Revisiting the Art of Francis Bacon and his Contemporaries

Submitted for the Degree of PhD by Publication

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Professor Martin Hammer

TEXT BOUND CLOSE TO THE SPINE IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

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Abstract:

The nine items that I am submitting for a PhD by publication (two books and seven articles, amounting to some 220,000 words in total) constitute, I claim, a coherent body of research in terms of both subject-matter and of underlying art-historical methodology. The field studied is British figurative painting during the 1940s and 1950s, with particular reference to the art of Francis Bacon, who emerged as an innovative and influential figure at that time. Other British artists under scrutiny include Graham Sutherland, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. My main interest is in visual intelligence and the process of visual translation within creativity, as discussed in the accompanying, 12,000 word reflective essay. I seek to analyse how artists feed in a highly purposeful and inventive manner off one another (Bacon and Sutherland in the 1940s), off their predecessors (such as Edgar Degas, Walter Sickert, Chaim Soutine, Pablo Picasso and Alberto Giacometti) and, especially in the case of Bacon, off various kinds of photographic imagery, above all propaganda emanating from pre-war Nazi Germany. This approach serves to embed the interpretation of meaning and content, a crucial concern for all these artists against the backdrop of a profoundly traumatic period in world history, within the analysis of formal language and of the process whereby artists and extend and manipulate to their own ends available resources of two-dimensional imagery.

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Revisiting the Art of Francis Bacon and his Contemporaries

My motivations in applying for a PhD by publication are threefold:

1. To take stock of what I see as a rich and coherent phase of research over the past decade
2. To augment, however modestly, the submission to REF 2014 in which my work is included (the School of Arts at University of Kent)
3. To facilitate future grant applications, especially from US institutions and foundations, where the absence of a PhD stands out and could conceivably disadvantage applications

Research submitted

During the past few years, I have produced an extended sequence of publications focussing on British art in the middle decades of the twentieth century, with particular reference to the work of Francis Bacon and Graham Sutherland, as well as, to a lesser extent, that of artists of a somewhat younger generation of painters such as Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. The latter artists have sometimes been pigeonholed, with Bacon, into a so-called 'School of London', an inchoate but nevertheless highly influential and distinctive tendency in British painting since the 1950s. One of my concerns has been to analyse what, if anything, unites this somewhat heterogeneous grouping, beyond personal links and commitments to figurative imagery, to the medium of painting, and to a sense of the continuing resonance of artistic tradition, at a time when their abstract and Pop contemporaries took a more iconoclastic stance.

The nine items that I am submitting for a PhD by publication (two books and seven articles, amounting to some 220,000 words in total) constitute, I would claim, a coherent body of research in terms of both subject-matter and of underlying art-historical methodology, as I seek to describe in the text that follows. Within that larger unity, the publications themselves can be seen to fall into four loose groupings, which will be apparent from the brief summaries provided of their content:

1/ Studies of the specific artistic interaction between Bacon and Sutherland:

- *Bacon and Sutherland* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). An extended (90,000 word) comparative analysis of the work of two British painters who worked in close awareness of one another's work during the 1940s (as evident from Bacon's letters to Sutherland). The book plots affinities and divergences in relation to the two artists' technique, materials, working methods, iconography (e.g. engagement with the Crucifixion theme), photographic sources, artistic language, assimilation of ideas from continental modernism (in particular Picasso and Surrealism), and the sense of working in tragic times, channelled into an immersion in imagery and devices from Aeschylean tragedy.
- 'Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery', *Burlington Magazine,* May 2010, pp. 307-12. The speculation in *Bacon and Sutherland* that Bacon's participation in the legendary group show at the Lefevre Gallery in April 1945 might have been indebted to the advocacy of Sutherland, a fellow exhibitor, was subsequently confirmed by the gallery's correspondence with both artists, which I discovered in the Tate archive and published here, with accompanying commentary on what these documents add to our understanding of the artistic and personal dialogue between the two men.

2/ Studies of Bacon's allusions in his work to Nazi propaganda imagery:

- '"Seeing the story of one's time": appropriations from Nazi photography in the work of Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain*, November 2009, pp. 317-353 (co-author Chris Stephens, Tate Britain). This article pooled the ideas that Stephens and I had arrived at independently, laying out an approach and argument that were treated in more detail and depth in my subsequent, single author monograph.
- *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012). This 70,000 word (and richly illustrated) book focuses on what I read as Bacon's pictorial appropriations of imagery from Nazi propaganda photographs, mostly produced by Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's official photographer, though others were produced to record architectural projects designed by the likes of Albert Speer. Such imagery was produced in vast quantity throughout the 1930s for internal and external consumption. I demonstrate that this was a key point of reference for Bacon's work

from the early 1940s through to the early 1950s, with a revival of the interest in his two *Crucifixion* triptychs of the early 1960s. I aim to establish specific relationships between a sustained series of Bacon paintings and the photographs (sometimes plural) from which they derive their inspiration, considering how the artist transformed and fused his sources, both in visual terms and in relation to the possible meanings and ideas he was seeking to convey. Bacon's work is considered in the wider context of artistic and cultural responses to the rise of Fascism and the horrors of the war and its aftermath. Points of comparison previously unfamiliar in the Bacon literature include W.H. Auden, Bertolt Brecht, and the film-maker Alain Resnais.

3/ Analyses of certain key elements of Bacon's artistic outlook and methodology:

- 'Francis Bacon: Painting after Photography', *Art History*, April 2012, pp. 354-71 (issue also appearing as independent book *British Art in the Cultural Field, 1939-69* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 156-73). The essay goes beyond the identification of photographic sources for specific paintings to explore, at a more general level, how Francis Bacon responded to photographs, and what this tells us about his historical affinities. One useful model is the account Roland Barthes provided (in *Camera Lucida*) of the subjective 'phenomenology' involved in reading photographs. Bacon also recognised the inherent artifice of the photographic image, in parallel with his photographer/painter friend Peter Rose Pulham. Several specific motifs and formal devices in his work around 1950 can more usefully be aligned with the innovations of recent and current photographers (notably Robert Frank) than with contemporary painting. The final theme is the interplay in Bacon between the processes of feeding off photographs and embedding meaning, an issue discussed in relation to *Untitled (Crouching Figures)* from c. 1952 (on long-term loan to the Courtauld Institute Gallery) and its clear derivation from a photograph of a lioness attacking a photographer which had appeared in *Picture Post* magazine several years previously.
- 'Continuity and Contradiction in the Art of Francis Bacon', in Rina Arya ed., *Francis Bacon: Critical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Oxford etc: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 121-168. This ambitious 15,000 word essay seeks to define some fundamental and

continuous features of the way Francis Bacon's paintings are constructed visually, what one might term their pictorial rhetoric, and also of the improvisational ('accidental') creative processes that complemented and indeed generated their specific pictorial effects. Such matters are usually discussed quite repetitively, and to a considerable extent in terms dictated by Bacon's own commentary on his work, conveyed through the David Sylvester interviews. I seek instead to approach the work phenomenologically, so to speak, describing what it is actually like for viewers to look at the paintings in real time and space (rather than in reproduction, which in certain ways seriously distorts them). Their radical ambiguity, whereby multiple visual contradictions are held in suspension rather than resolved, is seen as integrally connected to their systematic indeterminacy of meaning and emotional affect. The artist's own verbal statements are analysed in terms of their structural affinity with his visual creations, rather than as a secondary and transparent explanation of the pictures. This deliberately broad treatment of his art also accommodates commentary on such themes as Bacon's appropriations from photographic imagery, the role of preliminary drawing in his working methods, his use of glazing, his fascination with serial and triptych formats, etc.

4/ Considerations of the shared artistic roots of the 'School of London' painters, including Bacon, in the examples provided by the work of Edgar Degas, Chaim Soutine and Walter Sickert:

- 'Found in Translation: Chaim Soutine and English Art', *Modernist Cultures*, November 2010, pp. 218-242. The article is the first to consider the impact of the early work of Chaim Soutine, produced in the South of France around 1920, on a circle of painters working in Britain some 30 years later, notably Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, as well as on the writer David Sylvester who promoted both their work and the key French artists such as Alberto Giacometti and Soutine who seemed to epitomise the new 'existentialist' climate. After the war Soutine became a cult figure in London, as he did in contemporary Paris and New York. He embodied the idea of the 'tragic' artist in his still-life imagery of flayed animals, his uncompromising, heavily-laden paint surfaces, and in his identity as a Jew who had died in 1943, an indirect victim of the Nazi occupation of France. I try to identify

which works in particular were known to the English artists, themselves all Jewish except for Bacon, and to describe the very different ways in which they reacted to Soutine's art and adapted its lessons to their own artistic purposes.

- 'Francis Bacon: Looking Back to Degas', *Tate Papers*, Spring 2012 (http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/francis-bacon-back-degas). This essay was based on the 2011 Rothenstein lecture given at Tate Britain. Providing the first focused account of Francis Bacon's artistic dialogue with Edgar Degas, I argue that the French painter was a consistent source of inspiration to Bacon throughout his career, informing his decisions about subject matter, style and medium. As far as possible I try to establish the impact of specific works by Degas that Bacon was able to view in museum collections (e.g. the National Gallery, London) and temporary exhibitions.
- '"Mainly Nourishment": Echoes of Sickert in the Work of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 14:1, 2013, pp. 87-100. The argument that Sickert was (along with Soutine) the key point of departure for the aesthetic of the 'School of London' is supported by the description of specific appropriations from works by Sickert (works whose current availability is documented) in selected major paintings by Bacon and Freud, especially their images of the nude.

It should be noted that during the same period I have also produced several more general studies in the same fields, which are aimed at more general readerships (and for that reason are not included in this PhD application):

- Martin Hammer, *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924-1950*, (London: Scala, 2005). This included an extended introduction, and reprints of certain key Sutherland texts buried in obscure publications. The volume accompanied an exhibition dedicated to Sutherland's first three decades of artistic production, first shown at Dulwich Picture Gallery and travelling to the Djanolgy Gallery, University of Nottingham.
- *The Naked Portrait*, exh. cat. National Galleries of Scotland and Compton Verney, 2007. Freud and Bacon featured within this wide-ranging exhibition attempting to identify and account for a distinctive strand in modern extensions of the portrait genre, fusing

the nude and portrait genres. The show was accompanied by a 50,000 word book/catalogue (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2007).

- 'Francis Bacon and British Soutine-Mania', *Soutine/Bacon*, exh. cat. Helly Nahmad Gallery, New York, May 2011, pp. 153-7 (this edited version of the *Modernist Cultures* article was also reprinted in the exhibition catalogue *Chaim Soutine and his contemporaries from Russia to* Paris, Ben Uri Gallery, London, 2012, pp. 37-9).
- 'After Camden Town: Sickert's Legacy since 1930', The Camden Town Group in Context Online Research Project, Tate website, Spring 2012 (http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/martin-hammer-after-camden-town-sickerts-legacy-since-1930-r1104349). A broad survey of what the art of Sickert meant to successive generations of British painters.
- 'Graham Sutherland: "Forms which take on an almost human aspect"', wide-ranging introductory essay (in Italian) for the catalogue of an exhibition of work by Sutherland in Italian collections, Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Parma, September 2012, pp 21-37.
- *Francis Bacon* (London: Phaidon, *Art in Focus* series, 2013). Introductory survey of the artist in a series devoted to canonical post-war artists.

Underpinning Methodology:

Aside from the historical connections, how do these several studies manifest a consistent set of interests and concerns? Broadly I see the context for my work as a gathering impulse within Art History as a discipline, especially amongst scholars addressing the modern period, to develop forms of interpretation which go beyond the traditional, uncritical reliance on artists' own view of their work, as articulated in interviews, statements of intention, manifestoes, and in conversations with sympathetic, 'authorised' critical spokesmen (e.g. the writings of David Sylvester on Bacon, or William Feaver on Freud). This development is partly a matter of distance, with the contemporary becoming historical. In addition, the influence of Critical Theory (e.g. 'death of the author' discourse) has properly engendered a distrust of naïve 'intentionalism', and an unwillingness to take at face value artists' own sense of their creative isolation and autonomy, entirely understandable as such feelings might be in psychological terms.

A more historicising and enquiring approach to the period and artists that interested me in the post-war British context began to emerge with broadly-based studies such as James Hyman's *The Battle for Realism.*[1] Subsequently, Bacon studies has become an especially fertile field for new and more speculative lines of enquiry (including my own), in the wake of the literal death of the artist himself (in 1992) and then that of David Sylvester, his faithful Boswell (in 2001), and in the light too of the emergence of his idiosyncratic studio archive, dominated by photographs, books and magazines rather than personal papers (Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin) and also of important works hitherto believed to be lost. The excellent catalogues produced for the 2008/9 centenary exhibition (shown at Tate Britain, the Prado Museum, Madrid, and the Metropolitan Museum, New York) and for the 2009 exhibition *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty* (Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin) effectively crystallised the new approaches that had come to the fore in recent years.[2] Subsequently, the Bacon industry has shown no signs of losing momentum. Beyond the endless parade of exhibition-related publications, 2012 alone witnessed the appearance of four major scholarly books devoted to his art, of which *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* was one.[3]

My own particular contribution to Bacon studies stems from an impulse to view his work in a more 'intertextual' (or perhaps one might say 'intervisual') manner, identifying points of departure and affinity for his work in artistic and non-artistic imagery with which he may, or may not, have been directly familiar. Such visual transpositions serve as valuable springboards to new scholarly and critical interpretation, just as the served for Bacon as stimuli to radical transposition in his paintings. I have also tried to situate his concerns and work in both a local (Sutherland) and a broad, international context, embracing not only the work of visual artists but also writers and film-makers. Such approaches serve to take our understanding of his work beyond the categories of isolated genius and British eccentric within which he had typically been placed, implicitly or explicitly. My concern is to present Bacon as a representative cultural figure of his period. I have sought to present him as an artist engaged, as were others of his generation, with the actualities of the historical moment, above all with the experience of living through Second World War, including the extended build up with the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and the war's still more extended aftermath in the form of the Cold War and anti-colonial struggles, generating a continuing atmosphere of trauma and latent or actual violence. This is a reaction against the received view of Bacon as an artist addressing in his work a more 'universal' notion of 'the human condition'. The prime evidence for these forms of historicisation are Bacon's actual paintings, and the visual resources they appropriate, but my work has also emphasised the revelatory significance of primary documents, as supplements and sometimes correctives to the familiar, retrospective accounts that Bacon provided in the famous and all too familiar interviews with Sylvester, probably one of the best-selling publications in the literature on art.[4]

A concern to, in a sense, 'normalise' Bacon, that is to present him as an artist operating in a specific time and place and interacting creatively with his contemporaries, was initially channelled into a closely focused study of parallels and possible cross-fertilisation between Bacon and his friend Graham Sutherland during the 1940s. This comparative consideration of two contemporaries reflected, I suspect, a tendency within recent exhibition curating. Precedents included the magnificent, detailed account of Picasso and Braque as Cubists in an exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1989), and a range of exhibitions and publications in the early 2000s exploring the artistic dialogue between

Picasso and Matisse, including that shown at Tate Modern in 2002. The approach has continued in recent Tate Modern shows devoted to Bauhaus artists Albers and Moholy-Nagy (2006) and to the Russian avant-garde figures Rodchenko and Popova (2009). Such paired shows succeed in avoiding the two extremes of the sweeping, thematic survey, in which individual artistic personality is lost, and the single artist monograph, which emphasises individual development and biographical determinants at the expense of broader, perhaps social factors that may well inform a given body of work. To put it another way, it permits a balance to be struck between wider patterns of imagery or artistic language that characterise a period or movement, and the singular creative preoccupations, conscious or unconscious, of a particular artist. This was likewise my aim in *Bacon and Sutherland*, where the juxtaposition served not only to qualify the ideology of solitary genius endemic in Bacon criticism, but also to demonstrate that Graham Sutherland looks a different and more interesting artist when considered in conjunction with such an international and un-English artist as Bacon, as opposed to his usual pigeonholing as the devoted adherent to an insular neo-romantic tradition rooted in the legacy of Samuel Palmer and his Romantic contemporaries.

The point of departure for *Bacon and Sutherland* was the perception that the work of the two artists, especially in the mid 1940s, reveal significant affinities of iconography and pictorial language, which had been noted in passing by several previous authors but had never been investigated in detail and depth; and the fact that Sutherland's archive contains a rare cache of letters from Bacon belonging to the same period, which shed light on the attitudes, personality and movements of a figure generally shrouded in obscurity (as regards his formative decades), as well as the evident friendship and sense of common purpose between the two men. The fundamental research question that seemed to emerge was: what can we learn about these two artists individually from considering them in conjunction with one another? Although their artistic dialogue (and friendship, until it became strained) continued into the 1950s and beyond, I decided to focus on the 1940s, when there seemed to be a real two-way interplay between the two painters (as opposed to Sutherland's clearly derivative position later), and when both could usefully be viewed in relation to the fascinating cultural climate epitomised and fostered by the magazine *Horizon*, which was bankrolled and part-edited by Peter Watson, a friend and supporter of

both artists, but which ceased publication at the turn of the decade. The book opened with a sequence of juxtapositions between roughly contemporary paintings by the two artists (20 paintings in all), serving as a visual essay that might prompt the reader to note and reflect upon points of contact. The main body of the book comprised an introduction, outlining the aims and content of the book, and three extended chapters with headed sections devoted to overarching themes that serve to keep both artists in play throughout the unfolding of the argument. To summarise those three chapters, 'Interactions' assembled the evidence for the relationship and dialogue between the two artists, covering their contacts in the late 1930s in relation to a group exhibition, and Sutherland's elevated status as independent and war artist (compared with Bacon's obscurity). It plotted on a month by month basis the visual affinities between the pictures with which Bacon launched his career in April 1945 and both concurrent and earlier works by Sutherland, including uses of colour, physical support (Sundeala board) metamorphic imagery, forms from wild animal photography (not established with such precision in previous Bacon literature, as in the Marius Maxwell source for the 1945 *Figure in a Landscape*, and not adduced at all before in relation to Sutherland). The first section also covered both artists' engagement with Crucifixion imagery, and move towards working in a larger scale. A subsequent discussion of their activities, movement and work between 1947 and 1949 made use of the longest letters from Bacon to Sutherland, sent from the South of France and Paris at a time when both artists were spending as much time in France as they could afford, away from the grim austerity of post-war London. The artists' convergence on imagery of the human figure is then considered in relation to Sutherland's *Standing Form* and initial engagement with portraiture, in the same year (1949) that Bacon produced a remarkable body of new work for his one-man show at the Hanover Gallery (now also Sutherland's dealer). A further section focussed on their shared involvement in the artistic and literary milieux around *Horizon*, and the advocacy both received from the important critic Robert Melville.

The chapter 'Devastation' explores the ways in which both artists responded to the traumatic circumstances of the wider world, including but also going beyond the role Sutherland played in the official War Artists scheme between 1940 and 1944. It seemed appropriate to construct a context in which the build up to war in the late 1930s, the Second World War itself, and the aftermath of the revelations of the death camps and the

beginnings of the Cold War, together comprised a continuous period, in terms of aesthetic sensibility. This argument is supported by considerable evidence from British literary history. The common ground between the two artists is pursued through a number of themes: a subversive, anti-pastoral approach to landscape imagery; direct reference to present circumstances in the form of the destruction of the material environment and the human body and Bacon's more idiosyncratic allusions to Nazi propaganda; the aspiration towards a 'tragic' art, embracing the two artists' shared engagement with Aeschylus, as mediated through W.B. Stanford's book *Aeschylus in his Style* (1942); the recourse to Crucifixion and other Passion imagery, widely shared in art and literature of the period, as a framework for symbolic commentary on current manifestations of human cruelty; their shared engagement with an ambiguous rather than didactic approach to meaning; and finally parallels with the Holocaust photography of Lee Miller and the attitudes to contemporary culture articulated in *Horizon*, to consolidate the argument that Bacon and Sutherland had points of affinity with one another, but also belonged to a wider phase in British culture, rooted in the communal experience of the most appalling external circumstances. Finally, the third 'Influences' section seeks to place the two artists in a broader, international context of developments in art, literature and philosophy. The discussion takes in the inspiration of Surrealism and Picasso (interweaving with English Romantic points of reference in Sutherland's case); the particular impact of *Guernica* as a demonstration of how modernist language could be combined with public comment on the wider world; and the affinity between both artists and the post-war climate of French Existentialism, epitomised by the British response to the new figurative idiom in sculpture and painting of Alberto Giacometti.

Bacon and Sutherland had an initial impact, and a longer-term influence within the discipline. The book was quite prominently reviewed (usually in conjunction with the Sutherland exhibition and its more colourful catalogue/book) in general magazines such as *The Spectator*, *The New Statesman* and the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, as well as the more usual specialist journals such as *The Burlington Magazine*, *Apollo*, *The Art Newspaper*, *The Art Book* and *The British Art* Journal.[5] Attentive readers pointed out a few regrettable mistakes.[6] Nevertheless, the book can I think be regarded as enhancing our knowledge and understanding of the period and protagonists in several respects. Along

with the more narrowly focussed exhibition and catalogue, it restored the art of Sutherland to its rightful place at the forefront of a particular phase in the history of British modernism. The association with a somewhat parochial 'neo-romanticism', and above all the manifest decline evident in his later work, had caused Sutherland somewhat to disappear from view after the comprehensive retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1980 and the appearance of Roger Berthoud's 1982 biography.[7] The evidence that the book and show served to put Sutherland back 'on the map' are communications from art historians and curators active in the field; doctoral research (in particular a CDA PhD project between the department of Art History at Bristol University and the National Museum of Wales, focussed on the Sutherland archive, for which I was external examiner in 2012); rising prices in the saleroom; endless (unwelcome) approaches from dealers and owners asking me to authenticate works; the engaged and enthusiastic discussion of his work in recent art-historical accounts of the period (e.g. Alexandra Harris's 2010 book *Romantic Moderns*);[8] the more prominent place accorded to Sutherland in, for example, displays at Tate Britain; and the emergence of subsequent exhibition projects such as the show focussing on early drawings at Modern Art, Oxford, and that devoted to work by Sutherland in Italian collections in September 2012 at the Fondazione Rocca Magnani near Parma (for the latter I was asked to provide the catalogue essay and opening lecture).[9] My aim to consider Sutherland in a wider international context is reflected in the inclusion and treatment of his work in the 2012 exhibition *Picasso and Modern European Art*, showing at Tate Britain and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, and in its important accompanying catalogue, where *Bacon and Sutherland* is cited and quoted.[10]

In relation to Bacon studies, my concern was, as already noted, to remove the work from the sphere of personal biography (and hagiography), and to read it in terms of creative dialogue with other artists (Sutherland, but also Picasso, the Surrealists and Giacometti), and a possible awareness of the work of writers (such as Aeschylus, T.S. Eliot, Jean-Paul Sartre, David Gascoyne). In *Bacon and Sutherland*, the artist's engagement with ideas of a tragic aesthetic and with the current expressive resonance of Crucifixion imagery was seen as representative of cultural reactions to contemporary circumstances. The book has been widely cited in the Bacon literature and was, for example, referred to several times in *Francis Bacon: The Violence of the Real*, the catalogue of a major 2006/7 exhibition in

Germany, as well as in the catalogue of the 2008/9 Bacon centenary exhibition.[11] The discussion of Bacon's response to Picasso, especially the volumetric Dinard bather drawings illustrated in a pre-war issue of the magazine *Cahiers d'Art*, was again echoed in the catalogue and installation of *Picasso and Modern British Art*.

Bacon and Sutherland introduced new primary documentation into the study of the two artists, as an alternative to the reliance in earlier literature on the artists' own retrospective comments about their aims and intentions. The publication as an Appendix of transcripts of Bacon's nine communications to Sutherland has been followed by that of the artist's letters to the collector and art world impresario Colin Anderson and those to the Lefevre and Hanover Galleries.[12] I also discovered a cache of letters to Bacon's close friend Sonia Orwell (in the George Orwell archive held by University College, London), including one from 1954 that is quoted at length (pp. 97-8) and is now widely agreed to be a key indication of his attitudes to photography and to the relationship between his art and recent history.[13] Further light on Bacon is shed by the correspondence between his artist friends Isabel Lambert (Rawsthorne) and Peter Rose Pulham (Tate Archive). The discussion of Sutherland likewise draws upon correspondence from the period with, for example, his friend and patron Kenneth Clark (Tate and National Museum of Wales), the War Artists Scheme (Imperial War Museum), and the critics Edward Sackville-West (Tate) and Robert Melville (Tate).

The 2008/9 Francis Bacon retrospective provided the catalyst for my reengagement with Bacon, following a period of immersion in the panoramic *Naked Portrait* exhibition and book, whose title echoes a frequent terminology employed by Lucian Freud. The most significant elaboration of the argument of *Bacon and Sutherland* has been a sustained exploration of Bacon's use of Nazi propaganda photographs, as a means to comment upon contemporary history and experience. This research first appeared as a joint article with Chris Stephens, one of the Tate Centenary show curators, and has come to fruition in a further full-length monograph, entitled *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda*, which appeared in autumn 2012. From a different point of view, this work reinforces the argument of the earlier book that Bacon's art was deeply informed by the experience of living through the war and its attendant horrors. From my perspective, Bacon seems to have been unique

amongst ambitious, progressively minded artists of the period in choosing, independently from any external requirements, to make Hitler and Nazi Germany one of the principal subjects and themes of his art. The book is, then, about how and why Bacon appropriated imagery from Fascist propaganda photographs, themselves produced in the 1930s. In accumulating and exploring specific examples of that process, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* offers a fresh overall perspective on the artist. In contrast to the many available studies, it focuses upon a particular strand and period of his work, rather than embracing his whole career. The emphasis is on close readings of the paintings themselves, and what we can infer about the technical and imaginative processes by which they were made. This approach is, I believe, appropriate and necessary when discussing an artist who remarked in a late interview: 'the thing about me is ... my whole sensibility is a visual one'.[14] The implication is that looking – at works of art, films, at photographs of many kinds, and of course at his own paintings as he worked on them and judged whether they were finished or satisfactory – was crucial to his art-making activity. The most fruitful research informing the study was looking hard at Bacon's paintings, in the original whenever possible, and trying to ask some fundamental questions about what points of departure they involved, and what they might mean. The main type of evidence adduced is what the pictures themselves look like, as in how they appear but also as in what visual analogies they seem to possess with other kinds of imagery, both artistic and photographic. A persistent strategy is juxtaposing specific paintings by Bacon with works of art and also literature with which he may (or may not) have been familiar. On occasion this serves to highlight by contrast what was singular and different about Bacon. Sometimes the intention is to indicate the inspiration he may have derived from others, such as the painter Walter Sickert or poets like Wynstan Auden. At other times, I introduce comparisons in order to suggest the kind of artist that Bacon was, in my view, or to demonstrate that it made sense to others to explore certain ideas in roughly the same historical context and circumstances in which Bacon also found himself, so lending greater plausibility to the interpretations of his work that I am offering. The readings of specific works presented here are often, it has to be said, quite speculative and subjective. But I hope they are also faithful to the impulses that informed Bacon's paintings, one of which was to create works of art that do not give up readily legible messages or precise meanings, but rather invite the imaginative absorption of the viewer.[15] They are not necessarily driven by conceptual abstractions, whether intellectual, moral or ideological, and they do not lend themselves to

decoding in terms of essential messages. Within that general approach of allowing visual affinities to drive the argument, the recurrent point of comparison is Nazi propaganda imagery. The core idea I explore in the book is that this very particular type of photography, made in Germany in the late 1920s and 1930s, provided one of the key springboards for a substantial proportion of Bacon's known paintings made between the early 1940s and the mid 1950s, as well as a few important works from even later in his career.

As a consequence of that argument, Bacon emerges, I would claim, as a different kind of artist from the familiar stereotype, in both academic and more popular treatments, whereby the paintings are seen as essentially rooted in a disembodied imagination and in private realms of experience, such as his personal relationships with lovers and friends and his experiences of particular places. However, the paintings themselves demonstrate that wider historical events were also integral to his concerns, and that, for Bacon, it was mass circulation photographs that most vividly triggered feelings and memories about the traumatic period he lived through. Overall, I argue that the strand in his work discussed in *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* arises from the interplay between a general ambition and a recurrent process. The ambition was to comment or reflect in some sense upon the contemporary world, to produce a latter-day version of what is commonly termed 'history painting', implying a stronger engagement with momentous themes than does the Baudelairean notion of the painting of modern life. Meanwhile, Bacon's picture-making process typically involved encountering photographs that he found imaginatively and visually suggestive, extracting them physically from their original context in a book or magazine, editing them by working into them with pen, pencil or brush, and/or cropping and folding them, and then holding or placing such visual aids in the studio in such a way that he could contemplate and transfer the imagery onto a canvas that he was either starting to work on, or had already begun. Such appropriations of photographic imagery, including Nazi propaganda, might then be combined and radically transformed within the production of any particular work. Chapter One elaborates that general perspective on Bacon's art. Thereafter, Chapter Two focuses on the wider context of British fascination with Hitler and the currency of Fascist photographic imagery that promoted his cause. The two subsequent and much longer chapters build on those foundations and develop close readings of some of Bacon's most important early paintings, in roughly chronological

sequence, culminating in the two *Crucifixion* triptychs of 1962 and 1965. Bacon's concern might be seen as a visual equivalent to Hannah Arendt's formulation in 1945: "the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe—as death became the fundamental problem after the last war."

Having outlined some of the specific contributions my work has made to the study of British modernism, and Bacon in particular, it seems worthwhile to characterise what I have come to identify as my distinctive concerns as an art historian, concerns which have the potential I believe for wider application, not least in my own future research as I move beyond a phase of immersion in Bacon and his British contemporaries into other areas if research. In order to historicize Bacon, the principal strategy employed in both *Bacon and Sutherland* and *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* is one of juxtaposing his paintings with other visual material, a body of painting and photography respectively. In terms of methodology, such studies reflect a personal interest in what might be termed visual translation. Compared to many others perhaps, my approach to art history is emphatically visual, with ideas and interpretations often emerging from engagement with objects and a perception of visual resemblance or affinity.

By way of a case study, Graham Sutherland's decision to move to the county back in the 1920s was inspired by his youthful infatuation with the art of Samuel Palmer, who in turn had been based in, and stimulated by, the village of Shoreham. An immersion in Palmer was strikingly apparent in Sutherland's early etchings. In the 1930s, however, Sutherland decided to reinvent himself as a modernist painter, the prints market having collapsed after the Wall St crash. He was soon taken up by Kenneth Clark, then director of the National Gallery and general rising star, who evidently saw Sutherland as a latter-day Palmer, an artist he too collected and admired. Sutherland and Clark doubtless shared some notion that a post-Surrealist sense of the roots of art in fantasy and the subconscious, augmented by chance encounters with found objects, was perfectly compatible with an attachment to the English Romantic tradition in general, and to Palmer in particular. The two men surely lingered over *Cornfield by Moonlight, with the Evening Star*, a major Palmer from around 1830 that Clark had acquired, and that served as something of a talisman for Sutherland, informing the approach to imagery, style, and medium in works such as *Black Landscape*

from 1940.[16] Palmer remained the main model for Sutherland's interest in effects of sunset and nocturnal lighting, endowing the natural landscape with a mystery and expressive charge. But whereas the more obviously derivative etchings of a decade earlier inherited a mood of benign tranquillity from Palmer, Sutherland's mature paintings project a darkness that is emotional as well as visual, bound up of course with current wartime realities.

In the patriotic climate of the Second World War it is not surprising that neo-romanticism came to be seen more narrowly and dogmatically as an antidote to international modernism. In 1947 Sutherland was so incensed by a magazine essay proclaiming that English artists were mainly looking back to the native tradition that he winged off a letter for publication:

> During the course of his argument – that English painting has gained by the enforced insularity of the war – Mr. Nicolson writes of myself (and others) as *having turned their backs on Paris to seek inspiration in the English romantic movement of the early nineteenth century.* I cannot let this pass. Current art criticism is peculiarly absolutist; and here is yet another example of the habit of art historians to oversimplify – to label and to pigeonhole. I do not deny that I received great adolescent stimulus from Palmer and Blake; but that does not mean I turn my back on Paris. The question of influences is not as easy as that, and is surely a more complex and subtle matter than can be covered by such snap judgements. Painters are affected by things which come to them from all over the place; from many kinds of painting and many things. One absorbs what one needs at a given time.[17]

The accusation about over-simplification is well-made, though equally Sutherland's comments illustrate a common pitfall when artists talk about the influences on their own work. That dismissive remark about Palmer and Blake as adolescent stimuli is characteristic of an impulse to deny or minimize the inspiration extracted from others. As we know from the work of literary critic Harold Bloom, there is a good deal of anxiety attached to influence.

In my own research, I am fascinated by the 'question of influences', the way artists feed off existing visual imagery, be it past or present, artistic or vernacular, within the process of conceiving and creating their own work. I relish Sutherland's insistence on the 'complexity

and subtlety' of the process, but also on the element of opportunism: 'One absorbs what one needs at a given time'. To which might be added: one absorbs from particular things that happens to be accessible. That aspect comes to the fore in the 2013 article about Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud assimilating ideas from Sickert. I argue here that Bacon was particularly excited by Sickert's *La Hollandaise* (c. 1907), now in the Tate, which he surely encountered in the Redfern Gallery's Coronation exhibition in the summer of 1953. The show included one of Bacon's own *Head* series, and the two works were even listed next to one another in the catalogue. Previously, this now familiar Sickert had, as far as I know, languished in obscurity. My sense that contemplating *La Hollandaise* was especially critical for Bacon's 1953 *Two Figures* is suggested by the remarkably similar ways in which animated marks in the foreground are floated against a dark, tonal ground, and in particular by the broad touches of light paint dragged over the texture of the canvas, to describe sheet and pillows. Note also the radically blurred treatment of the facial features and the exaggerated, seemingly random highlights in the modelling of the bodies in each work. Bacon was alert, one might infer, to the sheer boldness and experimentalism of which Sickert was capable, and he may have perceived in *La Hollandaise* a raw sensuality, a sense of physicality projected not just through illustration but also through the texture and manipulation of paint, which he then proceeded to elaborate in his own picture, grafting what he had gleaned from Sickert onto imagery of wrestlers derived more obviously from Muybridge, to produce an astonishingly frank evocation of gay sex. The photographic starting point was obviously there from the start, but here as elsewhere one cannot be sure how and when the Sickert allusion surfaced, if it did. A comment Jasper Johns made in 1982 may be relevant: 'Working itself may initiate memories of other works. Naming or painting those ghosts sometimes seems a way to stop their nagging'.[18]

In Freud's *Large Interior W.9*, the artist's positioning of his aged mother, seated and lost in her thoughts, in front of a nude figure lying on her back, her face framed by her arms and gazing contemplatively up at the ceiling, brings to mind Sickert compositions from the Camden Town murder series that feature seated males and recumbent naked females, notably the Kirkcaldy version of *What shall we do for the Rent?* (c. 1908), a work which, intriguingly, was exhibited at the Fine Art Society in London in 1973, the same date as the Freud bears. But another comparison is, I think, still more telling about what Freud saw and

valued in Sickert. The predominantly brown, ochre and dirty white palette, the close up but high viewpoint, the orientation of the two older figures, and the atmosphere of psychological dislocation across the generations, together suggest an absorption on Freud's part in the Tate's *Ennui* (c. 1914), which by Sickert's standards is an unusually monumental as well as tightly executed and constructed picture. The taut pyramid enclosing the two figures, notwithstanding their spatial dislocation, corresponds strikingly to Freud's configuration of the model's knees containing the mother's head and shoulders, and connecting visually with the contour of the chair. The obdurate presence of wood, leather, plaster and so forth seem in each case further to oppress the uncommunicative pairs of individuals. The beer glass on the table in *Ennui* establishes a hard geometric note, offsetting other surfaces and textures, closely analogous to Freud's mortar and pestle. Such affinities and allusions coexist with notable differences of conception. Narrative and psychological suggestions in the Sickert, the sense of a stale family relationship unrelieved by, or perhaps intensified by, the trappings of respectable middle-class life, serve to highlight the stark studio staging in the Freud, where the girl and woman seem only to come together for the artist's pictorial convenience – it is recorded indeed that they never actually coincided on the premises. As spectators we might feel inclined to wonder if the two figures are contemplating one another's state of being, whether in memory or anticipation, such elemental realities symbolized by the bareness of the space. Or does such a reading mistake for melancholy or thought of any description the sheer impassivity necessary for sitting still hour after hour for the demanding maestro? One might be deterred from venturing such claims by Freud's reported comment: 'My method was so arduous that there was no room for influence'.[19] Or by Bacon's blunt remark to an interviewer: 'I've never been influenced by Sickert'.[20] However, given the plausible visual evidence in each case, I took solace from something Sickert himself said on one occasion: 'To the really creative painter, it must be remembered, the work of other men is mainly nourishment, to assist him in his own creation. That is one reason why the laity are wise to approach the criticism of art by an artist with the profoundest mistrust'.[21]

More briefly, in exploring Bacon's engagement with the art of Degas, Sickert's own great mentor, extending I argue throughout the nearly 50 years of Bacon's mature production, I tried to take into account Bacon's general admiration for Degas' unswerving commitment to

the human figure, prized free from classical idealization, and also his very specific responses to works that happened to be on show either permanently or temporarily in London, including pictures in the collection of the National Gallery. The examination of the importance of Chaim Soutine for post-war British painters, arguing for example that Freud took his cue to some degree from the subject-matter and poignant atmosphere of Soutine's work, albeit translated into a totally opposed artistic language. This involved, for example, juxtaposing *Girl with Roses* of 1947-48 with Soutine's so-called *The Mad Woman* (c.1919), which had been exhibited at the Gimpel Fils gallery in 1947. The availability in London of Soutine's *Landscape at Céret* (c. 1920), especially at a 1953 show at the Redfern, is also identified as a particular catalyst for the enthusiasm and assimilation of Bacon, Auerbach, Leon Kossoff and critic David Sylvester.

This interest in visual translation has methodological affinities and points of departure. Since the 1980s the notion of 'appropriation' has tended to dominate the conceptual framework within which art critics and historians have thought about borrowings and adaptations, whether from mass media or artistic imagery.[22] This is perhaps because the terms suggests knowingness and ideological virtue, an artistic corollary to the process of deconstruction performed on visual and other cultural materials by Roland Barthes, say. The process sounds postmodernist, in the wake of Barthes' famous remark that all texts, and by implication images, are ultimately 'tissues of quotations'. The contemporary work of figures like Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Gerhard Richter and numerous others are obviously compatible with such 'appropriationist' discourse, marking what has been termed a 'referential turn'. There is clearly a shift from the more private, you might even say surreptitious, absorption of source material in earlier artists. I am also conscious that in current literary studies, the identification by the reader of models and points of reference is widely emphasised, under the term intertextuality, which was launched by Kristeva in the late 1960s, and certainly sounds more interesting and sexy than influence.[23] The notion of the intertextual does indeed provide a way of by-passing the artist's biography, subjectivity or verbalized intentions, the stock tools of explanation that Barthes rightly dismissed as superficial and misleading in 'The Death of the Author'. But the famous notion of a 'tissue of quotations', as discerned by the duly empowered reader or viewer, arguably throws out

with the bathwater the baby that is agency, the artist's own decisions to use and modify some specific starting point.

Personally, I am more conscious of extending a mode of analysis expounded in Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, now over 50 years old.[24] Gombrich's treatment was limited by his preoccupations with realism and the psychology of perception, but the core argument at a deeper level was that, yes, artists generate their work out of a vast array of impulses and assumptions, conscious or unconscious, and in response to a wide range of stimuli and external determinants, but in doing so they inescapably adapt the available resources and conventions of art itself, as practiced by their predecessors and contemporaries. In their own work, that is to say, they in some way extend the existing tradition and prevailing idiom of their particular medium. This might at times seem an end in itself, from the perspective of the artist, but it is also what permits him or her to articulate ideas, express feelings and attitudes, represent the external world, and generally engage and shape the spectator's response to their work. Gombrich himself was extending the Germanic disciplinary tradition represented by figures such as Warburg, Wölfflin and Riegl. He acknowledged as much when he summarised thus the argument of *Art and Illusion*: 'All paintings, as Wölfflin said, owe more to other paintings than they owe to direct observation'. In turn, Gombrich's work stimulated Michael Baxandall, his student and subsequent colleague at the Warburg Institute. In a section of his altogether brilliant 1985 book *Patterns of Influence*, probably the only one most people know, Baxandall demolished the well-worn idea of 'influence'.[25] In one of the longest and most memorable sentences ever penned by an art historian, he argued that significant artists proceed by actively appropriating and transforming to their own distinctive ends, in very varied ways, possibilities which seem latent in art they have encountered. The term influence, with its inherent connotations of passivity, is left of use only for describing what art students derive from the current state of practice, or what lesser artists absorb from their more innovative fellows.

I am happy to acknowledge influence from Baxandall, and suspect that all I am adding, from reflection on work produced during the modern period where we have so much more information at our disposal, is the notion that it may be especially worthwhile to think not only about how artists proceed from a diffuse admiration for artists they admire, and whatever broad values those artists stand for, but also that we should aim to recapture the

intense and highly visual reactions that they have to specific works of art, encountered perhaps fortuitously, which strike a chord with concerns and needs of the moment. Jasper Johns can once again be taken as representative of the artist's perspective that I am trying to capture when he remarked: 'Influence? It's very hard for me to play with that word, because one is influenced by everything'. But within that omnivorous framework, it is engagement with specifics that really counts: 'I like special paintings and I like special painter's works and that's about as far as it goes'.[26] Johns further commented: 'There are works by other artists which remain significant for me over a long period of time. I may refer to them in my painting. But a particular work may seem important at one time, and later lose its significance'.[27] Johns is also a notable example of how artists use specific works of their own, old or recent, as springboards to creativity. However, I would further want to insist that significant artists remain for a sustained period highly responsive to stimuli in the wider artistic environment, which becomes a key element in maintaining a momentum of development and self-renewal. It is perhaps when they stop looking outwards, and focus purely on their own oeuvre and habits as the only resource they need, that their work can become less compelling (the same is true by the way of art historians, and I can only plead that self-referentiality is inherent in this particular exercise!).

Francis Bacon in his later work is, to my mind, a good example of such aesthetic sclerosis. But he is also an exemplary figure in this context because there is such gaping divide between his final pictures – how they look, what meanings or expressive charge they emit – and the photographs, more than existing paintings, which he constantly cannibalized, combined, edited and transmuted to his own purposes. It was trawling through copies of *Picture Post* magazine, a prime source for Nazi images, that threw up other points of departure, such as the double page spread from 1947 of a lion attaching a photographer, including the large image of the lioness hovering with menace above the man, which turned in his hands into another evocation of male sexual tenderness in a series of pictures by Bacon from the early 1950s. The process epitomizes a remark he made in an interview:

> You are bombarded by images all the time. There are only a few, though, which stick in your mind and have some influence, but some do have a considerable effect. It's difficult to say much about this effect because it isn't so much the image which matters, but what you do with it ... I think that every image, everything we see,

changes our way of seeing everything else ... There's a sort of influence of image upon image.[28]

One could multiply specific instances of artists feeding off existing imagery in diverse ways. But let me step back and ask what are the benefits and attractions of such a concern? Broadly, it offers a counterpoint, or antidote, to what I see as the over-valuation of abstract ideas in much art history from the last 20 years or so, whereby it tends to be seen as preeminently important to locate the artistic practice under consideration within a conceptual framework deriving in some way from a canon of revered authors and approved texts. I am often left with the sense that a perceived obligation to 'theorise' a topic has in practice turned into making the material fit some preconceived schema, to the detriment of critical engagement and illumination. This is not meant as a crusty polemic, but I do want to assert that mainstream art history, as currently practiced, can run the risk of neglecting two important factors. Firstly, art historians are supposed to be good at looking hard and critically analysing what they see, as well as merging into some interdisciplinary pool of cultural diagnostics. That's one sense of looking as research. Secondly, and much more importantly, artists themselves are undoubtedly good at, and obsessively engaged with, the activity of looking at visual artefacts. Some insight into this is provided by Simon Grant's recent anthology, *In My View: Personal Reflections on Art by Today's Leading Artists*, in which practitioners reflect upon particular works, past or present, which had meant a great deal to them.[29] For example, the American Pop Artist Ed Ruscha has spoken of the talismanic status that Millais' *Ophelia* has long possessed for him. He concedes: 'Ophelia is in the grand tradition of English painting, and its story goes back to Shakespeare; my work goes back to 1968 and, you could say, is the culmination of commercial America'. But Ruscha recalls discovering the work 'when I came to the UK in 1961 and was struck by its originality. I guess I had a fondness for all sorts of pre-Raphaelite images back then. The feeling passed, but the nature of this painting stayed with me'. Ruscha adds: 'Each time I come to London, I feel obliged to see it. In some ways, I feel I am looking at myself'. 'The painting became a trigger in my art, an inspiration', he states: 'I viewed it strictly as a picture, how it was composed and so on ... You look down on her from an oblique angle, so the painting is an aerial view; the diagonal of her body in the water is an aspect my work echoes. My study of art is ordered on that thinking: that you look at something almost as if

it were a tabletop arrangement. I regard a lot of my paintings and even my photographs as the offspring of this painting'.

But of course what the book contains are verbalizations. For artists, I would argue, actually contemplating specific works of art in collections, exhibitions or even sometimes reproduction is absolutely fundamental to their visual creativity, in much the same way that reading matters hugely to writers, or listening to musicians, watching movies to film-makers. For artists too, looking might be described as a form of research. The activity is amply documented, at any rate. Manet is one of the most referential of artists, and remarked for instance of the 1862 *Spanish Singer:* 'When I was painting this figure I was thinking about the Madrid masters and about Hals as well'.[30] John Baldessari comments, in Grant's *In my View*, that 'for me, art is a conversation with other artists'; while Bacon stated that 'to create something ... is a kind of echo from one artist to another'.[31]

I would not wish to say that we should only consider art from the artist's perspective. But the pendulum may have swung too far to the opposite extreme, and we should not entirely neglect that profound and enthusiastic engagement with art objects that means so much to practitioners. So my kind of art history is perhaps a glorified form of eavesdropping. Specific appropriations have nothing to do with the kind of pigeonholing into movements or national schools that Sutherland rightly cautioned art historians against. I am also keen to retain continuities with ways of looking that are not purely esoteric. Immensely refined commentary, such as Baxandall on Piero dell Francesca's *Baptism of Christ in Patterns of Intention*, can be seen as an extension of thought processes that, at root, are quite basic and intuitive. For the artist, as suggested, the constant question or problem is where do I go from here; how can I extend my creative resources in relation to what I have already done, to what others around me are doing, and to the wider visual culture from remote media, periods and cultures with which I possess familiarity? Equally, within the act of looking at a work of art, as of listening to music, viewing a film and so forth, it surely comes quite naturally to contemplate what that work is like and unlike. Placing an object within a genre, tradition, tendency, oeuvre, or whatever, is one of the key ways in which viewers at all levels of sophistication make sense of aesthetic encounters, and sharpen their critical purchase. Recognition of apparent allusions is often one of the pleasures that knowing

viewers take from their engagement with works of art. Measuring influences is equally tied in with evaluation. Few observers could discern much invention or innovation in what were seen as Damien Hirst's pastiches of Bacon, none of which appeared in last year's Hirst retrospective at Tate Modern. The relationship between value judgement and visual appropriation may be a good topic for philosophical aesthetics, if it not already. From the perspectives of both artist and viewer, then, an art history rooted in visual juxtaposition is not just a pedagogic formula, exploiting in the good old days the famous pair of slide projectors, but corresponds to the actuality of how works of art are made and experienced, in the world beyond the seminar room and the learned journal.

I feel bound also to consider whether any problems arise from performing this mode of art history? As we have seen, a significant obstacle or deterrent is the attitude frequently articulated by artists, when they or their protective heirs are still around to listen to those misleading art historians. On the whole, at any rate before the onset of appropriation art, the last thing ambitious artists like talking or reading about is how they took their bearings from others. Aside from vanity and psychological imperatives, they quite rightly suspect that such derivations might somehow be taken to diminish them, given the naive cult of originality and individual genius prevalent in the modern art world. Eavesdropping can be taken as rude and indiscreet, in other words. Moreover it can be a distraction. As we have seen, visual derivations of any interest need to be seen as active transformations, subordinate to the wider concerns of the artist doing the transforming, and as the springboard for thematic interpretation by the viewer or critic. In that sense, noting visual triggers can appear rather secondary to the main meat of considering what the final work suggests, expresses, communicates etc, a matter of means rather than ends. A sceptic might say so what, for instance, confronted by my fascinated observation that David's imagery of martial masculinity in the 1785 *Oath of the Horatii* took a cue from the small figure, likewise angular and seen from the back, to the left of the *Rape of the Sabine Women* by Poussin, a work in the Louvre by one of David's favourite artists executed in the late 1630s. So are we dealing here with an intriguing insight into the creative process, or with mere trainspotting?

Practically speaking, new technologies may provide even more support and stimulation for art historians in describing and evaluating such conversations than is the case with literature. The web represents a massive shift in the ease and speed with which one can scan through reproductive images, compared with manhandling books, mounted plates and so forth. Moreover extracting such images and putting them together into a powerpoint, for comparative purposes, is a far more flexible instrument than operating with old-fashioned 35mm slides. When it comes to publications, visual relationships are problematic to illustrate given the limitations on the quality and number of reproductions that are usually available to accompany academic texts, and the prohibitive image and copyright costs that are often involved. Conversely, a pair of small reproductions might look much more alike than would the originals. What is certain is that perceived relationships – literally perceived - are exceedingly difficult to describe in terms of verbal discourse, given that such affinities are manifestations of essentially visual kinds of intelligence. The available lexicon of terms, even as expanded by Baxandall, maps crudely onto the subtleties of visual reinterpretation. The argument can end up sounding rather laboured and subjective, so that an affinity I see as incontrovertible might strike someone else as completely off the wall, or mere coincidence. It may conceivably be easier to demonstrate literary assimilation than visual. For one thing, apparent manifestations of dialogue between artists and their predecessors or contemporaries are often hard to support from documentation, beyond such sources as the endlessly revealing letters of Van Gogh. Artists may give less away in this respect than writers, being on the whole less verbal creatures.

Artistic transmission can most effectively be addressed through the medium of exhibitions, where original works can be juxtaposed to permit consideration of known or hypothetical historical relationships. The Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted two famous, controversial shows in the 1980s looking at 'Primitivism' and at the import into High Art of visual ideas from low kinds of imagery such as ads, caricature and graffiti, curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe respectively.[32] In recent years, academic and museum art historians have curated shows devoted, for example, to Turner's dialogue with other artists, or Picasso's engagement with the Old Masters, his mutually productive rivalry with Matisse and ongoing interest in Degas, as well as the stimulus Picasso provided in turn to several British modernists.[33] The recent 'Seduced by Art' at the National Gallery explored how past

and present photographers have looked at paintings as a creative resource.[34] Exhibitions have their own difficulties: seeming to be too didactic or academic, for instance, or not always being able to get the right loans to capture a historical encounter.

The preceding discussion draws on my discussion of such methodological issues in two recent papers. The first ('Eavesdropping on Artists: Quentin Tarantino meets Quentin de la Tour') was presented to the Aesthetics Research Group research seminar at the University of Kent in March 2013. The second ('Influence/ Appropriation: a Perspective from Art History') was delivered at the interdisciplinary *"Efface the Traces!": Modernism and Influence* conference, held at the University of Durham in April 2013, which in itself indicated that exploring such matters is timely. One possible future project is to write a book about the issue of influence, or appropriation, with particular reference to the modern period. Another, which clearly build upon this core interest, is to lead a research project revisiting the transatlantic artistic dialogue during the 1960s, which I have been working on in recent months as a potential exhibition and publication focusing on art produced in the year 1965, as seen from the perspective of 2015, the 50th anniversary too of the University of Kent. A third idea is to develop some of the articles submitted herewith to produce a book placing Francis Bacon within the broad field of modern art, considering his debts to the art of the past, his dialogue with contemporaries, and the inspiration derived from his work by successive generations of British artists who shared his engagement with photographic, mass-media imagery (such as Richard Hamilton, R.B. Kitaj, David Hockney, Jeremy Deller and Dexter Dalwood). This latter topic was considered in another recent conference paper, now submitted for publication.

I trust these reflections offer a useful commentary on the attitudes and motivations underpinning the body of research I have submitted herewith for the degree of PhD by publication.

NOTES

[1] James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

[2] Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens (eds.), *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).

[3] Rina Arya, *Francis Bacon: Painting in a Godless World* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2012); Rina Arya (ed.), *Francis Bacon: Critical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), which includes one of the essays I am submitting; Nicholas Chare, *After Francis Bacon* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); and my own *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda.*

[4] David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993).

[5] William Feaver, 'Not a Matching Pair, *The Spectator*, 23 May 2005; Richard Cork, 'Bacon and Sutherland' *The New Statesman*, 23 June 2005; Stephen Farthing, 'Haunted Psychdramas', *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 17 February 2006; Dennis Farr, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2005, pp. 630-1; Martin Harrison, 'A Story of Friends Disunting', *The Art Newspaper*, September 2005; Andrew Lambirth, 'The New Realism of the Imagination', *The Art Book,* February 2006, pp. 6-8; Adrian Clark, 'Sutherland and Bacon', *The British Art Journal*, Vol VI, no 3.

[6] For example, Bacon was born in 1909, not 1910; Sutherland's Northampton *Crucifixion* is not, strictly speaking, an altarpiece; and, to my further embarrassment, there are footnotes in which Spurling becomes Spalding, and James Hyman becomes Timothy Hyman.

[7] See Ronald Alley, *Graham Sutherland* (London: Tate Gallery, 1982); Roger Berthoud, *Graham Sutherland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

[8] Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).

[9] George Shaw, Brian Catling, Alexandra Harris and Emily Smith, *Graham Sutherland: An Unfinished World* (exh. cat., Oxford: Modern Art, 2011).

[10] James Beechey and Chris Stephens (eds.), *Picasso and Modern European Art* (London: Tate Publications, 2012).

[11] Armin Zweite (ed), *Francis Bacon: The Violence of the Real* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006); Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*.

[12] Adrian Clark, 'Francis Bacon's Correspondence with Sir Colin Anderson', *British Art Journal* (London), vol.8, no.1, 2007, pp. 39-43; 'Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery', *Burlington Magazine,* May 2010, pp. 307-12 (the correspondence with Duncan Macdonald); Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in the 1950s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), transcribing the letters to the Hanover Gallery, mostly from the 1950s.

[13] Bacon, letter to Sonia Orwell, 13 December 1954, Orwell Archive, Library, University College, London. An extract subsequently appeared in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, p. 21. The letter is a key point of reference in my book *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda.*

[14] 'Interview with Francis Bacon', in Hugh M. Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953* (Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego/London: Lund Humphries, 2002), p. 46.

