Francis Bacon – In the Mirror of Photography

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Collecting, Preparatory Practice and Painting

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1. Introduction

'Das erste, was jeder Historiker lernen muss, ist, sich zu bescheiden. Es gibt so unendlich viel, was er gerne wüßte und niemals wissen wird. Aber auch da, wo wir nicht dabei waren, dürfen wir mitunter den Versuch wagen zu erschließen, was sich abgespielt haben mag, indem wir etwa ganz allgemein fragen, unter welchen Bedingungen ein Bildwerk zustande kommen kann.'[1]
Ernst Gombrich

'One learns by looking. That's what you must do, look.'[2]
Francis Bacon

The British painter Francis Bacon (1909–1992) is famed for his idiosyncratic depiction of the human body, screaming popes, and distorted portraits. In an era dominated by abstract art, Bacon reinvented figuration in a manner shocking and compelling in equal measure; shocking, however, less for the representation of actual horror and violence, which is often made too much of, but rather for its blunt insistence on a fact of life: that we all inhabit a mortal body. How the elusive protagonists on his canvases came about, and how he constructed his strange yet compelling compositions, has long been obscure. The following study, which is predominantly technical in nature, aims to shed light on the genesis of his paintings.

1 'The first thing a historian has to learn is to content oneself. There is an infinite number of things he would like to know but will never know. But even where we were not present we may try to deduce what might have happened by asking in a general manner under which circumstances a work of art may have come into existence,' translation by the present author, from Ernst H. Gombrich, *Wege zur Bildgestaltung: Vom Einfall zur Ausführung*, Gerda Henkel lecture, ed. by Rheinisch Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften and Gerda Henkel Stiftung (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), p. 5. There is an English translation in Ernst H. Gombrich, *Topics of Our Time: Twentieth-Century Issues in Learning and in Art* (London: Phaidon 1992), p. 219, but this is edited and altered.

2 Michel Archimbaud, *Francis Bacon: In Conversation with Michel Archimbaud* (London: Phaidon 2010), orig. pubd in French (Paris: J-.C. Lattès, 1992), p. 157.

1 Francis Bacon, *Two Seated Figures*, 1979, oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5 cm, private collection.

2 Francis Bacon, *Seated Figure*, 1979, oil on canvas, 198 × 147.5 cm, private collection.

Without a confession or an eye-witness, solving a criminal case depends on the collection of evidence. The genesis of Francis Bacon's paintings is like such a case. As the artist was invariably reticent about his working methods and never allowed any critic to observe the process, not much is known about the origins of his iconography or his working methods. The art historian, not unlike a detective, must thus rely on an analysis of circumstances, and of objects found at the *locus delicti*, if one wishes to understand how the artworks came into being. The present analysis will look for answers in the artist's studio. For in this instance, fortunately, a vast collection of pieces of evidence is available for examination. Since 2001, the contents of Bacon's last studio at 7 Reece Mews, London, have been accessible for research purposes at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.[3] The torn book pages, crumpled newspaper cuttings, and battered photographs, as they are both reference mate-

3 Tate Britain had decided against taking the material and it was difficult to preserve it in situ, see Geordie Greig, 'Francis Bacon's studio leaves town', *Sunday Times*, 30 August 1998, pp. 8–9, p. 8; Sarah Thornton, 'Francis Bacon claims his place at the top of the market', *The Art Newspaper*, 194 (29 August 2008) <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2008/09/01/francis-bacon-claims-his-place-at-the-top-of-the-market> [accessed 31 July 2021]; Barbara Dawson, 'Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty', in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty,* ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 50–69, p. 51; more information on the removal process can be found in Barbara Dawson, 'Francis Bacon's Studio: The Dublin Chapter', in *Francis Bacon's Studio*, by Margarita Cappock (London: Merrell, 2005), pp. 11–21.

3 Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 94.

4 RM98F112:55: Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 95.

rial and a result of the process, hold the key to a better understanding of the inception of Bacon's paintings.

In 1979 Bacon and David Sylvester discussed the problem of creativity for contemporary painters. Sylvester flippantly summarised the issue as 'they don't really know what to paint.'[4] Bacon countered 'I suppose it's that I'm not short of images at all; I have thousands of them. That's not a problem. I don't see why it should ever be a problem for a painter – for any real painter. By saying that, I don't think I'm a real painter either, but I happen to be very, very full of images.'[5] What sounds like a self-confident comment from the highly inventive artist that Bacon was, could, however, also be read as an accurate description of his infamously chaotic working environment at 7 Reece Mews, which was full to the brim with images of all sorts. Might there indeed be a direct connection between the pictures on the studio floor and those on Bacon's canvases, and if so, what is the nature of this relationship? What role do they play within his creative process?

4 David Sylvester, Interviews with Francis Bacon, rev. and enl. edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), pp. 165–166.

5 Ibid.

What motivates my line of enquiry may be illustrated by taking a close look at two works from 1979, the year in which Bacon claimed to be 'very full of images'.[6] *Two Seated Figures* and *Seated Figure* resemble each other in their choice of subject, anonymous seated men in dark suits and hats, and in their colour scheme: the monochrome beige of the ground and the off-white of the walls (figure 1 and 2). Although on separate canvases, the three protagonists seem to share the same pictorial space. This impression stems from their common origin: all figures derive from the same photographic illustration, a double-spread showing director Allan Dwan, his assistant Arthur Rosson, and an unknown man on a movie set in Santa Barbara in 1913, published in Kevin Brownlow's book *The Parade's Gone By* from 1968 (figure 3 and 4).[7] Not only did Bacon borrow the figures, he also adopted the separation of the three men by the margins of the pages for his distribution of the figures on two canvases. The book, tattered and gummed up, and two loose leaves featuring the image used to create *Seated Figure*, were found in Bacon's studio.

Hypotheses

The present study is based on two hypotheses. First, Bacon's iconography stems from the pre-existing, mostly lens-based imagery he collected in his studios for this purpose (including original photographic prints, mechanically reproduced photographs in books and newspapers, reproductions of film-stills and photographic reproductions of artworks). The direct photographic references known during Bacon's lifetime and those discovered afterwards are no exceptions or lucky finds, but symptoms of a well-rehearsed, deliberate, and consistent appropriation practice. In fact, it may well be that all his paintings were based on photographic material, a claim which has been made in the past,[8] without, however, underpinning it with any data.

Second, the working process can be deciphered by carefully investigating Bacon's working documents and environments, through comparative analysis of the source item and the finished canvas, and by tracing the appropriation process from one to the other. This allows us to track the exact construction of a work, to determine which, how many, where, and how pre-existing images were fed into a painting. We may then detect and interpret recurring patterns and methodologies, providing us with an in-depth insight into Bacon's creative process, which will help us better understand his work.

6 Ibid.

7 Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 94–95, the copy found in Bacon's studio (RM98F110:67) is so gummed up that it can barely be opened; RM98F112:55 and RM98F110:79: two torn leaves of the same page from this publication relate to *Seated Figure*, 1979. The latter comes from the 1973 edition of the book. 'RM98FXY:Z' are archive numbers which were assigned to the items in the Francis Bacon Studio Archive at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

8 Cf. Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Painting after Photography', *Association of Art Historians Art History* (April 2012), pp. 355–371, p. 357.

Background

In 2010 I was commissioned by the Estate of Francis Bacon to examine Bacon's studio material at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. The one-year project focused on around 4000 items bearing images, including original photographic prints, books, newspapers, magazines and postcards, torn out leaves and fragments of pages. The goal was to fill the gaps in the knowledge of these items, and to gain a deeper understanding of their relationship to Bacon's finished canvases. Almost 20 years after the artist's death, the research on his studio material was still incomplete. At the start of the research, for about 1300 items in the Francis Bacon Studio Archive the publication of origin was still unknown, subjects of photographs or printed leaves had not been identified, or other relevant data, for instance which pages of a book had been torn out, was missing. The endeavour, which required meticulous field work combing through the material itself as well as archival research in a variety of libraries and archives in Ireland and the UK, turned out to be more than rewarding. Over 400 items were conclusively identified, and altogether over 1000 files in the museum's database were enriched with relevant new information from the author's research and existing publications on Bacon. Additionally, over thirty new relations between specific studio items and finished paintings were discovered. These links are characterised by striking formal coherences between the pre-existing, mostly photographic image, and its painted counterpart. The results of the project were used to update the museum database at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane where they are now available for future research, and some of the most compelling links were published in *Francis Bacon: Metamorphoses* in 2011.[9]

This text draws on information gathered and thoughts conceived during the Francis Bacon Archive Fellowship, but the process of identifying studio material and establishing and collecting formal one-on-one links continued afterwards. The principal objective of the past few years has been to find suitable art historical approaches for a plethora of novel data to contextualise and interpret it adequately. The following study is the result of these efforts. A further research project with The Estate of Francis Bacon fed into this book. In 2011, I assessed the estate of the art critic David Sylvester at Tate Britain, in particular the unedited interviews with Bacon, which are referenced throughout this book.[10]

Goals, Value, Methodology

The cornerstone of the present study is the identification of the studio material. Knowing when a torn leaf was published, or when a photograph was taken, is of crucial importance because only an image which existed before a canvas was conceived can arguably be its source. In the past, studio items were often published and integrated into a discussion without this information, which led to chronologically impossible combinations.[11] Knowing

9 Katharina Günther, *Francis Bacon: Metamorphoses* (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2011).

10 TGA200816–TGA200816/12/25, Hyman Kreitman Library and Archive, Tate Britain, London (in the following 'HKA:').

11 See some items in Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Merrell, 2005), for example her relating RM98F130:153: torn leaf, Mary Louise Grossman and John Hamlet, *Birds of Prey of the World*

the date of the items also allows for careful quantitative and chronological assessment of the studio contents. Likewise, only when the subject of a newspaper cutting or a Polaroid picture is known is it possible to better understand these subjects, their relationship to their painted equivalent and to Bacon; only then can qualitative evaluations of topics and subjects among the studio contents be made.

Formal like-for-like links had sporadically been discovered before among the studio items,[12] but the number of hitherto unknown direct transpositions of reference material I discovered during the Francis Bacon Archive Fellowship made it clear, that these links should be taken more seriously as a field of research in their own right. In addition, the role of the space and its contents should be re-evaluated: it should be considered to be more than a generic source of inspiration or a snapshot of the artist's general interests. Newly discovered links were combined with those recognised earlier in secondary literature in an attempt to fully grasp the extent and nature of the phenomenon. To date, such direct formal links have never comprehensively been collected, analysed and interpreted, and it is the goal of this study to fill this gap.

This is the background against which the nature of the relationship between lens-based imagery and painting will be analysed. For, as Frank Van Deren Coke knew,

> 'through a comparison of paintings and their photographic sources we gain a better understanding of how the camera affects an artist's work. Much is revealed about the artist when we see what he keeps, what he omits, what he modifies. […] The disparities between a photograph and a painting can illuminate the nature of the artist's *modus operandi*, thus shedding light on the creative process.'[13]

In the comparative analysis, special attention will be given to the state of the material. It was ruthlessly manipulated, utterly altered and re-formulated, sometimes almost beyond recognition. Since these alterations turned out to feed directly into the painted iconography in combination with the pre-existing shapes and forms, Martin Harrison's idea that the original photographic prints and printed reproductions in the studio served Bacon as an equivalent of 'traditional artist's preliminary drawings or sketches'[14] forms a vital point of reference for this study. Yet, there is much more to the process. Certain regularly occurring techniques and procedures in Bacon's preparatory and appropriation practice predetermine character-

(London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 36–37, to Francis Bacon, *Landscape near Malabata*, *Tangier,* 1963, p. 135 and p. 137.

12 For example, in 1999 Martin Harrison related RM98F1A:40: torn leaf, mounted on support, affixed with two paper-clips, Thomas Wiseman, *Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1964), p. 158, film still from Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, 1959, to Bacon's *Study of Henrietta Moraes*, 1969, see Martin Harrison, 'Points of Reference. Francis Bacon and Photography', in *Francis Bacon: Paintings from the Estate 1980–1991*, exh. cat. (London: Faggionato Fine Arts, 1999, London: Faggionato Fine Arts, 1999), pp.13–22, p. 21.

13 Frank Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph: From Delacroix to Warhol*, rev. and enl. edn (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), p. 1.

14 Martin Harrison, 'Latent Images', in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 70–87, p. 71.

istic effects of the finished canvases, for instance the physical and narrative isolation of the figure, which suggests that Bacon used the appropriation process itself as a stylistic device.

This analysis aims to decode Bacon's working process and the technical construction of his paintings, and to find out what was important to the artist within this process. It may help refute prevailing myths and misconceptions, and remove Bacon scholarship from the influence of the artist's editing hand. Where applicable, I will discuss the meaning of the finished painting, but this is not the main focus of this study.

