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THE WORK OF FRANCIS BACON AND LUCIAN FREUD
IN RELATION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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INTRODUCTION

The technological revolution of the 20th century has irreversibly changed every aspect of human existence. It has affected everything from the smallest domestic appliance to the most sophisticated industrial equipment, indeed it has changed our whole outlook on the very nature of life itself. Whether or not the quality of life has improved, there is no doubt that the material standard of living and the general standard of academic education certainly have. The result of these developments, however, particularly in relation to the advances that have been made in the field of transport, communication, and industry, has been the final and definite end of many localized cultures, their ways of living and their traditions and their replacement with an ever-strengthening materialist mass-culture, originating from the "New World" of America.

Human beings, without much warning, suddenly appeared to find themselves in a condition of existence that, in the entire history of human existence, was unique. No longer, for example, could a blacksmith's son depend upon the fact that he would inherit his father's trade and continue to blacksmith, yet there seemed to be an increasing general and external pressure to be successful in a material, or at least a visible, manner, without there being any definite method specified by which such success could be achieved.

The result of this rapidly changing social infrastructure has been the increasing growth of an element of instability and insecurity in relation to each individual's existence, as well as the increasing social necessity for the individual to keep his insecurity concealed. The most terrifying consequence of all of the effects of the 20th century on the nature of human existence was the fact that one of the traditions that came to be no longer valid was man's, unquestioned belief that he was created by a God, and that his own existence must therefore be meaningful. Without God, he found himself faced with the possibility that his life may be no more than the result of an accident, and therefore that he may have to accept the responsibility of creating his own meaning.

T.S. Eliot described the condition of man in this Godless state as one in which he finds himself both hollow and stuffed, with, 'Headpieces filled with straw, Alas', (3.P.77) due to his rejection of his creator, God, in his poem, "The Hollow Men".

Jean-Paul Sartre, in a similar manner claimed that man, in this state, exists both in a state of 'being' and in a state of 'nothingness'. Unlike Eliot, however, Sartre professed that only now is man to face the reality of his existence authentically, proclaiming that the concept of God was an invention of man's and that in reality man's existence preceeds his essence, that each individual is no more than what he makes himself.

The painter Francis Bacon, in conversation with David Sylvester, said that,

When you're outside a tradition, as every artist is to-day, one can only want to record one's own feelings about certain situations as closely to one's own nervous system as one possibly can. (9.P.43)

What this has involved with Bacon's work, as with a contempory of his, Lucian Freud, is the attempt, subjectively, to record and establish in paint, the very reality of the nature of human existence in the 20th century. The result of which has been the creation of images in which the traits of isolation, anguish, insecurity and their concealment, have been prevalent. What I attempt to do in this essay is to examine the fact that these traits in particular have been portrayed in both artist's work as being integral to human existence in this century, with specific reference to the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre.

This essay is structured in three chapters, followed by a conclusion. The first chapter is concerned exclusively with Bacon, the appearance of his work, the presence of the elements of anguish and isolation in it, and with reference to his methods and intentions in relation to the work.

Chapter II examines the reasons that may be responsible for the presence of this isolation and anguish, in relation to the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Chapter III introduces the work of Lucian Freud and establishes a connection between his work and Bacon's, in relation to their portrayal of two separate aspects of human existence, the public and the private.

The conclusion examines how successful both artists have been in their portrayal of the entirety of human existence, again, in relation to Sartre.

CHAPTER I

Michel Leiris, in the concluding paragraphs of his essay, Francis Bacon - Full Face and in Profile, attempts in a general way to suggest the significance of Bacon's work, stating that,

From personal experience that his pictures help us, most powerfully, to feel the sheer fact of existence as it is sensed by a man without illusions.

(6.P.44)

He continues to claim that while observing this sheer fact of existence, the viewer develops an awareness of his own existence and of an element of duality that is a fundamental factor of it,

We feel we are in touch with reality itself and are at last living our life, while at the same time realizing that our delight is flawed with a strange dissonance: the anguish aroused by that hostile immanence, death.

(6.P.44)

Whether this personal reaction is as general as Leiris would seem to imply with his use of the collective terms 'us' and 'we', is of course speculation. Nevertheless, it does raise an interesting aspect in relation to Bacon's work, work which Bacon himself has repeatedly declared to be without any form of narrative and containing no specific messages, that aspect being its relationship to the viewers. Leiris, however, also makes some interesting and perceptive observations in relation to the very nature of Francis Bacon, his character, as well as work, and the philosophy that is fundamental to both, and an initial understanding of the same is essential prior to any consideration of his paintings as independent entities.

Francis Bacon is indeed a man without illusions. He has no illusions in relation to the contradictory nature both of the modern world in general and of the present state of art, acknowledging that they are both simultaneously extremely complicated and primitive. He suffers

no illusions in relation to his own situation, existing within that world, both as a human being and as an artist. While defining himself as a realist, he claims that realism is in constant need of reinvention and redefinition. In relation to his stature and selfimportance as a human being, he has stated that he considers himself, and human existence in general, to be accidental, futile and without any concrete reason. In conversation with David Sylestor he outlined his view of life as,

Meaningless, but we give it meaning during our own existence.
We create certain attitudes which give it a meaning while
we exist, though they in themselves are meaningless, really.
(9.P.133)

qualifying his use of the term, 'meaning', as

'a way of existing from day to day', (9.P.133)

the only purpose being

'a purpose for nothing', (9.P.133)

Taking into consideration this apparent nihilism, his unwillingness to differentiate in the generally accepted sense between the banal and the profound, to glorify or to romanticize, it is not surprising that he wandered around Europe for many years living an apparently carefree, bohemian lifestyle before deciding in the mid 1940's to commit himself to painting. It is no less surprising, having made that commitment that the subject which obsessed him then (and still continues to do so) is none other than the peculiar phenomenon that is human existence within the contemporary chaos of the 20th century.