[15] See Martin Hammer, 'Continuity and Contradiction in the Art of Francis Bacon: The Interlocking of Image and Paint', Arya, *Francis Bacon: Critical and Theoretical Perspectives*, pp. 121-168.

[16] The topic was discussed in my lecture 'Palmer Revisited: the response of Kenneth Clark and Graham Sutherland', British Museum, London, January 2006 (in relation to the current Samuel Palmer exhibition at the BM).

[17] 'English Painting' (1947), reprinted in Martin Hammer, *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924-1950* (London: Scala, 2005), p. 161.

[18] Cited in Marco Livingstone, 'Jasper Johns', in Richard Morphet (ed.), *Encounters: New Art from Old* (London: National Gallery, 2000), p. 182.

[19] Freud cited in Sebastian Smee, *Lucian Freud* (Cologne etc: Taschen, 2007), p. 14.

[20] Cited in Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert: "Images which Unlock Other Images"', in Martin Harrison (ed.), *Francis Bacon: New Studies* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), p. 74.

[21] Sickert, 'Risi-Bisi' (1912), reprinted in Osbert Sitwell (ed.), *A Free House!, or The Artist as Craftsman, being the Writings of Walter Richard Sickert* (London: Macmillan, 1947), p. 176.

[22] See David Evans, *Appropriation (Documents of Contemporary Art)* (Boston: MIT Press, 2009); and the section 'Notes from the Field: Appropriation' in the June 2012 issue of *The Art Bulletin.*

[23] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[24] Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, 1960).

[25] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

[26] Kirk Varnedoe (ed.), *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), p. 157.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Francis Bacon in Conversation with Michel Archimbaud* (London: Phaidon, 1993), pp. 147-48.

[29] Simon Grant, *In My View: Personal Reflections on Art by Today's Leading Artists* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012).

[30] Cited in Lawrence W. Nichols, 'Manet and Hals: Two Geniuses, One Vision', *Manet: Portraying Life* (exh. cat., London: Royal Academy, 2013), p. 66.

[31] 'John Baldessari on Sigmar Polke' in Grant, *In My View*, p. 31; *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, p. 126.

[32] William Rubin (ed.), *'Primitivism' in Twentieth-Century Modern: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988); Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990)

[33] See David Solkin, *Turner and the Masters* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009); Ian Warrell, Alan Crookham and Philippa Simpson, *Turner Inspired – In the Light of Claude* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012); Anne Baldassari, Elizabeth Cowling, John Elderfield, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine and Kirk Varnedoe, *Matisse Picasso* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002); Elizabeth Cowling and Richard Kendall, *Picasso Looks at Degas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010); Beechey and Stephens, *Picasso and Modern British Art* (2012).

[34] Hope Kingsley and Christopher Riopelle, *Seduced by Art: Photography Past and Present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012)

Martin Hammer
Chris Stephens

'Seeing the Story of One's Time': Appropriations from Nazi Photography in the Work of Francis Bacon

By mid-1946, Francis Bacon had begun to establish a distinct presence on the London art scene. In April 1945, he had exhibited *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and *Figure in a Landscape* (1945) in a group exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery (*146–7, 97*). Early the following year, he showed a pair of related pictures as *Figure Study I* and *II* (*98, 99*), and that summer one could see both *Man with Microphones* (1946) at the Lefevre and *Painting* (1946) at the Redfern Gallery (Figure 1 and *101*).* The latter two works prompted an interesting aside from one rather unimpressed reviewer: 'Some people have said, though not in print, that these latest works of Francis Bacon's are comments of the first importance on the times.'[1] Such a reticence about acknowledging a connection between Bacon's pictures and the realities of the contemporary world has generally been maintained in the literature on the artist. The leading authorities have continued to avoid mentioning the war, or to do so only to assert that his art transcended the immediate circumstances of its production, and addressed a more universal and tragic human condition, understood in broadly existentialist terms. The notable exception is John Russell's 1964 book on the artist, with its set-piece account of his encounter with the *Three Studies* in 1945, which seemed an artistic corollary to the many images of horrendous violence that were blighting the atmosphere of celebration at the end of the war.[2] But at the time Russell was more inhibited: reviewing the Lefevre Gallery show, he raved about the works of Matthew Smith and Graham Sutherland, and remarked only of Bacon: 'This [the triptych] reaches the furthest reach of anatomical Guignol; but a large "Figure in a Landscape" compels respect by its ambition and morbid accomplishment.'[3]

Nowadays, by contrast, the war cannot get mentioned enough. For generations who did not experience them directly, the events and psychological impact of the Second World War have become an obsessive and exotic source of fascination, as evidenced by numerous historical studies, films and novels.[4] What might it be like to read Bacon's early work as some kind of comment on what were by any standards extraordinary times? He had witnessed the rise of the Nazis and worked as an ARP (Air Raid Precaution) warden in London during the Blitz. The war had finally ended in Europe at around the same time as Bacon's initial public appearance, but alongside the news of victory and liberation came the endless revelations of continuing destruction, civilian and military deaths,

*The italicized numbers in brackets refer to the illustrations, by page number, in Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, eds, *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). Many reproductions can also be found online – for example, on the centenary exhibition website: http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/francisbacon/default.shtm. Our illustrations are mostly comparative.

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Figure 1. Francis Bacon, *Study for Man with Microphones* (subsequently overpainted), 1946; illustration from J.T. Soby, *Contemporary Painters* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1948). © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS, London, 2009.

large-scale rape and looting, migration of displaced persons on a massive scale, and, above all, the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps and the subsequent sufferings of Jewish survivors.[5] Meanwhile, the first uses of the atom bomb in August 1945 terminated the war in Asia, and thereafter the early stages in the cold war added a bitter twist to the traumatized, impoverished and gloom-laden atmosphere of post-war Britain, as fears of a potential and even more deadly new conflict coincided with poring over the horrors of the last one at the Nuremberg Trials.

In sum, Bacon's key early works emerged from a period in his life during which he witnessed an utterly traumatic historical scenario. The problem is framing the connection. His friends related how it was the war that galvanized a renewed creativity; the experience 'suddenly turned him on to painting again, after several year's withdrawal . . . when he was discharged from his ARP post, he found, against all expectation, that painting had become an obsession for him'.[6] By extension, is there any sense in which Bacon resumed painting in order to comment, in his own very singular way,

upon the specific moment? To construct a reading of his art in such terms, the key evidence is his use of Nazi propaganda images as points of reference and departure for many pictures from the early 1940s to the mid-1950s and beyond. No systematic study has been undertaken of this neglected topic, notwithstanding a few hints in Ronald Alley's 1964 catalogue raisonné.[7]

Throughout his life, as we now know, Bacon accumulated photographs from books, newspapers or magazines documenting contemporary political power and violence. That this was one ingredient in the general inspiration for his painting that he derived from photography was established in the early 1950s. Sam Hunter described the extensive collection of photographs kept on a table at one end of Bacon's studio, encompassing 'Goebbels wagging a finger on the public platform, the human carnage of a highway accident, every sort of war atrocity, the bloody streets of Moscow during the October Revolution', and so on.[8] The presence of such imagery, as well as that of photographs of works of art that interested Bacon, was also documented by Hunter in the form of three selections of photographic material arranged on the studio floor, two of which illustrated his article in New York's *Magazine of Art* (Figures 2 and 3).[9] In his famous book of interviews, David Sylvester illustrated other kinds of photographic imagery that fascinated Bacon, who remarked on how he found photographs

Figure 2. Sam Hunter, montage of material from Bacon's studio, 7 Cromwell Place, *c.*1950. © Sam Hunter

Figure 3. Sam Hunter, montage of material from Bacon's studio, 7 Cromwell Place, *c.*1950. © Sam Hunter

more interesting than paintings, and had 'always been haunted' by them, describing the process of reverie and imaginative insight they could provoke:

> I think it's the slight remove from fact, which returns me onto the fact more violently. Through the photographic image I find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it. And photographs are not only points of reference; they're often triggers of ideas.[10]

Later, he elaborated frankly on the 'incredibly useful source of inspiration' that photographs provided: 'Images also help me find and realise ideas. I look at hundreds of very different, contrasting images and I pinch details from them, rather like people who eat from other people's plates. When I paint, I want to paint an image from my imagination, and this image is subsequently transformed.'[11]

To explore his appropriations of Nazi imagery, we want to propose several connections between the paintings and specific photographs, which raise intriguing issues about what he pinched, how he transformed such sources in accordance with his imaginative conceptions, and what meanings might thereby be extracted from the final works. Regarding his

access to Nazi propaganda images, some of those he worked from had been disseminated in the press, but others were more esoteric and may have been acquired in Germany in the 1930s. Concerning his incorporation of a swastika in his 1965 Crucifixion triptych (*151*), Bacon remarked: 'You see, with those enormous crowds that have so often been filmed and photographed at the Nuremberg rallies, I had seen all those people and they all had those armbands on with their swastikas on them and I wanted that in this image.'[12] If the implication is indeed that Bacon had visited Germany on one or more occasions in the 1930s, as he certainly had in 1929 and 1930, then he could of course have returned with a cache of illustrated books, including some of the numerous volumes produced by Hitler's friend and favourite photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann. But his means of access may have been less direct.

It has been proposed that photographs of leading Nazis were a source for Bacon as early as the 1936–7 *Figure in a Garden* (*47*), although the only known evidence is Alley's remark that one of its several nicknames was 'Goering and his Lion Cub'.[13] Alley proceeded to comment that in the later 1930s Bacon 'became particularly interested in photographs of Hitler and Mussolini when these began to reach England'.[14] Fascist imagery was certainly relevant for the two pictures made after he started painting again in the early to mid-1940s. In Alley's catalogue, these and others came under the category of 'abandoned'. It was not that the works in question had been left unfinished or unresolved – as that term might suggest – but that they were 'abandoned' in as much as Bacon did not bother to take them with him when he left 7 Cromwell Place in April 1951. In fact, Peter Rose Pulham's photographs of works stacked in that studio show that at least some of those later recorded as 'abandoned' or 'destroyed' were considered finished enough to be framed and glazed. If these works were left in Bacon's studio in 1951, they were presumably there in summer 1950 when Hunter recorded photographic material from the table.[15] As has been suggested, we might deduce from Hunter's inclusion of several relevant photographs of Nazis that the link between the photographs and the paintings on view close by was evident, if not discussed.[16]

Man Standing (*93*) is derived from Heinrich Hoffmann's photograph of Hitler on a balcony in Prague, receiving the adoration of the masses below, an image in one of Hunter's selections.[17] The painting as a whole is derived from the photograph, although both figure and background are generalized. Formally, the work might seem unfinished and also retrogressive in relation to the more avant-garde experiments that Bacon had exhibited in the late 1930s. The greater naturalism and loose brushwork, and, indeed, the direct borrowing from a press photograph cumulatively suggest, however, that the art of Walter Sickert may have been a significant catalyst.[18] Bacon had many opportunities at this stage to see work by Sickert, including pictures from the late 1920s onwards which were overtly based on photographs and popular engravings. The two versions of *H.M. King Edward VIII* (1936) provide striking precedents for Bacon's decision to base the overall composition of a painting on low-grade press photography of a recognizable public figure.[19] The same Sickert curiously

foreshadows the imagery of *Figure Getting out of a Car*, discussed below, as well as the more obviously unfinished *Man in a Cap* (93), a puppet-like Fascist demagogue, strutting, screaming and gesticulating on his podium, which has been connected with specific photographs of Goebbels and Himmler from *Picture Post* that Hunter photographed. It might be noted, however, that the spread had only appeared in a 1947 issue, the visual connection is not that close, and the impassioned orator is a cliché of Nazi iconography.[20]

Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* has stood, almost from the moment of its first exhibition, as a singular work both in art history and in the narration of Bacon's individual career. Its timely display in April 1945 secured its association with the post-war, post-Holocaust world and led to its being seen as opening a new chapter in artistic representation. In the shape of Bacon's biography, it has come to mark his re-emergence and, with his collusion, has become secure as Number 1 in any catalogue of the painter's mature output. Nonetheless, it is in fact possible to position the triptych as part of a larger family of paintings from the mid-1940s, most of which are among those listed by Alley as either 'destroyed' or 'abandoned'.[21] For example, the same poor-quality fibreboard support unites the triptych with *Man in a Cap*, *Man Standing* (and its now-separated verso), the unfinished street scene sold in 2008 as *Untitled (Landscape)*, and *Untitled* (1943 or 1944; a variation on the right-hand panel of the *Three Studies*).[22] These supports are also similar in size.[23] The inscription 'Petersfield' on the reverse of the right-hand panel of the *Three Studies* probably does not relate directly to the image on the recto of that board but nevertheless does tie the use of the board support to Bacon's occasional stays in the nearby village of Steep from 1941 to 1943.[24]

It can be argued that the *Three Studies* also possessed a strong wartime resonance for Bacon, rather than marking a simple continuation of pre-war concerns and influences, or a turn away from the specific contemporary circumstances registered in *Man in a Cap* and *Man Standing* towards a more universal imagery, both observations which are frequently encountered in the literature. The case can be elaborated on several levels.[25] The triptych might, for instance, be seen to register a mindset described by historian Peter Calvocoressi: 'As the Nazis recede into history they become objects of interest to historians, sociologists and psychologists, but they were in their own generation objects of pure horror.'[26] *Three Studies* encapsulates that sense of revulsion, and a traumatic sense of humanity reduced through physical and psychological violence to a base, animal condition, although it is unclear whether we are confronted by the aggressors or by their victims. The gaping mouth to the right ambiguously conveys a scream of pain, a roar of exhortation to inflict pain on others, or even the yawn of some animal in the wild.

That visceral impact is reinforced by the work's artistic affinities and thematic allusions. It possesses close stylistic parallels with the concurrent work of his friend Graham Sutherland, whether produced independently or as official war artist, work which was indeed conceived and enthusiastically received as a distillation of the atmosphere and emotional impact of the war. Moreover both Bacon and Sutherland drew inspiration from

Guernica and related work by Picasso, which had demonstrated how art might convey in uncompromisingly modernist terms the violence and tragic tenor of contemporary life. Picasso's use of animal imagery as surrogates for human feelings and sensations informed the bestial suggestions, adapted from photography, which Bacon incorporated within the triptych; reproductions of Picasso's *Crucifixion* drawings enhanced the appeal of that subject as an epitome of tragic suffering and man's capacity for cruelty. In making reference to the theme in his title, Bacon exemplified the widespread recourse to Crucifixion imagery in wartime art and literature. The existing triptych of figure studies was nevertheless associated in Bacon's own mind, as he said several years later, with the Eumenides, otherwise known as the Furies, or The Kindly Ones, the Oresteia narrative's agents of divine retribution against those guilty of committing especially heinous crimes. Bacon's engagement with Greek tragedy is again both appropriate to the times and inconceivable without the currency of classical myth in the writings of Sigmund Freud and in the iconography of Surrealism and Picasso's art of the 1930s. Bacon scholars have also focused on the inspiration of particular passages in the Aeschylus play, evoking the physical loathsomeness of the Eumenides, on the impact of W.B. Stanford's 1942 book *Aeschylus in his Style*, and on the catalyst provided by T.S. Eliot's recent play *The Family Reunion*, a contemporary reworking of the Oresteia.[27]

Those are the standard observations, but the question remains as to why Bacon was drawn to that specific classical theme. Accentuating the wartime dimension of the triptych suggests a more straightforward way of making sense of its Eumenides overtones. The argument hinges on a reading of the settings in which Bacon's creatures are placed, and which unify the work visually. The backdrops were clearly added at a late stage, and consist of bright orange paint, flatly applied, which Bacon then articulated in a minimal way by superimposing black lines that seem to recede in perspective and to suggest symmetrically arranged spaces across the triptych. The right-hand panel also contains a passage suggesting grassy scrubland, reinforcing the animalistic connotations of the monstrous hybrid occupying the space. The visual evidence is supported by documentation implying that the background was completed at the last minute. On 21 March of an unspecified year Isabel Lambert (later Rawsthorne) reported to Peter Rose Pulham that she had visited Francis 'two days ago in his Millais room', recording the works she saw in his Cromwell Place studio: 'One large landscape with headless figure impressed me. Lovely colour, open air, etc. Really most mature in every way. I did not care for the various forms on red ground (three paintings which I know you like).'[28]

As Lambert seems to describe *Figure in a Landscape* (1945) and *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) – the works that Bacon exhibited at the Lefevre Gallery in April 1945 – her visit presumably came only a couple of weeks before that show. It is noteworthy that, a painter herself, she recalls the *Three Studies* as 'red' rather than the hot orange that is so memorably a characteristic of them. There is evidence that the very lean orange paint was added over another layer of redder

hue and so, if we accept the speculative dating of the letter to March 1945, it suggests that such a change was only made shortly before the paintings were dispatched.

Aside from their role as foils for his figurative inventions, what associations did Bacon have in mind for the backdrops? Russell described the three figures as 'confined in a low-ceilinged, windowless and oddly proportioned space', and this has become the standard description.[29] But that may be an overly literal interpretation of the visual evidence. Bacon could equally well have intended a schematic reference to more specific spaces, exterior as well as interior, which he chose to indicate simply by means of linear contours, eliminating detail and any differentiation of texture and colour between, say, the ground plane, architecture and the sky. Conceivably, he had in mind the monumental, not to say bombastic, exercises in classicizing architectural rhetoric, many designed by Albert Speer, which had been constructed (taking advantage of slave labour) in pre-war Germany. Though functioning buildings, such structures had also generated iconic images of Nazi power that were then widely disseminated in propagandist books and photographs. In Bacon's triptych, one might see the centralized tunnel-like space as a simplified rendition of, say, the great marble gallery in Speer's monumental Chancellery building in Berlin, which is indeed an interior (Figure 4). But the oblique perspective in the left-hand panel perhaps evokes perspectival street scenes with exterior views of the same building (Figure 5). The right-hand panel gestures towards similar Berlin imagery, but also in its emphatic near-symmetrical perspective towards the open, vast, yet highly structured spaces devised for the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg (Figure 6).

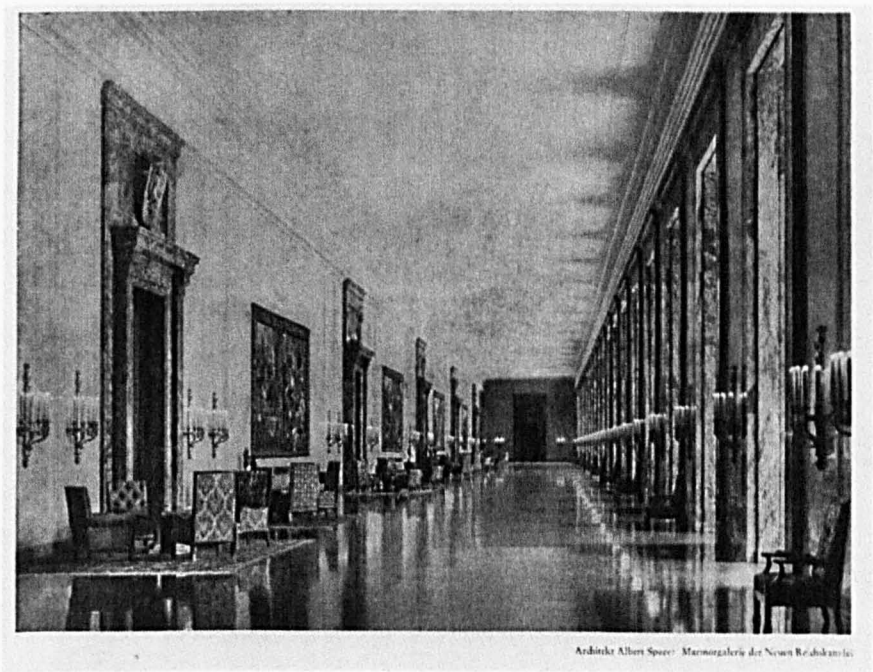
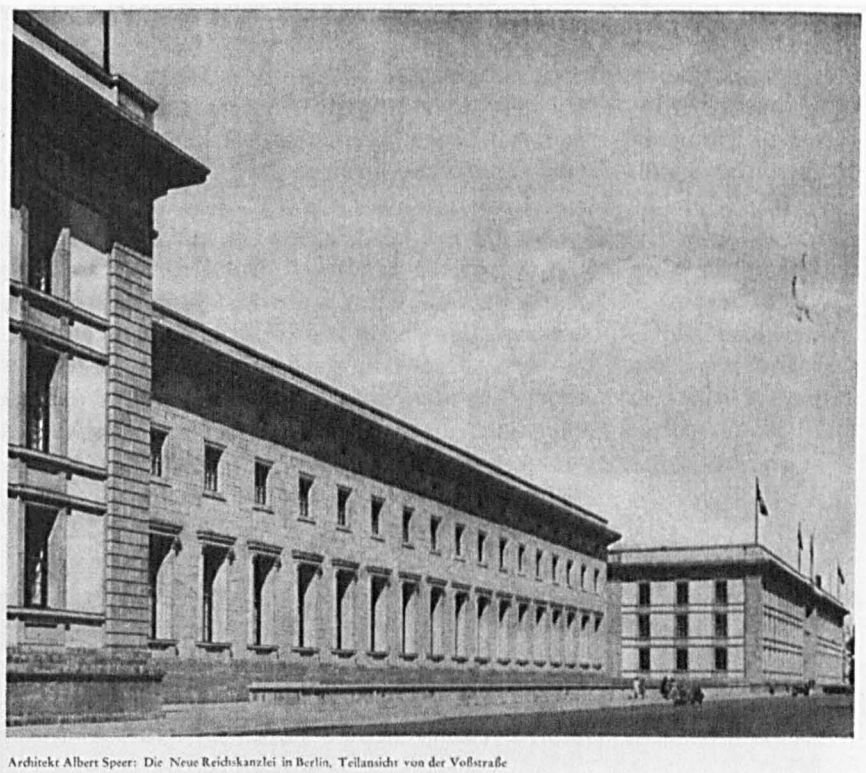


Figure 4. Albert Speer, Marble Gallery, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin; illustration from Albert Speer, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941).



Architekt Albert Speer: Die Neue Reichskanzlei in Berlin, Teilansicht von der Voßstraße

Figure 5. Albert Speer, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin; illustration from Albert Speer, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941).

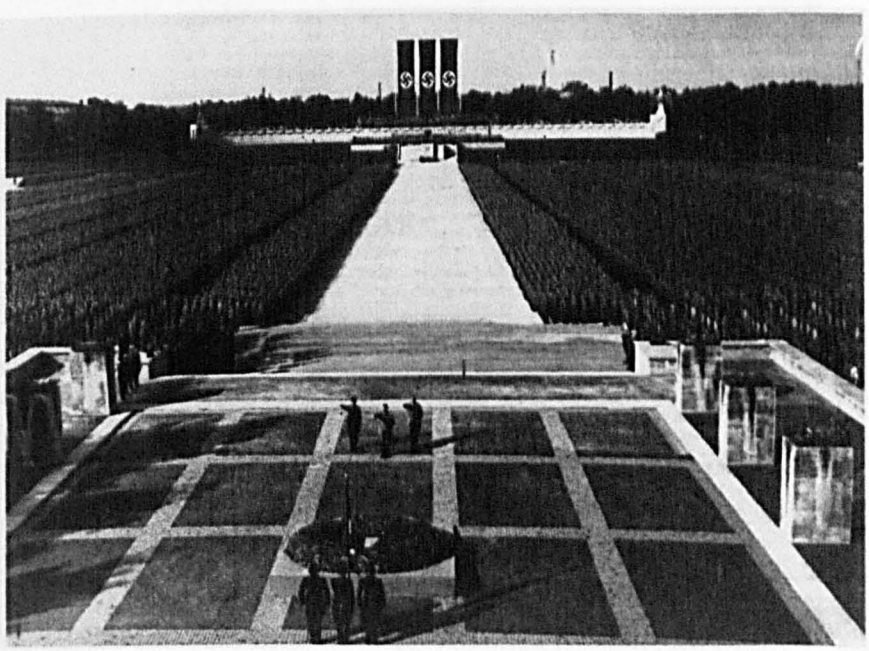


Figure 6. Albert Speer, Luitpoldarena, Nuremberg, 1934.

On this reading, Bacon's *Three Studies* imagined that the Eumenides had taken up residence at the very heart of Nazi Germany. The embodiments of vengeance against those who have committed the worst of crimes had now come to haunt Berlin and the Nazi leadership. The idea is an apt commentary on what was actually happening in 1944, the year within which Bacon realized his triptych, as the war turned with the D-Day landings and Soviet advances from the east, and with bombing wreaking cataclysmic destruction on German cities and on the Nazi war machine. Projecting the avenging Furies in the Nazi heartland offered a compelling allegorical distillation of current events.

While the imagery of the *Three Studies* is allusive and open to speculative interpretation, many of the destroyed and abandoned works appear less ambiguous in their intent and can be more readily associated with source photographs. The bestial monstrosity of the panels finds its closest echo in *Figure Getting out of a Car*, a work subsequently overpainted by Bacon (Figure 7). The picture echoed the widespread imagery of Nazi leaders,

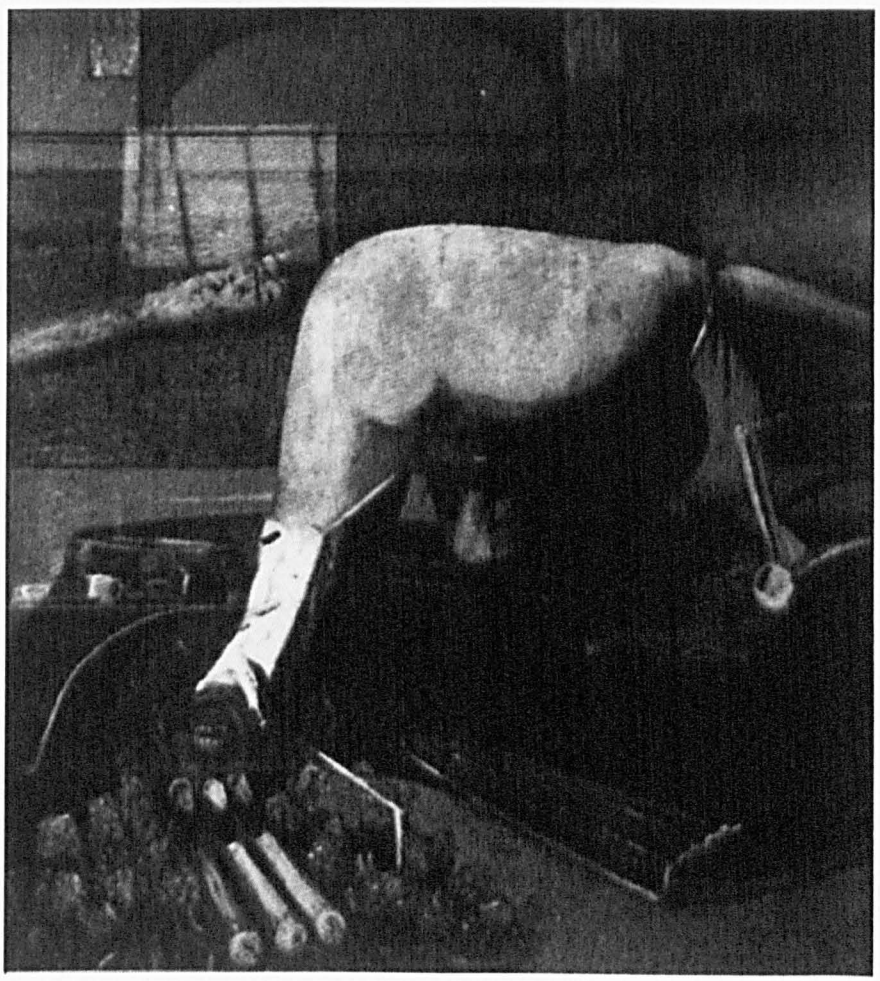


Figure 7. Francis Bacon, *Figure Getting out of a Car* (subsequently overpainted), here dated to 1945–46. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS, London, 2009.

moving like gods in their chariots amidst crowds or vast armies. In particular, the slender forms emanating from either side of the body strikingly recall a Hoffmann photograph of Hitler reaching out to well-wishers as he arrived at Nuremberg in 1933 (Figure 8). Bacon acknowledged to Alley that *Figure Getting out of a Car* was based on a picture of Hitler getting out of his car at one of the Nuremberg rallies.[30] A recently discovered unpublished image by Hunter proves that the details of the car derive from a photograph of Hitler standing in his infamous Mercedes saluting the Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg in November 1938 (Figure 9, bottom left), a close relative of the image that had featured in one of Hoffmann's books (Figure 10).[31] Curiously, the head and hand of Hitler are cropped by what might at first sight appear a random diagonal cut or passage of overpainting. If we look at the original photograph, however, this cropping turns out to coincide exactly with the base line of the background architecture, a view of Speer's Principal Tribune building at Nuremberg in a steep perspective typical of the photography of Nazi architecture. One can infer that Bacon carefully extracted the architectural background before proceeding to recycle and magnify it as the first stage of the unfinished *Untitled (Landscape)* (Figure 11).[32] The process Bacon employed provides an early instance of the physical manipulations of a photograph as a form of preliminary drawing, a method of working that requires further research.[33]

In the sequence of events, it is likely that this purposeful editing of the photograph occurred well before the making of *Figure Getting out of a Car*. The use of a smaller-scale fibreboard support suggests that the newly emergent picture was executed earlier, perhaps around 1943–4. Coincidentally, this reinforces the argument that Bacon had Nazi architecture specifically in mind during the period when he conceived the settings for the *Three Studies*. Despite its conventional dating, *Figure Getting out of a Car* was probably

Figure 8. Hitler, Nuremberg rally; illustration from *Deutschland Erwacht* (Hamburg: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst Hamburg-Bahrenfeld, 1933).

Figure 9. Sam Hunter, montage of material from Bacon's studio, 7 Cromwell Place, *c.*1950. © Sam Hunter.

executed a year or two later, after rather than before the triptych.[34] The serpentine neck of the creature standing in the open-top motor car reaches down for the mouth to speak into a bank of microphones. Such an array of microphones appears not only in *Study for Man with Microphones* but also in the formally related *Painting* of the same year, 1946. These both share the same motif of a white-collared, suited male figure under an umbrella. While the umbrella motif links them both to *Figure Study II*, a comparison of compositions reveals a close relationship between all three and *Figure in a Landscape* (1945), and serves to emphasize in the latter the penumbral mouth that emerges from the blackness of the figure's absent head snarling into a bank of microphones. The very particular background of *Figure Getting Out of a Car* is a characteristic shared with other paintings: the 'destroyed' *Figure Study* shows a similar arched architectural feature, and both they and *Figure Study I* share the weathered surface that runs horizontally across the background as if below a sort of dado. Photographs of the time showed all three in close proximity.[35]

The pair of pictures shown in London in summer 1946 turn out likewise to be steeped in Nazi imagery. The most literal instance, which may be why Bacon eventually rejected and drastically overpainted it, was *Study for Man with Microphones*, which includes references to the ubiquitous image

Figure 10. Hitler at Nuremberg rally; illustration from Heinrich Hoffmann, *Parteitag Grossdeutschland* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1938).

of the Fascist orator and his stereotypical attributes such as the podium, microphones, floral bouquets, and curtained backdrops, all serving in propaganda photographs to confer a spurious aura of civilization and moral dignity onto the proceedings, even an air of ecclesiastical celebration (Figures 12 and 13). Hoffmann published several photographs of Hitler receiving bunches of flowers from adoring children and a similar view of

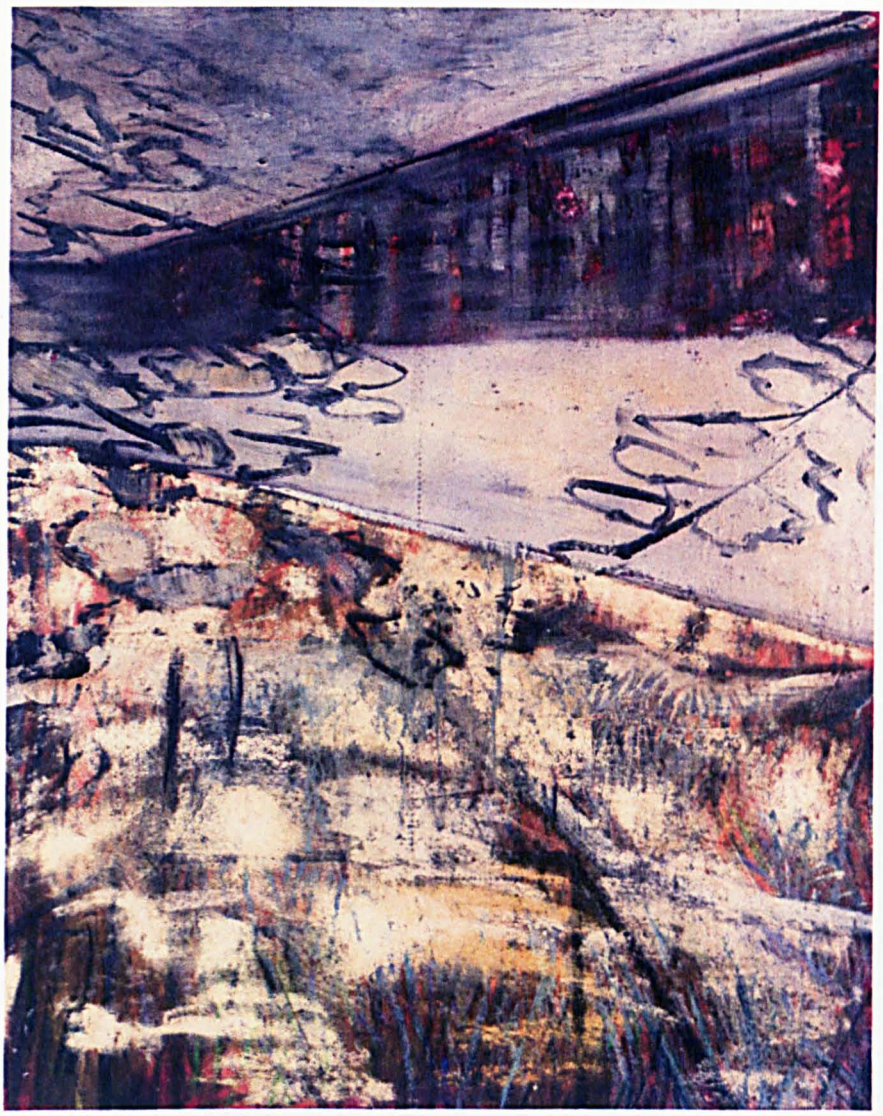


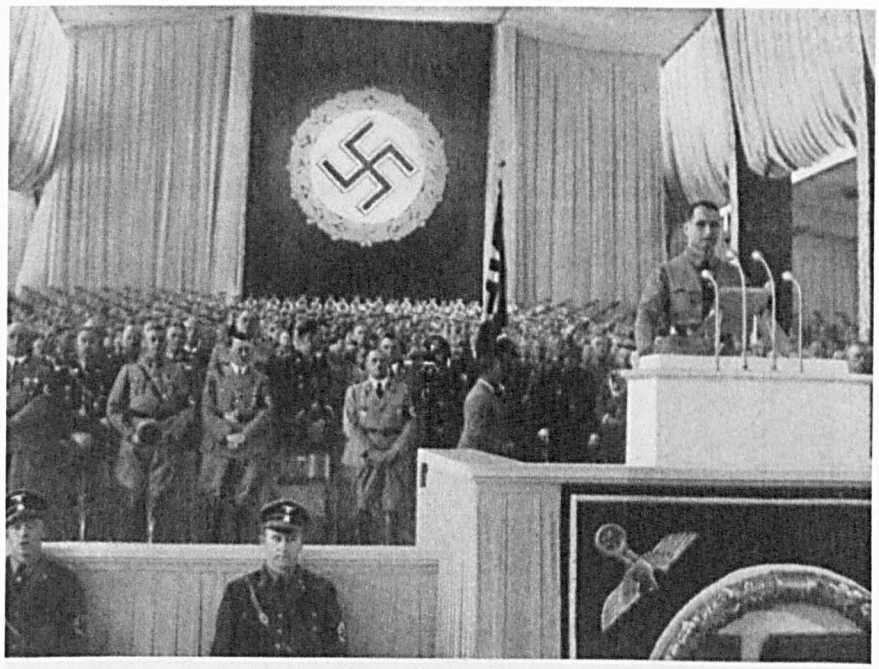
Figure 11. Francis Bacon *Untitled*, Private Collection, 1943–4. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS, London, 2009.

him being handed a posy as he approaches the podium appears in Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (Figure 14). The ironic juxtaposition of symbols of brutal Nazi power with the colour and transience of flowers might also be seen in the alternative versions of the side panels of the *Three Studies*, in both of which the howling figures plunge their snouts into bunches of flowers.[36] If these show such scented, strongly coloured flowers as roses and hydrangeas, a particular, sharp-leaved palm sprouts abundantly from *Figure Study II*, *Study for Man with Microphones* and the second state of *Figure Getting out of a Car*. It is tempting to speculate that the specific source for Bacon's use of these leaves is another Hoffmann photograph of Hitler, in Austria following the Anschluss, visiting the highly adorned grave of his parents in Linz (Figure 15). Like many Hoffmann

Figure 12. Hitler making speech; illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1937).

images, the picture of Hitler at the parental grave was issued as a postcard.[37]

Painting (1946) has often been taken to evoke the vile dictators who had recently strutted the world stage, suggestively fused with intimations of the abattoir and the Crucifixion. According to Bacon's recollection, the first



Rudolf Heß eröffnet den „Reichsparteitag der Arbeit"

Figure 13. Rudolf Hess at podium; illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1937).

Figure 14. Postcard of Hitler meeting small children.

state of the picture, an image of a bird based presumably on wildlife photography, 'suddenly suggested' both 'an opening-up into another area of feeling altogether' and the 'whole image' that he then brought to fruition.[38] The final painting has a montage-like discontinuity. The figure seems especially to evoke the features of Mussolini, who also appeared in

At the grave of the parents

Am Grabe der Eltern

31

Figure 15. Hitler at his parents' grave; illustration from Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler in Seiner Heimat* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1938).

numerous podium and balcony images. The swags at the top were inspired not just by the decorations in a butcher's shop but also, according to Martin Harrison, by 'the decoration on a canopy above Hitler speaking at a rally'.[39] No evidence is offered, although it is not hard to find pictures of platforms decorated in this manner. But a more specific point of reference for the picture was again, in our view, architectural photography. The initial bird imagery could even have triggered associations with a pervasive Nazi symbolism, which featured in photographs of, say, the Hall of Honour in the Berlin Air Ministry, dominated appropriately enough by the vast image of an eagle, flanked by a pair of undecorated panels. Such imagery may at some level have become transmuted into Bacon's symmetrical splayed carcass, flanked by window blinds. Particularly suggestive in relation to *Painting* (1946) is a Hoffmann photograph of Hitler posed in front of a symbolic Nazi eagle (Figure 16).[40]

Equally, he may have been thinking of the mosaic hall that Speer had designed for Hitler's Chancellery building, which had been widely disseminated in colour photographs before the war, often devoid of human occupation (Figure 17).[41] The iconic general view of this space can be compared with the hieratic symmetry of the Bacon, the perspective construction of the floor plane (as in the Hall of Honour), the central decorative and symbolic focus of the smaller, stylized golden eagle, as well as the dominant pink colouration, with the two tones of marble inlay transformed into walls and blinds (Figure 18). The perspective lines describing the lower edges of Bacon's blinds echo the upper edges of the inlaid panels, although the relationship of dark and light pink is reversed. The swags in the painting evoke the inlaid cartouches decorating the top of the panels, and one might even speculate that the paired bones standing in for microphones could have been triggered by the twin eagles in the lower sections. Even the repeated comma-like marks just above the black diagonal to the right of Bacon's umbrella echo the patterning above the door in the right-hand wall of the marble hall. There are sufficient close correspondences to suggest that in realizing *Painting* in 1946 Bacon was feeding off such photographic imagery. The resulting collisions of dissonant imagery might be taken to evoke the Fascist dialectic of gruesome violence and neo-Roman cultural rhetoric.

Moreover, it was precisely the pink Marble Hall of the Chancellery that witnessed the ceremony of the funeral of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi governor of Bohemia and Moravia assassinated in Prague in May 1942. There Nazi leaders – including Hitler himself – came to pay their respects before Heydrich's coffin surrounded by mounds of floral tributes. Himmler delivered the eulogy and Hitler bestowed a military honour posthumously, stepping through the flowers to place it on the coffin. An already-established aesthetic of Nazi oratory was thus extended by an iconography of heroic martyrdom, a highly ritualized display of the celebration of death.[42] One might speculate that the flowers that so dominate the images of this occasion made an impression on Bacon. The protagonist in *Figure Study I* bending amid blue hydrangeas and bunches of some other pink flower recalls those men who bow in tribute to Heydrich. The destroyed *Figure Study* replicates the same motif of herringbone greatcoat

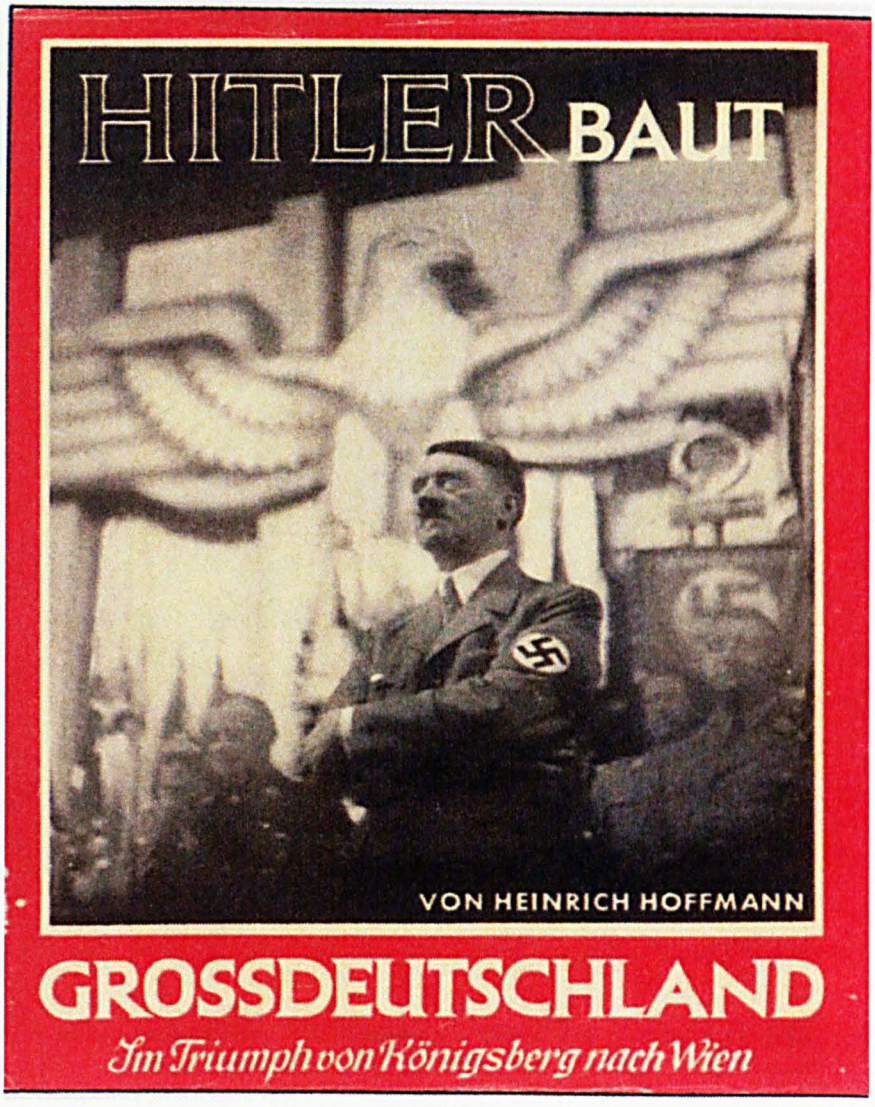


Figure 16. Dust jacket cover for Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Baut Grossdeutschland* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1938).

and hat bending amongst a profusion of flowers. The figure also sports a fur-trimmed coat similar to that just discernible in *Standing Man*.

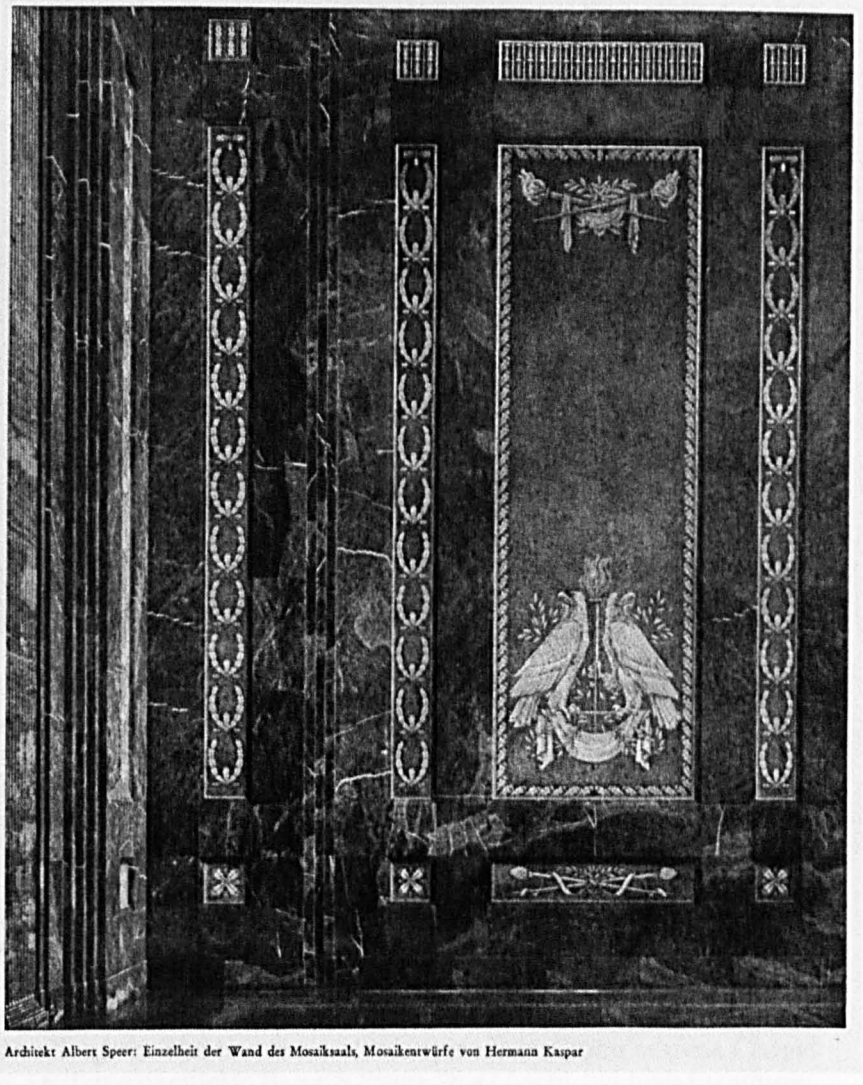
Another recurring motif is the umbrella that covers the figure in three of the paintings of 1945–6: *Figure Study II*, *Study for Man with Microphones* and *Painting*. Several sources for Bacon's use of umbrellas more generally have been proposed. Degas' *Beach Scene* has been related to his *Triptych* (1974–6) and Harrison has observed that 'umbrellas were a common sight on film sets in the 1920s'.[43] There is a more apt potential source for Bacon's 1940s umbrellas than those previously proposed; it is indeed from a film set, being an image from the book documenting the making of Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* (Figure 19).[44] This shows not only the

Architekt Albert Speer: Mosaiksaal der Neuen Reichskanzlei

Figure 17. Albert Speer, Marble Hall, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin; illustration from Albert Speer, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941).

cameraman sheltering from the rain under a raised umbrella but also his camera to his right and draped in such a way that echoes very closely the disposition of the greatcoats in the three 1945–6 *Figure Study* paintings. The 1936 Berlin Olympic Games were a crucial moment for Nazi propaganda and Riefenstahl's *Olympia* was a major contributor to the construction of the Games as part of a neo-classical age of power and athleticism. It conceivably provided Bacon with a model of an artist using the physical prowess of the human form as a visual metaphor for a political will to power on which he would draw later.

References to Nazi imagery run alongside, and are interwoven with, allusions to Christian symbolism. Bacon's scant correspondence suggests a continuing fascination with the theme of the Crucifixion deeper and more far-reaching than hitherto thought. We have seen that the *Figure Studies* of



Architekt Albert Speer: Einzelheit der Wand des Mosaiksaals, Mosaikentwürfe von Hermann Kaspar

Figure 18. Albert Speer, Marble Hall, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin; illustration from Albert Speer, *Neue Deutsche Baukunst* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941).

1945–6 could include visual references to supplicants at Heydrich's funeral, to Nazi orators, to Hitler at his parents' tomb, or to Riefenstahl's documentary of the Berlin Olympics. Soon after their completion, however, Bacon was insistent that '[t]hese paintings are studies for the Magdalene and the smaller of the two was the first studie [sic] and I would like them entitled as such in the catalogue'.[45] The pictures themselves do not evoke obvious analogies with the image of the Magdalene, especially given that the prominent items of clothing, the tweed coats and hat, are not only contemporary rather than historical but also masculine rather than feminine. Nevertheless, the evidence that Bacon did indeed envisage a Magdalene reference in this pair of pictures reinforces the visual affinities with traditional imagery of this figure, who played a prominent role in the narrative of Christ's passion.

Figure 19. Photographer sheltering from rain; illustration from Leni Riefenstahl, *Schönheit Im Olympische Kampf* [Beauty in the Olympic Struggle] (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937).

As an embodiment of human grief, Mary Magdalene, often viewed side on, features in various narrative contexts. She is encountered washing Christ's feet, as in the treatment by Poussin in the Seven Sacraments. She assumes the most dramatic emotive role in Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*, serving as a counterpart to the more restrained figures of Mary, the mother of Christ, and John. This seems the direct precedent for Sutherland's *Weeping Magdalene* of 1946, a convergence of imagery that adds another dimension to the artist's dialogue with Bacon at this period.[46] In the biblical narrative, Mary subsequently encounters the risen Christ, who enjoins her not to touch him when she reaches out to him in wonder (*Noli me Tangere*). The treatment of this episode in Giotto's Arena Chapel offers a striking parallel to Bacon's *Figure Study I*, which echoes the simple, monumental curve of the back in the Giotto, and takes even further the veiling of recognizable human features by means of drapery. The arm in the Bacon, edited out with a dark glaze to the point of near invisibility, recalls the outstretched arms of Giotto's Magdalene, who, like Bacon's figure, is juxtaposed with flowers (Figure 20).[47] Moreover, there are models in tradition for Bacon's more iconic presentation of a single figure. The naked arm and upper torso in Bacon's second version is reminiscent of images that allude to the myth of Mary's fallen, sexual nature, which she subsequently renounced, as, for example, in Guercino's *Mary Magdalene and Two Angels* (1622, Pinacoteca, Vatican), where she is attended by angels and leans in a comparable manner to the Bacon figure on an altar-like structure. One might also recall Gustave Doré's distillation of her role and narrative in his engraved image of *Mary Magdalene Repentant*, juxtaposing the figure with a skull symbolizing death. Visually, this image strikingly

Figure 20. Giotto, detail of Mary Magdalene from *Jesus Arisen Appears to Magdalene*; illustration from Carlo Carrà, *Giotto* (London: Zwemmer, 1925).

prefigures the combination of straight lines and flowing curves in the configuration of the drapery in both Bacon's variants.

As with his references to the Crucifixion or the Eumenides, Bacon evidently valued the metaphorical and expressive charge of such 'mythic' imagery. The image of the Magdalene may have epitomized for Bacon the state of extreme grief or mourning, an appropriate enough reflection on the traumatized mood that lingered well after the formal cessation of wartime hostilities. Perhaps this appropriation of a traditional iconographic type or personification was gradually subsumed by a more generalized evocation of imagery associated with a funeral, such as outdoor clothing and flowers, the harsh physicality of which offsets the psychological frailty, and even the virtual visual absence in the first version, of the inner self contained within the outer garb.[48] By such means, Bacon conceivably wished to assert the contemporary resonance of the Magdalene image, as elsewhere the allusion to the Crucifixion, verbal in *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* and visual in *Painting* (1946), served to distil the currency in the present of sadistic cruelty and violence.

The Passion continued to preoccupy Bacon. Writing from Monte Carlo in summer 1947, he told Colin Anderson that he was working on 'a large crucifixion group'.[49] On the same day he delivered the same news to Duncan McDonald at the Lefevre Gallery: 'I shall have a group of three large paintings about the size of the one which went to the Contemporary Art Society . . . They want to be hung together in a series as they are a sort of Crucifixion. I am finishing the second, and the colour is a sort of intense blue violet.'[50]

In a subsequent undated letter to Anderson, Bacon reported: 'I have a painting I am working on now it is in size about 2 ft 6" by 3 ft 4" I hope to have it finished in about a week or 10 days it is a study for a much larger picture I hope to do of "Christ shown to the people" '.[51] It has been observed that the only painting of that period of those dimensions is *Head I* (1947–8), the first of the series of heads and the first instance where Bacon superimposed an ape's mouth onto the remnants of a human head.[52] The idea that this image of an animal bursting out from the human might be a reworking of the *Ecce Homo* is tantalizing, but one cannot assume *Head I* (*102*) is the work discussed with Anderson (that correspondence refers to numerous works which seem never to have seen the light of day). In the context of Bacon's fascination with Nazi iconography, Pilate's presentation of Christ to the people is an intriguing subject to tackle only a year after the Nuremberg Trials, images of which were widely disseminated.

Bacon's recurrent conflation of the iconographies of Nazi public ceremony and Christ's Passion continues in his relatively prolific production after 1949, which continued to incorporate more frequent references to Fascist imagery than critics have allowed. *Study for a Portrait* (1949), for instance, seems to recall the more recent spectacle of the once all-powerful leaders turned captives at the Nuremberg Trials.[53] But pre-war propaganda images remained Bacon's prime point of departure, sometimes allied to religious themes. In *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950, *83*), the cross clearly began life as an image of a wall with two windows.[54] It has an affinity with press photographs of Hitler acknowledging his adoring supporters, whether from buildings or from train windows (Figure 21). Bacon then seems to have read this imagery as a cross, and merely added the two creatures, a cat-like tormentor and the bat or owl-like Fury who stands in for the crucified Christ.

