

Author's Introduction to the English Edition

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Francis Bacon's painting is of a very special violence. Bacon, to be sure, often traffics in the violence of a depicted scene: spectacles of horror, Crucifixions, prostheses and mutilations, monsters. But these are overly facile detours, detours that the artist himself judges severely and condemns in his work. What directly interests him is a violence that is involved only with color and line: the violence of a sensation (and not of a representation), a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression. For example, a scream rent from us by a foreboding of invisible forces: "to paint the scream more than the horror..." In the long run Bacon's Figures aren't wracked bodies at all, but ordinary bodies in ordinary situations of constraint and discomfort. A man ordered to sit still for hours on a narrow stool is bound to assume contorted postures. The violence of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile... Bacon's bodies, heads, Figures are of flesh, and what fascinates him are the invisible forces that model flesh or shake it. This is not the relationship of form and matter, but of materials and forces; to make these forces visible through their effects on flesh. There is, before anything else, a force of inertia that is of flesh itself; with Bacon, flesh, however firm, descends from bones; it falls or tends to fall away from them (hence those flattened sleepers who keep one arm raised, or thighs lifted from which the flesh seems to cascade). What fascinates Bacon is not movement, but its effect on an immobile body: heads whipped by wind, deformed by an aspiration—but also all the interior forces that climb through flesh. To make spasm visible. The entire body becomes plexus. If there is feeling in Bacon, it is not a taste for horror, it is pity, an intense pity: pity for flesh, including the flesh of dead animals.

There is another element in Bacon's painting: those large fields of color on which the Figure detaches itself, fields without depth or with only the kind of shallow depth that characterizes postcubism. These large shores are themselves divided in sections, or else crossed by tubes or very thin rails, or else sliced by a band or largish stripe. These form an armature, a bone structure. Sometimes they are like a ship's rigging, suspended in the sky of the field of color, upon which the Figure executes its taunting acrobatics.

These two pictorial elements do not remain indifferent to one another, but instead draw life from one another. It often seems that the flat fields of color curl around the Figure, together constituting a *shallow depth*, forming a hollow volume, determining a curve, an isolating track or ring at the core of which the Figure enacts its small feats (vomiting in a sink, shutting the door with the tip of its foot, twisting itself on a stool). This kind of situation finds its equivalent only in theater, or in a Beckett novel such as *Le Dépeupleur* (published in English in 1972 as *The Lost Ones*)—"inside a flattened cylinder... The light... Its yellowness"—or else it is found in visions of bodies plunging into a black tunnel. But if these fields of color press toward the Figure, the Figure in turn presses outward, trying to pass and dissolve through the Fields. Already we have here the role of the spasm or of the scream: the entire body trying to escape, to flow out of itself. And this occurs not only in Bacon's sinks but also through his famous umbrellas, which snatch part of the Figure and have a prolonged, exaggerated point, like vampires: the entire body trying to flee, to disgorge itself through a tip or a hole. Or else, on the contrary, it will flatten itself and stretch itself into a thick mirror, lodging its entirety into this width until it separates and dissipates like a lump of fat in a bowl of soup. The Figures themselves always present clean zones and foggy ones that attest to this dissipation. As of 1978-1979 we can speak of a few paintings still rare with Bacon wherein the Figure has in effect disappeared, leaving a trace or a geyser, a jet of water, of vapor, of sand, of dust, or of grass. This new period, which seems so rich to us in possibilities for the future, is an abstraction that is purely Bacon's. It consummates

the double motion, of fields of color toward the Figure, and of the Figure toward the fields.

Bacon is a great colorist. And color with him relates to many different systems, two most importantly—one of which corresponds to the Figure/flesh, and the other to the color-field/section. It is as though Bacon has reassumed the entire problem of painting after Cézanne. Cézanne's "solution"—basically a modulation of color by means of distinct touches that proceed according to the order of the spectrum—in effect gave birth or rebirth to two problems: how, on the one hand, to preserve the homogeneity or unity of ground as though it were a perpendicular armature for chromatic progression, while on the other also to preserve the specificity or singularity of a form in perpetual variation? It was the new problem for Van Gogh as much as for Gauguin. A problem with two pressing dangers, since the ground could not be allowed to remain inert, nor could the form become murky or dissolve into grisaille. Van Gogh and Gauguin rediscovered the art of the portrait, "the portrait through color," by restoring to the ground vast monochrome fields that carry toward infinity, and by inventing new colors—"far from nature"—for flesh, colors that seem to have been baked in a kiln and that rival ceramics. The first aspect has not ceased to inspire experiments in modern painting: those great, brilliant monochrome fields that take life not in variations of hue but in very subtle shifts of intensity or saturation determined by zones of proximity. This would be Bacon's path: where these zones of proximity are induced either by sections of fields of color, or by virtue of a white stretched band or larger stripe that crosses the field (one finds an analogous structure in Barnett Newman). The other aspect, the colors for flesh, was to be resolved by Bacon along lines that Gauguin presaged: by producing broken tones (*tons rompus*), as though baked in a furnace and flayed by fire. Bacon's genius as a colorist exists in both of these ideas at once, while most modern painters have concentrated on the first. These two aspects are strict correlates in Bacon: a brilliant, pure tone for the large fields, coupled with a program of intensification; broken tones for the flesh, coupled with a procedure of rupturing or "fireblasting," a

critical mixture of complementaries. It is as though painting were able to conquer time in two ways, through color: as eternity and light in the infinity of a field, where bodies fall or go through their paces; and in another way as passage, as metabolic variability in the enactment of these bodies, in their flesh and on their skin (thus three large male backs with varying chasms in value). It is a *Chronochromie*, in the spirit in which the composer Olivier Messiaen named one of his works.

The abandonment of simple figuration is the general fact of modern painting and, still more, of painting altogether, of all time. But what is interesting is the way in which Bacon, for his part, breaks with figuration: it is not impressionism, not expressionism, not symbolism, not cubism, not abstraction... Never (except perhaps in the case of Michelangelo) has anyone broken with figuration by elevating the Figure to such prominence. It is the confrontation of Figure and field, their solitary wrestling in *shallow depth*, that rips the painting away from all narrative as well as from all symbolization. When narrative or symbolic, figuration only obtains the bogus violence of the represented or the signified, but it expresses nothing of the violence of sensation—in other words, of the act of painting. It was natural, even necessary, that Bacon should revive the triptych: in this format he finds the conditions for painting and for color exactly as he conceives them to be. The triptych has thoroughly separate sections, truly distinct, which in advance negate any narrative that would establish itself among them. Yet Bacon also links these sections with a kind of brutal, unifying distribution that makes them interrelate free of any symbolic undercurrent. It is in the triptychs that colors become light and that light divides itself into colors. In them, one discovers rhythm as the essence of painting. For it is never a matter of this or that character, this or that object possessing rhythm. On the contrary, rhythms and rhythms alone become characters, become objects. Rhythms are the only characters, the only Figures. The triptych's function is precisely to this point—to make evident that which might otherwise risk remaining hidden. What a triptych's three panels in various ways distribute is analogous to three basic

rhythms—one steady or “witness” rhythm, and two other rhythms, one of *crescendo or simplification* (climbing, expanding, diastolic, adding value), the other of *diminuendo or elimination* (descending, contracting, systolic, removing value). Let us consider every Bacon triptych: in any given case, where is the witness-Figure, where is the adjunctive or the reductive Figure? A 1972 *Triptych* shows a Figure whose back is “diminished,” but whose leg is already complete, and another Figure whose torso has been completed, but who is missing one leg and whose other leg is running. These are monsters from the point of view of figuration. But from the point of view of the Figures themselves, these are rhythms and nothing else, rhythms as in a piece of music, as in the music of Messiaen which makes you hear “rhythmic characters.” If one keeps the development of the triptych in mind, of this way Bacon has of effecting relationships between painting and music, then one can return to the simple paintings. No doubt one would see that each of them is organized as though a triptych, that each already encompasses a triptych, each distributes rhythms, at least three, as though so many Figures resonate in the field, and that the field separates and joins them, superposes them, of a piece.

CHAPTER 2

Note on Figuration in Past Painting

Painting, religion, and photography — On two misconceptions

Painting has to extract the Figure from the figurative. But Bacon invokes two developments which seem to indicate that modern painting has a different relation to figuration or illustration than the painting of the past. First, photography has taken over the illustrative and documentary role, so that modern painting no longer needs to fulfill this function, which still burdened earlier painters. Second, painting used to be conditioned by certain "religious possibilities" that still gave a pictorial meaning to figuration, whereas modern painting is an atheistic game.¹

Yet it is by no means certain that these two ideas, taken from Malraux, are adequate. On the one hand, such activities are in competition with each other, and one art would never be content to assume a role abandoned by another. It is hard to imagine an activity that would take over a function relinquished by a superior art. The photograph, though instantaneous, has a completely different ambition than representing, illustrating, or narrating. And when Bacon speaks of his own use of photographs, and of the relationships between photography and painting, he has much more profound things to say. On the other hand, the link between the pictorial element and religious sentiment, in past painting, in turn seems poorly defined by the hypothesis of a figurative function that was simply sanctified by faith.

