

**Visualising Sentient Place:**  
**An artist's study of figure and place through the relationship of**  
**Francis Bacon's paintings with his Reece Mews studio**

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## **Visualising Sentient Place: An artist's study of figure and place through the relationship of Francis Bacon's paintings with his Reece Mews studio**

### **Abstract:**

This thesis looks at the human figure as place, taking the example of the artist Francis Bacon and his studio at 7 Reece Mews, London, to understand how an artist can visualise 'placed experience.' Bacon said, "I am very influenced by places – by the atmosphere of a room." I take this as a starting point to challenge the accepted 'caged' reading of his work. I argue that Bacon's oeuvre grew out of initial ideas in his work as an interior designer, to question how the human figure can be pictured. His 'sensitivity to places' informed Bacon's work and when he finally entered Reece Mews, aged 52, his work changed to reflect his own experience and milieu. Through a focus on edges in painting, considering the philosophy of Place by Edward S Casey, and Jeff Malpas, I outline how Bacon's studio became intrinsic to his working process, due to the 'chaotic' detritus he collected around him, which allowed him to bypass 'willed' authorship, so he became "a vessel through which an image took shape." The images that this extended self (or reversed self) created at Reece Mews lead to several late "figure paintings without figures," where the body-figure is replaced with the place-figure. An image of the human figure *as* place; sentient place.

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# Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

## 1.1/ Preface

This chapter firstly provides a basic introduction to this thesis and the research it represents. It also outlines the questions pursued in the research process and explains the term 'sentient place' identified in the thesis title. The penultimate section, entitled 'Why Bacon? Why Now,' locates the required, 'original contribution to knowledge' offered by the PhD research. The final section outlines the overall structure of the thesis.

## 1.2/ Specific focus

This thesis has two fundamental entry points. The first is a question of the visualisation of place and figure in terms of landscape/local environment. How do we visualise ourselves if we are not simply defined by the human body, if we understand ourselves *primarily* as a place which involves our immediate surroundings? This question arises out of my own creative practice, as well as an engagement with the ideas of *Place* as discussed by philosophers Edward S. Casey and Jeff Malpas, alongside ideas about *atmosphere* by Gernot Böhme. It also develops from my early interest in Bacon's work starting in the 1970s.

The second entry point which aims to help answer the first, is how place is visualised in the particular example of the work of Francis Bacon with relation to his studio at 7 Reece Mews, London. I have deliberately taken that relationship as the focal point of this research because it is a useful example of the way Bacon developed an image of a *place-figure*. A development of visual and methodological transformations that evolved in Bacon's later paintings, as this thesis will argue.

Reece Mews was an important place for Bacon personally and creatively, (this can be seen in artworks made during his time there). His relation to that studio/home can be understood as part of a lifelong interest in artworks dealing with interior spaces that revolved around relations between figure, room and landscape. For this research I use Reece Mews for several reasons: it is now a cultural artefact that is accessible to the public and which allows for a general discourse; it acts as part of the documentation of his work, his life and his main immediate environment; and, as it was 'archeologically' transferred to Dublin, it is a reasonably faithful reconstruction of that room at a particular point in time.

To discuss these two entry points through Bacon's work in relation to his studio at Reece Mews, I will use two phrases to define my thinking: 'the image of placed experience' and 'sentient place.' This thesis supports the view that Bacon's relationship to place is an important thread in his work, and that it needs to be understood through his imagery in relation to his working processes and how they deal with his sense of emplacement. Bacon emphasised the importance of making 'idea and technique inseparable,' so, as at least some of his works clearly reflect his immediate surrounding environment, place would become the focus for an image of a place-figure.<sup>1</sup>

There appear to be three stages to Bacon's development that engage with place. They can be, I suggest, roughly grouped as follows. The first is the usual figure-ground relationship of painting, where the main figure is related to some visual ground – this often happens in painting as a unified painterly field. The second phase is what I term here as an image of placed experience where Bacon focuses on his own milieu and especially his immediate

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<sup>1</sup> Bacon, writing about the paintings of Matthew Smith, says that his paintings are best when "...attempting to make idea and technique inseparable. ...a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa." Rothenstein, J., McDonnell, A.J.L., et al (1953) *Matthew Smith: Paintings from 1909-1952*, London, Tate Gallery Publications and Information Department, p.12.

surroundings. This seems to tentatively start in the 1950s but, I suggest, it really focuses around the mid-1960s when he settles into Reece Mews. The third phase, which I call sentient place, is very late in his career and develops out of his relation to, and methodology derived from Reece Mews. This takes place in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In this way my research moves the focus on Bacon's work away from the 1940s and 1950s, which is often his most discussed work as it supports the general view of Bacon as an existentialist artist, to his later paintings. I will argue that his sense of place was reflected in his works and more importantly, that the place itself, his Reece Mews studio, reversed the role of artist/studio in the way that he worked on and thought about the human figure. His openness to place questioned the very edge of the figure – the figure beyond the normally accepted body image. I suggest that this leads from his studio/figure works, through his portraits and arguably can be seen to culminate in his late *Sand Dune* (1983) painting. As I will discuss, this painting shows an understanding of the figure as landscape which itself reverses the perspective normally taken, with nature embedded within a cultural/artificial world. In the process I am discussing, the artist/studio roles of making are reversed. As Bacon says: "I always think of myself not so much as a painter but as a medium for accident and chance."<sup>2</sup> In this way, Bacon becomes a conduit for imagery – which moves him away from the traditional figure/ground painter, towards an articulated figure-as-landscape painter. Effectively, this is figure painting via a removal of the self – and where the studio/figure complex arguably becomes one of the main subjects of his late, mature work.

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<sup>2</sup> Bacon, F., (2005, 2009) *Bacon's Arena*, BBC Two Television, 19 Mar 2005, 1':05."

My contention is that Bacon's move to his Reece Mews studio in 1961 coincided with several changes in his life, and these started to mark a considerable transformation (or at least a clarification or consolidation) in some of Bacon's work over several decades.

My research questions can be summed up as follows:

The primary question is i) How do we visualise ourselves as place/surroundings rather than bodies?

This question, seen through the example of Francis Bacon and Reece Mews is refined through the secondary questions:

- i) How did Bacon's Reece Mews studio affect his work?
- ii) How is the Reece Mews studio reflected in certain artworks, and what does that mean to Bacon?
- iii) How do these artworks reflect ideas about *place*, particularly through atmosphere, edge and external emotion?
- iv) What was Bacon's relationship to place in his work and how did that change over his career?
- v) How does his work in relation to his Reece Mews studio question the way we visualise the human form?

Bacon's later work (from about the mid-1960s onward) can be seen to change from images of the sensational to images dealing with sensation.<sup>3</sup> His subject moves from the generalised cultural image to the more directly intimate and reflective world of his

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<sup>3</sup> Bacon tells Peppiatt: "When I was young I needed extreme subject matter...as I grew older I began to find the subject matter in my own life." Peppiatt, M., (2008) *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, rev. edition, London, Constable, p.254.

immediate milieu. This subject, visualising a sensory world, and creating an image of the sensory self/figure, appears to be latent in his work from very early on, in his furniture design and early artworks from the 1920s and 1930s, but arises more clearly later in life. I believe that at least one trajectory of his work moves from the realisation of the human figure *within* an environment to the human figure *as* environment.

As, philosopher of place, Jeff Malpas states:

Place is not founded on subjectivity but is that on which the notion of subjectivity is founded. Thus, one does not first have a subject that apprehends certain features of the world in terms of the idea of place; rather, the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place.<sup>4</sup>

It is Bacon's visualising of the place-figure through an image of placed experience that, I suggest, defines his late work and which comes at a time that 'place' is finding an image, a re-definition in wider, and changing context. As Edward S. Casey writes about the reemergence of Place from a predominance of Space and Time in Western culture: "it comes out of the concealment in which it has been kept for over two millennia."<sup>5</sup> The importance of an image of placed experience corresponds to Casey's idea that:

The 'where' is *back in place*, ... Painting, as one case in point, is no longer being done exclusively from a removed point of view, that is, "the view from nowhere" that obtains for homogenous monofocal space. Painters are acknowledging that they

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<sup>4</sup> Malpas, J. (2018a) *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, London and New York, Routledge, p.33.

<sup>5</sup> Casey, E.S. (1998) *The Fate of Place: a philosophical history*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, p.339.

paint *up close*, in the near sphere of full bodily engagement with the subject matter...<sup>6</sup>

This 'full bodily engagement' is the placed experience that I consider Bacon to have engaged with and then moved beyond, where the body becomes a *part* of something else – a sentient place.

### 1.3/ Sentient place

I started this research using Edward Casey's phrase the 'geographical self' as a way of establishing the idea of understanding the human figure as a wider 'landscape' that needs further exploration and clarification, and which also moves us away from defining ourselves purely in relation to the confines of the human body.<sup>7</sup> Casey's writing explores the geographical self in terms of local place, but I think it is necessary to examine this self within very specific limitations to be able to understand it more clearly in relation to Bacon. It seemed to me that Casey's idea of the 'geographical self' was still primarily about a human subject *in* something – however engaged that was. But ultimately, for this research, it felt more useful to replace that term with my own, 'sentient place', as I wanted to reverse the situation from human subject, to place as subject, to highlight the way I thought Bacon was allowing his imagery to arise from the studio avoiding conscious human subjective choice - or at the very least, through a mixture of both.

By the term 'sentient place' I mean to look at the human figure as placed – away from the body and reversing the emphasis usually placed there, looking from the place angle. If we

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<sup>6</sup> Casey 1998, p.340.

<sup>7</sup> Casey, E. S., (2001) 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91(4), pp.683–693.

are embedded in place then in some ways, we can consider ourselves as the sentient element of it, or at least, as Casey says, 'subject to place.'<sup>8</sup> How might we make an image of a human figure as subject to place? We would need to break up the normalised figurative form, open its edges and change its relations – question the accepted outline and invent new edges and structures to extend those old forms. What Bacon seems to do, at the end of his career, is to open place up as a zone of inner relationships which are explored through edges.

How are we embedded, a part of place, and how might a questioning of the depiction of ourselves change the way we see ourselves? Making images of human beings is fascinating as it explores fundamental questions of identity. How do we make an image of what we are in, what we experience, and how that place is us? How do we create an embedded figuration if the human body, as generally visualised and *thought* to be seen, is no longer the primary vehicle?

This making an image of a place-figure is problematic as it is something we are 'inside.' It expresses something otherwise invisible. As Anthony Miccoli states in *Topology* (2017):  
“The environment a human occupies does not simply affect the human, it constitutes the very mechanisms by which that humanity is apprehended and expressed.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Casey, E.S. (2001) 'Body, Self, and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World' in P. Adams, S. Hoelscher, & K. Till, eds. *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001) p.415.

<sup>9</sup> Miccoli, A. (2017) 'Topology' *Critical Posthumanism: Genealogy of the Posthuman* website, n.p. Available at: <https://criticalposthumanism.net/topology/> [Accessed: 12/05/24].

## 1.4/ Why Bacon, why now?

Francis Bacon's reputation continues to develop as his work sustains further interest and interpretation. His relevance to artists, curators, writers, theorists and a wider public today can be demonstrated by the numerous exhibitions and publications continuously produced world-wide.<sup>10</sup> Examples of recent publications include exhibition catalogues, monographs and biographies, such as: *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné* (2016), *Francis Bacon: Revelations* (2021); four books in *The Francis Bacon Studies* series (2019, 2019, 2020, 2021), *The Death of Francis Bacon* (2021), *Bacon in Moscow* (2022), *Francis Bacon: A Self-Portrait in Words* (2024), alongside other critical essays and academic writing.

Not least of the current Bacon exhibitions, generating world-wide interest, is the installation of the Reece Mews studio in the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane – which has been on view to the public since 2001. The studio room of Bacon's Reece Mews home has been faithfully reconstructed physically, apart from the natural lighting. It is now possible, not only to see the works made in that studio – to be found in numerous public collections and exhibitions – but also to visit a reconstruction of the immediate environment in which they were produced.

In twenty-first century critical and historical discourse, Bacon is perceived as an important artist. For example, he is one of “the greatest painters of the human body” according to theorist Rina Arya, who also quotes Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens who suggest that

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<sup>10</sup> For example, major exhibitions in the past decade or so have taken place at the Ashmolean, Oxford (2013-14); Guggenheim, Bilbao (2016-17); Tate, Liverpool and Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart (2016); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019-20); Royal Academy, London (2022); MASP - Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (2024); and the National Portrait Gallery, London (2024-5).

“Bacon was not only one of the great painters of the human form but one of the great articulators of the human condition.”<sup>11</sup>

One aspect of the continued interest in his work is the possible affect it could have on future artists. This current research is part of that group, demonstrating possible avenues of practice that arise from his work. In Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan’s recent biography *Francis Bacon: Revelations* (2021), the authors quote Colm Toibin and place his idea within a context that suggests how Bacon’s later work could be a useful guide for future artists. The authors write:

The writer Colm Toibin found “a restlessness here which we might also find in Beethoven’s late chamber music – a feeling that Bacon might begin again, that he is searching for some way to make images that he knows will only be possible for artists in the future, if they are even possible at all...” The idea of a figureless figure painting always fascinated Bacon. One of his first mature paintings, *Figure Study I* (1945-46), depicted an overcoat and a fedora suffused with the presence of an absent man. Bacon’s images of water and sand sometimes concealed a possible figure, as did the tightening in certain images of grass. In the shifting of the sand, he was still searching for a new figure.<sup>12</sup>

Gilles Deleuze, in the ‘Author’s Preface to the English Edition’ of *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation* (2003 orig 1981) also suggests possibilities in the later work:

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<sup>11</sup> Arya, R. (2009) ‘Remaking the Body: The Cultural Dimensions of Francis Bacon’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Taylor and Francis Group, 13:2, pp.143-158, Published online: 20 May 2009, p.143.

<sup>12</sup> Stevens, M. and Swan, A. (2021) *Francis Bacon: Revelations*, London, William Collins, pp.633-634 citing Colm Toibin ‘Late Francis Bacon: Spirit and Substance,’ in Michael Cary, ed., *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings* (New York: Gagosian Gallery/Rizzoli, 2015), p.803.

As of 1978-9, we can speak of a few paintings – still rare with Bacon – in which the figure has in effect disappeared, leaving a trace...of vapour, sand, dust, or grass. This new period, which seems so rich in possibilities for the future, is an abstraction which is purely Bacon's.<sup>13</sup>

In these quotes, both Toibin and Deleuze suggest a new development late in Bacon's oeuvre (that I see as a logical outcome of a longstanding interest in place), which sets out a possible avenue for figure painting/visualising for himself and for 'artists in the future.' The idea of Stevens and Swan's 'figureless figure painting' and the renewed interest in Place, as outlined by Edward Casey, arguably cohere in Bacon's late work and offer a rich area of visual research for younger figurative artists in our time. Edward Casey also points out one of the major factors in which Place has become important recently and one that artists are and will be dealing with: our relationship to our environment.<sup>14</sup>

As humans making art, Bacon says that we are obsessed with ourselves<sup>15</sup> – but what does 'ourselves' mean and how do images of ourselves help us to understand that? An ecological-self is understood by many to mean that we are part of something larger, connected to a world around us. But the constant imagery and idea of self as a standalone being, as a consumer and competitive product, takes us away from that understanding. Even the understanding of a connected self is not adequate – the reality is more complex. As Gernot Böhme writes "...the relation of modern man with nature can only be revised when he

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze, G., (trans Smith, D. W.) (2003) *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, London and New York, Continuum, p.xii.

<sup>14</sup> See Casey, E.S., (2009) *Getting Back into Place: toward a renewed understanding of the place-world*. Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, pp.xxi-xxxvi.

<sup>15</sup> Bacon states, "I think art is an obsession with life and, after all, as we are human beings our greatest obsession is with ourselves." Sylvester, D. (2016) *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd., p.72.

experiences himself *as nature*"<sup>16</sup> [my italics]. We are not just connected *to* nature; we are a *part* of something. David Seamon sums up the duality problem well when he writes:

There is a growing recognition that any dualistic conception of the people-environment relationship is inadequate because of the lived fact that human beings are always conjoined, enmeshed, and immersed in their world. In other words, a relationship that is assumed conceptually to be two (people/environment) is lived existentially as one (people-environment intertwinement). ... The two must be envisioned together as the experienced wholeness of people-in-world. ... I do not mean to suggest here that this holistic perspective is widely accepted in the environmental disciplines today. In fact, the dualistic, ecological perspective of people/environment reciprocity still dominates and has become even more entrenched, partly because of the popular tropes of sustainability, green design, and climate change.<sup>17</sup>

It seems to me that at least some works by Bacon deal with this duality issue in interesting ways that could be helpful to explore. The ramifications of his figure/place complex are broad, and the ways that we visualise ourselves in images are an important way of understanding that complexity. Developing ways of visualising ourselves and place can help change perspectives that we use and share. Visual culture reflects and can sometimes lead a wider awareness.

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<sup>16</sup> Böhme, G., (ed Thibaud, J-P.) (2018) *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, p.115.

<sup>17</sup> Seamon, D. (2012) 'Place, Place Identity, and Phenomenology, in Casakin, H., Romice, O., Porta, S. eds. *The Role of Place Identity in the Perception, Understanding, and Design of the Built Environment*, London, Betham Science Publishers, p.4.

The original contribution to knowledge in this thesis is a rethinking of figurative imagery in terms of Place – using place as the *primary* viewpoint. As this subject needs a specific place to analyse, and shared information for further discussion, the research focuses on Francis Bacon’s oeuvre, and particularly his relationship with his Reece Mews studio/home. I outline the resulting reading of his work, which not only brings together parts of his output that are otherwise understood as discrete and to some degree at odds with his main career,<sup>18</sup> but more importantly places his Reece Mews studio and home as central to his later development of figurative painting. This research demonstrates the way Bacon, through an engagement with specific place and milieu and using chance procedures, opened his work to extended possibilities of figurative painting beyond the body’s skin to a multiply-edged interior world of relationships, creating works late in his career that allowed place to become the central driver of figurative imagery. This reading shows Bacon as a useful guide for later artists to reconsider the human figure primarily in terms of, *and through the agency of*, local environment. The research also opens a new overview into the lineage of place within Francis Bacon’s work, initiating a line of enquiry that builds on ideas that Martin Harrison (*In Camera*)<sup>19</sup>, Margarita Cappock (*Francis Bacon’s Studio*)<sup>20</sup> and Katharina Günther (*Francis Bacon: In the Mirror of Photography*)<sup>21</sup> outlined in previous research and discussions about Reece Mews.

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<sup>18</sup> This was at least partly due to Bacon’s dismissal of his early work and editing of his legacy throughout his life. For example, the following dialogue about his furniture design sums up his attitude. Bacon: “I don’t think anything was very original,” Sylvester: “And you had no interest in going on...”, Bacon: “No. I started to try and do painting.” Sylvester 2016, p.81.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, M. (2005) *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd.

<sup>20</sup> Cappock, M. (2005) *Francis Bacon’s Studio*, London, Merrell Publishers Limited.

<sup>21</sup> Günther, K., (2022) *Francis Bacon: In the Mirror of Photography, Collecting, Preparatory Practice and Painting*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter GmbH.

## 1.5/ Thesis outline

To discuss the idea of place in Francis Bacon's work I have broken the thesis into two sections, Part 1 Figure and Architecture and Part 2 The Image of Placed Experience.

Part 1: Figure and Architecture establishes Bacon's interest in space and place in his work in two chapters, 3 and 4. Chapter 3 looks at his early and mid-career work from the 1920s to the 1950s, starting with his furniture and interior design works to outline how these set up some themes that Bacon explores throughout his life. This moves on to look at his studio-as-subject paintings, particularly *Composition* (1933), *Corner of the Studio* (1934) and *Studio Interior* (c1936) which show the importance of this subject, the influence of Pablo Picasso and Roy de Maistre, and the beginnings of Bacon visualising place. Chapter 3 ends with a focus on Bacon's 1950s interior figure paintings to examine how Bacon develops the idea of fluid/atmospheric space/interiors and their relations to the human figure through a 'diversification' technique.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter 4 focuses on Reece Mews, where I cover the 'pragmatics' of specific place outlining its geography: the basic layout and function of the studio and wider home. This section is based on visits to the reconstructed studio at The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, and includes thoughts about the space by the lead archaeologist, Edmond O'Donovan, who meticulously recorded the studio in South Kensington before its move to Dublin. The second part of Chapter 4 briefly looks at his move into Reece Mews and how that studio differs in character from his Cromwell Place studio (1943-51), his other important studio/home, to contrast

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<sup>22</sup> Bacon's 'curtain' or 'panel wall' lines act similarly to Degas' drawings. The lines occur in Bacon's paintings in the 1940s and 50s. Perhaps the best illustration of this is *Sketch for a Portrait of Lisa* (1955) [Fig 24]. Bacon speaks of Degas' pastel drawings where he "striates the form with these lines which are drawn through the image...[which]...intensify and diversify its reality" Bacon in Sylvester 2016, p.198.

them and help define the specific studio places and the particular importance of Reece Mews. Having set up some characteristics of Reece Mews I then look at two paintings *Triptych 1977* and *Triptych August 1972*, to consider how that place is visualised in different ways reflecting Bacon's developing ideas about studio/figure relationships and the personal importance of place. I follow that section with a survey of paintings that visually relate to, and seem to develop out of, Reece Mews itself. The configuration of the studio and home spaces are used as formal structures for Bacon's later paintings – but they are more than a backdrop as they start to transform the figure itself in terms of placed inner relationships.

I end Chapter 4 with a consideration of Reece Mews as an invented place which becomes an instigation to invention, or an inventor itself. I discuss how Bacon seems to have chosen, or recognised, forms and patterns from his previous studios, and how he strengthens these correspondences with the alterations (for instance the raised ceiling, and the added skylight) that he made to that studio. This is a pivotal section in the thesis where place takes on a wholeness of objects and atmosphere, the three-dimensional volume discussed at the beginning of the chapter, and a larger geographical persona of its own. Chapter 4, and especially the last section, leads on to a deeper discussion about Bacon's relation to the Reece Mews studio and his focus on making images of the place-figure.

Part 2: The Image of Placed Experience takes a closer look at the structures and methods that Bacon used to explore images of the experience of place.

Chapter 5 takes atmosphere as its subject because this is an important but largely undiscussed sense of place, and because Bacon said that he was particularly sensitive to the atmosphere of a place – and, it would seem, especially in the case of Reece Mews. I look at that subject in several ways. It starts with outlining the importance of air, particularly in light

of Bacon's chronic asthma; moving on to 'the cry, the breath and the mouth', which deals with the way Bacon visualised the mouth and what that might imply in his work, and in specific paintings – *Study of a Baboon* (1953), and *Head VI* (1949). I follow that by considering 'atmospheres and emotion outside in', dealing with ideas about atmosphere as discussed by Gernot Böhme, and moving on to notions from Edward Casey's book *Turning Emotion Inside Out*<sup>23</sup> (2022) to support my reading of some of Bacon's Reece Mews paintings.

Chapter 6, 'Portraits and edges', has three subsections which look at the portraits and self-portraits series that Bacon made while at Reece Mews, taking the view that these are both stand alone *and* research works which focus on the problem of visualising an 'open' figure – where Bacon works on a new method of combining figure and place (or ground) through the development of a vocabulary of edges. The argument is supported by Edward Casey's sense of edges in his book *The World on Edge*<sup>24</sup> (2017). This subject is discussed in terms of 'appearance' – where the term and idea are interpreted as both a recognisable portrait and as something appearing. I argue that Bacon's interest is in the sensing body rather than a simple external depiction, so appearance is an action and a looking forward - a possibility - rather than capturing a recognisable likeness that is already known. I then consider 'the Portraits and self-portraits series' that Bacon made at Reece Mews, where I suggest that he develops possible solutions to painting the figure in, or as, movement (both external and internal), and the figure's opening out into place or its sensory placed-ness. Seen in this light, the portraits and self-portraits are technically important paintings as they explore

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<sup>23</sup> Casey, E.S. (2022) *Turning Emotion Inside Out: affective life beyond the subject*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Casey, E.S. (2017) *The World on Edge*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press.

methods that become core to the overall challenge of his later work where he embeds idea and material into one event, which is the place-figure painting.

I discuss the portraits and self-portraits to define how they link through edges. Bacon looks at all kinds of edges, which include physical as well as psychical edges, and psychical edges can only be understood by being sensed or felt. So, to understand them in portraits of others he needs to visualise them through his own feelings and then explore the resulting depictions of edges that he creates for the self-portraits to his portraits of friends and lovers. It is interesting and revealing to note that Bacon held portraiture as the most important and the most difficult subject for painting of his time and placed it at the top of his hierarchy of subjects.<sup>25</sup> Bacon demonstrates the ambition for his work here.

This section leads on to 'Self-portraits and types of edges,' where I look at the variety of edges that Bacon invents and employs and how these relate to the studio. Bacon's edges are central to the portraits paintings, where he brings the material of paint, its application, his own sense of touch, the individual marks, the depicted object(s), and the canvas itself, into a unified set of singularities.

It is the variety of edges that Bacon explores that demonstrates how important they are and how he questions edges – and this in turn questions the sense of the body and its relation to place. This relationship is explored in place by his manipulation of the imagery he constantly collected and how the studio became party to his 'making visible'. The self-portraits show how important Reece Mews became to Bacon's development – how the portraits helped

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<sup>25</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.72.

clarify the experience of figure/place within his work and set up the reversal to Place-figure that he subsequently achieved.

Chapter 7 takes the edges idea and expands that through Bacon's larger works and brings the studio to the fore in terms of the idea of 'Sentient place'. I describe the term sentient place where the place is the driving force for the human figure and experience. Bacon's openness and vulnerability, combined with his studio-led practice allows the sensation of placed experience or the Place-figure to become the subject.

The first part of this chapter deals with 'Complex/compound place...' where I unravel some of the implications of the complexity of Bacon's edges and multiple places, which are discussed in terms of Bacon's frames, then spaceframes, and then painting surface as place.

The second half of the chapter focuses on three late landscape paintings by Bacon<sup>26</sup> which sum up ideas previously covered and the idea of the figure as landscape. I suggest that, for Bacon, this is the full reversal of the figure/place idea. The two are not separate things which become united, but a single complex, which is divided in various fractures to open it up and in a contradictory move, also seen externally – at an artificial/conceptual distance.

The final core chapter, Chapter 8 'Practice-based research,' discusses some of the drawings made as part of the visual and practical research for this thesis. I have used drawing as a way of defining some issues in my wider research, by visually examining the material culture of Bacon's studio and paintings, (both as lived environments), as well as an exploration of ways of developing a language of figurative artwork that visualises place as a particular landscape – an image of placed experience.

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<sup>26</sup> *Landscape* (1978) [Fig 101], *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982) [Fig 104], and *Sand Dune* (1983) [Fig 106].

I used drawing as a way of approaching Bacon's work and not copying it. The drawings are a translation process, a way of rethinking the language involved, as well as a documentary or a capturing of a physical place. The use of visualising Bacon's work and methods in this way reflects Danielle Boutet's remarks in *Metaphors of the Mind*, where she states that creative practice is "not the kind of thinking where one finds *answers* to *questions*, but rather where one contemplates and experiences situations, themes or feeling complexes (or ways of being)."<sup>27</sup> It was the translation of the *experience* of Reece Mews, as encountered in the Hugh Lane Gallery reconstruction, and seen in the 'abbreviated' imagery of Bacon's related paintings, that I explored and examined in the drawings. The drawings, each titled *Francis Bacon Studio Study* and numbered 1-20, were made over several years, but only the most recent, numbers 7 to 19 are included as reproductions in this thesis.

In Chapter 9, the thesis 'Conclusion,' I restate the original core question: how do we visualise ourselves if we are not defined externally by the human body, but rather understand and visualise ourselves *primarily* as a place? The question derives from my own creative practice and engagement with the idea of *Place* as discussed by Edward S. Casey and Jeff Malpas, along with ideas about *atmosphere* as outlined by Gernot Böhme.

As humans making art, Bacon says that we are obsessed with ourselves<sup>28</sup> – but I believe that he questions what 'ourselves' might mean and how images could be made to help us understand that. Gilles Deleuze, Colm Toibin, and Stevens and Swan point out a 'late development' in Bacon's work – a 'figureless figure painting' – which I argue was a logical outcome of a longstanding interest in place that Bacon pursued from the very start of his

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<sup>27</sup> Danielle Boutet 'Metaphors of the Mind: Art forms as modes of thinking and ways of being' in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' in the Arts* (2013) Barrett and Bolt (eds), p.30.

<sup>28</sup> "I think art is an obsession with life and, after all, as we are human beings our greatest obsession is with ourselves." Bacon in Sylvester 2016, p.72.

creative life. Bacon did not articulate this idea in these words, but I think his interests in reflecting the world around him, through some sort of ‘history painting’ (for instance painting his violent times), or combining imagery from hundreds of found images (his “compost”), or, later, focusing on his immediate surroundings, partners and friends all reflect a preoccupation with surroundings and places – wider and closer to home.

His focus on immediate and sensed experience, rooted in his studio environment is reflected in early works, such as *Composition* (1933) [Fig 9] and *Studio Interior* (c. 1936) [Fig 17], and then throughout his career, more clearly in his late works – for example *Self-portrait* (1973) [Fig 50]). This experiential focus leads into his late paintings, such as *Sand Dune* (1983) [Fig 106] and *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986) [Fig 64]), which set out the landscapes and figureless figure paintings that Toibin suggests demonstrate that Bacon was “searching for some way to make images that he knows will only be possible for artists in the future.”

Edward Casey has outlined the importance and resurgence of Place within our culture, as well as pointing out that one of the major factors why Place has become important recently, and one that artists are and will be dealing with, is our relationship to our environment.<sup>29</sup> Bacon’s place-figure complex sets out possible avenues for figure painting/visualising for ‘artists in the future’ offering a rich area of visual research for younger figurative artists in our time.

I think that at least some works by Bacon deal with this in interesting ways that could be helpful to explore. The ramifications of his place-figure complex are broad, and the ways

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<sup>29</sup> Casey (2009), pp.xxi-xxxvi.

that we visualise ourselves in images are an important way of understanding that complexity. Developing ways of visualising ourselves and place can help change perspectives that we use and share. Visual culture reflects and can sometimes lead a wider awareness.

This chapter has briefly set out the basic aims, intentions and overall structure of this thesis.

The next chapter (Chapter 2, Methodology and Literature Review) provides an expanded explanation of the hybrid research methods and critical analysis of focal research sources that have significantly informed my contribution to knowledge in the field of Bacon studies.

## Chapter 2: Methodology and Literature Review

### 2.1/ Introduction

As a researcher and a practising artist, I have taken a hybrid approach to this research about Bacon and his Reece Mews studio, both in terms of methodology, and regarding the nature and value of the primary and secondary sources that have proved to be most significant to the research project. As I will initially discuss in this chapter, the hybridity of the methodology lies in the combination of visual/gallery/textual research and analysis, with the production of physical/material artworks (drawings), that respond to and articulate visually my research-based consideration of Bacon's relationship with, or experience of, his Reece Mews studio.

The third section, 'Literature Review,' critically evaluates some of the main sources, or elements of sources, that I have found to be most significant to my research project. The final section summarises the points made in this chapter and leads on to Chapter 3, 'Figure and architecture,' which discusses aspects of Bacon's early design and art works, that I believe have a potential bearing on his Reece Mews work.

### 2.2/ Methodology

My methodology has been to approach the research and analysis of primary and secondary sources on Francis Bacon and his Reece Mews studio, in the first instance as an art-practitioner, but also in light of phenomenological and associated theorisations of place, which I explain further in the Literature Review. The primary sources for my research are both material artworks by Bacon and others that have been exhibited at or are held by international galleries, and the invaluable reconstruction of Bacon's Reece Mews studio at

the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. As an artist, I felt it was important to consider some of the visual language involved in Bacon's complex imagery and use the resulting material artworks (large-scale drawings, discussed in Chapter 8) as key elements of the research/conclusions along with this written thesis.

As many of Bacon's paintings as could be seen 'in the flesh' were visited in exhibitions around Europe, as I note in the introduction. The experience of the physical object is crucial for most – if not all - artworks, but especially Bacon's paintings, as much of the 'affect' is due to their materiality and relation of scale to viewer, as well as their painterly bravura alongside their subtlety of marks and colouration, much of which is lost or altered in reproduction. The reduction of artworks to reproductions in books and on screen, transforms them to images rather than objects and this lessens their breadth of meaning – changing them to photographic material, at least in some aspects. It is also interesting to grasp how the viewers' perceptions of the works may be affected by the way they are curated, hung and displayed. There were many strong Bacon exhibitions on during the time of this research, but one of the most outstanding in terms of the choice of works, the space they occupied, and the lighting was *Francis Bacon: Man and Beast* at the Royal Academy in London (2022).<sup>1</sup> The large rooms and directed lighting gave the works space to be contemplated up close as well as viewed at a distance. This was particularly useful as it afforded the triptychs space to establish their overall rhythmic sense.

The importance for this research of visiting the reconstruction of Bacon's Reece Mews studio at The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, cannot be overstated. The preservation of the space is useful for scholarship and public alike, especially due its careful conservation and

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<sup>1</sup> *Francis Bacon: Man and Beast*, Royal Academy, London, January 29 – April 17, 2022.

archiving of a very wide range of material. In the preface to *The Fate of Place: a philosophical history* (1998),<sup>2</sup> Edward Casey writes about the loss of place, and he says something which could easily relate to Bacon's studio, and perhaps the underlying reason for its careful 'archaeological' transplant to Dublin. Casey states: "...annihilation heightens awareness of the irreplaceability of... places, their singular configuration and unrepeatable history."<sup>3</sup> However, place is not just material objects, but an atmosphere as well, and this is something that any such transplant will find hard, if not impossible, to capture. It is atmosphere that Bacon speaks about in terms of his Reece Mews studio, and something that is very important to this current research. But, at the Hugh Lane, it is something we, as visitors, must imaginatively recreate for that very particular place.

Nevertheless, the studio still speaks on many levels, and experiencing it allows us some access to these. For example, Casey writes about scale restrictions and the power of edges when he says "we live in a finite sphere with many insistent circumferences, ... The edges that surround us, far from being merely restrictive, can be distinctly liberating. ...edges of events and places encourage, and often enhance, innovative actions and issue in unprecedented works. No wonder that artists need studios..."<sup>4</sup>

My chosen theoretical perspective questions aspects of some of the texts on the phenomenology of place, and more directly, of some of the vast number of texts regarding Bacon's studio practice and its relationship to the Reece Mews studio. However, as will be seen in the Literature Review below, it does not deny the value to Bacon scholars of all

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<sup>2</sup> Casey, E.S. (1998) *The Fate of Place: a philosophical history*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Casey 2017, p.91.

these other texts, rather it underlines what may be gained from them for the field of Bacon studies, by taking a fresh theoretical approach to the available visual and textual materials.

## 2.3/ Literature review

The core idea of this thesis began with the problem of visualising our relations to place, and not specifically with Bacon. Hence the research literature breaks down into two basic areas: texts about place, and texts about Bacon. However, there are several invaluable publications about Bacon and the Reece Mews studio used in this research which cross this divide,<sup>5</sup> as demonstrated later in this thesis. In this section I critically evaluate the main theoretical sources, or elements, that have proved most relevant to this thesis – other, additional sources are critically discussed in the various chapters, where appropriate.

In terms of sources about ‘place,’ I have mainly focused on works by Edward S. Casey and Jeff Malpas, current philosophers who have each made a close scrutiny of that subject, as part of the renewed interest in place that has been developing across disciplines<sup>6</sup> in the past few decades.

To mark the transition between significant philosophical texts regarding place and what I see as important texts focused on Bacon, I will move on to consider the French theorist, Gilles Deleuze who influentially applied his philosophical approach to a study of Bacon in his book *The Logic of Sensation* (1981, English translation 2003). Given the number of sources

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<sup>5</sup> See: Cappock, M. (2005) *Francis Bacon's Studio*, London, Merrell Publishers Limited; Günther, K. (2022) *Francis Bacon: In the Mirror of Photography, Collecting, Preparatory Practice and Painting*, Berlin/Boston, Walter De Gruyter GmbH.

<sup>6</sup> This interest can be seen, for example, in philosophy, as outlined by Casey in *The Fate of Place: a philosophical history* (1998), Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, and *Getting Back into Place: toward a renewed understanding of the Place-world* (1993), Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, alongside other disciplines such as geography and urban studies.

on Bacon that I have studied and that are critically discussed in the various chapters of this thesis where appropriate, I will follow this to consider in more detail works by three other authors as particularly significant to my research regarding Bacon: Margarita Cappock, Katharina Günther and Martin Harrison.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to 'place' as discussed by Casey and Malpas, I also include in this part of the review two books by Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2018) and *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces* (2020),<sup>8</sup> which focus on the study of atmosphere and place.

Casey and Malpas differ in their approaches to place as Casey understands place from a phenomenological perspective whereas Malpas takes a more ontological viewpoint. As Casey explains the difference: "I go from appearances to place, he from place to appearances. Otherwise put, where he argues for possibility conditions, I describe the phenomena that these conditions make possible."<sup>9</sup> However, both meet in the primary importance of 'place' to contemporary thinking. This difference of viewpoint helped develop my understanding of the changes that occurred in Bacon's work over several decades especially with respect to the late landscapes where, I believe, Bacon moved from a sensory embodied visualisation (feeling *from* the body outwards) to works that took a reversed perspective from the edge of place towards the figure, or, perhaps more accurately, where the figure (body) all but disappeared and place took on the figurative role.

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<sup>7</sup> See Cappock and Günther listed in footnote 35; Harrison, M. (2005) *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd.

<sup>8</sup> Böhme, G. (ed. Thibaud, J-P.) (2018) *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Oxford and New York, Routledge; Böhme, G. (2020) *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

<sup>9</sup> Casey, E. S. (1991) *J.E. Malpas's Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and diverging in/on place. *Philosophy & Geography*. 4. pp.225-230. DOI: 10.1080/10903770123141.

Two publications by Casey have been particularly important to my research: *The World on Edge* (2017) and *Turning Emotion Inside Out* (2022).<sup>10</sup> To discuss Casey's importance to this research, it is worth first noting David Seamon's description of phenomenology when he says: "phenomenologists emphasize that place is not a material or geographical environment distinct from the people associated with it but, rather, the indivisible, normally unnoticed phenomenon of person-or-people-experiencing-place."<sup>11</sup> This idea of the unnoticed is the first point where Casey's writing becomes helpful to my questioning of Bacon's relationship to Reece Mews. Casey's book, *The World on Edge*, was of primary importance for its detailed focus on edges, and also where he writes that "places and events bear their own edge-structures – structures rarely recognised as such."<sup>12</sup> Applying ideas about places, events and edge-structures to Bacon's paintings and relations to his studio, opened up a way of seeing varieties of integration of the person, the place and the artworks. The complexity of edges within these three co-ordinates of place allowed a multiplicity of connections to be understood between figure and place, in the first instance, leading on to a questioning of the body itself.

This leads to the second point in Seamon's description, that phenomenology is an anthropologically centred viewpoint that Bacon, as I state above, questions in some of his late work. Casey demonstrates his position by looking at the human body in the following manner:

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<sup>10</sup> Casey, E.S. (2017) *The World on Edge*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press.

Casey, E. S. (2022) *Turning Emotion Inside Out: Affective Life beyond the Subject*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Seamon, D. (2014) *Place as Organized Complexity: Understanding and Making Places Holistically*, first draft of a chapter prepared for a tentative edited volume on "place" sponsored by the Center for Humans and Nature, © 2014 David Seamon, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Casey 2017, p.299.

I pursued the differences between *the* edge of the body – its outer surface of skin or flesh – and its many subordinate edges, inner as well as outer, in an effort to show that we could not exist as animated and sensuous organisms without possessing a virtual latticework of bodily edges, which alert us to our environment...<sup>13</sup>

This phenomenological sensibility, where the physical body-edge is a site of a 'latticework' of edges is taken up by Bacon, I suggest, in his works after he arrived at Reece Mews. This is where Bacon begins to focus on his own everyday experience of place and people, and begins to develop a repertoire of edges within his imagery, particularly evolving these through his smaller head/portrait paintings (see chapter 6). Bacon further develops these open edges in his work to take on a more distanced view, in some cases during the late 1970s and 80s. Thus, Casey's phenomenological examination of edges is helpful in that it looks at a wide variety of 'edge-types' without offering a generic or single definition,<sup>14</sup> and I think this open reading corresponds to Bacon's production of 'studies,' as most of his works are thus titled, rather than fully definitive artistic statements. Both Casey and Bacon speak of capturing something on the move – Casey talks of "a special form of attentiveness...to whatever *presents* itself as an edge,"<sup>15</sup> [my italics], and Bacon of 'trapping the image' as it appears in the making.<sup>16</sup> Casey writes of a 'peri-phenomenology' "where *peri-* signifies 'around' or 'about' and it is associated with risk (as in "perilous")," due to dealing with all kinds of 'edge situations.'<sup>17</sup> Bacon also works with edge situations both in terms of his sometimes extreme figurative imagery, but possibly more importantly due to the risk of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.301.

<sup>16</sup> Sylvester 2016, pp.62, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Casey 2017, p. 301.

finding and losing images in his improvisatory handling of paint, and the chance or ‘non-rational’ marks that he used to build his images.<sup>18</sup> Casey’s open reading of edges also corresponds to the balance Bacon develops between specific portraits of his circle of friends, and a more fluid notion of bodies, boundaries and identities. The problem of ‘appearance’ is exactly the issue of edges. This is not only a question of recognisable figuration (portrait resemblance), but how an image appears on the canvas and in front of the viewer. Surfaces on all levels are questioned and utilised.

Casey identifies borders and boundaries, surfaces, limits, brinks, folds, cusps and frames as edges to be recognised and interpreted. He speaks of physical edges like rims, thresholds and margins, but also of edges of events and places, bodies and psyches. His edges include the often permeable or very indistinct, like his example of a park designed by Capability Brown, where it “blends imperceptibly into its surrounding space.”<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis I argue that Bacon works in a landscape of permeable borders, which he explores through a gamut of edge imagery (all of those mentioned by Casey above). I can think of no other artist who has developed such a varied language of edge-images, orchestrated them into works, and allowed them to lead his work into a different place - as a sense of place where the figure element is visually subsumed into the ‘external’ environment. I will support this idea further when reviewing the Bacon and studio-related textual sources below.

Surface as edge is important in Casey and Bacon, and links the often outline or silhouette-focused general idea of *an* edge with a literally more rounded view. This outline boundary

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<sup>18</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.67.

<sup>19</sup> Casey 2017, pp.299-301.

edge of 'things' is only sometimes the way that artists have conceptualised and visualised objects or forms. The problem of grasping the world by edges is noted by Philip Rawson<sup>20</sup> – where he discusses the idea that Renaissance artists followed ancient Greek and Roman precedents of grasping centres of volumes, the ovoid tradition to which Bacon was possibly the last heir. The importance of this is, I suggest, that Bacon was very aware of the *surfaces* of depicted things which included space or atmosphere. In the 1950s he used striated images to 'diversify'<sup>21</sup> the image, and the 'fourth wall,' for example in *Figures in a Landscape* (1952), which he developed into a complex idea about the extended figure, and the surface of the painting that combined with his interests in glazing and framing.

Bacon's surfaces, his glazed frames and his depicted spaceframes all articulate edges that are both boundaries and permeable borders. Singling out the complexity of 'frames *in and of painting*' [my italics] Casey writes a short 'Interlude'<sup>22</sup> detailing their importance and roles. He says that "frames are active... There is a two-way vector...the outside of the frame pulls toward the surrounding space, the inside toward the painted entity within."<sup>23</sup> This idea of the inside and outside, in any framing device, is something Casey takes into another realm in the other important source, *Turning Emotion Inside Out: Affective Life beyond the Subject*.<sup>24</sup>

Casey outlines the main idea of this book by relating a story about taking part in a demonstration march where "my emotions were not merely *in me* ... but more significantly located *outside me* ... By 'outside me' I mean ... the ways in which emotions emerge ...from

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<sup>20</sup> Rawson, P., (1969) *Drawing: the appreciation of the arts/3* (1969) London, Oxford University Press, p.166

<sup>21</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.198.

<sup>22</sup> Casey 2017, Interlude III, pp 97-105.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>24</sup> Casey, E. S., (2022) *Turning Emotion Inside Out: Affective Life beyond the Subject*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press.

somewhere other than in my body and/or mind. Emotions appear in this surrounding space.”<sup>25</sup> This ‘external’ placing of emotion is useful to thinking about Bacon’s image of the figure, in that although he is not necessarily visualising emotion he does consider, I argue, the importance of particular place and atmosphere in that figure/ image (as a development from his more generic 1950s diversified and fourth-wall images). Casey makes a case for an *external* reading of something we usually consider to be an inner phenomenon – *our emotions*.

The most directly relevant ideas to this current research are in the final chapter<sup>26</sup> of the book where Casey turns to discuss “the place of emotion in the circumambient natural world – situated in it and coming from it – [which] remains largely unexplored.”<sup>27</sup> Here he talks of atmosphere and specifically ‘air.’ Towards the end of the chapter, he quotes John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* talking about emotions as *impersonal events*.<sup>28</sup> Dewey states that “emotion is ‘impersonal’ because it is attached not to personal fortune but to the object to the construction of which the self has surrendered itself...”<sup>29</sup> This ‘surrendering’ of self is an important note for my reading of Bacon’s work, where he changes some of his imagery from the figure-in-place to a reversed place-figure, an environmental viewpoint. Casey suggests that he and Dewey converge closely when he ends the chapter by stating that atmosphere and environment are settings that transmit emotions that are not our own, into our receptive selves.<sup>30</sup> This receptive self is pivotal to Bacon’s Reece Mews aligned work where it begins to transform into his more devolved sense of sentient place, which happens in the

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<sup>25</sup> Casey 2022, p.xi.

<sup>26</sup> Casey 2022, Chapter 11: Atmosphere and Affective Environment, pp 184-199.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

late 1970s and 80s (for example in *Landscape* (1978), *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982), and *Sand Dune* (1983)). However, Casey does not take that step away from a human-centred phenomenological reading- as I have done - despite his shift to an external reading of emotion.

While Casey opens up readings about edges and atmospheres, the latter subject is developed further in my thesis with the support of texts by Gernot Böhme, particularly *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2018) and *Atmospheric Architectures* (2020).<sup>31</sup> *Atmospheric Architectures* is a collection of short texts where Böhme examines a user's experience of built environments and considers their atmospheres, particularly questioning the idea of object edges or boundaries by suggesting a focus on their emanations (or 'ecstasies' as he calls them). Böhme's main interest is architecture, which he considers an art of atmospheres rather than objects. In the book, he discusses the local environment of places through phenomena such as the effects of lighting, sound and colour. As Bacon employs imagery of all of these in his works, Böhme is a useful source for analysis of Bacon's visualisation of place. Even before these previously mentioned effects, Böhme establishes that the *forms* of things extend into space. Böhme writes: "a thing's form is... *effective* to the outside. It radiates into the surroundings, ...takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and fills it with tensions and movement suggestions."<sup>32</sup> Although this still addresses encounters with things, it does 'take away the homogeneity of space' – opening varieties of passages or edges. More than this, Böhme writes about our aesthetic view of nature, a landscape, as a two-way relationship – "a co-design, a co-operation, or an interplay (of the subject's

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<sup>31</sup> Böhme, G. (ed Thibaud, J-P.) (2018) *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Oxford and New York, Routledge; Böhme, G. (2020) *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

<sup>32</sup> Böhme 2020, p.23.

intention) with the objects emanations.”<sup>33</sup> It is interesting how Bacon also used the term ‘emanation’ when speaking about people – he attempted to capture the whole person in their movement and space – an energy or presence which he wanted to capture in the *act of making* the image.<sup>34</sup> The emanations of figures and things interacting is the place of atmosphere which Bacon visualises and explores throughout his career, but more completely in the 1950s through images of spaces and sound, and then in the 1960s to 1980s through colour and spaceframes (as discussed in chapters 5 and 6).

In *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Böhme explores the complexity of our relationship to our sensed environment, looking at emotions and aesthetic qualities in atmospheres.

Particularly relatable to my research, Böhme makes an important point about the way the human body is spatially different to ‘the mortal frame’ by the way we sense the environment<sup>35</sup> and then states that there is the “virtually unsolvable problem of representing the sensed body” as it would require a presentation of the body that would “mediate appearances of movements and speak through confessions” and “would enable the co-execution in own bodily feeling.”<sup>36</sup> It seems to me that this is a good description of the aims of Bacon’s figurative imagery, particularly in the Reece Mews works of the 1960s to 80s and in his portraits and self-portraits. In these works, movement is visually described as well as captured by deliberate and accidentally derived painterly gestures, and the works are most often ‘confessional’ in that they are about his immediate placed and wider temporal experience. For example in *Triptych* (1977), I suggest that Bacon develops a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.p.38.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvester 2016, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Böhme 2018, p.114.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.115.

working process that, to some degree, bypasses an overly conscious method to allow an intuitive physical approach and outcome to his works.

Böhme's writings help situate the human figure in place through the study of atmosphere, questioning the philosophical gap between the subjective experience and the 'object.' He states that there is an indeterminacy about atmospheres – whether they can be attributed to objects or environments, or the experiencing subject. We are uncertain where they are as they appear to take up space like a haze.<sup>37</sup> In relation to my discussions of Bacon, his initial relation to Reece Mews was based on his feeling of its atmosphere as being conducive to painting.<sup>38</sup> But more interestingly Böhme writes the following which demonstrates the complexity of atmosphere that, I believe, Bacon was pursuing: “An aesthetics of atmospheres pertains to artistic activity that consists in the production of particular receptions, or to the types of reception by viewers or consumers that play a role in the production of the “work” itself.”<sup>39</sup>

I will end this section of place-focused sources by discussing *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (2018) by Jeff Malpas. In this book, Malpas sets out to view place in a topological manner, where he sees and writes about place as an “open region within which a variety of elements are brought to light through their mutual inter-relation and juxtaposition within that region.”<sup>40</sup> The main idea of the book is to understand the complexity of place through various concepts and disciplines of the “place-bound identity of persons.” Malpas believes that we are “inextricably bound to place” by which he means

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<sup>37</sup> Böhme, G., and Jean-Paul Thibaud, J-P., ed., 'Abstract' from *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2016) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, n.p.

<sup>38</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.213.

<sup>39</sup> Böhme (2016) n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Malpas, J. (2018a) *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, London and New York, Routledge.

“*particular* places...in and through which a person’s life is lived.” Malpas takes this a step further by saying that “the very possibility of the appearance of things – of objects, of others, and of self – is possible only within the all-embracing compass of place.”<sup>41</sup> Speaking about the ‘obscurity’ of place Malpas says that place is central to experience – it gives it structure and makes it possible.<sup>42</sup> But the experience of place is not singular, as place is next to other places and also spaces intersect each other, and additionally, places contain places. Effectively, places are nested within each other but are also encompassed.<sup>43</sup>

I argue in this thesis that, when Bacon moved to Reece Mews and focused on his own life experience within his work, the complexity of the human figure *and* place presented themselves in these ways. We can see how his embedded sense of place and his movement through his home became part of the visual structures of subject in his images (see Chapter 4).

Bacon’s complex imagery also reflects a strong feeling for what Malpas calls ‘inter-subjectivity.’ He says that to have a sense of self we must have a sense of a ‘particular place within the world.’ This means that we need a “grasp of a conceptually complex structure...that encompasses different forms of spatiality, concepts of self and others and an objective order of things – which demands to be articulated...having language and having a sense of place...is a matter of the necessary inter-subjectivity of place”<sup>44</sup> It seems to me that Bacon’s understanding of the human figure is much more than a representation of a single being, even though he often painted single figures. Again, if we look at *Triptych* (1977) for example, we begin to see the complex relations of Bacon with his partner seen through the

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<sup>41</sup> Malpas (2018), p.12.

<sup>42</sup> Malpas 2018a, p.31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.

associated memories of places that they shared. The painting, as I discuss in chapter 4, relates well to Malpas' thoughts, where I think Bacon begins to add the objective sense of place to his more phenomenological sense of placed experience. Malpas writes:

One grasps the subjectivity of other individuals ... through being able to match one's own responses to those of others and through being able to locate others, both within an objective space to which each has access and in relation to a set of common objects and events. ...through my access to the 'anonymous' and impersonal realm of objectivity ... I am able to grasp the concept of others...[and] the concept of myself. I...represent myself and others...from within the same framework – 'anonymous', objective, and...inter-subjective.<sup>45</sup>

Bacon's work visualises all these relationships through a language of painting that always seems to also remain about immediate experience. In his works there is a rawness of grasping the world combined with a distance which makes that grasping close yet closed away. This is often signified by his use of separating figures into triptych panels and through the glazed framing that he insisted on.

The final point about Malpas' text is his discussion about what he terms 'Proust's Principle' where he says "The principle is one suggested by the very nature of Proust's search in *In Search of Lost Time*. In the book, Proust's identity is inextricably tied to the places in which his life has been lived," such that the recovery of self can only take the form of a recovery of place..."<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to note that Proust was also one of Bacon's favourite writers, to the point that Hugh Davies, in his interview material of 1973 stated: "He thinks Proust was

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<sup>45</sup> Malpas 2018a, p.154.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

the last significant comment on human behaviour.”<sup>47</sup> Malpas also suggests that “in Proust ... the temporal is found ... in the objects around us in the present.” In *Triptych* (1977) in particular, six years after Dyer’s death, Bacon links time, memory, and people to specific place. I believe that this demonstrates the complexity that Bacon encompasses in much of his work – which he ‘abbreviates into intensity’<sup>48</sup> so that we feel the sensations rather than read them illustratively.

I will now turn to the theoretical/art historical sources that are specifically about Francis Bacon that have been most useful to this research. In relation to the angle taken by my research, the book, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*<sup>49</sup> by the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, provides a useful point of transition from discussing the phenomenological philosophers I have used, to considering texts which focus specifically on Bacon. At the centre of Deleuze’s interpretation is his belief that Bacon’s work is about ‘sensation’ in a post-Cezanne lineage. The ‘lesson of Cezanne’ as a critique of Impressionism, Deleuze says, is that “sensation is in the body, and not the air”, “it is in the body, even the body of an apple.”<sup>50</sup> This does, of course, bring up the question of what constitutes the ‘body’ – and I argue in this thesis that, as Bacon begins to visualise, atmosphere is in the end part of a larger place-figure.