It was, however, imagery of the Nuremberg rallies that especially obsessed Bacon. He may, for instance, have known the substantial, beautifully produced volumes published in Germany before the war to commemorate the annual spectacles.[55] The numerous images of soldiers marching in formation past the Nazi leadership are echoed, for instance, in *Untitled (Marching Figures)* from around 1950.[56] Matthew Gale has related Bacon's use of vertical striations to images of the extraordinary nocturnal light shows Speer conceived for the 'Day of the Political Leaders' at Nuremberg, which have been described as follows:

> After sundown 110,000 men marched onto the review field while 100,000 spectators took their places in the stands. At a signal, once darkness fell, the space was suddenly encircled by a ring of light, with 30,000 flags and standards glistening in the illumination. Spotlights would focus on the main gate, as distant cheers announced the Führer's approach. At the instant he entered, 150 powerful searchlights would shoot into the sky to produce a gigantic, shimmering 'cathedral of light' . . . the essence of the ceremony was one of sacramental dedication to Führer and party. Encased in a circle of light and dark, the participants were transported into a vast phantasmagoria.[57]

In the numerous photographs of this utterly photogenic event, parallel beams of light register as densely packed, parallel stripes of light and dark.

THIS IS HOW THE FÜHRER TRAVELS

SO FÄHRT DER FÜHRER

38

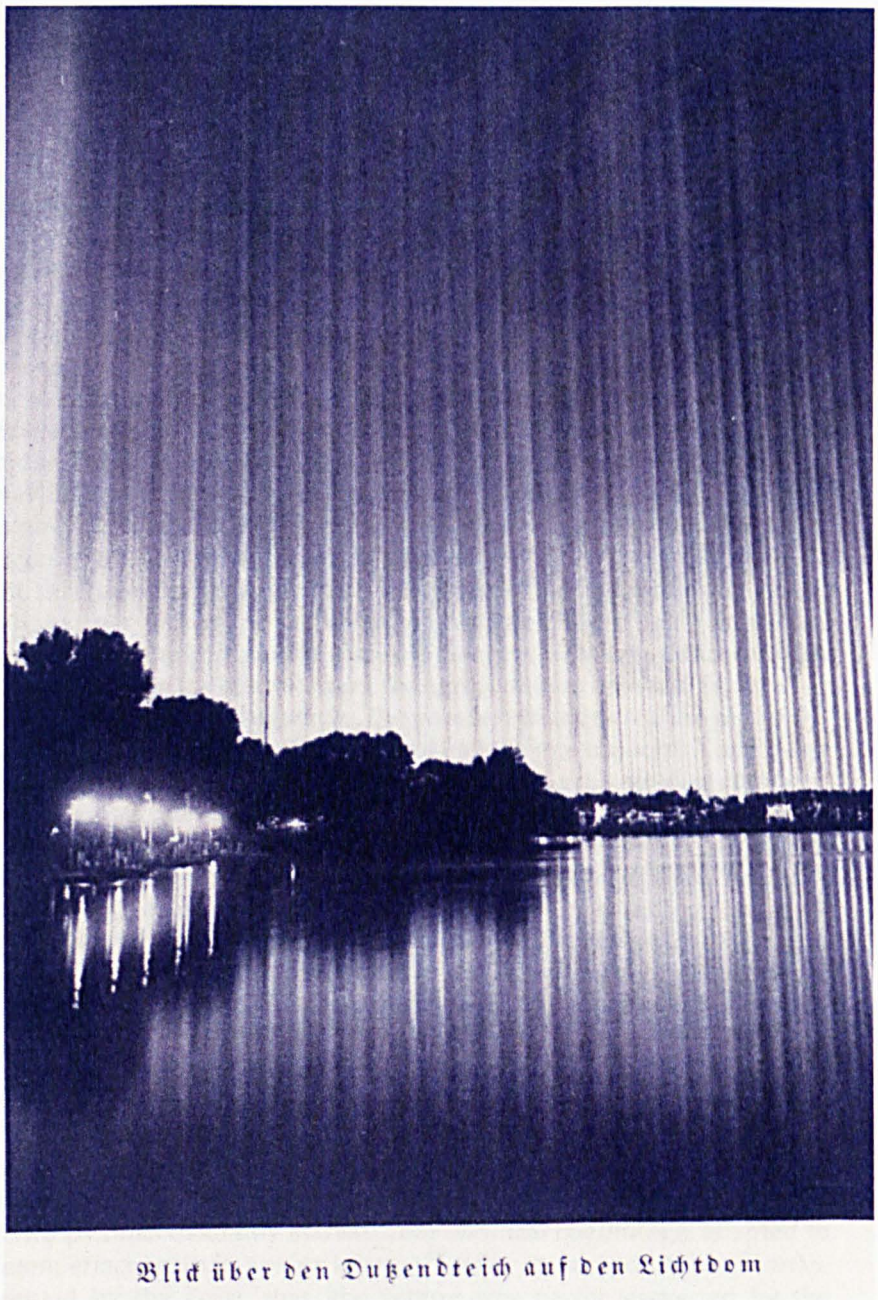
Figure 21. Hitler looking out of train windows; illustration from Heinrich Hoffmann, *Arbeits vom Alltag* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag, 1938).

Those included, for example, in the 1937 Nuremberg volume offer a striking visual parallel with the backdrops that Bacon started to use in 1949, as an elaboration of the more literal motif of curtains (Figures 22 and 23). An early instance is *Head VI* (1949, *104*), the last in the series of heads that seems to mark a new way of working and a new visual vocabulary and is the first surviving instance where Bacon brought together the motif of a gaping mouth and the bust of Velázquez's *Portrait of Innocent X*. The parallel striations of dry black paint against bare canvas seem not only to pass behind the clearly outlined cope of the figure, as well as the transparent space frame, but also to hover in front of the throne, except for the gilded finials, and to erode the upper half of the figure's head, so that only the screaming mouth remains.[58] In this and related works, we seem to confront absolute power dissolving into despair and non-being; ritual celebration transmuting into apocalyptic dissolution; the beams of light intimating defensive searchlights and conflagration, a visual metaphor, one might be tempted to say, for collective self-immolation.

There is a direct continuum between Nazi and papal imagery in Bacon's work. The pope pictures from 1949 onwards made more overt the appropriations from the Innocent X portrait, arguably already embedded in *Study for Man with Microphones* and *Painting* (1946). Interestingly, those pictures, with their strong undertones of Fascist demagogues, were then immediately followed by the variations on the Velázquez that Bacon is known to have been working on during his initial months in the south of France that summer, though the results were destroyed.[59] Moreover, in *Head VI* a tassel-ended cord hangs, as if closer to the viewer, in front of the skull-like black cavities that replace the eyes. This would become a

Blick auf das Zeppelinfeld

Figure 22. Cathedral of Light, Nuremberg rallies, 1937; illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1937).



Blick über den Dutzendteich auf den Lichtdom

Figure 23. Cathedral of Light, Nuremberg rallies, 1937; illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1937).

recurring motif in Bacon's painting, and one must surely draw some conclusions from the sources from which he chose to take them. In this instance, close examination of Hunter's third montage reveals its source to be a blind cord that hangs in front of Hitler in Hoffmann's photograph of the Führer surveying the vanquished Prague.[60] It is a detail which would, surely, be lost on viewers of the painting. And yet, we cannot ignore the

fact that in a reworking of Velázquez's great portrait of the pontiff, made four years after the opening of the concentration camps, Bacon has inserted an overt reference to Hitler, like a cipher for the Führer, perhaps. The detail recurs in the series of eight popes from 1953. As much as Velázquez's portrait, these seem to relate back to the 1951 trio of paintings which derive from the photograph of Pius XII carried in the *sedia gestatoria* that appears in one of Hunter's montages.[61] That Bacon is interested in the contemporary pope as well as Velázquez's painting suggests it is the subject as well as its rendering in art that fascinates. The fact that Pius XII was thought by some to have appeased the Nazis may not be irrelevant.

Imagery from Nuremberg may even be relevant for *Painting* (1950), with its disquieting juxtaposition of a figure seemingly in a shower, adapted from Muybridge, and the shadow that reads as another, menacing figure.[62] Both elements owed something to a drawing by Sickert relating to the Camden Town Murder series, as Rebecca Daniels has shown.[63] Late on, however, Bacon inserted the black outer framework, which has been compared formally to Matisse but which may rather have embedded an allusion to another of the photographs recording the 1937 Cathedral of Light, this time viewed from much further away, so that individual shafts barely register within the larger funnel of light (Figure 24).[64] From that recognition, one might start to associate imagery of taking a shower with what happened in the death camps, though goodness knows if this is what Bacon had in mind. Subsequently, the parallel striations feature regularly, as in the 1953 study after Velázquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X and 'Man in Blue' series and *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954, 134), serving compositional purposes but also providing a specific association, again if only for Bacon himself, with the existential backdrop against which his figures strive for some intimate human contact.[65] They also feature in *The End of the Line* (1953), ornamenting an image of railway lines leading towards a shed, within which a clothed arm seems to grasp or drag a partial naked figure.[66] Bacon surely intended here a distillation of the photographic imagery and unimaginable events associated with Auschwitz.

Study after Velázquez (1950, 112) and *Study of a Dog* (1952, 113) look very different, but their one common feature provides another dimension to Bacon's fascination with Nuremberg imagery.[67] The symmetrical red planar framework in *Study of a Dog*, describing a perspectival hexagon, can also be discerned in the 1950 picture, partially obscured by the curtain-like vertical grey and black streaks within which the papal figure is enmeshed. The two pictures evidently started from identical beginnings, adapted to different effect again in *Sphinx I* (1953).[68] Alley remarked of these works, prompted by the artist, that 'the setting was partly suggested by the gigantic stadium prepared for the National Socialist Party's annual conventions at Nuremberg'.[69] The triangular forms at the front recall images of Nuremberg's Zeppelinfield and the German Stadium, while the hexagonal plan in perspective echoes the vast open spaces of the adjacent city stadium (Figure 25). The setting in *Study of a Dog* (1952) – 'the flower-bed and the coast road' – was said to derive from 'colour picture-postcards of Monte Carlo'.[70] In fact, the flower bed also recalls the circular motif at the centre of the gridded area the Zeppelinfield and the theatrical ritual of the

Weit ins Land hinein strahlt der Lichtdom

Figure 24. Distant view of Cathedral of Light, Nuremberg rallies, 1937; illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte Verlag und Vertriebs-Gesellschaft, 1937).

conventions. In one sequence, one sees it approached by a triumvirate of Nazi leaders. Again, one can only speculate on what specific allegorical connotations or expressive undertones were guaranteed, for Bacon, by such subliminal architectural references.

It is evident that Bacon's paintings are densely inhabited by references to Nazi visual propaganda, in a manner probably without parallel in the art

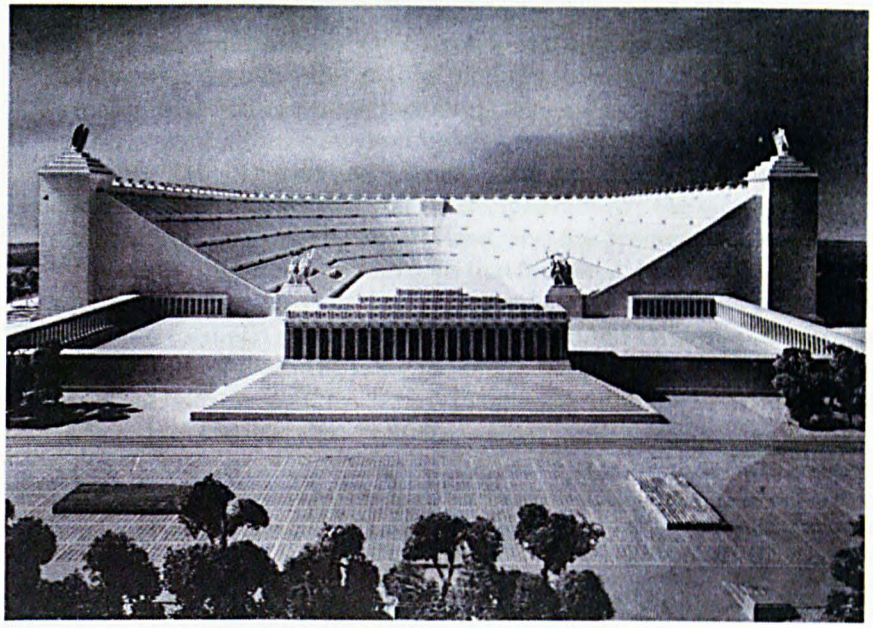


Figure 25. Albert Speer, model for German Stadium, Nuremberg, 1937.

of the post-war decade. We might note that the photographs to which Bacon was responding can be located at the opposite end of the scale from journalistic snapshots. Indeed high-production books, conceivably acquired in Germany before the war, look to have been a continuing resource. It is interesting that he should later have referred to 'documentary books', in conjunction with 'books of wild animals', as his principal points of reference for photographic imagery, rather than newspapers and magazines.[71] Bacon's sources comprised highly formalized images of architectural stage sets, sometimes featuring Nazi ceremonials that were in themselves ritualistic and stage-managed, created with a view to their impact on actual audiences and then on the much larger audiences who consumed their photographic records. One might also describe such images as 'painterly', in that they frequently employed such features as symmetry, spatial frontality, emphatic and orderly linear perspective, and dramatic contrast of light and shadow. In that sense they were especially compatible with Bacon's art-historical references: Picasso, Sickert, Velásquez. The affinities are comparable to those Bacon perceived between Muybridge's images of the body and representations of the nude by artists he especially admired, such as Michelangelo, Degas or, again, Sickert. Moreover, as we have also seen, the specific Nazi images from which Bacon chose to work meshed with his desire to gesture towards archetypal themes and patterns of imagery embedded within cultural tradition, whether the tragic narratives of Christianity and Classical Greek drama, or the articulation of political power within the conventions of portraiture.

Such conflations were bound up with Bacon's deeply rooted concern to engage the viewer in an imaginative response, rather than in the decoding

of some hidden 'message'. His insistence that we should not try to pin down intended meanings too narrowly was implicit in decisions he made about preserving or discarding pictures, framing titles, and generally refusing to let determinate meanings congeal around his paintings. The possible associations conveyed by his adaptations of found imagery were probably not preconceived, or programmatic in symbolic or ideological terms, or indeed overt and readily decipherable by the viewer. In practice the paintings were highly improvised, and the process might at any stage involve working from photographs that 'haunted' him. In 1949 a journalist quoted Bacon as denying, in a characteristic feint, that his pictures were supposed to 'mean a thing: They are just an attempt to make certain type of feeling visual... Painting is the pattern of one's own nervous system being projected onto canvas.'[72] A review of his 1950 show transmitted a variation on this characteristic standpoint:

> The artist has told me that his motives are purely aesthetic. That is, his obsession is with formal qualities, with forms at once concrete and dissolving, with the substance and texture of pigment, with the belief that every stroke of paint laid down ought to be a self-sufficient expression of the artist's idea. His reading, especially of Greek Tragedy, has influenced his attitude and inevitably shaped his patterns; but he would have us judge his paintings simply as works of art without seeking to read into them a symbolism never consciously premeditated.[73]

As time went on Bacon sought to obscure the more direct references to Nazis; one might speculate that the greater openness of meaning of the *Three Studies* is what Bacon sought to preserve while downplaying the more specific imagery of the related works that he wished to excise from his canon. Similarly, one might see his later identification of the three figures as the Eumenides of Greek myth as in part a strategy to downplay or complicate the Christian iconography that was always registered in the work's title. Recently we have been told how Bacon informed the American critic J.T. Soby that in the left-hand panel of the 1962 *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* 'the two figures on the left are Himmler and Hitler opening the doors of the gas chambers'. 'You may quote that,' Bacon continued – but he then denied saying or at any rate meaning it, and ended up pulling the plug on Soby's projected monograph.[74] It was entirely typical of Bacon to want the implications of his pictures to seep through to the viewer, without having to be spelled out.

It seems unlikely that Bacon's motivation for addressing the horrors of the Third Reich is the typically liberal one of horror and guilt. Nor, surely, does it indicate a desire to elevate Hitler and his followers to a quasi-religious status. What we can discern is an obsessive fascination with the relationship between the sacred and the profane, with the baseness of human behaviour and the depths of human cruelty, with the phenomenon of power and its translation into ceremony and ritual and into ideas of sacrifice. As Bacon's comment to Soby suggests, when he turned back to the crucifixion theme, reference to National Socialism also reappeared. Much has been made of the figure in the right-hand panel of the triptych *Crucifixion* (1965). Bacon famously denied any descriptive significance in

the swastika armband, regretting its inclusion and insisting it was added merely to bring a spot of red at that point in the painting.[75] The trivial observation that a spot of red was hardly necessary against the hot terra-cotta of the background may embolden our dismissal of this denial. Indeed, photographs of the painting when it was first received by the Marlborough Gallery show that Bacon subsequently toned down the swastika, perhaps when the triptych was sold to a German museum.[76] By implication, of course, Bacon failed to take the opportunity to remove the motif altogether. In its twisting movement, the muscular, nude male figure appears to be strangling a victim – a ghostly, green figure that seems to slide down towards the bottom of the picture. The image in the central panel is of a flayed carcass. Again, then, Bacon conflates the idea of crucifixion, the butcher's shop and Nazis just as he had in *Painting* (1946) and, more obliquely, in the *Three Studies*. Moreover, a turning figure similar to that in the 1965 *Crucifixion* recurs several times (though with at least one outstretched arm) and has been associated with the classical Greek sculpture of the *Discobolos*.[77] Interestingly, the opening sequence of Riefenstahl's *Olympia* shows the Olympic flame travelling from ancient Olympia to modern Germany and moves on to a sequence in which classical Greek sculptures morph into modern Aryan athletes. In one section, the *Discobolos* fades into a German discus thrower, and in the book after the film the two images sit side by side (Figure 26).[78] Riefenstahl's use of physical prowess as a symbol for a wider, political will to power may have operated as a further catalyst for Bacon.

What, then, do Bacon's allusions add up to as a comment on the times? In terms of content, what ideas were triggered by Bacon's imaginative contemplation of Nazi photographs? John Russell asserted that 'the great subject which Bacon always has at the back of his mind [is] "The History of Europe in My Lifetime"'.[79] More than once, Bacon observed that he had witnessed directly some of the violence of the twentieth century: the Irish

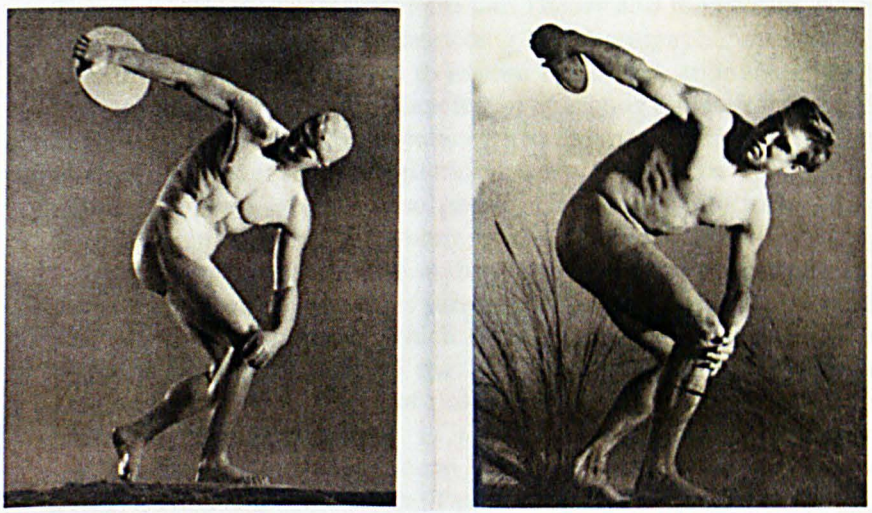


Figure 26. Ancient and modern discus throwers; illustration from Leni Riefenstahl, *Schönheit Im Olympische Kampf* [Beauty in the Olympic Struggle] (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937).

troubles, the rise of the Nazis, the London Blitz.[80] A letter of December 1954 provides insight into how Bacon might have seen this in relation to his art. Friends had suggested he might compile an illustrated book, a model for which he acquired in Rome:

> There is a wonderful book of photographs of the last 50 years called *Il Mondo Cambia* compiled with a foreword by Longanesi . . . they are nearly all photographs which I have already got through collecting them over years, but I think a sort of life story which sees underneath of the events of the last 40 years, so that you would not know whether it was imagination or fact, is what I could do, as the photographs themselves of events could be distorted into a personal private meaning, or in fact it could be a book about the history of the last 40 years but so interlocked with what one imagines has happened and what one believes has happened from the records we know of, but interlocked with history exerted through that time perhaps we could make something nearer to facts truer – and more exciting as though one was seeing the story of one's time for the first time.[81]

Bacon's ambitions for the book, which was never realized, can readily be transferred to the paintings, where photographs are indeed referenced and distorted, public events and private feelings interwoven within what felt like the projection of a specific nervous system. The notion of unearthing solipsistic meanings in Nazi imagery could lead in the direction of 'Fascinating Fascism', the 1974 essay in which Susan Sontag spiralled out from the work of Leni Riefenstahl to a discussion of 'the natural link' between Fascism and sadomasochism.[82] The argument seems more directly relevant to manifestations of a more recent revival of interest in Fascism, but one cannot discount its pertinence to Bacon, given his own sexual preferences. At any rate, the sentiments in Bacon's letter to Orwell remind us that he was a child of his time, who, for instance, enjoyed 'reading Freud very much because I like his way of explaining things'.[83] Sigmund Freud's late books, such as *Civilisation and its Discontents*, which extended psychoanalytical concepts beyond the personal to more collective realms, might have stimulated him on a more cerebral level to explore the psychoanalytical significance of Fascism, exactly the approach taken in a contemporaneous essay by Theodore Adorno exploring 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda'.[84] One way of describing his photographic appropriations would be that Bacon wished to expose the brutal, animalistic instincts that constituted the unconscious forces operating beneath the conscious façade projected by the Nazi state, with its smart uniforms bedecked with medals, its flower- and insignia-covered platforms, its choreographed mass rallies and its grandiose pseudo-classical architecture. To adapt Bacon's own terminology about reading photographs, his paintings may invite us to 'unlock' the underlying 'reality' of contemporary life, the glimpse that such pictures provide, through the 'slight remove from fact' within photographs, which then became far greater in his own pictorial transformations, of the will to power and sadistic violence lurking beneath the veneer of political ritual that pervaded public life in Nazi Germany.

A related perspective on Bacon is provided by Walter Benjamin who, in 1936, famously decried the Fascist aestheticization of political life:

'The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to its knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values'.[85] Bacon likewise seems fascinated by something akin to the 'aestheticization of political life' inherent in Fascism, but whereas Benjamin had recognized, as a theoretical proposition, that this was bound to culminate in war, Bacon witnessed the actual destructive and self-destructive cost of Fascism, and could revisit the earlier propaganda imagery from the distance of knowing the real horrors that ensued. It was Benjamin's admirer Hannah Arendt who famously remarked in 1945 that 'the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of post-war intellectual life in Europe – as death became the fundamental problem after the last war'.[86] Yet, as Tony Judt has noted, 'while the courts were defining the monstrous crimes that had just been committed in Europe, Europeans themselves were doing their best to forget them . . . Far from reflecting upon the problem of evil in the years that followed the end of World War II, most Europeans turned their heads resolutely away from it.'[87] The findings presented here suggest that we might start to see Francis Bacon as a rare exception to that general rule.

Notes

1 Maurice Collis, 'Art. The Lefevre Gallery', *Time and Tide*, 10 August 1946, 752.

2 John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 10.

3 John Russell, 'Round the Art Exhibitions', *The Listener* 33, no. 848 (12 April 1945): 412.

4 In particular, Jonathon Littell, *The Kindly Ones* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009); Littell's allusions to the Oresteia and the French literature of transgression, from de Sade to Bataille, invite direct comparison with Bacon and are discussed in Daniel Mendelsohn, 'Transgression', *The New York Review of Books* 56, no. 5 (26 March 2009). Littell has a long-standing interest in Bacon and is currently working on a book of essays about the artist.

5 For an overview of the neglected dark underside of these years, see William Hitchcock, *Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944–1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

6 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 20.

7 Ronald Alley (with introduction by John Rothenstein), *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964).

8 Sam Hunter, 'Francis Bacon: The Anatomy of Horror', *Magazine of Art* 95, no. 1 (January 1952): 12.

9 Prints from original negatives in Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, eds, *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 18, 170 and 171. The suggestion that Hunter chose photographs that resonated with paintings was made in Chris Stephens, 'Animal', in ibid., 92.

10 David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 30.

11 'Francis Bacon: I Painted to be Loved', *The Art Newspaper* 137 (June 2003): 28.

12 David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 236 (extract from 1982 interview).

13 Stephens, 'Animal', 91. Reproduced in ibid., 47.

14 Alley, *Francis Bacon*, 33.

15 While two of these were first reproduced in Hunter, 'Francis Bacon: The Anatomy of Horror', all three were reproduced for the first time in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 16, 170 and 171.

16 Stephens, 'Animal', 92. By the time he abandoned them at Cromwell Place, Bacon had repainted *Figure Getting Out of a Car* as *Landscape and Car* (Alley A4 revised state, exhibited Gagosian, London, 2006) and *Man with Microphones* (Alley A5), where the first and revised states are transposed, positing the latter as the earlier state. The painting was re-acquired by the artist *c.*1989, which explains why it now resides, cut into pieces, amongst the material from his studio at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

17 The image was used, for example, on the dust jacket of Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler in Böhmen-Mähren-Memel* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte, 1939).

18 On post-war admiration for Sickert by Bacon and others, see Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 75–79; James Hyman,

The Battle for Realism (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press), 56–63 ('English Echoes: The Legacy of Walter Sickert'); Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert: "Images which Unlock Other Images"', *Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1273 (April 2009): 224–230.

19 See Wendy Baron and Richard Shone, eds, *Sickert Paintings* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 332–335, with early exhibition histories.

20 Reproduced in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 93.

21 In 1964 Ronald Alley listed sixteen images (thirteen objects) under his 'Appendix A: Abandoned Pictures' and nine works under 'Appendix B: Destroyed Pictures', in Alley, *Francis Bacon*.

22 *Man in a Cap*: Alley A1; *Man Standing* (and its now-separated verso): Alley A2; *Untitled (Landscape)*: reproduced in Sothebys, *Contemporary Art Day Auction*, London, 28 February 2008, lot 152; *Untitled*, 1943 or 1944: reproduced in *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, Hayward Gallery, London 1998, cat.1.

23 X-ray evidence that the right-hand panel of the triptych was cut down from a larger composition and turned through 90 degrees might seem to complicate the significance of their common size and, in fact, the *Three Studies* are visibly different in size.

24 That the inscription is truncated by the edge of the board might suggest that it relates to a larger, earlier image. Dates from Harrison, *In Camera*, 2005, 38. The same inscription is found on the reverse of *Man in a Cap*, Alley A1.

25 Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005), Chapter 2 ('Devastation').

26 Peter Calvocoressi, *Total War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 546.

27 See Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 103–106; Stephens, 'Animal', 22 and 92.

28 Isabel Rawsthorne papers, Tate Archive 9612.1.3.21; Bacon's 'Millais room' was his studio at 7 Cromwell Place, London.

29 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 10.

30 Alley, *Francis Bacon*, A4.

31 Heinrich Hoffmann, *Parteitag Grossdeutschland* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte, 1937), a record of the State Party Day staged at Nuremberg in September 1938.

32 This source identified by Chris Stephens, lunchtime lecture, Tate Britain, 19 September 2008; the painting was also recovered from 7 Cromwell Place by Robert Buhler but did not emerge onto the market until early 2008 (see note 22).

33 The topic is touched on in Rachel Tant, 'Archive', Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 166.

34 The problematic dating of this picture is discussed in Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 94–5, where a dating around 1945 is proposed, whereas the work had usually been attributed to either the early or middle part of the war (on the basis of Bacon's recollections, cited in Alley, *Francis Bacon*, A4). The background of *Figure Getting out of a Car* is very close to a lost *Figure Study*, which in other respects recalls, and was photographed alongside, *Figure Study No. 1* of 1945-46 (ibid., D3). The fact that it is on canvas supports a later date; *Figure in a Landscape* was painted on canvas in early 1945.

35 Alley, *Francis Bacon*, D3.

36 There is evidence that similar flowers were painted out of the central panel of *Three Studies*. For reproductions of the others, see *Untitled*, 1943 or 1944, Hayward 1998, cat.1 and *Study for a Figure*, c.1944, Alley A3.

37 www.oldpicturepostcard.co.uk

38 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 11.

39 Harrison, *In Camera*, 50.

40 Used on the dust jacket cover of Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Baut Grossdeutschland* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte, 1938).

41 *Die Neue Reichskanzlei* [The New Reichschancellery], Franz Eher Nachfolger, Munich, 1939. There are many images of the building in journals of the time, such as *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*, Berlin, September 1939.

42 We are grateful to David Alan Mellor for highlighting the importance of Heydrich's funeral in the history of Nazi ceremonies.

43 Harrison, *In Camera*, 52.

44 Leni Riefenstahl, *Olympia* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 289 – a republication of *Schönheit Im Olympische Kampf* [Beauty in the Olympic Struggle] (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937), where the image is on page 275.

45 Bacon to Duncan McDonald of Alex. Reid & Lefevre Gallery, n.d. [?January 1946], Lefevre Gallery Archive, Tate Archive 200211. This disproves Alley's note that *Figure Study I* had 'sometimes been incorrectly and misleadingly known as "Study for the Human Figure at the Cross II"' (the first presumably being the destroyed *Figure Study*, c.1945), and that *Figure Study II* was 'sometimes incorrectly known as "The Magdalene", but the artist says that he never thought of the figure as the Magdalene and never associated it in any way with the Crucifixion'.

46 Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 131–133.

47 The passage is isolated as a detail in the folio of black-and-white reproductions, *Giotto: The Arena Chapel* (London: Zwemmer, 1937; introduction by M. Marangoni), pl. 33.

48 For an analysis of the picture, see Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland* 137–8.

49 Adrian Clark, 'Francis Bacon's Correspondence with Sir Colin Anderson', *British Art Journal* 8, no.1 (2007): 40.

50 Bacon to Duncan McDonald, Lefevre Gallery Archive, Tate Archive 200211. We have no way of knowing whether Bacon destroyed the works or if the story was a fabrication to support requests for money.

51 Bacon to Anderson, published in Clark, 'Francis Bacon's Correspondence', 42.

52 Ibid., 40.

53 Reproduced in Harrison, *In Camera*, 235. The picture especially recalls photographs of Herman Göring as he sat in the defendant's box.

54 Reproduced in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 83.

55 For example, Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit* (Berlin: C.A. Weller, 1937). The British Library has a run of the *Reichstagung in Nürnberg* volumes from 1933 to 1938.

56 Reproduced in Harrison, *In Camera*,13.

57 Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook, 2003), 66.

58 Reproduced in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 104.

59 See Bacon's letters to Graham Sutherland, 19 October and 30 December [1946], reprinted in Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 237–238.

60 The cord has been edited out of many published or online versions of this image.

61 *Pope I – Study after Portrait of Pope Innocent X by Velázquez* (1951), Aberdeen Museum & Art Gallery (Alley 34, *114*); *Pope II* (1951), Mannheim Kunsthalle (Alley 35); *Pope III* (1951), destroyed (Alley 36).

62 Reproduced in Harrison, *In Camera*, 101.

63 On the relationship to Sickert's drawing *Conversation* (*c.*1909, Royal College of Art, London), see Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 225.

64 Alley claimed that this was Bacon's first direct borrowing from Muybridge (Alley, *Francis Bacon*, 48), and this has recently been reiterated by Daniels ('Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 228), although *Study from the Human Body* (1949) seems a better candidate (Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 47–8). For the Matisse suggestion, see Harrison, *In Camera*, 98–101.

65 Reproduced in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 132–4.

66 Reproduced in Harrison, *In Camera*, 131. The accompanying commentary on the work is unpersuasive. The work was recorded as 'destroyed' by Alley (*Francis Bacon*, D9), but has re-emerged since Bacon's death.

67 This connection is also noted, but interpreted more thematically, in Matthew Gale, 'Zone', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 107.

68 Reproduced in Harrison, *In Camera*, 227.

69 Alley, *Francis Bacon*, 63.

70 Ibid., 58.

71 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 199.

72 'Survivors', *Time* 54 (21 November 1949): 44.

73 Neville Wallis, 'Francis Bacon', *Observer*, 29 September 1950, 6, cited in Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 103.

74 Martin Harrison, 'Bacon's Paintings', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 45.

75 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 65.

76 Martin Harrison, Keynote Lecture at Francis Bacon conference, Tate Britain, London, 23 October 2008.

77 See, for example, *Triptych March 1974* and *Figure in Movement* (1978).

78 Riefenstahl, *Olympia*, 40–1.

79 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 55.

80 Bacon (1971–3), in Sylvester, *Interviews*, 81; Hugh Davies, 'Bacon Material', unpublished typescript, 1973, collection Sam Hunter.

81 Bacon, letter to Sonia Orwell, 13 December 1954, Orwell Archive, Library, University College, London. The letter was composed in a hotel in Rome. Some punctuation has been inserted for the sake of clarity. The text here provides a more accurate transcription than the version published in *Bacon and Sutherland* (97–98). An extract subsequently appeared in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 21. The reference is to Leo Longanesi, *Il mondo cambia. Storia di cinquant'anni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1949). For a surviving sheet worked on by Bacon, see Harrison and Daniels, *Francis Bacon: Incunabula* (London: Thames and Hudson), 62. The Ann mentioned in the letter may well be Ann Fleming, wife of the novelist Ian, who was a close friend of Bacon's and Orwell's and the previous month had remarked to Evelyn Waugh: 'I thought you might have some small unpublished work of a morbid character that could be illustrated

by Francis Bacon' (Mark Amory, ed., *The Letters of Ann Fleming* [London: Harvill Press, 1985], 147). In encouraging Bacon to do a book, the two women were doubtless inspired by his conversation, and an impulse to help Bacon with his perennial money problems.

82 *A Susan Sontag Reader* (London: Penguin, 1982), 324.

83 *Francis Bacon in Conversation with Michel Archimbaud* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 84.

84 Theodore Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991), 132–57.

85 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1968), 243.

86 Hannah Arendt, 'Nightmare and Flight', *Partisan Review* 12, no. 2 (1945), reprinted in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, Jerome Kohn, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 133–5.

87 Tony Judt, 'The "Problem of Evil" in Postwar Europe', *New York Review of Books* 55, no. 2 (14 February 2008 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/21031).

Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery

by MARTIN HAMMER

THE LEFEVRE GALLERY in London, founded in 1871, played a significant role in selling modern European art, mostly French, to British collectors and, through its exhibitions, in assisting successive generations of artists to assimilate new directions in art.[1] Between the Wars, it mounted shows devoted to Georges Seurat (1926), Edgar Degas (1928), Paul Cézanne (1935) as well as then current figures such as Matisse (1927), Picasso (1931), Braque (1934) and Salvador Dalí (1936). Multiple-artist exhibitions, containing a work or two by big names, were a recurrent feature of the schedule. The Gallery also dealt in modern British art, and was especially active in this capacity around the end of the Second World War. Duncan Macdonald (Fig.21), a director of the Gallery, sought to seize the initiative in showing marketable British artists as the art world gradually revived, even though cross-Channel communications remained difficult and the cost of importing pictures prohibitive.[2] During the early part of the War, the Gallery had only been open around two days a week, and its holdings were evacuated to the Mendip Hills. This was fortunate as in spring 1943 its long-serving premises in King Street were destroyed in a German bombing raid. Macdonald, who for some time had been in New York working at the associated Bignou Gallery, then returned to London and oversaw the relaunching of Lefevre at 131–34 New Bond Street towards the end of 1944. Thereafter, the Gallery showed modern British art, interwoven with displays of French pictures from stock. The programme included exhibitions of established abstract artists such as Ben Nicholson (1945) and Barbara Hepworth (1944 and 1946), independent figures such as Jankel Adler (1946), Frances Hodgkins (1946) and L.S. Lowry (1945), and the younger Neo-romantics such as John Minton (1945), Keith Vaughan (1944 and 1946) and Lucian Freud (1944 and 1947, the latter shared with John Craxton). This story would repay general investigation with reference to the Gallery's extensive archives, and to the parallel activities of rivals such as the Leicester, Gimpel Fils and Redfern Galleries.

The focus of this article is on the Gallery's dealings with Francis Bacon, and the light they shed on his biography and work. The Lefevre is probably most frequently cited in relation to the group show of spring 1945 in which Bacon first exhibited *Three studies for figures at the base of a Crucifixion* (1944), the mythic point of origin for his mature work. What the archives confirm is that Bacon's inclusion was a direct consequence of his close personal and creative rapport with Graham Sutherland, which had begun in 1943.[3] Sutherland's reputation then was

21. *Portrait of Duncan Macdonald*, by Walter Sickert. 1928/29. Etching (2nd state), 28.6 by 21.1 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

extremely elevated, as a result of his dark landscape imagery and his work over the previous five years as an official war artist, featuring images of bomb-blasted buildings, mining and apocalyptic steel-works interiors.[4] With the end of the War in sight, Macdonald had decided to cultivate Sutherland, encouraging him to contribute to a group show that would help to relaunch

I am grateful to the former owners of the Lefevre Gallery for giving me permission to study the Gallery's papers at Tate Gallery Archive. Abbreviations used in the notes are: LGA: Lefevre Gallery Archive, TGA: Tate Gallery Archive; FB: Francis Bacon; DM: Duncan Macdonald; and GS: Graham Sutherland.

[1] D. Cooper: 'A Franco-Scottish link with the Past', exh. cat. *Alex Reid & Lefevre*, London (Lefevre Gallery) 1976, pp.3–26; for historical background, see F. Fowle: exh. cat. *Impressionism and Scotland*, Edinburgh (National Galleries of Scotland) 2008, p.141. After a 1926 merger it became the Alex Reid and Lefevre Gallery, although the shorthand version was more often used, as it is here.

[2] See M. Garlake: *New Art New World*, New Haven and London 1998, p.25.

[3] For the relationship between the two artists, see M. Hammer: *Bacon and Sutherland*, New Haven and London 2005. The reciprocal nature of their admiration is further suggested in a remark inserted by J.T. Soby into his early 1960s text for an unrealised monograph on Bacon, based on a 'recent interview': 'all his life he had been looking for some help to find a theoretical background for his painting [. . .] Once in his life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it'; New York, Museum of Modern Art Archive, J.T. Soby Papers, typescript draft of book on Bacon, p.4.

[4] On Sutherland's work in the 1940s, see M. Hammer: *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924–1950*, London 2005.

his independent career and serve as the prelude to a one-man show and a continuing association with the Gallery. Over the coming months, artist and dealer talked also about a show in Paris, where Macdonald had a partnership arrangement, although that idea never materialised. Sutherland's powerful position is reflected in his communications with the Gallery. He was able to be quite fastidious about which artists' work his own would be hung alongside, announcing early in 1945 that he would prefer Moore, Hodgkins and Nicholson.[5] When Nicholson withdrew, Sutherland suggested a bold alternative:

> . . . as for the painter to take BN's place it seems there is not much choice other than Piper. I should really prefer Francis Bacon for whose work you know I have a really profound admiration. It is true he has shown very little; but nowadays with every Tom, Dick and Harry showing yards of painting without much selection or standard this is refreshing, & his recent things, while being quite uncompromising, have a grandeur & brilliance which is rarely seen in English art.[6]

Macdonald responded with suitable enthusiasm. On 22nd January he stated: 'if you prefer Francis Bacon I shall try him'. He took the opportunity to suggest a further possibility, which resulted in another addition to the line-up: 'what would you think of Matthew Smith being added to the group? He is [. . .] a different generation in work, but [. . .] surely the best painter of his generation'.[7] That same day, Macdonald opened up communications with Bacon: 'Your friend Graham Sutherland has spoken very highly of your Painting and is very keen that I should see it. May I come as soon as we can arrange a suitable date between us?'. He was, he explained, aiming to bring together works by several artists and 'Sutherland suggests that you should be one of these'.[8] The following month Macdonald told Sutherland: 'I went to see Francis Bacon and have asked him to send four or five works to the Show. I shall tell you about his work when we meet'.[9] He subsequently reported to Bacon that he had lunched with the Sutherlands and 'was delighted to hear from this artist that he had seen some of your new pictures, which he praised highly'. Bacon should telephone him to talk about which pictures to include.[10]

The exhibition *Recent Paintings by Francis Bacon, Frances Hodgkins, Henry Moore, Matthew Smith, Graham Sutherland* ran at the Lefevre Gallery throughout April 1945. Bacon was represented by the *Three studies* and *Figure in a landscape* (1945). The catalogue also listed eight works by Hodgkins, fifteen by Moore (including thirteen drawings), nine by Smith and eleven by Sutherland. Macdonald was able to inform Sutherland that all his works had sold. Moreover the Bacons had contributed to the overall success of the show: 'many people are interested in the Francis Bacon pictures, even though they find them "frightening".[11] I think myself they are very well designed and painted and I look forward to seeing more of his later oil paintings. I shall watch his new work with interest if I have the opportunity'. Subsequently, he informed Sutherland: 'there are now only two Smith oil paintings and two Moore drawings left in the whole Exhibition. You [. . .] would be very glad if you could hear the enthusiasm of many young people for your part of the Show, and indeed for the whole Exhibition'. Macdonald was delighted by the reviews and visitor numbers, such that they had to reprint the catalogue three times.[12] Clearly Bacon benefited not just from the company he was keeping, but also from the current situation in which many people desired to visit galleries, with wartime pressures finally waning but all the big museums still devoid of their contents.

After the exhibition, Bacon asked to be paid for *Figure in a landscape*, which had been sold to the artist's cousin Diana Watson. Interestingly, the cheque for £108.6.8 included a deduction of £25 for 'the three Pictures sold to Mr Hall, owing to the fact that they were sold in your Studio. Do you remember the arrangement we came to on my last visit to your studio?'.[13] Bacon apologised for the tardy sending of a receipt: 'I have been laid up with asthma and forgot about it. Yes of course I remember about the arrangement over Mr Hall's pictures and am very grateful to you for only taking half the percentage on them'.[14] Presumably, Bacon had originally intended to show and potentially sell *Three studies*, but his lover and supporter Eric Hall was able at the last minute, by means of this arrangement with the Lefevre, to acquire the work and prevent it being lost to another collector and possibly even sold as three separate pictures. Hall may have been ahead of Bacon himself in estimating the triptych as a major breakthrough. He eventually presented the work to the Tate Gallery, after the breakdown in his relationship with Bacon.

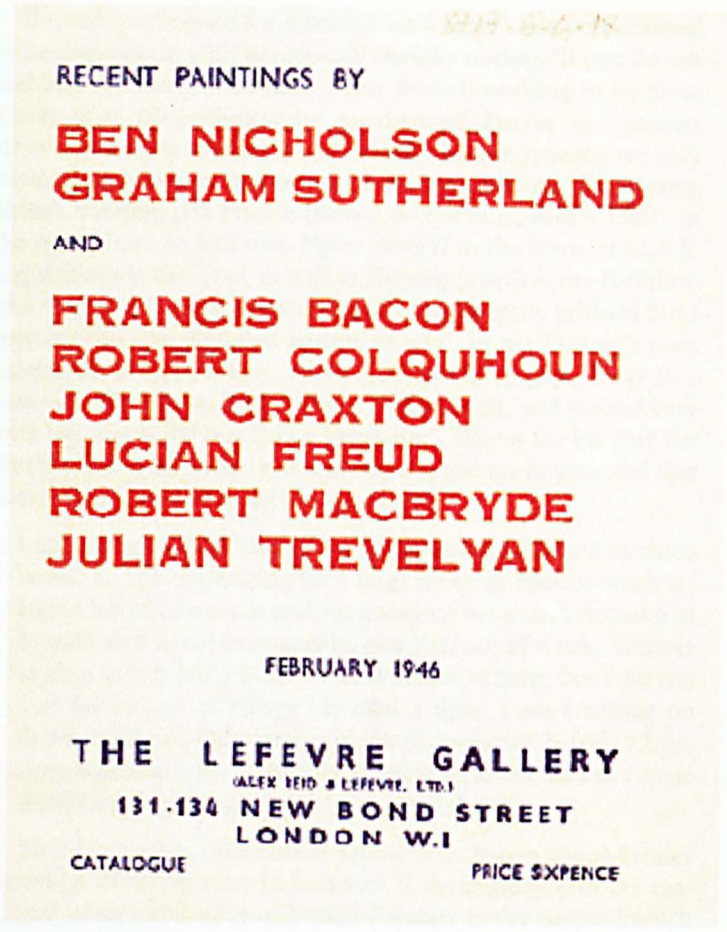
Macdonald now viewed Bacon as one of his stable of rising artists. Towards the end of 1945, he told Sutherland that he hoped to include Bacon, Craxton, Freud, Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde and probably Julian Trevelyan in an exhibition of 'good contemporary painters' in February 1946: 'naturally your last canvasses would have the centre of the show [. . .] If in the New Year you see B, F or C, I hope you will encourage them to do their utmost to make this next show a fine one'.[15] In the event, Bacon contributed *Figure study I* and *Figure study II* to the show. His advance commentary suggests that other pictures had seemed possible at one stage: 'I am afraid I have only been able to send 2 pictures. The one I sold I have not been able to get a frame for and the new one you saw I am not satisfied with yet . . .'.[16] Perhaps the former was the picture Bacon sold to Peter Watson, but later took back and destroyed.[17] Regarding the two works that were dispatched, Bacon remarked: 'These paintings are studies for the Magdalene and the smaller of the two was the first studie [*sic*] and I would like them entitled as such in the catalogue'.[18] The association lingered, and *Figure study II* was entitled *Magdalene* in the catalogue for Bacon's 1962 Tate Gallery retrospective. The artist was at pains to refute this; according to Alley's catalogue raisonné of 1964, 'the artist says he never thought of the figure as the Magdalene and never associated it in

[5] GS to DM, n.d. [mid-January 1945], LGA; the P.S. to the letter rammed home the message: 'Do see F. Bacon's new works'.
[6] GS to DM, n.d. [mid-January 1945], LGA.
[7] DM to GS, 22nd January 1945, LGA.
[8] DM to FB, 22nd January 1945, LGA.
[9] DM to GS, 1st March [1945], LGA.
[10] DM to FB, 12th March 1945, LGA.
[11] DM to GS, 11th April [1945], LGA.
[12] DM to GS, 19th April [1945], LGA.
[13] DM to FB, 14th May 1945, LGA.
[14] FB to DM, 25th May 1945, LGA.
[15] DM to GS, 27th December 1945, LGA.
[16] FB to DM, n.d. [?January 1946], LGA.
[17] Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.55.
[18] FB to DM, n.d. [?January 1946], LGA.
[19] R. Alley: *Francis Bacon*, London 1964, p.39.
[20] M. Hammer and C. Stephens: '"Seeing the story of one's time": appropriations from Nazi photography in the work of Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain* 10

any way with the Crucifixion'.[19] The allusion in the letter seems to contradict this, and has been discussed elsewhere in the context of Bacon's extraordinary fusion during this period of references to religious imagery and to Nazi propaganda photography.[20] Nevertheless in the catalogue for the Lefevre Gallery show, as it appeared in February 1946 (Fig.22), the pictures were listed as 'Figure Study (No.1)' and 'Figure Study (No.2)'. Indeed, Bacon generally opted hereafter for neutral titles, such as *Painting* (1946), even though the latter picture too alludes to Crucifixion imagery. He may have carried on improvising the pictures after writing the letter, and introduced changes that rendered the titles he originally had in mind inappropriate. But the shift may also capture Bacon's realisation, for reasons unknown, that evocative titles could be counterproductive, encouraging over-literal or reductive readings.[21]

The gallery succeeded in selling both pictures, resulting in a further cheque for £183.6.8.[22] *Figure study I* was purchased by Brenda Bomford on behalf of her husband, James, who collected French Impressionist and modern British art and proceeded to acquire a significant quantity of Bacons over the coming years.[23] *Figure study II* was acquired by the Contemporary Art Society, the charitable body that bought works of art for onward distribution to public galleries. The purchase is likely to have been contentious, given the picture's disturbing imagery and the artist's obscurity, and several years elapsed before it found a home in the Bagshaw Art Gallery, Batley (subsequently transferred to Huddersfield Art Gallery). The initial acquisition was supported, one imagines, by two figures active in the C.A.S. who became friendly with Bacon around this time. One was John Russell, whose enthusiasm for the artist can only have been reinforced by his recent contacts with Sutherland, documented in the Lefevre Archive, in connection with Russell's forthcoming book *From Sickert to 1948*, a survey of British art based around C.A.S. acquisitions.[24] Russell went on to write the first monograph on Bacon, incorporating vivid recollections of first seeing *Three studies for figures at the base of the Crucifixion* at the Lefevre Gallery.[25] The other was Sir Colin Anderson, the wealthy collector and patron, a new member of the C.A.S. committee and the recipient over the following few years of letters from Bacon that have recently been published, providing a valuable complement to the exchanges with Sutherland, and the Hanover and Lefevre Galleries.[26] Like the Lefevre correspondence, the Anderson letters lay bare Bacon's acute and persistent financial disarray, including an apparent threat of bankruptcy for what sound like gambling debts, and they indicate his somewhat unscrupulous attitude towards wealthy individuals who could easily afford to help him out.

In April 1946 Macdonald was eager to sustain the connection with Bacon, who was planning to leave London: 'I hope you will come and dine with me, one evening before you leave for the South of France, so that we may make any arrangements possible, regarding the sending of pictures and the exhibition of same in the Lefevre Galleries. We shall do our utmost to find a good home for the large picture which is now here'.[27] The latter must have been *Study for man with microphones* (Fig.23), which the Gallery showed that summer. This and *Painting* (1946) were evidently carried out in quick succession during the first half of 1946. The latter has often been seen to descend from a tradition of butchery images as epitomised in Rembrandt's *Carcass of beef* (1657) in the Louvre, Paris. The variations on this theme by Chaim Soutine, an artist much admired by Bacon, can also be seen as a more immediate catalyst for *Painting* (1946).[28] He could certainly have known the versions by Soutine in which the suspended Crucifix-like carcass is rendered with the artist's characteristic heightened palette and painterly touch. It is worth noting that one such Soutine had been in Britain for several years, in the collection of Sutherland's friend Eardley Knollys, and was in fact included in the Lefevre's exhibition *School of Paris (Picasso and his Contemporaries)* that immediately followed the group show which launched Bacon.[29] In this atypical variation, Soutine focused rather on one slab of beef, with its rich colouration, textures and formal structure. Memories of the picture may have informed Bacon's ribs of beef suspended to



22. Cover page of a catalogue for a group show at the Lefevre Gallery, London. February 1946.

(2009), pp.315–52 (issue devoted to Francis Bacon).

[21] A parallel move away from mythic and evocative to neutral titles is encountered in the contemporary work of American Abstract Expressionists such as Clyfford Still.

[22] DM to FB, 9th April [1946], LGA.

[23] See the provenances provided in Alley, *op. cit.* (note 19).

[24] DM/GS correspondence from November and December 1945, LGA; indicating that Sutherland knew Russell quite well and liked his writing.

[25] J. Russell: *Francis Bacon*, London 1979, p.10.

[26] A. Clark: 'Francis Bacon's correspondence with Sir Colin Anderson', *The British Art Journal* 8 (2007), pp.39–43; Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.234–40 (letters to GS); and M. Peppiatt: *Bacon in the 1950s*, New Haven and London 2006, pp.141–53 (Hanover Gallery letters).

[27] DM to FB, 9th April [1946], LGA.

[28] On Soutine's importance for Bacon and his fellow 'School of London' artists, see the present writer's forthcoming article; 'Soutine in English Translation', *Modernist Cultures* (October 2010).

[29] M. Tuchman, E. Dunow and K. Perls: *Chaim Soutine (1893–1943): Catalogue Raisonné, Part I*, Cologne 2002, pp.470 and 473, no.99.

23. *Study for a man with microphones*, by Francis Bacon. 1946 (subsequently over-painted). Canvas, 145 by 127.8 cm.

such compelling effect on the tubular metal podium in front of his generic fascist dictator.

It was the sale of *Painting* (1946) to the Redfern Gallery that made it possible for Bacon to leave a still-dismal, post-War Britain for the sunshine and hedonistic pursuits of the South of France. His life and artistic activities in Monte Carlo are conveyed in communications to Macdonald and others. In August he wrote:

> I have been meaning to write to you for ages. I have found a flat here, not really what I like but it will do until I decide what I am going to do. I do not know how long I want to stay here. I may go to Paris after the winter if I can find anything there. Life is curious here very expensive in some ways and in others cheaper than England. I am working but afraid the things are still very large & it is unfortunate for me financially but there is nothing to be done at the moment. Everything in the way of food can be got here from Cumberland hams to caviar if one chooses to pay. The really difficult thing even on the black market is canvas but I have been able to get some very good coarse linen sheets which turn into very good canvases. Nobody down here has ever heard of painting except the extraordinary lesbian affairs they concoct out of the landscape and the bougainvilleas which have to be seen to be believed but perhaps their ignorance is no greater than the knowing ones at home.[30]

Bacon's preference for working on a large scale was deemed to be imprudent, with Macdonald ruefully noting: 'If you do not feel like shrinking your sizes, I fear there is nothing to be done about it'.[31] Nevertheless he encouraged Bacon to consider showing work in France: 'If you are still there in January, we may meet, and between us we might devise a scheme for putting British Painting (via Francis Bacon) on the map, *dans le Midi*'. In the meantime, he had seen *Figure study II* in the show of C.A.S. acquisitions at the Tate, as well as *Painting* (1946) at the Redfern: 'the colour was certainly startling and for me quite brilliant but I suppose the size militated against its sale'. In the Gallery's own exhibition *British Painters, Past and Present* in August, *Study for a man with microphones* 'had a whole wall to itself, and looked very well but alas it did not find a purchaser'. Bacon for his part felt that the South of France was unlikely to produce buyers, and that everything was becoming too expensive:

> I am going to Paris on the 1st of November for two or three weeks [. . .] I am looking for a large room in Paris to work in. I have heard of a room and am going up to see it. I do not feel I could stay here permanently, not because of work, because as long as it is fairly quiet I can work anywhere, but I do not care for its sort of village life after a time. I am working on three studies of Velasquez portrait of Innocent II [*sic*]. I have almost finished one. I find them exciting to do, and of course always hoping it is going to be the real thing.[32]

That December, Macdonald reported to Bacon about further showings of his pictures in London: 'I am sending you the catalogue of an Exhibition of British Painters at the Anglo-French Centre, which is later going on to Paris. He [the organiser] borrowed the three studies, I think, from one of your friends [Eric Hall], and from me he borrowed the one illustrated [*Study for a man with microphones*], but found he had not the space to hang it . . .'.[33] Macdonald also commented that he had been deeply impressed by Sutherland's *Crucifixion*, having attended the unveiling at St Matthew's church, Northampton: 'I believe it is the finest thing he has done'. The affinity with Bacon struck Macdonald: 'I keep wondering how it would affect you, who have already done so many studies for a similar subject'. He was also keen to see the Velázquez studies, also described in Bacon's letters to Sutherland from late 1946, although the earliest such variation to survive is *Head VI* of 1949.[34]

During 1947 Macdonald maintained his contacts with both Bacon and Sutherland, judging by scattered reports of his sightings of the one in letters to the other. That spring he expressed regret at missing Bacon on his last visit to London, and asked for photographs of recent works completed in France to show James Soby of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, who he clearly hoped might buy a picture.[35] Meanwhile Soby himself needed reassurance in relation to Bacon's eccentric titling of his works: 'I think I told you that Francis Bacon's "Man with Microphones" is really a highly finished picture, and any new one he makes will probably be called a "study", in spite of its finality. He has a large imagination, and always hopes that

FB to DM, sent from Hotel Ré, Monte Carlo, 20th August 1946, LGA.