The image that he almost invariably presents us with is that of an isolated figure, situated sometimes in a space recognisable as a room, complete with such props as lightswitches and bulbs, venetian blinds, and newspapers etc. On other occasions the figures appear in less descriptive, ambiguous spaces which seem to serve merely as armatures on which to hang or hold the figure on the canvas. One unifying factor, however, in all of his paintings in the contemporyness of the historical timespace portrayed, whether it be due to the presence of modern

artifacts, or the even, uneventful coverage of large spaces with a single hue or due to some indefinable reason, there is never any doubt that the figures portrayed are existing in a modern environment and context.

The figures themselves, whether they be portraits either of self or of friends or whether they be anonymous, always appear, in contrast to the relatively naturalistic portrayal of inanimate objects (lightbulbs, telephones etc.), to be in a continuous state of anguish or crisis. More often than not certain anatomical features may not only be distorted but missing completely, or a consistency may be lacking between part of a body which appears to be quite structured and another part of it which looks as if it could be in the midst of a transition from solid to liquid form. Other figures still appear to be no more than completely formless, chaotic mounds of flesh.

1 Many of these characteristic traits are to be found, for example, in the 1964 triptych Three Figures in a Room. The room itself is, in fact, simplified down to an elliptical shape constituting the floor, sandwiched between a darkening of it's own tone, beyond it's lower edge and a flat even beige tone above it, serving as a wall. It's spaciousness, along with the neutrality of the beige wall and brown, carpet-like floor are reminiscent of some modern office or library, although this is denied, in it's narrative context by the presence not only of a toilet seat in the left side panel, but also by the figures, who appear naked and in a state of inactive, contemplativeness.

I use the term 'inactive contemplativeness', in an attempt to describe the curious predicament that all these figures appear to be in, each one of whom bear all or some of the traits previously referred to - that of being distorted, simultaneously structured and in the midst of changing form, pensive and anguished. None of them appear to be engaged in any form of physical or constructive action. The central figure is seen lying on an enormous chair, while the figure in the right side panel is perched upon a stool, similar to the type found in fast food restaurants, even the figure in the left side panel who is seen sitting upon a toilet seat creates the impression that he is simply sitting on it as opposed to using it.



Fig. 1. Three Figures in a Room. 1964

Fig. 1. Detail



The fact that each of these figures permit themselves to indulge in such inactiveness suggests that they each, respectively, consider themselves to be in a situation of privacy, for such inactiveness is rarely tolerated from or permitted of a person in public. The painting is titled Three Figures in a Room, but even so there is no indication that they are there at the same time, or if so, that they are aware of each of the other presences. Inherent in this fact, is the fact the Bacon's figure's in this painting, as is the case almost without exception with all of his figures are portrayed, not only existing in a state of solitude but indeed in a state of isolation.

Bacon acknowledged this isolation when talking to David Sylvester (9.P.22) he referred to his use of the triptych as a method of including more than a single figure in the same painting while simultaneously keeping them isolated so as to prevent a narrative being created, a fact that, in the present complicated state of painting, he claims is inevitable when more than one figure appears on the same canvas.

Bacon's awareness of this complicated state of painting, caused, in no small way by the technological advances that have been made in the past century, along with his negation of narrative and his loathing of illustration, are factors that he has more than once referred to, in explanation of the unique appearance of his paintings. In reference to his distortion of figures for example he has claimed that such distortion, which is the result of chance or accidental occurrence's in the paint, is necessary in an age that is devoid of tradition, with photography having made the artists former role of reporter null and void, and with such developments as X-ray's having forever changed the way in which we perceive people (9.P.66). The important issue, however, in relation to Bacon's methods of working, and indeed his inclination in interviews to talk about them, is quite simply not to confuse his method's of working for the subjects of his work, in doing so to detract from or undervalue the images themselves. His use therefore of the triptych to prevent narrative, or distortion to destroy illustrational qualities, should not be seen as taking from the potency of the images created. They are methods by which isolated and dislocated figures are established in paint, as opposed to the reason's responsible for the isolation or the meanings that they may hold.

What Francis Bacon is not only concerned but obsessed with in his painting is the creation of an image in which a specific fact of reality, with all of its complexities, potency and poignancy will, not be reflected, but to use his own term "trapped" (9.P.180). This trapping of reality he attempts to achieve through his reliance on a method of painting which consists of a balance between his conscious modelling of paint and an unconscious element in the use of accident which creates a logical, ordered image in the most irrational manner and with a greater potency and vividness than he (Bacon) claims, any,

'accepted way of doing it could of brought about'

(9.P.105)

In relation to a previous reference to a quote from Michel Leiris, the sheer fact of existence, is, not discovered through conscious, intellectual means, but sensed, by Bacon (6.P.44).

This in turn is communicated to the viewer, again through the senses, due to the fact that the reality in question has been once removed from the accepted, preconceived notion of how it should appear and then returned to its original fact through irrational means. It communicates therefore, not through the intellect, but, as Bacon likes to say, straight onto the nervous system. In this manner Bacon manages to create in paint, figures that are independent realities in their own right, which appear to encompass the energy, and meaning's of day to day existence that are qualities of the actual initial reality of living beings. He does this while simultaneously keeping them free of any metaphorical or symbolic significance or functions.

Once these realities, however, have been so convincingly established, we are left with that which is of central importance, the images themselves. The overwhelming impression that resounds from the figures in these images is that of their extreme isolation and anguish.

They appear to consider themselves to be in situations of privacy, in which the relative security of such solitude, has provided them with the opportunity to dwell upon their own existential condition,

in doing so, developing an awareness of their isolation and the anguish that is created because of it. In this solitude, they permit themselves to feel and express this anguish without the concealing facades that human beings inevitably erect when they come into contact with other human beings. Their anguish therefore is revealed, visually to the viewers, in the distorted and disorientated appearance of Bacon's figures.

To quote Bacon,

We nearly always live through screens - a screened existence. And I think ... that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.