The analysis of how Bacon used photographs is a case study, however, which should certainly be seen in a wider context. From the invention of photography to the present day, painters from Edgar Degas to Gerhard Richter have collected and used photographs as inspiration, tool, and conceptual springboard. Points of contact and differences to his fellow painters will be addressed throughout. I will reference photo and media theory from Walter Benjamin to Jean Baudrillard, and historical accordances and differences, technical and otherwise, to single artists, groups, and methods from collage to chance procedures will be pointed out and evaluated.

Structure

This book is divided into three main parts and a fourth concluding chapter. Part one introduces the artist's own attitude towards photography and discusses his public image and the current state of knowledge versus the results of the present research. Part two focusses on Bacon's working material and environment, while part three is dedicated to an extensive comparative analysis of pre-existing imagery and finished paintings.

Chapter 1.1. identifies the artist's ambiguous attitude towards photography as a defining motivation of his appropriation practice, and discusses the resulting secrecy regarding his methods in context. This withholding of information shaped the contemporaneous state of research, in which the impact of photography on Bacon's art was discounted as a generic influence (chapter 1.2.). Today the studio material is still under-researched, its discussion is determined by misconceptions, and there is no consensus on its role for Bacon, within the working process and for the finished canvas; sometimes, its analysis is rejected outright. The analysis of *Painting 1946*, 1946 and its photographic points of reference in chapter 1.3. serves as an introduction to the formal analysis in chapter 3, and, as a first case study, will be used to debunk the artist's story of the accidental emergence of his iconography. Chapter 1.4. will show that *Painting 1946*, 1946 is not an exception but rather an example of a consistent working method, by introducing the research results which form the basis of this study: a definition of, and a list of one-on-one links between photographic base images and finished paintings (*List of Pictorial References to Francis Bacon's Paintings*).

Chapter 2 focusses on the studio contents and environments, mainly drawing on information concerning Bacon's last and best documented studio at 7 Reece Mews. Chapter 2.1. describes how the photographic material in the studio, in combination with the choice of topics, form a hyper-figurative starting point consistent with art which revolves around the human body and experience. Just like Bacon's painting, a lot of the material

is closely related to his private life and in the encapsulated studio space, it constitutes a highly personal, tailor-made simulacrum.[15] The ensuing chapter (2.2.) takes a closer look at the overall intentionality of the space, the dynamics of how material entered and left the studio, and how and when it reached its quantitative peak – all of which is closely interwoven with and guided by the creation of Bacon's paintings. The peculiar aesthetics of the working documents determined by deliberate manipulations, but also by accidental decay, will be unravelled in chapter 2.3. I will describe how the handling and editing of the material helped Bacon to grasp pictorial elements, rehearse and test their distortion, and prepare them for the consequent transposition into oil paint. I will elucidate how, by comparison, Bacon's actual sketches are of minor significance for the working process and the finished painting (2.4.).

On the basis of selected examples, the relationship between source images and their final painted version will be explored in detail in chapter 3, approaching the formal elements spatial setting, figure, and colour separately. The spatial setting was usually abstracted during the appropriation process, which is consistent with Bacon's minimal backgrounds, denying naturalistic perspective (3.1.). One setting may refer to several sources, and, as will be elaborated in the second part of the chapter, figure and ground are usually lifted from different sources, which reaffirms the isolation of the figure on the canvas. Chapter 3.2.1. traces how the figure itself is built up. Often assembled from several sources, which are combined as pictorial fragments on the picture plane or blended and merged, some deformations, such as an incohesive body image, sometimes find their origin in this fragmentary process.

The limitations of this line of enquiry and Bacon's use of photographs will be laid out in the following chapters. I will explain how photograph and painting are closest to each other in the outlines of forms and shapes, but furthest apart in their contrasting materiality (3.2.2.). I will then show that the narrative in a source item is often not adopted in the painting, with the latter usually not communicating a clear narrative at all (3.3.1.). The next chapter (3.3.2.) will explore similar patterns in relation to identity. Taking Bacon's portraits based on photographs as an example, I will discuss how the identity of the subject in the photograph is often not consonant with the one on the canvas. Bacon used alien photographic sources to add emotive aspects to his portraits, and identity and likeness in Bacon's work are indeed fluid. He not only borrowed figures and objects from his image bank, but colours, too (3.4.). Yet, as I will show, colour and form often stemmed from different sources and the borrowed colour was not confined to its shape of origin. Bearing this in mind, it seems unlikely that, when Bacon painted his popes after black and white illustrations of

15 *Simulacrum* is here understood not only as a mere simulation of reality, but, following Jean Baudrillard's idea that it has the power to become a truth in its own right, the *hyperreal*, see Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Simulations*, by Jean Baudrillard (New York: Semiotext[e] 1983), pp. 1–79, p. 2; Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Mike Gane, rev. edn (Los Angeles/London/Singapore/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), pp. 71–72.

Diego Velázquez' *Portrait of Innocent X*, 1650 in purple instead of red, this was a mistake.[16] The last chapter (4.) will evaluate Bacon's work with and from photographs per se, and situate this practice in the wider context of modern art, where the engagement with photography, and a focus on material and abstraction versus figuration, were major trajectories.

In *Francis Bacon – In the Mirror of Photography. Collecting, Preparatory Practice and Painting,* we will learn by close and comparative looking, and by the evaluation of circumstantial evidence. We will encounter a dense web of tightrope walks between figuration and abstraction, the teasing evocation and withdrawal of narrative and identity, and a hinting at a naturalistic spatial setting only to disappoint. This tension will keep us on our toes. In light of Dawn Ades' assumption that 'Bacon is not so much using the photograph as attacking it, challenging its status as record or fact through his transformations',[17] the simultaneous fascination for and proximity to, and rejection and subversion of the photograph can be seen as another polarity in Bacon's work. We will see that Bacon used the photograph as a hyper-figurative starting point from which he almost immediately moved his own image 'very much further away from the photograph'[18] during the preliminary stages as well as during the execution of the painting, until its final emancipation through the choice and handling of material.

Following Gombrich's advice quoted above, the analyses will be executed with due caution. We have to accept that with Bacon himself long gone, many details about his motivations, interests and actions must forever remain in the realm of speculation. Yet, on the basis of the contents of 7 Reece Mews, 'asking in a general way under which circumstances a work of art may have come into existence'[19] will, as we will see, prove fruitful, and valid. I will show that the photographic material Bacon collected was pivotal for his painting as a formal starting point for the canvases, on which he worked in solitude and seclusion, his only company the torn book pages and crumpled photographs. Yet it is important to underline that I do not consider, nor do I mean to imply, the photographic material to be the *only* influence on Bacon's painting, nor that Bacon was influenced only via photography. 'My whole life goes into my work',[20] the artist explained, and he absorbed art and life outside the walls of his studio and beyond what he found in books and magazines. Any analysis of Bacon's relationship to another artist, for instance, rather than prioritizing the reproductions in his possession, must also take into account if and when he had access to

16 Cf. David Sylvester, *Looking back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 42–44, Martin Harrison, 'Francis Bacon's *Study for a Portrait*, 1953', in *Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Auction*, by Christie's, catalogue (London 2011), pp. 87–94, pp. 91–92.

17 Dawn Ades, 'Web of Images', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1985; Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1985/1986; Berlin: Nationalgalerie, 1986 (London: Thames and Hudson in association with Tate Gallery 1985; New York: Abrams, 1985), pp. 8–23, p. 22.

18 Sylvester 2000, p. 235.

19 Gombrich 1989, p. 5.

20 Francis Bacon in conversation with Michael Peppiatt, in: Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Studies for a Portrait: Essays and Interviews* (New Haven, CT/ London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 21.

original works, and should qualify what Bacon absorbed from the work in the flesh.[21] For example, to accurately judge the impact of Walter Sickert's paint application on Bacon, it has to be taken into account that due to its tonality it is difficult to photograph, but also that Bacon may have seen originals on a variety of occasions,[22] and in 1971 bought Sickert's *Granby Street*, 1912–1913.[23] Thus, the present study should be understood as a focussed but not an exclusive approach.

1.1. A Private Passion – Bacon's Attitude towards Photography

Throughout his career Bacon talked frequently and extensively about photography. While he did not make his engagement with the medium a secret altogether, the artist's own words are only illuminating apropos his general attitude towards the medium, and tell of a passionate, yet complicated relationship. However, they are of limited help when attempting to gain a detailed understanding of the nature of Bacon's relationship to photography in terms of his collecting habits, preparatory work, and adoption process. As a consequence, any evaluation of his working methods must depend almost exclusively on the analysis of the studio contents and their connection to his finished canvases.

Ambiguities

In many respects, Bacon expressed a positive, even enthusiastic attitude towards lens-based imagery. He explained that '99 percent of the time I find that photographs are very much more interesting than either abstract or figurative painting',[24] and that he had 'always been haunted by them'.[25] He expressed an insatiable craving for everything the medium had to offer and emphasised his desire to look 'at every type of photograph',[26] which, by his own account, ranged from an aerial view of a crowd on a square in St. Petersburg during the Revolution,[27] photographs of footballers and boxers,[28] X-ray photography,[29] stop motion studies by Muybridge[30] to pornographic images.[31] According to Bacon, photographs pro-

21 This point would certainly require further study.
22 Cf. Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Walter Sickert; "Images which unlock other images"', in *Francis Bacon – New Studies: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Martin Harrison (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 56–87, pp. 62–63, p. 66, p. 82 and p. 84.
23 Cf. Martin Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), p. 78.
24 Sylvester 2009, p. 32.
25 Ibid.
26 Bacon to Bragg in: Documentary, 'Francis Bacon', prod. and dir. by David Hinton, ed. by and with Melvyn Bragg interview, for *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 1985.
27 Cf. Bacon to John Rothenstein in: 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon. Catalogue Raisonné and Documentation*, by Ronald Alley and John Rothenstein (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), pp. 7–21, p. 17.
28 Sylvester 2009, p. 116.
29 Cf. ibid., p. 32, see also pp. 46 and 47.
30 Cf. ibid., p. 30.
31 Cf. Bacon to Bragg in *Francis Bacon* 1985.

vided valuable inspiration for him in depicting the human body[32] and, more specifically, the body in motion.[33] Bacon was fascinated by the absoluteness and immediacy of the camera picture and its ability to trap and eternalise a fugitive moment or sensation. 'There it is. It is itself and there is nothing else,'[34] he commented admiringly, and noted that his art aspired to 'the same immediate effect than that you see in this photograph of this wild […] animal after the kill.'[35] For him, this intense experience of the moment was closely related to a notion of mortality, which added 'poignancy'[36] to the image.

And yet, his passion did not come without ambiguities and qualifications, and a wish to distance his art from the medium.[37] For Bacon also regarded photography as fundamentally different, even inferior to painting as an art form.[38] For him, a photograph was 'a means of illustrating something and illustration doesn't interest me.'[39] Bacon voiced his indifference towards art photography[40] and emphasised that 'the last thing I want to be is photographic in any way'[41] and that he aimed to take his own images 'very much further away from the photograph'.[42] In a delicate balance of push and pull, absorption and rejection, the camera vision formed a vital starting point and an endless source of inspiration, but also a potent counterpoint and negative motivation for his art. This ambiguity is a determining factor in Bacon's work with and from photographs.

From Bacon's point of view, painters in the past might have aimed to record and illustrate their environment, but this task now fell to the camera, which was much better at it.[43] As a consequence, he believed, painting had to re-invent itself by coming down to something more 'basic and fundamental',[44] something 'extreme […] where you unlock the areas of feeling which lead to a deeper sense of the reality of the image'.[45] Bacon concluded that 'photography altered completely this whole thing of figurative painting',[46] and the positioning of his painting between figuration and abstraction,[47] and the interweaving of

32 Cf. Sylvester 2009, pp. 46, p. 116, p. 199.
33 Cf. Bacon to Rothenstein in: Rothenstein 1964, p. 17.
34 *Francis Bacon* 1985.
35 Ibid.
36 Peter Beard, 'Francis Bacon: Remarks from an Interview with Peter Beard', in *Francis Bacon: Recent Paintings 1968–1974*, ed. by Henry Geldzahler, exh. cat. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), pp. 14–20, p. 15.
37 Cf. Harrison 2009a, p. 71.
38 Cf. Sylvester 2009, pp. 57–58, HKA: TGA 2008/16/16/4/2/9, 1973, 'Bacon Interviews IIIc', 'October 1973 IIIC', p. 42.
39 Archimbaud 2010, p. 12, for a similar comment see also Sylvester 2009, p. 30.
40 Cf. Archimbaud 2010, p. 12.
41 HKA: TGA ? IVa-b September 1974, p. 14.
42 Sylvester 2000, p. 235.
43 Cf. Sylvester 2009, pp. 65–66, see also p. 176; and Bacon to Bragg in: *Francis Bacon* 1985.
44 Sylvester 2009, p. 66.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid, p. 12.
47 Ibid.

icon and material he was so adept at,[48] were amongst the consequences he drew from this. Bacon echoed an attitude which had been a crucial factor in the development of many early 20th century avant-garde positions.[49] From its inception, the alleged truthfulness of the camera – albeit not always perceived as aesthetically pleasing – had pressured painters into following its high standards of literal accuracy.[50] From the turn of the century, however, painters started to revolt against the supremacy of photography and artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Georges Braque, and André Breton proclaimed in a similar manner to Bacon the necessity for change but also the positive effect, the relief brought by the camera.[51] Kirchner claimed that 'today photography takes over exact representation [so that] painting, relieved from this task, gains its former freedom of action'[52] while Picasso declared that 'photography has arrived at a point where it is capable of liberating painting from all literature, from the anecdote, and even from the subject. […] So shouldn't painters profit from their newly acquired liberty … to do other things?'[53] These 'other things' came in a variety of shapes and forms; all tendencies towards abstraction, for example, can be interpreted as at least partly motivated by the competition with the camera.[54]

A Closer Look Denied

While Bacon talked freely about photography in a universal, non-specific way, one hopes in vain for more detailed information on his working methods and engagement with single photographs – that, he deliberately kept out of the public eye. As soon as interviewers started asking more concrete questions, Bacon became tight-lipped and evasive, and often contradicted more affirmative comments made on other occasions. When Michael Peppiatt asked Bacon in 1989 if he was still looking at 'books of photographs'[55] the latter bluntly answered 'no'[56] and changed the subject. In attempts to downplay the intensity of his use of photography, Bacon argued that 'I know people think I've often used it, but that isn't true',[57]

48 Cf. Francis Bacon, 'A Painter's Tribute', in *Matthew Smith: Paintings from 1909 to 1952*, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1953 (London: Tate Gallery, 1953), p. 12.

