

## **Paint And Suffering: Series And Community In Francis Bacon's Paintings**

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### **1. Introduction: The Visual Aesthetics Of Bacon**

Francis Bacon's paintings are disturbing. His images present active figures who are defined by their activity, but their activity is fraught with violence. I analyze their activity in terms of the activity of actualization itself, which is shown to be a serial process both of construction and destruction in which the viewer participates. It is a process of relating one element to another in the construction of the figure, where each iterative construction differentiates previous constructions. Thus the activity of actualization presented in Bacon's images is an immanent process of serially iterative constructive activity.

Bacon's figures appear to be moving, whether or not they appear to be doing anything. They are both realistically represented and destroyed by Bacon's representational acts. The figures are situated in mundane places that are also uncanny. They are presented as confined within frames, screaming, or distractedly gazing in reflective concern. While the structure of Bacon's images is confusing, it encourages the viewer to engage with them. Bacon's images are often interpreted to be traumatic expressions of the post-war British psyche, where the ongoing destruction of the figure represents the violence, isolation, and pain of modern subjectivity. I argue that the activity of the figure is both its destruction and its emergence: it is an image of the serial activity of actualization as violent and painful process.

The figures express pain, and thus have the interiority of subjects. But Bacon's figures do not solicit the viewer's sympathy, for they gaze into the distance without addressing or engaging with the viewer. Instead, the formal properties of his images, such as skewed perspective and indexical signs, address and engage the viewer's participation. They tell the viewer where to look and how to look, directing the viewer towards the figure's activity of actualization. There the viewer is presented with the juxtaposition of realist representation and destructive marks and smears which involve the viewer in constructively relating them in order to actualize the figure. Participation in the activity of the figure is a constructive process of relating one part to another, yet each relational construction both changes or destroys previous constructions and leads to further

constructions. Thus the figure's activity of actualization is a serially iterative process of continual becoming and continual dissolution in which the viewer participates.

The viewer can never completely realize Bacon's suffering figures into stable forms because they are defined by the serial activity of actualization. Moreover, by participating in their actualization activity, the viewer is shown to affect the figure: the figure appears to be hurt by the process. Thus my analysis will refer to those by Gilles Deleuze and Ernst van Alphen, who argue that the activity presented in Bacon's images is that of sensation or affectivity: they show that it is not only the figure that it affected, but also the viewer. By visually enacting the figure's destruction, the viewer is shown to affect the figure, which leads to the realization that the viewer too is an affective subject. Both Deleuze and van Alphen argue that by making perception a theme which implicates the viewer, Bacon generalizes perception as a model of sensation or affectivity itself. They argue that the activity of actualization is the active process of affectivity; both figure and viewer are uncontrollably made and unmade by the affective process of receiving and responding to sensation. With them, I hold that the subject of Bacon's image is an affective subject. Yet I contend that the activity of Bacon's figures is not simply a matter of the interaction of physical forces. The figures' violence and suffering transcends the physical and places them in an ethical dimension where concern is paramount. In Bacon's paintings, the serially iterative activity of actualization presents a model of affective and participatory subjectivity.

## 2. A Familiar Image Of Bacon: Tracing The Affect

Released in 1998, the film *Love is the Devil* offers an interpretation of the famously disturbing works of the modern British painter Francis Bacon. Subtitled *Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon*, the film adopts a biographical approach to understanding the artist's work which presents perception as a primary theme in his paintings.

This is first of all because the subtitle plays on a title common to many of Bacon's paintings, such as *Study for a Portrait*, 1977, *Three studies for a portrait of Peter Beard*, 1975, *Three studies of Figures on Beds*, 1972, *Two studies for a portrait of George Dyer*, 1968, or *Three studies for Portrait of Lucien Freud*, 1965. Through that allusion, the film claims to present a portrait study of Francis Bacon following the manner of his own portrait studies<sup>1</sup>. While the film offers a biographical snapshot of a period in the artist's life, the subtitle suggests a view of Bacon that is similar to what is assumed to be the artist's own view of himself and others: Bacon's paintings are taken as evidence of his perspective on himself, other people, and his environment. In this way, the film attempts to provide insight into the meaning of Bacon's difficult work by presenting his life from

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<sup>1</sup> On the presupposed veracity and iconicity of portraiture, see Brilliant (chs. 1,3) and Lejeune (109-118).

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his own point of view. The subtitle also suggests that Bacon's paintings reveal something true about the people and objects he paints. The belief that his "studies for portraits" are somehow accurate is a presupposition of the film if viewers are to regard the scenes it dramatizes as historically accurate. Bacon is presented under the aegis of his own vision of the world, a vision taken from his paintings. Thus the filmic biography of Francis Bacon is in effect an autobiographical portrait of the artist, recounting events in his life through the supposed perception of the artist and using his art to shed light on the artist's life and work.

Secondly, the camera work of the film supports what can be called this self-reflexive objectivization of Francis Bacon. It attempts to suggest if not reproduce the same blurring, deformation and misshaping of figures Bacon presents in his paintings. The "study for a portrait of Francis Bacon" puts Francis Bacon's studies for portraits into motion, making the film a veritable motion picture by unpacking into a temporal sequence of film frames the "moving quality" of Bacon's paintings, to use van Alphen's phrase (11). The Baconesque eye of the camera peers at people in terms of a particular narrative scenario: through bar glasses, dirty windows and drunken blurs, distorting characters's faces in obvious similarities to their distortion in Bacon's portraits.

Yet the point of view not only of Bacon but of other characters is presented as warped and blurred. For example, the objects of Bacon's partner George Dyer's gaze are seen through what viewers are led to believe is an alcohol and drug induced haze, showing such things as bathroom sinks and toilet bowls distorted in a manner that quotes many of Bacon's most famous images. Moreover, Dyer's vision increasingly blurs as his relationship with Bacon intensifies. The vision of the world found in Bacon's paintings, which distorts everything it sees, is attributed not only to Bacon but to the people around him. The world of Francis Bacon is presented as both objectively deformed and increasingly deformed by his perception. The film's story line suggests that the characters' proximity to Bacon necessarily involves the dissolution of clarity and distinction into deformation and distortion, exemplified by the increasing intimacy between Bacon and Dyer. By presenting Bacon's vision as already distorted, and showing how it actively infects the vision of others and profoundly changes their lives, *Love is the Devil* implicitly claims that as a painter Bacon directly represents on his canvases what he sees. He views the world in an unusual, distorted way and paints it as such. The film's claims to the truth of this interpretation are based on the real effects of his distorting vision on the lives of others; it distorts and deforms their lives. Bacon is actually presented as seeing the world through the distorted perception of his art because the objects of his vision, such as George Dyer, actually becomes distorted, deformed and in some cases destroyed. A causal relation between Bacon's distorting vision and the subsequent distortions of his environment is explicitly posited in the film.