(9.P.82)

Bacon has also stated that he considers art to be,

'An obsession with life, and after all as we are human beings our greatest obsession is with ourselves'

(9.P.63)

'The greatest art always returns you to the vulnerability of the human situation'

(9.P.199)

Acknowledging this obsession that we, as human beings have with ourselves and the vulnerability of our situation, may provide an explanation, not only for Bacon's making of his paintings, but also for their relevance to the rest of us. It may be that the viewer, when confronted with one of Bacon's paintings, suddenly finds that he has been elevated in role, to that of a voyeur, witnessing an image of human existence, stripped of some of its screens or veils, thus revealing some fundamental traits of what it is to be alive and human. Those traits being isolation, anguish, insecurity and vulnerability, all of which he can relate to his own existence, but that are not generally acknowledged or admitted in public. It may indeed be, as Michel Leiris has proposed, that the significance of Bacon's work is its ability to create in us an awareness of the sheer fact of our existence while providing us with a muted reassurance of the fact that the vulnerability we feel is not unique to each of us but a general human condition. (6.P.44)

CHAPTER II

2 There has been much speculation as to the cause of the isolation and anguish of Bacon's figures. Some critics have dismissed it as being no more than sensationalism, while others have proposed that such paintings as the 1944 Three Studies at the Base of a Crucifixion and the similarly titled Three Studies for a Crucifixion from 1962 may be direct and intentional comments on the horrors of war and the 'inhumanity' of man. Another proposal has been that Bacon's figures are portrayed anticipating some impending tragedy, such as death. Donald Kuspit, for example, described Bacon's figures as being,

'Sick with death - not necessarily literal death, but rather the feeling of being nothing'

arising from a,

'Compulsive attention to the inevitability of death'.

(1.P.10)

In relation to the violence in his work, Bacon does not deny its presence but has stated clearly that it has nothing to do with the violence of war but in fact that,

'It's to do with an attempt to remake the violence of reality itself'.

(9.P.81)

Of the possibilities mentioned here, the most accurate is by far Donald Kuspit's, even though it is essentially inverted. Bacon's figures are not sick with death, experiencing the feeling of being nothing. On the contrary, they are alive with mortality, experiencing their own potential to mould themselves, through their own free actions into anything they choose. The crucial difference here is the exchange of the term death for mortality, for Bacon is concerned, not with the inevitability of death but simply with the ability to die, which is only possible in the case of someone who is, in their present state, still alive. The anguish and isolation of Bacon's figures is due not

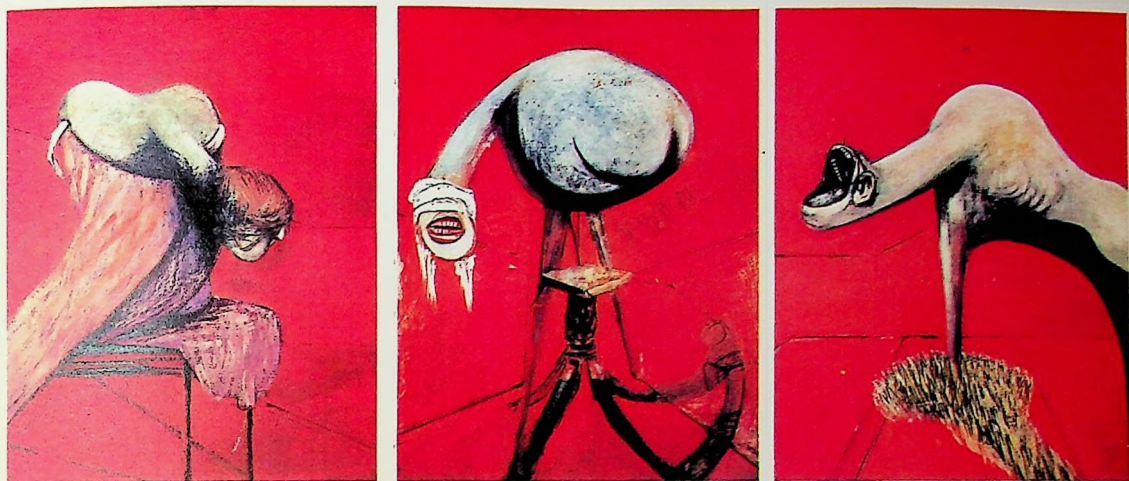


Fig. 2. Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion. 1944

to the fear of death but to the very fact of living.

The key to a greater understanding of how the fact of living or existing is the cause of the anguish and isolation of Bacon's figures is to be found in two statements of Bacons. The first was a reply to a question of David Sylvester's in which he asked Bacon what he considered his painting to be concerned with besides appearance, to which Bacon answered,

'It's concerned with my kind of psyche, it's concerned with my kind of - I'm putting, it in a very pleasant way - exhilarated despair'.

(9.P.83)

The second was in the context of a letter written to Michel Leiris in which he proposed that,

'It may be that realism, in its most profound expression, is always subjective.'

(6.P.32)

Thus, in reference to his 'subjective realism' it is apparent that Bacon's figures must be considered in relation to his own desparate but exhilarating attitude towards life.

Bacon considers life to be meaningless, yet he considers himself to be an optimist. His vision of man in the 20th century is of a being no longer able to accept without question, as had always been the tradition previously, that his existence was valid and justified simply because he had been created by God. Instead, he considers human existence to be the result of accident, reducing it, therefore, to the level of a game without any criteria on which to measure the success and validity of any particular individual's actions. Yet Bacon does not mourn this lack of security but instead expresses the opinion that, as life is so banal,

'You may as well try and make a kind of grandeur of it rather than be nursed to oblivion'.

(9.P.125)

As previously mentioned he considers life to be without any single or definite truth or reason, but that we give it meaning while we exist. This attitude to life is not unique to Bacon, however, but is in fact very similar to that professed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his philosophical writings between 1930 and 1946, culminating in Being and Nothingness (1943) and Existentialism and Humanism (1946).

