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Boring Sensations: Deleuze on Meat and Vegetables

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In his book, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze betrays a preference for largely dramatic and “sensational” (even if not “sensationalistic”) artworks that privilege the “scream” over the yawn, and ignores the type of understated works that Jacques Rancière would characterize as “pensive” images, or even the intentionally “boring” works of postmodern art. This paper critically examines Deleuzian concepts on the reception of art—i.e. sensation, affection, and affect—and explores their applicability to subtle and seemingly neutral/boring/deadpan works. Philosophers including Barthes and Rancière addressed the challenge of engaging with images in postmodernity by asking what happens when we encounter a yawn rather than a scream, or, in the case of Barthes, what happens when a scream makes us yawn? With the existence of already shocking photographs in mass culture, and with the end of the “shock of the new,” Barthes sought aesthetic redemption in the punctum rather than the studium. Heidegger, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, looks at boredom itself as a “fundamental attunement” that needed to be absorbed and engaged with directly, rather than escaped from. Using Deleuze’s example of “Pierre and Paul” in his lectures on Spinoza’s concept of “affectio” (affection) and “affectus” (affect), this paper seeks to draw out some of the conceptual limitations in Deleuzian notions of sensation, affection, and affect in dealing with understated or purposely boring works, and proposes an understanding of these concepts in a less fixed and instantiated manner, and more as slower unravelings that grow, fade, or linger.

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Deleuze and Bacon

In a recent exhibition of Francis Bacon's late paintings¹, hyperbolic and sensationalistic language marked the introduction and reviews of the show. The press release distributed by the Gagosian gallery in New York, where the show was taking place, used words such as “visceral,” “gut wrenching,” and “primal” to describe Bacon's paintings. And the exhibition reviews used equally excessive turns of phrases to describe Bacon's works. Ken Johnson, in a *New York Times* article, for example, compared Bacon's late paintings to “unusually stylish graphic novel(s),” and characterized the figures used in his paintings as “escapees from movies like ‘Ghostbusters’ and ‘Men in Black.’”² Michelle Stein, in a review for *Hyperallergic*,³ describes Bacon's figures as being “weighed [by] deep psychological trauma and loneliness.” This forceful and dramatic use of language in describing and reacting to Bacon's work is not surprising. Bacon's use of distorted figures—with their extended necks, faceless heads, torsos without limbs, and faces or bodies smeared off or blended into deep blacks with a rag or brush—seem to call for equally dramatic reactions and engagements.

Gilles Deleuze—in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*—finds in Bacon's work a “very special violence” with “spectacles of horror, Crucifixions, prosthesis and mutilations, monsters” (xxix). To Deleuze, this “violence” is not necessarily one that is illustrated in the paintings through violent acts or movements by Bacon's figures—“which are subjected to neither torture nor brutality, to which nothing visible happens” (34)—but a “static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression” (xxiv). While Deleuze's decision to single out Francis Bacon's work would seem to be the most obvious and least dramatic path that one can take in speaking to what Henri Bergson, in *Time and Free Will*, calls the “overwhelming of the immediate consciousness” (*Key Writings* 90), or what Deleuze himself calls the “violence of a sensation” (*The Logic of Sensation* xxix), in this paper I would like to explore the *applicability* of Deleuzian concepts (i.e.

¹ “Francis Bacon: Late Paintings,” Gagosian Gallery, New York, NY (November 7 – December 12, 2015)

² “‘Francis Bacon: Late Paintings,’ at Gagosian, Is a Vivid Narrative.” *The New York Times* 3 Dec. 2015

³ “The Calmer, Contemplative Mood of Francis Bacon's Late Paintings.” *Hyperallergic*. December 7, 2015

“sensations,” “affection,” “affect,” etc.) to more understated and seemingly neutral/boring/deadpan art forms, or draw out (if any) other facets of, or nuances in, Deleuzian aesthetic concepts that would make sense in our engagements with these other types of works, where “spasms” (xxix) are less obvious or seemingly non-existent. In other words, I will be questioning the adequacy of Deleuzian concepts to properly engage with “flat” and (seemingly) affectless works, and counterpose and/or weave in ideas of other thinkers—i.e. Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Rancière—who are able to address the reception of and/or bodily engagements with artworks with a slower burn.