Deleuze goes on to write: “Bacon constantly says that sensation is what passes from one "order" to another, from one "level" to another, from one "area" to another. This is why

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<sup>47</sup> Hugh Davies quotes Bacon: “I read Proust perhaps more than any other modern writers” p.111, and later writes that “He thinks Proust was the last significant comment on human behaviour” p.116, Davis, H., ‘Interviewing Bacon, 1973, in Harrison, M., (2009) *Francis Bacon – New Studies*, Gottingen, Germany, Steidl.

<sup>48</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.198.

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, G., (1981, trans Smith, D. W. 2003) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, London and New York, Continuum.

<sup>50</sup> Deleuze 2003, p.35.

sensation is the “master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations.”<sup>51</sup> This idea of the body deformations is something that might be better understood as the exploration of edges which is where and how sensation passes between figure and ground, and where Bacon questions the place of the body, or the ‘figure.’ So, the phenomenological point that Deleuze makes in *Chapter Six: Painting and Sensation*, when he concludes that “the flat field closes in around the Figure and when the Figure contracts or ... expands in order to rejoin the field, to the point where the Figure merges with the field”<sup>52</sup> is in keeping with the reading of my research. Of course, for Deleuze, the body is different to the Figure (or the ‘body without organs’) which is something larger than the body of flesh and bone. So, a multiple sense of being is involved here, again in keeping with this thesis.

However, Deleuze talks about place only in a general sense and he focuses on the body and its *escape* into the external world. He does not relate this to Bacon’s own ‘place’ in the world in terms of his lived home/studio and personal experience. When Deleuze uses the term ‘place’ it is usually generalised – as in *Chapter 1: the Round Area, the Ring*, where he is writing about Bacon’s enclosure forms. He states that:

“These are all “places” [lieux]. ... these techniques are rather rudimentary, ... they do not consign the Figure to immobility but, ... render sensible a kind of progression, an exploration of the Figure within the place, or upon itself. It is an operative field. The relation of the Figure to its isolating place defines a “fact...”<sup>53</sup>

Deleuze explains this well, but he does not make any link to Bacon’s own experience.

Therefore, Deleuze does not join the painterly methods, that he also discusses, to Bacon’s

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze 2003, p.2.

working procedures, and how they are connected to and affected by his place of work. This is what I argue in this thesis as a means toward a wider understanding of the imagery Bacon uses and their embeddedness in place *and* methodology. I also think Deleuze's insistence on "escape"<sup>54</sup> in Bacon's imagery results from the emphasis on ideas and depictions that established Bacon's reputation in his mid-career work of the 1940s to early 1960s. Indeed, in the catalogue to the exhibition, *Francis Bacon: Unsichtbare Raume/Francis Bacon: Invisible Rooms*,<sup>55</sup> (2016), an essay by Ina Conzen, *The Reality of the Artificial – Thoughts on Francis Bacon's 'Invisible Rooms'*<sup>56</sup> – makes this connection regarding Bacon's rooms and spaceframes by stating: "...Deleuze begins his discussion of the artist with the description of these rooms, or 'places', that isolate the figure...that restrict the figure's mobility"<sup>57</sup> and that make the figure iconic, but "confined [in]...glass-like cages...without giving them an escape to a saving outdoors."<sup>58</sup> Conzen also states: "...in the late 1940s and lasting for roughly a decade ...the ghostly architectural framing plays a very special role. The mostly seated figures appear to be screaming in desperation at these boundaries."<sup>59</sup>

It is my contention, however, that Bacon's work significantly changed from the mid-1960s onwards due to his new home and life focus. Deleuze's reading of Bacon remains interior to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., I think Deleuze takes a narrative and illustrational view of Bacon when he discusses 'escape,' and I believe 'escape' is the wrong term for much of Bacon's imagery, especially the later work, which is more about a visualisation of the place-figure, as I argue in the thesis. Deleuze emphasises 'escape,' for example: "The entire series of spasms in Bacon is of this type: scenes of love, of vomiting and excreting, in which the body attempts to escape from itself *through* one of its organs in order to rejoin the field or material structure" p.16; "it is the Figure that wants to pass through a vanishing point in the contour in order to dissipate into the material structure" p.17; "The mouth ... is no longer a particular organ, but the hole through which the entire body escapes" p.26; "The entire body escapes through the screaming mouth" p.28.

<sup>55</sup> Conzen, I., Barnes, L., Littmann, P., et al (2016) *Francis Bacon: Unsichtbare Raume/Francis Bacon: Invisible Rooms*, Munich, London, New York, Prestel Publishing Ltd.

<sup>56</sup> Conzen 2016, p.15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

the paintings and does not relate to ideas beyond the frame, whereas I believe some of the most fruitful work took place at Reece Mews, which melded Bacon with his work, so that it was not illustrative but part of a lived actuality. My reading looks at the methods of painting and the relations of figure and place rather than at the sense of an interior narrative reading. Deleuze only looks at the methods of painting in their relation to the figure and the figure becoming. There is a stress on transformation – a more temporal reading. My contrary understanding is about Bacon establishing or exploring what the figure *is*, how it is visualised *in its experience*. In my view, this is not temporal, but spatial – more in keeping with Malpas' reading of Proust where time and space meet in 'place'.

This wider focus on 'place' (and on Bacon's immediate milieu), I believe, also helps us understand the whole of Bacon's career from its very beginning to its end. In his book, Deleuze cites David Sylvester's<sup>60</sup> division of Bacon's work into three periods, which he agrees with but then adds a fourth 'nascent period'<sup>61</sup>, where "the Figure had effectively disappeared, leaving behind only a vague trace of its former presence."<sup>62</sup> I agree with Deleuze's addition, but through my reading of Bacon's sense of place, I suggest an alternative wording for the four periods in his work. These are effectively set out in the main chapters of the thesis and could be briefly characterised as: 1. design work and early paintings dealing with figure interface and immediate environment (studio paintings); 2. figure/ground relations – figure emerging/merging with the environment; 3. images of placed experience (Reece Mews); and 4. sentient place – studio/landscapes. So, Deleuze's 'disappearance of the figure' becomes the place-figure in my reading.

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<sup>60</sup> Deleuze 2003, p.29.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp.30-31.

As is well-known in the discipline, there is a vast amount of past and recent publications on Francis Bacon. My bibliography, although extensive, only pays tribute to some of these writings. In the last part of this Literature Review, I do not intend to provide a detailed review of all the relevant texts cited in the bibliography, as many of these sources, whether they are art-historical, biographical, or interviews with Bacon, are critically analysed/discussed in the various specific chapters of the thesis. Instead, I propose to emphasise a few key authors on Bacon whose works have been particularly invaluable for my research.

There is no doubt that Martin Harrison, Chief Editor at the Estate of Francis Bacon, has become a significantly prolific and factually reliable author in the realm of Bacon studies. Out of the many publications written or edited by Harrison, two stand out as being particularly useful to my research. These are, *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*,<sup>63</sup> and *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*.<sup>64</sup>

In the book *In Camera* Harrison focuses on discussing Bacon's shifting dialectic between art and photography, and the evolution of his figural style, through biography and analysis of specific important works across his career.<sup>65</sup> From the start, Harrison makes some useful points for this thesis, for example, pointing out that Bacon used found photographs, but that after 1962 also used and commissioned new photographs.<sup>66</sup> This dates a change in his work just after his move to Reece Mews in late 1961, when he starts to focus on his own experience and his immediate milieu, away from generalised imagery. Harrison notes that

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<sup>63</sup> Harrison, M., (2005) *In Camera: Francis Bacon, Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd.

<sup>64</sup> Harrison, M., Daniels, R. (eds.) (2016) *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, London, The Estate of Francis Bacon.

<sup>65</sup> Harrison 2005, p.8.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Bacon hoarded imagery, often using it more than once, and making use of multiple copies of images possibly utilising differences in scale, definition and colour. He also states that Bacon's work became more self-referential in the 1970s when he increasingly made images from his own earlier paintings.<sup>67</sup> For example, Harrison states that photographs of his Battersea studio (1955-61) show few signs of wall-based images, whereas Reece Mews always had a "wall-as-tackboard" of his own works demonstrating that "Bacon's principal pictorial references were to his own oeuvre."<sup>68</sup> The points above help establish Bacon's connections to place and established working routines therein, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 4.

Harrison's integration of biography and analysis help to establish relationships between places and Bacon's work. For example, he suggests that the "stately presentation" of Bacon's paintings, allying his work with Old Masters, might have been influenced by his "military and industrial" family connections and his visits to his great-aunt Eliza Mitchell's Gothic mansion, which had its own large picture gallery including works by Etty and Leighton.<sup>69</sup> He also makes a case for the influence of artists like James Pryde<sup>70</sup> whose gloomy Gothic interiors may have connections to Bacon's work of the 1940s and 50s, and Edward Gordon Craig's more modernist stage designs – both visualising powerful interior spaces. Harrison also points out the colour influence (predominantly of orange in *La Coiffure* (1896) of Degas on Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) – and Degas' late main subject of "people in rooms."<sup>71</sup> All these examples support an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.41.

understanding of Bacon's interest in surroundings and an awareness of visualising an experience of place.

For this research the most important of Harrison's writings is *In Camera*,<sup>72</sup> where he states that connecting Bacon's paintings with his studios and their organisation is reductive. I agree, if we are thinking that link is illustratively connected and limited in meaning – that they are simply about describing place as autobiography (despite Harrison quoting Bacon: "the places I live in...are like an autobiography"<sup>73</sup>). I understand Bacon's work to have various lines of subject, activity and thought, and that at least one line of those is concerned with the relation of figure to place. For Bacon, this happened throughout his career but focused through Reece Mews after 1961, as I argue in chapter 4.

Significantly, Harrison suggests that the Reece mews studio was itself a type of *camera* as his "theatre-of-action."<sup>74</sup> In chapter 4 of this thesis, I liken the studio to a top-lit camera obscura due to its skylight, where the example of Powell and Pressburger's doctor, in *A Matter of Life or Death* (1946), views his local village with the aid of falling images from a roof projected table-top image. Bacon often stated that images just drop into his mind like slides,<sup>75</sup> so this darkened space (studio), lit from above, and floor scattered with photographic material, takes on an atmosphere of externalised mind, or a reflection of the visualisation process.

Harrison also usefully points out an important visual connection between the Reece Mews staircase and his painting *Study for the Human Body (Man Turning on Light)* (1973). He links

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp.113-198.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.113.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>75</sup> Sylvester 2016, pp.21, 155, 156.

the spaceframes to individual isolation, and to the “free-hand axonometric-like diagram...of 7 Reece Mews. ...[whose] spaces would haunt many of his paintings.”<sup>76</sup> Harrison also suggested that the sketch of Reece Mews [Fig 36], along with other “geometrical frameworks – metal railings [from casinos], race-course fencing” all underpinned many of his Reece Mews paintings.<sup>77</sup>

Relating Bacon’s paintings to Reece Mews, Harrison equates the lack of domestic comfort and relaxation in his paintings with the “monastic cell” of the studio and the “spartan – *unheimlich*” qualities of the rest of his home.<sup>78</sup> He further relates these to Bacon’s design origins and the possible links to Le Corbusier’s ‘machines for living in’ modernist dictum. Under the chapter’s sub-heading of *Atmosphere*, Harrison outlines the importance of Bacon’s studios, living spaces and his visualisations of experienced places. He starts with a clearly autobiographical work, *Sleeping Figure* (1974), which takes the ‘theatre of action’ or ‘field of operations’ literally, where Bacon is seen in hospital for an operation. This extends the idea of the arena in other works that identify places of action. In this case he closes off the room, as we look through a glass door. This reflects Bacon’s paintings of enclosures (for example, the curtained walls of *Figures in a Landscape* (1952), as well as his emphatic use of glazed framing to distance the viewer.<sup>79</sup>

Harrison continues by writing that 7 Cromwell Place had a history of artists and photographers previously living there, and was the place where Bacon painted his first major work *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944). He also draws parallels of architectural elements in the flat and studio to backgrounds in paintings made

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<sup>76</sup> Harrison 2005, p.15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122.

there – so again linking place and imagery. However, writing about Bacon’s work after leaving Cromwell Place, Harrison states that “It must be admitted that few of the paintings that Bacon began or completed in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and London between 1953 and 1955 support the hypothesis that his paintings and environment are correlated.”<sup>80</sup> Again, I agree that a direct relation of place to image was not important for the images, but that capturing and thinking about atmosphere or the sense of a connection between figure and place was. This is my main argument. Harrison does discuss though, how some studios were less successful due to intermittent or changing light (for instance, Mallord Street and Narrow Street)<sup>81</sup> – hence implying that the atmosphere literally affected Bacon’s work.

The importance of place was not only about physical environment, as Harrison points out in his section about Bacon in St Ives. The possible inclusion of horizontal simplified shapes may have come from the landscape, but also from other abstract artists working there, like Patrick Heron. Harrison suggests this by saying that Bacon’s time in St Ives “consolidated the shift towards flatter, simpler, lighter grounds and a greater distinction between the more painterly ‘image’ and the ‘abstract’ ground,”<sup>82</sup> reflecting Bacon’s thinking that abstraction “should be restricted to the backgrounds of paintings.”<sup>83</sup>

I disagree with the point Harrison makes here, that Bacon’s new flattened backgrounds “should not be over-emphasised,”<sup>84</sup> though he probably means in terms of the fashion for abstraction at the time. This simplification is an important change in Bacon’s work where he separates the figure and background and starts to paint them in different ways. This

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.41.

questions the usual figure-ground relation of similarity in handling to one of opposition, bringing in new problems for Bacon, which I argue that he solves through his small portraits series (see chapter 6). I see this figure-ground relationship as central to Bacon's Reece Mews work.

Harrison states that Bacon was 'constrained' by his Battersea studio,<sup>85</sup> and that the move to Reece Mews in 1961 ended a "ten-year period without a permanent studio of his own," and that the new studio "was to have a profound effect on Bacon's life and art."<sup>86</sup> As previously noted, Bacon now started using photographs of friends, often directed by him but taken by others, alongside found imagery. He also started a long series of small portraits (1964) which were often small triptychs, while taking up his larger triptych paintings as well.<sup>87</sup>

Harrison also states that photographs changed the interior spaces of his paintings 'from cages to shorthand ciphers of rooms,' and he suggests that the now flat coloured grounds of his paintings kept his work up-to-date in its appeal and relation to minimalism and conceptual art rather than as anachronistic to his time.<sup>88</sup> Harrison, however, does not follow up this ground-figure relationship and its own possible conceptual reading.

In a section titled *Breathless*, Harrison valuably discusses the idea of the open mouth in Bacon's work and reminds us that Bacon considered that his figures were sometimes screaming, but also possibly yawning or sneezing. I follow up this idea in chapter 5, linking air, breath and atmosphere as an important part of the experience of place. Harrison writes

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.170.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.171.

about Bacon's asthma and how the "airless spaces [in some of his works] evoke the gasping for breath of the asthmatic."<sup>89</sup>

Much of *In Camera*, as the title on the face of it suggests, is about photography. Harrison weaves Bacon's life, photography and his paintings throughout and there is much useful material that underpins various readings of Bacon's work. My interest was particularly in the other reading of 'In Camera' – as 'in a room' – so my use of Harrison's ideas is specifically oriented to that thinking. This doesn't deny any other readings, but I have limited my interests in this source to this line of inquiry. The same can be said of Harrison's *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné* (2016),<sup>90</sup> which is currently *the* definitive source for Bacon's paintings and drawings, listed with reproductions and texts for each work and utterly invaluable as a resource.

The last two books I will review here are intimately related to Bacon's Reece Mews studio – my focal topic. I will start with *Francis Bacon's Studio* (2005) by Margarita Cappock. This in-depth and well-illustrated book looks at the Reece Mews studio during and after the move to Dublin. It is the first study of the contents of the studio, which comprised about 7,500 objects, including photographs, books and magazines, works on paper as well as destroyed and unfinished final works. Barbara Dawson's introductory chapter describes the studio, its layout, preparations for the studio move from London to Dublin, and the extraordinary care of documenting the contents and moving them and the walls, floor and ceiling to Dublin. In the following chapters, Cappock makes a detailed analysis of aspects of the studio contents – including chapters on found photographs and Bacon's drawings.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>90</sup> Harrison, M. and Daniels, R., (eds) (2016) *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, London, The Estate of Francis Bacon.

Cappock demonstrates some fascinating connections between found imagery and paintings, especially some useful links between photographs taken in a photoshoot of George Dyer in Bacon's studio by John Deakin, and Bacon's painting *Triptych 1977*.<sup>91</sup> Cappock outlines the relationship of the painting's left panel to one of Deakin's photographs, pointing out the clothing left by Dyer and how this "scrupulous inclusion of his clothing...[could be understood as]...a discreet *memento mori* "<sup>92</sup> These links afforded me a deeper insight into the possible 'narrative'<sup>93</sup> or set of relationships within that whole triptych. This led to establishing Bacon's relation to Reece Mews through place and memory (see thesis Chapter 4).

Cappock also helpfully juxtaposes photographic imagery that is used in specific paintings which helped support my inquiry into visual links between paintings and the studio structure, layout and atmosphere. I was able to begin to link the studio to specific paintings – for example, *Study for a Self-Portrait* (1981) is reproduced close to the photograph *Francis Bacon in his Reece Mews studio*<sup>94</sup> (1974) by Michael Holtz. Comparing the images, we see the folds, made by Bacon on the photograph, which were used along with some of the shapes of the ceiling edge and the stacked paintings against the wall, how Bacon used these in a strongly edited version to create the dark surrounding shape around the self-portrait in the painting. I discuss this link in Chapter 4 of this thesis. This exemplifies the simplification of his surroundings into a shorthand version of the layout and sense of place, which in other paintings is developed into a character or atmosphere of the studio.

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<sup>91</sup> Cappock 2005, p.38.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp.39-40.

<sup>93</sup> Although Bacon denies the place of narrative in his work, as Katharina Günther writes "his paintings do incorporate subtle hints and faint leads towards a story", Günther 2022, p.226.

<sup>94</sup> Cappock 2005, pp.76-77.

Further details by Cappock helped relate the studio atmosphere to Bacon's work. For example, she points out that Holtz's photographs capture the "true natural light"<sup>95</sup> of the space. Again, the photograph *Francis Bacon in his Reece Mews studio*, and others by Holtz, show the ambient light (on a bright day), and demonstrate that the ceiling colour was clearly reflected throughout the space, throwing an orange cast on Bacon and his surrounds. As Bacon was 'sensitive to the atmosphere of a place'<sup>96</sup> this would not have gone unnoticed – at the very least at a subconscious level. I think this pervading colour had some effect on Bacon's sense of atmosphere in his works and would have supported or suggested his return to the orange ground in his paintings that he had used many years before.

Cappock's images of the studio and the detritus, as well as my visits to the studio at the Hugh Lane gallery, were sometimes used as the starting point for my practice-based research drawings (see Chapter 8). My drawing *Francis Bacon Studio Study 12* (2021), for example, uses the folded tracing-paper drawings, reproduced in Cappock's book on page 170, as the supporting 'ground' which holds layers of images stacked on top. Other detritus images, used in drawings *FBSS11* (2020) and *FBSS18* (2024), were taken from Martin Harrison's *Francis Bacon: Incunabula* (2008).

Cappock offers insights into Bacon's manipulation of working material,<sup>97</sup> as previously stated about Holtz's photograph, and this is something taken further in the next source to be discussed. In *Francis Bacon: In the Mirror of Photography* (2022), Katharina Günther sets out, at the very beginning, to question the predominant reading of Bacon's work, which she states is often seen as "shocking", but that this is "made too much of." Günther's research

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>96</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.213.

<sup>97</sup> Cappock 2005, p.39.

helps broaden our knowledge of Bacon's working methods and situates his painting within procedures and place, away from the generally understood immediate, improvisatory, expressionist reading, towards a meticulous preparation procedure where "the studio, its contents, and its dynamics played a decisive and active role in the working process."<sup>98</sup>

Günther's research is mainly a technical analysis<sup>99</sup> of Bacon's studio contents, looking at the methods of manipulation of photographs and reproductions that littered the floor. This detritus, according to Günther, was "ruthlessly manipulated, utterly altered and re-formulated, sometimes almost beyond recognition."<sup>100</sup> Günther takes an in-depth view of the material and details how Bacon took it from initial stages to painting.

Part 2 of *The Mirror of Photography* is specifically about an analysis (and importance) of Bacon's studio and his working processes. Günther clearly states that Bacon scholarship and interpretation would "have taken a different turn" if Reece Mews studio and contents had not been saved and available for historical examination.<sup>101</sup> Although, it needs to be remembered that the studio was cleared from time to time and that other studios were temporarily used.

Importantly, for this current research, through further discussion about the developing use of detritus and image manipulation in several studios over a few decades, Günther says that it "needed the additional catalyst of moving into Reece Mews to allow such alterations to

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<sup>98</sup> Günther 2022, p.271.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.50.

appear more prominently and openly in his work.”<sup>102</sup> This agrees with the importance of Reece Mews studio that I see as pivotal to Bacon’s sense of place (see Chapter 4).

Günther goes on to speak about role of the ‘studio dynamics,’ as described by John Russell<sup>103</sup> as the “pulverizer,”<sup>104</sup> where Bacon’s prepared images/photographs (which he tore, folded, glued, paint splattered) were further distressed in their mix with piles of other material on the floor, where Bacon worked and where they were constantly trodden on. Bacon accepted, “embracing, fostering, and provoking,” these “accidental” manipulations, and in this way “bypassed artistic agency and avoided illustrating personal impulses.”<sup>105</sup> This, I consider, is important to Bacon’s use of his space – allowing the place to have a major role in image creation – one of the important changes that took place in Bacon’s work at Reece Mews. This is further confirmed/reiterated when Günther talks about his working process (using chance procedures like throwing paint) as an “attempt to remove himself from authorial agency.”<sup>106</sup>

In her discussions about space, Günther relates that the depicted space becomes more minimal throughout his work from the 1940s onward. Günther notes that the shallow spaces in Bacon’s paintings are mainly derived from photographs,<sup>107</sup> (though it is clear that his studio informed at least some, which I outline in Chapter 4). She states that Bacon minimalised space and that his disinterest in “a more accurate rendering of space motivated how he appropriated and adopted photographs.”<sup>108</sup> I think that Günther is simplifying this

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>103</sup> Russell, J. (1997) *Francis Bacon*, London, Thames and Hudson.

<sup>104</sup> Günther p.120: Günther writes that some “images were sent through the ‘pulverizer’ of the studio dynamics several times, even after they had been altered and appropriated for painting.”

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.125.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.209.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

too much and that the move to the very late work using “monochromatic colour planes”<sup>109</sup> misses the point that these were more likely to be atmospheric in their nature, as I argue in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

I think the focus of Günther’s book, on photography, does tend to limit her reading of Bacon’s work and possibly misread the use of photographs as basic material. In the case of *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986), for example, Günther claims that the simple floorboard area is taken from a photograph from Micheal Peto and Alexander Bland’s book *The Dancer’s World* (1963).<sup>110</sup> She makes a case for the floorboards resembling the photograph, but choosing a found image may only be helpful to convey an external truth to a painting, so that it has some sense of reality to it rather than a generic quality. It also, again, bypasses authorship. But this doesn’t tell us about the possible reading or meaning of that work, for instance. The attendant light switch and bare bulb, in this painting, more likely relate the painted image to his studio, as I discuss (again in Chapter 4).

Günther speaks about the complexity of Bacon’s paintings when she describes his methods of creating images from found photographs as: “...the more complex layering, merging, melting, the *fusion* of almost identical pre-existing settings,”<sup>111</sup> but this complexity does not seem to be taken further than the painting or the procedural processes. Günther does not widen the creative field to the place and relate to a larger understanding of Bacon’s figuration. Although Günther writes about the role of the studio, that is mainly in terms of the way the detritus was part of that space and the whole space as a ‘pulverizer,’ rather

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.153.

than any spatial or place sense. The limits of the figure along with the limits of the photograph confine a wider reading of place.

Generally, the importance of edge is overlooked, and this has wider implications. For example, Günther writes about Bacon's painting techniques discussing how he distances his paintings from their photographic sources. In one case, for example, the bird in the left panel of *Two Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants* (1968), Günther says that it is "only coarsely defined...with gestural brushstrokes... [and that it] depends heavily on the outline, here determined by the margins of the red ground. [my italics]." <sup>112</sup> Looking at the photograph and the painting next to each other <sup>113</sup> we can see that Günther is right, that the ground defines the body of the bird, but she doesn't then mention that the ground (also the pictured floor) relates to the water shapes in the photograph too. The rings of water mirror the arena of Bacon's circular floor enclosure. Günther is right to see that the ground creates an outline edge that carries "the main load in conveying [the bird's] configuration" <sup>114</sup> but she doesn't carry that through to consider the external shape doing so and how that might be significant to Bacon's complete figure-place visualisation.

Likewise, Günther goes on to write about outline as the starting point for many of Bacon's works, where he defined a "'vague outline of something' on the empty canvas." <sup>115</sup> Here she talks about a simple line drawing to start Bacon's artwork. But Günther only talks about an outline or a contour <sup>116</sup> and doesn't appear to see that line as a sketched suggestion, a porous edge *between* two places, extending to the full implication of the outline. As Edward

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.195.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp.196-197.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.195.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.197.

Casey writes about frames, an outline also faces two directions – inward and outward at the same time. In Günther’s example, *Self-Portrait (1991-92)*<sup>117</sup> we see a figure sketched onto a canvas, but at the same initial phase of the painting we see straight lines that surround the figure lines along with a bed or furniture outline below the figure. So, Bacon appears to be thinking about figure and its place from the very start of an image, and that ‘outlines’ delineate inside and outside at the same time. This may seem like a small detail, but as soon as we see a line having two faces we are taken away from the simple edge of a thing to an interface. This interface is what the figure sets up, especially for Bacon who often takes great pains to separate figures to avoid narratives and, more importantly, is always aware of edges and surfaces, as I argue in this thesis.

An important point that Günther makes in her ‘Spatial Setting and Photography’ chapter (3.1) is that figures and settings were often taken from separate photographs.<sup>118</sup> She gives examples which support her understanding, but I believe, there are paintings that contradict this view and demonstrate that Bacon’s procedures were not always directly related to their possible reading or meaning. In section iv of my Chapter 4, I discuss some of Bacon’s images that directly relate to his studio. Günther does, however, go into some detail about how Bacon relates the separate figures with the grounds to integrate them. She outlines various methods of integration, through trading similar figure shapes for the ‘background’ found image, using a mirror image to encompass the new figure, and times when he doesn’t integrate them but uses the disruption instead.<sup>119</sup> In terms of my reading, any difference or disruption between figure and ground in Bacon’s work in the late period had a purpose –

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.159.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p168-170.

and this, I argue, is to open a gap up between the two extremes of being-in-place. It was this opening that Bacon was often exploring and which allowed him to develop past this distancing to a point where he nearly wholly removes the figure and focuses on what I term sentient place.

One of Günther's last points is about identity in Bacon's paintings, where she states that photographic material "facilitated Bacon's challenging and blurring of conventional ideas of representation, portraiture and identity."<sup>120</sup> This is an important subject in relation to this thesis – the openness of identity, how features were blurred and figures took on the looks of more than one identifiable person, informs the way we might read Bacon's questioning of appearance, and a wider reading of the borders of self and the figure in place and milieu.

Günther quotes Michel Archimbaud saying that Bacon saw appearance as "a fluid and changeable condition,"<sup>121</sup> and further notes that "boundaries between portrait and figure study were unstable and blurry."<sup>122</sup> This instability of appearance (and the genres of his paintings), I argue, was also part of Bacon's way of questioning the edge of the figure and the way it was embedded in place (see Chapter 6).

Günther concludes that "Bacon's painting and his working environment depended on, shaped, and mutually influenced one another."<sup>123</sup> This is really the starting point of my thesis, where I take this relationship of Bacon and place to position place as the leading edge of Bacon's later work. Günther's book offers much insight into Bacon's work, it is rich

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.233.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.237.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.239.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.272.

with detail and well-documented discussions, its limit though, is the focus on Bacon's use of photography, which kept the reading internal to the pictures and methods involved.

In this chapter, I have described the broad, necessarily hybrid methodology used for this research project, which has included textual sources alongside the visual/physical artefacts of paintings, installations, and photographs related to Bacon's art practice and studio environments, supported by my own practical research through drawing, which extended my thinking about Bacon's visualisation of place in relation to his Reece Mews studio. The chapter has ended with a review of a number of the most important philosophical and textual sources for my approach to the thesis topic and a brief description of the artefacts involved. The next chapter (Ch.3), *Figure and Architecture* will investigate the beginnings of Bacon's creative career (as an interior designer), which arguably set the groundwork for his life-long interest in place.

## Part 1: Figure and Architecture

The first part of the thesis lays out the basics about Bacon and his studio and supports the deeper, specific investigations in part two.

The two chapters in part one look at the way Bacon's early design work can be understood as directly relevant to his painting through the connections between rooms and figures.

Furniture connects figure to architecture and makes architecture more inhabitable, often taking similar basic forms on a reduced scale for human use. Bacon's furniture designs start to invent forms that could be seen as precursors to his spaceframes, curtained zones and enclosures. These ideas last throughout his working life. They can be seen to arise from his earliest days and are developed over the 1930s to 1950s in his paintings, but it is only when Bacon moves to his Reece Mews home that his work takes on specifically *placed* imagery where forms and furniture become part of images of placed experience in some of his work.

Bacon seems to have had a complicated relationship to place, which could be at least partly due to his childhood experiences of moving home frequently (as described in biographies by Sinclair, Peppiatt and Stephens and Swan) a pattern set early and which followed throughout his life, until he arrived at Reece Mews.

This complicated relationship to home or place is reflected across his work. The line of 'place' that I want to look at here is one of the important but elusive subjects that threads its way through his practice. Bacon's work is much more varied in its subjects than seems to be discussed generally, which makes unravelling his relations to place complicated.

It is possible to define the general subjects (or tenors<sup>1</sup>)<sup>2</sup> within Bacon's oeuvre in the following way.

Perhaps the clearest, and the one that dominates most discussions about his work, is the human body, which includes animal/human images. The second could be identified as documentary or history painting – as John Russell had stated that Bacon wanted “to paint the history of Europe in my lifetime.”<sup>3</sup> A third subject would be works based on other artworks/artefacts (ie Van Gogh paintings, Velazquez Pope variations, Muybridge based imagery, and literature (for example, Eliot, Aeschylus and mythology).

The fourth is autobiography – paintings of himself and friends (which are not always solely portraits). Which clearly leads on to the fifth category of portraits and heads (which are often smaller paintings). Sixth, landscapes; and seventh, the figure/ground/place imagery. These last subjects (5, 6 and 7) will be the main focus of this thesis.

Of course, what makes investigating Bacon's work so interesting is that these subjects are not necessarily self-sufficient categories or themes – they cross over and merge with each other, though some works may clearly fall under particular categories more directly.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Rawson discusses the idea of a 'topic' of a work of art as having two aspects: “First is the *tenor*, which is what promotes the extension of forms into space; second is the special meaning enclosed in the topic, which may not be an obvious direct product of the tenor though it may be 'hung on' it.” Rawson 1969, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> For Bacon, the subject is seen as a way of trapping the reality. He states “One always starts work with the subject, no matter how tenuous it is, and one constructs an artificial structure by which one can trap the reality of the subject-matter that one has started from. ... The subject is the bait.” Sylvester 2016, p.202.

<sup>3</sup> John Russell writes of Bacon's interest in this idea when he writes: “Bacon always has at the back of his mind: 'The History of Europe in My Lifetime'. ...the subject...presides over everything that Bacon has done...” Russell 1997, p.55, however, this is modified by Bacon in discussion with Hugh Davies when Bacon replies to Davies' question about this idea saying “he didn't think it was possible to achieve such an image and that one's subject is effected by the fact that one lives through that time.” Davies in Harrison 2009, p.104.

## Chapter 3: Figure and architecture

To begin this discussion about Bacon's specific relation to his Reece Mews studio it is useful to start with his earlier work, well before his time there, to explore a line within his oeuvre that deals with architecture and the human figure. The subject of rooms in Bacon's work is often mentioned by curators, theorists and biographers - for instance, Cappock (2005), Harrison (2005), Conzen (2016), Russell (1997), Stevens and Swan (2021)), - but this does not seem to be fully explored as a line throughout his work which changes with his living/working circumstances and subjects. The main period of change, as I have stated, appears to be between his 1950s and 1970s works, but the move from a generic response to place to a specific one seems to take a long time to evolve. It is in the mature stage of his work that this attendance to place becomes more focused. For a longer view I need to start with his earliest design and two-dimensional artworks of the 1920s and 30s.

### 3.1/ Early furniture / interior design / artworks

Martin Harrison, in his 2005 lecture on Bacon at the Shafrazi Gallery, New York, outlines a common reaction to Bacon's early interior design career when he says that it "is slightly hard to reconcile with that ambition [to become a painter]."<sup>4</sup> However, Harrison goes on to say that commentators on Bacon have looked at the visual relationships of his tubular steel furniture with structures and figure supports in his paintings. In his book, *Francis Bacon: In Camera*, he also suggests a link to the modernist simplified spaces that Bacon had seen and copied as a designer.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless Bacon distanced himself from his design work – in his

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<sup>4</sup> Harrison, M., (2005a) *Sources and Interpretations*, Lecture recorded at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison does however, point out: "Bacon's experience in the realm of interior design, although he sought to minimise its significance, informed both the pared-down modernist spaces in his paintings and the armatures on which he displayed their figures." Harrison 2005b, p.23.

book *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an enigma*, Michael Peppiatt, who knew the artist well, writes about Bacon's dismissal of his early design work:

"The artist rejected it out of hand, dismissing it as a brief, unimportant episode in which he did nothing of any originality"<sup>6</sup>, and "Bacon dismissed his work as a designer contemptuously, mainly because he felt it detracted from his prestige as a painter."<sup>7</sup>

This has been a standard response by many interpreters, but this is also questioned by Peppiatt in the following sentences:

...his experience with interior spaces and his predilection for mirrors, tubular steel furniture and curtains hanging ... 'in sculptural folds' never left him. The room space ... was to provide the theatre for nine-tenths of everything he painted...<sup>8</sup>

When considering Bacon's sense of place throughout his work it becomes clear that his earliest period as a furniture and interior designer is not an anomaly, or an early 'career' misdirection as seems to be suggested by interpreters and Bacon himself. Instead, it demonstrates a direct encounter with relations between the human figure and the place it inhabits – literally and metaphorically – and something which appears to be an interest throughout his life. This sense of relation of human and place, I argue, runs through all his work and is one of the main guiding interests of his oeuvre. This informs many changes in Bacon's work as he grapples with the possibilities of visualising this subject. It is often simply understood in terms of the classic figure/ground question that many artists deal with – and

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<sup>6</sup> Peppiatt 2008, p.55.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

this is quite relevant to Bacon – but it is the continuous questioning of this in Bacon that makes him such an inventive and interesting painter, and vital to his own time and still of interest today.

The furniture pieces show an engagement with Modernism and are generally considered as strongly influenced by other designers<sup>9</sup>. This, in itself, is an interesting reflection on the relations between humans and their surroundings – both in terms of the designs which look at physical habitation, but also in looking at how individual and, more broadly, contemporary designers deal with that issue. We have the problems of designs themselves plus the idea of reflecting on other designer's solutions and thinking. It follows that Bacon's early painterly career uses other artist's works (mainly Picasso, but, closer to home, his mentor Roy de Maistre) as learning tools, especially as he was a self-taught artist, but also as ways of reflecting on their imagery and processes.

The Modernist agenda that surrounded Bacon (in Berlin and Paris) as he began his creative career generally considered design as socially important and transformational. Modernism was resetting our relation to the world and at that stage was influenced by an internationalist viewpoint. This wider setting is likely to have influenced any sense of place that he would paint.

As well documented in the Bacon biographies by Sinclair (1993), Peppiatt (2008), Stevens and Swan (2021) he had witnessed rebellion in Ireland and WWI in his childhood years, and lived through WWII with even closer first-hand experience, so his life always dealt with larger, often violent, external forces that impinged upon his more 'domestic' arrangements.

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<sup>9</sup> Lauren Barnes writes that Bacon was influenced by Le Corbusier and Eileen Gray. Barnes in Conzen 2016, p. 120; Peppiatt cites Breuer and Le Corbusier as design influences. Peppiatt 2008, p.57.

Little wonder that Bacon was sensitive to the chaos around him. Modernism itself was revolutionary on many levels, and sometimes implicitly violent (as in Picasso's early Cubism, as well as Expressionism and Futurism).



Figure 1: Francis Bacon, Studio photograph (c1930?) From *The Atlantic*, Books (review of Stevens and Swan, *Francis Bacon: Revelations*), March 25, 2021.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2: Photograph of Bacon's interior design work – taken, according to Martin Harrison's New York lecture, in Bacon's own home – 17 Queensbury Mews, London. <sup>11</sup>

So Bacon's early design work reflects some Modernist ideas and practices. But, on a more personal level for Bacon, I think his furniture design also demonstrates early interests in figures and enclosures that prefigure later rooms and framing devices in his work.

For example, in Fig 1, a studio photograph of his furniture designs, we see a bureau/sideboard at the back of the room against the wall which houses two open box shapes that are accented by their contrasting white interiors. These open rectangular shapes are strong features of the piece which sits alongside a sofa with high back and sides, again with light interior and dark surround, designed to enclose the sitter. These objects

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<sup>10</sup> N.B. In this thesis, the illustration captions give the bare essentials of the image/source to guide the reader, and the List of Illustrations provides the full reference data, for research purposes.

<sup>11</sup> The image of his furniture designs comes originally from an article on Bacon's designs published in *The Studio*, vol.100, August 1930, pp.140-1.

invite use; they are open enclosures – a device used by Bacon in many later paintings. As previously mentioned, other interpreters have also previously pointed out the use of chrome tubing for tables and other pieces of furniture by Bacon – describing this as a precursor to the rails in his later works. In Fig 2, a second studio photograph, we see a table and two stools which also use the tubular steel material, and these tend to create cubic spaces below them. Like the open enclosures of the bureau/sideboard these negative spaces appear important to his designs. Also, in Fig 2 there are two circular mirrors. At least one of his circular mirrors seems to have survived throughout his career, as one plays a dominant role in Reece Mews studio. The circular design, echoed in the two tables in Fig 1 becomes a recurring interior spatial motif later in his paintings.

What I think we see in these designs are particular concerns with space and how the figure uses and relates to the pieces and to space itself – even if at a rudimentary level.



Figure 3: Francis Bacon, *Painted Screen* (c1930), Three panels, oil on plywood, Each panel: 72 x 24 in. (183 x 61 cm), Credit: Tate Images / Tate Images, Copyright: © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025



Figure 4: Francis Bacon *Watercolour* (1929), Watercolour, gouache, pencil and black ink on paper, 8 ¼ x 5 ½ in. (21 x 14 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025

One of Bacon's earliest extant artworks is his *Painted Screen* of c1930 [Fig 3]. This can be considered his first triptych and is a good example of a visual work that crosses the interior design/visual art genres – it is at once a piece of furniture and a set of paintings. In the context of this current research it is important that it crosses these creative boundaries as well as amalgamating human-type figures with architectural structures within the imagery. For example, the left panel combines a figure and a brick wall in a single black form, only defined as separate objects by some incised lines within the overall form; the centre panel suggests a figure in, and as part of, a shadowy doorway, as the dark opening also takes on the shoulder form and is therefore confused visually with the figure; and the right panel brings together two figures and a fluted column, which overlap and the lower, front figure becomes an architectural decoration in its rhythm to the bottom of the column. This screen, in this case, starts to develop a core theme that runs throughout Bacon's work – the figure and environment in embedded relationship with each other. This theme becomes more complex later in his work, and calls for more radical rethinking of the figure. Also, in this piece, the screens and their interior painted scenes act like spaceframes in relation to figures and larger rooms/picture frame; and there is a hint of the orange ground that appears again much later. These ideas will be discussed more fully later in the thesis.

Another early artwork, *Watercolour* (1929) [Fig 4] has a diving figure incorporated into an architectural layout. Importantly, Bacon uses lines of floorboards across the image as might be seen in an axonometric architectural drawing. The lines of the floorboards are related to the fluting of the columns in the *Screen*, made a year later. These are an early occurrence of a line pattern, and architectural detailing, that Bacon will use throughout his creative work.



Figure 5: Francis Bacon, *Gouache* (1929) Gouache, distemper and watercolour on paper 14 × 9 ¾ in. (35.5 × 25 cm)  
© The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025

Figure 6: Juan Gris, *The Sunblind* (1914) Papier colle: Gouache, paper, chalk and charcoal on canvas 921 × 727 mm. Image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)

Bacon often talked about being influenced by Picasso, but it seems other cubist artists also played a role. For example, it is interesting to note that Juan Gris is singled out and mentioned for his technical quality. Hugh Davies in *Interviewing Bacon, 1973* recalls Bacon saying: “To me Cubism is partly falling apart... except Gris who survives best. Gris’ immaculate technique has survived better”<sup>12</sup> and “...nobody’s been able to use the new technical possibilities well. Matisse, Picasso and Gris in certain works come closest.”<sup>13</sup> If we compare the early Bacon *Gouache* (1929) [Fig 5] with an example Juan Gris papier collé, *The Sunblind* (1914) [Fig 6], there are clearly related architectural and other pictorial elements which Bacon uses here and in many later works. There is a high viewpoint creating deeply angled ‘floor’ surface, a ‘shuttering’ line pattern which describes planes in the image but also breaks up those larger planes or zones (and suggests space beyond in the Gris), and

<sup>12</sup> Davies in Harrison 2009, p.103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.109.

there are the deep shadows which frame the main 'subject'. In the Gris, there is even a light painterly shadow from the foot of the central vase/wine glass shape which seems to have a different treatment or life of its own compared to the object casting it, and a collaged newspaper header. These appear to relate to or may have suggested later devices used by Bacon in the guise of the odd figure shadows and the random collaged, transfer lettering. It is also relevant that Gris said "I try to concretise that which is abstract ... My art is an art of synthesis ... I consider that the architectural side of painting is mathematical, the abstract side, I want to humanise it."<sup>14</sup>

Alongside the formal and subject inventions from Cubism, Bacon also absorbed Surrealist ideas, particularly from Alberto Giacometti and Henri Michaux. He speaks of both these artists in later interviews with particular praise for Giacometti.



Figure 7. Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4a.m.* (1932) 25 x 28 1/4 x 15 3/4" (63.5 x 71.8 x 40 cm) MoMA © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Figure 8. Francis Bacon, detail from *Three Figures and Portrait* (1975), Oil paint and pastel on canvas Support: 1981 x 1473 mm, frame: 2175 x 1668 x 98 mm, collection: Tate, © Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025

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<sup>14</sup> Gris, J. (1921) *Juan Gris (1887-1927) Reply to a Questionnaire*. In Harrison, C., Wood, P. (eds) (2003), *Art in Theory: an Anthology of Changing Ideas 1900-2000*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, p.246.

As Michael Peppiatt has written, Bacon would have seen early Giacometti work in the London *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936.<sup>15</sup> Several image ideas in Giacometti's piece *The Palace at 4a.m.* (1932) [Fig 7], shown in the exhibition, seem to coincide with Bacon's works. As pointed out by Peppiatt, the 'cage-like structure' could have connections with Bacon's 'spaceframes'. Further to that insight the spine<sup>16</sup> object on the right, encased in a rectangular frame, occurs later in Bacon's figures in *Three Figures and Portrait* (1975), [Fig 8] and might have resonated with, or influenced, his notion of the artwork needing to work directly on the viewer's nervous system. Further, Giacometti's framed spine could be understood as a sort of prototype for Bacon's later spaceframed figures (see chapter 7), and even Giacometti's later move from surrealism to his observational works has some parallel with Bacon's change of focus from his 1940s/50s works to his 1960s/70s Reece Mews turn to painting friends and his own milieu.<sup>17</sup> I will return to these ideas in later chapters.

Again, in Giacometti's *Palace* sculpture, the triptych of panels on the left-hand side of the artwork (alluding to a wall or a screen) behind the female figure, and the bird of prey object at the top right of the sculpture also point to later forms and subjects used by Bacon. The whole work, housed in a building's structural frame, is raised on a platform/plinth – both of which Bacon later used in many paintings. It is unlikely that all these devices were consciously taken from Giacometti, but they may demonstrate connected thinking and shared interests and strategies for images. Giacometti was one of the few contemporary

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<sup>15</sup> Peppiatt writes "Although his own work had been rejected for being 'insufficiently surreal', Bacon would certainly have visited the International Surrealist Exhibition, ...[seeing] Giacometti's haunting *Palace at 4a.m.* (with its cage-like structure, which was to prove so useful to Bacon later on)" Peppiatt 2008, p.89.

<sup>16</sup> Bacon also spoke about the spine image in relation to Degas' *After the Bath* (1903), a drawing in the National Gallery, London which fascinated him. Sylvester 2016, p.53.

<sup>17</sup> Peppiatt also makes this point, saying, "Giacometti, who had tirelessly drawn, painted and sculpted his own inner circle...may have served as an example." Peppiatt 2008, p.256.

artists that Bacon rated highly, though this, he claimed, was mainly for Giacometti's drawings.<sup>18</sup>

Peppiatt, quoted at the beginning of this section, uses the term 'theatre' when he says, "The room space ... was to provide the theatre for nine-tenths of everything he painted..."<sup>19</sup>

Theatre, here, can be understood as a backdrop, as Peppiatt suggests, or as a place of objective props to a figurative enquiry. This theatre has a sense of stage, of acting – but it also suggests a sense of heightened place (or even something a bit more ominous – a theatre for operating, or a theatre of war). In Bacon's work, or at least his mature work, even though he spoke of the work being 'artificial', he would have worked hard to steer away from any sense of staginess, theatricality, or acting, at least in terms of narrative, especially as he wanted a sense of realism – a reporting of reality.<sup>20</sup> He aimed toward the place of action. The difference in terms of theatre, is similar to the difference between acting (in a play on a stage) and the theatre of an event in contemporary performance art. The first is pre-written, rehearsed and performed over and over; the second sets out given parameters and is improvised at the time of performance. For Bacon, painting was performative: "I don't want to *say* something, I want to *do* something" he says to David Sylvester.<sup>21</sup> So, the theatre, in Bacon's case, is the place of action which is both the action of the figure *in* the painting as well as the action to achieve the image – *on* the surface, as well as in the theatre of the studio. (This leads on to the next section of this chapter about paintings of the studio.) For Bacon, the relation between the act of making the painting and

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<sup>18</sup> Peppiatt notes Bacon's 'short tribute to Giacometti' in an exhibition catalogue saying, "For me Giacometti is not only the greatest draughtsman of our period, but one of the greatest of all time." Peppiatt 2008, p.349.

<sup>19</sup> Peppiatt 2008, p.56.

<sup>20</sup> Bacon told Sylvester: "I believe that art is recording; I think it's reporting." Sylvester 2016, p.69.

<sup>21</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.222.

the image *in* the painting was interlocked, similar to his concept of the relation of image to the material of paint. The successful painting for Bacon was when there was ‘a complete interlocking of image and paint’ as Bacon wrote about the work of Matthew Smith.<sup>22</sup>

One last point about his design work. Bacon created several rug designs (as seen in Figs 1 and 2 above) which possibly point to his later interest in carpets and plinth-like forms that raised the figure in the notional spaces of the paintings. It seems clear that Bacon’s interior design interests carried on into later life. For example, in his 1973 interview Hugh Davies notes Bacon as speaking about colour: ‘Said color in foreground of recent triptych (1973 Dyer-Bacon-Freud) based on Aubousson [sic] carpets, “I have always loved them...”’<sup>23</sup>

Bacon’s earliest designs and artworks demonstrate some strong relationships of figure with place, or at the very least in terms of their being in, or actions in, given spaces. These works spoke of objects in our immediate space which mediate that space/place – as interior design modifies architecture to afford living conditions. We can see that Bacon thought spatially about place and figure from the start of his career.

In the next section we see this interest in the room space develop into images of the artist’s studio. This is an important subject for Bacon as it is the interior that always surrounds the painter – it is a subject used by many artists before him, but his own use of it becomes personally important to him over time, where the human figure’s relation to specific place (rather than space) is questioned.

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<sup>22</sup> Rothenstein 1953, p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Davies in Harrison 2009, p.98.

### 3.2/ *Composition* (1933) and the studio as subject

*Composition* (1933) [Fig 9] helps to define the recurring subject of figure and room in Bacon's imagery. The painting shows a section of a room indicated by the details of floorboards and wall panelling which we have seen before in Bacon's work, and which become standard shorthand motifs for an interior space. But more specifically, it is a studio, as it clearly shows a side view of a stretched canvas propped on an easel of some sort, to the centre left.



Figure 9: Francis Bacon, *Composition* (1933), Egg tempera(?), pen and ink and pencil on paper, 20 ½ x 15 ⅝ in. (52.2 x 39.7 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025

What is interesting about this painting is that it contrasts the encompassing stasis of a place with the movement of the action of painting (depicted and in the making), and the material

(ink and paint) itself. The strange configuration of lines and shapes in the centre of the image is a figural presence in line with other artworks of that year: *Composition (Figure)* and *Composition (Figures)*. All three have clear reference to Picasso's biomorphic figures of the late 1920s. Although *Composition* (1933) initially looks like an abstraction, there is at least one figure. In the dark shape at the top right, there is a small head with an elongated neck and lines of hair, which is almost a reverse image of the figure in *Composition (Figure)* painting. In the *Composition* (1933) image the figure is almost lost, and the central open form of the picture seems like some explosion or apparition forming in front of us. Something appearing. Something or some energy with a twisted shape. It is an atmospheric presence, an event (of making the image) and the artist, at the same time.

It seems, at this point, that Bacon has the conventional idea of the subjective energy of the human *in* a static place. In his seminal book on human geography, *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan states that "Place is an organised world of meaning. It is essentially a static concept."<sup>24</sup> This image shows Bacon's concerns of this 'organised' world – a realm of held energies – structure and flux. Indeed, it would seem that this flux *is* the real figure – and the room becomes its structural skin or exoskeleton. This is one of Bacon's treatments of the room motif and one which slowly transforms in his work in the following decades.

The sense of enclosure is important to Bacon's work, as John Russell states, in 1971 (revised 1993) "[In 1933] Bacon was already marked out as a painter of figures in rooms, and of rooms schematically divided. The sense of enclosure, of situations pushed to their extreme

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<sup>24</sup> Tuan, Y-F. (2011) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press., p.179.

between four walls, is powerful enough to offset all shortcomings of assurance in the way those situations are handled.”<sup>25</sup>

It is telling that Bacon changed the title of this artwork from *The Artist's Studio* to *Composition*,<sup>26</sup> thereby changing the emphasis of the work from a depiction to the way it was depicted, abstracted from a static visual description to a more ambiguous word suggesting something more active, *being composed*, reflective of the dynamic image itself. An image *of* and *through* flux. The change of title takes the viewer's focus from looking *into* the work to the surface *making*.

The studio as subject is an idea that many artists have used – Picasso being an obvious and important example for Bacon, as well as Bacon's colleague and, briefly partner, Roy de Maistre. In *The Influence of Roy de Maistre on Francis Bacon* Rina Arya writes:

Another characteristic of de Maistre's paintings seen in Bacon is the strong sense of place, which (in Bacon's work) does not ground the forms but instead compounds the sense of dislocation. De Maistre creates an interesting sense of interiority by situating his figures in interiors that are comprised of a number of intersecting planes that fragment the space and create multiple perspectives. ... De Maistre often places the focal point in the corner of the room, which gives a strong sense of enclosure and interiority ... Bacon's rooms are often anonymous and characterless spaces, but in spite of this, the sense of the interior, and concomitantly the

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<sup>25</sup> Russell 1997, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> According to labels on the back showing the provenance of the picture, an earlier title for the piece was 'The Artist's Studio', Sotheby's, *Inside the World of Francis Bacon: Provenant de la Collection Majid Boustany* Auction: 24 October 2022, Paris. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2022/inside-the-world-of-francis-bacon-provenant-de-la-collection-majid-boustany/composition?locale=en> [Accessed 5/6/24].

figure/ground relationship, is very significant in his work. But, unlike de Maistre's work, architectural features are not wedded to their function, instead they subvert it, so doors or windows do not function as openings, space curves around itself, objects do not have gravity, and so on. His use of curved walls occlude space further as do his flat backgrounds.<sup>27</sup>

About the same time as Bacon's *Composition* (1933) Roy de Maistre made three paintings [Figs 10, 11 and 12], which are variations of a view of Bacon's studio. The first, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (1932) is a direct observational image with a doorway and paintings stacked against the walls. It is interesting to note that floorboards and wooden wall panelling/slates are evident in that studio, and these are not only motifs that Bacon uses as a shorthand for the studio but ones he takes and builds in Reece Mews later in his life. The paintings depicted in de Maistre's work (by Bacon) show a biomorphic figure on the right, and a heraldic bird form on the left. Again, these are forms that continue in Bacon's work for many years. The following two paintings by de Maistre, both titled *New Atlantis*, develop the lines and shapes within the original image (all part of a series of five or six related paintings).<sup>28</sup> The first variation [Fig 11] flattens the space and abstracts the depicted paintings, and an outline of a female figure appears in the shadowy doorway. The circular form behind the door is possibly Bacon's circular mirror from his design days. The final painting of the three [Fig 12] uses light and shadow areas like Picasso's *The Painter and His Model* (1927) [Fig 14] which influenced the series. This version has developed Bacon's

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<sup>27</sup> Arya 2017b, pp.607–622.

<sup>28</sup> Sotheby's, Important Australian Art sale (2009), lot 93. The catalogue note outlines a series of six related paintings to the *Studio/New Atlantis* paintings, and that it, in turn, relates to Picasso's *Artist [sic] and his model* (1927, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art). Available at: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2009/important-australian-art-au0732/lot.93.html> [Accessed 13/10/24].

heraldic animal on the left hand side of *Francis Bacon's Studio* painting into a larger bird shaped light area, which now includes a head form coming up the stairs developed from his first *New Atlantis* painting of a sketched figure in the doorway; and the stairs, once implied beyond the darkened doorway, now clearly relate to the floorboards and the wall panelling, and appear to be in the room itself. The series of paintings have transformed from a description of Bacon's studio to a symbolic reading of pictorial space.



Figure 10: Roy de Maistre, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (1932) Oil on canvas 91 by 76cm, 90.1 x 71.7cm, sold at auction by Christies on March 2024.

Figure 11: Roy de Maistre, *New Atlantis* (c.1933), oil on canvas, 135.5 x 153 cm (53.35 x 60.25 in).

Figure 12: Roy de Maistre, *New Atlantis* (c. 1933), oil on canvas, 111 x 126 cm., Sotheby's Melbourne, Important Australian Art, Lot 93, 2009.