DM to FB, 1st October 1946, LGA. A year later Bacon announced to Anderson that 'at the moment I can paint much smaller pictures which I am glad to be able to do'; Clark, *op. cit.* (note 26), p.41.

FB to DM, 19th October [1946], typed copy, LGA.

DM to FB, 4th December 1946, LGA; see exh. cat. *Seventh Exhibition: Adler, Bacon, Colquhoun, Hubert, MacBryde, Trevelyan*, London (Anglo-French Art Centre) November to December 1946, nos.6–8, as 'Studies for figures at the base of a crucifix'.

Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.237–38.

DM to FB, 23rd April 1947, LGA.

DM to J.T. Soby, 21st April 1947, LGA.

J.T. Soby: *Contemporary Painters*, New York 1948, p.151.

At the time that his planned monograph on Bacon was running into difficulties,

another picture will turn out to be 12 feet by 15 feet'.[36] The correspondence with Soby suggests that Macdonald was responsible for galvanising the American critic and collector's enthusiastic interest in Bacon, culminating in his unrealised work of the early 1960s on what would have been the first book on the artist. Soby wrote about Bacon and reproduced *Study for a man with microphones* in his 1948 survey of the current state of painting.[37] By his own testimony, Soby also played a key role in the Museum of Modern Art's decision to purchase *Painting* (1946) from the Redfern Gallery in 1948, and in the commission to the young critic Sam Hunter to produce what turned out to be an exceptional article on Bacon and his immersion in photography.[38]

Bacon's next letter to Macdonald in May took into account the dealer's recent six-week visit to New York. Notwithstanding the wonderful weather and light in France, the cost of living was proving oppressive, and America was starting to look an attractive alternative. Of late he had 'been acting as nurse as there is someone rather ill in the flat', but would send Soby some photographs in the next few weeks:

> I had not finished anything, but in the last few days have been able to finish a large one I like at the moment, and a smaller one. I was so pleased to see Graham and Kathy, and I am sure the change here gave him a good rest, as he looked so well when he left. If I sent you over two or three pictures at the end of June, do you think you could do anything with them? I am getting nearly completely broke. If I am going to try and go to America next year to try and live there for a bit, and if I can't sell anything or haven't anything to sell, I will get a job as a valet or cook. I can do both well, so if you have any rich friends who want a good English slave, do let me know, as I can always make an arrangement over these sorts of jobs so as to evade the permits for work which are so difficult to get.[39]

Bacon had perhaps been inspired by the accounts of life in the United States by his friends Cyril Connolly and Peter Watson, both of whom had recently crossed the Atlantic and encountered a culture richer and more vulgar in every sense than in Britain. Their discoveries and contacts resulted in a special double-issue of *Horizon* magazine in October 1947 devoted to contemporary America.[40]

In response, Macdonald indicated that he would certainly try to find buyers given the chance, and notwithstanding current difficulties in the commercial art world:

> The selling of pictures has slowed down somewhat in England, and a good deal in America, while Paris is worse still. If you can get a few of your new pictures that are not too large [. . .] we will all do our damnedest to find purchasers. Would you have any difficulty in getting them out of France? I am sure you would have to give me warning when you are sending them, how many, and the prices, so that I could get an import licence from the Board of Trade. I wonder whether it would not be wiser for you to bring them yourself and settle all your other affairs at the same time.[41]

He further indicated that he could indeed help Bacon to get to America, given his connections with the likes of Soby and James Johnson Sweeney, until 1946 a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Bacon's financial concerns come to the fore in his next letter that summer, where we encounter descriptions of new pictures:

> I think your suggestion of bringing the painting back will be better. I will come back at the end of September or beginning of October. I shall have a group of 3 large paintings about the size of the one which went to the CAS. Is there any chance of your having an exhibition in the autumn in which you could hang them? They want to be hung together in a series as they are a sort of Crucifixion. I am finishing the 2nd now. I think they are the most formal things I have done and the colour is a sort of intense blue violet. I think they are better than what I have done up to now. I hope so at any rate. If you think there is a chance of your being able to show them, as I really need the money desperately, I will write to the framer I go to and see what they can do about framing them. I want £750 for the set. It is not a quarter of what is has cost me with gambling etc; if you think you can get more, it would be tremendously welcome. Or perhaps your gallery would speculate in buying them directly, or would they have to be Scottish darning for that. I do not mean this bitterly [. . .] I am sure the Bonnard Exhibition must be very interesting. I would love to have seen it.[42]

The idea of a direct gallery purchase did not bear fruit. However, Bacon resumed his campaign to sell the same or related pictures through the Lefevre early in 1948:

> I have done a set of three paintings I would like to show. They are about the same size as the Contemporary Art Society one or a little smaller. Have you an Exhibition this spring or summer in which you would show them? I could get them to you by the end of April or beginning of May. I am glad to say I can work a lot now. A friend of mine, Eric Hall, is coming in to see you, and could give you some idea of them, as he is coming back here, perhaps you could tell him if there is any chance of showing them. They are things I have tried to do several times before, but I have never been able to bring them off, but this time I think it is much nearer.

Bacon's preoccupations were yet again financial:

> There is another thing. Is it possible to make me a small advance? I am quite broke, and canvas and paints are terribly expensive. Would it be possible to advance me £150. You can speak to Eric Hall about this, as if you could make me the advance, I would be grateful if you would let him have it on my behalf. I would be terribly grateful if you could possibly do this.

Finally, Bacon raised the issue of a picture that he wished to take back and rework: 'Some time when you have a van passing in the Kensington area, could you send back that awful picture of mine

with a typescript found wanting by Bacon and his London associates, Soby protested his credentials: 'I was the one who persuaded the Museum to buy its first Francis Bacon, I commissioned Sam Hunter to do his excellent article. I myself wrote the first article in America about his extraordinary talent'; Soby to Erica Brausen, 27th July 1962, document cited at note 3 above. The article in question was S. Hunter: 'Francis Bacon: the Anatomy of Horror', *Magazine of Art* 95 (1952), pp.13–14.

[39] FB to DM, 26th May [1947], LGA. He was still toying with the idea of going to America for a while in the following February; see Clark, *op. cit.* (note 26), p.41.

[40] *Horizon* 93–94 (October 1947).

[41] DM to FB, 10th June 1947, LGA.

[42] FB to DM, Friday 20th [June 1947], LGA. 'Scottish darning' may refer to the Gallery's commitment to the Scottish painters Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, as suggested by Richard Shone.

to 7 Cromwell Place. I want to use the back of the canvas and the frame'. Conversely, he tried to keep Macdonald sweet by making optimistic noises about future productivity:

> Here [Monte Carlo] the weather is lovely, and wonderfully isolated. There is no-one here. Now that I think I can produce the things much more rapidly, I hope I will become perhaps a better money-making proposition. If you know of anyone who will take the risk and supply me with paints, canvas, and the minimum of vittles think of me. I might make them money.[43]

The 'awful picture' in question was presumably *Study for man with microphones*, which had not sold at the Lefevre Gallery and which Bacon did indeed significantly rework around 1949, although the revised version in turn fell victim to Bacon's sacrificial knife after being exhibited in 1962. Equally, the blue-violet 'sort of Crucifixion' pictures, mentioned earlier in his letter, seem not to have survived Bacon's culling.

In late 1949, the year in which he turned forty, Bacon finally had his first one-man show, which turned out to be an immense critical and commercial success.[44] However, the venue was not the Lefevre but the Hanover Gallery, which had opened the previous year and had made an early splash with new pictures from the South of France by Sutherland. The Gallery, backed by Arthur Jeffress and run by Erica Brausen, formerly of the Redfern Gallery, emerged as probably the most lively venue for innovative British art over the next decade. The shift in power was undoubtedly hastened by the death of Duncan Macdonald in 1949. For a period the Lefevre Gallery had undoubtedly been one of the first points of call for anyone wishing to keep abreast of developments in British art. That prominence had been relatively short-lived, however, and the mantle was now passing to younger rivals.

[43] FB to DM, 23rd January 1948, LGA.
[44] Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.42.

Autobiographical notes by Roger Hilton

by ADRIAN LEWIS

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXT by Roger Hilton, published here for the first time (Fig.25; and Appendix below), is written in the artist's hand, undated, on one sheet of letter paper. Its references to Hilton's being taken up by the Waddington Gallery, London, and the ending of his first marriage place it after 1959–60, and the fact that the text is in French suggests that it was written in relation to his exhibition at the Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zürich, in June 1961. The text refers to many of the significant moments or passages in Hilton's life and career, at least as they figured in his memory at around the age of fifty, and can be amplified from what is known of his life.[1]

Hilton was born in 1911 and brought up in The Corner House, 10 Eastbury Road, Northwood, then still a small village on the edge of the Chilterns. His father, Oscar, a specialist in children's health, had settled at Northwood as a general practitioner, and his mother, Louisa, had trained in fine art at the Slade School of Art. The family initially employed three maids and nannies for the children. The young boy had a spaniel – 'The dog' in the notes – among other family pets (Fig.26). Hilton's self-attested love of football during his schooldays contrasts with the statement by his elder brother, John, in a memoir, that he was 'not very good at organised games'.[2] The operative words here are 'organised' and 'good', and the family's expectations are caught also in John's statement that Roger was 'not good at his books'. John, by contrast, fulfilled his father's hopes by attending Marlborough School and Oxford University, going through architectural training and then entering the civil service. We can understand here the reference to John as the 'superior' brother. Hilton's academic inferiority is of course partly a family construction, a matter of comparison between siblings, as well as indicative of how Hilton told his own 'destined' story. He may, for example, have been kept down a year at Arnold House School, but he was fourth in his final class at Northwood Preparatory and even at Bishop's Stortford College, he achieved credits in English, History, French with Oral, Elementary Maths and General Science at School Certificate level. While not getting into Oxford, he entered a university art school, the Slade (Fig.24).[3] To turn a creditable performance into a discreditable one is a recognisable narrative ploy.

Between 1931 and 1939 Hilton divided his time between England and France, spending more than two years in Paris over intermittent periods, during which he attended the Académie Ranson.[4] His 'love' during his time in Paris was an unrequited passion for Guilhen Perrier, the best friend of his brother John's future wife, Peggy Stephens. They met during a French trip in summer 1930 and again the following summer during a camping holiday on Dartmoor.[5] Guilhen, six years older than Hilton, was already studying at the Académie Ranson, and Hilton made

[1] For fuller documentation of the biographical data given here, see A. Lewis: *Roger Hilton: The Early Years*, Leicester 1984. More biographical sources are available in A. Lambirth: *Roger Hilton: The Figured Language of Thought*, London 2007. The autobiographical notes were first made available in A. Lewis: 'Roger Hilton and the Culture of Painting', Ph.D. diss. (University of Manchester, 1995), I, pp.32–38, and have previously only been briefly mentioned in *idem*: *Roger Hilton*, Aldershot 2003, pp.17 and 19; and C. Stephens: *Roger Hilton*, London 2006, pp.19 and 46.

[2] This memoir is available in Lewis 1995, *op. cit.* (note 1), III, appendix V, pp.487–97, esp. p.490. Hilton attended a Montessori school in Chester Road, Northwood, from October 1916 until the end of 1918, and Arnold House School, Northwood, from the start of 1919. He passed on to Northwood Preparatory School, failed to enter Marlborough, and attended Bishop's Stortford College from January 1925 until the end of the academic year in 1929.

[3] Hilton studied painting at the Slade School of Art from October 1929 to June 1931 and was also registered there from October 1934 to June 1935. Applying for teaching jobs encouraged Hilton to finish work for his Slade diploma which he

Found in Translation: Chaim Soutine and English Art

Martin Hammer

The impact of the work of Chaim Soutine (1893–43) on certain well-known British painters after 1945 provides a case study in the transmission of artistic ideas across time and space. Indeed, aside from its intrinsic historical interest, the material crystallises an issue of method that is worth airing in a journal committed to multi-disciplinary investigation of the modernist project. There are enormous critical gains, it goes without saying, but what might potentially be lost by highlighting affinities and connections across creative media? Is there a danger of losing sight of important features of the process of artistic production? At any rate art historians, in their urge to embed interdisciplinary theory within their discipline and to foreground decipherable meaning, have for some time been inclined to neglect, or even to dismiss as outmoded and formalist, a mode of critical analysis which is more narrowly visual in conception, and which found one of its most coherent expositions in a book published exactly fifty years ago, namely Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*.[1] I offer this study as a modest homage to book and author at this moment of the volume's anniversary, and as a pointer to the continuing relevance of Gombrich's approach, beyond the parameters of his own preoccupations with realism and the psychology of perception. His core argument at a deeper level was that artists generate their work out of a vast array of impulses and assumptions, conscious or unconscious, and in response to a wide range of stimuli and determinants, but that in doing so they inescapably adapt the available resources and conventions of art itself, as practised by their

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predecessors and contemporaries. In their own work, that is to say, they in some way extend (if they are artists, that is, of any substance) the existing tradition or, metaphorically speaking, language of their particular medium. This might at times seem an end in itself, from the perspective of the artist, but it is also what permits him or her to articulate ideas, express feelings and attitudes, represent the external world, and generally engage and shape the spectator's response to their art. Much the same argument could doubtless be elaborated in the cases of other creative media.

Indeed, one might even say something comparable about art historians. Gombrich himself was giving a new twist in *Art and Illusion* to thinking developed within the Germanic disciplinary tradition to which he was heir, represented by figures working on either side of 1900 such as Aby Warburg, Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Reigl. He acknowledged as much in *Art and Illusion* when he summarised his position: 'All paintings, as Wölfflin said, owe more to other paintings than they owe to direct observation'.[2] Gombrich's work in turn stimulated the late Michael Baxandall, his student and subsequent colleague at the Warburg Institute in London, to address the vexed themes of artistic tradition and the interplay between artists in his 1985 book *Patterns of Influence*.[3] Here Baxandall theorised an idea that was implicit in *Art and Illusion*, namely that significant artists proceed not by passively absorbing aspects of their artistic inheritance (the dread notion of 'influence'), but rather by actively appropriating and transforming to their own distinctive ends, in very varied ways, possibilities that seem to them to be latent in art they have encountered. Such a process is, by this account, integral to the processes of artistic creation and invention, as well as a precondition to the transmission of meaning.

I wish to recuperate this art-historical tradition in examining the inspiration that several English painters derived in the 1940s and 1950s from looking at the work of Soutine. Firstly, some concise background is in order. Soutine was born in 1893 in Smilovichi, a village near Minsk in Belarus, which was then within the Pale of Settlement, the area of Russia reserved for Jews. Having trained in Minsk, he moved to Paris in 1913, and became friendly with the likes of the painter Amedeo Modigliani and the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz. Landscape, still-life and the figure were the genres in which he specialised during the inter-war period, in a style characterised by loose, even crude brushwork, rhythmic distortion and bold, heightened colour (qualities that are of course particularly difficult to convey in reproduction).

Fig. 1. Chaim Soutine, *Landscape at Céret*, c. 1920–1. Oil on canvas. 61×83.8 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

The art of Soutine was introduced to British audiences at large by a substantial exhibition staged in 1963 at the Edinburgh Festival and then at the Tate Gallery, accompanied by a catalogue from the show's enthusiastic curator David Sylvester.[4] Both exhibition and publication surveyed the trajectory of Soutine's art, from the mid-1910s to the early 1940s, and the full range of his subject-matter. Yet in his text Sylvester chose to give pride of place to one period, Soutine's work from around 1920, and he focused on a specific image of the picturesque town of Céret, in the foothills of the French Pyrenees (Figure 1). At this painting, which he clearly knew intimately, the critic threw some of his finest purple prose, in an effort to evoke the metaphorical suggestions that viewers might take from the picture, given its striking departures both from descriptive naturalism and from the more tasteful pictorial effects familiar from current British responses to landscape imagery:

> Here is a jungle of colour, layer upon impenetrable layer, not murky but of a luxurious darkness in which light is held as in porphyry or basalt... Whether it is noon or dusk, whether it is raining or the wind is blowing, is of no concern. Nor is it really a matter of importance what things the shapes stand for – that this is a hill or a house or a

> tree... Our awareness cuts through objects. It responds to rhythms, to an interplay of forces... The picture is about action... it is Dionysian in that it works upon us in imagination like an intoxicant... Outside us everything merges, becomes fluid, fluid in its boundaries, fluid in identity... This is an art of pure sensation, an art in which the painter has bodied forth in paint his experience of the motif in front of him without giving thought to the names of the elements...[5]

Landscape at Céret, the picture in question, became public property the following year, when the Tate Gallery acquired it for their collection in the wake of the Soutine show.[6] But if the 1963 show launched the artist's reputation for a wide audience, it marked the fruition of a sustained and intense engagement with Soutine's work, especially the pictures from the Céret period and the Tate picture in particular, on the part of a more select artistic circle in Britain. In 1959 Sylvester had already announced, in his review of a major Soutine exhibition in Paris for *The New York Times*: 'No painter of the years between the wars has had so widespread an influence on post-war painting'.[7] Soutine had evidently eclipsed the likes of Picasso and Matisse, Miró and Mondrian, such inspirational figures before 1939.

Not that Soutine had been an entirely obscure figure during the period before the Second World War. From extremely humble beginnings, he had become a relatively successful and collectible Parisian painter, whose work appealed mostly to critics and collectors who liked their modern art rooted in description of the everyday world, the likes of Alfred Barnes, for example, creator eventually of the Barnes Foundation just outside Philadelphia, who amassed Soutines in quantity to hang next to his Post-Impressionist masterpieces and African masks. The art of Soutine at that point seemed to be a compelling extension of the great French tradition of heightened realism, embracing Courbet, Van Gogh and Cézanne, and also in a more contemporary context to belong with artists like Modigliani, Utrillo and Pascin under the catch-all heading of the School of Paris. The term clustered together artists who did not belong to a programmatic movement, such as Surrealism, and who could act as an antidote to modernist extremism. One would certainly not describe Soutine as a talisman for the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, the artist himself had in fact come to loathe the most experimental phase of his work and had tried to destroy as many early pictures as he could lay his hands on. Fortunately, a good few of these clogged and vehement pictures survived his self-censorship. Yet it was not until after the artist's death in 1943 that they came to be seen as his most important contribution.

So what changed? Soutine's own demise probably helped. His later years, as a Jew in occupied France, were exceptionally difficult and by the time he came out of hiding to seek medical assistance it was too late. This personal tragedy took on a much broader symbolic resonance, given that the wider world and mood had changed so dramatically since the late 1930s. In the wake of the horrors of the war and the subsequent revelations of the Holocaust in 1945, younger artists in diverse centres understandably felt the need to articulate a new sensibility appropriate to tragic times, and in so doing to sidestep the legacies of both post-Cubist abstraction, which could now seem merely decorative, and also the narcissistic indulgences of Surrealism. In this context, the early work of Soutine pointed one possible way forward. The artist's post-war reputation and impact in France and the United States, where the largest collections and the most important exhibitions were to be viewed, has received significant attention from art historians, notably in the catalogue for the 1998 Soutine show 'An Expressionist in Paris', staged at the Jewish Museum in New York.[8] The scholarly catalogue, probably the single most illuminating publication on the artist, documented the proliferation in Paris of books, exhibitions and new critical evaluations. Moreover, it has long been recognised in the literature on American Abstract Expressionism that the 1950 Soutine retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was a powerful catalyst for many artists, and that Willem De Kooning was a particular Soutine fan. The illustrated catalogue by Mortimer Wheeler evidently became a staple of artists' studios in the 1950s.[9] Over and above the contemporary artistic relevance that could be projected onto the radical spontaneity and painterliness of Soutine's work, it may well be the case, as the organisers of the Jewish Museum show speculated, that his art had now come to register, in apocalyptic vein, as 'a memorial... to Europe's murdered Jews... Might not the eviscerated cows and the fowl in the throes of death be experienced as modernist... reminders of man's darkest, cruellest and most primitive instincts? Couldn't Soutine's eruptive, vertiginous landscapes be construed as recollections of a ravaged Europe, or even as the foreshadowing of an apocalyptic post-atomic future?'[10]

Here I want to consider the more neglected story of how British artists responded to Soutine. A failure to address the topic is virtually the only common ground between Helen Lessore's hagiographic *A Partial Testament* (1986) and James Hyman's more analytical *The Battle for Realism* (2001), both of which sought to offer a synoptic account of such artists as Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff. In monographs and catalogues on their work, references

to Soutine are confined to the occasional passing comment. There are nods to Soutine in the recent literature on Bacon, including the catalogue of the 2008–2009 centenary show.[11] Likewise, Soutine's name receives fleeting mention in the catalogue for the 2009 Courtauld Institute Gallery show of Auerbach's powerful building-site pictures from the 1950s and early 1960s, although French post-war contemporaries such as Fautrier and Dubuffet are more prominently introduced as points of comparison.[12] Yet there is no doubt that Sylvester had such painters from Britain in mind when he offered his extravagant assessment of Soutine's postwar importance in 1959. One might go further and suggest that, as was perhaps quite often the case, Sylvester's critical judgements were to a large extent extrapolated from artists' studio talk. I shall argue that it was the painters whom the critic admired and promoted in the 1950s who had started to turn Soutine into a cult figure. Bacon, Freud, Auerbach and Kossoff have been identified not just as the core membership of the 'School of London', another less than helpful term, but if we wanted to find meaningful common ground between such seemingly disparate painters, a fervent interest in the art of Soutine is probably as good a place as any to start (another would be their immersion in the native inheritance of Walter Sickert).[13] The questions we need to ask are: when exactly did they encounter Soutine, what particular works did they know in the flesh as well as in reproduction, and what sorts of picture did they especially respond to; given their own diversity and artistic independence, how did they adapt Soutine's example to their individual purposes; and why did they all find his art so exciting?

The availability of Soutine's work to new generations of English artists after the war presupposed its earlier collectibility. The growing fashion for Soutine among collectors underpinned several one-man shows that had taken place in the Leicester, Storran and Redfern Galleries in London during the late 1930s.[14] Five works were shown in the Lefevre Gallery show *The Tragic Painters*, held in June 1938.[15] The term is prevalent in early Soutine criticism, and here, typically, it refers to the tragedy of the artist's isolation from society, rather than any broader sense of the drift of the late 1930s.[16] However, the constricted circumstances of the Second World War meant that such works remained in British collections. After 1945 they began to resurface in commercial galleries, which meant that artists were able to confront the actual paintings. Notably, such pictures formed the basis of the 1947 Soutine show staged by Gimpel Fils, a gallery which specialised in the School of Paris and work by progressive British contemporaries. The bulk of the eighteen pictures shown on that

occasion were credited to named collectors, including the painters Adrian Ryan and Edward Le Bas, both owners of examples of the dead animal pictures for which Soutine was famed.[17] Another picture of dead pheasants had been in London for some time, and was currently owned by Mrs I. Oliver Parker.[18] Further works, discussed in detail below, belonged to the dealer Erica Brausen, then of the Redfern Gallery, who subsequently ran the Hanover Gallery, and to Eardley Knollys, who was a painter himself but is better known for running the Storran Gallery.[19] The 1931 *Lady in Blue* owned by Robert Sainsbury is now in the collection of the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich, while a version of *The Cook* was owned in 1947 by Ernest Duveen.[20] Another pair of pictures had been lent by one Maurice Goldman.[21] *Paysage d'orage* was almost certainly the picture that inspired Sylvester to rhapsodic commentary in 1963, given that its early title was *Landscape at Céret (The Storm)*, a misguidedly meteorological reading of the picture's turbulent and dramatic interpretation of its landscape motif. Ownership was not indicated in 1947, but the future Tate work was in the possession at this stage of Rex de C. Nan Kivell, one of the directors of the Redfern Gallery, who had acquired the work for himself from their 1938 Soutine show.[22]

In sum, it was still possible in 1947 to assemble a representative display of good Soutines from British collections or gallery stock. In his brief essay for the catalogue, Maurice Collis rehearsed familiar perceptions of the artist. He noted that Soutine coincided with, but resisted, the prevailing pre-war movements: 'Though daily breathing the air of every kind of experiment, he remained entirely impervious to their suggestion'. His affinities rather were with the painterly, emotive art of Van Gogh and Expressionism: 'This tense, wild and melancholy mood gives Soutine's paintings their force. But mood cannot be separated from the means used to express it. Soutine's craftsmanship is of the highest quality'. This was, he noted, an unusual opportunity to see his work: 'Alas! His pictures are now rare on the market... The present exhibition is not likely to be followed in London by another. Let us look at Soutine while we can'.[23] Artists and other interested parties clearly proceeded to do exactly that.

As Collis predicted, there were no further single artist shows thereafter until the 1963 exhibition. Four Soutines were shown in the major *L'Ecole de Paris 1900–1950* exhibition staged at the Royal Academy in 1951.[24] Otherwise it was group shows in commercial galleries that provided the occasional opportunity to run into a Soutine. I want to speculate for the remainder of this article on the impact that such encounters may have made on artists. They could

also of course have been looking at reproductions, but it seems to me that the pictorial qualities and excitement of Soutine are likely to have been much more apparent when works were confronted in the original. One should concede, however, that it is not always straightforward to establish which precise pictures were exhibited in London during this period. The problem here is the general inadequacy of the Soutine record, given that the artist himself simply did not care about signing and dating works, and that there was evidently no one else around to keep a tally of what was shown where, and what was sold and bought by whom. The *Catalogue Raisonné* of Soutine's paintings by Maurice Tuchman and others is a wonderful source of illustrations and information, but it does not even mention some of the group shows I have unearthed, while the provenance histories are not at all thorough, and the authors took a somewhat cautious stance in relation to the minefield of Soutine attributions.[25] In consequence, when we survey the list of eighteen pictures exhibited at Gimpel Fils in 1947, for which information about titles, dimensions and sometimes owners is all that is provided in the catalogue, but no dates, it proves impossible at this stage to pin down the bulk of the pictures that were on view. In the discussion that follows, nevertheless, I have tried as far as possible to limit my argument about inspiration derived to a few particular Soutines that can be documented with some certainty as having featured in London gallery shows.

It has often been noted that Francis Bacon's *Painting* (1946) descended from a tradition of butchery images epitomised not just by Rembrandts such as the *Carcass of Beef* (1657) in the Louvre but also by variations on the theme by Soutine. Bacon could certainly have known the versions in which the suspended Crucifix-like carcass is rendered with the artist's characteristic heightened palette and painterly touch. It is worth noting that one such Soutine had been in Britain for several years, in the collection of Eardley Knollys, who was a good friend of Graham Sutherland's, to whom in turn Bacon had become close in the mid 1940s.[26] The picture was in fact included in the Lefevre Gallery *School of Paris (Picasso and his Contemporaries)* exhibition that immediately followed the legendary group show of April 1945 which had launched Bacon, thanks to its inclusion of his *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and *Figure in a Landscape* (1945) alongside pictures by Sutherland and others.[27] In this particular, rather atypical variation on the carcass image, Soutine focused on one slab of beef, lingering upon its rich colouration, textures and intricate structure. Memories of the picture may well have informed Bacon's own ribs of beef, suspended to such compelling expressive effect on

the tubular metal podium in front of his generic Fascist dictator, in the dense and ambitious picture he executed during the first half of 1946. Interestingly, when David Sylvester published his first critical response to Bacon, for a French audience, he related the artist to 'Soutine's *écorché*' as well as to 'Picasso's Surrealist period'.[28]

Decades later, Sylvester recalled that 'In the 1950s, Soutine was one of the two twentieth-century artists for whom Bacon expressed enormous admiration'.[29] The other, incongruously enough, was Pierre Bonnard. We know that Bacon owned a copy of Wheeler's seminal catalogue for the 1950 Museum of Modern Art show. It survived amongst the detritus of the Reece Mews studio, and the inside of its covers featured examples of the drawings that Bacon was supposed not to have made, but which emerged from several sources after his death.[30] Bacon was also obsessed by Van Gogh, who was such an obvious point of departure for Soutine, and the key prototype for the image of the artist as an alienated and tragic outsider. Not using preliminary studies, and improvising directly on the canvas, featured constantly in the mythology around Soutine, as did a proclivity for destroying his own pictures in great quantity, in fits of dissatisfaction, a practice which critics were already talking about in the case of Bacon by the late 1940s. Bacon had plenty of opportunity to assimilate such stories about Soutine from friends like Peter Watson (who evidently owned a Soutine), Isabel Rawsthorne and Peter Rose-Pulham, who had all spent considerable amounts of time in Paris in the 1930s, let alone from the available illustrated publications, and one is bound to wonder how far his entire image of himself as an artist was shaped by an awareness of Soutine.[31] Certainly Bacon's identification with the earlier artist comes over strongly in a 1958 TV interview with Daniel Farson, when Bacon stated:

> Two of the very finest artists of our time – Picasso and Soutine – are two diametrically opposed types. Picasso is a man with enormous gifts who can do practically anything he wants. Soutine was a man with an enormous love of painting, who never drew, who painted his pictures directly and had deliberately never developed his technique. And he didn't develop his technique because he thought he would keep the thing cleaner and rawer by that method.[32]

By general consent, it was not until around 1956–57, notably in works such as *Figure in a Mountain Landscape* (1956) and the extended series of Van Gogh variations, that Bacon allowed his interest in early Soutine to exert a visible influence on the flamboyant brushwork and general look of his own pictures. In the latter case, the fusion suggests a

sense of artistic lineage, whereby Van Gogh begat Soutine who in turn begat Bacon himself. Bacon's often noted affinity at this point with De Kooning, especially the *Woman* pictures from the early 1950s, may reflect the parallel stimulus the two artists absorbed from Soutine, rather than any direct mutual awareness.

Lucian Freud was another early Soutine fan, as well as a close friend of Bacon's from the early 1940s onwards. In the literature on the artist, presumably drawing on conversations with Freud, one is told that he encountered works by Soutine during his extended trips to Paris in 1946 and after. Lawrence Gowing, for example, recorded Freud's lingering admiration for the Soutine paintings of dead animals that he was able to view on such visits.[33] It is also well known that Freud himself had already produced several drawings and paintings of dead rabbits, chickens and herons in the period from 1943 to 1945. This might merely suggest that he was well prepared to respond to Soutine. However the convergence of imagery raises the alternative possibility that Freud had already contemplated relevant Soutine models in Britain. During the war years he had evidently become close to the painter Adrian Ryan, who, as noted above, was listed as owning the *Flayed Rabbit* by Soutine that featured in the 1947 Gimpel Fils show. The nature of the short-lived personal connection with Freud is described in a recent study of Ryan, which also cites John Russell's observation in 1974 that Freud had been impressed by the 'emotional immediacy' of the pair of Soutines hanging in Ryan's flat at 48 Tite Street, where Freud frequently stayed over.[34] It was mainly from Eardley Knollys and the Storran Gallery that Ryan acquired his collection of modern French pictures, including the *Flayed Rabbit*, which he bought in March 1943 and then sold on at auction in March 1949.[35] This certainly coincides with the time when he and Freud were in close contact, judging from the evidence of Ryan's 1944 painting *Chicken in a Bucket*, which was based on a drawing that Freud had given him, as readily acknowledged in the inscription 'From a drawing by Lucian Freud, to whom this is dedicated. August 1944'.[36] Ryan's own work from this period is overtly indebted to Soutine's dead animal pictures, and the connection reinforces the argument that the same might equally have been true for Freud.[37] Unfortunately, there is no visual record of Ryan's *Flayed Rabbit*, and whether it was comparable in style and motif to the celebrated variation on the theme in the collection of the Barnes Foundation (Figure 7).[38] The identity of the second Soutine he evidently owned is also unclear.

There has always been a certain mythology of the innocent eye around Freud and his work. Writers tend uncritically to cite the artist's

Fig. 2. Lucian Freud, *Girl with Roses*, 1947/8. Oil on canvas. 105×74.5 cm. The British Council.

own comments about intense visual scrutiny of his subject precluding pictorial inspiration – 'My method was so arduous that there was no room for influence' – as if his fellow Viennese émigré Ernst Gombrich had not demonstrated in *Art and Illusion* that observation of nature is always mediated by artistic conventions and responses, which shape pictorial decisions about choice and treatment of subject matter.[39] If Freud was indeed taking his cue to some degree from the subject-matter and poignant atmosphere of Soutine's work, albeit translating that point of departure into a totally opposed artistic language, might it not equally be the case that his subsequent paintings of the human figure, such as *Girl with Roses* of 1947–48 (Figure 2), likewise reflected an immersion in Soutine's depictions of seated girls, with their expressively charged body language and exaggerated features? It is impossible to identify the two paintings shown at Gimpel Fils

Fig. 3. Chaim Soutine, *The Mad Woman/La Folle*, c. 1919. Oil on canvas. 95.9×60 cm. The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan.

in 1947 under the title *Portrait of a Young Girl*, since no details of ownership are provided, but these might have had a bearing on *Girl with Roses* and comparable Freuds. Less predictably, however, it is worth noting that *The Mad Woman* (c. 1919) was almost certainly one of the pictures shown, assuming, as do the authors of the Soutine *Catalogue Raisonné*, that this was the same as *La Folle* (Figure 3), the picture lent by Erica Brausen, of the Redfern Gallery, who the previous year had purchased Bacon's *Painting* (1946) and proceeded to sell it two years later to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[40] Notwithstanding all the obvious differences in the motif and its treatment between the painterly Soutine and the tightly executed, linear Freud, one might also note in both pictures the enlarged eyes, shoulder length hair, the curl of hair falling on the forehead, the exaggerated curvature of the chin beneath large lips, the placement of

the arms and hands, with the right arm bent and the left extended, the crossing of the legs from left to right, dictating the rhythmic folds and silhouette of the drapery, and even the slight halo of light around the contours of the body which seem to heighten the sense of vulnerability and psychological inwardness in each sitter. In my view, there are enough visual correspondences to suggest that his recent viewing of *The Mad Woman* may to some degree have informed Freud's conception of his portrait of Kitty Garman, which also projects an intense psychological presence. Such a reading is compatible with Hyman's suggestion in *The Battle for Realism* that Freud was responding in the late 1940s not just to Old Master traditions, the usual narrative, but also to other aspects of current French art, notably the work of Balthus.[41]

From the evidence accumulated thus far, we can reasonably claim that an enthusiastic interest in Soutine was emanating from both the work and the conversation of Bacon and Freud, who in turn became significant points of inspiration for artists such as Auerbach and Kossoff at the point when they were crystallising their own pictorial languages in the early 1950s. Both of the latter were students at the Royal College of Art during the period when Bacon was using a studio there, and exerting general inspiration on the work of students, even though he was not officially teaching. Within that context, the key encounter that Auerbach and Kossoff experienced with pictures by Soutine in the original took place, I would argue, in 1953. This was also a Damascene moment, it appears, for David Sylvester, who recalled many years later that 'around 1953 Bacon took me to the Redfern Gallery to see two or three Céret landscapes that were hanging there (one was purchased by the Tate some ten years later)'.[42] This refers to *Landscape at Céret (The Storm)*, which was now one of the four pictures by Soutine included in the gallery's exhibition *Russian Émigré Artists in Paris*, on show in November and December 1953.[43] Once again, it proves less easy to identify the other pictures, but I would argue that the presence of *Landscape at Céret* is sufficient to support the idea that seeing this exhibition proved a crucial catalyst for Auerbach and Kossoff, who may or may not also have been encouraged to visit the Redfern Gallery by a zealous Bacon.

In his 1992 monograph on Auerbach, drawing on extensive conversations with the artist, Robert Hughes remarked that 'one of the painters he most loved in the 1950s was Chaim Soutine'. He then reported Auerbach's revealing comments about what he saw and valued in the earlier artist:

> I can't deny that Soutine had a very great effect on me, especially the Céret pictures. I can't think of him as an expressionist artist, but as a great draughtsman who follows the form around the back and out the other side... There is absolutely nothing pedantic about Soutine's drawing; on the other hand, he didn't just make up shapes for the sake of making them up. One always feels a correspondence with the motif... .[44]

For Auerbach, looking at the Céret picture seems to have played a key role in accelerating the jump he made to his fully realised artistic idiom, accomplished while he was still a student at the Royal College. *Summer Building Site* of 1952 may be the picture in which Auerbach first sensed his singular identity as a painter, by his own account, but it was the pictures from the next year or two, exhibited in his 1955 degree show and then in his first one man show early the following year at the Beaux-Arts Gallery, that manifested a far more radical willingness to subsume literal references to the motif and its distinct elements into dark, intense, strongly tonal and astonishingly coagulated pictorial surfaces, barely legible in terms of imagery. Judging from the building site pictures, as well as the Tate's *E.O.W. Nude*, the two portraits of Leon Kossoff, and the earliest known Primrose Hill picture, 1954 was the year in which Auerbach started to produce pictures that he truly valued and wanted to preserve. It is therefore plausible to regard viewing the Soutines at the Redfern in late 1953 as an important catalyst.[45] At any rate, this cluster of Auerbachs possesses a number of visual affinities with the Tate's Soutine. There is most obviously the viscous materiality of the actual paint, built up from layered strokes and marks made with what appear to be large, and probably quite hard brushes. In both cases, the substance of paint reads as an equivalent to the visceral physical presence of the motif, rather than as virtuoso brushwork, displayed for purely aesthetic or expressive purposes. In the case of *Building Site, St Pancras–Summer* (1954), compare the directional diagonal marks in the lower right corners of each picture, or the superimposition of a lighter tone defining the contour of the distant building and mountain, in roughly the same place to the upper left of the two works, and evoking the luminous sky against which such features are silhouetted (Figure 4). Compare also the use of short dark bands to create an underlying spatial armature, especially in what reads as the middle distance of a sequence of spatial zones. A similar, generally dark palette of blacks, muddy off whites, earth colours, and the odd accent of more positive colour may be seen in both the Soutine and in other Auerbachs such as *Building Site, Portobello Road–Winter* and *Building Site near St Pauls*, both also from 1954.

Fig. 4. Frank Auerbach, *Building Site, St Pancras – summer*, 1954. Oil on board. 103×128.3 cm. Private Collection.

Needless to say, there are significant differences of emphasis. The Auerbachs seem more architecturally, less rhythmically structured. One might sense in his work the inheritance of Walter Sickert rather than Van Gogh. But the visual evidence suggests that looking at this Soutine, and perhaps others very like it, was fundamentally important at this stage for Auerbach. The recent Courtauld Gallery show demonstrated vividly how the example of Soutine provided Auerbach with a certain ideal of surface physicality, into which he could then proceed to insert an increasingly exact description of the spatial construction and detailing of his subject, and an increasingly rigorous sense of geometric structure.

Leon Kossoff's surviving works from 1954, such as *Railway Bridge, Mornington Crescent* and *St Paul's Building Site*, represent perhaps the closest point of convergence between the work of these two close friends. Moreover such Kossoffs echo, if anything even more closely, the distinctive idiom apparent in Soutine's vision of Céret. Indeed, Kossoff's close scrutiny of the Tate Soutine seems evident from the

Fig. 5. Leon Kossoff, *St Paul's Building Site*, 1954. Oil on board. 152.4×121.9 cm. Private Collection.

overall tonality, viewpoint and surface texture of *St Paul's Building Site* (Figure 5), as well as specific passages such as the high-key diagonal accent to the left, compared with the row of houses in the Soutine, and the armature of strong black forms disposed to the right of the two compositions.

On another level, Soutine's explicit variations on Rembrandtian imagery such as beef carcasses and female bathers foreshadow the adaptations that both Auerbach and Kossoff realised after works by the great Dutch artist in the National Gallery. Indeed a profound and acknowledged admiration for the subject matter and painterly technique of Rembrandt is a further common thread in the work of both these painters and also Bacon and Freud. Famously, there is a strong Jewish dimension to Rembrandt's art, both in his choice of Old Testament themes for subject pictures, and in his portraiture. The affinity brings into focus the complex and somewhat intangible issue of the significance for his English reception and posthumous influence of Soutine's Jewishness, which had always been a point of reference in the critical literature on his work.[46] After the revelation of the Holocaust, it seemed more appropriate and necessary than ever to emphasise the tragic aspect of Soutine's life and art. In the catalogue of the 1953 *Russian Émigré Artists in Paris* show at the Redfern, we read the familiar refrain that 'from his infancy which he spent in the ghetto his life was destined to be hard and unhappy'. But this reading is now taken much further: 'Soutine was all his life obsessed by the persecution of his race and he himself had to escape from the Nazi menace in Paris during the last world war. His paintings are fraught with tragedy and power.'[47] All but one of the artists in the show was Jewish, and their originality was said to reside 'in their essentially Russian-Jewish vision which has remained individualistic'.[48] Soutine in particular evidently came to distil the fate and sensibility of the twentieth-century Jew, and this may have been a key element in his artistic and emotional appeal for Auerbach, Freud and Kossoff, who all came from European Jewish families profoundly affected by recent events, and equally for Sylvester, who was also Jewish. Bacon was the only one of this circle who was not.

Kossoff was descended from a Russian Jewish family who had emigrated from the Ukraine to escape persecution, and he may therefore have especially identified with the tendency identified in the Redfern Gallery show. He certainly acknowledged (but also qualified) his sense of identity in a 1959 interview in *The Jewish Chronicle*, where he was quoted as saying:

> Of course my Jewishness must emerge in my work, so must my love of Rembrandt and Michelangelo and all the things that matter to me... But it is not just a question of subject matter. I prefer the living reality of Soutine, who never used a Jewish symbol, to the sweetness of Chagall... Soutine, like all great painters, has had to destroy all the wrappings of conventional thought which were between him and

> the creation of the living image, and though in the end he seems to reveal only his miserable Jewish self, he does so in a living atmosphere of grandeur and immortality which transcends national or religious barriers'.[49]

It is perhaps in Kossoff's work that we discern the strongest legacy of Soutine's figure paintings, particularly the series of pictures of an elderly man from around the same time as the Céret landscapes. The affinity is evident in the rhythmic but utterly uningratiating build up of the substance of paint in Kossoff's early portraits of his family and friends, and in their aspiration to convey precisely that expressive fusion of pathos and grandeur that the artist invoked in his interview. For Kossoff it was this fundamental sensibility, rather than superficial subject matter, that encapsulated his own emphatic sense of Jewishness. For all their visual points of contact, the humanist and expressionistic dimensions of Soutine with which Kossoff identified were ultimately very different from Auerbach's version of the artist, as summed up by the remark quoted earlier: 'I can't think of him as an expressionist artist, but as a great draughtsman'.

Aside from the possible significance of his Jewishness, why did Soutine start to mean so much to these two young art students? Certainly his work was not received in a vacuum. In artistic terms his art represented a yet more extreme and uncompromising extension of the painterly aesthetic they had both assimilated from studying with Bomberg a few years earlier, or indeed of that evident in the work of Matthew Smith, whose Tate retrospective earlier in 1953 could be viewed in relation to the short Bacon text in the catalogue (a more telling commentary perhaps on Bacon's own work) in which he stated that Smith was 'one of the very few English painters since Constable and Turner to be concerned with painting–that is, with attempting to make idea and technique inseparable. Painting in this sense tends towards a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa... painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down'.[50] Such thinking opens up larger intellectual contexts for the attraction to Soutine. In his 1963 text Sylvester presented Soutine as the true successor to Cézanne, in defiance of the more obvious continuity with Van Gogh. This perspective reflected the stance projected in a cult text of the period, namely D. H. Lawrence's 'Introduction to His Paintings', which had first been published in 1929 but was reprinted in 1950 in the widely accessible Penguin paperback edition of the *Selected Essays*.[51] The essay by the admired novelist

was clearly relished by Sylvester and his artist friends as an anti-Bloomsbury diatribe, a plea for the role of bodily consciousness in the making and viewing of art. Lawrence argued vehemently against the formalist orthodoxies designed to support abstraction, and in favour of the contrary view that 'in Cézanne modern French art made its first step back to real substance... He wanted to *express* what he suddenly, convulsedly knew! the existence of matter'.[52] Sylvester cited Lawrence in his critical commentary on Bomberg as well as Soutine.[53] The copy of a 1950 edition of the *Selected Essays* in Francis Bacon's studio archive in Dublin testifies to its currency.[54] For his part, Auerbach stated in a 1978 interview: 'Actually D. H. Lawrence on Cézanne is better than anyone else. He talks about the effort to disentangle himself from the clichés of painting and to present things raw.'[55]

In these artistic circles, I suggest, Lawrence's aesthetic and the practice of Soutine proved eminently compatible with one another in a climate strongly informed by French Existentialism. Soutine seemed to epitomise what an art might look like that articulated this very particular conception of human subjectivity, then at its most prestigious and influential internationally. As Paul Moorhouse has suggested, Existentialism offers a clear parallel to the emphasis in the work of Auerbach and Kossoff on art as process rather than as finished product. For such artists, by implication, a prolonged accumulation of decisions and revisions appeared to correspond, both metaphorically and literally, to an essentially improvisational idea of human existence, given that one could no longer believe with any authenticity in pre-existing religious, social or artistic values.[56] Elaborations of the Existentialist slogan that 'existence precedes essence' were available in quite accessible philosophical texts. But it would be surprising if artists had not also encountered Jean-Paul Sartre's literary exploration of such ideas in his novel *La Nausée*, published in France in 1938 and appearing in English translation as *Nausea* in 1949. Here the notion of existence coming before essence has a somewhat different resonance. The narrator in the novel provides a vivid distillation of what an alienated existentialist sensibility might feel like, subjectively. In one episode he is sitting in the park and becomes overwhelmed by the sheer materiality of the external universe:

> The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remembered that it was a root... Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that black, knotty

> mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. And then I had this revelation ...[57]

That revelation was a metaphysical sense of the absolute Absurdity or contingency of things, which provided 'the key to Existence, the key to my Nausea, to my own life'.[58] His experience of the tree root epitomised the gulf between physical existence in the raw, and the conceptualisations that we seek to impose:

> Faced with that big, rugged paw, neither ignorance nor knowledge had any importance; the world of explanations and reasons is not that of existence. A circle is not absurd, it is clearly explicable by the rotation of a segment of a straight line around one of its extremities. But a circle doesn't exist either. That root, on the other hand, existed in so far that I could not explain it. Knotty, inert, nameless, it fascinated me, filled my eyes, repeatedly brought me back to my own existence... I saw clearly that you could not pass from its function as a root, as a suction-pump, *to that*, to that hard, compact sea-lion skin, to that oily, horny, stubborn look...[59]

Pictures by Soutine such as *Gnarled Trees* (c. 1921, Yamazaki Mazak Corporation, Japan), and the early landscapes in general, provided a striking pictorial equivalent to a passage such as this one in *Nausea*.[60] This parallel is indeed implicit in the 1963 account of *Landscape at Céret* by Sylvester, the passage of text with which I began, and which emphasises the rawness and pre-conceptual aspect of the sensations of the external world transmitted by Soutine's picture. Likewise, in the early paintings of Auerbach and Kossoff, the elements of the motif seem to float free from ready legibility, and to become embedded in viscous paint surfaces that frequently look rather like a 'sea-lion skin', with an 'oily, horny, stubborn look'. Building-site themes in particular allowed them both to generate a kind of painting in which raw mud, or the fundamental contingency of the world, could be signified by paint surface and colour, while elements of linear structure, corresponding to architectural forms, evoked the painter's desperate search for order and the human impulse somehow to impose structure and linguistic convention onto the inchoate mess of experience. In other words, the theme functioned poetically and metaphorically, rather than as a more literal project of documenting the post-war rebuilding of London.

I have focused on what appear to be specific derivations from, or responses to, particular known works by Soutine within the early work of the core 'School of London' painters. A more ambitious account would elaborate the story into further aspects of their work and into subsequent decades. After the late 1950s, for example, Bacon moved

Fig. 6. Lucian Freud, *Naked Girl Asleep II*, 1968. Oil on canvas. 55.8×55.8 cm. Private Collection.

away from an all-over painterly idiom, but one might argue even so that the later portraits, with their rhythmic accumulation of curvilinear forms and marks and their emotive distortions of the human form, reflect the continuing imprint of Soutine's figurative imagery. In Freud's work, it was not until the later 1950s that his picture-making methods acquired any affinities with the loose technique characteristic of Soutine. This is usually put down to a dialogue with the work of Francis Bacon, but that is not incompatible with paying a new kind of attention to Soutine. Moreover the lasting impact on Freud of Soutine's dead animal pictures, remarked upon by Gowing, might explain the remarkable compositional parallels between pictures such as Soutine's

Fig. 7. Chaim Soutine, *Flayed Rabbit*, c.1921. Oil on canvas. 73×30 cm. Barnes Foundation, Merion.

Flayed Rabbit, the Barnes Foundation picture if not the unidentifiable version owned by Adrian Ryan, and some of Freud's later nudes, such as *Naked Girl Asleep* (1968) or *Rose* (1978–79), affinities which give a different edge perhaps to the frequent comment that in such pictures Freud treats his naked sitters like so many slabs of meat (Figures 6 and 7). The close but elevated viewpoint, the placing of the figure against a white sheet, and the splayed legs, might all be seen as residual echoes of Soutine, feeding into the process of setting up compositions that he painted so scrupulously from the life. In a 2006 exhibition catalogue about Soutine's inspiration Auerbach for his part is quoted as remarking: 'My interest in Soutine has never slackened', while Kossoff allowed two pictures to be included 'to articulate his involvement with Soutine'.[61] The more recent work of Auerbach indicates that he has in a sense recapitulated Soutine's own artistic trajectory, evolving from

the darkness and indigestible look of his early work to an idiom that is lighter in touch and mood, as well as in the quality of pictorial illumination that the pictures transmit.

From the evidence accumulated here, one can at any rate begin to understand why David Sylvester was so adamant in 1959 that Soutine was the artist of the pre-war period who had had the most to offer contemporary artists, both international, as has been demonstrated by others, and also British. For all the striking differences between the work of Bacon, Freud, Auerbach and Kossoff, one common denominator between them was a highly creative assimilation of diverse aspects of the early art of Chaim Soutine, as apparent in actual works that they had the opportunity to contemplate. This is an important but under-researched historical phenomenon in relation to post-war British art. In more general terms, the topic provides a fascinating case study with regard to Baxandall's observation that 'influence' always entails active and purposeful interpretation of the prototype in question, rather than mere passive absorption, and to Gombrich's argument fifty years ago in *Art and Illusion* to the effect that paintings ultimately owe more to other paintings than to direct observation.

* The thinking in this article was developed in response to Barnaby Wright's kind invitation to contribute a paper to the Courtauld Gallery Study Day 'Art in the Post-War World: Frank Auerbach and his Contemporaries' (5 December 2009).

Notes

1. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, 1960). The book derived from Gombrich's 1956 A. W. Mellon lectures at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. An interest in artistic dialogue has recently been most evident in exhibitions and their catalogues (e.g. *Matisse/Picasso*, *Turner and the Masters*, *Picasso looks at Degas*), in part perhaps because these are less hampered by the need to discuss such issues on the basis of reproductions.
2. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 268.
3. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 58–62.
4. *Chaim Soutine, 1893–1943* (Edinburgh International Festival, 1963).
5. David Sylvester, 'Introduction', Ibid., pp. 8–9, reprinted with minor changes as 'Soutine', in David Sylvester, *On Modern Art* (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp. 119–21. For a detailed account of the Céret period, see *Soutine: Céret 1919–1922* (Céret: Musée d'Art Moderne de Céret, 2000).
6. See Maurice Tuchman, Esti Dunow and Klaus Perls, *Chaim Soutine (1893–1943): Catalogue Raisonné* (Cologne: Bendikt Taschen Verlag, 2001), Landscapes no. 71.
7. David Sylvester, 'Soutine Reconsidered in Paris Exhibitions', *The New York Times*, 6 September 1959, p. 16.

8. Norman L. Kleeblatt and Kenneth E. Silver (eds), *Chaim Soutine: An Expressionist in Paris* (Munich and New York: Prestel Publications and Jewish Museum of New York, 1998).
9. Mortimer Wheeler, *Soutine* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950).
10. Kleeblatt and Silver, *Chaim Soutine*, pp. 15–16.
11. Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens (eds), *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), p. 154.
12. Barnaby Wright (ed), *Frank Auerbach: London Building Sites 1952–1962* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in association with Paul Holberton Publishing, 2009), p. 28.
13. On the parallel Sickert inspiration, see Martin Hammer, 'To Camden Town and Beyond: Sickert's Legacy since 1930' (*The Camden Town Project*, forthcoming Tate website, 2011).
14. See exhibitions listing in Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, p. 88.
15. *The Tragic Painters* (London: Alex Reid and LeFevre, June 1938), including as nos. 19–23 Soutine's *Paysage Provencal* (1923), *La soubrette* (1925), *Groom* (1926), *Le petit patissier* (1928) and *Grand arbre à Vence* (1933).
16. Ibid., catalogue introduction by Stephan Bourgeois, n. p.
17. *Chaim Soutine* (London: Gimpel Fils, 23 April–17 May 1947), nos. 14 (*Lapin écorché*) and 12 (*Nature morte*).
18. Ibid., no. 15 (see Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, Still-Lives no.105).
19. Ibid., nos. 5 (*La Folle*) and 13 (*Le Boeuf écorché*). The former is presumably Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, Portraits no 32, where it is tentatively proposed that the work was shown in the 1947 Gimpel Fils show. The latter corresponds to Still Lifes No. 99, though the 1947 showing is omitted.
20. Ibid., nos. 2 (*La Dame en bleu*) and 1 (*La Cuisinière*).
21. Ibid., nos. 4 and 7 (*Les Petits Ecoliers* and *Paysage*).
22. Ibid., no 9 (*Paysage d'orage*). On the earlier history of the work, see the Tate Collection website: (http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=-1&workid=13658&searchid=false&roomid=false&tabview=text&texttype=8).
23. Maurice Collis, 'Haim Soutine', Ibid., n. p.
24. *L'Ecole de Paris 1900–1950* (London: Royal Academy, 13 January to 7 March 1951), nos. 85–8.
25. On the problem of Soutine attributions, see Merlin James, 'Chaim Soutine. Catalogue Raisonné', *Burlington Magazine*, 136, Nov. 1994, pp. 775–7.
26. Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, Still Lifes no. 99.
27. See Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery', *Burlington Magazine*, 152, May 2010, pp. 307–12.
28. Cited in Gary Tinterow, 'Bacon and his Critics', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, p. 31.
29. David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 87.
30. Francis Bacon Studio Archive, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.
31. For new insights into the Parisian connections of Bacon's milieu, see Carol Jacobi, 'Cat's Cradle–Francis Bacon and the Art of "Isabel Rawsthorne"', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 10, November 2009, pp. 293–314. On Watson's ownership of a Soutine, see Roger Bristow, *The Last Bohemians: The Two Roberts–Colquhoun and MacBryde* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2010), p. 93.
32. Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 105.