Deleuze’s reaction is, of course, not one of an art critic, but a philosopher. And, consequently, he situates and processes Bacon’s work in and through his own philosophical concepts, from (Bergsonian) notions of “sensation” to “rhythm,” and “haptic” vision. Deleuze doesn’t betray a preference for a particular artistic genre—the way that Francis Bacon privileges portraiture over landscapes or still lifes, for example.⁴ In fact, Deleuze regards Cézanne’s still life paintings and Bacon’s “portraits” as equally *diagrammatic*, and he uses similarly theatrical words to describe Cézanne’s works, e.g. “chaos,” “catastrophe,” “collapse,” “stubborn,” etc. (83, 91).⁵ And, while Deleuze criticizes both abstraction (e.g. a “symbolic code” that is more “digital” than “manual” 84), and action painting—where the diagram, at the opposite end of abstraction, overwhelms and takes over the “totality” of a painting, and likened by Deleuze to being assaulted by a “foreign power in which the eye can find no rest,” (85, 87)—Deleuze does seem to privilege more dramatic works (preferring the “scream” over the “yawn”), and largely ignores the type of understated works that Jacques Rancière would characterize, in *The Emancipated Spectator*, as “pensive” images (107), or even the intentionally “boring” works of postmodern art.

⁴ See Bacon’s 1966 interview with David Sylvester.

⁵ Indeed, in *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze is insistent in establishing an affinity between Bacon and Cézanne despite their seemingly obvious differences (97-98). Clearly, to Deleuze, Cézanne is a necessary starting point in interpreting Bacon’s works, and the question(s) posed would not be simply to determine the similarities and differences between the two, but to determine to what degree the works of Bacon are “Cézannian” (97).

Meat and Vegetables



Francis Bacon, *Second Version of Triptych 1944* (1988)
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In Francis Bacon’s late paintings bodies are often stripped of anything recognizable as *personality*, and are devoid of any individuating “expressions” (bodily or facial)—which open themselves up to empathetic engagements. His bodies, usually at rest as “seated or crouching Figures” (*The Logic of Sensation* 34), are violently contorted, often with limbs missing, and their necks stretched out, becoming limbs themselves. His heads are precisely and fully that, with no distinguishing features, and are “faceless” (19) but for wide open mouths—*screams*, where “the entire body escapes through the mouth” (16)—exposing rows of teeth (“little bones,” 22), and, occasionally, clearly defined ears (which, in Bacon’s paintings, show up more often and are more prominently placed than his eyes—perhaps to amplify the irony of screams that cannot be heard or experienced). To Deleuze, these deformed bodies with “dismantled” faces (19) are not representations of *human* beings as such, but of *meat*, “the common fact of man and animal.” It is thanks to this centrality of *meat* in his paintings that a “pictorial tension” is possible, and allows Deleuze and others to speak of Bacon’s works in “animalistic” terms (20).

In Bacon’s early works, including *Painting* (1946), *Figure with Meat* (1954), and *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1962), meat is depicted literally—as large slabs of animal carcasses (like

those that one would find in a butcher shop or slaughterhouse)—to frame his figures (e.g. *Figure with Meat*, 1954), acting as supporting “props” in a composition (e.g. *Painting*, 1946), or as the dominant form(s) within a painting or panel (e.g. *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962). In Bacon’s late paintings, his figures take on the form of *meat* itself. In *Study from the Human Body* (1981), for example, the body that is about to enter a void is depicted like a slab of meat—as a single mass with no limbs or a head, except for a single leg (like a protruding bone) barely supporting the mass of flesh above it, and, in a second “frame”, part of a second leg and headless torso about to fall into the void. The form, i.e. a large mass with a single, protruding limb, is mirrored in several of his paintings, and is unmistakably shaped like the slabs of meat used in his earlier works.