Sartre, like Bacon, envisages 20th century man's condition to be one of abandonment, isolation and anguish, caused by his newly acquired, total freedom, and arising, in Sartre's opinion, from the fact that,

'Existence precedes our essence'.

(5.P.53)

His declaration of man's total freedom refers to his emancipation from tradition, particularly in relation to the belief in a God on whose moral code of value he could assess his actions, thereby giving his existence a predetermined meaning. In turn Sartre redefined man's existence as,

'An intentional activity which is constantly surpassing itself and reconstituting itself throughout its existence'.

(5.P.52)

Truth, he therefore redefined as

'The sum of each individuals freely chosen actions'.

(5.P.52)

Man, according to Sartre, is no more than what he makes himself. The responsibility, therefore, for what he is, and the consequences of his actions, lie entirely with each individual.

In Existentialism and Humanism, Sartre makes this distinction, between

what he refers to as 'authentic' and 'sincere' existence.

The term 'sincere' is derived from the Latin, sine-cera, meaning 'without wax'. Sincere existence is applicable in the case of an individual who refuses to acknowledge his ability to change the very nature of what he is, instead accepting the conviction that there is a predestined reason for his existence, and that his role is to realize it. He is 'without wax' in so much as he denies any responsibility for what he is, thus claiming that any attempt that he could make to change his essential essence, would result, not in the creation of a true self, but of a mask or a veneer. Sartre considers such existence to be an avoidance of the anguish and responsibility of choice, by denying the very ability to freely choose, by claiming that all decisions and their consequences are attributable either to God or to some natural order. In relation to such ideas, Sartre stated that,

Those who hide from this total freedom, in the guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses I shall call cowards. Others who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth, I shall call scum.

(5.P.58)

Francis Bacon, in relation to 'sincere' existence, stated that while he admires people with religious beliefs for their dedication, that he simultaneously despises them for,

'Living by a total falseness'.

(9.P.134)

In contrast to 'sincere' existence, however, is 'authentic' existence, derived from the Greek, auto-hentes, meaning 'to create oneself', and which Existentialism and Humanism has been described by Richard Kearney, as offering a blueprint for (5.P.53). 'Authentic' existence is founded upon the belief that existence precedes essence. It requires therefore, on the part of the individual, the acknowledgement that there is no given self to be true to, the rejection of theism and the acceptance of responsibility for what he is and the consequences of what he does. It also requires the acceptance of his ability constantly to change his present state of being, creating for and from himself a new

identity and persona, and his ability to choose how to live, within the limitations of certain circumstances such as his physical condition, economic class or nationality. To quote Sartre,

'Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards.'

(5.P.55)

Sartre states that an 'authentic' human being's existence is meaningful, on an ontological level, only in terms of it being a 'temporal projection', constantly projecting itself into a future, in which nothing exists prior to the individual creating it himself, and being aware of this fact (5.P.56). Such existence therefore demands the individual's ability to act freely which subsequently demands his ability to choose freely. This in turn has the necessary effect of placing the responsibility for the consequences of his choice and actions with the individual himself.

It is the realisation, according to Sartre, of this inescapability of choice and the responsibility that it inherently involves that condemns man to his total freedom. It is this realisation also that is the cause of his isolation and of his anguish, that isolation and anguish that we find in the work of Francis Bacon.

Each individual is isolated by the fact that he alone can and must make the choices for which he must accept responsibility. He experiences anguish in his choice making because of his awareness that there is no objective and definitive criterion of value available to him by which he can predict the exact consequences of his choice, or assess or vindicate them. He also experiences anguish because of the knowledge that, although each individual is responsible for himself, his actions affect more than himself, he must therefore also take this into account in any choices that he makes (5.P.56-57). To quote Sartre,

Anguish is the very condition of action - for action presupposes that there is a plurality of possibilities and in choosing one of these, we realise that it has value only because it is chosen.

(5.P.57)

Francis Bacon's existence is 'authentic' existence. The figures which he creates, as they are products of his subjective realism and concerned with his kind of psyche, his exhilarated despair, are also experiencing 'authentic' existence. They are usually depicted in situations of privacy of solitude, as is the case with the painting referred to
1 previously Three Figures in a Room, in which the figures are portrayed trapped in moments of inactiveness, experiencing the anguish both of choices still to be made, and the lack of certainty in relation to the correctness of choices already made. They are also isolated by the very fact of having to choose.

This is further emphasized by the relatively few occasions when Bacon has portrayed figures that are not solitary but aware of other presences. The most frequent such occurrence involves the portrayal of two figures, not involved in any intellectual communication but involved in some sort of sexual act, which is in fact a release for
3,4 anguish and tension, examples of which can be found in Three Studies of Figures on Beds and the centre panel of Triptych, both from 1972.

It is significant also that on the very rare occasions when Bacon has portrayed figures engaging in intellectual communication, as for example
5 in Two Seated Figures 1979 that these figures appear far less distorted than usual. This particular painting features two male figures, both fully dressed in suits, shirts and ties, shoes and even hats. They are both seated in the corner of a room, apparently engaged in conversation, one talking while the other glances at his watch, the only noticeable distortion seemingly being due to the physical movements of the mouth and hands. There is, however, an implied unease generated by the figures, and it is this element of implication that is the important factor in relation to this painting. That is that, the impression is created, not that these figures are devoid of the fact of isolation or the experiencing of anguish, but, that in their awareness that they are not alone, they have chosen to conceal it. Thus, their appearance is far less distorted than in the case with Bacon's more typical, extremely distorted figures who are portrayed in situations of privacy or solitude, or at least in the opinion that they are in such situations.



Fig. 3. Three Studies of Figures on Beds. 1972

Fig. 4. Triptych August. 1972 (centre panel)





Fig. 5 Two Seated Figures. 1979

CHAPTER III

- 5 Concluding Chapter II I made a reference to a painting, Two Seated Figures, which I claimed to be something of an exception in the context of Bacon's work in general, due to the fact that it portrays two figures, perhaps two representations of the same figure, each conscious of the fact that he is not alone. It is because of this awareness that these figures, in concealing their lack of security and anguish from their watchers, bear more resemblance to our general perception of human appearance than is characteristic of Bacon's more typical distorted figures. This painting, in the fact that it is concerned with man's public as opposed to his private existence, with the way that man portrays himself, and the way in which others perceive him, is actually more typical of Lucian Freud, a contemporary of Bacon's, than of the artist himself.