Consider an extreme example: El Greco's *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586–1588) [106]. A horizontal divides the painting into two parts, upper and lower, celestial and terrestrial. In the lower half, there is indeed a figuration or narration that represents the

burial of the count, although all the coefficients of bodily deformation, and notably elongation, are already at work. But in the upper half, where the count is received by Christ, there is a wild liberation, a total emancipation: the Figures are lifted up and elongated, refined without measure, beyond all constraint. Despite appearances, there is no longer a story to tell; the Figures are relieved of their representative role, and enter directly into relation with an order of celestial sensations. This is what Christian painting had already discovered in the religious sentiment: a properly pictorial atheism, where one could adhere literally to the idea that God must not be represented. With God—but also with Christ, the Virgin, and even Hell—lines, colors, and movements are freed from the demands of representation. The Figures are lifted up, or doubled over, or contorted, freed from all figuration. They no longer have anything to represent or narrate, since in this domain they are content to refer to the existing code of the church. Thus, in themselves, they no longer have to do with anything but "sensations"—celestial, infernal, or terrestrial sensations. Everything is made to pass through the code, the religious sentiment is painted in all the colors of the world. One must not say, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." It is just the opposite. For with God, everything is permitted. It is with God that everything is permitted, not only morally, since violences and infamies always find a holy justification, but aesthetically, in a much more important manner, because the divine Figures are wrought by a free creative work, by a fantasy in which everything is permitted. Christ's body is fashioned by a truly diabolical inspiration that makes it pass through all the "areas of sensation," through all the "levels of different feelings." Consider two further examples. In Giotto's *Stigmatization of St. Francis* (1297–1300) [105], Christ is transformed into a kite in the sky, a veritable airplane, which sends the stigmata to St. Francis, while the hatched lines that trace the path to the stigmata are like free marks, which the saint manipulates as if they were the strings of the airplane-kite. Or Tintoretto's *Creation of the Animals* (c. 1550) [109]: God is like a referee firing the gun at the start of a handicapped race, in which the birds and the

fish take off first, while the dog, the rabbits, the cow, and the unicorn await their turn.

Thus we cannot say that it was religious sentiment that sustained figuration in the painting of the past; on the contrary, it made possible a liberation of Figures, the emergence of Figures freed from all figuration. Nor can we say that the renunciation of figuration was easier for modern painting as a game. On the contrary, modern painting is invaded and besieged by photographs and clichés that are already lodged on the canvas before the painter even begins to work. In fact, it would be a mistake to think that the painter works on a white and virgin surface. The entire surface is already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with. This is exactly what Bacon says when he speaks of the photograph: it is not a figuration of what one sees, it is what modern man sees.² It is not dangerous simply because it is figurative, but because it claims to *reign over vision*, and thus to reign over painting. Having renounced the religious sentiment, but besieged by the photograph, modern painting finds itself in a situation that, despite appearances, makes it much more difficult to break with the figuration that would seem to be its miserable reserved domain. Abstract painting attests to this difficulty: the extraordinary work of abstract painting was necessary in order to tear modern art away from figuration. But is there not another path, more direct and more sensible?

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Body, Meat, and Spirit: Becoming-Animal

*Man and animal — The zone of indiscernibility —
Flesh and bone: the meat descends from the bone —
Pity — Head, face, and meat*

The body is the Figure, or rather the material of the Figure. The material of the Figure must not be confused with the spatializing material structure, which is positioned in opposition to it. The body is the Figure, not the structure. Conversely, the Figure, being a body, is not the face, and does not even have a face. It does have a head, because the head is an integral part of the body. It can even be reduced to the head. As a portraitist, Bacon is a painter of heads, not faces, and there is a great difference between the two. For the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination. It is not that the head lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit... Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter: *to dismantle the face, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face.*

The deformations the body undergoes are also the *animal traits of the head*. This has nothing to do with a correspondence between animal forms and facial forms. In fact, the face lost its form by being subjected to the techniques of rubbing and brushing that disorganize it and make a head emerge in its place. The marks or traits of animality are not animal forms but rather the spirits that haunt the wiped-off parts, that pull at the head, individualizing and qualifying the head without a face.¹ Bacon's techniques of local scrubbing and

asignifying traits take on a particular meaning here. Sometimes the human head is replaced by an animal, but it is not the animal as a form but rather the animal as a *trait*—for example, the quivering trait of a bird spiraling over the scrubbed area, while the simulacra of portrait-faces on either side of it act as “attendants” (as in the 1976 *Triptych* [79]). Sometimes an animal, for example, a real dog, is treated as the shadow of its master [52], or conversely, the man’s shadow itself assumes an autonomous and indeterminate animal existence [73]. The shadow escapes from the body like an animal we had been sheltering. In place of formal correspondences, what Bacon’s painting constitutes is a *zone of indiscernibility or undecidability* between man and animal. Man becomes animal, but not without the animal becoming spirit at the same time, the spirit of man, the physical spirit of man presented in the mirror as Eumenides or Fate [77]. It is never a combination of forms, but rather the common fact: the common fact of man and animal. Bacon pushes this to the point where even his most isolated Figure is already a coupled Figure, man is coupled with his animal in a latent bullfight.

This objective zone of indiscernibility is the entire body, but the body insofar as it is flesh or meat. Of course, the body has bones as well, but bones are only its spatial structure. A distinction is often made between flesh and bone, and even between things related to them. The body is revealed only when it ceases to be supported by the bones, when the flesh ceases to cover the bones, when the two exist for each other, but each on its own terms: the bone as the material structure of the body, the flesh as the bodily material of the Figure. Bacon admires the young woman in Degas’s *After the Bath* [101], whose suspended spinal column seems to protrude from her flesh, making it seem much more vulnerable and lithe, acrobatic.² In a completely different context, Bacon has painted such a spinal column on a Figure doubled over in contortions (*Three Figures and a Portrait*, 1975 [78]). This pictorial tension between flesh and bone is something that must be achieved. And what achieves this tension in the painting is, precisely, *meat*, through the splendor of its colors. Meat is the state of the body in which flesh and bone confront each

other locally rather than being composed structurally. The same is true of the mouth and the teeth, which are little bones. In meat, the flesh seems to *descend* from the bones, while the bones rise up from the flesh. This is a feature of Bacon’s that distinguishes him from Rembrandt and Soutine. If there is an “interpretation” of the body in Bacon, it lies in his taste for painting prone Figures, whose raised arm or thigh is equivalent to a bone, so that the drowsy flesh seems to descend from it. Thus, we find the two sleeping twins flanked by animal-spirit attendants in the central panel of the 1968 triptych [53]; but also the series of the sleeping man with raised arms [25], the sleeping woman with vertical legs [28], and the sleeper or addict with the hypodermic syringe [31, 58]. Well beyond the apparent sadism, the bones are like a trapeze apparatus (the carcass) upon which the flesh is the acrobat. The athleticism of the body is naturally prolonged in this acrobatics of the flesh. We can see here the importance of the *fall [chute]* in Bacon’s work. Already in the crucifixions, what interests Bacon is the descent, and the inverted head that reveals the flesh. In the crucifixions of 1962 and 1965, we can see the flesh literally descending from the bones, framed by an armchair-cross and a bone-lined ring [29, 35]. For both Bacon and Kafka, the spinal column is nothing but a sword beneath the skin, slipped into the body of an innocent sleeper by an executioner.³ Sometimes a bone will even be added only as an afterthought in a random spurt of paint.

Pity the meat! Meat is undoubtedly the chief object of Bacon’s pity, his only object of pity, his Anglo-Irish pity. On this point he is like Soutine, with his immense pity for the Jew. Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics. Bacon does not say, “Pity the beasts,” but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility; it is a “fact,” a state where the painter identifies with the objects of his horror and his compassion. The painter is certainly a butcher; but he goes to the butcher shop as if it were a church,

with the meat as the crucified victim (the *Painting* of 1946 [3]). Bacon is a religious painter only in butcher shops. "I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion. . . . Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal."⁴ Near the end of the eighteenth century, the novelist K. P. Moritz described a person with "strange feelings": an extreme sense of isolation, an insignificance almost equal to nothingness; the horror of sacrifice he feels when he witnesses the execution of four men, "exterminated and torn to pieces," and when he sees the remains of these men "thrown on the wheel" or over the balustrade; his certainty that in some strange way this event concerns all of us, that this discarded meat is we ourselves, and that the spectator is already in the spectacle, a "mass of ambulating flesh"; hence his living idea that even animals are part of humanity, that we are all criminals, we are all cattle; and then, his fascination with the wounded animal, "a calf, the head, the eyes, the snout, the nostrils . . . and sometimes he lost himself in such sustained contemplation of the beast that he really believed he experienced, for an instant, the *type of existence* of such a being . . . in short, the question if he, among men, was a dog or another animal had already occupied his thoughts since childhood."⁵ Moritz's passages are magnificent. This is not an arrangement of man and beast, nor a resemblance; it is a deep identity, a zone of indiscernibility more profound than any sentimental identification: the man who suffers is a beast, the beast that suffers is a man. This is the reality of becoming. What revolutionary person in art, politics, religion, or elsewhere, has not felt that extreme moment when he or she was nothing but a beast, and became responsible, not for the calves who died, but *before* the calves who died?

