

**FIGURE AND FLESH: FRANCIS BACON'S CHALLENGE TO THE
FIGURATIVE TRADITION IN WESTERN ART**

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By

Müge Telci

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I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman (Thesis Supervisor)

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emel Aközer

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Asuman Suner

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Zafer Aracagök

Approved by the Institute of Fine Arts

Prof. Dr. Bülent Özgüç
Director of the Institute Of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

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Müge Telci
M.F.A in Graphical Arts
Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman
June, 2002

When figuring the body is at stake within the Western tradition of art, figuration comes up as a question of framing and controlling the mass of body (flesh, bones, body liquids etc...). The apparent obsession of Western art with perfect body figures might be understood as an attempt to make safe the permeable boundary between the inside and outside of the body; between the inner self and outside world. Yet the depictions of human body in Francis Bacon's paintings reveal a disobedience to the conventional norms proposed by the figurative tradition and demonstrate a deliberate failure in controlling the mass of flesh. This thesis aims at a critical discussion on the dualist premises that lie at the core of figurative tradition in Western art by mainly following the path of Deleuze's examination of Francis Bacon's work.

Key words: Figuration, figure, body, representation, vision

ÖZET

FIGURE VE ET: FRANCIS BACON'IN BATI FİGÜRATİF GELENEĞİNE MEYDAN OKUYUŞU

Müge Telci
Grafik Tasarım Bölümü
Yüksek Lisans
Tez Yöneticisi: Yard. Doç. Dr. Mahmut Mutman
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Batı sanat geleneği içerisinde figürasyon vücut kütlelerinin (et, kemikler, beden sınırları vs...) kontrolü ve sınırlandırılması sorunu olarak ortaya çıkar. Batı sanatının mükemmel beden figürleri konusundaki görünür saplantısı bedenın içi ve dışı arasındaki geçirgen sınırı güvenli kılma çabası olarak anlaşılabilir. Ama Francis Bacon'ın resimlerindeki beden figürleri figüratif geleneğin önerdiği geleneksel normlara itaatsizdir: Bacon'ın resimlerinde et kontrol edilmez. Bu tez temel olarak Gilles Deleuze'ün Bacon analizini izleyerek Batı sanatındaki figürasyonun dualist öncülleri üzerine bir tartışmayı amaçlar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Figür, figürasyon, beden, yenedensunum, görüş

To my parents,

Nezahat Telci and İbrahim Telci

for their love, support and trust.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This thesis proposes a critical discussion on the dualist premises of the figuration in Western art that is raised over an analysis of Francis Bacon's paintings. The Western tradition of art has its own image of body that is molded by the dualist premises of the Western thought. Basic oppositions of dualist logic such as body/mind, inside/ outside, subject/object, form/matter, masculine/ feminine... are borne on to and recreated in the art works of West. However common the understanding of figuration as an unproblematic aesthetic category, the underlying aim here at stake is the definition of the spaces of the self and the other. Generally, it is argued that the obsession with ideal body figures is related with the anxieties about self-unity and the desire to separate the places of the self and the other. The specific inquest and contribution of this study is to approach the figuration in Western art within a framework that is based on the contemporary critiques of vision and representation.

Francis Bacon's continuous attempts to deform ideal body figures and his integration of figuration with deformations of ideal figure provide powerful insights in which to rethink the representations of body outside of dualist logic and to deconstruct the representational strategies that participate in the construction of the self-contained subject. In that respect, this study implements the examination of Bacon paintings to problematize the ideals of unity and perfection of body in Western art in a critical manner, rather than attempting at a discussion on artistic qualities of Francis Bacon paintings.

From the antiquity to our contemporary age, the history of art is marked by an endless effort to reach at perfect body forms. A critical look towards the implications of this effort shows us the correlation between ideals of unity and perfection in art and the anxieties embedded in the psychic nature of subjectivity. While proposing that the “the chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness” what Aristotles sets place is the classical ideal concerning the unity and integrity of form which still haunts Western culture as well as Western art. (Aristotles, quoted in Nead, 1992,7)

Although this obsession with perfect form is supposed to be just an un-problematic aesthetic category, indeed it passes of over a complex set of issues related with the production of Western sovereign subject. Embodiment of such an ideal in Western thought since antiquity is much more than employment of an aesthetic criterion as “...the notion of unified form is integrally bound up with the perception of self, and construction of individual identity” (Nead, 1992, 7).

Correspondingly, the figuration of human body that is the most privileged subject matter in the history of Western art comes up as an attempt to reach at the perfect body form. The embodiment of perfect body forms does not only offer ideal definitions for male and female body but also invite a particular mode of viewing that condition the self-contained and relaxed viewer. In that respect figuration must be regarded as a discourse on subject rather than an aesthetic category merely concerned with the principles of taste. More than being just a judgment on what is beautiful, figuration is indeed a process of framing that aims to make safe the permeable boundary between the inside and outside of the body, between the inner self and outside world, a representational strategy that participates in the construction of subjectivity.

Concisely, The figurative tradition in Western art can be understood as definition of limits and frames that designate the distinctions between the self and the other, the inside and the outside, the subject and the object etc... The ideal body figure is molded by the dualist premises that lie at the core of Western thinking rather than by naïve aesthetic judgments on beauty. Or it is better to remind that aesthetic judgments are never disinterested but ultimately informed by those premises.

Although Bacon's paintings remain figurative in a sense, the depictions of human body in Bacon paintings reveal a failure in being confined to the rules proposed by the conventions of dualist thinking. In Baconian bodies flesh rejects the dictates of ideal form and continuously tends to destroy the pre-supposed structure of the body. This simultaneity of the figuration (Bacon paintings are never abstractions) and the deformation of figure take back the safe position promised to the viewer and forces the viewer to an embodied experience. A version of what happens to the depicted bodies is repeated in the body of the viewer. In that respect an examination of Bacon paintings has further indications about the issues of representation, vision and body.

Bacon was born in Dublin in 1909 into an English family. He had little formal education because of his health problems (breathing difficulties, asthma). When he was 16 his father caught him dressing his mothers clothes and banished him from home. For a time he wandered around London taking short-lived jobs. In 1927 he went to Berlin where he encountered the violent images of German art and Bauhaus style. In 1929 he passed to Paris from Berlin. He saw Picasso's works and Bunuel's and Eiseinstain's

films in Paris and he was impressed by these images. A Picasso exhibition inspired him to start painting and drawing. In 1929 he returned to London and began painting. In London he was working as a furniture designer and on the one side he was painting. During the World War two, while he was working in civil defense he met lots of violent scenes and bloody bodies. One of his paintings, *Three Studies for Figures At the Base of A Crucifixion* was exhibited. After 1945 and mostly in 1950s and 1960s he had many important exhibitions. He died in 1992 in his studio from heart attack in Paris. In his 50-year career he became a very important painter of post war era. He depicted crucifixions, screaming popes and tortured bodies. He stayed independent and he was not alienated with any schools and movements.

1.2 CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

Following introduction a critique of the traditional accounts of vision is given in order to establish a theoretical framework to problematize the figuration in Western art. In traditional views vision is described as a disembodied activity and the subject and object of vision are conceptualized as distinct entities. The object of vision is there at a distance in an intelligible form. Visibility is nearly equated with a disembodied comprehensibility. This understanding takes its roots from the Cartesian dualism of body-mind according to which body and mind are assumed to be completely isolated from each other and mutually exclusive. Merleau-Ponty develops a unique interpretation of visual perception by rejecting the dualist descriptions of the relation between embodiment and consciousness. For him “The perceiving mind is an incarnated body”. (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Grosz, 1994, 87) Merleau-Ponty departs from the understandings of vision as a matter of distanced subject and passive object

and insists on the co-existence of the subject and object of vision that is held carnally. In this way, he deconstructs the notion of the pre-existing subjectivity as a self-contained entity. For him we are there by virtue of being locus of sensibilities.

After a brief examination of Merleau-Ponty's account of vision, Lyotard's concept of figural is introduced. To an extent, Lyotard agrees with the phenomenological critiques of the vision, yet he is also involved in the task the invention of 'a space of the invisible, of the possible'. He employs the concept 'figural' for this task. As Geoffrey Bennington states, Lyotard closely associates figure with a notion of transgression. In Lyotard's conceptualization, figural indicates a kind of interruption of discourse with respect to its resistance to be caught up in any kind of organization.

In his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* Deleuze makes use of both phenomenological argumentations on the nature of vision and Lyotard's deconstruction of representation by implementing the concept of figural. Very simply for Deleuze Bacon paintings indicate a shift from the classical figuration towards the Lyotardian figural. He argues that in Bacon paintings the invisible forces of sensation are rendered visible (vision is rendered embodied) and the organizational structure of figuration is deconstructed.

The third chapter aims to discuss the dualist roots of figuration in western art, how body figure is molded according to the confinements of dualist thinking and introduce the Baconian bodies' challenge to this tradition by mainly focusing on the framing processes in figuration. Although Francis Bacon's paintings remain figurative in a sense, they strangely and remarkably refuse the protocols on bordering the body

figures and the distance between the represented body and the body of the viewer, which are the very condition of the coherent, viewing subject.

In her critical exploration of the tradition of female nude Lynda Nead draws on Derrida's arguments on the frame that he mainly develops in "The Truth in Painting". According to Nead Derrida's position is problematisation of "disinterested aesthetic experience by focusing our attention not on the object of contemplation but on its boundary" (Nead, 1992,6). She suggests that "one of the principle goals of the female nude has been containment and regulation of female body" which is indeed a matter of definition of frames. (Nead, 1992,6)

The forms conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body-to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing inside of the body and outside, self from the space of the other. (Nead,1992, 6)

As mentioned above Baconian bodies refuse to be confined by the rules of figuration. If we use Deleuze's conceptualizations what is at hand in Bacon's paintings is body as Lyotardian figure that deconstructs the representative mode and any attempts of framing.

In the fourth chapter, the set of relations between painting, embodiment and gender is explored through Bacon's images of women. Echoing and contributing to the paradigm of feminine object/masculine viewer the represented bodies in the Western art works are mainly female bodies, which are made visible as distanced object of gaze.

Firstly the rareness of the female bodies in Bacon paintings can be understood as a response to the conventions of Western art in which, female body is the most common and privileged subject. Contrary to this convention, male bodies occupy the largest part of Bacon's repertoire of body images. Bacon strikingly shifts the focus; decentralize the female body.

Additionally, the female bodies in Bacon's paintings which are very few in number work against clichés that objectify female body. They become interrogation of longstanding assumptions about female identity and desire by resisting to the conventions of figurative representation concerning the production of masculine subject.

Although each chapter of the study seems to put emphasis on a specific critique of one of the oppositions counted above (the second chapter on the body/mind opposition, the third chapter on the inside/outside opposition and the fourth one on the masculine/feminine opposition), indeed all of them were referred in each chapter as the problematic of each oppositional pair always slips into other ones'.

CHAPTER 2. VISION REPRESENTATION FIGURE: THEORITICAL SCOPE FOR EXAMINATION OF BACONIAN BODIES

Descartes instituted a dualism which three centuries of philosophical thought have attempted to overcome or reconcile. (Grosz, 1994, 6)

2.1 RENDERING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUES OF TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF VISION

In *The Logic of Sensation* Deleuze employs art itself as a concept to question the theories according to which all forms of art are delineated as form giving processes. Contrary to the common assumptions on the nature of visual arts, he defines the general aim of painting as well as other art forms not as invention of forms, but rather creation of sensations. Echoing Paul Klee's famous phrase, 'not to render the visible, but to render visible', he locates some invisible forces prior to the act of drawing and defines the task of painting as capturing these forces.

For there is a community of arts, a common problem. In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but 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. (Deleuze, FB,34)

According to Deleuze painting should be involved not in the task of “ the reproduction of visible forms but the presentation of the non-visible forms that act behind and beneath these forms ” as Daniel W. Smith neatly expresses in his essay “Deleuze’s Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality”. (Smith, 1996,40) Deleuze spells out a close relation between the invisible forces and sensation, which for him, is the base of aesthetic experience. He conceptualizes force as something that is not itself sensed but as something that conditions sensation. It is possible to produce sensation in the body by exertion of a force.

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 the force is the condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force that is sensed, since 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 insensible 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. (Deleuze, FB, 34)

No doubt, here ‘rendering visible the invisible forces’ is not used in the ordinary sense of the words that is to illustrate forces on the canvas as visible forms. What is at stake here, indeed, is undermining of the positivist conceptions about what is visible and

what is invisible. It is also a rejection of the metaphysical conceptualizations of subjectivity as the Western understanding of vision is deeply imbricated with the Western notion of subjectivity. Within traditional accounts, vision is described as an activity in which the subject and object of vision are conceptualized as distinct entities. The visible is merely a fixed object, there, at a distance just to be contemplated. In this view, visibility is nearly equated to comprehensibility. Seeing things means seeing them in an intelligible form. This understanding takes its roots from the Cartesian dualism of body-mind according to which body and mind are assumed to be completely isolated from each other and mutually exclusive. Body is conceptualized just as a physical object that contains and separates mind from the rest of the world whereas mind is associated with the self-conscious subject. Due to this dualist purview, activity of seeing is conceptualized as a disembodied experience in which the distant object becomes clear to the consciousness; consequently knowable and possessed. It is in this sense that vision that is the most privileged sense within Western thought is associated with knowledge and possession.

Merleau-Ponty develops a unique interpretation of visual perception by rejecting the dualist descriptions of the relation between embodiment and consciousness. In his view body and mind are necessarily interrelated to each other and pursuing this view he establishes a notion of a perception that is corporeally based. Rather than being an empty container, Merleau-Ponty stresses that body is the very condition for perception of world, or in other words it is the locus of sensing. Yet on the other hand consciousness is not reducible to the sensible body.

