlett, Bosc, traveler, or sister, and then moves on, without pausing, without wondering about what is seen? How differently I had seen my sister: while drawing her, she was no longer a traveler, or even sister, but a face that confronted me with its

vulnerability and individuality. Is "seeing," then, a pausing and a wondering about what is seen? "To see" says Paul Valéry, "is to forget the name of the thing one sees" (Levin, 1988, p. 65). Can naming prevent one from seeing? To see, Matisse (Flam, 1973) writes,

> is itself a creative operation, requiring an effort.... the artist ... has to look at everything as though he saw it for the first time: he has to look at life as he did when he was a child ... I have often asked visitors who came to see me at Vence whether they noticed the thistles by the side of the road. Nobody had seen them; they would all have recognized the leaf of an acanthus on a Corinthian capital, but the memory of the capital prevented them from seeing the thistle in nature. (p. 148)

How do I see while I am drawing? Do I draw what I see? As I was browsing in a bookstore today, a title caught my attention: *How to Draw and Paint What You See*. What an appealing title! What assurance, what promise it holds for the beginning or amateur artist. To draw what you see: surely that is what we need to learn; surely that is why we draw—or is it ?

Van den Berg (1977, pp. 30-33) compares a landscape painting by Cézanne (Landscape at La Roche-Guyon) with a photograph of the same scene (Loran, 1970, p. 46).[1] At first glance, the photograph appears to show exactly the same view that Cézanne saw. We can imagine that the photographer stood on the same spot along the roadside where Cézanne set up his easel. However, Van den Berg invites us to look more carefully, and asks whether Cézanne really painted what he saw with his eyes. There are so many discrepancies between the photograph and the painting that we begin to wonder if Cézanne really saw from the same spot as the photographer.

What do we see when we look at a landscape? Van den Berg points out how in the painting the road turns to the left with "too large a curve." Indeed, when compared with the photograph of the same road, Cézanne's road looks awkward and two-dimensional. It is the kind of road about which, had it been painted by a student, an art teacher might say: "yes, that's a good start, but look again at the view in front of you: do you see how the road makes a diagonal line and appears smaller as it goes into the distance?" Loran points out that in this painting, "scientific perspective has been disregarded to say the least" (1970, p. 47). And yet, for all its awkwardness, Cézanne's road is believable. More convincingly than the road in the photograph, it is a road along which we can travel. Looking at the painting we can "see the sound of an approaching car" around the corner; how is it, asks Van den Berg (1977, p. 33), that Cézanne shows us the "visible presence" of what lies around the corner without showing the actual presence? "The artist," writes Degas, "does not draw what he sees, but what he must make others see" (Goldwater & Treves, 1947, p. 308).

Not only the road, but the distant hills in the painting are remarkably different from the hills in the photograph of La Roche-Guyon. Cézanne's hills are much higher, rising majestically above the village nestled in the valley. Van den Berg suggests that Cézanne painted the hills that he knows: having climbed them he knows their height (1977, pp. 32-33). We can imagine that when Cézanne looked at the hills at La Roche-Guyon he saw his hills, and hills known through long walks in hot Provençal sun are higher than the hills the photographer saw, or that you or I might see if we were to stand on that road. Cézanne has shown us the view that he knows. "The painter," writes Wadsworth, "does not paint what he sees but what he knows is" (Goldwater & Treves, 1947, p. 458).

Do I draw what I see or what I know? Is what I see really different from what I know? While drawing my sister, I saw her as a mother, I saw her concern for her children in her face. If I did not know Eleanor, surely I could not see this in her face. Do I draw what I see in the sense that I see what I know? Am I able to see only what I already know? Or does drawing draw out a new awareness of what I know? It was not until I began to draw Eleanor that I could see how I know her.

The "seeing" that sees through and sees into what I am drawing is not a mere optical vision. Yet the insight that I gain while drawing happens through my eyes. How is it that while faithfully drawing what my eyes see, I find myself "seeing" more than what I merely see with my eyes? As my eyes scrutinize my sister's face, I suddenly "see" her: I see her face with my eyes and my seeing sees through the face she shows to the world. How does this happen? Why should it be so surprising that while drawing my seeing slides into "seeing" in spite of my effort to maintain a cool, dispassionate gaze, calculating angles, mentally measuring this width against that length?

