

**TACTILITY, ILLUSIONISM AND THE DEPICTION OF FLESH IN SELECTED
CONTEMPORARY PAINTING**

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ABSTRACT

Painting that gives an illusion of external reality can often induce powerful tactile sensations in the viewer, even though it is primarily a visual art. This dissertation examines features of tactility and illusionism that occur together in selected contemporary figure painting. The aim is to show that, despite arguments to the contrary, illusionistic painting need not always effect an intellectual response in the viewer.

Some art critics and historians have argued that in its quest to produce a perfect replica of nature, illusionistic painting erases all traces of the artist's bodily labour and fails to capture the physicality of objects. It is argued that this serves to distance the viewer from the image in a bodily and emotional way. An excessive build-up of the material of paint, on the other hand, is assumed to convey an acute sense of corporeality and to create an intimate spectatorial response to the image.

In this present study, with specific reference to the twentieth century painters, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, and to the theories of the psychoanalyst, Marion Milner, I maintain that this is true only to a degree. My hypothesis is that through a particular painting process, during which the artist responds in a bodily way to the objects viewed, a certain textural paint mark can be produced. It is this, I argue, that creates a tactile quality in a painting whether or not the painted surface is overtly material or smoothly and realistically rendered.

I discuss my own work in relation to the contents of this dissertation.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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19th day of July, 19 99

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Introduction

During the years I have studied art I have often noticed that certain naturalistic¹ paintings of the past and present offer a more convincing illusion of reality than others do. The objects depicted in these works seem to have a remarkable solidity, texture and three-dimensionalism, which arouses my sense of touch when viewing them. Furthermore, if these paintings depict or allude to flesh, they often impart a sense of corporeality in addition to stimulating the viewer's sense of touch. Through a physical response to, and identification with these tactile images, I seem to lose some sense of the distance between the painted objects and myself, giving rise to an intimate viewing experience of the work.

I encountered this phenomenon once again in some of my own illusory paintings of the nude human body. While I was making these images, I discovered that a special painting process was required to create these tactile images. This process involved the forfeiture of both self-consciousness and the perception of the distance between the objects I was painting and myself. In other words, I had to imagine that I was not only touching the objects but that I had assumed their physical identity.

In contrast to tactility, there are aspects of painting that seem to appeal simply to the eye and distance the viewer from the image viewed. As with tactile paintings, the artistic procedure concerned with producing 'optical' images like these seems to be similar to the viewer's experience of them (Walker, 1975:9).² In works that are optical, the artist is conscious of him/herself before the canvas or board and is aware of the separation between him/herself and the objects to be painted.³

The difference between an optical painting and a tactile one is clearly demonstrated by the following two comments comparing the figurative paintings of the human body by Lucian Freud (b. 1922) and Francis Bacon (1909 – 1992), which are considered to be tactile, to certain more optical paintings. The first comment comes from Bruce Nauman who states that

Freud does not follow the two generally accepted contemporary paths of painting the nude: ... seeing the body as a highly articulated still-life ... – the Philip Pearlstein method – ... [or] incorporat[ing, as Eric Fischl's paintings do,] the sociological and the erotic (Nauman, 1996:95).

Instead, he says, 'Freud's work ... seems to set up a material equivalence between flesh and paint' (ibid.). The second comment is by Martin Gayford. He points out that the difference between Bacon and other modernist painters of the nude, such as the Futurist Boccioni or the Cubist Picasso, 'is that with Bacon there is a far greater sense that his figures are actually made out of living flesh' (Gayford, 1996:45).

A further comment by David Bourdon about the artist, Philip Pearlstein, suggests that optical painting can also be emotionally barren. In his article 'Up Close and Impersonal', Bourdon mentions that

[t]he artist's physical closeness to his subjects seems to exaggerate his apparent emotional detachment... . Pearlstein is an heir to the European academic tradition of studio life classes... . Empirical, literal-minded and dedicated to factuality (Bourdon, 1997:97).

Pearlstein appears to want to make accurate facsimiles of human bodies that are free from his subjective responses to them. Taking into account the probable bipolar nature of opticality and tactility in naturalistic painting, Bourdon's remark further implies that the artist of a tactile painting is neither emotionally detached from his/her subject nor is his/her painting devoid of emotion. This is certainly true of myself as a painter and of my tactile paintings. My brush marks are invested with the passion or sentiment that I am feeling at the time of painting.

The emotional, bodily and tactile features that seem to occur in these and other naturalistic paintings appear to be instrumental in opening up an image to the viewer's interpretation of it. The viewer's response to such images seems to be subjective. This subjectivity clouds the rational and objective absorption of the facts comprising the work, and the viewer is influenced by his/her own emotional and bodily reaction to, and identification with, the physicality of the image. Idealistically, since a clearly

depicted optical image may present itself to the viewer uncontaminated by his/her subjective responses, the idea expressed by that image must, in theory, remain unchanged. In this scenario, the viewer passively receives the information offered by the image, whereby his/her individuality is repressed by the didacticism of the painting. In contrast to this, a tactile painting that allows for a variety of interpretations does not close itself off from the production of new ideas. It could also be possible that the subjectivity of the viewer's response causes ideas to be produced spontaneously rather than through a self-conscious application of received notions.

Tactility also points to a rejuvenation of the creative body. In an era of ready-mades and installation art, where the emphasis is placed 'on "art as idea" rather than as "produced object"', the bodily labour that is involved in the craft of painting and other 'traditional' art practices seems to be rapidly coming to an end (Preller, 1997). Furthermore, Karin Preller writes in her essay, 'The "Labour" of Painting in a Postmodern Culture' (1997), that 'this phenomenon is an indication that "labour/skill" or "craft", specifically as embodied in painting, is undervalued, out of fashion or, at the very least, neglected, in the art world' (ibid.).⁴ Contemporary painters like Freud and Bacon challenge these ideas because they have physically, as well as mentally, struggled with, and mastered the craft of painting. Paintings such as theirs are evidence that the art of painting still exists, and strongly so.

In this research I shall explore the nature of tactility⁵ and its value for art, with reference to selected paintings of the past and present. I have chosen to focus particularly on the paintings of Freud and Bacon because of their similarity to my own work. Bacon's experiences as a painter, made public through various interviews⁶, correspond very well with my own creative experiences. Additionally, Freud and Bacon are twentieth-century artists, providing a context common to them and me.

The text *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950) by the psychoanalyst, Marion Milner, has guided my search for a psychoanalytical interpretation of tactility. In this work, Milner writes about and analyses her own attempts to learn to draw and paint, explaining that she was inspired to 'express the feelings that come from the sense of touch and muscular movement rather than from the sense of sight' (Milner, 1950:10). She also

states that she experienced an imaginary 'fusion' between herself and the objects she drew or painted (ibid.:142). The comparable experiences of Milner and myself make *On Not Being Able to Paint* invaluable to this present study.

Chapter 1 is an overview of the features of tactility that concern this research. In this chapter, I introduce Bernard Berenson's 'tactile values'⁷ and Leora Farber's idea that certain paintings with an overtly material surface and subject matter that alludes to the body have an emotional quality and evoke the corporeal.⁸ These two interpretations of tactility in painting comprise the main theme of this study.

Chapter 2 examines selected psychoanalytical theories that relate to the artist's and viewer's experiences of tactility. In particular, I look at Milner's concept of an imaginary boundary-loss occurring in the mind of the artist and viewer between themselves and the objects viewed.⁹

In chapter 3, I discuss the artists, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, in relation to the arguments presented in the first two chapters. This discussion is continued in chapter 4, this time with the emphasis on tactility as a symbol of bodily rejuvenation.

Chapter 5 considers the role the viewer plays in the interpretation of a tactile painting. With Umberto Eco's idea of the 'open work'¹⁰ in mind, I argue that the viewer's subjective and individual interpretation contributes to the meaning of certain tactile images.

Finally, chapter 6 is an analysis of the practical work I made for this degree, considering how the issues raised in the previous chapters are reflected in the work.

NOTES:

¹ According to *The Oxford Companion to Art* (1970), the term 'naturalistic' is commonly used to denote a type of art that endeavours to represent natural objects as they appear in contrast to a stylized or 'conceptual' art such as that of the Egyptians. In this sense the art of the Greek Classical period is often claimed to be the first truly 'naturalistic' art and that of the Italian Renaissance is spoken of as a revival of naturalism (see Osborne, 1970:766-77). While naturalism generally restricts itself to a concern for accurate transcriptions of the natural world, 'realism' additionally concerns itself with the type of subject matter depicted, and typically concentrates on mundane or squalid objects or scenes (see Reynolds with Seddon, 1981:171).

² 'Opticality' is 'the Greenbergian/Fried term for pictorial illusion addressed to the eyesight alone' (Walker, 1975:9).

³ I gathered this both from my own painting experiences and from the research I did for this degree.

⁴ Preller notes that some installations undeniably involve 'work', but that it is a different type of work than that which is ascribed to painting. Preller states that '[w]here "labour" or "skill" (the "labour" of the mind, or physical labour) may therefore nor be irrelevant, "traditional" skills, as embodied specifically in painting, seem to be regarded as conservative and *passé*' (Preller, 1997).

⁵ It must be noted that a difficulty arises in giving a definition to tactility. This is because it often differs in style and form from one painting to another, viewers differ in their ways of reading tactility and in their discernment of tactile paintings, and, in addition, not all similarly formed paintings display equal degrees of tactility. To overcome this problem I have tried to avoid generalities, concentrating instead on specific artists and paintings.

⁶ This will be mentioned later in this dissertation.

⁷ See Berenson, 1960:53.

⁸ See Farber, 1992, *passim*.

⁹ I shall alternate between discussions of both the artist's and the viewer's experiences of, and responses to, the aspects of painting with which I am concerned. In the case of the artist, I shall examine both his/her role in the creative process and his/her role as viewer in front of the canvas or board because [i]nside each artist is a spectator upon whom the artist, the artist as agent, is dependent' (Wollheim, 1991:101). Although I am aware that spectatorial responses differ with each individual, I shall endeavour to present an argument from the viewer's point of view based on artists', critics and

art historians' comments on the works discussed in this dissertation, as well as my own experiences of these paintings.

¹⁰ See Eco, 1979, 1989, 1990, *passim*.

Chapter 1

Tactility and illusionism in painting

Although painting is a visual art, it can often evoke powerful tactile sensations in the viewer. While it is difficult to give a general definition of tactile painting¹, attempts have been made to rise to this challenge. In this chapter I shall discuss two interpretations of tactility that are useful in analysing the paintings of Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, as well as my own work.

The first interpretation is Bernard Berenson's well-known proposal that certain paintings depicting three-dimensional illusionism² have the power to stimulate the viewer's sense of touch.³ The second is the idea presented by Leora Farber in her dissertation *Opticality and Tactility in Selected South African Still-life Painting* (1992). Farber's argument maintains that tactility is a painting's ability to indicate corporeality in an intimate way. Her thesis echoes the intentions of many artists since the 1970s whose art, dealing with the human body, promotes the capacity to *feel* as the ultimate distinguishing human trait, drawing to the surface emotions inherent in the body itself.⁴ This second interpretation refers to the evocation of a bodily and emotional reaction in the viewer, as much through an overtly material surface as through the subject matter – both of which suggest the body.

In contrast to this, it has been argued by certain art historians and critics⁵ that because illusionistic painting is primarily a visual experience (favouring subject matter over the materiality of the paint), the viewer is distanced from it bodily and emotionally. I propose that illusionistic paintings which stimulate the sense of touch have the power to evoke the corporeal and to trigger the emotions despite the lack of overt materiality. It is precisely this, I believe, that makes such a painting tactile in Berenson's sense.

The Plinian story that praises Zeuxis' representation of grapes for being so dextrously painted that even the birds were fooled by its naturalism, asserts the idea that the perfect replication of nature is the primary aim of painting.⁶ The goal of illusionistic painting has often been considered to be the production of the 'essential copy'⁷ of external reality (Bryson, 1983:13).



Figure 1 John Constable *The Hay-wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 129.54 x 187.96 cm

It would appear, for example, that in John Constable's *The Hay-wain* (see figure 1) the artist aimed to capture the likeness of a river reflecting a surrounding rural scene and the typically English weather of breezes and intermittent sunshine. Constable's painting could be classed, therefore, as an attempt to produce Norman Bryson's 'essential copy'. In his text *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (1983), Bryson notes that it

is a natural enough attitude to think of painting as a copy of the world, and given the importance of realism in Western painting it is perhaps inevitable that eventually this attitude would be elevated to a doctrine, as it has been by Gombrich (ibid.:xii).

Here, Bryson is referring to Sir Ernst Gombrich who, in his text *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960), claims that painting is a 'record of perception' (ibid.). Bernard Berenson holds a similar opinion to Gombrich. In his discussion of fifteenth-century Florentine painting in *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1960), Berenson says that 'painting is an art which aims at giving an abiding impression of artistic reality with only two dimensions' (Berenson, 1960:52). By 'artistic reality' he means the

creation of illusionary three dimensions – a painter must, he says, ‘construct his third dimension’ (ibid.:53). The two figures in Masaccio’s *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (see figure 2), for example, convey the illusion of three-dimensional reality in a very convincing way due to the artist’s superb use of chiaroscuro⁸, which fully defines the human figures. The painting, thus, becomes a record of the perception of real objects in real space.



Figure 2 Masaccio (Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Mone) *Expulsion of Adam and Eve*. c. 1425-7, fresco

Berenson believes that the stimulation of touch in a visual context is the key to the pictorial perception of three dimensions in a two-dimensional painting, 'giving tactile values to retinal impressions' (ibid.). Illusionistically painted objects are always within ultimate or potential

reach, but the viewer is unable to grasp their three-dimensional form as he/she could do with real objects. A viewer of a painting may make actual contact with the paint, canvas, frame and so forth, but he/she can never physically penetrate its illusory third dimension. Berenson's tactile sensations, thus, appeal only through the eye and never to the actual sensory receptors of touch.

In paintings producing the illusion of three-dimensional solidity, Berenson notes that it is the effect of simulating volume which arouses the viewer's sense of touch, making the illusionistic masses seem physically graspable. He says that when looking at Masaccio's paintings he feels he could 'touch every figure, that it would yield a definite resistance to [his] touch' (ibid.:65).

Berenson explains that our sense of pictorial three dimensionality relates to our perception of three dimensions in the external world. 'Psychology has ascertained that sight alone gives us no accurate sense of the third dimension' as our retinal images are essentially two dimensional (ibid.:52). Knowledge of the third dimension is acquired through our bodily experiences. The anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber, writes about this in a letter to the art historian and critic Meyer Shapiro:

Berenson's 'tactile values' in painting, which can appeal only through the eye, and never actually to the sense of touch, nevertheless refer to something that underlies the vision which is at the center of visual art: namely, that feeling by touching precedes sight, phylogenetically and ontogenetically in every human baby. We all touch first, learn to see later, and in learning erect a nearby visual world on a tactile base, giving a double quality to all perceptions of objects, first within immediate reach, and later within ultimate or potential reach (Kroeber, 1970:267).

Or, as Berenson states:

In our infancy, long before we are conscious of the process, the sense of touch, helped on by the muscular sensations of movement teaches us to appreciate depth, the third dimension, both in objects and in space (Berenson, 1960:52).

These factors become a person's 'test of reality' (ibid.). For example, 'we see objects in only one profile at a time, and the infant, like the inhabitant of a two-dimensional world, 'might have before him an entire series of profiles ... without ever realising that he was looking at one single [object] in relief' (Focillon, 1992:78). By touching the object the infant comes to understand the unifying relationship between the series of profiles. Distances, likewise, can only be gauged after we have experienced moving through space and relating this physical experience to the corresponding retinal image. Thus, the inexperienced eye moving towards distant objects comes to understand that objects farther away from the eye look smaller than those which are closer. Illusionistic painting, also able to display an object in only one profile, similarly relies on Kroeber's 'double quality' to give a sense of three dimensions.

Bryson, however, proposes that, fundamentally, painting is more than just a recording of what the eye sees and how the mind interprets it. He feels that 'a doctrine of perceptualism in which the problems of art are, in the end, subsumed into the psychology of the perceiving subject remains incoherent' (Bryson, 1983:xii). According to this, Berenson's assessment of Florentine painting, albeit an observation of great value, is not complete because 'what is suppressed by the account of painting as a record of perception is ... its reality as a sign' (ibid.). The human body is one important 'signifying force outside painting' with which it is in constant touch (ibid.:xiii).