The title of the film *Love is the Devil* presents Bacon as a devilish figure whose love is a destructive, corrupting force. Entering into a relationship with Bacon involves entering the tortured, distorted world evoked in his images. In this way, Bacon is presented as somehow evil. As representations of his destructive vision, his paintings are

understood to evince that evil quality. Hence, perception holds ontological primacy in the film because it purports to show how Bacon recreates the world in terms of his own distorted, deformed, and obscure vision of it. The way he sees the world in terms of violent distortions is presented as the way to view his artwork. Otherwise confusing aspects of the artist's work, such as his use of skewed perspective, his construction of uncanny representational spaces, his inclusion of indexical symbols such as arrows, and his deformations of figures are to be understood in terms of the violence of Bacon's perception. The basis of this biographical approach is hypothetical: Bacon's life and vision are considered to be distorted and painful. Francis Bacon's art is treated as representative of his vision of the world and as directly influenced by what the writer Daniel Farson called Bacon's "gilded gutter of life". However, it does open up an approach to understanding what is happening in the images themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This is because *Love is the Devil* presents the experience of viewing Bacon's paintings as violent. The images are tortuous and confusing to look at, a point on which most commentators of his work agree.<sup>3</sup> Figures are warped or mutilated. Shadows are amorphous and threatening extrusions which rarely correspond to the figure shadowed. Depending on where the viewer focuses, light has numerous conflicting sources and tends to obscure rather than clarify what is happening in the images. The frequent presence of light bulbs also acts as an oppressive force on figures, limiting their activities or weighing them down. The perspective structuring the representation of space is often sloppily rendered and skewed, situating the viewer in various and conflicting positions in relation to the image. Figures and parts of figures are enframed, encaged, or boxed into various structures which inexplicably oppress and confine them. The images present mirrors which do not mirror the figures who look into them, or, more perplexingly, which reflect back to the viewer. The images are marked with arrows and circles which draw the viewer's attention to details for no obvious reason. Figures are situated in uncanny spaces -- familiar yet unknowable -- which further confuses a coherent reading of Bacon's paintings. All subtend the violence of Bacon's imagery by thwarting the viewer's efforts to explain it. The ways by which Bacon presents violence are heightened by the ways in which they undermine any rational analysis of it.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, the 1977 *Study for a Portrait* is violent and baffling. Seated uncomfortably cross-legged on a chair, the figure of the image transforms under the viewer's gaze to appear variously like a man in boxer shorts, a grotesque diapered infant, and an ape. Features such as the figure's eye and nose, ear and neck, and even his knee are rendered with realism. But the realism becomes distorted. Bacon blurs the figure's face and torso by smearing and wiping the paint, erasing and blurring the realist representation into partial obscurity. The blurring effect makes the figure appear to be caught in motion, but also deformed. Its body appears immobile, while its face gazes passively but warily down the space of the image.

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<sup>2</sup> See Farson. The film *Love is the Devil* is partially based on Farson's book.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, van Alphen, Deleuze (1981), Schmied, Gowing and Hunter, and Russell.

<sup>4</sup> This is why Kuspit claims they are "hysterical paintings" (1986).

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A bar constrains the lower part of the figure's legs as he sits within the black space of a wooden box-like structure hovering against a dark iron ceiling and a pink floor-ground. Yet the hovering box also appears to be sliding down both a blue and a yellow rail which extend to the bottom of the canvas. Impossibly, it appears to be simultaneously moving down and hovering in its fixed position. The box also seems to be superimposed over an unseen background, obscuring the horizon line between the pink floor and iron grey space above. Like a mirror, the space of the box projects a space that extends indefinitely within its frame. Not only is the hovering box unlocatable but so is the space within it. The figure is cut off by the lower frame of the box, suggesting his legs continue in a space impossibly larger than the box's capacity. Furthermore, the space within the box does not exactly correspond to the space the figure occupies, for the bar restraining him within the box is also paradoxically attached to a pole outside it.

On the pink ground below writhes a thickly impastoed shadow that is dark, substantial and covered with blood-red patches. In virtue of their similar shape and the shadow's 180° rotation from the figure, it appears to belong to the figure. Yet it also appears to be a lower extension of the figure, oozing out below him, as well as a figure in its own right connected to the main figure by a small charcoal circle. The main figure appears warily to gaze partially at this shadow, partially into the distance. Around the amorphous shadow-figure are patches of white resembling pieces of typewritten paper, like tickets, cigarette packages, or official notices. They are disturbing because, like the shadow-figure, they are ominously covered with streaks of red. However, they also suggest that wherever the figure may be located, it is someplace in the everyday world of litter and garbage.

Insofar as any one perspective is possible in this image, the viewer's gaze is situated in the point of view of the main figure because the viewer sees what it can see. Thus the viewer is made perceptually to identify with the figure; not because the figure addresses the viewer, but because their positions in relation to the activity taking place mirror one another. The identification is structural. The figure within the box acts as a mirror image of the viewer. Like the indefinitely extending space surrounding a mirror image, the space of the box presents a realm in which all the space contained within it can never be seen. Given a point of view which reveals as much to the viewer as it does to the figure about the space of the image and what is happening in it, the viewer's perspective on the scene is mirrored by the figure's. Yet like a mirror image, the figure remains infinitely far away and isolated from the space of the viewer. Moreover, the figure looks afraid; its expression of pain suggests it has an interiority, thus indicating that it is an individual subject like the viewer. There is a psychic, sympathetic identification with the figure as a subject whose point of view the viewer shares.

However, this sympathetic identification does not make the viewer any less helpless in understanding or explaining the painful event. As Ernst van Alphen suggests in his critical analysis *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, the conventions of visual representation employed here, such as realistic representation, a perspectival system of representation, and a sympathetic identification with the figure through a shared point of

view, draw the viewer into the image. The viewer is led to identify with the painful and confusing event portrayed by becoming entangled in its diverging representational schemes. Made to identify with the figure's pain, the viewer remains isolated from the figure who doesn't even address her gaze. Any attempt visually to synthesize the image into a coherent narrative account is thus continually frustrated by the various ways the viewer is led around the image. As the film suggests, violence and vision are intimately related in Bacon's paintings.

### 3. Violence, Suffering And Freedom

My analysis of Francis Bacon's paintings maintains that they are indeed violent in the ways articulated by the film. They present the viewer with images of unremitting pain and suffering which lead the viewer to identify with them. For this reason, my analysis seriously considers the argument put forward by van Alphen that perception and affectivity are primary to the presentation of violence in Bacon's paintings because the perceptive activity of the viewer is affected by and implicated in the violence presented in the images. His analysis of the affectivity defining the viewer's response to Bacon's images is similar to that offered by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whose work *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* analyzes the sensational affect of Bacon's images. Deleuze argues that Bacon's images present affectivity in terms of the structure of the violently deforming sensation. In different ways, both van Alphen and Deleuze interpret affectivity to be a given feature of existence. Van Alphen argues that affectivity is articulated in Bacon's images in terms of the affected force of the body's resistance to representational or discursive systems which limit it in stultifying subject positions. Affectivity is seen as dissolving the constrictions of subjectivity, releasing the figures from the constraints of fixed representations. By contrast, Deleuze argues affectivity is articulated in terms of the structure of violent sensation, which he understands to be the universal structure of the activity of becoming. Deleuze claims that Bacon's images present an account of the activity of the actualization of all things – whether they be perceiving subjects, animals, or sand dunes -- as a violent and continual process of becoming. Although they offer different and often conflicting interpretations of the violence in Bacon's images, I take the analyses of van Alphen and Deleuze as my starting point and endorse the view that Bacon's images are violent.