There is an identification of Bacon with the studio and the artist's materials that can be seen in some of his works. Harrison and Daniels write, for example, that "*Corner of the Studio* 1934...explored the theme of the artist's studio, focusing on the floorboards, door and walls in a freer and more abstract style than de Maistre's, and in which the *easel could also be interpreted as a biomorph*" [my italics].<sup>29</sup> Bacon often acknowledged the influence of Picasso, and the biomorph that Harrison and Daniels point out in the *Corner of the Studio* (1934) [Fig 13] painting could owe much to Picasso's *The Painter and his Model* (1927) [Fig

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<sup>29</sup> Bond 2012, p.35.

14]. There are some interesting similarities between the Picasso and Bacon paintings which seems to demonstrate that de Maistre and Bacon were both looking at that painting.



Figure 13: Francis Bacon, *Corner of the Studio* (1934), Pen, ink and wash on paper, photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS 2025.

Figure 14: Pablo Picasso, *The Painter and his Model* (1927), oil on canvas, 200 x 214 cm, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

In *Corner of the Studio* Bacon's central figure/object, in a mid-brown tone, appears to be an amalgamation of the model, artist and easel forms of the Picasso painting. In *The Painter and His Model*, the female model figure (centre/left) is drawn in curvilinear lines – in opposition to the angular lines of the artist and easel, (right). The lower half of Bacon's figure has similarities to the legs and lower body of the model and the upper half takes on the easel and head of the artist image. His figure seems to be an amalgamation of Picasso's two figures. A darker inky shadow falls across the image floor and between Picasso's model and artist halves. This shadow form is not only a device he uses in his later work, but one

that seems to include the viewer in the image. This relation of the viewer to the image is also important to Bacon later in his practice.

The door in the background of *The Corner of the Studio* relates to Picasso's door which is indicated by two vertical panels at the top right of his painting, and which reinforce the angular artist depiction. In Picasso's painting an easel and canvas stand between the artist and the model and the canvas's top line carries across the top of the image to include the model. This makes the female figure a combination of both model and image. More importantly, in relation to Bacon's picture, the floorboards curve up behind the model/figure, enclosing her further than just a room enclosure. This curvature gives an enfolding nature to what might normally be a rigid surrounding structure which Bacon had previously used in *Composition* (1933). The room/studio becomes partly animate, anthropomorphic – a participant in the drama of the image. Bacon's 1934 drawing also uses this device. This seems to be the beginning of his use of the studio space as extension of the subject – the figure - and possibly introduces the idea of the curved interior which became characteristic of much of his later work. Bacon adds to the animation of the room using apparently random wall markings and smudges which reflect his main 'biomorph' character. Even the few ink blobs that are seen across his drawing reflect the dots used by Picasso across his painting.

Although the model figure is reflected in the curvature of the floor, she is still easily identified. The artist figure is less clear. Art historian Michael FitzGerald writes about the

Picasso painting: “ ... [The artist] equally distorted, ... consists only of thick rectilinear lines ... *so spare and scattered that we might easily miss the figure they describe* [my italics].”<sup>30</sup>

As Fitzgerald says, Picasso’s artist figure in the painting is “so spare and scattered” in its drawn semblance that it disappears into the room structure and descriptive lines. Its form bleeds into the furniture and room definition so much that it is almost invisible at first view. The distortions and melding of figure and ‘ground’/space here seem to have a connection to Bacon’s development and experiments with a similar type of visualisation.

FitzGerald continues:

...Picasso conceived the studio as a place of intellectual conflict in which artist and model engage in a creative exchange, ... "Painter and Model" shows the culmination of this struggle, one that has unlocked the most disturbing depths of the human imagination, all set in the blandest of everyday places. Picasso described "Les Demoiselles" as "an exorcism" of evil forces from the artist or viewer. In "Painter and Model," artist and audience are not separate from the danger. They penetrate the painting's hallucinatory darkness and share in the violence that transforms the model.<sup>31</sup>

The violence of looking and depicting that Fitzgerald writes about here has an obvious connection to Bacon’s mid-career works, but which Bacon calls “the brutality of fact.”<sup>32</sup> A painting of the act of painting, shadows and light, distortion and recognition, and the conflation of the studio with all of these is an important precedent for Bacon’s oeuvre.

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<sup>30</sup> FitzGerald 2011, n.p.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>32</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.204.

FitzGerald's statement that the "artist and audience are not separate from the danger" suggests a weaving of all the elements of the painting into a single event – something that Bacon's later works also take on. They become seductively painted places that draw us in and sometimes repel us with their imagery at the same time. They weave the viewer (and artist) in and out of the depictions. This is all part of the way Bacon develops a relationship with the space we inhabit in and outside of his work.

Further to the point about the way the figure and the studio are condensed, Andrew Bond writes about Bacon's works:

...figures often seem trapped in the canvas, or in the convoluted representations of space within it. ... Linear frames that seem to contain the figure may also bisect it, fragmenting the body not only on the pictorial plane but also in space, by seeming to appear in front of and simultaneously behind the frame. In this way the figure is woven into the fabric of the canvas.<sup>33</sup>

Picasso's *The Painter and his Model* also has elements of this. The lines of the figures are the same as those that define the studio room and the objects within it. They are a lattice work of lines which make it difficult to discern who or what is being depicted.

In his book *The Perception of the Environment*, social anthropologist Tim Ingold, also writes about the way we live in terms of weaving. Bacon's paintings find their form as they are made and equate in some ways to the surface and interior of Ingold's weaving metaphor.

Ingold writes:

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<sup>33</sup> Bond, A. (ed.) (2012) *Francis Bacon: Five Decades*, London, UK, Thames & Hudson Ltd., p.2.

Dwelling in the world...is tantamount to the ongoing, temporal interweaving of our lives with one another and with the manifold constituents of our environment. ... The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave.<sup>34</sup>

What these quotes suggest is that Bacon's method is a found experience in the making. The works need to be looked at closely – examined and lived through. They are dwelling spaces themselves. And it is this very dwelling activity that is the prime subject of his work. In this case dwelling is used as an action, an active verb – at odds with the usual thinking of place as a static noun – or at least allowing the contradiction of these two positions to coexist.



Figure 15: Pablo Picasso, *The Three Dancers* (1925) Oil paint on canvas 2153 × 1422 mm © Succession Picasso/DACS 2025

Figure 16: Francis Bacon, *After Picasso, 'La Danse'* (1933) Chalk, pastel, pen and ink, charcoal and pencil on paper 25 1/8 x 18 3/8 in. (64 x 48 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

<sup>34</sup> Ingold, T. (2000) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, dwelling and skill*, Oxford, UK, Routledge, p.348.

Two other works around this time also reinforce the room/studio theme in interesting ways: Bacon's *After Picasso, 'La Danse'* (1933) [Fig 16], and *Studio Interior* (c. 1936) [Fig 17].

His version of *La Danse* uses vertical lines across the whole canvas that resemble wall panelling (and of course can also refer to floorboards), but this odd use of parallel lines over the top of the figurative imagery demonstrates an engagement with the 'fourth wall' of any suggested visual and theatrical space. Bacon comes back to this linear wall idea (though in fabric folds) in his mid-career work of the 1950s, and they take on the woven metaphor more clearly. I will look at those curtain-wall paintings in the next section.



Figure 17: Francis Bacon, *Studio Interior* (c. 1936) Pastel and pencil on paper 9 3/8 x 13 3/4 in. (23.5 x 35 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Bacon's *Studio Interior* has floorboards, again, which give a simple space to the image. However, a possible ceiling line, describing the space above the figure is more complicated as it sits over the top of the figure and pictured canvas. This ambiguously reads as a wall and ceiling line behind the figure but also one that projects into our (the viewer's) space, perhaps indicating the fourth wall again.

The spatial, and subject, ambiguity is further confused as Bacon curiously visually attaches the central figure to both the sculpture and stand on the left, and the canvas and easel on the right, by a rather disjointed leg and some other unspecified section of the body respectively. This figure is clearly derived from Picasso's biomorphic figures from the late 1920s and, due to its distorted outline or body edge, relates to Bacon's later portraits of the 1970s and 80s (which I will look at in chapter 6). In this painting it seems clear that Bacon is distorting the figure *in relation to* the studio function and room structure. He also uses the legs of the easel and the sculpture stand to completely straddle the floor space so that, instead of standing on a specific point of the floor, they point to the floor and the picture edges, thus joining the objects to the room space and the picture plane at the same time.

This image also marks the beginning of his use of solid colour grounds and how they encompass the figure, here acting as an enclosing agent with its own fullness and force. The ground colour, like the ceiling line, is also brought in front of the figure as striations over the left leg, anchoring, or weaving, the figure to the ground/place. The red room may, of course, derive from or have some connection to Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911), although Bacon said on several occasions that Matisse was less interesting to him than Picasso, for his lack of 'the brutality of fact' that Picasso created in his paintings.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Bacon's ground acts like Matisse's in this case, the character of the place being as important as the characters within it.<sup>36</sup> This single colour ground is developed further, later in Bacon's work, where I consider it as defining a sense of atmosphere (as discussed in Chapter 5).

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<sup>35</sup> Bacon says to Sylvester, "...for me there is very little realism in Matisse. ...Matisse never had the...brutality of fact which Picasso had." Sylvester 2016, p.204.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Peppiatt writes that, "It seems clear – although Bacon would have rejected the notion out of hand – that Matisse had a central influence on his use of colour as well as his articulation of space." Peppiatt 2021, p.38.

Having outlined some very early works of Bacon's career and his figure/room focus, in the next section I will look at the way that Bacon starts to explore a painterly language where he further develops the merging of figure and place.

### 3.3/ Figure/place merging/emerging

In this section I will discuss some of Bacon's late 1940s and 1950s paintings and how they demonstrate relations to place – both in terms of a physical relation to his studio at the time, and to his depiction of space within those paintings. As previously stated, I consider that the theme of figure and place is often central to Bacon's works and this strand of thinking/making weaves its way from the beginning, though it is not always obviously present and is not the only concern of his work.

Bacon's places of work appear to have strong (if not always clear) relations to his output. So it is interesting to see the 1950 photograph by Sam Hunter of Bacon in his Cromwell Place studio [Fig 19] where he is leaning against a curtained wall. John Russell quotes Bacon saying "I've always wanted to paint curtains. I love rooms that are hung all round with just curtains hung in even folds."<sup>37</sup> Curtains were a repeated item in several working places for Bacon: for example, as Peppiatt notes, Bacon's first studio had white rubber curtains that he had designed, and at Reece Mews his sitting room curtains had a rail that covered the window wall and turned to cover half the door wall – and, being reflected in the full-height mirror on the opposite wall, allowed half the room to appear completely curtained.<sup>38</sup> In Keith Davey's photograph of Reece Mews sitting room<sup>39</sup> the curtain rail can clearly be seen

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<sup>37</sup> Russell 1997, p.35.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh Davies notes "The end of the living room has two windows...[with] floor to ceiling heavy, dark green/grey drapes... These fell in folds exactly like his paintings... The rails for the curtains ran along window wall and turned the corner so that they could also cover the part of the perpendicular wall where the door was. I think the railing might also allow the curtain to wrap on the other side too – hence he could create a 3-sided alcove of curtain to use as a setting..." Davies in Harrison 2021, p.159.

<sup>39</sup> Keith Davey photo (1992), *7 Reece Mews, London, May 1992*, in Boustany, M. (2021), *Francis Bacon's Studios*, Francis Bacon, MB Art Foundation, Monaco, pp.282-283.

and has similarities to Bacon's *Figures in a Landscape* [Fig 21] 'room' form and to the simpler outlines of the spaceframes of other paintings.

Bacon lived and worked at 7 Cromwell Place from 1943-51 and many paintings between those years and after are broken with vertical lines. At this time, they appear mostly as curtains [see Figs 18, 20, 21], and it is interesting to note that the first clearly painted curtained image by Bacon was *Study for a Figure* (c. 1945), two years after moving into Cromwell Place, and that many curtained paintings followed that from about 1948. But striations appear earlier (as previously discussed) as panelling [Fig 16] or floorboards [Figs 4, 5, 9, 17], and these variations are repeated in later work.<sup>40</sup>

Ina Conzen, in her essay for the exhibition catalogue for *Invisible Rooms*, writes:

In the late 1940s Bacon began painting more regularly, and produced his first series born of his 'obsession with doing the one perfect picture', repeatedly circling around the same motif. The figures frequently disappear behind curtain-like structures of stripes.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of whether the figures are behind, in front or mixing with the curtain forms needs further discussion as this varies across the paintings of the 1940s and 50s. There is a particular case in some of the mouth paintings that will be covered in chapter 5, but for this section I will focus on the figures and their relations to the striations/curtains that pertain to a merging with place/space.

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<sup>40</sup> In fact, the curtains, panelling and floorboards appear throughout his life, in places around him and in his paintings. Hugh Davies' Interview with Bacon, 1973 quotes Bacon as saying that the curved rooms in his paintings came from Farmleigh "these large semi-circular rooms...had large, heavy hanging drapes and beautiful landscape vistas beyond them." Davies in Harrison 2009, p.104.

<sup>41</sup> Conzen 2016, p.18.

I agree with Deleuze that Bacon's overall aim was to create an image and a site of sensation<sup>42</sup> – the feeling of being *in* a place – from the inside out in terms of depiction, but without using overtly descriptive or 'illustrational' means. His working method developed over years so that the work was made in the same way as Bacon meant it to be seen – an image working directly on the nervous system, with only secondary recourse to intellectual understanding.<sup>43</sup> This sensory reception was reflected in the sensory visualisation that he went through to make, or find, the image/object. In this case, Bacon, despite being the 'maker' of the image/work was also the first audience member<sup>44</sup> – and the first to experience the image as fully emerged when finished. This is a compelling reason why Bacon never made full drawings or designs for his work, only sketching vague layouts. That the image emerged from various possibilities was a crucial idea for Bacon's work, so that it was not overly predetermined (or illustrational, in his own words).

John Russell uses a hunting metaphor about the way Bacon used daydreaming and the 'trap' for his capture of 'the image'. He writes, "The idea of the trap is a favourite with him, and he sees the painter – his kind of painter at any rate – as lying in wait for the image in the way that a hunter...will lie in wait above the baited trap that he has set hours, if not days,

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<sup>42</sup> Deleuze writes: "Sensation...is Being-in-the-World...at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed." Deleuze 2003, pp.34-35.

<sup>43</sup> When asked about the difference between illustrational and non-illustrational form, Bacon states: "the difference is that an illustrational form tells you through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas a non-illustrational form works first upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into the fact." Sylvester 2016, pp.65-66.

<sup>44</sup> Bacon says to Sylvester about his method during the painting process: "I look at them almost like a stranger, not knowing how these things have come about and why have these marks that have happened on the canvas evolved into these particular forms." Sylvester 2016, p. 116.

before.”<sup>45</sup> The image, in this case, was to emerge fully formed of its own free will.<sup>46</sup> This opening out of a sensory sensibility, and tuning out from a controlled thinking process, helped Bacon evolve a vulnerability within his working process and to position that within his work. Again, Russell’s writing about Bacon’s late 1940s *Head* series is helpful here. He writes:

Perhaps the *Six Heads* ... are simply statements about what it feels like to be alone in a room. Looking at them, we realise that although European painting includes a great many portraits of individuals in rooms, they are never about what it feels like to be alone in a room: the painter always makes two. ... What painting had never shown before is the disintegration of the social being ... [where we might feel] that the accepted hierarchy of our features is collapsing ... [we are] suddenly adrift, fragmented, and subject to strange mutation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Russell 1997, p.22.

<sup>46</sup> Bacon and Sylvester have a long discussion about the use of the irrational, of chance or luck in his image-making. Bacon states: “painting...will only catch the mystery of reality if the painter doesn’t know how to do it.” And later says “I’m hoping accidents or chance ...will bring it about for me.”...“if the formation of the image that you want is done irrationally, it seems to come onto the nervous system much more strongly than if you knew how you could do it.” Later, again, Sylvester quotes Duchamp saying, “the realization...cannot and must not be fully self-conscious.” To which Bacon replies, “They cannot be.” Sylvester 2016, pp.116, 119, 122.

<sup>47</sup> Russell 1997, p.38.



Figure 18: Francis Bacon, *Head III* (1949) Oil on canvas 32 x 26 in. (81 x 66 cm), © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 19: Sam Hunter, *Francis Bacon in his studio, 7 Cromwell Place, London, 1950*. MB Art Collection, Monaco, © Estate of Sam Hunter.

This fragmentation reflects a view of the body from an experiential point of view – not of looking at someone else – complete, externally, a full body – but from the partial views of being that person. But not just this fragmented view of oneself, but in unity with one's surroundings. The difference we *feel* about *ourselves in place* when we are alone. We will look at this in more detail in Part 2 of this thesis.

The problem for Bacon was that we should feel the sense of our material being without losing the reference to the figure and the surroundings, so never becoming completely visually 'abstract' and therefore not clear about the subject. This means that we get some level of description which dissipates into a ghostly presence in some of the 1950s works. Artworks like *Figure* (c1951) and *Figures in a Landscape* (1952) [Figs 20 and 21] are good examples of this attempt at this sensory figuration.

*Figure* (c1951) uses the curtain/striations as part of a double interior – a room and a smaller ‘spaceframe’. The room space is indicated by the curtain lines that run vertically down the image covering the top two-thirds of the picture. Where they stop roughly determines the edge of a floor. This is also where the lines splay out as if from a curved rail near the front of the image (reminiscent of the floorboards in his *Corner of the Studio* (1934) painting [Fig 13]), in front of the figure and the spaceframe (or at least parts of it). The splayed lines seem to attach to the front rail at points, but also, to the centre right, obliterate or run through it. These lines attach to the ‘curtain’ verticals giving the image a powerful dynamic. The downward brush marks (downward, as they are clearly painted from the top of the image where they are full of paint, to lower down the canvas where they start to run out) make it feel like a downward energy across the whole image. The lines also, as Bacon says of Degas, ‘intensify and diversify’ the image.<sup>48</sup> They diversify the figure across the width of the interior room space by disrupting the body and by echoing the grey tones centred on the figure but distributed away from it (or possibly towards it). The visual vibrations set up by the tonal variations in the lines give a shimmering intensity to the painting. The problem with this organisation of the striated figure is that it reads across the surface pushing towards a two-dimensional reading (despite the floor indication. The way Bacon counteracts this is by introducing the spaceframe – “to bring the image out of the background.”<sup>49</sup> The figure is given an implied three-dimensionality this way.

*Figures in a Landscape* (1952) [Fig 21] is perhaps more literal in the sense of spatial delineation but goes further by indicating a ‘ghost’ room within a larger external landscape.

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<sup>48</sup> Bacon talking of Degas’ pastel drawings, says to Sylvester, that Degas “striates the form with these lines which are drawn through the image and in a certain sense both intensify and diversify its reality.” Sylvester 2016, p.198.

<sup>49</sup> Davies in Harrison 2021, p.174.

This makes some sense of the 'spaceframes' as places of presence, which I will discuss later (Chapter 7). The curtain lines in this painting delineate three walls of an enclosure – the lines that define the wall that is also the picture plane are much less clear than those of the other two walls, indicating a closure in a very soft, semi-open manner.

Many of Bacon's enclosures have been often understood as cages – and there are some images where this feels to be true. However, the softening curtain lines in these and other related images undermine that single reading and open out the possible meanings involved in the room structures.

What the curtain lines (folds) do, is in fact open up multiple edges into his images. This is the first way that Bacon manipulates the figure and dissolves the usual recognisable outline of head and body. The dissolution of the figure is important as he associates it with the canvas by diversifying it (carrying the figure's animation/emanation<sup>50</sup>) through the figure and across the picture plane.

The multiplication of edges in Bacon's paintings, runs through all the possible spatial devices that he uses. These edges include all drawn/painted lines (curtain/wood lines, spaceframes, rails, floor/carpet edges, plinth and furniture forms), as well as the painting edges themselves and the rather grand picture frames, which are, themselves, extended, multiplied and articulated in the triptych form. However, it is not only the object edges that Bacon employs, but the surfaces as edges too. I will look at the use of edges and boundaries more closely in later Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

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<sup>50</sup> This is an important idea that I write about in Part 2 of this thesis. In discussion with Sylvester, Bacon says, "When I look at you across the table, I don't only see you but I see a whole emanation which has to do with personality and everything else." Sylvester 2016, p.94.

The very free, painterly language that Bacon employs in conjunction with the methods of combining found images and chance procedures as well as the effects that diversify the figurative image across

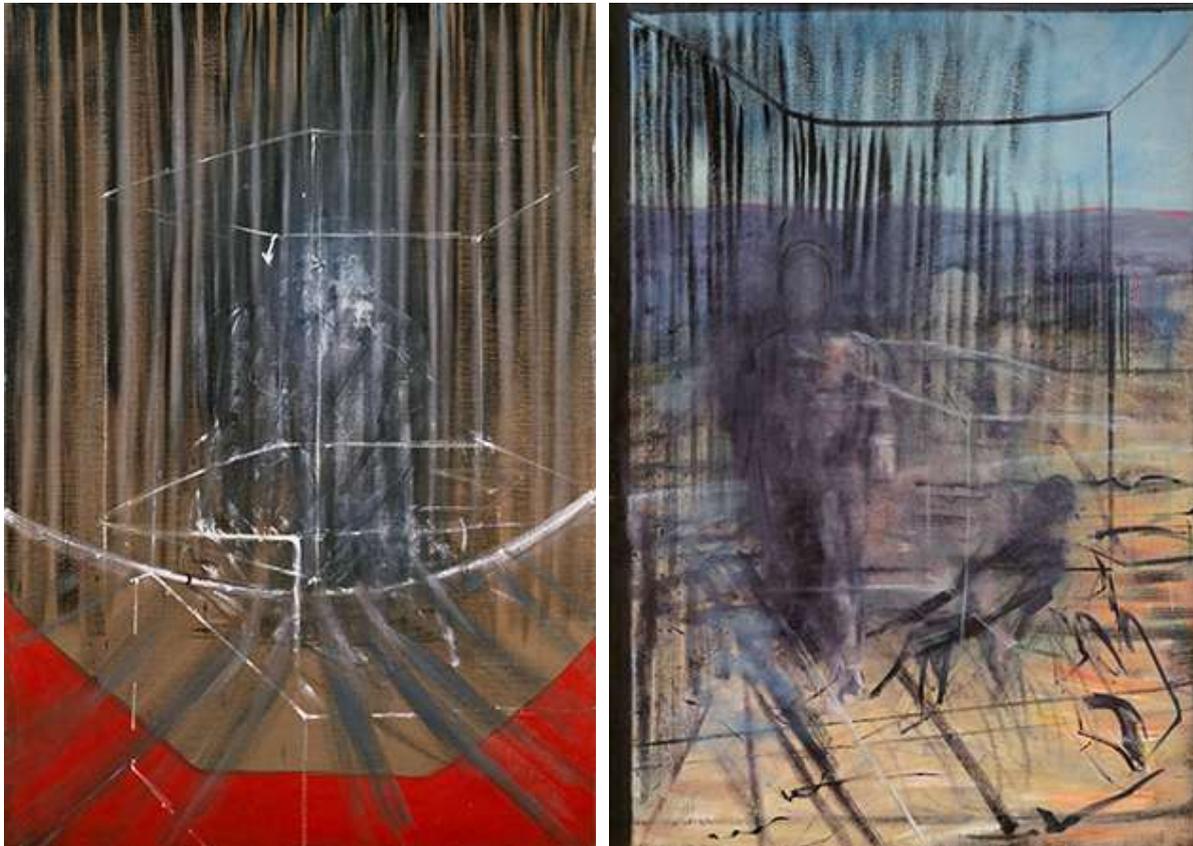


Figure 20: Francis Bacon, *Figure* (c1951), Oil on canvas, 78 x 54 in. (198.1 x 137.2 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 21: Francis Bacon, *Figures in a Landscape* (1952), Oil and alkyd paint on canvas, 78 x 54 ¼ in. (198 x 137.2 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

the work makes each painting a *place* of making – an *event* that finds itself as a painting in the making and played out in front of the viewer and the artist. This finding of the image, (even though Bacon starts out with some image in mind this usually gets drastically changed, according to the artist<sup>51</sup>) is an essential part of Bacon’s process. The presence of

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<sup>51</sup> Bacon to Sylvester: “all painting...is accident... I foresee it, and yet I hardly ever carry it out as I foresee it. It transforms itself by the actual paint.” Sylvester 2016, p.14.

the figure depicted is found during the painting – and this process embeds both the figure in the image as well as Bacon himself. His visualisation is an event in the making.

Further examples of the embedded figures can be seen in two works from the mid-1950s: *Seated Figure* (c1954) [Fig 22], and *Untitled* (c1954) [Fig 23] where the central figures (a full-length figure, and an open-mouthed head respectively) are ghostly beings held in place by a band of horizontal lines indicating a space of some sort. *Seated Figure* also has the vertical ‘curtain’ lines in the top half of the painting.



Figure 22: Francis Bacon, *Seated Figure* (c1954), Oil on canvas, 78 x 53  $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (198 x 137 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 23: Francis Bacon, *Untitled* (c1954), Oil on canvas, 60 x 45  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (152.4 x 115 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

The horizontal band across the space of these two paintings acts like a woven section that incorporates the central figure or head. This can be understood as a variation on the vertical curtain lines. We will come back to this woven quality later in Chapter 4. In the 1950s

paintings the fabric folds seem to relate to his time at Cromwell Place, which he left in 1951, as they start to fade away from use in the middle of that decade.

The spaceframe forms in these two pictures allow the figures to sit centrally in an imagined three-dimensional space rather than flatten into the overall picture plane by the horizontal weaving. The figures are held in place, and therefore in some tension, by the bands, but the figures also sit within the notional space of the image by the spaceframes<sup>52</sup>. The contradiction of the flattening weaving with the spaceframe's spatial volume places the figure as part of a wider, ambiguous event, questioning their edges and how figure and place interact. These appear to be embedded figures with multiple edges and suggested boundaries. Rather than caged figures, they are embedded – ghost presences that speak of Bacon's attempt to grapple with, what he called, the emanation of the human figure that he aimed for in his works. I will discuss this idea of the emanation/energy of the figure image in the second section of this thesis.



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<sup>52</sup> Bacon tells Hugh Davies that he used the spaceframe device “to bring the image out of the background” Davies in Harrison 2021, p.174, and that he “Used for formal reasons – to enclose and see figures more clearly – to make the image clear.” Ibid., p.170.

Figure 24: Francis Bacon, *Sketch for a Portrait of Lisa* (1955), Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 51 cm) Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

The contrast between *Untitled* (1954) and the *Sketch for a Portrait of Lisa* (1955) [Fig 24] shows two methods that Bacon uses to open up the figurative ‘object’ to an overall reading, while also embedding that figure into a space or place. Lisa Sainsbury is ‘diversified’ across the surface while the *Untitled* head is woven into space. In the Sainsbury portrait, for example, the striated vertical lines break up the volume of the head and carry highlights away and back to the head – as though it was gathering or fading away in memory or objectivity. Lisa Sainsbury’s features are hers but also come from a photograph of an Egyptian sculpture.<sup>53</sup> The identity is, to some extent, equivocal and questioned along with the figure’s physical materiality.

We can see in his later works how Bacon sometimes fuses or confuses identities – for example, in two self-portrait works from 1980, *Three studies for self-portrait* and *Study for Self-Portrait* [Figs 25 and 26], where his facial characteristics appear to be mixed with those of his friend Peter Beard.



Figure 25: Francis Bacon *Three studies for self-portrait* (1980) Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 91.5 cm., Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

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<sup>53</sup> Cappock 2005, p.143.



Figure26: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1980) Oil on canvas 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Jenni Carter, Viscopy.

This idea of identity is one that we will come back to later, but for now it will be useful to understand Bacon's figures in terms of appearance and disappearance which has significance in their relations to the places they inhabit and the picture as object. If Gilles Deleuze aligns Bacon with Cezanne's idea of painting sensation, then it is interesting to note that in his interview with Michel Archimbaud Bacon speaks about Cezanne, saying:

... I only like the works from the end of his life. ... when there is almost nothing on the canvas, when the subjects have almost completely disappeared, ... when one has the impression that they've barely been sketched and that they are about to disappear.<sup>54</sup>

This fragility is in contrast with the corporeality often spoken about in Bacon's work. This subject of materiality and immateriality, or a question of visualising a new

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<sup>54</sup> Archimbaud, M. (1993) *Francis Bacon: In Conversation with Michel Archimbaud*, London, Phaidon Press., p.42.

figuration/landscape, is developed in Bacon's later work, and more directly in relation to place. It is central to his embedded relation to Reece Mews.

The idea of the figure and place merging and emerging from each other begins to focus in the 1950s for Bacon, leading on to the more personal relation to place that characterises his work at Reece Mews from the mid-1960s on. The question of how to make a figure-place image is, I believe, one of the major subjects of Bacon's work and he needed a long-term engagement with a specific place to develop this line of inquiry.

In Chapter 3 I have looked at Bacon's earliest formulations of the human figure and its environment. This helps clarify why he might have started his creative career as a designer of interiors and furniture – these being the interface between figure and surrounding architecture or larger place. This interest does not appear clear to Bacon until later, but we see (in section 2 of this chapter) that when he moved his practice to painting the subject of the artist and studio became an important image to start from. *Composition* (1933), *Corner of the Studio* (1934), and *Studio Interior* (c. 1936) clearly demonstrate Bacon's focus on this emerging figure/place subject.

Bacon took a break from painting for some years, coming back in the mid-1940s and it was in his Cromwell Place studio (his first significant painting studio) that his work began to mature and find itself. In section 3 of this chapter, I looked at some ideas about the relations of image to studio, linking the curtain lines, for example, with the Cromwell Place studio, how these curtain forms became metaphors for ambiguous relations of figure to place, and how this enfolding interior material was carried into his real-life Reece Mews living situation. It is important to note these connections between objects, places and painted

imagery, and how they feed into the creative practice, but also how created imagery influences the place itself. I will return to this idea in the next chapter, especially in the final section about place: The invention of place/the place of invention.

## Chapter 4: Reece Muse



Figure 27: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon Studio* (1998) C-type print on aluminium, 122 x 152.5 x 5 cm., Collection & image © Hugh Lane Gallery. Purchased, 2001. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS 2025.

“Reece Muse,” a play on the name of Francis Bacon’s home address was a title of one of the ‘archaeological’ drawings, made by Edmond O’Donovan of the studio before it was moved to Dublin, sums up some sense of the relationship of the artist to his main studio. Bacon often used images of close friends for the subject matter of his mature paintings, but one relationship that is discussed but not clearly defined is the importance of his final studio and its effect on his work.<sup>1</sup> I use O’Donovan’s play on words here to emphasise the role of Bacon’s immediate geography and his use and recognition of it. But it turns out that it was possibly more than a muse.

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<sup>1</sup> Though Katharina Günther’s recent publication *Francis Bacon: the Mirror of Photography* outlines much of Bacon’s use of manipulated photographs and the studio’s role in preparatory work for his paintings. Günther, K., (2022) *Francis Bacon: In the Mirror of Photography, Collecting, Preparatory Practice and Painting* Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter GmbH.

Bacon moved into 7 Reece Mews in 1961 where he lived and worked for 31 years until his death in 1992. He stayed in this small studio throughout the time that he created much of the work considered in this research. There has been discussion about the studio and its functions and state over the years (for example Cappock 2005, Günther 2022), but it is clear that the studio informed and formed the imagery – it wasn't external to Bacon or simply a place of work and repository for paintings, but Bacon was internal to it and, I believe, he allowed himself to be a function of it. This is what I mean by the phrase 'sentient place.' I'm not conflating Bacon with the studio but examining an emphasis of relationship – of openness to immediate sensation that Bacon held as central to the practice of painting. As we have seen in previous chapters, the subject of the studio was important to Bacon throughout his career, but it is one of the various threads within his work and perhaps needs to be understood as a subconscious exploration rather than an overtly conscious theme.

The studio, the place of making, is very important to any artist, but to some it becomes even more important than a workshop or an occasional image source. For Bacon it was part of his method and medium, and subject. Two statements made by Bacon help us position his attitude to this particular space/place:

For some reason the moment I saw this place I knew that I could work here. *I am very influenced by places – by the atmosphere of a room...*<sup>2</sup> [my italics] and "This mess here around us is rather like my mind; it may be a good image of what goes on inside me, that's what it's like, my life is like that."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.213.

<sup>3</sup> Tuthill, P. (2007) 'Francis Bacon's Studio, Hugh Lane Gallery Dublin', in *White Hot Magazine*, 2, April, n.p.

In these short quotes, Bacon says that atmosphere is identified and conducive to working, but perhaps more importantly he mixes the place/atmosphere with his 'mind' and his 'life' more generally. His language shifts so that there appears to be no clear delineation between inside and outside.

Andrew Bond writes about Bacon's studio as a 'cultural battery' likening it to Joseph Beuys' stacks and bundles of objects which he gave that term. The detritus that filled the studio Bond compares to Beuys' bound and piled objects.<sup>4</sup> This charged atmosphere is also suggested by Margarita Cappock writing about her first visit to Bacon's studio, "...the artist had now been dead for 5 years, but ...[the studio]... continued to exude an energy that was captivating."<sup>5</sup>

This idea of energy or battery requires some level of containment. Energy needs to be collected or stored in order for it to be released when required; it needs to be channelled for use. Bacon's studio was confined in various ways, through collected and stored materials; through architectural arrangement; and through locality. The energy of the studio could also be understood as linked to the energy of the person that Bacon tried to capture in his portraits and figure paintings<sup>6</sup>. There is, again, a strong link between what we would normally consider inside and outside.

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<sup>4</sup> Bond 2012, p.29.

<sup>5</sup> Cappock 2005, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> When Bacon speaks about the emanation of a person to be caught in the painting, Sylvester suggests the word 'energy' instead of emanation. Bacon replies "Energy is better. There is the appearance and there is the energy within the appearance." Sylvester 2016, p.197.

## 4.1 / Reece Mews: pragmatics

Francis Bacon's reconstructed studio at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

To help us reconsider what is normally understood as an artist's studio, it might be useful, and in line with this research into place, to consider Bacon's studio as a landscape rather than a single room, and to gain a sense of the geography of this place. An initial reaction when visiting the painstaking reconstruction of Bacon's long-term London studio in Dublin is to consider the interior as a chaotic mess. Despite this first reaction, some order is visible due to the long period that Bacon worked there. It is interesting that his general working process (in spatial terms) had become visible – like clothing will begin to show the way it is worn over time – the methods and habits have left traces or forms. By this I mean that there are separate areas within it that articulate it as a place or an environment. These are useful to look at in relation to his paintings – to discern forms and methods that place the actions in the artworks.

As Edmond O'Donovan says about the archaeological deconstruction of the studio, it initially looks chaotic,

...but actually there was quite a lot of structure to the room... and as we started to dismantle the studio we started to see how the space was used... if we think about ourselves as human beings we very often behave in...very habitual ways and usually [this] is related to function.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> O'Donovan, E., (2018) 'Transporting the Francis Bacon studio from London to Dublin,' lecture at The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 09/11/18, 10'35" Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9OSqXhdue0> [Accessed 01/07/24].

We often think of a place as static, as mentioned earlier, and in many ways passive (especially a home, where we use convenient objects in a reasonably controlled environment). Place is usually considered a combination of things and space. Bacon's studio is an example of a slowly changing place that, through its notional divisions sets up zones, volumes and passages that generate and are generated through particular uses. This is true of many places, but in Bacon's studio these became more than accepted restrictions, becoming methodologies.

O'Donovan continues, "...in certain areas there's a lot of source material like pictures, and books in certain areas, his paints in certain areas, so there was a sort of a structure to the room which literally just reflected how he used it."<sup>8</sup>

O'Donovan discusses some relations between the structure and use of the studio and its relations to some of Bacon's artworks and sketches. He speaks about the spaceframes pointing them out in a slide of the right-hand panel of *Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1984), saying "that's not about the subject, that's actually the studio appearing in his art."<sup>9</sup>

Earlier he states, "if you look at the source material that's on the floor and some of his sketches you can start to see how he worked in the room not just physically but also what he [was] absorbing and how he's using the room to create his paintings."<sup>10</sup>

The studio was originally two rooms, as can be seen by the two doorways and the remaining sections of the dividing wall, although it is not clear when the rooms were merged. Bacon

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20'01."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 28'00."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17'28."

responded well to the new studio in terms of atmosphere, but carried out some important changes at the time of moving in. In an interview with David Sylvester Bacon said:

I had the ceiling taken off...and the light is not especially good because it's east-west. But the place had an atmosphere that made me know I could work here. I can't explain why. There are certain places where you know you can work and there are certain places where you know you can't. It's very odd: I don't know how one can explain the atmosphere of places. I suppose it is the way places are constructed. This one had a low ceiling...but I had the ceiling taken off in here and the council allowed me to put in that small skylight.<sup>11</sup>

The accumulation of working detritus makes visible three distinct, but not separate, *working* zones in the studio, see figures 28 and 29. These are:

A/ Making zone: in front of the easel; B/ Preparatory zone: a preparation and paint mixing space next to the small table; C/ Reflective zone: a small chair for resting/contemplating the work at hand.

These zones are hard to see in the photograph [Fig 28] but are quite clear when visiting the studio and studying it for a short time.

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.213.



Figure 28: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon Studio* (1998) C-type print on aluminium, 122 x 152.5 x 5 cm., Collection & image © Hugh Lane Gallery. Purchased, 2001. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS 2025.

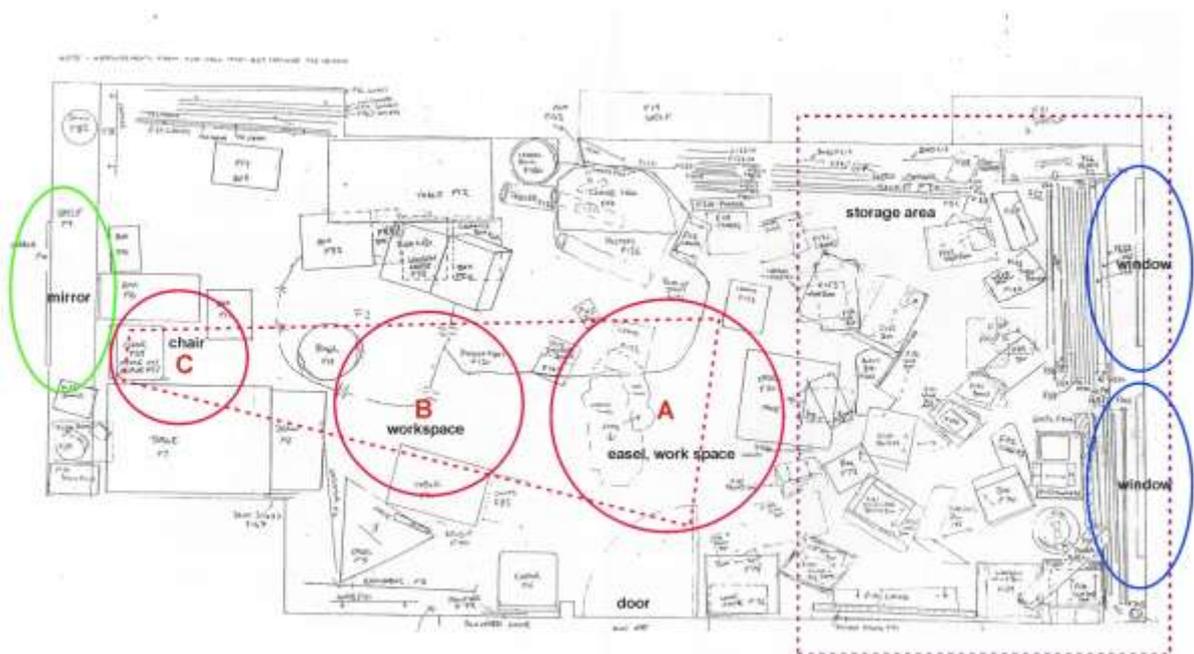


Figure 29: archeological drawing of Bacon's studio by Edmond O'Donovan, augmented with colour diagrammatic details by the author to show limited open working areas © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS 2025.

Zone A seems to have been the most 'static' in its spatial position over the years, as witnessed in the various photographs by occasional visitors. It is centrally positioned in the room, lit from the skylight which was behind the painter, approximately above zone B.

Bacon seems to have painted with the studio door open or closed, although its open position would have interfered with the large canvases he favoured. However, there are oil paint marks, where the artist tested his colours, on both sides of the door. As the open door would have been behind the canvas and easel this demonstrates that Bacon sometimes had the door closed. The door position may have been dependent on the size of the canvas or if the containment of the room was important (due to other people being in the rest of flat at the time or due to a need for further enclosure).

The skylight and the wooden-clad ceiling were added by Bacon when he took over the flat. The building faced east so the skylight captured the east/west moving light of the day, which suited (or influenced) Bacon's working pattern of painting in the morning (from 6am to lunchtime) and socialising away from home from afternoon to late evening or early morning. Direct light into the working area of the studio would only have happened after midday. So the morning light would have been more constant in the studio, and more conducive to working.

**Zone B** is moveable in that there is a table with paints and brushes and a tripod easel for smaller works like his portrait series. Colour mixing and testing took place here as can be witnessed by the marks on the walls.

**Zone C** seems to have been very moveable (again considering studio photographs of the chair in various places), but in practice it is always useful to be able to stand back to view any work in progress. This zone includes the mirror on the back wall, which would probably have been used (initially at least, when there was less floor-based detritus and therefore easier access to it) to view the painting in reverse and would have created a double viewing

distance (an important advantage for the small studio). This helps to see the work anew, or differently, after getting used to seeing it in its usual working position and distance.

There are a couple of other points about the mirror:

1. It is understood to be one of the mirrors Bacon designed in his earlier furniture/interior design phase – thus one of the remnants from his past that he has carried into his present working place.
2. it is circular – and ‘captures’ a circular image or zone (the image of mirroring happens a lot in Bacon’s work<sup>12</sup>)
3. it is damaged – the silvering on the back is flaking(?) so that the reflection is not perfect – this might also have been useful to Bacon – much like his chaotic studio was, and his torn and damaged reference photographs, as it breaks up and changes the reflected image – possibly suggesting other visual possibilities.

For Bacon, the studio was not just a room in which to paint, it was a constructed place; an amalgam of a found place with the right ‘atmosphere’ and a construction that reflected his history and his working methods. His identification with the space was not simply egocentric (though this was present), but also it supported or was active in opening up sensation.

The studio includes dozens of books stacked in the corner of the painting table, and the debris on the floor is made up of photographs, folded photographs and other printed images, more books as well as paint-soaked material, pots, brushes and newspapers.

Further printed imagery of his own previous work was on the far wall opposite the door. The

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze 2003, pp.18, 19.

door and wall on entering the studio were used to test paint colours so were covered in paint like a large palette.

The folded imagery found in the studio was both deliberately created by hand and accidentally made underfoot. Bacon used folding to generate ideas and for possible figurative inventions/solutions for his paintings. After, and before use, these manipulated images were abandoned on the floor and walked on – over a period of time they became distressed and less ‘readable’ in terms of the imagery – which would have been useful to Bacon for adding to his active interpretation of the photographs.<sup>13</sup> Bacon’s interest in the photographic image is very strong. In the interview with Francis Giacobetti, Bacon states:

Photography, for me, brings us back to the actual event more clearly, more directly. Contemplation allows me to imagine my own truth, and the idea that I get of this truth helps me to discover other ideas, and so on...My work becomes a chain of ideas created by the many images that I look at and which I have registered, often on contrasting subjects. I look for the suggestion of one image as it relates to another.<sup>14</sup>

The idea and use of the folding of images and the depth of images, books and visual information in his studio demonstrates a labyrinthine/chaotic/myriad of connections and possible channels of wandering akin to the baroque reading of space as discussed by Otto Bollnow in *Human Space* (2020). Bollnow writes:

Baroque space may, somewhat paradoxically, be described most aptly as an unlimited interior. ... The limits of parts of space ... are veiled by overlapping

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<sup>13</sup> See Cappock (2005) and Günther (2022).

<sup>14</sup> Giacobetti, F. (2003) ‘Francis Giacobetti Interviews Francis Bacon: “I painted to be loved,”’ *The Art Newspaper*, 137, June. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/504491475/Francis-Bacon-s-Last-Interview-By-Francis-Giacobetti-1991-1992> [Accessed 07/04/25].

architectural decoration, the bordering wall becomes invisible to the observer... In the bewildering sequence of intersections and viewpoints, solid space breaks up into perspectives leading into the infinite.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to consider that the edges of the folded photographs, and the way he immersed himself in them, as reflective of his use of spaceframes which seems to have folded, or at least repeated, the studio 'frame' itself. The importance of edges for Bacon is central to Part 2 of this thesis.

More than this wandering amongst the imagery and losing himself in its visual labyrinth, the collection of detritus in the studio also confined his use of the space. The sense of confinement was clearly useful to Bacon, but this also varied across the width and height of the room. As in O'Donovan's lecture slide [Fig 30] when considering the studio, we need to think about the whole place as a three-dimensional volume. In this volume, the floor, walls, ceiling and air space need to be considered. The floor space was the most restricted area because of the detritus collected there, but the space was also vertically divided, mainly by the easel and the usually large work underway on it, and sometimes by the open door. So, the studio volume was articulated into two vertical zones of workspace and storage space. The easel and painting blocked off more than a third of the studio space as well as the only original windows which faced the mews. These were further blocked by stored canvases. The only useful light for painting came from the skylight and the bare lightbulbs. Bacon mostly painted during the morning, so the skylight would have been the main illumination used.

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<sup>15</sup> Bollnow 2020, p.112.

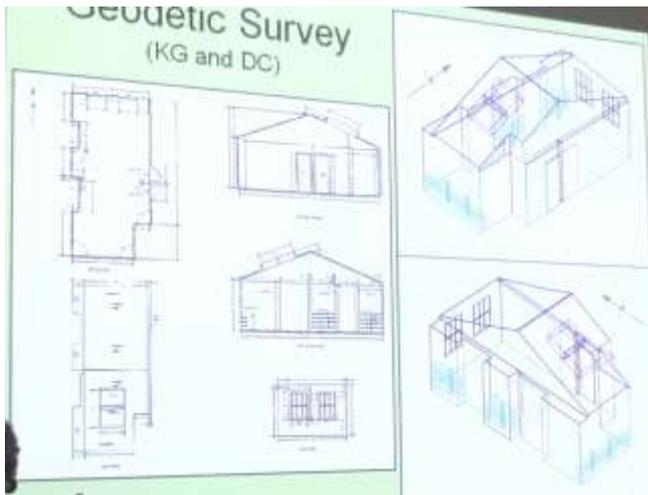


Figure 30: Geodetic survey slide from O'Donovan talk video, *Transporting the Francis Bacon studio from London to Dublin, 23'27"* © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS 2025.

The studio was part of Bacon's home which was a first-floor flat situated above a storage space, previously a garage and before that a stable. So, the building had humble beginnings as quarters for grooms and more recently a storage facility for Bacon's framer. The simple, spartan place was never changed to be more comfortable. Figure 31 shows the position of the studio in the flat, where we can see that a third of Bacon's home was the studio.

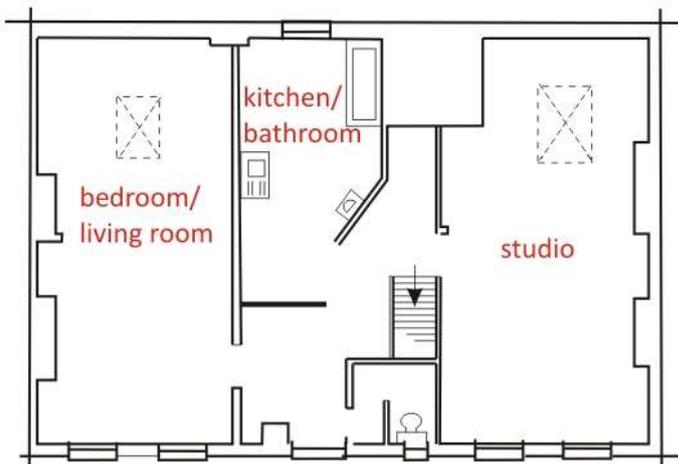


Figure 31: drawing by the author based on Reece Mews plan from Kensington and Chelsea Planning and Building Control, Planning search - Microfiche records from 1948-1996

The rest of the flat was included in his creative practice to various degrees. For example, he had rows of reproductions of his own work arrayed across one wall of the small

kitchen/bathroom, and he said that he used reproductions of his own works to suggest new paintings.<sup>16</sup> It is also likely that he used his sitting room table for carefully folding, manipulating and pinning photographs for use in the studio, and he had a large mirror in the sitting room opposite the door where he would catch himself or others entering the space. Mirrors fascinated Bacon<sup>17</sup>, they play a part in later work and are part of his spatial structuring and the play on realities in his images. Davies reports Bacon as saying: “Mirrors seem to compose the image in a certain scale and ready placed in a square frame.” Here he made a motion of a frame with his hands.’ Bacon went on to speak about his *Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot’s ‘Sweeney Agonistes’,* (1967). Davies writes: “He explained the angles of the mirrored reflections and agreed that the figure on the telephone was beyond the canvas sharing the viewer’s space, hence a fellow voyeur.”<sup>18</sup> Davies also notes that Bacon suggested that the figure in the door/mirror of *Triptych – Studies from the Human Body* (1970), “could be a mirror reflecting stuff from out here and pointed to the space before the page, where we stood.”<sup>19</sup>

Bacon’s mirrors sometimes, therefore, bring the surroundings into the imagery, just as the mirrors in his home were used to capture fleeting moments and impressions of people in

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<sup>16</sup> “I like looking at them for this reason that, like other pictures and like other things I look at, they’re always a kind of visual stimulus. I think, well why didn’t I do this in another way or in a better way and so they suggest all sorts of other images so that’s reason I have them.” Bacon in *Francis Bacon at his Home and Studio 7 Reece Mews in London*, *Lives of the Artists*: 4’58”. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-ThcnobftE> [Accessed 20 3 25].

<sup>17</sup> Davies notes the following about Bacon’s decorations at his east London home, 80 Narrow Street: “Here, strange angle of two adjacent mirrors mounted on walls bent backwards at 45 degrees. ... Second mirror, Bacon’s idea and gives a very weird perspective of room and of going up the stairs. Due to its diagonal placement you see yourself when you least expect it – just like in his paintings.” Davies in Harrison 2021, p.212.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

place, caught in their everyday unthought gestures and movements.<sup>20</sup> It is not surprising that the whole of Reece Mews (and beyond, of course) fed into Bacon's work. About his imagery, Bacon said "I use the whole of my experience, I know this all goes into the work, not consciously exact but they all go into all the imagery."<sup>21</sup> We might generally interpret this as meaning that he used everything that he encountered – every person and situation, but we might also interpret this as meaning a sense of wholeness – of how we are in a place, or places.

Having covered some ideas about the pragmatics of Reece Mews, the next section looks at the characteristics of the place and how it specifically suited or affected Bacon's work. I make some points about the differences between Reece Mews and earlier studios, particularly Cromwell Place. But of course, there are similarities to his earlier studios as well, and these are important and discussed later in this chapter. It is interesting that Stevens and Swan, recent chroniclers of Bacon's life, compared Reece Mews to his first studio for his design work: "For Bacon's purposes...Reece Mews was as focused as a pared-down modernist room. It was for sleep, work, sustenance. His social life he directed outwards into the flux at the other end of the tube."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Davies writes: "in Reece Mews he has the large mirror facing the doorway into the living room and continually looks at himself while entering the room. Many of his recent works have this same setting of a figure in a doorway..." Davies in Harrison 2009, p.105.

<sup>21</sup> Davies in Harrison 2021, p.216.

<sup>22</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.465.

## 4.2/ New home and studio – townhouse to hut: permanently temporary (a study)

When looking at the relationship to, and effect of Reece Mews on Bacon's paintings it is useful to think about the way Bacon lived there. Reece Mews was essentially a workplace with spaces to eat and sleep on the side. As John Edwards wrote in the foreword to *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio*, "the studio...was for so many years the heart of our home."<sup>23</sup> But from the photographs and the way friends wrote about it we can also see that Reece Mews had a temporary feel, fairly unhomely, and lacking the comfort that many of us would want in a home; the kitchen was basic and doubled as the bathroom; the bedsitting room had a table and chairs, two sofas and the end of the room was taken up by the bed. In 1976, John Edwards' first impression was to think that Bacon was 'lamping it' (Cockney rhyming slang for living like a tramp).<sup>24</sup> And if we look at the basic layout and room functions it clearly prioritises the studio space, which, due to Bacon's addition of a panelled ceiling, his use of the bare floorboards and the continuous chaotic appearance took on a feel of some small rustic (rough) hut. This deliberate unhomeliness was important to Bacon and supported his making process. It seems that this apparent temporariness was one of the core bases for his painting (never at rest – out of time with its contemporariness – shifting and improvisatory), where Bacon's repeated use of the preparatory term 'study' in his artworks' titles makes sense. This permanent state of temporariness seems to be one of the core contradictory tenets of Bacon's work.

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<sup>23</sup> Edwards, J. /The Estate of Francis Bacon (2001) *7 Reece Mews, Francis Bacon's Studio*: Photographs by Perry Ogden, New York, Thames and Hudson Inc., p.13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

The idea of the 'hut' may reflect a core reversal/contradiction in Bacon's work. The removal from distraction and society is often discussed when thinking about creative making spaces – but this is both the case and untrue in Bacon's studio. The 'room of one's own' or secure space is often the standard response to an artist's (or writer's) studio. But if we can see Bacon's studio as a rough dwelling of some kind, we know that it is not at all rustic in the rural sense as it is very definitely in the reasonably well-heeled South Kensington area of London which he loved<sup>25</sup> – an area of cultural significance due to the major museums – and centrally located for London attractions and distractions. The sophistication and culture of a major European city was Bacon's nature. He drew on the breadth of city life for his work. The environment was important on various levels for Bacon, and we can see this reflected in the subjects he dealt with – from political and historical events to friends in rooms and personal 'landscapes' – the world was invited into the studio, usually via the photograph. Bacon's use of the photograph is discussed by almost all his interpreters, including Martin Harrison in his book *In Camera* (2005), and I will come back to look at one specific idea about the camera obscura in relation to his studio later.

We might understand the idea of the temporary hut more fully if we consider Bacon's description of a house that he bought near Reece Mews with idea of moving into. Bacon says to David Sylvester "I once bought a beautiful studio round the corner in Roland Gardens, with the most perfect light, and did it up so well, ...that I absolutely couldn't work in it. ...I made it too grand...it hadn't got the chaos."<sup>26</sup> So he stayed at Reece Mews, in the chaos.

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<sup>25</sup> John Edwards writes "South Kensington was his favourite part of London...He liked the routines of South Ken life..." Edwards 2001, p.12.