The perceiving mind is an incarnated body. I have tried... to reestablish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against the doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness. These philosophies commonly forget- in favor of a pure exteriority or of a pure interiority- the insertion of mind in corporeality, the ambiguous relation with our body, and correlatively with perceived things ...and it is equally clear that one does not account for the facts by superimposing a pure contemplative consciousness on a thing-like body... Perceptual behavior emerges... from relations to a situation and to an environment, which are not merely working of a pure, knowing subject... (Merleau-Ponty quoted in Grosz, 1994, 87)

Although it is well beyond the aim and limits of this study to explore and discuss all the aspects of Merleau-Ponty's argument on the embodiment of perception, one important feature of his notion of corporeal perception is that it turns to be a criticism to the notions of subject, object and meaning that are derived from presumptions on the transcendental subject. In Merleau-Ponty's account of vision the very distinction between the seer (subject) and the world that is seen (object) disappears as he insists on the inter-subjective nature of vision. As I mentioned above according to the traditional understandings of vision we can see the things because they are comprehensible objects and our consciousness associated with our pre-existing subjectivity is capable of comprehending. Yet, Merleau-Ponty departs from these understandings of vision as a matter of distanced subject and passive object. He argues for the embodied natures of both the seer and the visible and attributes a co-existence to the subject and object of vision that is held carnally. In his view, the seer and the

seen comes together within the act of perception. I can see others not because of my pre-existing inner capacity of consciousness but co-existence and relation of my body with other bodies. Very simply, it is by virtue of being embodied and visible that I am also able to see the others. Merleau-Ponty undoes the notion of pre-existing subjectivity as an inner and self-contained entity; we are only there as we are locus of sensibilities. Elizabeth Grosz neatly expresses the above ideas in her *Volatile Bodies*:

Perception involves neither keeping the self-contained object at distance nor the purely perceptual functioning of a self-identical subject. Each is implicated in and necessary for the existence of the other as such. The flesh is that elementary, pre-communicative domain out of which both subject and object, in their mutual interactions, develop. The subject can no longer be conceived as an enclosed nucleus of identity or as an empty receptivity ready to take in the contents provided by objects. And objects can no longer be viewed as a pure positivity or simply an aggregate of sensation. Subject and object, mind and body, the visible and invisible, are intercalated; the “rays”, the lines of force, indelibly etch the one into the other. (Grosz,1994, 103)

Once the positivist conceptions about vision are undermined, it is much easier to understand the co-existence of visibility and non-visibility or what it meant by ‘to render the invisible forces visible’. As seeing is no more thought to be the mind’s comprehension of intelligible forms but a sensuous experience, what is visible ceases to be a mere form and turns to a sensible thing in which it is possible to capture the invisible. Sensible thing is the site where “the visible and invisible are intercalated”. Invisible is there as “a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one

has or has not received, but of which if one has received it one knows all there is to know, and about which in the end there is nothing to say.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968,131)

2.2 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ROOTS OF DELEUZE’S ANALYSIS OF BACON PAINTINGS

In his essay “Gilles Deleuze: The Aesthetics of Force” Ronald Bogue places Deleuze’s analysis of Bacon within a specific tradition of Cézanne criticism in which Henri Maldiney and Jean-François Lyotard appear as prominent names. (Bogue, 1996, 258)

Through his phenomenological interpretation of Cézanne Maldiney draws on the opposition of perception and sensation derived by Straus in *The Primary World of Senses* (1935). Maldiney, taking the opposition between perception and sensation developed by Straus as a starting point, proposes that perception belongs to the order of rational and lingual whereas sensation gives rise to a prerational and alingual experience. According to Maldiney, “...perception designating the experience of a rational, verbally-mediated world of uniform atomistic space and time in which subject and object are clearly demarcated from each other, and sensation the experience of a prerational, alingual world of perspectival, dynamic space and time in which subject and object are not clearly differentiated.” For Straus the opposition between perception and sensation parallels the distinction between geography and landscape in the sense that he conceives the space of landscape as space of sensation. The task implied here for the landscape painter is the presentation of a sort of sensible manifestation: “to make visible the sensate space of our pre-reflective, animal being-in-the-world”. (Bogue, 1996,258) Landscape painting, says Straus ‘makes visible the

invisible, although it be something far removed. Great landscapes all have a visionary character. Such vision is of the invisible becoming visible'. (Straus, quoted in Bogue, 1994, 258) Maldiney draws on this insight in his analysis of Cézanne. For him art is a phenomenal appearance; 'the truth of sensible' that is evident in Cézanne's landscapes. 'A canvas of Cézanne's puts us in communication with a pre-objective, phenomenal reality'. (Bogue, 1996, 258)

There are obvious affinities between Maldiney's analysis of Cézanne paintings and Deleuze's examination of Bacon paintings. Deleuze agrees with Maldiney that Cézanne is well aware of the problem of capturing forces and strives to paint force. He is a painter of sensations in the sense that he aims "to harness in which sensation gives us the forces that are not given." (Deleuze, FB, 39) In *The Logic of Sensation* Deleuze underlies the similarities between Bacon and Cézanne and proposes that Bacon, too, is a 'painter of these forces and sensations' as Cézanne. Yet in Bacon's paintings are "the unorganised and non-organic sensations of the body without organs" whereas Cézanne renders "visible the force that folds the mountains, the germinative force of apple, the thermic force of landscape etc.". (Bogue, 1994,260-261)

In *The Logic of Sensation* Deleuze seems to be astonished by Bacon's response to the problem of rendering visible the invisible forces; "Bacon's figures seem to be one of the marvellous responses in the history of painting to the question, how can one make invisible forces visible?" (Deleuze, FB, 35) For example, he conceives Bacon's Heads in his Head series (Fig. 1,2) as sites where a certain drama of forces is played out In Deleuze's view the deformed and wiped-off parts in Baconian bodies indicate exertion of forces. The movements of the figures are subordinated to the forces that coerce or

strike them. “... the extraordinary agitation of these heads is not derived from a movement that the series would supposedly reconstituted, but from the forces of pressure, dilation, contraction, flattening, and elongation that are exerted on the immobile head.” (Deleuze, FB, 35) According to Deleuze, Bacon strives to capture the forces that threaten to drive outward the head as a detective. (Deleuze, FB, 36) He deforms the figures by way of wiping and sweeping. Deleuze conceives these deformations as attempts to make visible the invisible forces. The wiped-off parts of the heads are the places where the forces are exerted . And Force conditions sensation just at the place where the form is deformed. The viewer is directed to an involuntary experience of sensation exercised through the forces captured.

Deleuze’s emphasis of the notion of sensation in his analysis of Bacon paintings is an evidence of his attention to the phenomenological argumentation on the nature of vision. *The Logic of Sensation* seems most directly to address the question of painting not as a site of comprehensible forms but on the contrary as a site disruptive of the intelligible forms. Deleuze appreciates Bacon paintings as they disturb the stable boundaries that might establish the painting as a site of forms that offers a safe contemplating kind of experience to the viewer. In Bacon’s paintings force is sensed (produces sensation) where the presupposed form is disrupted. In this respect, what capturing forces means is precisely undoing the cognitive form by bringing sensation into the activity of seeing. Now I will briefly examine Lyotard’s notion of figure which is largely employed by Deleuze in his analysis of Bacon’s paintings



Figure 1.

Francis, Bacon

Head III

1949



Figure 2.

Bacon, Francis

Head VI

1949

2.3 THE FIGURAL: LYOTARD'S DECONSTRUCTION OF

REPRESENTATION

Lyotard begins *Discours, Figure* with a seemingly quite simple argument that reading and seeing are different sorts of experiences. He is concerned with a critique of the understandings of visible as something that can be reduced to the readable (especially the structuralist attempts like semiology of work of art) and also the attempts to consider texts as visible realms. Although it is, without question, necessary to see the text in order to be able to read, what is at stake in reading is a minimal visibility, as this visibility ('materiality of signifier') is subordinated to the 'intellection of the signified'. While we are reading what matters is not the plastic values of the printed material but the text. In this respect the transparency of the letters (the signifiers) is a common experience while reading. While arguing for the multi-dimensionality and deepness of visual space against the flatness of text, Lyotard depends extensively on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the visible that is put contrary to the Saussurean linguistics. Lyotard is attracted by Merleau-Ponty's stress on the corporeality of vision and the mutual belonging of the seer and world-object seeing as they imply the possibility of depth. For Lyotard visible becomes readable in the case that it becomes "invested with cultural codes, clichéd forms, and conventional interpretations". "the read belongs to the system of spacings which constitutes the code of language; the seen requires opening, transcendence, showing-hiding."(DF,268) However Lyotard's position cannot be asserted as one which is on the side of vision against text, and phenomenology against linguistics. Rather he attempts to deconstruct of both phenomenology and linguistics by way of demonstrating the intervention of the textual space and the visible.

In *Discours, figure* Lyotard constructs two series of terms that are distinguished on the basis of the distinction between reading and seeing: “On the side of reading, terms such as flatness, surface signification, opposition, systematically, conceptuality, legality and the ‘discourse ‘ of the book’s title: on the side of seeing, terms such as depth, sens, difference, instability, the body, desire and transgression, and the eponymous figure.” (Bennington, 1988, 58) Yet it should be noted that here at work is not simply opposing these series as good things on one side and the bad things on the other. The particularity of Lyotard’s work is that he proposes difference instead of oppositions. What is crucial about figure is it works by virtue of being within and against representation at the same time. Lyotard’s purpose is less to reintroduce the opposition between the two sets aligned with discourse on the one side and figure on the other side. Rather his notion of figure is something that opens up a difference within discourse. To tell it more clearly his work undoes the oppositions by demonstrating the differences at work on each side of the opposition. Thus his work demonstrates a deconstruction of these oppositions within the terms of each set. “... the concern is not to maintain the apparent opposition between these two series, nor even to invert the traditional valorizations they imply, but to deconstruct them.” (Bennington, 1991, 58)

Bennington starts his examination of *Discours, Figure* from Lyotard’s approach to Saussure’s famous phrase; “language is a system of differences without any positive terms.” and quotes a large paragraph from Lyotard which he believes “expounds the core of the book’s discussion of structuralism, and will be worth explicating in some detail.” (Bennington, 1988, 59)

[Saussure's] conception of structure leads him to absorb the whole of signification into cutting-up i.e. into the system of intervals between the terms, or the system of values. And yet he does not give up having recourse at the very same time to an idea of signification which opposes it to value as vertical is opposed to horizontal or depth to surface. What could pass for a failing in a linguist determined to limit his study to the structure of language, that is the temptation of introducing the thickness of the sign onto the transparency of the system, is however, much more than an error or naivety: a fact which one could term transcendental is betrayed here, namely that all discourse constitutes its object in depth: when this discourse is that of the linguist and he takes signification as his object, he spontaneously thematises it as something thick, he is led to posit signification as a sign. In reality this depth is an effect of object-positioning due to the current discourse: which signification at a distance and posits that it is a sign just as it does any object. (Benignton, 1988, 59)

Benignton interprets the first part of the above passage as Lyotard's recognition of the main emphasis of the infamous quote from Saussure, "Language is a system of differences without any positive terms": the linguistic meaning is entirely derived from value. In other words the meaning of a term in a linguistic system depends on the place of the term within that system. So within the system what matters is not meaning but value. At the level of phonemes (signifiers are primarily the phonemes of the speech), Bennington gives the example of 'cat'. 'Cat' as a linguistic term derives its linguistic value from the difference of its phonemes from the phonemes of 'that sequence to /bat/, /cut/, /cap/, and so on.' At the level of semantics, if we look at a dictionary in order to reach the meaning of cat what we find is another single word or combinations

of words that might in a way take place of the word cat. The meaning of 'cat' as a linguistic term has no direct relation to the animal cat. What we can conclude here is that the signified is not there as a positive term in any sense, there is not a 'signified as such.' Yet Lyotard points to a certain confusion of Saussurean linguistics about the signified and the referent which are supposed to be strictly cut from each other. On the one hand Saussurean Linguistics emphasizes the arbitrariness of sign, linguistic term gains its value from its place within the system, on the other hand there is an indication of the concept. Although Saussurean linguistics insists on the idea that language is an entirely closed system of signification, Lyotard argues that reference is necessary also for linguistics. Indeed sign does not only stay within the linguistic system where it has its value according to the other terms but also participates in a sensible order, the order of referent. "To speak is always to speak of something, and his dimension of reference, which the structuralist method ignores on principle, is nothing other than the p[re]sence of distantiation of seeing in the experience of discourse" (Lyotard, quoted in Readings, 1991, 13)

The uniqueness of Lyotard's approach to the question comes at the point that he does not attempt to resolve the confusion but strives to demonstrate that here indication or reference functions as figure within the system of significations. He approaches this question initially by drawing a distinction between two kinds of negativities: the one that is involved in seeing and the one that is involved in reading. Lyotard argues that there is also a type of negativity involved in seeing but it is of a different sort from that which is involved in reading. For him the first one is linked to designation while the latter is linked to signification. (Bennington, 1988, 60) Lyotard writes:

Negativity is a position which rules over two heterogeneous experiences. There is a negation implied in the visible: distance, the constitutive spacing of space, negation experienced in variability. The experience of this mobility which engenders extension, thickness, figure is a privileged object of description for the phenomenologist, it is the constitutive seeing that Husserl attempts to rediscover beneath its collapse into formed vision, it is the permanent genesis of objective space and body for meaning beneath them in the flesh according to Merleau-Ponty...