Yet I contend that Bacon's images do more than just present violence as an element of the activity of actualization. In the face of violence and suffering, Bacon's images ask "Is there that which transcends them?". This question arises because violence and suffering mean much more than the mere relative play of opposing physical forces.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>5</sup> Kuspit sees something over and above physical violence in Bacon's work, even if he does not see it as anything more than "energy and emotion" (1986:57).

Bacon, violence and suffering have an ethical dimension, and only for that reason are they offensive. The mere play of opposing physical forces is not suffering, because for there to be suffering there must be something over and above physical interaction. The struggle presented in Bacon's images is not the physical attraction and repulsion of forces, but the opposition between the physical and that which opposes it: the non-physical, the dimension of freedom that transcends the physical. Violence and suffering in the proper meaning of those terms are nothing other than the struggle of the physical and the non-physical which, as presented in the serial structure of Bacon's paintings and the viewer's response that they demand, is the struggle of embodied freedom.

Van Alphen rightly describes the activity in Bacon's paintings as the "ongoing fragmentation of the body" that instigates the ongoing fragmentation of its subject (15, 190).<sup>6</sup> Deleuze interprets it to be the infinite process of becoming-other (1994:177). My analysis complements these views, for I argue that the activity is presented as the serially iterative activity of actualization. Like van Alphen and Deleuze, I hold that the activity of the image is presented in the process of its happening and is located at the site of the figure. However, rather than interpreting this activity negatively as distorting, deforming activity, I suggest it involves an element of construction: the serially iterative activity of actualization is the free activity of constructing differences. That is, the activity of the actualization of the figure is understood in a twofold way. It is destructive because by continually differentiating the figure it continually destroys the figure. The activity appears to unmake the realist representation of Bacon's figures, which is why they appear to be in the process of dissolving, distorting, or destructing. However, the activity of Bacon's figures is equally constructive because the viewer is made visually to construct the figure out of the turbulence. For this reason, the activity of actualization is understood to be a differentiating activity because the figure is presented as continually differentiating in relation to the viewer. The viewer's role in relation to the activity is crucial. When the image is understood to reflect back the viewer's own acts of looking and thus implicate the viewer in the activity of the image, as van Alphen rightly contends, the viewer performs the activity of the actualization of the figure. The viewer is directed by the structure of the image to enact the figure's activity according to a serially ordered relational structure. As Bacon's images present this activity, it is ongoing and centralized at the figure: it is the figure's free acts of construction out of the continual violence of its destruction.

A fundamental feature of the activity of actualization as it is presented in Bacon's images is affectivity. The activity of actualization is a matter of exchange and interaction: it is the reception of affective stimuli that compels a response. Yet as I will show, the suffering nature of the response to affectivity endured by Bacon's figures and enacted by the viewer is more than a matter of affective stimuli. Bacon's figures are continually transforming or actualizing differently because they are continually affected differently. This is the basis of the violence they endure: the structure of the activity of actualization

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<sup>6</sup> Nochlin (2001) also argues that Bacon's paintings are about fragmentation. She calls the fragmentations "deliberate destructions", and argues that Bacon's images express the fragmentation of modern subjects, linking fragmentation to historical events and social conditions.

is an affective structure which perpetually differentiates the figure from what it was. Yet by presenting the figures as suffering, Bacon's images show that the physical interplay of opposing forces continually inflicted on and affecting the figures involves something more than physical struggle. Thus the interpretation of Bacon's images must include something more than a materialist, physicalist or mechanical interpretation of the process of giving and receiving affect. The freedom to respond cannot be reduced to the attractive and repulsive play of forces; rather, it is an ultimate and underivable element in the activity of actualization. It is my contention that in Bacon's paintings, the underivable element of freedom is always embodied, suffering freedom, and it is this embodied, suffering freedom that is presented in the serially iterative structure of his images and in the contemplative, concerned, pained, or resisting comportment of his figures.

#### **4. The Violence And Suffering Of The Serial Figure**

Viewing Bacon's images entangles the viewing subject in them. The analyses of van Alphen and Deleuze show that Bacon's images are affective images which ensnare the viewer in the violence they present. They destabilize the viewing subject by putting into question what both theorists show to be very basis of the viewer's subjectivity, namely affective embodiment.<sup>7</sup> In this way, Bacon's images take the role of the viewer seriously by making the viewer's acts of perception crucial to their structure. When perception and affectivity are understood to be the subject of Bacon's paintings, the perception of the viewing subject is required to be subject to the paintings. Because they are also violent images, the viewing subject is subject to their violence. Yet there is more going on than the violent destabilization of the subject of Bacon's paintings, whether that subject is understood to be the figure or the viewer. Bacon's images insist that there is meaning in that infliction of violence which viewers are made to realize when they are drawn into the

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze's analysis of sensation is his account of the active, moving quality of Bacon's images and how it implicates the viewer. Understood as paintings of sensations, Bacon's images are events of the violent affectivity of the figure. They are its activity of actualization presented in the process of its happening. Bacon's figures are not stable objects of perception, but sensations presented as sensible aggregates which affect the viewer. Viewers' acts of perceiving the figure are continually affected by what they perceive because they continually perceive the figure differently and are compelled not merely to receive the affect of the figure but to respond to it. Viewers are made to perform the figure's activity of actualization. The viewer's response is directed by the structure of the sensation, the structure of the becoming process or activity of actualization of the figure. That is, the viewer is made to experience the image as a sensory affect: perceiving it demands being affected by it. This is what makes Bacon's paintings strike "immediately onto the nervous system" (Bacon, in Sylvester, 58). Like van Alphen's "mechanical process" of affective perception (47), Deleuze's sensation is a composition of forces structured according to the intensive synthesis of differential relations. Hence sensation is the process of sensation. Sensation is what it does. To understand Bacon's paintings is to understand what they do, for to perceive them is to enact their affectivity or activity of actualization. This, van Alphen and Deleuze claim, is the basis of the active, moving quality and of the violence in Bacon's images, for these forces are not caused by will but are necessary.

images.<sup>8</sup> Because it is presented in the context of violent pain and suffering, this meaning is more than the presentation of subjects as active material objects.

The violence of the affective exchange enacted between the viewing subject and the figure reveals that the ultimate fact of affective embodiment involves something which transcends the body, something which transcends the affective interplay of physical forces. The violence involves an ethical dimension which the viewer realizes by being made to participate in the conflict enacted in and by Bacon's images.<sup>9</sup> The violent structure of his paintings forces the viewer to enact a tragic struggle between freedom and the physical.<sup>10</sup> For the violence of Bacon's images is presented in terms of suffering: the suffering of the figure and, on van Alphen's analysis, the suffering of the viewer.<sup>11</sup> But there can be neither violence nor suffering in the play of physical forces unless something else is present, namely the freedom to respond which is not reducible to physical force.

Crucial to an understanding of the violence and suffering of Bacon's paintings is his presentation of them as active dynamical relations. The fact that the paintings present violence in the process of its happening is fundamental to what I hold to be their ethical meaning. This is because Bacon's paintings reveal the viewer to be affected, and they compel an affective response from the viewer.<sup>12</sup> They direct the structure of that response

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Kuspit claims "Bacon's paint spontaneously presents us with an authentic, compelling image – an image to which we feel committed, inescapably bound" (1986:57).

