"Now the doubt whether an object of our inner ideas and general outlook is or is not, like the question whether subjective consciousness has generated it in itself and whether the manner and mode in which it has brought it before itself was also in correspondence with the object in its essential nature, is precisely what arouses in men the higher scientific need which demands that, even if we have a notion that an object is or that there is such an object, nevertheless the object must be exhibited or proved in accordance with its necessity" (G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, O.U.P., v.I, p.24).

This is the general recognition of the true. It is a more inward statement of that insight of the ancients that all men by nature desire to know. It is more inward in the sense that it allows the other than the true its place. It is bound up with the possibility of the appearance: that which is at the heart of the beautiful - as the true which can be whole in appearance. It is the relation between these moments - the true and the beautiful which makes crucial for Hegel that art has that which comes before it and that which comes after. Nature, the before, is that appearance which is recognized as true only in the whole of its being - not in any appearance itself. Religion, the after, is subjective wholeness which no longer finds appearance adequate. Philosophy is the unity of the objectivity of the beautiful and the subjectivity of religion.

This edition of *Animus* presents the tensions of this before and after in relation to art. The first paper, by Paul Epstein, centres on the vision of the ideal in the natural and the state which must be sorted out within the Greek *polis*. The result is the very subjectivity which grounds our problem, truth as appearance. It is a separating out of the before and after of art. Put in the terms of Aristophanes' play, the natural involves the every day of things and our particularity, the religious and theoretical is brought to life in the limit of the tragic to the transcendent only, coupled with the ability of comedy to treat of the whole: the divine life and the actual life of the spectators; to bring about the individual as against the particular; and to unite the gods of marriage generative with the god of oblivion and judgement. The argument is that once one has seen such a unity one has already entered into a philosophy of art. Aristotle, as what is after art, is already implied.

The second, an essay by Sean McGrath, calls for art to take up only the middle ground, suggesting that in technology neither the truly natural before nor the freely thoughtful after can maintain themselves. Necessary is Heidegger's direct appeal to the danger and an aesthetic - an apparent, or counterfeit - return to the sensibilities within medieval contemplation. In answer to this hiding which fits the danger is the vision of a technology of explicit limits, allowing deeper possibilities.
Following what could be viewed as a subjective withdrawal from modernism in Heideggerian thinking we have Jennifer Dyer’s fascinating presentation of an objective rage. If Heidegger takes up a religious inwardness Francis Bacon makes appear a philosophical objectivity which suffers and yet constructs our impatient ever relative and gliding studies for our own portraits. The appearance is so fraught because at its heart is the glimpsed freedom of that same concrete individual proposed in Aristotle and Aristophanes. But now the glimpsing is an act within the portrait, not something we see but which we might be seeing seen. Is this the complete observer which Nietzsche saw with interest and Heidegger saw with horror? Or is it a deeper individuality and freedom and a deepening too of aesthetic indifference.

Oddly enough these questions are most explicitly raised in this issue not in relation to the most recent art works but in a consideration belonging to Hegel's own time and indeed to his own circle. Is Goethe arguing in Faust that poetry is the highest expression of truth in the modern age? At stake in the essay by Kenneth Kierans is the life of Faust as true individual as against the “seeing” (as in Francis Bacon) of Mephistopheles and God, a seeing which we can only watch as unified for us or for Faust - either way something seems to have been lost. And at stake in this self conscious poetics: is poetry as the unity of the beautiful of appearance not simply to be worshipped - the “after” which Hegel argues is in a certain way inevitable - or also, in Kierans' terms, is it to be judged: "A work of art invites us ..to intellectual activity, and this not for the sake of creating more art, but for the purpose of knowing what art is and what its limits are." Art may be created anew if only to think through in another way the beauty of true thought as part of its very necessity.
Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* And The Nature Of Tragedy

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Two generations before Aristotle wrote his celebrated treatise on what the nature of tragic mimesis (or imitation) is, the comic poet Aristophanes had written two plays about the subject, *Thesmophoriazusae* and the more celebrated *Frogs*. The first play has the poet Euripides as its hero, and the second the god Dionysus. This god is the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, and at a festival in his honour, dramas both tragic and comic were presented at Athens. Through these festivals, the citizens of Athens saw the presentation of two different forms of the divine human relationship, each mediated by the characters’ participation in the life of the *polis*. In tragedy, human life is seen as dependent on the life of the gods, while in Comedy, man makes the life of the gods his own. With one exception, *Persae* of Aeschylus, all the extant tragedies are set in the mythic realm, and all the comedies of Aristophanes involve an element drawn from contemporary Athenian life.

The tragedies of Euripides are closer to comedy than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the plays of these latter two, the connection between the action on the stage and spectator is left to the spectator. Euripides, by presenting characters who are like contemporaries, draws closer to comedy. As well, the gods in his plays often directly address the audience and thus make the audience part of the action. These tendencies are completed in Aristophanes. His characters are all drawn from contemporary life, and they, together with the chorus, often address the audience directly.

In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes, by examining the relation of Euripides and his plays to the contemporary world of Athens, is examining nothing else than the elements of Comedy itself. In this play Aristophanes shows the education both of the female sex and the tragic poet Euripides who has angered them. The women can no longer practice their favorite vices, because the dramatist has depicted them on the stage not as heroines but as scoundrels: this has alerted their husbands, who have begun to oppress them. The women thus turn their festival, the Thesmophoria\(^1\), into a women’s caucus. Instead of

\(^1\) The Thesmophoria was a women’s festival held in the Fall which solemnly marked the descent of Persephone into Hades, Demeter’s mourning for her, and finally the return of Persephone. While in one sense it is a fertility festival, it assumes the conditions of a society that has a settled agricultural life. As B. B. Rogers notes in *The Thesmophoriazusae of Aristophanes* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), pp. x, xi, the festival celebrates Demeter and Persephone as the givers of Home. Certainly the whole structure of the
celebrating the Thesmophoroi, Persephone and Demeter, who have given marriage and family life to humanity, they plot to kill Euripides, so that they might be restored to their illicit pleasures. Instead of celebrating marriage, the women wish to enjoy various pleasures that undermine marriage. The result of the dispute is the total correction of both parties to it. As the women are led to return to the true celebration of the Thesmophoria, Euripides turns to the depiction of women as heroines whom men will heroically defend and marry. The play ends with Euripides agreeing in future to depict women heroically, acknowledging the difference between the heroic union of man and woman and a purely sensual connection. Thus the gifts of the Thesmophoroi are made known to humanity both through the religious rituals of the Thesmophoria and the dramatic action of the tragic festival. To everyday consciousness, the festival of the Thesmophoria and the festival of Dionysus, of which Tragedy is a part, are two discrete events. Because Comedy can present any aspect of contemporary life it finds significant, it is able to consider both in one dramatic action.

The great importance of the Thesmophoriazusae of Aristophanes in the development of his poetical theology lies in its presentation of the Thesmophoroi as that reality which humanity must imitate to be free. In every play of Aristophanes, a typical Athenian makes the life of an institution or god of the City his own, thereby giving it actuality. The particular form in which human individuality is formed by [its] making actual the essential realm differentiates one drama of the poet from another. The first five plays assume the sovereignty of the Olympian religion and the institutions to which it gives life; in them, the hero experiences institutions or aspects of city life that fall short of describing its entire life. In the sixth play, Birds, a representative Athenian makes actual the whole of the City's life, including its religion, and thereby not only equals but surpasses Zeus, the chief god of the City. With Zeus "overthrown" the poet describes the relation of the hero to the totality of the life of the City in a variety of forms. In Thesmophoriazusae, Lysistrata, and Frogs, he looks to other deities, respectively the Thesmophoroi, Athena and Dionysus, as that from which humanity derives its individuality. In Ecclesiazusae, he finds it in the objective institutions of Family and State, while in the last play Plutus, he devises a god who has no other reality than to bring men to acquire the range of human goods, from wealth to virtue.

Thesmophoriazusae was produced in 411 B.C, the same year as Lysistrata, several years after Birds. While Lysistrata assumes the displacement of Zeus accomplished in Birds, it looks to his daughter, Athena, as the centre of human life, and not a reality play assumes that the goddesses are being celebrated as presiding deities of marriage. The women’s feeling of oppression by their husbands and their conversion of the Thesmophoria into a means of establishing what they take to be female freedom can have no meaning except as a revolt against the established institution of marriage.

2 Acharnians, Clouds, Knights, Peace, Wasps.

Dikaiopolis struggles to establish a pan-Hellenic peace in Acharnians. In Clouds, Strepsiades learns that his well-being depends not on self-serving sophistry but on the Olympian gods. Knights shows a vulgar sausage-seller able to restore the Demus, or people of Athens, to a healthy political order. In Peace, a farmer finds that peace among the Greeks is ultimately a gift of the gods, and in Wasps, a young man learns that he cannot keep his father (who represents the generation that fought at Marathon against the Persians) away from the political and festal life of the City.
outside the Olympian gods. Thus after the women have restored order in both the familial and political realms they then praise Athena, the patron goddess of the City in its actual life. The poet's search for the essential elements of the City takes a more radical turn in *Thesmophoriazusae*, where the poet considers the divine human relation present in a religious festival. The festival draws together the gods as the causes of marriage, and the humans who celebrate that gift. Thus the comic poet has before him ready made as it were, the materials for a comedy, a certain unity of the divine life with the actual life of the spectators. In every comedy, the action begins with some aspect of life in Athens that is absolutely contemporary and which brings affliction of one kind or another to the hero. This latter can overcome the affliction only by finding his well being in relation to the life of the State, and in most plays, also to the gods who preside over that life.