Descartes describes an experience of seeing that has come to characterize the objectifying gaze of scientific observation *and* the scrutinizing gaze of representational drawing since the Renaissance: "when looking from a window and saying I see men who pass on the street, I really do not see them, but infer that what I see is men ... what do I see from the window but hats and coats?" (Levin, 1988, pp. 95-96). Let us imagine that I am to make a convincingly realistic drawing of the view from Descartes' window. To draw what I see from this window, I have to see with Descartes' eyes, setting aside what I know about what I see—that there are people beneath the hats and coats. Yet as I look carefully at these hats and coats, painstakingly drawing them in all their details, my visual perception is heightened: I do not see people, I do not even see hats and coats, but lines and shapes of brown, black, and grey. "To see is to forget the name of the things one sees" (Valéry, in Levin, 1988, p. 65). In the midst of this, the knowledge of the people

beneath the garments unexpectedly reappears with a fresh vividness: I "see" the imperturbable face of the businessman beneath the bowler hat; I "see" the gleeful child beneath the bicycle helmet. The more I "see" through what my eyes see, the more believable my drawing will be. If you were to look at the finished drawing, you would not say, "This is a drawing of hats and coats"; rather, you would say "This is a picture of people walking along a street, seen from a window." You might even ask, "Do you see that man in the bowler hat? the way he walks and holds his head? Well, that looks just like my uncle; I can just 'see' the look on his face!"

What do we see when we look at a landscape? Here on the train, gazing out of the window, I look at the landscape, but I do not really see it. I have an impression of green hills, and wide expanse of sky. Yet the hills roll by my gaze, their particular contours unnoticed. This view is a background for my thoughts; it is not the subject of my thoughts. My gaze is that of one who thinks or daydreams: my eyes wander dreamily across fields, over hills, far into the distance and back again, all in a few moments.

Noticing that my gaze is without focus or purpose, I recall what one of my drawing students said about why she likes to draw: she enjoys looking at things closely, and drawing, she says, extends that enjoyment by adding discipline to it, forcing her to really study something rather than half-seeing it in a day dreamy haze. Yes, I think, looking out of the train window, if I were to draw this view (even in motion), I would begin to "see," giving myself to this landscape, following its lines with my pen, studying what now escapes my dreamy gaze. "Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see" says Nicolaïdes (1941, p. 5). Yet is it not the experience of drawing what we see that teaches us to see and disciplines our looking? The "gift of the visible" says Merleau-Ponty, "is earned by exercise; it is not in a few months, or in solitude, that a painter comes into full possession of his vision ... his vision in any event learns only by seeing" (1964, p. 165). Can we learn to see without drawing? "Drawing is the discipline," Franck (1973) writes, "by which I rediscover the world ... what I have not drawn I have never really seen ... when I start drawing an ordinary thing I realize how extraordinary it is, sheer miracle: the branching of a tree, the structure of a dandelion's seed puff" (p. 6).

Earlier today, I sat in a park and drew a building nearby; it was an old stone building. Only after I had been drawing for some time did I notice the gargoyles that perched playfully beneath the roof and peered round the corners. If I had not drawn that building, would I have ever seen those gargoyles? Once I noticed the gargoyles, I began to draw them. The more I drew, the more I saw in their strange stone faces. They almost seemed to come to life. Isn't it peculiar, I thought, people walk

by here every day and I bet they never notice those wonderful gargoyles. If I lived in this city and walked by this building every day I could not help but see those gargoyles now that I have drawn them. It would be impossible for me now to walk by here without feeling those gargoyles wink and grimace at me. By seeing with an artist's eye, do we give sight to what we have seen? Klee says that while in a forest, "I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 167). Small children often draw faces on the flowers and sun in their pictures; is this because they feel the flowers and sun looking back at them? Kandinsky (1964) describes how things look back at him:

> Everything "dead" trembled. Not only the stars, moon, woods, flowers of which the poets sing, but also a cigarette butt lying in the ashtray, a patient white trouser button looking up from a puddle in the street, a submissive bit of bark that an ant drags through the high grass in its strong jaws to uncertain but important destinations, a page of a calendar toward which the conscious hand reaches to tear it forcibly from the warm companionship of the remaining block of pages—everything shows me its face, its innermost being; its secret soul, which is more often silent than heard. (pp. 23-24)

When We are All Eyes the World Draws our Attention

Did the button, bark, or trees that "looked" at Kandinsky or Klee invite these artists not only to return their look, but to draw them? Are we "drawn," in the original sense of the word as *pulled* (Skeat, 1958), by what we see to draw it? The landscape that rolls by the train window is pleasant to look at but I am not pulled by it to pick up my pen and draw. What is it like to be drawn to draw?