Deleuze ties Bacon closely to Cézanne in *The Logic of Sensation*,⁶ and finds in both a common aim to “*paint the sensation*” (32) through the “deformation (of) the *form at rest*” (50). While Deleuze points to “obvious” (mostly formal) differences in the ways in which the artists treat “planes” or fields of color (i.e. Bacon’s treatment being more “shallow” or “superficial” than Cézanne’s), and their approaches to the “deformation of bodies” (i.e. Cézanne doing so in the context of an “open” world, or *Nature*, and Bacon in a “closed” one), I would add that there exists a difference in *sensibility* between painting bodies as *meat*—or man as *becoming-animal* (25)—and painting bowls of fruit. With *meat* one could speak of “spasms,” “athleticism,” and “force,” by virtue of the motor functions that are implied (or we already naturally associate with) muscle tissue, whereas with fruit or any other vegetation—usually associated with states of growth or decay—one would need to rely fully on formal qualities (e.g. the choice and pairings of colors, lines, and planes, or, in the case of Cézanne, the use of the brush to “deform”) to speak to or express “movement” or “force”.⁷ Looking at the figure in the third panel of *Second Version of Triptych 1944*, for example, one could easily picture the figure in the act of craning its neck, and one could also imagine it about to jump off its platform at any minute. In Bacon’s work, a body, or *meat*,⁸

⁶ One could say even that Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sensation*, is really talking about Cézanne through Bacon’s paintings.

⁷ To Deleuze “force” (in particular) is a “condition of sensation” (48)

⁸ See Deleuze’s chapter on “Body, Meat and Spirit: Becoming-Animal” in *The Logic of Sensation* on the relationships in Bacon between the body and the animal, and the face and the head, and “meat” being the “common zone of man and the beast” (21), etc.

leaning over a precipice has pictorial tension precisely because we could imagine that the body is able to “self-correct” whereas a vegetable in a similarly precarious position could do nothing but fall—all we could do is “watch” and wait for the inevitable.



Juan Sánchez Cotán. *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*. c. 1600

Rather than comparing Bacon to Cézanne, it would be more interesting, for the purposes of this paper (i.e. in questioning the applicability of Deleuzian notions of affect/affection to understated works), to counterpose Bacon’s work with those of Juan Sánchez Cotán, a seventeenth century Spanish artist whose still lifes, remarkably, resonate (formally) with Bacon’s later works. Unlike contextualized (i.e. “table setting”) still lifes, Cotán’s sparsely populated paintings are set in a plain *cantarero*, a common larder used to store and preserve food, with fruits and vegetables stripped of their context as objects of pleasure, i.e. “eating” (with a clear absence of cutlery, bowls

or plates), or emotionally laden symbols of domestic bliss or “home” (a dining table, folds of fabric, or a kitchen window). Cotán’s common fruits and vegetables, like Bacon’s *meat*, are suspended in fields of color (or rest in abstracted grounds) and “caged” by his simple, cube-like niches. And, like Bacon’s figures leaning over their platforms⁹ in *Second Version of Triptych* 1944, Cotán’s fruit and vegetables are put in a similarly precarious positions, i.e. the slice of melon and the cucumber hanging over the edge of their abstracted grounds.

Bacon’s screaming *bodies-without-organs* imbue his paintings with an “excessive presence” (*The Logic of Sensation* 44), something that Deleuze characterizes as “insistent” and “interminable.” To Deleuze, there is “an insistence of a scream that survives the mouth, the insistence of a body that survives the organism, the insistence of transitory organs that survive the qualified organs. And in this excessive presence, the identity of an already-there” (44). This “excessive presence” or “insistence”¹⁰ in Bacon’s paintings is what, in Stern’s review of the show (quoted above) calls for a “strong reaction.” On the other hand, Cotán’s paintings—with his disciplined treatment of his subject matter, and in, what Charles Sterling in his book *Still Life* would characterize as his “calculated and concentrated” compositions (95)—could not be described as calling for this type of reaction. While there are no “spasms” in Cotán’s works, there is tension, albeit one of a slower and less immediately clear sort than what one would expect from Bacon’s work. In fact, given Cotán’s monastic background and religious aims,¹¹ to say that he is purposely trying to *bore* the viewer—primarily through his persistent repetition of motifs (to a greater extreme than Bacon)—would probably not be inaccurate: “[Cotán] approaches painting in terms of a discipline, or ritual: always the same cantarero ... always the same recurring elements, the light raking at forty-five degrees, the same alteration of bright greens and yellows against the grey ground, the same scale, the same size of frame. To alter any of these would be to allow too much room for personal self-assertion, and the pride of creativity...” (Bryson 70).

⁹ We can see that even the bird-like figure in the second panel, while seemingly standing on the “ground,” is, in fact, also on a platform, with the “circus red” carpet dropping down at the point on which one of the tripod-like figure’s leg touches it.