49 Cf. Coke 1981, p. 95.

50 Cf. Aaron Scharf (1968), *Art and Photography*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 66–67, pp. 211–227; see also David Campany, 'Survey', in *Art and Photography*, ed. by David Campany (London: Phaidon, 2003), pp. 12–45, p. 18.

51 Cf. André Breton in the preface to an exhibition catalogue on Max Ernst's photomontages, Paris, 1921, cited from Dawn Ades, *An Introduction to Photography & Surrealism,* booklet for exhibition *L'Amour fou: Photography & Surrealism*, London: Hayward Gallery, 1986 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986), p. 2; Kirchner cited in Heinrich Schwarz, 'Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influences', in *Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influences: Selected Essays by Heinrich Schwarz*, ed. by William E. Parker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 109–117, p. 111; Braque cited in Coke 1981, p. 299.

52 Kircher quoted from Schwarz 1987, p. 111.

53 Picasso quoted in Coke 1981, p. 299.

54 Cf. Coke 1981, p. 299.

55 Peppiatt 2008b, p. 193.

56 Ibid.

57 Archimbaud 2010, p. 12.

and that he was only 'at one time'[58] preoccupied with the medium anyway. Comments on his actual preparatory and adoption process are scant and uninformative. He merely explained how 'suddenly this image [the painted subject] […] began to form itself [after seeing photographs]',[59] 'that thing [the painted subject] came out of it [the photograph]', that he somehow made 'something of the feeling'[60] when seeing a photographic reproduction and that photographs 'bring up'[61] and 'breed'[62] other images for him. The role of photographs was described by Bacon with a variety of terms ranging from 'triggers of ideas',[63] 'dictionary',[64] 'record',[65] 'tool',[66] 'aide-mémoire',[67] to 'stimulation',[68] or that they were employed as 'my models and my subject matter'.[69] These terms may seem contradictory, the common denominator, however, is that they ascribe to the photograph an auxiliary, preliminary role. How a photograph was a 'stimulation' or a 'trigger of ideas' is hard to decode but their role as 'tool' and 'model and subject matter' will be unfolded in the following analysis.

Only on rare occasions did Bacon publicly profess an interest in specific publications, for instance a book with 'beautiful hand-coloured plates of diseases of the mouth'[70] he had bought in Paris and the medical textbook *Positioning in Radiography*.[71] He was more open in private, and in a letter to his friend Sonia Orwell in 1954 he raved about the book *Il Mondo Cambia. Storia di Cinquant'anni*, which he described as containing 'some of his most significant pictorial stimuli'.[72] Likewise, the unedited versions of the interviews with David Sylvester contain more information on specific publications than the published ones. Bacon for example talked about a 'small […] German book […] where they have put all

58 Ibid., p. 14.
59 Edward Behr, 'I Only Paint for Myself', interview with Francis Bacon, published as part of 'Agony and the Artist', by Carter S. Wiseman, Edward Behr and Patricia W. Mooney, *Newsweek*, 24 January 1977, pp. 46–49, p. 49.
60 Bacon to Bragg in *Francis Bacon* 1985.
61 Ibid.
62 Sylvester 2009, p. 14.
63 Ibid., p. 30.
64 Ibid., p. 73.
65 Archimbaud 2010, p. 12.
66 Ibid., p. 16.
67 Ibid., p. 15.
68 Ibid., p. 101.
69 Bacon to Bragg in *Francis Bacon* 1985.
70 Sylvester 2009, p. 35, Bacon probably referred to Ludwig Grünwald, *Atlas-Manuel des Maladies de la Bouche, du Pharynx et des Fosses Nasales* (Paris: Bailliere et fils, 1903), two fragments of the publication were found in Bacon's studio, no page numbers, tab.5, fig.1: 'Epulis' [RM98F105:140J].
71 Cf. Bacon to Bragg in: *Francis Bacon* 1985; likely regarding K.C. Clark, *Positioning in Radiography* (London: Heinemann, 1942) [e.g. RM98F93:13].
72 Francis Bacon, letter to Sonia Orwell, 1954, as paraphrased in Martin Harrison and Rebecca Daniels, *Francis Bacon: Incunabula* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), comment no. 62, no page numbers.

Rembrandt's self-portraits together'[73] and 'a small book of Géricault that I've got',[74] but these statements were edited out, possibly at Bacon's request. Bacon only very sporadically pointed out direct photographic references for his paintings, as he did when elaborating that the right panel of *Triptych*, 1991 was indeed a 'painted photograph'.[75] Overall, he clearly disapproved of this line of enquiry and remained reticent on that matter throughout his career.[76]

The same pattern was repeated when visual records showed the material he had in his studios. Bacon regularly allowed pictures to be taken of the studio in its entirety, and even invited film crews into the small space of Reece Mews. Numerous well-known photographers, including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Cecil Beaton, Ian Berry, Michael Holtz and Don McCullin,[77] captured the mess with or without the artist present, and Melvyn Bragg interviewed Bacon in Reece Mews for the BBC *Southbank Show* in 1985.[78] These photographs communicated an unspecific idea of the role of photography for the artist and unwittingly promoted his precept of the accidental working process. To the public it certainly had to appear a lucky accident that, from that undefined, chaotic conglomeration of a myriad of images, he managed to create his iconic masterpieces; this is epitomised by the caption to a photograph of the gloomy looking painter in his work space from *Newsweek* in 1977 reading 'Bacon in his studio: Struggling with chance'.[79]

No critic was allowed to study Bacon's working documents in depth and in detail. Visitors usually 'got no further than the spartan bed-sitting room'[80] and when Bacon was not in the mood to see guests the 'drawbridge went up'[81] and the property became altogether inaccessible. Most of the time, the studio was a 'no-go area',[82] and even if allowed into the small working space, visitors recalled a feeling of unease, as if they were entering forbidden

73 HKA: Folder TGA 2008/16/16/4/2/9 'Bacon Interviews IIIb, July 1973 IIIb, R-9, Bacon likely referred to RM98F108:33: Wilhelm Pinder, *Rembrandts Selbstbildnisse* (Königstein im Taunus: Karl Robert Langewiesche, 1945).

74 HKA: TGA 2008/16/16/4/2/9, 'Bacon Interviews IIIc', 'October 1973 IIIC', p. 10; Bacon might have meant Klaus Berger, *Géricault et son Oeuvre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), a fragment of p. 41, Théodore Géricault, *Couple Amoureux* (detail), c.1815, is mounted on cardboard together with two other images [RM98F8:95].

75 'I'll go on until I drop', Francis Bacon's last interview, interviewer Richard Cork for *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, first broadcast 17 August 1991 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/bacon/5415.shtml> [accessed 16 March 2019], the photograph is The Estate of Francis Bacon, studio item: Jacques Saraben, Francis Bacon, 1973.

76 Cf. Harrison 2009a, p. 71.

77 Henri Cartier-Bresson, Royal Academy, 1952; Cecil Beaton, Overstrand Mansions, 1960; Ian Berry, Reece Mews, 1967; Michael Holtz, Reece Mews, 1974, Don McCullin, Reece Mews, 1982; cf. also Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon: Spuren im Atelier des Künstlers* (Munich: Knesebeck, 2005), pp. 63–64.

78 *Francis Bacon* 1985.

79 Behr 1977, p. 46.

80 Peppiatt 2006a, footnote 43 on p. 60.

81 Barry Joule in conversation, 17 September 2013.

82 Michael Peppiatt, 'Francis Bacon's Studio', *Burlington Magazine*, 148.1240 (July 2006), 495.

territory in which touching – let alone scrutinising the working documents – felt like a sacrilege.[83] According to Peppiatt, Bacon did not take any chances and locked away important studio items in a sea-chest.[84]

Bacon authorised the publication of photographs allowing the study of single studio items only three times. Sam Hunter documented an intimate insight into Bacon's studio at Cromwell Place in 1950 and two photographs of a selection of printed material were published two years later in the *Magazine of Art* (figure 39).[85] It was not until 1975 that new reproductions of single photographs and book pages from the studio featured in Sylvester's *Interviews with Francis Bacon*.[86] After that, Bacon only agreed one more time to working documents being published, in Wieland Schmied's *Francis Bacon: Vier Studien zu einem Porträt* in 1985.[87] Single items can be seen in film documentaries, such as 'Sunday Night Francis Bacon' in 1966, in which Sylvester interviewed Bacon for the BBC,[88] and in *The South Bank Show* in 1985.[89] And yet, while in the first TV programme Bacon can be seen plucking specific leaves and publications from the floor with Sylvester, Bacon took a more cautious stance in the latter, and Bragg was denied the same privilege. Instead, a selection of torn pages and photographs was arranged on a table in the living area of Reece Mews as if to remove the material and its discussion spatially and intellectually from the painting process.

Bacon never consented to being filmed or photographed while actually painting or working with the studio material. The documents we have seem staged, unnatural, and detached from his true procedures. A series of photographs shows Bacon in front of a canvas with a working document, Helmar Lerski's portrait of the painter, c.1929–1930, placed on

83 Cf. Hugh Marlais Davies, 'Interviewing Bacon, 1973', in *Francis Bacon – New Studies: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Martin Harrison (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 88–123, p. 91, Brian Clarke, 'Detritus', francis-bacon.com, [n.d.] <https://www.francis-bacon.com/content/detritus> [accessed 31 July 2021].

84 Cf. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in the 1950s*, pubd. in relation to the exhibition *Francis Bacon: Paintings from the 1950s*, Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2006; Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2007; Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2007 (New Haven, Conn./London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 11; no other records of such a container, or its content, exist.

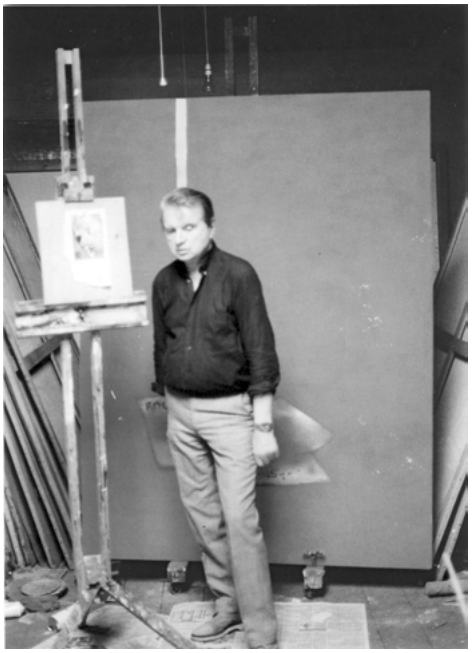
85 Sam Hunter, 'Francis Bacon: The Anatomy of Horror', *Magazine of Art*, 45.1 (January 1952), pp. 11–15, p. 12, they were reprinted several times, for example in Lawrence Alloway, 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon*, exh. cat. (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago, 1963/1964, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1963), pp. 12–25, p. 21. Bacon kept one of Hunter's photographs in his studio, see RM98F1A:201.

86 Cf. David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), for example, p. 33 fig. 31, p. 39, figs. 36–37.

87 Wieland Schmied, *Francis Bacon: Vier Studien zu einem Porträt* (Berlin: Frölich & Kaufmann, 1985), p. 144, p. 147, and p. 148.

88 Documentary, 'Sunday Night Francis Bacon', dir. by Michael Gill and with David Sylvester interview, BBC Television, 1966.

89 *Francis Bacon* 1985.