Similarities between the two artists work are not initially obvious except for the knowledge that they both paint only people that they know well, if not intimately and that each of them has in the past featured as a subject for the other. It may be no less obvious, on an initial glance, to see the connection between Freud's own almost stylized work from the 1950's and his thickly painted figures from the mid 1960's on. In both cases, however, similarities are not only there but are substantial.

Freud, as with Bacon, is of the opinion that painting, in its present state, necessitates the use of untraditional, unpredictable methods. For example, he does not draw his figures from a single, fixed viewpoint but from many, so as not to miss anything that may be of use to him, putting in an ear perhaps that would otherwise not of been visible, before eventually taking out any detail that is not essential (4.P.60). He claims that this method is more like aiming than copying. He also shares Bacon's scorn for illustration, commenting to Lawrence Gowing,

Do you know there is something called picture-making?
I think it is often simply fatigue.
It rules out the hope of making something
remarkable.

(4.P.24)

The fact that both Freud and Bacon paint only people that they know well is of more than incidental importance, particularly in relation to Freud where it is vital to differentiate between his work and that of the life-painting genre. He has stated that,

'If you don't know them (his models) it can only be like a travel book'.

(4.P.56)

Freud does not simply perceive his subjects as anonymous, history-less, forms of flesh and blood, to be approached with a tourist like attitude, concerned only with superficial visible appearance. On the contrary, he knows not only their physical appearance but their personalities, their characters and their peculiarities. He sees them not only in the objective, electric light of his studio but also through the subjective filter of each specific relationship.

He has stated that,

I want paint to work as flesh, which is something different. I have always had a scorn for "la belle peinture" and "la delicatesses" des touches". I know my idea of portraiture came from dissatisfaction with portraits that resembled people. I would wish my portraits to be of the people, not like them. Not having a look of the sitter, being them. I didn't want to get just a likeness like a mimic, but to portray them, like an actor. As far as I am concerned the paint is the person. I want it to work for me just as flesh does.

(4.P.190.191)

What Freud is referring to when he states that he wants paint to work as flesh is the fact that he attempts in his paintings to recreate flesh, initially, in all of its' material complexity, not simply skin but all of the living and varied layers underneath it that create the form. More importantly, however, he wants the flesh in his paintings to function as it does in reality as a physical container for that indefinable essence that is human life.

'A sense of the entirety of a person and the principle that moulds him is Freud's longest lasting, most original theme.'

(4.P.85)

is how Gowing referred to that subject which has always been an obsession with Freud and central to his work which is, in fact, the very same subject that has obsessed Bacon, which I previously referred to as the phenomenon of human existence in the chaos of the 20th century. In Freud's work, however, there is always a very specific human's existence involved, although the identity, being irrelevant to the viewer, is rarely made known.

If, however, the uniting factor in the work of Bacon and Freud is their subjective portrayal of the reality of 20th century human existence then what differentiates them so drastically is the fact that each of them respectively concentrates on one of two seemingly incompatible yet essential aspects of the condition of human existence, that being the dual nature of the dialectic between the private and the public.

When confronted with a Lucian Freud painting the viewer is not, as with Bacon, attributed the status of voyeur, witnessing the indiscretion of openly expressed anguish. Instead, he is placed in a situation of mutual acknowledgement, the sensation created is not only that he is aware of the painted figure but also that the figure is aware of the viewer's presence.

The reason for this divide can be attributed directly to the two artist's respective methods of working. Bacon, for example, paints his figures, even his portraits, from photographic material and from memory, but never in the actual presence of the person. He is, therefore, in a situation of privacy while working. In contrast, Freud always works in the presence of his subjects, subjects that he has more than a purely painter-model relationship with. In this case not only are both the subject and the painter under scrutiny from each other and aware of the fact, but they also, due to the nature of their relationship, have more than a passing interest in the way that they are perceived by the other. Freud stated that he wants his painted figures to portray the reality of the individual in question as an actor would. In a similar fashion, the viewer of a painting by Freud completes the casting and is placed in the role of the artist himself.

Lawrence Gowing, in relation to Freud's work stated that,

This kind of painting represents what can be seen of a human being, and also the character of the seeing. Sight is not just one of the senses. It is the sense, the faculty with which a person construes his environment and other people.

(4.P.60)

Gowing continues to state that Freud's paintings are representations on the part of the model and painter, both of seeing and being seen, that there is a sense of vulnerability present and that each, while 'devouring' the other is simultaneously,

'indulging, and fearing, the dream of being devoured'

(4.P.60)

Distortion of figures is the predominant recurring characteristic of Bacon's paintings, with Freud the equivalent characteristic is a staring, facial expression which seems simultaneously to create feelings of vacancy, concentration, vulnerability and defensiveness. Most important of all, however, is the lack of certainty as to whether this stare is focused outwardly at something or someone beyond the figure or whether it is concentrated inwardly upon the figure itself. Sartre, in concluding Existentialism and Humanism drew an analogy between mortality and the creative process in so much as he claims that a painting is not criticized as irresponsible because it was not painted in accordance to rules that were established previously. Nevertheless, the painting is still judged. Man, in a similar fashion, being what he makes himself, should not be judged by any criteria that was established before him, yet he still will be judged by other's and by himself in relation to what he has made himself (5.P.57). This may offer some explanation as to the ambiguous nature of this stare, as it may be that Freud's models, due to the physical inactivity that modelling requires, and in the knowledge that they are under severe scrutiny from Freud, find themselves in a situation where they have been provided with the perfect opportunity, initially to wonder how they are being perceived by Freud and subsequently to scrutinize themselves and become enthralled with the question of how satisfied they are with the people that they have made themselves. Implied in Freud's paintings is the fact that underneath the exterior appearance

of each human being that he paints, there is a being that is just as distorted, anguished and isolated as any of Bacon's, a being that for the most part has been concealed, but not completely.