Briefly put, the action of the play is as follows. Euripides has learned of the women's intent to plot his murder at their Thesmophoria; they are furious that his exposure of their vices in his dramas has led to their husbands' close supervision of them. The poet persuades his kinsman, Mnesilochus, to infiltrate the festival, dressed as a woman, in order to plead his cause. The women, alerted to the presence of an intruder, now devote their efforts to punishing him, rather than plotting the death of Euripides. Euripides tries to save his kinsman by "applying" various rescue scenes from his plays to the action. In these Euripides enacts the role of a hero who seeks to save an endangered woman, and neither Euripides nor Mnesilochus seems to have the slightest sense of the incongruities involved. The poet imagines that he can enact any part that he has written whenever he wants. Mnesilochus thinks that his temporary transvestitism entitles him to be a heroine in a drama. One remarkable thing has resulted from this attempt, however: we see that some of Euripides’s plays treat women heroically and not as vulgarians. The tragic heroes, however, cannot trick either the women or the Scythian policeman sent to guard Mnesilochus. These latter have one fact before them: Mnesilochus is a criminal who has invaded a women’s only festival. There is no reason for them to think that they have been transported to the theatre of Dionysus, to become spectators at a play. The women, now celebrating the festival of their goddesses, agree to release Mnesilochus, if Euripides will depict women as heroines on the stage. He must still outwit the Scythian, and dressed as a procuress, he lures him with the promise of the enjoyment of a strumpet. The play ends as Euripides experiences the difference between what kind of mimesis belongs to the theatre and what to everyday life.

No critic has clearly seen the human-divine relation that animates the plot. However, taken together, the views of certain noted critics have within them the major elements of the drama. K. Dover does not seem to think that the play has a plot: “It is not difficult to say what the play is about: major parodies of Helen, Andromeda (both of which were first performed in the previous year) and at least one play of Agathon, plus minor parodies of some other Euripidean plays and parody of the preceedings of the assembly, are combined with slapstick, vulgar buffoonery, jokes about adultery and the ways of women, and a foreign policeman’s pidgin Greek, to present something for all tastes, and
the happy ending (happy for everyone except the policeman) leaves us with nothing difficult to think about.”

C. Whitman thinks that the drama does have a plot and emphasizes the importance of Euripides as the comic hero. Nevertheless he is in substantial agreement with Dover in thinking the play not only a parody of Euripides’s plays but also a satire of the poet himself⁴. In fact, although many verses from the plays of Euripides are quoted verbatim, there is not one word of parody in them of Euripides’s plays. It is his attempt to apply scenes from his plays to everyday life that is shown to be ridiculous, not the plays themselves. The mere repetition of an author’s words does not constitute parody: they must in some obvious sense be held up to ridicule. *Mad Magazine* and the celebrated Alfred E. Newman seem to recognize this more clearly than Dover and Whitman.

Whitman thinks that the play is also a satire of Euripides himself. While the poet’s initial confusion of tragedy and everyday life is indeed ridiculous, he eventually corrects his misconception, and a man capable of education is not simply an object of satire. For Whitman, however, this correction proves rather that Euripides is not a proper comic hero. A true hero, for him, is triumphant in the assertion of his private subjectivity both in thought and action. This dogmatic assertion, however, does not accord with the nature of the correction. If the correction of Euripides indeed makes his presentation of men and women more a presence of the gods, this does not limit his heroism.

K. Reckford has a real insight into the importance of the gods in the play. Although he does not treat their relation to the particulars of the plot extensively, he does know that the gods and the festal independence that they give underlie the whole drama⁶. In sum, then, the main elements of the play, the mocking of Euripides, the centrality of the hero and gods, have all appeared, although dividedly, amongst the views of the critics. This article will attempt to draw them together.

The action begins with a mysterious Euripides leading his kinsman Mnesilochus on a seeming wild goose chase. The latter tries to learn where they are going, but the poet answers cryptically that he must neither hear what he will soon see or see what he will soon hear. Euripides speaks here as a tragic poet, who reserves to himself the knowledge of the drama that is about to be played before his kinsman. A drama has both an audible and a visible element, and they originate in the mind of the poet. But Euripides’s cryptic remark indicates that he has no sense of the incongruity of transferring directly what belongs to the theatre to the real world. Eventually they come to the house of his fellow tragic poet, Agathon. Euripides explains that he has learned that the women, keeping their festival of Thesmophoria, plan to use this as an occasion to plot his murder. He has depicted women in his dramas as drunkards, household thieves, and adulterers, and as a

consequence their husbands have begun to keep a close watch on them. The women, for their part, hope that by ridding themselves of the poet, they can enjoy their vices with impunity. Euripides hopes that Agathon will address the women who are keeping the Thesmophoria on his behalf and save him from their wrath.

Euripides sees in the Thesmophoria and the women in the Euripidean tragedies presented at the festival of Dionysus the source of their current troubles. The women imagine that they can be free of the oppressive oversight of their husbands if they can change the image of themselves presented on the stage. Euripides for his part must somehow change the course of the Thesmophoria that will soon become a radical women’s caucus if he is to escape death. To judge from their plans, neither Euripides nor the women seem to feel any inhibition about meddling in a festival that has heretofore not been within their particular province.

It seems natural that Euripides should have chosen Agathon as the person appropriate to infiltrate the Thesmophoria on his behalf. He has certain similarities to women already. As a pathic, he is accustomed to the embraces of men. And as a poet, he follows a peculiar practice he dresses like a woman before writing verses for the female sex. Nevertheless Agathon refuses to masquerade as a woman at the Thesmophoria. His fear of the women takes precedence for him over any sympathy that his androgyny and professional brotherhood might incline him to. Mnesilochus, a kinsman by marriage, volunteers to help Euripides at this point, and he submits to the arts of Euripides. So, depilitated and attired as a woman, he is prepared to attend the Thesmophoria. The poet swears to help him if he should fall into any difficulty.

Euripides here relies both on a debased form of the mimetic art of Tragedy and a family tie arising from marriage. He hopes to use both these to control the festival that celebrates the divine origin of marriage. To transform the appearance of a man so that he looks like a woman has no place in the mimesis appropriate to Tragedy. Male actors certainly wore costumes that indicated women, but the real mimesis was of a woman’s actions and speech. Nevertheless, Euripides has every confidence that he can transfer his art out of the theatre to everyday life, with apparently no consciousness of the incongruities involved.

In a parallel incongruity, the women for their part also wish to extend the range of their festival, even to the elimination of a poet whose plays inspire their husbands to rein in their vices. With both the poet and women committed to their own outsized ambitions and follies, the comic poet begins his depiction of the clash between the decadent and the decadent.

Mnesilochus arrives at the festival. The women are indignant at Euripides for exposing their vices, and they especially regret that, after seeing his plays, their husbands have become more vigilant in preventing their pursuit of their vices; no one denies that Euripides has correctly exposed their vices. One speaker suggests that only Euripides' death will restore them to their former unfettered enjoyment.
Mnesilochus then tries to persuade the women that Euripides has been only somewhat their enemy. He has not, says Mnesilochus, exposed all their vices; he lists a number of infamous practices that Euripides has not shown on the stage. This does not appease the women, and in their anger, and in the failure of Mnesilochus, one sees the limits of that persuasion for which Euripides was so famous, or perhaps notorious. When Euripides is writing a tragic drama, it is his own logos that animates all the characters, their speeches and the effects of their speeches. Here outside the self contained world of the drama, Mnesilochus must devise his own speeches and must confront people whose thoughts and desires arise entirely from their own minds. What Mnesilochus does is for the benefit of Euripides but it does not fall within the thought of Euripides.

At this point, Cleisthenes, a well known pathic and, by his own account, a devoted friend of women, arrives to announce that Euripides has sent a man into their meeting. A brief physical investigation shows that Mnesilochus, despite his efforts to conceal it, has a penis and is thus the intruder. The women tie him up, awaiting the arrival of a magistrate to determine his punishment. As is evident, the mimetic arts cannot undo what nature has done. The real measure is whether he is a married woman or not: the women have used a vulgar measure to discover the illegality of Mnesilochus’s presence.

With this, the first division of the action ends. Neither Euripides nor the women have gained that which they consciously aimed at. The latter had hoped to convert their festival into a means of freeing themselves from the restraint of Euripides. They are now preoccupied with the sexual bona fides of those present. Their original concern with the natural benefits of being wives has degenerated into an obsession with the physical side of their persons.

Euripides for his part had hoped to adapt the art of tragic mimesis to save himself from the schemes of the women. He has tried to use his tragedian's art to control the women's festival. This art has proven, first, weaker than the anger of the women and finally weaker than nature. No art has been able to obscure Mnesilochus' masculine nature; Euripides has not been able to triumph by persuading the women that he uses his art rightly. While the women are no longer debating about how best to kill him, they have in their power a kinsman he has pledged to save from any danger.

For both Euripides and the women, the change from their original intention will compel them to a new relation to the festivals. The women find themselves now enforcing an actual rule of their Thesmophoria by seeking to have Mnesilochus punished. They are no longer trying to dictate the content of tragedy by ridding themselves of a poet unfavorable to their interests.

Euripides will soon have to confront the two festivals, the tragic festival and the Thesmophoria, more in accord with their original content. He will no longer oppose women who are devoting themselves to the celebration of their festival, now not scheming to enjoy their vulgar ends. When soon he will try to use his tragic art for ends outside the drama, he will pursue an ethical end, the rescue of his kinsman.
In the parabasis, the women appeal to the audience to give up their misogyny and thus show that they have moved beyond the petty criminality that had inspired Euripides's attacks in the first instance. First the women indicate how very contradictory men are in their attitude to women. Although they denigrate women as a plague, they constantly pursue them. Second, the women argue that a matron's status in the State should depend on the good or evil that her son does to the State. This latter development shows that the women have changed from their earlier desire to kill Euripides in order to secure their natural good, to declaring civic virtue the true measure of their lives. The parabasis marks, then, a true turning point; just as Euripides must acknowledge the female sex as more than a gang of anarchists, so the women acknowledge men as capable of virtue in the State.

In the remainder of the play, Euripides learns both to depict women heroically in his dramas and to properly distinguish this realm of the dramatic festival from the realm of the everyday. His education here results from his inability to free his kinsman by 'applying' two rescue scenes from his plays to his predicament. The poet appears in both as a hero who will save a heroine enacted by Mnesilochus. But he is unable to intrude his plays into the realm of the Thesmophoria. The women, intent now on celebrating their festival, simply regard Mnesilochus as a criminal whom the State will punish. Euripides thus is compelled to agree to treat all women heroically in his dramas in exchange for the release of his kinsman. The women, however, leave it to the poet to free his kinsman from his Scythian guard.