Painting can signify the human body not only through representations but also through symbolism.⁹ For example, brush-strokes are evidence of the painter's physical labour and as such they are signs of the painter's body. In her dissertation, *Opticality and Tactility in Selected South African Still-life Painting* (1992), Leora Farber describes paintings that include features of 'pictorial flatness', 'textural articulation' and 'assertion of the material medium' as tactile in this second sense (Farber, 1992:21). She gives as an example Penny Siopis's *Three Lace Cloths* (see figure 3), explaining that the fragmentation of the surface draws the viewer's attention to the physical involvement of the painter with her medium – Siopis actually used her hands to build up this 'extremely material surface' (ibid.:35). Farber uses Bryson's term 'deixis'¹⁰ to describe this process:

Assertion of medium as substance shifts the emphasis deictically back to the sender of the message – the surface refers to and acts as an extension of

the painter's body, reading as if in the deictic time of the painting process
(ibid:36)

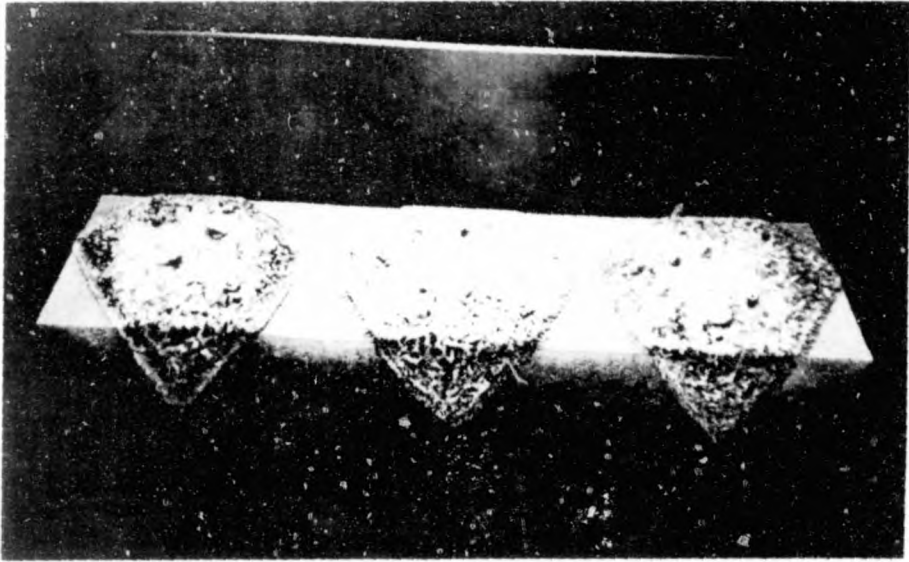


Figure 3 Penny Siopis *Three Lace Cloths*, 1984, oil on canvas, 300 x 150 cm



detail

According to Farber, the above-mentioned qualities of painting 'can release bodily/sensory awareness' in the viewer as an identification with the actions of the painter's body (ibid.:34). This creates a sense of intimacy with the painting.

Body references of a much more complex kind are also present in Siopis's painting. Where objects both remain separate from, and merge with, the lace cloths on which they rest, a ruptured surface is created that is 'not unlike ruptures into the external skin of the body' (ibid.:38). They seem to allude to exposed internal organs and may well arouse a feeling of disgust or 'squeamishness' in the viewer (Hudson, 1982:10).¹¹ The viewer is made insecure by the conflicting feelings of intimacy (attraction) and repulsion.

The painting's contraposition to idealised images of the nude, for example, which deny these unsettling aspects of the body¹², implies that its maker is antagonistic towards such conventions. This powerful and aggressive attack, which has its roots in feminist theory¹³, demonstrates two things about the second definition of tactility. The first is that it causes *spontaneous* emotional and bodily reactions in the viewer. The second is that it does not privilege the gaze – the 'scientific gaze which makes knowledge visible, known and possessible' (Farber, 1992:12).

The twentieth-century French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault, notes that between the years 1650 – 1800 there developed a view which saw the world as 'situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher' (Jay in ibid.:10). Oculocentrism¹⁴ in Western culture dates back to antiquity. The period of Modernism which began in the Renaissance, influenced by the philosophy of René Descartes (1596 – 1650), was the chief proponent of 'the visual as a source of knowledge' (van Alphen, 1992:48). This age of confidence in science advocated vision as the sensory means of detached observation.

E. G. Schachtel's terms 'distance sense' to define vision, and 'proximity senses' for touch, taste and smell (Schachtel, 1949:23-24), are worth mentioning in this context. Schachtel states that 'both pleasure and disgust are more intimately linked with proximity senses than with distance senses. The pleasure which a perfume, a taste, or a texture can give is much

more of a bodily – a physical one' (ibid.). This suggests that the interference of subjective, emotive reactions springing from the proximity senses would sully the clarity of visual observation. There would no longer be a 'spectatorial split between a detached, contemplative subject and object viewed' as Descartes proposed (Jay in Farber, 1992:9).

Highly naturalistic paintings are typically thought to privilege the gaze. For example, the technical problems in the formulation of rational perspective in *The Battle of San Romano* by Paolo Uccello (see figure 4) which are solved rationally (Uccello placed broken lances on the ground in a grid arranged according to the mathematically resolved perspective of Alberti¹⁵), induce a similarly rational response in the viewer. Here, the painting's smooth surface creates a credible illusion of external reality and the viewer is able to see it from a 'singular, prime viewpoint' (ibid.:11). According to John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972),

[t]he illusion produced from this singular vantage point [causes] the artist/spectator [to assume] a God-like position and he may feel empowered to control and 'possess' the scene. He is placed in a privileged position which affirms his status, enabling him to be the mastering I/eye (Berger, 1972:16).

The scene seems to have been planned rationally because Uccello's layout of objects emphasises frontality, symmetry, balance and order. It is as though it has been 'deliberately arranged for the viewer's benefit.... This "theatrical" quality emphasises the viewer's position as commanding subject' (ibid.:10).

The viewer's sense of control and possession over the scene suggests that an intellectual response is induced. If Schachtel's 'proximity senses' were to be evoked, the viewer may feel mastered by the scene – controlled or influenced subjectively by involuntary emotions and bodily responses such as those which are probably brought about by Siopis's *Three Lace Cloths*. In Berger's description, the eye of the painter is 'disembodied'¹⁶ (Jay in Farber, 1992:21). The viewer is presumed to have a sense of somatic isolation from the painted objects because 'the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance.... The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality' (Irigaray in ibid.:16).



Figure 4 Paolo Uccello *The Battle of San Romano*, c. 1455, tempera on wood panel, 15.24 x 25.680 m

Farber gives the term 'optical' to paintings that disembody the viewer (*ibid.*, *passim.*).¹⁷ She states that in addition to compositional elements like frontality, symmetry and balance, '[m]edium is mastered in a way which relies on a "smooth" surface to create a credible illusion' (*ibid.*:10). It is mastered 'in a manner that suggests that the world described ... is none other than the world perfectly seen ... as if visual phenomena are ... made present without the intervention of a human maker' (Alpers in *ibid.*:13). Bryson argues that within the art of the West, illusionistic painting 'manipulates the sign in such a way as to conceal its status as a sign' (Bryson, 1983:xiii). In its pursuit of the real or the natural, illusionistic painting 'approaches a point where it sheds everything that interferes with its reduplicative mission' (*ibid.*:3), including the fact that the painting was made by the activity of a human body. The painter appears to be 'passive before experience and his existence can be described as an arc extending between two, and only two, points: the retina and the brush' (*ibid.*:6).

What, then, of illusional paintings that stimulate the viewer's sense of touch? The building-up of not simply a three-dimensionality, but a *textural* three-dimensionality – however slight the texture – seems to me to be the factor that makes highly illusional paintings tactile. In other words, a painting that appears to be a facsimile of external reality but which has a somatic

quality, is equal, not opposite to a painting with an extremely material surface such as Siopis's *Three Lace Cloths*. The textural mark, whether overt or camouflaged, carries with it aspects of corporeality such as residues of the painter's physical labour and the suggestion of bodily features and functions. It is, therefore, possible that it is this that determines whether an artist produces a copy of an object or creates a more intimate rendering of it.

Still-life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water (see figure 5) by Francisco de Zurbarán is an example of a smoothly rendered, realistic painting which displays qualities of tactility. I mention this painting because Farber uses it to demonstrate her concept of opticality, and I feel that she is mistaken. Taking her cue from the twentieth-century art historian, Svetlana Alpers, Farber compares this southern (Spanish) still-life painting to seventeenth-century northern (Dutch) painting, which Farber believes is more tactile. Farber states that

[i]n the southern still-life tradition, the viewer actively looks out at the world as its commanding presence. Man is generally given privilege. In the Dutch approach, the world – assumed to be prior to man – is made visible and seen. Concern is with mirroring nature exactly and unselectively (Farber, 1992:9).

Although this description seems to place both southern and northern seventeenth-century painting within the context of the 'essential copy', what Farber is attempting to demonstrate is that in the southern tradition, man projects himself on to the world he sees, whereas in the northern tradition the world is viewed with more clear-sightedness. According to Farber, the 'natural' abundance, and random arrangement, of the objects, details and textural features of the northern tradition are aspects of tactility. On the other hand, Farber argues, in the southern tradition a more optical effect is created through the orderliness with which the objects are laid out and the restraint with which details are rendered.

Farber appears, here, to be wrong on two counts. Firstly, in comparison with her more general account of tactility, Farber appears to be contradicting herself. In her general account, she equates the painted 'mirror-image' of nature with its possession and control, thereby making the seventeenth-century southern and northern traditions comparable. Furthermore, man is lessening the objective distance between himself and the world by projecting himself on to the

objects he sees. Consequently, the scientific objectivity of his observations would be reduced, and this would allow for the interference of subjective responses. Secondly, I believe that a seventeenth-century painting from the southern tradition, such as *Still-life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water*, is tactile rather than optical because it is built up of textural marks.

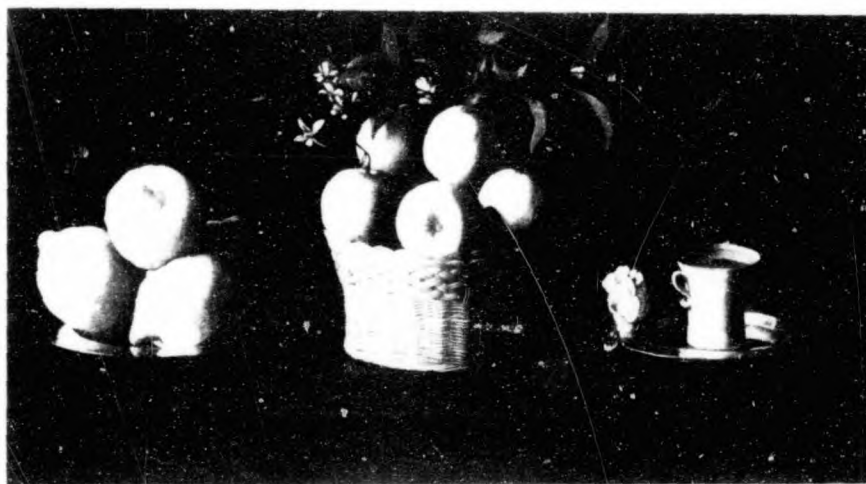


Figure 5 Francisco de Zurbarán *Still-life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water*, 1633

Texture and its corporeal aspects become difficult to detect: the more they are hidden within a smooth surface. It is likely that they can be sensed only in a 'mysterious' and perhaps semi-conscious way. A conjectural discussion of tactility in terms of analysing this particular phenomenon will be useful here and will lead into the topic of the second chapter, which deals with tactility on a more psychoanalytical level. To begin with, in his discussion of tactile values, Berenson does not explain clearly why Cimabue appears to be less conscious of, or less able to realise the third dimension than a later painter like Giotto. Berenson states that these earlier Florentine painters did not have 'the power to stimulate the tactile imagination' (Berenson, 1960:53). Their works were 'highly decorative, very intelligible symbols, capable indeed of communicating something, but losing all higher value the moment the message is delivered' (ibid.). On the other hand, it appears that 'Giotto's registration of the visual field is subtler, more attentive, and in every way superior to that of Cimabue' (Bryson, 1983:6). As both painters attempt to create three-dimensional form and space – Cimabue's *Crucified*

Christ (see figure 6) conveys volume through similar, albeit more schematic, light and shaded areas to Giotto's *Crucified Christ* (see figure 7) – this description does not suggest how Giotto's technique differs from Cimabue's. My observations of these two works have led me to believe that Giotto's paintwork has textural quality that Cimabue's does not or, more accurately, has less of.

A painting like Giotto's *Crucified Christ* where the texture of the mark is concealed within a smoothly realistic, three-dimensional form suggests a particular skill¹⁸ on the artist's part. There is, in Giotto's work, a 'terse and perfect relation between the movements of the brush and the tactile sense of the body' (Hughes, 1988:20). This is the description Robert Hughes gives Lucian Freud's *Naked Portrait* (see figure 8), but it is appropriate for Giotto's painting as well. In all likelihood, tactile form occurs when 'the keenly somatic' is authentically felt by the artist (ibid.:8). The truly felt painting, where there is a direct correspondence between feeling and form, may well be the key to tactile painting. It seems true of the Florentine paintings Berenson judges to be tactile, true of Freud's and Francis Bacon's paintings, true of my own work and, as we shall see later, true of what the psychoanalyst, Marion Milner, attempted to achieve.

The ability of an artist to produce textural volume is not limited to thinly painted realistic images. Mass of paint may contribute substantially to a sense of three-dimensional, tactile volume. In Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* (see figure 9) or Freud's *Blond Girl, Night Portrait* (see figure 10), the paint is built up thickly to add physicality to the illusory three dimensions. The painting becomes in part a relief sculpture that is controlled in such a way as to add to the illusion of tangible flesh. This is taken to extremes in Siopis's *Three Lace cloths* where volume is conveyed almost completely through the 'sculpting' of the paint; her paintings are no longer illusions of three dimensions, but 'sculptured forms' made of paint.

Displaying the paint's materiality in this way emphasises painting's bondage to matter. As Henri Focillon says: 'Unless and until it actually exists in matter, [the form of art] is little better than a vista of the mind' (Focillon, 1992:95).¹⁹ In order to have material form, painting has, therefore, to quit the realm of pure thought. In painting, thought cannot be divorced from form and matter, both of which, in turn, direct thought. '[T]he feeling in a work of art is something the artist conceived as he created the symbolic form to present it, rather than

something he was undergoing and involuntarily venting in an artistic process' (Langer in Milner, 1950:158).



Figure 6 Cimabue (Cenni de Pepi) *Crucified Christ* (detail of painted cross),
c.1265, fresco



Figure 7 Giotto (Giotto di Bondone) *Crucified Christ (detail of painted cross)*.

1290-1300, fresco



Figure 8 Lucian Freud *Naked Portrait*, 1980-81, oil on canvas, 90 x 75 cm

The mass of painting (including the canvas, frame etc.) contributes to its tactile form and painting is in its essence 'tangible' (Focillon, 1992:34). To be 'tangible', Focillon means that art

must renounce thought, must become dimensional, must both measure and qualify space. It is in this very turning outward that its inmost principle resides. It lies under our eyes and under our hands as a kind of extrusion upon [the] world (ibid.).

As an object to be touched and held, a painting belongs to the world of physical substances that are comprehended both through the visual and the tactile sense. The features that Farber lists as tactile: pictorial flatness, textural articulation and assertion of the material medium – the actual three-dimensional manipulation of the surface of paint – are, non-representationally, features indicating the paint's physical presence. Furthermore, the substance of paint can become an equivalent for the substance of the object. For example, Freud uses Cremnitz white, which is a thick, lead-filled pigment for the painting of flesh and uses other, less heavy whites for painting inanimate matter.²⁰



Figure 8 Lucian Freud *Naked Portrait*, 1980-81, oil on canvas, 90 x 75 cm

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Figure 9 Rembrandt (Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn) *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*,
1665, oil on canvas, 82 x 63 cm



Figure 10 Lucian Freud *Blond Girl, Night Portrait*, 1980-85, oil on canvas,
71 x 71 cm

Painting is tangible not only as an image built up of matter but also because of its irreducibility. In this sense, a painting cannot be truly transcribed into another medium or form without loss of meaning. As Focillon states,

[t]he most voluminous collection of commentaries and memoirs, written by artists whose understanding of the problems of form is fully equated by their understanding of words, could never replace the meanest work of art (ibid.).