33. Lawrence Gowing, *Lucian Freud* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), p. 13. Gowing is echoed in Sebastian Smee, *Lucian Freud* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), p. 14, where *Dead Heron* (1945) is tellingly juxtaposed with Soutine's *Two Pheasants* (1919), also an image of dead birds disposed frontally and upside down, although the affinity is not elaborated in the text.
34. Julian Machin, *Adrian Ryan: Rather a Rum Life* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2009), pp. 47–9.
35. Ibid., pp. 53–4.
36. Ibid., p. 48. The picture is reproduced (n. p.).
37. See his *Skate* (1945), reproduced ibid (n. p.).
38. Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, Still Lifes no. 47.
39. Cited in Smee, *Lucian Freud*, p. 14.
40. *Chaim Soutine* (Gimpel Fils), no. 5. See note 17.
41. James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 104–107.
42. Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p. 87.
43. *Russian Émigré Artists in Paris* (London: Redfern Gallery, November and December 1953), nos 1–4. The show also included Alexsey Grishchenko, Mane-Katz, Pinchus Kremegne, Marc Chagall, Osip Zadkine and several other now relatively obscure figures.
44. Robert Hughes, *Frank Auerbach* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), p. 86.
45. Wright, *Frank Auerbach*, includes the transitional *Building Site, Bruton Street: winter* (2) and *Building Site, Earls Court Road: winter* (3), both dated 1953. This may qualify my argument, although these could have been finished at the end of that year, or the dates may register when he began the pictures, which often took many months to realise, rather than the point at which he decided they were finished.
46. Kleeblatt and Silver, *Chaim Soutine*, passim.
47. See brief profile in *Russian Émigré Artists* n. p.
48. Alexander Watt, introduction in *Russian Émigré Artists* (n. p.).
49. Leon Kossoff, interview with N. G. Stone in 'The Artist and the Community', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 27 November 1959.
50. Francis Bacon, 'Matthew Smith–a Painter's Tribute', in *Matthew Smith* (London: Tate Gallery, 1953), p. 12.
51. D. H. Lawrence, 'Introduction to His Paintings', *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), pp. 307–48.
52. Ibid., pp. 326–7.
53. Sylvester, *On Modern Art*, p. 168.
54. Francis Bacon Studio Archive, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.
55. *Frank Auerbach* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1978), p. 22.
56. See Paul Moorhouse, 'A Human Universe: Auerbach's Building-Site Paintings and Existentialism' in Wright, *Frank Auerbach*, pp. 56–71.
57. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Diary of Antoine Roquentin* (London: John Lehmann, 1949, translated by Lloyd Alexander, thereafter *Nausea*), p. 182. French edition published 1938.
58. Ibid., p. 185.
59. Ibid., pp. 185–6.
60. Tuchman, Dunow and Perls, *Chaim Soutine*, Landscapes no. 66; Wheeler, *Soutine*, p. 49.
61. *Soutine and Modern Art: The New Landscape/The New Still Life* (New York: Cheim & Read, 2006), n. p.

Research

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Francis Bacon: Back to Degas

Rothenstein Lecture 2011

By Martin Hammer

11 May 2012

Tate Papers Issue 17

Providing the first focused account of Francis Bacon's artistic dialogue with Edgar Degas, Martin Hammer argues that the French painter was a consistent source of inspiration to Bacon throughout his career, informing his decisions about subject matter, style and medium.

There is nothing like a pair of matching sofas for sparking off a conversation. In the case of this first juxtaposition, both are blue, with rounded backs, set against off-white walls and plain light brown floors (figs.1–2). Both are accompanied by middle-aged males in postures suggesting private contemplation, who have set aside their cigarette or pipe, as well as their well-thumbed papers, and who either sit or put their feet up on rather more flimsy items of wooden furniture. Each picture subverts the social transaction traditionally inherent in portraiture, evoking instead states of inwardness and the casual clothing and sparse environment of the modern bohemian. It was observing such affinities between Edgar Degas's portrait of his critic friend *Diego Martelli* 1879 (National Galleries of Scotland), and Francis Bacon's *Self-portrait* 1963 (National Museum of Wales), that triggered the exploration that follows.[1] The two pictures are very different in ways that are typical of their makers: Degas's dispassionate observation and daringly asymmetrical composition and high viewpoint, as opposed to Bacon's symmetry, simplification and abstraction from appearances. Nevertheless, the parallels seem striking enough to go beyond coincidence and to provoke speculation about what Degas meant to an artist born seventy-five years later, who worked long after the demise of naturalism and, indeed, in the aftermath of cubism, abstraction and surrealism. The question, then, is what might have motivated Bacon to look all the way back to Degas?

Fig.1
Francis Bacon
Study for Self-Portrait
1963
Oil paint on canvas
1652 x 1426 mm
© National Museum of Wales

Bacon once observed that 'to create something … is a sort of echo from one artist to another'.[2] The mainstream texts on his work tend to emphasise the places Bacon encountered, the people he knew, and the terrible times he lived through, as though his work adds up to a kind of psychological autobiography. This is

overstated and simplistic, even if Bacon in other moods encouraged such readings. Art does come out of life, but in an indirect and more complicated fashion than this type of commentary implies. What is more demonstrable is that major artists engage with past and present art as a resource in itself, in developing the aesthetic means to embody whatever content they have in mind. This was certainly true of Bacon, who insisted that he looked at everything. Quite a lot is now known about his visual and imaginative reactions to photographs, which he worked from more consistently than almost any other modern painter. But we are at a rudimentary stage in grasping how Bacon responded to the work of other artists. The theme encompasses his quotations from Old Masters such as Velázquez, Rembrandt, Grünewald and Ingres; and his appropriations from such immediate predecessors as Picasso, Sickert and Soutine; as well as his interchange with contemporaries such as Sutherland and Giacometti.[3] Bacon also declared great admiration for several late nineteenth-century artists such as Monet, Gauguin, Rodin, Seurat and, above all, van Gogh. But this essay focuses on Degas, and can only hint that Bacon's interest in the work of these artists is much more jumbled up than a crude listing makes out.[4]

Fig.2
Edgar Degas
Diego Martelli 1879
Oil paint on canvas
1104 x 998 mm
© National Galleries of Scotland

Artists scrutinise other artists in distinctive and idiosyncratic ways, through the filter of their own preoccupations.[5] But Bacon's take on Degas was also shaped by the works he happened to confront, and whose availability reflected decisions made by other people about acquiring works for museums, selling them in galleries, and displaying them in exhibitions. In that sense, Bacon's artistic assimilation is one component within the larger story of the British response to Degas, which began as early as the 1870s, and is of course still alive and well.[6] In between, we might note the commercial Degas show at Agnew's, London, in 1936, the year before a group show in the same gallery in which Bacon participated; and further exhibitions in 1950 and 1958 at the Lefevre Gallery, which had also staged Bacon's emergence in another series of group displays in 1945 and 1946.[7] Many of the best works by Degas in British public and private collections were brought together in a major exhibition in Edinburgh and then at the Tate Gallery in 1952. Then there were the works and exhibitions Bacon could have seen on trips to Paris, which may well have been more frequent than is currently known. At any rate, Bacon had ample opportunity to engage with Degas in the original – over and above the increasingly vivid reproductions that were becoming available – and this essay will try to pin down what he gleaned from such specific encounters.

In *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* c.1944 (Tate N06171), the work in which Bacon came to believe he had discovered his artistic identity, the disquieting hybrid creatures pay homage to the grotesque anatomical distortions and sculptural presence of a particular phase in Picasso's art around 1930, focused upon bather imagery.[8] Bacon's three images almost certainly started life as separate pictures, and the decision to bind them together visually into a triptych was realised in part by superimposing around the figures' contours a consistent backdrop of unmodulated orange, with minimal perspective indications. One critic has drawn a visual parallel with Degas's *Combing the Hair* c.1896 (National Gallery, London), which had been acquired for the national collection in 1937.[9] In the wake of Degas's death in 1917 and the sales of his studio contents, the interwar years were a key moment for the acquisition of works by British institutions, works that tended to be shown initially at the Tate Gallery and were only later sent to their present home in Trafalgar

Square. Another work already in public hands, *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando* 1879 (National Gallery, London), was an even more telling model to Bacon for the floating three-dimensional form set against a backdrop of strong, flat orange, which Degas also superimposed late on, to offset the figure and perspective construction (fig.3).[10]

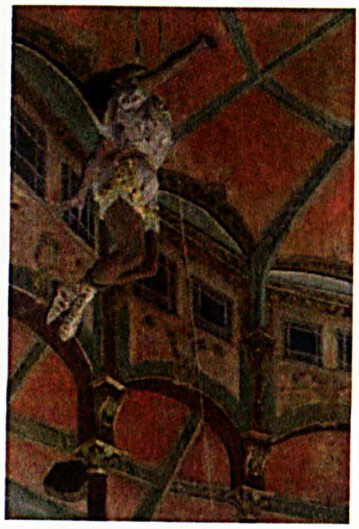

Fig.3
Edgar Degas
Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando 1879
Oil paint on canvas
1172 x 775 mm
The National Gallery, London
© The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence

The triptych also indicates Bacon's interest in a third Degas that had entered the national collection as early as 1926, namely the late *Ballet Dancers* c.1890–1900 (National Gallery, London; fig.4). Discussing the left-hand picture of the triptych (fig.5), Martin Harrison has noted that Bacon appropriated the head in profile from one of the photographs in an old book he owned about ectoplasms and mediums.[11] But it is almost as though Bacon homed in on the particular illustration that reminded him of the treatment of the head in the nearmost dancer in the Degas. That figure certainly seems to be the springboard for the configuration of the upper body, where Bacon exaggerates the indentation between the two rounded shoulder blades, and the extension of the spine into the neck, which in his hands becomes elongated and downwards inclined. The slender white straps and emphatically curved forms seem to secure the connection with *Ballet Dancers*, as do the placement of his creature's knee and the angle of the stool on which it rests. In sum, the Bacon figure starts to look like an unlikely composite of the photograph, the Degas, and Picasso bather imagery. Such things appear 'mixed up' in his mind in much the same way that Michelangelo and Eadweard Muybridge converged, Bacon famously remarked, in his imaginative projections of the male body.[12] Moreover, it is likely that Bacon was excited by the painterly freedom of *Ballet Dancers*, the bold and diverse marks, made with the artist's fingers perhaps in places, applied onto coarse unprimed canvas which is left substantially exposed, especially to the right of the picture.[13] Bacon, too, often left canvas bare, as in the central panel of the 1944 triptych. He subsequently took to painting on the rear, rougher side of his supports, to heighten the contrast between the visual textures of granular canvas and smeared, scumbled paint marks. It is even possible to speculate that Degas's necessary recourse to glazing large pastels might have reinforced Bacon's impulse to use glass in framing his paintings, for practical reasons initially, perhaps, but thereafter on aesthetic grounds. At any rate, *Ballet Dancers* suggests that late Degas was a key point of departure for the sense of layering and variable degrees of sharpness and blur, the sense of an image suspended in the course of its improvisation into being, that remained fundamental to Bacon's art.

Fig.4
Edgar Degas
Ballet Dancers c.1890–1900
Oil paint on canvas
725 x 730 mm
The National Gallery, London
©The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence

At the same time, Degas demonstrated to Bacon how emphatically pictorial statements could emerge out of a process of appropriating photographic imagery. Degas's overt exploitation of photography was announced in another London picture, the early *Princess Pauline de Metternich* c.1865 (National Gallery, London), famously based on a *carte de visite*. Given Bacon's immersion in Muybridge, he may well have sensed the strong link between the late nineteenth-

century photographer and the contemporary work of Degas.[14] Bacon's friend and interlocutor David Sylvester made the connection as early as 1954, noting Bacon's exploitation of Muybridge's 'great photographic compendium – which served Degas in a quite different fashion – of human and animal locomotion'.[15]

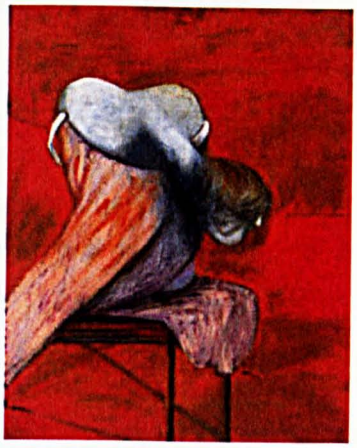

Fig.5
Francis Bacon
Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion c.1944 (left panel)
Oil paint on board
940 x 737 mm
© Tate

A process of compacting visual sources may be evident again in *Study from the Human Body* 1949 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), which was executed shortly before being included in Bacon's one-man show at the Hanover Gallery in late 1949. A fascination with the image of the human back is one of the more obvious common denominators between Bacon and Degas. After Bacon's death, Sylvester remarked of *Study from the Human Body*: 'The figure is the first of many which show an undying love for the Degas pastel in the National Gallery, London, of a woman drying herself.'[16] For Bacon, *After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself* c.1890–5 (National Gallery, London) was indeed something of a talisman (fig.6). It epitomised Degas's approach to a larger obsession the two artists shared with the plasticity of the body, its potential for the most varied forms of articulation, in movement and repose. But when did Bacon encounter *After the Bath*? Sylvester's authoritative tone suggests that he was remembering its discovery around the time that he and the artist first got to know one another. This particular Degas was not in fact acquired by the National Gallery until 1959. However, it was shown in the Lefevre Gallery's Degas show in 1950, and there is no record of a previous public showing.[17] *After the Bath* was then purchased by the collector Harry Walston from the exhibition (though it was twice lent to the Tate Gallery for a few months before finally being acquired for the nation).[18] It is possible that Sylvester was conflating the work with the equally remarkable Degas bather pastel in the Courtauld collection, shown in a memorial display at the Tate Gallery in summer 1948; equally, before its exhibition, Bacon may have encountered *After the Bath* informally at the Lefevre Gallery, where he had exhibited and was well known.[19] At any rate, such quintessential Degas imagery seems to have fed into Bacon's first variant on the *toilette* theme, the *Painting* 1950 (Leeds Art Gallery), fusing with impressions derived from a Sickert drawing identified by the art historian Rebecca Daniels.[20]

Fig.6
Edgar Degas
After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself c.1890–5
Pastel on paper on board
1035 x 985 mm
The National Gallery, London
© The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence

From a different perspective, Degas's *After the Bath* was again in Sylvester's thoughts when discussing the remarkable *Study after Velázquez* 1950 (private collection), one of Bacon's very first pope pictures. The critic evoked Bacon's reinvention of the curtain motif here in less literal terms:

> The short folds in the purple cape and the long folds in the grey background curtain together create a wonderful counterpoint … He had observed in certain late Degas pastels the use of sets of close parallel lines that seemed to be passing through a semi-transparent body. Bacon's development of this usage, which he called 'shuttering', was to formalize the folds in background curtains into stripes that passed very emphatically through a figure. I asked him once if he could explain why

Degas's shuttering could be so poignant. 'Well, it means that the sensation doesn't come straight out at you but slides slowly and gently through the gaps.'[21]

Degas himself would not perhaps have put it like that. Rather, the remark captures Bacon's own, highly metaphorical sense of pictorial devices. In a later interview, the artist remarked of Degas's pastels: 'he shuttered the body, in a way, shuttered the image and then he put an enormous amount of colour through these lines.' For Bacon, this device 'created intensity'.[22] In *Study after Velázquez*, any such impressions from Degas fuse with more direct derivations from black and white photography. Bacon would, for example, have known Erich Salomon's photograph, reproduced in *Picture Post* magazine in 1947, where the great and the good are captured, unaware and unposed, through a diaphanous curtain.[23] Another possible model is pre-war Nazi propaganda imagery, specifically the spectacle of the 'cathedral of light' that Albert Speer devised for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games and the culminating ceremony at the Nuremberg rallies, in which parallel beams of light directed into the night sky register as densely packed stripes of light and dark.[24] Bacon was fascinated by the gulf between the Nazi propagandist façade and the ruthless will to power that it veiled. A terminology akin to shuttering came to mind when he talked, in a somewhat Nietzschean vein, about his aims: 'We nearly always live through screens – a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks violent, that I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.'[25] Bacon surely saw Degas, Nietzsche's near contemporary after all, as the exemplary artist who cut through to raw human realities.

The light and dark striations generally recede into the background in Bacon's work from the first half of the 1950s. In the foreground, the Degas-like motif of the naked figure viewed from the back is restated in a sequence of pictures from 1952, including *Untitled (Crouching Figures)* (Estate of Francis Bacon) and, above all, *Study for Crouching Nude* (Detroit Institute of Arts) that was one of Bacon's favourite works.[26] The theme allowed him to channel visual suggestions from such varied sources as Muybridge's photography, Michelangelo drawings, Rodin sculptures and from classical antiquity, which have all been seen as catalysts.[27] Or Degas may again be cited, such as the nude drying herself, unusually oriented to the right, which had been shown at the Lefevre Gallery show two years earlier.[28] But such points of reference interacted with an even more direct springboard in photojournalism for Bacon's conception of the figure. For Bacon, the image of the back edited out the individuality implicit in facial features and so projected an animalistic sense of humanity. The association is reinforced here by the squatting or crouching posture that recalls the body language of apes, complementing the cage-like setting. For his part, Degas famously remarked that women at their *toilette* were like cats washing themselves, and the application to his work of the term 'human animal' goes all the way back to the writer Joris-Karl Huysmans.[29] In 1952 Bacon was actually working from an illustrated feature article that had appeared in the same 1947 issue of *Picture Post* magazine about a lioness attacking a photographer in the wild.[30] Bacon was clearly mesmerised by the largest image, in which the seated lioness seems to take on an incongruously gentle and protective attitude towards the recumbent figure, and to take on a decidedly anthropomorphic appearance. In *Study for Crouching Nude* the image of an animal with human attributes is metamorphosed by Bacon into a figure with animal undertones. Aside from the articulation of the body, the relationship with the photograph is implicit in the pool of shadow to the right of the figure, and in *Untitled (Crouching Figures)* and several related pictures by the inclusion of elements of the lying figure with bent legs. Here the imagery takes on unmistakable homoerotic overtones, almost as if the instinctive violence of the kill is converted in Bacon's imagination into some sadomasochistic fantasy. The photograph was Bacon's immediate

source, but Degas remains in play if we concur with the art historian John Rothenstein's description in 1964 of a typical mechanism in Bacon's creativity: 'his images often derive from a variety of photographs of different subjects and these may be fixed or coloured by his memory of still some other thing seen or remembered.'[31] This remark captures a very visual process of transformation and synthesis that is bound to be travestied in any verbal description.

Several new departures are evident in Bacon's art of the late 1950s and into the 1960s, in the aftermath of the variations on a van Gogh self-portrait that Bacon hurriedly executed in 1957. These developments include, first, a proliferation of naked figures, and in particular of female bodies, hitherto a rarity in Bacon's work; secondly, an emphasis on the overall articulation of the body, which is sometimes more dynamically charged, but in general becomes more sculpturally defined, against simpler and increasingly colourful backdrops; thirdly, a move away from the photographic effects of grisaille, blur and inconsistent focus that had been dominant a few years earlier; and, fourthly, an espousal of working on paper.[32] Although Bacon always denied that he drew, a significant cluster of cursory sketches have since come to light, with provenances among Bacon's circle, but without any signatures or dates. The bulk were acquired by Tate and exhibited in 2003. Curator Matthew Gale convincingly ascribed the bulk of the drawings to around 1957 to 1961, on the basis of documentary evidence as well as visual correspondences with paintings dated from 1959 to the early 1960s.[33] It is the hypothesis of this essay that these various new directions register in part Bacon's assimilation of a fresh aspect of Degas.

Bacon is very likely to have seen the Lefevre Gallery exhibition *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, staged between April and May 1958. It was accompanied by a bigger catalogue than usual, with all works illustrated and with an essay by Bacon's long-time acquaintance Douglas Cooper, setting Degas within the wider history of the monotype (fig.7).[34] Indeed, although there was a handful of works in the other media, the undoubted revelation of the show was the thirty-six monotypes, one-off images pulled from a sheet of metal on which the artist had improvised the image in printers' ink, with radical freedom of touch and economy of means (at times working with his fingers and with rags). This was a strand in Degas's work that had hitherto been relatively unknown in Britain compared with the paintings, pastels and sculpture. No monotypes, for instance, had been shown at the Tate Gallery six years earlier. Their impact would only have been enhanced for Bacon by the well-founded rumours that Picasso was keen to purchase several brothel monotypes from the London exhibition.[35] The works on show in 1958 are at the opposite end of the spectrum from Degas's elegant ballet and race track pictures. Their earthy sensuality and bleak atmosphere were evoked at the time in the pages of the *Burlington Magazine*:

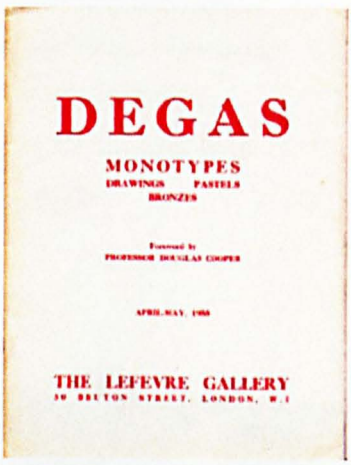

Fig.7
Cover of *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, exhibition catalogue, Lefevre Gallery, London, April–May 1958.

> nothing can mitigate the wretchedness of their [the prostitutes'] existence. Degas is prepared with Goya-like mercilessness to drain away all vestige of lying glamour in order to distil this disagreeable truth. The women are hideous, fat, no longer young; their clients shifty, and horribly respectable with their umbrellas and bowler hats … his attitude towards all such sad exploits of human beings was never compassionate. Rather he was deeply concerned

> with truth for its own sake, in probing life beneath the crust of good manners … He knew just how thin this crust was, and took a defiant delight in exposing the squalor that lay below it. We who still like for the sake of a little piece of mind to pretend that the crust still holds, are put in our place by the spectacle of all grace, all varnish, being ripped away with so much genius to reveal the raw facts. [36]

While the words of this review may echo any number of contemporary reactions to Bacon's paintings, what is the visual evidence that these works by Degas struck a chord with Bacon? The abject, contorted naked women, in minimal interiors, who feature in Bacon's art over the next two or three years suggest a general continuity with the Degas monotypes. More specific affinities exist between the drawn *Figure in a Corner* and one such Degas: in both, the figures' arms are stretched out, and one leg is extended and the other bent, with the genitals prominently displayed, while the bed or sofa on which they disport themselves recedes diagonally into a shallow space. [37] In several of the monotypes Degas's women recline and doze, perhaps in a state of post-coital stupor (fig.8). Likewise recumbent figures abound in Bacon drawings, as in *Figure Lying No.2* (Tate T07375), and related paintings such as *Sleeping Figure* 1959, a tender depiction of his lover Peter Lacy. [38] In its unselfconscious body language, remote from the posing of the traditional nude, the latter may incorporate Bacon's recent memories of the girl conceived by Degas for *Rest* c.1879 (Musée Picasso, Paris), one of Picasso's acquisitions. The same monotype includes a fragmentary glimpse of a male customer entering the space which may have been a point of reference at some level for Bacon's enigmatic *Walking Figure* 1960 (Dallas Museum of Art). Bacon's nudes lying upside down on sofas, in works on paper (such as *Reclining Figure No.1* and *Reclining Figure No.2*; Tate T07353–4) and on canvas – as in *Reclining Woman* 1961 (Tate T00453; fig.9) – recall the postures in several monotypes, which show prostitutes relaxing on upholstered couches (fig.8). [39] Figures viewed from the back occur in several of Degas's prints and drawings in the Lefevre Gallery exhibition, as they do in Bacon sketches like *Standing Figure* (Tate T07367), an especially economical image that possibly incorporates a recollection of one of Degas's naked girls. [40] Finally, *Figure Bending Forwards* (Tate T07358) and *Bending Figure No.2* by Bacon (Tate T07379; fig.10) bring to mind the more contorted bodies in Degas's imagery of girls at their *toilette* (fig.11), although Muybridge's photographs are also relevant here. [41] Generally, Degas and Muybridge seem to have coalesced for Bacon within this body of work. [42] It is not possible to say for sure that Bacon saw these works by Degas. But the cursory discussion above indicates that there are sufficient visual and thematic parallels, across a fair proportion of Bacon's work known or thought to date from the subsequent period, to support the proposition that the Lefevre Degas show in spring 1958 was a significant catalyst.

Fig.8
Edgar Degas
Rest c.1879
Monotype 159 x 108 mm

From *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, exhibition catalogue, Lefevre Gallery, London, April–May 1958.

Fig.9
Francis Bacon
Reclining Woman 1961
Oil on canvas 1988 x 1416 mm
© Estate of Francis Bacon

Its fascination for Bacon may have gone beyond iconography. The exhibition might also have prompted him to explore the possibilities of drawing. The current view is that Bacon turned to working on paper in the late 1950s as something of a temporary expedient, in order to help him resolve his current pictorial problems.[43] If that is correct, which is impossible to prove since earlier and later graphic production could be lost, then Bacon might well have derived sustenance from Degas's monotypes. Their extraordinary daring and lack of inhibition, in relation to both imagery and technique, would surely have resonated with Bacon. At the same time, they demonstrated how an artist might choose working on paper, on an intimate scale, as a vehicle for private studio experimentation and perhaps for erotic reverie, producing images that only became public after the artist's death. In other words, they showed how drawing could be something other than a practical instrument for developing ideas for paintings, which was anathema to Bacon given his commitment to improvisation on the canvas.

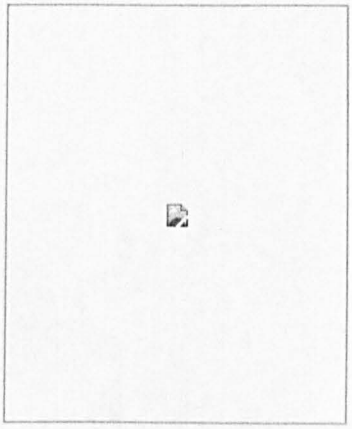

Fig.10
Francis Bacon
Bending Figure, No. 2
circa 1957-61
Ballpoint pen and oil on paper
support: 340 x 270 mm
Purchased with assistance from the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and a group of anonymous donors in memory of Mario Tazzoli 1998

View the main page for this artwork

The argument about the Degas monotypes makes sense in relation to Bacon's wider evolution. The period around 1960 tends to be rather glossed over, even by the Tate's 2008 retrospective, reflecting its problematic aesthetic status. The one point that is regularly made is that Bacon's simpler, colourful backdrops reflect his new awareness of American abstract expressionism and its St Ives equivalent in current British art, reinforced by his three-month stay in Cornwall in 1959.[44] Yet, paradoxically, Bacon's move towards a more animated treatment of the human body may in part have represented a reaction against abstraction, a type of art which lacked meaningful content in Bacon's view. He may have been appropriating abstract devices for his backdrops in a spirit more of parody than emulation. An intensified interest in Degas, on the other hand, would be entirely compatible with the broader engagement with late nineteenth-century French art that informed Bacon's art at this point. This extended notably to Rodin's sculpture, analogous of course to Degas in its brutal realism and bodily contortions. Rodin was mentioned admiringly by Bacon in his lists of possible new pictures, and was proposed by Matthew Gale as a springboard for Bacon's 'distortion and idiosyncratic articulation of the human figure' at this juncture.[45]

By general consent, Bacon hit his artistic stride again in the early 1960s, a moment which roughly correlates, coincidentally or otherwise, with the new contentment in his personal life associated with meeting George Dyer. The period from then until the mid-1970s was one of the undoubted peaks in Bacon's art. His sense of himself as a latter-day realist comes through strongly in the concurrent interviews with David Sylvester. Correspondingly, Bacon's engagement with Degas becomes more overt, one element in a Francophilia that was apparent in the satisfaction he derived from being invited to stage a big retrospective at the Grand Palais, Paris in 1971, in his acquisition of a flat in Paris, and in his several friendships at this time with French artists and writers, notably Michel Leiris. It is plausible that Bacon identified with Degas as a fellow spirit, a model for his own devotion to 'the human clay', in W.H. Auden's resonant phrase, and thus as the antidote to a contemporary scene dominated by abstraction and pop art, from which Bacon felt increasingly isolated.

His new immersion in portraiture, for instance, was bound up with his admiration for Degas, as has already been indicated. Bacon no doubt perceived that, in works like *Diego Martelli*, shown in London in 1952, Degas had taken portraiture off its pedestal in much the same way that the women at their *toilette* pictures brought the image of the nude down to earth, locating it within contemporary everyday experience and the private sphere. In the Martelli portrait, the pose served to convey the singular physical and psychological presence of Degas's sitter, and to evoke a fictive obliviousness to the observing artist, rather than the social front that is normally encountered in portraits. Its enduring impact is evident in the more exaggerated body language of Bacon's *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* 1969 (private collection), 'awkward in his squirming pose' in Chris Stephens's words, as well in certain late self-portraits such as *Self-Portrait with a Watch* 1973 (private collection).[46] Bacon's immediate points of reference were often photographs by John Deakin, but in directing the conception and making of these, Bacon may well have had Degas at the back of his mind. The George Dyer images from the 1960s, such as *Study of George Dyer in a Mirror* 1968 (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid), raise the further point that including paintings within paintings is an interesting sub-theme in both artists' approaches to portraiture.[47] At the other end of the scale spectrum, the robust physicality and rich tonality of Degas's *Head of a Woman* c.1874 (Tate N03390; fig.12), another early acquisition for the national collection, may have been an example for Bacon's head and shoulder portraits form the early 1960s onwards, especially in the many, robustly sensual depictions of the artist and model Isabel Rawsthorne.

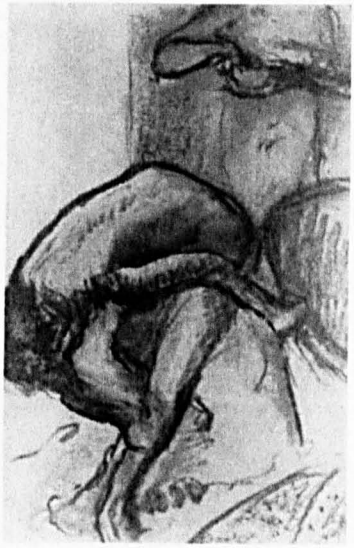

Fig.11
Edgar Degas
Breakfast After the Bath, Young Woman Drying Herself c.1896
Charcoal and pastel on paper
762 x 489 mm
From *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, exhibition catalogue, Lefevre Gallery, London, April–May 1958.

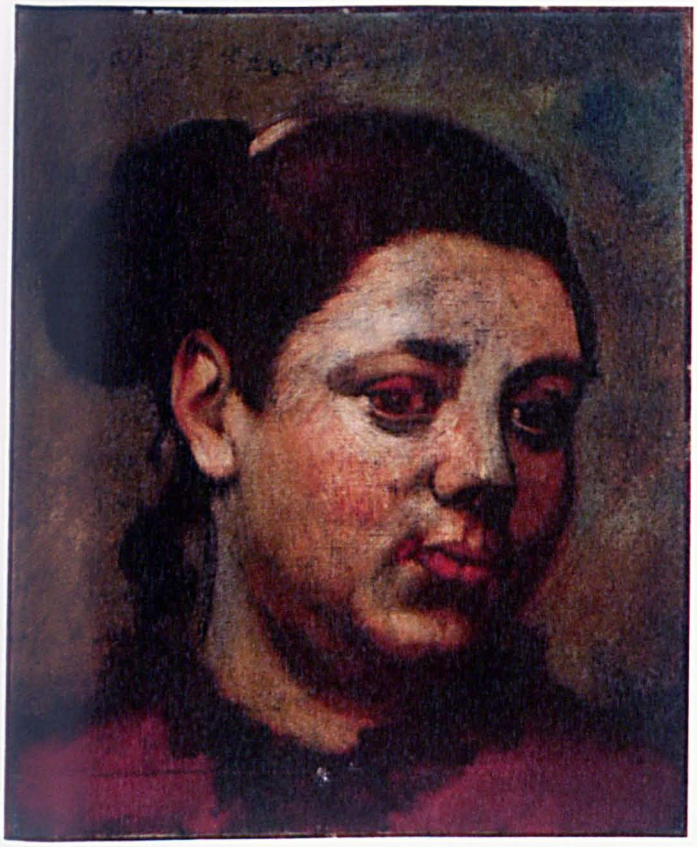

Fig.12

Edgar Degas

Head of a Woman c.1874

Oil on canvas 321 x 267 mm

Tate

Dyer inspired other works that went beyond straightforward portraiture. In the 1964 triptych *Three Figures in a Room* 1964 (Centre Pompidou, Paris), a playful and erotically charged love letter, Bacon's apparent feminisation of the naked figure is accentuated by his allusions to Degas. The centrepiece of Dyer in repose on a couch recalls Degas's imagery of the boudoir interior as a place of serenity and bodily pleasure while the right-hand depiction of his lover swivelling on a barstool evokes the ungainly poise of Degas's sculpted ballet dancers, exemplified by the two bronzes acquired by Tate in 1949 and 1951.[48] At the same time, the dance studio interiors could have encouraged Bacon to distil the luminous, simplified spaces that offset his increasingly plastic figures. Most obviously, Degas's imagery of women at their *toilette* is transposed in the left-hand panel of the triptych into Bacon's depiction of a man literally sat on the toilet, which it is hard not to see as light-hearted, even an in-joke, if Bacon is permitted to depart from tragic mode. The visceral physicality that he saw in Degas turns into a projection of Bacon's own muscular ideal. Here, and above all in the depictions of the male *toilette* in *Three Studies of the Male Back* 1970, Bacon paid his most explicit homages to Degas's *After the Bath*, by then on permanent display in the National Gallery. In between making the two triptychs, Bacon explained to Sylvester in their 1966 conversation what it was that he found so riveting about that particular Degas: 'You will find at the very top of the spine that the spine almost comes out of the skin altogether. And this gives it such a grip and a twist that you're more conscious of the vulnerability of the rest of the body than if he had drawn the spine naturally up to the neck. He breaks it so that this thing seems to protrude from the flesh.'[49] The most literal elaboration of this idea in his own work occurs in *Three Figures and Portrait* 1975 (Tate T02112), though here virtuosity comes perhaps at the expense of vulnerability.

The first half of the 1970s may well have been the period in which Degas meant most to Bacon. Sylvester shrewdly noted that *Triptych* 1974–7 (private collection) 'surely contains Bacon's most complex homage to Degas':

> The two male backs are among the many in his work which are indebted to the Degas pastel in the National Gallery of a woman sponging her back; the horses with rider also recall Degas; and the whole atmosphere must be indebted … to a further Degas in the National Gallery, the *Beach Scene*: the panorama of sands and sea and sky, the contrast between figures near and far, the umbrellas, the way that shadows and pieces of fabric are silhouetted against the sky. [50]

Bacon proceeded to include *After the Bath* in his *The Artist's Choice* exhibition, staged in 1985 at the National Gallery, London, with the Degas on the cover of the accompanying pamphlet. The actual picture was hung in the middle of three nudes occupying what Sylvester recalled as 'the best wall', flanked by Velzáquez's *Rokeby Venus* 1647–51 and Michelangelo's *Entombment* c.1500: 'Degas was seen as the progeny of the masters on either side, and thus as Bacon's key painter.' [51]

Others who knew Bacon well picked up on this reverence for Degas. In the first, but still the most suggestive monograph, the art critic John Russell lingered over the importance of *After the Bath* but observed too: 'since Degas was a great student of people in rooms, it is natural that Bacon should often have studied the paintings in which Degas brought off just that element of psychological ambiguity which Bacon himself often strives for' – a point Russell illustrated with Degas's early *Interior* c.1868–9 (Philadelphia Museum of Art), a picture which does indeed presage the air of indeterminate menace in, for instance, the central panel of Bacon's *Triptych – In Memory of George Dyer* 1971 (Fondation Beyeler, Basel). [52] Subsequently, the biographer Michael Peppiatt quoted Bacon thus: 'I love Degas. I think his pastels are among the greatest things ever made. I think they're far greater than his paintings.' [53] And from Peppiatt himself: 'Bacon had obtained a copy of the rare Lemoisne *catalogue raisonné* of Degas's work and he kept it in the studio during this period, frequently leafing through the hundreds of images that Degas, whom he admired more than any other nineteenth-century artist save van Gogh, had created.' [54]

Visual parallels with Degas occasionally make themselves felt in Bacon's work from his final decade or so. It is interesting to note that both of these committed recorders of the human form were unusually drawn in their later careers to imagery of landscape, although the knobbly, rounded forms that both of them explored in the natural world were redolent of bodily associations. Compare, for instance, Bacon's *Sand Dune* 1983 (Fondation Beyeler, Basel; fig.13) with Degas's late coastal scenes, for example *Le Cap Hornu near St Valery-sur-Somme* c.1890–3 (British Museum; fig.14). One of Bacon's very last pictures, *Study for the Human Body* 1991, presents striking parallels of scale, imagery and palette to Degas's *Dancers at the Bar* c.1900 (Philips Collection, Washington), notwithstanding the gulf between Degas's slender, immaterial females and Bacon's body-building beefcake. [55]

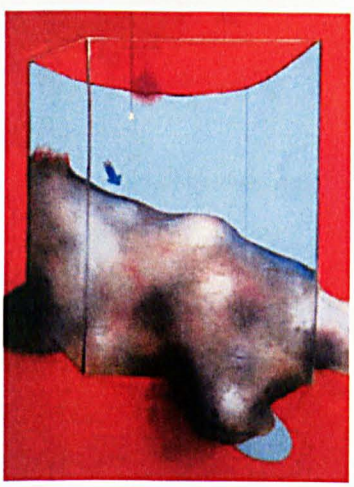

Fig.13
Francis Bacon
Sand Dune 1983
Oil paint and pastel on

A feature of Degas's later art that Bacon is likely to have found exciting was its

combination of taut, analytical drawing of the structure of the body, in defined spatial settings, with sparse expanses of painterly texture and increasingly arbitrary flat colour, including the bright oranges to which Bacon was especially devoted. Equally, the acidic greens encountered in late Degas, such as *A Group of Dancers* c.1890 (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh), are the most striking precedent for Bacon's audacious viridians, epitomised by *Crouching Nude* 1961.[56]

canvas
1980 x 1475 mm
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel
Photograph

In general, what Bacon admired in Degas was the sensation of visceral reality, created not merely through description but also by the knowing manipulation of paint marks on a flat surface, beneath the effect of spontaneity that both cultivated. An underlying affinity of attitude is evident by juxtaposing a typical comment made late in life by Bacon – 'The more artificial you can make it, the greater chance you've got of its looking real'[57] – with remarks attributed to Degas such as: 'One gives the idea of truth by means of the false' and '"Art" is the same word as "artifice", that is to say, something deceitful. It must succeed in giving the impression of nature by false means'.[58] Moreover both artists were neurotic perfectionists, prone to asking if they could take back for revision works they had completed and even sold. Each went so far on occasion as to destroy the work in question, and unsurprisingly both had such requests turned down by wary owners, by the Tate in fact in Bacon's case, when in 1966 he asked to add a green carpet to *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* 1963 (Tate T00604), acquired three years earlier;[59] and by the owner and friend of the artist Henri Rouart, when Degas asked if he could modify *Dancers Practicing at the Barre* 1877 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), having come to regret the visual analogy between the watering can, commonly used to sprinkle the floor to suppress dust, and the pose of the rightmost dancer.[60]

Fig.14
Edgar Degas
Le Cap Hornu near St Valery-sur-Somme
c.1890–93
Monotype
299 x 399 mm
The British Museum

It is tempting as well to see Bacon's attitude to artistic media as reflecting his awareness of Degas. His mixing of pastel and paint, especially in the 1940s, may reflect a fascination with the French artist's technical experimentalism. Bacon, too, felt the lure of working in three dimensions, judging from the Sylvester interviews, though unlike Degas he remained a sculptor *manqué*.[61] Even taking into account the posthumously revealed sketches discussed earlier, Bacon barely drew and, according to Sylvester, was 'forever asserting that he couldn't draw', but, interestingly, he was drawn to several artists renowned for their virtuoso draughtsmanship, Degas and Michelangelo as well as Giacometti and Seurat.[62] Discernable here is an element of compensation or wish fulfilment in an artist who had never learnt to draw in the traditional sense, and who relied on inventive manipulations of paint to evoke the presence of forms in space. In other words, within the identification, there was also an attraction of opposites in Bacon's response to Degas.

This essay assembles some evidence – and quite a lot of speculation – regarding what Bacon might have derived, throughout his career, from looking hard at works by Degas. Some of its juxtapositions of particular works may seem more persuasive than others, but it is hoped that the overall argument has demonstrated that there is a real continuity of sensibility between the two artists, and that Bacon's documented admiration for Degas had profound, wide-ranging consequences for his art – on a par with his immersion in Picasso or Soutine. There is doubtless much more to be said about what he saw and valued in Degas, such as sexual connotations, or a darker side of the French artist implicit, too, in John Berger's comments about his

fascination with 'the human capacity for martyrdom ... The human quality Degas most admired was endurance'.[63] On a broader front, finally, this essay has sought to indicate the benefits of treating Bacon as a singular but also regular artist, rather than as a kind of shaman or a charismatic bohemian who happened to paint. Regular artists, especially those of the highest distinction, find compelling provocation in other works of art, and Bacon was no exception: 'to create something ... is a sort of echo from one artist to another'. He may have been personally committed to alcohol, gambling and picking up teddy boys, but bouncing off great artists like Degas was ultimately far more significant for Bacon's painting.

Notes

1. See Martin Hammer, 'Clearing away the Screens', in *Francis Bacon: Portraits and Heads*, exhibition catalogue, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2005, pp.21 and 27 note 17. Perhaps Bacon's interest in Degas revived at this point as a result of encountering Jean Sutherland Bogg's pioneering and monumental study *Portraits by Degas*, Berkeley 1962.
2. Francis Bacon, cited in *Francis Bacon: In Conversation with Michel Archimbaud*, London 1993, p.126.
3. Some of these relationships are addressed in Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali (eds.), *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, Milan 2003; Anne Baldassari, *Bacon Picasso*, Paris 2005; Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert: "Images which unlock other images"', in Martin Harrison (ed.), *Francis Bacon: New Studies. Centenary Essays*, Göttingen 2010, pp.57–87; *Soutine/Bacon*, exhibition catalogue, Helly Nahmad Gallery, New York 2011; Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, New Haven and London 2005.
4. The legacy of Degas, for instance, was transmitted to Bacon in part through Sickert and Bonnard, as well as through Picasso, who studied Degas's work intensely. See Elizabeth Cowling and Richard Kendall, *Picasso Looks at Degas*, New Haven and London 2010.
5. The classic discussion of 'influence' remains Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, New Haven and London 1991, pp.58–62.
6. See Anna Gruetzner Robins and Richard Thomson, *Degas, Sickert, Toulouse-Lautrec*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain, London 2005; Frances Fowle, *Impressionism and Scotland*, exhibition catalogue, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2008; Douglas Cooper, 'A Franco-Scottish Link with the Past', in *Alex Reid & Lefevre*, London 1976; Richard Kendall and Jill Devonyar, *Degas and the Ballet: Picturing Movement*, exhibition catalogue, Royal Academy of Arts, London 2011.
7. Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery', *Burlington Magazine*, May 2010, pp.307–12.
8. See Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, pp.203–4. It is worth noting that Picasso's *Nude Standing by the Sea* 1929 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) was with the Lefevre Gallery from 1929 until at least 1936; see Gary Tinterow and Susan Alyson Stein (eds.), *Picasso in the Metropolitan Museum*, New Haven and London 2010, p.212.
9. Martin Harrison, *In Camera. Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, London 2005, p.41.
10. David Bomford, Sarah Herring, Jo Kirby and others, *Art in the Making: Degas*, London 2004, pp.90–1.
11. Harrison 2005, pp.41–3.
12. David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, London 1993, p.114.
13. On the innovative technique used in this work, see Bomford 2004, pp.136–41.
14. See Kendall and Devonyar 2011.
15. David Sylvester, 'Francis Bacon' (1954), partially reprinted in David Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, London 2002, p.57.
16. David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, London 2001, p.54.
17. *Edgar Degas 1834–1917*, exhibition catalogue, Lefevre Gallery, London, May–June 1950, no.9, reproduced p.7. The provenance is given as the studio sale and another Paris sale in 1942, from which the gallery or their French partner had presumably acquired the work.
18. Loaned to the Tate Gallery in December 1951–May 1952 and February–April 1958; details of the picture's history are derived from the file on the work in the National Gallery Archives.
19. By contrast, Degas's study of Hélène Rouart (Lefevre Gallery 1950, no.8) is listed as having been shown in the gallery's *XIX Century French Masters* exhibition the previous year.
20. Daniels 2010, pp.57–87.
21. Sylvester 1993, pp.49–50.
22. Ibid., p.176.

23 'He Photographed Europe in Decay', *Picture Post*, 9 August 1947, p.8.

24 Martin Hammer and Chris Stephens, '"Seeing the Story of One's Time": Appropriations from Nazi Photography in the Work of Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain*, November 2009, pp.340–3. See also Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda*, London 2012.

25 Sylvester 1993, p.82.

26 *Study for Crouching Nude* was exhibited finished in the summer of 1952, which negates the possibility that Bacon was prompted by works such as *Woman Drying Herself* c.1890–5 (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh) exhibited in the Degas show at the Tate Gallery that autumn.

27 Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens (eds.), *Francis Bacon*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain, London 2008, p.110.

28 The work is visible in the installation shot in *Alex Reid & Lefevre*, London 1976, and reproduced in *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, exhibition catalogue, Lefevre Gallery, London, April–May 1958, p.22 no.31. At the time of publication, the whereabouts of the work are unknown to the author.

29 Kendall and Devonyar 2011, p. 130.

30 See Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Painting after Photography', *Art History*, April 2012, pp.369–70

31 John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in Ronald Alley, *Francis Bacon*, London 1964, pp.17–8.

32 There is a useful discussion of this period in Martin Harrison's 'Catalogue Note' on Francis Bacon, *Crouching Nude* 1961, in Sothebys, *Contemporary Art Evening Auction*, 29 June 2011, lot 49.

33 Matthew Gale, *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, London 1999.

34 Douglas Cooper, 'The Monotypes of Degas', in *Degas. Monotypes, Drawings, Pastels, Bronzes*, pp.3–5. The images are arranged visually rather than by numerical sequence. It was the art historian Richard Thomson who initially drew my attention to the possible significance of this show for Bacon. In the discussion after the first presentation of this paper Anthony Diamond recalled that the Lefevre show had had a powerful impact on artists more widely.

35 See Cowling and Kendall 2010, pp.223–36. This study demonstrates that the monotypes had been known for decades in advanced artistic circles in Paris.

36 Benedict Nicolson, 'Degas Monotypes', *Burlington Magazine*, May 1958, pp.172–5.

37 Bacon reproduced in Gale 1999, fig.22; Degas reproduced in Lefevre Gallery 1958, no.16.

38 Bacon reproduced in Gale 1999, fig.31; Degas reproduced in Lefevre Gallery 1958,no.23.

39 Bacon reproduced in Gale 1999, nos.3 and 4; Degas reproduced in Lefevre Gallery 1958, nos.20 and 26.

40 Bacon reproduced in Gale 1999, no.17; Degas reproduced in Lefevre Gallery 1958, nos.5 and 18.

41 Bacon reproduced in Gale 1999, nos.8 and 29; Degas reproduced in Lefevre Gallery 1958, no.33.

42 On the Muybridge sources for several drawings, see Gale 1999, pp.25–9.

43 See Rachel Tait, 'Archive', in Gale and Stephens 2008, pp.186–7.

44 Harrison 2005, pp.136–41; Ben Tufnell, *Francis Bacon in St Ives: Experiment and Transition 1957–62*, exhibition catalogue, Tate St Ives 2007.

45 Harrison 2005, pp.141–7; Gale 1999, p.78.

46 Chris Stephens,'"Like a Shadow": Darkness, Life and Death in the Art of Francis Bacon', in Anna Coliva and Michael Peppiat (eds.), *Caravaggio Bacon*, Rome 2009, p.70.

47 Compare, for example, Degas's portrait of *James-Jacques-Joseph Tissot* c.1866–8 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

48 Degas's *Dancer Looking at the Sole of her Right Foot* c.1910–11 (Tate N05919) and *Dancer Putting on her Stocking* c.1900 (Tate N05918) were acquired for the Tate collection in 1949 and 1951 respectively.

49 Sylvester 1993, pp.46–7.

50 Sylvester 2001, pp.151-2. I am happy to echo Sylvester's acknowledgement to Sarah Whitfield for the point about the National Gallery's *Beach Scene* c.1869–70.

51 Ibid., p.210.

52 John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, London 1979, pp.39–40 (also pp.116–8)

53 Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Studies for a Portrait*, New Haven and London 1996, p.144.

54 Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, London 1996, pp.267–8. Further confirmation of Bacon's admiration for Degas was also given by Angus Stewart, who knew Bacon as a Chelsea neighbour, in the discussion that followed the first presentation of this paper.

55 Bacon reproduced at http://www.francis-bacon.com/paintings/study-from-human-body-1991/?c=85-92, accessed 8 May 2012; Degas reproduced at http://www.phillipscollection.org/exhibitions/past/2011/2011_12_31_Degas.aspx, accessed 8 May 2012.

56 For *Crouching Nude* 1961, see Sothebys, *Contemporary Art Evening Auction*, 29 June 2011, lot 49.

57 Sylvester 1993, p.148.

58 Kendall and Devonyar 2011, p.192.

59 See Matthew Gale, '*Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* 1963 by Francis Bacon', catalogue entry, February 1999, http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=-1&workid=680&searchid=16986&roomid=false&tabview=text&texttype=8, accessed 17 January 2012.

60 Jean Sutherland Boggs, Henri Loyrette, Michael Pantazi and others, *Degas*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1988, p.278.

61 Sylvester 1993, p.108.

62 David Sylvester, 'Bacon's Secret Vice', in Gale 1999, p.10.

63 John Berger, 'The Dark Side of Degas's Ballet Dancers', *Guardian*, 15 November 2011.

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Francis Bacon: Painting after Photography

Martin Hammer

It mattered a great deal to Francis Bacon that making his paintings felt open, fluid, and intuitive: 'I don't want the work to be hazy, but I work in a kind of haze of sensations and feelings and ideas that come to me and that I try to crystallise.'[1] The process was inaccessible to external scrutiny in the sense that it involved the accumulation and interplay of all manner of imaginative impulses and pictorial decisions in the privacy of the studio. We do not generally have the benefit of preparatory studies to show how Bacon's thinking for works evolved, or contemporary documentation explaining his ambitions for particular pictures. But we are not obliged to succumb to mystification. It is possible to describe the general sequence of well-rehearsed operations that Bacon employed, within which pictures might be improvised into being.[2] One can in addition identify broad categories of stimulus that consistently fed into the production of his paintings, alongside more fleeting thoughts and emotional states. These might include reading poetry and other kinds of text, as a limbering up for painting, or responding to work by other artists. Here I want to focus on the contemplation of photographs as a persistent and crucial activity in the production of his pictures. Bacon's habit of working from photography locates him within a major trajectory in modern art, extending from Edgar Degas and Walter Sickert to the likes of Richard Hamilton, Andy Warhol, and Gerhard Richter. But the manner in which Bacon edited and transmuted such sources is highly distinctive. For that reason perhaps he has been omitted from recent explorations of the specific theme of painting based on photographs, as in the 2007 Hayward Gallery show *The Painting of Modern Life*, which opened with 'a major turn in the history of painting' in the 1960s and carried the story through to the present.[3] It is as though critics simply cannot see Bacon's pictorial interest and originality through the expressionistic, 'human condition' discourse that characteristically frames his work.

Within the Bacon literature, the topic features routinely. His fascination with particular sorts of photography was registered by early supporters such as Robert Melville, Sam Hunter, David Sylvester and Lawrence Alloway.[4] Hunter famously illustrated two spreads of photographs that he had encountered in the artist's studio in 1950, and judged relevant to the paintings he saw in their vicinity.[5] In 1954, Sylvester went so far as to state that 'no serious painter has owed so much to the photograph as Bacon'; while other artists had merely borrowed imagery, 'he has tried to find a painterly equivalent for its actual physical attributes and its manner of presenting the image'.[6] In the famous volume of interviews, the same

Detail from Peter Rose Pulham, untitled illustration, 1937 (*plate 3*).

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critic illustrated several photographs in Bacon's possession, while the artist is quoted talking memorably about how he found photographs more interesting than paintings. He had 'always been haunted' by them, he remarked, evoking the reverie that he found they could stimulate: 'I think it's the slight remove from fact, which returns me onto the fact more violently. Through the photographic image I find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it. And photographs are not only points of reference; 'they're often triggers of ideas'.[7] Bacon's appropriations were sustained by a general sense of the psychological and cultural impact of lens-based imagery, since 'when one looks at something, one's not only looking at it directly but one's also looking at it through the assault that has already been made by photography and film'.[8] Yet images borrowed from photography could only provide a starting point for the more profound sensations and emotions that painting could produce: 'the difference from direct recording through the camera is that as an artist you have to, in a sense, set a trap by which you hope to trap this living fact alive', a process connected to his sense that 'the texture of a photograph seems to go through an illustrational process onto the nervous system, whereas the texture of a painting seems to come immediately onto the nervous system'.[9]

Since the artist's death in 1992, research in this area has been stimulated by the retrieval and cataloguing of the sedimented contents of his studio, including numerous photographs, though what survives may be quite random given the stories about Bacon destroying material and the absence from the archive of material we know he exploited at some point. The many sheets and publications that emerged have been widely exhibited, culminating in the recent *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*.[10] Moreover, several critics have focused on the artist's photographic adaptations, accumulating derivations for elements in the pictures.[11] Further detective work will no doubt continue to establish precise points of origin, and the provenance of sheets in the archive torn from books or magazines.[12] In broad terms we probably have a good grasp of the range of photographic material that Bacon collected and exploited. We know, for instance, that he harvested images from magazines such as *Picture Post*, *Le Crapouillet*, *Paris Match*, sporting and body-building magazines, and later the Sunday colour supplements, pioneered in Britain by *The Sunday Times* in 1962. His immersion in press imagery went back to the late 1930s, and was foreshadowed, and perhaps prompted, by the later work of Sickert.[13] Bacon's engagement with such material after the War paralleled that of early pop artists such as Paolozzi and Rauschenberg, as well as cultural analysts such as Marshall McLuhan and Roland Barthes. More idiosyncratically, Bacon derived sustenance from quite esoteric illustrated books, often in large format and presumably expensive, though this did not inhibit him from vandalizing them to make it easier to use images for artistic purposes. He seems, for example, to have made regular reference to Marius Maxwell's *Stalking Big Game with a Camera* (1924), K. C. Clark's medical textbook *Positioning in Radiography* (1939), Eadweard Muybridge's studies of human motion first published in the late nineteenth century, Baron von Schrenck Notzing's weird *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1920), and, as recently demonstrated, volumes of Nazi propaganda imagery.[14] It was likewise from printed sources, rather than from the original works, that Bacon often borrowed ideas from artistic tradition, as in the numerous books he acquired with reproductions of Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, the springboard for his own variations produced over a twenty-year period. Bacon worked extensively from reproductions of his own paintings, a very visible feature of his working environment after the move to Reece Mews in 1961.[15] During his later decades, he also referred to photographic portraits

of the likes of George Dyer, Isabel Rawsthorne and Lucian Freud, made and printed to his specifications by his photographer friend John Deakin. Overall, it can probably now be assumed that there is hardly a painting by Bacon that did not, in some sense, take its cue from one or more photographic images, even if the derivations cannot as yet be pinned down in all cases.