After the parabasis, Euripides tries to save Mnesilochus by using various scenes from his plays. First, he undertakes the role of Menelaos with his kinsman playing Helen, in Egypt. Second, he plays Perseus, and Mnesilochus Andromeda. These scenes show Euripides’s developing understanding of the relation between Tragedy and life in the every day world. In them Euripides has changed considerably from his representation at the beginning of the play. Then he made every day women the model for his dramas. Now he makes heroic women and the men moved by them the models for his own action to save his kinsman. However, he has not yet clearly distinguished between the realms of drama and everyday life. This leads him to act as if the women celebrating the Thesmophoria are the enemies of his heroines; to the contrary, they have given up their earlier activity as a women’s caucus, to celebrate Demeter and Persephone. In doing so they declare the divine ground of Euripides’s attempt at freeing his kinsman.

The parallel development of Euripides and the women has the following form. First Euripides attempts as Menelaos to save his wife Helen, and this is interrupted by the arrival of the Scythian policeman who ties Mnesilochus to a plank. Then Euripides, impersonating the unmarried Perseus, is moved by the suffering of Andromeda/Mnesilochus, thereby showing the general capacity of female virtue to draw male heroism to it.

Therefore, when Euripides's Perseus cannot save Mnesilochus's Andromeda, the poet must acknowledge the failure of this means of saving his kinsman from the women. He must treat with them as man to women, as poet to Thesmophiazusae. He will treat
all women heroically in his plays, and they will not prosecute his kinsman. The women agree to this, but the eluding of the Scythian policeman they leave to Euripides. To do this, Euripides dresses as a procuress, in order to lure the Scythian away with the promised enjoyment of a strumpet. With this distinction between the mimesis proper to tragedy and that proper to a ruse, the play ends.

In this agreement, Euripides gives reality to the Thesmophoroi. They have given the marital tie to mortals, but it rests with the latter to make this gift actual. Through their festival the women have celebrated the goddesses and thus made known their gift. In Tragedy, by depicting women heroically, Euripides will show women who through their lives give life to this gift. Moreover, because he has attained theoretical clarity about the nature of women and the family, he can now succeed in the realm of practical activity and free his kinsman. When Euripides dresses up as a procuress, he is not here using a scene from one of his own plays. He does not, moreover, propose to overcome the Scythian with drama, but with what appeals to his barbarian nature, a strumpet. The Scythian gladly deserts his appointed post to pursue her, and the women help Euripides by misleading the guard about where the strumpet has gone.

Thus the drama ends with both Euripides and the women proclaiming the Thesmophoroi. The women do so more directly by singing hymns of praise. The poet does so through the dramas he has enacted and those that he promised to enact. He has celebrated marriage by showing the heroism that a woman can inspire in a man. His ruse with the Scythian shows that he knows the difference between a conjugal relation and a purely sensual one. He has moreover promised to depict women heroically in future. Thus although the poet and the women proclaim a divine gift in their festivals, their human activity is essential to that proclamation. Their deviation from their respective festivals and their return to them indicates that in human hands and not divine lies the manifestation of the divine gift. Thus even in festivals that declare a divine human relation, human activity supplies the truly subjective element.

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Toward A Technology That Allows The Beautiful To Occur

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The ecological problem is an aesthetic crisis. The world is becoming increasingly less beautiful because of technology. Leavening Heidegger with a measure of largely forgotten medieval aesthetics, I maintain that we have forgotten the ontological relevance of the beautiful, and the aesthetic relevance of the ontological. We have allowed our technology to develop without consideration for aesthetic effect. I offer three criteria for a technology that allows the beautiful to occur: fittingness, transparency, and self-containment.¹

1. Heidegger’s Critique Of Technology

Let me begin with Heidegger’s thesis: by coercing beings into perpetual presence, technology “sets” [gestellt] up the world as a “a standing reserve” [Bestand] of resources always available for human use.² Every technological device is a cause that is efficacious to the degree that it brings some natural phenomena into limited and strictly controlled actuality. Technology coerces beings, which are governed by a hidden law of emergence and withdrawal, into perpetual presence. Physis, nature, is the pre-Socratic figure for being, the emergence and withdrawal of things from a hidden source. “For [the Greeks] being [physis] is what flourishes on its own, in no way compelled, what rises and comes forward, and what goes back into itself and passes away. It is the rule that rises and resides in itself.”³ To coerce beings into perpetual presence is to abstract them from physis, to appropriate their coming to be for our own purposes.

At the end of “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger leaves us with the cryptic suggestion that a “saving power” lies concealed in this “dangerous” moment in the destiny of the West. We are at a stage in the history of being where the human being

¹ Readers of Scholastic aesthetics will recognize here modification of Aquinas’s three attributes of beauty: consonantia, claritas, and integritas. Aquinas drew on Aristotle’s Metaphysics 13, 1078 b. Aristotle speaks of order, symmetry, and definiteness.
no longer fully encounters itself because everywhere it finds only itself. “Man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. . . . In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today only encounter himself, i.e., his essence.” The machine we have built for ourselves conceals from us our own essence, for it conceals the gratuity of being. The saving power hinges on the apotheosis of the hubris of contemporary technology in this moment of our history, for the questionability of the divorce of the technological and the aesthetic, the abstraction upon which our technology is founded, only now comes to the fore. It is significant that we are at last beginning to recognize that our technological planet is less beautiful than it once was.

Heidegger understands techne as a mode of poiesis, interpreting poiesis as passing from the non-present into presence. He translates Plato, Symposium, 205b as: “Every occasion for whatever passes beyond the non-present and goes forward into presencing is poiesis, bringing forth [Her-vor-bringen].” All emergence into presence is poiesis. Techne, the manufacturing of artifacts, is as much a kind of poiesis as physis. Coming to be is a poetic event. Heidegger speaks of beauty as the appearance of coming to be. “The word “beautiful” [schön] means appearing in the radiance of such coming to the fore [Erscheinen im Schein solchen Vorscheins].” Techne, like artistic creation, brings something into presence. As such it has an essential relationship to physis. To create art is to parallel physis and effect an increase in being. Technology is also concerned with bringing into being, but in a different way.

Ancient technology hearkened to the way beings emerge and withdraw of their own accord; it paid heed to physis. The farmer can grow crops because he knows the ways of things that grow. He is not the sufficient cause of their growth; rather he holds in unconcealment “their own rule of self-emergence.” Ancient techne is “the disclosing of beings as such, in the manner of a knowing guidance of bringing-forth.” It “is no kind of an attack: it lets what is already coming to presence arrive.” The farmer’s work fits into the natural rhythm governing the emergence and withdrawal of beings; it is not a coercion of physis but a dialogical response to it. As such it has an aesthetic dimension. For it is the nature of the artwork to illuminate and bring into view that hidden ground which makes all coming to be possible: the earth. “In setting up a world, the [art] work sets forth the earth. This setting forth must be thought here in the strict sense of the word. The work moves the earth itself into the open region of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be earth.” The earth is the dark self-withholding ground of physis,

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4 Heidegger, “Technology,” 308
5 Ibid., 293.
6 Heidegger, Nietzsche 1, 110.
8 Heidegger, Nietzsche 1, 82
“the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing.”\textsuperscript{10} It is that which never fully shows itself, but makes possible all other self-showing, “that which comes forth and shelters.”\textsuperscript{11} It resists ever[y] effort to coerce it into presence, but shows itself as the self-withholding ground only insofar as it is left alone. The proper kind of \textit{techne} participates in the emergence and withdrawal of beings, serves the unconcealment of beings, and also in its own way sets forth the earth. This natural self-disclosure, “light . . . shining to and into the work”, Heidegger calls “the beautiful.”\textsuperscript{12}

Modern technology, by contrast, is a “challenging forth” of beings, a coercion that overrides \textit{physis}, a declaration of war on the self-withholding earth.\textsuperscript{13} We expedite the emergence of things, unlocking and exposing their power, in order to maximize yield, minimize expense, and ultimately ameliorate human living. Modern technology systematically secures nature as a constantly available resource by “enframing” being, limiting it to that which is calculable and thus controllable.\textsuperscript{14} By \textit{challenging} beings into presence, modern technology circumvents \textit{physis}. Our contemporary urban landscape shows how technology has purchased efficiency at the price of diversity. Aquinas frequently argues that a certain curious feature of the real is justified because it is fitting that as many varieties of beings exist as possible. Modern technology moves in the opposite direction: standardization, repetition of pattern, homogenization, chains of gray cities of rectangular blocks, ringed by industrial ‘parks,’ and connected to one another by paved circuits of rushing traffic. This is an architecture modeled on the machine: modular, systematic, endlessly repeatable.

2. Modernism And The Aesthetics Of The Machine

Early modernist architects openly celebrated the pure functionalism of machines. Modernism was a call to architectural authenticity. The modernists repudiated neo-Classical, neo-Romanesque, and neo-Gothic architecture as a facade, modern structures decorated with features from another age. The machine excludes such aesthetic excess. With the fervor of revolutionaries, they demanded that modern buildings brazenly exhibit the new structures made possible by concrete, glass, and steel.\textsuperscript{15} The undisguised functionalism of steamships, airplanes, and automobiles exemplified what a modern structure ought to look like. In 1914, Italian futurist Marinetti raved, “We declare that the world’s splendor has been enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed. A racing motor car, its frame adorned with great pipes, like snakes with explosive breath ... a roaring

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10} Ibid., 172.
\bibitem{11} Ibid., 171.
\bibitem{12} Ibid., 178.
\bibitem{13} Heidegger, “Technology,” 296.
\bibitem{14} Ibid., 301.
\end{thebibliography}
In 1923 Walter Gropius, director of Bauhaus, envisioned “an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast motor cars, an architecture whose function is clearly recognizable in relation to its form.” This revolution was not restricted to office buildings and airports, it embraced that most intimate of built forms: the house. Le Corbusier’s writes, “We must create the mass-production spirit, the spirit of constructing mass-production houses. If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the ‘house machine.”