A painting's tangible presence is crucial to a full understanding of it. The meaning of an artwork is not communicated through a concept outside of itself. It is through its form that a concept is communicated; a concept embedded within that form. Conceptual artists²¹, for instance, consciously assert the idea of their artwork (the intentions of the artist) over the work itself. It is, however, through the 'sidelined' art object that the concept is made known because 'conceptual art ... is best explained through itself, i.e., through the examination of conceptual art, rather than through any assumptions outside of itself' (Meyer, 1972:viii). All

paintings, therefore, even those illusionistic paintings with highly enamelled surfaces²² and its *trompe l'oeil*²³ effects like the Flemish painter Jan van Eyck's *Jan Arnolfini and His Wife* (see figure 11) are, because of their tangibility, expressly tactile.

Putting aside the idea of the textural mark for a moment and concentrating simply on the depiction of volume, it is incorrect to assume that the more physically substantial the paint, the more a painting is able to stimulate the viewer's sense of tactility. In works such as *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage* (see figure 12) by Jackson Pollock, where paint is amassed as in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*, space is rendered both by virtue of the paint's material build-up and by illusionistic layering.



Figure 11 Jan van Eyck *Jan Arnolfini and His Wife*, 1434, tempera and oil on wood, 81.28 x 55.88 cm

In many ways, *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage* is similar to the decorations of the ninth-century Irish manuscript, the *Book of Kells* (see figure 13). The overlapping of ribbon-like forms renders space in both cases. The manuscript illumination conveys the illusion of a minute depth between the layers. In *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage*, there is a physical overlapping of paint marks. Both the built-up mass of Pollock's paint and the illustrated ribbons in the *Book of Kells* contribute equally effectively to a sense of volume and three dimensions and both are tactile according to Berenson's definition of space.

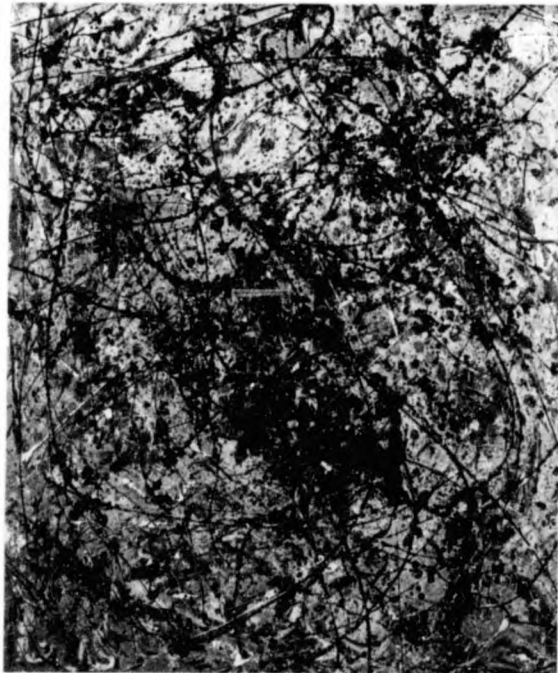


Figure 12 Jackson Pollock *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage*, 1947, oil on canvas, 111 x 92 cm

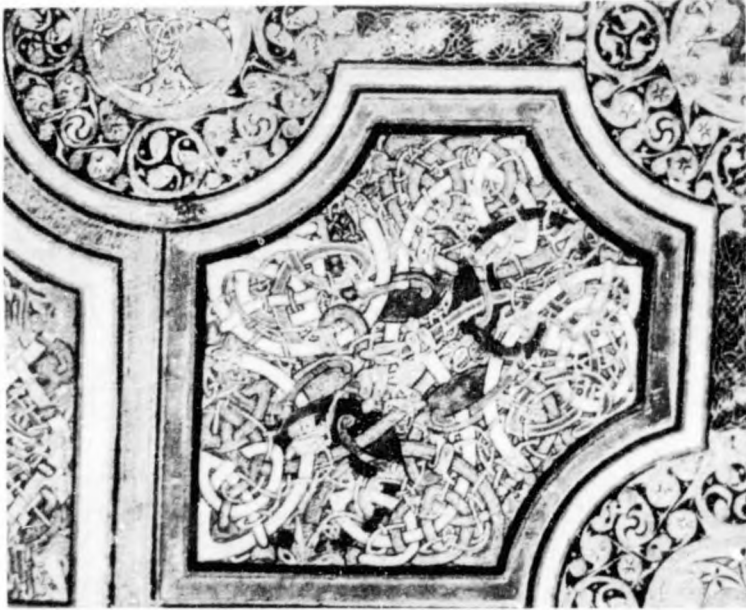


Figure 13 Illumination from the *Book of Kells*, ninth century (detail from the page of the eight circles)

But in addition to actual space, *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage* is like the *Book of Kells* because it also displays powerful illusory space. For instance, the background showing through between the interlaces in the *Book of Kells* and *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage* might be taken to be either a solid surface or a space of infinite proportions.

Imagination²⁴ is, therefore, a factor that contributes substantially to the viewer's impression of a physical sense of three dimensions in illusionistic paintings. This is illustrated by Kroeber's statement:

the representative picture we only see but cannot, *in imagination*, touch, does not carry the same attraction and concentration of interest as the one we can, imaginatively, handle and touch as well as see clearly (Kroeber, 1970:267, my italics).

Focillon notes that there is a difference between space and form rendered via reason and space and form rendered via the imagination. He mentions the inability of rationally constructed

constructed space and form to render the illusion of physical space convincingly and gives as an example certain Renaissance paintings whose figures and backgrounds are incompatible. In *The Annunciation* by Carlo Crivelli (see figure 14) the linear perspective converges too rapidly into a single vanishing point and creates an uncomfortable and unlikely space for the painted figures. In such works

nature and space are no longer an extension beyond man, or a periphery around him that both prolongs and penetrates his being, but are instead an entirely separate entity with which he is not in accord (Focillon, 1992:82).

Focillon explains that with constructions of Albertian perspective, painters have reduced the figure and background 'to the data of a ground plan by calculating the correct relationships between them with the precision of mathematics' (ibid.:92). Such works seem to fit Farber's description of opticality (as opposed to tactility), and the viewer may well experience a feeling of disembodiment because 'the world ... is an edifice, viewed from a single point' (ibid.).

Focillon argues, however, that these 'constructed perspectives remain fortunately bathed in the memory of imaginary perspectives' (ibid.). Focillon's idea that 'forms suffice to define all space' helps to explain this (ibid.). In the way the background of Pollock's *Reflections of a Celestial Carriage* gives the impression of space because of its relationship to the form of the ribbon-like strands above, so the accurately observed foreshortening of the figure in Tintoretto's *The Discovery of the Body of St. Mark* (see figure 15) serves to define the space in which it lies.²⁵ The illusion of real space is more convincingly rendered when the forms of objects play a relational role. In Titian's *Self-portrait* (see figure 16), for example, in which the background has no perspective lines whatsoever, the figure alone is the means of indicating physical space. As Robert Hughes states: 'We are never loose from our bodies and the re-embodiment of our experience of that world' is what the truly felt painting offers (Hughes, 1988:8). In such paintings the textural mark seems once again to come into play. Berenson's definition of tactility is subsumed into Farber's definition because of the relation that the constructed illusion of three-dimensionality has with actual physical experience of space and matter.



Figure 14 Carlo Crivelli *The Annunciation*, 1486

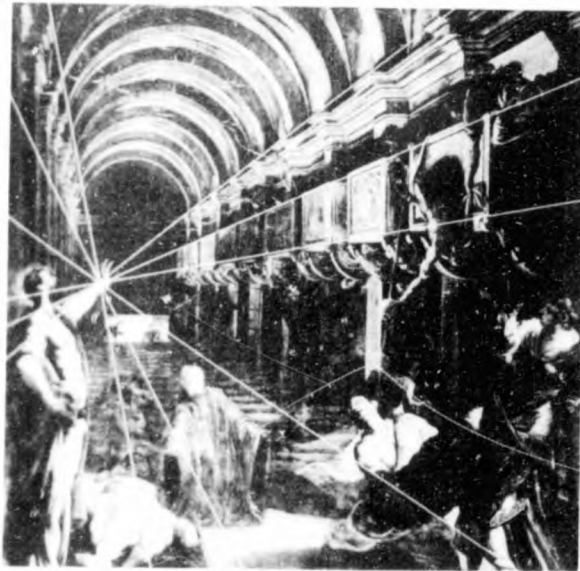


Figure 15 Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti) *The Discovery of the Body of St. Mark*, c. 1562,
35.56 x 35.56 cm

In her text *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950) the psychoanalyst, Marion Milner, observes that tactile form in painting is linked more profoundly to space than simply as a tool to define it pictorially. She comes to this conclusion from her own experiments in drawing and painting which she writes about in the book mentioned above. Milner feels that tactile form evokes both the illusion of physical space surrounding painted objects and similitudes of human spatial experiences. Her statement: '[i]t was as if one's mind could want to express the feelings that come from the sense of touch and muscular movement rather than from the sense of sight' (Milner, 1950:10) links her ideas to Berenson's, but she notes further that

painting is concerned with the feelings conveyed by space ... with problems of being a separate body in a world of other bodies which occupy different bits of space ... with ideas of distance and separation and having and losing (ibid.:11-12).



Figure 16 Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) *Self-Portrait*, c. 1570

This implies that tactile form encompasses the bodily and emotional experiences of being in the world and also the effects of such experiences on the sense of self – the sense in the imagination of the ‘awareness of the separateness of the “me” and the “not-me”’ (ibid.:155).²⁶

Milner’s ideas coincide exceptionally well with my own painting experiences. My ideas came about initially because of a ‘breakthrough’, as such, to the third dimension in one of my paintings. In the second year of my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree I had been struggling to reproduce the external appearance of a still-life and was unsuccessful until I achieved a sudden loss of self-consciousness and attained a higher level of concentration. My creative responses to the still-life objects became more ‘instinctual’, relating to the bodily experience of touching the objects. Tone and hue became secondary to the textural quality of the image, which seemed to capture the actual physicality of the objects, even when the paint was quite thin and smooth. The sense of objective spatial distance between the objects and myself seemed to be reduced and, as a result, the image took on a more intimate, direct sense of the third dimension. It had much more of a physical feel of solidity in space (see figure 17).



Figure 17 Thomasin Dewhurst *Still-life*, 1992, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

The skill to create imaginary, tactile and textural space and form in an illusional painting appears to be linked to the psychical functioning of the artist and with his/her ability to surmount the need to use reason and logic to solve the problem of rendering three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. In chapter 2, with reference to various psychoanalytical and art-critical texts, I shall examine this phenomenon from both the artist's and the viewer's point of view.

NOTES:

¹ See introduction.

² According to *The Oxford Companion to Art*, the term 'illusionism' refers to a principle of naturalistic art whereby verisimilitude in representation causes the spectator to seem to be seeing an actual object or scene, even though he/she knows that it is simply a pictorial representation (see Osborne, 1970:560-1).

³ Bernard Berenson introduced the term 'tactile values' in his *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896). While Berenson's elevation of tactile values into a general requisite of all painting has been rejected as an example of the fallacy into which many critics, wishing to impose their own interests and likings universally, have fallen, his affirmation of the existence of tactile values is relevant to my dissertation in relation to my independent discovery of such tactile values in my own work (see Osborne, 1970:1120-1).

⁴ Body art practices, particularly performance, endurance and duration art, underscore the corporeal. The lived experience of the body during the performance activity aims to evoke an immediate physical and emotional response in the viewer through his or her identification with the experiences of the performing body.

⁵ These art historians and critics and their ideas will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁶ Bryson quotes Pliny as follows:

The contemporaries and rivals of Zeuxis were Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus, Parrhasius. This last, it is recorded, entered into a competition with Zeuxis. Zeuxis produced a picture of grapes so dexterously represented that birds began to fly down to eat from the painted vine. Whereupon Parrhasius designed so lifelike a picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn back and the picture displayed. When he realised his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour, he yielded up the palm, saying that whereas he had managed to deceive only birds, Parrhasius had deceived an artist (Pliny in Bryson, 1983:1).

⁷ Bryson notes that

[t]he doctrine of technical progress towards an Essential Copy proposes that at a utopian extreme the image will transcend the limitations imposed by history, and will reproduce in perfect form the reality of the natural world: history is the condition from which it seeks to escape. Against this utopia the sociology of knowledge argues that such an escape is impossible, since the reality experienced by human beings is always historically produced: there is no transcendent and naturally given Reality.... [I]t is more accurate to say that "realism" lies rather in a coincidence between a representation and that which a particular society proposes and assumes as its reality; a reality involving the complex formation of codes of behaviour, law, psychology, social manners, dress, gesture, posture – all these practical norms which govern the stance of human beings

towards their particular historical environment. It is in relation to this socially determined body of codes and not in relation to an immutable "universal visual experience", that the realism of an image should be understood (Bryson, 1983:13).

⁸ Chiaroscuro means light and shade from the Latin *clarus* clear and *obscurus* dark. It is the manipulation of light and dark areas in two-dimensional art (such as drawing, painting or printing). It is used especially for the creation of illusional three-dimensions.

⁹ I am referring to the 'primal pre-logical' sense of the symbolic that Marion Milner's article discusses in her essay 'The role of Illusion in Symbol Formation' where the symbol and the thing symbolised are 'one and the same' (Milner, 1955:85). Milner uses a statement by the art critic and historian, Herbert Read, to explain this. Read notes that this use of the word 'treat[s] the symbol as an integral or original form of expression. A word itself may be a symbol in this sense, and a language a system of symbols' (Read in *ibid.*). It is related to the kind of expression in painting I discuss in chapter 2 – an instinctive rather than a rational, calculated approach to painting on the part of the artist. Milner quotes the writer on art, Susanne Langer, stating that 'the feeling in a work of art is something the artist conceived as he created the symbolic form to present it, rather than something he was undergoing and involuntarily venting in an artistic process' (Langer in Milner, 1950:158). This will be discussed further in chapter 2.

¹⁰ 'Deixis' refers to a denoting word, such as 'her' or 'I', whose reference is determined by the context of its utterance. From the Greek *deiktikos* concerning proof, from *deiknunai* to show. In this case deixis has a similar meaning to that of symbol, in the sense mentioned previously.

¹¹ A feeling of repulsion is likely to occur because internal organs are 'features of our body (that we perceive) as being dangerous because they remind us of our mortality and the strength of the body over the mind' (Bell, D., 1985:47).

¹² Liam Hudson, in his book *Bodies of Knowledge* (1982), states that

tidying and smoothing creates an image that we immediately recognise as idealised; and in so doing, we acknowledge, whether we realise it or not, that the alarmingly earthy aspects of the body and its functions are associated in our minds with its untidy detail. ... Crucially, a formal treatment of the body encourages in us the denial that these dangerously particular features are in fact there (Hudson, 1982:51).

¹³ Leora Farber uses the phrase '[Re]-sourcing the body' to describe Siopis' painting (Farber, 1992:33, *passim*). She emphasises 'Re' so as to indicate a *return* to the body as opposed to the 'de-carnalised vision' which is generally manifest in western arts and culture (*ibid.*). Farber also notes that it is usually women's art that concerns a return to the body – a reaction to the traditionally 'masculine' vision of western culture that has been the propounder of a decarnalized gaze. For example, Farber quotes the feminist writer, Luce Irigaray,

who associates women's writing with fluidity and touch, noting that it 'does not privilege the gaze but takes all figures back to their tactile birth' (Ligarray in Moi, 1985:145). An aggressive double attack on the viewer such as this, is designed to shake the foundations of the paradigm which for so long has asserted purified form over the living (and dying) body, and with it, according to feminist theory, Woman's control over her own identity.

¹⁴ Oculocentrism is a term used by Farber meaning the privileging of vision historically as 'the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and the world' (Jay in Farber, 1992:8).

¹⁵ The convention of a single-point perspective, predominant in European art of the early Renaissance which is based on the perspective theory of Leon Battista Alberti. Alberti was an Italian architect and writer and the first important art theorist of the Renaissance. He became familiar with the laws of linear perspective through the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and these laws became useful in their application to painting during his own and succeeding generations (see Bram, L., Phillips, R. Dickey, N. (eds.), Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, vol. 1; U.S.A., Funk and Wagnalls Inc., 1983, pp. 352 -353).

¹⁶ According to Martin Jay, Albertian perspective 'enables the viewer's eye to be correlated with the eye of the painter. This system addresses the singular (as opposed to binocular) eye of the spectator/artist directly, centering everything around his monocular viewpoint.... Such an eye is considered to be 'static, unblinking and fixed...producing a visual take that was externalized, reduced to one point of view, and disembodied' (Jay in Farber, 1992:7).