The negation which works in the system of language appears to be of a different sort, as does unconscious...[the unconscious of seeing] refers to a phenomenology, [that of language] to an archeology. In the first of these, it is the very act which is unconscious itself in the naïve natural fascination of the object it has in view; for the second, unconscious belongs to the virtual, it precedes and surrounds the act because it is what makes the act possible, it invests and remains unknown to it because the act erases it by its presence...(Lyotard, quoted in Bennington, 1988, 60-61)

Here two types of negativities are introduced one that which belongs to the flat space of text and another which belongs to the depth of seeing. At first sight Lyotard's approach to the problem appears to remain at the level of the distinction between reading and seeing, however the particularity and complexity of his approach comes out as he points at the intrusion of designation (that is attributed to the realm of seeing) to the realm of language. Through structural approaches only signification is retained within the system of language and designation is excluded from this pure

system: the value of the linguistic terms are proposed to be determined solely by their relations to other terms hence their connection to the referent is ignored. Language is the realm of significations whereas designation is attributed to the realm of seeing.

He employs the question of deixis in order to exemplify a place where language goes beyond simple signification and opens out towards designation. Deictics like 'I, here or now' are not simple significations. For example here is not reducible to a value in a system as its value is not determined by the word's situation with respect to other words but according to our body's situation in space. We relate 'here' to indicators like 'in front', 'behind', 'right', 'left' which are negativities and does not include positive values. What gives their meaning is the body's position in space. It is not possible to give the meaning of the word 'here' while staying within the linguistic system.

The indicated place, the *here*, is apprehended in a sensible field, as its focal point no doubt, but not so that its surroundings are eliminated as is the case in the choices that a speaker makes; they remain, in an uncertain and undeniable presence, curvilinear, the presence of that which lies at the edge of vision, a reference absolutely necessary to the indication of place... (Lyotard, quoted in Readings, 1991, 16)

In this sense deictics are evidences of a collapse between the signified and the referent. We clearly observe that the structuralist description of signification that is entirely defined within the linguistic system does not work here. It is obvious in the case of deictics that there is an inevitable intrusion of designation into the realm of language. Indeed this process is not limited with deictic words but they are very clear examples

of designation attached to the signification. Designation is necessarily part of language that introduces the depth of the visual into the flat space of the textual) .“...they open the ‘flat’ negativity of the language system to the ‘deep’ negativity of the sensory field.” (Bennington, 1988,63) In *Discours, Figure* Lyotard argues for the order of referent and designation as the figural movement that inhabits language. The moments of designation within the system of language rejected by structural approaches are indeed the figural movements within the system of language.

Briefly for Lyotard, the text always includes a sensible field of vision that is against the linguistic order or cultural representation. He does not mean to take a position on the side of designation or seeing opposed to reading and signification but rather introduces the concept of figure as something that disturbs or rather transgresses any textual organization. He accounts for the figural co-existence of the two heterogeneous spaces; the visual and the textual and in his view it is this co-existence of two heterogeneous spaces that brings out the possibility of deconstruction of representation. Thus figure comes out from this complex imbrication of the two heterogeneous spaces. Figure does not offer another sort of representation nor does it represent the unrepresentable but rather an implication of the possibility of non-representation.

As Geoffrey Bennington states, Lyotard closely associates the figural with a notion of transgression. Within Lyotard’s conceptualisation, the figural indicates a kind of interruption of discourse with respect to its resistance to be caught up by any kind of organization. It ruptures outside the discourse and distorts or rather unsettles it by emerging as evidence of something that cannot be represented. “Lyotard’s argument around figural depends on a notion of transgression: put simply, the figure transgresses

the law of discourse, refuses to respect the invariant spacing and rules of substitution which define the system of language...”(Bennington, 1988,91)To tell it in another way figure is and remains as interrogation to the discourse indicating a possibility of non-representation.

After examining Lyotard’s concept of figure we can now pass to the issue of the figurality of art that interests us, mostly. In *Discours, figure* Lyotad argues,

The position of art is a denial of the position of discourse. The position of art indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified, and indicates this function both at the edge of and within discourse. It indicates that the transcendence of the symbol is the figure, that is to say a spatial manifestation which linguistic space cannot incorporate without being overthrown, an exteriority which cannot be interiorized as *signification*. Art is posed otherwise a plasticity and desire, curved extension, in the face of invariance and reason. (Lyotard, quoted in Readings, 1991, 25)

As Roland Bogue argues, for Lyotard conventional visual representation is repression of “the anomalies of sensation, the deformations and violations of ‘good form’ that disturbs the eye”. (Bogue,1994, 269) Lyotard agrees with phenomenological approaches to the fine arts that disruption the good-form in artistic practice deals with the invisible forces which are indeed forces of deformation. Yet he also argues for emergence of figural within the art works. For him artwork’s evocation of the figural is a deconstruction of representation in the sense that the figure indicates a possibility of un-representable. As Bill Readings asserts that for Lyotard Cézanne’s landscapes

‘testify to something that cannot be represented’. In painting Mont Saint-Victoire (Fig. 3) Cézanne achieves a co-presentation of “both focal zone and the curved periphery of foveal vision.” (Readings, 1991, 25)The image impossibly participates in two heterogeneous spaces resulting at an invention of the ‘space of the invisible, of the possible’, evocation of figural. As reminded above it is disruption of representation not in the sense of representing the irrepresentable but in the sense of transgressing of any pre-supposed organization.

Lyotard claims that the imbrication of ‘focal zone and the curved periphery of foveal vision’ that Cézanne achieves indeed shows the condition of visibility itself. We have discussed the Cartesian understandings of vision as comprehension of visible forms, coincidentally Cartesian optics depends on a straight geometry. It is investment of visible ‘with cultural codes, clichéd forms, and conventional interpretations’ mentioned above. As Reading paraphrases from *Discours, figure,*

The ‘textualisation’ of the visual by Renaissance perspective or Cartesian optics is an attempt to understand objects as in principle visible from a singular, immobile, point. The effect of this is to reduce vision to an affair of geometry, of straight lines, to exclude curvature and anamorphosis. The immobilization of the eye flattens the visual space around a focal center, projecting the visible as a stable image clearly visible on a transparent screen. (Readings, 1991, 25-26)

According to Lyotard anamorphosis emerges from the co-presentation of two heterogeneous spaces: the peripheral vision (that is excluded by Renaissance painting because its less intelligible) and geometrical vision. For example he understands

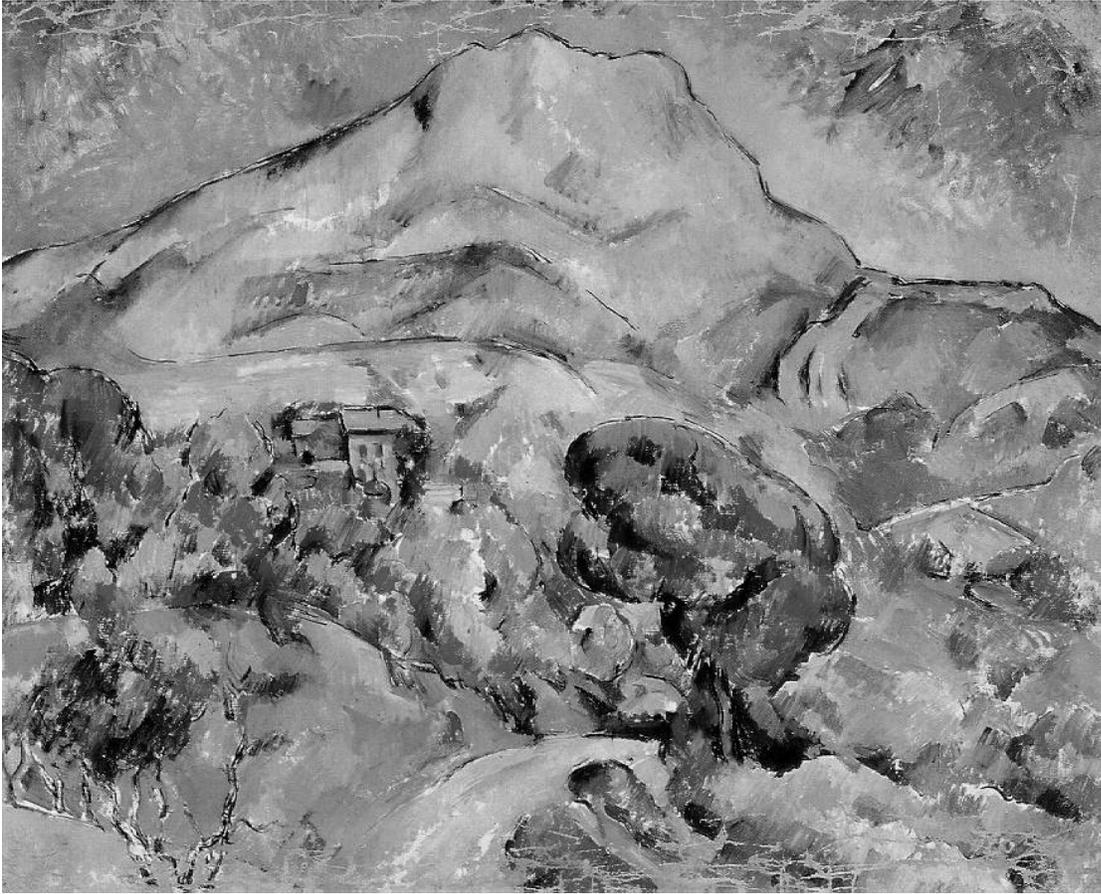


Figure 3.
Cezanne, Paul
Mont Sainte-Victoire
1900
Oil on canvas
31 x 39 in. (78 x 99 cm)
Hermitage, St. Petersburg

Holbein's *Ambassadors* (Fig. 4) as a realization of anamorphosis as it puts radically heterogeneous spaces of representation together. (Readings, 1991, 2) "The god form of representation deconstructed by 'bad' forms: the skull in Holbein's picture, in the portrait of Charles the First." (Lyotard, quoted in Readings, 1991, 26)



Figure 4.
Holbein, Hans
The Ambassadors
1533
Oil on wood
207 x 209.5 cm
National Gallery, London

2.4 DISRUPTION OF CLICHES: BACK TO BACON PAINTINGS UNDER THE LIGHT OF LYOTARD'S NOTION OF FIGURE

Deleuze accepts that phenomenological attempts (such as Merleau-Ponty's) aim at freeing of aesthetics from the confinements of perception or recognition. Yet he finds these attempts incomplete as they remain depending on a idea of a 'natural perception'. In order to create a perspective that exceeds the discursive obligations of phenomenological level and to consider aesthetics in a much broader surface than the surface of perception-sensation debate Deleuze makes use of Lyotard's powerful notion of figural. It is precisely this notion of figure that makes it possible, for him, to develop an analysis of Bacon's paintings in a critical manner that exceeds the bounds of phenomenology.

What is common to many of Bacon's paintings is the human figure considering the term as something referring to human body. Also, it is this body in Bacon's paintings that plays the role of figure, referring to the concept that Lyotard develops. When Deleuze says, "Bacon's Figures seems to be one of the most marvelous responses in the history of painting to the question of , How can one make invisible forces visible? This is the primary function of the figures." (FB 35) he is well aware of this fact. Bacon attempts to escape the figuration towards figurality by way of his body images. Within the protocols of classical representation figuration strives to produce visible forms, which are supposed to illustrate body. Body should be represented in an intelligibly clear form that is unified and has strict boundaries. What the unity and strict boundaries of figure renders is an object of recognition which is cerebral, structured and lingual; a cliché.

Whereas 'figuration' refers to a form that is related to an object that it is supposed to represent (recognition), the Figure is the form that is connected to a sensation and conveys the violence of sensation directly to the nervous system (sign). In Bacon's paintings it is the human body that plays the this role of figure: It functions as the material support of that sustains a precise sensation. (Smith, 1994,44)

For Bacon paintings Deleuze argues, "from the start, the Figure has been the body. But this body is not simply waiting for the structure... it is waiting for something inside itself, it exerts an, an intense effort upon itself to become a figure" (FB, 12). While mediating on the relation between figuration and deformation of figure, Bacon achieves what Lyotard praises as evocation of figurality: co-presence of two radically heterogenous spaces. On the one hand there is the body, visible form and on the other side there is the force exerted on the body. Bacon deliberately avoids abstraction, as he is aware that it is falling into the trap of cliché, again. Instead he prefers to deal with the invisible forces that are exerted on the body and deconstruct the good form and bad form by an impossible co-existence of both. It is a movement to prevent fixing a point of vision. Figure itself becomes a place of interrogation to the figuration by a figural interruption that is held by the co-existence of form and deformations.

Deleuze refutes to the common assumption that painters begin with a white, blank canvas. For him it is this confusion that the failure of figuration follows from. According to Deleuze canvas is covered with 'figurative givens' or clichés before the work of painter. What retains for the painter is to paint the images, which are already

there. Indeed it is this trap of the cliché that threatens the painter. Bacon's answer to the question "how do I proceed so that what I paint does not become a cliché?" is 'free marks' that emerge from accidental chance strokes . For Bacon, the involuntary, accidental marks on the canvas are highly suggestive.

It works from that moment when consciously I don't know what I'm doing. I've often found that, if I have tried to follow the image more exactly, in the sense of being more illustrational, and it has become extremely banal, and then out of sheer exasperation and hopelessness I've completely destroyed it by not knowing all the marks I was making within the image – suddenly I have found that the thing come nearer to the way that my visual instincts feel about the image I am trying to trap. (Sylvester,1968, 54)

Baconian body is what disturbs the cliché. Bacon manages to deform the pre-given, pre-supposed forms (cliché) that he inevitably has in his mind when he starts painting by virtue of free marks or chance marks. In other words the body as Lyotardian figure in Bacon paintings disrupts any pre-existing structure within which it can be represented and traces from the cliché towards the figural. It is a shift from conventional figuration to figurality in Lyotardian sense: disruption of the field of representation.