As I look at this landscape from the train, I recall another one. It was an afternoon in the early spring. As I walked through the familiar meadows near my home, everything struck me as being especially beautiful. The sunlight glinting on the meandering river, the still bare branches of the trees reaching toward an open sky: everything invited me to linger and to look. It was not so much that the river and the trees looked back at me, but that they drew my gaze toward them with their beauty.

Seeing a beautiful sight—whether a landscape, object or person—makes me want to do something about it. It is not enough just to look: I must respond to the invitation the sight offers me by doing something.

So on that afternoon I quickly went home to get my drawing book and pen. Returning to the meadows, I perched on a fence and surveyed the scene. "As soon as I sit down in that landscape with my pen, it is no longer 'Oh how lovely ...' it simply is" (Franck, 1973, p. 37). Soon I am

lost in the line of the river as it runs across the meadow and across my page. My drawing is a response to the way this landscape draws me.

Several drawings and an hour or so later, I clamber down from the fence and walk again through the meadows. Now it is not just the obviously beautiful that draws me, but everything, even the most ordinary things pull me to look and wonder: the weeds that grow along the edge of the footpath, the sparrow in the hedgerow, the shapes of the spaces between the branches of the trees. Everything looks beautiful just as it is. My seeing does not want to change what I see. How unlike Merleau-Ponty's painter whose "eyes see the world, sees what inadequacies keep the world from being a painting" (1964, p. 165). Is this the difference between drawing and painting: that the process of painting, with its colors and costly materials, strives "to create a new world" (Kandinsky, 1964, p. 35), whereas drawing pays homage to the world as it is? To draw is to attend to what we see—not to change it.

After drawing, I find myself looking at the world with new eyes. "When ... I see, suddenly I am all eyes" (Franck, 1973, p. 6) and like Klee, I find the trees looking back at me, as if my "seeing" enables them to reciprocate my wondering gaze. Walking along, now at a slower pace, I smile to myself as I recall an art student who told me that one day while driving home from a drawing class, she got so "involved" with what she was seeing that she had difficulty driving.

The intensity of seeing with eyes opened through long hours of drawing is not always an effortless or comfortable experience. Kandinsky (1964) writes about how,

> Entirely without consciousness I steadily absorbed impressions, sometimes so intensively and incessantly that I felt as if my chest were cramped and my breathing difficult. I became so overtired and overstuffed that I often thought with envy of clerks who were permitted and able to relax completely after their day's work. I longed for dull-witted rest ... I had however, to see without pause. (p. 33)

"I've often thought about the way I see," says Hockney (1987), "for years I've thought my eyes were funny or something. I keep thinking how much can you really see and what is it you really take in as your eye moves about focusing."

Through drawing does my vision become more receptive? With my eyes opened, I am able to "take in," to "absorb" sights that might otherwise go unnoticed. Or is it the scene that is receptive to my looking? While in the meadow I was pulled, taken in by the trees and the sunlight on the river. I was absorbed by what I saw. The landscape gave itself to my seeing and I gave my attention to what I drew: "the act of receiving is always also the act of giving: a mode of *giving attention to*.... Perception gives as well as receives" (Levin, 1988, p. 63). Does the experience of

drawing, more than painting or photography, awaken this reciprocal mode of seeing?

Is the experience of painting, as Kandinsky (1964, p. 35) suggests, one of creating "a new world" out of canvas and color? And while painting do we not change and recreate what we see, regardless of whether we call ourselves abstract, impressionist, or even realist painters? How do we see through photography? The everyday ways of speaking about these activities may reveal something about how we see through them: we "make" a painting and we "take" a photograph. Would it not be strange to hear a painter speak of "taking" paintings or a photographer speak of "making" photographs? When we draw, however, we neither make nor take "pictures."