¹⁷ See introduction.

¹⁸ This particular type of skill involves more than simply copying the external appearances of objects. With the creation of tactility, I believe that an artist must attain a level of concentration akin to a trance or reverie, in order that he/she becomes receptive to his/her tactile responses to objects. This shall be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

¹⁹ Focillon states that 'art is neither its own schematic pattern nor its own carefully calculated abbreviation...art is not simply a kind of fantastic geometry, or even a kind of particularly complex topography' (Focillon, 1992:95). He means that whereas a map is a schematic representation of the topography of an area of land, art is not a reduction of something else. Art may simply *represent* objects outside of the world of art, but it fully *presents* its material.

²⁰ See Hughes, 1988:22.

²¹ Conceptual Art (also called 'Idea Art' or 'Information Art') refers to work produced from the mid-1960's asserting the idea or intention of the artist as the most important part of the work. This was in contrast to

other contemporary art which placed the emphasis on the appearance of the artwork and its aesthetic appeal. (see Meyer, 1972:viii-ix and Turner, 1996:684-5).

²² By 'enamelled surfaces', I mean the technique used in certain naturalistic paintings whereby paintmarks (and with them the 'signature' of the artist and build-up of paint) are eliminated in order to create a convincing illusion of reality. The smoothness of the surface, which melds the marks and layers of paint together, creates an evenness and gloss akin to enamel.

²³ *Trompe l'oeil* is illusionism taken to the extreme. With ordinary pictorial illusionism, the viewer knows that he is looking at a pictorial representation and not the real object or scene, but with the *trompe l'oeil* effect, the viewer may well be fooled into thinking the representation is the actual object or scene (see Osborne, 1970:560-1).

²⁴ Marion Milner notes the difference between the straightforward ideas of 'representing distance, solidity, the grouping of objects, differences of light and shade' of the 'common mind', and the 'strong private views ... on the meanings of light, distance, darkness and so on' of the 'imaginative mind' (Milner, 1950:9).

²⁵ Although it is true that even schematically constructed space such as that in Uccello's *Battle* is equally defined by forms within the picture – the forms of the lances, both on the ground and in the air, and the linear forms of the borders of fields and groups of trees, which portray the constructed space – my emphasis here is on more ambiguous space *suggested* through figure rather than ground.

²⁶ Milner in *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950) and *The Hands of the Living God: An Account of a Psycho-analytic Treatment* (1988), and Ernst van Alphen in *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (1992) liken creative experience to schizophrenia where the sense of the 'me' as separate from the 'not-me' is blurred. Milner feels that 'no[n]-differentiation' between the painter and the objects painted is a necessary part of the imaginative creative process (Milner, 1950:153-5).

Chapter 2

Boundary-loss

The most significant psychoanalytical theory about the creative process propounded by Marion Milner in *On Not Being Able to Paint* is that of an imaginary fusion or boundary-loss between the perception of self in an individual and the perception of the external world of other people or objects. Milner states that through the activity of painting she discovered an

experience that made all other usual occupations unimportant by comparison. It was the discovery that when painting something from nature there occurred, at least sometimes, a fusion into a never before known wholeness ... the object and oneself [were] no longer felt to be separate (Milner, 1950:142).

The theory is significant to this research not only because of the emphasis Milner places on it but also in terms of its striking resemblance to my own, independently-arrived-at, understanding of this process.¹ In this chapter I shall attempt to make a connection between the theory of boundary-loss and an artist's instinctive ability to create a sense of tactility in painting.

I previously discussed two types of tactility that can occur in painting. In the first, the painting stimulates a sense of touch in the viewer through depictions of seemingly graspable three-dimensional forms, and in the second it evokes a sense of the corporeal. The second type of tactility arouses a bodily response in the viewer through an identification with the complexity of body references in the painting. It also implicates the painter's body through traces of his/her painterly labour left behind in the brush marks.

I also mentioned that tactile paintings differ greatly in style and form, making it difficult to say, in general, what material aspects – what tangible evidence – a painting must have in order for it to be 'felt' by the viewer. If a general rule is to be ventured at all, I propose that it would be

directed by psychical phenomena (boundary-loss in particular). Therefore, what appears in various paintings to be a recurrence of the two above-mentioned types of tactility is deceptive. I believe that in the cases where tactility does occur in paintings of a similar type, it is more likely to be a coincidence than a rule.

When several examples of three-dimensional figure painting in fifteenth-century Florence display the kind of tactility that makes the viewer feel he/she could touch the painted flesh, it is conceivable that it might have happened coincidentally, and not because the artists were obeying general rules of style or technique. In other words, if similar psychic-states occur in artists who paint similar subject matter in a similar way then, hypothetically, common tactile forms that seem to have been rendered according to stylistic canons will be created.²

What happens in the mind of the artist? Does Milner's testimony that 'the object and oneself [were] no longer felt to be separate' mean that the artist feels him/herself to have become part of the object being painted? In my own artistic experience this is not the case. Instead, the sense of distance or space between the object and myself appears, in my imagination, to decrease. The resulting painted object appears to be very close to the viewer, even in paintings depicting foreground space. For example, the detail and clarity with which Freud portrays the flesh of many of his portrait figures makes them appear so close as to almost protrude from the picture plane, as if one was studying the flesh from only millimetres away. In *Night Portrait* (see figure 18) the prominence of the flesh overrides the spatial depiction of foreground. There seems to be an inclusion of boundary-loss in the essentially boundary-gaining understanding of the separation and space between oneself and objects viewed at a distance. Looking at the figure and the area in front of her, a closeness as well as a physical distance in space is created which contradict, yet sustain each other by giving each other their sense of three-dimensionality. There is a feeling of space surrounding the body, and the body's tangible nearness gives an immediate sense of its coming out of that space. It is the tactile form that Milner feels conjures the illusion of physical space. It is also the tactile form that, she says, evokes similitudes of human spatial experiences – bodily experiences of being in the world and the effects of such experiences on the sense of separation between oneself and another person or object.³



Figure 18 Lucian Freud *Night Portrait*, 1977-78, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 71.1 cm

The term 'boundary' can be taken to mean the area where the edges of a body meet with the surrounding environment. The skin, like a fortress enclosing the body's interior and keeping out the exterior world, represents this physical boundary. The skin belongs to the class of organs called 'exteroceptors', which pick up sensations from outside the body and enable it to create a relationship between the body of the self and the external world of the other (Montague, 1971:92).⁴ Through this protective border, the possibility of danger from the external world such as mechanical threats or invasions by foreign substances and organisms is determined. This in turn helps to guide the adaptation of self to external conditions.⁵ In this way, the sense of sight, smell, hearing and taste can be seen as boundaries, too. Thus, 'boundary' could be further defined as the sense of where one ends and the non-self begins.

The skin gives rise to the sense of touch which is, according to Ashley Montague, author of *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1971), '[t]he greatest sense in our body' (ibid.:1). For example, the sense of touch is the first sense to be developed in the human embryo. It is also the first medium of communication between the infant and the outside world. It gives us our knowledge of thickness and form which is important because 'in the

final analysis we do not believe in the reality of anything unless we can touch it; we must have tangible evidence' (ibid.:107). It is through tactile stimulation that the infant functions in a normal way because

cutaneous stimulation in the various forms in which the newborn and young receive it is of prime importance for their healthy physical and behavioural development. It appears probable that for human beings tactile stimulation is of fundamental consequence for the development of healthy emotional or affectual relationships, that 'licking', in its actual and figurative sense, and love are closely connected; in short, that one learns to love not by instruction but by being loved (ibid.:31).

The touch-sensitive boundary of the skin, sensing the outside world from within the body, is mutually receptive – inner and outer stimuli are received concurrently. In *The Ego and the Id* (1962), Sigmund Freud states that

a person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is *seen* like any other object, but to the *touch* it yields two kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent to an internal perception. Psycho-physiology has fully discussed the manner in which a person's own body attains its special position among other objects in the world of perception. Pain, too, seems to play a part in the process, and the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illnesses is perhaps a model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our body (Freud, 1962:15-16).

At the point of physical contact between an individual and another object, the individual experiences, for example, the texture, solidity, heat or coldness of the other as an inner feeling of pressure or temperature. While pressure or temperature could be described as qualities coming from the object, they would not be known to exist as such without the aid of the sense receptors in the skin. Figuratively speaking, it appears that the skin becomes the single boundary between its owner and another object because the object seems to lose its boundaries. Or, rather, the object is perceived to have its own boundaries and to be separate

from the self by the visual sense; but by the tactile sense it is perceived to be within the self's body-boundary.

As mentioned in the first chapter, subjectivity thus plays a part in the acquirement of tactile knowledge. Walter Ong writes in *The Presence of the Word* (1967) that

touch involves my own subjectivity more than any other sense. When I feel this object as something 'out there', beyond the bounds of my body, I also at the same instant experience my own self (Ong, 1967:169-170).

A sense of self, which is commonly referred to as the ego,⁶ is, therefore, involved. The boundary of the ego is likened to the skin because it represents a surface entity. Where the skin is the boundary between reception of externality and internality in terms of physical sensation, the limits of the ego are a boundary between receptions of psychical externality and internality. More accurately, though, the ego represents a psychophysical boundary.⁷ This is because '[t]he ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' (Freud, 1962:16). The translator notes that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body' (ibid.). The ego could, therefore, be seen as symbolic⁸ of the skin. If this is correct, then the boundary of the psychical self is bound to the physical sensations that arise from the tactile nerves of the skin. It means that psychical boundary-loss is perhaps also essentially tactile. In terms of tactile painting where boundary-loss is combined with boundary-gain, the object's illusion of closeness could well occur because of an imaginary skin sensation through which the tactile qualities of the object are felt to be within the physical boundaries of the self. The relationship between the viewing self and the object viewed⁹ is accompanied by a closeness, extreme to the point of imaginary contact; and it is possible that the self experiences the illusion that the object is not only physically contacting the self, but is included within the self as well. In view of this, Milner's statement that 'the object and oneself [were] no longer felt to be separate' may well mean that the artist does feel him/herself to become one with the object being painted (Milner, 1950:142).

The idea of assimilation of the outside world into the ego is integral to psychoanalytical theories of boundary-loss. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961), Sigmund Freud likens the psyche to 'a living organism in its most simplified possible form as an undifferentiated

vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation' (Freud, 1961:30). In response to this simile, J. B. Pontalis, in his essay, 'The Psyche as a Double Metaphor for the Body', visualises the psyche 'extend[ing] and repeat[ing] for itself the functions of an elementary organism utterly absorbed in tasks of assimilation and rejection' (Pontalis, 1981:167). According to this, the idea of the outside world is incorporated into the psyche and vice versa.

An analysis by Marion Milner of the state of mind of a schizophrenic¹⁰ patient provides a lucid description of the feeling of having ingested the external world, caused by a distorted idea of the psychophysical self. She considers the

question of where the actual body-boundary was felt to be [in the patient]. Did it mean that the skin was felt to include the whole world and therefore was denied altogether? Certainly the introspective quality of what have been called oceanic states seems to include this feeling ... For the schizophrenic patient ... constantly complained that she could not get the world outside her (Milner, 1955:95).

Although this is an example of a mental disorder, 'oceanic states' also occur in people who are mentally well. Sigmund Freud gave the term 'oceanic' to the sensation of displaced or dissolved boundaries (Freud, 1946:8). He describes it as being 'a feeling which [is like] ... a sensation of "eternity", a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded' (ibid.). The term was not his own, but given to him by a friend whom he mentions in chapter 1 of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1946). Freud points out that the term was used in connection with religious feelings:

It is, he says, a purely subjective experience, not an article of belief; it implies no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious spirit ... One might call oneself religious on the grounds of this oceanic feeling alone, even though one might reject all beliefs and all illusions (ibid.).¹¹

In her article, 'The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation', Milner connects religious and artistic ecstasy with dreams and mental disorders because these experiences are all evidence of

the symbol-formation most plainly seen in civilised man.¹² Symbol-formation, Milner says, is a means of adaptation to reality which is based on

the process by which the infant's interest is transferred from an original primary object to a secondary one ... depending upon the identification of the primary object with another that is different from it but emotionally is felt to be the same (Milner, 1955:82).

Milner goes on to say that 'the primary "object" that the infant seeks to find again is a fusion of self and object, it is mouth and breast felt as fused into one' (ibid.:87). Symbol-formation is therefore linked to boundary-loss. Again, physical contact (between the infant's mouth and the mother's breast) seems to be the *sine qua non* of this feeling of non-separation. Understanding this, the oceanic feeling or feeling of ecstatic boundary-loss, caused by the self's absorption of the external world, may well be essentially tactile.

The existence of boundaries has to be learnt. In the beginning, '[w]hen the infant at the breast receives stimuli, he cannot as yet distinguish whether they come from his ego or from the outer world' (Freud, 1946:11-12). The infant's sense of self is all-pervading or, rather, the infant has no sense of self at all. The loss of ego-boundaries in the adult during the activity of painting, as postulated by Milner, appears to be a return to the stage in the development of the infantile psyche where the ego-boundaries have not yet been formed. The psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, in her text, *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (1975), asserts the idea that infantile psychical states do recur in adult life. She notes that '[p]sycho-analysis of adults has shown me that the effects of ... early phantasy-life¹³ are lasting, and profoundly influence the unconscious mind of the grown-up person' (Klein, 1975:61).

A useful demonstration of both the symbolic aspect of art and the relation of art to the infantile psyche is Milner's idea that creativity is symbolic of a bodily release which she calls 'the experience of orgasm' (Milner, 1950:149). It is the pre-genital orgasm that is significant here. The term 'pre-genital' refers to 'the infantile period which precedes the genital phase; a stage during which the libido seeks satisfaction from the anal and oral regions' (Chaplin, 1968:375). The bodily production and release of faeces, urine, vomit, saliva, flatus etc. in the infant may induce the pre-genital orgasm which Milner describes as 'a state of blissful

transcending of boundaries' (Milner, 1950:150). Milner notes that the pre-genital orgasm is 'of great importance in any enquiry into ways of thinking about the human capacity to make things, whether material objects, or ideas, or both combined' (ibid.:149). For example, in artists or poets who are inhibited in their capacity to produce ideas, Milner found

clinical evidence which seems to show that ... there has been a catastrophic disillusion in the original discovery that their faeces are not as lively, as beautiful, and boundless, as the lovely feelings that they had in the giving of them (ibid.:150).

This was because

those patients had an extremely idealized notion of what their products ought to be, and the task of objective evaluation of what they in fact produced appeared to be so disillusioning to them that they often gave up the attempt to produce anything (ibid.:149).

The disappointment with the reality of the body products relates to 'the infant's disillusion of its own omnipotence, its gradual discovery that it has not created the world by its own wishes' (ibid.:150).

This 'blissful transcendence of boundaries', or omnipotence, is therefore shown to be the release of the self into the external world as well as the self's ingestion of the external world. Through art, an imaginary release is initiated which symbolises an actual body release. What is interesting in terms of painting's ability to index the corporeal is that the boundary-loss, through ingestion or release, takes on the additional metaphorical forms of the digestive and the excretory systems. This is especially worthy of attention because by means of very descriptive painting techniques, Freud and Bacon seem to literalise these metaphors. The metaphorical quality of these paintings is due to their rendering in tactile paint. In chapter 4, I shall present the argument that tactile paint has a symbolic nature which is representative of the idea of boundary-loss in addition to its ability to create an experience of boundary-loss in the viewer. For instance, Freud's images of massive bodies, particularly those from the early



Figure 19 Lucian Freud *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, 1995-96, oil on canvas, 225 x 121.9 cm

to the mid 1990s such as *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* (see figure 19) can conceivably be perceived as the manifestation of the idea of the ingesting or consuming ego, because the concept of eating is often concomitant with the concept of corpulent flesh. On the other hand, the figure in the central panel of Bacon's *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (see figure 20) seems to be excreting parts of itself into the background.¹⁴



Figure 20 Francis Bacon *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, oil on canvas, each panel 198 x 145 cm (central panel)

So far in this chapter, aspects of the corporeal have been described as occurring within the artist's mind. The question now arises as to how the artist transfers these bodily thoughts to the material form of the painting. My understanding is that it is precisely during the act of painting that the artist's feelings of boundary-loss and awareness of his/her tactile response to the object occur – triggered by the painting activity itself, and because of this, materialisation is inevitable.