3. FRAMING THE BODY: DUALIST PREMISES OF THE WESTERN TRADITION OF ART AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE BACONIAN BODIES

3.1 BODY FIGURE

“... what happens when a viewer encounters a represented body.” (Elkins, 1999, vii)

This permanent requirement- to distinguish between the internal or proper sense and the circumstance of the object being talked about- organises all philosophical discourse on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such... This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and the outside of the art object, here *a discourse on the frame*. (Derrida, quoted in Nead, 1992, 5)

..., then without the frame there can be no unified art object and no coherent viewing subject. (Nead, 1992, 6)

Traditionally, Western culture has been inspired by the ideal figure in classical art. Embodiment of such an ideal in Western art since Antiquity does not only propose ideal definitions of male and female bodies but also invites a mode of viewing. A critical look towards the implications of this effort shows us the correlation between ideals of unity and perfection in art and the anxieties embedded in the psychic nature of subjectivity. According to the Western account of vision that we have discussed in the preceding chapter, seeing is defined as an activity in which the subject and object are described as distinct entities. This account has long been central to

the Western tradition of art as well as Western philosophy. Within this tradition the artwork is tried to be fixed as an object of representation that is put at a distance to be passively contemplated. This is also the case in representations of human body in Western tradition of art, even with a more emphasis. Correlated with the Western understanding of vision and subjectivity Western representations of body insist on the ideals of integrity and perfection that are supposed to offer a safe contemplation for the viewer. In that respect figurative tradition in painting demonstrates an intense effort to keep the viewer's encounter with a represented body within a realm where protocols of a safe, contemplating kind of viewing is retained. That is mainly because although the figuration of human body is supposed to be just an un-problematic aesthetic category, indeed it involves a complex set of issues like production of subjectivity and definition of the places of self and other...

When figuring the body is at stake within the western tradition of art, figuration comes up as a question of framing and controlling of the mass of body (flesh, bones, body liquids etc...). The function of the body figure here might be understood as a way making safe the permeable boundary between the inside and outside of the body. The apparent obsession with the body figures through the Western history of art is indeed an attempt to overcome the anxiety about the margins of human body and subjectivity. As Lynda Nead argues "...the margins are dangerous and will need to be subjected to the discipline of art again... and again." (Nead, 1992,7) The body should be turned into a disciplined, bordered and distant unity in order to offer an undisturbing aesthetic experience to the viewer and hence to participate in the construction of viewer as a self-contained subject. Through representation of body as object, as distanced entity, what is achieved is, indeed, the construction of Western sovereign (masculine) subject that is the owner of the gaze as well as the knowledge. As Rosemary

Betterton states in her book *An Intimate Distance Women, Artists and the Body*, “In feminist writings on science, the concept of detachment or objectivity has been connected to a specifically masculine subjectivity, the desire for a separation between an observer and the thing known, the subject and object of knowledge.” (Betterton, 1996, 28-29) Within this perspective the Western tradition of figurative art can be understood as definition of limits and frames that designate the distinctions between self/other, inside/outside, subject/object, male/female etc.... Simply, it can be said that ideal body figure in Western art is moulded by dualist premises that lie at the core of Western thinking. Therefore, it is expected to be strictly contoured, distant from the viewer and gendered.

It seems to be that carefully framed human figures invite a particular kind of relaxed and self-contained viewer. There is an obvious parallel between the figurative tradition’s attempt to contour the body image and the Western anxiety about the margins and spaces of the self and other. The process of giving strict frames to the body and placing it distant from the viewer is a part of the process of ‘formation of self and the spaces of other’ as Lynda Nead argues (Nead: 1992: 7). The body is never complete and wholly determined. In western discourse on the subject, body is seen as the container of the mind and the safe boundary between the inner self and the outside world: it is something whole and self-sufficient. Yet, indeed we experience it as something fragmented, amorphous and incomplete. This split is the main reason for the anxiety about the margins of human body and subjectivity. The ongoing attempt to discipline and frame the body stems from this anxiety. The body should be turned into a disciplined, bordered and distant unity in order to offer an undisturbing aesthetic experience to the viewer and hence to participate in the construction of viewer as a self-contained subject.

We shall never completely master nature; our bodily organism, itself apart of that nature, will always remain a transient structure with a limited capacity for adaptation and achievement. (Freud quoted in Mirzoeff: 1995: 19)

By body I understand a concrete, material animate organisation of flesh, organs nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organisation only through their physical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality. The body is so to speak, organically/ biologically/naturally 'incomplete'; it is this in determinate, amorphous, a series of un-coordinated potentialities, which require social triggering, ordering, and long term 'administration'. (Grosz, quoted in Mirzoeff: 1995: 19)

Depending on the above quotes from Sigmund Freud and Elizabeth Grosz , Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests in his book, *Bodyscape: Art Modernity and the Ideal Figure* that the representation of body can be understood as a manner of search for the imaginary unity that the body; indeed lacks. "Representations of the body are one means of seeking to complete this inevitably disjunctured entity" (Mirzoeff, 1995, 21) According to him Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (Fig. 5) which is one of the most well-known and reproduced images of western art is a striking example of this search. In the painting da Vinci constructs a parallel between the male body and two perfect geometrical forms: the square and the circle.

The male figure is represented twice, once standing the other is with arms and legs extended. In this way the proportions of this ideal body represent the dimensions of two perfect forms: the circle and the square. Vitruvian Man has become the expression

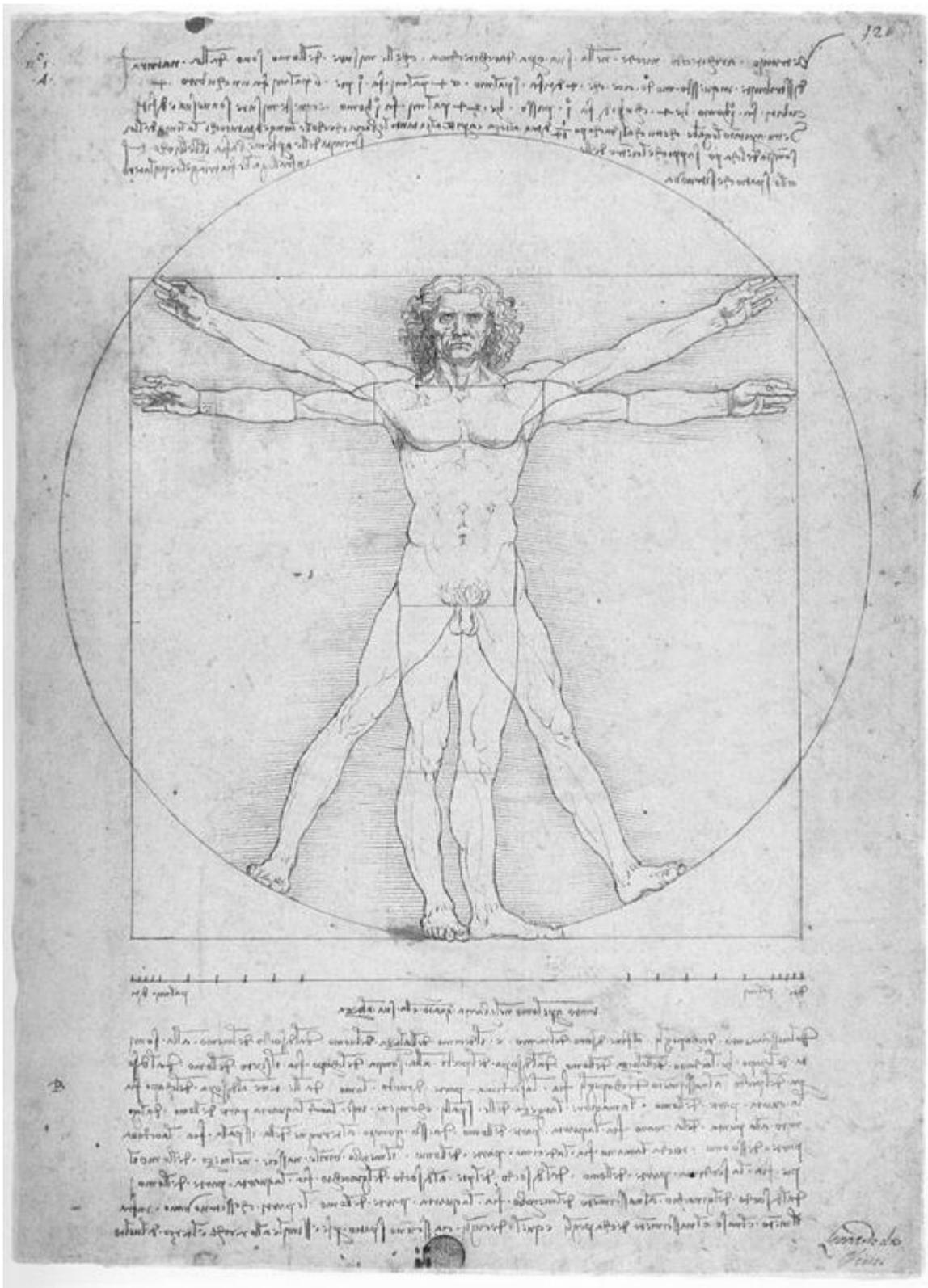


Figure 5.

Leonardo da Vinci
Vitruvian Man

of a belief in the perfect form of the human body that art enacts...There is no excess, no unexplained dimension or activity...

Discussing on a significant quotation from Aristotles; 'The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness' (Aristotles quoted in Nead: 1992: 7) Nead proposes that here Aristotles establishes the the classical ideal concerning the unity and integrity of form which still haunts Western culture and art. According to Nead what is at stake in all these discourses on the perfection of the body form is "the production of rational, coherent subject" (Nead: 1992: 7) "In other words, the notion of unified form is integrally bound up with the perception of self, and construction of individual identity" (Nead: 1992: 7) Drawing from the relation that Freud proposes between psychical structures and perception and representation of body, she argues that the subjectivity is also articulated in psychoanalytic discourse "in terms of spaces and boundaries, of fixing of the limits of corporeality" (Nead, 1992,7)

The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides... representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus. (Freud, quoted in Nead, 1992, 7)

In that respect the description of art's aim as an attempt to reach at the perfect forms stems from an effort to subject the dangerous margins of the body to the form giving activity of art and hence to overcome the anxiety mentioned above. Since what is supposed to be the safe boundary between the spaces of the self and other is indeed permeable site of many conflicts what is left to do is to subject it to a disciplining process and to represent it as it should be. The unified and perfect body figure can function in quite different modes such as ideal object of

desire, ideal subjectivity that the viewer can identify... Yet, in each case, specific norms on subjectivity, which dictate strictly contoured bodies and a coherent viewing subject are retained. What goes on within the realm of art is indeed part of a more general attempt: the social disciplining of the body.

In her critical exploration of the tradition of female nude Lynda Nead draws on Derrida's arguments on the frame that he mainly develops in *The Truth in Painting*. According to Nead Derrida's position is a problematisation of "disinterested aesthetic experience by focusing our attention not on the object of contemplation but on its boundary" (Nead, 1992,6). She suggests that "one of the principle goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of female body" which is indeed a matter of definition of frames. (Nead, 1992, 6)

The forms conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body- to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing inside of the body and outside, the self from the space of the other. (Nead, 1992, 6)

Although Francis Bacon's paintings remain figurative in a sense, they strangely and remarkably refuse these protocols on bordering the body figures and the distance between the represented body and the body of the viewer of the painting, which are the very conditions of the coherent, viewing subject. In Francis Bacon's paintings the traditional conception of a unified, bordered figure is not maintained. He demonstrates a deliberate failure in disciplining the flesh and defining the borderlines of the figure. His fleshy bodies reject the dictates of ideal figure and this brings out depicted body's refusal to function as a vehicle for a coherent subject. The uncontrolled flesh undoes the borderlines contouring the figure. Hence Baconian bodies come

out as critics of the unified 'figure' and never attempt to draw distinct boundaries between the inside and outside, they modestly undo the possibility of any distanced, stable identities.

Generally I aim at raising a discussion on the dualists roots of figurative tradition of Western art through Francis Bacon's challenge to this tradition mainly focusing on the framing processes.

3.4 FROM CLASSICAL BODY FIGURE TOWARDS BODY AS LYOTARDIAN 'FIGURE': AN EXAMINATION OF BACON'S PAINTINGS THROUGH DELEUZE'S CONCEPTUALISATION

Deleuze proposes that Bacon's continuous willingness to deform the ideal form functions to undermine the distance between the object and subject of the artwork in the sense that the deformations of the Baconian bodies condition the sensations created in the viewer. In that respect, Bacon renders back the true condition of seeing that occurs as the mutual embodiment of the seer and the world seen that Merleau-Ponty argues for. Deformation of bodies is the main path through which Bacon departs from the figurative tradition in Western art and becomes a distinct figure in the history of Western painting.