¹⁰ Given the seventeenth-century root meaning of the word “insistence” (Deleuze uses the direct equivalent in French, “insistance”) as “standing” (*sistere*) “upon” (*in*), or “persistent”, a better phrase than “excessive presence” might be “persistent presence”.

¹¹ See Norman Bryson’s essay on Cotán in *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*

Cotán's use of repetition of (motifs, composition, and the treatment of light and color) prefigures the purposely mechanistic works of artists including Bernd and Hilla Becher (i.e. their water tower series), Andy Warhol (i.e. his silk-screened paintings), and Ed Ruscha (*Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, etc.). In Cotán's case, however, repetition is not used as a (critical or ironic) *reflection* of the world, but a *rejection* of the world expressed through artistic spectacle.

Boredom

In *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson uses an example of mixing sugar in a glass of water and the accompanying "impatience" that one feels in waiting for it to melt to represent something that is *lived* vs. something that is "thought"—a lived duration (*Key Writings* 215). This example of the experience of lived time is, in fact, *boredom*, the simple, quotidian type of "boring" experience that Martin Heidegger, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, defines as something "wearisome" or "tedious," and what he calls the "first form of boredom" (84). Heidegger, like Bergson (although for different purposes), believes that the "little fact" of *boredom*—a lived duration to Bergson, and a "fundamental attunement" to Heidegger (64)—is "big with meaning" (Bergson 215).¹²

¹² Heidegger builds up what he calls the various "instances" of boredom from this first, and simple form of boredom—i.e. "what is boring is evidently in *this* or *that*" (Heidegger 114)—to a second form, where "we find nothing that is boring (and) are "not able to say *what* is boring us" (114)—i.e. we are in a state that "holds us in limbo and leaves us empty" (87)—and, finally, a "profound boredom"—i.e. "*it is boring for one*" (134)—that Heidegger views as a "*fundamental attunement* of contemporary Dasein" (132, emphasis mine). In his essay "Some Ancient Notions of Boredom" Peter Toohey writes that the "literary and sociological significance" of boredom has been relatively minor in ancient literature. And even in its most common use, "in spite of its ubiquity the notion of boredom—in ancient or modern literature—is very hard to pin down. The meaning seems to shift with the centuries and, even with these centuries, to shift according to the sensibility and the age of the person using it" (151). From the *taedium vitae*, *luxuria* and the *horror loci* of the Romans to the monastic notion of *acedia* of the so-called "Desert Fathers" and the chronic ennui or *langueur* of the Romantics (see Irvine 89-90) it is difficult to come to terms with a fixed notion of boredom. Heidegger suggests that we don't know anything about boredom precisely because "we *do not want* to know about it" and that perhaps we "lack the courage" to find out because we "constantly seek *to escape* it" (78).

Elizabeth Goodstein, in *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*, writes on boredom's integration into popular culture: "the democratization of leisure that conditions the emergence of modern subjectivity was accompanied by a *democratization of skepticism* (and) as the conditions of mass culture emerged, an initially elitist discourse of subjective disaffection gradually took hold in popular culture" (98-99). From this universally experienced boredom—signified by the "lack of an inner life (and the) failure to find meaning in anything at all" (99), and Heidegger's "second instance" of boredom—the culture of "frenetic" amusement emerged. Goodstein continues: "The contemporary terror of boredom, which testifies to its apparent inevitability, is saturated with the post-romantic resignation to a world in which neither work nor leisure can bring happiness to subjects who no longer hope for divine restitution in the next" (99). Boredom ceased to become the spiritual condition of the pre-medieval monastics or the romantic notion of aristocracy and transformed into modernity's monster:

*But among the jackals, the panthers, the bitch-hounds,
The apes, the scorpions, the vultures, the serpents,
The monsters screeching, howling, grumbling, creeping,
In the infamous menagerie of our vices,
There is one uglier, wickeder, more shameless!
Although he makes no large gestures nor loud cries
He willingly would make rubbish of the earth
And with a yawn swallow the world.¹³*