Earlier, I quoted Milner as saying that sometimes during painting or drawing, she felt that the object was not separate from her. Following on from this, she notes that

neither were thought and sensation and feeling and action. All one's visual perceptions of colour, shape, texture, weight, as well as thought and memory, ideas about the object and action towards it, the movement of one's hand together with the feeling of delight in the 'thusness' of the thing, they all seemed fused into a wholeness of being ... Moreover, when this state of concentration was really achieved one was no longer aware of oneself doing it, one no longer acted from a centre to an object as remote; in fact something quite special happened to one's sense of self. And when the bit of painting was finished there was before one's eyes a permanent record of the experiences (ibid.:142).

The bodily action involved in this process, the movement of the hand, is an important aspect of this experience. Milner gives the term 'contemplative action' – a 'state of concentration' where one is 'no longer aware of oneself' – to the action of art-making where the artist is in a reverie-like state of mind (ibid.:140,164). She explains that in

day-dreaming there is no action, thought is just playing with itself, but in the free-drawings there was mind and body meeting in expressive action. And it was apparently just this that seemed to be the fertilizing factor (ibid.:74).

Thus, the art being made is not a representation of a preconceived idea but an idea that develops as the drawing or painting develops. Milner emphasises the importance of this by quoting the art historian and critic, Susanne Langer, who states: 'the feeling in a work of art is something the artist conceived as he created the symbolic form to present it, rather than something he was undergoing and involuntarily venting in an artistic process' (Langer in ibid.:158).

There has been some criticism of Milner's argument that the creation of such 'symbolic form' involves the willingness of the artist 'to give up [the] first idea as soon as the lines drawn suggested something else' (ibid.:71-72). In his text, *The Art of the Maker* (1994), Peter

Dormer claims that this was an excuse on Milner's part to avoid learning the skill of representational painting because she said that her early life-drawings and sketches of landscapes 'gave no sense of being new creations in their own right, they seemed to be only tolerably good imitations of something else; in fact to be counterfeits', while her later 'free drawings' where her hand drew as it liked were much more 'satisfying' (ibid.:3,9). According to Dormer, this demonstrates that Milner

fled from the difficulties of [the problems which confront the painter] because she was put off, for understandable reasons, by the sheer s'log and disappointment that the amateur or beginner almost inevitably endures in the first months or even years of study (Dormer, 1994:68).

In his criticism of Milner, Dormer is possibly denying the role imagination plays in solving artistic problems. In his book, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (1987), Mark Johnson notes that in Western philosophical tradition there is thought to exist a gap between the 'cognitive, conceptual, formal or rational side' of human experience and the 'bodily, perceptual, material, and emotional side', so that, consequently, 'all meaning, logical connection, conceptualization, and reasoning are aligned with the mental or rational dimension, while perception, imagination, and feeling are aligned with the bodily dimension' (Johnson, 1987:xxv). Theories about meaning and rationality, or what Johnson calls 'objectivism', make the assumption that 'there is a rational structure to reality, independent of the beliefs of any particular people, and correct reason mirrors this rational structure' (ibid.:ix-x). Human bodily and imaginary experience and understanding are thought to have no bearing on the nature of meaning and rationality because meaning is regarded as existing only in the relation between abstract symbols – words, for example – and things in the world.¹⁵ Johnson, however, argues that 'there is no unbridgeable gap between these two realms' and that

imagination is a pervasive structuring activity by means of which we achieve coherent, patterned, unified representations. It is indispensable for our ability to make sense of our experience, to find it meaningful...
[I]magination is absolutely central ... to our rational capacity to find

significant connections, to draw inferences, and to solve problems (ibid.:168).

In *A Study of Imagination in Early Childhood* (1935) Ruth Griffiths points out that with inhibited children who tend to be inward-looking and unwilling to be involved with the external world (such as not playing with peers), 'large quantities of energy are drawn off [during periods of day-dreaming] in an attempt to solve a subjective problem' (Griffiths, 1935:126). Griffiths argues that day-dreaming is a means for the child to adapt to the world. She states that

with so much to learn, so much to accomplish in order that he may, as we say, 'be introduced as rapidly as possible to the culture of the age in which he lives', the child plays and day-dreams with the passing of the days. It seems there must be some secret power in phantasy itself which enables him to bring about his phenomenal development ... [T]he child, existing in a world altogether too difficult for him, too hard and cold for his fragile mind to grasp, turns away and finds consolation in his play and his dreams – harmless amusements enough! – awaiting the time when his mental and physical development will enable him to come into closer contact with reality (ibid.:170).

In Dormer's view it seems that art is reduced to the documentation of external appearances of objects in the world, leaving no room for the creator's own responses to those objects during the activity of the transcription. For Milner, on the other hand, the meaning of her art lies exactly in the imaginative, subjective realm. Her 'irrational' willingness to let an idea develop as the painting develops, led her to discover a tactile, bodily perception of the world, and this became her purpose for painting. She states that 'preconceived ideas ... in drawing might have a limiting effect on one's freedom of expression' and that 'the imaginative mind could have strong private views of its own on the meanings of light, distance, darkness and so on' (Milner, 1950:5,9). Milner's discovery of the aim and meaning of her art *after* she had made her intuitive beginnings, shows that the 'free, non-rule-governed activity [of imagination is able to] ... achieve new structure in our experience and can remold existing patterns to generate novel meaning' (Johnson, 1987:165).¹⁶ Thus, it is because of imagination that the

sense of touch accompanying visual perception is materialised in paint, and made conscious.¹⁷ Were it not for the wandering of Milner's mind and hand, her paintings would have remained only 'fairly accurate [but despairingly boring] cop[ies] of ... object[s]' (Milner, 1950:4).

If the goal of painting is not to copy the appearance of objects, then it is inexpedient to pursue it. Milner's procedure allows her to become aware of the aesthetic development of the painting and to change her ideas accordingly – to *create* rather than copy. It is a skill that Milner learnt. It is not, as Dormer puts it, a flight from such a task. Bacon explains succinctly the very thing Milner is attempting; that is, not consciously knowing the goal of the painting, and the skilful discovery of it through unwilled imagery:

when you're at the canvas ... you don't know where you are or where you're going or, above all, what's going to happen. You're in a fog. ... In a way it's purely by chance that something happens on canvas. Most of the time it has nothing to do with the original idea, if indeed I had one to start off with. In other respects, it's also true that I have a curious type of self-discipline which is probably an asset, because painting doesn't just consist of throwing paint at the canvas. I don't have a master plan when I begin a canvas, but there is an acquired skill which, together with time and age, amounts to a certain ability. ... What's most surprising is that this something which has appeared, almost in spite of oneself, is sometimes better than what you were in the process of doing (Bacon in Archimbaud, 1993:87,82).

It seems as though the combination of a reverie-like state of mind and the activity of painting enables the artist to access less conscious responses which he/she would not ordinarily be able to access. It may well bring about the transformation from copy to creation. In the making of tactile paintings, discovering a tactile response to objects and giving this response material, visual form, seem to occur simultaneously – each helping to give rise to the other.¹⁸ It is perhaps this that gives the painter the ability to 'do consciously what we all do unconsciously – construct his third dimension' (Berenson, 1960:53).

I believe that by constructing the third dimension or by materialising the subjective, tactile response to objects through paint, the feelings of boundary-loss belonging to this response, which the painter initially experienced, may well be recreated for the viewer. The painted object appears to appropriate the boundary-eliminating bodily sensations of the observed object by means of the textural brush mark. In turn, the viewer senses, via the painting, the painter's original response and, again, boundaries are lost. In the dual role of painter and primary viewer for whom the painting is painted, I rework my own images until they trigger a feeling in me that corresponds to the tactile feelings I have when looking at the nude figure of the model.

The purpose of contemplative action is now clearer. In fact, Milner's phrase: 'mind and body [meet] in expressive action' is echoed by Bacon who says that a satisfying picture emerges through the 'encounter between [his] work and the act of painting' (Milner, 1950:74, Bacon in Archimbaud, 1993:88). It also supports my theory that it is during the act of painting that boundary-loss and tactility occur.

The final hypothesis of this chapter relates to Milner's statement that poets and artists are inhibited in their work because of a 'disillusion in the original discovery that their faeces are not as lively, as beautiful, and boundless, as the lovely feelings they had in the giving of them' (Milner, 1950:150). During the activity of creating a tactile painting it is possible that the illusory state of omnipotence is returned to in some way and recreated in the painting. In contrast to the split between the orgasmic giving of body products and the products themselves, a tactile painting – if it veritably evokes feelings of boundary-loss in the viewer – seems to create a product equivalent to the feelings that produced it, because those feelings appear to be embedded in the painting's material surface. An illusion is created that the painted product is the tactile response itself. Milner presents this idea in her statement: 'creativity in the arts is making a symbol for feeling' (ibid.:148). She notes that

the artist's use of his medium, what the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines as an 'intervening substance through which impressions are conveyed to the senses;' ... can be made to take the shape of one's phantasies (Milner, 1955: 99).

NOTES:

¹ By 'independent understanding' I mean the discoveries I had made prior to any theoretical research I had done on the subject.

² I am not claiming that this is true of the Florentine painters' states of mind. It is simply an example to illustrate my idea. I shall demonstrate this hypothesis more solidly using statements made by the painters Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, from certain critics' and art historians' theories and responses to the paintings of these two artists, as well as from my own experiences as an artist and spectator.

³ See chapter 1.

⁴ In terms of bodily responses to objects, there are also

[r]eceptors that are stimulated principally by the actions of the body itself (which) are called proprioceptors. It is both through its skin and the proprioceptors that the infant receives the messages from the muscle-joint-ligament behaviour of the person holding it (Montague, 1971:92).

⁵ See Montague, 1971: Chapter 1, *passim*.

⁶ The ego is the self, particularly the individual's conception of himself. Another meaning of 'ego' is the superficial portion of the id, or primitive infantile mind, which develops out of the id in response to stimulation from the infant's physical and social environments (see Chaplin, 1968:104). Both these meanings are relevant to my dissertation, but only the first meaning is applicable in this case.

⁷ The term 'psychophysical' pertains to processes that have both bodily and psychological aspects. It relates to the doctrine of psychophysical parallelism that asserts that for every event of consciousness there is a corresponding event in the nervous system (see Chaplin, 1968:401).

⁸ In the 'primal pre-logical' sense presented by Milner (Milner, 1955:85). See chapter 1.

⁹ The viewing self includes both the artist who views the actual object and the viewer of the painted object.

¹⁰ Schizophrenia is a form of mental disease that involves the sense of self in relation to the 'not-self' or the external world. The personality is disintegrated and detached from the environment. The term 'schizophrenia' means literally 'splitting of the mind' and indicates a kind of withdrawal ('splitting') from the outside world. The term was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler (1857 - 1939) to replace

the older designation 'dementia praecox' which means 'premature insanity' (see *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, Vol. 15, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974, p. 174 and *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Micropaedia, Vol. 10, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1987, p. 520).

¹¹ Freud himself said he had never experienced such a feeling but assented that, in spite of this, it did not mean that it did not occur in others (see Freud, 1946:8-9).

¹² See Milner, 1955:82

¹³ The term 'phantasy' is a variant spelling of 'fantasy'. It denotes the process of imagining objects or events in terms of imagery. The whim or pleasure of the moment directs this process. In its normal range, phantasy serves both a creative and adjustive function (see Chaplin, 1968:180-181).

¹⁴ I shall pursue this idea in chapter 4.

¹⁵ See Johnson, 1987:x, *passim*.

¹⁶ This is Johnson's summary of a part of Immanuel Kant's ideas on imagination.

¹⁷ This refers to a quotation from Bernard Berenson: 'The painter must ... do consciously what we all do unconsciously - construct his third dimension' (Berenson, 1960:53). Milner also says that the free drawings were made 'without the stimulus of strong conscious feeling about some external object' (Milner, 1950:7).

¹⁸ It is almost certain that by giving material form to these indistinct tactile responses they are changed. By articulating them in paint, the artist is giving them a quality that they did not originally have. However, my concern lies not with the degree of accuracy of their rendition but with the tactile power they imbue the painted image.

Chapter 3

Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon

In this chapter I shall discuss the artists, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, in order to examine the links between their work and the ideas presented in chapters 1 and 2. Many of the paintings of these two artists display qualities of tactility which, in conjunction with their representations of the human body, give their paint the appearance of real flesh. Their accurate use of skin tones and chiaroscuro makes the painted flesh seem three-dimensional and physically graspable, which recalls Berenson's understanding of how 'tactile values' occur in certain paintings of Renaissance Florence.¹ Farber's idea of tactility² occurs in their images in the form of bodily indices that seem to cause spontaneous bodily and emotional spectatorial responses, both of attraction and repulsion. Brush marks that indicate the bodily labour of the artists are also present in their work. In addition to the aspects of technique described above, it seems possible that an imaginary boundary-loss between artist and object is experienced, which the viewer relives through the resulting painting.

3.1 Lucian Freud

Whilst Lucian Freud has painted portraits, cityscapes and very detailed nature studies, he is best known for his highly tactile oil paintings of the nude human form. Regarded by some as the greatest living realist painter³, Freud goes against the post-modernist idea that painting enriches itself by taking its inspiration from other visual media such as film, printing, still photography and television.⁴ Freud offers paintings that are the re-embodiment of his experience of the world. Robert Hughes states that in Freud's paintings 'there is a world ... re-formed by the daring subtlety and persistent slowness of the painter's eye ... [that delivers us from] the merely conceptual, the unfelt, the second-hand or the rhetorically transcendent' (Hughes, 1988:8).

The son of Sigmund Freud's youngest son, Ernst Freud, Lucian Freud was born and lived in Berlin until 1933 when his family moved to England to escape the Nazis. He became a naturalised British subject in 1939 and still lives in London. Freud's apprenticeship in painting took place in England and he had his first experience of painting in oil at the progressive Bryanston school in Dorset. In 1938 he attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. In 1939 he joined the East Anglican School of Drawing and Painting run by Cedric Morris, and from 1942 to 1943 he studied part-time at Goldsmiths' College in London. During the years 1946 and 1947, just before embarking on his career, he travelled to Paris and Greece to paint.⁵

Freud's early paintings and drawings are linear and spiky in their mannerisms. Robert Hughes, in his book, *Lucian Freud: Paintings*, mentions that although, as a boy in Germany, Freud had not looked at much German expressionism, these early paintings remind him of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.⁶ *Refugees* (see figure 21), for example, painted by Freud in 1941, resembles Otto Dix's *Prague Street* (see figure 22), both in style and in the mask-like quality of the faces.



Figure 21 Lucian Freud *The Refugees*, 1941, oil on panel, 50.8 x 61 cm



Figure 22 Otto Dix *Prague Street*, 1920

There is a connection, too, between other early works and Surrealism.⁷ In *The Painter's Room* (see figure 23), the sharp clarity and classical style, the absurd arrangement of objects (a giant zebra's head jutting into the room through a window, a tattered chaise-longue, a house plant, a piece of cloth and a top hat) give the impression of a de Chirico painting (see figure 24).

Freud's independent artistic identity was established with his intense and precisely detailed realistic paintings. Still linear and favouring flat shapes, a painting such as *Girl with Roses* (see figure 25), with its smooth transitions, brings to mind both Ingres⁸ (Freud was dubbed 'the Ingres of Existentialism' by Herbert Read⁹) and Netherlandish portraiture.¹⁰ It is illuminating to compare this painting to Ingres' *La Comtesse d'Haussonville* and van Eyck's *Jan Arnolfini and his Wife* (see figures 26 and 11).

While Freud's scrutinising observation of his sitters continued in later works, a change came about in his handling of paint during the 1950s. Using hoghair brushes instead of sable, the brush marks began to describe the face and body in terms of shape and structure.



Figure 23 Lucian Freud *The Painter's Room*, 1943, oil on canvas, 62.2 x 76.2 cm



Figure 24 Giorgio de Chirico *The Song of Love*, 1914



Figure 25 Lucian Freud *Girl with Roses*, 1947-48, oil on canvas, 105.5 x 74.5 cm



Figure 26 Ingres (Jean Auguste Dominique) *La Comtesse d'Haussonville*, 1845



Figure 27 Lucian Freud *Woman Smiling*, 1958-59, oil on canvas, 71 x 55.8 cm

Woman Smiling (see figure 27) is, according to Hughes, a turning point in Freud's work as he begins to mould and model the human form as though it were 'human clay' (ibid.:18). In this painting, the attention is no longer only on the surface detail but a sculpturally tactile, three-dimensional image is also introduced. In other words, the marks are not just following the surface details 'with obedient literalness' but are painterly equivalents for the forms of the face, both above and below the surface (Gowing, 1982:118¹¹). From this painting onwards, Freud displays to an ever-increasing degree the substance of both the illusory flesh and the paint itself.