The deformations of body in Bacon paintings might be said to be violent. Yet what is crucial here is that these deformations can never be interpreted as spectacles of violence. The Bacon paintings are violent with respect to the violence that they direct towards the viewer's body and his safe position. Significantly, Baconian bodies transmit the violence they undergo to the viewer's body, thus cease to be mere spectacles. For example the lying figure in the left panel and the standing figure in the right panel of *Crucifixion 1965* (Fig. 6) are extreme cases of the

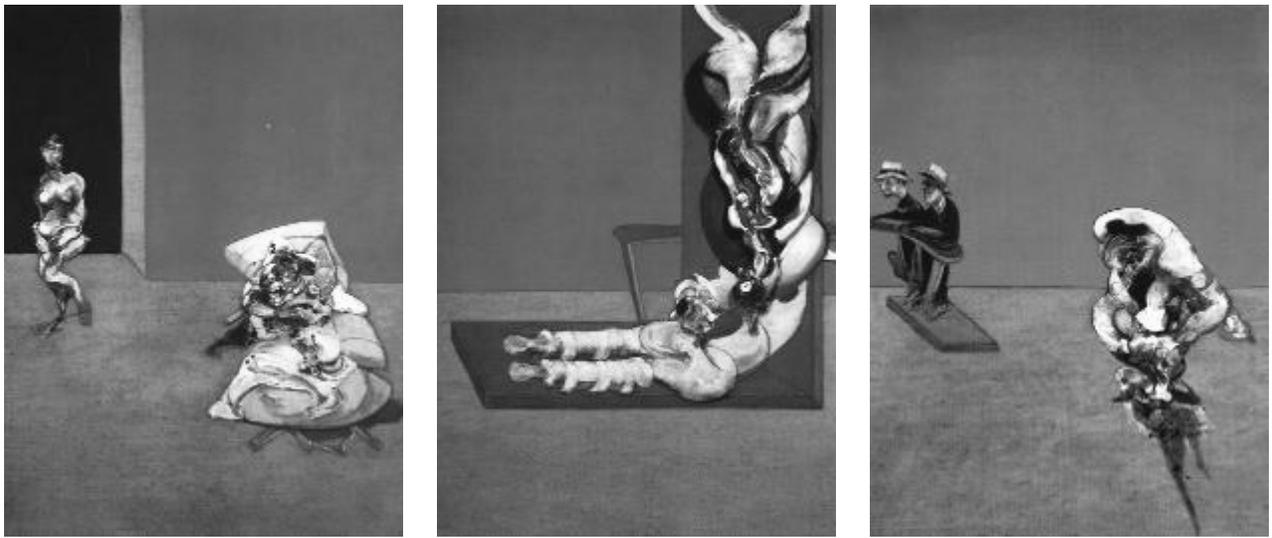


Figure 6.
Francis Bacon
Crucifixion, 1965
Oil on canvas
each panel 197.2 x 147 cm
Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich

deformations that Baconian bodies undergo. In the left panel it is even hardly recognizable that there is a figure lying on the bed. Yet it is still impossible to interpret these paintings as spectacles of violence. They do not offer any kind of disembodied aesthetic pleasure. To be clearer I may give an example of what I call a spectacle of violence. For example In Peter Paul Rubens' *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (Fig. 7) what we encounter is a scene of violence that two men attack two young women. Yet rather than being disturbing, this painting is even pleasurable when the beauty of the bodies and its nice composition is considered. That is what I mean by spectacle of violence.



Figure 7.

Rubens, Peter Poul
The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus
c. 1618
Oil on canvas
88 x 82 7/8 in (224 x 210.5 cm)
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

To repeat it briefly, by way of the conventions that have long been central to the Western art the viewer's encounter with a represented body is tried to be kept within a realm where protocols of a safe, contemplating kind of viewing is retained. The viewer and the art work are thought to be distinct entities; the former one is active whereas the latter is passive. On the other hand Bacon paintings can be interpreted as harsh attacks to the safe position promised to the spectator by the Western figurative painting. One distinct feature of Bacon paintings is their threat to the safe contemplation that has long been the condition of an aesthetic pleasure of an undisturbing kind. The body represented in the painting and the body of the viewer are no more distinct entities. The viewer is forced into a bodily experience rather than enjoying the aesthetic pleasure served by a spectacular scene of violence.

Ronald Bogue argues that Bacon's project can be understood as painting "the body of sensation as opposed to the figurative body of conventional representation" (Bogue: 1994: 261). As mentioned in the preceding chapter in Deleuze's account, painting's purpose is less to invent visible forms which is the primary purpose suggested by the Western figurative tradition than to capture invisible forces in order to create sensations. The answer why he devotes a whole book on Bacon paintings is that he is astonished by the response that Baconian figures give to the question of how to render invisible forces visible that condition the sensation created in the seer's body. This looks very close to the ideas that Francis Bacon himself repeats many times in his interviews. In an interview with David Sylvester he defines his task while painting: he answers Sylvester's question "why is it you want to avoid telling a story?" as follows "I don't want to avoid telling a story, But I want very much to do the thing that Valéry said- to give the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance. And the moment story enters, the boredom comes up on you." (Sylvester: 1987: 65) Bacon, indeed, attempts to avoid two things, which are to be sure among the fundamental elements of the figurative

Western art: illustration and narration. He argues both narration and illustration work upon brain whereas he wants something more nervous than cerebral. For him the painting is not there to tell a story or to illustrate something but to produce sensations, which directly address the nervous system. Narration sets place the boredom in the sense that it directly addresses the brain without traversing the path of nervous system. It functions as the producer and the carrier of meaning that is supposed to be fully graspable by the intellect. Yet what Bacon attempts is to create something that is not fully graspable, a possibility of communication without carrying graspable meanings; that is direct and unmediated sensations.

Bacon closely associates narration and illustration to classical representation. As Narrations and illustrations produce and carry graspable meanings they become main tools of classical representation. Bacon strives to escape from the confinements of classical representation by avoiding these two. Consequently, it runs an endless effort to erase these two from the canvas throughout his work. The two main path that Bacon keeps to escape the confinements of classical representation are isolation and deformation. As Deleuze writes, in Bacon paintings “The figure is not simply the isolated body, but also the deformed body that escapes from itself” (Deleuze, FB, 14). This is the way Bacon responds to the figurative tradition of conventional Western art and departs towards the ‘figural’. In what follows I want to dwell on what these two features of Baconian bodies.

In Bacon’s paintings figures are usually isolated “within a ring, upon a chair, bed, or sofa, inside a circle or parallelepiped” (Deleuze, FB, 2) . The circle can be literally a circle, a cage, a sink or a furniture... For example in *Pope II* (Fig. 8) a parallelepiped encases the Pope’s figure as in the case of *There studies of Male Back* (Fig.9).



Figure 8.
Francis Bacon
Pope II, 1951

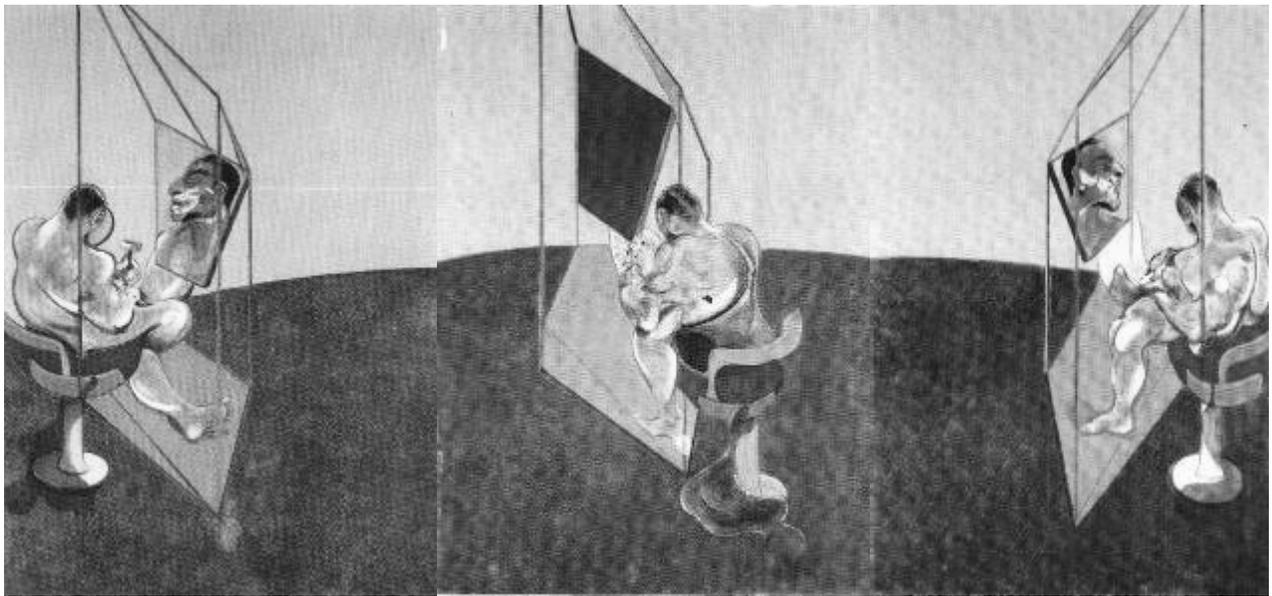


Figure 9.

Francis Bacon

Three Studies of the Male
Back, 1970 - Triptych

1970

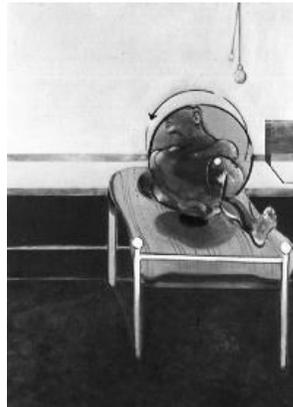


Figure 10.

Francis Bacon

Three Studies of figures

on Beds

1972

In the case of *Three Studies of Figures on Beds* (Fig. 10) there are both literal circles and also the beds function as encircling elements. What is all behind his attempts to isolate figures is to “cut off the story between one and the other.”(Sylvester,1987,23). Indeed the relationship of an image to object and other images in a composite whole directly indicates narration. Thus isolation of images eliminates the possibility of a narration that can take place depending on these interrelations. In one of his interviews Bacon expresses his dream as putting as much figure as possible on a canvas without conveying any narrative relationship between them. According to Deleuze body becomes figural through this imprisonment. Deleuze argues “if painting has nothing to narrate and no story to tell, something is happening all the same, which defines the functioning of the painting.” (Deleuze, FB 11) To be sure this functioning of the painting brings a possibility of figural that destroys the pre-supposed narration on the canvas and communicates without telling a story.

And the second important aspect of Bacon’s bodies is that they are always deformed bodies. “The figure is not simply the isolated body, but also the deformed body that escapes from itself” (Deleuze: FB:14). In Bacon’s paintings, Deleuze argues “from the start, the Figure has been the body, and the body has a place within the enclosure of the circle. But this body is not simply waiting for the structure, it is waiting for something inside itself, it exerts an intense effort upon itself to become a figure” (Deleuze, FB, 12). Deleuze asserts *Figure at a Wash Basin* (Fig. 11) as a guiding example, according to him the body-figure in this painting “exerts an intense motionless effort upon itself in order to escape down the blackness of the drain.” (Deleuze: FB: 12) We can choose another example from 1976; *Figure in Movement*. (Fig. 12) As Deleuze argue that here the movement is subordinated to the forces that are exerted from inside the body despite what the name of the painting suggests. The body serves an intense effort onto itself in order to escape from itself.

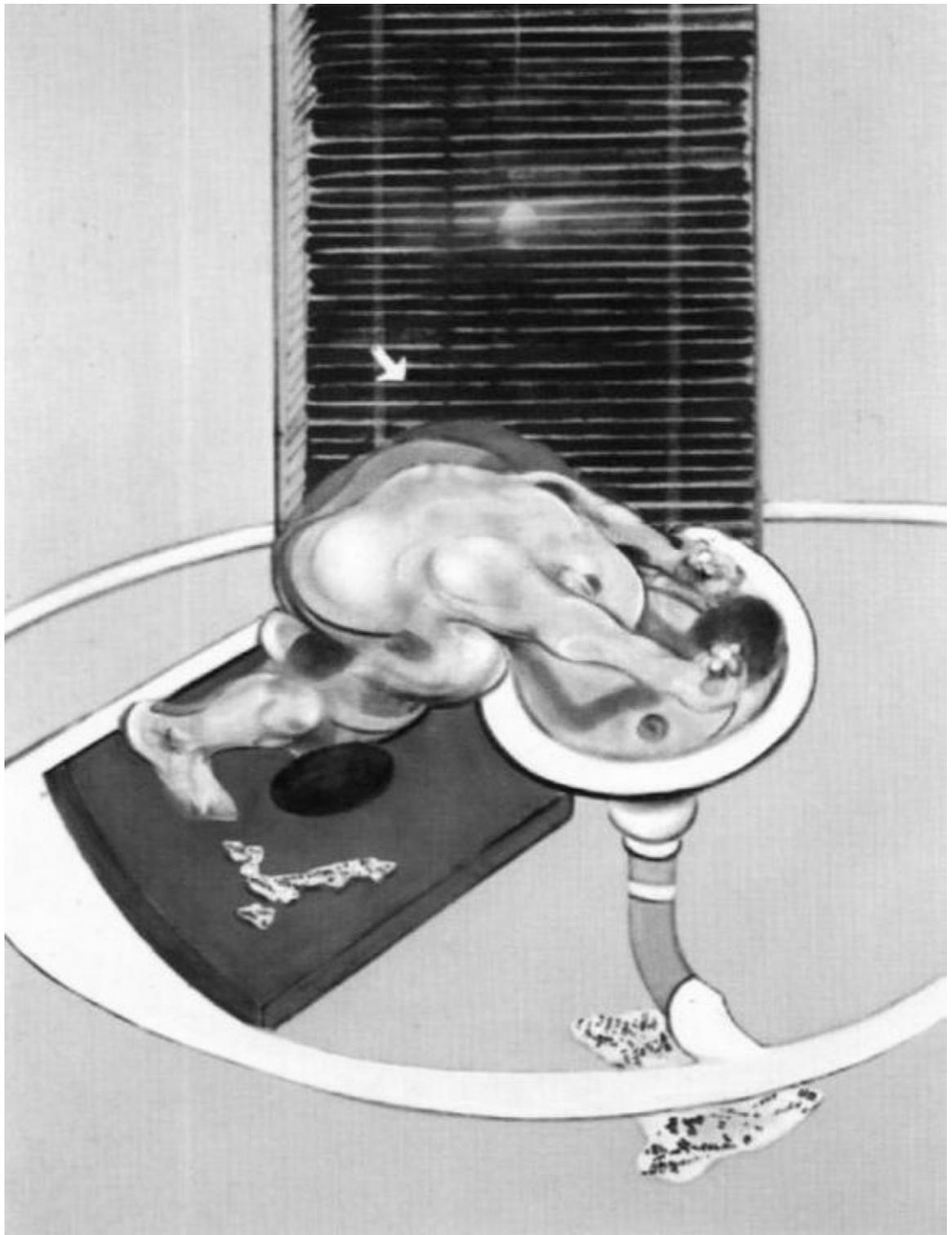


Figure 11.
Francis Bacon
Figure at a Washbasin, 1976.