<sup>9</sup> The claims that Bacon's violent images present the dignity of the body, the trauma of war, or the existential internal conflict of the human subject do not fully explain them. Yet they are important because they recognize that there is meaning in the images and that it is something more than the physical brutality of what happens in them. See Russell; Gowing and Hunter; Kuspit (1986).

<sup>10</sup> John Hatch's analysis of fate as the theme and the method of Bacon's paintings makes a similar point. Basically, Hatch reads Bacon's paintings as presenting the struggle between individual will and the physical forces of 'fate'. Thematically, this is understood as the struggle between individual desires and social convention, the drives of the unconscious, religious doctrines, and public laws. In relation to Bacon's painting practice, it is the struggle between Bacon's painterly intentions and the spontaneity of the paint. Hatch's analysis hints at freedom without ever fully explaining how it is worked out in either Bacon's subject matter or his practice.

<sup>11</sup> This is the starting point of van Alphen's analysis, which begins with the claim that "Seeing a work by Francis Bacon hurts" (9). It is also where Deleuze's analysis begins, for he claims that Bacon paints a new type of relation between figures and figures to the world, namely "ces nouveaux rapports *matters of fact*, par opposition aux relations intelligibles (d'objets ou d'idees)", where matters of fact are analyzed as given sensations (1981:10). It is also the basis of Michel Leiris' analysis. He claims "What Bacon offers in most of his paintings ... are ... depictions of living people or normally banal objects – endowed, or at least apparently so, with a certain figurative veracity directly referential to phenomena experienced through the medium of the senses or, more generally, the sensibility ... so that they exist more forcefully than any simple representation (6). Similarly, John Hatch begins his analysis by seriously considering Bacon's claim that "I want very, very much ... to give the sensation without the boredom of conveyance" (Hatch, 164; Bacon, in Sylvester, 65). There seems to be little disagreement about the theme and effect of affectivity in Bacon's images.

<sup>12</sup> Van Alphen explains that in Bacon's images, "the human figure is not the *subject* of [a] narrative of perception. The human figure is rather the *locus* of the events, the scene of action. Perception happens in and on the human figure ... Perception, then, is not an activity directed by the human subject, but a mechanical process happening to the human figure" (47, 48). Here, perception is not "the distanced mastery of the modernist and positivist gaze, which dominates the world while leaving the subject of looking

in terms of the structure of affectivity. As both van Alphen and Deleuze show, the structure of the viewer's response is performative: it is a matter of participatorily enacting the activity of the actualization of the figure in terms of its affective structure.<sup>13</sup> The affective structure of the figure is reflected back to the viewer, who is thus understood to be, not a stable, fixed self, but a self that is constantly in the process of becoming. The viewer is subject to the activity of actualization that continually differentiates perceiving subjects. Deleuze's critical analysis of this activity reveals that, although not structured by the perceiving subject, the activity of actualization is nevertheless structured by serially ordered acts of construction. I contend that this convincing interpretation of Bacon's paintings involves the further element of freedom, for the serially iterative act of construction is articulated by Bacon's images as intrinsically involving a dimension of freedom and it is this which defines what it means to be affected. The freedom of both the viewer's acts or perception and the figure's acts of response helps to explain both why Bacon's figures appear to be suffering and why viewers can find Bacon's images ultimately uplifting despite their violence.<sup>14</sup>

The structure of serially iterative acts of construction is presented in terms of the affective ways Bacon's images implicate the viewer's visual activity. The viewer's acts of perception are implicated in the images by Bacon's unorthodox use of traditional pictorial means such as skewed perspectival schemes, indexical signs, isolating structures, lapses in realism, apathetic figures, mundane situations, and an unending narrative sequence of events.

Bacon's use of perspective is similar to Degas': it draws the viewer into the images by positioning the viewer in different points of view in relation to them. For instance, from certain angles the viewer is given the point of view of the main figure and so led to

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uninvolved" (55). Rather, perception is implicated in the world and defined by what it sees. It is constructive and relationally oriented. Van Alphen understands it as sensory activity or the affectivity given to subjects in virtue of their embodiment. In Bacon's images, figures are affected by their perceptions inasmuch as they are affected by any sensory stimuli and the activity of perception makes the subject "the subject of perception" (48).

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze argues that Bacon's paintings are themselves sensations: they can only be felt or sensed or perceived. This is clearly shown to be the case when we try to describe one of Bacon's paintings; it is impossible to relay the visual affect without visually experiencing it. Hence Deleuze argues that Bacon throws over representation by presenting sensation rather than reproducing visible forms. The images present the viewer with the activity of the actualization of sensible forms, namely the active process of perception, affectivity or sensation itself. For this reason, Deleuze interprets the viewers' affective implication in the figure not in terms of its representation but in terms of its actualization. Bacon's figures are events of the actualization of the figure, understood as a body of sensations in the process of their actualization. In virtue of their affect on the viewer, Deleuze's analysis ultimately claims the this structure of actualization applies to the viewing subject as well. Like the figure, viewers are sensational bodies. Daniel Smith gives a clear account of Deleuze's concept of sensation (35-36).

<sup>14</sup> The unexpectedly uplifting aspect of Bacon's images is where van Alphen concludes his critical analysis and where Hatch begins his. Van Alphen finds the uncontrollable mechanism of the affected body an escape route from the stultifying identity structures imposed on subjects. Hatch's analysis interprets the violent struggle in Bacon's paintings to be the rallying call for individuals to always assert themselves and "take control over their own life" (173). As I indicate in note 10, Hatch does not clearly explain how this is supposed to happen.

identify with the figure's position in the violent enactment. But that point of view is always shifted to another, leaving the viewer in an unstable viewing position in relation to the image. Bacon does not hide the fact that the viewer is given an insecure and vacillating viewing position in relation to his images. For instance, the cages, boxes, rails, beds, and chairs on or in which the figure is situated are ostentatiously rendered in a sloppy way. This maintains the uncertainty and mobility of the viewer's perspective on the image. The viewer is not put in a mastering, directing position in relation to the image. Instead, the viewer is directed around the image with no stable perspectival position in relation to it. Because Bacon's skewed perspectival structures are centred around the figure, they situate the viewer in a variety of shifting points of view on the figure. In a use of perspective similar to Degas', the viewer is made to perceive the figure from various angles: from above, below, beside, before, and even behind the figure. Thus the viewer is given visual mobility in relation to the figure.<sup>15</sup>

Another reason for the instability of the viewer's perspectival position is Bacon's use of indexical signs, such as arrows and circles, which are set off from the pictorial representation on the canvas. They are flatly painted on top of the picture plane, which emphasizes the fact that the paintings are two-dimensional representations. The signs are not representational features of Bacon's images but pointers indicating how to move around them. They address the viewer by indicating where to look and directing the gaze from one element to another. Hence the indexical signs make clear that the viewing subject is not a directing subject. Bacon's signs position the viewer external to the activity presented, participating in it not by adopting the figure's position within the image but by moving around the structure of the picture plane. Where the perspectival scheme offers numerous angles on the figure, the signs tell where to focus visual attention. They urge the viewer semiotically to engage with the image by signposting potentially meaningful pictorial elements. Thus they have the further effect of suggesting there is meaning to be made.