- 6 Take, for example, an early painting of Freud's such as Girl with Roses, which dates from 1948. The title, as is customary with Freud, simply states what is already visually obvious as opposed to providing any extra significance to the painting. The image is relatively straightforward: there is a girl, probably in her early 20's, sitting on a chair against the background of a rich, green wall, very little of which is evident, as the figure itself fills most of the canvas. She is not relaxed, as she surely would be if she were simply posing for a life-drawing exercise, as she does not lean back in the chair but instead sits up straight on its edge, taking all of the pressure of her weight onto herself. This suggests that she is so deeply preoccupied with thought that physical stress has somehow been overshadowed by its' mental equivalent, a suggestion that is reinforced by the manner in which she holds a rose in front of her. She seems to have completely forgotten about it, but it remains stationary because of the tense nature of her arm.

The very presence of the rose, however, as with the uneasy position of the girl, are secondary observations on the part of the viewer, for there is no doubt that the focus of the painting is the girl's face, which is pale to the point of it being the brightest part of the picture. It is in her face that the concealment of her anxiety has most apparently begun to crack. She has allowed her mouth to open slightly, producing an expression of controlled despair and panic, and giving the impression, as with her general position, that her inner life-force has momentarily become concerned with itself to the point of slightly losing contact with its outer, physical appearance. This is exemplified by her wide, open, staring eyes which seem to encompass most of her face. Her eyes are two, tiny, delicate areas of her physical body which we see both unconcealed and unprotected by skin. Their very openness is suggestive of the girl's vulnerability as well as her awareness of her situation. Her eyes are wide open, staring, concentrating and yet there is an ambiguity in them as to whether her gaze is concentrated on that which is visually perceptible to her,



Fig. 6. Girl with Roses. 1948

beyond herself, or on that which she privately knows herself to be.

- 6 Girl with Roses is an early painting of Freud's. This fact in itself is significant, as it demonstrates his obsession with the subject of human existence, for as he has said,

'So far as I can remember I have always tried to do the same thing'.

(.P.132)

- 6 All that has changed in Freud's work in the four decades since Girl with Roses was painted has been the technical methods and Freud's ever-increasing confidence and competence with paint through which he has attempted to do 'the same thing'. His methods have, in that time, gone through some radical changes, the significant breakthrough being
- 7 recognized as occurring with the 1959 painting Woman Smiling. These changes have involved aspects as varied as the use of hoghair instead of sable brushes, the introduction of Kremitz White, a pigment that is responsible for the dense, bumpy texture of Freud's later paintings, and the discovery that he could no longer paint from a sitting position, for the reason, he claims, that you cannot sit while you are unhappy (4.P.132, P.136).

The result of these changes, however, is the creation of paintings, in which the paint has been applied much more freely and thickly than had previously been the case, producing images with a higher and richer intensity of naturalness, realism, energy and liveliness than ever before. One of the most poignant of these images is a painting entitled

8 The Painter's Mother Resting II from 1977.

This painting consists quite simply of an incredibly intimate portrayal of Freud's mother. However, probably because of this very intimacy and the nature of a mother-son relationship, it also seems to encompass all of the anguish and isolation that is human life. Freud appears to have achieved his intention in this painting of injecting his paint with all of the properties of flesh.