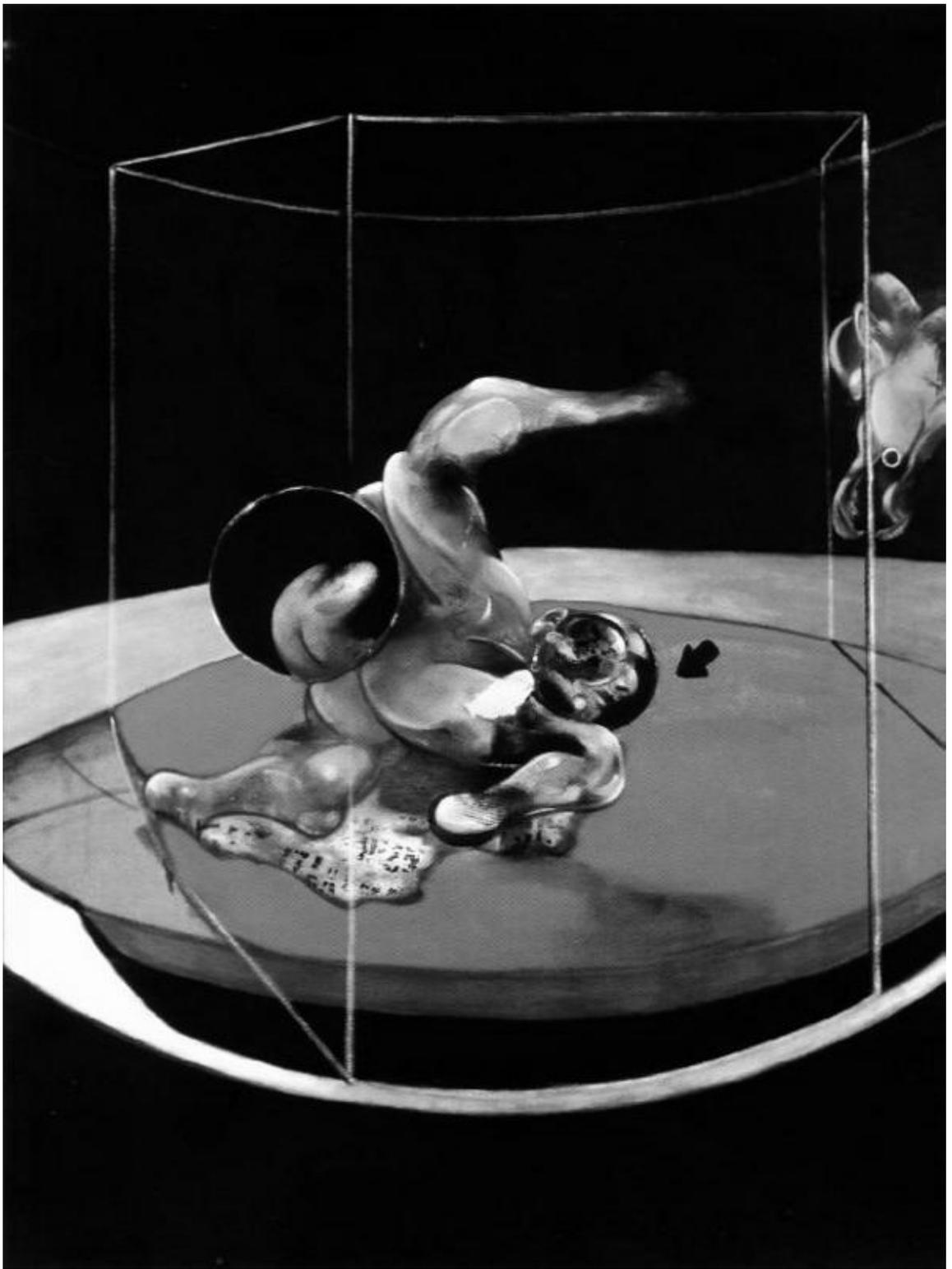


Figure 11.
Francis Bacon
Figures in Movement, 1976

It is force that constitutes deformation as 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... (Deleuze: FB; 35)

Two strongest examples of painting forces that Deleuze identifies in Bacon's paintings are screams, and smiles. As Bacon himself attributes a special importance to "Paint the scream..." Deleuze analyses Bacon's screams as a special case of rendering the invisible forces visible. He first clearly distinguishes Bacon's painting of screams from "giving color to a particular intense sound" by drawing our attention to the relationship that Bacon constructs between 'the visibility of the scream' and invisible 'forces that sustain the scream'. (Deleuze: FB: 35-36) "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 the invisible forces..." (Deleuze: FB: 36) What is at stake is 'coupling of forces' as Deleuze proposes: "...coupling of forces, the perceptible force of the scream and the force that makes one scream" (Deleuze: FB: 36) Bacon's purpose is less to set up a visible spectacle than to make visible the forces that cause scream as he wants "to paint the scream more than the horror" (Bacon quoted in Deleuze, FB: 36)

The forces that cause the scream, that convulse the body until they emerge at the mouth a wiped-off 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.” (Bacon: quoted in Deleuze: FB: 36)

In Deleuze’s view, also, the pressures of the shadows are exemplary case points for this intense effort of body that tries to escape from itself. He conceives shadows as well as screams as strikes of force outwards the body, in other words as moments of escape.

Shadow acquires presence only because it escapes from the body, the shadow is the body that escaped from itself through some localized point in the contour. And the scream Bacon’s scream is the operation through which the entire body escapes through mouth. All the pressures of the body... (Deleuze: FB;13)

According to Smith, painting these moments of escape is a way of attaining a sensation in painting. Force conditions the sensation. Bacon is involved in capturing the invisible forces that produce scream rather than representing a visible horror.(Smith, 1994,34) Put briefly, all Bacon’s attempts to paint the forces that body exerts onto itself are indeed attempts to create sensations as it was discussed above.

According to Deleuze, Bacon Bodies are caught up in violent processes of becoming. The process of becoming animal in the case of *Head III* might be an example. In *Head III* it seems like head of a man is replaced by head of a chimpanzee but it is not the structure of Chimpanzee’s head that takes place but a trait of it. According to Deleuze the animal traits emerging from human forms in Bacon’s portraits indicate a general ‘becoming-animal’ which is not confined to a process of a “mimetic relation between man and animal, but of ‘a zone of indiscernability, of undecidability, between men and animal’ (Deleuze, FB, 20) In Deleuze’s view “animal traits of certain figures and heads in bacon involves a double significance: man becomes animal, but not without the animal taking on something on the esprit of man” (Ades, 1985, 14) Within these paintings it is no longer quite certain whether

these figure refers to human to animal but rather they indicate ‘a zone of indiscernability, of undecidability, between men and animal’ as quoted above.

Indeed all these features of the bodies in Bacon’s pictures fit quite well into another, more general concept of Deleuze and Guattari: body without organs which is the condition of the body resisting any kind of definable structure and identification. Deleuze says that “beyond the organism, but also the limit of the lived body, there lies what Antonio Artaud discovered the name 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 enemies of bodies’” (Artaud quoted in Deleuze: FB: 28) It can be understood as the drama of body in attempt towards an absolute freedom, which is indeed inaccessible nevertheless near as a possibility. In Deleuze’s view body without organs is flesh through which a wave traces and dismantles the organization. In Deleuze’s view body without organs is linked to sensation in a way that sensation comes out of from the confrontation of waves and the forces that are exerted on the body. He claims “when sensation is linked to the body in this way, it ceases to be representative and become real. So body functions the role of the figure as it dismantles the presupposed representation. In Bacon’s paintings human figures becomes a figure in Lyotard’s sense by reaching body without organs. Figure (the body images in Bacon’s paintings) is what interrupts the harmony and balance provided by what Lyotard calls the good-form. Within the Western tradition of art it is always a question of framing and controlling of the mass of flesh. The flesh should be turned into a disciplined, bordered and distant unity in order to offer an undisturbing aesthetic experience to the viewer that remains on the level of recognition. Otherwise feared body is accepted into the realm of art only after suffering a kind of disciplining transformation.

However the depicted bodies in Francis Bacon’s paintings, which are conceived as body without organs by Deleuze, reveal a failure in being confined to these rules. Flesh rejects the dictates of ideal

form and continuously tends to destroy the pre-supposed structure of the body. Baconian bodies which come out as figures provide immediate sensations rather than graspable meanings. It does not presuppose a definable structure as a consequence it is neither fixable nor conventional. . In this way figures of Bacon come out as nearly unrepresentable as just sensible presences. According to Deleuze Presence is the first word that comes to mind in front of Bacon's pictures. They are hysterical excessive presences. *The Reclining Woman* (Fig. 13) is good example for the case where the figure destroy representative organization by way of desire and attains a kind of presence on the canvas.

In sum we can say that Bacon's ultimate strategy is not to show bodies but make them present on the canvas so that they can attain sensations. The body images in paintings might be considered as unstable presences on the canvas, which oppose the ideals of unity and integrity of form, and regulates the viewer whose eyes are disciplined by conventions.

3.4 PAINTING AS HISTERIA

Presence presence...this is the first word that comes to mind in front of a one of Bacon's paintings. Could this presence be hysterical? (Deleuze: FB; 31)

Indeed what Deleuze suggests between painting and hysteria is a very simple relationship. For him, both painting and hysteria go beyond representation by attempting at subversive presences. "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 presences beneath representation, beyond representation." (Deleuze: FB: 31) For Deleuze, hysteria of Bacon's paintings is disruptive in that it works to bring out



Figure 13.
Francis Bacon
Reclining Woman, 1961

presences and undo the basis of representative forms. Bacon's Lyodardian body figures attend for presences not for narration or illustration. Deleuze claims about Bacon's paintings: "Everywhere there is a presence acting directly on the nervous system, which makes representation, whether in space or at a distance impossible" (Deleuze, FB, 31)

According to Freud's theory, hysterical symptoms are simply formations that express repressed sexual wishes. In this view, the symptoms of hysteria are, therefore, expressive of a narration that is repressed. Unlike Freud's, Deleuze's point suggests a reconsideration of hysteria not as representation but presentation. While talking about the hysteria of Bacon's paintings, Deleuze departs from the Freudian characterisation of hysteria and conceives of hysteria as a pure presence, which escapes from, or rather, disruptive of any representation.

Countering the characterisation of painting in terms of fixed forms, Deleuze assigns painting a fundamental anarchy of hysteria. Hysteria is anarchic in the sense that it escapes the conventional, representational norms and codes and refuses to provide a fixed position for the eye of the viewer. It resists to the tendencies to regard visible as a readable text. "Painting is hysteria, or coverts hysteria, because it makes immediately visible. It invests the eye through colour and line. But it does not treat the eye as a fixed organ. It liberates lines and colours from their representative function, but at the same time it liberates the eye from its adherence to the organism, from its character as a fixed and qualified organ." (Deleuze, FB, 32) For Deleuze, recognition of the hysteria of the painting evokes a double definition of painting, indeed:

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 of colours freed from organic representation. And each is produced by the other: the pure presence of the body becomes visible at the same time the eye becomes the destined organ of this presence. (Deleuze, 32...)

By posing the startling question above, “Could this presence be hysterical?” , Deleuze brings the theme of hysteria into the question of representation to argue for a possibility of non-representation. For him the hysteria of Bacon’s paintings indicate a breakdown in the conventional sufficiencies of representational norms. Placing the human bodies into the site of the unreadable (the site of the figural in Lyotard’s words), Bacon assigns them a transgressive character. He challenges the set of boundaries that shape the body in representation and in so doing bring out or rather set free the fundamental hysteria of painting. According to Deleuze painting carries a fundamental hysteria in itself; yet it, often, takes two main paths to avoid this fundamental hysteria, either figurative path or abstractive path. Departing from these two paths Bacon sets free the fundamental hysteria of painting and attempts at a move from figuration to figural in Lyotardian sense. Deleuze conceives of Bacon’s bodies as acting out a form of hysteria that leads them towards a non-representational pure presence.

CHAPTER 4. GENDER, EMBODIMENT, PAINTING: QUESTION OF GENDER IN BACON'S PAINTINGS

4.1. VISUALISATION OF FEMALE BODY; CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINE SUBJECTIVITY

The following chapter aims to question the set of relations between painting, embodiment and gender through the issue of gender in Bacon paintings. As discussed in the preceding chapters the representation of body within the Western tradition of art sets up a discourse on subject by offering norms on contemplating viewing and thus on unified, viewing subject besides proposing particular, ideal definitions of male and female bodies. Echoing and contributing to the paradigm of feminine object/masculine viewer those represented bodies are frequently female bodies, which are made visible as distanced objects of masculine gaze. It seems to be that visualization of body, particularly of female body participates in the production of the distance between the female object and the male subject. It is the process of the production of coherent, masculine identity. Indeed female figure in Western tradition of art operates as distanced object of the disembodied vision, which is the very condition of a coherent and masculine owner of vision. Thus the question of how to represent the female bodies shifts toward the question of masculine subjectivity and gender difference. The issue of production of subject takes place as the issue of the production of gendered subject conceived principally as male.

In the last chapter of his book *Francis Bacon and the Loss of the Self*, Ernst Van Alphen focuses on the issue of representation of gendered body that he defines as “the most

crucial issue concerning the construction of self in western art”(Alphen, 1992, 15). So we can take this chapter as the continuation of our discussion on the determination of the spaces of the self and the other in the preceding chapters as it is generally a gendered process. According to Alphen the way that Bacon depicts sexed bodies offer a significant challenge to the gender based clichés that haunt Western tradition of art. He conceives the rareness of female bodies in Bacon’s paintings as a deliberate response to the conventions of Western art in which, to be sure, female body is the most common and privileged subject. Lynda Nead clearly states the situation in her book, *Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*:

Anyone who examines the history of western art must be struck by the prevalence images of the female body. More than any other subject, the female nude connotes ‘Art’. The framed image of the a female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery, is shorthand for art more generally; it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilisation and accomplishment” (Nead, 1992, 1).