The revolution has succeeded. We are surrounded by machine-like architecture, suburbs of rows of identical houses, strip malls, inner cities of concrete canyons. At the moment I live in a two hundred year old country inn that has been converted into an apartment building. It is a gracious four-story brick building built on the banks of a creek, with a peaked roof, dormer windows and a broad set of stairs leading to the second floor. It must have been lovely in its day, a small manor nestled into the landscape, overlooking a creek and surrounding farms and hills. In the past century an industrial park has developed around the house. The little inn stands imprisoned by parking lots, warehouses and factories. Across the street is a milk processing plant: a massive windowless grey concrete box with a complex appendage of towering steal cylinders, pipes, and loading bays, interrupting from its rear. The sound of milk production fills the neighborhood with a background din of white noise. This building shows nothing but itself. It is not only devoid of aesthetic sense, it is unignorable.

Modernism was notoriously indifferent to place. Le Corbusier envisioned cities of high rise apartment buildings as ‘towers in a park,’ the vertical space made accessible for habitation liberating horizontal space for trees and grass. The task was not to built into what was already there, but to remove everything and start from a level plane. To design whole communities in one view that could be installed anywhere entailed erasing pre-existing patterns of dwelling, inscribed into a landscape by centuries of human living. Modern architecture is “the system” that “goes anywhere and everywhere, but genuinely fits nowhere.”

The failure of modernism has led many of us to question whether in fact machines make good living spaces. On the architect’s drafting table, Brasilia, the modernist capital of Brazil, doubtlessly looked impressive. In actuality it has proven nearly uninhabitable. The first city designed on modernist principles from a tabula rasa, a utopia designed free of the constraints of adapting to previously built structures, Brasilia is a colossal failure.

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The designers forgot to factor in the human element. The residents spontaneously rejected the abstract shapes as a suitable place to dwell and returned to more organic, familiar forms: the tin roof shacks and crowded lanes of nearby slums. “The designs are monumental and picturesque ... cold, hard shapes of the future. Brasilia’s problem is that these buildings are monuments, isolated from each other by a great deal of empty space, while the real life of the city is relegated to acres of shanty towns only a few kilometers away.”

Phenomenologist Erazim Kohak traces twentieth century existential malaise to the homelessness of the human being consigned to live in a machine: “The world of artifacts and constructs with which we have surrounded ourselves knows neither a law nor a rhythm: in its context even resting and rising come to seem arbitrary. We ourselves have constructed that world for our dwelling place, replacing rude nature with the artifacts of techne, yet increasingly we confess ourselves bewildered strangers within it, ‘alienated,’ ‘contingently thrown’ into its anonymous machinery, and tempted to abolish the conflict between our meaningful humanity and our mechanical life-world by convincing ourselves, with Descartes, that we, too, are but machines.

3. Retrieving An Ontological Aesthetics

In subjectivist aesthetics, the beautiful is held to be not a manifestation of being, but a product of reason. Beauty is conceived in the human mind and imposed upon nature. The cultivated imagination transforms the given. For an ontological aesthetics, the reverse is the case. The given transforms the imagination. Hans-Georg Gadamer comments that beautiful things act on us, not the other way around. Art is not an imitation of reality, nor is it the expression of the rare perceptions of the genius. Art is reality come to a new manifestation of itself. Being is not ‘pictured’ or ‘expressed’ in art; it is brought to presence. The work of art is a “true increase of being.” As Heidegger puts it, art is “a becoming and happening of truth.” “Truth is the unconcealment of beings as beings. Truth is the truth of Being. Beauty does not occur apart from this truth. When truth sets itself into the work, it appears. Appearance – as this being of truth in the work and as work – is beauty. Thus the beautiful belongs to truth’s proprietary event. It does not exist merely relative to pleasure and purely as its object. The beautiful does lie in form, but only because the forma once took its light from Being as the beingness of beings.”

The Heideggerian ontological aesthetic echos a medieval thesis: the transcendental

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23 Ibid., 156.
The notion of beauty as a transcendental originates with the thirteenth century commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius, the fifth century Greek author of *De divinis nominibus*, a work which describes creation as an irradiation of beauty, an emanation of the Creator, who is Beauty itself. The anonymous author of *De divinis nominibus* writes: “But the Superessential Beautiful is called ‘Beauty’ because of that quality which It imparts to all things severally according to their nature, and because It is the Cause of the harmony and splendor in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light, the beautifying communications of its originating ray; and because It summons all things to fare unto Itself (from whence It hath the name of ‘Fairness’), and because It draws all things together in a state of mutual interpenetration.” The Scholastic commentators on Pseudo-Dionysius defined beauty as one of the four transcendental attributes of being. The other three are goodness, unity, and truth. Because the transcendentals are the presupposition of whatever can be a subject or a predicate of a subject, that is, because they are trans-categorial, they are convertible. Wherever there is being, there too is beauty, goodness, unity, and truth. The transcendentals are ontologically the same, but their sameness is not an identity without difference. They differ intentionally, according to their different ‘ratios,’ for each articulates a different mode of intentionality. A thing can be intended as an object of appetite, something desired, and its being will appear as good. This emphasis on appearance, on the way the thing shows itself, is not the ‘mere appearance’ of subjectivist aesthetics. The thing can only appear good or beautiful because it really is so. The same thing that appears as good to the appetite can be intended as something to be contemplatively enjoyed, something which pleases the cognitive faculty. In this respect it appears as beautiful. The beauty disclosed to the cognitive faculty that has eyes to see is not a projection of the subject; rather it is the radiance of the thing, the shining of its form. Aquinas writes, “Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind – because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty. Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause.”

Beauty is a formal cause, not a final cause – that is, where the thing as good draws us towards it as that for the sake of which I do whatever it is I do, the term of a desire, the beautiful does not drive us to act, to do or to make, it does not excite the appetites, but pleases us by its form. It is not the term of a desire but the shining of the form on the

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28 Aquinas, *Summa theologicae*, 1a, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1.
desire-free intellect. The beautiful thing quiets the appetites and becalms desire. “The beautiful is that which calms the desire by being seen or known.”29 My appetite finds its rest in the beautiful thing. Conversely the beautiful only shines on me when I make no claim on it.

As a formal distinction within being, an intentional structure, beauty is something ‘in the soul’ -- the pleasure caused by the radiance of form -- and yet, for all that, it remains ontological. It is the harmony of parts to whole and whole to parts within a being, ‘the sounding together’ of parts ordered to a common end (consonantia); the shining of intelligible structure in the thing (claritas); and the unity of the thing with itself (integritas). The beautiful is neither subjective nor objective. It is appearance of being – the illumination of being in the structure showing itself in the artwork, the landscape, the built form. But the appearance is impossible without us. We are the theatre within which the showing occurs. The thing is beautiful, but the appearance of the beautiful is reserved for us alone. Beauty is a relationship of thing with intellect, and cannot be conceived apart from this relationship.

Recognizing the tension between Heidegger’s neo-Pagan aim to replace Aquinas’s actus purus with the pre-Socratic physis as the original meaning of being, we can nonetheless draw the following connections between Heidegger’s phenomenology of beauty and Aquinas’s. First, beauty is neither subjective (in the soul alone) nor objective (independent of the soul). Beauty is precisely the way the soul [Dasein] is privileged to experience being. Second, the coming to be of things is beautiful, for if for Aquinas all that exists is beautiful, for Heidegger the unconcealment of beings is beautiful. Third, the coercion of things into unnatural perpetual presence risks annulling the appearance of the beautiful because it erases the horizon of absence (for Aquinas, potency) against which the natural coming to be of anything is profiled. We are no longer witnesses to the happening of being; we are the agents who forbid beings to be the way they are. There is little aesthetic pleasure to be had in the coming to be of the technically manipulated form for there is no coming to be here, but only a coercion to be.

4. Towards A New Way Of Being Technical

Could we not argue that modern technology has its own beauty? It is, after all, something that is in a certain way. This is a difficult question. Yes, the efficiency of technology is in a way beautiful, but its beauty is mitigated to the degree that it detracts from physis. It purchases its unconcealment at the expense of the whole. By expediting the processes of emergence into being, it diminishes the whole. The ecological question, “Is our technology appropriate?” conceals a deeper question, “Does our technology let nature show itself?” Only a being that lets be is sustainable. A technology that lets be preserves and shelters rather than processes and consumes. To be technical in a beautiful

29 Ibid., 1a., q. 27, a. 1, ad. 3.
way means allowing aesthetic criteria to balance utility and efficiency in the design and construction of technology. Modifying and applying the medieval tripartite structure of beauty, I suggest that a technology that allows the beautiful to occur is characterized by *fittingness, transparency, and self-containment*. It is a technology that fits in: it does not diminish but improves its setting, raising it up into a higher unity. It is a transparent technology: it freely discloses its own limits and thereby discloses a wholeness that transcends it. It is self-contained, limiting itself in order to allow for the occurrence of that which makes it possible.

**a. Fittingness.**

Pythagoras was the first to explore the relationship of beauty to harmony. All rational numbers are a ratio, but some ratios are more perfect than others. When two equally taut strings with a ratio of relative lengths expressible in whole numbers are plucked, they harmonize. One can hear the harmony of 2 to 1 (the octave), or 3 to 2 (the fifth), or 4 to 3 (the fourth).\(^\text{30}\) For the Pythagorean the beautiful is perfect ratio, ideal proportion. Hence according to Plato (a disciple of Pythagoras), the artist must know the nature of measure [metron].\(^\text{31}\) From this Pythagorean background emerges the idea that a thing is beautiful because of the fit of its parts. Beautiful things manifest proportion. James Joyce speaks of “the rhythm of beauty;” “the first formal aesthetic relation of part to part in any aesthetic whole or of an aesthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the aesthetic whole of which it is a part.”\(^\text{32}\)

Fittingness is more than the relationship of parts to whole within the thing. For the thing never stands alone. In the twelfth century Robert Grosseteste writes: “Beauty is a concordance and fittingness of a thing to itself and of all its individual parts to themselves and to each other and to the whole, *and of the whole to all things* [italics mine].”\(^\text{33}\) In order for the beautiful to occur the thing must fit with other things. The beautiful structure improves its surroundings. It does not eclipse, but gathers other beings into the light of its shining. Frank Lloyd Wright’s “organic architecture” holds that architecture is beautiful only when the form fits the setting. Architects must carefully choose their site “to make the landscape more beautiful than before that building was built.”\(^\text{34}\) The shape of the building, the materials used, the situation of the structure in relation to other features, are to be determined with a view to fittingness. Wright says, “My prescription for a modern house: first, a good site. Pick one that has features making for character ... Then build your house so that you may still look from where you stood upon all that charmed you and lose nothing of what you saw before the house was built, but see more.”\(^\text{35}\) The house improves the site as the well chosen piece of art improves the room in


\(^{31}\) Plato, *Philebus* 64e.