<sup>26</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.214.

There is a link here, I believe, to Adam Sharr's discussion about Martin Heidegger's town dwelling as opposed to his Black Forest 'hutte'. Sharr writes:

The [town] house, it appears, represented benign but ultimately distancing insulation from the strictures of the more immediate engagement with the world he found "up there" [the hut] in concentration. The house's amenable comforts were seemingly gained only at the expense of experiential resonance, whereas the physical size of the hut necessarily intensified the interaction of individuals' "dwelling" with "places" of inhabitation... It was not elementary enough, clouding rather than emphasizing questions of being.<sup>27</sup>

It is also a sense of being that Bacon addresses in many of his works; the way room and figure work together, and the way that Reece Mews had a strong sense of 'concentrated engagement' for Bacon. Embedded in Reece Mews as he became (which was increasingly influential and reflected in his work), it differed from the "pared-down modernist room" as previously described by Stevens and Swan,<sup>28</sup> as it was certainly not Le Corbusier's Modernist 'machine for living in,' but a place reflecting human frailty and vulnerability itself.

This basic, rough quality of Reece Mews had some important advantages then, over recent studios. As a complete home, it also allowed for constant access to his studio space, and, in contrast to some earlier studios he could work alone and be alone in the whole home. It was his place, and he could control who came and went, unlike being part of the shared home in Battersea, his previous residence from 1955-61. Although it was in a small Mews, it had easy access to the area of London he knew best and felt at home in. He was near the V&A

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<sup>27</sup> Sharr, A. (2017) *Heidegger's Hut*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press., p.103.

<sup>28</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.465.

Museum which he often visited to see Constable studies, Michelangelo artworks and Muybridge photographs, for example. Transport links gave easy access to his Soho eating and drinking haunts, as well as the National Gallery, the British Museum, and numerous other public and private galleries.

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The difference between his Reece Mews home/studio and earlier living places varies, but a wide contrast is demonstrated if we compare his Cromwell Place home (1943-51) with that of Reece Mews (1961-92). Of course, Bacon was older, and the wider context of WWII and post-war London had significantly changed by the time he arrived at Reece Mews, but the studios could not be more different. Cromwell Place was already a well-known studio/artist's house from Victorian times,<sup>29</sup> it was large and stood on a grand street. Although Bacon only had access to use the ground floor, it had an open aspect with large entrance hall and a billiard room at the back which acted as Bacon's studio. Bacon says that his work really started at Cromwell Place and was later regretful that he gave it up. Speaking about Cromwell Place he said:

...it was then, about 1943-44, that I really started to paint. Nothing had really coagulated until then. ... That was a wonderful studio. But, you know, when the war started and the bombs came, the whole of the roof of Millais's studio had been blown in, and the room I painted in was never built as a studio. It was an enormous billiard room... But it was a wonderful studio.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Formerly the home of Sir John Everett Millais from 1862-77.

<sup>30</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.212.

In his own words Bacon suggests that the studio had a profound effect on his work – that it really started there. In chapter 3 I drew a relation of place to Bacon’s paintings – where the curtained wall in the Cromwell Place studio corresponded to the imagery of curtain/striations in his developing paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. This visualisation of a temporary or insubstantial enclosure and materiality plays throughout his work and is reflected in his continuously changing living situations and studios.<sup>31</sup> The building impermanence would have been compounded by living through the war in London, and clearly visible in the destruction of Millais’ studio space as quoted above.

Bacon shared Cromwell Place with Jessie Lighfoot, his childhood nanny who looked after him during much of his time in London until her death in 1951, and Bacon’s lover, Eric Hall, also lived there for some time.<sup>32</sup> It was a social space – even a society space if we consider its history. Bacon held many dinner parties at Cromwell Place, and he and Lightfoot ran illicit gambling nights there during the war, all in his studio.<sup>33</sup>

All of this would have been impossible in Reece Mews. The location was physically nearby Cromwell Place, but it’s outlook and locale couldn’t have been more of a contrast. As previously stated, his new studio was in a cobbled mews which had only one entrance/exit to the main road; the flat itself was on the first floor and at the top of a very steep, narrow staircase. It was a smaller, domestic scale space that, in complete contrast to Cromwell Place, was originally a service space for the grooms to live above the stables located on the ground floor. It was a raised spartan ‘hut’ in comparison to the open opulence of Cromwell Place (see Figs 32 and 33 for external visual contrast). As Bacon himself said of Reece Mews

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<sup>31</sup> According to biographical information Bacon had approximately 22 different studios/living spaces throughout his life, some briefly, some simultaneously.

<sup>32</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, pp.202, 204.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp.204-205.

“I live in, you may say, a gilded squalor.”<sup>34</sup> Cromwell Place was a place for visitors, Reece Mews was for a very few invited guests – the studio itself often out of bounds.

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There were already some changes to Bacon’s work taking place when he moved into his Reece Mews studio/home in November 1961.<sup>35</sup> His colour palette had been changing and he had started painting some portraits through the 1950s of his patrons, the Sainsburys, as well as David Sylvester and Cecil Beaton for example, but it wasn’t until his move to Reece Mews that he began a long series of portraits and self-portraits and started the large-scale triptychs that secured his reputation as a major artist.<sup>36</sup> His work moved in a more personally specific direction where friends became his main subjects rather than anonymous figures and works based on other artists’ works.<sup>37</sup> Place became more clearly defined or based on inhabited space. As Lawrence Gowing suggests: “From this point on [1962-63] in Bacon’s work figures are more often concerned together in a single episode or in an identifiable setting, a landscape or a townscape or a habitable interior.”<sup>38</sup> In conjunction with these pictorial changes there were technical ones too. Katharina Günther, talking about the photographic image manipulation used by Bacon, says that it “needed the

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<sup>34</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.59.

<sup>35</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.464.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvester, Interview 1, conducted in 1962: there is a telling dialogue between Sylvester and Bacon: ‘FB “I want a record of an image.” DS “A record of an image you’ve seen in life?” FB “Of a person or a thing” DS “A particular person?” FB “Yes” DS “But this was less so in the past?” “Less so in the past, but now it becomes more and more insistent...” Sylvester 2016, p.31.

Interview 3 (1971-73): “Triptychs have been a very large part of your output in recent years. ...your very first major work was triptych, back in 1944. But, ...between then and 1962 ...you only did one, ...in 1953...” Ibid., p.98.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Peppiatt quotes Bacon as saying, “When I was younger, I needed extreme subject matter for my paintings. Then, as I got older, I realised I had all the subjects I needed in my own life.” Peppiatt 2021, p.104.

<sup>38</sup> Gowing 1989, pp.20-21.

additional catalyst of moving into Reece Mews to allow such alterations to appear more prominently and openly in his work.”<sup>39</sup>



Figure 32: 7 Cromwell Place, London, 2024. Photo by the author (05/04/24) © Kerry Andrews

Figure 33: 7 Reece Mews Studio, London, 1998. Photo: Perry Ogden © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025

The yellow highlighted sections of the buildings in the photographs indicate Bacon’s home. The green highlighting on the right photograph indicates the Reece Mews studio

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<sup>39</sup> Günther 2022, p.92.



Fig 34: Henri Cartier-Bresson *Francis Bacon in his studio in London (1952)*, Gelatin Silver print, 9.3/8 x 14.1/8 in., signed in margin. © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos, courtesy Fondation HCB, Source Clipping © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025.

The effect of moving from a shared flat, albeit with a studio room, in Battersea, to a larger space to live, at least initially, alone must have been liberating. In his introduction to *Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio* (2001) John Edwards wrote "He loved it in that little room and said he could work better in there than in any studio he'd ever had."<sup>40</sup>

Bacon's own comments on the importance of Reece Mews and working alone demonstrate his strong relationship to his working environment. For example, many years after moving to Reece Mews, in conversation with Michel Archimbaud, Bacon stated: "I can only paint here in my studio. I've had plenty of others, but I've been here for nearly thirty years now and it suits me very well."<sup>41</sup> He is also quoted as saying: "If I'm working, I don't want to see people. ...It's definitely much better for me not to be disturbed while I'm working,"<sup>42</sup> and

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<sup>40</sup> Edwards 2001, p.12.

<sup>41</sup> Archimbaud 1993, p.163.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

more emphatically, “To work I must be absolutely alone. Nobody in the house.... My instinct fails when others are there.”<sup>43</sup>

This latter statement is more telling about both his reliance on his Reece Mews home as a larger working environment (beyond the studio room), and as his sensory openness to the place itself. One is less self-conscious when alone. Being alone in a space allows a certain open relationship with an environment – the space is less divided into personal zones and more easily explored/lived in on one’s own terms. More than this, as we experience ourselves less externally complete – as a single, whole being when we are alone. We tend to fracture into various relations with the environment. We perceive ‘ourselves’ as sets of relations that are more or less at one with the place around us. This open and varied unity (unities) with his environment makes Bacon’s statement “This mess here around us is rather like my mind; it may be a good image of what goes on inside me, that’s what it’s like, my life is like that”<sup>44</sup> more understandable in relation to his working methods. These methods are contingent upon his immersion in the work (and environment in it and around him). He says “I prefer just being alone here. ...I work in a kind of haze of sensations and feelings.”<sup>45</sup>

Bacon’s studio and his relation to it is complex. In it, he opens out to chance and to a wider world. The studio becomes both external self and internal outside world. As Gilles Deleuze writes in *The Fold* (1988): “Closure is the condition of being for the world. The condition of closure holds for the infinite opening of the finite: it ‘finitely represents infinity.’ ... The world must be placed in the subject in order that the subject can be for the world.”<sup>46</sup> This idea of infinity within a small space corresponds to Bollnow’s Baroque space previously

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<sup>43</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.525.

<sup>44</sup> Tuthill 2007, n.p.

<sup>45</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.218.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze 1988, p.28.

quoted, and Bacon's declared aim, to Hugh Davies in 1973, to make images of seas or landscapes within a room.<sup>47</sup>

The complex relationship that Bacon has with Reece Mews can be at least partially understood through the idea of the camera obscura. This idea has also been considered by Martin Harrison and Edmond O'Donovan. Harrison suggests that Bacon's studio is something like a camera obscura, in that it is a darkened space with a 'roof-light cut through' and says, "the studio was a type of camera, but it afforded no exterior view..."<sup>48</sup> However, he does not take this further. This notion of the camera obscura in relation to Bacon's studio is something that archaeologist Edmond O'Donovan also discusses in his Hugh Lane Gallery lecture already mentioned in this chapter. In relation to earlier artists using the camera obscura box form to grasp an image of reality, O'Donovan says: "in some ways what you can see is, I think, that Bacon had the same sort of thing going on in his head without the camera obscura."<sup>49</sup> O'Donovan is suggesting that the form of the architectural box of the studio is a 3d image that Bacon uses in the spaceframes and room structures in his paintings.

I think the camera obscura idea holds in terms of a darkened space with a light source, in this case, the skylight. Some camera obscura constructions had the light source/lens at the top of the room, and this projected down onto a tabletop. A good example is seen in the Powell and Pressburger film *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946-7) [Fig 35]. In a sense this

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<sup>47</sup> Davies quotes Bacon: "I would like to paint a landscape in a box." About a landscape or a seascape he says "...if you could enclose their infinity in a box they would have a greater concentration." Davies in Harrison 2009, p.111.

<sup>48</sup> Harrison 2005, p.114.

<sup>49</sup> O'Donovan, E., (2018) 'Transporting the Francis Bacon studio from London to Dublin,' lecture at The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 09/11/18, 17'06" Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9OSqXhdue0> [Accessed 01/07/24].

parallels Reece Mews as the visual material/detritus littered the floor like a projection from the outside world. Bacon's 'all-seeing eye'<sup>50</sup> reflects the doctor's vision in the film, of his village where he watched his patients' lives from a distance. Although there is a different psychology here, we can understand the collected material as a representation of Bacon's world view. In Reece Mews the collection of imagery ranged across the spectrum of photographic information, piled high on the floor and stacked against the wall, also adding to the visual pressure/concentration of the studio.



Figure 35: A camera obscura in Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946-7), public domain.

This camera obscura idea also struck me when visiting Reece Mews studio in Dublin, and something that speaks of the vertical dimension of Bacon's studio. The skylight, and indeed the wood panelled ceiling, were important for Bacon in terms of extending the feeling of vertical space within the studio. In fact, the verticality of the room changed a great deal with

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<sup>50</sup> Peppiatt remembers Bacon saying: "I'm like a grinding machine ... I look at everything, and it all goes in and gets ground up very fine" Peppiatt 2021, p.52.

Bacon's remodelling when moving in, and the top light would have allowed a slowly changing light over the span of the day, possibly dramatically changing the light according to the weather.

What appears to be an important sense in Bacon is a larger spatial interest – the way place works around us and us within it. There is a sense of dimensionality that manifests itself in early work with interiors and furniture and then in visualising ourselves in place – first in terms of an abstract room idea and then more specifically *in place* with Reece Mews. There is a *volume* of place – horizontality and verticality. This verticality appears in various ways. We can see, for example, Bacon's sketch, generically titled *Untitled drawing of three rooms approached by a ladder* (no date) by Tate but understood by other sources, such as Martin Harrison,<sup>51</sup> as an image of Reece Mews [Fig 36], where we see how the flat was lifted away from the ground on its distinctly vertical staircase. The layout can be seen to clearly resemble the Reece Mews floor plan in Figure 31 above. The sketch is possibly a memory of a fleeting initial visit to Reece Mews as it is not entirely accurate about the layout of the rooms, or the number of windows, but what is clearly remembered is the narrow and steep staircase and the raised, first floor position; the vertical and horizontal planes of the new home.

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<sup>51</sup> In his book *In Camera* Harrison titles the drawing, *Diagrammatic sketch of 7 Reece Mews, c. 1961*. He states: "Bacon probably made the sketch ... when he first acquired the property. His architectonic conception of space ... underpinned many of the paintings he made there" Harrison 2005, p.119.

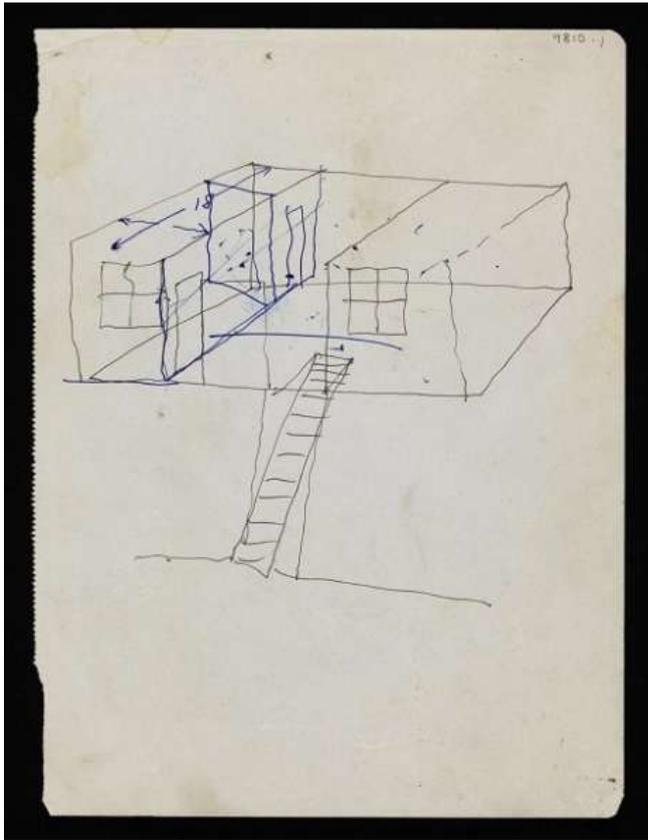


Figure 36: Francis Bacon, *Untitled drawing of three rooms approached by a ladder* (no date), Ink on paper 253 × 189 mm, Tate Archive collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

The sketch visually relates to Bacon's room shapes and the spaceframes that he used in his paintings – and suggests a relationship with the containment of those rooms and frames.

Bacon's immediate feeling for the studio as a good place to work may have been in part a recognition of the condensed feeling of space it gave and that he had already been depicting. Bacon was quite clear about how Reece Mews studio space felt right when he said on more than one occasion, "For some reason the moment I saw this place I knew that I could work here." There was an immediate connection – perhaps a recognition. In any case the studio became the centre of Bacon's world – a place that was such a good 'fit' that no other could take its place. It was a turning point in Bacon's work, where his identification with the space allowed his work to mature from descriptions of people in spaces to a visualisation of being in place. As Jeff Malpas writes, "Particular places enter into our self-

conception and self-identity because it is only in, and through, our grasp of the places in which we are situated that we can encounter objects, other persons, or, indeed, ourselves.”<sup>52</sup> The reciprocation of figure and place is the passage that Reece Mews allowed Bacon to make. But, I suggest, this was a passage toward another point – to finding a way of allowing the place/experience to take precedent, questioning the way we make images of, and see ourselves as places, or landscapes.

In this section I have outlined some of the characteristics of Reece Mews that were important to Bacon’s work – from its spartan simplicity to its concentration of space; from the newly found centre of focus for work it offered Bacon, to its spatial structure which gave specific forms to previously imaginary spaces. In the next section I look at two example paintings that demonstrate Bacon’s different responses to Reece Mews and direct visualisations of his embedded life and work there.

#### 4.3/ *Triptych* (1977) and *Triptych August 1972* (1972)



Figure37: Francis Bacon, *Triptych* (1977), Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS 2025.

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<sup>52</sup> Malpas 2018, p.180.

*Triptych* (1977) [Fig 37] is overlooked in many responses to Bacon's oeuvre, possibly due to size, but probably because it doesn't seem to easily fit into analyses or discussions put forward by his interpreters. It is often considered an anomaly in some respects – so much so that Martin Harrison writes in the Catalogue Raisonné that "It was uncharacteristic...for him to make such an openly autobiographical statement, and it remained the only painting of this kind that he completed."<sup>53</sup>

But this triptych bears further analysis despite, or due to, this seeming oddness – especially in view of developing an inquiry into Bacon and his relationship with his studio. Bacon had started a series of self-portraits fifteen years earlier (in 1962, according to Harrison<sup>54</sup>), just the year after moving into Reece Mews studio. *Triptych* (1977) tells us about Bacon's smaller works (as each panel is the usual 35.5 x 30.5 cm of the smaller portraits) and how it might reflect on the sequence of portrait and self-portrait heads.

First, I will look at the imagery/iconography of the triptych. Harrison notes the following in the Catalogue Raisonné entry about this work: "*Triptych 1977* (small, *two studios* and Bacon head)" and "The *two studio images* were based on photographs by Peter Stark"<sup>55</sup> [my italics in both quotes]. He suggests that the triptych is composed of two paintings of the Reece Mews studio alongside a self-portrait head. However, the middle painting is clearly not an image of the studio, but of Bacon's bed and part of his sitting room/bedroom. This reading can be verified by, for example, photographs taken by Edward Quinn in 1978 [Fig 38] where

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<sup>53</sup> Harrison, 2016, p.1122.

<sup>54</sup> Harrison, M., (2023) *Endless Variations*. London, Ordovas. In the exhibition catalogue of Bacon and Warhol artworks Harrison writes "In 1962 Bacon painted the first of the small portrait and self-portrait triptychs which initiated an important category of work that continued to preoccupy him until the late 1980s." p.34.

<sup>55</sup> Harrison, 2016, p.1122.

we can see Bacon's bed with a similarly patterned bedspread, with a small table and reading lamp, all shown laid out as in the painting, though from a different angle.

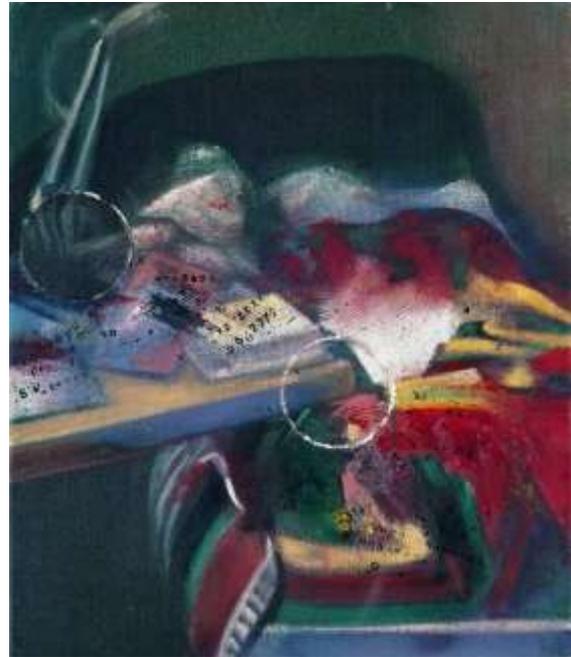


Figure 38: Edward Quinn, *Francis Bacon at 7 Reece Mews* (1978). Photo Edward Quinn, © edwardquinn.com.

Figure 39: Centre panel from Fig 37

The three images that comprise this triptych are therefore, from left to right: 1/ studio view; 2/ bed and table with lamp in living/bedroom; 3/ self-portrait head. So, the triptych represents three different 'subjects' which take the place of what would usually, in his developing set of small paintings, have been three versions of the same portrait head or three different heads.

In the overall scheme of his small portrait heads series of artworks *Triptych* (1977) can be read as an extended self-portrait which, in this specific case, includes the immediate place(s) around him. The three panels make up a triptych of important 'places' (and I will discuss later in this thesis why his portrait could be considered a place in this context), or

relationships – a triangulation of Bacon’s sense of being if we take the geographical reading that is implied in this work.

Further to this, there is place and memory in play in this triptych. The idea of memory in this work is demonstrated by Margarita Cappock in her book *Francis Bacon’s Studio*<sup>56</sup> (2015) where she discusses the left studio panel of this triptych. Cappock clearly shows that the folded fabric on top of the cardboard box, in the centre right of the painting, are George Dyer’s clothes which he removed for a photo shoot in the studio.<sup>57</sup> The resulting photographs from that shoot were used for various paintings over the years. So, this later triptych can be read as a distanced memory of Bacon’s partner of 8 years, George Dyer (who died in 1971). Or, more accurately, the triptych demonstrates a relationship between two people in terms of the places they shared and that were close to Bacon every day. We begin to see how that relationship is made more poignant by the once inhabited and shared places and objects now remembered through the paintings. There is a sense of the touching – in physical (the place and the painterly) and emotional terms here, and all at once.

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<sup>56</sup> Cappock writes: “The left panel of *Triptych* (1977) is Bacon’s only literal view of where he worked. He has, with surprising fidelity, rendered its shelving, paint tins, boxes, a pair of trousers and another piece of clothing – the last two belonging to Dyer – casually laid on a box. With the very studio before and around him, Bacon chose a detail of the room from some thirteen years earlier. The scene had changed little over time, but there was more to it than this. Following his death, Dyer’s absence from the space was permanent. His non-appearance in the painting and the scrupulous inclusion of his clothing elicit the thought that this was, after all, a discreet *memento mori* and that, just as photography recorded the living, so it also preserved the memory of the dead.” Cappock 2015, p.39.

<sup>57</sup> Cappock 2015, p.39.



Figure 40: Left panel from Fig 37



Figure 41: Bacon studio material, photograph of fragment, John Deakin, *George Dyer in the Reece Mews studio*, c. 1965  
Photo © John Deakin Archive, Source Clipping © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025.

This painting's oddness, as previously described, is partly due to the way it compresses narratives of short 'events' and at least one longer event – the clothes worn and removed on a particular occasion (the result of which is remembered at various times through other paintings), the bed that they both shared over the time of their relationship, and an image of self (as seen through another's eyes – or at least a camera's eye – as Bacon's self-portrait shows his eyes downcast and not looking at himself as in a mirror). The whole triptych is inward looking and reflective in scale and tone. There is a contradiction of internal expression as seen externally – both subject and object, and this is something Bacon develops in his work and I will return to later. There is also an identification of clothing which has an interesting resonance throughout the triptych – Dyer's discarded clothes on the left, balanced against Bacon's colourful shirt on the right, and their shared bedclothes between them. Even the home/studio relates as something worn by them both and showing the occupants' wear and tear as clothing does.

There is a sense of narrative in this work despite Bacon's avowed disinterest in 'illustration' or stories, as well as a sense of dialogue(s). Or perhaps lost or displaced dialogues. This includes a dialogue with a partner, a dialogue with self, and a dialogue with others (audience). All of these dialogues are 'placed' – and are evoked through place.

Bacon wanted his work to have a poignancy, and he spoke about the problem of connection with another person. Hugh Davies in his notes from interviews quotes Bacon saying, "The frustration is that people can never be close enough to each other. If you're in love you can't break down the barriers of the skin"<sup>58</sup> Again, the idea of distance is important to Bacon which plays out in his framing of figures in spaceframes and in the glazed picture frame.

But there is an intimacy as well. For example, Bacon stated "...people say you forget about death, but you don't. ...all the people I've been really fond of have died. And you don't stop thinking about them; time doesn't heal."<sup>59</sup> Bacon considered painting as a form of memory.

In conversation with David Sylvester, Bacon spoke about distorting a portrait into appearance, and Sylvester replied, "Are you saying that a painting is almost a way of bringing somebody back, that the process of painting is almost like the process of recalling?" Bacon replied, "I am saying it."<sup>60</sup> Davies also reports Bacon talking about *Triptych May-June 1973* saying that "...he had to paint this image which had been haunting him ever since Dyer's death."<sup>61</sup> It is perhaps telling that the large-scale so-called black triptychs about Dyer's death,<sup>62</sup> created in the early 1970s, were followed some years later by this small 1977 triptych, which is more intimate and reflective. Bacon, Dyer, Reece Mews and the

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<sup>58</sup> Davies in Harrison 2009, p.107.

<sup>59</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.85.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>61</sup> Davies in Harrison 2021, p.196.

<sup>62</sup> *In Memory of George Dyer* (1971), *Triptych August 1972* (1972), *Triptych May-June* (1973).

material of making become more entangled in this elliptical and understated work. An example of the way *place* takes on memory in *Triptych* (1977) can be seen in the difference between the use of the bed in the centre panel, which takes the place of the two coupling/fighting figures in *Triptych August 1972* (1972) [Fig 43].



Figure 42: Right panel from Fig 37

In an interview with Laureano Ralón, the philosopher of place, Jeff Malpas, notes:

Memory and dialogue are both key ideas [of] ...our mode of being in the world....  
Dialogue... captures the essential responsivity of thought and of being. But dialogue is itself always guided by memory – by a sense of that to which we are already given over, to which we already belong, to which we are already oriented. In this way, dialogue ... and responsivity themselves reflect the topographical/topological character of thought and being – in Heidegger this is elaborated in terms of the idea

of thinking as not only remembrance, but also as homecoming (although a homecoming that is always 'uncanny').<sup>63</sup>

The dialogues involved in this work start with an implied portrait of Dyer (or lack of Dyer) on the left, a portrait of Bacon on the right, and a shared place between them. But we also have a self-portrait/place triptych comprised of Bacon's studio on the left, his home space in the centre, and himself on the right. Further to these two readings the inclusion and materialisation of the senses of dialogue in Bacon's *Triptych* (1977) multiply. Malpas' term of 'dialogue', in the above quote can also refer, in the case of Bacon's triptych, to the 'languages' of paint (as material) and painting (as activity), as well as verbal and textual language, both literally and metaphorically. This brings me to the second point raised by this triptych, the way iconography is embedded in material, or the way iconography and material are united/singular. It is through a multi-layered material/image that Bacon visualises memory and dialogues. I will discuss ideas about the painterly language further in chapter 6 (about edges), but for now I just want to mention the variety of devices that Bacon uses here.

1/ There is the rehearsed and a continuing development of a repertoire of brush marks, with additional lines of colour 'printed' on the picture surface from corduroy fabric – specifically in the self-portrait canvas, and mostly over the mouth and nose areas of the face. [Perhaps this obscuring device of the mouth relates to the loss of dry transfer text – implied words that lessen across the paintings (see the next point below). The triptych, full of writing/lettering on the other two panels, moves to silence or the unspoken in the right hand panel.]

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<sup>63</sup> Malpas, J. (2010) 'Jeff Malpas interviewed by Laureano Ralón' April 24th, (Figure/Ground), n.p.

2/ There are two further varieties of marks, beyond the brush and fabric marks, these are dry transfer lettering and tracings of circular objects.

Bacon employs his often used material of dry transfer lettering to two of the three paintings – the left and centre panels. These two images include some printed matter depicted in them – books on the bedside table, printed books and newspapers in the studio. But the lettering spills across the images, creating a surface texture and eccentric rhythms (humorously including a line of 'z's to the left of the bed), so our understanding of the lettering (which is simultaneously intelligible and nonsensical) goes from a literal book-bound text to a metaphor of words and language, written and spoken, to sounds.

The traced circles (from found objects, probably paint tins) sit on the picture surface like the dry transfer lettering, but they do not clearly 'represent' anything. In terms of numbers of circles, they diminish if reading the images from left to right – from three in the left panel, two in the centre and one in the right panel. The circles relate to the making of the painting - the tins for mixing paint - and in this picture they may also relate to the circular mirror at the top left of the left-hand panel. These circles create focal points in this (and other) paintings – but ones that appear random in choice. In this case they seem to point out gaps, joins or edges in the imagery.

3/ There are two dark bars on the left sides of the two outer panels. The left panel's dark bar simply reflects the cut edge of the photograph Bacon used for the image. The reproductions from Cappock's *Bacon's Studio* book<sup>64</sup> show this quite clearly (see fig. 41). It is not clear whether the self-portrait panel on the right is similarly cut due to the original photograph or not. However, wherever this part of the image originated, these bars change

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<sup>64</sup> Cappock 2005, p.38.

the shapes of the images in both those panels and constrict the sense of space. Generally, on the small head paintings, the canvas is not constrained in shape, so these bars are specific to this and a few other triptychs. However, the idea of constricted space/place is very important to Bacon's mature work and I will look at this further in later chapters. The bars also add to a sense of symmetry of the overall triptych – but one which is not a full mirror image – but a repetition – as the bar is on the left side of both panels. Generally, the mirror image and repetition are two important devices and interests in Bacon's paintings. It may be too literal to be read this way, but the two dark bars could be seen as a sense of incompleteness in the studio and self-portrait paintings – where the only complete image is the bed. Do these dark, negative shapes set up a sense of lack or loss in the paintings?

The spacing of the separate canvases that comprise the triptych not only inform the sense of dialogues, (and disruption and distance) between Bacon and Dyer, for example, but also read as a set of different places within the overall home. The studio is related to the living/bedroom as equals (both having their own canvas), but the overall places and the figures are composed in a more complex format than first appears. Bacon's self-portrait and the painting of his studio (which is intimately connected to him) 'frame' the triptych, right and left respectively. So, Bacon is attendant (if we use this concept taken from Bacon) to the centre panel, twice. In this case, Bacon is distanced from himself. But as Dyer's clothes stand in for him in the left panel, as partner and as the artist's primary model during the 1960s (and beyond in photographs), he is well connected to the studio – and becomes the left hand 'attendant.' They both then attend the centre panel which is the bed they shared as lovers. Both separately attend the place of their union. They are separated to share the memory of their joining, to share the lack of their joining. Bacon is alive and present in the

portrait whereas Dyer is gone but remembered through clothing and a photograph of his absence. The images draw lines of connection across them connecting memory, objects and place.

It is poignant (and illuminating) that Bacon states that painting dead people is problematic – because there are only photographs and not the real person available to reference, to experience as a living presence. As Bacon said, in 1975, “once they’re dead you have the memory of them but you haven’t got them.”<sup>65</sup> He clearly felt that he needed the living presence of the model – even if not directly in front of him while he worked – so as to paint the “emanation” or “energy” beyond the appearance captured in the photograph/aide memoire.<sup>66</sup> “...when you are painting somebody, ...you are...trying to get near not only to their appearance but also to the way they have affected you, because every shape has an implication.”<sup>67</sup> Bacon’s phrase about method, here, is telling. “Every shape has an implication” very clearly states his attention to all the marks and methods he uses and how they and the imagery carry the full sense or weight of the painting.

*Triptych* (1977) helps establish Bacon’s change from a previous generic sense of place (and event) in his earlier work, through a deeply felt lived experience over a period of years (and anchored to the same place) – to a complex image of place. This change is not abrupt and there are other paintings from Bacon’s oeuvre that reference specific events or photographs, but this *Triptych* sets a specific point of reference to place that seems to be unequalled. It is, perhaps, the most extreme example of Bacon recording an intimate narrative through self-portrait and place.

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<sup>65</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.150.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.196-197.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

Having said this about *Triptych 1977*, it is interesting that Bacon had previously painted the same idea, but with a very different layout, scale and outcome. Though it is debated about who the figures in the painting are, at least some interpretations suggest that the figure on the right is Bacon. If so, *Triptych August 1972* (1972) [Fig 43] has the same pattern of panels – left: Dyer; centre: lovers; right: Bacon. It is one of his large triptychs, is much more grand and formal, so has a less intimate staging. It demonstrates the variety within Bacon’s overall works – that similar ideas could be conveyed or explored in different ways.

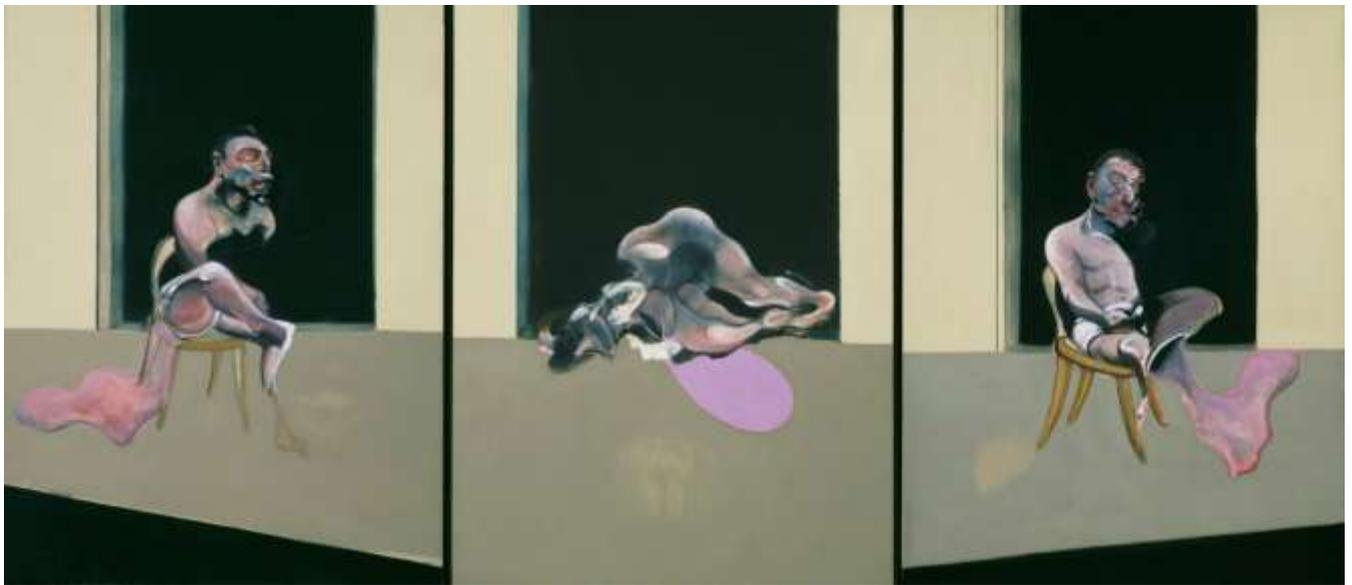


Figure 43: Francis Bacon, *Triptych August 1972* (1972), Oil and sand on three canvases, Each 198.1 × 147.3cm (78 × 58 in.) Tate © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2016, Photo: © Tate, London 2016.

Matthew Gale confirms the lack of clarity about the identity of the figures when writing about Hugh Davies’ thoughts on the painting. Davies writes, “A suggestion of an ‘internal conflict’ for the painter himself may be found in the way in which the self-portrait turns away from this central scene.” In contradiction Gale states that “Although some have suggested that the right-hand figure resembles Bacon himself, it seems likely that this, too,

was Dyer, as asserted in an earlier Tate catalogue.”<sup>68</sup> This equivocation of visual identity is something Bacon often employs and something I will return to later.

If we consider Bacon is the right panel figure, what becomes evident in the comparison between *Triptych* (1977) and *Triptych August 1972* is that the subject remains the same, but the visualisation is very different. The earlier painting appears to be more anonymous or generalised in its spatial design, but in terms of the figures it relates to the portraits and self-portraits of around that same time, which we will look at in chapter 6, and which explore an open, fluid relation of figure/ground. In any case we can see the range of methods that Bacon employs to consider the image of figure and place. We could think of this as Bacon making images that move between depictions *of* and developments *from*. Depictions *of* would be at the more descriptive end of the visualising spectrum – *Triptych* (1977), for example, which is quite rare in Bacon’s oeuvre as a complete painting, whereas *Triptych August 1972* takes an opposite angle – it works *from* the subjects of figure and place – less descriptive and more enacted or abstracted from particular givens. It is worth remembering however, Bacon, despite his dislike of description, did concede that he often used it for specific passages in his paintings, for details of facial features, for example.<sup>69</sup> So there is always a balance of those oppositions within his work.

*Triptych August 1972* demonstrates how Bacon moved from a whole (canvas-wide) image of figure/place in the 1950s, where the two interlaced with each other through striated lines, and were painted in a similar fashion, to a very different method of exploring the same

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<sup>68</sup> Gale 2001: n.p., The Tate website caption for *Triptych August 1972* states: ‘This work is generally considered one in a series of *Black Triptychs* which followed the suicide of Bacon’s lover, George Dyer. Dyer appears on the left and Bacon is on the right.’

<sup>69</sup> “...in spite of theoretically longing for the image to be made up of irrational marks, inevitably illustration has come into it to make certain parts of the head and face which, if one left them out, one would then only be making an abstract design.” Bacon in Sylvester 2016, p.147, Interview 5 (1975).

problem. The change was towards a non-unity, which comprised flat ground colour in opposition to painterly figures. I think these opposing ideas helped Bacon articulate and explore the questionable line of the edges of things – people and objects, people and people. The two opposing methods within one picture set out subjective and objective forms, but this was so Bacon could more clearly explore that uncertain edge – questioning where the thing/person ended and where something/someone else began. He suggested that this was the real subject when he stated that two figures never combine no matter how close they got – but he also talked of ‘emanations’ in terms of human subjects, so there could be a combination of sorts between people and/or objects that is less describable with traditional figurative visualisations. This sets up a dialogue of edges that Bacon explores in depth in his portraits and brings to his larger works.

This formal invention is the practical focus of *Triptych August 1972*. The black areas are not painterly but flat and singular. In the case of this triptych the idea of the figure emerging or disappearing as in the 1950s paintings is implied but there is a different use of placing the figures. Here Bacon explores edges. Chapter 6 will look at the idea of edges more generally and in terms of Bacon’s portraits series, but *Triptych August 1972* employs some particular edges, and it is worth briefly looking at them here.

The most striking edges used in this painting are those used in the Dyer and Bacon figures. They are each halved in their torsos in opposing ways – Dyer horizontally (top only), Bacon vertically (left only) – so both are open to the background, Dyer like an ancient sculpture bust, Bacon like an open coat or garment. Dyer’s sculptural bust has an amorphous lower edge, but this is supported by a thin white broken line (edge) – giving it a sense of solidity, despite its lightness and thinness.

Both of the figures visually 'sit' on the 'background' black 'door' baseline and their legs tail off into the floor ground or into Bacon's usual ambiguous shadow, so that they are most fully present (presence) in front of the flat black 'space' that they seem to emerge from or be part of in some way. Their body edges are open and soft/vulnerable, whereas the flat black strictly encases them. There is one overriding condition in the figure and the ground relation – the figure is held, trapped, or embedded in the flat colour.

The subject of the figure and ground relation is always important for Bacon, but his mature work often deals with it as spatially relational, as a web of relations that are disconnected connections. People, objects, space and place are not homogenised by a painterly language but are pushed apart.<sup>70</sup> It is through a questioning of connecting and disconnecting disparate things through the exploration of edges that Bacon's visual language develops in his mature work.

Both the triptychs discussed in this section approach a similar subject in quite different ways – using methods at the extreme of Bacon's painterly language. They outline the issues that Bacon was dealing with – real experience, directly realised – reported reality at the moment of making. Both works are about relationships of many kinds. It is particularly poignant that for *Triptych* (1977) the complex relations are visually bound into specific place: the place of Reece Mews, the place of the painting. As Jeff Malpas writes, "...one recalls not just the person but the person *and* place, and both as part of the same image, part of a single

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<sup>70</sup> David Sylvester points this out: "...you came to combine a *malerisch* handling of the form...with a hard, flat, bright ground, so that you violently juxtapose two opposite conventions." Sylvester 2016, p.138; and later he suggests that Bacon's successful and later paintings are an "interlocking of clearly illustrational marks with highly suggestive irrational marks, which has some marks serving one purpose and other marks the other purpose?" To which Bacon agrees. Sylvester 2016, p.149.

remembrance.” ... “Without places, beings would be only abstractions. It is places that make their images precise...”<sup>71</sup>

From these specific paintings I now move to look at other visualisations of place in Bacon’s paintings. The following section discusses the more seemingly ambiguous and indirect visualisations of Reece Mews which start to outline his focus on a sense of structure and atmosphere. We see some of Bacon’s thinking around the idea of the studio and lived place through large scale paintings and triptychs.

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<sup>71</sup> Malpas 2018, p.179.

#### 4.4/ Paintings and their relations to Reece Mews studio and home

“I always think of myself not so much as a painter but as a medium for accident and chance”<sup>72</sup>

At the beginning of this section there are two points that help to underpin the chapter’s line of thought:

The first is that Reece Mews, and primarily the studio, grew in importance from the mid-1960s onward. It didn’t just act as an image store where detritus suggested imagery, but the space and atmosphere became part of the character of some of his work and part of the characters who lived there. The apparent chaos of the studio allowed fragmentation, a certain loss of logical relations and a complexity of spaces to arise – and the diversity of material reflected a wide world of sensations and possible visual realities to pin down.

The second is that, like Picasso, Bacon’s work is often best understood in what happens between paintings – the changes of the devices and methods he employs. Hence his series of works – for instance the heads/portraits, triptychs – and the play of devices and methods, the repetition of motifs (Dyer), spaceframes, circles etc. and recycling his own images – both in depiction of larger motifs as well as recorded as small copies on the walls around his studio and the rest of his home. Although I am talking mostly formally about the paintings, it needs to be remembered that it is attachment to an importance of the image that drives formal invention. Bacon sees the subject (or creativity) in what he calls the “technical imagination.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bacon, F. in *Bacon’s Arena*, BBC Two Television, 19 Mar 2005, 1’05.”

<sup>73</sup> “Real imagination is technical imagination. It is in the ways you think up to bring an event to life again, in the search for the technique to trap the object and given moment ... Art lies in the constant struggle to come near

In the previous section we saw how *Triptych* (1977) reflected Bacon's living and working circumstances and how the home and studio space were identified as intricately woven into place and identity. However, *Triptych* (1977), as Martin Harrison states, was an 'uncharacteristic' painting in being so clearly autobiographical (and so clearly and descriptively *placed*). It is also considered more directly representational in manner compared to most of his other works. Bacon was clear about his disinterest in 'illustrational' detail and on several occasions stated that: "a painter... to attempt to record life, has to do it in a much more *intense and curtailed way. It has to...[simplify] into reality. You have to abbreviate into intensity* [my emphasis]."74

This idea of abbreviation needs to be kept in mind when we start to look at Bacon's imagery in relation to his studio/home space. By the 1960s and 70s he was aiming to simplify the image. In his fourth interview with David Sylvester (dated 1974), Bacon states:

I've increasingly wanted to make the images simpler and more complicated. And for this to work, it can work more starkly if the background is very united and clear. ... I hate a homely atmosphere, .... I would like the intimacy of the image against a very stark background.<sup>75</sup>

Michael Peppiatt also quotes Bacon, speaking in the mid-1960s, about simplifying the image for the sake of the speed required for an audience to feel the sensation of the artwork:

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to the sensory side of objects." Francis Bacon statement from interview first published in *Time* magazine in 1952, reproduced in *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, ed. Andrew Carnduff Ritchie [exhibition catalogue] (New York: MoMA, 1955), 60. Republished, Walsh, V. (2009). '... to give the sensation without the boredom of conveyance': in Francis Bacon and the Aesthetic of Ambiguity. *Visual Culture in Britain*, 10 (3), 235–252. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14714780903265887> [Accessed 01/07/24]; and in Günther 2022, p.93.

<sup>74</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.198.

<sup>75</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.138.

What one wants in art nowadays is a shorthand where the sensation comes across right away. You have to give these things right away, otherwise people can't be bothered.<sup>76</sup>

So the interiors that Bacon was painting at this time and after are simplified, and in particular cases, deal with specific place, but in an abbreviated and sensory, rather than illustrational, way. In this state, the interior becomes a landscape of sensation rather than one to be delineated or illustrated, but one that remains important, partly internalised and partly distant, both known and unknown. The idea of sensory place opens out the studio to a wider landscape which we will look at in later chapters.

Bacon was unwilling to become a totally abstract painter. The closest that he seems to have come to that possibility is *Composition* (1933) [Fig 9]. "I always want to *record* a face or body, and I want to do it as near my own feelings as possible. It's the exact opposite of abstract painting."<sup>77</sup> He said that painting needed "tension"<sup>78</sup> so he was obliged to have some sense of illustration (depiction of people or objects) in his imagery. This made the possibility of visualising sensory place a complex task. A sensed space would be difficult to visualise with a conventional representational aspect to the figure as this could lead to a common division of body and place. A sensed space would need other ways of being articulated if it was to explore sensory awareness in a compelling, immediate and clear way.

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<sup>76</sup> Peppiatt 2016, p.27.

<sup>77</sup> Sinclair 1993, p.180.

<sup>78</sup> Bacon to Sylvester: "I believe that art is recording; I think it's reporting. And I think that in abstract art, as there's no report, there's nothing other than the aesthetic of the painter and his few sensations. There's never any tension in it." Sylvester 2016, p.69.

In his book *The Production of Space* (1974) Henri Lefebvre discusses some ideas that reflect on place/space which are relevant to this current reading of Bacon and his use of his Reece Mews studio. Lefebvre writes “A homogeneous and utterly simultaneous space would be strictly imperceptible. [where] ...Localisation - and lateralisation - are no more.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, a sensory/sensed space needs to be broken or articulated to be visually realised and made visible. But it requires different articulations than those ‘normally’ used – for instance, the human body, objects, architecture – to visualise other continuities of space than the edges we immediately identify and understand or conform to, and that often act as separations rather than connections. We will see this again when discussing the idea of edges in chapter 6, and how Bacon takes some pains to identify ways of opening the figure into various types of edges.

Lefebvre, in his critical analysis of ‘modern space’ as something seen externally states:

This modern space ...is also the space of blank sheets of paper, drawing-boards, plans, sections, elevations, scale models, geometrical projections, and the like.” He continues: “A narrow and desiccated rationality of this kind overlooks the core and foundation of space, the total body, the brain, gestures, and so forth. ...space does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible-readable realm, but that it is first of all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lefebvre, H. (Nicholson-Smith, D. trans.) (1991) *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing. p.200.

<sup>80</sup> Lefebvre 1991, p.200.

These last points that Lefebvre makes reflect Bacon's sense of place/space already seen in some of his works and how they relate to architecture and show some sense of figure and place merging as discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

It seems to be, that due to his move to Reece Mews and an evolving interest in a more intimate subject of friends and his own life in his artwork, Bacon was able to 'place' his figures in a specific environment, which worked its way into his imagery, albeit in a sometimes apparently simplified and abstracted manner. Many of his paintings became grounded in a more personal sense and therefore the figures themselves tended to open out and bleed into the environment in a different way than before his Reece Mews time. We could say that Bacon's figuration changed because of this specific interior. It appears that Bacon's work was maturing away from earlier 'sensational' imagery toward a later more formal and slightly cooler relation of a sensory figure/place imagery.

We can see this change over a period of time and possibly more clearly in the portraits and self-portraits which we will look at in more detail in chapter 6. This current chapter looks at images that clearly connect to his studio at Reece Mews. The first image that Bacon made that uses Reece Mews is a sketch of the flat dated around 1961 [Fig 45]. As discussed earlier, it appears to be a quick drawing made from memory after a visit to the place as it isn't particularly accurate. However, it does show the steep flight of stairs that led to the flat with the various rooms leading off from it. This external space sketch demonstrates a 3d plan and is memorable for the relation of the stairs to the raised 1<sup>st</sup> floor flat, with no visible means of support or ground structure. The steepness of the stairs is clearly remembered. It

seems important that the main rooms of the flat are raised and separated from ground level. As Harrison suggests, the whole building is articulated like a spaceframe.<sup>81</sup>

One of Bacon's occasional sketches [Fig 46] towards a painting, shows two versions of a figure on a steep stairway, one of which is in a small, enclosed space, reminiscent of the Reece Mews entrance area. These sketches show us ways that Reece Mews starts to make appearances in his work.

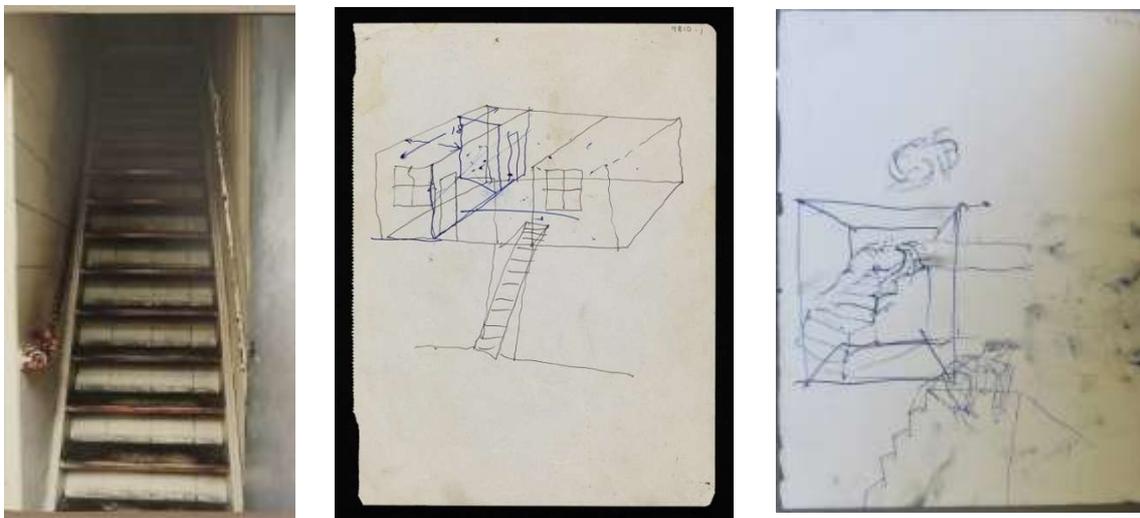


Figure 44: Photo: Perry Ogden, '7 Reece Mews entrance staircase' in, John Edwards, (2001), *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 7, Photos © Perry Ogden.com, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 45: Francis Bacon, *Untitled drawing of three rooms approached by a ladder* (no date), Ink on paper 253 × 189 mm, Tate Archive collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 46: Francis Bacon, (no date) *Untitled drawing*, possibly of figures crawling on steps, ink on paper, 247 x 186mm, Tate archive © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

The appearance is generally transformed or simplified away from the home and the focus on an intimate environment. Bacon's use of the studio/home is specific and general at the same time – unlike, for example, the depiction of the homes of the French Intimist artists Vuillard and Bonnard, with their warmer and enclosed interior/home worlds that we enter via the artworks. Bacon does not usually invite us into his personal place but uses it to

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<sup>81</sup> Harrison 2005, p.115.

develop complete figure-scapes – and to explore sensation as lived and felt experience. This allows an exploration of the figure/place complex as a sensory relationship rather than an illustration or catalogue of objects. It also allows the viewer to enter the *artwork as place* rather than an illustrated recognisably ‘other’ place. We feel and sense the truth of a lived place rather than recognise its individual externally described features. The place Bacon inhabits is the studio – the place the viewer inhabits is the painting surface. As Ernst van Alphen writes, “The body as sense organ: this is not only a relevant definition of the body in Bacon’s paintings, but also of the effect his paintings have on the viewer.”<sup>82</sup>

Bacon often worked from photographs taken in his studio, and over the next few pages I look at some relationships that directly relate to the place. But I also want to suggest that the atmosphere of the studio becomes important over the 1970s and 80s and is entwined with the imagery, design, handling of paint/materials and the colour palettes that he used.

Bacon’s painting *Study from the Human Body (Man Turning on a Light)* from 1973 [Fig 47] also seems to be based on the stairwell of Reece Mews. Martin Harrison has made this link before,<sup>83</sup> and when the painting is juxtaposed next to Perry Ogden’s photograph of the stairwell from the landing [Fig 48], the shapes of the painting clearly echo those of the photograph. Further, there appears to be pentimenti within the green ‘space/floor’ area of the painting that looks like a suggestion of stairs or a landing shape that was painted out [see Fig 49]. It is also possible that the green shape grew from a small floor area to a more ambiguous floor/void. In any case the space(s) in the painting engulf, divide, and engage with the figure. Hugh Davies, in his *Bacon Diary 1973*, gives some interesting thoughts about

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<sup>82</sup> van Alphen 1992, p.32.