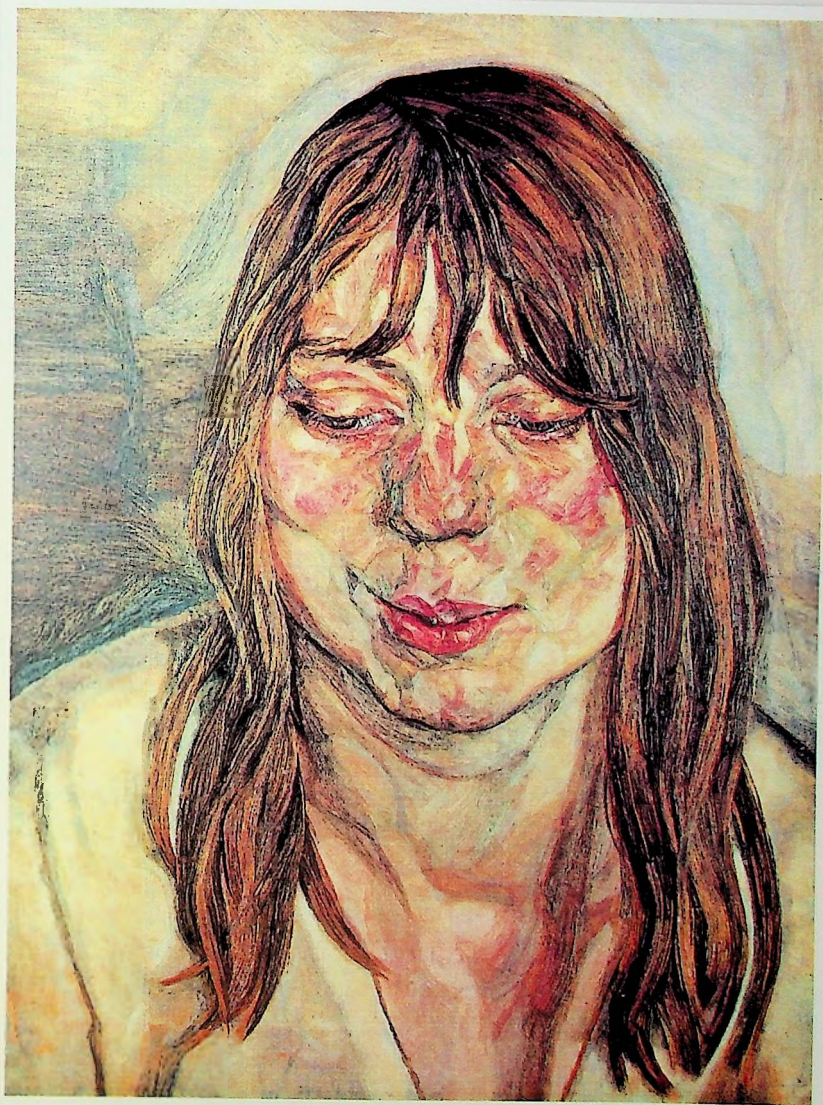


Fig. 7. Woman Smiling. 1959

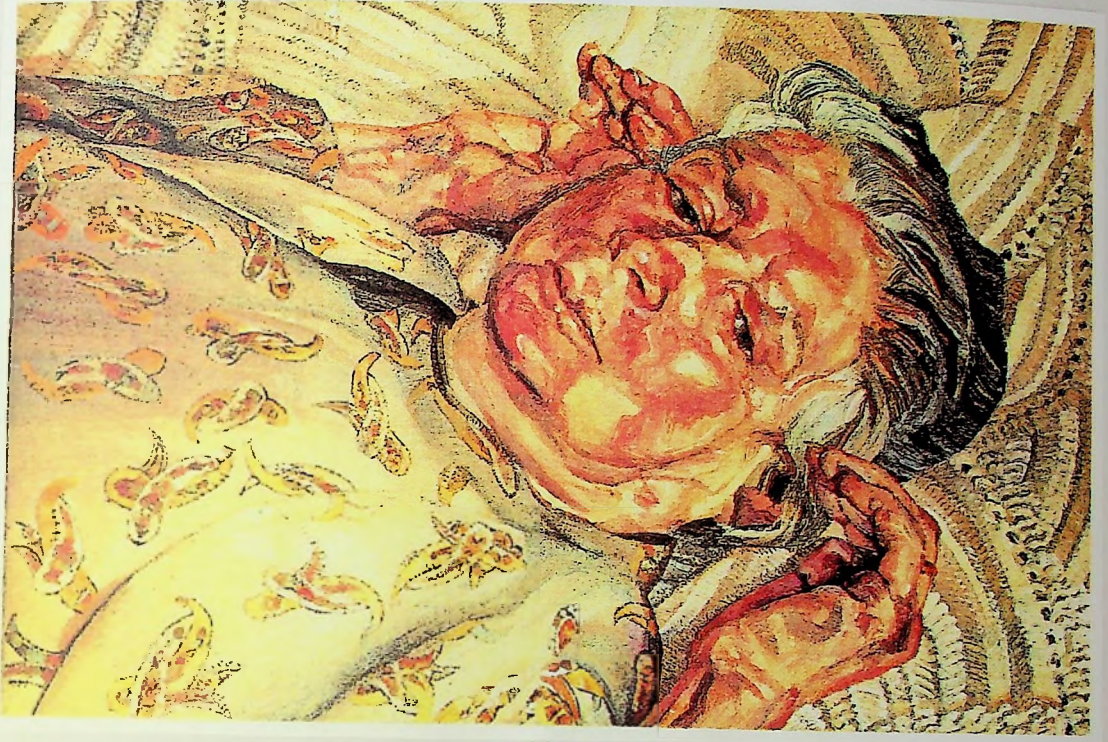


Fig. 8 The Painter's Mother Resting II. 1977

Viewing from above, and from a very close distance, we see Freud's mother lying on her back, wearing a paisley design dress and resting on a textured piece of cloth, probably a bedspread. Both of her hands lie limp on either side of her head in a position that is familiar to us only in infants. The intensity with which the flesh has been painted is such that we feel that it would be possible to take her pulse from one of the blue veins that are visible on the wrist of her right hand, there is never any doubt that there is a living being within the figure.

6 The element of seeing and being seen that Gowing referred to is probably at its most evident in paintings such as this. The figures eyes no longer have the almost exaggerated openness of Girl with Roses and yet Freud has painted his mother with such conviction and sensitivity that her ambiguous stare is even more convincing.

6 Realism, as stated previously in this eassay, is in its most profound expression, subjective. This applies not only to the artist, in the creation of his work but also to the viewer as he encounters it. In relation to a painting such as Girl with Roses he will inevitably speculate as to the nature of the relationship between Freud and the girl in accordance with his own experiences. With the painting of Freud's mother, however, this information has been provided, intentionally, so as to add to the meaning of the painting, in the acknowledgement that the viewer will inevitably bring his knowledge and understanding of the mother-child relationship into his appreciation of the painting. The mother, due to her age, is unavoidably closer to the end of her life than to its' beginning, at which time her essence will finally, and for the first time, be irretrievably defined. For the son, her death will also mark the last perception that she will have of his life and essence. What the viewer, therefore, is witnessing in this painting is the voluntary submission of two people to each others scrutiny, for what may be their definitive perception. Not alone this, but the person for whom they have made themselves vulnerable is, in each case, not somebody whose opinion they consider of incidental importance but probably the person whose opinion they value the greatest, that being the child's of the the mother and vice verse. The poignacy of the situation is heightened even further by the fact that the viewer, in this relationship, finds himself cast in the role of the child.

CONCLUSION

For the past 50 years both Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud have in their painting been striving towards the same goal, that being the creation of an image that will encompass the reality of human existence in the 20th century, as perceived subjectively by the two artists, as completely as possible. The images that they have provided us with have invariably portrayed figures experiencing 'authentic' as opposed to 'sincere' existence. Such existence being characterized by the overwhelming presence of the traits of anguish, isolation, vulnerability and insecurity caused by man's realisation of his responsibility for the creation of his own essence and the consequences of his actions. In the creation of these images, both artists have had considerable although limited success. This success has been considerable in the fact that they each, individually have managed to portray one of two elements of human existence with great intensity. It has been limited, however, because of the fact that in order to portray the entire reality of human existence, surely both aspects should be present in the same image, as in reality they are present in the same individual. As it was Sartre, however, who defined the very nature of 'authentic' existence, it is Sartre also whom I refer to in relation to the dual nature of human existence portrayed separately by Bacon and Freud.