\(^{35}\) Wright quoted in *Wright in the Realm of Ideas*, 44.
which it is placed.

Built things can detract from their setting; they can have the opposite effect as the work of art and effect a diminishment of being. Technology that imposes structure in indifference to setting commits this aesthetic crime. The violation is so commonplace that examples of it are banal: Hydroelectric towers plowing through forests, billboards concealing farmland, skyscrapers walling off a lakeshore, freeways desecrating meadows. Is there no other way for us to accomplish certain tasks than by doing violence to that which we are called to shelter?

Phenomenological Architect Robert Mugerauer asks whether technology “can be encountered in a deeper, more originary manner” by being more “fittingly placed” in the natural and human environment.36 In Mugerauer’s language a fitting technology “camouflages” itself, “keeps its place” rather than “displacing us.”37 Camouflage does not originally signify the counterfeit, but that which fits into an environment so well that it cannot be distinguished from that environment. “Something can hide or counterfeit only because it first of all fits in.”38 Rather than modular, homogenous and replaceable, such a technology would be organic, heterogeneous, and local.39 To develop a fitting technology requires something which at present is not expected of engineers, careful attention to the structure of our lived world, that is, aesthetic sensitivity.

b. Transparency

To be beautiful in a technical way is to let nature show itself through technology, nature (physis), not the isolated thing, but the whole from whence it comes and to which it must return. Some interpretations of claritas overemphasize form at the expense of that which makes it possible. Form emerges from matter, the structured from the indeterminate, the luminous from the dark. If with Heidegger we hold the beautiful to be the emergence of being -- not just the being that has emerged, but the very movement of coming to be -- then darkness is essential to it. A beautiful technology will let the dark in, as a zen garden highlights the passing of the seasons. That which obstructs the emergence of form is not the same as that which enables the natural withdrawal of form. Things can only emerge of their own accord if they are also permitted to withdraw of their own accord.

c. Self-containment.

The beautiful does not occur without a moment of restraint. Kant’s famous thesis

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37 Ibid., 132.
38 Ibid., 133.
39 Ibid., 135.
about the beautiful, that it pleases us in a disinterested way, is a modern version of the Scholastic distinction between transcendental goodness and transcendental beauty: the former is intentionally determined by desire, the latter is independent of desire. Detachment is not indifference. As Heidegger puts it, to overcome interest is not to sever relations with the object but to establish an essential relationship to it for the first time, so that the object “comes to the fore as pure object.”

A self-contained technology lets form shine without eclipsing nature. Like the painter who knows when to leave a detail at the level of suggestion, the writer who knows when to leave something unsaid, the architect who resists the inclination to ornamentation, a technology that allows the beautiful to occur holds back and lets be. Heidegger calls this “sparing.” It is in his view the essence of dwelling: “Real sparing is something positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it specifically to its essential being, when we ‘free’ it in the proper sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free space that safeguards each thing in its essence.”

In 1854, Thoreau wrote: “We need the tonic of wilderness . . . At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us, because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.” His voice is no less relevant (and ignored) today than it was when he wrote these words, at the peak of the industrial revolution. In “The Memorial Address,” Heidegger speaks of a detachment which makes use of technology without allowing it to determine human living, a comportment that expresses ‘yes’ and at the same time ‘no,’ a “letting go toward things.” Cultivating such openness promises us “the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way,” to “stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.” Thoreau and Heidegger are saying similar things: If our sprawling cities banish the night sky, and pave over field and forest, if our industry reduces the diversity of life on the planet, if our automobility is incrementally destructive of wild spaces, it is we ourselves who are poorer for it. We deceive ourselves by presuming to be masters of that which makes our living possible.

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40 Heidegger, Nietzsche 1, 110.
41 Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” tr. Albert Hofstadter, in Basic Writings, 327.
44 Ibid., 55.
Paint And Suffering: Series And Community In Francis Bacon's Paintings

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1. Introduction: The Visual Aesthetics Of Bacon

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

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

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

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

2. A Familiar Image Of Bacon: Tracing The Affect

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

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

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1 On the presupposed veracity and iconicity of portraiture, see Brilliant (chs. 1,3) and Lejeune (109-118).
his own point of view. The subtitle also suggests that Bacon’s paintings reveal something true about the people and objects he paints. The belief that his “studies for portraits” are somehow accurate is a presupposition of the film if viewers are to regard the scenes it dramatizes as historically accurate. Bacon is presented under the aegis of his own vision of the world, a vision taken from his paintings. Thus the filmic biography of Francis Bacon is in effect an autobiographical portrait of the artist, recounting events in his life through the supposed perception of the artist and using his art to shed light on the artist’s life and work.

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

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

The title of the film Love is the Devil presents Bacon as a devilish figure whose love is a destructive, corrupting force. Entering into a relationship with Bacon involves entering the tortured, distorted world evoked in his images. In this way, Bacon is presented as somehow evil. As representations of his destructive vision, his paintings are
understood to evince that evil quality. Hence, perception holds ontological primacy in the film because it purports to show how Bacon recreates the world in terms of his own distorted, deformed, and obscure vision of it. The way he sees the world in terms of violent distortions is presented as the way to view his artwork. Otherwise confusing aspects of the artist’s work, such as his use of skewed perspective, his construction of uncanny representational spaces, his inclusion of indexical symbols such as arrows, and his deformations of figures are to be understood in terms of the violence of Bacon’s perception. The basis of this biographical approach is hypothetical: Bacon’s life and vision are considered to be distorted and painful. Francis Bacon’s art is treated as representative of his vision of the world and as directly influenced by what the writer Daniel Farson called Bacon’s “gilded gutter of life”. However, it does open up an approach to understanding what is happening in the images themselves.2

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

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

2 See Farson. The film Love is the Devil is partially based on Farson’s book.
3 See, for instance, van Alphen, Deleuze (1981), Schmied, Gowing and Hunter, and Russell.
4 This is why Kuspit claims they are “hysterical paintings” (1986).
A bar constrains the lower part of the figure’s legs as he sits within the black space of a wooden box-like structure hovering against a dark iron ceiling and a pink floorground. Yet the hovering box also appears to be sliding down both a blue and a yellow rail which extend to the bottom of the canvas. Impossibly, it appears to be simultaneously moving down and hovering in its fixed position. The box also seems to be superimposed over an unseen background, obscuring the horizon line between the pink floor and iron grey space above. Like a mirror, the space of the box projects a space that extends indefinitely within its frame. Not only is the hovering box unlocatable but so is the space within it. The figure is cut off by the lower frame of the box, suggesting his legs continue in a space impossibly larger than the box’s capacity. Furthermore, the space within the box does not exactly correspond to the space the figure occupies, for the bar restraining him within the box is also paradoxically attached to a pole outside it.

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

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

However, this sympathetic identification does not make the viewer any less helpless in understanding or explaining the painful event. As Ernst van Alphen suggests in his critical analysis *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, the conventions of visual representation employed here, such as realistic representation, a perspectival system of representation, and a sympathetic identification with the figure through a shared point of
view, draw the viewer into the image. The viewer is led to identify with the painful and confusing event portrayed by becoming entangled in its diverging representational schemes. Made to identify with the figure’s pain, the viewer remains isolated from the figure who doesn’t even address her gaze. Any attempt visually to synthesize the image into a coherent narrative account is thus continually frustrated by the various ways the viewer is led around the image. As the film suggests, violence and vision are intimately related in Bacon’s paintings.

3. Violence, Suffering And Freedom

My analysis of Francis Bacon’s paintings maintains that they are indeed violent in the ways articulated by the film. They present the viewer with images of unremitting pain and suffering which lead the viewer to identify with them. For this reason, my analysis seriously considers the argument put forward by van Alphen that perception and affectivity are primary to the presentation of violence in Bacon’s paintings because the perceptive activity of the viewer is affected by and implicated in the violence presented in the images. His analysis of the affectivity defining the viewer’s response to Bacon’s images is similar to that offered by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whose work *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* analyzes the sensational affect of Bacon’s images.

Deleuze argues that Bacon’s images present affectivity in terms of the structure of the violently deforming sensation. In different ways, both van Alphen and Deleuze interpret affectivity to be a given feature of existence. Van Alphen argues that affectivity is articulated in Bacon’s images in terms of the affected force of the body’s resistance to representational or discursive systems which limit it in stultifying subject positions. Affectivity is seen as dissolving the constrictions of subjectivity, releasing the figures from the constraints of fixed representations. By contrast, Deleuze argues affectivity is articulated in terms of the structure of violent sensation, which he understands to be the universal structure of the activity of becoming. Deleuze claims that Bacon’s images present an account of the activity of the actualization of all things – whether they be perceiving subjects, animals, or sand dunes -- as a violent and continual process of becoming. Although they offer different and often conflicting interpretations of the violence in Bacon’s images, I take the analyses of van Alphen and Deleuze as my starting point and endorse the view that Bacon’s images are violent.

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

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5 Kuspit sees something over and above physical violence in Bacon’s work, even if he does not see it as anything more than “energy and emotion” (1986:57).
Bacon, violence and suffering have an ethical dimension, and only for that reason are they offensive. The mere play of opposing physical forces is not suffering, because for there to be suffering there must be something over and above physical interaction. The struggle presented in Bacon’s images is not the physical attraction and repulsion of forces, but the opposition between the physical and that which opposes it: the non-physical, the dimension of freedom that transcends the physical. Violence and suffering in the proper meaning of those terms are nothing other than the struggle of the physical and the non-physical which, as presented in the serial structure of Bacon’s paintings and the viewer’s response that they demand, is the struggle of embodied freedom.