<sup>83</sup> Harrison 2005, p.115.

this painting. He writes, “Left corner quadrant was pale blue with yellow in it of the mirrors and a lighted bulb appeared in the middle background...” and slightly later continues “figure in painting had left side of his body wrapped around or almost being cut in half by the wall. ...When he [Bacon] came back to the living room, he turned on the light switch in much the same way as if to punctuate the fact that he chose simple actions to paint, doing it opposite the mirror so that he could watch himself.”<sup>84</sup> Here Davies points out that Bacon’s interest in mirrors plays a role in his image making, and how he used the large mirrors in Reece Mews as a way of catching the image. But more importantly he suggests how Bacon uses the characteristics of his home/place rearranging them for a pictorial space. Davies also clearly points out that the ‘background’ imagery engages with the body when he says that the “left side of his body wrapped around or almost being cut in half by the wall.” This appears to be difficult to square with Bacon’s statement that “the figure comes first and generally the background afterwards.”<sup>85</sup> Bacon must have in mind some ideas about the spatial arrangement of his works when he starts out even if these change in the process of painting. We only need to look at the Bacon sketches held in Tate Britain archives to see how important the spatial arrangement is to the figure. Almost all of the 22 images visualise figures within spaces of some kind [see figure 45 for example]. In fact, Tate Archive and Public Records Catalogue notes suggest: “He wanted people to think his images sprang directly from instinct and the act of painting. These archive items, acquired in tandem with more finished drawings which have been included in the Tate collection of paintings,

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<sup>84</sup> Davies in Harrison 2021, p.175.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

strongly suggest that his works were actually carefully worked out and planned in advance.”<sup>86</sup>

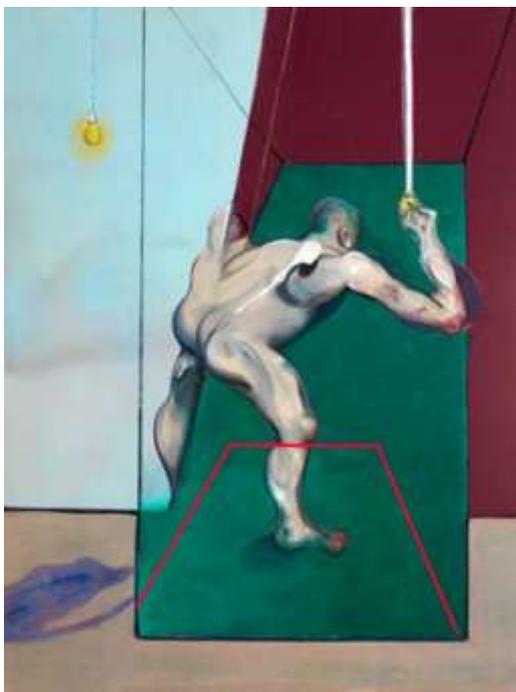


Figure 47: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body (Man Turning on Light)* (1973) Oil and alkyd paint on canvas 79 x 58 ½ in. (200.6 x 148.4 cm) Private collection © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 48: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon's 7 Reece Mews studio, London 1998* (1998) Photograph, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025.

Figure 49: Copy of Fig 47 annotated by the author

<sup>86</sup> Tate Archive and Public Records Catalogue notes. Available at: <https://archive.tate.org.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=TGA+9810&pos=4> [Accessed 26 11 24].

The space in this painting is ambiguous but can also be linked perhaps more simply than suggested above, to the layout in *Reece Mews* – the blue space (with the bare hanging lightbulb) on the left would be the studio and the beige floor at the bottom of the picture, the studio and landing wooden floorboards. The deep red-brown background suggests the darker hallway as seen from the brighter studio. The basic geography of *Reece Mews* is there, and the figure of the man turning on the light is strangely embedded into it, held in a web of lines and moving into the green void (hallway/stairwell) at its heart.

So, it seems that *Study from the Human Body* is a good example of the idea of creating *from* a given situation rather than describing or making an illustration *of* it. The manoeuvring of spatial relationships in the painting relates to his manoeuvring, and the sensation of that, within specific place. This image demonstrates how Bacon reorganises sections of space which play with perspectives reinforcing the physical invention, artificiality, and painterly language bringing us back to the sensation of ourselves in space and the pictorial surface. Bacon demonstrates a strong ability to manipulate space in his mind. Forms and ‘voids’ (or positive and negative forms) as well as figures or parts of figures are often turned and modelled to rearticulate the effects of forms – probably as a way of experiencing them anew.

In *Self-portrait* (1973) [Fig 50] Bacon paints himself in a space that relates to his studio. The bare floorboards and the newspaper scattered on it become a simplified version of his working space. The door is in the right place and a dark shape sits on a chair where his painting and easel would have stood. A later version of the same idea and appears to be from the same visual source is *Study for Self-Portrait* (1982) [Fig 51]. Both these paintings

centre on Bacon in situ, and the 1982 version places Bacon and his chair in approximately the same place as it would have been in his studio when painting.

Bacon was also one of the last painters to use the ovoid tradition of European painting and this is evident in the figure of the 1973 version. The ovoid form, as developed in the Renaissance from ancient Greek and Roman examples, was a way of building figures and groups of related figures through chains of oval shapes. Bacon seems to have followed this technique mainly from the example of Michelangelo's drawings. Bacon uses this form to construct his figures to a certain extent, and it suits his swirling and curved method of applying paint. A simple curved variant of this form is used in the chairs in this painting, but it also could partly account for the curved space of the floor, acting as a spotlight (which he often used around his bare lightbulbs) and as a way of tying the figure to the room. His curved painted brush marks and ovoid shapes play against the diagonal floorboards and harder architectural forms in the painting, building a contradictory set of rhythms.

In the 1982 version Bacon uses a seemingly flat blue for the wall (which might be a pre-mixed house paint colour as Margarita Cappock notes that many tins of proprietary paints were found in his studio<sup>87</sup>), but more importantly it is interesting to note that both the 1973 and the 1982 versions use the 'background' colours mixed with the 'body' and floor colours to create the figure. Both the heads are informed by Bacon's many portraits in the way they deal with and relate to the ground colours. In the 1982 version in particular, the head bleeds into the wall, and this is an important focal edge to this painting. In fact, the small rectangle behind Bacon's head in this painting is similar to the small format of the portraits and self-portraits series and the relation of Bacon to the rest of the painting seems to imply an equal

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<sup>87</sup> Cappock 2005, p.211.

weight of room to figure, thus questioning their close relationship and exploring the edges *between them*. I will discuss the portrait/ground/edges ideas further in chapter 6.



Figure 50: Francis Bacon, *Self-portrait* (1973) CR 73-10, Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACs 2025.

Figure 51: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1982) Oil on canvas, 78 x 58 ½ in. (198 x 147.7 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACs 2025.

Further to this questioning of the figure/room complex, other paintings also demonstrate how Bacon uses his studio as the basic schema for images and develops a dialogue with the space/place and its atmosphere. Some, apparently simpler than others.

Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* (1981) [Fig 54] and *Study for a Self-portrait* (1981) [Fig 55] can both be linked to a photograph and the overall studio layout. Figures 52 and 53 show two copies of a photograph of Bacon in his studio by Michael Holtz,<sup>88</sup> the second with

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<sup>88</sup> Both Harrison (Harrison 2016) and Cappock make the link to the figure as in a photograph by Michael Holtz from 1974. My photograph taken from Cappock, M., *Francis Bacon's Studio*, Cappock 2005, pp.71/77.

annotations showing how both these 1981 paintings take their basic form from the image. The folded lines, visible in the first photograph [Fig 52], show Bacon's physical manipulation along the central vertical line of the image which becomes the edge of the doorway in the painting. The real doorway to Bacon's studio is just to the left, outside the photograph – and seems to have been important to Bacon as he worked at his easel very close to the open door and the darker hallway beyond it.

Bacon often folded or tore up photographs as image material for his paintings.<sup>89</sup> In this case the folding translates to the overall design of the image delineating spaces in the 1981 paintings. Bacon uses spatial manipulations throughout his later work, and this is where the formal subject often lies. Bacon's intentional folding of Holz's photograph gives him a spatial structure based on the photograph *and* the studio. As in my annotated version of the photograph [Fig 53] shows, the fold runs up the near centre of the image, which Bacon then links to the ceiling edge, then runs to the stored canvas edge and then down that left side to the approximate top of the boxes of detritus and finishing at the right edge of the photograph. The real and imaginary edges correspond to the real and imaginary spaces in the two 1981 canvases, apparently made one after the other as described by Harrison in the *Catalogue Raisonne*.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> see Cappock 2005 and Günther 2022.

<sup>90</sup> *Catalogue Raisonne* numbers: *Study from the Human Body* (1981) CR 81-05, and *Study for Self-Portrait* (1981) CR 81-06 (Harrison 2016).



Figure 52: Michael Holtz photo, *Francis Bacon in the Reece Mews Studio* (1974), 24 x 16.6 cm © Michael Holtz, photo from Cappock, M. (2005) p.77 by the author (19/08/24)

Figure 53: Figure 52 with annotations by the author

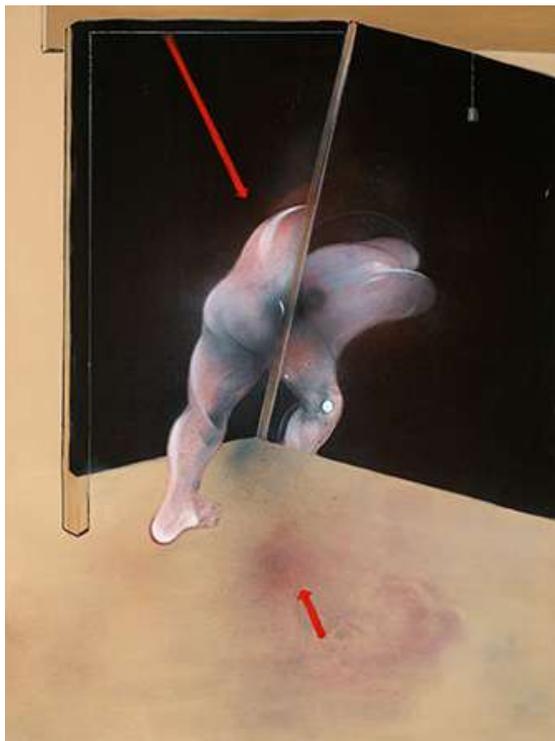


Figure 54: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body* (1981) Oil and aerosol paint on canvas, 78 x 58 ¾ in. (198 x 147.5 cm), © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 55: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1981) Oil on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) Collection: Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 56: Francis Bacon, *Study of a Man Talking* (1981) Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) The Hess Art Collection, Berne, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 57: Edward Quinn, *Francis Bacon with John Edwards in his studio with Carcass of Meat and Bird of Prey* (finished 1980), 7 Reece Mews London S.W. 7, (1980), Photo Edward Quinn, © edwardquinn.com.

At first glance, *Study of a Man Talking* (1980) [Fig 56] is a straightforward figure painting. There is a clear link between Edward Quinn's photograph of Bacon and John Edwards in his studio [Fig 57] and the painting, which simplifies the image in the photograph, removing Bacon himself and much of the detail within the space around him, as well as most of the image on the depicted painting. Bacon keeps the studio floor indicated by the newspaper under the figure's feet, the edges of the canvas behind Edwards, the light pull and the easel struts at the top of the picture and the shadowy floor in the depicted painting itself. The pose of the figure is similar to Edwards in Quinn's photograph.

What is intriguing here is the way Bacon alters the spaces within the image. The depicted painting (now within the larger painting) becomes an ambiguous extension of the studio space. The talking man's right shoulder seems to fall behind the canvas edge of the depicted

painting, confusing the pictorial space so that he is both in front of and inside that picture's space. Supporting this spatial confusion, Edwards is pictured with his feet on the floor in front of the depicted painting, but while one edge of the depicted canvas runs behind the figure's legs a second line runs from the bottom left edge comes toward the actual painting's lower edge. The two image spaces seem to merge. This is supported by the newspaper behind Edwards feet which appears to lie across the two depicted spaces.

This confusion of edges is echoed in the difference in handling of the main clothed body, which is fairly representational and descriptive, and the figure's head which is distorted (by its captured talking movement). This focus on edges relates to Bacon's portrait studies over the previous decades. The relationship to his portrait/head studies demonstrates the way that series of works/explorations take the body into deformations that Bacon had not previously explored. I will look at this idea further in chapter 6.

*Study of a Man Talking* is a useful painting that helps us understand several ways that Bacon weaves objects and place together. If we stand in front of this painting, we would be in three places at the same time. For Bacon, at least two of them would be the same studio place (actual and depicted). For viewers in a gallery the layers of place complicate the spaces we inhabit – particularly if the glazing reflects us (especially in the darker sections of the painting which would reflect our own reality more clearly). The depicted figure of Edwards is just under life size – so we are mirrored by the standing figure facing us, as well as by the glass reflection. Bacon plays further with the figure's head blurring into a dark rectangle behind it – like many of his smaller portrait studies blur edges and ground. This could be a window onto the dark space behind the depicted wall, or it could be a painting or mirror situated on it. The overall angle of the rectangle differs from both the depicted

spaces' perspectives, so it ambiguously sits in another space – possibly on the picture plane itself. It is perhaps inspired by the orange 'window' that Bacon painted on the *Carcass of Meat and Bird of Prey* (1980) which sat on the picture plane.

Bacon's interest in mirrors and pictures within pictures plays with space and the multiplicity and problem of depicting a truthful reporting of our experience of space/place. They may presage the later mature works' focus on how fact slips away from us as we try to speak about that experience. Bacon's 'brutality of fact', I think, was never really about the sensational image – and moved toward the emergence of the sensory self. Visualising this, for Bacon, requires a distancing artificiality, which fixes or 'traps' this 'image' – the self, multiply mirrored, enmeshed in our landscape. Memory, now and possibility; past, present and future held in an uncertain state.

In *Study for a Portrait* (1981) [Fig 58], again derived from the Deakin photographs of George Dyer (c1965) [Fig 59] the structure of the painting follows, in a schematic form, the general layout of the studio. Dyer is on the chair in the middle of the studio, as in the photograph. The circle behind Dyer clearly relates to the studio mirror, and, like the blue light falling into the studio from the skylight, is in approximately the right place in the overall layout of the room. Even the wall on the right of the painting reflects the place where canvases were stacked or where reproductions of Bacon's work were often pinned.

The circle/mirror form is repeated twice on the right of the image, one black, which ties the head and its depiction together across the divide of blue/light, and one blue with a copy of Dyer's head in profile with text around it, pinned to that circle. The circle on the left, behind the seated Dyer, lies both behind him, on the shoulder, and in front of his head, dividing the forehead area into two different perspectives [Fig 60]. The blue architectural/light form also creates a long line through the figure dividing it into two halves. This line seems to pin the figure, or weave it, into the space – just as Bacon had earlier talked about using a hypodermic needle or a nail to pin the figure to the 'bed' (ground) in his painting.<sup>91</sup> On the right of the 1981 image he literally pins Dyer's paper portrait to the wall.



Figure 58: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait* (1981) Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) Private collection, USA, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Bacon says the following about *Lying Figure with Hypodermic Syringe* (1963): "I've used the figures lying on beds with a hypodermic syringe as a form of nailing the image more strongly into reality or appearance. I don't put the syringe because of the drug that's being injected but because it's less stupid than putting a nail through the arm, which would be even more melodramatic. I put the syringe because I want a nailing of the flesh onto the bed." Sylvester 2016, p.91.

Bacon is playing here with mirror images – as glass reflections as well as paintings, photographs or even texts. He understands how a picture within a picture changes the reading of the whole image into a play with realities. Bacon saw himself, as discussed with Michel Leiris,<sup>92</sup> as a ‘realist’ painter and interested more and more in a formal language of imagery. Realism that related to an audience in a very direct manner. In Bacon’s case (and many other artists) the audience includes himself, if as he claims, his work is spontaneous and improvisatory and is completed when the painting finds its visualisation and material outcome. As Bacon says to David Sylvester “...one has an intention, but what really happens comes about in working...it actually comes about in the working. ... In working you are really following this kind of cloud of sensation in yourself, but you don’t know what it really is.”<sup>93</sup> The performance of painting is the act of finding the outcome, the image which is as novel to him as it is to another viewer.

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<sup>92</sup> Leiris writes that Bacon’s realism “is not simply transcriptive but creative, is less concerned to present than to establish reality...” Leiris, M. (Weightman, J. trans) (1987) *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, New York and London, Arthur A. Bartley Publishers., p.33.

<sup>93</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.169.

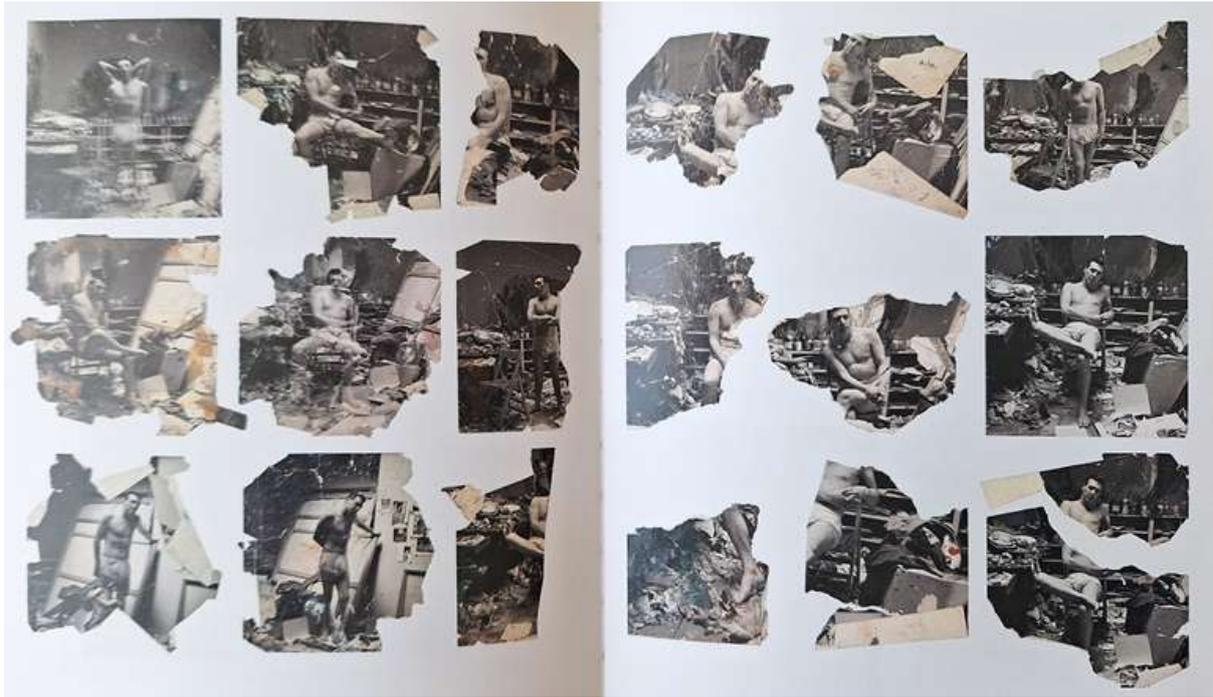


Figure 59: John Deakin, photographs of George Dyer c.1965, taken by the author from a double page spread in Logan Sisely ed. (2009) *A Terrible Beauty*, Gottingen: Steidl, pp.82-83 © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS London/ARS NY 2025, John Deakin Collection: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Ireland.



Figure 60: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait* (1981), detail, Figure 60: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait* (1981), oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, 78 x 58 in., (198 x 147.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

In the detail of *Study for a Portrait* (1981) [Fig 60] we can see another two devices that Bacon uses at this time: the first is a spray-painted softness around the nose and forehead of the figure – blending the figure and the blue ground into each other, possibly extending the figure into the ground – or vice versa. I will look at this again in the Portraits section in chapter 6. The second painterly device is the use of a passage of lines across the eye of the figure. This is where Bacon uses a piece of corduroy cloth to press paint onto the image, to create a small ‘shuttering’ effect which appears to soften the image but also to possibly

suggest a reduced sense (of vision in this case). This is a device that Bacon uses at this time, and one we will see again in the portraits section.

Bacon also uses another idea in the right hand 'reproduction' of the head (on paper with text). Here he paints the reproduction with a flesh-coloured pink with a darker toned edge, which suggests the image hovers between a real fleshy figure and a flat reproduction – something he often does in the shadows of his figures.

As previously noted, Bacon was now aiming for his work to be both intimate in terms of the figure and stark in terms of ground. He often used the term *trap*<sup>94</sup> – to contain the figure, or to find it as it became visualised as he painted. Around this time Bacon simplified to an even greater extent with a few paintings made between 1982 and 1986. He seems to identify the orange ground he had used before with the Reece Mews studio itself. This had been a favourite colour but was now used to a greater extent.<sup>95</sup> As Stevens and Swan note in their biography of Bacon: "In 1979, he painted *Studies of the Human Body* with a flaming orange background. Twenty-six pictures followed in the '80s that included the 'Bacon orange.'"<sup>96</sup>

The painting that most clearly connects the orange ground with the studio is *Blood on the Floor - Painting* (1986) [Fig 64]. The studio, as often, is identified through the hanging bulb and pull-cord light switch in the centre of the image. But here, the floorboards (also recurring imagery, as discussed earlier) are imagined as a pathway, like the one he used at Reece Mews between his chair at the back of the space, and his easel, set in the middle of

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<sup>94</sup> For example, Bacon states: "It's really a question...of being able to set a trap with which one would be able to catch the fact at its most living point." Sylvester 2016, p.62.

<sup>95</sup> Bacon tells Michel Archimbaud that "orange...is my favourite colour; I couldn't explain in any satisfactory way the reasons why I find it such a beautiful colour", Archimbaud 1993, p.170.

<sup>96</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.632.

the room, through the detritus covering most of the floor, as Figures 62 and 63 demonstrate.<sup>97</sup>

For Bacon, the subject as described by the title, is the blood on the bare floor. But this blood might easily be seen as a paint splatter – and, interestingly, could confuse or conflate the two readings, thus bringing the notional figure and its surrounding place into a single item, tying them together as a place-figure. In this case, the figurative element is clearly subservient to the sense of place. Again, as Stevens and Swan write, “The idea of the figureless figure painting always fascinated Bacon.”<sup>98</sup>

The constricted floorboard pathway pushes into the colour field delineating a space that conforms to that trajectory while identifying a closed sensory world. The orange interior can be read as both an atmosphere and a surface (or picture plane edge – see chapter 7) at the same time. The orange ground has a force and warmth that signify an intense space or atmosphere, and it easily stands in for the fullness of the studio (with its detritus) and the space of the room itself. This colour force is clearly painted on the surface but reads as a space as well as an object. It also radiates forward from the picture plane into our physical space – a volume of atmosphere which engulfs us.

It is interesting to note that Bacon’s first related colour ‘background’ was in his *Studio Interior* (c1936) [Fig 17], where a strong red filled the space. So it appears that red/orange colours were associated from his very early work with the studio/interior image. As stated earlier, the orange ‘ground’ colour has a history for Bacon. It was a popular colour at the

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<sup>97</sup> Davies also points out this path writing: “This studio room was full of junk – [with] a corridor to walk through...” Davies in Harrison 2021, p.158.

<sup>98</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.633.

time of his design phase<sup>99</sup> and he used it in his breakthrough painting *Three Figures at the base of a Crucifixion* (1944). So, the colour's 'interior' link was set up quite early but seems to have been appropriate and appropriated for his work based in/on Reece Mews. It might have become associated with Reece Mews in a more prosaic way as well – the wooden ceiling that Bacon put in before he settled into the studio [see Fig 61] might have affected the atmosphere of the place as the reflecting daylight (on a bright day), as in the photograph by Michael Holtz [Fig 52], or under incandescent bulb lights, would suffuse the space with a strong orange reflection/glow. The ceiling dominates the space as the only uncluttered surface, with its characteristic wooden panelling lines that Bacon had un(?)consciously brought in (from his earlier studio in Chelsea, as depicted in Roy de Maistre's paintings of Bacon's studio in 1932-33 [Figs 10, 11, 12]).



Figure 61: Photograph of the ceiling at Reece Mews, reconstruction at Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Ireland. Photo by the author (15/04/23) © Kerry Andrews

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<sup>99</sup> Peppiatt 2008, p.106.



Figure 62: Carlos Freire, (1977) *Francis Bacon in his Studio at Reece Mews, London*, gelatin silver print, 42 x 28 cm ; 16½ x 11 in. Photo © Carlos Freire.

Figure 63: Copy of Fig 62 with annotations by the author



Figure 64: Francis Bacon, *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986), Oil and pastel on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198.1 x 147.3 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

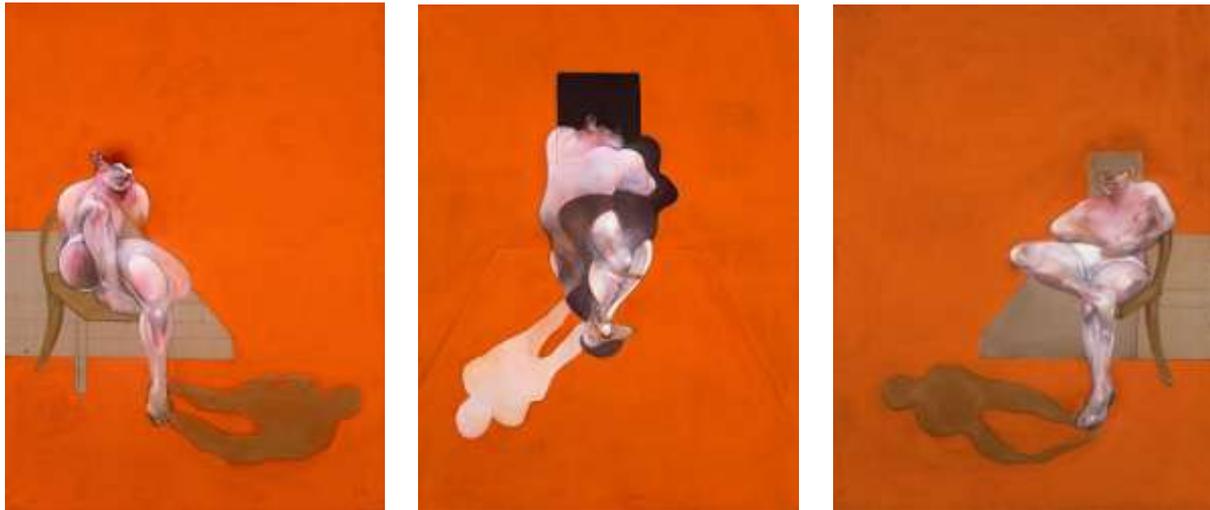


Figure 65: Francis Bacon, *Triptych* (1983), oil, pastel and aerosol paint on canvas, each panel: 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), Abelló Collection, Madrid, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

*Triptych* (1983) [Fig 65] has the same orange ground again and the painting refers to the studio through its use of John Deakin's studio-based photographs of George Dyer, previously discussed. The triptych's deceptive simplicity is energised with an atmospheric vibrancy, while an illusional sense of space is given by the plinth forms in the left and right panels, the figures and their shadows, a drawn floor boundary, and a dark window/image/void in the centre. The radiant orange ground colour is so simplified that it becomes all encompassing – walls and floor – with only a slightly different coloured line to demarcate the floor in the centre panel, and plinths on the left and right panels signifying some sense of space. I think it is clear that the ground and figures have equal visual weight – the figures in their complexity and handling are set within a larger, powerful atmosphere.

Bacon uses various devices that seem to meld the figures and ground together. Although all the figures have almost fully delineated bodies, all their heads are halved and bleed into the colourspace behind/surrounding them. Each of the heads has a very deliberate edge cut across them – these are sensory, 'pre-conscious' heads, part of their environment and seemingly not directly conscious of it. The left figure's head almost literally bleeds directly

into the orange ground via a deeper red mist. The figure on the right bleeds into a brown square which matches its plinth below, connecting the two. The centre panel figure's head bleeds into a black square in the middle of the back wall.

The two attendant, left and right panel, figures have rather conventional dark shadows which point to the centre panel, whereas the floor shadow of the central figure is in some opposition to them, as it is a much lighter white/pink/orange shade. All the figures have a fluidity and extend their bodies through their shadows which also have some character of their own as they don't logically reflect the body's position.

This central figure is the most complex, especially as it appears to be woven into its shadow or a second figure. This may relate to other 'couples' paintings like *Two Figures* (1961), the double figure in the left panel of *Triptych - Studies from the Human Body* (1970), or the later *Study of a Man and Woman Walking* (1988 – 1989). As suggested, the central panel figure is a woven or twisted form that links the top black square/void with the white floor shadow. The lighter body and its shadow entwine with the darker secondary figure/shadow which takes a line of light and dark (each at some point being positive or negative) through the body from the lighter floor shadow up to the window/void. This weaving of imagery is sometimes clearly visible, like these examples, or sometimes more metaphorically present as in the attendant figures' relations with place in the side panels of this painting.



Figure 66: Francis Bacon, Figure in left panel of *Triptych* (1983), detail of Figure 65

The triptych, though classically balanced with centre and symmetrical side panels, has moments of imbalance as well. For example, the two attendant figures sit on half-completed chairs. Only the plinths behind them hold them in a visual balance. This device gives the image some uncertainty and takes the images away from logically complete representation. Similarly illogical is the angled line of the plinth that runs through the left-hand figure [Fig 66]. The line and plinth colour cut through the chest of the figure and the line continues up into the neck area. This, again, locks and weaves the figure in place as well as taking the image away from any traditionally observational correctness.

The outer panel paintings have again used the John Deakin photographs of George Dyer in the studio, but Bacon has changed the chairs, from his studio folding chair, to a design similar to the ones he had in the sitting room of Reece Mews.<sup>100</sup> This might be due to the curvature of the back and back legs of the sitting room chairs, which continue the curvature

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<sup>100</sup> Bacon tells Davies that ‘the cane chairs are from his flat’ Davies in Harrison 2021, p.204; and Davies quotes Bacon saying, “I tend to turn furniture and twist it about as much as the bodies, for my own ends.” Davies in Harrison 2009, p.122; Davies recalls Bacon speaking about the lights and cords in his paintings being taken from the studio, saying: “I use things around me.” Davies in Harrison 2009, p.97.

of the edges and volumes of the body. The chair becomes a link between, or an echo of, the rounder edges of the body and the hard edges of the plinths behind.

Another painting in this sequence of studio-related images is *Kneeling Figure – Back View* (1982) [Fig 68] which also uses the same orange ground colour, and like *Study for Portrait* (1981) [Fig 58] bears some resemblance to the overall layout of Reece Mews studio, as seen in Figure 67 below. The floor and the mirror especially have connections to an east to west view of the studio, a view that Bacon would have had every time he turned away from a painting he was working on. The circle form in the painting has a similar scale as the mirror in the studio, and the hanging bulb also has a reference to the studio. Behind the figure is a tattered paper pinned to the end wall, close to the zone in the studio where Bacon kept books and magazines stacked. The paper, with random text, also resembles something found on the studio floor like a piece of newspaper or something Bacon might have used as a reference while painting.



Figure 67: Francis Bacon studio at Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin. Photo (15/04/23) with annotation by the author © Kerry Andrews



Figure 68: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) Oil, aerosol paint and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

Along the lines of the spatial incongruencies of *Triptych* (1983) the circle/mirror shape in *Kneeling Figure* runs through the body, pinning it to the shape and acting as an anchor and as a focusing point as in other paintings (such as *Three Figures and a Portrait* (1975)).

*Kneeling Figure – Back View* also has a spaceframe, within its orange ground space, which will be discussed later, in Chapter 7.

Bacon employed any useful motif to hand to anchor and link his figures in some reality, so we find many objects and suggestions of his studio/home in his paintings. For example, as previously noted, lightbulbs, pull-cord switches, and newspapers littered many paintings, but we also see his bed with rounded corners as depicted in some paintings,<sup>101</sup> and its 'headboard curved slightly round, high with carpet-like green fabric,'<sup>102</sup> seen in *Triptych* (1977) [Fig 37 and 39] and also as an influence on various paintings, for example *Study for Portrait of Henrietta Moraes* (1964), *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes on a Blue Couch* (1965), and *Two Figures on a Couch* (1967). All these objects as well as chairs which often resembled his home furniture played anchoring roles in his paintings. But other details also make appearances – for instance, the small studio table with its open drawer can be seen as a motif in the background of the left panel of *Triptych* (1967), and the washbasin in *Self-portrait* (1973) (CR 73-05) is taken from a photograph of himself in his kitchen/bathroom leaning on the bathroom sink. Of course, visual references and connections with Reece Mews may have started earlier. Is *Nude* (1961), for example, Bacon's first painting made at Reece Mews? It is dated circa late 1961<sup>103</sup> which was around the time of his move there

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<sup>101</sup> Davies in Harrison 2009, p.95.

<sup>102</sup> Davies in Harrison 2021, p.158.

<sup>103</sup> The Catalogue Raisonné informs us that the photography for this painting was ordered 20 December 1961 and that 'Paintings were usually sent to be photographed shortly after leaving Bacon's studio. The photography dates provide key data, therefore, in the chronology of paintings.' Harrison 2016.

from Battersea. In that painting we see a standing female figure in a small space which appears to be lit from above by a skylight reminiscent of those Bacon had installed at Reece Mews. The skylight motif can also be found in the left panel of *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1981) (and by inference *Painting March 1985* (1985)), as well as being the source of the light falling in *Study for Portrait* (1981). More oblique references to the Reece Mews studio might be found in the triptychs *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969), *Three Studies of the Male Back* (1970), and *Study for Portrait* (1971) whose extremely angled spaceframes could be influenced by the angled ceiling in the Reece Mews studio. As I have previously cited, Hugh Davies notes, when talking about objects in his paintings, Bacon clearly stated: “I use things around me.”

In this section, I have looked at specific instances of Reece Mews reflected in some of Bacon’s paintings – from very direct references like those in *Self-portrait* (1973), to more elliptical references of place and atmosphere in *Blood on the Floor* (1986). I have drawn out various visual references to support the idea that the Reece Mews studio (and flat) had a significant place in Bacon’s work and visual processes. In the next section I will take that further to explore the idea that the Reece Mews studio was as much an invention that came out of his thinking and earlier works, as it was a place that came to play an important role in the creation of his work.

#### 4.5/ The invention of place / the place of invention (setting the trap)

As discussed in the last section, there is a relation of paintings to studio, where imagery is suggested by place, or where the figures and the place are of equal relations that reflect and affect each other. There is also a clear reciprocation between Bacon's paintings/process and his studio where both are in dialogue. We can see, over time that Bacon's interest in place led to the studio becoming instrumental in the creative process. The paintings, the process and the place become a single landscape. And that landscape becomes articulated, to be able to see it. I will look at the spaceframe device in Chapter 7, as an example of Bacon's spatial articulation.

In terms of the reciprocal arrangement of room and work, it is often considered that Bacon retrieved imagery from the floor detritus and instantly used it to work freely and directly onto the canvas, but Katharina Günther's research suggests that it was a more complicated and slower process. Günther's detailed analysis of Bacon's image manipulation and preparation of his photographic working material in his studio demonstrates a complicated process which includes a lengthy hands-on approach, but also outlines the chance deformations the studio environment ('studio dynamics' in Günther's terminology) played in determining imagery:

Accidental processes are pivotal in the long-term change of the studio items. By accepting, embracing, fostering, and provoking them, Bacon successfully *bypassed artistic agency* and avoided illustrating personal impulses. [my italics].<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Günther 2022, p.125.

This bypassing of 'artistic agency' is an important feature of Reece Mews. It is over a long period of time that the studio's importance becomes clear and develops fully into the wider field of Bacon's image making. Most earlier studios were also chaotic, although possibly a bit less so than Reece Mews, in terms of floor detritus. We can see this in photographs of Cromwell Place, for example, where the majority of studio clutter seems to be furniture [see Fig 34]. There was little room for furniture in the Reece Mews studio.

Günther explains this slow change to Bacon's studios:

The working environment seemed to have only slowly developed into the ankle-deep chaos we know today. [There was] a table in the centre of the room, which was an 'enormously high-heaped affair with a mountain of papers and magazines' in the studio at Glebe Place in the early 1940s, and ... in Cromwell Place in 1950, working documents were still kept on tables too. ... The studio dynamics then were presumably more civilized.<sup>105</sup>

In photographs of his studio at Overstrand Mansions, which he occupied from 1955 to 1961, we can see the floor detritus beginning to take shape in all its chaotic energy. And this was carried further in his move to Reece Mews in late 1961. But, perhaps more tellingly, as previously discussed, Bacon raised and changed the ceiling and installed the skylight in Reece Mews, so the studio change from a mansion house flat to a mews house was more significant than just the interior working material. Bacon's remodelling and use of the space was more complete than at other studios, which appear to have been used as found. This

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid 2022, p.91.

may have set up a clearer physical relationship to the complete Reece Mews studio room and its accompanying living areas.

Despite the apparent flatness of the painted ground/space in his paintings, Bacon's creative imagination is spatial, he is able to manipulate figures in space and the space around them – almost as if the spaceframes are a 3d box containing a figure and all turns at the same time. We will see some cases, later, where the same figure is manipulated and turned from painting to painting, for example. This may have been linked to his initial interest in Picasso's Cubism and his own interior design/furniture starting points; the figure's relation to smaller and larger environments being inherently interesting to him from an early stage. Figural relations to architectural form (in terms of rigid structures *and* as plastic form) were important throughout his creative life.

As suggested in the previous section of this chapter, the idea of 'flat' areas of colour might be rethought in terms of their possible use by Bacon. His thoughts about simplification are pertinent here as he wanted to avoid description, and the physical place of the painting (the picture surface) was also important, so colour need not be read as flat but of atmosphere and of, or as, place itself. The idea of atmosphere will be discussed in the next chapter.

So, there is contradiction at the heart of Bacon's sense of place – it is *spatial* in the sense of 3d volume (not emptiness), it is *place* in the sense of reportage and experience – linked to his reason for making portraits and the placing of his depicted figures. These points will be discussed in Part 2 of the thesis.

Bacon's development of the studio over some years demonstrates a growing understanding of the importance of the studio place – a knowledge of the requirements of his paintings –

where they were leading and what they required. Bacon spoke of ‘trapping’ the image<sup>106</sup> (of the figure) and it appears that the studio was part of this trap, the invention of which needed time to come to fruition.

If we compare an earlier painting with a photograph of Reece Mews, there appears to be a premonition of, or an early visual precursor to the place Reece Mews turned out to be. It is curious, and perhaps somewhat telling, that the painting *Crouching Figure* (1949) [Fig 69] seems to anticipate the imagery in Edward Quinn’s photograph titled *Francis Bacon in Reece Mews Studio. London 1980* (1980) [Fig 70]. Quinn’s photograph gives a good sense of the overall studio place as used by Bacon. It was taken from the mirror end of the studio (west), where Bacon would sit to view the painting that he was currently working on. This view allows us to see how the whole space was orchestrated by Bacon, built upon the ‘good atmosphere’ that he felt when he first visited. The photograph is taken 19 years after moving in and the layout hardly changed from 1961-92.

Quinn’s photograph clearly shows the wood panelled ceiling structure that Bacon installed in 1961, which opened up the height of the room and allowed for the skylight which gave him a steady overhead illumination for his work; the left wall is covered in constantly changing photographs of his own work; the wall on the right was used as a test palette (this shows the area Bacon used for mixing colours and preparing to paint); the floor is mostly cluttered with photographic material and old newspapers. The far end of the room, nearly half the entire space, was used for storage.

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<sup>106</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.202.

Bacon's painting, *Crouching Figure* appears to predict Reece Mews studio in several ways. The ceiling panelling is reflected in the light brown vertical stripes at the top of the painting; the figure, is constrained within the overall space and held in place by a spaceframe, a rectangular box form and a curved bar – and these correspond to Bacon in the photograph naturally taking the same pose as the painted figure, surrounded by the blank canvas behind and the arena of the containing room itself.

If we consider Majid Boustany's answer to a question by Guillaume Mallécot about *Crouching Figure*, he suggests a few interesting thoughts that take this correspondence further. Boustany says that this painting is:

...one of the first works in which the artist was able to depict the human condition in all its fragility. It is an intriguing work that reveals a half-human, half-animal form in the centre of the composition, Bacon's first crouching figure. This is also one of the first paintings in which the artist is using the cage iconography in his composition...<sup>107</sup>

Boustany's response to the figure as 'the human condition in all its fragility' (or vulnerability) fits well with Bacon's attitude in the photograph. It seems to me that this vulnerability reflects Bacon's relation to the studio – his openness to it as a specific and powerful place, as a force that generates ideas and paintings. The 'half-human, half-animal' idea of the central figure corresponds to Bacon's stated sensory, pre-conscious focus of his work. The 'cage' or spaceframe begins about this time (1949) according to Boustany, and this is important in Bacon's growing articulation of place.

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<sup>107</sup> Mallécot 2022, n.p.

Just as Bacon's work in the 1950s developed ideas about the figure, a room and a landscape, that changed further in his move to Reece Mews. The edge of the person was questioned, and the placed relationships became part of his last studio. Quinn's photograph shows us the paint on the right wall, predominantly covered in orange-red, reds and some pinks, which give the space a rather figurative colouration – a fleshiness – and this tends to link the studio and the body image together. The place is woven from complex relations across the space – and to previous Bacon studios and paintings. This sense of weaving is reflected in the 1949 painting's walls as they appear to be woven in a mainly lateral brushwork pattern – and where the greyness of the figure is woven into the colour of the walls. It is possible that *Crouching Figure* sets the template for Bacon's working method, central subject and his sense of space. Something he eventually finds (and then develops) in Reece Mews, 12 years later.

I believe that all the edges of Reece Mews, especially the studio became important to Bacon. As Edward Casey writes:

...edges, spatial and temporal alike, pervade our lives, leading us to realise that constructive coping emerges from within the very challenges that edges frame and present. In their very finitude and modes of closure, edges of events and places encourage, and often enhance, innovative actions and issue in unprecedented works. No wonder that artists need studios, scholars use desks..., scientists flourish in laboratories. ...people...benefit from being in workplaces alive with edges, where

discipline goes hand in hand with inspiration. The restrictive spatiality of such places...can summon the extraordinary.<sup>108</sup>

This makes sense of Bacon's focus on rooms in much of his work, his use of Reece Mews' restricted space and the functioning of Reece Mews studio in terms of Günther's 'studio dynamics' where much of the working process was a result of the studio itself.

Generally, *the artist's studio* has been the subject of many books,<sup>109</sup> which explore how they are used by artists, and Bacon's studio is often cited in those, as well as in much writing specifically about him. His studio is sometimes celebrated as an artwork, in its own right. But studio spaces are usually seen from the human point of view – anthropocentrically considered, and usually from the outside. In Bacon's case, there is an argument that the studio has a more important and active role – and this is not due to the romantic vision of its aesthetic power. Bacon's work was about vulnerability, more than will, and his works arise from the way he developed the sense of the studio space over many years, before arriving at Reece Mews and after.

It is worth considering the practicalities of working places, as these give us insights into how we each are, in Edward Casey's words, "subject to place."<sup>110</sup> This helps us to not look *at* it, but to be *in* it. This difference is crucial to thinking about place, the way we engage with it, the way we are it, the way it makes us act, the way we are its actions. So, it is useful to have

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<sup>108</sup> Casey 2017, p.91.

<sup>109</sup> For example: Hall, J., (2022) *The Artist's Studio: A Cultural History*, Thames and Hudson; Blazwick, I., (ed), (2022) *The Artist's Studio: A Century of the Artist's Studio 1920–2020*, Whitechapel Gallery; Bell, K., (2013) *The Artist's House*, Sternberg Press.

<sup>110</sup> Casey 2001, p.415.

Reece Mews reconstructed in the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, to help us engage with this place-thing rather than dealing with the distance that photographs give it.

Reece Mews appears in many of Bacon's paintings, but often in an oblique or abbreviated manner, what is more important is how the studio makes him, or at least allows him, to work. Bacon's relationship with Reece Mews was complex and the work that arises out of it is equally complex. To understand the work, we need to understand Bacon's studio relationship. This relationship was reciprocal. Bacon 'found' a conducive atmosphere but changed it too. The place dynamic, as reflected in his work, is what the next section and the second half of this thesis covers.



Figure 69: Francis Bacon, *Crouching Figure* (c1949), Oil and sand on canvas 70 ½ × 47 ¾ in. (179.6 × 121.3 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 70: Edward Quinn, *Francis Bacon in Reece Mews studio. London 1980* (1980), photograph, Photo Edward Quinn, © edwardquinn.com.

## Part 2: The Image of Placed Experience

### Chapter 5: Atmospheres

To further develop the idea of the relationship of Bacon to his studio/environment and how that is reflected in his paintings, it will be useful to look at some ideas about atmospheres as Bacon said specifically how attuned he was to them. In this chapter I will use Gernot Böhme's writings on atmospheres<sup>1</sup> as a lens to look at Bacon's sensory figuration.

In the *Interviews* with David Sylvester, Bacon talks about various studios that he had in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Most of them were less successful places to work for Bacon, either due to light, or, in his later Paris studio, due to his knowledge of the cities of Paris and London. London was better known to him and more conducive to his work. Bacon specifically uses the word atmosphere in two answers to Sylvester. Although Bacon cites the problems of 'light' in several of the unsuccessful studios (King's Road, Tangier, Monte Carlo and Narrow Street), it was not the light that originally attracted him to Reece Mews.

When Sylvester asked Bacon: "Was it the light in this studio that particularly made you like the place when you saw it?" Bacon replied,

No. I had the ceiling taken off, so it isn't the same light, and the light is not especially good because it's east-west. But the place had an atmosphere that made me know I could work here. I can't explain why. There are certain places where you know you can work and there are certain places that you know that you can't. It's very odd: I

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<sup>1</sup> Böhme 2018 and 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.212.

don't know how one can explain the atmosphere of places. I suppose it is the way a place is constructed.<sup>3</sup>

Previously, Bacon had stated:

For some reason the moment I saw this place I knew that I could work here. I am very influenced by places – by the atmosphere of a room, you know. And I just knew from the very moment that I came here that I would be able to work here.<sup>4</sup>

From the *Interviews* (specifically Interview 9) it becomes clear that particular places helped Bacon work. And these places are particular rooms which are grounded in a specific wider place – in these two cases (Cromwell Place and Reece Mews) South Kensington, in West London. So, we can see that an identity of place circles wider than the studio itself. Although this is discussed in chapter 4, it is useful to keep in mind the various zones of place and atmosphere that might be important here.

As the philosopher of a theory of atmospheres, Gernot Böhme, writes:

Should art aspire to making the body as the nature that we are ourselves its topic, it would have to research a widely unknown field, the mediation of self-experience to modern man, a thing he has always suppressed. The point would be a liberation of the senses from their *fixation on objects and signals...there is the virtually unsolvable problem of representing the sensed body* [my italics].<sup>5</sup>

This sensed body is exactly what I believe Bacon is painting from the mid-1950s and more specifically and clearly, from the early 1960s, and which becomes more place-bound in the

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<sup>3</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.213.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvester 2016, pp.212-213.

<sup>5</sup> Böhme 2018, p.115.

1970s-80s to be able to *place* the full sensation of experience, and in some cases imply sensation as external to the body. He moves from a general sense of this subject, to visualising focused instances of the sensed being, which is clearly the most direct method of exploring this subject. For Bacon, the studio is a working, living example of sensory experience and one he cultivates at Reece Mews as part of his working method, as we saw at the end of the last chapter.

Böhme, again says:

So the body is the primary sounding board enabling us to participate in the world.

...we bodily feel that we are somewhere..., our presence in surroundings.<sup>6</sup>

We will look at this idea of the body as 'sounding board' in section 5.2 below, but I first want to discuss an important aspect of atmosphere – a sense of air, and why this would have been of importance to Bacon.

## 5.1/ Air

"*Three Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards*, 1984, has a surface so light it is almost conjured out of air. The surface is dry, and as delicate as the portrait is tender, and in places it is powdered or lightly rubbed with paint."<sup>7</sup>

Air is quite clearly an important part of atmosphere in its material/sensory form as well as in its symbolic sense. If Bacon was to develop images of the sensory body, they would require a visualisation of air to define the continuous body in space, which I will discuss in chapter 6

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<sup>6</sup> Böhme 2018, p.114.

<sup>7</sup> Ades 1985, p.9.

when looking at his portrait works. But I think it is also useful to briefly mention here why Bacon might be particularly sensitive to ideas about air itself.

It is well known that Bacon was asthmatic. He talked about this himself, for example, in *Sylvester's Interviews*, where he states "I remember when I was very young and had very, very bad asthma and I used to be given injections of morphia..."<sup>8</sup> But it wasn't just a childhood issue for Bacon as he famously missed going to fight in WWII in 1939 because of this illness. Biographer Andrew Sinclair writes:

Francis Bacon was prevented from joining up by his sense of detachment and his asthma and sinus trouble. He had already had an operation on the roof of his mouth several years before, but it had not improved his sinus condition, which was only kept under control by large doses of the drug M and B.<sup>9</sup>

Asthma, coupled with an ongoing sinus condition must have made breathing sometimes quite difficult. It is also interesting to note that Bacon's sinus issues had led to a mouth operation. This adds to the possible asthma/respiratory connection to Bacon's interest in the mouth as a visual image (at least in the 1950s).

In her short book *Out of Breath: Vulnerability of Air in Contemporary Art*, Caterina Albano, although not writing about Bacon, makes some points that are pertinent to this current discussion. Albano sets the scene for her main discussions by writing the following:

The regular rhythm of the breath, which mostly remains below the conscious perceptive threshold, punctuates the position of the body in space as the breath

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<sup>8</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.180.

<sup>9</sup> Sinclair 1993, p.82.

constantly adjusts to the external climatological and physical conditions of the atmosphere. ... Coughing, gasping, shortness of breath, or hyperventilation can be due to physiological conditions and respiratory problems or may be responses to external factors, such as temperature or the presence of irritants in the air, like pollens or dust.<sup>10</sup>

Even minute changes in the breath are affective events that modify and actualise the individual interaction of a body both physically and emotionally with its surrounding environment, typifying its dependency on an air-bound state and its interdependence with all other human and nonhuman entities in that environment.<sup>11</sup>

Albano points out the constant connection we have with the world through breathing and with others through shared air. Our bodies react unconsciously to air and atmosphere – like the everyday environment around us, we are mostly unaware of our connections. Our physical reactions can be (internal) physiological or responses to external stimuli. And of course, both may happen at the same time. The edges between our interiors and exteriors are blurred by air.

But this, often unconscious connection is clearer when one becomes breathless (through asthma, respiratory issues or environmental irritants) and breathlessness can be distressing.

As Albano states:

Breathlessness generates a fractured perception of the integration of body and self that further upsets the interrelationship of matter and meaning that the inhalation

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<sup>10</sup> Albano 2022, p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.10.

and exhalation of air epitomize ontologically. The sufferer feels “trapped” in the uncertainty and fear that breathlessness causes, shrinking one’s experience and imbuing every action with foreboding.<sup>12</sup>

Bacon’s constant asthmatic condition (along with other medical conditions throughout his life) will sometimes have been debilitating and will have caused a sense of physical vulnerability which could have left him, as Albano says: “trapped in the uncertainty and fear that breathlessness causes.” Bacon’s stated daily concern with death would have been deepened by bouts of particularly bad asthma. As Bacon told Francis Jacobetti in his last interview (1992):

I have suffered from asthma attacks since I was a child and it gets no better in old age. Asthma is a terrible complaint; when night falls you are never sure if you will wake up the next morning. It attacks the very foundations of life—your breathing. You always feel as if you are in remission, always ready to die.<sup>13</sup>

This sense of air will have often been exacerbated by Bacon’s use of materials in his studio which would also have affected the air and physical atmosphere. For example, from my own experience, the use of pastels (or pigment), which he used over the paint, produces a lot of dust which layers the floor and objects<sup>14</sup>, and his use of aerosol spray paints and fixative spray (which carry a warning of some toxicity today) for the pastels/pigment, would have permeated the air in his studio and possibly his whole flat. Added to this, the smell of oil and household paints, turps, solvents amid the “hothouse” condition of his studio that Michael

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobetti 2003, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> John Edwards writes about clearing the studio when he first met Bacon in 1976, he noted that “Everything was covered with a fine orange and pink dust. I later learned that this was the raw pigment he liked so much, but which, because he was asthmatic, was so damaging to his health.” Edwards 2001, p. 10.

Peppiatt commented on, as I mentioned earlier, would also have impacted the sense of presence and density of the air.

In fact, the studio was not dusted or cleaned, as Christopher Turner relates in *Cabinet* magazine, Bacon's cleaner, Jean Ward, said "He definitely didn't like anyone going into his studio, that was his domain, I was never allowed to clean it."<sup>15</sup> So, the place had a very materially present atmosphere whose density would have been physically and psychologically felt. The vulnerability of precarious health issues seems to have coupled with a sensitivity to the psychology of atmosphere, a vulnerability that informs all of Bacon's paintings. For Bacon, the intake of air (breath) was clearly not just confined to the studio but connected him to a material and temporal sense of a wider world. In an article by Joshua Gilder for *Flash Art* in 1983, Bacon states:

The world is just a dung heap, it's made up of compost of the millions and millions who have died and are blowing about. The dead are blowing in your nostrils every hour, every second you breathe in.<sup>16</sup>

The ideas of air and Bacon's focus on his breath led me on to consider Bacon's imagery of the cry, the breath and the mouth and their use in his iconography dealing with the body, environment and place.

## 5.2/ The cry / the breath / the mouth

It is interesting that Böhme uses the term 'sounding board' in the quote mentioned above, as this is how we might start to consider Bacon's entry into the visualisation of atmosphere

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<sup>15</sup> Turner 2009, n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Gilder, J. (1983) 'I Think About Death Every Day,' *Flash Art*, 112, May, pp.17-21, reprinted in Carey, M. (ed) (2015) *Francis Bacon Late Paintings*, New York, Gagosian Gallery, pp.176-178.

in his paintings. It has been pointed out that Bacon's work has a strong sense of synaesthesia (Nicholas Chare<sup>17</sup> 2005, 2006, 2009) – a mixture of sight and sound as well as touch. Certainly, in the 1950s he completed many works where sound, or the lack of it, is indicated, particularly through his obsession with the mouth which comes to the fore in this period.

There has been much written about Bacon's use of the famous cry from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, and *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Poussin and their connections to violence. Much of this commentary is reasonable and probably true. But, as we have seen in the section above, Bacon has problematic relations with the mouth which indicates a place of connection (and some disconnection) – it still remains a doorway between places (especially in his 1950s works). I think this interest in the mouth demonstrates an early visualisation of his attempts to resolve the issue of a figurative image that includes place, or the figure and environment. He uses several ways of dealing with the mouth that denote different methods of exploring an interior/exterior relation/sensation.

It is worth reiterating here, an insightful point made by Dawn Ades in conversation with Richard Calvocoressi and Martin Harrison. Ades reminds us that, "the mouth, when crying, shouting, breathing, yawning, or laughing, is not speaking."<sup>18</sup> That is, for the human at least, it is not using language or understanding in an intellectual sense. In this context the image of the mouth brings us closer to the animal where Bacon is trying to break down the state

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<sup>17</sup> Chare writes, in relation to the 'noise' of the studio: "The studio acted as a sounding board for the artist, a testing ground for the production of noise. The studio and its contents permitted the painter access to a kind of delirium. It was a space of semiotic excess in which echoes of the real were clearly audible to the eye. Bacon harnessed this experience and, through his use of chance, permitted its passage into paint." Chare 2006, pp.83-98.

<sup>18</sup> Ades 2022, 13'30."

where our conscious sense overrides sensation. There is an immediacy to these other mouthings – a direct relation to place and placedness.