Existentialism and Humanism was primarily concerned with a fundamental anthropology, as it claimed that 'authentic' existence is purely a 20th century phenomenon, claiming that human existence had always formerly been 'sincere', due to man's belief in a greater power than himself, responsible for the creation of a definite human essence. This anthropological study, however, was built upon the foundation that Sartre had established three years earlier in 1943, in Being and Nothingness, which was concerned with the nature of man's general ontological being as opposed to his purely 'human' being specific to the 20th century.

(5.P.62)

In Being and Nothingness, Sartre described human existence literally as,

'A dialectic between the ontological poles of 'nothingness' (as an imaginative being - beyond - the - world) and 'being' (as a perceptual being - in - the - midst - of - the - world).'

(5.P.62)

He claims that man's ability to exist in a state of nothingness is due to the fact that his very essence is the result of his own intentional activity, his ability to create himself. He claims that even such entities as perception, emotion, and his ability to imagine are conscious, intentional activities of man, referring to perception as,

'An act which presents an object in its presence.,'

(5.P.58)

with imagination being the opposite,

'An act which presents an object in its absence.'

(5.P.58)

He continues to state that it is therefore impossible to imagine an object and perceive it simultaneously.

The importance of imagination as an intentional human activity is the fact that it gives man the ability to transcend, to go beyond the actuality of the perceptible world of object. It is this transcending ability that gives man the power constantly to propel himself forward into his future, for, according to Sartre, as soon as an individual realises his essence, he is no longer the person that he has become aware of, he is not perceiving his present self but imagining his past self. He has transcended his present self, which is temporal and therefore constantly changing, yet he has not yet realised his his future self. He has, by his ability to imagine, gone beyond

the existential condition of being an object, a perceivable thing: he has become a 'no-thing', existing in a state of nothingness which is freedom. (5.P.59)

Sartre refers to the individual's consciousness, while existing in a state of 'nothingness', as consciousness 'for-itself' (5.P.62), which he applies to the individual's ability to be free, transcendent, subjective, and anguished. Consciousness 'for-itself', he claims, is consciousness which views the world of facts and objects not simply as facts and objects, but in relation to the manner in which the individual can use them for his own purposes. For example, when a ball is not simply perceived as being a ball, but is considered as something that the individual can kick, throw, bounce etc. Anguish, according to Sartre, is always present when an individual is existing 'for-itself', this anguish being due to the responsibility that he feels, in the knowledge that the entire, perceptible world of objects is available to be used by him in any manner that he chooses.

In contrast, man also exists in a state of 'being', as a perceptual object in the midst of the world, in which case Sartre claims man exists as a consciousness 'in-itself' (5.P.62), which he applies to necessity, facticity, objectivity and shame. Man exists, according to Sartre, as a consciousness 'in-itself', when he is reduced, through the perception of other individuals from his state of transcendent nothingness to the level of an object among objects, to a definite 'thing' as opposed to a 'no-thing', he is objectified into no more than a physical appearance. Sartre claims that in this condition the individual experiences shame, which he describes as,

Recognising myself in the degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the other. It is the experience of having 'fallen' into a world of objects.

(5.P.63)

No individual, because of the fact that he shares the world of objects with other individuals, can exist completely 'for-itself', nor,

however, due to his ability to transcend can he exist completely 'in-itself'. His existence, therefore, to return to Sartre's original definition, is,

'A dialectic between the ontological poles of 'nothingness' and 'being'.

(4.P.62)

The distorted figures that Francis Bacon portrays in paintings such
1 as Three Figures in a Room, which is characteristic of Bacon's work
in general, exist purely 'for themselves'. They are solitary figures,
therefore, they share their isolated world's with nobody else to
reduce them to the level of being beings existing 'in-themselves'.
The fact that the isolated worlds portrayed by Bacon are worlds as
seen 'for-themselves' by the figures that occupy them is apparent
1 in the fact that every detail in them that is unnecessary to the
Figures in a Room, all that the room consists of is a simplified
space containing only the three pieces of furniture that the figures
are sitting on. The figures themselves, as they are existing in
their transcendent states of 'nothingness', are not required to conform
to any definite, recognisable physical appearance. Instead, their
visible appearances reflect the anguished nature of their state of
existence, they appear distorted, in the midst of transition,
partially structured and partially chaotic.

Lucian Freud's figures, however, are portrayed with no more entirety
than Bacon's, as his figures always appear to be existing purely
as beings in-themselves. This is due to the fact that in Freud's
work both the figures' exterior appearance and their physical
relationships to the inanimate objects that surround them, are quite
simply too thoroughly perceived and translated into paint. This
results in too much emphasis being placed on the figure as an object,

as opposed to the object simply being a container for the living
6 being, which is Freud's intention. In the case of Girl with Roses,
for example, the solidity and physical mass of the figure are portrayed
very definitely and specifically. There is, however, no discrimination
between the intensity with which Freud has painted the girl's face,
the velvet texture of her skirt or the highly polished wood of the
chair, they all communicate too well in relation to the physical nature
of the actual, perceptible objects. The anguish and 'nothingness'
of Freud's figures, their existence 'for-themselves' is only implied
as opposed to portrayed, too many of the veils or screens that Bacon
referred to still remain intact.

This divide between Freud's work and Bacon's is hardly surprising
considering the fact that as Freud always works in the presence of
his subject, it would be almost impossible for him not to objectively
perceive his subject, while Bacon, in contrast, could not avoid
imagining his reality, as he always works in his subject's absence.
Indeed it may be that the inclusion of both aspects of human existence
in a single image may be as impossible as it is, according to Sartre,
to simultaneously imagine and perceive the same reality. Either
way, between them, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon have produced images
of 20th century human existence, its isolation, its anguish and its
insecurity, that are probably as close to the actual reality as have
yet been established in paint.

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