There have been numerous descriptions of Freud's nude portraits as painterly equivalents for flesh. For instance, according to Martin Gayford, Freud is 'a painter who has made flesh his subject above all others – and painted it with a literal substantiality which is perhaps unrivalled, certainly in twentieth century painting' (Gayford, 1996:46). Linda Nochlin calls the flesh of Freud's figures 'all-too-human' (Nochlin, 1994:57), and Robert Hughes states that '[n]o modern nudes are more densely packed with bodily life' (Hughes,

1988:20). *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* fully demonstrates Freud's sensibility for substance. This painting depicts an astonishingly obese woman asleep on a chair. The material surface of paint and the woman's body is painted with a sense of sculptural mass that outdoes Freud's previous work and in fact 'exceeds in size most of the painted bodies of our culture, from Ingres to Rubens' (Kendall, 1996:46). Similar to Berenson's understanding of 'tactile values', the three dimensions are painted in tones of peach, pink, ochre, blue and grey with a plasticity that creates the illusion of a physically graspable form within space. As with Siopis's *Three Lace Cloths*, the mass of paint is built up semi-sculpturally, and both the illusion of three dimensions and the literal rendition of mass are equally effective in rendering a form that stimulates the sense of touch in the viewer. The physicality of living flesh is also produced through the deliberate use of Cremnitz white, a very heavy pigment containing twice as much lead oxide as flake white.¹² Freud is adamant that he 'wouldn't use Cremnitz on anything that wasn't alive; I use it for flesh, or even on the hairs of a dog, but never, for instance, on a woman's dress'" (Freud in Hughes, 1988:22).¹³

While the portrayal of skin texture and rotundity stimulate the tactile sense, a deeper muscle sensation is aroused in the viewer through the depiction of weight. The breasts, for example, collapse onto the stomach, which in turn rests heavily on the right thigh, and the woman's right wrist and forearm strain under the weight of the sleeping head. The u-shaped shadow beneath the breasts is pre-empted in the face and echoed in the stomach and pubic area, knees, calves and ankles, emphasising the pull of gravity. The heaviness of sleep exaggerates the heaviness of this massive body.

In this image, there is an acute sense of a living body that in a work like Philip Pearlstein's *Chevrons #2* there is not (see figure 28). The reason for this difference seems to be that in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* there is a combination of the descriptive and the suggestive. Sleep itself is not (and cannot be) shown but only indirectly represented through the depiction of a woman with her eyes shut and her muscles heavy and relaxed. The viewer is called upon to *imagine* the sleeping figure's state of unconsciousness, and he/she does this by identifying with the sleeping body and remembering his/her own experience of sleep. The external appearances of the eyes and muscles – operating in much the same

way as the word 'sleeping' in the title does – act as associative symbols for the state of this woman's body. This is the descriptive aspect of this image. The suggestive aspect is that the paint actually seems to embody the sensations of slumbering flesh. Here the textural mark comes into play.



Figure 28 Philip Pearlstein *Chevrons #2*, 1996, oil on canvas, 121.92 x 91.44 cm

When Robert Storr notes that 'whereas Pearlstein's realism is optical, Freud's is, in at least equal measure, tactile' (Storr, 1988:134)¹⁴, he appears to be explaining that Freud's paint is texturally suggestive of the human body. In comparison to *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, Pearlstein's *Chevrons #2* gives a good visual description of tightly crossed legs, one leg pressing down hard on another, but the notion that these legs belong to a body with nerves or emotions is not readily evoked. Pearlstein's image brings to mind the relationship between photographer and model which, as Donald Kuspit puts it, is 'a relationship inherently mechanical and sterile, because mediated by a machine rather than a sensitive human hand' and sparks conscious and unconscious feelings aroused during the transaction between painter and model only to a 'tiny extent' (Kuspit, 1994:57, *passim*). With Freud, on the other hand, Kuspit feels that there is an

ambivalently libidinous and aggressive flow between sitter and painter, which reveals the human existence of both [and] is subtly registered by the painter's hand, as by a seismograph. Attuning to not only the

external reality of appearances but to the inner reality of feelings, the hand can synthesise them both ... bespeak[ing] the singularity not only of the sitter's appearance but of the emotional transaction between sitter and painter (ibid.).

By registering his own human existence as well as that of the sitter, Freud can be seen to be *merging* with his paintings. In his essay, 'Courbet's "Femininity"', Michael Fried presents the theory that the nineteenth-century artist, Gustave Courbet, merges in a 'quasi-bodily' manner into certain of his paintings and this theory is useful for an interpretation of Freud (Fried, 1988:43).¹⁵ Freud's work has been likened to Courbet's. Martin Gayford has, in fact, stated that Freud betters the efforts of Courbet: '*Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* ... outdoes Courbet's *Bathers*¹⁶ and similar performances from the past in sheer monumentality of physical presence. The woman's breasts, stomach and knees positively bulge out towards the viewer in a startling 3-D effect' (Gayford, 1996:46). By referring to Fried's theory I hope to demonstrate that there is a possibility that feelings of boundary-loss between painter and object painted contribute to the creation of tactile qualities (or the embodiment of the corporeal) in Freud's work.

In Courbet's *Man with a Leather Belt* (see figure 29), 'the apparent proximity of the sitter to the picture surface ... seems designed to collapse all sense of distance and therefore of separation between sitter and painter ... and ultimately between painting and painter-beholder' (Fried, 1988:43).¹⁷ The success of the image in producing this effect in the viewer can be gauged by the painter because, as Richard Wollheim puts it, '[i]nside each artist is a spectator upon whom the artist, as agent, is dependent' (Wollheim, 1991:101). Therefore, if Courbet has been successful in seeing his intentions through, then, assumably, other viewers of his paintings will merge in a 'quasi-bodily' manner into his paintings as well. Fried notes that there are a number of devices Courbet uses for this merger. Images of figures with their backs turned to the viewer – the female figure in *The Source* (see figure 30) – is one example. By adopting the painter's and the beholder's posture before the canvas, these figures become 'surrogates' for him/her (Fried, 1988:44, *passim*). Averting the eyes of many of his figures is another device Courbet has for attaining this merger between the painter-beholder/beholder and the painting. Completely

absorbed in the world of the painting, the painted figure is unaware of being watched by the viewer and thus 'screen[s] the audience out' (Fried, 1980:68). The result is the absorption of the viewer. Fried states that

to refuse to allow the fact of [the audience's] existence to impinge upon the absorbed consciousness of [the] figures ... seems to [give them] a deep thrill of pleasure and in fact to have transfixed them before the canvas (ibid.).¹⁸



Figure 29 Gustave Courbet *Man with a Leather Belt*, c.1845-46

The viewer is not only less self-conscious than if he/she were confronted with a direct look, but is also less aware of the optical activity of looking, which, as a result, allows for the participation of more bodily sensations. Fried implies this by his use of the words 'beheld' and 'beholder'. Different from the words 'view', 'look' or 'see' and 'viewer' or 'spectator', these words define the accessing of an image as a function of the tactile nerves and the muscles – the 'viewer' both *be-holds* the image and in turn is *be-held* by the image. Described in this way, such a 'look' does not privilege the gaze. Fried enlarges upon this concept and notes that '[Courbet] found himself driven to seek to reconstitute

within the painting, the absorption in his bodily liveliness as he stood or sat before the canvas' (Fried in Herbst, 1996:4). The viewer's experience before the voluminous and seemingly living flesh of the two women in *Sleep* (see figure 31), for example, 'approaches sensory overload' because 'Courbet gave free rein to a fantasy of total corporeal presence' so that the painted figure 'could draw the beholder literally out of himself, or at the very least could eliminate all sense of difference between himself as ... beholder and what he beheld' (Fried, 1988:51-52). Fried's thesis of a merger between the painter Courbet and his sitters and between the painting and the viewer resembles the ideas about boundary-loss I presented in chapter 2. In both these theories there is an involvement of the body in the sensory reception of images, as the phrase '*quasi-corporeal merger*' reveals by linking itself to the idea of an imaginary experience of physical boundary-loss in tactile paintings.



Figure 30 Gustave Courbet *The Source*, 1868



Figure 31 Gustave Courbet *Sleep*, 1866

Freud and Courbet are alike in their rendering of substantial flesh. In addition to this, Freud's *Naked Portrait* resembles *Man with a Leather Belt* because the minutiae of the figure, focussed as if seen 'through a magnifying glass', give an illusion of nearness that reduces the distance evoked by the foreground space (Gayford, 1996:43). Although most of the figures in Freud's paintings face forward (and are not, therefore, Fried's 'surrogates' for the painter-beholder/holder); most of them, such as the woman in *Naked Woman on a Sofa* (see figure 32) or the man in *Naked Man with Rat* (see figure 33), avert their eyes. The role these men and women had as portrait-sitters for Freud remains obvious in their painted likenesses, however, and it is difficult to forget that they were aware of being looked at. It is only when the sitters fall asleep, as in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, that they appear to have become oblivious to the painter and viewer. Freud's sleeping figures are absorbed in the world of their painting and a probable consequence is the viewer's absorption into this world as well. In view of these similarities to Courbet and the highly tactile quality of paintings like *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, it is not impossible that Freud has experienced a sense of merger with his sitters and his paintings.



Figure 32 Lucian Freud *Naked Woman on a Sofa*, 1984-85, oil on canvas, 51 x 60.5 cm

I mentioned previously that the artistic procedure by which a tactile painting is created is based on instinct and is not altogether conscious. I also described the way that the corporeal is sensed in an illusionistic painting (other than through the evidence of brush marks, bodily indices or built-up paint) as being mysterious.¹⁹ Martin Gayford suggests just this when he describes Freud's development from his precisely detailed and smoothly finished paintings to his later works as 'a series of steps and jumps to a free and painterly style, with which he can create the same effect of detailed particularity' but which is 'more mysterious and magical' (ibid.:47). While Freud 'severely restricts his pictorial invention to what is actually in front of him' (ibid.:46) he does not restrict his inventiveness. *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* offers a feast of diverse marks – equivalents for tone, texture and form – and Freud has made

those great areas of flesh, that wobbly abdomen, those thighs like over-stuffed cushions, visually exciting, not just as mass, but also inch by inch Viewed from close up, the flesh of the model is made up of flecks, scumbles and patches of blue, grey, white, ochre and pink, mixed together with astonishing freedom (ibid.).



Figure 33 Lucian Freud *Naked Man with Rat*, 1977-78, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 91.5 cm

Compared to his early works, the ingenuity with which these non-representational marks can bring an image of striking realism into focus when viewed at a distance, indeed suggests that Freud has developed a less logical, more 'authentically felt' way of rendering flesh (Hughes, 1988:8). This is precisely how I describe my own experience of the creation of tactility²⁰, and how Milner describes her similar experiences.²¹

Freud is connected to Milner in another way, too. Her conception of a certain state of concentration that allows the painter is able to access previously unrealised tactile responses to objects²² appears to be what Feaver is thinking when he says that Freud's paintings reveal that he has achieved a 'concentration that makes the embers of discovery glow and flare' and that allowed Freud 'to develop something unknown to [him]' (Feaver, 1993:140).

Like Bacon²³, Freud, the extreme naturalist, relies on chance. Freud was influenced by Bacon's ideas on the visual possibilities of paint directed by chance. Freud says:

[Bacon's] work inspired me, his personality affected me. He talked a great deal about the paint itself, carrying the form and imbuing the paint with this sort of life. He talked about packing a lot of things into one single brushstroke, which amused and excited me (ibid.).

Returning to Dormer's criticism of Milner²⁴, this demonstrates that letting a painting develop in ways unplanned by the artist can often lead to the discovery of more powerful imagery than was expected. Through a procedure that is quite the opposite of Bacon's²⁵, Freud begins with extreme control, concentration and keen observation, and arrives at an image where the marks take on their own interesting abstract form while, almost magically, retaining their naturalistic function. Freud's starting point of stark transcription of visual reality takes him to the new and unknown and gives him the ability, in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, to readily evoke the internal physicality and tactility of a living body.

Apart from the observation of details, Freud feels that it is important to capture pictorial truth. He says:

[w]hen I look at a body I know it gives me choices of what to put in a painting; what will suit me and what won't. There is a distinction between fact and truth. Truth has an element of revelation about it. If something is true, it does more than strike one as merely being so (Hughes, 1988:20).

Therefore, all elements of a picture must harmonise and work towards one idea. In *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* the flesh of the massive body, being the main subject, is given a central point in the composition and is lit up more definitely than the surrounding room. Compliantly, the background area also assumes the properties of flesh. Sloping forward awkwardly, the floor does not, as Jed Perl has said, show an inability on Freud's part to understand '[t]he most elementary mechanics of placing things in space ... so that [floors] seem to float in front of a bed or chair' (Perl in Gayford, 1996:48). Instead, this floor

lacks rigidity in sympathy with the painting's theme of flesh, and behaves in the organic and rather uncontrolled way that a body might behave. Although Freud has said he uses Cremnitz white (the paint that has a substance similar to flesh) only on animate objects, the floor and carpet are painted with the same soft solidity as the woman's body. Pictorial integrity for Freud, in this painting, is the clothing of objects in the painterly equivalent for human flesh.



Figure 34 Lucian Freud *The Pig Man*, 1976-77, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 91.4 cm

Representations of the human body have a special relationship to paint with tactile qualities. Freud's tactile figures challenge the classically ideal body by presenting the unideal truth of living flesh. Acutely corporeal, Freud's uniquely handled paint imbues the image with somatic life. The physical labour of the painter recorded in the scumbled brush marks on the upper left arm and on the right hand side of the stomach in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet* animates the depictions of cellulite-ridden flesh. They appear to move in memory of the movement of the painter's hand. In a similar fashion, where the paint is pushed and pulled across the face in *Woman Smiling*, handled like clay rather than brushed

on, the skin seems to pull and push itself away from the bone. The painted flesh appears to have a life independent of the mind within it.

Like the flesh he paints, Freud also takes relatively little notice of the workings of his sitters' minds. While some of the faces, such as that of *The Big Man* (see figure 34), are expressly lyrical and rendered with a sensitivity to the mood of the person, the face of the nude figure in *Naked Man with Rat* has a glazed, unexpressive look. Alternatively, as in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, the figure is asleep. It is most likely that these two figures are expressing the weariness and boredom of spending lengthy sessions sitting for Freud, but Freud's remark that '[t]he head must be just another limb' demonstrates that there is clearly more to it than that (Hughes, 1988:20).

Flesh is what principally captures Freud's interest and he scrutinises it with an almost scientific interest. The art critic, William Feaver, has commented on this. He considers the similarity between Freud and his grandfather, Sigmund, to be their 'clinical[ness]' (Feaver, 1993:136). He implies that the 'thorough physical examination' which Sigmund Freud gave to his patients (before he examined their minds) is echoed in Freud's approach to painting the nude (ibid.).

Likening Lucien Freud to a doctor or, rather, a medical scientist is apt because he poses his bodies as if they were specimens in a laboratory. The operating theatre is brought to mind by the ordinariness of the surroundings and the harsh, bright light that discloses the figure of the *Naked Man on a Bed* (see figure 35), where his closed eyes suggest the effects of a general anaesthetic. The light in this painting is reminiscent of another feature of the medical world: the X-ray. Claude Gandelman, in his text, *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (1991), says that 'looking at a picture haptically means focusing on the picture's surface as if to touch or penetrate it' (Gandelman, 1991:111). He describes the painted representation of human body's interior as 'X-ray vision' or 'haptics in extremis' (ibid.). Gandelman quotes Edith Hoffman's²⁶ comment about a self-portrait by Oscar Kokoschka, an early twentieth-century painter who was said to paint through the means of X-rays²⁷, in which she described the face as 'brutally marked with little blue veins' (Hoffman in ibid.). This description can easily be applied to a painting of Freud's such as

Woman Smiling or *Naked Woman on a Sofa* where the brushstrokes seem to reach beneath the skin to the structure of veins and capillaries. It demonstrates that he too has an intensely tactile gaze that bores into the human anatomy. The hospital analogy can be taken one step further: the man in *Naked Man on a Bed* also resembles a corpse on a table in the morgue and, as such, it could be seen as a premonition of death.