Within the skewed perspectival structures, Bacon isolates his figures on circumscribing structures that also focus the viewer's attention on the figure as the locus of activity. Excepting some of his portrait studies which tend to isolate the figures in empty black space, Bacon situates his figures in cages, beds, boxes, chairs, raised floors, platforms, rings, swings, strings and tracks. This has a number of effects. The first is the centralization of the figure, which not only directs the viewer's visual attention to the figure as a main element in the image, but also suggests that the meaning of other

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<sup>15</sup> The isolating structures can also be understood to support the structuring activity of the figure's vectors. They frame the figure, as Deleuze claims, in a specific "operational field". The frame never fixes the figure in a static position, just as the springboard extension and focalizing ring does not in *The Portrait of George Dyer Crouching*. Rather, the frame limits the figure's relational activity within specific configurations. The warped or sloppily rendered perspective of the frames, such as the Escher-like cage structures or the wires on which the figure is balanced in perpetual imbalance, also function both to isolate the figure and to situate it in permanent mobility. From the perspective of the viewer, seeing the figure in one situation, for instance contained in the cage or balanced at one point on the wire, opens up a new way to see it, such as escaping from the cage or balanced at another point on the wire. It isolates the structure of differentiating activity that enacts the figure's structure (Deleuze, 1981:96).

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elements should be interpreted in relation to it. Secondly, these structures accentuate the structured nature of the activity happening in them. For instance, the circular structure around *Figure at a Washbasin*, 1976, emphasizes the curved convulsions of the figure's movement; the flatly planar and undulated bed of *Sleeping Figure*, 1974, enhances the flattening activity of the figure's sleep; the vertical lines of the cage in *Head VI*, 1949, emphasize the dissolving, vertical descent that is happening; both the strings looped across the canvas and the rings of the tires on which the figure rides in *Portrait of George Dyer Riding a Bicycle*, 1966, heighten the precariousness of his balance and focus the activity on the turns of his pedalling movement. These circumscribing devices emphasize and guide the viewer's perception towards the structure of the figure's activity. Thirdly, the circumscribing devices have the iconographical suggestion of sacrificial altars, especially when they are beds, tables, crucifixes, and raised platforms on which the figure is outstretched. In the context of the violent deformations to the figure's representation and the violent iconography, situating the figure on an isolating structure sets the figure off as a particularly significant event of suffering.

As indicated above, Bacon's stylistic lapses in and out of realist representation incite the viewer to participate in the activity presented in his paintings. Initially, they can be understood to complicate the viewer's participation in the image, giving the viewer the role of either constructing or destructing the figure. On the one hand, Bacon's use of realism urges the viewer to see the image realistically and discern real portraits out of his studies by visually reconstructing the wipes and smears that deform the realism. In order to do this, the viewer must engage in the figure's activity of actualization and perform it with the figure. The viewer must construct the missing and unclear parts of the figure's representation. On the other hand, Bacon's blurring swipes at the realism force the viewer to reconsider her representational expectations. By highly gestural sweeps with his brush, blobs, dots or thrown streaks of paint, and random markings, Bacon's acts of representing the figures ravage their representations by erasing, deforming or negating them. The ravaged areas are where the activity of the image is most perspicuous and they are usually where the indexical signs direct the viewer to look. From this perspective, the viewer is made visually to move with the deforming blurs and smears and to destruct the figure, revealing that the realism presents the figure as incomplete.

Two primary effects emerge out of Bacon's lapsing realism. First, whether viewers perceive the figure in terms of the realism or the blurring deformations, the figure is presented as incompletely realized. It is either always in the process of realization or always in the process of dissolving; both ways present the figure in the process of differentiation. Secondly, Bacon's explicit facture or acts of representing his figures are presented as part of the figures themselves. Even the most minimal presence of realist representation indicates that all the marks articulating the figure are the actualization of the figure. The artist's activity of representing the figure is transferred to the figure, which means the figure is presented in the process of differentiating or continually actualizing itself as different. The incompleteness of the figure is related to its continual process of actualizing differently. It is not completely realized because it is undergoing its activity of actualization. Furthermore, because there is nothing in the presentation which

indicates an end point or telos to its activity of actualization, the figure's activity of actualization is presented as ongoing.

For this reason, the viewer's constructive or destructive visual engagement with the activity of the figure can be understood to be an activity which actualizes the figure. By visually following Bacon's differentiating articulation of the figure under the direction of the indexical signs, the viewer is led visually both to construct the figure and to destroy it. Thus the viewer's engagement neither deforms nor reforms the figure but transforms it. The viewer continually transforms the figure's representation by relating Bacon's blurs, marks, and streaks of paint. Each mark leads into another to actualize the figure anew. The process of relating these marks is an iterative process because each act of relation differentiates what came before. The process is serial because each new iterative act changes the order of relation that constructs the figure. The viewer is implicated in a process of serially iterative acts of construction that continually actualizes the figure differently. In this way, Bacon's overt acts of painting implicate the viewer's acts of perception. The viewer is involved in the process of differentiating the figure from what it was as she moves through the image, actualizing the figure by serially relating elements to other elements and moving through different perspectival angles around the figure. The viewer's activity is the serially iterative differentiation of the figure as she is directed around it by Bacon's facture, perspective, signs and contours.

For instance, looking at *Figure at a Washbasin*, presents the viewer with a male figure who appears to be in the process of heaving into a sink. Like most of Bacon's figures, this one is vertebral, but seems to be held together not by a formative skeletal armature but by the spasms and stimuli of its nervous system, as Bacon himself insists (Bacon, in Sylvester, 58). The figure is a writhing, convulsive organism, constructed of unstable areas of disturbance. His back contorts in a flux of arcs that result, on the right, with his tautly held head and, on the left, with a spasm of legs. Clear delineation is produced through Michelangelo-like thick musculature: the figure's upper arms and shoulders strain to support him and appear to emerge out of the fluctuating arcs of his back's vigorous convulsions. This can only be seen, however, by visually relating together the various lines and tonal values of Bacon's articulation of the figure. The arrow directs the viewer to look at the figure's back and move from one faded outline to the next and then to the next. The shifting tones of grey, pink, and brown move the viewer's gaze onto the figure's body, in and out of spinal recesses and raised muscles, always moving. From one area to another, the viewer constructs what she sees, but each construction changes what was made before. Moving down his back, the heavy curved arc is seen to be the figure's buttock. Moving down further, that arc is related to the next and reconfigures it into a shudder of his lower torso, while the next arc is seen to define the figure's buttock.