The nineteenth century valorization of modernity by Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" is precisely this attempt to flee from modern boredom—a terrorizing monster that would "with a yawn swallow the world." The frantic aim of Baudelaire's *flâneur* in "The Painter of Modern Life"—an artist, a "solitary, gifted (man) with an active imagination" (12)—is to "hurriedly" search for "modernity," "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (12). To Baudelaire every age has "its own modernity" (12) and the sole aim of successive *flâneurs*—artists, writers, musicians, philosophers—is this ceaseless search for "originality" or "the new." And, in order to realize Baudelaire's vision of modernity, a continuing *cycle* (though viewed as "progressive") of

¹³ Charles Baudelaire (excerpt from *Au lecture*, transl. Eli Siegel)

boredom-desire-satisfaction needed to be in place—an endless series of literary and artistic spectacles and spasms.

In “After Shock/Between Boredom and History” Patrice Petro examines the problematics of engaging with art in late modernity “when the ‘shock of the new’ ceased to be shocking, when change itself had become routinized, commodified, banalized, and when the extraordinary, the unusual, and the fantastic became inextricably linked to the boring, the prosaic, and the everyday” (70). This continuing “shock of the new” can’t help but lead to a *desensitization* of sensation, and *softens* our reception of and reaction to artworks which no longer “seize and close in” around us (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation* 37). While Deleuze rightly points out the existence of already existing images and “clichés” that are projected by the artist on the “blank surface” of a canvas as s/he begins his/her work—images that need to be “emptied,” cleared,” and “cleaned” (71)—he does not take into account the existing clichés that are added to the canvas at the point of reception by the viewer. While it would be simple enough to talk about artworks that “pass through the brain ... and act directly upon the nervous system” (32), Bergson himself points out that culture itself weighs powerfully on seemingly raw sensations (*Key Writings* 89). And, Frederic Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, writes about “the waning of affect (when) the very aesthetic of expression itself (vanished) in the world of the postmodern” (11). The sensation of Bacon’s screams, at least in our contemporary experience, is effectively clouded over, and even missed altogether, by our post-modern (oversaturated and desensitized) nervous systems.

Boring Art

By the 1960s, artists—particularly Andy Warhol, with films like *Sleep* (a five-and-a-half-hour real-time film of someone sleeping) and *Empire* (an even longer slow-motion silent film of the Empire State Building lasting eight hours)—capitulated to this new condition by addressing boredom directly. Petro characterizes this new artistic engagement as “a refusal of the political modernist ‘aesthetics of distraction, sensory stimulation, and shock’” (qtd. in Haladyn 157). With

intentionally boring works of postmodern art, including the deadpan photographs of Ed Ruscha (e.g. *Every Building on Sunset Strip* or *TwentySix Gasoline Stations*) and the works of the *New Topographics* (including the industrial catalog aesthetic of water towers by Bernd and Hilla Becker, or the frontal and geometric images of Lewis Baltz), *boredom* turns now into “an aesthetic response” and a “phenomenological problem” (Jameson 71). Warhol, in speaking about the consumption of popular television shows, remarked that “most people love watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I’m just the opposite: If I’m going to sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don’t want it to be essentially the same – I want it to be exactly the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel” (qtd. In Svendsen loc. 1614).

Between 1962 and 1964, Andy Warhol produced a series of silk-screened paintings that departed from the type of saccharine and kitschy advertising images that he was (and is) mostly known for. Using graphically violent photographs pulled out of news stories on death, disasters, and suicides, Warhol used his method of repeatedly silk-screening large canvases with these blown up images to create his *Death and Disaster* series. His first international exhibition in 1964 at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in Paris featured some of these works.¹⁴

¹⁴ While Warhol originally wanted to name the show *Death in America* but the gallery used his name as the show’s title instead.



Andy Warhol. *Saturday Disaster* (1964)

In *Saturday Disaster* (1964) two bodies spill out of a wrecked car—one hanging over the other through an opening on the roof—and framed by twisted metal, door panels, and bystanders standing casually in the background. Like all of the other paintings in this series, the image is silk-screened in a heavy-handed and over-inked manner and printed repeatedly (twice, in this case)

over an evenly-colored field on the canvas. The works in this series¹⁵ bring to mind some of Francis Bacon's earlier paintings, e.g. *Painting (1946)*—with roughly applied segments of black contrasted against bodies hanging and laying lifelessly on the canvas. While it may seem that these paintings mark a violent and sensationalistic turn in Warhol's work,¹⁶ his formal treatment of these images—already reproduced on tabloid newspapers for mass consumption—included formal strategies that fall in line with the rest of his flat, deadpan works, i.e. the use of repetition, using images in mass circulation, and over-inking and over-contrasting the images to pull violent subject matter into “disappearing” into overuse and over-treatment.