Figure 35 Lucian Freud *Naked Man on a Bed*, 1987, oil on canvas, 56.5 x 61 cm

Tacit elements of sickness and death disturb the viewer in the same way as Siopis' *Three Lace Cloths* does.²⁸ This painting's disquieting ability to seduce the viewer into intimacy with the painting while at the same time shocking or repulsing him/her, is a feature of Freud's *Naked Man on a Bed*. Paint renders the knobs of skin on his legs, back, stomach and face both by being knobbly itself and by creating an illusion of three dimensions, and this excess of tactility effects an intimate spectatorial response. This puckered flesh, like the varicose veins in the legs of the *Naked Woman on a Sofa* and the obesity of the woman in *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, is also a feature that may cause the viewer to recoil from the painting, as it is a sign of physical imperfection and ageing. There is a sensation that there are things happening to the flesh – moving, growing, living and decaying – in an atmosphere of time condensed into a single moment. The viewer may be

repulsed by the imaginary bodily contact made with the un-ideal bodies of these strangers and, because of an identification with the palpable painted body, may also react negatively to the promise, in time, of their own ageing and death. Gayford asks:

What is the emotional effect of Freud's work? ... Freud seems to see the world at close range through his own eyes only, painting attractive or repulsive sights according to his whim. ... [S]urely capturing what philosophers call brute fact – unavoidable truths about this world – is at the heart of his enterprise (Gayford, 1996:49).

There is a further aspect of the attraction/repulsion dichotomy in Freud's work: rough paint work is a paradoxical companion to the tenderness with which Freud sometimes depicts the bodies of his sitters. Tenderness is shown, for instance, in the softness of the skin covering the cheekbones in *Girl in Striped Nightdress* (see figure 36) which is painted with a sensuousness that transforms the brushstrokes into erotic caresses and sensual responses to the flesh. It is the 'libidinous and aggressive flow between sitter and painter' noted earlier by Kuspit. These brushstrokes, however, are not the conventionally beautiful and smoothly transitional brushstrokes of Ingres *La Comtesse d'Haussonville*, nor do they possess the virtuoso beauty of a rapid and dextrous handling as is seen in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*. Instead, while undeniably free, the paintwork in *Girl in Striped Nightdress* could arguably be called clumsy. It is certainly coarse and harsh. Freud himself has likened his paintwork to that of Frans Hals, whose roughness he said was 'shock[ing]' (Freud in Hughes, 1988:20), and the almost violent roughness of Freud's paint in *Girl in Striped Nightdress* shocks too, considering the delicacy of the face it is depicting. Lacking the beauty usually found in the nude paintings of western art, Freud's paint again challenges the idealised nude because, as Linda Nochlin states, Freud's scumble 'is a sign of the flesh's mortality' (Nochlin, 1994:57). In *Girl in Striped Nightdress*, Freud remains aware of the realities of living flesh with its potential for decay and for death despite his feelings of fondness towards it, and it may be that this awareness even feeds his response. Perhaps, in the words of T. S. Eliot, he feels a tenderness for this '[i]ninitely suffering thing' (Eliot in Feaver, 1993:138).²⁹



Figure 36 Lucian Freud *Girl in a Striped Nightdress*, 1983-85, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.6 cm

3.2 Francis Bacon

Detailed realism is not what makes the paintings of Francis Bacon seem alive. Light, gestural scumble rather than thick, heavy impasto, is what gives Bacon's images their tactile quality and enables him, like Freud, to achieve a painterly re-embodiment of physical experience. By avoiding the illustrative and the narrative³⁰, Bacon attempts to capture the impossible – the sensations of a human body.

Francis Bacon, the son of English parents, was born and lived in Dublin until 1914 when, at the outbreak of the war, his family moved to London. Partly due to severe asthma, which he suffered from as a child, Bacon had almost no formal education. He was also a self-taught painter. During the years 1927 and 1928, Bacon travelled to Berlin and Paris. In Paris, he visited a Picasso exhibition at the Paul Rosenberg Gallery that greatly impressed him and inspired him to start making drawings and watercolours. Before he started to paint in oils, Bacon returned to London in 1929 and tried to establish himself as an interior decorator, designing furniture and rugs. In 1931, still in London, he moved to Fulham Road with the intention of painting seriously, but earned his living by doing odd jobs, none of them connected to art. Pronounced unfit for military service in 1943 because of his asthma, he turned to painting as a full-time activity.³¹

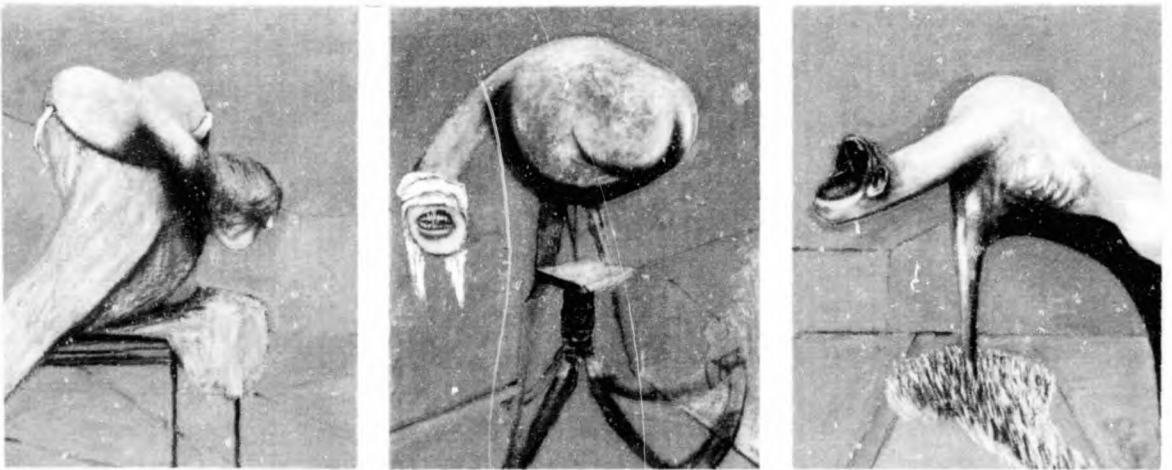


Figure 37 Francis Bacon *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, oil and pastel on board, each panel 94 x 84 cm

Bacon destroyed most of his early works because he found them unsatisfactory, and others he left behind when he was moving from studio to studio. In 1944 he executed the well-known triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (see figure 37). This painting, according to Bacon³², is the first example of his mature style, and its brightly coloured background, sketched-in perspective lines and half-scumbled, half-smearred paint are features that recur throughout almost all of Bacon's oeuvre. Similar to Freud's *The Painter's Room*, this painting is reminiscent of Surrealism³³, although it is the bestial imagery, and not a bizarre combination of objects, which brings this movement to mind. Such a fantastical metamorphosis of the human form can be found in the Surrealist painting, *The Five Strangers* (see figure 38) by Yves Tanguy.



Figure 38 Yves Tanguy *The Five Strangers*, 1941

While fervid brushstrokes tend to cause an outlandish disintegration of the epidermis in the portrait triptych *Three Studies for Head of Isobel Rawsthorne* (see figure 39), this later painting is more truly representational than *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* because the human figure abandons its biomorphic³⁴ shape. This is despite the latter's more realistically cohesive and smoothly painted skin surfaces.



Figure 39 Francis Bacon *Three Studies for Head of Isobel Rawsthorne*, 1965, oil on canvas, each panel 35.5 x 30.5 cm



Figure 40 Francis Bacon *Painting*, 1946, oil and tempera on canvas, 198 x 132 cm

Animalism, in his later works, has, however, far from disappeared. This doctrine proposing that man is entirely animal and has no soul is implied in *Painting* (see figure 40)

where the gigantic carcass of beef makes reference to the Crucifixion, suggesting that in death man is reduced to meat. For Bacon, the Crucifixion has none of its religious significance, but is merely 'an act of man's behaviour, a way of behaviour to another' and it is therefore understandable that he is reminded of it by 'pictures about slaughter houses' (Bacon in Sylvester, 1975:23).



Figure 41 Francis Bacon *Study from Innocent X*, 1962, oil on canvas, 198 x 145 cm

Another example of Bacon's disquieting visions of secularisation is the 'defrocking' of the Pope in *Study from Innocent X* (see figure 41). The implicit secularity in Velasquez's portrait of the man who was Pope, appears to be unmistakable in Bacon's copy where the Pope's red attire seems to have been turned into raw muscle from which the white skin is detaching itself. The Pope is being skinned alive by invisible hands before our eyes, bringing him down to the level of the profane and the carnal. This image glorifies fleshly life as religion would glorify spiritual life. It brings to mind

Ruskin's³⁵ famous distinction between 'aesthesia' and 'theoria', between 'mere animal consciousness...' and 'exulting, reverent and grateful perception'. ... Ruskin's moral universe is turned upside down by the time this dualism reaches Bacon: his outlook is so imbued with a Nietzschean³⁶ sense of vitalism that 'mere animal consciousness' is actually the 'exulted' condition he seeks (Cohen, 1997:68).³⁷

I applied Gandelman's term 'haptics in extremis' to Freud's work, and Gandelman himself has applied it to Bacon's. Bacon's imagery of 'bleeding body-meat' is like the flaying motif found in the paintings of Kokoschka (Gandelman, 1991:127). In *Study from Innocent X*, Bacon's gaze has penetrated the skin to reveal the anatomy underneath, functioning as an X-ray does, and it is similar to Kokoschka's illustrations for a play he wrote, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (see figure 42) where Man and Woman are engaged in flaying each other's body. Bacon's X-ray vision, his depictions of bodies that appear to have undergone flaying, and his interest in books about medical pathology³⁸ make the medical world as applicable a metaphor for Bacon as it is for Freud. More significant for this dissertation, however, is Gandelman's idea that the penetrating gaze comprises extreme tactility.



Figure 42 Oscar Kokoschka *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, 1908

The identification³⁹ of the human body with the body and death of the animal in *Painting* and the transformation of cloth into skin, muscle and ligament in *Study from Innocent X* are all the more pronounced (and all the more startling) because of the bodily realism created by the image's powerful tactility. Rapid strokes render the subtle chiaroscuro, tones and texture of the meat and leave traces of the paint's substance and the action of the artist. In paintings like these, where paint seems to become flesh, the viewer's senses are aroused to the excitement and intensity of the olfactory nerves of a hound on the scent and, in fact, one *can* almost smell the meat of the flayed carcass and body.⁴⁰ It is Bacon's aim to trap the image 'at its most living point' and he feels that the strength of his imagery lies in the paint that 'comes across directly onto the nervous system' (Bacon in Sylvester, 1975:54,18). Paint that is 'illustrative' or 'narrative' does not 'present' things, he says, but instead 'tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain' (ibid.). His statement: 'trap[ping] this living fact alive ... has to do with texture' (ibid.:57) demonstrates that Bacon is saying that he prefers paint that is tactile to paint that is optical.⁴¹ It implies that the imaginary stimulation of the viewer's sense of touch is essential to the full appreciation of Bacon's imagery.

In Bacon's paintings, as with Freud's, it is, nevertheless, the combination of the suggestive (tactile) and the descriptive (optical) that creates a powerfully real image. For example, in *Study of Innocent X* the illusion of flesh is produced by the sweeping shapes, the ruddy colour injected with a white that looks like skin, fat or gristle and the striations where bristles have cut into wet paint that *describe* the appearance of muscle. The physical substance of the paint and the gesture of the brushstrokes that suggest the texture of skin also produce this illusion. Bacon's attempts to both delineate⁴² and to suggest causes spontaneous and opposing responses in the viewer.

Michael Fried's term 'theatricality'⁴³, which denotes 'separateness, distancedness and mutual facing' (Fried, 1988:43) is brought to mind by the verb 'delineate'. Firstly, with all the descriptive imagery in his work, it is not difficult for the viewer to suspend his/her disbelief and take Bacon's swirls and slashes of paint for real bodily injury, especially when a body that is distorted by frantic brush marks and not contained within its borders lies on a bed that is conventionally realistic with its clear outlines and regular shape, such as the

central panel in *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*. The literalness of the bed is easily extended to the figure, and the mutilations are taken for real (as the suggestive brushstrokes are taken to be descriptive). Secondly, the spectator is aware of his/her viewing presence before the canvas because, while many of Bacon's figures are absorbed in activity and do not confront the viewer (see figure 43)⁴⁴, the descriptive or illustrative painting refers directly to the viewer, demonstrating what is happening or how something looks. Moreover, in *Three Studies for Figures on Beds*, the circular arrows act like vectors, directing the viewer's look, again making him/her aware that he/she is *looking* at a *picture*. I italicise these words because opticality is intermingled with the tactility of the figures; a tactility that causes the viewer to become absorbed or merged in a *bodily* rather than a visual or cerebral way with this part of the painting.



Figure 43 Francis Bacon *Three Studies for Figures on Beds*, 1972, oil and pastel on canvas, each panel 198 x 147.5 cm

By favouring the 'nervous system' as a receptive site for the image, Bacon has implied that a bodily response to such an image overrides a visual one where his tactile or more direct paint is concerned. In addition to the flesh-like paint, the two bodies in the central panel of *Three Studies for Figures on Beds* merge into a single form, and it is illuminating (in terms of my second italicised word) to compare this image to Courbet's *Sleep*. Fried states that the bodies of the two women in this painting are depicted as 'a seemingly endless expanse of flesh' that 'draw[s] the beholder literally out of himself, or at the very least ... eliminate[s] all sense of difference between himself as painter/beholder and what he beheld' (ibid.:51-52). A possible result, therefore, of the represented merger in *Three Studies for Figures on Beds* is that as the viewer becomes absorbed and forgets or loses him/herself⁴⁵ in the image he/she also forgets about the illusory nature of the image. The painting is felt to be real and the viewer's imaginary boundary-loss is felt to be an actual experience, making it seem all the more real.⁴⁶

The different types of imagery work like adversaries, each attempting to recruit the viewer, so that he/she is not only jostled between an optical response and a tactile one, but also between sensations of intimacy and repulsion. In *Study for Innocent X*, the suggestive or tactile paint, portraying a velvety fleshiness, seduces, while the harsh descriptive imagery repels. In *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, not only are the mutilations taken literally because of the descriptive paint, but also because of the pungent sense of reality the tactility gives to the ripped flesh. The viewer, who is already distanced from Bacon's images by his/her awareness of his/her viewing presence, is pushed away farther because he/she probably recoils from the apparent reality of the violence. There is a spontaneity to the responses of the viewer who is merging and identifying with Bacon's painted bodies and, at the same time, repulsed by the thought of touching the exposed muscle and sensing the pain. The experience of intimacy is antagonised by the need to withdraw from the subject matter, resulting in a mental experience that is like a grasshopper trying to escape from a lidded glass jar.⁴⁷

Bacon's violence is, however, less literal than it initially seems. Although, in Joshua Gilder's interview with him, Bacon thinks that it is likely that the violent times through which he lived (two world wars and the Sinn Féin movement in Ireland) have influenced

his work⁴⁸, it is probably more accurate to say that Bacon's gestures are by-products of a painting process that aims to evoke the living aspects of the body. As he says to Joshua Gilder, '[p]eople always interpret [my paintings] as violent. I'm certainly not trying to do that. I'm really trying to make them as real from my point of view as I possibly can' (Bacon in Gilder, 1983:17). Gesture equals tactility, which equals physical life. At the expense of misinterpretation, Bacon leaves the brush marks in their violent state in order to achieve the tactility that he values so highly. The aliveness of the figures in *Three Studies for Figures on Beds*, thus, lies in their apparent anticipation of death, bringing yet another paradox to Bacon's work.

Bacon's painting process significantly matches that of Marion Milner⁴⁹ because, in order to persuade the viewer that his nudes are 'actually made out of living flesh' (Gayford, 1996:45), he states that he is 'not only remaking the look of the image ... [but also] all the areas of feeling which [he himself] ha[s] apprehensions of' (Bacon in Sylvester, 1975:27-28). This echoes Milner who thinks that the 'thought[s] and sensation[s] and feeling[s] and action[s]' that occur while she paints are 'permanent[ly] record[ed]' in the resulting picture (Milner, 1950:142).

Bacon declares that he captures this imagery in an 'extraordinary irrational' way by abandoning 'conscious will' and relying on chance and accident⁵⁰ (Bacon in Sylvester, 1975:27,17). This is demonstrated by his explanation of the tactile *Painting*:

[it] came to me as an accident. I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field ... but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident (ibid.:11)

In the past few years, however, Bacon's reputation for spontaneity has been cast into doubt. A substantial body of Bacon's oil sketches and drawings dating from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, many of which are thought to be preparatory studies for his paintings, were discovered in the 1990s.⁵¹ Following the disclosure of these works, Bacon was accused of having 'cruelly and deliberately ma[de] fools of his friends and admirers'

with his claims about the spontaneity of his mature style (Lucie-Smith in Snookes, 1999:18). The question, therefore, arose as to whether Bacon's method of painting was really as extraordinarily irrational as he had professed.