It should also be remembered that Bacon was equivocal about the open mouth reading as a cry or scream. In addition to the Eisenstein and Poussin references mentioned above, Bacon famously used a book of diseases of the mouth as visual stimulus for his paintings. In his book *In Camera*, Harrison writes: “Bacon refuted that his Popes *were* screaming, saying they may have been yawning or sneezing...”<sup>19</sup>

In 1953 Bacon painted his *Study of a Baboon* [Fig 71]. This is an interesting work which uses the mouth image. In this case, the image is based on a photograph of a baboon yawning,<sup>20</sup> not screaming or crying out. The yawn is interesting, in that it has to do with breath – an intake and an escape.<sup>21</sup>

The commentary that MoMA provides for this work from their collection reads:

...he copied this baboon from one of his favorite books, Marius Maxwell's *Stalking Big Game with a Camera in Equatorial Africa*, ... among the plates is a startling reproduction of baboons in acacia trees. The baboon at the right is perched on a forked tree trunk much like that in Bacon's work. Bacon had traveled often in Africa and was reportedly fascinated to see monkeys and apes of various kinds caged in the parks, while outside others roamed in freedom. *Study of a Baboon* pointedly incarnates this ambivalence. The baboon is half imprisoned, half free. The vigorously

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<sup>19</sup> Harrison 2005, p.208.

<sup>20</sup> Desmond Morris is noted as writing: “The image was taken from a well-known photograph of a baboon yawning, not screaming.” Collins, A., (ed.) (2021) Exhibition catalogue: *Francis Bacon: Man and Beast*, London, Royal Academy of Arts. p.141.

<sup>21</sup> Yawn: Involuntary opening of the mouth, accompanied by slowly breathing inward and then outward. <https://www.rxlist.com/yawn/definition.htm>

painted bars of the cage force the baboon uncomfortably close to the viewer. Its body is partly transparent and ghostly, but its sinister open maw and glinting white fangs mark a very real presence. Bacon pens the viewer into the enclosure with the ferocious creature, suggesting a close correlation between the two beings.<sup>22</sup>

There are two points in this commentary that are interesting for this current research: the first is that the baboon is “half imprisoned, half free.” It is both inside a fenced enclosure but quite clearly able to escape if required as the fencing seems to stop some distance above the ground surface.



Figure 71: Francis Bacon, *Study of a Baboon* (1953), Oil on canvas 78 x 54 in. (198 x 137 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Bequest, © 2025 Estate of Francis Bacon / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London.

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Bacon (1953), *Study of a Baboon*. Publication excerpt from The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999, p.213. Available at: [https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80580?artist\\_id=272&page=1&sov\\_referrer=artist](https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80580?artist_id=272&page=1&sov_referrer=artist) [Accessed 26/10/23].

Of course, the image is not logical or merely descriptive (illustrational) in the handling of its imagery or content. If we read the mouth as a cry it is easily supported by the agitation of the image by the repeated grass movement, which also mirrors the shape of the animal's body and the lines that lead from its main body to the mouth/muzzle. The fence lines continue that field of lines into a more regimented variation, and the tree behind the fence continues the cry, from the body (and earth) into the dark background. These painterly devices are other versions of diversifying the figure across the image, as discussed in chapter 3.

The second point from the commentary is that the "body is partly transparent and ghostly." The body of the baboon is only indicated by brief brush marks that are semi-transparent, and its corporeality is lessened by this treatment. But it does lead us (via the brush mark lines and change of tonality) to the mouth, which is painted, in contrast to the rest of the body, in some precise detail and definition. This makes the mouth of the animal central to the image.

If we read the image as a yawn, we have an inhale and exhale of breath. The body is connected to the external landscape by the air passing through the mouth – the inner and outer worlds of the baboon are linked by this passage of air, as well as being visualised with an open, transparent handling of the 'ghostly' body. The point of connection is the delineated mouth which becomes the focus of breath and being. The mouth defines the body, it is the place of being in this case.

As Caterina Albano writes “...through the passage of air in and out of the body, the breath exposes the permeability of the body itself, its porosity and sensitivity to the surrounding environment.”<sup>23</sup>

The point that becomes important here is the difference in feeling between an externalised cry – emotion released, and an exchange of air/breath – a two-way passage. The painting could encapsulate both readings of course, but if we take the air/breath reading of this painting we can start to see the way Bacon begins to incorporate and develop atmosphere into his work through the depicted human/animal subject as opposed to the practical/material method in *Composition* (1933) [Fig 9]. As Bacon often said, the aim was to align the visual subject with the practical method so that the two were one act.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 72: Francis Bacon, *Head VI* (1949), Oil on canvas 93.2 × 76.5 cm (36.7 × 30.1 in), Arts Council collection, Hayward Gallery, London © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025

Bacon had already been using the open mouth/cry/breath motif for some years by the time the baboon painting was made. The first appearance of this motif is the *Three Figures at the*

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<sup>23</sup> Albano 2022, p.6

<sup>24</sup> Bacon in Rothenstein 1953, p.12

*Base of a Crucifixion* (1945). But in 1949 he created *Head VI* [Fig 72] one of a series of works based on an amalgamation of the nurse from *Battleship Potemkin* and *Pope Innocent X* by Velasquez.

In their recent biography, *Francis Bacon: Revelations* (2021), Stevens and Swan write about the film that the image came from:

In April 1926...a shortened version released in Berlin became a sensation: there were probably numerous showings of the movie while Bacon was in the city. The indelible image of the nurse caught in the massacre on the Odessa Steps – her pince-nez bloodily shattering as she opens her mouth in a scream – would haunt him for the rest of his life.<sup>25</sup>

The image of the nurse is invariably read by commentators as a screaming figure. But as the film is silent it is a sound we never hear – and the image, by itself, away from the context of the film, could easily be read as a gasp (an image of silent shock or trauma, an unspeakable, unvoiced sensation). The image, the mouth, when seen as a soundless cry or a gasp, share the idea of the mouth as a place between two worlds. The close-up on screen would also make the head much larger than life-size, so appearing particularly close to the viewer. Face to face. But the lack of sound and the black and white image would partly distance the immediacy of the image's directness. These dual contrasting effects of closeness and distance are qualities Bacon uses in his paintings throughout his mature work. This can be seen, for example, in the tactile surfaces of his paintings which are closed off behind glass.

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<sup>25</sup> Stevens and Swan 2021, p.65.

*Head VI*, has some similarities to *Study of a Baboon* – the mouth being the focal point of the painting; the energetic lines (in this case in the form of curtains and a loosely painted mantle over the shoulders of the Pope figure); and an enclosure, this time a box shape around the figure.

Again, we have a cry/or gasp that is silenced – but doubly so. The original relation to the silent film is evoked, but the surrounding box (often interpreted as made of glass) also muffles, or at least encloses, any cry, any possible sound. We are close but distanced. However, we do see the cry if this is what it is.

### 5.3/ Atmospheres and emotion outside in

Having established some possible readings of the significance of air and the mouth in the last two sections I want to return to Bacon's visualisation and exploration of atmosphere.

In *Atmospheric Architectures* (2020) Gernot Böhme sets out a useful definition of the subject when he writes:

...atmospheres are totalities: they flood out over everything, they tinge the entire world of sight, they let everything appear in a certain light, and they aggregate a multiplicity of impressions into an overall mood. ... there is something irrational about atmospheres, literally, something inexpressible.<sup>26</sup>

Böhme also writes about bodily space, in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2018), in a way that relates to Bacon's bounded bodies in terms of their limited pictorial spaces, and his own placed sensibility in Reece Mews studio.

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<sup>26</sup> Bohme 2020, p.159.

Bodily space is neither the place a person's body takes up nor the volume that it constitutes. A person's bodily space is the sphere of his or her material presence. The latter continually transcends the limits of the body. ... Bodily space – that is, the space we experience only through our bodily presence – obtains its character not only through constriction and expansion and not only through direction, centring, concentration, and articulation. Rather, it always has an emotional character as well. Narrowness and broadness when experienced bodily are not, of course, emotionally neutral but have an effect on our frame of mind as well. In general, we might say that ... we feel the character of the space in which we find ourselves. A space, whether it is one shaped architectonically or musically, strikes us in a particular way. We say that space has an atmosphere.<sup>27</sup>

The image of atmosphere in Bacon's paintings is an image of the fullness of space; in Böhme's terms, that 'irrational inexpressible.' Finding a way of effectively rendering an atmosphere was something of a preoccupation for Bacon. We have seen attempts in the 1950s paintings (Chapter 3) and in later paintings that use Reece Mews as a model (Chapter 4), and I will look at how the portraits and self-portraits from the 1960s to 1980s focused on the figure/ground relationship to devise methods to open out the figure to its surrounding environment in Chapter 6. In fact, the energy or 'emanation' of a human figure that Bacon spoke about,<sup>28</sup> is a similar problem for visual depiction as the 'inexpressible' atmosphere would be. We might consider that Bacon's paintings attempt to visualise emanations within atmospheres. But this meeting of nested abstractions would only work for Bacon when they had the grist of some authentic vision of the human body. One example of this might be

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<sup>27</sup> Böhme 2018, pp.180-181.

<sup>28</sup> Sylvester 2016, pp.94, 196-197.

*Study for Self-Portrait* (1980) [Fig 73], which deals with atmosphere as material, as density. For Bacon, part of the visualising of atmosphere is the problem of making an image of the amalgamation of figure and ground/environment while still holding on to, or suggesting, recognisable appearance.



Figure 73: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1980) Oil on canvas 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Jenni Carter, Viscopy

The atmospheric fullness or density was, after his move to Reece Mews, mostly depicted using single fields of colour. The balance between the detailed painterly figures and the flat ground was equal for the most part so Bacon had to explore a variety of edges and overlays to depict a figuration that explored the visible edges of emanations within atmospheres.

This sensitivity to the placed relationship of figure and atmosphere was something that Bacon physically experienced as well as visually explored in his paintings. For instance, he spoke about his sensitivity to rooms, light and atmosphere on several occasions and this was also demonstrated by his problems with certain studios (both points mentioned earlier).

Clearly Bacon needed a steady light without any interference and not overly bright to work in, but it is difficult to note the differences or similarities between his many studios as most of them have not been documented. However, some comparisons have already been made about his two most important studios in Chapter 4.

Finding and creating the right atmosphere then was crucial. In terms of working in a studio, the right atmosphere would mean the overall physical conditions needed. Beyond the basics (enough space to work; good, steady light; useful tools to hand; useful layout/structure; and supporting materials), the environment itself would need to be conducive to working, and as Bacon said, Reece Mews had the right atmosphere. It is curious that he seemed to respond to the constraints of a small and fairly narrow space which limited the size of his paintings (all of his large works were on canvases just big enough to come up the steep staircase), and it was almost impossible for Bacon to see all three works of a triptych together in his studio. The cramped quality of the studio must have had some effect on or use for Bacon.

It is interesting to note here that Michael Peppiatt makes a particular point of mentioning the heat in Bacon's Reece Mews studio. In *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* Peppiatt notes: "...he kept his studio heated to a hothouse temperature."<sup>29</sup> In this way, the studio was intentionally physically present. As discussed in the previous sections the heat, along with the smell of oil paint and solvents and other paint materials, and the occasionally swept up dust (added to his paint for texture) hanging in the air must have all added to the density of the place; and the panelled ceiling, painted walls, hanging reproductions of

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<sup>29</sup> Peppiatt 2008, p.143.

artworks, easels, boxes, stored canvases in combination with the floor detritus, rags and materials, the light (and dark) of the place, again added to the dense interior landscape. This place was found *and* created – the *characteristics*, the atmosphere (material and immaterial), were part of his living and painting process.

When working in the studio alone, as he mostly did, his knowledge of the place and the specific layout of his working area would have allowed an intense focus. In this manner it is often the case that one is not aware of oneself, and the place and body begin to merge in the making process. This would have been reflected in the imagery of Bacon's paintings that especially deal with figure and place (particularly the self-portraits and some of the paintings discussed in Chapter 4 for example). Bacon's working method was bound into the room with imagery from books and the floor detritus – and it is clear that Bacon shared his creative work with the studio and became deeply embedded into place. For example, the use of his studio floor 'compost heap'<sup>30</sup> as part of his painting process is well described by Katharina Günther when talking about his manipulation of found imagery. Günther outlines how Bacon's process was at least partly controlled by the studio, stating:

Bacon...relied on luck and chance to modify images. 'Real imagination is technical imagination', he said, and by letting the passage of time and the *studio dynamics* [my italics] take over parts of the creative development of his imagery, Bacon, ... bypassed 'authorial or artistic agency.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Peppiatt writes: "Bacon's entire imaginative life depended on this 'heap of broken images' (he himself referred to it more sardonically as his 'compost heap')"

<sup>31</sup> Günther quotes Bacon from an interview in *Time*, New York, 1952, which was quoted in *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, ed. By Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, exh. Cat. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955, p.60. The second quote that Günther makes is from Iversen, M., 'Introduction: The Aesthetics of

Taking these ideas a step further, according to Edward Casey, atmosphere and emotion can be understood as embedded in place. In his book *Turning Emotion Inside Out* (2022) Casey initiates this merger by first discussing the ideas of atmosphere and breath/air together, when he says: “The word “atmosphere” signifies breathing (atmos: “steam,” “vapor,” including the air we breathe) within a certain sphere or globe (sphaire).”<sup>32</sup> He then ties the atmosphere to emotions which he sees are sometimes external to ourselves: “Emotions are *air-borne*, experientially if not literally ... The very air that persons inhale and exhale transports emotion into and out of them...”<sup>33</sup>

Further, he merges environment, emotion and ourselves, when he states:

As emotional beings, we exist on the far side of anything merely private or subjective; as well as on the near side of what surrounds us – so near that we merge with it. Not only do we exist *in* environments, we *are* our environments, and our environments *are* us bodily and emotionally.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of the Reece Mews studio, this environment multiplied inwards and outwards on a huge scale if we consider the role of the studio detritus. In her book, *Francis Bacon in the Mirror of Photography*, Günther outlines the breadth of material Bacon collected in his studio:

Bacon did...collect the whole world in Reece Mews, creating his very own, tailor-made simulacrum of it: news and current affairs, his friends, history, science, and art

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Chance’ in *Chance: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Margaret Iversen (London/Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), pp.11-86. Günther 2022, p.93.

<sup>32</sup> Casey 2022, p.185.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

were all present in the form of photographic reproductions in books, newspapers, magazines, and original photographic prints.<sup>35</sup>

Bacon spoke about how he looked at many of these photographs by entering them and replaying the events.<sup>36</sup> He felt they were *places* to enter. Each of the photographs he looked at in depth would be seen as a place and a new event due to his reading of it. So, the studio was not just a single room-place/atmosphere that was divided into smaller sub-places according to his painting requirements (mixing area, easel area, reflection area), but also a 'place-world' or 'life-world' (in Casey's terms), that contained thousands<sup>37</sup> of possible localised place events.

Günther, again helps clarify Bacon's visual collage of imagery when she writes: "Bacon said about the studio that he did not understand an image as a single entity but in the context of other images, and by his own account observed and absorbed how they influence each other."<sup>38</sup>

If Bacon entered these photographs as places, they must have suggested atmospheres of their own on an individual basis. Collectively, and from a distance, the jumble of places and atmospheres must have opened out the studio to much wider horizons, atmospheres and external emotions.

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<sup>35</sup> Günther 2022, p.64.

<sup>36</sup> "Through the photographic image I find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it." Bacon in Sylvester 2016, p.37.

<sup>37</sup> According to Günther 'Most of the working material, around 2,500 items, are mechanically reproduced photographs printed in books, magazines and newspapers, and on postcards, or fragments thereof. Around 1500 items are original photographic items.' Günther 2022, p.50.

"By the time of his death ... the studio held over 7500 items, 4000 of which contained images." Günther 2022, p.90.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.79.

Casey outlines a 'radically fusionist' sense of emotion that goes 'beyond interpersonal models' – where emotions are environments which allow "us to be there in ontologically unique ways. ...it is a matter of the life-world existing as emotional. In being emotional myself, I become affectively co-constituted with this world and vice versa..."<sup>39</sup>

The way Casey suggests that we are 'merged with our surroundings...melded with them' through atmospheric emotion is, I believe, a useful way to understand Bacon's late works, where colour (particularly colour, but also structures and shapes) reflects not only physical atmosphere, but also an emotional place. To be clear, I'm using Casey's idea here to help position the sense of place as an atmospheric presence.

I think the idea of atmosphere in Bacon's paintings is crucial to understanding them as artworks dealing with a life-world and not just individual figuration or depictions. His works are not stories or simply pictures of characters/friends but an attempt to envisage sensory being, or more abstractly put, place within place. But Bacon's work is contradictory and complex, so the reading of place is ambiguously internal and external to the body – and this is where edge comes into play. The porous image of the figure requires and determines the handling of material that Bacon develops from the 1960s onwards.

The next chapter looks at the way Bacon opened up the figure via edges, particularly through the portraits and self-portraits.

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<sup>39</sup> Casey 2022, p.195.

## Chapter 6: Portraits and edges

In this chapter I will look at Bacon's portraits and self-portraits to discuss the way he used these works to focus on some problems of the placed figure, and how he explored smaller details and subtleties that supported his larger works, especially how edges could be deployed.

The idea of considering edges for this research came from Edward Casey's book *The World on Edge* (2017),<sup>1</sup> initially in relation to Bacon's spaceframes or 'cages' and his sense of architectural space. In fact, the more we look at his paintings the more edges we see and the more the idea of all kinds of edges in Bacon's work takes hold. This investigation into the way Bacon focused on edges, begins with his portraits series – but the study moves on to reflect on many types of edges in his work and his studio, and how that might lead to thinking about Bacon's complex space within, and external to, his paintings. However, the complexity *and* contradictory elements within Bacon's work are also in play here. It should be remembered that Bacon inherited the figurative ovoid tradition in European painting which means that, according to Philip Rawson in his book *Drawing* (1969),<sup>2</sup> objects in this tradition are usually visually grasped as volumes – from the centre outwards. This may generate edges of course, but these edges, or boundaries, may not be the way that we understand form. So, I suggest, Bacon's formal figurative language uses edges and volumes as complementary and contradictory elements.

The relation of edges to the studio is at least twofold. The first is that the various additions and manipulations that Bacon made to his ever growing and ever-changing stock of images

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<sup>1</sup> Casey, E.S., (2017) *The World on Edge*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Rawson 1969, p.166.

in the studio all produce new edges to the material. Folding and tearing were the main methods of manipulation, and these often change the image dramatically – usually destroying the wholeness of the image and figure within, creating interior and exterior edges. The second relation to the studio is the opening of the image and the correlation of its openness with the edges of the room itself.

## 6.1/ Appearance

...if the image is going to be any good nowadays it has to go much deeper than simply recording appearance.<sup>3</sup>

Bacon often used the word ‘appearance’, which is thought to mean how things look, a fixed recognisable representation, especially of the human figure/face. However, we might also consider the other reading of appearance – to appear somewhere, to show, to make or become visible. This might also link to Bacon’s interest in the séance photos by Schrenck-Notzing,<sup>4</sup> to his self-professed sensitivity to atmosphere, and his obsession with figures in rooms. The limitation of the word ‘appearance’ in Bacon’s work to a person’s recognisability or look, limits the idea to illustration, but if we open out the meaning to include the wider presence of a person this leads us to consider an external envelope/atmosphere – beyond the body. How one appears in the world – the question of the edge of the body.

In this case we can begin to see why Bacon manipulates the figure/paint/material as an immediate way of creating the figure – ‘trapping the image’ – or, rather, finding the image in

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<sup>3</sup> Bacon in Peppiatt 2016, p.149.

<sup>4</sup> Schrenck-Notzing, A., (1920) *Phenomena of Materialisation*, Kegan Paul. Stevens and Swan write about Bacon’s interest in the images from that book “with its mediums and ectoplasmic spirits...The séances he attended with his friends...in the late 1940s were doubtless part of Bacon’s interest in spiritualist effects as well.” Stevens and Swan 2021, pp.293-294.

the making – finding out how to make an image. We also begin to understand Bacon’s meaning when he stresses that the medium and image must work together – they must body forth. And it makes sense that Bacon’s interest is in the sensing body rather than a simple external depiction. It is clear that the image that most held Bacon’s attention, Velazquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650), was because of its psychological power, its intimation of a complex being painted with a directness. Both Velazquez and the Pope’s gazes seem to meet head on, in a penetrating exchange where that fleeting look is captured forever – in the liveliness and formation of the paint – alive to us even now.

For Bacon, the appearance might also relate to the idea that comes out of his portraits – that they do not illustrate how the sitter looks in terms of ‘they look like that’ (a backward look at someone in a certain time) but rather capture the person in the movement and in the making. So, they *become*, they are *proposals* – the head comes into being and looking as it is found, as it is being made<sup>5</sup> – looking forward to a possibility, to appear, and not descriptive of a past knowledge, but built on an intimate knowledge of the character depicted/captured.

The portrait series, I believe, explores appearance through edges which focus on an openness, dialogue/multilogue, movement, and sense of touch (visually as a body sense and physically as a hand sense). His self-portraits particularly explore the various realms of interiorities and the externalising edges that they have – the heads are opened out, articulated in sections that are both continuous and separate at the same time. They are images of sensory experience – the lived body as different to the seen body – but that

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<sup>5</sup> Speaking about painting portraits, Bacon states: “the mystery of painting today is how can appearance be made...so that you catch the mystery of appearance within the mystery of the making.” Sylvester 2016, p.122; later Bacon says, “the way I try to bring appearance about makes one question all the time what appearance is at all.” Sylvester 2016, p.136.

knowledge of the lived informs the seen (other) as well. The lived body is lived somewhere – there are boundaries of some sort, and these are often suggestions of rooms.

## 6.2/ The portraits and self-portraits series

Gendlin's basic claim [is] that "we are interactions with the environment – other people, the world, the universe – and we can sense ourselves to be just such an interaction". In short, "we are environmental interaction in the universe."<sup>6</sup>

Bacon's small portraits series develops possible solutions to painting the figure in, or as, movement (both external and internal), and, related to this, the figure's opening out into place or its sensory placed-ness. In the portraits Bacon practices and explores the forms that open the figure, using edges as a primary method. Here, I will use some of Edward Casey's ideas to discuss Bacon's explorations of edges, boundaries and borders within his portraits series made between the 1960s and 1980s.

Bacon starts a long series of portraits from the early 1960s which are mainly of friends, but there is also a large portion of those works which are self-portraits. A closer look at the self-portraits, especially in terms of deformations and edges, as well as the whole portraits series becomes an important study for understanding Bacon's larger body of work. I maintain that the portraits, and particularly the self-portraits, are where Bacon tested out and developed methods of painting that were central to his sensory figure imagery used in his larger works.

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<sup>6</sup> Casey quotes philosophical psychologist Eugene T Gendlin whose writing draws from Heidegger, suggesting that "the environment should not be considered *external*." From Gendlin *Saying What We Mean: Implicit Precision and the Responsive Order* Selected Works by Eugene T. Gendlin, (2018). Northwestern University Press. Casey 2022, p.194.

The main portraits series appears to be a combination of Bacon's new-found home/studio and his turn of attention to his own experience and friends. As seen in chapter 4, Bacon developed a series of paintings that involved spatial structures based on his studio and some of these were large self-portraits (as in *Self-portrait* (1973)(CR 73-10) [Fig 50] and *Study for Self-Portrait* (1982) [Fig 51]). Those larger self-portraits clearly develop from his smaller, exploratory, series and question the connection of figure and place.

The small portraits develop a painterly language that breaks up the figure into sets of shapes – it is at this point in Bacon's oeuvre where the figure becomes distorted beyond the usual figure outline that he had used in much of his work, especially in the 1950s.

Throughout that decade's works the figure form is usually more or less intact in terms of its recognisable external physical envelope but this radically alters in the 1960s, and the portraits are a place where Bacon can focus more singularly on the form of the head in relation to the ground/space/place and the edge of the image/canvas. This distortion is a more radical extension of the opening up of the figure with the curtain/lines devices that he had previously used.

I contend that the self-portraits are the most important images of the portrait series as Bacon was able to push the ideas of appearance further than painting friends, as he has no 'model' to please, but more importantly because he was able to consider his own sensory experience in relation to the figurative image and the frame. In this case the frame is the edge of the small painting, but this relationship can also stand in for larger forms, rooms, spaceframes, frames, triptych edges etc which he employs in his larger works. The lived figure is explored in these images – questioning the boundaries and edges of the traditional body image – the 'inner' and 'outer' body are brought together through the porous

structures he develops. Bacon appears to be visualising the shifting vulnerability of the relations between the internal/external world of the human figure. There are two points that Edward Casey makes that help develop these ideas: "...my bodily edges are always plural: they are both felt and perceived as *several*. This means that my body as experienced does not possess a single, definitive, or final edge."<sup>7</sup> Later, he suggests, in terms of himself moving within place, "...bodily edges tend to be subordinated to the actions of the mobile body. It is as if the edges of my body dissolve in the drama of such actions – even though they are indispensable to the enactment of the drama itself."<sup>8</sup>

For Bacon, the figure's energy, is a core concern – even when it apparently seems to be at rest (sitting in a chair or lying on a bed). In conversation with David Sylvester, Bacon says, "When I look at you across the table, I don't only see you but I see a whole emanation which has to do with personality and everything else." To which Sylvester replies with the suggestion that 'emanation' should be replaced with the word 'energy', which Bacon agrees with.<sup>9</sup> Bacon later said "... there is the appearance and there is the energy within the appearance. And that is an extremely difficult thing to trap."<sup>10</sup>

The "energy within the appearance" is the movement that Bacon often tries to visualise – or, rather, the energy that is also manifest as an 'emanation.' So, an interior/exterior boundary is crossed by this energy/movement. Bacon aims to visualise that energy/emanation moving beyond the body, or contained by an external space, as well as its opposite, in the direction from place to inner self.

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<sup>7</sup> Casey 2017, p.215.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.220.

<sup>9</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.197.

To complicate matters, if Bacon is exploring the sense of edges, he would need to encompass a variety of edges. As Casey points out, these include physical (body/world) as well as psychical edges:

I maintain that psychical edges are perfectly real and an integral part of ongoing human (and doubtless animal) life. ...human beings and other animal beings ... have cognitive powers of anticipation and reflection as well as a range of feelings and emotions...[which] are implicated in the apprehension of edges of many things and places and events in our immediate environments. But they have their own edges ... if we take “psyche” to connote such things as consciousness, memory, the emotional realm, and certain preconscious and unconscious states, *the psyche has edges*.<sup>11</sup>

To visualise the psychical edges Bacon would need to focus on self-portraits because, as Casey says, “[they] are altogether actual insofar as they are *felt* – felt by us directly ... their actuality is such that we *know them from within* – from inside our own experience.”<sup>12</sup> So, to understand the subject as deeply as possible at least some of the portraits, would need to include self-portraits for Bacon to be able to speak about the psychical edges and how they engage with (or become synonymous with) the world edges.

Bacon held the portrait as a highly significant subject. In a hierarchy of painting Bacon suggests to Sylvester that portraiture was the most important and the most difficult for painting of his time.<sup>13</sup> We can see, in the small portraits series, and in the larger portraits,

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<sup>11</sup> Casey 2017, p.236.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.72.

that he often treats the head as a centre for these works – but the body and local environment also have important roles.

In his book *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, Ernst van Alphen states “...it makes sense that in many of Bacon’s paintings the heads of the figures are even more deformed than the rest of their bodies. Most of the senses are concentrated in the head: sight, smell, hearing, taste.”<sup>14</sup> There is much that I agree with in Alphen’s book, especially the idea of the loss of self, but my own reading of Bacon’s work deals with a placed/spatial understanding and although I agree that in the small self-portraits Bacon focuses on the head, and that the head is a focus of his larger portraits and self-portraits, the body and place are vital too. It is the relations between them all that I argue are the subject of the paintings.

The portrait head has special problems for the painter – ‘likeness’ combined with an overall sense of ‘being’ tends to make the head more difficult to configure and capture as a likeness we can agree on. But, in the larger works the body is also an important focus. And this is especially important as Bacon wants the viewer (and himself) to engage with ‘certain preconscious and unconscious states.’ (This is clear when he says that he wants the image to work directly on the viewer’s nervous system before they understand the painting intellectually.<sup>15</sup>) But more than this, as Casey points out: “The center of my corporeal self seems somehow to be located in [the] bodily core, somewhere between my hips and my shoulders and sometimes including my head as well.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, as I have suggested, Bacon often paints the head as a study for ways of painting the body.<sup>17</sup> It seems important that

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<sup>14</sup> Van Alphen 1992, p.32.

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester 2016, pp.65-66.

<sup>16</sup> Casey 2017, p.211.

<sup>17</sup> There is a difference in the way Bacon paints the nude as opposed to the clothed body – and this is what I think van Alphen is referring to. The nude is painted similarly to the head. The clothing on the clothed figure is perhaps more linked to the environment and less radically altered.

when Bacon paints the head he sometimes covers the eyes, ears and mouth with coloured striations (made with a piece of ribbed fabric loaded with paint and pressed onto the image) [see Fig 74].<sup>18</sup> These lines which allow us to see the features beneath can be understood as a sign of closure or at least an obscuring of the sense underneath. These marks discount the immediate and identifiable sensory organs and connote a wider sensory body experience – away from an immediately conscious ‘head *understanding*.’

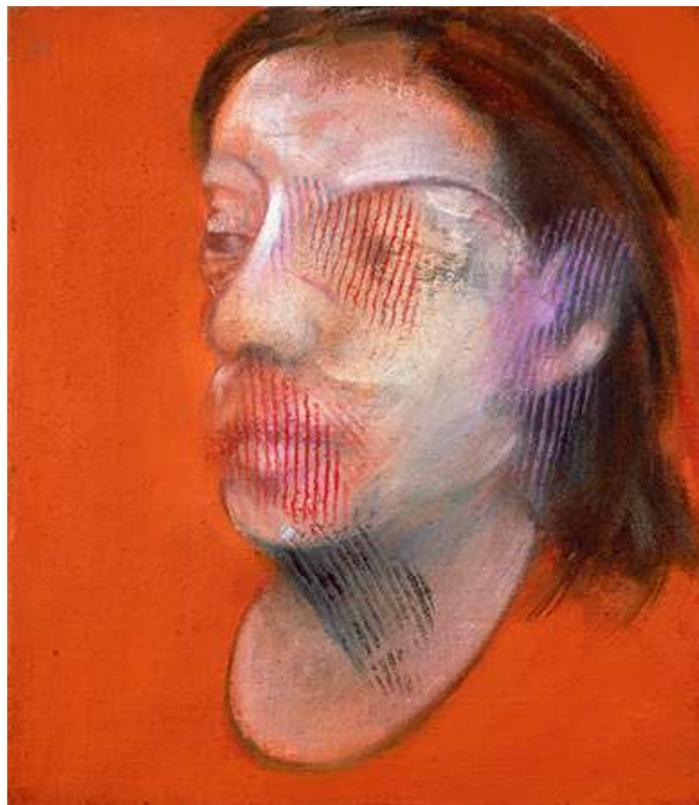


Figure 74: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1982) Oil and pastel on canvas, 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 33.05 cm). Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Bacon often used centred forms (ovals), and these can have unclear boundaries or edges. This is one way Bacon physically images

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<sup>18</sup> These striations were discussed in the presentation ‘Francis Bacon’s Eyes: Blindness, Portraiture, and the Derangement of the Senses’ by Dany Nobus, and his later conversation with Alenka Zupančič at the *Bacon, Philosophy, and Psychoanalysis* event at King’s College London, September 2023.

the 'loss of self' – through a loss of defined edge.<sup>19</sup> Edges blur, or trail off, fade into other colours, shapes or 'ground.' The body edge is unstable and often held in place or invaded by the surrounding environment – or, that link of body/environment is amorphous.

Looking at the *Study for Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1982) [Fig 74] there are various edges employed. The portrait is executed in a vigorously painterly manner with features and full head more or less defined in a recognisable form. However, the bright orange-red ground has an equal force to the head and encloses it almost completely – running into the clothes that Rawsthorne is indicated (by the neckline) as wearing. In this way the head is separated but joined bodily to the ground. Bacon implies that the local environment to Rawsthorne (the place or room) and her clothing are a singular enclosed entity. The space or atmosphere is something worn, or close and encompassing. This may link to the way Bacon paints clothing in a much less 'deformed' manner – relating it to the room edge rather than the body edge. In addition to this use of the colour as 'background,' corresponding colours are also repeated in the lines overlaid on the figure's left eye and mouth. So, although these colours are developed away from the orange-red, these striations could be understood as possibly cancelling out the sense underneath, as suggested above – and/or may be a device to bring the ground colour over the front of the head. In which case the head is surrounded by the environment or the atmosphere it is in, creating another 'invisible' edge of the surroundings and skin of the head. This is one of the ways Bacon visualises our embedded nature in place.

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<sup>19</sup> This is, perhaps, one of the defining qualities of painting as opposed to drawing. Brush marks are centred on themselves and create edges that are less consciously clearly defined than, say, drawing implements. This is why, I believe, Bacon was a great painter and less concerned with drawing – or at least drawing as defined by usual drawing tools.

### 6.3/ Self-portraits and types of edges

“...the figures which, in some cases, seem to lose their bone-structure to become strange fluxes or whorls of matter in fusion...”<sup>20</sup>

“I wanted to paint a head as if folded in on itself like folds of a curtain.”<sup>21</sup>

The edges in Bacon’s works are complex – they are everywhere – they have different speeds, energies, qualities, types of marks/gestures, surfaces, shapes, and voids. They refer to each other and complement and contradict each other. In their overall variety/multiplicity, across the canvas(es) they can be understood as a kind of orchestration. So, the temporal reading is not only in the singular mark, but also in the way that marks read across space/place as well as material and notional realities. This is where we begin to see the richness of Bacon’s spatial relations – the various places within places, and how these convey different meanings and play with our reading of place and fact/truth.

Across his work, Bacon uses tears, folds, creases, gradations, curves, swirls, dynamic wide single brush marks, dry-painterly edges, thin drawn lines, shadow lines, layers and smudges which happen at different speeds. In terms of temporal readings, he uses slow edges: gradations, dry painterly edges, smudges, lined layers; fast edges: swerved brush marks, curved lines, swirls, tears, creases, smears, thrown paint; and still edges: spaceframes, and frames.

The multiplication of edges in Bacon’s paintings runs through all the possible spatial devices that he uses. These edges include all drawn/painted lines (such as curtain/panel lines,

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<sup>20</sup> Leiris 1987, p.27.

<sup>21</sup> Bacon in Davies in Harrison 2021, p.206.

spaceframes, rails, floor/carpet edges, plinth and furniture forms), as well as the painting edges themselves and the picture frames, which are extended in the triptych form. It is not only the object edges that Bacon employs, but the surfaces as edges too.

In the self-portraits, Bacon speaks and explores from the personal experience aspect of picturing. As Casey writes about the edges of the self:

My bodily edges are so much mine, so much a part of what I alone can experience, that they do not lend themselves to public consumption... We might say that external projections of my bodily being entail my being *turned out* from myself towards others – whereas my own bodily edges are ineluctably *turned back in* toward myself, folded into my own body. These edges accrue to me as an integral part of me. It is as if they have always already sunk into me - even if their outer surface, their skin or nails, is exposed to the surrounding world, being open to the gaze of others, whether to be appreciated or reviled or treated with indifference.<sup>22</sup>

The self-portrait head 'deformations' explore a variety of edges and *passages* between body and place. The body edges and the place edges sometimes correspond to the image manipulations and collected material in the studio – for example, folded photographs with hard edges that disrupt surfaces; torn edges that are softer but have a level of focus and violence to them; feathered edges of drier paint across a surface; or printed lines of paint from a ribbed fabric that leaves a veil across another level of depiction. These all relate to painted lines across the picture surface which are sometimes softened by an obvious hand drawn looseness or are hard-edged by the way they have been traced around hard objects

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<sup>22</sup> Casey 2017, p.216.

(rulers, jars and bin lid), or they are veiled by painting out some areas and leaving lighter drawn lines to show through or continue out from under the newer paint surface. In most cases there is a congruency between a feeling of rawness of material and deed.



Figure 75: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1967). Oil on canvas. Each panel 14 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5), CR number 67-01. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 76: Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait* (1972), Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

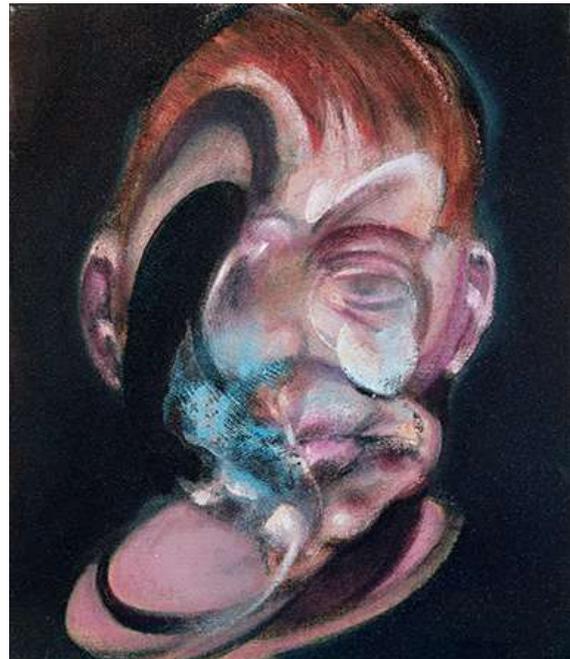


Figure 77: Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait* (1973), Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Looking at *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1967) [Fig 75], *Self-Portrait* (1972) [Fig 76], and *Self-Portrait* (1973) [Fig 77], we can see Bacon exploring edges in several ways. The first is by

creating highlighted volumes which speak of a leading edge towards the viewer and the picture plane, describing forms more than side edges. These volumes often swirl or curve, giving the form some direction and energy and breaking up the larger head structure allowing the usually flat ground colour to create the external edge by invading the head as in Figs 76 and 77. This relationship of ground colour to head is possibly the most important edge, and the most problematic for Bacon. The ground, in many cases works like that in Fig 76 – where it surrounds the head and neck to isolate the head but envelop its existence in the dark ground itself. In these two self-portraits the ground colour is both behind and in front. The head *and* the ground are given energy by their active shapes. In the painting



Figure 78: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self-Portrait* (1972, June), Triptych, Oil on canvas, each panel 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Goulandris collection, Athens. © The Estate of Francis Bacon, © DACS London, OSDEETE, Athens 2025.

*Three Studies for Self-Portrait* (1972, June) [Fig 78], the heads are also 3 dimensionally surrounded by the ground colour. On the Goulandris Foundation website, the museum where these paintings are permanently exhibited, the information tells us:

Looking [at] the painting from the left to the right, we observe how the face gets progressively erased, as if devoured by the void that surrounds it. In the last painting, both the right eye and the cheekbone are no longer visible.<sup>23</sup>

This 'erasure,' which could also be an integration, of course, leads us out to the picture edge and the completeness of the whole canvas. There is a clear vulnerability in this triptych, eyes closed and sensing rather than seeing, covered in lines and transparent colours, the paintbrush shapes and the colour transformations adding layers of edges across the face. The sense of touch is paramount, especially in the right-hand panel image [see Fig 79]. The layers on this face build an identity of fragments suspended over the top of each other – an abstraction of marks that visually combine and disintegrate at the same time – as though a movement of air would make the image fall apart. On all three heads the left side is clearly demarcated when the black ground creates an edge – the right side of the face creates more of a dialogue between the colours and forms against the blackness.

In *Three Studies for Self Portrait* (1975) [Fig 81], Bacon takes the figurative edge and volume manipulations further. Here it is not just an extension of the lighting effects that Bacon transforms as in the 1972 triptych. The left-hand panel could be understood as such, with the dark ground pushing into the left cheek of the head, but in this head we also see a fold on the right cheek, as though the head were made of paper and folding back on itself – like paper peeling from a wall. The plastic malleability of the heads develops across the panels. In the centre we have whorls that open out the neck and show the black ground through – maybe linked to breathing, or reminiscent of the open mouth, but another example of an

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<sup>23</sup> Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation n.p., Available at <https://goulandris.gr/en/artwork/bacon-francis-three-studies-for-self-portrait> [Accessed 2/4/25].



Figure 79: detail of Fig 78, right panel. Photo by the author (27/09/23)



Figure 80: detail of Fig 78, centre panel. Photo by the author (27/09/23)



Figure 81: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self Portrait* (1975), Oil on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.4 cm), Private collection © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

edge that does not literally describe any head feature but opens the form out. The right-hand panel appears to have a very firm tear across the right cheek which corresponds to the torn photos found in Bacon's studio. In terms of edges, it introduces a cusp shape which is rare in these works as this emphatic intrusion across the head feels almost three-dimensionally rendered, so that it literally opens the head to the space around it. The black ground, as in other works, is painted around the head and therefore defines the shape but also reads like an equal force to the features themselves giving the external/ground/figure edge a push/pull energy. This is supported by the real ground colour (the natural tone of the canvas) left showing at the base of each head/neck/shoulder, as this foregrounds the dark colour, sitting on the picture surface, as an important object itself.

Another feature of the right-hand panel head is a ridge or fold across the face. This articulates the head into two parts – cranium and jaw areas – that reads as if the head is turning. Much of the painting in this triptych uses the centred highlight volumetric method to create forms allowing the edges of those marks to dissipate into soft trailing or dry brush edges. These edges are suggestive rather than emphatic and work in contrast to the harder,

defined edges of the cusp form, the circular forms and the eye edges for example. Almost all the marks and edges imply energy (often folding inwards) and add up to create an appearance of a head – appearing in the space and out of it.

In his book *Corpus*, Jean-Luc Nancy sums up the reading of Bacon's portraits that I have been articulating above. He writes:

I don't want to produce the effect of a closed or finite thing, because when we talk about the body we talk about something entirely opposed to the closed and the finite. With the body, we speak about something open and infinite, about the opening of closure itself, the infinite of the finite itself. That's what I want to try to develop: the body is the open.<sup>24</sup>

One last point that I would like to make about the *Three Studies for Self Portrait* (1975), is that this set of portraits look more like Bacon's friend, photographer Peter Beard (or a mixture of Beard and Bacon?) than a self-portrait. Certainly, the left panel face looks more like Beard, and the right-hand panel looks more like Bacon possibly with an amalgamation of other faces. In other paintings Bacon seems to use various faces and bodies at times – for instance, Dyer's and Freud's bodies/poses, but still calls them self-portraits. Is this a questioning of identity, a play on the edges of personality, of each of us in similar and connected circumstance?

Although not strictly a triptych self-portrait, *Three Studies for Portraits (including Self-Portrait)* (1969) [Fig 82]), does include Bacon in the right-hand panel. This set of images relates more clearly to the torn and trampled detritus that Bacon had strewn across his

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy 2008, p.122.

studio. Tearing and folding were useful to transforming his imagery [Figs 83-85] so Bacon often folded photographs and printed imagery carefully and paperclipped it to hold the folding in place (see Cappock and Günther <sup>25</sup>) as



Figure 82: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Portraits (including Self-Portrait)* (1969). Oil on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Private Collection, Switzerland, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

well as allowing it to be partially obliterated by walking on it. The imagery that Bacon used often had oil stains and fingerprint marks from holding them while painting. The 1969 triptych demonstrates how that tearing helped Bacon manipulate the figure. The left and centre panels, in particular, relate to the torn imagery by extending the head across the canvas, and opening it out to the atmosphere around it, allowing the ground colour a positive fullness and equality. As in *Three Studies for Self Portrait* (1975) [Fig 81] the canvas base ground can be seen very clearly, so this makes the coloured ground painted on top more obviously important and part of the head construction. The paintings, again use both highlighted volume painting in contrast with harder edges, which are often lines or lines that

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<sup>25</sup> Examples of damaged and reassembled imagery can be found in: Cappock 2005: illustrations of folded and joined imagery includes paperclipped images, (Fig 57), p.42, (Fig 302) p.168, (Fig 217), p.125, (Fig 210), p.121, safety pinned photographs (Fig 175), p.102, mounted photographs on paper or cardboard (Figs 218,219) p.126; and in Günther 2022: folded, (Fig 19) p.100, and paperclipped and bagged images, pl.XII, p.419.

appear between overlaid colours. In these paintings the edged forms take on other almost geographical readings. The left panel head unravels and splits or tears apart, and the centre



Figure 83: Sergei Eisenstein, film still from *Battleship Potemkin* (1926), detritus from Bacon's studio, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, fig.4 in Blaize O'Connor (2008) "Dust and Debitage: An Archaeology of Francis Bacon's Studio", in Ian Russell, Series ed. (2008) *Archaeologies of Art: Papers from the Sixth World Archaeological Congress*, UCD: Scholarcast, Series 2, p.6.

Figure 84: Rembrandt self-portrait, torn out book page, collection of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, in Harrison, M. *Incunabula*, p.165. Photo by author (04/05/24)



Figure 85: Detritus from Francis Bacon's studio. In *ibid.* pp.162-163. Photo by author (04/05/24)

panel crumples inwards as the torn section pushes into the head causing a ridged zone to appear. Bacon's head in the right panel is made up of two tectonic plates colliding across the centre of the face. And within the larger events of the three heads are a myriad of forms and lines that, overall, form an orchestration of edges.

This invented variety makes the heads feel like they are both disintegrating and combining at the same time. This complexity (almost chaos) is built on a deep order. As Casey points out about the proliferation of edges:

Various kinds of edge can coexist equably within a single concrete instance...

We...must acknowledge the intertangement of the various kinds of edge...for it is thanks to their interweaving that a given edge is rarely reducible to being a transparent exhibition of a preexisting type... the matter is more complex and more interesting. To admit this is not to descend into descriptive taxonomic chaos; it is to discern an abiding order in the midst of complexity.<sup>26</sup>

Bacon's self-portraits are the real test of his sense of being. Each painting is something he knows or senses from the inside out and the outside in. This is the edge of the person, not just responding to another person(ality) that he 'knows' as a friend, but something more problematic to visualise – the internalised and externalised world and how they interface or open into and out of each other. This also informs his portraits of others, and his larger works and triptychs.

As mentioned earlier, the sense of touch, especially in the portraits is important and defines the physical edge of the body and the paint itself, which meld into one 'skin.' The surface of

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<sup>26</sup> Casey 2017, p.24.

the painting and the surface of the depicted skin are brushed on with care and become a single surface/edge in these works. Often, in Bacon's paintings, studio dust is added to the paint – literally putting the studio into the work – or bridging the two places, comingling them as a single place. Commentators often speak of 'flesh' when discussing Bacon's paintings – which has clear physical and sexual connotations, which are important – but they rarely speak of skin, which is thinner, more fragile, more about touch, and surface, and a medium or edge between 'inner' and 'outer.' The multiplicity of edges and by implication, surfaces lead us out from the figure to the depicted objects and rooms and caught between these are the spaceframes. And beyond all of those the painting is distanced by the glass of the frame, and the frame itself.

In the next chapter I will look at these larger edges and surfaces, the complex and compound spaces that comprise Bacon's large-scale paintings and triptychs.

As Casey writes about this complex edge-world:

Of primary importance is the deeply intertwined co-presences that characterises the entire edge-world... Such co-presence characterises the circumstance in which edges meet, our own along with those of virtually everything we encounter. ...an interplace of edges. To be in this world is to be in its embrace and to embrace it in turn. Not merely successively but *all at once*. This last phrase...should be extended to the place-world as coinhabited by edges and the sensuous bodies that coexist with them. In this world, what matters most happens all at once – in the moment, at the

place, in the event where these edges and bodies coincide. It is there...that a transfer between hand and edge emerges in a transaction of touching...<sup>27</sup>

In this chapter I have argued that the idea of appearance in Bacon's work was not solely about a recognisable face/person/object but about something appearing – something gathering appearance, being made visible. This happened in the image, on the picture plane and in the studio apparatus. All of these can be understood as edges or surface-edges. I also suggested that Bacon used his smaller portrait head paintings as experiments for ways to paint the figure-ground relationship and how the self-portraits visualised the psychological edges that Casey identifies. I maintain that Bacon was making an image of the experience of place from inside out, with a variety of edges that made the head volumetric but open with layers of marks or open forms. As Bacon stated, "I'm always trying through chance or accident to find a way by which appearance can be there but remade out of other shapes."<sup>28</sup>

Chapter 7 takes the edges idea and expands that through Bacon's larger works, especially those that show relationships to the studio. The studio comes to the fore in terms of the idea of sentient place.

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<sup>27</sup> Casey 2017, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.123.

## Chapter 7: Sentient place

After discussing Bacon's small portraits and his use of edges, this chapter looks at the complex spaces and places of Bacon's larger works; how he makes images of sensed place and images of internal place. For Bacon, the studio is an important part of his making process and an active field where he is placed as part of an environment, and he is a conduit of it in terms of making *it*, and the figure (himself, us) visible. However, the human body is now called into question as a unified object as it has become part of a set of connections within a particular environment. Forming an image of this is problematic.

As Lefebvre writes in *The Production of Space*: "A homogeneous and utterly simultaneous space would be strictly imperceptible."<sup>1</sup> So, to make an image of a lived place or placed experience, one would need to open it out in various ways to make it visible. I suggest that this is what has been seen as the 'violence' of the later paintings by Bacon. The image (physically) and the place (metaphorically) are torn and folded to open them out so we can witness their reality, (and ours). To see this reality, we must disrupt its surface, its sense of singularity.

How is Bacon's *sentient place*, his *sensed* environment-place (or place-figure), then, visualised as a whole? This is Bacon's core visual and painterly problem in many of his later works. His answer is to make various edges and temporalities visible. To understand this, it is perhaps easiest to start with the idea of movement which instantly puts singular place into a multiplicity – our relations to place vary as soon as we move and particularly if we move *in relation* to it or *for* it (that it makes us move). And, as we have seen, Bacon often

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<sup>1</sup> Lefebvre 1991, p.200.

talks about and depicts movement – especially simple everyday movements like turning on a light, turning around bodily or even talking. This movement is internal and external. It is a willed action, *and it happens in and often as a reaction to/result of place*. This action may include memory as even that needs to open space as we have seen in Chapter 4, *Triptych* (1977). Movement opens volumes and edges and has an important role to play. As Jeff Malpas says: “Places are established in relation to activity...”<sup>2</sup> But this movement is not only about depicted activity – it is also about *being in* somewhere, interactions of place. This clearly reflects Bacon’s relation to his studio – and his work is often rooted in his relation to it. Previously I noted how Bacon altered the Reece Mews space (Chapter 4) to be more useful to him – to suit his requirements – in line with what he had learnt from previous studios and work. The place and the work enfolded each other – they were made in mutual relation, and this enfolding required to be visualised.

The multiplicity of edges and surfaces in Bacon’s paintings lead us out from, and back to, the core ‘figure,’ (which is not confined to the standard outlines of a ‘body’) to the depicted objects and rooms. Often caught between these are Bacon’s spaceframes and beyond all of those the painting is distanced by the glass of the frame, and by the frame itself.

If we consider the figure, spaceframe and picture frame relationships we can begin to see how this enfolded place is realised in the paintings. In this chapter I will use Edward Casey’s ideas about edges and frames, along with Jeff Malpas’ thoughts about the unity and complexity of place from his book *Place and Experience* (2018).

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<sup>2</sup> Malpas 2018, p.174.

The idea of sentient place that I am proposing, is opposite to Deleuze's idea of the "dissipated figure"<sup>3</sup> and Casey's "lived body – spread throughout a given place" where the implication is that it is seen from the human perspective outward. Rather, sentient place suggests that place is the driving force for the human figure and experience. Bacon's openness and vulnerability lets the sensation of placed experience become the subject. As Eddy Batache (an art historian and good friend of Bacon) says "He made himself a vessel through which an image took shape, and he was content to deliver it to us with no concern at all for its interpretation."<sup>4</sup>

## 7.1/ Complex/compound place, spaceframes and frames

"...it is in place, and in relation to our own being-in-place, that the world begins."<sup>5</sup>

To understand Bacon's complex space, it is important to address his use of frames, internal and external, and his use of spaceframes and how these, in some cases, relate to or articulate his studio/placedness.

Firstly, in terms of architecture, there is a difference in Bacon's later work to his earlier, 1950s, paintings. In Chapter 3 architecture and figure were discussed as a unified field of merging and emerging. He uses the later spaceframes and flat colour areas, I suggest, to indicate a disunified field – or at least areas or zones of breakage or dis-location in what otherwise might be considered a unity. The whole is not – as Lefebvre says, 'indistinguishable' – but it is able to be articulated into sub-places and the body/figure's sub-edges become open from interior and exterior in a different manner.

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze 2003, p.27 and 30.

<sup>4</sup> Sabatier, B. (Batache, E., Preface) (2012) *Francis Bacon, The Complete Graphic Work: Catalogue Raisonné*, Paris, JSC Modern Art Gallery, p.23.

<sup>5</sup> Malpas 2018, p.12.

Two points that Jeff Malpas makes are useful to start with here:

The concept of place is essentially the concept of a *bounded* but open region, *within which* a set of interconnected elements can be situated. ... such a concept necessarily involves a form of ‘containment’ – enclosedness within bounds...<sup>6</sup>

And further to this Malpas later continues:

The crucial idea here is surely not of a place without bounds but of a place without internal limits, whose dimensions can never be exhausted – a place that, instead of imprisoning, releases into an immeasurable wealth of experience and memory.<sup>7</sup>

I suggest that this could be where the reading of Bacon’s earlier work of the 1950s, usually read as containment, submitted to a change through the 1960s. The sense of capture within a confined space, which Bacon said he never meant,<sup>8</sup> changed to an openness – a vulnerability to a ‘wealth of experience and memory,’ a move that required Bacon’s images to shift from the sensational to a reflection on placed sensation – from illustration to implication. A maturing from imposed visualisation to an open exploration of experience, which he shared with the viewer in the experienced place of the painted (active) picture surface, as well as in the image.

This ‘immeasurable wealth of experience and memory’ may not tally with what we initially see in the paintings but makes sense when we consider the studio. Reece Mews studio bristled with visual material (thousands of photographs and books) and consequently edges

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177.

<sup>8</sup> Davies reports Bacon speaking about the spaceframes: “said they were never intended for psychological effect or expression, claustrophobia et al...used for formal reasons to enclose and articulate the figures more clearly, to make the image clear.” Davies in Harrison (2009), p.98; “not as enclosing it in its own loneliness” *Ibid.*, p.107.

of all kinds. These edges are external and internal to each image as well as the larger book or document holding those images. All these image edges reflected the sub-places and the larger studio place and beyond.