5 Photograph, Barry Joule, Francis Bacon in the Reece Mews studio, c.1980s.

an easel at eye level (figure 5),[90] and two more show him with brush in hand leaning over what looks like a torn page from a book and a sketchbook.[91] Another series features Bacon holding a brush, seemingly working on the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1984 (figure 6).[92] And yet, multi-coloured fingerprints and paint marks on the studio items indicate that they were held up, handled or placed below the canvas during the painting process, and *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* indeed looks finished, while Bacon's static posture does not match descriptions of his painting process as physical and dynamic.[93] These are symbolic images, revealing more how Bacon did *not* work instead of confirming *how* he worked.

90 Photograph, Barry Joule, Francis Bacon in the Reece Mews studio, c.1980s, reproduced in: David Alan Mellor, *The Barry Joule Archive – Works on Paper attributed to Francis Bacon*, pubd. in relation to the exhibition of the same name, Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2000 (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2000), p. 1, 'Francis Bacon in studio with 1928 [sic] Lerski, Berlin photograph and unfinished canvas, 1982'.

91 Ibid., p. 2, 'Francis Bacon painting in a sketchbook, 1988', and p. 12, 'Francis Bacon painting on a photograph, 1988'.

92 Photograph, John Edwards, Francis Bacon painting the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1984, two fragments are RM98F107:23 and RM98F105:140O, a complete print is owned by The Estate of Francis Bacon. For the painting see figure 97 on p. 248.

93 Cf. e.g. *Self Portraits with Friends: The Selected Diaries of Cecil Beaton*, ed. by Richard Buckle (London: Vintage Publishing, 1991), p. 322.

6 The Estate of Francis Bacon, studio item: photograph, John Edwards, Francis Bacon painting the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1984.

The reasons for Bacon keeping his engagement with photography out of the critic's eye were manifold. A major factor was photography's long struggle for acceptance in the realm of the fine arts. In 1859, Charles Baudelaire famously argued that photographs were used only by painters of 'too slender talent or too lazy to complete their studies'.[94] John Ruskin later denied the photograph even the auxiliary role he had first ascribed to it, stating that it will 'give you nothing valuable that you do not work for'.[95] He was particularly critical of the mechanical nature of the process. According to Ruskin, the definition of art was 'human labour regulated by human design'[96] only.

While in America, for example, the relationship between photography and art had been discussed more positively and more constructively from the 1930s onwards,[97] the British post-war art establishment remained critical.[98] Arguments had not changed much since Baudelaire and Ruskin. In 1956, the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Sir Leigh Ashton, refused to acquire photographs as art objects because 'photography is a

94 Charles Baudelaire, letter on the 'Salon de 1859' to Jean Morel, editor of Revue Française, *Revue Française*, 10 June – 20 July 1859, as cited in Scharf 1979, p. 145.

95 Scharf 1979, p. 99, see also pp. 95–101.

96 Ruskin quoted from Scharf 1979, p. 99.

97 Cf. e.g. Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: A Short Critical History*, pubd. in relation to the exhibition *Photography 1839–1937*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938); see also Schwarz 1987, which was first published in 1949.

98 Cf. Harrison 2009a, p. 71–73.

purely mechanical process into which the artist does not enter'.[99] Jacques Salomon argued in relation to an exhibition of works by Édouard Vuillard in 1964 that this mechanical quality clashed with the organic nature of painting and Salomon identified a struggle when the painter had tried to integrate photographs in his works, whereas the 'sketches found their place naturally'.[100] The act of adoption itself was regarded with scepticism, too, for 'the idea of an artist imitating the achievements of someone else, even if only partially, suggests a crippling lack of imagination, even fraud',[101] because it clashed with the contemporaneous emphasis 'on the concept of personal liberty […]',[102] as Keith Roberts pointed out. Such resentment persisted in contemporary art writing, the indignation perhaps increasing the more acknowledged and beloved an artist was. Scholarship struggled to accept that Jan Vermeer van Delft used the camera obscura 'wholesale'[103] for large parts of his compositions and similarly, the exhibition *Picasso and Photography* as late as 1999 was reviewed with 'sensational headlines such as "Picasso Exposed" as if a fraud was uncovered'.[104] Thus, Bacon was well-advised to conceal his appropriation practice from photographs if he did not want to jeopardise his career and put himself in danger of being severely misunderstood.[105] His secrecy did not, however, protect him from criticism. For the little that was known, the paintings in the 1962 Tate retrospective were slammed for their 'extraordinary dependence on second-hand imagery, even second-hand imagination'.[106]

Another danger was narrow and misguided interpretations of his paintings on the basis of potential, or actual photographic sources beyond his control, and Bacon lamented an 'overemphasis on the photograph'[107] in people's perception of his work. In line with this, he usually offered little clues towards their meaning. In 1971, Lawrence Gowing based an essay on Bacon mentioning *Positioning in Radiography* as a source of inspiration,[108] and, for example, saw references to radiography in the depiction of Muriel Belcher's nostril in *Miss Muriel Belcher*, 1959.[109] Bacon criticised that '[…] perhaps Lawrence Gowing has a bit over-emphasised it; this is always the trouble of telling people about sources of things –

99 Sir Leigh Ashton as cited in Harrison 2009a, p. 72.

100 Jacques Salomon, 'Vuillard and His Kodak', in *Vuillard et son Kodak*, exh. cat. London: Lefevre Gallery, 1964 (London: Lefevre Gallery, 1964), pp. 2–15, p. 3.

101 Keith Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Art into Art: Works of Art as a Source of Inspiration*, exh. cat. London: Burlington Magazine at Sotheby & Co., 1971 (London: Sotheby's, 1971), pp. 3–4, p. 3.

102 Ibid.

103 Philip Steadman, *Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the Truth Behind the Masterpieces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

104 Martin Harrison, 'Francis Bacon: Lost and Found', *Apollo: The International Magazine of Art and Antiques*, 161 (2005), pp. 90–97, p. 97, Harrison refers to *The Sunday Times: Culture*, 7 February 1999 (front cover).

105 Cf. Harrison 2009a, pp. 71–73.

106 Norbert Lynton, 'London Letter: Bacon, Davie, Kokoschka', *Art International*, 8.6 (1962), pp. 68–69, p. 68, as cited in Harrison 2009a, p. 73.

107 Sylvester 2000, p. 235.

108 Bacon talks about *Positioning in Radiography* with David Sylvester in Sylvester 2009, pp. 30–31.

109 Cf. Lawrence Gowing, 'Positioning in Representation', *Studio International*, 183.940 (January 1972), 14–22, p. 14.

is that they over-emphasise these sources […].'[110] After a museum visit Bacon reportedly triumphantly exclaimed that 'no critic will ever know where *that* one came from!'[111]

Furthermore, Bacon saw himself in the tradition of the Old Masters and his paintings 'were to deserve either the National Gallery or the dustbin'.[112] The autodidact must have been aware that he was inferior to his heroes in some technical aspects, for example, he could not draw.[113] Maybe his dependence on photography therefore did not fit into his self-perception, let alone his public image, especially since, as pointed out above, Bacon somewhat shared the idea of the inferiority of photography as an art form. In this context, he may have also aimed to dissociate himself from contemporaneous Pop Art positions. For him, 'Pop Art is made for kicks'.[114] While he shared with them an acute awareness of how mass media would come to define post-war Britain, and had an eclectic taste in the collection of printed matter which included 'Low Art' sources from magazines and advertisements, he never made it the core of his art and remained a traditional painter as regards media and techniques.[115] Subsequently, Bacon, who deemed talking about technique 'a waste of time',[116] may have simply regarded other topics as more relevant, and might have preferred to discuss his ability as a colourist over his exact use of photographs.[117]

Such concealment is not unusual in the history of art and Bacon may have had the same reservations as many of his predecessors. Because Michelangelo Buonarroti feared the 'judgment of history',[118] he burnt much of his preparatory work before his death to prevent the public from seeing his struggles, and to maintain the illusion that his works had been immaculate from the beginning.[119] 'I know artists are secretive about their methods – they are today, and there's no reason to suppose they were ever any different,'[120] David Hockney stated on the use of optical aids. Many artists, including Bacon, may have feared that the sober, sometimes banal reality of planning, constructing, and executing a painting, brought to light by a step-by-step dissection of the working process, may not live up to, or take away from the magic of the finished masterpiece, and consequently belittle the genius and

110 HKA: TGA 2008/16/16/4/2/9, 1973, pp. 41–43.
111 John Russell (1971), *Francis Bacon*, rev. edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 180.
112 Ibid., p. 28.
113 Bacon's sketches will be discussed in chapter 2.4.
114 Bacon to Peppiatt, in Peppiatt 2008, p. 17.
115 Cf. Victoria Walsh, 'Real Imagination is Technical Imagination', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, exh. cat. London: Tate Britain, 2008/2009; Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2009; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009 (London: Tate Pub., 2008), pp. 74–88, p. 74.
116 Andrew Durham, 'Note on Technique', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1985; Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1985/1986; Berlin: Nationalgalerie, 1986 (London: Thames and Hudson in association with Tate Gallery 1985; New York: Abrams, 1985), pp. 231–233, p. 232.
117 Cf. Hugh Marlais Davies, telephone conversation with the author, 7 June 2016.
118 Frederick Hartt, *The Drawings of Michelangelo* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), p. 20.
119 Cf. Hartt 1971, p. 20.
120 David Hockney (2001), *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), p. 14.

reputation of the artist. Of course, this is not the goal of the present study. To the contrary, it will show how much creativity and inventiveness lie in Bacon's methods and techniques. The pressure is even higher when it comes to the artist's peers. Joan Miró kept his sketches secret because they would have brought him into discredit with his fellow Surrealists, who cherished the subconscious over the sketchpad.[121] Bacon was reportedly so alarmed by a request to bequeath his working material to an archive that he immediately disposed of a large amount of it.[122]

Thus, at the root of Bacon's engagement with photography lies a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the medium: it is simultaneously a valued starting- and an important counterpoint. This insight is vital for a better understanding of Bacon's somewhat contradictive behaviour and methodologies, for it expressed itself in the obsessive collection and employment of photographic images, which, however, he kept to himself, and in their immediate, radical subversion.

1.2. State of Research

'Oh yes – Bacon uses photographs'[123]

In principle, it is a long-known fact that Francis Bacon's art draws on lens-based imagery. In 1949, Robert Melville first pointed out formal similarities between the gaping mouth in Bacon's *Head VI* and the screaming woman from Sergei Eisenstein's silent movie *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925.[124] While contemporaneous writing often discussed his relationship to photography, the discussion was mostly superficial and did not take a prominent place in Bacon scholarship until after his death. Only a handful of essays and two book chapters targeted the phenomenon in more detail, including David Sylvester's discussion of Bacon's stylistic proximity to news pictures in 1952,[125] and Hugh Marlais Davies' investigation of 'The Adaptation of Photographic Sources' in his Ph.D. thesis from 1975.[126] The lack of more profound discussion and seriousness is a direct result of Bacon only very rarely revealing any in-depth information.

121 Cf. Sylvester 2000, p. 205.

122 Cf. Dennis Farr, 'Francis Bacon in Context', in *Francis Bacon: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. New Haven, Conn.: The Yale Centre for British Art, 1999; Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1999; San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art, 1999; Fort Worth: Museum of Modern Art, 1999 (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Trust for Museum Exhibitions, 1999), pp. 18–24, p. 225, footnote 2, quoted from Harrison 2005a, p. 83.

123 Russell John 2001, p. 70.

124 Cf. Robert Melville, 'Francis Bacon', *Horizon*, 20.120–1 (December 1949–January 1950), pp. 419–23.

125 David Sylvester, 'The Paintings of Francis Bacon', *Listener*, 3 January 1952, pp. 28–29.

126 Hugh Marlais Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Early and Middle Years, 1928 – 1958* (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1978), pp. 119–153: 'The Adaptation of Photographic Sources'; other examples are Russell John 2001, pp. 54–71: 'The Prehensile Image'; Anonymous, 'Mr. Francis Bacon's New Paintings: Extraordinary Use of Photographs', *The Times*, 13 November 1953, p. 10.