It shows, however, an unawareness on the part of Bacon's critics to ask this question only once such sketches had come to public notice, because the repetitiveness of Bacon's paintings has always implied that there was a deliberation to his spontaneity. Bacon, the 'Johnny-one-note of art', appears to *learning the craft* of using accident (Gayford, 1996:43). In fact, the twentieth-century artist Frank Auerbach has said that what Bacon calls accident 'isn't accident at all' (Sylvester, 1975:94-96). David Sylvester explains that it is, instead, more like the reflex action of a sportsman or woman where the mind, body and intention work together in perfect harmony. He states that

in the middle of a game somebody will play a very good shot and in reply you will play a better shot than you thought you could ever possibly play. The very difficulty makes your own shot that much better, and you're amazed and don't know how you did it, hardly believe you did it ... a kind of trance-like state you get into (ibid.:96).⁵²

Bacon's reflex action is the rapid and economical single brushstroke, evoked by the stimulus of the human body, with which he instinctively captures chiaroscuro, flesh tones, texture and bodily feelings.

While I feel that Dormer is wrong in respect to his interpretation of Milner's free drawings, his discussion of craft knowledge is insightful here, and serves to illustrate Bacon's technique. Dormer remarks that, in learning a skill, the amateur relies on rules. It is a gradual process and, for a long time, 'fluency in the body of knowledge cannot be taken for granted' (Dormer, 1994:40). For an expert, having craft knowledge means 'living in that knowledge' (ibid.). The emotions, intellect and physical processes all function at once. It is very likely that this is what turns the apprentice into an artist.

Bacon's paintings seem to be about learning a craft and accomplishing an art. Bacon's repetitiveness demonstrates that he had a conscious goal and that through practice,

through the reworking of the marks he made, he attempted to reach that goal. Each painting seems to be a struggle to re-reach a previous level of expertise.⁵³ Once reached, the struggle ceases, and the goal is accomplished with swift mastery. Out of 'an absolute feeling' of the 'impossibility' of capturing the sensations of the living body through what he calls an illustrational process – or what might now be called the craft without the art – Bacon has fined-tuned his use of accident so that it has become a component of his artistic technique (Bacon in Sylvester, 1975:13).



Figure 44 Gustave Courbet *Painter's Studio*, 1855

In light of his similarity to Milner and Courbet, it is reasonable to assume that Bacon also experienced a feeling of boundary-loss during this painting procedure. The author of *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (1992), Ernst van Alphen, is certain that Bacon's viewers experience boundary-loss, and, from what has been discussed in this dissertation, it is likely that it originates from the artist. According to van Alphen, the 'narrative boundaries'⁵⁴ between events 'inside' Bacon's paintings and the viewer 'outside' are 'fuzzed out', and the viewer feels that he/she is 'in' the picture (van Alphen. 1992:29). Therefore, in a painting like *Three Studies for Figures on Beds*, the viewer identifies with the figures' battering by 'physical stimuli' so that, for the viewer, 'the experience of the picture will be like the experience of its subject' (ibid.:47). The viewer's identity becomes

'contaminated' by that of the painted figure (ibid.:62). Whereas the identity of the painter-beholder, to use Fried's term, is confirmed by the figures who are surrogates for him/her, the viewer experiences what van Alphen calls a 'loss of self' (ibid., *passim*).



Figure 45 Francis Bacon *Study for Portrait of van Gogh*, 1957, oil on canvas, 202.5 x 142 cm

The figures themselves also appear to encounter a loss of self, a loss of *physical* self through their somatic deterioration. The lovers in *Three Studies for Figures on Beds*, whose flesh seems to detach itself from the body-whole, lose their separate identities by dissolving into each other and into the background. It is not unlike the merger between people and objects in Courbet's *Painter's Studio* (see figure 44), where the 'river and waterfall may be seen to flow out of the canvas and beyond [the self-portrait of Courbet], descending to the studio floor in the long folds of the otherwise naked model's white sheet' (Fried, 1988:44). The removal of objective distance between the painter-beholder and image is represented in *Painter's Studio*, where the skin, as boundary, disappears.

Bacon often, like Freud, establishes a *theme* of flesh in this way.⁵⁵ In *Study for Portrait of van Gogh VI* (see figure 45), for example, the vigorous, tactile brush marks feature throughout the painting, turning a landscape into a bodyscape⁵⁶, and in the centre panel of *Triptych, May-June* (see figure 47) he gives the figure's giant bat-like shadow corporeal form. In this unusual allusion to death, the shadow drains the bodily substance from the figure to which it belongs⁵⁷ and resurrects the dying flesh with tactile paint.



Figure 46 Francis Bacon *Triptych, May-June*, 1973, oil on canvas, 198 x 147.5 cm

NOTES:

¹ See chapter 1.

² See chapter 1.

³ See Hughes, 1988:7.

⁴ See Hughes, 1988:7.

⁵ The biographical details came from the various sources cited in this chapter.

⁶ See Hughes, 1988:11. *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting is the name given in 1924 by Gustav Hartlaub, director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle to a group of artists whose works were executed in a realistic style (in contrast to the prevailing styles of Expressionism and Abstraction) and reflected what Hartlaub characterised as the resignation and cynicism of the post World War I period in Germany (see Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, vol. VII, 15th Edition, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974, p. 274).

⁷ Surrealism was the movement in art and literature flourishing in Europe between World Wars I and II. Surrealism grew principally out of the earlier movement of Dadaism, which before World War I produced works of anti-art that deliberately defied reason, but Surrealism's emphasis was not on negation but on positive expression. The movement represented a reaction against what its members saw as the destruction wrought by the rationalism that had guided European culture and politics in the past and that had culminated in the horrors of World War I (see Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, vol. IX, 15th Edition, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974, p. 693).

⁸ See Hughes, 1988:16.

⁹ Herbert Read made this statement in *Contemporary British Art*, Harmondsworth, 1951, p.35. Existentialism is a family of philosophies (dating from about 1930) devoted to an interpretation of human existence in a world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character. Existence is thus regarded as particular and individual; an avenue to the meaning of Being; and a challenge to choice – a choice that is conditioned by man's being-in-the-world (in a concrete and historically determined situation (see Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, vol. IV, 15th Edition, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974, p. 5).

¹⁰ See Storr, 1988:135

¹¹ See Gowing, 1982:118

¹² See chapter 1.

¹³ Interestingly enough, Hughes notes that 'the peculiar graininess of Cremnitz white enabled him to give the skin some of the peculiar quality one sees in Bacon, where the swiping brush leaves a mark on the canvas akin to a deposit of raw tissue' (Hughes, 1988:22)

¹⁴ This is similar to Bacon who also describes the difference between paint that conveys directly onto the nervous system and paint that tells you a story through a long diatribe through the brain (to be discussed in section 3.2)

¹⁵ Fried claims that the traditional gender oppositions of western visual imagery, such as 'man as the bearer and woman as the *object* of the look or gaze' are undone in certain of Courbet's paintings (Fried in Faunce and Nochlin, 1988:43). I shall examine this in chapter 5.

¹⁶ *Bathers* is a painting Courbet did in 1853.

¹⁷ Fried's term 'painter-beholder' indicates that Courbet is both the painter and viewer of his paintings.

¹⁸ Fried is here actually discussing the work of Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) and the responses of the contemporary audience but the features of absorption on Greuze's paintings do occur in Courbet's and, as Fried states, this kind of 'absorption [will] return with a vengeance in the art of Courbet' (Fried, 1980:70)

¹⁹ See chapter 1.

²⁰ See chapter 1.

²¹ See chapter 2.

²² See chapter 2.

²³ This shall be demonstrated in section 3.2. of this chapter.

²⁴ See chapter 2.

²⁵ Bacon began many paintings by throwing or smearing paint onto the canvas to produce marks by chance which would make the image look more realistic or truer to the likeness of a portrait than would happen by more controlled means. This will be discussed in section 3.2. of this chapter.

²⁶ Edith Hoffman was one of Oscar Kokoschka's first biographers.

²⁷ Frank Whitford in his text, *Kokoschka: A Life*, quotes the architect Adolf Loos who said to Kokoschka that he had 'X-ray eyes' (Whitford, 1986:53).

²⁸ See chapter 1.

²⁹ In conversation with William Feaver, Freud quoted this line from T. S. Eliot's 'Preludes'. The whole of his quotation is as follows: "I am moved by fancies that are curled/ Around these images, and cling/ The notion of some infinitely gentle/ Infinitely suffering thing" (Eliot in Feaver, 1993:138).

³⁰ See Deleuze, 1983, *passim*.

³¹ The biographical details came from the various sources cited in this chapter.

³² See Turner, 1996:27

³³ According to David Cohen, Herbert Read had wanted to include Bacon in the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition at the Burlington Galleries, but bizarrely his co-selectors deemed him "not surrealist enough" (see Cohen, 1997:67).

³⁴ By biomorphic I mean a shape that, although not representative of one particular animal form, alludes to many.

³⁵ John Ruskin (1819-1900) was an art critic, a writer and a reformer. He was interested in the relationship between art and morality, and this theme was first set forth in 1843 with the publication of the first volume of his *Modern Painters*.

³⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher and one of the most influential modern thinkers. He held the view that all life expresses a will to power, and the highest values are those that represent the highest values of strength and vitality. He did not, however, understand these values primarily in terms of political or physical power, but in great artistic and intellectual achievements. They are values that bold, masterful, self-assertive individuals (such as the ancient Greek and Renaissance Italians) have created for themselves. Nietzsche was an existentialist (Existentialism is the philosophical

movement or tendency emphasising individual existence, freedom and choice) who proclaimed the "death of God" and went on to reject the entire Judeo-Christian moral tradition in favour of a heroic pagan ideal (see Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, vol. IV, 15th Edition, U.S.A., Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974, p. 699).

³⁷ This reversal of the spiritual and the bodily shall be referred to again later in this chapter when I shall introduce ideas relating to grotesque imagery to my discussion of Freud's and Bacon's work. One of the features of grotesque imagery is the emphasis on the body, its functionalism and its earthiness; another feature is turning things on their heads such as, for example, the spiritual and the bodily and, concerning body itself, reversing the role of the head and the bottom, so that the bottom is situated where the head should be. Many facts about grotesque imagery I have taken from Mikhail Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* (1968).

³⁸ See David Sylvester's *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 1975, *passim*.

³⁹ I am referring to the identification of the human species with other animal species as well as Bacon's own identification with meat – he says that 'he was always surprised ... when he went into a butcher's shop, not to find himself hanging up on a hook' (Gayford, 1996:44)

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, in his article 'The Logic of Sensation', explains Bacon's paintings in terms of levels of sensation, making reference to Cézanne who called the experience of his own paintings 'a logic of the senses' (Cézanne in Deleuze, 1983:16). One of the ways in which sensation occurs in levels is that that 'would be tantamount to the domains of sensation that refer to each of the different sense organs', so that one not only looks at the images or appreciates them haptically only either, but one 'hears the hoofs of the beast' in his bullfights, or tastes and smells his representations of meat (*ibid.*:16, *passim*).

⁴¹ This is linked to the idea of the textural brush mark I mentioned in chapter 1.

⁴² I use the word 'delineate' deliberately because it refers to both line and word. In chapter 4 I will present the ideas of Claude Gandelman who, in his text *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (1991), feels that the difference between haptical imagery and optical imagery is that the haptical tends to represent surface and the optical tends towards the outline, ending up as the letter or word. The crux of his idea is that optical imagery functions in a similar way to language.

⁴³ 'Theatricality' is used by Fried to define a current in French painting arising around the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing until at least the advent of Manet (Fried, 1988:43) (see section 3.1 of this chapter). Like Freud's work, Bacon's displays aspects of both absorption (denoting an intimacy or merger with the image on the part of the viewer) and theatricality but whereas I was interested mainly in

absorption in connection with Freud's work I am interested in Bacon's work with the viewer's suspension of disbelief which is linked to his/her painting that confronts the viewer, making him/her aware of his *viewing* presence before the image awareness of his/her optical presence in front of the canvas, and its relation to the absorption of the viewer into the work.

⁴⁴ A feature of Fried's ideas on absorption. See section 3.1 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ Or, as Ernst van Alphen puts it, the viewer's 'loss of self' (van Alphen, 1992, *passim*). I will discuss van Alphen in chapter 4 when I look at the psychoanalytic metaphors of assimilation and excretion mentioned in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Going one step further, this could be interpreted as the recreation of infantile boundary-transcendence I mentioned in chapter one that I said was a possible artistic goal.

⁴⁷ In Sergei Eisenstein's film, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), there is a scene showing a close-up of a nurse who has been shot in the head. This image has influenced Bacon very much. Here, the viewer is trapped into looking at the gruesome details of the bullet wound because of the image's nearness to him/her. It is possible that such an image of horror would also fascinate or transfix viewers, and so, in its extreme theatricality, it returns to absorption. The film is about a mutiny that took place on board the battleship Potemkin during the failed Revolution of 1905 against the Russian Tsar. Bad food, especially maggotty meat served for weeks on end caused the mutiny. The close-up of wounded nurse is part of a fictitious massacre on the Odessa steps, which Eisenstein included in his film.

⁴⁸ See Gilder, 1983:17.

⁴⁹ See chapters 1 and 2.

⁵⁰ This is similar to Milner's idea of a 'state of concentration' based on chance, instinct and less-than-conscious states of mind where 'one was no longer aware of oneself' (Milner, 1950:142).

⁵¹ See Snookes, 1999:18

⁵² The 'trance-like state' is like Milner's term 'reverie' that she uses to describe the state of mind during which boundary-loss occurs. See chapter 2.

⁵³ See Sylvester, 1975, *passim*.

⁵⁴ By 'narrative', van Alphen is using a description of painting that, like 'illustrative', Bacon says he tries to avoid in his work. Van Alphen understands narrative to refer directly to the viewer, making him/her aware of his presence as viewer (or in literary terms, reader or listener). Although Linda Nochlin states that '(a)lmost from the beginning, Bacon's work has been engaged with temporality, making, at the very least, a flirtation with narrative unavoidable' (Nochlin, 1996:108-109), van Alphen feels that in Bacon's work, an optical or cerebral response is overridden by a bodily one and the viewer becomes less aware that he/she is looking at a picture.

⁵⁵ Even though, like Freud who uses Cremnitz white for painting flesh, Bacon often paints his figures in oils, and uses quick-drying, hard emulsion house paints or acrylic paints for the background.

⁵⁶ 'Bodyscape', in this instance, denotes a field (or the whole area of the canvas) of flesh that resembles a landscape.

⁵⁷ According to Linda Nochlin, this figure represents George Dyer, Bacon's lover, who committed suicide right before the opening of a major retrospective of Bacon's work in 1971-72 at the Grand Palais in Paris. Dyer committed suicide at the Hotel des Saint-Pères (See Nochlin, 1996:110)

Chapter 4

The symbol of tactility

Tactility symbolises rebirth or renewal by giving life to the inanimate matter depicted in the paintings of Freud and Bacon. While the decaying, ageing flesh of the woman in Freud's *Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, the corpse-like posture of the man in his *Naked Man on a Bed*, and the dying body of the man in Bacon's *Triptych, May-June* may signal the nearing end of these individual lives, the fleshy paint appears to represent life's continuance. In this chapter I shall discuss the conflict between the instinctive psychological and biological forces of life and death that are suggested by the images of Freud and Bacon.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud presents the idea that the forces of life and death struggle against one another in biological organisms. He states that the death instinct 'exercise[s] pressure towards death', and the life or sexual instinct 'towards a prolongation of life' (Freud, 1961:38).¹ In her essay, 'The Violence of Paint', Parveen Adams attributes Freud's libidinal² life instinct to the organic paint of the bat-like shadow in Bacon's *Triptych, May-June*. She writes:

I would say that what escapes through the orifices is *libido*. The body squeezes itself out, empties itself out. What oozes out is the lamella, the organ of the drive (Adams; 1996:118).

Life is on loan to the body in a grim, never-to-be-completed hire-purchase system where death always lurks in readiness to repossess it. In its dance with death, life moves from figure to background and back again, battering and distorting the body – the site for these events. This can be seen in the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, where the body is stretched and pulled apart as the tactile paint flows and splashes out from the lower back, head and legs into the pillow and the sheet. This

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