## 5. Violence, Suffering, And Concern

This serially iterative constructive activity is performed throughout the viewer's visual movement around the figure's body. It is a matter of constructing the form of the figure in terms of the articulation Bacon's acts of painting give. Yet constructing the figure involves continually differentiating and destructing what was already constructed. The figure can never be completely realized because, as one part is related with another to form a specific area of the figure's body, that part then relates to another part differently and changes how the figure was previously perceived. For instance, the curve under the figure's shoulder looks like its knee. Yet when that knee is related to the leg extended behind it, the curve under the knee also appears to be the knee. There is no way to synthesize the figure's form into a completed whole because the visual activity which viewers are directed by the image to perform is an ongoing process of serially iterative acts of constructing the figure anew. Participating in the figure's activity of actualization means continually differentiating the construction of its body. The violence of the image is not only due to the narrative of sickness suggested in the imagery. It is also the violence of the transformations the figure undergoes as the viewer perceives it. The figure suffers through a continual destruction and reconstruction of the stability and security of form.

While Bacon's figures continually differentiate or actualize anew in terms of the viewer's process of looking, Bacon is nevertheless careful minimally to maintain their recognizable form. Viewers can recognize the concentration of activity in the main figure, and can recognize whether it is more human or animal, male or female, in more or less pain. Yet the figure's form is a matter of the continual actualization of its form. It is presented in the process of coming-to-be and perishing simultaneously, which is to say the activity of the actualization of the figure is the activity of its differentiation from what it was. The making of the figure implies its unmaking. Paradoxically, it is not the areas of realism which are found to shape the figure, but the areas of Bacon's dynamic deformations of those areas. The figure's body is held together by the acts of Bacon's fluid contour delineations, scrubbing, rubbing, and dynamic facture. In this way, the figure's body is constructed by the acts which dissolve it. Construction and destruction are interrelated features of its activity of actualization.

It is in this context that Bacon's paintings are seen to be physically violent. The figure's bodies are painful to look at because they are presented in the process of their destruction. And as I have explained, even when the viewer interpretively enacts this activity as constructive it is still destructive on account of the very nature of the activity of actualization as a differentiating activity. The violence Bacon's figures undergo is most forcefully expressed through their bodies, even in the figures who scream. The figures rarely look towards the viewer, and in the images where they do, such as the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1980, or *Study for Portrait (Michel Leiris)*, 1978, they appear to look through rather than at the viewer, as if

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preoccupied with something else. The figures do not address the viewer visually to plea for help or sympathy, for instance. The address to the viewer is performed by Bacon's indexical signs. The figure's pain is presented through the continual destruction of its body. Twisting, writhing, and mutating, it physically reacts to forces which continually ravage it.<sup>16</sup>

However, Bacon's figures are not just presented as bodies in the process of their destruction. They are presented as suffering bodies, bodies which experience pain on account of the continual acts of violence they endure, especially in the context of threatening imagery. This is because Bacon's figures unexpectedly appear contemplative or distracted. The screaming faces of some of Bacon's figures and the contemplative attitudes of others differ from the physical violence they sustain. This indicates there is more being presented than physical destruction. In their states of ceaseless actualization, Bacon's figures do not appear oblivious to the activity of actualization which continually makes them different. There is violence and suffering because in various ways the figures appear to reflect on the destructive activity happening on and in their bodies.<sup>17</sup>

The reflective comportment of Bacon's figures manifests the suffering of concern. In the face of such violent, physical transformations, this reflection transforms the physicality of the violence itself. For where there is listening, waiting, watching, contemplation, distraction, and repose, there is concern, and concern belongs to a dimension that is other than the physical. The scream is pained; the apathetic look is the resigned concern about the inevitability of what is happening. The reflective attitude of Bacon's figures shows that the affective is distinct from and more than that which affects. The violence they endure is not entirely physical because it is recognized by them as violence.

The nature of the figures transcends the physical because their reflective comportment indicates that their pain cannot be reduced to mere materiality. For example, in the triptych *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait*, 1973, Bacon is shown in three different representations of the process of transforming. Yet Bacon's face appears concerned or preoccupied with something else. While the viewer's gaze is busy with the

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<sup>16</sup> Van Alphen understands the images themselves to return the viewer's gaze. In this way, the viewer's acts of perception are explicitly thematized in the image. Yet the viewer does not receive the self-assurance she expects from this returned gaze. In his chapter "Bodyscapes", van Alphen points out that while, theoretically, the viewer's sense of self is confirmed by the look of the other, for the other sees her as whole and returns that view to the subject, this is not the case with Bacon. In Bacon's images, intersubjective wholeness is denied because not only is it the viewer's own acts of perception that are returned, but they are returned without a completely realized image of the body (ch. 4). I argue that Bacon's images draw in the viewing subject with an offer of this self-other relationship, but then reinterpret the relationship in terms of the participatory structure of the concerned, communal nature of the images.

<sup>17</sup> Kuspit provides a striking account of the figure's expressions: "This defiant unhappiness is customarily understood as an anguished sign of autonomy, a subversion of worldly appearances to construct the integrity of art in spite of the world. But Bacon forces us to read it not as willful transcendence of the world but as a hysterical, and invariably histrionic, effort to recollect it in all its anxiety-arousing absurdity" (55). In my view, however, Bacon is less interested in autonomy than in community and his suffering figures do not present hysteria but involvement and participation.

activity concentrated and enframed in his face by the heavy contours which set it off from the background and the canvas edge which foreshortens it, Bacon's gaze is directed away, with all the apathy of a mug-shot. The response suggested in his expression does not correlate with the violent undoing of his face. The process of deformation happening to the distractedly contemplative face in *Study for Portrait (Michel Leiris)*, 1978, is a process of grotesque mutations rather than gentle differentiations. Yet Leiris' expression is contemplative to the point of resignation. Similarly, the figures in the first panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, appear to accept the ongoing process of their deformation. The figure on the left appears to gaze in resignation while the figure on the right seems to glance in acknowledgement. In the central panel, the figure reclines on the bed, as if Manet's *Olympia*, 1863, were drawing up her legs, and the figure grins spitefully during the self destruction of its own body. In the right panel, the array of meat on the inverse crucifix yells out of the mouth in its stomach. The screaming pope in Bacon's *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, grips his chair and screams as not only he, but the entire image, either disintegrates into the modulating void of black lines in a rapidly descending fury from the top down, or emerges in a rapid ascension from the foreground white robes up into the modulating void. Although the figure screams, it does not get up. The figure sufferingly stiffens and endures. All of these are responses to the physical force of the figure's destruction which cannot be explained by force alone.<sup>18</sup>

The reflective responses of the figures also suggests that while the destruction is violent and causes suffering, it is not entirely extraordinary. The figures do not react with horrified surprise; they endure the violence done to them. Bacon's figures are presented performing mundane, ordinary acts, such as turning their heads, vomiting, defecating, copulating, wrestling, walking, sleeping, sitting, or screaming. Even when the figure screams it continues sitting. The fact that Bacon's figures continue to perform everyday, routine activities while their bodies are in the process of coming apart suggests that the activity of actualization they endure is not extraordinary but the very order of the mundane: it is the ordinary. The painful process of actualization is manifested differently throughout the different routine activities the figures perform, but it is not presented as a pain the figures can either do anything to stop or from which they can escape. Some scream in response, others carry on with what they are doing, but none of Bacon's figures can disentangle themselves from it. For instance, the seated *Figure Writing Reflected in a*

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<sup>18</sup> It should be also noted here that the figures' reactions differ between images according to who or what they are, and so cannot be explained merely in terms of physical response. Popes, crucified figures, and monstrous flesh-like figures mostly scream in response to the physical violence. The figures in portraits tend contemplatively to gaze, while others are preoccupied and continue with everyday activities. John Hatch's analysis argues that those figures whose freedom is most confined usually suffer more than those who are not so confined, such as the screaming popes who are (in his view) confined by the conventions of the church and the crucified figures who are (in his view) confined by the iconology of the cross (171). More plausibly, the female figures who appear contemptuously to grin through their pain are, in van Alphen's analysis, determined by the tradition of the female nude (174). The howling meat and fleshy, limbless creatures can be added to this list, as confined by their crippled inability to do more than flail. Throughout all the differences in response, none of the figures are wholly determined by the physical force that affects them

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*Mirror*, 1976, appears preoccupied with what he is doing and less concerned with his pain than the screaming pope in *Head VI*, 1949, who appears to brace himself in order fully to face the pain of the violent activity that continually differentiates his body. In both extreme instances, the figures appear to live with their ongoing pain as a feature of what they are.