Yet observant critics have sporadically spotted new photographic references; Muybridge's motion studies in particular were regularly connected to Bacon's work.[127] Furthermore, on the basis of Sam Hunter's photographs, John Rothenstein in 1962 established a connection between a news photograph of Pope Pius XII which Bacon held *in* his studio and *Pope III*, 1951, underlining the immediate significance of the studio contents.[128] In their 1964 catalogue raisonné, Rothenstein and Ronald Alley suggested a photographic starting point for thirty-six out of the 230 featured works, hinting at the potentially high number of formal links in existence.[129] In the same year, Frank Van Deren Coke juxtaposed twelve Bacon paintings with photographic sources from reference books in *The Painter and the Photograph. From Delacroix to Warhol,*[130] illustrating their close pictorial proximity. In studies on the shared history of painting and photography, such as *The Painter and the Photograph*, Bacon was mentioned regularly.[131] The fact that Bacon needs to be placed and can fruitfully be discussed within this tradition has been largely ignored in Bacon scholarship to date, and Rothenstein relating Bacon's interest in Muybridge to painters such as Thomas Eakins, Ernest Meissonier, and Georges Seurat in 1974 is a rare exception.[132]

Such comments and observations did not make a noticeable impact, however. No one connected the dots and extrapolated from the known formal references to a deliberate and consistent working method based on the photographic material the artist collected in his studios (see *List of Pictorial References to Francis Bacon's Paintings*). Instead, the prevailing opinion, as shaped by influential authors such as Russell and Hunter, was that 'it would be quite untrue to suggest that there is a one-to-one relationship between this photograph [photograph of the Petrograd Riots in 1917], or any other photograph, and what Bacon does in his painting',[133] as claimed by the first, and that the reference images in the studio were of no of direct relevance for his iconography, for 'at the one end stand his paintings, unique and extremely personal inventions. At the other are tables littered with newspapers

127 For example, David Boxer suggested the mouth of the creature in the centre panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, might have been inspired by the German magazine *Simplicissimus*, 29.9 (28 May 1923), p. 107, Th. Th. Heine, cartoon 'Wie sieht Hitler aus?', hier 'Oder ist der Mund die Hauptsache?', David Wayne Boxer, 'The Early Work of Francis Bacon' (Ph.D. thesis, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore 1975), p. 50.

128 Cf. John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1962, London: Tate Gallery, 1962), no page numbers.

129 Cf. Ronald Alley and John Rothenstein, *Francis Bacon Catalogue. Raisonné and Documentation* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964, cat. nos. 8, 25, 29, 30, 33–40, 45, 53, 55, 56, 58, 67, 74, 75, 89, 92–94, 98, 100, 102, 108, 111, 117, 127, 129, 135, 159, 182, A9, D8.

130 Cf. Coke 1981, pp. 113–115, ill. nos. 264–273, pp. 167–170, ill. nos. 367–378.

131 See Scharf 1979, p. 220; see also Otto Stelzer (1966), *Kunst und Photographie: Kontakte, Einflüsse, Wirkungen* (Munich: Piper, 1978), e.g. pp. 162–166; see also Gordon Hendricks, *Eadweard Muybridge: The Father of the Motion Picture* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975, pp. 206–207, pp. 209–210, ill. nos. 184–188.

132 Cf. John Rothenstein, 'Francis Bacon', in *Modern English Painters: Wood to Hockney* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1974), pp. 157–175, p. 166.

133 Russell John 2001, p. 58.

photographs and clippings',[134] as stated by the latter. Similar points of view were repeated, for example, by Gilles Deleuze who claimed in 1981 that 'at no point does he [Bacon] ever integrate the photograph into the creative process',[135] and Wieland Schmied, who stated in 1985 that Bacon was not influenced by single photographs but rather by the mere existence of photography.[136] Directly reflecting Bacon's scant information policy, during his lifetime the idée reçue amongst art historians was that photography was an important but generic influence. This allowed Russell to remark that 'most people think in an unfocused way that "Oh yes – Bacon uses photographs"'.[137]

This idea was fostered, if not forced by Bacon. There is much to suggest that the painter was not only careful about what and how much information to release on his working methods but also directly controlled what was written about him. For example, Russell in his 1971 monograph introduced 'point[s] of departure'[138] for Bacon's paintings in Muybridge but, as pointed out above, in the same publication denied the existence of any pictorial one-on-one links. Perhaps this reserved conclusion which contradicted his own analysis, as Harrison has suggested, was the result of Bacon's editing hand;[139] he also denied Russell access to more source material for the second edition of his book.[140] Other cases are known in which Bacon, when he did not like the content, simply denied the author the reproduction rights for an essay or a book or asked for the publication to be put on hold.[141] Thus, if critics did not want to risk the publication of their work, like Russell, they had to make concessions.

The Missing Link

After Bacon's death in 1992, the emergence and accessibility of material the analysis, publication, and display of which he had not allowed during his lifetime triggered a paradigmatic shift in writings on the artist.[142] The largest, and arguably most important set, were the thousands of tattered magazines, paint-spattered photographs and folded and torn

134 Hunter 1952, pp. 11–12.
135 Gilles Deleuze (2003), *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 65.
136 Cf. Schmied 1985, p. 41.
137 Russell John 2001, p. 70.
138 Ibid., p. 65.
139 Cf. Harrison 2009a, p. 72.
140 Cf. Harrison 2005a, p. 83.
141 Cf. Martin Harrison, 'Bacon's Paintings', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, exh. cat. London: Tate Britain, 2008/2009; Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2009; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009 (London: Tate Pub., 2008), pp. 40–49, p. 45; Walsh 2008, p. 74; Harrison 2005b, p. 97.
142 Three biographies were published after Bacon's death: Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Vintage, 1993), Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times* (London: Crown, 1993), and Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), several sets of sketches were exhibited in the show *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, ed. by Matthew Gale, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1999 (London: Tate Gallery, 1999).

fragments of book pages from his last studio at 7 Reece Mews, which attracted attention not only for their quantity, but also for their peculiar, curiously compelling aesthetic and the impressive range of subjects. Finally, Bacon's own collection of photographic material could be studied in detail, which shifted the discourse on his relationship to photography from a general to a more concrete level.

Few scholars analysed the material before 2001[143] and it was not until 2005 that two landmark publications assessed and evaluated the torn book leaves and fragile photographs in greater depth. Margarita Cappock's *Francis Bacon's Studio*[144] provided an overview of certain groups of material and, for the first time, allowed a closer look at a variety of single items. Martin Harrison's *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*[145] from the same year embedded the working processes in an extensive art historical study, which included Bacon's immediate historical and art historical context as well as biographical and psychological interpretations of his work. In 2008, *Francis Bacon: Incunabula*[146] featured a large number of full-page reproductions of selected pieces and short explanations of their significance for the artist and his work. *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty* at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane in 2009 is the only exhibition to date with a pronounced emphasis on the studio contents, and its catalogue contains illuminating essays on Bacon's relationship to photography in general but also to single photographers, such as Peter Beard.[147] Today, there is barely a publication on Bacon which does not reproduce photographs of the studio material and no exhibition is staged without displaying photographs of Reece Mews and original working documents. The enthusiasm for researching them did not last, however, and the initially steady flow of essays has recently started to run dry.[148] After the opening of the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation in Monaco in 2014 and the publication of the new catalogue raisonné in 2016,[149] Bacon scholarship is at present dominated by different topics.

Since the material from Reece Mews became accessible for research, a number of new one-on-one links between the battered photographs and crumpled news pictures and Bacon's paintings have been discovered.[150] For a while it appeared that no author wanted to publish without discovering a new connection – no matter how vague – or at least interpret

143 Cf. e.g. Harrison 1999, p. 21.
144 Cappock 2005a.
145 Harrison 2005a.
146 Harrison, Daniels 2008.
147 *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009); Rebecca Daniels, 'Francis Bacon and Peter Beard: The Dead Elephant Interviews and Other Stories', in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 134–151.
148 One of the more recent examples is Hammer 2012a.
149 *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. by Martin Harrison (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2016).
150 Cf. e.g. Daniels 2009b, p. 136, RM98F16:278: Peter Beard, detail of contact sheet, running boxer dog with muskrat in its mouth, and Francis Bacon, 'Dog', 1967.

an already known one, reminiscent of the 'search for tantalizing iconographic keys in an archive fever'[151] that David Alan Mellor diagnosed in 2009. And yet, there is no consensus on the importance and meaning of the image-image links, and the relationship of the studio material to Bacon's paintings. Just like past scholarship failed to acknowledge the direct connection between the hints towards Bacon's interest in photography in his works and the actual photographic material *in* his studio, today's research struggles to grasp the direct and immediate connection between Bacon's painted iconography and single, *specific* items from Reece Mews. Often, the material is only superficially introduced and quoted to prove or refer to the artist's general interest in a topic.[152]

Studio items and other photographic sources are regularly suggestively juxtaposed with formally unrelated paintings and direct borrowings from studio material are left unanalysed and unexplained,[153] which is potentially misleading in the first case and unsatisfying in the second. Conversely, the importance of actual and potential source material is at other times utterly overestimated. Martin Hammer dedicated a whole book to Bacon's presumed extensive appropriation of Nazi-propaganda, concluding that during the 1940s and 1950s Bacon made 'Hitler and Nazi Germany one of the principal subjects of his art',[154] ignoring the fact that such sources might have been just one of many disparate pictorial references.

Other critics doubted the value of the studio contents as a research resource altogether and disputed whether Bacon had incorporated any of it directly at all. The material was described as an 'incredible pile of rubbish'[155] and its removal to Dublin as 'most bizarre'.[156] The display of working documents alongside Bacon's paintings in Tate's 2008 retrospective was harshly dismissed, too. The 'tatty memorabilia'[157] should be passed over as a 'mere sideshow'[158] because neither logic nor a better understanding of their genesis could 'illuminate'[159] Bacon's paintings and 'establish his place in posterity'.[160] Even Chris Stephens, one of the curators of the show, and Barbara Dawson, who lent the material to Tate, are quoted as being 'careful to insist that it would be a mistake to draw too many direct inferences between

151 David Alan Mellor, 'Framing Bacon: Reception and Representation from Little Magazine to TV Screen, 1945–1966', *Visual Culture in Britain*, special issue: *Bacon Reframed: A Themed Issue on Francis Bacon*, 10.3 (2009), pp. 227–234, p. 229.

152 Cf. Dawson 2009, p. 55.

153 Cf. *Francis Bacon: Five Decades*, ed. by Anthony Bond, exh. cat. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2012/2013 (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), pp. 92–93, pp. 156–157.

154 Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), p. 7.

155 Sally Vincent, 'The Born again Dubliner', *Guardian*, 12 May 2001 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2001/may/12/weekend.sallyvincent> [accessed 31 July 2021].

156 Ibid.

157 Rachel Campbell-Johnston, 'Francis Bacon at the Tate Britain', *Sunday Times*, 9 September 2008 <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts _entertainement/visual_arts/article4706909.ece> [accessed November 2014].

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

what was found there and finished canvasses'.[161] This attitude is echoed by Rachel Tant who is convinced that the studio merely had a generic significance for the artist,[162] while Michael Peppiatt in 2009 makes a general 'atmosphere of visual excitement, with incongruous couplings and chance associations,'[163] responsible for Bacon's painting. Maybe at the core of such criticism and resentment lies a concern voiced by Nicholas Chare, who pointed at the risk 'of replacing looking at the artist's works with scrutinizing his source materials.'[164]

Yet, how *can* a discussion of Bacon's relationship to photography take place without a careful examination of the most obvious source: Bacon's own collection of photographic material? How can Bacon's working methods be explored without a close look at his working environment? How can the impact of the artist's editing hand and rigid patterns of interpretation be overcome without the collection of new factual data? For, this 'pile of rubbish',[165] these 'tatty studio relica'[166] happen to hold crucial clues to a better understanding of Bacon's working process, the genesis of his iconography, and vital aspects of his finished canvases. As such, as Harrison underlined, their examination 'is no more or less relevant than the study of a traditional artist's preliminary drawings or sketches',[167] which is usually not understood as sabotaging an artwork's artistic impact and creative value.

Most of the time, research into this material tends to focus on a single topic or person. Indeed, an analysis and interpretation of overarching mechanisms, dynamics, and processes involved in the handling of the material is exceedingly rare. Most scholars considered the physical alterations of the studio items determined by folds, tears, and paint marks insignificant during Bacon's lifetime, and their importance is in fact still contested. Where they fed into a painting they were dismissed as 'exceptional cases within a sea of origami'.[168] Since 1999, however, Harrison repeatedly underlined their deliberateness and their significance for the painted iconography, which led him to conclude that 'they [the transformed items] were, in effect, his preliminary studies.'[169] Also in 1999, Matthew Gale was the first one

161 Aida Edemariam, 'Francis Bacon: Box of Tricks', *Guardian*, 5 September 2008 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/sep/05/francis.bacon> [accessed 31 July 2021].

162 Cf. Rachel Tant, 'Archive', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, exh. cat. London: Tate Britain, 2008/2009; Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2009; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009 (London: Tate Pub., 2008), pp. 164–168, p. 168, she quotes Harrison 2005a.

163 Peppiatt 2008b, p. 37.

164 Nicholas Chare, *After Francis Bacon: Synaesthesia and Sex in Paint* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), p. 48; Raymond Lucas also addressed the questionable shift in the meaning of archive items when single items are rendered valuable by their display in Dublin, see Raymond Lucas, 'The Sketchbook as Collection: A Phenomenology of Sketching', in *Recto Verso: Redefining the Sketchbook*, ed. by Angela Bartram, Nader El-Bizri and Douglas Gittens (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 191–205, p. 196.

165 Vincent 2001.

166 Campbell-Johnston 2008.

167 Harrison 2009a, p. 71.

168 Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Dublin and Compton Verney', *Burlington Magazine*, 152.1282 (January 2010), 59–61, p. 60.