But can one say the same thing, exactly the same thing, about meat and the head, namely, that they are the zone of objective indcision between man and animal? Can one say objectively that the head is meat (just as meat is spirit)? Of all the parts of the body, is

not the head the part that is closest to the bone? Look again at El Greco or Soutine. Yet Bacon does not seem to think of the head in this manner. The bone belongs to the face, not to the head. According to Bacon, there is no death's-head. The head is deboned rather than bony, yet it is not at all soft, but firm. The head is of the flesh, and the mask itself is not a death mask, it is a block of firm flesh that has been separated from the bone: hence the studies for a portrait of William Blake [20, 21]. Bacon's own head is a piece of flesh haunted by a very beautiful gaze emanating from eyes without sockets. And he pays tribute to Rembrandt for having known how to paint a final self-portrait as one such block of flesh without eye sockets.⁶ Throughout Bacon's work, the relationship between the head and meat runs through a scale of intensity that renders it increasingly intimate. First, the meat (flesh on one side, bone on the other) is positioned on the edge of the ring or the balustrade where the Figure-head is seated [3]; but it is also the dense, fleshly rain that surrounds the head and dismantles its face beneath the umbrella [65]. The scream that comes out of the Pope's mouth, and the pity that comes out of his eyes, have meat as their object [27]. Later, the meat is given a head, through which it takes flight and descends from the cross, as in the two preceding crucifixions [29, 35]. Later still, Bacon's series of heads will assert their identity with meat, among the most beautiful of which are those painted in the colors of meat, red and blue [26]. Finally, the meat is itself the head; the head becomes the non-localized power of the meat, as in the 1950 *Fragment of a Crucifixion* [7], where the meat howls under the gaze of a dog-spirit perched on top of the cross. Bacon dislikes this painting because of the simplicity of its rather obvious method: it had been enough to hollow out a mouth from solid meat. Still, it is important to understand the affinity of the mouth, and the interior of the mouth, with meat, and to reach the point where the open mouth becomes nothing more than the section of a severed artery, or even a jacket sleeve that is equivalent to an artery, as in the bloodied pillow in the *Sweeney Agonistes* triptych [46]. The mouth then acquires this power of nonlocalization

that turns all meat into a head without a face. It is no longer a particular organ, but the hole through which the entire body escapes, and from which the flesh descends (here the method of free, involuntary marks will be necessary). This is what Bacon calls the Scream, in the immense pity that the meat evokes.

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Painting and Sensation

*Cézanne and sensation — The levels of sensation —
Figuration and violence — The movement of translation,
the stroll — The phenomenological unity of the senses:
sensation and rhythm*

There are two ways of going beyond figuration (that is, beyond both the illustrative and the figurative): either toward abstract form or toward the Figure. Cézanne gave a simple name to this way of the Figure: sensation. The Figure is the sensible form related to a sensation; it acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh, whereas abstract form is addressed to the head and acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone. Certainly Cézanne did not invent this way of sensation in painting, but he gave it an unprecedented status. Sensation is the opposite of the facile and the ready-made, the cliché, but also of the "sensational," the spontaneous, etc. Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, "instinct," "temperament"—a whole vocabulary common to both Naturalism and Cézanne), and one face turned toward the object (the "fact," the place, the event). Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly, it is Being-in-the-World, as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other.¹ And at the limit, it is the same body that, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed. This was Cézanne's lesson against the impressionists: sensation is not in the "free" or disembodied play of light and

color (impressions); on the contrary, it is in the body, even the body of an apple. Color is in the body, sensation is in the body, and not in the air. Sensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation (what Lawrence, speaking of Cézanne, called "the appleyness of the apple").²

This is the very general thread that links Bacon to Cézanne: *paint the sensation*, or, as Bacon will say in words very close to Cézanne's, *record the fact*.³ "It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain."⁴ There would seem to be only obvious differences between these two painters: Cézanne's world as landscape and still life (even before the portraits, which are treated as landscapes) versus Bacon's inverted hierarchy that dismisses still lifes and landscapes;⁵ the world as Nature in Cézanne versus the world as artifact in Bacon. But precisely, are not these obvious differences in the service of "sensation" and "temperament"? In other words, are they not inscribed in what links Bacon to Cézanne, in what they have in common? When Bacon speaks of sensation, he says two things, which are very similar to Cézanne. Negatively, he says that the form related to the sensation (the Figure) is the opposite of the form related to an object that it is supposed to represent (figuration). As Valéry put it, sensation is that which is transmitted directly, and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story.⁶ And positively, Bacon constantly says that sensation is what passes from one "order" to another, from one "level" to another, from one "area" to another. This is why sensation is the master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations. In this regard, the same criticism can be made against both figurative painting and abstract painting: they pass through the brain, they do not act directly upon the nervous system, they do not attain the sensation, they do not liberate the Figure—all because they remain at *one and the same level*.⁷ They can implement transformations of form, but they cannot attain deformations of bodies. In what sense Bacon

is Cézannian, even more so than if he were a disciple of Cézanne, we will have occasion to consider later.

What does Bacon mean when, throughout the interviews, he speaks of "orders of sensation," "levels of feeling," "areas of sensation," or "shifting sequences"?⁸ At first, one might think that each order, level, or area corresponds to a specific sensation: each sensation would thus be a term in a sequence or a series. For example, the series of Rembrandt's self-portraits involves us in different areas of feeling.⁹ And it is true that painting, and especially Bacon's painting, proceeds through series: series of crucifixions, series of Popes, series of self-portraits, series of the mouth, of the mouth that screams, the mouth that smiles... Moreover, there can be series of simultaneity, as in the triptychs, which make at least three levels or orders coexist. And the series can be closed, when it has a contrasting composition, but it can be open, when it is continued or continuable beyond the three.¹⁰ All this is true. But it would not be true were there not something else as well, something that is already at work in each painting, each Figure, each sensation. It is each painting, each Figure, that is itself a shifting sequence or series (and not simply a term in a series); it is each sensation that exists at diverse levels, in different orders, or in different domains. This means that there are not sensations of different orders, but different orders of one and the same sensation. It is the nature of sensation to envelop a constitutive difference of level, a plurality of constituting domains. Every sensation, and every Figure, is already an "accumulated" or "coagulated" sensation, as in a limestone figure.¹¹ Hence the irreducibly synthetic character of sensation. What then, we must ask, is the source of this synthetic character, through which each material sensation has several levels, several orders or domains. What are these levels, and what makes up their sensing or sensed unity?

A first response must obviously be rejected. What makes up the material synthetic unity of a sensation would be the represented object, the figured thing. This is theoretically impossible, since the Figure is opposed to figuration. But even if we observe practically, as

Bacon does, that something is nonetheless figured (for instance, a screaming Pope), this secondary figuration depends on the neutralization of all primary figuration. Bacon himself formulates this problem, which concerns the inevitable preservation of a practical figuration at the very moment when the Figure asserts its intention to break away from the figurative. We will see how he resolves the problem. In any case, Bacon has always tried to eliminate the "sensational," that is, the primary figuration of that which provokes a violent sensation. This is the meaning of the formula, "I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror."¹² When he paints the screaming Pope, there is nothing that might cause horror, and the curtain in front of the Pope is not only a way of isolating him, of shielding him from view; it is rather the way in which the Pope himself sees nothing, and screams *before the invisible*. Thus neutralized, the horror is multiplied because it is inferred from the scream, and not the reverse. And certainly it is not easy to renounce the horror, or the primary figuration. Sometimes he has to turn against his own instincts, renounce his own experience. Bacon harbors within himself all the violence of Ireland, and the violence of Nazism, the violence of war. He passes through the horror of the crucifixions, and especially the fragment of the crucifixion, or the head of meat, or the bloody suitcase. But when he passes judgment on his own paintings, he rejects all those that are still too "sensational," because the figuration that subsists in them reconstitutes a scene of horror, even if only secondarily, thereby reintroducing a story to be told: even the bullfights are too dramatic. As soon as there is horror, a story is reintroduced, and the scream is botched. In the end, the maximum violence will be found in the seated or crouching Figures, which are subjected to neither torture nor brutality, to which nothing visible happens, and yet which manifest the power of the paint all the more. This is because violence has two very different meanings: "When talking about the violence of paint, it's nothing to do with the violence of war."¹³ The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it

passes, the domains it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of the nature of a represented object. It is the same with Artaud: cruelty is not what one believes it to be, and depends less and less on what is represented.

A second interpretation must also be rejected, which would confuse the levels of sensation, that is, the valencies of the sensation, with an ambivalence of feeling. At one point, Sylvester suggests, "Since you talk about recording different levels of feeling in one image... you may be expressing at one and the same time a love of the person and a hostility towards them... both a caress and an assault?" To which Bacon responds, "That is too logical. I don't think that's the way things work. I think it goes to a deeper thing: how do I feel I can make this image more immediately real to myself? That's all."¹⁴ In fact, the psychoanalytic hypothesis of ambivalence not only has the disadvantage of localizing the ambivalence on the side of the spectator who looks at the painting; for even if we presuppose an ambivalence in the Figure itself, it would refer to feelings that the Figure would experience in relation to represented things, in relation to a narrated story. But there are no feelings in Bacon: there are nothing but affects, that is, "sensations" and "instincts," according to the formula of Naturalism. Sensation is what determines instinct at a particular moment, just as instinct is the passage from one sensation to another, the search for the "best" sensation (not the most agreeable sensation, but the one that fills the flesh at a particular moment of its descent, contraction, or dilation).