The uncanny setting in which Bacon's figures are situated further emphasizes the everyday nature of figures' violence and suffering. The very reason the settings are uncanny is that although isolated from any familiar environment, they still appear to be familiar, mundane places. The familiar aspect of the setting, the figures' performance of mundane activities, and their contemplative attitudes help to identify the viewer with the figures by identifying with the everyday nature of their situations. Furthermore, the everyday settings and activities, as well as the distracted concern of the figures, characterize the violent activity of actualization that transforms them as mundane. It is not violent in the sense of exceptional. The violence of the activity of actualization is not out of the ordinary.

The mundanity of the event encourages a narrative reading of it. Given figural characters performing everyday acts in a minimally familiar setting, the viewer can treat the image as the representation of everyday events. The presentation of contemplative and suffering figures in ordinary situations who undergo violent transformations makes the images intriguing; the viewer is compelled to figure out the plot.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, van Alphen argues that

Bacon's paintings display many signs which traditionally signify narrativity, and thus stimulate a narrative reading, [however] by the same token any attempt to postulate narratives based on the painting is countered (30).

By juxtaposing a violent event in the process of its happening with representations of mundane activities, the image draws the viewer to speculate on the nature of the event without giving the viewer an actual storyline.<sup>20</sup> As Andrew Forge argues, the narrative can never be discerned because the "boundaries of a story are refused" (Forge, 31).

The mundane familiarity of the suggested narrative is another way by which the viewer is led to identify with the distractedly deforming figures. While violently distorted, the figures appear to be situated in the everyday world. Yet Bacon's images do not present traditional narratives with a beginning and an end to a sequence of episodes. The event is ongoing, always in the process of its happening, and the viewer's unfolding

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<sup>19</sup> For an exciting analysis of intrigue in terms of the viewer's role in a narrative of detection, see van Alphen, Chapter Three, especially the section called "Mystery Portraits".

<sup>20</sup> In fact, van Alphen claims, the viewer is drawn into the story, acting it out with the figures as they perform it. For this reason, he claims the images are not "conveying" a "pre-existing story"; they tell a story in the sense that the images present a process of unfolding events (28). In my view, they can also be understood as dramatic enactments in which the viewer plays a crucial role.

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series of relationally constructive acts that actualize the figure endow the activity happening in the image with a sequential structure. This underscores the viewer's role in the enactment of the activity of actualization. The viewer's activity does not unfold a chronicle of events, it performs the events. The viewer's activity is thus crucially involved in the activity presented, for the viewer's process of enactment is the serially iterative process of the activity of the actualization of the event of the figure. Only in terms of the viewer's performance of the activity of actualization can the images be said to be narrative.<sup>21</sup>

Further, part of the uncanny nature of Bacon's settings is their timelessness. Bacon's diptychs and triptychs, which traditionally would be read as a narrative of events continued through each panel, instead isolate their figures from one another and present neither narrative movement nor temporal development of the figure. Bacon's imagery neither indicates day or night nor includes readable clocks and calendars. The only temporal suggestion in the images is found in the iconography, such as the figures' clothing, hairstyles, furniture, light bulbs, cameras, cigarettes, and pens. This iconography situates the events approximately in middle-class, mid-twentieth century Western culture. However, the provision of the setting with an era only reinforces its mundane familiarity by situating the events presented in the everyday world. It provides an historical link between the figures and the viewer by presenting the figures in terms of a historical, culturally specific narrative. Yet, once again, this narrative is confounded because, despite the historical time-frame, there is nothing of historical importance being presented. The activity of actualization the figures endure is not presented as specific to that historical epoch but as underlying the everyday activities particular to that period. It is an ongoing feature of the world. Thus the viewer is given suffering figures who undergo transformative events without the structure of a plot or storyline, a cause, or a resolution.

The ways in which Bacon presents the violent exchange of affectivity in his images and through his figures implicate the viewer in the activity of the images. The viewer is affected by the images, directed to assume various perspectival relations and visually concentrate on various areas of the images in order to understand them. Moreover, the viewer is led to focus on the activity concentrated at the figure and, ultimately, to actualize the figure out of the maelstrom of marks which articulate its presence. The viewer visually actualizes the figure by performing the serially iterative process of relating one part to another in order to articulate the figure's body. Each act of serial iteration constructs a part of the figure in relation to a previous part; each act always leads to another and differentiates the construction from what it was. The viewer's process of visually actualizing the figure is ongoing and relationally structured in a serially iterative

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<sup>21</sup> This is van Alphen's point in Chapter One of his analysis. Bacon's paintings do not provide the viewer with a narrative understood as a product or representation of events. Rather, they involve the viewer in the process of narrative, where the viewer is implicated in the activity presented in the image. See the preceding note.

order of events.<sup>22</sup> However, it is not solely directed by the image because the viewer is free within the structure of the figure to decide where and how the serial relations will be constructed. Thus the very structure that Bacon's images present the viewer reveals that the affectivity of the viewer involves more than the interaction of physical forces. This is true of the figure as well, for the figures response to the activity of its ongoing destruction is reflective. Suffering is shown to be underivable from the physical forces of affectivity, and it is on this basis alone that Bacon's images can be understood to be what they are: violent images of suffering figures. Bacon's figures suffer because they are shown reflectively to respond to the forces that destroy their bodies with acts that transcend physical reaction, such as repose, resignation, waiting, and sleep. Thus their suffering is also put in the context of everyday activities and scenarios; they live with their pain. For these reasons, the activity of actualization of the figure in which the viewer is participatorily implicated is to be understood as ordinary, familiar, ongoing and concerned. In Bacon, the ordinary is not reducible to material forces. It is the empathically affected world of concern.

### **Violence, Suffering, And Community**

In Bacon, the varying intensities of colour and his acts of deforming his figures are so rendered that looking at a figure in one particular way, for instance from a certain angle or along a certain contour, leads to something new. The figure in *Portrait of George Dyer Crouching*, 1966, for instance, appears to be moving because the viewer serially relates elements of the figure's articulation with other elements, such as one contour with another contour, a tonal value, a smear, or an area of realism. Each element articulating the figure iterates into another; each act of serially iterative actualization performed by the viewer constructs it anew and therefore differentiates the presentation of the figure from what it was. Because the viewer serially iterates the ongoing activity articulating the figure, the viewer's acts of iteratively constructing the figure are ongoing, which means the activity of actualization of the figure is ongoing. Yet while the serially iterative acts of constructing the figure differentiate how it is seen continually, no individual act of construction is lost in the process.