In this tradition women are positioned to reflect the male subjectivities as passive objects. The certainty of the objectivity of the female body, in turn, functions to define male subjectivity. Contrary to this convention, the largest part of Bacon’s repertoire of body images is occupied by male bodies. Bacon, strikingly, shifts the focus; decentralise the female body. For Alphen this decentralisation of female body is a strategy that works against the conventions of Western art that objectifies women.

4.2. CONVENTIONS OF FEMALE NUDE AND FEMALE NUDE IN BACON'S PAINTINGS

Within Bacon's oeuvre, there are just a few female nudes besides a considerable number of male nudes. Indeed in Western tradition of art nude, at the first hand, connotes female nude for the reasons that Gill Saunders neatly expresses,

'nude' is synonymous with 'female nude' because nakedness connotes passivity, vulnerability; it is powerless and anonymous. In other words it is a 'female' state and equated with femininity. (Saunders, quoted in Alphen, 1992, 169)

The passage summarizes the main precepts of the female nude, highlighting the association of female body with passivity and vulnerability. In this classical view the male viewer is positioned with a fixed and secure orientation in front of the passive and vulnerable female body. Bacon's privileging of the male nudes can be understood as a representational strategy against this traditional view. "The fact that Bacon paints mainly male, instead of female, nudes is in itself a strategy for disempowering the tradition of the objectification of women." (Alphen, 1992, 169)

The theme of female nude largely occupies the debates in visual theory in general and feminist visual theory in particular. One of the leading works on the topic is John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. Until recently, the arguments that Berger proposed in *Ways of Seeing* have been taken as key formulations for feminist understandings of the

conventional representations of female body. Indeed his famous formulation about post-renaissance painting, 'men looked', 'woman appeared', tends to articulate a central axiom of western culture: man is active, woman is passive. According to him this cultural alignment of male as active and female as passive continues within the western tradition of art: man emerges as the bearer of the look while woman is the passive object of his gaze. Up to this time, Berger's formulation has been applied in numerous feminist interpretations of art works. And what all-feminist art critics, historians and, theoreticians at least to an extent, agree upon with him is that within Western tradition of art female body is objectified in front of male gaze. Laura Mulvey's famous work on narrative cinema extends the topic by making use of psychoanalytic concepts of fetishism and voyeurism.

Laura Mulvey's appropriation of Freudian concepts of voyeurism and fetishism gave further cogency to a binary split between women as passive objects of the look, and men as active subjects of their own desires. The theory of the 'male gaze' provided a powerful explanatory framework for the deep-seated and enduring resistance to change of certain representations of the female body in art and in cinema. (Betterton, 1996, 11)

Alphen starts his analysis of Bacon's female nudes within this framework. He states his view in words below:

It has often been remarked that the traditional representation of female nude placed women on display for the voyeuristic pleasure of male spectator. The naked body of the represented woman becomes an imaginary erotic object

offered to the man's gaze. John Berger formulates this practice as follows:

'almost all post-Renaissance European sexual imaginary is frontal-either literally or metaphorically- because the sexual protagonist is the spectator-owner looking at it.' (Alphen, 1992, 169)

One of Alphen's main arguments is that Bacon's female nudes (which are very few in number) work against clichés that objectify female body in front of male gaze and in so doing deconstruct the Western construction of masculinity. Bacon's female bodies become interrogation of the longstanding assumptions about female identity and desire by resisting to the conventions of figurative representation, which, indeed, are conveyer of cultural definitions. Representation, indeed, is an enactment of cultural forces.

Precisely where Berger can be and has been criticized is that, while he questions gaze, he omits the body's violating potential. If we link this to the discussions in the preceding chapter the obsession with the representations of female body and the endless effort to pacify it may be a result of the anxiety about its violating potential. With its own pleasures and desires female body is indeed threatening for the sovereignty of male subject. There is always a tension between the demands of symbolic order and the female body that resists them. While drawing female nudes Bacon does not undermine this resistance, rather puts an emphasis on it. Female bodies in Bacon's paintings resist to the conventions of figurative representation and become interrogation of longstanding attempts to pacify it.

While Deleuze addresses the hysteria of Bacon's paintings, he does not deal with questions of gender, however hysteria is usually associated with feminine. Numerous feminist writers read it as the resistance of female body to the demands of cultural order. Is it possible to link the hysteria of Bacon's paintings to the issues of female desire and identity? In the following section a brief introduction of some feminist understandings of hysteria will be given. Then I will turn back the analysis of female bodies in Bacon's paintings.

4.3. HYSTERIA AS A FEMININE DISCOURSE ADDRESSED TO PATRIARCHAL THOUGHT

At the end of nineteenth century Jean Charcot (before Freud) contributed to the categorization of hysteria (which was mainly associated with woman then) as a non-gender-specific disease by observing the existence of male hysteria as well as female one. Although this is a step in perception of hysteria, in more recent times some feminist writers tried re-associate hysteria to a female position, which breaks through the conventional cultural codes. What follows is a brief introduction of some of these views.

In her article "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, The Case of Anna O.", Dianne Hunter rereads Breuer's case history of Anna O. introduced in Freud's and Breuer's collaborated work *Studies in hysteria*. Anna o. whose real name was Bertha Pappenheim suffers from a hysterical collapse in 1880 while she was nursing her deadly ill father and becomes Josef Breuer's patient who was a respected Viennese physician then. Between the years of 1880 and 1882 she had been a patient of Dr. Breuer for

two years. Yet in 1882 Breuer gives up his therapy sessions with her after she suffers from an hysterical crisis of abdominal pains accompanied by cries “now Dr. Breuer’s child is coming. After this imaginary delivery pains for Breuer’s child Breuer leaves Pappenhaim’s house and they never meet again.

Hunter condemns Breuer for he could not recognize the importance of his encounter with Anna O. Yet he, at least, finds the case remarkable enough to report to his friend Freud and Freud gets impressed by the case. Hunter thinks that Breuer suppresses Pappenhaim’s identity while he was editing the story. Yet she can, still, learn about her from some latter sources. She bourns into a wealth Jewish family, in Vienna, in 1859. She had two older sisters who died in childhood and a younger brother. She had been healthy up to her father’s illness yet while she was nursing her father she stops eating and looses to much weight that her doctor’s forbidden her to continue nursing. Then she develops a complex form of hysteria in the following three months. She has a cough that resembles her father’s, suffers from paralysis in particular organs of her body which turns into contracture of her entire body, deafness and disturbances of vision.

Yet what mostly Hunter is concerned among Pappenhaim’s problems is her aphasia, a profound disorganization of speech and her usage of her own body as signifier. After Pappenhaim regains her ability to speak she was unable to understand and talk in German, her native tongue while she could understand and speak in foreign languages. And in times of stress she uses a mixture of different languages. Hunter offers a feminist interpretation to her situation, which was called once “strange” and “bizarre” by Freud. Her speechlessness, her communication in translation and her pantomime

impress Hunter. She appreciates Papenheim's situation as an interrogation to her cultural identity

According to Hunter Freud's and Breuer's explanations for Papenheim's linguistic symptoms are inadequate. They explain it by associating it to a memory. One night while she was nursing for her father she suffers a hysterical paralysis of her arm she tries to pray at that moment but she cannot remember anything other than a child prayer in English. According to Freud and Breuer that is why she speaks in English when her hysteria develops. Yet according to Hunter this memory has nothing to do with the speechlessness and poly lingual jargon of Papenheim.

Indeed the sources of her hysteria were typical of her time. She is defined in Breuer's texts as very intelligent and lively young woman who had developed intellectual capacities and interests. And while she was nursing for her father at home, her younger brother starts The University of Vienna, which was closed to woman students then. Although Breuer does not recognize or at least express like this according to Hunter Papenheim was rejecting her inferior position in an orthodox Jewish family.

In this form Papenheim's linguistic discord and conversion symptoms, her unusual means of expression is read by Hunter as her regression towards the cultural order in which she feels herself struck.

Reminding the surrealist's recognition of hysteria as an expressive discourse, she argues hysteria is a feminine discourse addressed to patriarchal thought She understands feminism as a transformed hysteria or rather hysteria is feminism lacking a social network in the outer world.

In popular culture the word “hysterical” has often been used in attempts to discredit feminist expression, for both hysterics and feminists are “out of control”: neither hysterics nor feminists cooperate dutifully with patriarchal conventions. Attempts to discredit feminists as “hysterical” derive from repressive impulse similar to the defense that creates hysterical symptoms in the first place: repudiation – of socially untoward feelings such as anger and resentment. Thus one may call hysteria a self-repudiating form of feminine discourse in which the body signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically. (Hunter,...

Another case history that feminist critics dwell on is of Freud’s famous case study of Dora which is narrated in Freud’s essay “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria”. Dora is first introduced to Freud in 1898 because she was suffering from nervous coughs. Yet she does not continue the therapy courses, as her cough is spontaneous. Yet two years later her father again takes her to Freud, what he wants from Freud is to bring her into order because “Dora had grown unmistakably neurotic” in Freud’s own words. Her relationships with her family are very bad and she was also dissatisfied with herself. She suffers from dyspnea, migraine, nervous coughing. So Freud starts his treatments of Dora in 1900 when she was eighteen under these circumstances. With respect to the symptoms Freud calls her disease ‘petite hysteria’.

During the therapy sessions Freud asks Dora about her experiences. What she tells and Freud brings into order is briefly a story of sexual affairs. When Dora’s family was

moved to small town her father was dissatisfied by his marriage to her mother. They met another couple that was unhappy with their marriage. A love affair develops between Frau K. and her father and Dora her self has indeed a friendly relation to both Frau K. and Herr K. She also takes care of their children. Herr K. and Dora go walking and Herr K. gives her presents. Indeed what goes on is that her father and Herr K. make a kind of secret exchange of Dora and Frau K.

Jaqueline Rose starts her article "Dora: Fragment of an analysis" with the question "What would it mean to reopen the case of Dora now?" She first mentions the present dialogue between psychoanalysis and feminism. According to her psychoanalysis implies a place where that is possible "to describe the coming into being of femininity" at first yet when it fails in the next step "as it did with Dora" this indeed implies the impossibility of the project of becoming feminine. According to her Dora is repressed by psychoanalysis. In this case of hysteria places on the body which becomes the site of feminine, outside discourse. She searches how Freud's failure makes it impossible any notion of feminine that is outside representation.

In the first part of the article she dwells on the case the relation of the failure of the case to Freud's notion of femininity. According to her what psychoanalytic discourse does not acknowledge is the feminine sexuality reveals persistence of the question of desire. What she mainly argues is that psychoanalytic discourse suppresses the question of desire. For her the hysterical symptoms should be read as in their relation to the persistence of desire.

At this point can we consider hysteria as an interrogation of female body to the patriarchal assumptions about female desire and identity and the cultural roles assigned to them. In *Volatile Bodies* Elizabeth Grosz mentions,

...possibility of women's strategic occupation of hysteria as a form of resistance to the demands and requirements of heterosexual role culturally assigned to women. Like homosexual or any other sexual practices, the hystericization of women's bodies is procedure that, depending on its particular contexts, its particular location, and particular subjects, may function as form of complicity with or refusal of patriarchal sexual relations. (Grosz,1994, 157-158)

4.4. SETTING FREE THE HYSTERIA OF FEMALE BODY: EXAMINATION OF FEMALE FIGURES IN BACON PAINTINGS

According to Alphen a very significant and frequent way of the objectification of female body is elimination of any unpleasable aspects and any signs of desire. Within this economy, desire and subjectivity of woman is neglected, she cannot have any desires. Or she cannot carry any sign of desire on her body that threatens the viewer's position as all-controlling subject. As Betterton states, "In the tradition of fine art nude the unregulated sexual body is repressed in order to maintain the unity and integrity of the viewing subject." (Betterton, 1996, 135) The only place that is assigned to her is being, "an erotic object offered to the male gaze" in Alphen's words (Alphen,1992, 57). As I mentioned above, determined primarily by the cultural

presumptions of gendered identity man should be constructed as the active agent of his own desires while woman is the object of his gaze. The way to achieve this is turning the female body into an undesiring but a desirable object. The removal of the body hairs from the representation of female bodies or concealing them is a clear example of this objectifying process. The body hair implies the woman's physical desire, which is contrary to the expectations about her (non) –identity. It should be removed or concealed as it carries a potential threat to the voyeuristic pleasure of the male viewer. “The convention of deleting female body hair from paintings, for example, can be explained as supporting this objectifying gaze: every hint of physical desire or animal passion on the part of woman is eliminated.” (Alphen, 1992, 169) Indeed, this implies an effort for removal or concealing of female subjectivity that prevents the viewer construction of himself as subject in front of the painting.