Furthermore, we can presume that Bacon actually looked at physical photographs while painting (rather than just looking at them in advance, or working from images committed to memory). The evidence includes the testimony of sitters who recalled Bacon contemplating unrelated photographs while ostensibly painting their portraits; the creases, tears and spatterings on images within or torn from books or magazines, as already evident in the images Hunter recorded, testifying to their presence near the easel; and also Bacon's frequent cropping and folding of photographs. Recent research has revealed that the precise extrication of details from images can already be documented in the early 1940s, when he cut out an element of a Nazi photograph and used it in designing a picture; and also that the strange origami he performed on photographs was done in some cases at least to make it easier for Bacon to hold or stand the image up in front of him while working.[16] One reason perhaps why he disliked others watching him paint was a sense that such procedures could easily at that time have been misunderstood and used against him.

Aside from their frequent obscurity, the obstacle to ready recognition of Bacon's photographic adaptations is the degree to which source material was edited within the creative process and through the filter of a painterly style. In the work of other photography-dependent painters, before or since, there is no such transformation, although the appropriated image may well be counterpointed (as in Richter) by visible paint manipulation. Bacon's paintings could also involve unlikely fusions, such as the torso taken from Velázquez's *Pope Innocent X* and the head from *Battleship Potemkin*; or the merging, when concocting visceral and erotically charged images of the human body, of suggestions from Muybridge and reproductions of Michelangelo drawings.[17] Equally, a figure might be adapted from one source and elements in the setting from elsewhere. In the early *Figure in a Landscape* (1945), the fragmentary figure that Bacon claimed was based on a snapshot of Eric Hall sitting in Hyde Park is set against a landscape backdrop extracted from the photograph of a water buffalo in Maxwell's *Stalking Big Game*.[18] In such cases, we cannot be sure whether Bacon began with a preconceived intention to bring together those two elements, or whether he started with the one, be it figure or setting, and then decided to combine it with the other on scrutinizing what he had already committed to canvas.

It is necessary to go beyond the identification of specific sources, and the description of their pictorial editing and combining, in order to confront the fundamental question of why Bacon homed in on found images in the first place. He clearly looked widely at the photography that was now so ubiquitous in the modern visual environment, but was discerning and selective about the particular examples that he chose to collect and to extricate from their original setting. So what was it about certain photographs that induced him to 'wander' into them imaginatively, to 'unlock' their reality so that they became 'triggers of ideas'? We can only guess of course at what Bacon saw, thought and felt when he looked, obsessively in some cases, at particular photographs. An instance where his reaction is recorded suggests that his interpretations could be highly personal. Bacon was especially attached to a well-known historical image, captured from a high viewpoint, of people running for safety in all directions on Nevsky Prospekt, Petrograd, during the unfolding of some violent episode during the Russian Revolution.[19] When he showed it to John

Rothenstein, Bacon remarked '"Not one of these hundreds of figures looks remotely like a conventional figure; each one, caught in violent motion, is stranger and at first sight less intelligible than one could possibly have imagined it. Could anything", he asked, indicating an off-balance L-shaped form in the foreground, "be more utterly unlike the conventional concept of a man running"'.[20] According to John Russell, who had clearly talked about the same picture, 'Bacon prizes it for the strange kinship between this panic-stricken populace and the strange distortions of cave painting.'[21]

It may be helpful in thinking about Bacon to bring to bear the reflections on photography encountered in the writings of Barthes. Barthes belonged roughly to the same generation as Bacon, and likewise manifested an obsessive fascination with photography throughout his working life. In brief summary, the early journalistic essays collected in *Mythologies* (1957) teased out the ideological messages encoded in kinds of imagery that pervaded the mass media. Subsequent, more theoretical writings address the different levels on which photographs register, as in 'The photographic message' (1961).[22] 'The third meaning' (1970) demonstrates that Barthes, like Bacon, was very interested in the particular category of film stills, notably those deriving from the films of Eisenstein. For Barthes, such images float free from the ready legibility of film narrative and possess what he termed an 'obtuse' meaning distinct from, indeed contradictory to, their obvious descriptive and symbolic meanings.[23] Barthes's pursuit of the quirky and supplementary dimension of photographic images culminates in *Camera Lucida* (1977), his book-length meditation on the distinctive nature of the medium. He acknowledged that his approach to photographs was now informed by a 'vague, casual, even cynical phenomenology', which sought 'to retain an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria'.[24] His viewing of actual images was unashamedly subjective: 'As *spectator* I was interested in Photography only for "sentimental" reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, feel, hence I notice, I observe and I think.'[25] Barthes reflected on why he was wholly indifferent to most of the images he encountered and profoundly affected by just a few, even within the work of major practitioners: 'In this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it. So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist for me: *an animation*. The photograph itself is not animated (I do not believe in "lifelike" photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure.'[26] It was in characterizing this process that Barthes developed his distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum*, or the stock, culturally informed reading to which all photographs are susceptible, which is in tune with what its maker intended and provokes no more than interest, as opposed to the surprising detail that subverts the coherence of the image and sparks off a more individual reaction and an 'expansion' of meaning, against the grain of whatever the photographer had in mind. The *punctum* is 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'.[27] It induces an 'absolute subjectivity' and a state of 'pensiveness'.[28] This seems strikingly akin to Bacon. One might say that the painter too was subject to experiences of animation, where a photographic image or *punctum*-like detail seemed to spark off ideas, sensations, and connections with poetic ideas or notions for pictures, irrespective of any intended purposes. The 'adventure' in his case might go beyond the private contemplation described by Barthes, and take the form of a decision to appropriate, transmute and fuse elements from found imagery, bringing his sources to life by making them his own.

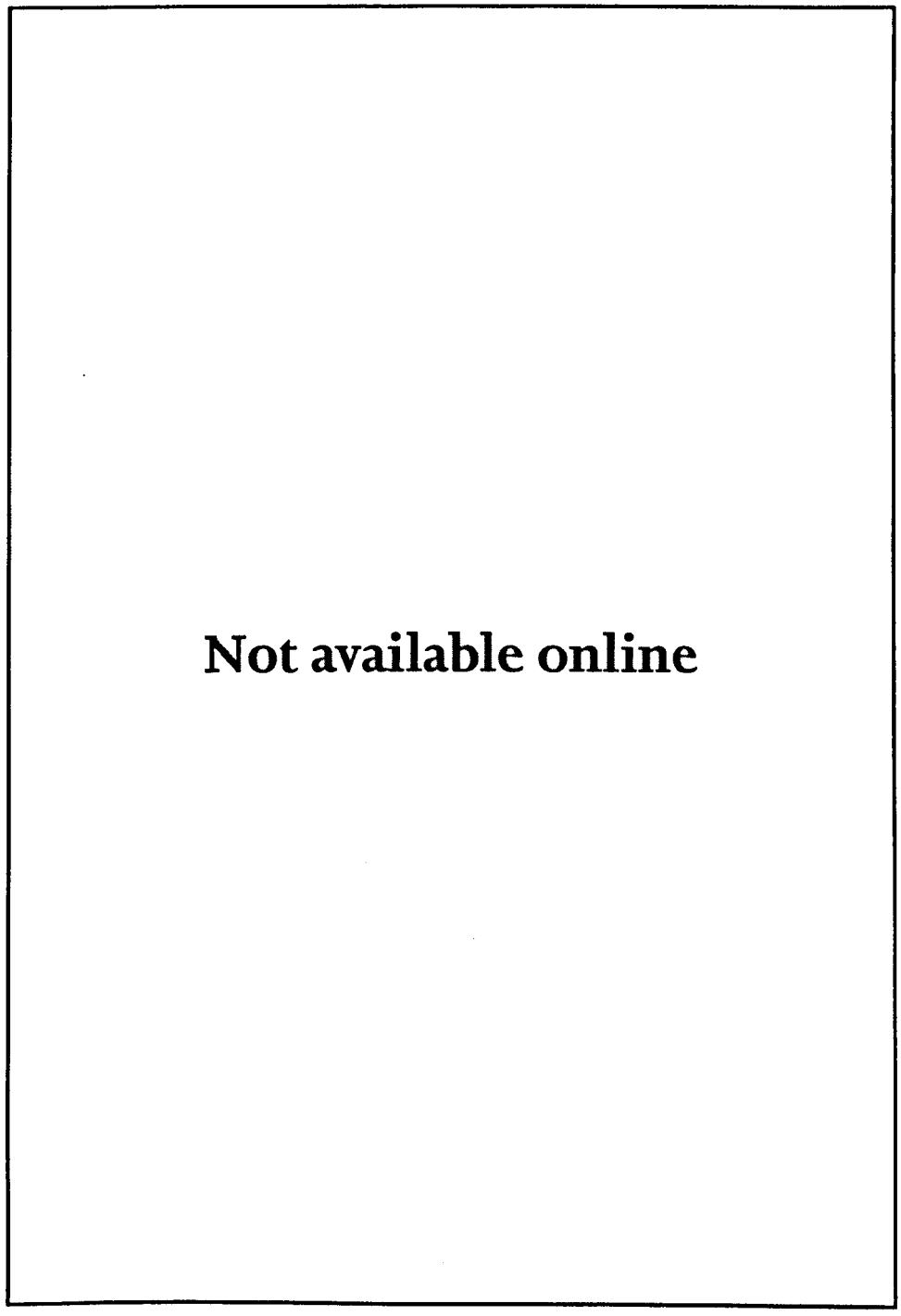
The juxtaposition with Barthes might imply that Bacon's focus on specific photographs was random rather than the result of any thematic logic. This may substantially have been the case, but it is nevertheless worth asking what if anything the different kinds of photography that he relished or worked from had in common, whether visually or thematically. Part of the appeal of photographs, including for Bacon and Barthes, is that they are indexical; they necessarily register some aspect of the world as it is, or was at the instant of capture, whereas painting always entails interpretation and abstraction. However, some of Bacon's favourite strands of photography are also notable for looking emphatically staged and artificial. The spreads in *Positioning in Radiography* combine sharply focused, stylized images of models interacting with X-ray equipment, to demonstrate how different parts of the body are recorded, with examples of the resulting photographs, incorporating diagrammatic lines, arrows and symbols for didactic purposes. In Muybridge's sequential depictions of actions and movements, the human or animal subjects are often captured against a backdrop of numbered grid patterns, ostensibly for reasons of scientific measurement. Still more overtly contrived are the images in *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1920), which purport to show the manifestation of ectoplasms, either in a raw state or legible as faces or bodies. Such occurrences are played out by a cast of mediums in trance-like states, often partially hidden by curtains. Compelling photographs of Nazi leaders and their political rituals record events that were patently staged for the benefit of actual audiences but also to generate images for wider circulation as propaganda. In directing Deakin about how to characterize his friends, Bacon had first hand experience of the calculating decision-making process behind the production of any photograph, however casual the result might appear. Within such imagery, then, overt artifice and theatricality reinforces the remove from reality inherent in the tonal nature of black and white photography; in the freezing of a process of movement that we normally register as continuous (a characteristic for instance of the sports photography that Bacon enjoyed), and that generates unfamiliar 'distortions' of pose and anatomy; and in the flimsy flatness of images that purport to describe a solid spatial world. Bacon's outlook is epitomized by his seemingly eccentric perspective on colour photography, which became increasingly prevalent in post-war popular culture and seemed to most consumers to offer a more vivid effect of realism. According to Russell:

> Over the last twenty years he has been fascinated, also, by colour-photography: or, more precisely, by reproductions of colour-photography ... he finds in the heightened and falsified colour of photography a stimulus more potent than that which other peoples' paintings can normally offer. By taking a magnifying glass to some colour-plate book, he can bring into focus the 'wonderfully arbitrary' procedures by which form is conveyed in such conditions: somehow or other, in these bizarre tumbles, falsehood and truth change places.[29]

Indeed, Russell remarked, 'Bacon values the photograph as a source of significant falsehood.'[30] The found image serves 'as a way of breaking back into reality: or, equally, of taking reality by surprise'. This apparent paradox, the falsehood that reveals reality, underpinned Bacon's response to particular photographs and also the effect that he aimed for in his own paintings. The idea of artifice crops up regularly in the commentary on his work that he provided to Sylvester.[31] Elsewhere Bacon explained the old-fashioned presentation of his pictures:

> The frame is artificial and that's precisely why it's there; to reinforce the artificial nature of the painting. The more the artificiality of the painting is apparent, the better, and the more chance the painting has of working or of showing something. That might seem paradoxical, but it makes perfect sense in art: one achieves one's goal by using the maximum of artificial means, and one succeeds much more in doing something authentic when the artificiality is perfectly obvious.[32]

One might, then, discern an accord between his own subjective experience of those photographs that induced him to 'wander' into them and to 'unlock' their reality, and



1 Francis Bacon, *Pope I – Study after Pope Innocent X by Velazquez*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 1980 × 1370 mm. Aberdeen: Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections. © The Estate of Francis Bacon/ DACS 2008. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.

2 Peter Rose Pulham, untitled illustration from *Photography Year Book Vol II 1936/7 – The International Annual of Camera Art*, ed. T. Korda, London, 1937.

the sensations that his own paintings would, ideally, present to viewers confronting his pictures (of whom he of course was always the first), that of being led into a deeper apprehension beyond the screens and veils of familiar sense impressions, or as Bacon might say of being returned 'onto the fact more violently'.

Bacon was excited in fact by the limitations of photography outlined by Peter Rose Pulham in a 1952 radio talk, published in *The Listener*, which Bacon thought 'the finest thing ever written about photography'.[33] The two men were close friends during the War years and after. As a once successful, now partially lapsed photographer, Rose Pulham argued that the photographic registration of reality was limited, compared to the perceptual fluidity and complexity of the human eye, as well as necessarily partial: 'Nothing is less true than the notion that the camera cannot lie: on the contrary, it is incapable of telling the truth, it cannot even reproduce human vision, and as our idea of human vision is in itself a convention, a photograph is twice removed from any possible reality; it can only present one of the myriad facets of a possible truth.'[34] The most vivid images were, for Rose Pulham, those in which the artifice of the medium was apparent: 'Both the curiously precise detailed flatness of early photographs, and the vagueness of press photographs reproduced through a coarse screen on bad paper, seem to me more convincing, more realistic, than those which show every pore of your skin.' Ironically, Rose Pulham seems here to be taking a pot shot at the brutal close-up portraits produced in 1951/52 by John Deakin, for which Bacon was one among many sitters.[35] As Bacon also realized, the representation of colour, like that of space and light, revealed to Rose Pulham the inherent unreality of images generated by the camera:

> ... even a coloured photograph is not much more realistic than one in monochrome, nor could it be, however much the chemical side were perfected. If you look in the ground glass screen of a camera you will see that the colours appear harder, more metallic, than they do to the eye ... Van Gogh seems to have painted a sky and sun as convincingly as anyone has done so far, but the reality is achieved by an exaggeration or even a partial reversal of the colours the mind is accustomed to accept.[36]

The much-vaunted objectivity of the camera is qualified in another respect, recalling Bacon's wilfully subjective responses: 'the photograph looked at is an image distorted by emotion, for no two people can look at a photograph with quite the same sensations.'[37] From the photographer's perspective, there can be no definitive realism, only the choice of one set of conventions and picture-making possibilities rather than the available alternatives. One might speculate that Rose Pulham's stance towards photography had some impact upon Bacon, just as the example and convictions of the latter encouraged Rose Pulham during the War to transfer his allegiance. Although 'the photographer has as much scope as the painter for the

Not available online

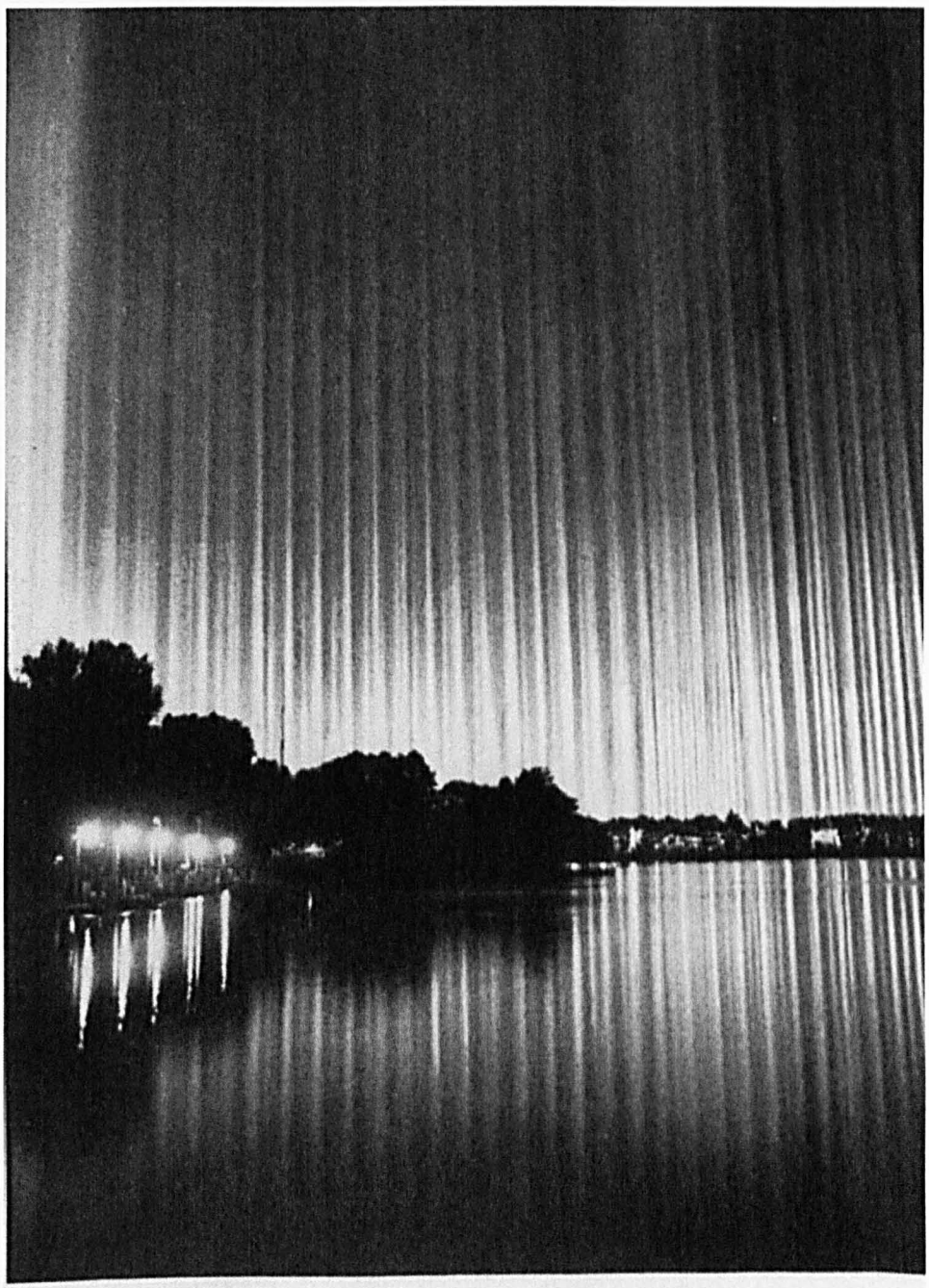
3 Francis Bacon, *Study after Velazquez*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 1980 × 1372 mm. The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Collection. © The Estate of Francis Bacon/DACS 2008. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.

expression of his feelings, in the end photography seemed to me a cumbersome means of expression and I returned to painting ... I really believe now that a painting can be more realistic than a photograph.'[38] For Bacon, the more intense impact of painting was perfectly compatible with exploiting the suggestive imagery and visual effects of photography. His appropriations in practice reflected his fascination with the artificial resources of a medium often misunderstood as straightforwardly truthful. Bacon's approach to colour in the work of his later decades might be considered in this context, though the topic would be difficult to research. One story is revealing. After the Marlborough Gallery started to have his pictures photographed in colour, he was shown a colour transparency of a new work which had, by mistake, ended up too blue; however, he greatly liked the unintended effect and, partly in response, arranged for the picture to be returned to him so that he could rework it.[39]

I want to focus on an earlier phase of his work, in relation to Isabel Rawsthorne's report to Rose Pulham in 1949 that their mutual friend Bacon was currently 'obsessed with the photographic delineation of form – wishes, as far as I can see, to seize such a quality in painting'.[40] This aspect of Bacon's work famously took on a wider significance for Lawrence Alloway, who in 1962 declared: 'Pop art begins in London about 1949 with work by Francis Bacon': 'He used, in screaming heads that he painted at this time, a still from an old movie, The Battleship Potemkin. This image, of the nurse wounded in the eye in the Odessa-steps sequence, though mixed with other elements, of course, was central to the meaning of the work ... The difference between Bacon's use of quotations from the mass media and other, earlier uses is this: Recognition of the photographic origin of a part of his image is central to his intention.'[41] Alloway adduces the obvious example. But 1949 also saw Bacon's first known appropriations from Muybridge in *Study for the Human Body*, indicating his move towards a more naturalistic, and in a sense photographic, figure style.[42] For Bacon, emulating 'the photographic delineation of form' may have represented a strategy for sidestepping the received languages of recent and contemporary art, and staking out an independent territory – an understandable motivation for an artist about to launch himself with a one-man show at the Hanover Gallery in November 1949. He certainly had plenty of opportunity to observe the methods of photographers, given his friendships with Rose Pulham, Deakin and others. Beyond increased naturalism, one might discern a photographic allusion in Bacon's new, albeit short-lived approach to colour, whereby he limited his palette to monochromatic shades of grey, interrupted only by the browns of bare canvas, an effect which recalls the silvery tonal structure of black and white photographic prints.[43] His concurrent introduction of the space frame in *Head VI* and *Study for a Portrait* (both from 1949) could be viewed as a pictorial and perspectival elaboration of the standard photographic process of cropping, using a masking device and an enlarger. The affinity is perhaps implicit in Bacon's comment that the device was not expressive or descriptive in origin: 'I

use the frame to see the image ... I cut down the scale of the canvas by drawing in these rectangles which concentrate the image down.'[44] The most direct parallel may be with the marking up of a print with a grease pencil that photographers would customarily do as the preliminary, or sketch, for an actual cropping.

This was not the only context in which photographic imagery might be found in combination with graphic mark-making. Bacon was doubtless aware of Rose Pulham's importation of loosely surrealist devices and stylistic experimentation into his pre-war fashion photography. In one instance, the overt montaging of an elegantly dressed figure, extracted from a photograph, and an insubstantial architectural setting drawn in white paint against a dark backdrop, a trick of the



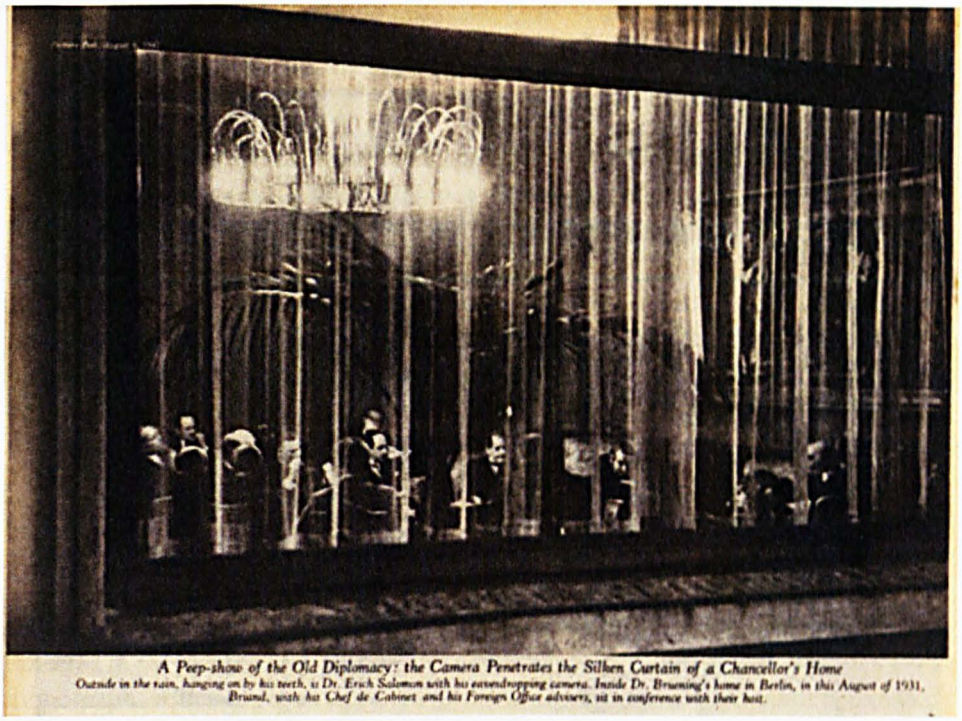
4 Cathedral of Light, Nuremberg Rallies, 1937. Illustration from Hanns Kerrl, *Reichstagung in Nürnberg 1937. Der Parteitag der Arbeit*, Berlin, 1937.

darkroom, strikingly prefigures the visual idiom in a cluster of Bacons from the early 1950s, notably the large 1951 Popes (*plate 1* and *plate 2*).[45] Here the painter likewise started with a ground of diluted black or dark blue paint sunk into the weave of the canvas, and proceeded to work from dark to light in superimposing an architectural perspective and, then, the more tangible forms of the figure and other foreground fixtures.

The interplay between figure and ground was a key issue for Bacon at this time. Several of the works in his 1949 show included a curtain delimiting a shallow and frontal pictorial space, with figures moving through small gaps either towards us or, more commonly, backwards into fictive depth. The motif can be connected to

GEORGES SAAD (*Paris*)

5 Georges Saad, untitled illustration from *Photography Year Book Vol II 1936/7 – The International Annual of Camera Art*, ed. T. Korda, London, 1937.



A Peep-show of the Old Diplomacy: the Camera Penetrates the Silken Curtain of a Chancellor's Home

Outside in the rain, hanging on by his teeth, is Dr. Erich Salomon with his eavesdropping camera. Inside Dr. Bruening's home in Berlin, in this August of 1931, Briand, with his Chef de Cabinet and his Foreign Office advisers, sit in conference with their host.

6 Erich Salomon, 'A Peep-show of the Old Diplomacy'. Illustration from 'He photographed Europe in decay', *Picture Post*, 9 August 1947.

the actual floor to ceiling drape that evidently featured at one end of Bacon's studio, as recorded in Sam Hunter's 1950 studio photographs, having perhaps started life as a wartime blackout.[46] There is an intriguing parallel in the contemporary work of Bacon's friend Lucian Freud, which would merit further research in relation to the interplay between the two painters.[47] Curtain backdrops are also a stock feature of many strands of photographic imagery, to the extent that Bacon's allusion seems over-determined. They are ubiquitous in the tradition of painted portraiture, as extended by contemporary society photographers such as Cecil Beaton. Comparisons have been made with the mysterious images of mediums emerging from the shadowed gaps between heavy, theatrical drapes in the photographs illustrating Schrenck-Notzing's *Phenomena of Materialisation*. The Nazi propaganda images that Bacon exploited extensively in the post-war decade often featured settings rendered glamorous, photogenic and spuriously dignified by the inclusion of swathes of fabric, as a backdrop to oratorical performances by the party leadership.[48] Indeed, Bacon's first curtain appears in *Man with Microphones* (1946), which plainly refers back to such imagery. The motif also featured routinely in magazine images of theatrically posed male body builders, mainly imported from America, which evidently functioned as a form of gay pornography during a period when homosexuality remained illegal. The effect seems especially close to the setting Bacon devised for an unfinished and abandoned picture from around 1949 that emerged after his death.[49]

In *Study after Velasquez* (1950), the parallel black and grey striations that served previously to describe curtain folds have floated free from their representational moorings, generating a semi-transparent shuttering (*plate 3*). Bacon's experimentation was remarked upon by Rawsthorne in a letter to Rose Pulham:

> The background is the same grey curtain with a suggestion of the folds in front of the head – 'dissolving' is Francis' own expression, for this kind of double vision. I gather he wants to make it even more accentuated .... This is

> a much more austere painting than any I have seen of his. The modelling, and it really is the only word to use in this case, is quite remarkable. The whole thing has a beautiful texture.[50]

The effect is commonly compared to Titian's portrait of Cardinal Filippo Archinto semi-concealed by a transparent curtain, a picture in Philadelphia that Bacon is unlikely to have known, even in reproduction.[51] Photography once again offers more compelling precedents. Despite the gulf of imagery, one possible point of reference for *Study after Velasquez* is the extraordinary body of photographs, emanating from Nazi Germany, that celebrated the 'cathedral of light' made up of parallel searchlight beams directed into the night sky, as devised by Albert Speer for the Berlin Olympics and the culminating ceremony at the Nuremberg rallies (*plate 4*).[52] Figures seen through veils or partially opaque materials are a recurrent element in fashion imagery from the 1930s, as in the image by Georges Saad reproduced in *Photography Year Book* or, again, in the work of Rose Pulham (*plate 5*).[53] Equally, Bacon would doubtless have encountered the photograph by Erich Salomon, reproduced in *Picture Post* magazine in 1947, where the great and the good are captured, unaware and unposed, through a diaphanous curtain (*plate 6*).[54] The artist's own interest in Salomon may well be reflected in the lengthy excursus on 'the camera as polemicist' in John Russell's 1971 monograph, which drew on conversations and a long-term acquaintance between the two men.[55] For Russell, the importance of Salomon was the way that his work in Germany in the late 1920s 'had broken the cipher of public life by penetrating into forbidden places at forbidden times', capturing, for example, 'moments late at night when the delegates to an international conference collapsed on the sofa like stranded landfish, jaws agape, waistcoats awry, liqueur glasses filled just once too often'.[56] Of Bacon's work up to the mid-1950s, the critic remarked that 'human nature is caught off balance ... in ways that relate quite closely to Dr Salomon's intrusions'.[57] This particular juxtaposition with *Study after Velasquez* reinforces Sylvester's probing account in 1954 of what the artist, by now a close friend, was deriving from the visual language of photography:

> Bacon is fascinated by the peculiar tonal unity of photographs, their 'all-overness' of texture ... he is attracted by the velvety consistency of images on newsprint, as well as by the way in which the forms in such images are blurred as if dissolving away. Bacon's interest in these quasi-atmospheric effects of the conjunction of the camera lens and the behaviour of printer's ink on the porous surface of cheap newsprint is the outcome of his desire to make the vibrations of the paint itself his means of communication.[58]

In the context of more experimental photography, Bacon's fusion of figure and shuttering can, for example, be associated with early works by Nigel Henderson, in which figures merge into semi-transparent screens comprising, for instance, glass windows complicated by reflections or by distorting textures, the rows of nylon stockings or mannequin heads on market stalls, or the access to shop interiors.[59] The precise dating of these images is uncertain, and it is conceivable that awareness of Bacon's new work fed into the work of the photographer, both here and in Henderson's stressed bather photographs with their distortions of the naked male form produced by stretching the print while enlarging. An example of the latter remained amongst Bacon's studio detritus, though we do not know when and whether it was either given or purchased.[60] Henderson appropriated his imagery in

Not available online

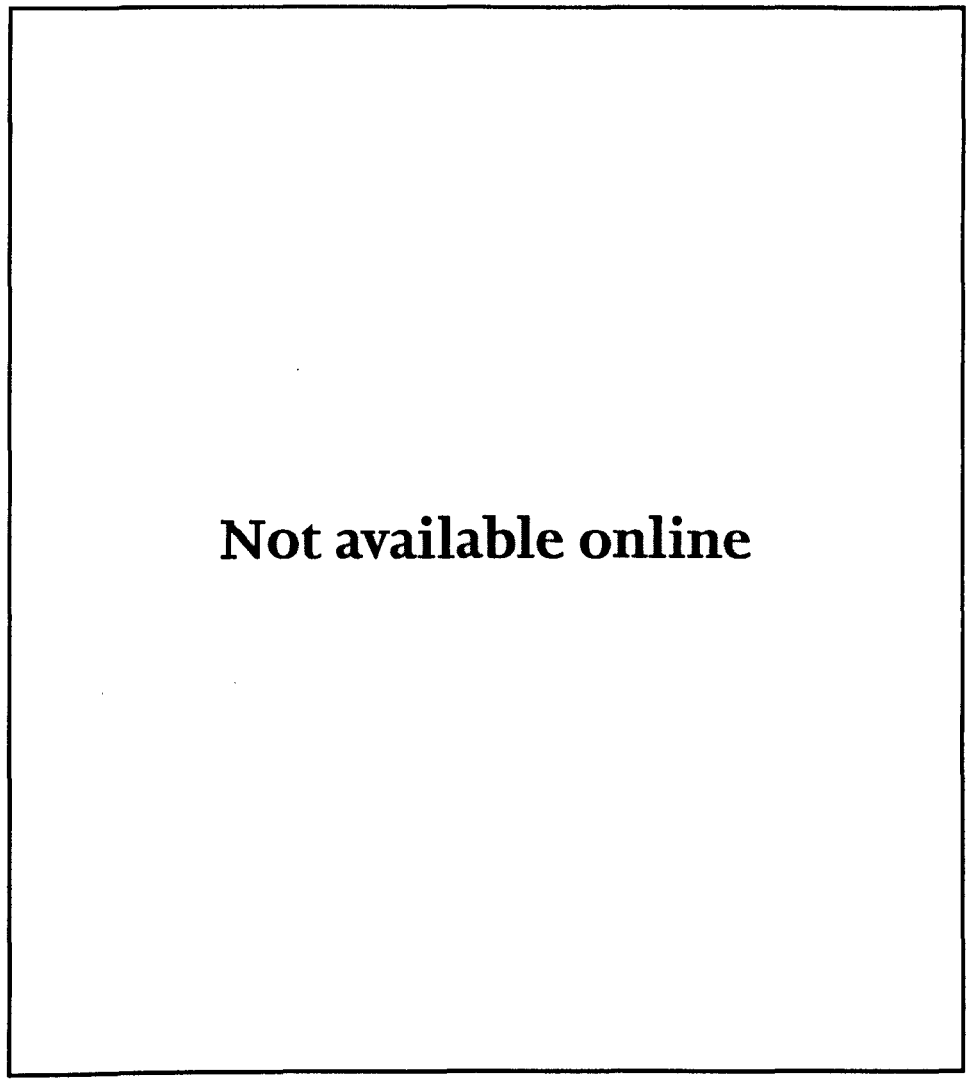
7 Francis Bacon, *Man with Dog*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 1520 × 1170 mm. Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery. © The Estate of Francis Bacon/ DACS 2008. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.

this work from a Victorian lantern slide, which seems akin to Bacon, while the sense of artistic intervention was reinforced by pleating prints and rephotographing them, a process that again brings to mind Bacon's physical manipulations of photographs. Henderson's work more obviously reflected the inspiration of László Moholy-Nagy's street photography from the late 1930s, and the innovative photography assembled in his book *Vision in Motion* (1947), where motifs are shown as radically disrupted by the patterns of light and shadow created by physical or optical filters.[61] It is possible that such images were a catalyst for Bacon too. We know that the volume was in his possession, since the Dublin archive also contains a photograph extracted from it showing a complex effect of sunlight passing through shuttered windows.[62] *Vision in Motion* is more commonly encountered as one of a cluster of books with photographic illustrations that became touchstones in the late 1940s for the likes of Henderson and his close friend, the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi. Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art* (1931) was another such catalyst that Bacon also owned and foraged from.[63] Such volumes were not obvious points of reference for the artist, and it is possible that his interest was stimulated by his association with these younger figures, who may in turn have responded to Bacon's one-man show in late 1949, and to the originality of his pictorial acknowledgement of photographic sources, as later transmitted by their supporter Alloway. Such interplay with the emerging Independent Group is indicative of an awareness of self-consciously artistic photography that underpinned Bacon's espousal of 'the photographic delineation of form'.

Advanced photography in an international context provides further points of contact with Bacon. One affinity is the theme of the enclosed small-scale interior, often dark, which served on either side of 1950 as a metaphor for the retreat to inward spaces in the work of many photographers (e.g. Irving Penn, Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, Josef Sudek and the occasional production at this stage of Rose Pulham).[64] Moreover, several photographers at this time were drawn to effects of variable or selective focus, the manipulation of the contrast between sharp and blurred components of a scene, and the cultivation of accidental- and spontaneous-looking effects evoking the snapshot, located at the opposite stylistic pole from the formality and consistent precision of predecessors such as Walker Evans or Henri Cartier-Bresson. Graininess and blur are especially associated with the innovative post-war street photography of Otto Steinert, who labelled a new 'subjective photography' tendency in a German context in 1951, and that of his American contemporaries such as Louis Faurer, Robert Frank and William Klein. Comparably extreme and disquieting effects occur in much of Bacon's work at that time, as in the varied resolution in *Study for Crouching Nude* of 1952, where the vulnerability of the figure is enhanced by its ethereal description, in contrast to the hard-edged definition of its surroundings.

There are particular parallels of sensibility between Bacon and Frank, presumably coincidental though the two men could have encountered one another when

8 Francis Bacon, *Untitled (Crouching Figures)*, c. 1952. Oil on canvas, 1473 × 1322 cm. The Estate of Francis Bacon, courtesy of Faggionato Fine Arts, London (on long-term loan to The Courtauld Gallery, London). Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.



Frank worked in Britain for several months around 1950. A copy of the first French edition (1958) of Frank's legendary book *The Americans* was unearthed in Bacon's studio archive.[65] Whether or not he was aware of Bacon's work, Frank was certainly attentive to artistic developments, and was clearly affected in New York, his principal base, by the aesthetic and improvisational ethos of gestural abstract expressionists such as Willem De Kooning and Franz Kline. If we return to Bacon's *Study after Velasquez* (1950), the sensation of the solid figure seen through, and dematerialized by, an all-over vertical shuttering generates a spatial ambiguity that would be heightened for the viewer by reflections in the glazing that Bacon used in presenting his pictures. In Frank's *London* (1951), a variety of reflective surfaces are observed through a surface that itself bears the traces of a reflected curtain.[66] The subjects could hardly be more divergent, but the two works manifest a strikingly comparable aesthetic language. Likewise, Bacon's *Man with Dog* of 1953 brings to mind Frank's well-known *New York City* from the following year, a raw and spontaneous-looking image shot probably without any reference to the camera's viewfinder (*plate 7*).[67] The connections between the two works extend from the uncluttered pavement settings and the cut-off black silhouettes of the two walking men to the abjection and pathos of the central feature, dog and legless man respectively, and of course to the emphatic blurring, unmitigated by passages of sharper focus, that evokes both the sensation of fleeting movement and

the subjectivity in a more emotional sense of the implied perceiving agent. For Frank, it has been said, 'blur and other half-controlled accidents could be recoded ... as signs of fractured experience, of the anxious immersion of the photographer/viewer in the chaos of the world'.[68] The existential isolation of the dog in this and related pictures by Bacon finds its closest corollary in the image captured in London by Frank of a forlorn and unprepossessing bulldog, excluded from the massed humanity lined up behind it who seem oblivious to its presence.[69] Overall, such affinities with the likes of Rose Pulham, Henderson and Frank suggest that Bacon probably had a closer alignment with current avant-garde photography than did any other innovative painter of his day, and that this is a key component of his originality.

The works from the early 1950s are interesting, finally, in relation to the complex interplay between thematic preoccupations and the animating impact of photography. Schematically, did Bacon's reactions to the imagery and visual vocabulary of photographs come before and stimulate ideas of pictorial content, or did meanings projected for paintings shape his appropriations from photography? Existing commentary tends to take its cue from the artist's remark about photographs serving as suggestive triggers for ideas, implying that Bacon, in his creative 'haze', was the virtually passive medium through which sensations, feelings and impressions from photographs, films, books, private experiences and so forth mysteriously passed, through the intermediary of accidental, subconscious processes. The outcome was powerful, evocative pictures, rooted in and addressing the faculty of instinct rather than rational intellect. Bacon typically insisted: 'I'm just trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can. I don't even know what half of them mean. I'm not saying anything.'[70] The alternative to this 'automatist' model is to consider whether, either generally or in the case of the other half of his work, Bacon might have approached the canvas armed with conscious ideas, intentions and a repertoire of particular image types in mind, even if these were subject to minor or substantial revision within the creation of works. Bacon's lists of pictures he envisaged making, and the series format in which he so frequently worked in the 1950s, imply the role of preconception in his creativity.[71] In the case of one series, we have an inkling of the association he himself made between an image and the underlying meanings it embodied. In November 1954, while working on the *Man in Blue* pictures, he told Sylvester in a letter that he was 'excited about the new series I am doing – it is about dreams and life in hotel bedrooms'.[72] Can we assume, then, that Bacon often had some such notion of what a picture he was working on, or was about to embark upon, was 'about'? If so, decisions about appropriating photographic imagery might need to be viewed as secondary to an idea of pictorial content, rather than as the spur to images. Conceivably, he sometimes decided to explore an idea, and then realized it by retrieving particular photographic images from his studio stock, and adapting what he needed to the pictorial purpose at hand. The scenario is compatible with Russell's remark about the photographs Bacon had long been accumulating:


The Cameraman Loses Consciousness, as the Lion is Just About to be Driven Off by Rescuers

9 'The Cameraman Loses Consciousness'. Illustration from 'Mauled by a Lion in Africa', *Picture Post*, 9 August 1947.

'Bacon has at one time or another hoarded thousands of such photographs; and just as James Joyce was said to be able to put his hand on just the book or newspaper or magazine in which he could find the everyday phrase that he wanted to metamorphose, so Bacon knows every one of his strange family of images by name.'[73]

An interesting case study is provided by Bacon's several variations on the image of a crouching naked male seen from a three-quarter side and back view, with his nearest arm extended towards the ground and his head inclined downwards so that it is barely visible. Earlier explorations may have been destroyed, but the configuration first appears in the Detroit *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952) and *Untitled (Crouching Figures)*, currently on loan to the Courtauld Galleries, which has also been dated to the early 1950s (*plate 8*). It is repeated in several subsequent works.[74] Matthew Gale has described the motif as 'a potent synthesis of Bacon's disparate vocabulary of images', drawing on such varied artistic sources as Michelangelo, Cézanne and Masaccio, while also echoing poses encountered in Muybridge's images of rowing and, behind the figure in the Detroit picture, the numbers accompanying grid backdrops in the famous sequential photographs of movement.[75] Another possible catalyst was the big Degas show at the Tate Gallery in the autumn of 1952; one can easily imagine Bacon reacting with excitement to the frank presentation of the body and the striated technique in works such as the Edinburgh *Woman Drying Herself*, a pastel from the mid-1890s.[76] Whatever the role of such stimuli, the actual source for the figure turns out to have been photographic and much less artistic. Bacon's nude was derived from an illustrated feature about a lioness attacking a photographer in the wild, which had appeared in *Picture Post* magazine back in 1947, in the same issue in fact as the feature on Erich Salomon (*plate 9*).[77] The artist was clearly mesmerized by the largest of the images, where the seated lioness assumes a decidedly anthropomorphic appearance and seems to take on an incongruously gentle and protective attitude towards the recumbent figure. In the paintings under consideration, the viewpoint edited out the individuality implicit in facial features and projected an animalistic condition of humanity, an association reinforced by the squatting or crouching posture that recalls the body language of apes, complementing the cage-like setting in *Study for Crouching Nude* or the landscape backgrounds elsewhere. We can now see how the image of an animal with human attributes has been metamorphosed, through pictorial editing, into a figure with animal undertones. Aside from the detailed articulation of the body, the relationship with the photograph is implicit in the pool of shadow to the right of the figure in *Study for Crouching Nude*, while in *Untitled (Crouching Figures)* and related pictures it is acknowledged by the inclusion of the second, lying figure with bent legs, the victim in the original photograph. In Bacon's hands, the imagery takes on unmistakable homoerotic overtones, with a suggestion perhaps of the instinctive violence of the kill transmuted into some sadomasochistic fantasy. The appropriation suggests that he might have conceived the notion, in or around 1952, of creating a pictorial distillation of some state of sexual desire, and at the same time responding to existing presentations of the nude. Such thinking prompted him to dig out the photograph from *Picture Post* that had been in the studio for five years to provide the springboard for his figure. Of course, this account is much too crude. But some such process seems to be captured in the artist's frank comments, towards the end of his career, about the 'incredibly useful source of inspiration' that photographs had always provided: 'Images also help me find and realise ideas. I look at hundreds of very different, contrasting images and I pinch details from them, rather like people who eat from other people's plates. When I paint, I want to paint an image from my imagination, and this image is subsequently transformed.'[78]

Notes

1 David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, London, 1993, 194.
2 Such a description is attempted in Martin Hammer, 'Contradiction and continuity in the art of Francis Bacon', in Rina Arya, ed., *Francis Bacon: Critical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Brighton, forthcoming 2012.
3 Ralph Rugoff, 'Painting Modern Life', exh. cat., *The Painting of Modern Life*, Hayward Gallery, London, 2007, 10.
4 The early historiography is sketched in Martin Harrison, 'Latent Images', exh. cat., *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, Göttingen, 2009, 71–2.
5 Prints from Hunter's three original negatives are included in Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, eds, *Francis Bacon*, London, 2008, 16, 170 and 171. For the suggestion that he chose photographs that resonated with paintings visible in the studio, see Chris Stephens, 'Animal', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 92.
6 David Sylvester, 'Francis Bacon', *Britain Today*, February 1954, 25.
7 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 30.
8 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 30.
9 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 57–8.
10 *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, shown at the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin and Compton Verney in 2009–10.
11 Martin Harrison, *In Camera. Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, London, 2005.
12 Some identifications of material in Dublin are recorded in Martin Harrison and Rebecca Daniels, *Incunabula*, London, 2008.
13 See Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, New Haven and London, 2005, 46. Bacon's longstanding interest is implied in John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, London, 1979, 67–70.
14 Martin Hammer and Chris Stephens, '"Seeing the story of one's time": Appropriations from Nazi photography in the work of Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain*, November 2009, 317–53. The argument will be elaborated in my forthcoming book *Francis Bacon: and Nazi Propaganda* (London, 2013).
15 Discussed in Hammer, 'Contradiction and continuity'.
16 The wartime episode is discussed in Hammer and Stephens, '"Seeing the story of one's time"', 325 . On Bacon's purposeful manipulations, see Marcus Finke, '"I don't find it at all violent myself": Bacon's material practice and the human body', *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, 122–33.
17 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 114.
18 The image survives in a battered state in the Dublin archive (see Harrison and Daniels, *Incunabula*, 139).
19 D. C. Somervell, *100 Years in Pictures*, London, 1951, 202–3. For a distressed reproduction from Bacon's copy, suggesting the book persistently lay open at this double-page spread, see Harrison and Daniels, *Incunabula*, 42–3.
20 John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in Ronald Alley, *Francis Bacon*, London, 1964, 17.
21 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 58.
22 Roland Barthes, 'The photographic message', in *Image. Music. Text*, London, 1977, 15–31.
23 Barthes, 'The third meaning', in *Image. Music. Text*, 52–68.
24 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, London, 1983, 21.
25 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 20–1.
26 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 20.
27 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26–7.
28 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55.
29 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 66.
30 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 71.
31 Bacon's notion of 'artificiality' is elaborated, for example, in Sylvester, *Interviews*, 40, 53, 125, 148, 162, 172, 179 and 180.
32 *Francis Bacon: In Conversation with Michel Archimbaud*, London, 1993, 167.
33 Harrison, *In Camera*, 109.
34 Typescript in *Too Short a Summer: The Photographs of Peter Rose Pulham*, exh. cat., Impressions Gallery of Photography, York, 1979, 16.
35 See Robin Muir, *A Maverick Eye: The Street Photography of John Deakin*, London, 2002.
36 *Too Short a Summer*, 17.
37 *Too Short a Summer*, 17.
38 *Too Short a Summer*, 19.
39 Harrison and Daniels, *Incunabula*, 187 (see commentary).
40 Isabel Rawsthorne, letter to Peter Rose Pulham, 3 July [1949], Rawsthorne Papers, Tate (TGA 9612/1/3/27).
41 Lawrence Alloway, '"Pop art" since 1949', *The Listener*, 27 December 1962, reprinted Richard Kalina, ed., *Imagining the Present: Essays by Lawrence Alloway*, London and New York, 81.
42 Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, 47.
43 The point is cursorily made in Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in Alley, *Francis Bacon*, 17, and Harrison, *In Camera*, 106.
44 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 22–3.
45 T. Korda, ed., *Photography Year Book Vol II 1936/7 – The International Annual of Camera Art* , London, 1937, 47.
46 Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, back cover.
47 See, for example, Freud's *Interior Scene* (1948: illustrated in Catherine Lampert, *Lucian Freud*, exh. cat., Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2007, 45) and *Painter and Daughter* (1949: in Lawrence Gowing, *Lucian Freud*, London, 1982, plate 80).
48 Hammer and Stephens, '"Seeing the story of one's time"', 330.
49 *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, 43.
50 Isabel Rawsthorne, letter to Peter Rose Pulham, 30 December [1950], Rawsthorne Papers, Tate (TGA 9612/1/3/43).
51 The Titian comparison was launched in Lawrence Alloway's introduction to *Francis Bacon*, exh. cat., The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1963, 14–16.
52 Hammer and Stephens, '"Seeing the story of one's time"', 340–3.
53 *Photography Year Book Vol II 1936/7*,182; a relevant example by Rose Pulham is *Fashion Study* (1930s, Victoria & Albert Museum).
54 'He photographed Europe in decay', *Picture Post*, 9 August 1947, 8.
55 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 67.
56 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 68.
57 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 68.
58 Sylvester, 'Francis Bacon', 25–6.
59 Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson: Parallel of Life and Art*, London, 2001, 50–1, 56–7, 69, 72–3, and 75.
60 Victoria Walsh, 'Real imagination is technical imagination', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 76–7.
61 Mary Benedetta, *The Street Markets of London* (*Photography by L. Moholy-Nagy*), London, 1936 (e.g. plate opposite 63); L. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, Chicago, IL, 1947, figs 231, 236, 277, 279. On the significance of *Vision in Motion* for Henderson, see Walsh, *Nigel Henderson*, 21–3.
62 Harrison and Daniels, *Incunabula*, 119.
63 See Walsh, 'Real imagination is technical imagination', 76.
64 On this theme and the broad, international sensibility in post-war photography, see Colin Westerbeck, 'Beyond the photographic frame', in Sarah Greenhough, Joel Snyder, David Travis and Colin Westerbeck, *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow*, Washington, DC, 1989, 348–52.
65 Harrison, *In Camera*, 86–7.
66 Reproduced in Robert Frank, *Story Lines*, Göttingen, 2004, 64. As will be evident from this paragraph, I had hoped to reproduce three works by Frank, but was denied permission, without any explanation, by the artist.
67 Reproduced in Greenhough et al., *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow*, 357.
68 David Campany, '"Almost the same thing": Some thoughts on the collector-photographer', in Emma Dexter and Thomas Weski (eds), *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph*, London, 2003, 34.
69 Reproduced in Frank, *Story Lines*, 65.
70 Sylvester, *Interviews*, 82.
71 For the lists, see Matthew Gale, *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, London, 1999. The role of the series format is broached in Hammer, 'Contradiction and continuity'.
72 Cited in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 122.
73 Russell, *Francis Bacon*, 66.
74 See *Untitled (Crouching Nude on Rail)* (1953), *Figures in Landscape* (1956), *Two Figures in a Room* (1959) and *Portrait of George Dyer Crouching* (1966). The motif can perhaps be seen as a more descriptive reprise of the left-hand panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944).
75 Matthew Gale, 'Zone', in Gale and Stephens, *Francis Bacon*, 110.
76 See Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Back to Degas', Rothenstein Lecture, Tate Britain, November 2011, published in *Tate Papers* (Spring 2012).
77 'Mauled by a Lion in Africa', *Picture Post*, 9 August 1947, 13.
78 'Francis Bacon: I painted to be loved', *The Art Newspaper*, 137, June 2003, 28.

MARTIN HAMMER

Contradiction and Continuity in the Art of Francis Bacon

In this paper I wish to step back from the claims about expressive intensity and strong content that are usually at the forefront of critical and art-historical commentary on the work of Francis Bacon. Instead I shall focus on the pictorial mechanics of his work. This approach at least has the merit of raising some fresh and interesting questions about his art, such as how were the paintings produced, practically speaking, and what distinctive pictorial sensations do they offer the viewer? How, in addition, is meaning embedded in the visual language of his pictures, extending to his recurrent preferences for series and triptych formats? In 1953, Bacon famously proclaimed that Matthew Smith was 'one of the very few English painters since Constable and Turner to be concerned with painting – that is, with attempting to make idea and technique inseparable. Painting in this sense tends towards a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa' (Bacon, 1953: 12). In Bacon too, albeit in a very different manner, image and paint need to be seen as interlocked rather than distinct, within the processes of both making and viewing. To that end, I want to focus on elements of continuity and recycling in his art. Contrary to the myth of permanent revolution, art historians have begun to explore repetition as a wider phenomenon within the production of art in the modern period, providing a context for estimating how it functions in Bacon (Kahng, 2007). How does the reiteration of imagery and pictorial devices manifest itself in his particular working procedures, and how does it impinge on the experience of spectators?

Consumption

The centenary show staged in London, Madrid and New York during 2008–9 conveyed the phases through which Bacon's art evolved over the six decades or so of his working life. The catalogue likewise characterized the unfolding of his artistic language with new subtlety (Gale and Stephens, 2008). Yet the show also highlighted striking continuities across the oeuvre in its entirety. Scale, format and visual presentation comprise the most immediate manifestations of Bacon's constancy. It has long been noted that from around 1950 he painted the bulk of his pictures on vertical canvasses of two specific sizes, either around 200 × 150 cm or approximately 35 × 30 cm, and that the physical scale of the entire figures or heads remained strikingly consistent, at somewhat less than life-size, within and across the two formats. When David Sylvester confronted Bacon with this observation, the artist conceded his 'rigidness' (Sylvester, 1993: 21). From the early 1960s onwards both sizes of picture were also regularly grouped into triptychs (the alternative possibility of the diptych is rarely encountered). Bacon's presentation of his pictures, from which he never departed, involved protective glazing and traditional gilded and moulded frames, elements that are of course edited out of reproductions, but form an integral part of the sensation one receives from the actual pictures. Repetition is likewise manifest in the replicas he made in the latter part of his career of early compositions such as *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (c. 1944) and *Painting* (1946), of which he created new versions in 1988 and 1971 respectively. Matthew Gale has discussed Bacon's motivations in redoing two of his canonical compositions on a suitably monumental scale and with a stability of surface that the originals lacked, which enabled the new pictures to serve as surrogates for the originals at a time when big exhibitions were starting to proliferate (Gale, 1998–9).[1] In these instances repetition functions virtually as a form of pictorial reproduction, as it

1 Gale 1998–9, entry on *Second Version of Triptych 1944* (1988).

does in the work of other major artists (De Chirico, Duchamp, Gabo, and Warhol are just a few examples that come readily to mind).