Earlier today, I "took" a picture of my sister in the park. I had been looking for a good place to take a picture of Eleanor; when she sat on a bench in front of a wall with yellow roses cascading over its worn, grey stones, I thought "what a lovely picture!" As I reached for my camera I mentally framed Eleanor and the yellow roses with an imaginary rectangle. Of course, we might also do this preliminary framing before drawing or painting: we look through the rectangular opening in a cardboard viewfinder or hold our hands in strange contortions before our face in an attempt to frame the scene before us. This is how we might begin; but once we have started to draw or paint, the imaginary frame is set aside, the view before our eyes is once again the landscape that surrounds us, and we can never quite see our drawing or painting until it appears on the paper or canvas. When I framed Eleanor and the yellow roses in my imagination, however, I could already see the finished picture. The picture was there, already made; it was just a matter of taking it. So I held the camera up to my eye, looked through the lens, cheerfully commanded "smile!" and took a shot of Eleanor. In an instant I captured my sister and the yellow roses in the afternoon light; I captured the moment. Now I have a picture of my sister. No wonder some people who live out of contact with the modern western world feel that a camera can capture their soul! What seeing through a camera, like "seeing through photographs, really invites is an acquisitive relation to the world" (Sontag, in Levin, 1988, p. 121). Is the snapshot photograph a seizing rather than a "seeing?" Drawing Eleanor on the train, I saw her and I was left with the disquieting question, "is this you?" rather than the confident claim, "I've caught you."

How Do I Know What I See Until I see What I Draw?

If drawing does not like painting "create a new world," or like photography "take a picture," then what does drawing do? Perhaps the drawings here in my sketch book will show me something about what drawing does, about what we do while we draw. I open my drawing

book and let the pages flip by one after another: faces and landscapes appear and disappear before my eyes just as scene after scene glides by through the train window. Now, I slow down as I look through my drawing book, letting my eyes rest for a few moments on each page. Every drawing holds the memory of the situation in which it was done and the marks left on each page trace the process of drawing.

Here is a drawing of a young woman at an art class. I remember the evening well. Glancing around the table for a face to draw, my eyes settle on the young woman opposite me. Those glasses will be a challenge, I think, as I pick up a large stick of soft graphite. Here goes! I grasp the graphite in my fist, in a manner not unlike a small child holding a crayon, except that the drawing tip of the graphite is secured by my thumb. My hand now moves over the paper, parallel to its surface; as my hand circles around Mera's head, I remind myself that for this drawing we are not to use line. My hand momentarily panics: "how am I to begin?" it seems to ask. "Well, just do what you usually do," I tell my hand, "but without lines or outlines." And so my uncertain hand lands on the page, somewhere on the left side of Mera's head, although it hardly matters where; it's just a matter of starting, getting something on the paper. My hand makes a scribbling gesture that the graphite, held as it is on its side, echoes with wide grey marks. I focus on Mera's head, searching for the darkest areas. My eyes continue to look up while my hand, holding the graphite, scribbles rapidly on the paper: back and forth, this way, that way, lighter here, darker there. I am suddenly fascinated by this way of seeing: dark and light areas pop into focus. I risk a glance at the page to see what is happening. I can see Mera's face appearing. Intrigued, I continue. My hand, now completely uninhibited, scribbles furiously, pushing back here, carving away there. As I draw, now rapidly and confidently, I can vaguely feel the look from someone on my right, the look that says, "she really knows what she's doing!" It may appear that way, I think in response to the look, but in fact I don't know what I am doing at all; rather, I'm finding out as I go along. I feel like a blind person, discovering the shape of a face by touching it; I feel like a sculptor chiseling away at a stone, watching the head emerge. "How do I know what I think" W.H. Auden said of writing, "until I see what I say?" (McEachern, 1984, p. 279). Could we ask of drawing: How do I know what I see until I see what I draw?

After so many years of drawing, I feel as if I am drawing for the first time. And yet isn't every drawing like this? Doesn't every mark of the pencil, pen, or graphite mark out a new path? Why would I bother drawing if I knew beforehand how the drawing was going to work out? Yet how would I be motivated to draw if I didn't already envisage the finished drawing? I must have had something in mind when I selected

the large stick of graphite. I must have had something in mind, but what?