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

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

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6 Nochlin (2001) also argues that Bacon’s paintings are about fragmentation. She calls the fragmentations “deliberate destructions”, and argues that Bacon’s images express the fragmentation of modern subjects, linking fragmentation to historical events and social conditions.
is an affective structure which perpetually differentiates the figure from what it was. Yet by presenting the figures as suffering, Bacon’s images show that the physical interplay of opposing forces continually inflicted on and affecting the figures involves something more than physical struggle. Thus the interpretation of Bacon’s images must include something more than a materialist, physicalist or mechanical interpretation of the process of giving and receiving affect. The freedom to respond cannot be reduced to the attractive and repulsive play of forces; rather, it is an ultimate and underivable element in the activity of actualization. It is my contention that in Bacon’s paintings, the underivable element of freedom is always embodied, suffering freedom, and it is this embodied, suffering freedom that is presented in the serially iterative structure of his images and in the contemplative, concerned, pained, or resisting comportment of his figures.

4. The Violence And Suffering Of The Serial Figure

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

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

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

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

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8 For instance, Kuspit claims “Bacon’s paint spontaneously presents us with an authentic, compelling image – an image to which we feel committed, inescapably bound” (1986:57).

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

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

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

12 Van Alphen explains that in Bacon’s images, “the human figure is not the subject of [a] narrative of perception. The human figure is rather the locus of the events, the scene of action. Perception happens in and on the human figure ... Perception, then, is not an activity directed by the human subject, but a mechanical process happening to the human figure” (47, 48). Here, perception is not “the distanced mastery of the modernist and positivist gaze, which dominates the world while leaving the subject of looking
in terms of the structure of affectivity. As both van Alphen and Deleuze show, the structure of the viewer’s response is performative: it is a matter of participatorily enacting the activity of the actualization of the figure in terms of its affective structure. The affective structure of the figure is reflected back to the viewer, who is thus understood to be, not a stable, fixed self, but a self that is constantly in the process of becoming. The viewer is subject to the activity of actualization that continually differentiates perceiving subjects. Deleuze’s critical analysis of this activity reveals that, although not structured by the perceiving subject, the activity of actualization is nevertheless structured by serially ordered acts of construction. I contend that this convincing interpretation of Bacon’s paintings involves the further element of freedom, for the serially iterative act of construction is articulated by Bacon’s images as intrinsically involving a dimension of freedom and it is this which defines what it means to be affected. The freedom of both the viewer’s acts or perception and the figure’s acts of response helps to explain both why Bacon’s figures appear to be suffering and why viewers can find Bacon’s images ultimately uplifting despite their violence.

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

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

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

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

14 The unexpectedly uplifting aspect of Bacon’s images is where van Alphen concludes his critical analysis and where Hatch begins his. Van Alphen finds the uncontrollable mechanism of the affected body an escape route from the stultifying identity structures imposed on subjects. Hatch’s analysis interprets the violent struggle in Bacon’s paintings to be the rallying call for individuals to always assert themselves and “take control over their own life” (173). As I indicate in note 10, Hatch does not clearly explain how this is supposed to happen.
identify with the figure’s position in the violent enactment. But that point of view is always shifted to another, leaving the viewer in an unstable viewing position in relation to the image. Bacon does not hide the fact that the viewer is given an insecure and vacillating viewing position in relation to his images. For instance, the cages, boxes, rails, beds, and chairs on or in which the figure is situated are ostentatiously rendered in a sloppy way. This maintains the uncertainty and mobility of the viewer’s perspective on the image. The viewer is not put in a mastering, directing position in relation to the image. Instead, the viewer is directed around the image with no stable perspectival position in relation to it. Because Bacon’s skewed perspectival structures are centred around the figure, they situate the viewer in a variety of shifting points of view on the figure. In a use of perspective similar to Degas’, the viewer is made to perceive the figure from various angles: from above, below, beside, before, and even behind the figure. Thus the viewer is given visual mobility in relation to the figure. 

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

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

15 The isolating structures can also be understood to support the structuring activity of the figure’s vectors. They frame the figure, as Deleuze claims, in a specific “operational field”. The frame never fixes the figure in a static position, just as the springboard extension and focalizing ring does not in The Portrait of George Dyer Crouching. Rather, the frame limits the figure’s relational activity within specific configurations. The warped or sloppily rendered perspective of the frames, such as the Escher-like cage structures or the wires on which the figure is balanced in perpetual imbalance, also function both to isolate the figure and to situate it in permanent mobility. From the perspective of the viewer, seeing the figure in one situation, for instance contained in the cage or balanced at one point on the wire, opens up a new way to see it, such as escaping from the cage or balanced at another point on the wire. It isolates the structure of differentiating activity that enacts the figure’s structure (Deleuze, 1981:96).
elements should be interpreted in relation to it. Secondly, these structures accentuate the structured nature of the activity happening in them. For instance, the circular structure around *Figure at a Washbasin*, 1976, emphasizes the curved convulsions of the figure’s movement; the flatly planar and undulated bed of *Sleeping Figure*, 1974, enhances the flattening activity of the figure’s sleep; the vertical lines of the cage in *Head VI*, 1949, emphasize the dissolving, vertical descent that is happening; both the strings looped across the canvas and the rings of the tires on which the figure rides in *Portrait of George Dyer Riding a Bicycle*, 1966, heighten the precariousness of his balance and focus the activity on the turns of his pedalling movement. These circumscribing devices emphasize and guide the viewer’s perception towards the structure of the figure’s activity. Thirdly, the circumscribing devices have the iconographical suggestion of sacrificial altars, especially when they are beds, tables, crucifixes, and raised platforms on which the figure is outstretched. In the context of the violent deformations to the figure’s representation and the violent iconography, situating the figure on an isolating structure sets the figure off as a particularly significant event of suffering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is in this context that Bacon’s paintings are seen to be physically violent. The figure’s bodies are painful to look at because they are presented in the process of their destruction. And as I have explained, even when the viewer interpretively enacts this activity as constructive it is still destructive on account of the very nature of the activity of actualization as a differentiating activity. The violence Bacon’s figures undergo is most forcefully expressed through their bodies, even in the figures who scream. The figures rarely look towards the viewer, and in the images where they do, such as the centre panel of Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards, 1980, or Study for Portrait (Michel Leiris), 1978, they appear to look through rather than at the viewer, as if
preoccupied with something else. The figures do not address the viewer visually to plea for help or sympathy, for instance. The address to the viewer is performed by Bacon’s indexical signs. The figure’s pain is presented through the continual destruction of its body. Twisting, writhing, and mutating, it physically reacts to forces which continually ravage it.\[^16\]

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

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

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

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

\[^17\] Kuspit provides a striking account of the figure’s expressions: “This defiant unhappiness is customarily understood as an anguished sign of autonomy, a subversion of worldly appearances to construct the integrity of art in spite of the world. But Bacon forces us to read it not as willful transcendence of the world but as a hysterical, and invariably histrionic, effort to recollect it in all its anxiety-arousing absurdity” (55). In my view, however, Bacon is less interested in autonomy than in community and his suffering figures do not present hysteria but involvement and participation.
activity concentrated and enframed in his face by the heavy contours which set it off from the background and the canvas edge which foreshortens it, Bacon’s gaze is directed away, with all the apathy of a mug-shot. The response suggested in his expression does not correlate with the violent undoing of his face. The process of deformation happening to the distractedly contemplative face in *Study for Portrait* (Michel Leiris), 1978, is a process of grotesque mutations rather than gentle differentiations. Yet Leiris’ expression is contemplative to the point of resignation. Similarly, the figures in the first panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, appear to accept the ongoing process of their deformation. The figure on the left appears to gaze in resignation while the figure on the right seems to glance in acknowledgement. In the central panel, the figure reclines on the bed, as if Manet’s *Olympia*, 1863, were drawing up her legs, and the figure grins spitefully during the self destruction of its own body. In the right panel, the array of meat on the inverse crucifix yells out of the mouth in its stomach. The screaming pope in Bacon’s *Study after Velazquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, grips his chair and screams as not only he, but the entire image, either disintegrates into the modulating void of black lines in a rapidly descending fury from the top down, or emerges in a rapid ascension from the foreground white robes up into the modulating void. Although the figure screams, it does not get up. The figure sufferingly stiffens and endures. All of these are responses to the physical force of the figure’s destruction which cannot be explained by force alone.¹⁸

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

¹⁸ It should be also noted here that the figures’ reactions differ between images according to who or what they are, and so cannot be explained merely in terms of physical response. Popes, crucified figures, and monstrous flesh-like figures mostly scream in response to the physical violence. The figures in portraits tend contemplatively to gaze, while others are preoccupied and continue with everyday activities. John Hatch’s analysis argues that those figures whose freedom is most confined usually suffer more than those who are not so confined, such as the screaming popes who are (in his view) confined by the conventions of the church and the crucified figures who are (in his view) confined by the iconology of the cross (171). More plausibly, the female figures who appear contemptuously to grin through their pain are, in van Alphen’s analysis, determined by the tradition of the female nude (174). The howling meat and fleshy, limbless creatures can be added to this list, as confined by their crippled inability to do more than flail. Throughout all the differences in response, none of the figures are wholly determined by the physical force that affects them
Mirror, 1976, appears preoccupied with what he is doing and less concerned with his pain than the screaming pope in Head VI, 1949, who appears to brace himself in order fully to face the pain of the violent activity that continually differentiates his body. In both extreme instances, the figures appear to live with their ongoing pain as a feature of what they are.

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

The mundanity of the event encourages a narrative reading of it. Given figural characters performing everyday acts in a minimally familiar setting, the viewer can treat the image as the representation of everyday events. The presentation of contemplative and suffering figures in ordinary situations who undergo violent transformations makes the images intriguing; the viewer is compelled to figure out the plot. For this reason, van Alphen argues that Bacon’s paintings display many signs which traditionally signify narrativity, and thus stimulate a narrative reading, [however] by the same token any attempt to postulate narratives based on the painting is countered (30).