But what about less literal forms of continuity? How might we characterize what even one of his most eloquent admirers, after viewing the big 1971 show in Paris, acknowledged to be the element of 'monotony' in his art (Forge, 1971: 631). It seems redundant to rehearse familiar generalities about the persistent despairing or violent atmosphere of his work, reflecting the artist's outlook on life or historical circumstances. Less attention has been paid to what might be termed the underlying *rhetoric* of Bacon's art, the recurrent pictorial means to any such expressive ends. Is it possible to discern continuities at a level deeper than reiterated imagery, devices or motifs? From the viewer's perspective, an initial constant is the characteristic relationship between the parts and the whole. The pictures persistently dispense with intricacy or complexity of overall organization – what is commonly referred to under the heading of 'composition'. A simple, balanced symmetry, or basic asymmetry around an implied central axis, underpin the structure of many works, just as the bulk of the triptychs are emphatically symmetrical, with balancing outer wings flanking a more centred image in the middle (from the c.1944 *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* onwards). The components of the 'setting' might form equally rudimentary visual rhythms, as in the rhythm of curves ascending a picture such as *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963). This method guarantees a certain obvious architecture, within which Bacon consistently disrupted our received expectation of pictorial order. Certainly an overwhelming impression emanating from the centenary show was that painting after painting demonstrated an impulse, singular in degree if not in kind, to incorporate multiple contradictions within the confines of an individual picture, as a feature of both imagery and style. Willed and extreme oppositions seemed to be more consistently visible, more inherent in the very structure of Bacon's art, than is the case for any immediate predecessor or contemporary.[2] Contradictions are, one might say, at the core of his artistic

2 There is a certain affinity with the current work of the British abstract painter Alan Davie, though the juxtaposition of contrary modes is less extreme than in Bacon,

rhetoric, and work to undermine the typical concern amongst painters, whether modern or pre-modern, to achieve a state of resolution or harmony, in terms of representation and formal language, such that diversity of incident in a picture is registered in relation to an overall coherence of surface, composition, technique, and imagery. Unity in diversity is the well-known mantra for this general ideal, whereas in Bacon the diversity patently fails in many respects to resolve. A key element in Bacon's originality is the way in which his paintings look highly controlled and ordered, even architectural, at the same time as they appear spontaneous, fragmentary and verging, in passages, on formlessness and disintegration.

Oppositions or tensions enter most obviously into the interplay between figure and setting. Most of Bacon's pictures represent bodies whose contortions imply malleability, sensuality, vitality and potential dynamism, suggesting a continuity between human and animal orders of being. Such animal affinities are heightened by the frequent use of nakedness, evoking an essential vulnerability. The expressive tone of such imagery is, however, harder to pin down than the critical clichés suggest. Bacon's paintings have often been taken to intimate such momentous themes as violence, lust, catastrophe, apprehension, or mortality.[3] Many of his thematic preoccupations – meat, wounds, the Crucifixion, Greek Tragedy, bullfighting, boxing, bellicose dictators, crime – explore areas of human obsession and fantasy that might be distilled, in Bacon's own shorthand formulation, as 'the violence of life'. But one can equally extract from his work such connotations as tenderness, compassion, desire, even love. As Deleuze tellingly observed: 'If there is feeling in Bacon, it is not a taste for horror, it is pity, an intense pity' (Deleuze, 2003: xi). Whatever the emotional resonance generated by the figures, the pictures often read, at

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while his stylistic fragmentation is recapitulated in the work of subsequent figures such as David Salle in the 1980s and Dexter Dalwood more recently. Bacon is one direct point of reference among many for the work of Dalwood, who contributed a thought-provoking review of the centenary show ('Francis Bacon', *Burlington Magazine*, December, 2008: 841–2).

3 See Gale and Stephens 2008, indicating how far this model persisted in the centenary show.

the same time, as seductively decorative, aesthetically self-conscious in their manipulations of colour, line and surface texture. For instance, the flat orange backdrops of the *Three Studies* and other early works presage the bright synthetically colourful backgrounds of numerous pictures from the late 1950s onwards, after Bacon had emerged from a darker period in between. From early on commentators have stressed the sheer sensuous beauty of his pictorial surfaces, notwithstanding the seemingly disconcerting imagery embedded within them, and have frequently reached for comparisons with Old Masters such as Velázquez.

Systematic contradiction can also be discerned at a more basic illustrative level. For example, we might be left uncertain about whether figures are occupying interior or exterior spaces. Landscape elements are inserted into enclosed rooms, as in the substitution of a grassy field for the ground plane in *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954). The opened-up umbrellas in several early pictures carry a similar ambiguity. More generally, if the figures manifest a relatively consistent treatment, it is also a recurrent feature of Bacon's paintings that those bodies are played off against interior settings and, so to speak, accessories, which read as hard, geometric, straight-edged, synthetic and often metallic. The larger opposition of figure and interior is frequently mediated by secondary elements that provide direct support or enclosure, such as chairs, thrones, beds, cages, curtains, and crosses. The elements that accompany the figures may strike one as perversely banal or domestic. In the *Three Studies*, for instance, the work in which Bacon recognized his artistic identity, the wounded, disconsolate hybrid creature in the central panel is juxtaposed with what looks like the supporting leg of a table or tripod. Thereafter, we encounter such fixtures as tassels (e.g. *Head VI*, 1949); tubular metal structures (*Study for a Figure II*, 1953–4); mattresses (*Henrietta Moraes*, 1966) but also simple colourful pieces of contemporary furniture, such as chairs and sofas (*Three Figures in a Room*, 1964); toilets (*Triptych, May–June 1973*, 1973) as well as sinks (*Self-Portrait*, 1973); window blinds (*Painting*, 1946); curtains (*Study from the Human Body*, 1949); items of clothing, such as tweed coats (*Figure Study II*, 1945–6), the suits featured in many 1950s pictures such as the *Man in Blue* series, the finery of Bacon's numerous popes, or even curious accoutrements such as underpants (*Portrait of John Edwards*, 1988) and cricket pads (*Figure in*

Movement, 1985). Elsewhere we find safety pins (*Study from the Human Body*, 1949); ashtrays (*Two Studies for Portrait of George Dyer*, 1968); mirrors (*Study of George Dyer in a Mirror*, 1968); numerous bare light bulbs (*Lying* Figure, 1969) and light switches (*Self-Portrait with a Watch*, 1973); newspapers, evoked by the passages of Letraset that he started quite late on in his career to apply to the picture surface (*Painting*, 1973); plants and flowers (*Figure Study I*, 1945–6); carpets and rugs (*Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror*, 1968); and many doors but also disembodied architectural features such as the window in *Paralytic Child Walking on All Fours (from Muybridge)* of 1961. The presence of such fixtures has led critics to note a connection with Bacon's activities in the early 1930s as a designer of modernist furniture and interiors. The observation fails to do justice to the pervasiveness and expressive charge of incongruous juxtapositions between figures and accessories in Bacon's paintings. The effect could be read, for instance, as anchoring dramatic behaviour and extreme emotion within the realm of the everyday.

From a more formalist perspective one can describe many Bacons as both painterly and linear, in the terminology of pioneer art historian Heinrich Wölfflin. Elements of the figurative matter and the background setting are given emphatically defined linear contours, while other passages are conspicuously built up with freely applied marks. Bacon consistently worked on the verso of the canvas, exploiting its coarse texture to generate contrasting effects of smooth and animated application. The latter range from touches that almost caress the canvas with a thinly loaded brush, as in *Head VI* (1949), to idiosyncratic methods of pressing fabric or other foreign substances into wet paint to create diverse textural effects, as well as throwing splodges of white paint at the canvas so they assume random-looking configurations. Nick Chare has argued recently that in Bacon, as in other gay artists such as Jasper Johns, 'touches that involve the use of fabric can be gendered as feminine' while the 'chance blobs and splatters', with their ejaculatory overtones, 'represent a hyperbolic performance of abstract expressionist technique, a parodic enactment of its masculinist values paraded as dirty laundry' (Chare, 2009: 684–5).

The resultant descriptive effect is that Bacon's paintings often seem to move in and out of focus, as though certain elements of the settings are

hard and tactile, while others, notably the figures they enclose, seem to be crystallizing into form, or else dissolving into some more nebulous or ethereal state. This is a recurrent characteristic of Bacon's pope pictures, the series of men in blue, and one-off paintings such as *Crouching Nude*, works from the early 1950s. It is evident again in some late works, where passages of paint are sprayed onto the canvas, although the pictures of the 1960s and 1970s generally feature more insistently tangible elements. The inconsistent focus correlates with a further ambiguity, whereby a sense of static, monumental form is undercut by suggestions of the expenditure of bodily energy. In the Tate's *Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1966), the sitter appears in one sense still and solid, reminiscent of a classical bust, projecting a sideways glance that is both imperious and watchful. Yet the accumulation of rhythmically arranged, semi-transparent forms serves to dematerialize the figure, suggesting a process of motion enacted by either sitter or observer.

The imagery in Bacon's work is represented by the familiar methods of modelling and contouring to suggest forms in fictive space. Elements overlap one another to create recession, and the setting often incorporates strong indications of linear perspective. This extends to the diagrammatic spatial frames which contradict the prevailing stylized realism, unless they are read, too literally, as glass boxes. Then again, within the same painting, we might well encounter lines, arrows, areas of paint texture, random-looking marks, patches of unmodulated colour, and areas of coarse canvas. Indeed, bare canvas has an emphatic presence in many works between around 1950 and the early 1960s, as well as in many late works, but it also features in sections of paintings that are otherwise consistently layered, as in the central panel of the early *Three Studies*, or even in the thick, heavily worked *Head II* (1949), which nevertheless remains unworked in the lower left hand corner. Overall, then, the pictures consistently end up looking very flat, comprising marks and shapes that adhere visually to the picture plane, and at the same time suggestive of layers and pockets of space, encasing tangible forms played upon by light. Moreover, some aspects of a picture by Bacon might appear painstaking, almost slick in their technical virtuosity, whereas other passages register as wilfully crass and incompetent. A flagrant example of this is provided by the naked

portrait of *Henrietta Moraes* (1966), where the highly wrought execution and the emphatically sculptural description of the figure on the bed are undercut by Bacon's late insertion of crude, summary brushmarks evoking the metallic substructure of a fold-up bed. The manner in which his paintings so often contain manifestly unfinished or provisional passages provides a visual equivalent to the 'study' terminology so frequently used in the titles he gave his pictures, starting once again with *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*.

In one sense, Bacon's pictures look aggressively, even brashly modern, in their figurative distortions, their flattening and fragmentation of pictorial space, the highly non-naturalistic use of colour, and their defiance of traditional forms of skill and pictorial coherence. They also include overt allusions to contemporary visual media, such as film stills and many kinds of vernacular photography, including photo-booth strips. But, at the same time, they proclaim a bravura painterliness, and possess an unmistakably traditional, even old-masterly air, thanks to their monumental scale, the medium they employ of oil paint on canvas, and their evident allusions to the genres of the altarpiece, history painting and portraiture. Such features are reinforced by direct quotations from pre-modern imagery, such as Grünewald's Crucifixions and other religious themes, the image of Pope Innocent X by Velázquez, Van Gogh's self-portraiture, and Ingres' *Oedipus and the Sphinx*. The traditionalist aspect, asserted as it is subverted, is signalled in another way by Bacon's consistent use, already noted, of gilded frames and reflective glazing. He adopted this display strategy in the mid- to late 1940s, in part perhaps for practical, conservation reasons given his preference at this stage for combining paint and pastel (as in *Painting*, 1946) and his stated desire to avoid applying varnish to the surface of his pictures (Sylvester, 1993: 87). However, the aesthetic significance that this method quickly acquired for Bacon is implicit in the first published articles on his work, written by Robert Melville for *Horizon* magazine and *World Review*. It is highly idiosyncratic that these should have featured reproductions of several paintings with the frames included (Melville, 1949–50, 1951

and 1952).[4] Presumably it was Bacon who suggested the idea, relishing the stronger simulation of the physical presence of his paintings.

Bacon's recurrent pictorial idiom, as characterized here, correlates with the persona he projected when talking to Sylvester and others. It would be naïve to regard such articulations of his outlook as straightforward commentary on, or explanation of, the actual pictures. Rather, we might look for common denominators, at a more structural level, between his visual and verbal rhetoric. Just as the paintings persistently confound our expectation of coherent form and meaning, so his conceptual and verbal thought processes seem to cultivate paradox. For Bacon, the work involved a 'kind of tightrope walk between what is called figurative art and abstraction' (Sylvester, 1993: 12). He sought in his paintings an 'ambiguous precision' and a 'very ordered image' which nevertheless 'comes about by chance' (Sylvester, 1993: 12, 56). In an unpublished text of 1962, J. T. Soby quoted Bacon as having commented 'seven or eight years' previously: 'What I've always wanted to do is to make things that are very formal yet coming to bits' (J. T. Soby papers).[5] To Peppiatt he commented: 'What you really want is a kind of complicated simplicity – you want simplicity, but with all the implications of everything else within it. A reduction, a compression' (Peppiatt, 1996: 96–7). An effect of spontaneity was essential to the effect Bacon sought, yet its apparent opposite also comes to the fore when he talked about the presentation of the pictures:

> The frame is artificial and that's precisely why it's there; to reinforce the artificial nature of the painting. The more the artificiality of the painting is apparent, the better, and the more chance the painting has of working or of showing something. That might seem paradoxical, but it makes perfect sense in art: one achieves one's goal by using the maximum of artificial means, and one succeeds much more in doing something authentic when the artificiality is perfectly obvious. Take the example of Greek or Classical poets; their language was very artificial and highly stylized. They all worked within constraints, and yet it's precisely in doing so that they produced

4 Melville, 1949–50, 1951 and 1952.

5 J. T. Soby papers, Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

> their greatest works which give us, when we read them, that impression of freedom and spontaneity. (Archimbaud, 1993: 167)[6]

As with his own pictures, Bacon enjoyed types of photographic imagery where the soft, vulnerable, flexible forms of the human body are played off against geometric or regular grid formations, including Muybridge's studies of human motion, or against hard-edged equipment and diagrammatic additions in the illustrations to K. C. Clark's *Positioning in Radiography* (1939).[7] In the images in the bizarre volume *Phenomena of Materialisation* (published in English translation in 1920), to which Bacon was devoted, the passages of ethereal ectoplasmic matter in Baron von Schrenck-Notzing's photographs are constantly heightened in their insubstantiality by the contrast with sharply defined drapery. He derived endless delight from Aeschylus's perverse verbal image in a speech by Clytemnestra, 'The reek of human blood smiles out at me', as translated in W. B. Stanford's 1942 book about the ancient tragedian's literary style. Moreover, outside the aesthetic realm, Bacon was conscious in himself of a capacity to be 'optimistic and totally without hope', an attitude he famously characterized as 'exhilarated despair', which is rooted in a sense that 'if life excites you, its opposite, like a shadow, death, must also excite you' (Sylvester, 1993: 80, 83, and 78). He preferred to live domestically, we gather, in a situation of 'gilded squalor' (Sylvester, 1993: 52).

How might we make sense of the discordant pictorial idiom that I have tried to describe, ranging over Bacon's entire work? What satisfactions and significance might it have held for the artist? What did he conceive might be the likely impact on the spectator, of which he of course was always the first? I have focussed on his work in isolation, but to what extent can his aesthetic preferences be seen to embed allusions to the wider culture he inhabited? At some level, the widespread exploitation of incongruous

6 This elaborates an idea that Bacon derived from Van Gogh about the possibility of fictive transformations giving a truer sense of reality than literal accuracy, as conveyed in his letter to his brother Theo from Neunen [July 1885]: the connection is indicated in Michael Peppiatt's 1987 interview, reprinted in Peppiatt, 2008: 144.

7 Such sources of inspiration were indicated in Sylvester, 1993: 31–3.

juxtaposition in the work of Surrealist artists such as Masson and Magritte must have predisposed Bacon towards pictorial contradiction, as well as an improvisatory creative process, even if he eventually took against the specific manifestations of Surrealist practice. Equally, he could have found sustenance for thinking in terms of polarities from prominent writers. The numerous testimonies from those who spent time with Bacon, to the effect that he was, in one formulation, 'a very intelligent and comprehending man', encourage the assumption that he was familiar with ideas that were 'in the air' (Forge, 1976: 92). From early on, Bacon was evidently a great admirer of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, which were extensively translated and commented upon in Britain. *The Birth of Tragedy* may well have been a catalyst for Bacon's own fascination with classical Greek tragedy and for thinking about the arts more generally as emerging from a convergence of ecstatic intoxication (the Dionysiac) and the projection of a dream-like order and control (the Apollonian). Bacon's outlook of 'exhilarated despair' is uncannily reminiscent of Nietzsche's 'pessimism of strength', comprising 'an intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence' (Nietzsche, 1967: 17). One might equally note Sigmund Freud's tendency to employ conceptual polarities, the conscious and unconscious layers of the mind most obviously, but also, in his later writings, the life and death instincts (*Eros* and *Thanatos*) as the twin and contradictory determinants of human behaviour. Bacon stated once that he liked 'reading Freud very much because I like his way of explaining things' (Archimbaud, 1993: 84). Moreover he may have relished the affinities between his own work and recent forms of expression in other media which sought to disrupt traditional narrative continuities through devices of montage and jarring juxtaposition. It is well known that he retained a passion for the early poetry of T. S. Eliot, which required readers to negotiate radically different registers and discordant fragments of imagery.[8] Bacon could equally have been struck by parallels between the literary technique

8 Several scholars have argued for T. S. Eliot as a key point of reference and inspiration for Bacon's painting. See Gale and Stephens. 2008, *passim*.

of assembling disconnected images and allusions, as evident in poems like *The Waste Land*, and the radical montage idiom of early Soviet cinema. Such stimuli seem to converge in a work such as *Painting* (1946), where the impact of incongruous juxtapositions of figure, umbrella, blinds and Crucifixion-like carcass is immeasurably heightened by the decking out of the metallic podium with bones and ribs of beef, reinforcing the suggestion of a butcher's shop inherent in the suspended carcass. In the films of Sergei Eisenstein, a cinematic touchstone for artists and intellectuals in the interwar period, he encountered 'remarkable' visual imagery, Bacon later acknowledged, that 'strongly directed' him in his youth towards becoming a painter (Mellor, 2008: 57). He specified the impact of seeing *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, both of which incorporated symbolic references to butchery. In the climactic scene in *Strike*, images of the slaughter of animals in the abattoir and the massacre of rebellious workers are interwoven in one of Eisenstein's most extreme and dramatic exploitations of montage technique. In *Battleship Potemkin* it was the taking on board of rotten meat, and the sailor's refusal to eat it, that became the catalyst for the mutiny from which the entire tragic narrative of the film unfolded. In each case the repellent visual imagery enhances emotionally the symbolic, ideological, message that working men had been treated as no better than animals under the Tsarist regime.

Thematic parallels raise the possibility that Bacon derived a methodological lesson from Eisenstein. The early films were well known and widely appreciated, but by the mid 1940s it was also possible to view Eisenstein's recent historical films, such as *Alexander Nevsky*, and to engage with his theoretical writings about cinema, which had been appearing occasionally in translation in little magazines such as *Close-Up*, but now did so more accessibly in the 1943 anthology *The Film Sense*. Bacon loved going to the cinema and owned other books about film, so could well have been familiar with this one. If so, he would surely have been interested in Eisenstein's conception of montage, as elaborated in the first section in *The Film Sense* devoted to the theme of 'Word and Image' (Eisenstein, 1943: 13–59). Here the director explored the wider resonance and function of the technique, which was no longer such an overt, anti-naturalistic feature of his films. The effectiveness of the method resides, he claimed, in the fact that 'it includes

in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator', who 'not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author':

> In fact, every spectator, in correspondence with his own individuality, and in his own way and out of his own experience – out of the womb of his fantasies, out of the warp and weft of his associations, all conditioned by the premises of his character, habits, and social appurtenances, creates an image in accordance with the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him to understand and experience the author's theme ... it is precisely the *montage* principle, as distinguished from that of *representation*, which obliges spectators themselves to *create* and the montage principle, by this means, achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the *spectator* which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events. (Eisenstein, 1943: 34, 35, and 37)

Whether or not he was aware of such ideas, Bacon's artistic method and ambition are broadly in tune with Eisenstein's thinking. But the comparison also highlights distinctions between their approaches. It may generally be the case that incongruous juxtaposition and montage place a particular onus upon the viewer, or the reader or listener in relation to other media, to make their own particular sense of the dissonant sensations of image and style that bombard them, to assume an active rather than passive position in constructing an interpretation. But in experiencing Eisenstein's films, as his statements indicate, the viewer is expected in the end to arrive at his or her own understanding and affirmation of the underlying political messages that the films project. In a very different historical context and in the more private medium of painting, Bacon can be seen rather to manifest an impulse towards ambiguity and indeterminacy, valued for their own sake. Such an impulse is of course deeply rooted in the artistic culture of the modern period, and finds one expression in Susan Sontag's strictures in the mid 1960s '*against interpretation*', or the imposition of some preconceived structure of meaning onto the sensuous experience of the art work (Gamboni, 2002). In Bacon, disparate fragments of imagery are brought together in such a way as to defy any definitively coherent or

conclusive interpretation, in symbolic as well as visual terms (Harrison, 2005: 44–6). Resolution would imply a situation of comfort, a Matissean armchair, whereas his paintings typically strive to generate feelings of agitation, uncertainty, and perhaps emotional and intellectual excitement. They function as provocations to the beholder, inducing an urge to find personal meanings and feelings within the process of negotiating the many tensions and contrasts in the pictures.

In that context, it is worth going beyond the play of contrast within a single canvas to consider Bacon's recurrent use of serial and triptych formats, which implicitly require the spectator to contemplate one painting in relation to others, visually and thematically. As has often been noted, the triptych allowed him to work on a monumental scale, and to invest his pictures with a grandeur, formality and subliminal religiosity disconcertingly at odds with their abject or intimate content. Yet the effect, as with the various series, is also further to fragment and disperse the viewer's attention, to compel one to shift the focus of one's gaze between individual parts and between sections and the whole in order to make sense of the work in their own terms. The accumulation of images may imply the passage of time, or the accumulation of different aspects of an individual in a portrait triptych, as most directly perhaps in *Triptych, May–June 1973* (1973), Bacon's visualization of the final moments of his lover George Dyer, who overdosed in their Paris hotel room the night before Bacon's major retrospective opened at the Grand Palais. However, such information was not made available at the time, through titling for instance, and even here we are not presented with an unambiguous narrative of events. It clearly mattered to Bacon that, unlike the movements of a symphony, the acts of a drama or film, or the chapters of a novel, a series or triptych of images does not unfold in predetermined sequence, and can therefore remain more pregnant in its implications.

Bacon declared of his pictures that he himself 'had no idea what half of them mean. I'm not saying anything' (Sylvester, 1993: 82). He was insistent that they did not project 'narratives', in the sense that they could be reduced to some particular story or meaning, to be decoded from the work, which might then exhaust its significance. An early instance of this reflex occurs in a review of his 1950 Hanover Gallery show:

> The artist has told me that his motives are purely aesthetic. That is his obsession is with formal qualities, with forms at once concrete and dissolving, with the substance and texture of pigment, with the belief that every stroke of paint laid down ought to be a self-sufficient expression of the artist's idea. His reading, especially of Greek Tragedy, has influenced his attitude and inevitably shaped his patterns; but he would have us judge his paintings simply as works of art without seeking to read into them a symbolism never consciously premeditated. (Hammer, 2005: 103)

A piece on Bacon in *Time* magazine from 1952 quoted him to similar effect: 'Everybody has his own interpretation of a painting he sees. I don't mind if people have different interpretations of what I have painted' (New York, 1955: 60). That sense of the potential diversity of viewers' responses to his work is compatible with a remark Bacon made in a letter to Michel Leiris nearly thirty years later: 'In a book about Nietzsche I found the following quote, which agrees with my own ideas to a large extent: "There is no event, no phenomenon, word or thought which does not have a multiple sense".'[9] He admired Duchamp's *The Large Glass* precisely because it was 'so impervious to interpretation' (Sylvester, 1993: 179). Moreover Bacon liked bald titles for his pictures so that 'people can read what they like into them' (Sylvester, 1993: 197). He clearly became frustrated when critics simplistically asserted what they took to be the fundamental meaning of his art, such as the anguish of the human condition, in a manner that was too literal or reductive for his taste. One response was an apparent perversity – he insisted to Sylvester that the syringes in the Henrietta Moraes pictures were purely formal, and that the motif of the screaming mouth was nothing to do with expressing sensations of pain or horror: 'I've always hoped in a sense to be able to paint the mouth like Monet painted a sunset' (Sylvester, 1993: 50). In a more destructive vein, Bacon went so far as to debar the Tate Gallery from publishing, in the catalogue of his 1985 retrospective, the commentaries on specific pictures which had been painstakingly compiled by curator Richard Francis (Peppiatt, 1996: 308). Other publications were at first encouraged by Bacon, but then stamped out. Any hint of telling the viewer

9 Translation of Francis Bacon, letter to Michel Leiris, 20 November 1981, Gagosian, 2006: 31.

what to see, think or feel was the antithesis of the open-ended engagement that he hoped would emerge in the encounter with his pictures.

Can we detect any residue of a 'period eye' in the extreme visual incoherence and thematic ambiguity of his paintings? There are no doubt many ways in which one might respond to this crucial question, and here I wish to lay out just one possibility. In practice the viewing experience will necessarily vary, but a general effect that Bacon perhaps envisaged was enhancing spectators' consciousness of themselves when they confronted his pictures. Here we might note an affinity with the American Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman, who remarked: 'One thing I am involved in ... is that painting should give man a sense of place: that he knows he's there, so he's aware of himself... I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others, who are also separate' (Newman, 1990: 257–8). In Bacon's case, that sense of the self as physically and psychologically present is triggered not only by the singular figure in the canvas, who one might in some sense empathize with or recognize as an abject alter ego, but also by the inescapable image of one's own reflection, possibly flanked by others. As early as 1951, Robert Melville reported: 'Bacon insists that his pictures must never be seen without glass: the glass makes them a little more difficult to see because one's own reflection is there, rather self-conscious and insubstantial, mingling quite felicitously with images of the flesh in its last extremity' (Melville 1951, 64). According to Rothenstein, the 'dark blue pictures in particular, I heard him observe, gained by enabling the spectator to see his own face in the glass'.[10] The sensation of an image gives way as we physically approach the picture to an awareness of paint as raw manipulated stuff, which in turn is complicated by the more intangible sensation of reflections of ourselves, other people, other pictures, walls, spotlights and so on, which serve, like the banal elements within the representation, to inject 'rivets' of the everyday into the experience of the picture. We are forced as spectators to negotiate different degrees of tactility, different registers

10 John Rothenstein, Introduction, Alley, 1964: 19.

of light, space, corporeality, and thus to become conscious of ourselves in the act of perceiving.

There is no direct connection between Bacon and Newman, and not much visual similarity between their work, but it would be easy and indeed fascinating to elaborate a comparison between them on several levels. At root, both were very much figures of their time, who internalized the cultural climate of the immediate post-war years in which priority was accorded to the experience of subjectivity and individuality over more objective or social conceptions of identity.[11] At the risk of crass generalization, one might say that this profoundly traumatic historical moment made it imperative to reassert ideals of human vitality and individual selfhood, albeit with an undertone of extreme pathos, in the wake of recent mass slaughter and dehumanization. It has been noted that the outlook on life that Bacon articulated in statements and interviews was compatible with the atheistic, or one might say Nietzschean, existentialism associated with a figure such as Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre, 1946). Indeed the entire thrust of existentialism, the dominant intellectual force at this point, was to assert the freedom of the individual, and the need to avoid the 'bad faith' implicit in conforming to inherited formulae for behaviour and belief. It was necessary to live life on the more authentic premise that 'existence precedes essence', meaning we have the opportunity, indeed the responsibility, as free agents to make our own choices and decisions, to create meaning and value in the specific terms of our own lives. In a world without the consolations of communal social or religious values, let alone the promise of an after-life, we must each of us cultivate our own instincts, impulses, and desires. Life in general and making pictures in particular were a matter of taking risks, and living with the consequences. Bacon was also an inveterate gambler, and saw an affinity between the casino and the studio, between playing the tables, and exploiting the 'mysterious and continual struggle with chance', 'the pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down', that 'painting to-day' necessarily

11 On Bacon's affinities with French existentialism see Hammer, 2005: 222–31; and Gale, 1999: 17.

involved (Bacon, 1953: 12).[12] Beyond the existentialist echoes of his verbal style, Bacon's pictorial rhetoric of contrasts and tensions works to return the viewer not merely to the optical sensation of their singular physical presence, but also to an intensified awareness of subjectivity, as an inchoate stream of decisions, thoughts, memories, sensations of many kinds, and feelings. They trigger something akin to a phenomenological experience of being, to invoke another key concept of the period. Their ambiguities, on so many levels, were calibrated to provoking such a sense in the spectator, and so dramatizing the 'freedom and spontaneity' that formed the common ground between the experiences Bacon relished in the studio and those that he desired for the suitably sensitive viewer engaging imaginatively with his pictures, and perhaps exhilarating in his or her own despair.

Production

Let me turn now to continuities evident within the production of the pictures, identifying with the position of Bacon and the process of making rather than the spectator and the process of interpretation. Even more so than other artists his creative processes have acquired an air of mystery, as they clearly possessed for Bacon who savoured the surprising way in which his pictures came into being, seemingly beyond the parameters of conscious intention and control. Conversely, he was very private about his procedures, and would not allow anyone to photograph or film him working. He likewise gave away little that was specific or concrete in recorded conversations about how he painted, as opposed to the more abstract exchanges about the role of chance. My aim here is to submit the way he operated in the studio to more analytical description.

12 Bacon remarked: 'I would like to explain to you one day the vice of gambling one day it is for me intimately linked with painting', Bacon, letter to Colin Anderson, 12/2/51 [1952], reprinted in Clark, 2007: 42.

Again it proves valuable to consider the role of repetition in Bacon's progress from one painting to another, whether they be works made in immediate succession to one another in the case for example of the series and triptychs, or instances when he appropriated ideas from previous pictures after a prolonged gap. How does any such recycling of images, devices and processes function in tandem with the exercise of spontaneity, which implies a freedom from preconception? This emphasis on improvisation is usually identified as the continuous thread in Bacon's working process, and, as Andrew Forge noted, 'monotony is a strange feature in an artist whose whole aesthetic derives from risk and a reckless indifference to anything habitual or comfortable or decorative' (Forge, 1971: 631). In truth, little has been written about the actual, and no doubt complex, sequence of operations between Bacon's initial confrontation with the bare canvas and his ultimate decision to release a picture into the world, or else to reject and perhaps destroy it. If repetition and improvisation form one recurrent dialectic within that process, another comprises the interplay between assertion and denial, between the accretion of elements and marks to build up a picture, and the negation of any such elements by editing and over-painting. The pictorial oppositions noted above can be seen as the by-product of the interweaving of such contrary impulses within the process of making.

There is an evident gulf between the specifics of that process and the more generalized rhetoric that surrounds it. An emphasis on improvisation, or chance and accident in his own preferred terminology, looms large for example in the Sylvester conversations, and in much of the literature devoted to Bacon's output. Like many artists over the last hundred years or more, he clearly needed to feel, when active in his studio, that making pictures was an excitingly open and unpredictable affair, a voyage into the unknown, requiring nimble decision-making about how to take the work forward in relation to what had already been done to a canvas, and about when it eventually worked and could be deemed to be finished. However there is a strongly rhetorical dimension to the claims made for the essential spontaneity of his methods. His emphasis on the role of improvisation is in fact one more variation on a well-established topos in the discourse around modern art. The idea that the best work in that tradition crystallized

within the process of its making, rather than following an idea worked out and perhaps drawn out in advance, is constantly encountered in one form or another in the commentaries provided by the artists themselves, from at least Matisse onwards, and by their critical spokespersons. One might even maintain that artists, including Bacon, and their audiences had unconsciously internalized a particular concept of the 'artist function', to adapt Foucault's 'author function', whereby the artist is positively required to display such characteristics as spontaneity, messiness, playfulness, freedom from emotional inhibition, and so forth, any or all of which qualities might serve as antidotes to the highly rational, instrumental character of everyday life within our sort of society. The artist exemplifies, that is, an alternative mode of being which we find therapeutic and entertaining to contemplate out of office hours, so to speak. Such an outlook acquired added resonance in the period immediately after a war in which whole societies had been mobilized to collective military ends. Bacon can readily be aligned with the current 'existentialist' emphasis on subjective experience as an ongoing decision-making process, conducted outside any sustaining framework of social, religious or ideological values, a process that for Sartre himself was epitomized by the improvisational behaviour of the creative artist (Sartre, 1946: 602).

From a more art-historical perspective, improvisation in Bacon tends to be viewed as an extension of the long 'painterly' tradition in European art, conventionally characterized in terms of expressiveness and spontaneity, and encompassing painters he greatly admired such as Rembrandt, Velázquez, Monet or Soutine. This approach has two main connotations in critical discourse. In the first place, painterliness involves asserting brush marks, touches and surface texture as a visible and important feature of the picture and its aesthetic appreciation. Secondly, as a mainstream picture-making procedure from Titian onwards, it entails the artist working up an idea on the canvas itself, rather than transferring it from drawings or other forms of preparatory study and then using paint to, as it were, fill in the contours. He or she might begin, that is, with some general composition or image, which would then be submitted to an accumulation of adjustments in order to refine the specific conjunction of image and composition. These two aspects of the painterly are closely related, but in principle

they are distinct; a composition might be improvised but the final surface smoothed off, so to speak, whereas an image might be carefully worked out in advance, but then realized in a loose-looking style (indeed Bacon's later work in particular provides examples of both processes). We might also do well to recall Michael Baxandall's subtle and provocative discussion in his book *Patterns of Intention* (1991) of the ways in which a reliance on process, understood as a complex and progressive sequence of responses on the artist's part to different states of the work in hand, comprises a fundamental and defining characteristic of art, in the Western tradition at any rate. On this model art is opposed to other kinds of visual artefact (Baxandall's example is engineering design) in which conception and execution are essentially distinct (Baxandall, 1991: chapter II).

In Bacon criticism, visible mark-making is commonly conflated with the improvisation of imagery. The earliest account of his creative procedures, by Robert Melville, is typical: 'Bacon never makes a drawing. He starts with a picture with a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that ironmongers stock, and almost the entire work is painted with such brushes' (Melville, 1949–50: 422). The critic proceeded to reflect upon Bacon's propensity for destroying paintings, even successful ones. We are informed that he liked neither having to look at his finished paintings, nor sending them into the world: 'He releases one occasionally, but only when compelled to throw it like a counter into the game of keeping body and soul together'. Melville evoked the urgent, almost visionary imperative of Bacon's improvisational mode of working:

> Swiftness of execution has become an essential of his creative process, for he has to re-create visualisations that are so tenuous that they can only be seen, so to speak, out of the corner of the mind's eye. He has to snatch, as it flashes across his mind, the movement of a head, the sliding of an inert body, the passage of a scream ... In a way, his concern is with the act more than the result, with means not ends, although he knows that the ends prescribe the means. His concern is with the power to make images rise up suddenly on his canvas, as a sorcerer might summon up spirits, wanting nothing of them except their emergence at his bidding. (Melville, 1951: 64)

Melville's account and terminology foreshadow Harold Rosenberg's celebrated 1952 essay 'The American Action Painters' about the contemporary

American painters with whom he was friendly, later known as the Abstract Expressionists, who 'took to the white expanse of the canvas as Melville's Ishmael took to the sea', and for whom 'what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event' (Rosenberg, 1952: 589). For critics such as Sylvester highlighting the role of chance was a way of positioning Bacon not as an eccentric outsider but as representative of the prevailing international climate in art, informed by existentialist thinking, whereby individual touch and self-expression were paramount.[13] Moreover, both Melville and Sylvester were steeped in pre-war Surrealism and doubtless perceived continuity between Bacon's practice and the Surrealist method of 'automatism', the process of creating random marks or textures that permitted the artist then to project and clarify imagery. This method functioned for its practitioners as a pictorial manifestation of the release and expression of subconscious feelings and fantasies, a process whose wider centrality to mental life had been laid bare in the writings of Freud and his followers. For Bacon too, when 'the will has been subdued by the instinct', one allows 'the deeper levels of the personality to come through': 'they come through without the brain interfering with the inevitability of an image. It seems to come straight out of what we choose to call the unconscious with the foam of the unconscious locked around it – which is its freshness' (Sylvester, 1993: 120).[14] His idea of the 'accident' likewise evokes Freud's notion that subconscious impulses underpin what appear to be chance occurrences of forgetfulness, verbal slips, or unintended behaviour, or 'the psychopathology of everyday life'.

Descriptions of his working process by Bacon and friends were, then, geared as much towards validating his status as a cutting-edge contemporary artist as to providing disinterested information. The rhetoric tells us little about the actuality of his procedures in the studio, about what exploiting the accident actually involved. It may be useful to step outside the usual

13 Epitomised by the 1955 essay The Streamlined Era, reprinted in Sylvester, 2002: 49–52.

14 The second shorter phrase is Sylvester's but Bacon clearly approved. His gloss on this idea seems to echo D. H. Lawrence's notion of consciousness and thought as fleeting apparitions with no substantial reality, the foam on the surface of the wave.

frame of reference in order to pursue the argument that Bacon, like other artists or for that matter musicians, required a strong edifice of habit, routine and repetition to permit the exercise of spontaneous, or 'intuitive', behaviour and decisions. As the critic Sam Hunter acutely remarked after spending time with Bacon in the summer of 1950: 'behind the deceptive effect of spontaneity is a rigorous personal discipline of vision and a long period of trial and errors in sorting and choosing relevant images, and of learning how to marry vision and technique' (Hunter, 1952: 13). His work may provide an artistic example of what has been described in a wider context as 'structured spontaneity'. Malcolm Gladwell for example argues that such diverse forms of behaviour as war-gaming, car salesmanship and improvised theatre (to which sporting performance could be added) illustrate the principles that spontaneity works best when it is meticulously rehearsed in terms of underlying principles and strategies, and that 'truly successful decision making relies on a balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking' (Gladwell, 2005: 141).

How might this apply to Bacon? Pictures generally are consumed in an instant but produced over time, in distinct phases of activity. In the words of Degas, a picture is 'the result of a *series of operations*' (Kendall, 1996: 97). The process can be subdivided, schematically, between periods of engagement in paint application and contemplation of the results thereof. Involuntary or intuitive ('accidental') actions, which may have felt as though they were produced in a 'haze of sensations and feelings and ideas', interact with calculating and conscious decision-making, embedded physically in the action of standing back and appraising more coolly what had been done to the canvas in progress (Sylvester, 1993: 194). Such an appraisal might then lead to judgements about what to preserve, amend or reject in the next phase of working, though this might then take on an improvisational momentum. Over a longer time frame, that is days and weeks rather than hours, the picture-making process can also be broken down to some degree into distinct stages. Any description of such a sequence is again bound to be simplistic, but it is worth attempting to lay out a general model. In Bacon the first stage seems to have been stating the image by, in effect, drawing it out on the canvas. There is some evidence that this was first done in pencil, establishing a basic linear configuration which he would then consolidate

with paint, using quite large brushes as Melville indicated (Daniels, 2010: 71). Exactly the same sequence of operations is encountered in some of Bacon's drawings, where graphic imagery is worked up in paint (Gale, 1999). We also now know from documentary evidence that he did not just make up images on the spur of the moment, or at least not always, as he was given to making lists of possible works, judging from the annotations on the inside covers of several books (one must surely surmise that many other lists on ephemeral pieces of paper did not survive) (Gale, 1999: 77–80). At any rate this initial idea provided a point of departure which if necessary it would be easy enough to edit, or to wipe off and replace with an alternative possibility, once he had been able to take stock of what the canvas contained. According to Bacon, such modifications happened all the time. He remarked to Sylvester: 'when I start a new canvas I have a certain idea of what I want to do, but while I'm painting, suddenly, out of the painting itself, in some way these forms and directions that I hadn't anticipated just appear. It is these I call accidents' (Archimbaud, 1993: 83). Michael Peppiatt in turn enquired whether Bacon made a sketch on the canvas, to which he responded:

Sometime, a little bit. It never, never stays that way. Often you just put on paint almost without knowing what you're doing. You've got to get some material on the canvas to begin with. Then it may or may not begin to work. It doesn't often happen within the first day or two. You can never tell. I just go on putting paint on or wiping it off. And sometimes the shadows of the marks left from this lead to another image and the possibility of something else coming up ... (Peppiatt, 2008: 195–6).

Likewise, Bacon took delight in recounting stories of pictures that started out one way, and ended up looking completely different. The classic case of taking advantage of unforeseen chain reactions was provided by *Painting* (1946), which 'came to me as an accident' according to his account to Sylvester in 1962:

> I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field. And it may have been bound up in some way with the three forms that had gone before, but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose the picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another. (Sylvester, 1993: 11)

Bacon's own accounts are in line with Melville's account of an impulse to 'make images rise up suddenly on his canvas', and they imply a conception of the 'accident' that is quite different from the pictorial practices with which they are usually aligned. Such instantaneous registering of images, Melville's tenuous 'visualizations', is remote from abstract mark making, whether performed as a stimulus to projecting 'subconscious' imagery in the manner of automatism, or as an expressive gesture valued in its own right in the work of Americans such as Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning. Instead the accident signified introducing components of invented imagery, whether at the initial or subsequent stages in the production of the picture. It is indicative that the activity of reading should have played an important role in prompting images, not as illustrations but rather as encapsulations of the essential feeling or sensation he had derived from a passage of text. Immersing himself in the likes of T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Aeschylus or Shakespeare in advance of beginning to paint often provoked ideas, as acknowledged in the titles for certain works (such as the late triptychs 'inspired' by T. S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and by the *Oresteia*). It is worth noting how he described this process in the most concrete account available, namely Bacon's letter to the writer Michel Leiris concerning a work in progress, eventually entitled *Triptych* (1976): 'I am currently working on quite a large triptych in which the accidents were based on Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad, and now I am work I find that *Frele Bruit* [a recent novel by Leiris] comes in all the time as well, so I do not know what accident will occur'.[15] The phrasing here confirms that the notion of the accident for Bacon often had little to do with abstract marks, but was essentially a matter of improvising figurative content. The Sylvester interviews misleadingly equate Bacon's methods with a more conventional idea of painterly brushwork, in part because the two men were often talking about portraiture, by then the artist's main preoccupation, where the subject-matter is of course a given.

15 Translation of Francis Bacon, letter to Michel Leiris, 3 April 1976, Gagosian 2006: 31, 23.

What form did Bacon's tenuous visualizations take in the imaginative compositions? I would argue that the starting point for his pictures generally comprised some quite basic conjunction of animated figure (or animal) and contrasting background setting. The latter might, for example, comprise a piece of furniture or elements of a fictive interior or exterior space. The point is that projecting imaginary images in this generic form is different from beginning with a figure and then developing a backdrop around it, which is how Bacon's initial image-making was envisaged by the authors of the centenary catalogue.[16] There are various forms of evidence to suggest instead that figure and setting came together. Aside from the many works that disclose their own working process thanks to their use of bare canvas or thin execution, one might note that it is this hybrid imagery that is consistently encountered in the unfinished pictures from all periods found in Bacon's studio after his death, such as *Untitled (Figure with Raised Arm)* from the late 1940s through to *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, which was on the easel when he died, whereas it is unusual to encounter a figure floating against the void of the canvas.[17] In the drawings on paper that have recently come to light, the imagery also regularly comprises figures located within settings constructed from straighter lines and more geometric formations. Moreover the extended hand-written lists of intended pictures that emerged around the same time characteristically include quite precise references to setting as well as activity. They include, for example, 'figure climbing over balustrade as in p.[painting] of dog', 'images of human body on sofas', and 'figure of young girl in centre of circular room on carpet or on grass or sand' (Gale, 1999: 77–80). In other words, from the start Bacon was often thinking about situated figures, and in terms of a polarity corresponding to the basic opposition that underpinned the contradictory rhetoric of his paintings.

In conceiving and realizing any such ideas for pictures, the specific ingredients were often recycled from elsewhere. One constant impulse for

16 See Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, On the Margin of the Impossible, Gale and Stephens 2008, 22–3.

17 Dublin, 2009, figs. 19 and 26 (both The Hugh Lane Gallery collection).

example was inserting and transmuting pockets of imagery extracted from the many kinds of photography that he stored in his studio, a theme discussed by the present writer and others elsewhere.[18] However, developing ideas already present within his work was another, equally recurrent form of appropriation. The most obvious manifestation of this was working in series, a procedure which Sylvester invited Bacon to explain:

> FB: ... Partly because I see every image all the time in a shifting way and almost in shifting sequences. So that one can take it from more or less what is called ordinary figuration to a very, very far point.
> DS: When you're doing a series, do you paint them one after the other or do you work on them concurrently?
> FB: I do them one after the other. One suggests the other. (Sylvester, 1993: 21)

The relevance of such thinking extends beyond the actual series. A process of developing ideas from one canvas to the next is already evident in the cluster of early works relating to the *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (c.1944). It is recognized that Bacon was in some respects taking his bearings here from the lost Picassoid pictures that he showed in 1937 and that survive only in the form of the poor reproductions accompanying a sneering review of the group exhibition in which they featured.[19] The three components of the triptych were clearly not one-offs but rather products of a sustained experimentation with those particular hybrid configurations. They may well in fact have started like as independent images, before coming together in the 1944 work that Bacon exhibited in April 1945, which in turn was originally intended, as the title indicates, to be a sort of predella positioned beneath an image of the Crucifixion that was never realized in this context. At any rate both the right-hand and left-hand panels of the triptych exist in the form of self-sufficient variants that Bacon chose neither to date nor exhibit and whose survival is fortuitous. One version

18 E.g. Harrison 2005, Dublin 2009, and my article Francis Bacon: Painting after Photography, in the special issue of *Art History* devoted to 'New Approaches to British Art, 1939–1969' (September 2012), and also book about Bacon's appropriations from Nazi propaganda (forthcoming Tate, 2013).

19 Alley, 1964, D1 and 2.

of the left-hand image was exhibited recently in Dublin, and shows the process of transformation to which Bacon subjected the image (Dublin, 2009). The configuration of the hybrid figure remained constant, but in the self-standing variant he inserted a vase of flowers that the figure appears to be sniffing, as well as a more elaborate openwork linear construction in the foreground, defined by black and white linear elements. The large sweeping shape to the left suggesting a composite of body and drapery has now become solid black, while the unmodulated orange backdrop in the triptych, augmented with minimal perspectival lines, has changed into a plain floor plane receding to an expanse of densely folded curtain, subsequently a recurrent motif in Bacon's work, which serves to define the shallow, frontal picture space that the figure occupies. The preponderance in this version of ochres and browns generates a very different, muted tonality reminiscent of the work of Sickert, an artist Bacon admired. The picture is somewhat larger than the triptych version, and it is painted on board rather than on canvas, which Bacon, Graham Sutherland and others used in wartime when canvas was hard to obtain. Such evidence suggests that it was probably made later than the work in the Tate. Indeed close scrutiny of the surface indicates that the curtained backdrop is in fact painted on top of a layer of orange paint, implying that the picture probably began as an even closer variation on the triptych image, which Bacon then chose to modify in quite significant ways.

Bacon's distinctive process of developing ideas on the actual canvas, rather than in the more usual context of preliminary studies, can be demonstrated again in the case of *Figure Study I* (1945–6). This picture too has a heavily worked surface, and it looks as though the image emerged from a sustained process of editing and layering. In particular, the textured horizontal band in the upper part of the picture bears the shadows of previous states of the picture. The passage immediately above the figure seems in fact to be the ghost of the shapes and positioning of the 'shoulders' of the figure in the two works just considered, of which the self-standing version is identical in scale to the Edinburgh picture. From this cue we might note that the same head and clump of hair have been replaced by the trilby hat and by the murky shape lurking within the passage of diluted black paint beneath it evoking a cast shadow. In each case a horizontal line connects

this passage to the right hand edge. It then becomes possible to see that the overcoat was elaborated in relation to and on top of the same curved black shape that we encounter in *Study for a Figure*, as particularly evident from the diagonal lines extending upwards from the lower part of the left-hand edge of the picture. The bunch of flowers is another point of contact, as is the orange background that Bacon used in the triptych and initially used in the variant. In other words he probably began with another variation of the idea of the left-hand panel from the triptych and then subjected it to another, very different set of transmutations, as the picture evolved in the studio. The larger and more resolved *Figure Study II* (1945–6) seems then to have been produced as an elaboration of certain aspects, notably the overcoat, of what he had ended up with in *Figure Study I*. The sequence of works as a whole epitomizes Bacon's method, established even at this early stage, of developing new images through a process of rehearsing a pictorial idea that interested him, and then working into the configurations on the canvas in order to generate a new work. In the case of the Edinburgh picture, the process resulted in an intensification of the effect of contrast between the diverse elements and also of the indeterminacy of the picture's content, which is also expressed in his decision to change the title from 'Magdalene', with its direction to the viewer, to the more open-ended 'Figure Study'.[20] Conservation analyses have demonstrated that *Figure Study I* is also characteristic of the sustained process of overpainting and revision typical of Bacon's work from the mid 1940s. The extent of such modifications is evident from the cases of pictures that were photographed in his studio, before being subjected to radical changes. For example, *Figure Getting out of a Car* (c. 1945) looked somewhat like the *Three Studies*, but subsequently acquired an overlay of exotic foliage comparable to *Figure Study II* (1945–6) and *Man with Microphones* (1946). Months or a year or two separate the two phases in the picture's realization.[21] Likewise *Man with Microphones*, a close relative of *Painting* in its imagery and bright

20 The documentation of this change may be consulted in Hammer, 2010.

21 The problematic dating of this picture is discussed in Hammer, 2005: 94–5, where I argue for a dating around 1945, as have others.

palette, was transformed around three years later into a grisaille image of a naked man seen from the back, though large sections of the background were retained.[22] Making such early pictures evidently involved the wholesale reworking of the composition, perhaps several times over judging by the accumulation of paint layers revealed by the microscopic analysis of samples (Shepard, 2009: 156–8).

But from the late 1940s onwards, as Joanne Shepherd has shown on the basis of close study of the abandoned pictures in Dublin, Bacon consistently remained faithful to the image established by the initial drawing on the canvas, inserting any revisions and adjustments within the confines of that overall compositional idea (Shepard, 2009: 160–73). Across that shift, he continued to operate by making variations on existing themes. The impulse is evident from one list of potential pictures in which he enjoined himself to paint a 'man crawling on rail as in Detroit picture against rock background' and 'statue with dog or birds around base Tate picture of Monte Carlo as basis' (Gale, 1999: 77, 79). An example in practice is the monumental *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* triptych of 1962, a conscious reprise of the 1944 *Three Studies* triptych which he produced as the culminating point of his retrospective that year at the Tate Gallery. The work in turn served as the point of departure three year later for a second *Crucifixion* triptych, in which certain elements of its predecessor are restated but also modified and rearranged, most obviously by shifting the carcass/Crucifixion into the centre. More idiosyncratically, Bacon would also work in quick succession on a cluster of works devoted to an image or configuration. Such variations might or might not then be exhibited together as a series. This opens up an unfamiliar context for Bacon in that the idea of serial production has an extended history in modern art, beginning with Monet and becoming a particular focus of interest and rigorous exploration amongst American abstract artists in the 1960s, which prompted John Coplans to curate the historical survey *Serial Imagery* (Kahng, 2007: 14–20).

It is worth itemizing how much of the work that he produced once he got into his stride falls into thematic groupings and sequences. Thus his

22 Alley, 1964, A5 (sequence of images reversed); Hammer, 2005: 95 and 49.

one-man show in November 1949 included a numbered series of six heads, of which the second at any rate is a close variation on the first (Alley, 1964: 20–5). The final Head was also of course the first exhibited variation on the Velázquez portrait of *Pope Innocent X*, though Bacon is known to have been experimenting with the idea since 1946. The many subsequent popes through to the mid 1960s are a mixture of one-offs and various mini-series, including those based on the photograph of the contemporary pontiff being carried on his sedia from 1951, the *Study for Portrait* series, eight of which were dispatched to New York in 1953 for Bacon's show at the Durlacher Brothers gallery, and the 1961 sequence *Pope I – VI* (Alley, 1964: 59–66, 186). The seven versions of *Man in Blue* were shown together in his show at the Hanover Gallery in spring 1954 (Alley, 1964: 81–7). Other motifs which were elaborated in various independent pictures include the several surviving images centred upon a dog derived from Muybridge; the various compositions focussed on an image of an Egyptian sphinx, of unknown photographic derivation; and the variations of an image based on William Blake's death mask.[23] The 1958 show at the Hanover comprised several of his Soutinesque variants on the destroyed Van Gogh self-portrait.[24] The *Head* series of 1961 and the four versions of *Man with Glasses* from 1963 both demonstrate a continuing interest in working with an image and subjecting it to modification (Alley, 1964: 217–20). More privately, several of Bacon's drawings of a crawling figure from the late 1950s were generated by a process of tracing the image from one sheet to the next in a sketchbook and then introducing variations (Gale, 1999: 26). The method of reworking an idea is explicit in *Study for Bullfight No 1* and *Second Version of 'Study for Bullfight No 1'*, made in quick succession in 1969, and in other late works.