There is a third, more interesting, hypothesis. This would be the motor hypothesis. The levels of sensation would be like arrests or snapshots of motion, which would recompose the movement synthetically in all its continuity, speed, and violence, as in synthetic cubism, futurism, or Duchamp's *Nude* [102]. It is true that Bacon is fascinated by the decomposition of movement in Muybridge, which he has used as a subject matter. It is also true that he obtains very intense and violent movements of his own [39], such as George Dyer's 180-degree turn of the head toward Lucian Freud [42]. More generally, Bacon's Figures are often frozen in the middle of a strange stroll

[68], as in *Man Carrying a Child* [22] or the Van Gogh [23]. The round area or the parallelepiped that isolates the Figure itself becomes a motor, and Bacon has not abandoned the project that a mobile sculpture could achieve more easily: in this case, the contour or pedestal would slide along the length of the armature so that the Figure could make its "daily round."¹⁵ But it is precisely the nature of this daily round that can inform us of the status of movement in Bacon. Beckett and Bacon have never been so close, and this daily round is the kind of stroll typical of Beckett's characters: they too trundle about fitfully without ever leaving their circle or parallelepiped. It is the stroll of the paralytic child and its mother clinging to the edge of the balustrade in a curious handicapped race [36]. It is the about-face in *Figure Turning* [30]. It is George Dyer's bicycle ride [40], which closely resembles that of Moritz's hero: "his vision was limited to the small piece of land he could see about him. . . . To him, the end of all things seemed to lead, at the end of his journey, to just such a point."¹⁶ Therefore, even when the contour is displaced, the movement consists less of this displacement than the amoeba-like exploration that the Figure is engaged in inside the contour. Movement does not explain sensation; on the contrary, it is explained by the elasticity of the sensation, its *vis elastica*. According to Beckett's or Kafka's law, there is immobility beyond movement: beyond standing up, there is sitting down, and beyond sitting down, lying down, beyond which one finally dissipates. The true acrobat is one who is consigned to immobility inside the circle. The large feet of the Figures often do not lend themselves to walking: they are almost clubfeet (and the large armchairs often seem to resemble shoes for clubfeet). In short, it is not movement that explains the levels of sensation, it is the levels of sensation that explain what remains of movement. And in fact, what interests Bacon is not exactly movement, although his painting makes movement very intense and violent. But in the end, it is a movement "in-place," a spasm, which reveals a completely different problem characteristic of Bacon: *the action of invisible forces on the body* (hence the bodily deformations, which are due to this more profound cause). In the 1973 triptych

Spasm
as movement
in immobility
↓
Cool

[73], the movement of translation occurs between two spasms, between the two movements of a contraction in one place.

Then there would be yet another hypothesis, more "phenomenological." The levels of sensation would really be domains of sensation that refer to the different sense organs; but precisely each level, each domain, would have a way of referring to the others, independently of the represented object they have in common. Between a color, a taste, a touch, a smell, a noise, a weight, there would be an existential communication that would constitute the "pathic" (non-representative) moment of *the* sensation. In Bacon's bullfights, for example, we hear the noise of the beast's hooves [56, 57]; in the 1976 triptych, we touch the quivering of the bird plunging into the place where the head should be [79], and each time meat is represented, we touch it, smell it, eat it, weigh it, as in Soutine's work; and the portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne [41] causes a head to appear to which ovals and traits have been added in order to widen the eyes, flair the nostrils, lengthen the mouth, and mobilize the skin in a common exercise of all the organs at once. The painter would thus *make visible* a kind of original unity of the senses, and would make a multisensible Figure appear visually.

But this operation is possible only if the sensation of a particular domain (here, the visual sensation) is in direct contact with a vital power that exceeds every domain and traverses them all. This power is Rhythm, which is more profound than vision, hearing, etc. Rhythm appears as music when it invests the auditory level, and as painting when it invests the visual level. This is a "logic of the senses," as Cézanne said, which is neither rational nor cerebral. What is ultimate is thus the relation between sensation and rhythm, which places in each sensation the levels and domains through which it passes. This rhythm runs through a painting just as it runs through a piece of music. It is diastole-systole: the world that seizes me by closing in around me, the self that opens to the world and opens the world itself.¹⁷ Cézanne, it is said, is the painter who put a vital rhythm into the visual sensation. Must we say the same thing of Bacon, with his co-existent movements, when the flat field closes in around the Figure

and when the Figure contracts or, on the contrary, expands in order to rejoin the field, to the point where the figure merges with the field? Could it be that Bacon's closed and artificial world reveals the same vital movement as Cézanne's Nature? Bacon is not using empty words when he declares that he is cerebrally pessimistic but nervously optimistic, with an optimism that believes only in life.¹⁸ The same "temperament" as Cézanne? Bacon's formula would be: figuratively pessimistic, but figurally optimistic.

CHAPTER 7

Hysteria

*The body without organs: Artaud — Worringer's Gothic line —
What the "difference of level" in sensation means — Vibration —
Hysteria and presence — Bacon's doubt —
Hysteria, painting, and the eye*

This ground, this rhythmic unity of the senses, can be discovered only by going beyond the organism. The phenomenological hypothesis is perhaps insufficient because it merely invokes the lived body. But the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlivable Power [*Puissance*]. We can seek the unity of rhythm only at the point where rhythm itself plunges into chaos, into the night, at the point where the differences of level are perpetually and violently mixed.

Beyond the organism, but also at the limit of the lived body, there lies what Artaud discovered and named: the body without organs. "The body is the body / it stands alone / it has no need of organs / the body is never an organism / organisms are the enemies of bodies."¹ The body without organs is opposed less to organs than to that organization of organs we call an organism. It is an intense and intensive body. It is traversed by a wave that traces levels or thresholds in the body according to the variations of its amplitude. Thus the body does not have organs, but thresholds or levels. Sensation is not qualitative and qualified, but has only an intensive reality, which no longer determines within itself representative elements, but allotropic variations. Sensation is vibration. We know that the egg reveals just this state of the body "before" organic representation: axes and vectors, gradients, zones, kinematic movements, and dynamic tendencies, in relation to which forms are contingent or accessory. "No mouth.

No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus." It is a whole nonorganic life, for the organism is not life, it is what imprisons life. The body is completely living, and yet nonorganic. Likewise sensation, when it acquires a body through the organism, takes on an excessive and spasmodic appearance, exceeding the bounds of organic activity. It is immediately conveyed in the flesh through the nervous wave or vital emotion. Bacon and Artaud meet on many points: the Figure is the body without organs (dismantle the organism in favor of the body, the face in favor of the head); the body without organs is flesh and nerve; a wave flows through it and traces levels upon it; a sensation is produced when the wave encounters the Forces acting on the body, an "affective athleticism," a scream-breath. When sensation is linked to the body in this way, it ceases to be representative and becomes real; and *cruelty* will be linked less and less to the representation of something horrible, and will become nothing other than the action of forces upon the body, or sensation (the opposite of the sensational). As opposed to a *miserabiliste* painter who paints parts of organs, Bacon has not ceased to paint bodies without organs, the intensive fact of the body. The scrubbed and brushed parts of the canvas are, in Bacon, parts of a neutralized organism, restored to their state of zones or levels: "the human visage has not yet found its face."

A powerful nonorganic life: this is how Worringer defined Gothic art, "the northern Gothic line."² It is opposed in principle to the organic representation of classical art. Classical art can be figurative, insofar as it refers to something represented, but it can also be abstract, when it extricates a geometric form from the representation. But the pictorial line in Gothic painting is completely different, as are its geometry and figure. First of all, this line is decorative; it lies at the surface, but it is a material decoration that does not outline a form. It is a geometry no longer in the service of the essential and eternal, but a geometry in the service of "problems" or "accidents": ablation, adjunction, projection, intersection. It is thus a line that never ceases to change direction, that is broken, split, diverted, turned in on itself, coiled up, or even extended beyond its natural limits,

dying away in a "disordered convulsion": there are *free marks* that extend or arrest the line, acting beneath or beyond representation. It is thus a geometry or a decoration that has become vital and profound, on the condition that it is no longer organic: it elevates mechanical forces to sensible intuition, it works through violent movements. If it encounters the animal, if it becomes *animalized*, it is not by outlining a form but, on the contrary, by imposing, through its clarity and nonorganic precision, a zone where forms become indiscernible. It also attests to a high *spirituality*, since what leads it to seek the elementary forces beyond the organic is a spiritual will. But this spirituality is a spirituality of the body; the spirit is the body itself, the body without organs... (The first Figure of Bacon would be that of a Gothic decorator.)

Life provides many ambiguous approaches to the body without organs (alcohol, drugs, schizophrenia, sadomasochism, and so on). But can the living reality of this body be named "hysteria," and if so, in what sense? A wave with a variable amplitude flows through the body without organs; it traces zones and levels on this body according to the variations of its amplitude. When the wave encounters external forces at a particular level, a sensation appears. An organ will be determined by this encounter, but it is a provisional organ that endures only as long as the passage of the wave and the action of the force, and which will be displaced in order to be posited elsewhere. "No organ is constant as regards either function or position... sex organs sprout anywhere... rectums open, defecate and close... the entire organism changes color and consistency in split-second adjustments."³ In fact, the body without organs does not lack organs, it simply lacks the organism, that is, this particular organization of organs. The body without organs is thus defined by an *indeterminate organ*, whereas the organism is defined by determinate organs: "Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order why not have one all-purpose hole to eat *and* eliminate? We could seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place."⁴ But what does it mean to speak of a polyvalent orifice or an indeterminate organ?