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

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

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19 For an exciting analysis of intrigue in terms of the viewer’s role in a narrative of detection, see van Alphen, Chapter Three, especially the section called “Mystery Portraits”.

20 In fact, van Alphen claims, the viewer is drawn into the story, acting it out with the figures as they perform it. For this reason, he claims the images are not “conveying” a “pre-existing story” ; they tell a story in the sense that the images present a process of unfolding events (28). In my view, they can also be understood as dramatic enactments in which the viewer plays a crucial role.
series of relationally constructive acts that actualize the figure endow the activity happening in the image with a sequential structure. This underscores the viewer’s role in the enactment of the activity of actualization. The viewer’s activity does not unfold a chronicle of events, it performs the events. The viewer’s activity is thus crucially involved in the activity presented, for the viewer’s process of enactment is the serially iterative process of the activity of the actualization of the event of the figure. Only in terms of the viewer’s performance of the activity of actualization can the images be said to be narrative.\(^{21}\)

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

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

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\(^{21}\) This is van Alphen’s point in Chapter One of his analysis. Bacon’s paintings do not provide the viewer with a narrative understood as a product or representation of events. Rather, they involve the viewer in the process of narrative, where the viewer is implicated in the activity presented in the image. See the preceding note.
order of events. However, it is not solely directed by the image because the viewer is free within the structure of the figure to decide where and how the serial relations will be constructed. Thus the very structure that Bacon’s images present the viewer reveals that the affectivity of the viewer involves more than the interaction of physical forces. This is true of the figure as well, for the figure’s response to the activity of its ongoing destruction is reflective. Suffering is shown to be underivable from the physical forces of affectivity, and it is on this basis alone that Bacon’s images can be understood to be what they are: violent images of suffering figures. Bacon’s figures suffer because they are shown reflectively to respond to the forces that destroy their bodies with acts that transcend physical reaction, such as repose, resignation, waiting, and sleep. Thus their suffering is also put in the context of everyday activities and scenarios; they live with their pain. For these reasons, the activity of actualization of the figure in which the viewer is participatorily implicated is to be understood as ordinary, familiar, ongoing and concerned. In Bacon, the ordinary is not reducible to material forces. It is the empathically affected world of concern.

Violence, Suffering, And Community

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

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

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22 The viewer’s participation in the ongoing, relational structure of Bacon’s figures is the point of Deleuze’s analysis of it as a sensation, namely a differential, relational structure. See also Smith (1996). For analyses of the viewer’s constructive participation in Bacon’s images, see van Alphen (ch.2), Leiris (6-8), and Kuspit (57).
perception. For example, the uppermost contour of the figure’s back remains exactly that when it is related to the contour beneath and seen also to be the farthest shoulder blade. Related to the head, the contour is also the muscular tension of a neck, and also the heaving arc of a torso in a rigorous inhalation of breath. Each contour remains the same and each perceptual construction of it remains the same. The viewer’s perception of the figure does not radically differentiate the figure but cumulatively differentiates the order of relations that structure it. With each new serially iterative act of visual construction, the significance of previous acts is altered. The figure is a relational whole because the connected parts compose what is easily distinguished as the main figure. In this way, the structure of Bacon’s figures is similar to the structure of Edgar Degas’ figures, for it implicates the viewer’s visual activity and directs the viewer performatively to enact the serially iterative, constructive activity of the figure’s actualization. In the work of both artists, the figure is understood in terms of the activity that makes it what it is. Moreover, in both cases the figure is never completely realized. However, in Bacon’s images the fundamental incompleteness of the figure which derives from its becoming-process is presented as painful. Each act of differentiating the figure is an act of constructing and of destroying the figure. Each deformation and intensity is preserved as it leads into another, differentiating the presentation of the figure without being subsumed in the relational transformation. The figure is a serially iterative differentiating unity.

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

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

23 Bacon also admired Degas’ late pastels, such as After the bath, 1903, National Gallery London, specifically for the “grip and twist” of the figure’s spine which gives her body the “vulnerability” of meat (in Sylvester, 46-7).
responses to affectivity. In this context of violence, the significance of the free act in Bacon becomes crucial.

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

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

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

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


Faust, Art, Religion

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For insight into the structure and aim of Faust one can look to the ‘Prologue in Heaven’. There we are introduced to the main characters of Goethe’s great poem: Faust, the ideal man of European Enlightenment; Mephistopheles, the dark, negative side of reason; and God, the mystical, positive side of reason. In this structure one may see in broad outline the task that Goethe set himself, which was to place the secular ideal of Enlightenment in the same sphere as religion, and to bring to our minds – in a work of the highest poetic quality – characters who can express both the Divine and the deepest interests of humanity.

Goethe’s poem is not a traditional Christian cautionary tale. It does not warn the reader his eternal soul will be lost if he sells his soul to the devil in return for supernatural powers.1 Faust is thoroughly modern in his search for meaning in life and in his striving for fulfillment. He wants more knowledge, more power, and he is given to melancholy and despair – ‘gloomy weariness’ – when he cannot get what he wants.2 But it is for his striving, his never giving up, that he is finally saved and his soul carried upward.

Faust achieves salvation not only through God, but also through his own action. In the ‘Prologue in Heaven’ scene, the Lord is supportive of Faust’s striving, his energy and restlessness, and even encourages Mephistopheles to tempt Faust, to goad him on. God gives Mephistopheles the role of challenging Faust, of stimulating and provoking and shocking him, so that he will never escape into peace and quiet, never find a moment so beautiful it can bring him to a ‘total standstill’.3 So long as he never finds one moment so fulfilling that he will want to stay with it forever, he will frustrate the devil and justify God’s confidence in him.

The difficulty is that Mephistopheles is certain that by provoking Faust he can destroy him. He says that he will distract Faust, lead him ever downward into darkness and confusion, and ‘make him greedy for the dust’ (Sc. 3, line 335). And this is plausible

1 On the difference between Goethe’s Faust and the traditional Faust, see Gerhard Kaiser, Ist der Mensch zu retten? Vision und Kritik der Moderne in Goethes Faust (Freiberg: Rombach, 1994).

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enough. Faust’s ceaseless striving for knowledge and power seems totally incompatible with everything good and beautiful. He has in him the negative spirit of Mephistopheles.⁴

But God has no fear of the devil. He says to Mephistopheles: ‘You are a type I never learnt to hate’ (Sc. 3, line 338). God is able to withstand the negative spirit of Mephistopheles and include it as a subordinate moment or stage of his own activity.⁵ We see the depth and breadth of this activity when he addresses the archangels and exhorts them to continue to love ‘the eternal Process’, for it is ‘ever living and forever rich’. God speaks of the negative result of the process – its ‘vanishing phenomena’ – but knows this negativity to be positive and firm and lasting (Sc. 3, lines 346-8). By virtue of his activity the negative is converted into being. It is in this context that God is able to say, in reference to Faust’s restlessness, ‘I will soon lead him into clarity’ (Sc.3, line 309).

In the remarkable opening scene of the poem, ‘Night’, we meet Faust, professor and scholar, sitting at his desk in his study. He is disgusted with himself and with his search for knowledge. He has mastered his studies – philosophy, law, medicine, theology – and can make them intelligible to his students, but finds himself cut off from the real world. His ‘empty’ preaching is not only incapable of ‘bettering mankind’, but is also useless from the point of view of his own ‘worldly success’ (Sc. 4, 373-4).

Faust is the very image of European Enlightenment. His mind, his own independent understanding, has led him to reject all claims to supernatural knowledge and authority and to affirm the natural and human world, the limited and finite realm of practical conduct and social success. But the ideal of Enlightenment is not as promising as it had appeared. In pursuing it, Faust has been drawn into more and more abstract spheres of thought, and now at the extreme point – where he can ‘take no pleasure in anything’ – he turns into his own opposite.⁶ He feels the need to abandon his ideal and joyously takes up magic in order that he might finally see and enjoy the ‘innermost life’ of the world, ‘all its seeds and sources’ (Sc. 4, lines 383-4).

In relation to magic, Faust transcends the limited standpoint of his enlightened scientific understanding, or rather puts it in the service of his unlimited ambition. The result is not what he expects. He summons the earth spirit, but is caught off guard.⁷ The spirit’s voice and the sight of its face – surrounded by a flashing red flame – overwhelm him: ‘Ah, you are too terrible!’, he exclaims (Sc. 4, line 483). The spirit’s creativity, its

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⁴ This is why in the twentieth century the Faust character became the object of such perverse fascination. See Hans Schwerte, Faust und das Faustische: Ein Kapitel deutscher Ideologie (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962).


⁷ Here Faust is shaken to the core. But later, in the ‘Forest Cavern’ scene, he will praise the earth spirit for having strengthened him: ‘Oh sublime Spirit! You have given me, / Given me all I asked for’ (Sc. 17, lines 3217-18).
surging energy, ever turning and returning, is too much for Faust to bear. The spirit knows this and vanishes, saying, ‘You match the spirit you can comprehend: I am not he’ (Sc. 4, lines 512-13).

Faust has now to face his despair. He is not an eternal spirit but a man subject to fear and death. He set out to embrace the earth, to enjoy life in all its fullness, and shrank away from it. He feels crushed, but decides that he is still capable of a noble deed. He resolves to confront death and take his own life, ‘to step gladly over this great brink, / And if it is the void, into the void to sink’ (Sc. 4, lines 718-19). In his isolation and defeat, Faust is conscious not of things and other people, but only of himself. His learning and ambition appear here as self-destructive, as empty negation.

Yet it is through his suicidal despair, his willingness to acknowledge his own nothingness, that Faust rediscovers his vocation. Just as he is about to drink poison, his hand is checked by the peal of Easter bells. Easter is for Faust a ceremony of rebirth, not just in a Christian but in a secular sense. For the music reminds him of his childhood, of the games he played to celebrate the spring. In an instant, the mercurial and ever active Faust decides not to kill himself and to turn back to the world: ‘Now my tears flow, I love the earth once more!’ (Sc. 4, line 784).