Giorgione's *The Sleeping Venus* (Fig. 14) is a classical case study of reclining nude. Here we come back to the set of gendered conventions about looking and being looked at. The woman is represented as having no substance, she does not reveal any sign of desire: she is sleeping. She lies with a disinterested posture with closed eyes; all her body hair is removed, instead, she has a soft white skin. As Laura Mulvey suggests ‘the smooth glossy body,..., is a defense against an anxiety provoking, uneasy and uncanny body’ (quoted in betterton,1996, 135) She even looks like weightless. Her desiring subjectivity is completely eliminated under the frames of gendered conventions of art. Her sleepy body offers a complete voyeuristic pleasure to the male viewer without any threat of female subjectivity and desire. “She is completely subjugated to the male gaze by the erasure of any threatening sign of the

woman's desiring subjectivity.” (Alphen, 1992, 169) Alphen quotes from Bataille who neatly expresses the situation:

“The erotic value of feminine form is linked to the effacement of that natural heaviness that recalls the material use of the members and the necessity of skeleton. The more unreal the forms, the less clearly they are subject to animal truth, to the physiological truth of the human body, the better they answer to the generally accepted image of the desirable woman. (Alphen,1992, 170)



Figure 14.
Giorione, Giorgio da Catefranco
Venus Asleep
c. 1510
Oil on canvas
108 x 175 cm
Gemaeldegallerie Alte Meister, Dresden

In Manet's Olympia (Fig. 15) Alphen identifies a "scandalization of this tradition" (Alphen, 1992, 170). A main difference between conventional female nudes and Manet's Olympia turns on the question of objectification of female body in front of male gaze. The painting has some features, which prevent Olympia being a passive object of desire and it is in this sense that it transgresses the borders of the tradition of female nude. "Manet's Olympia was such disturbing image for Manet's contemporaries because it contains several *displaced* signs of her sexuality: the gesture of her hand, the cat, the black female, the bouquet of flowers." (Alphen, 1992, 170) The awkwardness of her pose, her gestures, and her look are overwhelming proofs of Olympia's resistance to the conventions of looking and being looked at.. Olympia is usually called one of the most Baudelarian of Manet's paintings: "...Staring at me, like a tamed tiger,/ with a vague and dreamy expression,/ she tried various positions" (Baudelaire, quoted in Krell, 50) By way of the significant features mentioned above Olympia resists objectification and take the possession of her own desires as well as her look. "In the intimacy and silence of her room, Olympia stands out starkly, violently, the shock of her body's acid vividness softened by nothing, intensified on the contrary, by the white sheets."(Bataille, quoted in Pointon, 133) What Manet does here is to reveal the desiring female subjectivity in a scandalous way. Hence the painting becomes an announcement of the challenge of female body to the patriarchal assumptions about female desire that carry cultural authority.



Figure 15
Manet, Edouard
Olympia
1863
Oil on canvas
51 3/8 x 74 3/4 in. (130.5 x 190 cm)
Musee d'Orsay, Paris

What Alphen sees in Bacon's female nudes is a radicalisation of Manet's scandal.

Bacon's female nudes are fascinating because they offer an account of women's desire, which is not bound within parameters of gendered conventions. As Deleuze suggests in *The Logic of Sensation* the bodies in Bacon's paintings elude the distanced objectifying gaze of the viewer and produce bodily sensation that threatens the safety of the viewer.

One example of Bacon's female nudes is *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror*. In this painting the exposition of female nude to the viewer's gaze recalls classical nude yet the mirror, which is conventionally turned toward woman, is turned toward the viewer (a male voyeur) in this case. The mirror image reflects a dressed man watching

the woman. A curious parallel exists between Bacon's *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror* (Fig. 17) and Manet's *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergere* (A Bar at the Folies-Bergere) (Fig. 16). Thus, Alphen reads Bacon's painting as a commentary on Manet's *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergere*. In Manet's painting there is a young woman serving behind a bar, just behind the woman a mirror extends reflecting the back of the woman and a male figure at the right side. What strikes here is the male image on the right corner of the mirror that is supposedly the mirror image of a man sitting on the bar offers an identification point for the viewer who is in front of the painting. On the one hand the painting seems to be the embodiment of the representational conventions of male onlooker and female object of gaze yet on the other hand it, at least to an extent, interrogates the convention it embodies. The woman's look and steady presence counters to be objectified in front of male gaze. To be sure, the woman's look weakens the controlling power of the male voyeur in the mirror however; he still holds his sovereign status as the owner of the gaze, by analogy so does the viewer. "Yet the embarrassing power directness of the woman's gaze in the Manet painting only just begins to undermine the power of louche voyeur, a bourgeois gentlemen who seems out of place in the bar but, who is nevertheless still, along with the viewer, the master." (Alphen, 1992,62) Compared to Manet's *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergere*, the extent which Bacon's *Study of Nude with Figure in Mirror* provides critical insights to the conventions of looking and being looked at is larger. Formation of the viewer as the distant, safe subject and the body painted as passive object is very crucial in western art as it concerns painless pleasure that the viewer should get in front of the painting. However, this clear distinction is seen to be blurring in the Bacon painting. The woman is presented as object of gaze in front of the male voyeur in the mirror and also in front of the viewer as in the conventional cases. However as Alphen



Figure 16.

Manet, Eduard
A Bar at the Folies-Bergeres
1881-82
Oil on canvas
37 3/4 x 51 1/4 in. (96 x 130 cm)
Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

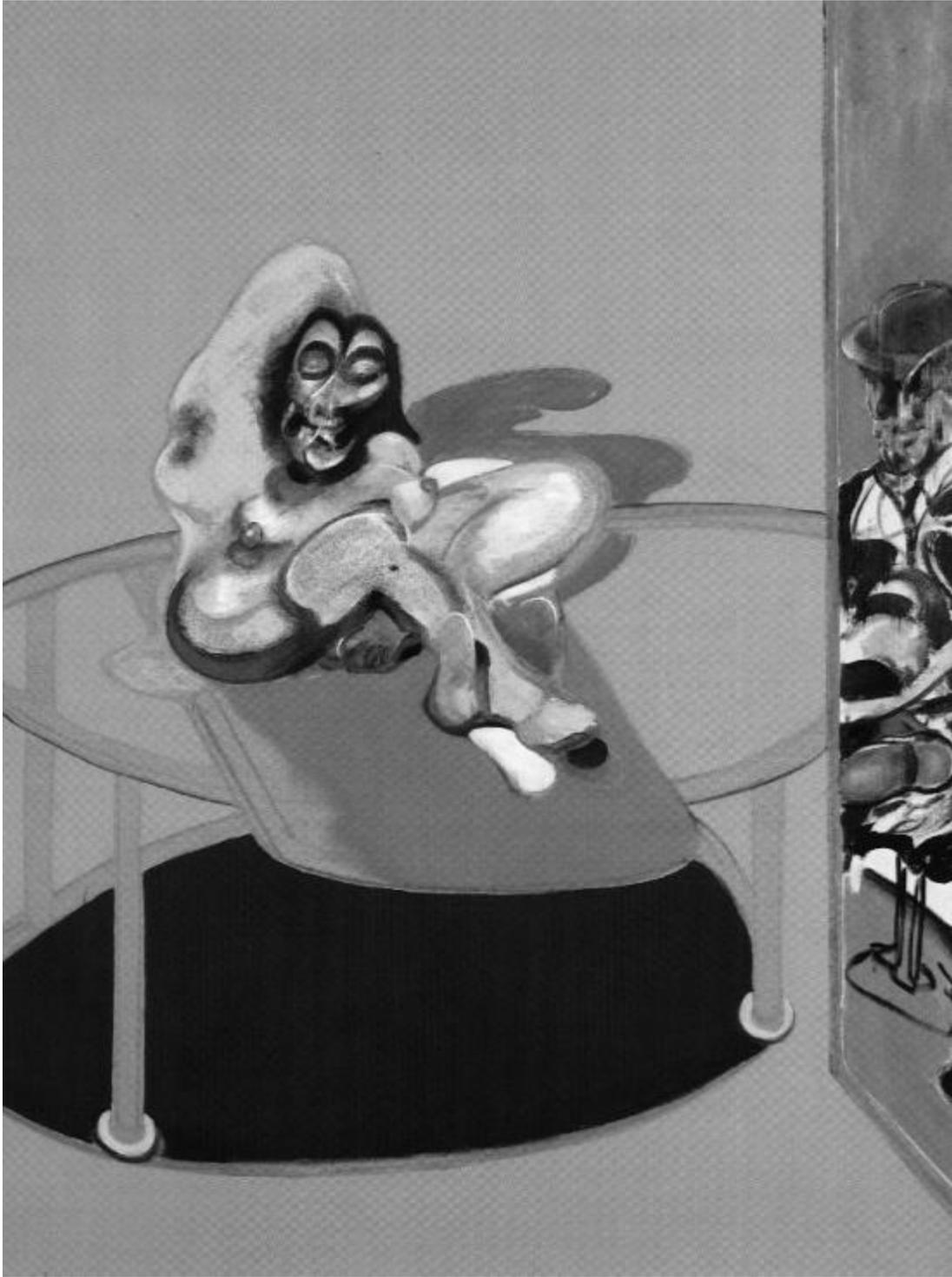


Figure 17.
Francis Bacon
Study of a Nude with Figure in a Mirror
1969

announces the sharpened signs of her objectification and the distortions of her body replicated on the male figure carries her objectification toward the viewer.

The self-confident pose of the gangster like man in the Bacon painting embodies a double critique of this situation. First his look turns the woman into an ape; her total objecthood is not softened by a smile or a complying or subordinate look, but sharpened by animal like features (mouth and hair) But at the same time, the woman's body is distorted: her legs replicate the posture of man's legs. This similarity of pose suggests that the voyeur shares the animal features of the woman. And, by analogy, so does the viewer. (Alphen, 1992, 62)

According to Alphen this operation of the painting contaminates the viewer by taking back his status as subject of the painting. The painting makes the viewer subjected to his own objectifying look by creating a version of this objectification on his body. “the onlooker is contaminated, his looking touches his body as it touches her. This threatens his identity, as he becomes like his subject.” (Alphen, 1992, 62)

Study for a Portrait is another female figure of Bacon that shares similarities with *Study of Nude with Figure in Mirror*. The figure reclines on a chaise recalling classical nudes. She has animal like features and seems sexually aggressive. “She grimaces, showing her teeth, as if laughing in cynical mockery; her arms look like animal bones; her hair is loose and wild. Her hair is reminiscent of that other hairy, ape-like woman figure in *Study of Nude with Figure in a Mirror*” The female body in this paintings can

also be understood as an interrogation of female passivity that still haunts western imaginary and culture.

To me *Reclining Woman* (Fig. 13) is the most striking of Baconian nudes that offers alternative representation of female body and desire. In the painting we see a female figure on a couch, setting of a classical reclining nude. Compared to the posture and gestures of a classical nude the Bacon painting is totally strange. Contrary to the conventions of the classical nude according to which the woman should disinterestedly lie and any signs of desire should be removed, Bacon attempts to excavate the figure of the desiring female body. “The posture of this woman on the couch-her legs separate open, her hair wild and disordered- do not make her a suitable object of sexual desire, instead she is herself is embodiment of desire.” Unlike the classical nudes with closed or semi-closed eyes Bacon’s reclining woman has a strange kind of look that turns the viewer into object of her gaze. It is a scene that confuses the distinctions between voyeur subject and the object of its look. It implies a shift between seer and seen, subject and object of gaze. The viewer is drawn into a situation of passivity feeling the pain of objectification. The woman in the painting is virtually acting out an orgasm.

Her head tips, backward as if expressing the rupture of orgasm. Her eye confronts the onlooker, leaving him no room to look away; but looking is painful because, rather than offering her beauty to the viewer (beauty is clearly irrelevant as a category here) she is pure subject, active not available for construction by the other (Alphen, 1992, 62).

If we try to sum up some significant features of female bodies in Bacon's paintings that challenge the tradition of nude: firstly they are disturbingly unclear depictions of body lacking wholeness and leaving no room for voyeuristic pleasure. They are stripped of any reference to notions of perfection and beauty. They announce a radical challenge to the classical notion of beauty as well as the patriarchal assumptions about the female desire that still carry cultural authority. He opens up that hysteria which breaks up the conventional boundaries between subject and object, between masculine and feminine. The female bodies in Bacon's paintings ultimately enact hysterical refusals of passivity, revealing actively desiring women.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to problematize the figurative tradition in Western art as an attempt to overcome the anxieties about the margins of body that is supposed to be the boundary between the inner-self and outside world. Contrary to the common the understandings of figuration as an un-problematic aesthetic category, it was argued that the representation of body has always been a complex and problematic issue that concerns the construction of subjectivity and the definition of the spaces of the self and other.

The significance of Francis Bacon's work for the inquest of this study was that his integration of figuration with deformations of ideal figure have provided powerful insights in which to rethink the representations of body outside of dualist logic. In figurative painting body is represented according to the basic oppositions of dualist logic such as body/mind, inside/outside, subject/object, form/matter, masculine/ feminine...Bacon's body images undermine all these oppositions by achieving the co-existence of body figure and its deformation on the same canvas. He challenges the set of boundaries that shape the body in representation and sets free the fundamental hysteria of painting. Baconian body is what disturbs the cliché. Bacon manages to deform the pre-given, pre-supposed forms (cliché). In other words the body as Lyotardian figure in Bacon's paintings disrupts any pre-existing structure within which it can be represented and traces from the cliché towards the figural. It is a shift from conventional figuration to figurality in Lyotardian sense: disruption of the field of representation.

While Deleuze addresses the hysteria of Bacon's paintings, he does not deal with questions of gender, however hysteria is usually associated with feminine. Numerous feminist writers read it as the resistance of female body to the demands of cultural order. In the forth chapter his

argumentations on the hysteria of painting is expanded over a discussion on the set of relations between gender, embodiment and painting. The female bodies in Bacon's paintings announce a radical challenge to the classical notion of beauty as well as the patriarchal assumptions about the female desire that still carry cultural authority.

Placing the human bodies into the site of the unreadable (the site of the figural in Lyotard's words), Bacon assigns them a transgressive character. He challenges the set of boundaries that shape the body in representation and in so doing bring out or rather set free the fundamental hysteria of painting. Deleuze conceives of Bacon's bodies as acting out a form of hysteria that leads them towards a non-representational pure presence.

The hysteria of Bacon's paintings indicates a breakdown in the conventional sufficiency of representational norms. The hysterisized body in Bacon's paintings is striped of any representational functions assigned by the cultural order. In that respect Bacon does not invent a new mode of representation but rather a strategy for deconstruction of representation. In other words he traces from the classical figuration towards the Lyotardian figural.

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