Are not a mouth and an anus very distinct, and is not a passage of time needed to get from one to the other? Even in the meat, is there not a very distinct mouth, recognizable through its teeth, which cannot be confused with other organs? This is what must be understood: the wave flows through the body; at a certain level, an organ will be determined depending on the force it encounters; and this organ will change if the force itself changes, or if it moves to another level. In short, the body without organs is not defined by the absence of organs, nor is it defined solely by the existence of an indeterminate organ; it is finally defined by the *temporary and provisional presence* of determinate organs. This is one way of introducing time into the painting, and there is a great force of time in Bacon; time itself is being painted. The variation of texture and color on a body, a head, or a back (as in *Three Studies of the Male Back* of 1970 [63]) is actually a temporal variation regulated down to a tenth of a second. Hence the chromatic treatment of the body, which is very different from the treatment of the fields of color: the *chronochromatism* of the body is opposed to the *monochromatism* of the flat fields. To put time inside the Figure—this is the force of bodies in Bacon: the large male back as variation.

We can see from this how every sensation implies a difference of level (of order, of domain), and moves from one level to another. Even the phenomenological unity did not give an account of it. But the body without organs does give an account of it, if we look at the complete series: without organs—to the indeterminate polyvalent organ—to temporary and transitory organs. What is a mouth at one level becomes an anus at another level, or at the same level under the action of different forces. Now this complete series constitutes the hysterical reality of the body. If we look at the "picture" of hysteria that was formed in the nineteenth-century, in psychiatry and elsewhere, we find a number of features that have continually animated Bacon's bodies. First of all, there are the famous spastics and paralytics, the hyperesthetics or anesthetics, associated or alternating, sometimes fixed and sometimes migrant, depending on the passage of the nervous wave and the zones it invests or withdraws from.

Then, there are the phenomena of precipitation and anticipation or, on the contrary, of delay (hysteresis), of the afterward, which depend on the accelerations and delays of the wave's oscillations. Next, there is the transitory character of the organ's determination, which depends on the forces that are exerted upon it. Next, there is the direct action of these forces on the nervous system, as if the hysteric were a sleepwalker, a somnambulist in the waking state, a "Vigilambulist." Finally, there is a very peculiar feeling that arises from within the body, precisely because the body is felt *under* the body, the transitory organs are felt under the organization of the fixed organs. Furthermore, this body without organs and these transitory organs are themselves *seen*, in phenomena known as internal or external "autoscopia": it is no longer *my* head, but I feel myself inside *a* head, I see and I see myself inside a head; or else I do not see myself in the mirror, but I feel myself in the body that I see, and I see myself in this naked body when I am dressed... and so forth.⁵ Is there a psychosis in the world that might include this hysterical condition? "A kind of incomprehensible *stopping place* in the spirit, right in the middle of everything...?"⁶

Beckett's Characters and Bacon's Figures share a common setting, the same Ireland: the round area, the isolator, the Depopulator; the series of spastics and paralytics inside the round area; the stroll of the Vigilambulator; the presence of the attendant, who still feels, sees, and speaks; the way the body escapes from itself, that is, the way it escapes from the organism... It escapes from itself through the open mouth, through the anus or the stomach, or through the throat, or through the circle of the washbasin, or through the point of the umbrella.⁷ The presence of a body without organs under the organism, the presence of transitory organs under organic representation. A clothed Figure of Bacon's is seen nude in the mirror or on the canvas (*Two Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1968 [50]). The spastics and the hyperesthetics are often indicated by wiped or scrubbed zones [71], and the anesthetics and paralytics, by missing zones (as in the very detailed 1972 triptych [70]). Above all, we will see that Bacon's whole "style" takes place in a beforehand and an

afterward: what takes place before the painting has even begun, but also what takes place afterward, a hysteresis that will break off the work each time, interrupt its figurative course, and yet give it back afterward...

Presence, presence... this is the first word that comes to mind in front of one of Bacon's paintings.⁸ Could this presence be hysterical? The hysteric is at the same time someone who imposes his or her presence, but also someone for whom things and beings are present, *too* present, and who attributes to every thing and communicates to every being this excessive presence. There is therefore little difference between the hysteric, the "hystericized," and the "hystericizer." Bacon explains rather testily that the hysterical smile he painted on the 1953 portrait [11], on the human head of 1953 [13], and on the 1955 Pope [19], came from a "model" who was "very neurotic and almost hysterical." But in fact it is the whole painting that is hystericized. Bacon himself hystericizes when, beforehand, he abandons himself completely to the image, abandons his entire head to the camera of a photobooth, or rather, sees himself in a head that belongs to the camera, that has disappeared into the camera. What is this hysterical smile? Where is the abomination or abjection of this smile? Presence or insistence. Interminable presence. The insistence of the smile beyond the face and beneath the face. The insistence of a scream that survives the mouth, the insistence of a body that survives the organism, the insistence of transitory organs that survive the qualified organs. And in this excessive presence, the identity of an already-there and an always-delayed. Everywhere there is a presence acting directly on the nervous system, which makes representation, whether in place or at a distance, impossible. Sartre meant nothing less when he called himself a hysteric, and spoke of Flaubert's hysteria.¹⁰

What kind of hysteria are we speaking of here? Is it the hysteria of Bacon himself, or of the painter, or of the painting itself, or of painting in general? It is true that there are numerous dangers in constructing a clinical aesthetic (which nonetheless has the advantage of *not* being a psychoanalysis). And why refer specifically to

painting, when we could invoke so many writers or even musicians (Schumann and the contraction of the finger, the audition of the voice...)? What we are suggesting, in effect, is that there is a special relation between painting and hysteria. It is very simple. Painting directly attempts to release the presences beneath representation, beyond representation. The color system itself is a system of direct action on the nervous system. This is not a hysteria of the painter, but a hysteria of painting. With painting, hysteria becomes art. Or rather, with the painter, hysteria becomes painting. What the hysteric is incapable of doing—a little art—is accomplished in painting. It must also be said that the painter *is not* hysterical, in the sense of a negation in negative theology. Abjection becomes splendor; the horror of life becomes a very pure and very intense life. "Life is frightening," said Cézanne, but in this cry he had already given voice to all the joys of line and color. Painting transmutes this cerebral pessimism into nervous optimism. Painting is hysteria, or converts hysteria, because it makes presence immediately visible. It invests the eye through color and line. But it does not treat the eye as a fixed organ. It liberates lines and colors from their representative function, but at the same time it also liberates the eye from its adherence to the organism, from its character as a fixed and qualified organ: the eye becomes virtually the polyvalent indeterminate organ that sees the body without organs (the Figure) as a pure presence. Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes...). This is the double definition of painting: subjectively, it invests the eye, which ceases to be organic in order to become a polyvalent and transitory organ; objectively, it brings before us the reality of a body, of lines and colors freed from organic representation. And each is produced by the other: the pure presence of the body becomes visible at the same time that the eye becomes the destined organ of this presence.

Painting has two ways of avoiding this fundamental hysteria: either by conserving the figurative coordinates of organic representation, even if that means using them in very subtle ways or making these liberated presences or unorganized bodies pass beneath or

between these coordinates; or else by turning toward abstract form, and inventing a properly pictorial cerebrality ("reviving" painting in this direction). Velázquez was undoubtedly the wisest of the classical painters, possessing an immense wisdom: he created his extraordinary audacities by holding firmly to the coordinates of representation, by assuming completely the role of a documentarian...¹¹ What is Bacon's relation to Velázquez, and why does he claim him as his master? Why, when he speaks of his versions of the portrait of Pope Innocent X, does he express his doubt and discontent? In a way, Bacon has hystericized all the elements of Velázquez's painting. We cannot simply compare the two portraits of Innocent X, that of Velázquez and that of Bacon, who transforms it into the screaming Pope. We must compare Velázquez's portrait with all of Bacon's paintings. In Velázquez, the armchair already delineates the prison of the parallelepiped; the heavy curtain in back is already tending to move up front, and the mantelet has aspects of a side of beef; an unreadable yet clear parchment is in the hand, and the attentive, fixed eye of the Pope already sees something invisible looming up [112]. But all of this is strangely restrained, it is something that is going to happen, but has not yet acquired the ineluctable, irrepressible presence of Bacon's newspapers, the almost animal-like armchairs, the curtain up front, the brute meat, and the screaming mouth. Should these presences have been let loose? asks Bacon. Were not things better, infinitely better, in Velázquez? In refusing both the figurative path and the abstract path, was it necessary to display this relationship between hysteria and painting in full view? While our eye is enchanted with the two Innocent X's, Bacon questions himself.¹²