On the one hand, there is Faust, the thinker, who despairs because he finds himself cut off from life. On the other hand, there is Faust, the thinker, who discovers that he cannot tolerate this condition; he must be at one with the earth. So Faust, the thinker, is not onesided in relation to what is different, after all; he is the unity of thought and life, of self and other, of conscious and unconscious activity. This is indeed a beautiful conception. Yet, as we shall see, the unity is not such that its ground lies in Faust himself. Faust must connect with life, but from the standpoint of his infinite striving and ambition cannot connect with anything finite and particular.

In ‘Outside the Town Wall’, we see Faust out for a walk in the spring countryside. It is Easter Day, and he is jubilant in the midst of a crowd. This is the conscious, secular side of Faust: ‘Here I am human, here it’s allowed’ (Sc. 5, line 940). Yet, as the day wears on, he is increasingly dissatisfied with himself. His unconscious, spiritual side asserts itself. As the sun sets, Faust wishes he could follow it on its journey through the sky: ‘Oh if some wings would raise me, if somehow / I could follow its circuit through the air!’ (Sc. 5, lines 1074-75). At the same time, he feels the pull of the earth, his connection with the external world. He says, ‘In me there are two souls, alas, and their / Division tears my life in two’ (Sc. 5, lines 1112-13). One soul is worldly, the other beyond time and place.

This is a painful insight. By virtue of his learning and sense of independence, Faust is indeed, as Goethe himself said, an extraordinary man, a person altogether beyond ordinary sensibility. But his learning and the independence that comes out of it stand opposed to the ordinary consciousness of the world. It is evident then that Faust is not truly free; he seeks an independence that makes the world – both natural and human –

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8 On this point, Schiller did much to stimulate and clarify Goethe’s thinking about Faust. See Friedrich-Wilhelm Wentzlaff-Eggebert, Schillers Weg zu Goethe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963).
appear as given, unchanging, absolute. Faust seeks freedom both in himself and in the world, but as a practical construction his independence is something wholly formal. His inner, spiritual soul is opposed to his outer, earthly soul, and the tension is unbearable.¹⁹

But the two souls – the limited and the unlimited – do ultimately come together as one. The inner, spiritual tendency in Faust conflicts with the outward, worldly tendency. But the conflict between the two tendencies is at length resolved not only in God’s activity but in Faust’s.¹⁰ We can see how this happens if we examine the difference in outlook between Faust and Mephistopheles, disguised here as a poodle who follows Faust home from his walk.

Back in his study, Faust is as restless as ever but feels exhausted and empty of ideas. He turns for inspiration to the Bible, and tries to render into his own language the opening line of the Greek text of the Gospel of St. John, translating the word *Logos* in a number of ways – first as ‘Word’, secondly as ‘Mind’, thirdly as ‘Force’ and finally as ‘Deed’ (Sc. 6, lines 1224-1237). Now the spiritual as well as secular implications of all this are huge. Faust is giving us not an arbitrary succession of terms, but rather a concentrated critique of his own onesided, finite understanding. Each translation of *Logos* reveals its own limitation and gives way to the next until we have the real and true as opposed to the external image of a thought.

The primal Deed is the first act of divine creation, as in Genesis, ch. 1, when God says, ‘Let there be light’. But the active self, the will, is the essence of all creation, whether divine or human. The willing of the self in action is the creative event both in God’s consciousness of the world and in ours.¹¹ In both cases, it is not ‘mind’ but the spontaneous freedom of the will that ‘sets worlds on their creative course’ (Sc. 6, line 1232).

In this reflection on will, Faust overcomes his own onesided understanding and comes to see the external world in its own being and movement. He gives action and creativity an objective form. By contrast, Mephistopheles gives mind and will a thoroughly subjective shape, and so can only oppose them to the external world: ‘I am the spirit of perpetual negation’ (Sc. 6, line 1338). Whereas Faust’s vision of creation brings thought and life together and unites them, Mephistopheles can only divide and oppose and negate.

We see this endless negativity in Mephistopheles’ hostility towards the light. He says that he is ‘part of the Darkness before man / Whence light was born’, and so regards light as a secondary and derivative phenomenon (Sc. 6, lines 1350-51). Light is born from Night, and fights for independence, but is dependent on corporeal bodies. So once matter

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is destroyed and all things vanish – as they so richly deserve to – light will disappear and
the primal darkness will be restored. Until then, however, the finite realm of material
things persists, and, as Mephistopheles so elegantly puts it, ‘this coarse world, this mess, /
Stands in the way of Nothingness’ (Sc. 6, lines 1364-65).

Faust, to be sure, shares in this negative spirit. At the beginning of the second study
scene, we see that he has again fallen into despair, a deeper despair than earlier when he
was tempted to drink poison. Here he is struck by the thought that all things – the external
world as such – stand between him and the fulfillment of his wishes. He does not merely
question whether he will ever get what he wants. He is certain that the external world is
destructive of his ‘active soul’s creativeness’ (Sc. 7, line 1561). And so he is
overwhelmed by a feeling of complete hopelessness: ‘Thus by existence tortured and
oppressed / I crave for death, I long for rest’ (Sc. 7, lines 1570-71).

So Faust curses everything, existence as such, in a way that resists all consolation. No
sweet music or joyful childhood memory will work now to comfort or encourage him.
‘My curse on faith! My curse on hope! / My curse on patience above all!’ (Sc. 7, lines
1605-06). Faust is yearning for release from the constraints of an existence that has in it
nothing beautiful or good. It appears to him that between the external world and his inner
life and activity there is no connection. This thought prepares him for the contract which
Mephistopheles is about to offer:12

The pact with the devil is the means by which Faust unifies the conflicting sides of his
personality – the positive stage, which is there in the continuing struggle of the two sides
and in their mutual relation. The wager is not Faust’s idea, but he defines its terms. The
devil will win the bet and make Faust his slave, if ever he should offer Faust something
that completely satisfies him. Faust will lose if ever he finds peace and quiet, and for the
sake of pleasure ceases to be active: ‘If ever to the moment I shall say / Beautiful
moment, do not pass away!’ (Sc. 7, lines 1699-1700).

The wager scene stabilizes the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles. And its
result is positive, because it allows Faust to establish a certain balance or harmony
between matter and mind, between the external world and his inner creativity. For this
reason, the result of his action will not simply be the annihilation of things and people.

This is not to say that the result is a simple harmony of forces and tendencies. Faust
makes it clear that Mephistopheles will not win the bet: ‘You need have no fear that I will
break / This bond. To strive with all my energies -- / Just that is what I undertake’ (Sc. 7,
1760). Here Mephistopheles seems out of his element; he does not appear to realize that
in accepting the wager he is defeating himself. He assures Faust that he will not be
disappointed: ‘Nothing shall limit you’ (Sc. 7, line 1760).

12 For this and for what follows I am endebted to Cyrus Hamlin, ‘Goethe’s Faust and the Philosophers’, in
p. 236ff.
But there is irony on both sides. Faust is certain that he can win, because the terms and conditions of the bet, though finite, are infinite. And the devil is certain that he can win, because the terms and conditions of the bet, though infinite, are finite. This is a logic that transcends any ‘either-or’ attitude.\(^\text{13}\)

The pact in its true meaning is not something merely subjective. It elevates Faust above the earlier opposition between the external world and the inner world, transcends the difference between them and establishes a comprehensive, all-embracing point of view. But it doesn’t make unity primary or even lay emphasis on it; the pact instead ensures that the difference between the objective and subjective is preserved in the result. In fact, the wager illustrates Faust’s tragedy: it dissolves his happiness into a kind of negative activity, in which the different sides of his personality are set in opposition to one another.

That Faust is in the end saved appears to confound all logic. And this would be true if Faust’s heaven were a state of simple, undivided harmony and unity – a world of rest that brings his striving for fulfillment to an end. This soothing and calming condition may be close to some traditional Christian views of heaven. But to Faust such a condition could only be one of illusion and deception. For him, the direct and immediate unification of the finite and infinite sides of his personality is neither possible nor desirable. So the heaven he enters into is one in which he is still striving ever upwards.

Faust’s heaven is one in which the external and internal sides of his personality pass into one another and turn into their opposites. There is nothing there that is ultimate and stable. Faust’s salvation embraces within itself the opposing sides of his personality, but seen now as transitory moments. This salvation is not mysterious or perverse, except from the standpoint of a onesided understanding that resists this kind of disintegration and transition. The angels who carry Faust’s ‘immortal part’ up to heaven put it this way: ‘He who strives on and lives to strive can earn redemption still.’\(^\text{14}\)

In short, Faust denies the ‘Beautiful moment’ (Sc. 7, line 1700). A perfect harmony of nature and reason, matter and form, is impossible. The unity of the two sides appears only as a succession of moments. The wager makes the beautiful moment a mere ideal, a vanishing reality.

In the same way, Goethe’s poem, just as it is, denies the moment of aesthetic completion. Goethe evidently saw poetry as the highest expression of truth in the modern age. At the same time, he puts into his poetry the most sophisticated thoughts and

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reflections. So for him a work of art is not just to be savoured and enjoyed, but to be judged also, since it stands within the world of reason and its relations.

Hegel, Goethe’s contemporary, spoke of the way in which moderns are ‘beyond venerating works of art as divine and worshipping them.’ They insist on having a point of view, and bring their judgement and will into all aspects of their experience. ‘The beautiful days of Greek art, like the golden days of the later Middle Ages, are gone.’ Art as art no longer satisfies. Seen in this perspective, Goethe’s Faust invites us to think, and to do so not for the sake of viewing and reproducing its particular contents, but for the purpose of knowing what art is relative to our own freedom to create. It is an exemplary work of modern art.

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15 This is not to say that Goethe wrote Faust with a view to expressing some thought or idea. He explicitly denied this. See Conversations of Goethe, p. 258: ‘From Heaven, through the world, to hell, would indeed be something; but this is no idea, only a course of action…. It would have been a fine thing, indeed, if I had strung so rich, varied, and highly diversified a life as I had brought to view in Faust upon the slender string of one pervading idea.