This is the active, moving quality of the figure: visually enacting the serially iterative process of actualizing the figure constructs an order of relations that shapes the figure in a certain way. With each new serially iterative act of construction, the order of relations changes, and therefore the structure of the figure changes. It transforms before the viewer's eyes in terms of the viewer's serially iterative and constructive acts of

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<sup>22</sup> The viewer's participation in the ongoing, relational structure of Bacon's figures is the point of Deleuze's analysis of it as a sensation, namely a differential, relational structure. See also Smith (1996). For analyses of the viewer's constructive participation in Bacon's images, see van Alphen (ch.2), Leiris (6-8), and Kuspit (57).

perception. For example, the uppermost contour of the figure's back remains exactly that when it is related to the contour beneath and seen also to be the farthest shoulder blade. Related to the head, the contour is also the muscular tension of a neck, and also the heaving arc of a torso in a rigorous inhalation of breath. Each contour remains the same and each perceptual construction of it remains the same. The viewer's perception of the figure does not radically differentiate the figure but cumulatively differentiates the order of relations that structure it. With each new serially iterative act of visual construction, the significance of previous acts is altered. The figure is a relational whole because the connected parts compose what is easily distinguished as the main figure. In this way, the structure of Bacon's figures is similar to the structure of Edgar Degas' figures, for it implicates the viewer's visual activity and directs the viewer performatively to enact the serially iterative, constructive activity of the figure's actualization.<sup>23</sup> In the work of both artists, the figure is understood in terms of the activity that makes it what it is. Moreover, in both cases the figure is never completely realized. However, in Bacon's images the fundamental incompleteness of the figure which derives from its becoming-process is presented as painful. Each act of differentiating the figure is an act of constructing and of destroying the figure. Each deformation and intensity is preserved as it leads into another, differentiating the presentation of the figure without being subsumed in the relational transformation. The figure is a serially iterative differentiating unity.

The differential structure of sensation, which is Deleuze's activity of actualization, is in Bacon one of cumulative, serially ordered acts of free construction. Hence the structure of Bacon's images can be understood in relation to the structure of Mondrian's images as well, for they are both open structures which the viewing subject freely actualizes. Yet Bacon's images do not situate the viewer in relation to the image as its principle of actualization, for the activity of actualization is in Bacon presented in the process of its happening. The viewer is drawn to identify with the figure and to participate in its becoming-process. But the viewer's identification with the figure is a matter of affectivity: the viewer's acts of perception are affected by the structure of the figure and drawn to participate in the violence the figure sufferingly endures.

Violence and suffering are presented in both the theme and structure of Bacon's images. They inform the iconography of his subject matter; Bacon's ravaged figures are isolated, naked, distracted and concerned, sometimes all in the same image. When the figures are not alone in a single image, they are put in relation to other figures who are often sinister, indifferent, or voyeuristic. The figures are surrounded by the iconography of pain, such as sickness and malaise, blood, swastikas, crucifixes, or syringes, and they are presented trapped in and sometimes screaming because of the violence they endure. There is neither jubilation nor serene relief in Bacon's images. Because the activity of actualization is ongoing, the figures are in a permanent and devastating state of destruction. The viewer's participation in the figure's activity of actualization ravages the figure as it represents it, revealing the violence of both the viewer's and the figure's

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<sup>23</sup> Bacon also admired Degas' late pastels, such as *After the bath*, 1903, National Gallery London, specifically for the "grip and twist" of the figure's spine which gives her body the "vulnerability" of meat (in Sylvester, 46-7).

responses to affectivity. In this context of violence, the significance of the free act in Bacon becomes crucial.

Freedom is what ultimately distinguishes the figure from the viewer who participates in its actualization. The activity of the figures in the paintings is more than the activity of actualization performed by the viewer. Van Alphen argues that the viewer participates in the violence inflicted on the figure, for the viewer's acts of perception are made relevant to the activity performed in the matrix of the figure. The viewer's acts of perception are directed by the affective structure of the figure freely to actualize it. But the viewer does not freely actualize the figure's response to that affective activity. The independent suffering of the figures, shown in their contemplative, distracted, screaming, or resigned but never jubilant or peaceful comportment, is part of the activity of the images. Their concern is independent of the viewer, something more than the viewer's performance of their activity of actualization. This is why we are able to say that Bacon's figures are suffering figures and that Bacon's paintings are violent: there is that in them which is independent of the physical interplay of forces and which is not only enacted by the viewer but presented in the images.

Furthermore, the serially iterative structure of free acts of construction presented by Bacon's images reveals the structure of the affected subject to be communal. The serially iterative free act of construction which the viewer performs and by which the figure is actualized defines the relation between the two. Because the activity of actualization is serially iterative, viewer and figure share a history. That is, the structure of affectivity is one by which one subject participates in another. This is not a form-bestowing but rather a communal relationship; in Bacon, the structure of the affective subject is shown to be open and public. As constituted by their own acts of construction, both figure and viewer are indeed independent centres of response. Yet because the serially iterative constructive activity that relates the viewer to the figure is not merely mechanical, the communal nature of affectivity is not merely a relationship of opposing forces. It is a relationship of openness and sympathy, of being affected by and participating in the activity of the other even in the most adverse situations.

On these terms, the viewer of Bacon's images is brought into a serially iterative relation of affectivity with the figure by iteratively experiencing the affectivity of the other. That is, the viewer sympathizes with the figure. The disturbing violence of Bacon's paintings brings the viewer to a communal and sympathetic exchange with the other which rises above both the form-bestowing relationship of representational subjectivity and the mere mechanism of the physical by affectively iterating the pain of the other. The iterative interdependence of free individuals transcends their physical constraints and suffering. This is not the interdependence of essentially atomic centres of activity. It is the interdependence of beings whose affectivity, far from being a matter of opposing forces, is a matter of sympathy and concern. Here, affectivity transcends the merely physical and transforms it into a dynamical relation of reciprocity in which we find

ourselves to be members of one another.<sup>24</sup> The shock of Bacon's work lies not in its dismemberments but in the discovery of our embodied sociality.

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<sup>24</sup> I hold this to be the case even with Bacon's inorganic figures, like the sand dune or jet of water, because they not only have the shape of animate figures but move with the specificity of their own activity. Comparing the sand dunes and water figures with one another reveals them to have their own unique modes of response to that which affects them. For instance, the 1981 *Sand Dune* undulates diffusely while the 1983 *Sand Dune* oozes out of its transparent box. So even here it is not simply a matter of forces acting on figures; rather, they seem to move on their own and in their own way, and the viewer is made to participate in and experience their activity with them. Although only a small number of Bacon's images are inorganic, his presentation of natural objects as centres of action and reaction correlates them with his treatment of human figures as themselves independent centres of action and reaction. The difference in the case of Bacon's human figures is that their turbulence is more than the interplay of forces. Violence and suffering are involved.

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