Just like the attentive but unaffected spectators in *Saturday Disaster (1964)*, Warhol successfully manages to tame the viscerality of Bacon's *meat* and turn them, in a sense, into something like Cotán's *vegetables*. Postmodern art's desensitization to Bacon's screams is evident in Warhol's response, in an interview, to his *Death and Disaster* paintings. In responding to a question about the origins of the series, Warhol replied: “Did you see the *Enquirer* this week? It had ‘The Wreck that Made Cops Cry’—a head cut in half, the arms and hands just lying there. It's sick, but I'm sure it happens all the time” (qtd. in Blakinger 270).

¹⁵ I chose not to use other silkscreened paintings by Andy Warhol, i.e. the JFK Assassination or Bonnie and Clyde, because these other works bring in aspects of Warhol's other works, i.e. Celebrity. Warhol's *Crash* series, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with sensationalistic images of violence on anonymous bodies, i.e. sensationalism and violence itself. Also, like Cotán's still lifes, the paintings in Warhol's *Crash* series have formal similarities to Bacon's works—in this case, the body as “meat” on a pictorial surface.

¹⁶ As John Blakinger seems to argue in his article “*Death in America and Life Magazine: Sources for Warhol's Disaster paintings*” *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 33, No. 66 (2012), pp. 269-285



Francis Bacon. *Painting* (1946).

Philosophers including Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière addressed the challenge of engaging with images in postmodernity by asking what happens when we encounter a yawn rather than a scream, or, in the case of Barthes, *what happens when a scream makes us yawn?* With the

existence of already shocking photographs in mass culture¹⁷, and with the end of the “shock of the new,” Barthes sought aesthetic redemption from the *punctum* rather than the *studium*. To Barthes, the *studium* is the obvious coded message in an image (51), while the *punctum* is often an overlooked “detail” or “a partial object” in the image (43). Barthes spoke less in terms of the duration that “fills up” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 25) intervals, but more in terms of “the passage of a void” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 49). And Barthes was less interested in the “violence” of sensation or representation (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation* 68), but in the “prick” of overlooked details.

While Deleuze makes it clear that Bacon’s “violence” is not based on “representation” but on “sensation” (68), Deleuze, in fact, codes Bacon’s works by creating philosophical equivalents, i.e. “this means that,” to Bacon’s works. With Deleuze’s treatment, Bacon’s works read more like *Vanitas* paintings, where symbolic significance is placed on specific elements (e.g. the “cage”, the “diagram”, the “contour”, etc.) with most elements having some sort of one-to-one equivalence to a Deleuzian concept—although in traditional *Vanitas* painting and interpretation, the equivalents for each element are primarily about the fragility of life in the face of impending death (Sterling 47), i.e. moral vs. philosophical or religious equivalents. In the case of Warhol, Deleuzian interpretations lose their utility, given that the potential sensation of the image—*any* image, however violent or shocking—is stripped of its power through repetition and overuse.¹⁸

¹⁷ To Rancière, we are in an age where a “shift” has occurred “from the intolerable in art to the intolerability of the image (itself)” (84, 88). While Bacon’s *Painting (1946)* may have resonated when it was exhibited shortly after the second world war, its affective qualities are blunted considerably when it “competes” with other images of violence, even when the “violence” is expressed outside of *representation(s)*.

¹⁸ One could, of course, argue that, with Warhol’s paintings (and other types of “boring” art in postmodernism), Barthes’ “punctum” is equally inapplicable. But, as I understand it, Barthes point in *Camera Lucida* is not only one of looking past the obvious code(s) of an image to the “detail” (to Barthes, the *punctum* is often a detail, but need not be), but, more importantly, to “give (oneself) up” (43) to a certain something (a “disturbance”) that cannot be located, named, or associated with a “sign” (54). There is certainly an anxiety (a “disturbance”) that boredom often provokes, and it is within this field that the *punctum* of boring art can be found.