I look down at my drawing; certainly I didn't have *this* in mind when I began. Peering through my eyelashes makes the scribbly marks blur and a face, yes Mera's face, comes into focus, astonishingly solid and three-dimensional on the flat paper. How did I do that? Now the drawing, as Berger (1960) writes,

> reached its point of crisis. Which is to say that what I had drawn began to interest me as much as what I could still discover ... One now begins to draw according to the demands, the needs, of the drawing. If the drawing is already in some way true, then these demands will probably correspond to what we might still discover by actual searching. (pp. 29-30)

Now I draw in response to the drawing, as well as in response to Mera sitting opposite me. The drawing, as the saying goes, now has a life of its own. It is as if it is no longer I who draw, but the drawing itself draws my attention to what it needs. I heed its demands and follow its leads; the shadow under her mouth wants to extend itself just a little further to the left; I draw the extension. I continue in this manner until my drawing looks up at me and says, "yes I am finished, you can stop now."

Now, here on the train, my drawing book rests on my knees open at the page with the drawing of Mera. My pen rests, temporarily out of use, in my hand. Across from me, my sister is far away immersed in her book. I turn to my drawing of Eleanor; I look at the drawing, then at her, and back at the drawing. Yes, it's finished, I think to myself. Besides, she looks different now. Looking at Eleanor, I see how she sits, how differently she sits than when I first drew her. I feel how much more comfortable and relaxed she is now. I see how her head is nestled into an uplifted shoulder. I see how the top edge of her book is parallel to her eyes, how both these lines are at right angles to the arching of her neck and other shoulder. I see all this at a glance without thinking it through verbally. Then the thought comes in the form of a question: "Shall I start another drawing of Eleanor?"

I turn to a fresh page and open my pen. I pause momentarily, but this time the clean white page is not so overwhelming: I am eager to draw and all too aware of the time that is quickly passing with the passing of the landscape through the window. Is there still enough time left to draw? As my pen touches the paper, edging along Eleanor's neck and shoulder, the thoughts that only a moment ago speculated about the time gradually fade and then vanish. As my pen circles playfully around Eleanor's head, more words, more thoughts take shape and quickly dissolve. Within a minute or two I am so completely absorbed in the movement of my hand and pen, in the lines that appear on the

paper, in the sight of Eleanor reading, that it is as if there is no space left for wordy thoughts. What Churchill writes about painting could also be said of drawing:

> I know of nothing which, without exhausting the body, more entirely absorbs the mind. Whatever the worries of the hour or the threats of the future, once the picture has begun to flow along, there is no room for them in the mental screen. They pass out into shadow and darkness. All one's mental light, such as it is, becomes concentrated on the task. Time stands respectfully aside. (Edwards, 1986, p. 54)

I could not possibly describe the experience of drawing as I do now in writing, while I am drawing.

In the midst of my second drawing of Eleanor, I suddenly realize that the train is moving at a slower pace. We are almost there ... better finish this while I can ... add that bit of hair that curls out to the left, touch up her eyes, check that angle.... Time no longer "stands respectfully aside," but now stands before me and urges me on. No longer fully engaged in the process of drawing, I find myself making a running commentary on the drawing as I add the finishing touches: it's a rather whimsical drawing, so different from the first one. Eleanor changed her pose only slightly and less than an hour has elapsed since I started the first drawing, yet this drawing looks so different from the first one. How can that be? How is it that each drawing shows me another view, another aspect of what I draw?

My thoughts are interrupted by the sudden halt of the train. "Here we are," Eleanor says. I look up saying something about how quickly the time has gone and our eyes meet as if to greet each other after a long absence. Seeing that Eleanor has already collected her things, I hurriedly put my drawing book away and pick up my coat and various bags.

"What have you been drawing?" Eleanor asks as we make our way through crowds and baggage. I can't help but smile at her question! "I'll show you when we get home," I respond, with a sisterly nudge and a twinkle in my eye.

Note

1. Here I have used Cézanne's painting in an attempt to show how an artist "sees" a landscape. While recognizing that the purposes and processes of painting differ from those of drawing, the way of seeing a landscape can, I feel, be similar enough, to use this painting as an example.

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