Each of these images and sets of images offered visual passages and pathways for Bacon to explore. He spoke of his use of photographs, for example, almost as physical places. In an interview with David Sylvester (Interview 2, 1966) Bacon says: “Through the photographic image I find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it.”<sup>9</sup> Each of these images are places then, and as Malpas writes: “Places always open up to disclose other places within them...”<sup>10</sup>

Add to this all the manipulations of the photographic material that Bacon makes, and the edges continue to proliferate almost endlessly. It appears that Bacon’s subject is edge. But these edges are not external boundaries but interrupted continuities – articulations of various connections and disconnections. As Malpas says:

Places can turn outwards to reveal other places, but they can likewise turn inwards to reveal their own character or the character of the subject who identifies with that place. In this latter respect, the possibility of taking a place to be variously oriented, to be folded either inwards or outwards (or, as it might also be put, to ‘unfold’ in a way that reveals something of its own structure or features of the world) is part of what enables Merleau-Ponty to speak... of the world as being wholly inside and I as wholly outside myself.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.37.

<sup>10</sup> Malpas 2018, p.172.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.174.

The intense manipulations of the photographic material that covered the studio room from wall to wall, manipulated by hand, and by foot, by choice and by chance often resulted in, and from, folding. Günther makes it clear that the continuous transformations of the material within the room rearticulated the imagery, often the same images, over and over.<sup>12</sup> The imagery was in a constant cycle of finding, manipulating, using, discarding, re-finding/reusing. The images were in decay through multiple handling, folding, tearing, by hand and underfoot, which allowed for chance to develop changing relationships and affinities. The edges of images and objects were continuously created and destroyed, 'suggesting images.'

Bacon's focus on edges, previously noted in his portraits and self-portraits, took place at all stages of the painting process. The detritus, "my models and my subject matter"<sup>13</sup> echoed with edges of all types.

### 7.1.2/ The frame edge(s)

What Casey writes about picture frames is useful, to see how edges, particularly linear edges, connect in their own ways. I will start with the picture frame and work inwards:

There is a two-way vector at work here: the outside of the frame pulls toward the surrounding space, the inside toward the painted entity within.<sup>14</sup>

[A picture frame] is not merely a delimiting presence or neutral place, and much less

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<sup>12</sup> "Other images were used frequently and consistently once they came into Bacon's possession. The crossed legs of George Dyer in the studio from photographs taken by John Deakin in c. 1965 appear in 20 works between 1966 and 1990, and forma prime example of Bacon repeatedly referencing the same source." Günther 2020, p.77.

<sup>13</sup> Bacon to Melvyn Bragg in *Francis Bacon* (1985), quoted in Günther 2022, p.54.

<sup>14</sup> Casey 2017, p.97.

is it a mere void in the manner of a gap; beyond its vectorial in-and-out dynamics, it constitutes a dynamic space of its own.<sup>15</sup>

Bacon's frames are very specifically present and deliberate. At a time when many artists preferred paintings to be shown without frames, he chose to use frames that had a definite material presence. They have a sense of age or tradition about them – being gold and using multiple interior lines and edges in their broad moulding. They have a sense of energy, with a larger, plain centre which is surrounded by lines of various width and depth either side. They ripple inward toward the picture and outward toward the wall [see Fig 86]. Like architectural moulding they can act as buffer zones, or forms with 'vectorial in-and-out dynamics' between different places – for instance, between doors, windows and walls. Modernist aesthetics removed this buffer zone and usually required one architectural 'object' to stand right against the next. Bacon's frames, however, were definite in their relations to the image and any 'external' place, while placing the artworks at some odds with Modernist aesthetics. His frames encase the painting, both around its perimeter *and* across its surface, with glass. The glass was another unusually unmodern characteristic of recent painting framing.

But despite its presence, a frame is an ambiguous place that has external forces and a 'dynamic space of its own.' Unfortunately, in reproductions the frame is usually lost, and this makes a difference to the work, which should be seen as an object rather than a small-scale illustrational picture. In our contemporary information age, we are used to seeing smaller reproductions of images and often on screen. This reduces objects to images or

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.98.

photographic reproductions, when they were not necessarily meant to be initially seen that way. I will come back to the paintings' material presence a bit later.



Figure 86: frame, left edge of left panel from *Triptych August 1972* (1972), photo by the author, Tate Britain (24/07/24)

Casey says that the picture frame is paradoxical: “being neither/nor (neither painting nor non-painting) while also being both/and (painting and non-painting). Hence the natural association of frames with veils: just as a veil hides-yet-reveals, so a frame encloses-yet-releases.”<sup>16</sup>

Casey’s frame/veil relationship is interesting in the case of Bacon’s paintings. The veil is often a soft, semi-transparent layer, that can relate to skin or curtains, both of which were important to Bacon in his work: clearly important to the 1950s figure/room/landscape paintings and some of the later portraits where the figure is obscured. In fact, this veiling happens throughout his later work, not least in the details of facial obscuring made with lines of paint created by dabbing ribbed fabric across the mouths, eyes and ears of many of

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<sup>16</sup> Casey 2017, p.102.

his figures.<sup>17</sup> The veil, as visual device, plays with a difficulty of seeing/perceiving and therefore also supports Bacon's insistence on an intuitive or felt response to his paintings.

This reinforces the idea that Bacon thought that the presentation of his work – as a complete object and seen in the right conditions and manner – were important to its reception. This ran throughout his thinking – the placing of his work in relation to the viewer, in terms of position but also in terms of gallery or cultural milieu were vital to its completion.

Veiling also relates to the artificiality of the frames and the ambiguous distancing effect that they have, which was one of the main reasons for using them.<sup>18</sup> Both the moulding and the glazing were important distancing devices for Bacon:

If you go into the Victoria and Albert Museum there's a wax figure of Michelangelo which is in a glass case. Well, it's very much more beautiful in the glass case than if it were in the open. It's more beautiful because it's been removed further from you.<sup>19</sup>

The ambiguity of the frame is that it both distances but allows some access. Bacon said that one of the reasons for using glass was because the paintings' surfaces were fragile due to the layering of various mediums, and they needed protection. The vulnerability of the figures, tied into the surface fragility, also needed a sense of distance.

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<sup>17</sup> Peppiatt writes about Bacon's late works that they were painted "as if a fine gauze had been applied over the wound-like surface of his figures" Peppiatt 2021, p.236.

<sup>18</sup> Bacon replying to Sylvester's question about the glass in his frames says, "It's the distance – that this thing is shut away from the spectator." Sylvester 2016, p.101.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison 2013, p.38.



Figure 87: Francis Bacon, *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1984), Oil on canvas, 78 1/10 × 58 3/10 in (198.3 × 148 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Bacon's frames become even more emphatic when they are used in a triptych format. His painting *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1984) [Fig 87], like all triptychs, repeats the frame form across the paintings, setting up a regular, even pulse (a pulse, which, in theory, Bacon agreed could go on indefinitely as he saw images in sequences or multiples<sup>20</sup>). The frames, then, are both individual *and* a larger structure, they separate the paintings and join them together in repetition across space.<sup>21</sup> In fact, their repetition is emphatically spatial, especially as Bacon required a distance between the paintings.<sup>22</sup> The frames not only physically help separate (by surrounding each panel) and yet tie the paintings together (by their repetition) but also repeat the internal edges/lines within the paintings. The simplest repetition inwardly in this instance, is with the rectangles that Bacon has made around each of Edwards' depicted heads. These rectangular shapes could be, as Bacon suggested to

<sup>20</sup> "I see images in series. And I suppose I could go on long beyond the triptych and do five or six together, but I find the triptych is a more balanced unit." Sylvester 2016, p.98.

<sup>21</sup> Peppiatt writes about the problem of series' of paintings, in this case triptychs, but without a narrative connection: "they would be placed together, but separated by thick, gold frames so that their contents could be viewed separately and any narrative continuity would be effectively disrupted." Peppiatt 2021, p. 239.

<sup>22</sup> Bacon to Sylvester: "when I had the show in Paris and the Guggenheim lent their *Crucifixion* triptych and the canvases were all together in one frame. It absolutely ruined the whole picture. I wrote and told them that if I'd wanted them all to be together I would have put them together. I wanted them to be in separate frames. It ruins the balance putting them together, because, if I'd wanted to do that, I would have painted them a different way." Sylvester 2016, p.100-101.

David Sylvester,<sup>23</sup> simply ways of focusing on the figure within – a way Bacon could concentrate on that section of painting. However, this single reason is questionable as these rectangles could also correspond to the painted portrait images within other large Bacon paintings, and, more importantly this triptych also uses the spaceframes that Bacon was talking about in that quote, in both outside panels. So the rectangles as focus does not really make sense in a painting with a spaceframe – unless those framing devices relate to the head and the full body separately. As Jeff Malpas writes in *Place and Experience*: “Places are juxtaposed and intersect one with another, even as places also contain places. Thus, one can move inwards to find other places nested within a place, as well as move outwards to find a more encompassing locale.”<sup>24</sup>

The rectangle, in the centre panel especially, repeats the frame format, almost creating a sense of perspective between the rectangle and the inner dark moulding section of the frame. Bacon often uses contradictory devices in his works to undermine a direct illustration of ‘reality’ – echoing Van Gogh’s idea of using lies to tell a deeper truth.<sup>25</sup> So, here, Bacon’s rectangular shape around the heads can refer to several ideas at the same time: to focus on the head, as he described in his spaceframes quote; it could refer to his small portrait head paintings – as they are on a similar scale; or it could refer to the portrait paintings/photographs that Bacon sometimes used in the backgrounds of his large works. This edge device resonates with possible readings. And, like the picture frame itself it has vectorial in-and-out dynamics as previously described.

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<sup>23</sup> Bacon to Sylvester: “I cut down the scale of the canvas by drawing in these rectangles which concentrate the image down. Just to see it better.” Sylvester 2016, p.23.

<sup>24</sup> Malpas 2018, p.33.

<sup>25</sup> Bacon speaks about lies: “In one of his letters Van Gogh speaks of the need to make changes in reality, which become lies that are truer than the literal truth. This is the only possible way the painter can bring back the intensity of the reality he is trying to capture.” Sylvester 2016, p.194.

## 7.1.2/ The spaceframe and related forms

This relation of the small rectangle and the picture frame is further complicated by the spaceframes in both side panels. The spaceframes in Bacon's paintings are an interesting device. They are drawn lines of paint that don't usually relate to the depicted architecture but often take the shape of some architectural form. In fact, in this triptych they may relate to Reece Mews as they have a pitched roof/ceiling effect much like Bacon's altered studio ceiling. The pitch of these spaceframes reaches beyond the picture frame thus anchoring the two frame structures – the otherwise floating spaceframe to the picture frame. This reaching beyond the picture frame places the spaceframe firmly in the designated pictorial space – even though they have no described solidity or recognisable 'reality' in themselves.

In some aspects the spaceframe is related to the picture frame and to the room space of the picture – it is an ambiguous construction which reads, as Casey says about picture frames themselves, both inwards towards the figure and outwards towards the frame. There is a tension created here. Bacon simply states that the spaceframes were a means for him to "focus on the figure", to "cut down the picture size." But what does this 'focus on the figure' entail? And why, then, does the three-dimensional spaceframe only partly include the figure's body allowing the figure's legs to fall outside its space, into the non-spaceframed section in this painting?

Casey discusses internal and external frames in some other paintings – using an example artwork by Miro where he drew a rectangular line around most of the marks and shapes within an artwork and then had a few marks transgress that frame/border.<sup>26</sup> Casey suggests

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<sup>26</sup> Joan Miro *Femme entourée d'un vol d'oiseaux dans la nuit* (1968), Casey 2017, p.99.

that Miro's internal frame "provides an opportunity to enhance the presentation" of the image, and that this inner frame is an "augmentation of being."<sup>27</sup>

Bacon's spaceframe does both of these. 'Enhancing the presentation' of the figure is not what Bacon directly speaks about, but it is inevitable if he uses the spaceframe to help focus on the figure while painting it. Enhancing his focus adds to our concentration on it too.

Casey's idea of the 'augmentation of being' is possibly more difficult to consider, but it seems, that when Bacon uses the spaceframe device, he is giving the figure a kind of double take. It appears to be twice-present: in the flesh, and within a figure zone. This may help to contain the emanation or energy (or atmosphere) that Bacon was trying to depict as part of the whole figure – the complete vibrant, energetic appearance that one feels in front of someone else. If this is the case it is interesting that this emanation takes the form of an architectural enclosure. This external edge of the appearance is an exoskeleton which allows the depicted body-figure its multi-edged openness, its soft amorphous intimacy, and its 'wound-like surfaces,' and offers a structural support or interior room – an *articulation*, or rupture, between the body and the larger room-space of the painting. By rupture, I mean a change in visual language that relates to the depicted space, but not in any conventional sense.

Due to the spaceframe, the body zone does not end at the skin of the body in some of the larger paintings (like the portraits) – the spaceframe is a method of creating a figure-place (exoskeleton) for the 'plastic' body and its body emanation/energy zone. This method of depicting this zone is very artificial<sup>28</sup> and reads like an abstract image placed into a figurative

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>28</sup> Bacon speaks of artificiality to Sylvester: "DS "It seems to me ... what matters most to you is ... a tension between juxtaposed references to different realities and the tension between a reference to reality and the

painting. It breaks the painting into two zones – the body-place and the environment-place, and these two are brought together by the ground colour(s) and by an architectural relation to an implied room shape and further relation to the picture frame. So, there is an internal frame pulse within the painting. This pulse takes the sense of movement away from, as well as towards, the figure – it is not figure-bound, but relates to and in place as well. In *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* the body is not particularly in movement (aside from that implied by the side panel heads and the balance of the figure on the stool), other than its internal energy or emanation, which seems to be the focus here.

That energy is also taken up in the image ground in various ways. For example, there is a curved 'bar' or 'furniture' shape in both side paintings, that Bacon has used in various other paintings<sup>29</sup>, which gives a circular energy to them. This bar is derived from a spiral shape that Bacon first used in *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952) which was more complex and gave a strong dynamic to that painting. This bar also has an ambiguous place in the painting, like the spaceframe, it hovers between realities.

The colour of the crossed legs of the right panel's figure are similar to the circular form, and the energy in the leg structure seems to correspond to it as well. This ties their movements together. The floor areas of each of the panels of the triptych are dappled with varying tones and colours that shift across their planes creating a sense of undulating movement.

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artificial structure by which it's made. FB "... it's in the artificial structure that the reality of the subject will be caught..." Sylvester 2016, p.202.

<sup>29</sup> A similar form is used in: *Study for Crouching Nude* (1952), *Study for Portrait on Folding Bed* (1963), *Study for a Portrait of Lucian Freud (Sideways)* (1971), *Self-Portrait* (1978).

That circular furniture curve is also echoed by the curvature of the 'horizon' blue wall and the earth shaped/coloured floor which reads as both room and suggested landscape. The curves create another pulse between figure and environment.



Figure 88: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982), oil, aerosol paint and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

Figure 89: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982), photo by the author (Hugh Lane Gallery, 15/04/23)

If we look again at *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) [Fig 88] we can see how the spaceframe and the floor/room space are indicated in different lines which mostly float over an orange-coloured ground. A ground colour that I suggested related to the Reece Mews interior and atmosphere (Chapter 4). The ground colour in this painting is handled differently from the ground colours in *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* which are fairly simple and run across the rectangle and spaceframe boundaries denying their physical reality as a separate object. In *Kneeling Figure - Back View* the ground is handled in a painterly manner and takes up the complete depicted space area and the room and

spaceframe lines are ambiguously linked. The orange ground is not flatly painted and adds an overall energy to the canvas.

This ground colour's uniformity is also broken, in this case, by the overpainting of a similar mix of the orange in the places highlighted with circles in Figure 89. The overpainting stays within the spaceframe zone demarcating it as separate in some way from the ground, while continuing the ground colour and binding them together. The ambiguity allows us to read the space as overall atmosphere and place within place at the same time, supporting a double-enclosure reading.

Bacon's edges are not only spatial but temporal – the confinement of each painting (by frame) and place (especially Reece Mews, or implied pictorial rooms) encourages the exploration of and invention of visible edges. The variety of edges and their attendant passages to and from multiply the connections and disconnections within the work.

Bacon's work is essentially spatial and temporal – but these are seen in reduced circumstances – small movements in restricted places are ways of focusing on the subject.

The small movements happen in various ways and enumerating some of them may help understand Bacon's figuration. On the basic image/viewer relationship, in the large portrait triptychs for example,<sup>30</sup> we see that there are often three separate images of the same subject. And these are set out in Bacon's standard police 'mugshot' layout: right profile, front face, and left profile.<sup>31</sup> So, our first set of visual movements are the artist's/viewer's relationship to the subject/figure. These changes of relationship are framed, start a pulse of

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<sup>30</sup> Bacon saw the portrait as the most difficult and important category of painting of his time. Speaking about the traditional hierarchy of painting subjects Bacon said: "I would say at the moment, as things are so difficult, that portraits come first." Sylvester 2016, p.72.

<sup>31</sup> Peppiatt describes Bacon's small portraits: "...overall Bacon preferred the triptych for its balance – and for its less obvious connotations with police and forensic 'mugshots.'" Peppiatt 2021, p.157.

repetition, and imply an all-round view and an establishing of a visual subject identity. The second set of movements are within the picture: the figure changing their position – such as fidgeting on a chair or moving their head, and the relations of objects within the image. The third is technical: the change of the shape of the spaceframe or other internal frame object, the subtle colour differences between panels, the figure shadows. The shifting changes and movements are an integral part of the subject of the paintings – the shifting dynamics of a place identity.

Compare the two triptychs, *Triptych: Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969) [Fig 90] with *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1984) [Fig 87], made fifteen years apart. The overall geography/layout is similar, however, the interior intensity of the 1969 painting is more open in the 1984 painting.

The spaceframe structures correspond across the years in the side panels, but the central one is lost in the later painting. The main change between the two is that the spaceframes in the Freud paintings cut through the figure [Figs 90, 91] and this multiplies the figure in the left panel, and creates an internal edge in all of them. This edge, as well as Freud's legs reaching outside the spaceframe, deny its 'real' physical presence as well as its reading as a cage or a glass box as the spaceframes in earlier paintings were identified. The spaceframes in the Edwards painting do not break the figure, but the figure's legs do cross the spaceframe outline. In fact Edwards' body seems to sit on the edge (threshold) of the spaceframe itself. But both Freud and Edwards are placed inside and outside of the frame – both are woven into the frame by their relationships to them. Freud is inside and outside in terms of his body position – but also divided by the frame so even further embedded into its dimensionality.

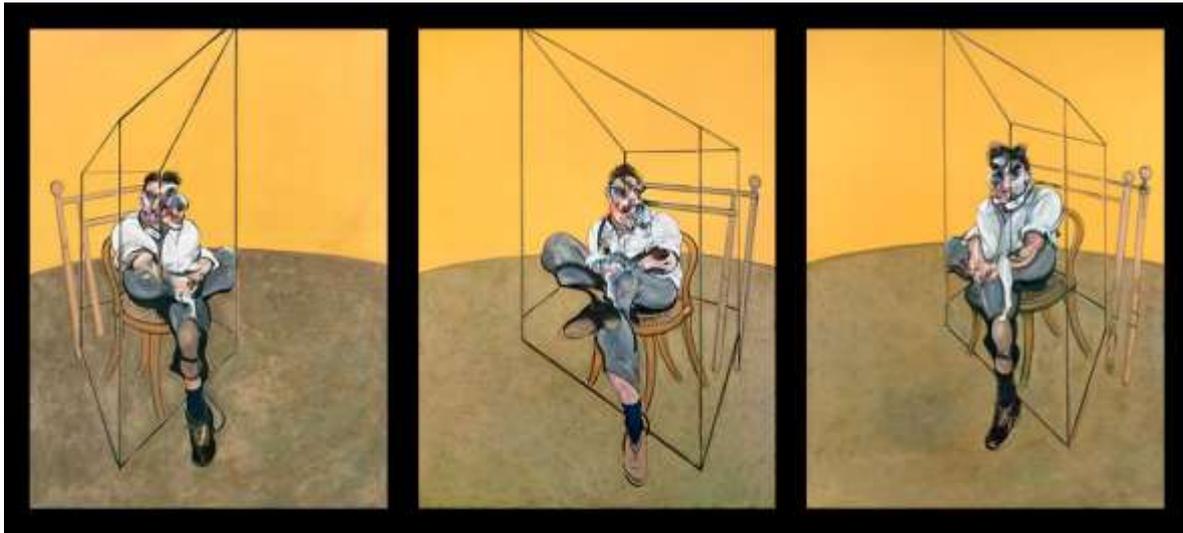


Figure 90: Francis Bacon *Triptych: Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969) Oil on canvas, Each panel: 77 7/8 x 58 1/8 in. (197.8 x 147.5 cm). © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 91: detail still from the video (1'07") *Francis Bacon on 'Three Studies of Lucian Freud'* (2013), Peek Films, Christie's

Here too, as previously stated, the ovoid tradition of forming the figure is repeated in the floor curve – and this has an effect of relating the body to its environment, whereas the spaceframe's architectural lines intervene in that relationship, but sets up its own relationship with the picture edge/picture frame. These relationships weave the overall image together, speaking of a contradiction of unity and division – articulating place.

*Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* appears simpler and more refined than *Triptych: Three Studies of Lucian Freud*. The spaceframes are simplified, and the centre panel spaceframe has been removed entirely. And that removal is quite palpable in relation to those left in the side panels. The contrast makes the figure in the centre panel more vulnerable, more direct, less removed.

The spaceframe and the arena or circular space, like the room, are theatres and architectural enclosures that Bacon uses. As discussed (on p185), Bacon was one of the last artists to use the ovoid shape as a way of building and articulating human forms. The ovoid shape was used as an enclosure structure which related to parts of the body (and world) and which rendered rounded shapes as chains of larger structures, therefore relating sections of the figure as separate but joined, and the body likewise joined to the natural world around it. Figures 92 and 93 show *Crouching Boy* by Michelangelo with annotations showing the use of ovoid forms to articulate the figure and larger shapes within it, though the use of ovoid forms is probably clearer in the drawing *A Couple in Embrace* [Fig 94] by Titian. Philip Rawson writes about the ovoid tradition as used by Titian and Veronese. He describes a particular way that they broke the 'continuous contour' of the body. For example, of Veronese Rawson states:

He did not attempt to preserve the linear value of the continuous contour; but he gave each ovoid segment of contour a multiple reference. That is to say, to each segment of contour with an ovoid inflection not one but many other opposing segments can be found which will suggest complete ovoids...The opposing related

segments may be quite far away across the surface of the composition; and so the ovoids they suggest will be big volumes of plastic space.<sup>32</sup>

We have already seen that Bacon also broke the body's contour with multiple edges, but his ovoid centred forms also created edges, and these were sometimes reflected in the circular/ovoid room or arena. It is interesting that the round rooms that Bacon's figures often inhabit become organic by this association.



Figure 92: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Crouching Boy* ca. 1524 (sculpted), ca. 1884 (cast), H 55.5cm, W 40.3cm, D 42.3cm, Victoria and Albert Museum

Figure 93: Figure 92 with annotations by the author



Figure 94: Titian (n.d.) *A couple in embrace*, drawing, 252 x 258 mm, The Fitzwilliam Museum (2025) 2256, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

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<sup>32</sup> Rawson 1969, p.166.

Bacon's *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge* (1988) [Fig 95] is an interesting example of the points previously mentioned. The ground/room colour is repainted mostly within the spaceframe interior, setting it as a place within a place, though the interior colour does bleed out into the wider ground and is a similar colour, bringing them together and keeping them apart at the same time. In a telling detail Bacon draws the light cord as if from the exterior space, but then slightly overpaints it so that it ambiguously reads both from the external ceiling and from the spaceframe's internal ceiling, thus supporting the doubleness of the room reading.



Fig 95: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge* (1988) Oil on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

In a second detail, Bacon paints a bright, white oval shape, the most prominent form in the painting, exactly where the depicted body (the truncated leg) meets the floor and the figure's shadow. This ovoid shape reads back into the body – through the repeated form

(this time a brown colour) on his waist, and then again repeated in the shoulder muscle above. The ovoid is, of course, repeated throughout the body in the arms, buttocks and legs. But this bright ovoid form also reads out from the body into the shadow and then is repeated further in the circular wall behind the figure which, in turn, is answered by the painted-out curved form below the figure. The painting out, again, is ambiguous and therefore the front (room) curve is both there and not there.

The highlighted ovoid calls attention to the juncture between figure and shadow which is also ambiguous and unrealistic – an artificial device that brings us back to the artificial painting image and its manipulated surface. This bright spot even rivals the figure's head for focal interest – in fact the head itself disappears into the ground colour within yet another (open) frame which the figure almost seems to be entering, though, as it appears further away than the figure that can't logically happen. This interior frame, another anomaly and ambiguity in the painting, may correspond to a doorway, an image, or a mirror form as is the case with smaller frames in many other works. This device of a frame within a (space)-frame within a picture frame is reminiscent of Shakespeare's plays within plays, and possibly his monologues or asides to the audience. For Shakespeare (a favourite, or *the* favourite,<sup>33</sup> author of Bacon's), these forms within forms have different kinds of spaces within an overall artificial play framework, and reflect the spaces within spaces of the detritus imagery in the studio.

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<sup>33</sup> Peppiatt, in his short text about Bacon and Shakespeare, written for the *Francis Bacon en toutes lettres*, Paris 2019-20 wrote "Of all the literary influences on Francis Bacon, Shakespeare is undoubtedly the earliest and most pervasive." Peppiatt 2021, p.160; and in an interview from 1989 Peppiatt reports Bacon saying, "Shakespeare was such a phenomenon. He seems suddenly to have had the past and the future all rolled up together at one time. He was so extraordinary...what he says and his attitude to life seem so immediate and contemporary now." Ibid., p.175.

In any event, *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge* as a complete image shifts between a depiction of a figure in a place (or places), and a painterly exploration of surface, the place of making.

### 7.1.3/ Painting as place

Bacon's friend and author, Michel Leiris, writes:

“...Bacon's essential aim is not so much to produce a picture that will be an object worth looking at, as to use the canvas as a theatre of operations for the assertion of certain realities.”<sup>34</sup>

This means that we should consider Bacon's painting itself as place. Leiris makes a useful point, but instead of 'assertion' I would write *visualisation* or *finding*; keeping the 'theatre of operations' live until such times as the painting is brought to an articulate state – or at least a point that shows enough image to allow the viewer to carry the sense on in their reception of the work. Unlike a sketch or a quick study, as in his drawings in the Tate archive, Bacon's paintings are worked from edge to edge – across the whole picture plane. They are complete 'landscapes' in their own right, and they mirror the studio/home/making complex in various ways.

For example, we can understand all the parts of Bacon's working conditions as filters – the studio, himself, and the painting. Bacon's folding and opening of the images and detritus in his studio is mirrored in the act of painting – the chance operations – the slow filtering of events (as described by Günther) over time and place lead to the painting surfaces becoming, as Leiris says, a place of operations – repeated openings, edges, relations and

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<sup>34</sup> Leiris 1987, p.15.

transformations. The relations mirror the place and living conditions, methods, reflection processes. His painterly sense of movement and accumulation of marks across the surface create passages of apparently random shapes, volumes, colours and edges to filter and trap the image [see Figs 96 and 97]. The 'trap,' for Bacon, was set for capturing a live 'reality,' *not* for a conscious, dead illustration of it. In this respect, the trap and the filter are useful metaphors for Bacon's method.

In an interview with David Sylvester, Bacon stated that he had a fascination for filters:

There was a book I bought years and years ago...of images of filters – they were just filters of different kinds of liquids, but the way they were formed suggested all sorts of ways in which I could use the human body (after all, the human body is in a sense a filter...).<sup>35</sup>

Not just the human body, but (Bacon himself and) the body of the studio acted as filters – a way of catching an abundance of imagery – a filter of images of the world and wider cultural artifacts. Bacon filtered those images, the place (of his studio and home) and the atmosphere through his working methods.

Leiris also states:

The space in which we breathe and the time in which we live here and now: this is what we find, almost without exception in Bacon's pictures, which seem to aim at the immediate expression of something immediate...<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.223.

<sup>36</sup> Leiris 1987, p.17.

Vitality, that expression is of, *and by*, the thing itself – of the event unfolding. Hence the importance of the combination of the image, the paint and painted surface for Bacon, who talked about working in a haze of sensation, which meant that he wasn't essentially controlling the process, the event. Bacon, writing about Matthew Smith, was writing about his own intentions when he said that Smith was:

attempting to make idea and technique inseparable... a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa...the brush stroke creates the form...every movement of the brush on the canvas alters the space and implications of the image.<sup>37</sup>



Figures 96 and 97: Two details from *Triptych August 1972* (1972), Oil and sand on three canvases, Each 198.1 × 147.3cm (78 × 58 in.) Tate © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2025, Photos by the author, 24/07/24, at Tate Britain

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<sup>37</sup> Rothenstein 1953, p.12.



Figure 98: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985-86) Oil and aerosol paint on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.



Figure 99: Francis Bacon, centre panel from Fig 98, *Study for a Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985-86)

The image accrues through the sedimentation of Bacon's paintings and his painterly method – much like the images are filtered through the layers of the studio. He builds the paintings' front edge, the surface, which captures and traps the image. Caught in the making.

The idea of the painting as place is not new. As Edward Casey describes in *Representing Place* (2002):

...the physicality of the representing work, and more particularly the sensuous quality of its surface, is made to subserve the task of representation.

...paintings provide place not just by expressly pictorial means ... the represented place is conveyed *through another place*: the place of painting itself. And this latter place is constituted primarily by its sheer surface. ... the tenuous tissue, that ties together representing and represented places. ... The properties of this surface influence, as from a gravitational ground, the qualities of the pictorial space that appears by its means. The pictorial space, configured as represented place, is not so much superimposed on this ground as *allowed to arise from it*. [my italics]<sup>38</sup>

This last sentence sounds very similar to Bacon's stated method of finding, or constituting, the work in the making process. 'The pictorial space...is not...superimposed...[but] allowed to arise from it' talks of the canvas surface, which is a place or environment, but for Bacon, the imagery *and* the process of arriving at it arise from the local environment. The studio as canvas.

Further, despite the painted surface as place already a consideration for earlier artists, Bacon takes this further in his technical and procedural methods and makes it primary

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<sup>38</sup> Casey 2002, p.121.

rather than 'subservient' as Casey describes. For example, unlike most painters Bacon used the reverse side of a prepared canvas (the 'underside/inside'?) which problematised the surface/body relationship, as Lawrence Gowing noted: "Bacon was painting now on defiantly raw and unprepared canvas. The paint soiled it or clogged it uncouthly."<sup>39</sup> So, the surface was not passively receptive to the application of paint as a primed, white canvas would usually be, but added its own problems, colour and material qualities. Practically speaking, using the reverse side of a primed canvas changes the application of paint, and oil and acrylic paints had different issues, for example, the speed and 'ease' of application; drying time and continuity of single flat colour field; absorption of paint into the surface; as well as the final texture and qualities of the paint/surface relation. Bacon's techniques were multiple, and very specific to the working process which was invented over a long period of time and place. The ground/surface for Bacon extended beyond the canvas surface as his various painterly and preparatory techniques took in, or developed from, the place around him.

In the next section I will look at the idea of landscape in Bacon's late work. As part of this discussion, I will turn again to Edward Casey and compare his ideas about a Willem de Kooning painting with Bacon's *Sand Dune* (1983). Part of his response to de Kooning's painting is in terms of mapping – particularly an idea about the main figure of his painting dragging itself across a ground. Casey states: "...to know the surface of anything – not just paper, but the earth itself as a geographic surface – we must drag a physical body directly over that surface in such a way as to trace a path there, make a trail."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Gowing 1989, p.17.

<sup>40</sup> Casey 2005, p.146.

This body can be human, or it can be a brush or other item, as an extension of ourselves, which we could drag across a surface. Although Casey is talking about the sensuous mapping of the earth, he is also talking about image making. And it is interesting to note that Bacon often used his (gloved) hands as well as brushes and fabrics to apply paint, so for Bacon, the body and various materials would have been used to develop and respond to the surface. But more than this, he didn't just drag a brush across a surface but, as previously discussed, he also threw and sprayed paint, used pastel on the surface which caused pigment dust to collect on the floor and hang in the air, and he swept up dust from the studio floor to add to the paint. The surface extended to atmosphere – his practice was atmospherically place bound, not just floor or canvas bound. The surface edge ran throughout the work and the studio, and as discussed in chapter 5, the atmosphere of the studio was included in that edge. This environment was an all-inclusive landscape, and this landscape was visualised in his later landscape paintings, as I will discuss in the next section.

## 7.2/ Landscapes

“... the relation of modern man with nature can only be revised when he experiences himself as nature.”<sup>41</sup>

In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* Gilles Deleuze suggests some late landscapes by Bacon start to find a different figurative response. In Chapter 5, *Recapitulative Note: Bacon's Periods and Aspects*, Deleuze states:

There will be...a very recent fourth period. ... Suppose the Figure had effectively disappeared, leaving behind only a vague trace of its former presence. ... The fact that we are familiar with only a few instances of this new organisation in Bacon's work must not make us rule out that this is a nascent period, which would be characterised by an “abstraction” that no longer has any need of the Figure.<sup>42</sup>

At this point Deleuze says he is looking at *Landscape* (1978), *Jet of Water* (1979), *Sand Dune* (1981), *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982), *Water Flowing from a Faucet* (1982), and *Sand Dune* (1983). For the present research I am specifically interested in the ‘natural’ landscapes of that set: *Landscape* (1978) [Fig 101], *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982) [Fig 104] and particularly *Sand Dune* (1983) [Fig 106]. My line of thinking differs from Deleuze in that the reading I am arguing sees this set of paintings, not so much as a new period of work as Deleuze defines them, but as a realisation of the implicit relations of figure and place that have been evolving in Bacon's work over previous decades. The difference lies in the focus that Deleuze has on the Figure as opposed to my focus on Place. For Deleuze the body defines

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<sup>41</sup> Bohme 2018, p.115.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze 2003, pp.30-31.

the human figure, even if he has a sense of 'surrounding' Figure, or the Figural. This returns him to suggested narratives or stories *within* the paintings as a way of making sense of the images. My argument however, as laid out in the previous section of this chapter, is that the area that Deleuze calls the Figure (which is larger than the body) is really an imaginary transition between figure and place which *allows for* our usual understanding of the body but really finds this accepted image as problematic. Bacon's 'body' depiction is the issue, the questioned 'given' he has dealt with over much of his career – and this figure image finally gives over to the whole image. Seen from the angle of place first, there is no isolation, no becoming, no escape or hysteria (as Deleuze understands Bacon), except for the problem of visualising the placed experience, the figure as place.

This section explores the notion of the figure/place as landscape as developed by Bacon in the later works. This image of the figure-place is not where the two separate things become united, but rather a single complex divided, to be seen externally – at an 'artificial' distance. These images stand outside nature, as a model, to visualise the way that the figure is totally embedded – totally habitat – the studio being a surrogate environment.

It is in these late landscapes that Bacon encapsulates the move in his work from interiorised culture within a wider landscape (as envisaged in *Painting* (c.1930), [Fig 100] for example), to its reverse: a landscape visualised within a cultural space. This transition was brought about mostly by Bacon's Reece Mews work (especially the portraits) where he explored the edges of person and place in terms of his (and, by way of analogy, our) experience, as we have seen in the previous chapters and sections.

Gernot Böhme outlines our recent problems of our relations to nature. In *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, he writes:

The more civilisation proceeded, the more nature became distant. It was this thing out there – beyond the town walls, on the other side of civilisation, the wild matter not appropriated by work or shaped by technical methods. ... We have also kept the nature that we are ourselves at a distance... We can only get to know the nature that we are ourselves through self-experience: through physically feeling it. ... Where does the language come from to articulate these experiences?<sup>43</sup>

The nature we are ourselves is something Bacon has visualised for most of his career. But often it was depicted in terms of the human figure in its animal and bodily senses. Bacon tellingly outlined a hierarchy of subject matter for his work in the 1966 interview (no 2) with Sylvester, when he said “...landscapes interest me much less. I think art is an obsession with life and after all, as we are human beings, our greatest obsession is with ourselves. Then possibly with animals, and then with landscapes.”<sup>44</sup>

In Bacon’s late landscapes the body has gone – not in a single ‘dissolved’ way, as in *turned into* – but now as a multiplicity of different modes and connections – and contradictions. The spaceframe still exists – there is division, just not in terms of the usually defined body.

### 7.2.1/ *Landscape* (1978) and *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982)

Although Bacon does not rule out landscapes as potential stand-alone subjects, he prioritises the human being, and so our reading of these late landscapes should keep that in mind and possibly consider them as figure-scapes. There are several points to make about

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<sup>43</sup> Böhme 2018, p.112.

<sup>44</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.72.

*Landscape* (1978) [Fig 101] which is the first of the three paintings I want to discuss here, particularly in light of Böhme's articulation of the 'self-experience' idea.

Bacon's image of placed experience is referenced in several ways in this painting:

First, we need to consider the central image. Bacon speaks about the image of the grass which he used in this painting, and the later version *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982) [Fig 104], which was a scrap of photograph on the floor in the studio:

It was a marvellous photograph I had of grass, and the photograph had got torn up and it formed to some extent the shape that the grass has. It kept on being trampled on so much in all the chaos of where I work, and, when I pulled it out, it had practically all fallen away, but there was just this sort of fragment of grass left.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 100: Francis Bacon, *Painting*, (c.1930) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 101: Francis Bacon, *Landscape* (1978) Oil and pastel on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.183.

The 'fragment of grass' that was left had clearly been through the studio dynamics that Günther outlines, so was as much studio-place as it was photo-place or nature-place. In fact, the edges of the grass form are similar to some of the self-portrait edges, particularly the cusp edge as in the right panel of the triptych *Three Studies for Self Portrait* (1975) [Fig 81]. This shape takes on an even more accentuated form in the *Waste Land* painting. The shape of the grass form seems to be as important as the grass itself, its survival as an important fragment, held within a spaceframe. Both landscape paintings also incorporate Bacon's signature torn newspaper, this time in the grass, not on the studio floor.

Bacon adds direction and visual compression to *Landscape* (1978) by using two arrows, towards the top, facing down, and at the bottom, facing up. These suggest a clear verticality (less usual for a landscape painting, this one being painted in a 'portrait format') and may obliquely refer to Reece Mews' verticality of skylight and floor detritus imagery. The blue sky and clouds, from the skylight, would have been the only link in the studio to the outside world, and, as quoted above, the grass patch was taken from a damaged photograph from the studio floor, so refers to external landscape, but also the internal studio. The verticality of the image also fits with the camera obscura relationship to Reece Mews discussed in Chapter 4, pp.107-108.

Bacon uses a black background which appears to refer to the Cinerama<sup>46</sup> film screens of the time. It is interesting that it is dark, without image. In this case it pushes the grass towards our reality, while its blackness speaks of interior, the cinema itself, but also of the distances of outer space. The sketchy white against the blue in the top section could refer to clouds –

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<sup>46</sup> Cappock notes that a torn fragment, with a spaceframe drawn over it, was found in Bacon's studio was from the Cinerama premiere programme, 1952. Cappock 2005, pp.123, 124.

but also looks, certainly in reproduction, something like the well-known planet earth photographs from 1960s/70s NASA imagery [Fig 102]. The roundness of the room now reads as earth and sky, and the earth and sky read of cinema and photography – artificial renderings of the ‘natural’ world.



Figure 102: NASA, *The Blue Marble* (1972) Photograph by Apollo 17 crew, public domain



Figure 103: Cinerama screen: Scene from the film *This is Cinerama* from 3 projectors (1952, re-released 1972), 35mm scan by Chemical Engineer, public domain

*Landscape* (1978) uses Bacon's journeying into photographs to find their own sense of place, (as discussed in Chapter 5, p.157, where he reflects on each work, taking time to enter them and wander within them), to bring together an artificial, culturally determined

world, which he brings back to a 'natural' realm – a landscape of placed experience – through the material of paint. Bacon, in his 'abbreviation' of images calls on his own, and the viewer's, visual memory and brings that back into a material presence, through the paint, alive with a vitality and itself a new compost. This is his realism, the immediacy of his language, and why illustration was anathema to him.

It is interesting to note that this painting went through a couple of stages of finish. In the *Interviews with Sylvester*, Bacon says:

I had it brought back to the studio... The first time, the background colour was a kind of fawn – it was the *colour of canvas* – but I felt I wanted it to be much more artificial. So...I added that whole very intense surround of cobalt blue, which I felt made it look more completely artificial and unreal. *I wanted that really strong blue to take all the naturalism out of it.* [my italics]<sup>47</sup>

So, the ground was changed from the "colour of canvas," which would have clearly related the image to taking place on Michel Leiris' 'field of operations'<sup>48</sup> (the canvas surface plane), to an artificial cobalt blue. The ground colour then becomes a final and definitive character-place in the painting, and it might be significant to remember that this 'artificial' blue is the opposite of his favourite orange on the colour wheel, which I have previously connected (in Chapter 4) to the Reece Mews studio.

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<sup>47</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.183.

<sup>48</sup> Leiris 1987, p.15.



Figure 104: Francis Bacon, *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982) Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 105: Figure 104 with annotations by the author

The second of the three landscape paintings to be discussed is *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982) [Fig 104], which is a later version of *Landscape* (1978) as it repeats the main aspects of that painting. However, the later painting is even more simplified, bringing the grass form forward almost as if it touches the picture plane; removing the spaceframe (or possibly merging it with the picture frame); and painting the previous wall/sky area in a mottled blue/purple/red colouration. Bacon also accentuates the ‘plinth’ supporting structure of the grass area – the last remnant of the interior forms from the 1978 painting. It is interesting to note that pentimenti [see Fig 105] in this painting show that it also probably started as a more overtly ‘interior’ landscape image. From reproductions it is possible to see two curved walls meeting at a gap or doorway – again with the Cinerama cinema screen shape. So, when the walls are painted out, the image changes from a room/landscape to a landscape

which includes the curvature of the earth, its (our) widest horizon. The detritus fragment of grass from the studio floor (complete with torn newspaper) has grown to global proportions. As Casey writes:

Horizons share with the ground under our feet the distinction of being avatars of the earth's edge... Both horizon and ground, acting in concert, count fully as the earth's edge. ... [the] edge of presentation in which the whole (the earth) is immanent in a part (the ground on which I stand).<sup>49</sup>

The 'plinth' edge of the grass form links studio and earth, but also image, painting surface (edge) and frame. The geography of the painting itself (again, Leiris' field of operations) and the various depictions of place through visual means (photographs, and diagrams – as indicated by the arrows) align the layers of place(s) from painted surface to studio to earth's horizon. Bacon's 'compost,' his 'heap of broken images,'<sup>50</sup> is connected to the painted surface, his studio place, culture and nature.

### 7.2.2/ *Sand Dune* (1983)

The final landscape painting in this group is *Sand Dune* (1983) [Fig 106], where Bacon brings the figure, landscape and studio together in a highly condensed image. An idea about the combination of a figure and a wide-open desert landscape had been in Bacon's mind for many years, as demonstrated by his statement to David Sylvester in Interview 2 from 1966: "And in a way you would love to be able in a portrait to make a Sahara of the appearance – to make it so like, yet seeming to have the distances of the Sahara."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Casey 2017, p.281.

<sup>50</sup> Eliot, V., (ed) *The Waste Land: a facsimile and transcript of the original drafts* (2010), p.135.

<sup>51</sup> Sylvester 2016, p.65.

It is my contention that *Sand Dune* realises the culmination of a line of interest in Bacon's work – the place-figure, an interior as living, organic place – the Sahara in a room; the landscape in a box. As Bacon speaks about his connection with the portrait and the Sahara and the idea of a landscape in a box,<sup>52</sup> it is a small step to understanding the full conjunction between the figure, landscape and boxed space. Bacon's ultimate portrait then is an image of a condensed version of these, sentient place.

The infinity of visual connections within Bacon's studio detritus imagery is itself an image of this portrait-landscape in a box.<sup>53</sup> The portrait is of the studio, with the studio as creative agent, where Bacon's role, as Batache stated, was as 'a vessel through which an image took shape.'

It seems quite clear that the painting brings together a body image and a desert dune image, as the central form can be read as both figure and landscape. I suggest that Bacon reused an existing body, as he had been recycling images for some years, and had them pinned on the walls around him for that purpose.<sup>54</sup> The main figure form in *Sand Dune* had already been used, for example, in *Kneeling Figure – Back View* (c. 1982) [Fig 107] and *Study from the Human Body* (1983)<sup>55</sup> [Fig 108]. The figures in these two paintings demonstrate Bacon's ability to think spatially about the figure images as he develops another version of

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<sup>52</sup> Bacon speaks about the Sahara in terms of the portrait, and more generally about landscape "I've thought about painting a landscape in a box,... 'sea and landscape are infinite but if you could enclose their infinity in a box they would have a greater concentration.'" Davies in Harrison 2021, p.192.

<sup>53</sup> This connects back to the 'Baroque unlimited interior' that Otto Bollnow describes (see Chapter 4, pages 98-99).

<sup>54</sup> In Interview 2 (1966) Sylvester asks: "There are some reproductions of your own paintings among all the photographs lying around the studio. Do you sometimes look at those while you're working?" Bacon replies: "I do very often... I very often find that I can work from photographs of my own works that have been done years before, and they become very suggestive." Sylvester 2016, p.43.

<sup>55</sup> A reproduction of this painting, pinned to the kitchen wall, can be clearly seen in a photograph by Perry Ogdon in John Edwards' *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio* (2001) on pp.94-95.

these figures, reversed and angled 45 degrees, in the *Sand Dune* painting (see Figs 107, 108, 109).

It seems that some of Bacon's working process, as Günther explains, was slower and often more methodical than is generally thought. Having imagery all around him suggested forms and images to paint – the studio/home bristled with imagery, but the process of preparing images sometimes involved image manipulation. John Edwards recalls that Bacon “would sometimes draw on tracing paper, slowly mirroring images underneath.”<sup>56</sup> I suggest that the central figure in *Sand Dune* was traced and reversed from either the *Kneeling Figure* or *Study from the Human Body* paintings. A tracing giving him a clear starting point for that pose.

In fact, the *Kneeling Figure* in particular, also has the same kind of paint handling as *Sand Dune* – a semi-transparent amorphous quality of skin, where the paint is softly brushed over the surface to obtain an unfocused quality. In addition, a similar spaceframe is copied across from *Kneeling Figure* to *Sand Dune*, and Bacon brings the bare, hanging lightbulb into both paintings. All three paintings have the same orange ground, which, as discussed earlier in the section on atmospheres, I believe align these paintings with the studio.

In *Sand Dune* Bacon exchanges the placing of the blue 'sky' and the orange interior atmosphere to reinforce the artificiality of the image and place the open landscape within the studio room. The body/dune spills across the painting both held in the spaceframe on the left, and exceeding it at the bottom and the right sides. The structure of the spaceframe takes on an architectural reading, having some sort of rigidity, as an exoskeleton or building

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<sup>56</sup> Edwards 2001, p.13.

framework and this contrasts with the amorphous body or shifting sand of the central image. Similarly, Casey writes, in *The World on Edge*, in contrast to the ‘immutable’ mountains: “...the dunes’ edges alter their configuration with passing winds and in keeping with the season.”<sup>57</sup> The dunes’ edges, its particular identity, are transitory, vulnerable and liable to be swept away. The vulnerability of the human figure has been central to Bacons’ work at least since the early 1950s and now the figure/studio is a mutable landscape.



Figure 106: Francis Bacon, *Sand Dune* (1983) CR 83-05, Oil, pastel and dust on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

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<sup>57</sup> Casey 2017, p.279.



Figure 107: reversed image of Figure 88: *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) CR 82-11



Figure 108: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body* (1983) CR 83-02, Oil, pastel and aerosol paint on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 109: reverse of Fig 108, *Study from the Human Body* (1983)

To analyse *Sand Dune* further it would be useful to refer, again, to Edward Casey where he talks about 'earth mapping' and 'absorbptive mapping' in his book *Earth Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (2005).<sup>58</sup> In a chapter titled *Absorptive versus Cartographic Mapping: Willem de Kooning on Bodies Moving in the Landscape* Casey writes about 'painting as a mode of mapping'<sup>59</sup> in relation to *Two Figures in a Landscape* (1967) [Fig 110].

Casey describes de Kooning's right-hand figure in *Two Figures in a Landscape* as a body crawling across the ground. He says: "this ...body...is the map by which it proceeds, since it actively embodies the knowledge it gains by its own exploration. This is literally grounded knowledge – knowledge of the earth gained from the ground up by the body that moves upon it."<sup>60</sup> The first sentence of that quote is a good description of Bacon's process and the surface of his paintings, as the image maps its own created territory. Bacon's 'mapping' is a sensory relation with place.

There are some similarities between *Sand Dune* (1983) and the de Kooning painting, but there are some important differences that help us understand Bacon's placedness and detachment through the articulation of the spaceframe. De Kooning's figure has some resemblance to Bacon's *Sand Dune*, and it is helpful to remember that they knew each other's works, and there was some overlap in terms of figurative painting where they both explored the material of paint and its application to canvas in relation to the human body at a time of late Modernist abstraction.<sup>61</sup> But more specifically in these two paintings there is a

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<sup>58</sup> Casey, E.S. (2005) *Earth Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*. Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>61</sup> Stevens and Swan state that, "Bacon was interested in meeting the Dutch-born Willem de Kooning, who also maintained a connection to the figure and whom Bacon called 'the great man in the United States, for bursting through the abstract and planting an image on the canvas.' He was prepared to drink and argue with de Kooning during his visit to London..." Stevens and Swan 2022, p.425; but more incisively Hugh Davies notes

visual connection between de Kooning's crawling body and Bacon's *Sand Dune* body. That is, if we reverse the de Kooning painting we can see that the *Sand Dune* 'figure' takes a very similar pose [see Figs 111 and 112]. I'm not suggesting that Bacon took de Kooning's figure, but looking at these two figures does help us compare the different approaches to figure and place that both artists seem to be visualising.



Figure 110: Willem de Kooning, *Two Figures in a Landscape* (1967) Oil on canvas, 178 x 203cm, object no. A 26087, Stedelijk Gallery, Amsterdam, ©The Willem de Kooning Foundation/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Bacon saying, "I don't think that his (de Koonings) Women are successful, they're too impersonal, never factual, too near to abstraction, too generalised." Davies in Harrison 2009, p.117.



Figure 111: painting as Fig 106 *Sand Dune*

Figure 112: reversed de Kooning painting *Two Figures in a Landscape* (Figure 110) for comparison with Fig 111

The similarity of the main figure forms in *Sand Dune* and *Two Figures in a landscape* demonstrate the difference of a unified field, a single state image, in the de Kooning, as opposed to an articulated placedness in the Bacon. The de Kooning uses a traditional image space, however manipulated and broken the visual field – it is a scene within a rectangular frame that signifies a single visual event. Bacon, however, uses two sets of devices that split into figurative associations and abstract concepts. He employs contrasting devices from both traditional painting iconography (figure and ground) and classic graphic iconography (diagrammatic forms – arrows, spaceframe and flat oval shape) to split and re-unite the pictorial space. But the split is not along clear lines, as it cuts across the overall image in various paths or relations. The dune/figure is clearly a painterly construct which reflects two grounds – the internal blue sky and the external orange room – the colours are literally reflected in the body/dune form, so all three are linked. The lightbulb and shadows also conform to the painting iconography in their manner of depiction. In contrast, the

spaceframe, arrow shape and flat blue disc at the bottom of the painting belong to graphic visual languages which are not usually used in traditional naturalistic depictions or scenes. The placing of these graphic forms causes them to relate to each other across the pictorial space – the spaceframe outlines an enclosure that sits on the orange ground which helps to suggest a floor and figure/dune space, the arrow floats in the blue sky area and points down the figure/dune form towards the blue disc which is below and partially behind the ‘knee’ of the dune. In another partial reversal of reading, Bacon paints the orange room atmosphere as a flat area which makes it part of the graphic language set as well as part of the painting iconography. The two language systems are woven across the pictorial space together as a unified painting, but the languages speak of their own systems and open fractures in that pictorial unity. There is a tension of readings for the viewer – and this is compounded by the ambiguous spatial reading which sets the dune and sky within the orange room/studio ground (with its ever-present bulb and light pull). This duality of iconography is often read by commentators as an isolation of the figure from the ground – but I maintain that this is an important core point for Bacon and his placed sensory figure. The ground and figure are not visualised as *the same* or *homogenous*, as we might consider the de Kooning crawling figure and its earth ground which are painted in a similar fashion across the canvas, but Bacon makes them different – and it is the difference that he questions and highlights. This difference, as an articulation of place, needs to be made visible to open up the space. It is through *Sand Dune* that Bacon questions the body itself – a figureless figure painting, a place-figure or a landscape within landscapes. Where edges are finite *and* amorphous.

These contradictions and dichotomies run through Bacon’s works, and, to come back to Casey’s point about de Kooning, Bacon is also mapping – but not just a sensuous one to one

singularity – rather, a complex sensory zone is split to allow atmosphere and air between various mappings which overlay each other. It is only in this overlay of systems that we begin to see the complex nature of visualising placedness.

This idea of overlaid systems and visualisations is something Katharina Günther's research into Bacon's studio methods supports. Günther outlines the way Bacon appropriates images from various sources, often decayed or in the throes of destruction from the studio floor, but also from books and magazines kept there which comprised an encyclopaedic range of subjects and genres. These images are often not appropriated in complete form but are sections that are visually stitched together as he painted onto the canvas. Various environments and even sections of bodies were brought together from very different sources in the painting process. So, the complex mapping that Bacon creates has evolved from his placed methods, and ends up in the mapped object, the painted and performed surface.

Casey writes about his idea of absorbtive mapping, for de Kooning (and earlier landscape artists) that it is about place "in terms of how it is concretely experienced by those who live there. ...how it feels to be in a place...within its immediate ambience. ...*the lived body is all over the place* – spread throughout a given place..." [my italics].<sup>62</sup>

The question here is not about whether Bacon's painting was about being in place or not, but about how that being in place needed to be, or could be, visualised in the painting. For Bacon, the idea that *the lived body is all over the place* is not gathered as a single experience but mapped in multiple perspectives.

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<sup>62</sup> Casey 2005, p.150.

Bacon was a very singular artist whose work took a different approach to figuration than most of those around him. None of the other 'London School' artists created such a complex visualisation of the experience of being, therefore pushing the visual language of figurative art. Whereas Lucien Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff for example, continued the tradition of a single visual space in their figure paintings – where handling and imagery were homogenous from canvas edge to edge, Bacon developed a language that divided figure and place to extremes which opened up this realm of Place as depicted and enacted in the making and the viewing. Bacon's work is similar to a three-dimensional puzzle, where each disparate element is interlocked with the other.

This Sentient Place chapter set out the main points of this thesis, where Bacon's studio environment is seen as a force and focus of some of his later work and a development of an idea in his oeuvre from his earliest years.

In Bacon's late works the human figure, visualised as a traditionally delineated body, is questioned. Instead, a figurative image rises out of place – one that requires a rethinking of the image of the body as a limited understanding of the relation of the human figure and its environment.