169 Harrison 1999, p. 21; see also Martin Harrison, 'Bacon's Incunabula', in *Francis Bacon: Incunabula*, by Martin Harrison and Rebecca Daniels (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), pp. 7–13, p. 7.

to point out that Bacon equally valued the effects of the 'enriching decay'[170] of his studio contents, accidental alterations such as material fatigue which evolve over a period of time, during the preparatory stages of a painting and the subsequent painting process. Marcel Finke has recently investigated Bacon's working methods in more detail and his Ph.D. thesis *Prekäre Oberflächen. Zur Materialität des Bildes und des Körpers am Beispiel der künstlerischen Praxis Francis Bacons* published in 2015[171] is the first and only thorough study on this subject.

With the exception of *Prekäre Oberflächen*, there has not been a comprehensive study of the studio contents for over fifteen years. The fact that Bacon systematically accumulated and transformed the photographic material in his studio to serve a deliberate and well-rehearsed preparatory and appropriation practice has not been fully appreciated by Bacon research to date. A systematic collection and examination of the pre-existing imagery-painting links has never been executed. *Francis Bacon: Metamorphoses*[172] is the first and until now the only publication focussing on a comparative analysis of Bacon's iconography and its photographic sources of inspiration, and the present study is an attempt to expand and deepen this initial effort.

1.3. Luck and Chance – *Painting 1946* as a Case Study

Initiated and promoted by the artist himself, the idea that Bacon's iconography emerged by accident still reverberates in contemporary Bacon scholarship. Yet, the analysis of the studio contents reveals that the artist's statements were contradicted by his actions. The photographic material he collected in fact directly informed the shapes and configurations on his canvases. The following chapter functions as an entry point into the comparative analysis of Bacon's paintings and their formal references in chapter 3, by contrasting how the artist presented himself with the reality of his procedures. Bacon regularly singled out *Painting 1946*, 1946 as the paradigm of the accidental genesis of his imagery, which makes this work an ideal point of departure for testing the validity of his claims.

'I don't really know how these particular forms come about'[173]

The significance of luck, chance, and accident is the issue the artist and his interviewers discussed most consistently and frequently. From one of the earliest statements in 1953[174]

170 Matthew Gale, 'Francis Bacon: Working on Paper', in *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, ed. by Matthew Gale, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1999 (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), pp. 13–36, p. 15.

171 Marcel Finke, *Prekäre Oberflächen: Zur Materialität des Bildes und des Körpers am Beispiel der künstlerischen Praxis Francis Bacons* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015), see also previous efforts: Marcel Finke, '"I Don't Find It at all Violent Myself": Bacon's Material Practice and the Human Body', in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 122–133.

172 Günther 2011.

173 Sylvester 2009, p. 100.

174 Cf. Bacon 1953, p. 12.

to the last interview in 1991,[175] Bacon emphasised the role this played in his art as well as his belief that it is the accidental image which has the strongest impact of all.[176] Bacon rated chance as no less than 'one of the most important and fertile aspects'[177] of his work. Hardly any interviewer ever challenged these claims in conversation. Richard Cork was a rare exception when he expressed doubts on the basis of the 'very complicated'[178] nature of Bacon's canvases, but only provoked an evasive response from the artist.[179]

Bacon struggled to clearly define what he meant by chance and accident and claimed repeatedly not to know what chance even was.[180] Often, Bacon's statements are contradictory. He said that it may have been 'inspired chance'[181] which had influenced his work, but in the same conversation explained that he was neither 'inspired [nor] gifted'.[182] He denied any proximity to 'trance-like'[183] states, which did not stop him from regarding himself 'not so much as a painter but as a medium for accident and chance. […].'[184] Bacon used terminology ranging from 'chance',[185] 'accident',[186] and 'luck'[187] via 'instinct'[188] to the less frequently used 'hazard',[189] 'unconscious',[190] 'non-rational'[191] or the feeling of being 'in a fog'.[192] These terms have in common that they appear to describe something that the artist did not willingly intend and decide: something which defies control. What the unknown force might be is hardly narrowed down by what Bacon thinks it is not. For example, he rejects the spontaneity of Abstract Expressionism as a reference due to its alleged 'sloppiness.'[193] However, Bacon claimed to share with Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism an awareness of the psychological structure of the mind in the vein of Sigmund Freud, elaborating that the elements of 'control' and 'surprise' which determine his working process tally with Freud's

175 Cf. 'I'll go on until I drop' 1991; see also Sylvester 2009, p. 53; Archimbaud 2010, p. 87; Beard 1975, p. 16; and Davies, H. M. 2009, p. 109.
176 See also Sylvester 2009, p. 53; Archimbaud 2010, p. 87; Davies, H. M. 2009, p. 109; and Beard 1975, p. 16.
177 Sylvester 2009, p. 52.
178 'I'll go on until I drop' 1991.
179 Ibid.
180 Cf. Sylvester 2009, p. 98; see also Beard 1975, p. 16.
181 Sylvester 2009, p. 96.
182 Ibid., p. 100.
183 Ibid., p. 96.
184 Ibid., p. 140.
185 Archimbaud 2010, p. 87.
186 Ibid., p. 81.
187 Bacon 1953, quoted from Durham 1985, p. 231.
188 Archimbaud 2010, p. 73.
189 Sylvester 2009, p. 98 and p. 104.
190 Archimbaud 2010, p. 84.
191 Sylvester 2009, p. 58.
192 Archimbaud 2010, p. 87.
193 Sylvester 2009, p. 94, cf. also p. 92.

distinction of the conscious and unconscious.[194] Yet, on another occasion he claimed to draw on psychoanalytical references simply to avoid 'metaphysical'[195] explanations.

The intention of his proclaimed working method, it appears, is to create somewhat stronger, more immediate and more powerful paintings by circumnavigating the brain and creating images in an irrational, accidental manner.[196] By the same token, chance helped Bacon, according to himself, to avoid the detested notion of illustration because the image created by accident would bypass the artist's own intellectual decisions too.[197] Bacon pointed out that he employed a certain editing process, however. Once provoked into existence, accidental emanations should be subject to the artist's 'instinct, self-criticism, and critical sense',[198] he thought. Thus, luck and chance are always balanced by skill and decision, but maintaining an air of mystery, he explained that their effects were indistinguishable.[199]

Some comments stand out from the usual narrative, and every so often Bacon admitted that he developed his imagery in relation to specific pictorial sources of inspiration. For example, he acknowledged the reference to photographic reproductions of Diego Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, c.1650 for his own Pope series, photographs of his sitters for portraits, and also mentioned that the figure in the right panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* of 1962 was inspired by Cimabue's *Crucifix*, Santa Croce, c.1265.[200] No critic has ever addressed these contradictions in conversation with Bacon, nor investigated the matter any further. Instead, the hints towards an alternative interpretation of his processes went unheard, and were overshadowed by the story of the fortuitous working method.

Often, it is not entirely clear what aspect of his work Bacon referred to when he claimed that chance played a significant role in his art. An accurate localisation within his practice, however, is key for a correct evaluation of his comments. For instance, chance – albeit of the deliberately provoked and controlled kind – played an important part in his paint application and the alterations of the studio items by decay (see chapter 3.2.2. and 2.3.). For the present analysis, the most relevant aspect within Bacon's considerations on luck, accident, and chance is their alleged role in the development of his iconography. Surprisingly, the artist himself claimed to be completely oblivious as to the genesis of this imagery. He stated that he did not know 'how these particular forms come about'[201] and that he did not know how 'these marks that have happened on the canvas evolved into these particular forms'[202] and that 'things [images] just drop in like slides'.[203]

194 Archimbaud 2010, p. 84.
195 Ibid.
196 Cf. Sylvester 2009, p. 120.
197 Cf. ibid., p. 58.
198 Sylvester 2009, p. 149.
199 Cf. ibid., p. 52.
200 Cf. ibid., p. 14, p. 24 and p. 38.
201 Ibid, p. 100.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid., p. 136.

In general, it is a somewhat futile task to cross-check an artist's comments by comparing it with the truth his work tells. Artwork and artist's statement are different entities and no artist is obliged to accurately explain his work to the public. Why should a magician reveal their tricks? On the contrary, Bacon is not the only artist actively editing the perception and interpretation of his work. Joseph Beuys' fabricated story to explain why he used felt and fat, a purported reference to the Crimean Tatars wrapping him up in those materials after his plane crashed in WWII, is equally infamous and persistent in art history.[204] Yet in Bacon's case, a closer look at the validity of his words is necessitated by the persistence of the idea in scholarship to a degree which makes it difficult to introduce alternative approaches. To date, critics prefer the idea of the ingenious masterpiece emerging out of thin air to analysing technical facts and necessities. For instance, Rachel Campbell-Johnston was convinced that 'curators [of the 2008 Bacon retrospective at Tate] ask us to think about the processes of making,' but this, she said, 'will not establish his place in posterity through technical analysis' because '[Bacon's] works are not illuminated by logic' and 'at the heart of his works lies an essential mystery'.[205] Scholars are only reluctantly starting to evaluate the artist's assertions more carefully, and voices like Dexter Dalwood's, who, endorsing Cork's objections, remarked in 2008 that 'to simply accept Bacon's version of how images floated into his head and then appeared on the canvas is to detract from his great skill as a painter'[206] are still scarce. Yet this is the line of enquiry that should be pursued – not to diminish Bacon's art but to highlight a highly creative and unique working process.

Painting 1946, 1946

Bacon usually resorted to *Painting 1946*, 1946 as a paradigmatic example of how he embraced chance procedures (plate I). He claimed to have adopted a passive role in its creation, having been guided by inexplicable 'accidents' as he explained to David Sylvester in 1962:

> 'Well, one of the pictures I did in 1946, the one like a butcher's shop, came to me as an accident. I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field. And it may have been bound up in some way with the three forms that had gone before, but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another. […] It suddenly suggested an opening-up into another area of feeling altogether. And then I made these things, I gradually made them. So that I don't think the bird suggested the umbrella; it suddenly suggested this whole image.'[207]

204 Cf. Frank Gieseke and Albert Markert, *Flieger, Filz und Vaterland: Eine erweiterte Beuys Biografie* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996), pp. 71–77.

205 Campell-Johnson 2008.

206 Dexter Dalwood, 'Exhibition Reviews, Francis Bacon, London', *Burlington Magazine*, 150.1269 (December 2008), 841–842, p. 841.

207 Sylvester 2009, p. 11.

Over the course of his career, Bacon reiterated the same narrative,[208] with a variation provided by Russell who added in 1971 that according to the artist, *Painting 1946* began as a 'chimpanzee in long grass',[209] which then led to the bird alighting on a field. The artist's comments have long been taken at face value and scholarship to date seizes upon them. After Rothenstein and Alley, John Russell, and Hugh M. Davies before him, Michael Peppiatt still repeated the story of *Painting 1946*'s accidental genesis in 2009.[210]

Bacon claimed that he 'couldn't say where any of these elements [in *Painting 1946*] came from.'[211] However, by closely analysing his working material we will be able to determine that they probably originated in the images he collected in his studio. The composition, along with the motif of the umbrella, is based on a torn and overpainted leaf mounted on cardboard, which was discovered among the studio contents.[212] The photogravure from J.A. Hammerton's *Peoples of all Nations: Their Life Today and Story of Their Past* published between 1922–1924, shows two young Asian boys on a dusty road, with one of them carrying a large umbrella (plate II). On close inspection of the work in the flesh, one notices the margin of primed canvas around the right edge of the umbrella and parts of the carcass on the same side.[213] The shape of these motifs must therefore have been decided at an early stage of the painting process and was not altered during its development. Their shape cannot have been accidental, and was not determined by 'one continuous accident mounting on top of another'.

It appears the page from *Peoples of all Nations* provided the artist with an intriguing found picture and a convenient starting point for further creative explorations in equal measure. Judging by the elements Bacon adopted, he might initially have been attracted to the powerful image of the dark cavity underneath the umbrella. Bacon seems not to have liked the original layout of the image, though. He drew a simple, rectangular construction on the photogravure which encloses the figures. It gives the picture a more symmetrical composition, a new spatial arrangement and a stronger focus on the umbrella. This novel arrangement distinctively echoes in *Painting 1946*, especially with the umbrella being slightly off centre here, too. Harrison has suggested that a source of inspiration might have been Masaccio's fresco of the *The Holy Trinity*, c.1426–1428.[214] If this crucifixion, which is famous

208 For example, Archimbaud 2010, p. 80–81.

209 Russell John 2001, p. 24.

210 Cf. Rothenstein 1964, p. 12; see also Alley, Rothenstein 1964, p. 40; Davies, H. M. 1978, p. 70; Russell John 2001, p. 24; Peppiatt 2006a, p. 17, Peppiatt leaves Bacon's claim uncommented.

211 Bacon to Michael Peppiatt in 1989, see Peppiatt 2008b, p. 191.

212 RM98F1:23: torn leaf, drawn over and mounted on support, *Peoples of all Nations: Their Life Today and Story of their Past*, ed. by J.A. Hammerton, 7 vols (London: The Fleetway House, 1922–1924), I, p. 147, see Günther 2011, p. 9.