But in the end, why should all this be peculiar to painting? Can we speak of a hysterical essence of painting, under the rubric of a purely aesthetic clinic, independent of any psychiatry and psychoanalysis? Why could not music also extricate pure presences, but through an ear that has become the polyvalent organ for sonorous bodies? And why not poetry or theater, when it is those of Artaud or Beckett? This problem concerning the essence of each art, and possibly their clinical essence, is less difficult than it seems to be. Cer-

tainly music traverses our bodies in profound ways, putting an ear in the stomach, in the lungs, and so on. It knows all about waves and nervousness. But it involves our body, and bodies in general, in another element. It strips bodies of their inertia, of the materiality of their presence: it *disembodies* bodies. We can thus speak with exactitude of a sonorous body and even of a bodily combat in music—for example, in a motif—but as Proust said, it is an immaterial and disembodied combat "in which there subsists not one scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind."¹³ In a sense, music begins where painting ends, and this is what is meant when one speaks of the superiority of music. It is lodged on lines of flight that pass through bodies, but which find their consistency elsewhere, whereas painting is lodged farther up, where the body escapes from itself. But in escaping, the body discovers the materiality of which it is composed, the pure presence of which it is made, and which it would not discover otherwise. Painting, in short, discovers the material reality of bodies with its line-color systems and its polyvalent organ, the eye. "Our eye," said Gauguin, "insatiable and in heat." [The adventure of painting is that it is the eye alone that can attend to material existence or material presence—even that of an apple. When music sets up its sonorous system and its polyvalent organ, the ear, it addresses itself to something very different from the material reality of bodies. It gives a disembodied and dematerialized body to the most spiritual of entities: "The beats of the timpani in the Requiem are sharp, majestic, and divine, and they can only announce to our surprised ears the coming of a being who, to use Stendhal's words, surely has relations with another world."¹⁴ This is why music does not have hysteria as its clinical essence, but is confronted more and more with a galloping schizophrenia. To hystericize music we would have to reintroduce colors, passing through a rudimentary or refined system of correspondence between sounds and colors.]

Painting Forces

*Rendering the invisible: the problem of painting — Deformation:
neither transformation nor decomposition — The scream —
Bacon's love of life — Enumeration of forces*

From another point of view, the question concerning the separation of the arts, their respective autonomy, and their possible hierarchy loses all importance. For there is a community of the arts, a common problem. In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces. For this reason no art is figurative. Paul Klee's famous formula—"Not to render the visible, but to render visible"—means nothing else. The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible. Likewise, music attempts to render sonorous forces that are not themselves sonorous. That much is clear. Force is closely related to sensation: for a sensation to exist, a force must be exerted on a body, on a point of the wave. But if force is the condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force that is sensed, since the sensation "gives" something completely different from the forces that condition it. How will sensation be able to sufficiently turn in on itself, relax or contract itself, so as to capture these non-given forces in what it gives us, to make us sense these insensible forces, and raise itself to its own conditions? It is in this way that music must render nonsonorous forces sonorous, and painting must render invisible forces visible. Sometimes these are the same thing: time, which is nonsonorous and invisible—how can time be painted, how can time be heard? And elementary forces such as pressure, inertia, weight, attraction, gravitation, germination—how can they be rendered? Sometimes, on the contrary, the insensible force of

one art instead seems to take part in the "givens" of another art: for example, how to paint sound, or even the scream? (And conversely, how to make colors audible?)

This is a problem of which painters are very conscious. When pious critics criticized Millet for painting peasants who were carrying an offertory like a sack of potatoes, Millet responded by saying that the weight common to the two objects was more profound than their figurative distinction. As a painter, he was striving to paint the force of that weight, and not the offertory or the sack of potatoes. And was it not Cézanne's genius to have subordinated all the techniques of painting to this task: rendering visible the folding force of mountains, the germinative force of a seed, the thermic force of a landscape, and so on? And Van Gogh: Van Gogh even invented unknown forces, the unheard-of force of a sunflower seed. For many painters, however, the problem of capturing forces, no matter how conscious it may have been, was mixed with another problem, equally important but less pure. This other problem was the decomposition and recomposition of effects: for example, the decomposition and recomposition of depth in the Renaissance, the decomposition and recomposition of colors in impressionism, the decomposition and recomposition of movement in cubism. We can see how one problem leads to the other, since movement, for example, is an effect that refers both to a unique force that produces it, and to a multiplicity of decomposable and recomposable elements beneath this force.

Bacon's Figures seem to be one of the most marvelous responses in the history of painting to the question, How can one make invisible forces visible? This is the primary function of the Figures. In this respect, we will see that Bacon remains relatively indifferent to the problem of effects. Not that he despises them, but he thinks that in the whole history of painting, they have been adequately mastered by the painters he admires, particularly the problem of movement, of "rendering" movement.¹ But if this is the case, it is reason enough to confront even more directly the problem of "rendering" invisible forces visible. This is true of all Bacon's series of heads and the series of self-portraits, and it is even the reason he made these

series [34, 48, 49, 54]: the extraordinary agitation of these heads is not derived from a movement that the series would supposedly reconstitute, but rather from the forces of pressure, dilation, contraction, flattening, and elongation that are exerted on the immobile head. They are like the forces of the cosmos confronting an intergalactic traveler immobile in his capsule. It is as if invisible forces were striking the head from many different angles. The wiped and swept parts of the face here take on a new meaning, because they mark the zone where the force is in the process of striking. This is why the problems Bacon faces are indeed those of deformation and not transformation. These are two very different categories. The transformation of form can be abstract or dynamic. But deformation is always bodily, and it is static, it happens at one place; it subordinates movement to force, but it also subordinates the abstract to the Figure. When a force is exerted on a scrubbed part, it does not give birth to an abstract form, nor does it combine sensible forms dynamically: on the contrary, it turns this zone into a zone of indiscernibility that is common to several forms, irreducible to any of them; and the lines of force that it creates escape every form through their very clarity, through their deforming precision (we saw this in the becoming-animal of the Figures). Cézanne was perhaps the first to have made deformations without transformation, thereby making truth fall back on the body. Here again Bacon is Cézannian: for both Bacon and Cézanne, the deformation is obtained in the *form at rest*; and at the same time, the whole material environment, the structure, begins to stir, "walls twitch and slide, chairs bend or rear up a little, cloths curl like burning paper..."²² Everything is now related to forces, everything is force. It is force that constitutes deformation as an act of painting: it lends itself neither to a transformation of form nor to a decomposition of elements. And Bacon's deformations are rarely constrained or forced, they are not tortures, despite appearances: on the contrary, they are the most natural postures of a body that has been reorganized by the simple force being exerted upon it: the desire to sleep, to vomit, to turn over, to remain seated as long as possible...

We must consider the special case of the scream. Why does Bacon think of the scream as one of the highest objects of painting? "Paint the scream..." [16, 24]. It is not at all a matter of giving color to a particularly intense sound. Music, for its part, is faced with the same task, which is certainly not to render the scream harmonious, but to establish a relationship between the sound of the scream and the forces that sustain it. In the same manner, painting will establish a relationship between these forces and the visible scream (the mouth that screams). But the forces that produce the scream, that convulse the body until they emerge at the mouth as a scrubbed zone, must not be confused with the visible spectacle before which one screams, nor even with the perceptible and sensible objects whose action decomposes and recomposes our pain. If we scream, it is always as victims of invisible and insensible forces that scramble every spectacle, and that even lie beyond pain and feeling. This is what Bacon means when he says he wanted "to paint the scream more than the horror."²³ If we could express this as a dilemma, it would be: either I paint the horror and I do not paint the scream, because I make a figuration of the horrible; or else I paint the scream, and I do not paint the visible horror, I will paint the visible horror less and less, since the scream captures or detects an invisible force.²⁴ Alban Berg knew how to make music out of the scream in the scream of Marie, and then in the very different scream of Lulu. But in both cases, he established a relationship between the sound of the scream and inaudible forces, those of the Earth in the horizontal scream of Marie, and those of Heaven in the vertical scream of Lulu. Bacon creates the painting of the scream because he establishes a relationship between the visibility of the scream (the open mouth as a shadowy abyss) and invisible forces, which are nothing other than the forces of the future. It was Kafka who spoke of detecting the diabolical powers of the future knocking at the door.²⁵ Every scream contains them potentially. Innocent X screams, but he screams behind the curtain, not only as someone who can no longer be seen, but as someone who cannot see, who has nothing left to see, whose

Inclusing 2 horror films

only remaining function is to render visible these invisible forces that are making him scream, these powers of the future. This is what is expressed in the phrase "to scream at"—not to scream *before* or *about*, but to scream *at* death—which suggests this coupling of forces, the perceptible force of the scream and the imperceptible force that makes one scream.