Reiteration is even apparent in the many portraits from around 1960 onwards of particular people with whom Bacon had close relationships, such as Peter Lacy, George Dyer, Lucian Freud, Muriel Belcher, Isabel Rawsthorne, Henrietta Moraes, Peter Beard, John Edwards and of course

23 Alley, 1964, nos. 39, 45, 50, 58 and 59 (dog pictures), 67, 68, 79 and 88 (sphinxes) and 92–4 and 102 (Blake series).

24 Alley, 1964, 112, 129–34 and 139.

himself. Portraits have typically arisen from specific and psychologically 'revealing' transactions between artist and sitter. Aside from memories of the individuals, Bacon's main point of reference while creating his portraits was photographs commissioned from his friend, the professional magazine photographer John Deakin. As Chris Stephens has remarked, the many Deakin images that Bacon owned themselves 'come in series', and follow a specific characterization of the individual that Bacon presumably dictated to the photographer: 'Moraes naked upon a mattress, Rawsthorne walking and standing in the streets of London, Freud sitting in a variety of poses on a cheap iron bed'. In the photographs, and in the groups of Bacon pictures of each sitter that stem from them, 'each individual seems to have a particular nature', such as Moraes 'either sexually alluring or abject, the clothed Rawsthorne more in command of her situation, Freud awkward in his squirming pose' (Stephens, 2009: 70). Bacon's impulse to produce sustained exercises in distilling the specific physiognomy, body language and aura of his close friends and lovers lent itself, therefore, to a different form of serial production. The sequential dimension of his portraiture is particularly evident in the triptychs. These bring together closely related images of the same individual, viewed perhaps from different angles, as in the large full-length images of Freud set against a yellow backdrop in *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969), and the numerous smaller head and shoulders triptychs devoted to each of his regular sitters, which often combine some variation on left, frontal and right viewpoints. One cannot easily disentangle the stimulus provided by reproductions of his existing paintings from that emanating from the Deakin photographs that he employed as points of reference. Thus the recurrent image of a seated male with crossed legs, naked except for underpants, was adapted from Deakin photographs of George Dyer to painted depictions by Bacon of the same sitter, which were created both during his lifetime (as in *Two Studies of George Dyer with Dog* from 1968, and the 1971 *Study of George Dyer*) as well as in the posthumous elegies he made in the wake of his lover's tragic suicide (e.g. *Triptych – August 1972* and *Three Portraits – Triptych* from the following year). The same format occurs yet again, more surprisingly one might think, in the context of late full-length portraits of John Edwards, where the head of a new sitter is in effect transposed onto a vein of bodily imagery established

for another person. This seems to contradict the impulse towards individualization discussed above, although the repetition conceivably registered Bacon's private sense that these two working-class East Enders had temperamental affinities, or played comparable roles in his personal and emotional life.

Further research is required adequately to gauge the significance, artistic or otherwise, that working in series held for Bacon, compared with other artists. The practice may of course have been even more pervasive given that his known work is only a small fraction of the pictures that he worked on to various degrees, but then chose in many cases to abandon or destroy. The serial accumulation of ideas might be viewed as an alternative to preliminary sketching, or to developing an image through building up layers, particularly during the 1950s when he particularly relished the effect of paint applied very thinly, almost staining the canvas. The format of the photographer's contact sheet, or the strip from the photobooth machine, may be relevant points of reference. It could also be suggested that serial presentation was one element in the inspiration Bacon derived from the sheets in Muybridge's books, although here a sequence of images is used to demonstrate the unfolding of a particular action, whereas a coherent progression does not seem evident in, say, Bacon's man in blue series, popes or Van Gogh variations. The effect is likewise remote from the series of photographs that artists such as Picasso and Matisse employed or encouraged, to document the making of particular works and to demonstrate how they distilled and perfected a particular image (Kahng, 2007). More germane precedents might be the reiteration of favourite images encountered in the work of certain nineteenth-century artists whom he particularly admired, such as Degas, Rodin and Van Gogh, not to mention Monet. Perhaps this is another dimension of Bacon's immersion in the work of Picasso, whose 1928 Dinard bathers or 1937 images of weeping women could readily be experienced as series when viewed in the form of the reproductions in *Cahiers d'Art* or the Zervos complete catalogue (Hammer, 2005). One might consider his serial practices in relation to Bacon's pervasive use of 'study' in the titles he gave to his pictures, already noted in relation to his avoidance of consistent finish. It is as though he was constantly aspiring to the perfect or definitive image that he could in some sense envisage

imaginatively, but that he felt he could rarely pull off in actuality. The alternative was to keep pushing at an idea through variations on a theme. Any specific realization of an idea was only provisional, and might serve as a prompt to trying to do it differently or better, with greater power and economy. The series format made manifest that sense of multiple possibilities, and to some degree challenges the idea that pictures have to be singular, one-off, hand-made creations, distinct from the repetition or editioning of an image associated with the production of prints, casts, multiples, or indeed photographs. At what might be seen as a more psychological level, the serial format correlated with Bacon's tendency to 'see every image all the time in a shifting way and almost in shifting sequences', enabling him to take an idea from 'what is called ordinary figuration to a very, very far point'. We seem indeed to confront something akin to the playing out of obsession. He stated, for example: 'Repetition can put one into a kind of trance-like state that you would never experience from a single image. The image repeated constantly puts you into a state of trance where it begins to work on you in different ways'.[25] Repetition has a strong currency, of course, in the psychoanalytical tradition, where it is viewed as a behavioural symptom of unconscious and neurotic impulses. Psychoanalysing artists on the evidence of their work is notoriously problematic, though this has not prevented some from reading Bacon's feelings about his aloof father, for example, or his homosexuality into the compulsive restatements of the Crucifixion or the image of the pope. Considering the compulsive dimension of his working method may be another way forward.

In terms of display strategy, the series format is generally supplanted by that of the triptych as a vehicle for elaborating versions of a given imagery. In some instances, the three images are remarkably close variations on a single pictorial idea, as for example in *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969), *Three Studies of the Male Back* (1970) and *Study for Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985–6). There are several further cases where the two outer panels are closely matched, symmetrically framing a contrasting central image, such as *Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem 'Sweeney Agonistes'* (1967), *Triptych*

25 Francis Bacon: Remarks from an Interview with Peter Beard, New York 1975: 18.

– *August 1972* (1972) and *Triptych* (1974–7). It is evident, then, that the triptych format operated for Bacon as an extension of a singular working method that was generally pervasive in his work. He conceded on one occasion that the triptych label was to some extent a misnomer:

> as far as my work is concerned, a triptych corresponds more to the idea of a succession of images on film. There are frequently three images, but there is no reason why I couldn't continue and add more. Why shouldn't there be more than three? What I do know is that I need these canvases to be separated from one another. (Archimbaud, 1993: 165)

Indeed, it may be noted that the distinction between the triptychs and one-off pictures in Bacon's work may be emphatic in an exhibition, but it was more fluid within the process of making, not least because the three elements in the triptychs are always independently framed and thus retain a degree of autonomy – integrating them within a single frame was anathema to Bacon (Sylvester, 1993: 86). For example, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (c. 1944) was exhibited as a triptych in 1945, but listed as three separate versions of 'Figure Study' in the catalogue of his 1949 one-man show and several times thereafter, reflecting their likely status in the first place as independent images which Bacon chose to bring together opportunistically and to coordinate visually.[26] The three large screaming popes of 1951–2 were distinct works, sold separately, but Bacon always seems to have thought of them as a potential triptych and presented them in this formation both in his 1952 Hanover Gallery show and in the 1962 Tate retrospective.[27] The 1953 triptych *Studies of the Human Head* was developed around the right-hand panel, which he had made as a separate work, whereas there are cases of late triptychs being dismantled and the components being shown on their own (Sylvester, 1993: 84). The regular use of the format from the early 1960s onwards can be seen, therefore, as an organic extension of, even replacement for, the serial presentation that

26 See Gale 1998–9, entry on *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (c. 1944), for the various titles under which the work was shown.

27 The three pope pictures are read as a sequence in Melville, 1952: 32. Installation shot from Tate show in Sylvester, 2000: 260.

Bacon had employed previously. The shift might be explained in terms of the suitability of triptychs for the big museum shows that the Marlborough Gallery was orchestrating in this period, symptoms of a commercial boom for modern art generally and Bacon specifically which meant that there was now an emerging market for such large-scale, expensive works. At the same time, Bacon might have been spurred on somewhat by the example of Alan Davie, who produced a series of large, colourful, freely executed triptychs in the period around 1960.

In relation to specific motifs within Bacon's pictures, derivations from his own previous oeuvre are especially apparent in the work from the latter three decades of his career. By now his art was insistently present not merely in the artist's memory but also, more tangibly, in the form of the reproductions of his own pictures with which he surrounded himself. From photographic records we can see that these dominated the images pinned to the studio and kitchen walls in his Reece Mews flat, where he lived and worked from 1961 onwards (Dublin, 2009: 56–9). The neat arrangement of such reproductions, in the interest one presumes of visibility, contrasted markedly with the numerous photographs, derived from myriad sources, which accumulated chaotically and messily on the studio floor, serving as occasional points of reference and inspiration. When Sylvester asked Bacon in 1966 whether he sometimes looked at such reproductions whilst working, the artist was unabashed about acknowledging their role:

> Well, I do very often. For instance, I've been trying to use one image I did around 1952 and trying to make this into a mirror so that the figure is crouched before an image of itself. It hasn't come off, but I find that I can work from photographs of my own works that have been done years before, and they become very suggestive. (Sylvester, 1993: 37)

The example that he cited, the abject image of an ape-like male figure in *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952), can indeed be seen to have been adapted to varied purposes over the subsequent decades, for example in *Untitled (Two Figures in the Grass)* and its close counterpart *Figures in a Landscape* (1956–7), and later in *Two Figures in a Room* (1959) and *Portrait of George Dyer Crouching* (1964). *Study for Crouching Nude* was evidently a particular favourite of Bacon's, as indicated not just by the reproductions he

accumulated but also by the reiteration of its composition and spatial structure in subsequent works such as *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963).[28] In a similar vein, the image of two intertwined, copulating men that was established in a celebrated picture of 1953, adapted from Muybridge photographs of wrestlers, came to be reiterated obsessively in the early 1970s, for example in *Triptych, Studies from the Human Body* (1970), *Triptych – August 1972* (1972), *Three Studies for Figures on a Bed* (1972) and *Two Figures with a Monkey* (1973), in the wake, perhaps significantly, of the legalization of homosexuality in Britain. The same motif was reprised in the right-hand panel of *Triptych* (1976), and in its more familiar central position in *Triptych – Studies of the Human Body* (1979) and the very late *Triptych* (1991). Then again the image and title of *Study from the Human Body*, presenting a walking and naked male figure viewed from the back, had initially crystallized in 1949 but found echoes in 1981 and 1983, while variations on the theme appeared in the 1973–4 *Study for a Human Body (Man Turning on the Light)*, the right-hand panel of *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1981), and *Study for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1986). Reiterations of established elements of imagery are, then, frequent and surprisingly direct in the work from Bacon's latter decades, a pattern rooted in taking cues from the photographs of his work that decorated his working environment. It is not known whether he worked to the same degree from photographs of his pictures before he moved to Reece Mews, and whether previous studios featured similar ornamentation, since there is little visual documentation of his previous working environments. However, there could well have been a relative shift in the 1960s. The scale and quality of the colour reproductions that he could now extract from his own exhibition catalogues would certainly have exceeded anything available earlier. His move to new premises coincided with the increasingly exploitation of new printing technologies, also evident in the production from 1962 onwards of newspaper colour supplements, and, crucially, with a burgeoning of the commercial market for modern and contemporary art which encouraged

28 Gale, 1998–9 entry on *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963).

top-end dealers such as the Marlborough Gallery to produce much more lavish catalogues as marketing tools.

This apparent lapse into self-repetition in Bacon's final decades could be taken to signify a waning of inspiration, a recurrent strain it is true in critical reactions to his later work, both during his lifetime and since. But positing a direct correlation between decline and repetition is too simplistic. Even if the use of photographs of his own works as springboards to creativity was indeed something of a new departure in the 1960s, and if the reiterations now perhaps became more obvious and formulaic, there was nothing new about Bacon working from his existing pictures. Such recycling and transformation of motifs is ubiquitous in his work, as we have seen, and functioned perhaps as the pictorial equivalent to the way in which composers, from Bach onwards, have regularly adapted blocks of musical material for use in new contexts. More specifically, motifs may have functioned for Bacon as a loose equivalent to Wagnerian *leitmotifs*, distilling particular ideas, themes or even the distinct auras of individuals, to which he obsessively returned and which could constantly be adapted to new pictorial contexts. Or one might say that they allowed him room to work on other levels, to paraphrase what Jasper Johns famously said about his persistent use of the American flag. Recapitulated imagery allowed Bacon to experiment with visible manipulated marks within its contours that, from his perspective, might serve to lift the picture above mere illustration and exert a direct, visceral impact on the viewer's 'nervous system', the singular potential of painting that was denied to photography (Sylvester, 1993: 57–8).

In parallel to the recycling and transmuting of components of imagery, the development of his pictures beyond the initial statement involved rehearsing quite a narrow repertoire of devices and procedures. The pictorial contrasts discussed earlier were contrived, technically speaking, by the use within a single picture of paint of varied colours and kinds, in a viscous or diluted state, sometimes mixed with sand or other foreign matter, as well as the employment of different sorts of brush, fabrics or other kinds of implement and method in order to apply paint onto the canvas and on top of existing layers. Moving between such techniques, Bacon would superimpose elements that in various ways elaborated upon, refined, cancelled out, or

otherwise edited what had already been built up on the canvas. The process could involve the introduction or removal of pockets of figurative imagery or of more abstract elements, as in the recurrent curtains and space-frames that cut across categories of subject-matter, just as the foreground railing in *Study after Velázquez* (1950) and *Pope I* (1951) recurs with variations in *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952) and *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953). Loose painterly passages might be set off by contrasting flat colour, as in the yellow paint that was clearly applied quite late on at the bottom of *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952). One major variable was the way in which figure and background were developed in relation to one another. The work of the early 1950s, for instance, suggests that Bacon often started by applying flat diluted colour, which might be applied as a virtual stain sunk into the canvas. He described to Sylvester how he 'put the whole wash on before I started putting the images down' (Sylvester, 1993: 195). This ground could then be overlaid with thicker and more opaque paint to evoke detail, with Bacon often working from dark to light in an extension of the historic Venetian manner. The underlying pictorial field usually remained strongly visible in the finished work, whether it be bare canvas (e.g. *Dog* 1952) or a single colour stained as diluted paint into the entire canvas, as for example in the 1954 *Man in Blue* series or the underlying red ground in the Tate's *Seated Figure* (1961). Bacon seems to have begun other pictures by laying in simple linear divisions, around which substantial sections of the canvas might be stained. This provided a more architectonic framework, at once flat and perspectival, within which he could again develop looser, less substantial figurative imagery (e.g. *Pope I – Study after Pope Innocent X by Velázquez*, 1951). Elsewhere we encounter Bacon laying in a symmetrical red framework bordering the bare canvas, which created a setting for diverse foreground imagery. This device appears partially obscured in *Study after Velázquez* (1950) and provides the backdrop in, for instance, *Study for a Dog* (1952) and *Sphinx I* (1953), as well as later drawings.[29] This latter cluster of works further qualifies the notion that

29 Reproduced Harrison, 2005: 227. On the references implicit in this background to Nazi architectural imagery, see Hammer and Stephens, 2009.

Bacon began his pictures by improvising a figure in some particular pose, around which the overall composition was then developed – here at any rate the opposite appears more likely to have been the case.[30] By contrast to this process of beginning with the ground, Bacon's insertion of a final layer of opaque flat colour in certain early works such as the *Three Studies* (c. 1944) or *Head I* (1948), using orange and black respectively, served paradoxically to describe the spatial backdrop and also to edit out redundant complications, creating a visual foil to the more sculptural and thickly worked description of the main figures. This was the method that Bacon reverted to, and employed consistently thereafter, in pictures from the early 1960s such as the triptych *Three Figures in a Room* (1964). In consequence it now becomes much more difficult to glean from the finished pictures, with their opaque surfaces, a sense of the adjustments that he might or might not have improvised in the course of making the work. It is only because of photographs for instance that we know that Bacon painted out the entire foreground incident of a figure reclining on a curved railing in the central panel of *Triptych* (1974–7).[31] However conservation analysis has revealed that Bacon introduced modifications to the colour and paint texture of the background, and to the ratio of bare canvas to painted areas, a process that could be quite extensive and that evidently ran in parallel to work on the figure and its immediate accessories, within an ongoing process of adjusting parts to other parts and to the whole (Shepard, 2009: 167–9).

It is well known that Bacon was one of several major modern artists who denied making preparatory drawings, only for it to be discovered after his death that he actually did so, whether continuously or more sporadically in concentrated bursts. Both the known drawings and the lists of envisaged works have been convincingly dated to the late 1950s, although he may well have operated similarly at earlier and later points of his career, but without the outcome surviving (Gale, 1999). Yet, famously, Bacon always denied that he made preparatory studies, or that they could serve any useful purpose. When Sylvester asked him in 1962 if he used sketches,

30 Gale, M. and C. Stephens, 2008, On the Margin of the Impossible, 22–3.
31 Gale and Stephens, 2008, On the Margin of the Impossible: 24.

he replied: 'I often think I should, but I don't. It's not very helpful in my kind of painting. As the actual texture, colour, the whole way the paint moves, are so accidental, any sketches that I did before could only give a kind of skeleton, possibly, of the way the thing might happen' (Sylvester, 1993: 20–1). Some of the surviving drawings do correlate quite closely with paintings, as Gale has demonstrated, but they may be variations on an idea rather than functional studies, and anyway the majority of the drawings do not correspond to pictures. The drawings, in other words, are better regarded as rehearsals for the kind of initial ideas with which he started, rather than as more deliberate preparation for pictures. Typically, as already noted, a frame or stage and a figure were conceived together in the studies. Bacon laid out such compositions with pen or pencil, and then sometimes worked on top of this with more freely applied paint. The entire process remains visible, due to the transparency of paint sufficiently diluted to be employed on this kind of support. It was surely in this sense that sketching could only be 'a kind of skeleton', compared to the satisfyingly complex process of layering and accretion that was involved in Bacon making a painting. Moreover the great advantage of oil paint on canvas (combined later with acrylic or household emulsion for the flat backdrops) was that superimposing layers of paint could entirely overlay all or some of what was already on the canvas, where this was what Bacon wanted, just as allowing *pentimenti* to remain visible was a conscious artistic judgement.

Bacon often seems to have introduced emphatic and visible marks quite late on in the process of constructing the pictures, generating the 'painterly' effect that critics usually associated with his emphasis on chance. The most dramatic manifestation of this was of course the ejaculatory blobs of white paint that became a recurrent device from the 1960s onwards, extending the dripping of paint found earlier (e.g. the 1963 *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed*). Their presence in the two closely linked bullfight pictures of 1969 has been described recently as the 'serial repetition of spontaneity', a notion which could be extended more widely.[32] Generally, in fact, Bacon became increasingly adept at manipulating and controlling techniques

32 Gale and Stephens, On the Margin of the Impossible: 25.

that look spontaneous. It was also at this advanced stage that he tended to insert the more textural passages of paint, using the brush in different and inventive ways, or increasingly, pieces of fabric such as corduroy which were pressed into wet paint to generate passages of texture akin to traditional scumbling. Unlike the white blobs, this was usually done within the contours of the main figure to generate effects of blur and movement. In consequence, Bacon was able to embed a human presence in his work in a two-fold manner that is quite distinctive in a pictorial context. We encounter simultaneously, or at any rate in quick succession as we move back and forth in front of his pictures, a figure depicted, in the perspective of its spatial environment, and within its outline we also encounter highly visible marks, with their literal presence on the flat plane, into which we unavoidably project traces of the painter's own manual gestures and caresses. A sense of the visceral is transmitted through the depicted body and its contortions and through indexical marks, both of which register the more acutely with the viewer through the emphatic contrast with their surrounding representational or surface environment. The depicted figure prevents the marks from registering as merely abstract or decorative, qualities that Bacon disdained; equally the marks prevent the figure from registering as merely illustrative, components in some imaginative fantasy that is distant from our own desires and bodily identification.

Bacon's addiction to cumulative improvisation, albeit within rehearsed strategies, meant that one of the most important decisions he confronted was when or whether any given picture was finished. When this did seem to be the case, he would evidently instruct his dealer to pick the work up so that it could be framed, but also so that he would not be tempted to carry on working pictures to the point that they became congested and laboured, losing the freshness and animation that he valued. He and Sylvester talked about this problem in the first of their published interviews, with Bacon asserting that he was unable to leave a picture and return to it weeks or months later: 'It has a hypnotic effect upon me, and I can't leave it alone, so I'm very glad actually – which is a very bad thing – to try and finish them and get them out of the place as soon as possible' (Sylvester, 1993: 19–20). He concurred that, left to his own devices, he would keep working on all his pictures until they were beyond redemption. Bacon was, then, a

compulsive fiddler, prone to reworking pictures even after he had deemed them to be finished, indeed after they had been exhibited and sold, if the owners would take the risk and permit such a thing. One documented example is his campaign in 1966 to insert a green carpet into an area of canvas left bare in *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963), which the Tate had acquired from the Marlborough Gallery show in which it was first exhibited, hot off the press. Bacon insisted he had always intended to make this change, but the gallery decided in the end that the picture might end up more radically changed, and so vetoed his request.[33] One could therefore take the view that Bacon's judgements about completion had a somewhat provisional or even arbitrary aspect. Indeed such decisions might well have a strong practical dimension, if for example he was under pressure to produce work in relation to the deadline of an imminent exhibition, which was was very often the way he operated judging from anecdotal evidence.

Nonetheless one assumes that the judgement to let a picture go involved aesthetic as well as pragmatic criteria. A given painting 'worked' for Bacon, not perhaps definitively or absolutely, but at least more than other works that were instead discarded. As we have seen, certain pictures clearly gave him particular satisfaction, such as *Painting* (1946) and *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952), which was evident in their use as springboards for later variations. But what exactly did it mean for a picture to work in Bacon's eyes? What was he looking for in a finished picture? Once again, this cannot of course be reduced to any facile formula, but one may presume that it involved realizing some effective fusion of form and content, 'a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa'. This was implicit in Bacon's own comments about the intentions that were, ideally, brought to fruition in his pictures. He aspired for instance to 'abbreviate into intensity' (Sylvester, 1993: 176). He also evoked a concern to distil pictorially the content with which he began: 'it's in the artificial structure that the reality of the subject will be caught, and the trap will close over the subject-matter and leave only the reality. One always starts with the subject, no matter how tenuous it is,

33 Gale 1998–9, entry on *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963).

and one constructs an artificial structure by which one can trap the reality of the subject-matter that one has started from' (Sylvester, 1993: 180). But what did Bacon have in mind when reiterating the phrase 'artificial structure'? In pictorial terms, the success of his works hinges, according to Joanna Shepard, on 'precisely orchestrated contrasts between thick and thin paint, between different textures and colours' (Shepard, 2009: 171). I would go further. Given that contradiction, in a variety of ways, is so pervasive a feature of Bacon's paintings, as discussed at length in the first part of this paper, one might suggest that this property encapsulated the overt artificiality that mattered so much to Bacon. Such effects were valued and consciously sought, and their achievement was integral not just to his picture-making procedures but also perhaps to his decisions about finish. One might infer, in other words, that he decided a picture worked when it conformed in an inventive and satisfying way to a general ideal of pictorial dissonance, the pictorial expression of the provocation Bacon wanted his pictures to give the viewer. Indeed one element in the difficulty he experienced in deciding pictures were finished was precisely such an ambition to sustain extreme tensions and contradictions. His problem, one might say, was how to finish a picture when lack of harmonious resolution, or finish in the conventional sense, was in part what he was after in his work.

The alternative option of course was always rejection, which could happen at any stage in the making process if Bacon came to feel that a picture was failing. We have seen that the ambiguities and oppositions in the pictures resulted from a singular dialectic of creation and negation within his working process. Superimposing layers or phases of paint might add to what was already in place on the canvas, but might also edit it by means of subtraction and overpainting. The impulse to spontaneous creative expression proceeded in tandem with the severe exercise of critical judgement, not only as the painting progressed but also in relation to any eventual decision about whether and when it might be thought to be finished. Bacon's strong critical sense was channelled into a remorseless habit of destroying pictures that did not completely satisfy him, even though on occasion he might later recognize that the pictures he had rejected were better than he had supposed, or even sometimes amongst his best (Sylvester, 1993: 17). That self-critical compulsion was noted persistently and from early on by

friends and reviewers (according to Rothenstein, for instance, 'hundreds of his canvases have been slashed, burned or overpainted').[34] Indeed Bacon's contrariness and negativity could extend to whole tracts of his work. He seems to have gone out of his way to destroy work from before he arrived at his mature artistic identity towards the end of the war, though such behaviour is not uncommon. More extreme and distinctive is the way in which, having painted numerous popes after Velázquez for twenty years up to and including *Study for Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1965), Bacon should then declare in 1966 that the entire series had been 'silly', and he wished he had never done them![35] He came to wish that the Tate would 'burn' the *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963) that they would not let him modify.[36] Conversely, one might well argue that the late work started to become slick and formulaic, as many concur that it eventually did, as Bacon's critical sense gradually became less acute and rigorous.

This paper has sought to grapple, albeit tentatively and speculatively, with some fundamental questions that tend not be asked about Bacon's paintings. What is their underlying aesthetic idiom? What is it like to look at them, as individual works and *en masse*? How do they permit or encourage the interpretation of meaning? And how are they made, in terms of thought processes and technical operations? Why for instance do they often come in series and triptychs, and how do such formats fit into Bacon's wider approach? How can critical analysis of Bacon bring together the dimensions of imagery or content, and form or pictorial language, a key goal for the artist given the laudatory comments about Matthew Smith with which we began? Moreover how can our answers to such questions take account also of the very specific cultural circumstances of the war and immediate post-war years, the moment in which he crystallized his artistic identity? Given my overall reading of Bacon's pictures as provocations rather than statements, it seems appropriate to end on a note of raising questions rather than offering definitive solutions.

34 John Rothenstein, Introduction, Alley, 1964: 21.

35 *Ibid.*, 37.

36 Gale 1998–9, entry on *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963).

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Martin Hammer

'Mainly Nourishment': Echoes of Sickert in the Work of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud

This article considers the legacy of what might be termed Edwardian anti-Edwardianism, viewed as a case study in plotting the transmission of ideas across artistic generations. Broadly, if 'Edwardian' stands, according to long-established cliché, for pomp and circumstance, vulgar materialism and slick technical virtuosity, then the art of Walter Sickert took a robust and polemical stand against such qualities, especially during the years between his return from living in France in 1905 and the outbreak of the First World War. His work at that time consistently addressed 'seedy' low-life subject matter, treated it in an idiom characterized by drab colours, dark tonalities and improvisational mark-making that ran counter to traditional notions of finish and pictorial coherence. The importance of Sickert's practice for younger artists at the time and for subsequent generations is well known, and it is restated on the Tate's splendid Camden Town Group website.[1] His influence was arguably at its most profound and pervasive in the years immediately following the Second World War. David Hockney recalled that, when he was a student at the Royal College in the late 1950s, 'Sickert was the great god and the whole style of painting in that art school – and in every other art school in England – was a cross between Sickert and the Euston Road School'.[2]

In parallel to such academicization of Sickert's example, the artist also mattered greatly to the 'School of London' artists, who were more experimental and innovative, if not self-consciously avant-garde, and who likewise established their signature styles and reputations in the post-war period. The group label is commonly accompanied by scare quotes because critics have struggled to discern common artistic ground between Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff and Michael Andrews, usually regarded as the core figures, beyond mutual friendship and admiration, and a shared commitment to imagery of 'the human clay', the phrase from Auden that the painter R. B. Kitaj appropriated when he coined the term 'School of London' in 1974.[3] Their work is indeed diverse in superficial stylistic terms. We might do better, I suggest, to see a set of deeply rooted artistic enthusiasms and loyalties, variously adapted to their own particular purposes, as the real glue that bound this group of painters together. Their canon took in certain old masters, from Rembrandt through to Edgar Degas, whose work was well represented in the National Gallery. Alberto Giacometti was clearly a key contemporary in his demonstration of the struggle involved in sustaining a figurative art that avoided post-Cubist formalization.

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Among the older generation of moderns, two painters above all seemed to have intimated the continuing possibility of a painterly realism, offering an antidote not only to the native tastefulness but also to the prevailing abstraction and engagement with popular visual culture among more progressive artists. The first was Chaim Soutine, the originally Ukrainian School of Paris artist, whose importance for post-war British painters and for critics such as David Sylvester I have considered in some detail elsewhere.[4] The second touchstone was Sickert, an older figure who, like Soutine, had died during the war, shortly after a hugely successful retrospective at the National Gallery in 1941. Subsequently, several illustrated monographs appeared, and the artist's own writings on art were brought together in the 1947 volume *A Free House*, which was clearly much talked about amongst artists.[5] A string of posthumous exhibitions culminated in the displays marking Sickert's centenary in 1960, including a major touring show that started at the Tate Gallery. The compatibility of Soutine and Sickert can readily be observed in the art of Auerbach and Kossoff during that period, underpinned by an ethos absorbed from their teacher, David Bomberg. But here I want to focus on aspects of the stimulus Bacon and Freud derived from Sickert, again operating in tandem with their immersion in the example of Soutine.

The notion that Sickert was important in a general sense for the 'School of London' artists is hardly ground-breaking. But in focusing on his use-value for Bacon and Freud, I wish to extend the approach employed in the aforementioned Soutine article and also in a recently published lecture exploring Bacon's long-term engagement with the art of Degas.[6] To my mind, it is especially worthwhile to think about how artists are affected not only by a diffuse inspiration derived from artists they admire, and from the broad values those artists stand for, but also by the intense and, of course, highly visual reactions that they have to specific works of art. They may be predisposed to work as they do by all manner of wider beliefs, assumptions and attitudes, internalized from the wider society, but often what really counts in the genesis of particular works, at the level of conscious motivation, is encountering concrete paintings or sculptures, whether by chance or design and in the original or in reproduction, which strike a chord with the concerns and needs of the moment. Feeding off, or measuring themselves, in some way against those exemplars then becomes integral to the creative process that produces new works. Furthermore, we need in principle to see artists as remaining highly responsive to their artistic environment, which becomes a key element in maintaining a momentum of development and self-renewal. It is perhaps when they stop looking outwards, and focus on their own *oeuvre* and habits as the only resource they need, that their work often becomes less compelling (the same is doubtless true of art historians).

As a field of enquiry within art history, such reactivity is most commonly investigated through the medium of exhibitions, where original works can be juxtaposed. One might think, to name but a few, of recent shows devoted to J. M. W. Turner's dialogue with other artists, Henri Matisse's response to Cubism, Pablo Picasso's rivalry with Matisse and persisting interest in Degas, and the stimulus Picasso provided in turn to

several British modernists, including Bacon.[7] The theme is less visible in traditional scholarly formats, where art historians tend rather to cast artists in their own image, as manipulators of complex abstract ideas and producers of determinate 'meaning', neglecting manifestations of dialogue between artists and their predecessors or contemporaries. These are admittedly often hard to support from documentation, as well as being exceedingly difficult to describe in terms of verbal discourse and logical argumentation, and, of course, problematic to illustrate given the limitations on the quality and number of reproductions that are usually available to accompany academic texts.

Another deterrent is the attitude frequently articulated by artists themselves. On the whole, the last thing ambitious artists like talking about is how they took their cue from others. Aside from vanity and psychological imperatives, they quite rightly suspect that such derivations might somehow be taken to diminish them and their work's status, given the naive cult of originality and individual genius prevalent in the modern art world (literary and film critics are much more willing to talk about appropriation and adaptation). Here, however, Sickert's view is salutary: 'To the really creative painter, it must be remembered, the work of other men is mainly nourishment, to assist him in his own creation. That is one reason why the laity are wise to approach the criticism of art by an artist with the profoundest mistrust.'[8] On that premise, I see no reason to be inhibited from exploring Sickertian features of his practice by Bacon's remark on one occasion to an interviewer: 'I've never been influenced by Sickert'.[9] Freud never encouraged the connection either, although he was on record as an admirer of, for example, Frans Hals, John Constable and Degas. It is the visual evidence of their actual work that suggests how looking hard at particular pictures by Sickert provided important nourishment for both Freud and Bacon.

It makes obvious sense to yoke the two painters together in this context. For years they were great friends, and doubtless the art of Sickert was one of the things they talked about. Indeed, Bacon at some point acquired Sickert's characteristic oil painting *Granby Street* from 1912–13, but subsequently chose to give the picture to Freud.[10] I do not know whether either artist owned any other Sickerts. Both painters' engagement with portraiture, and with the un-idealized nude set in dingy domestic surroundings, provides obvious lines of contact with Sickert, as does Freud's strong interest in the medium of etching. Nevertheless, their more concrete artistic debt remains under-researched, with the notable exception of Rebecca Daniel's work on Bacon and Sickert.[11] That neglect reflects a wider characteristic of the literature on Bacon and Freud. Neither tends to be discussed in relation to the inspiration of recent or contemporary art, as opposed to prestigious Old Masters, and to direct points of reference in photography in Bacon's case or in the motif physically in front of him for hours on end in Freud's studio. Freud once remarked of his reliance on direct scrutiny that '[m]y method was so arduous that there was no room for influence', as though his fellow Viennese émigré Ernst Gombrich had not shown that observation and representation are always mediated by artistic conventions and preoccupations, which inevitably shape decisions

regarding subject matter and treatment.[12] We need, then, to see the inspiration of Sickert as intersecting in complex and subtle ways with working directly from the model or from photographic source material.

Sickert's own, overt use of photographic sources, especially newspaper imagery, was doubtless in itself a catalyst for Bacon, whose own views may well be filtered through David Sylvester's remarks about Sickert in 1960, to the effect that 'his finest works are the best of his late works – the ones made from squared-up photographs in raw scrubbed colour with their dry graceless paint sinking into the coarse-grained canvas, works which are nothing but the strangeness of the shapes that the eye sees in nature when the mind ... is not allowed to intervene'.[13] Back in 1941, R. H. Wilenski had noted of Sickert's working method: 'Except in his early years he rarely painted from nature. His habit was to paint from drawings or photographs or prints. In some cases he used other people's photographs, in others he took the photographs himself or had them taken for his purpose ... In all his paintings he began where the drawing, the print or the photograph left off.'[14] From the early 1940s onwards, Bacon's work in turn drew constant inspiration from the many kinds of photographic imagery (from the press and books about wild animals, art, medicine, Nazi propaganda, Eadweard Muybridge's studies of the body in motion and so on) that he accumulated in his studio. As I have discussed elsewhere, Sickert's paintings such as *King George V and his Racing Manager* (1929–30) and the two versions of *H. M. King Edward VIII* (1936) offer a striking precedent for Bacon's decision to base compositions on low-grade press photography of a highly recognizable public figure.[15] The latter Sickert was based on a snapshot showing the figure stepping out from his vehicle onto the pavement, producing a sense of distortion and unsentimental detachment that clearly appealed to Bacon, who proceeded to work from photographs of Nazi leaders that had originally appeared in *Picture Post* in summer 1940 to develop the image of a puppet-like demagogue, strutting and screaming on his podium.[16] Another key work from the early 1940s, *Man Standing*, derived from a photograph of Hitler on the balcony of Prague castle at the time of the annexation of Czechoslovakia, which Bacon transformed into an evocation of reverie, somewhat in the manner of Sickert's *Girl at a Window: Little Rachel* (1907).[17] The choppy brushwork here might also reflect an engagement with Sickert's painterly execution. Sylvester contended that in *Figure in a Landscape* (1945) Bacon was responding on one level to Sickert's *The Miner* (1935–6), which had been shown in the Lefevre Gallery the year before Bacon made his own debut there.[18]

Bacon remained alert thereafter to Sickert's example. Daniels has tellingly observed that the conception of figure and menacing shadow in Bacon's *Painting* (1950) were directly informed by the Sickert drawing *Conversation* (*c.* 1908–9), a work relating to the Camden Town murder series that, on the recommendation of his friend Rodrigo Moynihan, was acquired by the Royal College of Art in early 1950, just before Bacon took over one of the studios there for a period. She further notes that an important show of early Sickert was held at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1953, immediately before Bacon's show in the same gallery. There are

several Sickerts where the subdued tonality, and the use of vertical shutters and bed as a compartmentalized framework for the figure, might well have fed into *Study for a Portrait* (1953), a work that Bacon included in his own exhibition. Daniels notes 'the position of the bed' and the 'emphasis on the light-soaked crumpled sheets defined by thick brushstrokes' in *Mornington Crescent Nude* (*c.* 1907) as a possible catalyst for Bacon's *Two Figures*, which was executed at some point in 1953 but thought too strong for regular public display (see Figure 1). This remarkable painting is, of course, more commonly related to Muybridge photography and to the currency of related imagery in physique magazines that possessed cult status within the gay community.[19]

Figure 1. Francis Bacon, *Two Figures* (1953), 1525 × 1165 mm, oil on canvas. Private collection, the Bridgeman Art Library, © the Estate of Francis Bacon, 2012.

Sickert may also have been a point of reference for *Two Figures*. We know that Bacon encountered a key Soutine, the early Céret landscape later acquired for the Tate, in a 1953 exhibition at the Redfern Gallery.[20] Likewise, he surely encountered Sickert's *La Hollandaise* (*c.* 1907), also now in the Tate, when it was included in the Redfern's 'Coronation Exhibition' that same summer. The show included one of Bacon's own 'Head' series, which the gallery owned, and in fact the two works were listed next to one another in the catalogue.[21] Previously, this now very familiar Sickert (Figure 2) had, as far as I know, languished in obscurity.[22] The idea that contemplating *La Hollandaise* was quite crucial for Bacon's *Two Figures* is supported by the remarkably similar ways in which animated marks in the foreground are floated against a dark, tonal ground,

Figure 2. Walter Richard Sickert, *La Hollandaise* (*c.* 1906), 511 × 406 mm, oil on canvas. © Tate, London 2012.

and in particular by the broad touches of light paint dragged over the texture of the canvas, to describe sheet and pillows. Note also the radically blurred treatment of the facial features and the exaggerated, seemingly random highlights in the modelling of the bodies in each work. Bacon was alert, I suggest, to the sheer boldness and experimentalism of which Sickert was capable. Bacon may also have perceived in *La Hollandaise* a raw sensuality, a sense of physicality projected not just through illustration but also through the texture and manipulation of paint, which he proceeded to elaborate in his own picture, by grafting what he had gleaned from Sickert onto Muybridge's imagery of wrestlers.

Bacon's subsequent engagement with the unfashionable genre of portraiture may equally owe something to the precedent of Sickert. The latter looks at his most Baconesque in the magnificent 1929 *Portrait of Sir Hugh Walpole*, with its smeary brushwork and boldly asymmetrical features.[23] The picture foreshadows the small-scale heads from around 1960 in which Bacon began to experiment with flat, brightly coloured backdrops, played off against luscious mark-making in the description of figures. Although the literal source is John Deakin's photographs, one might even see a residual echo of Sickert's *Portrait of Victor Lecourt* (1921–4) in Bacon's monumental *Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho* (1967).[24]

But their treatments of the nude provide the most obvious point of contact between Bacon and Freud, and between both of them and Sickert. Daniels cited Sickert's *Nude Lying Backwards on Bed* (*c.* 1904), which was shown once in London in 1951, as a possible model for Bacon's series of women reclining with their legs up from around 1960, such as the Tate's *Reclining Woman* (1961).[25] Equally, Sickert's shockingly foreshortened and frank presentation of the female nude in *L'Affaire de Camden Town* (*c.* 1909) may have provided a template for the relevant sections in Bacon's *Crucifixion* triptychs of 1962 and 1965, where Sickert's implied but understated violence becomes an explicit 'bed of crime', a favourite Bacon phrase evoking the simultaneous presence of discordant imagery and associations.[26] Bacon could have had the same Sickert in mind when conceiving his several naked portraits of Henrietta Moraes from the mid-1960s, where the figure is presented in strong foreshortening. *L'Affaire de Camden Town* is now one of the best known of all Sickert's paintings, but again we should note that it had been in France for several decades, passed rather discreetly though the Roland, Browse and Delbanco Gallery in the early 1950s, when it was eventually purchased by the artist Fred Uhlman, and was given fuller exposure, and indeed, reproduced for the first time, it would seem, only in 1960.[27] It may even be that Bacon and Freud discovered the work at this relatively late date. Since its sale in 1973, *L'Affaire de Camden Town* has been owned by a private collector who also possesses several major works by Bacon and Freud, including nudes by both artists. Indeed, the collector and the painters were good friends, and the acquisition of *L'Affaire de Camden Town* was evidently encouraged by Freud.[28] But the inclusion of it and comparable works in the various centenary exhibitions was symptomatic of a wider reawakening of interest, within an increasingly permissive climate, in the

most sexually provocative aspect of Sickert's art, namely the pictures from before the First World War focusing on naked females presented either on their own or in conjunction with clothed males, opening up potential narrative implications in the latter strand especially.[29]

Such paintings by Sickert surely played a significant role in setting the terms for the extended sequence of 'naked' female and occasionally male portraits that Lucian Freud produced from the late 1960s through to his death in 2012. His persistent 'naked portrait' terminology may in itself be a knowing echo of Sickert's polemical essay, 'The Naked and the Nude' from 1910, which eloquently laid out what the artist wished to avoid in his own work: 'The modern flood of representations of the Nude represents an intellectual and artistic bankruptcy that cannot but be considered degrading, even by those who do not believe the treatment of the naked human figure reprehensible on moral or religious grounds.' As the model for a more inventive and realistic approach, Sickert celebrated the example of Degas, who 'has incessantly chosen to draw figures from unaccustomed points of view'. Foreshadowing Freud's characteristic approach, Sickert memorably declared that 'perhaps the chief source of pleasure in the aspect of a nude is that it is in the nature of a gleam – a gleam of light and warmth and life. And that it should appear thus it should be set in surroundings of drapery or other contrasting surfaces.'[30]

In Freud's work the informal body language and loosely applied touch in *Naked Child Laughing*, a presentiment of the series proper dating from 1963, might be thought already to disclose an affinity with Sickert's *Jack Ashore* (1912–13), another work not publicly known in the original before the 1960 retrospective.[31] Both in its imagery and its broad technique, *Naked Child Laughing* is symptomatic of a major shift of direction in Freud's work, for which not only Sickert but also the work of Bacon seem to have been a crucial catalyst. In the more definitive *Naked Girl* from 1966, Freud may at some level have had in mind the pose and sense of the body sinking into the mattress in works by Sickert such as *The Iron Bedstead* (*c.* 1906) or *Mornington Crescent Nude* (1907), notwithstanding the more side-on viewpoint.[32] Equally, the twisted, foreshortened and notably un-idealized bodies in the two versions of *Naked Girl Asleep* (1967 and 1968), *Rose* (1978–9) and later works such as *Night Portrait* (1985–6), recall Sickert's explicit but more painterly treatment of the splayed female figure set against white sheets, in several works dating from around 1906.[33] One notable precursor is *Nuit d'Eté*, yet another sexually charged picture by Sickert that seems to have acquired visibility only in the 1960 centenary show.[34]

In *L'Affaire de Camden Town* the reclining nude is, of course, daringly juxtaposed against a standing male figure, a pictorial conceit which must surely have played some part in the genesis of Freud's *Painter and Model* (1986–7), as has been noted, attesting perhaps to the artist's regular access to the Sickert in the original.[35] The reference here is more overt visually than that acknowledged in the title of *Large Interior W. 11 (after Watteau)*, the monumental picture that Freud had executed at the start of the 1980s. There is also a more direct continuity of setting and atmosphere between the Freud and Sickert, whereas the relationship to the Watteau source

seems decidedly parodic. But, in *Painter and Model*, the roles in the Sickert are inverted, so that a clothed female painter looms over the naked male, who lies fully exposed on the battered leather Chesterfield that from the late 1970s often replaced the bed in many of Freud's exercises in bodily scrutiny. The comparison highlights other differences of approach. The Freud work is bigger, tighter in handling, less animated in every sense. It reads, one might say, as a studio confection, with the absence of a canvas and easel working to diminish the sense that we might be witnessing picture-making activity in the studio, and evoking instead indeterminate allegorical overtones. The original sexual charge in his pictorial model is more obscurely suggested in the Freud, by means of the ejaculatory squirt of paint emerging from the tube on the floor on which the woman has trodden and the apparent alignment of paint brush and penis.

One recent description of the Sickert notes 'a strong sense of fear and impending violence' and a 'fraught mood', but also detects contradictory signals of intimacy, so 'steeping the work in ambiguity'.[36] But there is an implicit reference to life beyond the studio, the world of real lives and relationships conducted in real everyday places, about which we are invited to speculate. We may or may not wish to identify the models he used, but can agree that Sickert's art makes reference to the tradition of narrative genre painting, whereas Freud's paintings are commonly held to aspire to the condition of portraiture. Commentators on *Painter and Model* generally find it necessary to emphasize that the painter is Celia Paul, one of Freud's lovers, whose personal creativity is somehow being celebrated. Viewed without the benefit of such background knowledge, and for all its realism of detail, the picture might seem an exercise in surreal, incongruous juxtaposition, especially when compared with the Sickert that was Freud's point of departure.

In the case of *Large Interior W.9* (1973), another in a long series of disconnected pairings, Freud's positioning of his aged mother, seated and lost in her thoughts, in front of a nude figure lying on her back, her face framed by her arms and gazing contemplatively up at the ceiling (Figure 3), brings to mind other Sickert compositions from the Camden Town murder series that feature seated males and recumbent naked females, notably the Kirkcaldy version of *What Shall We Do for the Rent?* (*c.* 1908), a work that, intriguingly enough, was exhibited at the Fine Art Society in London in 1973, the year the Freud was created.[37] But another comparison is, I think, still more telling about what Freud saw and valued in Sickert. The predominantly brown, ochre and dirty white palette, the close-up but high viewpoint, the orientation of the two older figures and the atmosphere of psychological dislocation across the generations together suggest an absorption on Freud's part in the Tate's *Ennui* (*c.* 1914), which by Sickert's standards is an unusually monumental as well as tightly executed and constructed picture (Figure 4).[38] The taut pyramid enclosing the two figures, notwithstanding their spatial dislocation, corresponds strikingly to Freud's configuration of the model's knees containing the mother's head and shoulders, and connecting visually with the contour of the chair. The obdurate presence of wood, leather, plaster and so forth seem in each case further to oppress the uncommunicative

Figure 3. Lucien Freud, *Large Interior W.9* (1973), 914 × 914 mm, oil on canvas. The Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement, the Bridgeman Art Library, © the Estate of Lucian Freud, 2012

pairs of individuals. The beer glass on the table in *Ennui* establishes a hard geometric note, offsetting other surfaces and textures, closely analogous to Freud's mortar and pestle. Such affinities and allusions coexist with notable differences of conception. Once again, the narrative and psychological suggestions in the Sickert, the sense of a stale family relationship unrelieved by, or perhaps intensified by, the trappings of respectable middle-class life, serve to highlight the stark studio staging in the Freud, where the girl and woman seem to come together only for the artist's pictorial convenience – it is recorded indeed that they never actually coincided on the premises.

As spectators we might feel inclined to wonder if the two figures are contemplating one another's state of being, whether in memory or anticipation, such elemental realities symbolized by the bareness of the space. Or does such a reading mistake for melancholy or thought of any description, the sheer impassivity necessary for sitting still hour after hour for the demanding maestro? More generally, we might ask from a sceptical position, do theatrical conjunction and obsessive detail in Freud's work function as a surrogate for expressive content, almost as a compensation for the absence of human engagement between the depicted figures or

Figure 4. Walter Richard Sickert, *Ennui* (*c.*1914), 1524 × 1124 mm, oil on canvas. © Tate, London 2012.

between subject and, first, artist and, then, viewer? Yet the powerful impact of such Freuds, to which many have attested, indicates that it may in fact be misguided to equate meaning with the kind of narrative reading appropriate to Sickert, while the flimsiness of much of what passes for critical analysis of Freud's work brings to mind Sickert's insight regarding 'The Language of Art':

> The real subject of a picture or a drawing is the plastic facts it succeeds in expressing, and all the world of pathos, of poetry, of sentiment that it succeeds in conveying, is conveyed by means of the plastic facts expressed, by the suggestion of the three dimensions of space, the

suggestion of weight, the prelude or the refrain of movement ... If the subject of a picture could be stated in words there had been no need to paint it.

The next sentence is especially apt to much of the critical literature on Freud, with its insistent biographical leanings: 'Writers on art ... mostly ride off from any real contact, either with a picture or its subject, to irrelevant secondary reflections capable of being buttoned onto that subject.'[39]

Yet another aspect of Sickert's art that probably excited Freud, in my view, was his recurrent use of mirrors, as a means to inject spatial complication into his compositions. In his self-portraiture in particular, Freud experimented with more quirky effects and imagery, and there is a clear line of continuity between works by Freud such as *Reflection with Two Children (Self-Portrait)* (1965), *Interior with Plant, Reflection Listening (Self-Portrait)* (1967–8) and *Small Interior (Self-Portrait)* (1968) and the similarly oblique and playful treatment encountered in Sickert's work on the same theme, such as *Self-Portrait: The Painter in his Studio* (1907) and *Self-Portrait: The Bust of Tom Sawyer* (1913).[40] In *Interior with Hand Mirror (Self-Portrait)* from 1967, showing Freud's own features in an oval mirror set against a sash window, the artist may likewise have taken a hint from equally intimate Sickerts such as *Mornington Crescent Nude: Contre-Jour* (*c.* 1905–6) and *Little Rachel at a Mirror* (1907), both shown in Agnew's 'Centenary show' in 1960. These, too, incorporate oval mirrors offset by the horizontals and verticals of windows, although such juxtapositions bring out Freud's greater instinct for compositional simplification.[41] Similarly, comparing Freud's naked bust-length self-portrait of 1985 with Sickert's *Juvenile Lead* from around 1907 indicates a shared engagement with the complex structure of the human head, while highlighting Sickert's consistently impressionistic treatment, leaving the viewer to supply the details, as against Freud's closely described realization of the main form and its nuances of local colour and texture, with the sculptural presence of the figure enhanced by minimal, neutral backdrops.[42] Nonetheless, Freud's entire approach to representing the human body might be said to be prefigured by Sickert's insistence, against James McNeill Whistler, that mastery 'is avid of complications, and shows itself in subordinating, in arranging, in digesting any and every complication'.[43]

This article has only scraped the surface of a fascinating strand, or tradition, within modern British art. The argument, as it stands, is very lightly illustrated. Moreover, the analysis of Bacon and Freud from this particular perspective could be taken further, as well as extended to the work of other artists in their milieu – Auerbach especially is perhaps more thorough-going in his emulation of Sickert than either. Nonetheless, the limited material assembled here can serve, at any rate, to exemplify Sickert's dictum, cited in full earlier: 'To the really creative painter ... the work of other men is mainly nourishment, to assist him in his own creation.' For Freud and Bacon, Sickert was clearly a continuing point of reference, to be mined when the occasion arose, and, like Soutine or

Giacometti, a compelling exemplar of an art that was figurative, even humane, in an appropriately visceral, post-war, existential manner.

Notes

1 For a broad survey coming up to the present, see Martin Hammer, 'After Camden Town: Sickert's Legacy since 1930', The Camden Town Group in Context Online Research Project, Tate website, Spring 2012, http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/martin-hammer-after-camden-town-sickerts-legacy-since-1930-r1104349. See also James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2001). Another instance is Jock McFadyen's show 'After Walter', Eleven Spitalfield Gallery, London, November–December 2012).

2 *David Hockney by David Hockney* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 34.

3 See James Hyman, 'The Persistence of Painting: Contexts for British Figurative Painting', in *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20th Century*, exhibition catalogue (Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2002), 255–6.

4 Martin Hammer, 'Found in Translation: Chaim Soutine and English Art', *Modernist Cultures*, 5 (November 2010): 218–42.

5 Osbert Sitwell, ed., *A Free House!, or The Artist as Craftsman, being the Writings of Walter Richard Sickert* (London: Macmillan, 1947).

6 Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Looking Back to Degas', *Tate Papers* (on-line journal), Spring 2012.

7 See David Solkin, *Turner and the Masters* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009); Ian Warrell, Alan Crookham and Philippa Simpson, *Turner Inspired – In the Light of Claude* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2012); Anne Baldassari, Elizabeth Cowling, John Elderfield, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine and Kirk Varnedoe, *Matisse Picasso* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002); Stephanie d'Alessandro and John Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention 1913–1917* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Cowling and Richard Kendall, *Picasso Looks at Degas* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2010); Chris Stephens, ed., *Picasso and Modern British Art* (London: Tate Publishing 2012).

8 Sickert, 'Risi-Bisi' (1912), reprinted in Sitwell, *A Free House!*, 176.

9 Cited in Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert: "Images which Unlock Other Images"', in *Francis Bacon: New Studies*, ed. Martin Harrison (Göngen: Steidl, 2009), 74.

10 See Wendy Baron, *Sickert: Paintings and Drawings* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2006), no. 397; Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 84–6.

11 Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 57–87.

12 Cited in Sebastian Smee, *Lucian Freud* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 4.

13 David Sylvester, 'Sickert' (1960), reprinted in *On Modern Art* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 155–6.

14 R. H. Wilenski, 'Sickert's Art', in *Sickert*, ed. Lillian Browse (London: Faber, 1943), 31–2.

15 Sickert's importance for Bacon's work in the 1940s is discussed in Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012).

16 The first version of Sickert's composition had been shown at the Leicester Galleries in 1936, the second at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1937; see Baron, *Sickert*, no. 726.

17 Ibid., no. 337.

18 Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 24–5.

19 Simon Ofield, 'Wrestling with Francis Bacon', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24, no 1 (2001): 113–30.

20 Hammer, 'Found in Translation', 230.

21 Exhibition catalogue, The Redfern Gallery, 'Coronation Exhibition', nos 48 and 49.

22 Baron, *Sickert*, no. 252.

23 Ibid., no. 692.

24 Ibid., no. 559.

25 Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 82–5.

26 Discussed in Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda*, 207.

27 Baron, *Sickert*, no. 354. It may be misleading to claim that the Sickert was 'exhibited' at the gallery (Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert', 66, 249, note 50).

28 Information from Catherine Lampert, e-mail to author dated August 25, 2012.

29 See Barnaby Wright, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Camden Town Nudes* (London: The Courtauld Gallery/Paul Holberton, 2007).

30 Sickert, 'The Naked and the Nude' (1910), reprinted in Sitwell, *A Free House!*, 324.

31 William Feaver, *Lucian Freud* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), no. 108; Baron, *Sickert*, no. 400.

32 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, no. 119; Baron, *Sickert*, nos 251, 334.

33 Robert Hughes, *Lucian Freud: Paintings* (London: The British Council, 1987), plates 37, 38; Feaver *Lucian Freud*, nos 166, 220.

34 Baron, *Sickert*, no. 253. For a better reproduction, see Wright, *Walter Sickert*, 71.
35 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, no. 224.
36 Wright, *Walter Sickert: The Camden Town Nudes*, 88.
37 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, no. 146; Baron, *Sickert*, no. 344.
38 Baron, *Sickert*, no. 418.
39 Sickert, 'The Language of Art' (1910), reprinted in Sitwell, *A Free House!*, 89.
40 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, nos 117, 126, 129; Baron, *Sickert*, nos 331, 408.
41 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, no. 124; Baron, *Sickert*, nos 247, 338.
42 Feaver, *Lucian Freud*, no. 210; Baron, *Sickert*, no. 330.
43 Sickert, 'Where Paul and I Differ' (1910), reprinted in Sitwell, *A Free House!*, 22.