



## Gradient (2/16/24)

Here's what can happen when a drawing shatters or dissolves all the way into nothing but flakes, though another drawing could do the same and look very different. In this case, the network of more voluptuous forms that first filled the page eroded into ribbons and knots, but these were only beginning to break up into separate forms and figures when the shattering began. None of the forms put up much of a fight. The thermodynamic gradient between order and chaos was steep and smooth, hardly a detour or dawdle along the way. To tell the truth, I hadn't been very attached to the figures and forms in the first place, whether from general jadedness or something else. Like a god who, just a couple of pages into *Genesis*, gets fed up with his creation and announces that *the end of all flesh has come before me*, I let my little world drown in swirling waters, but with no Noah and no ark.

You can still catch a whisper of the forms in the pencil lines incised on the surface of the paper, still shiny with graphite if you look at them in a raking light (but invisible in the reproduction), and in the particle trails that occupy the positive and negative spaces in and around where there once was structure. But what you see is not just here the bulge of a shoulder and there the arch of a back where figures once stood, but ghostly premonitions of future entities emerging in the form of dazzling curves and circles in the process of articulating. The dazzle, which is what told me I could stop drawing, is how you can see the nonduality of (1) structure having just dissolved, leaving only eddies and crosscurrents on the verge of dissipating altogether, and (2) structure on the verge of emerging, because even the brink of thermodynamic equilibrium is abuzz and aswirl with nascent complexities.

Was this balance too easily achieved, since the forms never struggled to realize themselves in the round and to glow with life even as the undertow was pulling them apart, and proceeded to *go gentle into that good night*? Was my going with the flow an act of enlightened non-attachment or *wu wei* (effortless action)-- or just laziness, the path of least resistance to the end of the drawing? Do most of my other drawings try too hard, yearn too quixotically to come alive, hold on too tightly and too long to form and figuration, trying to cheat death and dissolution, let go too reluctantly and not thoroughly enough? Not to be flip, but a quick answer to this question is *whatever works for you*.

In writing this, for the first time, I realize that what's been happening in my drawing has been happening in my writing too. I've always had to negotiate with myself when to indulge and

when to resist my own maximalism, but lately what I'm writing comes more and more into its own as I let go of words, prune back clauses, whittle down sentences, discard detours and parenthetical remarks. Because of my maximalism, it still amazes me that the subtractive part of the process is not just remedial but creative. Writing and drawing are hybrid additive *and* subtractive arts, *weaving plus carving*. The brain makes neural connections promiscuously, but intelligence can only evolve in the process of pruning them back, weeding out the least networked or nodal ones. You need the promiscuity and the pruning; they are one. *The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom* (Blake).