This is all very curious, but it is a source of extraordinary vitality. When Bacon distinguishes between two violences, that of the spectacle and that of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second, it is a kind of declaration of faith in life. The interviews contain many statements of this sort. Bacon says that he himself is cerebrally pessimistic; that is, he can scarcely see anything *but* horrors to paint, the horrors of the world. But he is nervously optimistic, because visible figuration is secondary in painting, and will have less and less importance: Bacon will reproach himself for painting too much horror, as if that were enough to leave the figurative behind; he moves more and more toward a Figure without horror. But why is it an act of vital faith to choose "the scream more than the horror," the violence of sensation more than the violence of the spectacle? The invisible forces, the powers of the future—are they not already upon us, and much more insurmountable than the worst spectacle and even the worst pain? Yes, in a certain sense—every piece of meat testifies to this. But in another sense, no. When, like a wrestler, the visible body confronts the powers of the invisible, it gives them no other visibility than its own. It is within this visibility that the body actively struggles, affirming the possibility of triumphing, which was beyond its reach as long as these powers remained invisible, hidden in a spectacle that sapped our strength and diverted us. It is as if combat had now become possible. The struggle with the shadow is the only real struggle. When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it. Life screams at death, but death is no longer this all-too-visible thing that makes us faint; it is this invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through the scream. Death is

judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse, as we like to believe.⁶ Bacon, no less than Beckett, is one of those artists who, in the name of a very intense life, can call for an even more intense life. He is not a painter who "believes" in death. His is indeed a figurative *miserabilisme*, but one that serves an increasingly powerful Figure of life. The same homage should be paid to Bacon that can be paid to Beckett or Kafka. In the very act of "representing" horror, mutilation, prosthesis, fall, or failure, they have erected indomitable Figures, indomitable through both their insistence and their presence. They have given life a new and extremely direct power of laughter.

Since the visible movements of the Figures are subordinated to the invisible forces exerted upon them, we can go behind the movements to these forces, and make an empirical list of the forces Bacon detects and captures. Although Bacon likens himself to a "pulverizer" or a "grinder," he is really more like a detective. The first invisible forces are those of isolation: they are supported by the fields, and become visible when they wrap themselves around the contour and wrap the fields around the Figure. The second are the forces of deformation, which seize the Figure's body and head, and become visible whenever the head shakes off its face, or the body its organism. (Bacon knows how to "render" intensely, for example, the flattening force of sleep [53, 76].) The third are the forces of dissipation, when the Figure fades away and returns to the field: what then renders these forces visible is a strange smile. But there are still many other forces. What can be said, first of all, about that invisible force of coupling that sweeps over two bodies with an extraordinary energy, but which they render visible by extracting from it a kind of polygon or diagram? And beyond that, what is the mysterious force that can only be captured or detected by triptychs? It is at the same time a force (characteristic of light) that unites the whole, but also a force that separates the Figures and panels, a luminous separation that should not be confused with the preceding isolation. Can Life, can Time, be rendered sensible, rendered visible? To render time visible, to render the force of time visible—Bacon seems to have done

this twice. There is the force of changing time, through the allotropic
 variation of bodies, "down to a tenth of a second," which involves
 deformation; and then there is the force of eternal time, the eternity
 of time, through the uniting-separating that reigns in the triptychs,
 a pure light. To render Time sensible in itself is a task common to
 the painter, the musician, and sometimes the writer. It is a task be-
 yond all measure or cadence.

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The Diagram

*The diagram in Bacon (traits and color-patches)¹ —
 Its manual character — Painting and the experience
 of catastrophe — Abstract painting, code, and optical space —
 Action Painting, diagram, and manual space —
 What Bacon dislikes about both these ways*

We do not listen closely enough to what painters have to say. They say that the painter is *already* in the canvas, where he or she encounters all the figurative and probabilistic givens that occupy and pre-occupy the canvas. An entire battle takes place on the canvas between the painter and these givens. There is thus a preparatory work that belongs to painting fully, and yet precedes the act of painting. This preparatory work can be done in sketches, though it need not be, and in any case sketches do not replace it (like many contemporary painters, Bacon does not make sketches).² This preparatory work is invisible and silent, yet extremely intense, and the act of painting itself appears as an afterward, an *après-coup* ("hysteresis") in relation to this work.

What does this act of painting consist of? Bacon defines it in this way: make random marks (lines-traits); scrub, sweep, or wipe the canvas in order to clear out locales or zones (color-patches); throw the paint, from various angles and at various speeds. Now this act, or these acts, presupposes that there were already figurative givens on the canvas (and in the painter's head), more or less virtual, more or less actual. It is precisely these givens that will be removed by the act of painting, either by being wiped, brushed, or rubbed, or else covered over. For example, a mouth: it will be elongated, stretched from one side of the head to the other. For example, the head: part

of it will be cleared away with a brush, broom, sponge, or rag. This is what Bacon calls a "graph" or a *Diagram*: it is as if a Sahara, a zone of the Sahara, were suddenly inserted into the head; it is as if a piece of rhinoceros skin, viewed under a microscope, were stretched over it; it is as if the two halves of the head were split open by an ocean; it is as if the unit of measure were changed, and micrometric, or even cosmic, units were substituted for the figurative unit.³ A Sahara, a rhinoceros skin: such is the suddenly outstretched diagram. It is as if, in the midst of the figurative and probabilistic givens, a *catastrophe* overcame the canvas.

It is like the emergence of another world. For these marks, these traits, are irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random. They are nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative. They are no longer either significant or signifiers: they are a-signifying traits. They are traits of sensation, but of confused sensations (the confused sensations, as Cézanne said, that we bring with us at birth). And above all, they are manual traits. It is here that the painter works with a rag, stick, brush, or sponge; it is here that he throws the paint with his hands.⁴ It is as if the hand assumed an independence, and began to be guided by other forces, making marks that no longer depend on either our will or our sight. These almost blind manual marks attest to the intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration. To a certain extent, they remove the painting from the optical organization that was already reigning over it and rendering it figurative in advance. The painter's hand intervenes in order to shake its own dependence and break up the sovereign optical organization: one can no longer see anything, as if in a catastrophe, a chaos.

This is the act of painting, or the turning point of the painting. There are two ways in which the painting can fail, once visually and once manually. One can remain entangled in the figurative givens and the optical organization of representation; but one can also spoil the diagram, botch it, so overload it that it is rendered inoperative (which is another way of remaining in the figurative: one will have simply mutilated or mauled the cliché...).⁵ The diagram is thus the operative set of a-signifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones,

line-strokes and color-patches. And the operation of the diagram, its function, says Bacon, is to be "suggestive." Or, more rigorously, to use language similar to Wittgenstein's, it is to introduce "possibilities of fact."⁶ Because they are destined to give us the Figure, it is all the more important for the traits and color-patches to break with figuration. This is why they are not sufficient in themselves, but must be "utilized." They mark out possibilities of fact, but do not yet constitute a fact (the pictorial fact). In order to be converted into a fact, in order to evolve into a Figure, they must be reinjected into the visual whole; but it is precisely through the action of these marks that the visual whole will cease to be an optical organization; it will give the eye another power, as well as an object that will no longer be figurative.

The diagram is the operative set of traits and color-patches, of lines and zones. Van Gogh's diagram, for example, is the set of straight and curved hatch marks that raise and lower the ground, twist the trees, make the sky palpitate, and which assume a particular intensity from 1888 onward. We can not only differentiate diagrams, we can also date the diagram of a painter, because there is always a moment when the painter confronts it most directly. The diagram is indeed a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also a germ of order or rhythm. It is a violent chaos in relation to the figurative givens, but it is a germ of rhythm in relation to the new order of the painting. As Bacon says, it "unlocks areas of sensation."⁷ The diagram ends the preparatory work and begins the act of painting. There is no painter who has not had this experience of the chaos-germ, where he or she no longer sees anything and risks foundering: the collapse of visual coordinates. This is not a psychological experience, but a properly pictorial experience, although it can have an immense influence on the psychic life of the painter. Painters here confront the greatest of dangers both for their work and for themselves. It is a kind of experience that is constantly renewed by the most diverse painters: Cézanne's "abyss" or "catastrophe," and the chance that this abyss will give way to rhythm; Paul Klee's "chaos," the vanishing "gray point," and the chance that this gray point will "leap over itself"

and unlock dimensions of sensation...⁸ Of all the arts, painting is undoubtedly the only one that necessarily, "hysterically," integrates its own catastrophe and consequently is constituted as a flight in advance. In the other arts, the catastrophe is only associated. But painters pass through the catastrophe themselves, embrace the chaos, and attempt to emerge from it. Where painters differ is in their manner of embracing this nonfigurative chaos, and in their evaluation of the pictorial order to come, and the relation of this order with this chaos. In this respect, we might perhaps distinguish three great paths, each of which groups together very different painters, but each of which designates a "modern" function of painting, or expresses what painting claims to bring to "modern man" (why still paint today?).

Abstraction would be one of these paths, but it is a path that reduces the abyss or chaos (as well as the manual) to a minimum: it offers us an asceticism, a spiritual salvation. Through an intense spiritual effort, it raises itself above the figurative givens, but it also turns chaos into a simple stream we must cross in order to discover the abstract and signifying Forms. Mondrian's square leaves the figurative (landscape) and leaps over chaos. It retains a kind of oscillation from this leap. Such an abstraction is essentially seen. One is tempted to say of abstract painting what Péguy said of Kantian morality: it has pure hands, but it has no hands. This is because the abstract forms are part of a new and purely optical space that no longer even needs to be subordinate to manual or tactile elements. In fact, they are distinguished from simple geometrical forms by "tension": tension is what internalizes in the visual the manual movement that describes the form and the invisible forces that determine it. It is what makes the form a properly visual transformation. Abstract optical space has no need of the tactile connections that classical representation was still organizing. But it follows that what abstract painting elaborates is less a diagram than a symbolic code, on the basis of great formal oppositions. It replaced the diagram with a code. This code is "digital," not in the sense of the manual, but in the sense of a finger that counts. "Digits" are the units that group together visually the terms in opposition. Thus, according to Kandinsky, vertical-

white-activity, horizontal-black-inertia, and so on. From this is derived a conception of binary choice that is opposed to random choice. Abstract painting took the elaboration of such a properly pictorial code very far (as in Auguste Herbin's "plastic alphabet," in which the distribution of forms and colors can be done according to the letters of a word).⁹ It is the code that is responsible for answering the question of painting today: what can save man from "the abyss," from external tumult and manual chaos? Open up a spiritual state for the man of the future, a man without hands. Restore to man a pure and internal optical space, which will perhaps be made up exclusively of the horizontal and the vertical. "Modern man seeks rest because he is deafened by the external."¹⁰ The hand is reduced to a finger that presses on an internal optical keyboard.