213 I am very grateful to Danielle King, Lilian Tone, and Michael Duffy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, to have organised for me to see the original work in their Conservation Department on 17 February 2015.

214 Masaccio's fresco of the *Trinity*, c.1424–1428, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, see Harrison 2005a, p. 51, caption to ill. no.47.

for its central perspective, indeed had a share in the genesis of *Painting 1946*, it may have motivated Bacon to create an equally balanced, symmetrical composition and to adjust the composition of the photogravure accordingly.

In Hunter's photographs we can see an overpainted magazine page among the working material in Cromwell Place, which in all probability served as the base for the car in *Figure Getting out of a Car* from c.1944 (figure 73 and 76).[215] This indicates that the purposeful alteration of photographic material was already an established process in the mid-1940s. Therefore, while it is impossible to date the drawing on the photogravure from *Peoples of All Nations*, it is conceivable that Bacon manipulated the page with the two Asian children during the preparatory stages of *Painting 1946.* Bacon must have invested a certain amount of time and thought away from the canvas to develop and execute the new composition on the photogravure. That the painting process was thus interrupted, or preceded by preparatory work, of course belies Bacon's claim that the work's genesis was accidental.

The prominent umbrella in *Painting 1946* features in two works that directly precede it, in *Study for Man with Microphones* from the same year and in *Figure Study II*, 1945–1946. Instead of following the dictates of chance, not only did Bacon hark back to a found image but, moreover, repeated an already rehearsed motif.[216] The repetition and further development of a motif, however, is no accident but an established artistic strategy.[217] Since *Peoples of all Nations* was published well before *Study for Man with Microphones* and *Figure Study II* were made, this image may have triggered the inclusion of an umbrella in these paintings as well. Interestingly, the photogravure much later also provided the exact shape of the umbrella in the right panel of *Triptych 1974–1977*, 1974–1977 (plate VI). Consistent with Bacon's avowed dependence on chance, he explained that 'I didn't foresee those [umbrellas in *Triptych 1974–1977*]. This was a very unforeseen painting.'[218]

Other elements of its iconography draw on pre-existing imagery too. The upper half of the figure's face is subsumed by the black void underneath the umbrella and ends abruptly above a red moustache. Again, this element did not come about purely by chance but was appropriated from a chromolithograph in Ludwig Grünwald's *Atlas-Manuel des Maladies de la Bouche, du Pharynx et des Fosses Nasales* from 1903, showing the chin, lower lip, and

215 The Mercedes from the picture was directly adopted for the painting. However, the upper part of the torn page was overpainted by the artist: torn leaf, overpainted, Heinrich Hoffmann, 'The Führer Who Commands', *Picture Post*, 13 July 1940, leaf photographed by Sam Hunter in the Cromwell Place studio, 1950, illustrated in: *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, exh. cat. (London: Tate Britain, 2008), p. 16, ill. no. 2, cf. Chris Stephens, 'Animal', in *Francis Bacon*, ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, exh. cat. London: Tate Britain, 2008/2009; Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2009; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009 (London: Tate Pub., 2008), pp. 90–95, p. 92. If photographed in the overpainted state, the magazine page must have been altered previously, which indicates that it was indeed used for *Figure Getting out of a Car*.

216 Cf. Harrison 2005a, p. 50.

217 Cf. Martin Harrison, 'Painting, Smudging', in *Francis Bacon – New Studies: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Martin Harrison (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 143–167, p. 154.

218 Sylvester 2009, p. 138.

teeth of a man with scurvy (plate III).[219] The significance of this publication for Bacon and the proximity to his oeuvre is underlined by the fact that two fragments of *Atlas-Manuel des Maladies de la Bouche* were found in the studio, which scholars in the past linked to the centre panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944.[220] It is likely this very publication Bacon remembered buying in Paris in the late 1920s, and which he then averred to have become 'obsessed by'.[221] Bacon edited out the lower lip and the fingers holding it down, but other elements from the medical illustration are recognisable, for instance the dominant chin and the number of teeth, including the dark rims on their bottom caused by the disease.[222] The upper teeth are barely visible in both images, unlike the prominent red moustache. Most significantly, the fragmentary nature of the illustration echoes strongly in this work. The black underneath the umbrella is perfectly homogenous and entirely smooth; nothing indicates that a complete face had ever been considered, which means that Bacon adopted the predetermined omission. In the book, the upper half of the face was left out for didactical reasons – to focus on the diseased areas of the mouth – but this was transformed by Bacon into an eerie gesture.

Bacon only painted flowers around the mid-1940s[223] and chose to depict a rose only once, here, in *Painting 1946*. With the help of the studio material, I was able to trace its origins in photography. Formal coherences indicate that it was informed by the hand-tinted photographic reproduction of a yellow tea rose 'Amelia Earhart' as portrayed in J. Horace McFarland's *Roses of the World in Color* from 1937 (plate IV).[224] The publication has completely disintegrated but a single torn leaf featuring a different variety was found in Reece Mews.[225] This item, once identified and dated, led to the yellow blossom relevant to *Painting 1946* in the same publication. The shape of the petals in the photographic reproduction match those of the painted blossom, with only little variation; its leaves were appropriated precisely. Not only was the overall shape borrowed from the pre-existing image but Bacon adopted its colour one-on-one. Contrary to his usual attitude, Bacon admitted in 1973 that 'the yellow button hole [in *Painting*] was from an image in a photo and I liked that colour.'[226] The present approach confirms Bacon's claim and illustrates the significance of this and similar statements, and the necessity to re-evaluate them carefully.

The dark colours of the foreground contrast strongly with the striking shades of pink in the blinds and the background. Pink hues must have preoccupied the painter around 1946,

219 Grünwald 1903, tab.1, fig.1.
220 Cf. Boxer 1975, p. 39.
221 Sylvester 2009, p. 35.
222 Six, straight, upright teeth and two crooked ones on the outside are visible in both the illustration and the painting.
223 See e.g. *Figure Getting out of a Car*, c. 1944 and *Figure Study I*, 1945.
224 J. Horace McFarland, *Roses of the World in Color* (London: Cassell, 1937), p. 6, 'Amelia Earhart', see Günther 2011, p. 9.
225 RM98F105:93: J. Horace McFarland, *Roses of the World in Color* (London: Cassell, 1937), pp. 163–164, recto: 'The Polyantha Rose, Mlle. Cécile Brunner'.
226 Davies, H. M. 2009, p. 122.

as paint samples from *Study for Man with Microphones*, c.1946–1948 show that this now overpainted work contained large areas in a similar colour.[227] Reminiscent of the repeated depiction of the umbrella, the recurrent use of the same colours makes it unlikely that they appeared by chance. We also know how much effort went into achieving the matt pink of the background. Bacon is reported to have mixed it from pastel hues because oil paint did not produce the right tone.[228] Deliberately working on creating a specific colour, of course, contradicts the story of the accidental genesis of *Painting 1946*.[229] If it was Bacon's goal to achieve a specific colour, he must have had a clear idea of it in mind or may indeed have had the colour in front of him. A powdery muted pink, not unlike the one in the background of the painting, featured frequently in fashion magazines of 1946.[230] That Bacon took an interest in fashion magazines at that time is indicated by a fragment from *Vogue*, April 1947 found in the studio.[231] An advertisement on the inside cover of *Vogue*, March 1946, for instance, promoted a lipstick of 'a surprise colour, a new colour, an angelic, ethereal, rose-tinted, perfectly Heavenly Pink'[232] on a monochrome pink background strongly resembling the one in *Painting 1946*. Bacon occasionally wore make-up himself and the light pink in *Triptych – Studies of the Human Body*, 1970, has in the past been connected to his colour schemes.[233] Thus, an advertisement for lipstick might have been of particular interest to the artist. The colours in the background of *Painting 1946* have faded dramatically since the mid-1940s and the colours of the blinds have turned from raspberry to pink.[234] Keen to keep the original character of the work intact, Bacon suggested to the Museum of Modern Art, the owner of the work, to fix it himself with an emulsion paint, but his offer was rejected.[235] During the course of the negotiations, Bacon sent samples of the colours he would like the blinds and background to be to the museum.[236] While one of them is a torn leaf from a book Bacon overpainted in a dark purple, the other one, meant for the background itself, is

227 Cf. Joanna Shepard, 'A Game of Chance: The Media and Techniques of Francis Bacon', in *Francis Bacon: A Terrible Beauty*, ed. by Logan Sisley, exh. cat. Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2009/2010 (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 152–175, p. 156.

228 Cf. Eugena Ordonez, 'Technical Report on Painting 1946', MoMa Conservation Archives (6 May 1985), quoted from Shepard 2009, footnote 12 on p. 155, p. 174.

229 Cf. Shepard 2009, footnote 12 on p. 155, p. 174.

230 *Vogue*, March 1946, inside cover, lipstick advertisement, 'Gala', see also *Vogue*, April 1946, p. 20: advertisement for 'Laeta Ramage', and the background of the captions on pp. 82–83 and p. 93: advertisement for 'Yardley Hand Cream'.

231 The Estate of Francis Bacon, studio item: fragment of leaf, mounted on support, George Platt Lynes, Christopher Isherwood, 1946, *Vogue*, April 1947, p. 71.

232 *Vogue* 1946a, inside cover, lipstick advertisement, 'Gala'.

233 Cf. Harrison 2005a, p. 93, caption to ill. no.87.

234 Cf. MoMA Conservation Archives, letter, 9 May 1984, from Antoinette King to William Rubin.

235 Cf. MoMA Conservation Archives, letter, 24 September 1970, from Francis Bacon to William S. Liebermann, and letter, 2 November 1970, from William S. Liebermann to Francis Bacon.

236 The two samples were sent to the Conservation Department of the Museum of Modern Art New York by the artist in 1971. They are now held as part of the in the conservation files on *Painting 1946*. In 1984, Bacon changed his mind and wanted the colours to be preserved as they were, see MoMA Conservation Archives, letter, 9 May 1984, from Antoinette King to William Rubin.

a cutting from a page with a printed pink colour. Thus, again, Bacon *picked* a pre-existing hue, just like he might have done initially.

The composition, the umbrella, the figure's chin, the rose in its button hole, and the colour in the background of *Painting 1946* are all atrributable to found imagery and the artist's own manipulation of that material. To integrate all sources into a cohesive picture, Bacon must have invested time and thought into their arrangement on the picture plane and balancing out their varying sizes on the canvas. The result is a complex yet harmonious work, which stands in stark contrast to the artist's assertions on how his images came about. The treatment of space and depth alone, for example, are clearly well thought-through: the white railing is closest to the viewer, then comes the seated figure, behind it are the carcasses of meat and at the very back are the blinds, all arranged in a well-balanced vertical symmetry. This overall consistency is impossible to create on a whim but it requires thought and planning to achieve the desired effect.

As we have seen, the development of the iconography in *Painting 1946* was guided by a conscious process of deliberately picking, choosing, combining, and editing source material. It must therefore be re-classified: rather than being a prime example of an accidental working process, it is a prime example of a deliberate and elaborate working practice based on the manipulation and appropriation of mechanically reproduced illustrations and photographs.

Beneath the Surface

The present study shows that Bacon's insistence on the accidental emergence of *Painting 1946*'s imagery is untenable. None of the sources identified so far depict an ape and a bird. Can traces of these animals be found on the canvas? Indeed, the lower part of the painting was subject to several alterations. A number of white curved lines shimmer through the dark layers of paint of the figure's suit and legs. Close to the white railing in the foreground, circular pink and purple structures are barely covered up by the present surface. Yet none of the shapes bears any resemblance to any kind of animal.

The conservation department of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, kindly provided an X-radiography of *Painting 1946*, which allowed a more detailed reconstruction of the development of the work (plate V).[237] Such an image may reveal traces of previous efforts and earlier versions of the present state, provided they were executed with pigments containing heavy metals such as lead and chromium traditionally used in white hues.[238] The radiograph confirms that the upper part of the painting underwent only minor changes, and was planned out to show only the garlands, the hanging carcass, and the umbrella in the exact manner in which they are visible today. With the help of the X-radiography, we

237 I am most grateful to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for sending me the image and allowing me to use it in my analysis.

238 Cf. Mauro Matteini and Arcangelo Moles, *Naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungsmethoden in der Restaurierung*, illustrated by Andreas Burmester (Munich: Callwey, 1990), pp. 62–72.

are also able to define more accurately the nature of the alterations in the lower half of the composition.