Pierre and Paul

Perhaps the difficulty in applying a Deleuzian reading to understated or boring works can be found in Deleuze's emphasis on, and isolation of, a "lifeless" *instantaneity* when writing about sensation. To Deleuze, a sensation is that which "acts *immediately* upon the nervous system" (*The Logic of Sensation* 31, emphasis mine), and he defines affection as the "*instantaneous effect* of an image of a thing on me" (*Cours Vincennes* 12/12/1980, emphasis mine). Furthermore, the immediacy of these concepts is often defined in dramatic and hyperbolic terms, i.e. the "violence" of a sensation (*The Logic of Sensation* 68), or sensation as "contracting trillions of vibrations" (*Bergsonism* 74). While Deleuze gives duration, or affect, a "life"—e.g. duration as a "lived transition" or "the passage from one thing to another" (*Cours Vincennes* 12/12/1980)—he does not allow for any nuanced changes within sensations or affections¹⁹ themselves, and looks at them as *static*, albeit intensive, states (e.g. the point of a graphite pencil on paper vs. the slow spread of watercolor on wet paper at the touch of a brush).

From 1978 to 1981 Gilles Deleuze gave a series of lectures (*Cours Vincennes* - 24/01/1978, 12/12/1980, 24/03/1981) on Spinoza's notions of "affection" (*affectio*) and "affect" (*affectus*). Deleuze uses the example of a chance encounter (*occursus*) with two different characters, Pierre and Paul: "in the street I run into Pierre, for whom I feel hostility, I pass by and say hello to Pierre, or perhaps I am afraid of him, and then I suddenly see Paul who is very very charming, and I say hello to Paul reassuredly and contentedly" (1978 lecture). In the example, the encounters with Pierre and Paul are *affections*, a "mixture of bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives the trace of the first." In this case, my change in mood from "sadness" to "joy" in meeting Pierre, then Paul—a "variation" from one pole to the other, or "the form of an increase-diminution- increase-diminution of the power of acting or the force of existing"—would be what Deleuze would characterize as an "affect" (Spinoza's *affectus*).

¹⁹ While similar, my understanding of sensation is that Deleuze allows for it to *lean* toward the body of the artwork itself (i.e. "sensation is what is painted" *The Logic of Sensation* 32), while affection leans toward the subject.

In this and other examples of Deleuzian encounters, bodies are often isolated between one body or object acting on another. Other bodies, e.g. bodies as part of a larger “body”—e.g. the “crowd” of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* which acts as both another (singular) “body,” and as environment and background for the *flâneur* (Baudelaire 9)—or overlooked and marginalized bodies are, in Deleuze, generally understood or perceived as not having any effect whatsoever upon the body in question. Additionally, the “background” or the environment and the multiple context(s) that surround and layer the encounter, are not taken into account. Perhaps this is the reason why, in *Bergsonism*, Bacon, through Deleuze, chooses to speak of “a being (that) can retain from a material object and the actions issuing from it only those elements that interest him. So that perception is not the object *plus* something, but the object *minus* something, minus everything that does not interest us” (24-25).

Deleuze’s use of a public street to illustrate his points seems like a logical enough choice. But, the example opens up some deeper complexities to what is usually involved in or contributes to public encounters. Very seldom (or not at all) do two bodies encounter each other outside of other bodies or a larger context that weigh on the encounter. While we cannot deny the existence of an immediate or, more accurately, initial affection, with a corresponding affect of sadness, in encountering Pierre, Deleuze does not allow for any nuanced fluctuations—analogue to the slow spreading of watercolor on wet paper—in the encounter itself. Additionally, Deleuze does not speak to any possible misattribution of affections, i.e. these encounters (and their corresponding “affective tonalities”) can, in fact, be complicated by bodies that may be neither Pierre nor Paul, or more realistically, only partially because of Pierre as of Paul—i.e. could this “sadness” be from Pierre himself, or is it partly from the dark alley in which we encounter Pierre and not Paul; or, perhaps, from our general dislike of people who wear suits, which Pierre happens to be wearing this day; or maybe this “sadness” is something that we have brought to the encounter ourselves and have unknowingly projected onto Pierre). And, finally, Deleuze does not speak of/to the more complex—i.e. from our inability to pin down or name them²⁰—affections and affects, e.g. Heidegger’s “boredom”—which, in its simplest instance, is not “indifference” at all (86), and in