A second path, often named abstract expressionism or *art informel*, offers an entirely different response, at the opposite extreme of abstraction. This time the abyss or chaos is deployed to the maximum. Somewhat like a map that is as large as the country, the diagram merges with the totality of the painting, the entire painting is diagrammatic. Optical geometry disappears in favor of a manual line, exclusively manual. The eye has difficulty following it. The incomparable discovery of this kind of painting is that of a line (and a patch of color) that does not form a contour, that delimits nothing, neither inside nor outside, neither concave nor convex: Pollock's line, Morris Louis's stain. It is the northern stain, the "Gothic line": the line does not go from one point to another, but passes *between* points, continually changing direction, and attains a power greater than 1, becoming adequate to the entire surface. From this point of view, we can see how abstract painting remained figurative, since its line still delimited an outline. If we seek the precursors of this new path, of this radical manner of escaping the figurative, we will find them every time a great painter of the past stopped painting things in order "to paint between things."¹¹ Turner's late watercolors conquer not only all the forces of impressionism, but also the power of an explosive line without outline or contour, which makes the painting itself an unparalleled catastrophe (rather than illustrating the catastrophe

romantically). Moreover, is this not one of the most prodigious constants of painting that is here being selected and isolated? In Kandinsky, there were nomadic lines without contour next to abstract geometric lines; and in Mondrian, the unequal thickness of the two sides of the square opened up a virtual diagonal without contours. But with Pollock, this line-trait and this color-patch will be pushed to their functional limit: no longer the transformation of the form but a decomposition of matter, which abandons us to its lineaments and granulations. The painting thus becomes a catastrophe-painting and a diagram-painting at one and the same time. This time, it is at the point closest to catastrophe, in absolute proximity, that modern man discovers rhythm: we can easily see how this response to the question of a "modern" function of painting is different from that given by abstraction. Here it is no longer an inner vision that gives us the infinite, but a manual power that is spread out "all over,"¹² from one edge of the painting to the other.

In the unity of the catastrophe and the diagram, man discovers rhythm as matter and material. The painter's instruments are no longer the paintbrush and the easel, which still conveyed the subordination of the hand to the requirements of an optical organization. The hand is liberated, and makes use of sticks, sponges, rags, syringes: Action Painting, the "frenetic dance" of the painter around the painting, or rather in the painting, which is no longer stretched on an easel but nailed, unstretched, to the ground. There has been a conversion from the horizon to the ground: the optical horizon reverts completely to the tactile ground. The diagram expresses the entire painting at once, that is, the optical catastrophe and the manual rhythm. The current evolution of abstract expressionism is completing this process by realizing what was still little more than a metaphor in Pollock: (1) the extension of the diagram to the spatial and temporal whole of the painting (displacement of the "beforehand" and the "afterward"); (2) the abandonment of any visual sovereignty, and even any visual control, over the painting in the process of being executed (the blindness of the painter); (3) the elaboration of lines that are "more" than lines, surfaces that are "more" than surfaces,

or, conversely, volumes that are "less" than volumes (Carl André's planar sculptures, Robert Ryman's fibers, Martin Barré's laminated works, Christian Bonnefoi's strata).¹³

It is all the more curious that the American critics, who took the analysis of abstract expressionism very far, could have defined it as the creation of a purely optical space, exclusively optical, peculiar to "modern man." This seems to us to be a quarrel over words, an ambiguity of words. In effect, what they meant was that the pictorial space lost all the imaginary tactile referents that, in classical three-dimensional representation, made it possible to see depths and contours, forms and grounds. But these tactile referents of classical representation expressed a relative subordination of the hand to the eye, of the manual to the visual. By liberating a space that is (wrongly) claimed to be purely optical, the abstract expressionists in fact did nothing other than to make visible an exclusively manual space, defined by the "planarity" of the canvas, the "impenetrability" of the painting, and the "gesturality" of the color—a space that is imposed upon the eye as an absolutely foreign power in which the eye can find no rest.¹⁴ These are no longer the tactile referents of vision, but precisely because it is the manual space of what is seen, a violence done to the eye. In the end, it was abstract painting that produced a purely optical space and suppressed tactile referents in favor of an eye of the mind: it suppressed the task of controlling the hand that the eye still had in classical representation. But Action Painting does something completely different: it reverses the classical subordination, it subordinates the eye to the hand, it imposes the hand on the eye, and it replaces the horizon with a ground.

One of the most profound tendencies of modern painting is the tendency to abandon the easel. For the easel was a decisive element not only in the maintenance of a figurative appearance, and not only in the relationship between the painter and Nature (the search for a motif), but also in the delimitation (frame and borders) and internal organization of the painting (depth, perspective...). What matters today is less the fact—does the painter still have an easel?—than the tendency, and the diverse ways this tendency is realized. In an

abstraction of Mondrian's type, the painting ceases to be an organism or an isolated organization in order to become a division of its own surface, which must create its own relations with the divisions of the "room" in which it will be hung. In this sense, Mondrian's painting is not decorative but architectonic, and abandons the easel in order to become mural painting. Pollock and others explicitly reject the easel in a completely different manner, namely, by making "all-over" paintings, by rediscovering the secret of the "Gothic line" (in Worringer's sense), by restoring an entire world of equal probabilities, by tracing lines that cross the entire painting and that start and continue off the frame, and by opposing to the organic notions of symmetry and center the power of a mechanical repetition elevated to intuition. This is no longer an easel painting but a ground painting (true easels have no other horizon than the ground).¹⁵ But in truth there are many ways of breaking with the easel. Bacon's triptych form is one of these ways, very different from the two preceding ways. In Bacon, what is true of the triptychs is also true of each independent painting, which is always, in one way or another, composed like a triptych. In the triptych, as we have seen, the borders of each of the three panels cease to isolate, though they continue to separate and divide. This uniting-separating is Bacon's technical solution, which brings his entire set of techniques into play, and distinguishes them from the techniques of abstract and informal painting. Are these three ways of once again becoming "Gothic"?

The important question is, Why did Bacon not become involved in either of the two preceding paths? The severity of his reactions, rather than claiming to pass judgment, simply indicates what was not right for him and explains why Bacon personally took neither of these paths. On the one hand, he is not attracted to paintings that tend to substitute a visual and spiritual code for the involuntary diagram (even if there is an exemplary attitude on the part of the artist). The code is inevitably cerebral and lacks sensation, the essential reality of the fall, that is, the direct action upon the nervous system. Kandinsky defined abstract painting by "tension," but according to

Bacon, tension is what abstract painting lacks the most. By internalizing tension in the optical form, abstract painting neutralized it. Finally, because it is abstract, the code can easily become a simple symbolic coding of the figurative.¹⁶ On the other hand, Bacon is not drawn to abstract expressionism, or to the power and mystery of the line without contour. This is because the diagram covers the entire painting, he says, and because its proliferation creates a veritable "mess." All the violent methods of Action Painting—stick, brush, broom, rag, and even pastry bag—are let loose in a catastrophe-painting. This time sensation is indeed attained, but it remains in an irremediably confused state. Bacon will never stop speaking of the absolute necessity of preventing the diagram from proliferating, the necessity of confining it to certain areas of the painting and certain moments of the act of painting. He thinks that, in this domain of the irrational trait and the line without contour, Michaux went further than Pollock, precisely because he remained a master of the diagram.¹⁷

Save the contour—nothing is more important for Bacon than this. A line that delimits nothing still has a contour or outline itself. Blake at least understood this.¹⁸ The diagram must not eat away at the entire painting; it must remain limited in space and time. It must remain operative and controlled. The violent methods must not be given free rein, and the necessary catastrophe must not submerge the whole. The diagram is a possibility of fact—it is not the Fact itself. Not all the figurative givens have to disappear; and above all, a new figuration, that of the Figure, should emerge from the diagram and make the sensation clear and precise. To emerge from the catastrophe... Even if, as an afterthought, one finishes a painting with a spurt of paint, it functions like a local "whiplash" that makes us emerge from the catastrophe rather than submerging us further.¹⁹ Could we at least say that during the *malerisch* period the diagram covered the whole painting? Had not the entire surface of the painting been lined with traits of grass, or variations of a dark color-patch functioning as a curtain? But even then, the precision of the sensation, the clarity of the Figure, and the rigor of the contour continued to act beneath the color-patch or the traits—which did not efface

the former, but instead gave them a power of vibration and nonlocalization (the mouth that smiles or screams). And in his subsequent period, Bacon returns to a localization of random traits and scrubbed zones. Bacon thus follows a third path, which is neither optical like abstract painting, nor manual like Action Painting.

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