The X-radiography image reveals parts of a fantastic creature with bulky shoulders and two bestial legs ending in a pair of paws. The left leg of the creature is positioned directly underneath the leg of the suited man, indicating that the development of the later figure is closely connected to the earlier figure. The shape of the shoulders is echoed above the limbs; Bacon seems to have changed their size once. The exaggerated anatomy resembles anatomies in preceding paintings, such as the left panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944 and *Study for a Figure*, c.1945. If Bacon originally intended to create a figure in the manner of the linear, sculptural creatures in these works, but in the end decided to commit to the painterly, human figure we know today, the X-radiography of *Painting 1946* supports this work's great significance as a turning point in his overall stylistic development. However, the repetition of an already established motif would, again, not have been the result of an accident. Moreover, the creature neither resembles a chimpanzee nor a bird. Instead, its claws are reminiscent of a big cat and the overall appearance is stiff and static, unlike an alighting bird, despite the fact that Bacon insisted that *Painting 1946* emerged out of the 'memory of a photograph, of something alighting'.[239]

Judging from the X-radiography, the iconography in *Painting 1946* was not developed out of an attempt to paint a monkey and a bird and there is no reason not to regard the alterations revealed by the radiograph as *pentimenti*, simple changes of heart. Instead, the current imagery was inspired by a mixture of the memory of previous works and a set of photographic sources of inspiration and executed, as argued above, following the shapes and forms of that printed material.

A Familiar Agent

In the 20th century, chance as an element of artistic practice was explored by artists ranging from Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and Jean Arp via Jackson Pollock to Gerhard Richter and Fischli & Weiss. The notion of chance was related to various forms of expression including the ready-made, collage, expressionist painting, performance, and participation art.[240] Even though the manner and context in which it was employed differ widely, all approaches challenge the very definition of what constitutes a work of art and what determines the role of the artist.[241]

At the beginning of the last century, Duchamp was one of the first artists to systematically explore the properties of chance. He experimented with the random shapes created by falling threads in a standardized process in *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913–1914.

239 HKA: TGA 2008/16/16/4/2/9 'Bacon Interviews IIIa', Interview III, December 1971, FB 37.

240 Cf. Margaret Iversen, 'Introduction: The Aesthetics of Chance', in *Chance: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. by Margaret Iversen (London/Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 12–27, p. 12.

241 Cf. Meredith Malone, 'Introduction', in Meredith Malone, *Chance Aesthetics*, exh. cat. St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009/2010 (St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009), pp. 3–7, p. 3.

Wooden templates following the curves thus created were later integrated in *The Large Glass*, 1915–1923.[242] By employing chance to create his forms, Duchamp successfully avoided any 'authorial or artistic agency'.[243] *Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Law of Chance)*, 1916–1917, by the Dadaist Jean Arp was made according to a similar principle. Dada utilised chance as a means to startle the social establishment and, in conjunction with unconventional materials like printed news images, to defy artistic conventions.[244] Influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories on the unconscious motivation of everyday 'accidents' such as slips of the pen, from the mid-1920s, André Breton, the forward thinker of Surrealism, shaped its theory and practice.[245] On the basis of Freud's writing, he promoted the idea that beauty lies in the accidental, a 'chance encounter'[246] in the street or an intriguing '"trouvaille" or lucky find spotted amidst the detritus of a flea market'.[247] Breton's Surrealism employed chance to bypass consciousness and intentionality to allow 'access to an otherwise inaccessible reality'.[248] Breton's ideas are seized on, for example, in Max Ernst's frottages such as *Forest and Dove,* 1927 and André Masson's automatic drawings.

Bacon admired Duchamp but the more significant point of contact with chance as an artistic agent was probably Surrealism. While having an ambivalent relationship with the movement, Bacon was, according to himself, greatly influenced by it in the early stages of his career.[249] In painting, Bacon respected Ernst and Masson, admired Luis Buñuel's films, and was well-familiar with Surrealist magazines such as *Documents* and *Minotaure*.[250] Bacon knew Breton's writings and, as Harrison suggested, his comments on luck and chance might well be owing to surrealist automatism.[251] When Bacon talks about images which emerged 'without the brain interfering'[252] and coming 'straight out of the unconscious'[253] it appears he is echoing Breton's wish to sidestep conscious decision to gain access to novel visual experiences.[254] Bacon himself, however, rejected any overlap of his practice with surrealist automatism.[255] And yet, what distinguishes Bacon most from all positions mentioned above,

242 Cf. Dario Gamboni, 'Stumbling Over/Upon Art', *Cabinet Magazine: Chance*, 19 (Fall 2005) <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/19/gamboni.php> [accessed 31 July 2021].
243 Iversen 2010, pp. 12.
244 Cf. e.g. Malone, 'Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object', in Meredith Malone, *Chance Aesthetics*, exh. cat. St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009/2010 (St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009), pp. 70–71, p. 70.
245 Cf. André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1924); see also Iversen 2010, p. 20.
246 Iversen 2010, p. 20.
247 Ibid.
248 Cf. ibid., p. 20.
249 Cf. Sylvester 2000, p. 245; see also Archimbaud 2010, p. 128.
250 Cf. Ades 1985, p. 12; see also: Michael Peppiatt (1996), *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, revised and updated (London: Constable, 2008), p. 63.
251 Cf. Harrison 2005a, p. 36.
252 Sylvester 2009, p. 120.
253 Sylvester 2009, p. 120.
254 Cf. Iversen 2010, p. 20.
255 Cf. Harrison 2009b p. 154.

is the fact that his avowed precept of luck and chance in the genesis of his iconography did not tally with his methods. For example, the umbrella, as can be seen in *Painting 1946*, *Study for Man with Microphones*, *Figure Study II* and *Triptych 1974–1977* might be a 'staple of Surrealist phallic symbolism'[256] but the way it came into existence was most unsurreal. Instead of emerging from of the artist's unconsciousness it was borrowed from a pre-existing image.

The Not-So-Accidental Working Process

Ultimately, Bacon's concept of chance remains elusive and unspecific. The ensuing vagueness and inconsistency perhaps indicate that Bacon's aim was neither a deliberately constructed concept, nor a defined practice like the one Duchamp developed to create his *Standard Stoppages* or the Surrealist use of *frottage*. The fact that he nonetheless insisted on and promoted his dependence on chance suggests that it may have been Bacon's aim to connect the *notion* of fortuitousness with his work in a general way and make that an inherent part of his public image. To entice the public and his critics to believe that his iconography was based on chance procedures released Bacon from any obligation to explain his work with photographs, and from having to explain their relationship to the finished painting. His efforts may therefore be rated as a diversionary tactic. Bacon was taking advantage of the inherent nature of chance itself, as defined by William Wollaston, who elaborated that it 'seems to be only a term, by which we express our ignorance of the cause of any thing'.[257] Bacon's tactics turned out to be successful: the alleged working principle paired with Bacon's resistance towards a detailed study of his working environment successfully prevented further inquiries and deeper insights into his actual procedures.

The aura of inexplicability certainly spurred the interest in his work. Bacon had successfully created a 'personal mystique'[258] by deliberately cultivating a fictional dependency on luck and chance which 'overrule[d] more mundane explanations'[259] of his work. This exciting story, unfettered by the tedious details of everyday struggle, was gratefully accepted in scholarship and perpetuated by writers and critics. Bacon's comments also contain an element of self-idealisation and self-promotion underlining the uniqueness and therefore monetary and intellectual value of each work: '[…], how can I recreate an accident?' Bacon asked, 'it's almost an impossible thing to do.'[260] The analysis of *Painting 1946* and its formal references demonstrated that Bacon's insistence on the accidental occurrence of his iconography has to be firmly rejected. While chance certainly played an important role in other aspects of his work, it does not in relation to the origin of his imagery.

256 Harrison 2005a, p. 50.
257 William Wollaston, 'Relig. Nat. v.83', in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), III, p. 10.
258 Shepard 2009, p. 153.
259 Ibid.
260 Sylvester 2009, p. 18.

1.4. The Iceberg – Research Material and Definition of 'Photographic Reference'

The last chapter described how the iconography of *Painting 1946*, 1946, the one work that Bacon so emphatically presented as paradigmatic for the accidental genesis of his imagery, was in reality developed with the help of pre-existing images. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate that what holds true for this work applies to large parts of Bacon's oeuvre, if not to every painting he ever created.

In 1999, David Sylvester entitled an essay in the exhibition catalogue of the show *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper* at Tate Britain, which displayed Bacon's newly emerged sketches, 'Bacon's Secret Vice'.[261] The text, as well as the exhibition, drew their impact from the fact that Bacon had always denied executing any. Sylvester explained that he had been aware of some sketches since the early 1960s, but had kept that knowledge to himself.[262] In light of the amount of material he was now confronted with, Sylvester called the ones he had seen 'the tip of the iceberg.'[263] The more significant 'secret vice', however, was Bacon's work with and from photographic material. In that sense, the photographic reference material for his paintings known during his lifetime was in fact the true 'tip of the iceberg'. The 'body of the iceberg', an extensive collection of one-on-one connections between photographic source material and painted iconography, will be assessed and examined here for the first time.

To delineate the relationship between two images is by its nature a difficult business. What might at first sight look self-evident is on closer inspection hard to pin down, elusive, and subjective. Most importantly, the reasons for claiming a connection, beyond the projections and associations of the recipient, need to be determined by looking at qualities inherent in the pictures themselves.[264] To that end I will study formal correspondences between pictorial elements: compositional building blocks like figures, spatial settings, or fragments thereof, and colours. These correspondences are mainly defined in terms of the matching of outlines of bodies and spaces. This also includes the positioning, dimensions, and proportions of limbs and perspective lines, their positioning on the picture plane, and their arrangement in relation to each other. Stylistic and generic references will be mentioned but are not the main focus of this study. A connection can only conclusively be established when a reference image pre-dates the painting in question, which makes the identification and dating of the torn book pages and fragments and shreds of newspapers a crucial first

261 David Sylvester, 'Bacon's Secret Vice', in *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, ed. by Matthew Gale, exh. cat. London: Tate Gallery, 1999 (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), pp. 9–11.

262 Cf. ibid., p. 9.

263 Ibid., p. 9.

264 Cf. Peter Geimer, 'Vergleichendes Sehen oder Gleichheit aus Versehen? Analogie und Differenz in kunsthistorischen Bildvergleichen', in *Vergleichendes Sehen*, ed. by Lena Bader, Martin Gaier and Falk Wolf (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2010), pp. 44–68, p. 57, cited from Guido Isekenmeier, 'In Richtung einer Theorie der Interpiktorialität', in *Interpiktorialität. Theorie und Geschichte der Bild-Bild-Bezüge*, ed. by Guido Isekenmeier (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), pp. 11–86, p. 13.

step.[265] The date of publication does not, however, have to be synonymous with the date of acquisition, or the date when the artist first saw an image, and this also has to be taken into account. Other criteria can help to argue in favour of a connection. The closest possible correlation is established when alterations to a working document are echoed directly in a painting. Any other supposed association is a matter of likelihood. It is for instance very likely that the artist saw an image which was found in Reece Mews, or which is known to have been there, or in any of his other studios at some point. And whenever working documents show fingerprints or other signs of heavy use such as crumpling, they are more plausible candidates than undisturbed ones. If an image cannot be associated with a studio, the connection to a painted subject depends on additional clues, for instance quotes from the artist mentioning the material, observations from friends or critics who saw the image, its availability to the artist in London or another place he is known to have travelled to or lived in at a certain point in time, and a pronounced interest in the subject.

List of Pictorial References to Francis Bacon's Paintings

In an unprecedented attempt, long-known links mentioned in publications on the artist and newly discovered ones were compiled in a single file, *List of Pictorial References to Francis Bacon's Paintings*. The first entry, the earliest known reference to photographic material, is *Crucifixion*, 1933. It draws on an inverted reproduction of an X-ray of a rib cage from *Atlas-Manuel des Maladies de la Bouche, du Pharynx et des Fosses Nasales*, 1903 (figure 7 and 8).[266] Bacon was to employ the same technique almost 30 years later when he inverted a photographic reproduction of Cimabue's *Crucifix*, Santa Croce, c.1265, which he used as the base image for the figure on the right panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962,[267] and he appears to have reversed several source images over the course of his career.[268] At this early stage of his career, in *Crucifixion,* 1933 Bacon already imaginatively fused a photographic source with influences from fine art, specifically Picasso's *Baigneuse aux Bras Levés*, 1929, and the same artist's *Crucifixion drawing after Grünewald,* 1932.[269]

The list forms the core of the present study. It neither pretends to be exhaustive nor exclusive and will have to be extended in the future, when further analysis of Bacon's working material yields more hitherto undetected references. The list includes the date of publication, bibliographical data, and photographer of each source item, and specifies whether

265 Cf. Martin Harrison, 'Introduction', in *Francis Bacon: Metamorphoses*, by Katharina Günther (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2011), p. 3.

266 Grünwald 1903, no page numbers, 'Sclérose du lobe inférieur du poumon gauche' (inverted).

267 Sylvester 2009, p. 14, RM98BC9: Paolo D'Ancona, *Les Primitifs Italiens du XIe au XIIIe Siecle*, (Paris: Editions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1935).

268 See, for example, the first frame of the fourth row from Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), plate 27, 'Man Performing Standing Broad Jump', which informed 'Figure on a Dais', 1958, cf. Harrison 2016a, p. 556.

269 Cf. Sylvester 2000, pp. 13–15; Herbert Read suggestively juxtaposed Picasso and Bacon in Herbert Read, *Art Now: An Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), ill. nos. 106–107.