What Bacon achieves here, I believe, is close to something that Jeff Malpas outlines in *Place and Experience* when he writes: "our dependence on place is something that always remains implicit or that can only be explicated with great difficulty."<sup>63</sup> Malpas' term 'dependence' is

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<sup>63</sup> Malpas 2018, p.181.

probably wrong in this situation – as it is too body-centred, but his meaning about the problematic explication of place is clear.

The next chapter, Practice-based Research, looks at my own visual responses to Bacon's work in light of his studio relationship. I look at a few of the large-scale drawings that I made after visiting the Hugh Lane Gallery installation of Bacon's studio as well as closer looking at some of Bacon's paintings (and drawings). There is nothing as good as drawing from the subject to help you see, so the drawings were a different way of researching the ideas in this thesis, and a different way of communicating outcomes as well.

## Chapter 8: Practice-based research

“Bacon once observed that ‘to create something ... is a sort of echo from one artist to another’.”<sup>1</sup>

As part of my research into the relationship of Bacon to his studio, through the material culture of his studio and paintings, and alongside theories and commentaries by Bacon scholars and interpreters, I have also used drawing as a way of expanding and defining that research. The drawings are a way of visually examining the studio as object, as lived environment/landscape and its relation to Bacon’s output, as well as an exploration of ways of developing a language of figurative artwork that visualises place as a particular landscape – an image of placed experience.

Although Bacon’s medium is specifically painting – both as action and as material – my ‘home’ medium is drawing, and I chose to develop this part of the research through drawing as a way of approaching Bacon’s work and not copying it. So, the drawings are a translation process – as well as a documentary or a capturing of a physical place – an interpretation of the Bacon landscape in terms of his studio. I have taken some pictorial elements from specific Bacon works but only as starting points (and for specific investigations) and I have aimed to use drawing as an analytical tool with a distance from Bacon but a closeness to my own earlier practice and to reflect my slower and more measured studio activity. These are working drawings although they appear to be finished artworks in their own right.

Although writing in a different context, about practice as alchemical thinking, it is worth keeping in mind the point that Danielle Boutet makes in her essay *Metaphors of the Mind*,

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<sup>1</sup> Hammer 2011, n.p.

when thinking about the way the drawings help my research. Boutet writes that creative practice is “not the kind of thinking where one finds *answers* to *questions*, but rather where one contemplates and experiences situations, themes or feeling complexes (or ways of being).”<sup>2</sup>

My working process reflects some of Bacon’s methods (for instance, manipulating found images, as detailed by Cappock and Günther, for example) where I use photographs to explore a relation to the place within the image and to the way it is articulated and given presence, a new life. My manipulation is through my own photographs and found imagery which are combined and processed using a computer drawing and image editing programme. Although this process is not physically manipulating objects, it does allow me to manipulate imagery using set methods that are limited in application but less so in outcomes. So far, the images I have been dealing with derive from Bacon’s studio and his paintings, and not my own studio. This would be a logical next step in the developing process of this research.

The drawings are a continuous series named and numbered *Francis Bacon Studio Study* (FBSS) 1 to 20 (so far). Only the most recent will be included in this analysis, which I enumerate here, in reverse order, from the most recent back. [NB. FBSS17 was abandoned unfinished.]

These drawings mark a return to one of my earliest activities as an artist – large scale drawing - but also develop out of more recent work which took the form of digital imaging, output as light boxes. The colour that I started to use for these drawings comes from both

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<sup>2</sup> Barrett 2013, p.30.

the lightbox idea of colour as a physical object affecting the atmosphere of the space in front of the artwork, and as a response to Bacon's paintings as visualising atmosphere. Hence the very strong colour palette used. It is important to remember that reproductions of artworks, both Bacon's and my own, will lose some primarily important information – scale, material and touch/surface – and relation to the body.

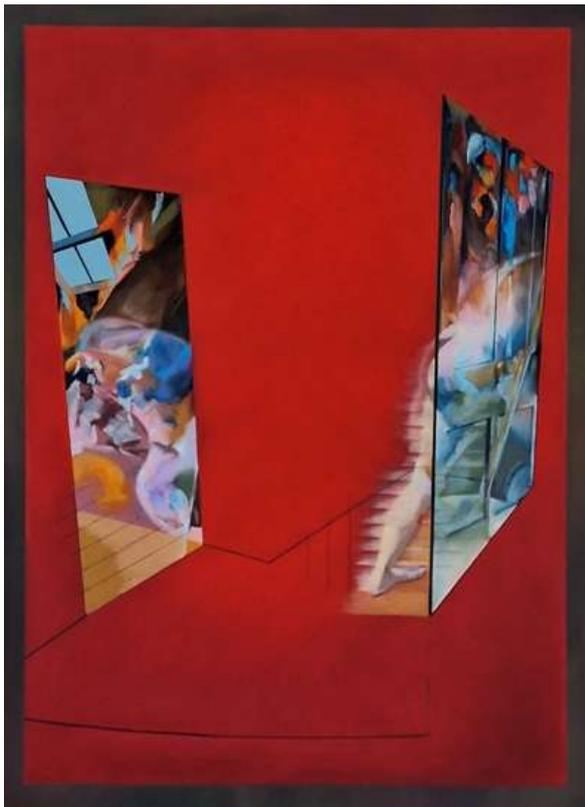


Figure 113: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 19* (2025), ink and pastel on paper, 149 x 105 cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

Figure 114: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 20* (2025) (unfinished state), ink and pastel on paper, 149 x 105 cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

*FBSS19* (2025) is a single drawing which follows on from *FBSS18* by removing the figure element from the central focal area which is taken over by the place itself. The image is based on the Reece Mews hallway, influenced by Bacon's painting *Study from the Human Body (Man Turning on Light)* (1973) [Fig 47] and referencing *Study from the Human Body*

(1981) [Fig 54]. *FBSS20* (2025) is an unfinished drawing, a version of *FBSS19* but reversing the idea of painterly and non-painterly areas and focusing on atmosphere.



Figure 115: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 18* (2024), ink and pastel on paper, each panel 192 x 108 cm, overall 340cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

*FBSS18* (2024) set out to create simplified images that encapsulate the way that Bacon and the place worked. Each section of this triptych is based on a different angle of Bacon's studio, and uses different coloured 'grounds', based on Bacon paintings, to explore various senses of atmosphere. Unfortunately, the Hugh Lane reconstruction of the studio is unable to demonstrate any lighting changes that must have taken place in its original setting, as it is situated within a white cube gallery space. Although reasonably constant for Bacon to work, the studio light will have changed with the weather and time of day, affecting the space and altering its character and working conditions – through heat, light quality and direction.

As Gernot Böhme writes: "If atmosphere is to develop in a concrete space or a location which addresses us a certain way, the illumination of the space or location is of fundamental importance. It is the colours of light, its distribution, intensity, concentration—or, as the

case may be, its diffusivity—that lend a certain atmosphere to space or an environment.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, I wanted to explore Bacon’s abbreviated visualisation of the room’s atmosphere, and mark how that will have changed both from the movement of the sun and from his own movement within the place. Very few triptychs or sets of multiple paintings by Bacon have different grounds, as he usually used the grounds to read across the images to visually hold them together, but as I was using different views of a single space, I felt that the change of atmosphere/colour would constitute a kind of temporal movement in the drawings.

The triptych was designed from left to right so that the panels contain the whole place. The left panel image is based on the easel and its relation to the studio doorway, as seen from the storage area near the (blocked) windows. The centre panel uses paper detritus from the studio floor overlaid on top of each other and embedded into that is an image of the central figure from Seurat’s *Bathers at Asnières* (1884) [Fig 116], which was a favourite painting of Bacon’s and mine.<sup>4</sup> The right panel is based on an image of the back wall of the studio where Bacon’s round mirror sat on a set of shelves.

The black lines derive from Bacon’s spaceframes locking in the more ‘malerisch’ drawing sections with the flat planes of colour. They also suggest shifting perspectives which cause ambiguous senses of placement and align with a visual movement on the picture surface, while visualising possible directions that one would see while moving through the space. They also suggest invisible connections between things. This leads me back to my use of the Seurat figure. My early interest in this painting led me to identify a simple structure that

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<sup>3</sup> Böhme, G. (2014) ‘Light and Space. On the Phenomenology of Light.’ *Dialogue and Universalism*. 24. 62-73. 10.5840/du201424491., p.16.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of *Une Baignade, Asnières* (1883-84) was found in Bacon’s studio. Harrison 2008, p.172.

Seurat may have used to isolate the central figure and give the image a feeling of enclosure [see my annotations in Fig 117]. I wondered if Bacon had subconsciously made a similar connection. The central figure is also slightly out of scale with the other figures, giving it an awkward relation to them.



Figure 116: Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières* (1884), oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, inventory no. NG3908, © National Gallery, London

Figure 117: Copy of Fig 115 *Bathers at Asnières*, with annotations by the author

Through these simple forms of isolating the central figure, Seurat successfully combines several figures in the same image without compromising the main figure's focal singularity and importance. Something Bacon would have admired.

Although I have referenced the human figure in some of my drawings, they mainly focus on the idea that "When we inhabit something it is no longer an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relation to other objects in the world."<sup>5</sup> This becomes clearer when we consider being alone within a space and how this differs from when we are with someone else in the same space. That aloneness allows a greater sensation and inclusion into the atmosphere of place.

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<sup>5</sup> Malpas 2006, p.27.

The other idea that I was interested in exploring in this drawing, as mentioned above, was the relationship between the flat colour planes and the more 'painterly' sections. This idea flips from object description to sensory experience. Of course, the two are brought together through heightened colour and connecting lines – but these oppositions aim to capture the extremes of place (as Bacon does), in this case figure and room edge. The black lines weave another place between them, and I equate these with the spaceframes and a questioning, provisional (and artificial, in Bacon's term) edge of interface between figure and place.

My drawings help the research by acting in a similar way to the spaceframes – they are studies, provisional trials of the interpretations and considerations made. They act as edges between Bacon's place and my own. Towards a definition of both.



Figure 118: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 16* (2023), Ink and pastel on paper, 108 x 192cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS16** (2023) [Fig.118] is essentially a triptych in one drawing, which used three viewpoints to explore the whole studio interior with its narrow structure and focused energy. Visual elements from various Bacon works are explored in this drawing. The central element is

from Bacon's *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986) [Fig. 64] as it primarily focused on the pathway between his studio chair and his easel, as discussed in chapter 4. That painting was one of the most 'abbreviated' images that Bacon made, and that reduction is something that I began to understand as more expressive of atmosphere and started to emulate in this drawing, and which was taken further in *FBSS18* [Fig.115].

Other elements (devices/motifs) that I incorporated from Bacon include the striations/panelling and floorboards which he repeated throughout most of his oeuvre. They had become synonymous with studios and particularly Reece Mews. In my drawing the floorboards lay across the top of a suggestion of the random newspapers strewn across his path, to emphasise the direction and the repeated patterns in his studio and paintings. The floorboard lines are repeated into the 'background' as wall panelling and up into the ceiling where the top orange/red triangular shapes derive from his raised roof structure.

The left and right sections use line drawings of the studio door and the mirror and skylight respectively. The door section is based on Duchamp's *Door: 11, rue Larrey* (1927) (image illustrated in Harrison, *Incunabula*, p.118), which Bacon had an image of and used in *Triptych – Studies from the Human Body* (1970)<sup>6</sup>. The incandescent bulb light of the hallway is contrasted with the blue panel on the right which includes the skylight.

There are three repeated semi-circular shapes that link to the mirror shape and Bacon's use of round floors (horizons) in many of his paintings. These shapes help define particular points, or zones of confinement, within the larger place, while adding a sense of dynamic to the overall image. Finally, there are some landscape elements to the left and right of the

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<sup>6</sup> Private collection. See: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/triptych-studies-human-body-0> [Accessed 04/10/25]

central path and in the semi-circular shape on the right. These refer to the way that Bacon amalgamated interior and exterior imagery throughout his works.



Figure 119: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 15 (2023)*, ink and pastel on paper, 136 x 106cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS15** (2023) [Fig.119] looks at the idea of a set of spaces, nested within a larger general sense of specific place as discussed in Chapter 4.1 The density of the studio/room was visualised through colour and shapes that suggest some studio objects as devices to anchor the image while also divorcing themselves from separate things to enable an exploration of sensation and atmosphere. Both FBSS15 and FBSS14 use circular forms – pools of light, ovoids, horizons...as reflecting the painter's movements or places of particular localised activity within the studio. Bacon's circular (arena) forms, that I'm identifying here with areas of the studio, were used by him alongside his spaceframes. Both are subsets of the larger space which might reflect similar ideas to a play within a play form (used by Shakespeare

whose work Bacon knew well and often quoted<sup>7</sup>) – as a way of articulating space through inner places. Open, but sometimes ambiguously complex architectural forms or enclosures, are often used by Bacon and take a position somewhere between the human figure and the framework of the paintings. The articulation of place, for Bacon, is achieved through compound place(s) where there is an ambiguity of alignment of a singular place with micro-places. This can be seen, for instance, in Bacon’s *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) [Fig 68] where the overall ‘ground’ colour (orange) is repainted with a slightly different version of that colour within the spaceframe form (as discussed in Chapter 7, section 7.1).



Figure 120: Kerry Andrews *Francis Bacon Studio Study 14 (2022/24)*, ink and pastel on paper, 145 x 167cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS14** (2022-24) [Fig.120] looks at the idea of articulated place through an extended use of ovoid forms which were a standard convention of Renaissance and post-Renaissance

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<sup>7</sup> Peppiatt, writing about Bacon and literature, says that Shakespeare was “the one towering figure whose work Bacon could actually quote and who, I believe had a deeper, more lasting impact on Bacon’s whole psyche than any other” Peppiatt 2021, p.160.

artworks up to and including Cezanne, and a formal device that Bacon used throughout his figures and in his arena shaped forms and architectures. As in FBSS15 [Fig.119], the ovoid forms in this drawing define zones within the larger space. The idea of moving through zones within a larger place, so seeing and sensing place as it appears to shift around, was the focus of this drawing. As Jeff Malpas writes:

Places are juxtaposed and intersect one with another, even as places also contain places. Thus, one can move inwards to find other places nested within a place, as well as move outwards to find a more encompassing locale. ... (the 'nesting' of places...is a significant point of connection between place and memory.)<sup>8</sup>

Looking at photos of the unfurnished Reece Mews studio it is apparent that the original space was two rooms – and these more or less align with the way Bacon organised the space – the front half as storage, the back half as working space. It is interesting that Bacon's easel and place of work were between the two halves – and almost in the studio doorway; in the juncture between three places.

FBSS14 [Fig.120] defines this layout through three distinct sections, but also entangles Bacon and his painting at the centre of the image through the incorporation of a suggestion of the figure from his painting *Study from the Human Body* (1981) [Fig. 54]. In that work Bacon ambiguously incorporates the figure into a doorway and a painting (which I connect to Reece Mews in Chapter 4.4), and my drawing similarly places the figure within a frame/alternative interior within a more illustrational depiction of his studio. Bacon's

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<sup>8</sup> Malpas 2018, p.33.

complex spatial sense in his painting abbreviates to a high degree his play of embeddedness in place and in painting. Those two 'places' are combined and yet separated by the figure, which is a single person, divided into two zones, and at least one of these zones is the picture within-the-picture idea that Bacon often uses to bring together levels of representation. This became part of the central motif in my drawing. That part of the drawing is flanked by two sections of the studio, thus becoming another triptych of sorts (as in FBSS16 [Fig.118]). The idea of the triptych format, either as three separate images or as three sections of a single image, leads to questions about encounter and multiplicity.

Malpas, again, sums up how a place can be visualised:

The complexity of place is mirrored in the complex process of triangulation and traverse by which the topographical surveyor builds up a map of the region being surveyed. No single sighting is sufficient to gain a view of the entire region, multiple sightings are required, and every sighting overlaps, to some extent, with some other sighting. ... It is only through such journeying, sighting, and re-sighting that place can be understood.<sup>9</sup>

My drawing looks at Bacon's studio in this geographical way. The triptych format of this single image reflects Bacon's early screen design of 1930; the curving lines (like Bacon's rails or arena shapes) set it as a shifting panel that swings on a pivot to move in both directions to the front and back of the studio space – following the movement of a figure in that space. The diagonal rectangular shape at the centre bottom of the drawing, refers to the light

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<sup>9</sup> Malpas 2018, p.39.

falling from the skylight as well as to the passage that Bacon walked from chair to easel (as used in drawings FBSS7 (2018-2019) [Fig.124], and FBSS16 [Fig.118]).

The drawing was re-worked in 2024 with the idea to lighten the central panel to act more like an image or separate space (place within a place). The colours and tones around the central section were darkened, but the handling turned more painterly and 'homely' in feel so the contrast between the central and flanking sections needed to be further worked to become more oppositional, to reflect Bacon's flat areas of colour against the more 'malerisch' figure sections.



Figure 121: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 12* (2021), ink and pastel on paper, 207 x 150cm, each drawing 105 x 70cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS12** (2021) [Fig.121] is a four-part drawing, taking four sheets of folded paper (detritus from the studio<sup>10</sup>), as visual starting point. These are combined with images of the studio and the spaceframe from *Water from a Running Tap* (1982)<sup>11</sup> to hold the fragments

<sup>10</sup> Cappock 2005, p.170.

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/water-running-tap>.

together. The image was a room within a room (nested place) – imagining the fragmented reality of the place as an internal frame full of fragments – a kind of filtering and catching of images. The idea of the studio and Bacon as filters relates to ideas in Chapter 7. The body, himself and the studio become combined in the idea of the filter. As Peppiatt notes: “Later, he came to see the body itself as ‘a kind of filter’, and no doubt his fascination with the various [industrial] filters was related to anthropomorphic associations they conjured up in his reverie.”<sup>12</sup>



Figure 122: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 11* (2020), triptych, ink and pastel on paper, each panel 130 x 93cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

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<sup>12</sup> Peppiatt 2008, p.89.



Figure 123: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 11*, right panel from a triptych, ink and pastel on paper, 130 x 93 cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS11** (2020) [Fig.122] is a triptych that explores three viewpoints of the studio dealing with the vertical axis of the studio and the fall of light from the skylight. Again, I used folded sheets of paper as starting points for the imagery and within those, details of the studio. A folded page of Muybridge photographs of a man jumping (found in *Incunabula*<sup>13</sup>) was used in the left-hand panel. The story of George Dyer breaking in through the skylight was part of the idea for this image – even though that story is supposedly made up by Bacon and Dyer, it seems to show the importance of the skylight to Bacon and the studio space. The right-hand panel is the studio at night which would have been a place of sensation first, before sight. The feeling of a darkened space would heighten the senses of touch across the body.

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<sup>13</sup> Harrison 2008, p.19.

The orange ground refers to the Reece Mews space (see Chapter 4) when reflected light colours the room from the ceiling colour – and I have used lines to indicate both floor and ceiling boards/slats as enclosure marks as found in many Bacon paintings.



Figure 124: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 7*, (2018-19) polyptych (4 panels), ink and pastel on paper, each panel approx. 110 x 70cm. Private collection © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS7** (2018-19) [Fig.124] is a set of four drawings, and like *FBSS16*, is based on Bacon's *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986) [Fig 64]. I was interested in how Bacon had abbreviated the studio to a narrow passage of the floor (as discussed in Chapter 4), from the foot of his studio chair to just in front of his easel. A well-trodden path that defined his practice in many ways. Along this path Bacon not only had his materials to hand, his paint and mixing place, but also much of his source material (see Chapter 4). At one end a stack of books and along the path, underfoot, a mixture of material and photographs that he inhabited and that inhabited his work.

The figures in the first and fourth drawings are from *Triptych* (1983) [Fig 65] where Bacon based his figures on the photographs of George Dyer in the studio. He embeds Dyer into the space by bleeding the figures into the ground (orange on the left and a small light brown square on the right). Dyer loses the top half of his head, the thinking bit, so we feel that his

relation to the place around is bodily sensed and not intellectually engaged. Exactly the way Bacon wanted his audience to primarily experience the painting.

The two centre panels of my drawing use other detritus and studio objects as atmospheric material. These are overlaid and divided up by lines from a folded Rembrandt reproduction from the studio floor.

This set of four drawings, along with others in this FBSS series, explores the atmosphere and complexity of how we sense space while moving through it. But more than this, it is a sense of being fragmented as *part* of the place that is the subject of these works.



Figure 125: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 6*, (2018) ink and pastel on paper, 107cm diameter © Kerry Andrews, 2025

**FBSS7** (2018) [Fig.125] is an early work in the series, included to show a previously 'malerisch' overall treatment of the image which I evolved through the series into the

painterly areas contrasted with the flat colour areas of the later drawings, as suggested by Bacon's later development and my evolving understanding of his imagery.

The central 'figure' is taken from a Bacon drawing with elements of the studio layered over and under.

The above sample of drawings demonstrate a set of questions and ideas that ran through much of this thesis research. Thinking around the idea of 'the image of placed experience' called for some analysis and trial visualisations as a way of grappling with the image manipulations that Bacon employed. My drawings were also translating some of Bacon's visual language while analysing it. My understanding is that Bacon engaged his act of painting in terms of material as a way of bringing to light the sense (atmosphere/energy) of place. This seems to be certainly true of a major set of his works, at least. This place, Reece Mews for Bacon, each painting for his viewers, and my drawings for me, became the figure/place, or as I have put it, sentient place. Place that determines us. Bacon's slow realisation of this, throughout his work, is not something directly articulated in his interviews or statements, but indirectly through the work and some ideas he mentions on the way, but I think it becomes abundantly clear the more you look at his works. In a way, it is to his credit that it was not something willed, but found, because that is the only way for place to speak – through the vulnerability of the 'self' disappearing and allowing the facts to emerge.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis began with a central question: *How do we visualise ourselves if we are not solely defined by the human body, but instead understood as place?* Drawing from my own creative practice and theoretical engagements with Edward S. Casey, Jeff Malpas, and Gernot Böhme, I explored this question by examining the mid-to-late paintings by Francis Bacon and their relationship to his studio at 7 Reece Mews.

### **Bacon's Studio and the idea of Sentient Place**

I have argued that Bacon's studio was more than a workspace. It became a dynamic environment that shaped his artistic output. His manipulation of the space – raising the ceiling, installing a skylight – reflects a deliberate engagement with atmosphere and emplacement. This thesis argues that Bacon's studio helped him to engage with *place-figure* imagery in his work, and move towards a sense of *sentient place*, a concept that reverses the conventional figure-ground relationship and positions place as a primary force shaping figurative visualisation.

This focus on place inverts the often generally accepted ideas about Bacon wilfully distorting the figure in an expressionist manner. On the contrary, I have argued that the 'distortions' are instead the image of the place-centric figuration that he was exploring, created by the relationships of place to sub-place/inner place (figure, body) explored through various types of edges. Bacon's focus on place, I argue, begins with his early design work where he develops furniture and interior design as a focal zone between figure and architecture. I suggest that this develops into his concerns about depicting the human body and its

relations to its surroundings and suggest that his furniture presages his later spaceframe forms.

### **Edge, Atmosphere, and the Dissolution of the Body**

Central to this research is Casey's phenomenological writing about edges which I have used to open new lines of thinking about Bacon's work. Defining the many ways Bacon uses edges is central to understanding his achievement. His edges refer to and question the visual edges of bodies, objects and spaces depicted and made in the paintings, as well as the pictorial surface itself and the 'real' edges of the canvases and frames (including glazing) – thus a multi-dimensional sense of visualisation and place. In my view, the role of the medium of paint is entangled with the imagery and place as volume/atmosphere and body, and the role of the studio itself is party to this dimensional entanglement.

Examining the complex puzzle of Bacon's paintings led me to understand the studio-place as a volume, including its atmosphere. Building on Böhme's notion of atmosphere and Casey's ideas of bodily space, I examined how Bacon's asthmatic condition and use of airborne materials led to a heightened sensitivity to the studio's physical and sensory qualities.

Related to this, the motif of the open mouth – often read as a scream – was reinterpreted as a site of breath and an open boundary. In this kind of imagery, Bacon defines the body in terms of incomplete edges, where they are both, paradoxically, open and closed at the same time.

In my view, Bacon's development of spaceframes, curtained rooms, and ambiguous edges served to dissolve the body into its environment, creating a complex interplay between containment and openness. His later landscapes, particularly *Sand Dune* (1983), exemplify

this transformation, where the figure becomes virtually indistinguishable from the surrounding place, reflecting the understanding of the studio itself as a generative landscape.

This thesis locates the importance of the place of Reece Mews – its total atmosphere/environment – at the centre of some of Bacon's most ambitious works, where he reconfigures the figure image in terms of a sensory body that is essentially inexpressible. Moreover, it suggests that he steps aside from a direct control of authorship to allow the figure to become 'visible', suggested or sensed, in another way. Having reflected on some of the figure-ground focus of the phenomenological ideas of his time in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, I maintain that his later work offers a critique of that figure-centred viewpoint, and begins to visualise a ground-figure combination, where the emphasis is on place. As humans, we are part of and entangled with place. In my view, Bacon's late work suggests ways to visualise this.

The thesis thus argues that Bacon engaged his act of painting as a way of bringing to light this sense of place – as a new place, a picture-place. Bacon understood how place determines us. He indirectly formed another place through the work, and he found a way to visualise it, not through an illustrative and willed way, but through a complex strategy of continuous finding. For Bacon, that was the only way for place to speak – through the artist's personal will disappearing, and therefore allowing the physical fact to emerge as a painted place, for both himself and the viewer.

## **Practice-Based Research and Contemporary Relevance**

The practice-based part of this research – consisting of 20 drawings – translates Bacon’s ideas into contemporary practice, exploring his relationship to the studio in terms of object and atmosphere, using colour and spatial handling to visualise placed experience. My drawings are not copies of Bacon’s work, but responses to it – ways of thinking through or trying out some of Bacon’s strategies, to continue to develop a language of figuration that foregrounds place over body.

## **Future Directions**

My research overall implies that Bacon’s approach offers a starting point for a new methodology for contemporary artists seeking to move beyond figure-centric imagery, while remaining within a figurative idiom. For example, in an era of environmental precarity, visualising the human as embedded within local and atmospheric environments becomes increasingly urgent. As the phenomenologist David Seamon has indicated, ecological discourse still maintains a “dualistic perspective of people/environment” – a dichotomy that yet needs to be resolved.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that my new interpretation of Bacon’s work may provide a valuable precedent for such reimagining, suggesting that this type of figuration could be a site of ecological and existential reflection and understanding. In relation to this, the way we depict ourselves is culturally important because images inform us about how we understand/experience ourselves and can alter the way we think and act.

Further research regarding Bacon could also expand the place-based analysis by situating Reece Mews within Bacon’s broader geographical and institutional contexts – South

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<sup>1</sup> Seamon, D. (2012), p.4.

Kensington, Soho, London, the Tate, Marlborough Gallery, and other landmark sites – and exploring how engagement with these environments influenced Bacon’s practice.

Additionally, psychological and social dimensions of place could be examined to deepen our understanding of emplacement and artistic agency.

This research may provide an impetus to artists to reconsider their ideas about Bacon’s work and relations to methods and new possibilities of figuration, or it may instigate new considerations about notions of place as presented in their own artworks and the theoretical works available to help them do so.

My own future work will continue to develop the concept of *sentient place*, extending Bacon’s methods and strategies while possibly shifting focus from Bacon’s studio to my own, and exploring how different configurations of home and studio affect/effect artistic production. This will extend the thesis’s insights into new terrains of practice-based research.

### **Final Reflections**

This thesis has argued that Francis Bacon’s later work reconfigures the human figure not as a bounded body but as a phenomenon shaped by, and embedded in, place. Through this lens, Bacon’s Reece Mews studio becomes both a literal and metaphorical landscape, shaping his imagery and dissolving the boundaries between figure and environment. This approach challenges traditional figuration and opens new possibilities for contemporary artists seeking to visualize the human condition in relation to atmosphere and material space. In doing so, Bacon’s legacy also offers a compelling framework for rethinking how we

depict and define our 'selves' – not as isolated bodies, but as beings inseparable from and conditional to the immediate places we inhabit, or the habitat that we are.

Francis Bacon's paintings suggest that the human form, when viewed from the perspective of place, becomes a site of atmospheric and emotional resonance that requires a new visualisation. As Colm Tóibín notes, Bacon's late work was "searching for some way to make images that he knows will only be possible for artists in the future."<sup>2</sup> This thesis argues that such images are not only possible but necessary, at a variety of levels, offering new ways to visualise ourselves as place-figures.

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<sup>2</sup> Stevens and Swan (2021), p.633.

## 10. List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Image from a 1930 photo-shoot of Bacon's interior design work at his 17 Queensbury Mews London home and studio, by *The Studio* art/design magazine. The August edition of *The Studio*, carried an illustrated article on Bacon's designs, entitled, "The 1930's Look in British Design." Sophie Madeline Dess (2021) noted that this image (courtesy of Bacon's sister, Ianthe Knott) was an "out-take sent to his mother," in "The Brilliance in Francis Bacon's Early Failures: A new biography of the painter sheds light on a little-known period of his life: the time he spent working as an interior designer." Review of Annalyn Swan and Mark Stevens, *Francis Bacon: Revelations*, Dublin, Ireland: William Collins, in *The Atlantic*, March 25. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/03/francis-bacons-early-failures-interior-design/618371/> [Accessed: 10/10/23].

Figure 2: Photo of Bacon's interior design work taken at 17 Queensbury Mews, London in 1930, that was included in "The 1930's Look in British Design", Martin Harrison (2005) Video Lecture: *Sources and Interpretations*, New York: Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 10.06-10.17', © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/media/sources-and-interpretations> [Accessed 14/03/25].

Figure 3: Francis Bacon, *Painted Screen* (c1930), three panels, oil on plywood, each panel: 72 × 24 in. (183 × 61 cm), Credit: Tate Images /Tate Images, Copyright: © The Estate of Francis Bacon. DACS 2025. Louise Bakare (2019) "Bacon rugs and triptych saved for now: UK places temporary export bans on £2.5m screen and three rugs by artist", *The Guardian* online, April

26 : Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/apr/26/francis-bacon-rugs-and-triptych-saved-for-now> [Accessed: 18/06/23].

Figure 4: Francis Bacon *Watercolour* (1929), Watercolour, gouache, pencil and black ink on paper, 8 ¼ × 5 ½ in. (21 × 14 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/watercolour> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 5: Francis Bacon, *Gouache* (1929) Gouache, distemper and watercolour on paper 14 × 9 ¾ in. (35.5 × 25 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon, DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/gouache> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 6: Juan Gris, *The Sunblind* (1914), papier collé/gouache, paper, chalk and charcoal on canvas 921 × 727 mm. N04757 Image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported) No copyright permission needed. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/synthetic-cubism> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 7. Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4a.m.* (1932), 25 x 28 ¼ x 15 ¾ in. (63.5 x 71.8 x 40 cm) MoMA © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris Available at <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80928> [Accessed 22/08/23]

Figure 8. Francis Bacon, detail from *Three Figures and Portrait* (1975), Oil paint and pastel on canvas support: 1981 × 1473 mm, frame: 2175 × 1668 × 98 mm, collection: Tate, © Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bacon-three-figures-and-portrait-t02112> [Accessed 02/11/23].

Figure 9: Francis Bacon, *Composition* (1933), pen and ink and pencil on paper, 20 ½ x 15 ⅝ in. (52.2 x 39.7 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/composition> [Accessed 6/4/21].

Figure 10: Roy de Maistre, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (1932) Oil on canvas 90.1 x 71.7cm, sold at auction by Christies on March 2024. Available at: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6474289> [Accessed 12/03/25].

Figure 11: Roy de Maistre, *New Atlantis* (c.1933), oil on canvas, 135.5 x 153 cm (53.35 x 60.25 in). Available at: Caroline De Mestre Walker, National Gallery of Australia (NSW), "Roy de Maistre, *New Atlantis* c.1933". © NGA 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxadizMt52k> [Accessed 12/03/25]. See also Sotheby's (Melbourne), 2006 Available at: <https://bidtoart.com/art/leroy-leveson-laurent-joseph-de-maistre-new-atlantis-7> [Accessed 12/03/25].

Figure 12: Roy de Maistre, *New Atlantis* (c. 1933) oil on canvas, 111 x 126cm, Sotheby's Melbourne, Important Australian Art, Lot 93, 2009. Available at: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2009/important-australian-art-au0732/lot.93.html> [Accessed 14/03/25].

Figure 13: Francis Bacon, *Corner of the Studio* (1934), Pen, ink and wash on paper, photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at Artimage: <https://artimage.org.uk/13169/francis-bacon/corner-of-the-studio--1934> [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 14: Pablo Picasso, *The Painter and his Model* (1927), oil on canvas, 200 x 214 cm, ©Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (Unfortunately now closed). Available at Wikiart;

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/painter-and-his-model-1927>, fair use for educational purposes only [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 15: Pablo Picasso, *The Three Dancers* (1925) Oil paint on canvas 2153 × 1422 mm © Succession Picasso/DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-the-three-dancers-t00729> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 16: Francis Bacon, *After Picasso, 'La Danse'* (1933) Chalk, pastel, pen and ink, charcoal and pencil on paper 25 1/8 x 18 7/8 in. (64 x 48 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/after-picasso-la-danse> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 17: Francis Bacon, *Studio Interior* (c. 1936) Pastel and pencil on paper 9 3/8 x 13 3/4 in. (23.5 x 35 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/studio-interior> [Accessed 13/06/23].

Figure 18: Francis Bacon, *Head III* (1949) Oil on canvas 32 x 26 in. (81 x 66 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2015. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/head-iii> [Accessed 16/06/23].

Figure 19: Photo: Sam Hunter, *Francis Bacon in his studio, 7 Cromwell Place, London, 1950* MB Art Collection, Monaco, © Estate of Sam Hunter 2025. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/francisbaconfoundation/p/DDPQo51omcF/?locale=apa%2Bitu%2Brtp%2Bslot%E3%80%90GB999.bet%E3%80%91.wubl&hl=en> [Accessed 13/03/25].

Figure 20: Francis Bacon, *Figure* (c.1951), Oil on canvas, 78 x 54 in. (198.1 x 137.2 cm)  
Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025,  
Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/figure> Accessed 20/8/23].

Figure 21: Francis Bacon, *Figures in a Landscape* (1952), Oil and alkyd paint on canvas, 78 x 54 ½ in. (198 x 137.2 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/figures-landscape> [Accessed 20/08/23].

Figure 22: Francis Bacon, *Seated Figure* (c.1954), Oil on canvas, 78 x 53 ⅞ in. (198 x 137 cm)  
Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.  
Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/seated-figure-0> [Accessed 09/09/23].

Figure 23: Francis Bacon, *Untitled* (c1954), Oil on canvas, 60 x 45 ¼ in. (152.4 x 115 cm)  
Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.  
Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/untitled> [Accessed 09/09/23].

Figure 24: Francis Bacon, *Sketch for a Portrait of Lisa* (1955), Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 51 cm) Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/sketch-portrait-lisa> [Accessed 12/11/24].

Figure 25: Francis Bacon, *Three studies for self-portrait* (1980) Oil on canvas, 35.5 × 91.5 cm.,  
Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/three-studies-self-portrait-8> [Accessed 16/6/23].

Figure 26: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1980) Oil on canvas 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025.

Photo: Jenni Carter, Viscopy. Available at: <https://artimage.org.uk/18007/francis-bacon/study-for-self-portrait--1980> [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 27: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon Studio* (1998) C-type print on aluminium, 122 x 152.5 x 5 cm., Collection & image © Hugh Lane Gallery. Purchased, 2001. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved/DACS 2025. Available at:

<https://onlinecollection.hughlane.ie/objects/1464/francis-bacon-studio?ctx=67dbdbf3b3235a75db5b42b8cff632f208b591a5&idx=15> [Accessed 03/07/24].

Figure 28: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon Studio* (1998) C-type print on aluminium, 122 x 152.5 x 5 cm., Collection & image © Hugh Lane Gallery. Purchased, 2001. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved/DACS 2025. Available at YouTube The Heritage Council

<https://onlinecollection.hughlane.ie/objects/1464/francis-bacon-studio?ctx=67dbdbf3b3235a75db5b42b8cff632f208b591a5&idx=15> [Accessed 03/07/24].

Figure 29: O'Donovan, E. (n.d.) *Archeological drawing of Francis Bacon's studio*, courtesy Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved.

DACS 2025. Augmented with colour diagrammatic details by the author to show studio working areas.

Figure 30: Geodetic survey slide from O'Donovan talk video, *Transporting the Francis Bacon studio from London to Dublin, 23'27"* © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 31: Drawing by the author, © Kerry Andrews 2025. Based on Reece Mews plan from Kensington and Chelsea Planning and Building Control: Planning search - Microfiche records from 1948-1996. (See bibliography for Kensington and Chelsea).

Figure 32: 7 Cromwell Place, London, 2024. Photo by the author 05/04/24. ©Kerry Andrews 2025.

Figure 33: Photo: Perry Ogden (1998), *7 Reece Mews Studio, London*, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/news/bacon-be-celebrated-historic-plaque> [Accessed 03/04/24].

Figure 34: Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Francis Bacon in his studio in London* (1952), Gelatin Silver print, 9.3/8 x 14.1/8 in., signed in margin. © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos, courtesy Fondation HCB, Source Clipping © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. Image available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/life/biography/1970s/bacon-henri-cartier-bresson> [Accessed 20/03/25].

Figure 35: A camera obscura, in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's film, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946-7), public domain. Available at: <https://es-la.facebook.com/168499158995/videos/matter-of-life-and-death-a-movie-cip-camera-obscura/1131475377045/> [Accessed: 13/03/25].

Figure 36: Francis Bacon, *Untitled drawing of three rooms approached by a ladder* (no date), Ink on paper 253 × 189 mm, Tate Archive collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All

rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-9810-1/bacon-untitled-drawing-of-three-rooms-approached-by-a-ladder> [Accessed 09/11/23] .

Figure 37: Francis Bacon, *Triptych* (1977), Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5 cm), Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/triptych-2> [Accessed 09/09/23].

Figure 38: Photo. Edward Quinn, in John Edwards, *Francis Bacon's Studio at 7 Reece Mews* (1978), © edwardquinn.co, 2025 © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/life/biography/1970s/quinn-bacon-reece-mews> [Accessed 14/03/25].

Figure 39: Centre panel from Fig 37.

Figure 40: Left panel from Fig 37.

Figure 41: Bacon studio material, photograph of fragment, John Deakin, George Dyer in the Reece Mews studio, c. 1965 Photo © John Deakin Archive, Source Clipping © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. Available at <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/studio/7-reece-mews/deakin-studio-debris> [Accessed 01/07/24].

Figure 42: Right panel from Fig 37.

Figure 43: Francis Bacon, *Triptych August 1972* (1972), Oil and sand on three canvases, Each 198.1 × 147.3cm (78 × 58 in.) Photo: Tate, London 2016, © The Estate of Francis Bacon

2025. All rights reserved. / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2025, Available at:

<https://artblart.com/tag/roy-de-maistre> / [Accessed 06/06/24].

Figure 44: Photo: Perry Ogden, "7 Reece Mews entrance staircase" in, John Edwards, (2001), *7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 7, Photos © Perry Ogden.com. 2025. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Figure 45: Francis Bacon, *Untitled drawing of three rooms approached by a ladder* (no date), Ink on paper 253 × 189 mm, Tate Archive collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025 Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-9810-1/bacon-untitled-drawing-of-three-rooms-approached-by-a-ladder> [Accessed 09/11/23].

Figure 46: Francis Bacon, (no date) *Untitled drawing*, possibly of figures crawling on steps, ink on paper, 247 x 186mm, Tate archive © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.tate-images.com/preview.asp?image=MC1664&badge=true&tc=true> , & at <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-9810-3/bacon-untitled-drawing-possibly-of-figures-crawling-on-steps> [Accessed 14/03/25].

Figure 47: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body (Man Turning on Light)* (1973) Oil and alkyd paint on canvas 79 x 58 ½ in. (200.6 x 148.4 cm) Private collection © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-human-body-man-turning-light> [Accessed 20/08/23].

Figure 48: Perry Ogden, *Francis Bacon's 7 Reece Mews studio, London 1998* (1998) Photograph, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025,

Available at: <https://artimage.org.uk/13330/francis-bacon/francis-bacon-s-7-reece-mews-studio--london-1998> [Accessed 04/09/23].

Figure 49: Copy of Fig 47 annotated by the author.

Figure 50: Francis Bacon, *Self-portrait* (1973) Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/self-portrait-13> [Accessed 19/07/24].

Figure 51: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1982) Oil on canvas, 78 x 58 ⅛ in. (198 x 147.7 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-self-portrait-10> [Accessed 19/07/24].

Figure 52: Photo: Michael Holtz (1974) *Francis Bacon in the Reece Mews Studio*, taken 01/01/74. Folded image illustrated in Cappock, M. (2005) *Francis Bacon's Studio*, Fig. 140, p.77. Photo © The estate of Francis Bacon 2025, Photo from the book by Kerry Andrews 04/05/24.

Fig 53: Copy of Fig 52 with annotations by the author.

Figure 54: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body* (1981) Oil and aerosol paint on canvas, 78 x 58 ¾ in. (198 x 147.5 cm), © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025, Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-human-body-0> [Accessed 28/03/24].

Figure 55: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1981) Oil on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) Collection: Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-self-portrait-9> [Accessed 04/09/23].

Figure 56: Francis Bacon, *Study of a Man Talking* (1981) Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) The Hess Art Collection, Berne, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025 Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-man-talking> [Accessed 29/10/23].

Figure 57: Edward Quinn (1980), *Francis Bacon with John Edwards in his studio with Carcass of Meat and Bird of Prey (finished 1980), 7 Reece Mews London S.W. 7*. Photo ©edwardquinn.com, Source Clipping © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025, Collection: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane Dublin, Ireland. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/studio/7-reece-mews/quinn-bacon-edwards> [Accessed 02/11/23].

Figure 58: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait* (1981), Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), Private collection, USA © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-portrait-23> [Accessed 04/9/23].

Figure 59: John Deakin, photographs of George Dyer c.1965, photographed by the author from a double page spread in: Logan Sisely (ed.) (2009) *A Terrible Beauty*, Gottingen: Steidl, pp. 82-83. John Deakin Collection: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Ireland. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS London/ARS NY 2025. [Accessed 16/03/25].

Figure 60: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait* (1981), oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas, 78 x 58 in., (198 x 147.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-portrait-23> [Accessed 16/03/25]. See also: Ori Hashmonay (2010) “The Singular Muse of Francis Bacon” re: Sotheby’s Contemporary Art Evening Auction 16/05/19. Available at: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/the-singular-muse-of-francis-bacon> [Accessed 07/07/24].

Figure 61: Photograph of the ceiling at Reece Mews, reconstruction at Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Ireland. Photo by the author (15/04/23) © Kerry Andrews

Figure 62: Carlos Freire, (1977) *Francis Bacon in his Studio at Reece Mews*, London, gelatin silver print, 42 x 28 cm; 16½ x 11 in. Photo © Carlos Freire 2025. Available at: <https://www.carlosfreirephotographer.com/francis-bacon/> [Accessed 14/04/25].

Figure 63: Copy of Fig 62 with annotations by the author’

Figure 64: Francis Bacon, *Blood on the Floor – Painting* (1986) Oil and pastel on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198.1 x 147.3 cm), Private Collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/blood-floor-painting> [Accessed 07/03/25].

Figure 65: Francis Bacon, *Triptych* (1983), Oil, pastel and aerosol paint on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), Abelló Collection, Madrid, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/triptych-3> [Accessed 07/03/25].

Figure 66: Francis Bacon, Figure in left panel of *Triptych* (1983), detail of Figure 64.

Figure 67: Francis Bacon studio at Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin. Photo by the author (15/04/23), plus annotation © Kerry Andrews

Figure 68: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) Oil, aerosol paint and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/kneeling-figure-back-view> [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 69: Francis Bacon, *Crouching Figure* (c.1949) Oil and sand on canvas 70 ½ × 47 ¾ in. (179.6 × 121.3 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025 <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/figure-crouching> [Accessed 13/06/23]

Figure 70: Edward Quinn, *Francis Bacon in Reece Mews studio. London 1980* (1980) photograph. Photo Edward Quinn, © edwardquinn.com. Available at: <https://www.edwardquinn.com/photos/arts/painters/francis-bacon/> [Accessed 13/06/2].

Figure 71: Francis Bacon, *Study of a Baboon* (1953), Oil on canvas 78 x 54 in. (198 x 137 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Bequest. © Estate of Francis Bacon / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London 2025. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80580> [Accessed 16/03/25].

Figure 72: Francis Bacon, *Head VI* (1949), Oil on canvas 93.2 × 76.5 cm (36.7 × 30.1 in), Arts Council collection, Hayward Gallery, London © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/head-vi> [Accessed 16/03/25].

Figure 73: Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (1980), Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 in. (35.5 x 30.5cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo Jenni Carter, Viscopy. Available at: <https://artimage.org.uk/18007/francis-bacon/study-for-self-portrait-1980> [Accessed 16/03/25].

Figure 74: Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1982), Oil and pastel on canvas, 14 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5cm). Private Collection. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-portrait-isabel-rawsthorne-1980-0> [Accessed 22/07/24].

Figure 75: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1967), Oil on canvas. Each panel 14 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5), CR number 67-01. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://francis-bacon.com/news/catalogue-raisonne-focus-three-studies-self-portrait-1967> [Accessed 23/10/23].

Figure 76: Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait* (1972), Oil on canvas, 14 x 12in. (35.5 x 30.5cm). Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved, DACS 2025. Available at: <https://francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/self-portrait-7> [Accessed 10/09/23].

Figure 77: Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait* (1973) Oil on canvas, 14 x 12in. (35.5 x 30.5cm). Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/self-portrait-14> [Accessed 10/09/23].

Figure 78: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self-Portrait* (1972, June) Triptych, Oil on canvas, each panel 114 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5cm). Goulandris collection, Athens, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS London, OSDEETE Athens 2025. Available at: <https://goulandris.gr/en/artwork/bacon-francis-three-studies-for-self-portrait> [Accessed 02/10/23].

Figure 79: Detail of Fig.78, right panel. Photo by the author (27/09/23).

Figure 80: Detail of Fig.78, central panel. Photo by the author (27/09/23).

Figure 81: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self-Portrait* (1975) Triptych, Oil on canvas, 14 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5cm). Private collection © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/life/biography/1970s/paintings/triptych-three-studies-self-portrait-75-03> [Accessed 11/09/23].

Figure 82: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Portraits (including Self-Portrait)* (1969). Triptych, Oil on canvas, each panel 14 x 12in (35.5 x 30.5cm). Private collection Switzerland © The Estate of Francis Bacon 1025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/three-studies-portraits-including-self-portrait> [Accessed 27/10/23].

Figure 83: Sergei Eisenstein, film still from *Battleship Potemkin* (1926), detritus from Bacon's studio, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin. Fig.4 in Blaize O'Connor (2008) "Dust and Debitage: An Archaeology of Francis Bacon's Studio", in Ian Russell, Series ed. (2008) *Archaeologies of Art: Papers from the Sixth World Archaeological Congress*, UCD: Scholarcast, Series 2, p.6.

Available at: [https://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/transcripts/Dust\\_and\\_debitage.pdf](https://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/transcripts/Dust_and_debitage.pdf) [Accessed 13/03/25].

Figure 84: Rembrandt self-portrait, torn out book page, collection of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, in Harrison, M. *Incunabula*, p.165. Photo by author (04/05/24)

Figure 85: Detritus from Francis Bacon's studio. © The estate of Francis Bacon 2025. In *ibid.* pp.162-163. Photos from book by Kerry Andrews (04/05/24).

Figure 86: frame, left edge of left panel from *Triptych August 1972* (1972), photo by Kerry Andrews, Tate Britain (24/07/24).

Figure 87: Francis Bacon, *Studies for a Portrait of John Edwards* (1984), Oil on canvas, 78 1/10 × 58 3/10 in/ 198.3 × 148 cm. © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/three-studies-portrait-john-edwards-0> [Accessed 13/03/25].

Figure 88: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) Oil, aerosol paint and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm). © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2025. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/kneeling-figure-back-view> [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 89: Francis Bacon, *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982), photo by the author, with annotations, Hugh Lane Gallery, 15/04/23. © Kerry Andrews 2025.

Figure 90: Francis Bacon, *Triptych: Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969), oil on canvas, Each panel: 77 7/8 x 58 1/8 in. (197.8 x 147.5 cm). © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights

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Figure 91: Christie's/Peek Films (2013), *Francis Bacon on 'Three Studies of Lucian Freud'*, detail still (1'07"). Public domain. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQIrruTKa4k> [Accessed 02/11/23].

Figure 92: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Crouching Boy* c.1524 (sculpted), English plaster cast, c.1884, H 55.5cm, W 40.3cm, D 42.3cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. Available at: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O41524/crouching-boy-statue-michelangelo/> [Accessed 03/06/24].

Figure 93: Figure 92 with annotations by the author.

Figure 94: Titian (n.d.) *A couple in embrace*, drawing, 252 x 258 mm, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University (2024), 2256, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Available at: <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/7960> [Accessed: 13/03/25].

Fig 95: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge* (1988) Oil on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-human-body-after-muybridge> [Accessed 01/08/24].

Figures 96 and 97: Two details from *Triptych August 1972* (1972), Oil and sand on three canvases, Each 198.1 x 147.3cm (78 x 58 in.) Tate © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2025, Photos by the author, 2024, at Tate Britain.

Figure 98: Francis Bacon, *Study for a Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985-86) Oil and aerosol paint on canvas, Triptych: Each panel: 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm), © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-self-portrait-triptych> [Accessed 19/08/24].

Figure 99: Francis Bacon, centre panel from Fig 98, *Study for a Self-Portrait – Triptych* (1985-86).

Figure 100: Francis Bacon, *Painting* (c.1930) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/life/family-friends-sitters/roy-de-maistre> [Accessed 14/03/25 ]. Image source, Ruthie V. (2018) “Francis Bacon was an Interior Designer”, Seattle Artist League, July 1: Available at: <https://www.seattleartistleague.com/2018/07/01/francis-bacon-was-an-interior-designer/> [Accessed 06/06/24].

Figure 101: Francis Bacon, *Landscape* (1978) Oil and pastel on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) Private collection, © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025. Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/landscape-1> [Accessed 05/09/23].

Figure 102: NASA, *The Blue Marble* (1972). Photograph by Apollo 17 crew. Public domain. Available at: <https://explorer1.jpl.nasa.gov/galleries/earth-from-space/#gallery-10> [Accessed 29/09/24].

Figure 103: Cinerama screen: Scene from the film *This is Cinerama* from 3 projectors (1952, re-released 1972), 35mm scan by Chemical Engineer, public domain, Available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=58589147> [Accessed 04/11/23].

Figure 104: Francis Bacon, *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982), Oil and dry transfer lettering on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved.

DACS 2025 Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/piece-waste-land> [Accessed 05/09/23].

Figure 105: Figure 103 with annotations by the author.

Figure 106: Francis Bacon, *Sand Dune* (1983) CR 83-05, Oil, pastel and dust on canvas 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025.

Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/sand-dune-0#license-image> [Accessed 06/04/21].

Figure 107: reversed image of Figure 88: *Kneeling Figure - Back View* (c. 1982) CR 82-11.

Figure 108: Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body* (1983) CR 83-02, Oil, pastel and aerosol paint on canvas, 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon 2025. All rights reserved. DACS 2025 (image transparent from site). Available at: <https://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings/study-human-body-2> [Accessed 10/06/24].

Figure 109: reverse image of Fig 108, Francis Bacon, *Study from the Human Body* (1983).

Figure 110: Willem de Kooning, *Two Figures in a Landscape* (1967), oil on canvas, 178 x 203cm, object no. A 26087, Stedelijk Gallery, Amsterdam: © The Willem de Kooning Foundation, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 2025. Available at: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/collectie/22-willem-de-kooning-two-figures-in-a-landscape> [Accessed 14/04/25].

Figure 111: Francis Bacon, *Sand Dune*, as Fig 106.

Figure 112: reversed de Kooning painting *Two Figures in a Landscape* (Figure 109) for comparison with Fig 111.

Figure 113: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 19* (2025), ink and pastel on paper, 108 x 192 cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 114: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 20* (2025), ink and pastel on paper, 108 x 192 cm, © Kerry Andrews, 2025

Figure 115: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 18* (2024), ink and pastel on paper, each panel 108 x 192 cm, overall 340cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 116: Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnieres* (1884) oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, inventory no. NG3908, © National Gallery, London, Available at:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/georges-seurat-bathers-at-asnieres> [Accessed 16/03/25].

Figure 117: Fig 115 with annotations by the author.

Figure 118: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 16* (2023) Ink and pastel on paper, 108 x 192cm © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 119: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 15* (2023), ink and pastel on paper, 136 x 106cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 120: Kerry Andrews *Francis Bacon Studio Study 14* (2022/24), ink and pastel on paper, 145 x 167cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 121: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 12* (2021), ink and pastel on paper, 207 x 150cm, each drawing 105 x 70cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 122: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 11* (2020), triptych, ink and pastel on paper, each panel 130 x 93cm. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 123: Kerry Andrews, detail of *Francis Bacon Studio Study 11* (2020), right-hand panel from the triptych in Figure 119. © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 124: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 7* (2018-19) polyptych (4 panels), ink and pastel on paper, each panel approx. 110 x 70cm © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

Figure 125: Kerry Andrews, *Francis Bacon Studio Study 6* (2018) ink and pastel on paper, 107cm diameter © Kerry Andrews, 2025.

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### **Galleries, Exhibitions and Events Attended**

*Francis Bacon: Invisible Rooms*, Tate Liverpool, May 18 – September 18, 2016.

*Francis Bacon: From Picasso to Velázquez*, Guggenheim Bilbao, September 30, 2016 – January 8, 2017.

*Francis Bacon: Books and Painting*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, September 11, 2019 – January 20, 2020.

*Francis Bacon: Man and Beast*, Royal Academy, London, January 29 – April 17, 2022.

*Endless Variations*, Ordovas, London, October 3 – December 15, 2023.

*Francis Bacon: Human Presence*, National Portrait Gallery, London, October 10, 2024 – January 19, 2025.

Francis Bacon’s Studio, The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.

Tate Britain, Permanent Collection, London.

Bacon drawings, Tate Archives, Tate Britain Prints and Drawings Rooms, London, July 24, 2024.

Fondation Beyeler, Basel.

B&E Goulandris Foundation, Athens.

*Bacon, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, event held at King's College London, September 7, 2023, the Estate of Francis Bacon and Kings College London's Centre for Philosophy and Art.