²⁰ Bergson in *Time and Free Will*: “an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named” (*Key Texts* 91)

its most profound instance “one feels timeless (and) removed from the flow of time” (141)—or Bergson’s example of “violent love” and “deep melancholy” that “takes possession of our soul” and which “permeate one another without any precise outlines” (*Key Texts* 90). While Bergson uses these two examples (in Spinoza, one related to joy, the other to sadness) as affects existing separately, one can easily imagine them, particularly when one speaks of love, as co-existing and “permeating one another.”²¹

Conclusion

In Bergson’s example of mixing sugar in water, the boredom that we experience in waiting for the sugar to melt grows with intensity—our impatience “grows.” If we think of a sensation not as something static, a “point,” but as sensation that can linger, grow, or fade—a slower affection, and perhaps, even having a type of duration of its own—one cannot, then, be simply bored or not bored, or joyful or not joyful, or sad or not sad. The “sadness” that we feel when encountering Pierre may slowly and imperceptibly (as a “vibration” with *longer wavelengths*), increase or decrease as it is allowed to sit within us. To Deleuze, an encounter with the “violence” of Bacon’s paintings is indeed a “spasm” and can only result in a perceptively instantaneous and clearly defined sensation/affection, i.e. “shock.” While, using Bergson’s model, an encounter with one of Cotán’s still lifes needs to be taken in patiently, as a sensation that “grows” (or “diminishes”) in time.

²¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze does write about affect in more nuanced terms, e.g. while discussing metallurgy in terms of “variations” between alloys, variations in proportions, variations between processes, etc.—which he links to “affective qualities or traits of expression of different levels” (405). And, he differentiates between types of affects—“the affects of the saber...are not the same as those of the sword” (406)—and even regards these variations as often unfixed and “in flux” (409). But, while he does not speak in terms of binaries (Peter and Paul, hot or cold), I do find it interesting that the Deleuze chooses the (essentially) violent transformation(s) of metalsmithing, rather than the “softer” and more “organic” trope of “being honeyed” used by Merleau-Ponty (discussed in the following page).

Instead of speaking of the *impatience* that one feels when waiting for sugar to melt, perhaps a better model for encounters with post-modern art would be Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of being "honeyed"—where the attempt to *grasp* at this slow moving liquid, instead, results in being slowly grasped by the honey itself: "while it undoubtedly has a certain consistency and allows itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from. It comes apart as soon as it has been given a particular shape and, what is more, it reverses the roles by grasping the hands of whoever would take hold of it" (*The World of Perception*, 60-61). Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, speaks of this type of encounter that can be "achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes is to make the image speak in silence)" and "to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness" (55). To Barthes, in these more understated encounters, affections are not viewed in terms of *instantaneity*, but as affections that are meant to *linger* and change, fade, or grow and take one over on its own accord.

Another issue is one of *misattribution* of sensations/affections. What Deleuze neglected to take into account in his examples of chance encounters are the contextual affections that can run parallel or peripheral to, or layered on top of, our most obvious encounters. In the case of standing before one of Bacon's paintings at the Gagosian, for example, a sensation that we may initially attribute to a particular painting may be based partially on its environment—e.g. the way Bacon had his newer works mounted behind glass, making them effectively (and affectively) "shiny," or the ways in which the works are mounted, positioned, and organized in a spacious and dramatically lit gallery. Additionally, the cultural context surrounding Bacon's paintings—e.g. the "rave" reviews of the show prior to a physical encounter with the works, or Bacon's reputation as a painter of "shocking" figures—can have an influence on sensation itself:

The influence of language on sensation is deeper than is usually thought. Not only does language make us believe in the unchangeableness of our sensations, but it will sometimes deceive us as to the nature of the sensation felt. Thus, when I partake of a dish that is supposed to be exquisite, the name which it bears, suggestive of the approval given to it, comes between my sensation and my consciousness; I may believe that the flavour pleases me when a slight effort of attention would prove the contrary. (Bergson, "Time and Free Will," *Key Texts* 89-90)

In this example, the "review" of the dish that Bergson is about to partake influences his actual experience of tasting the food, particularly if it is given by someone he respects. In the case of

Bacon's works at the Gagosian, the experience of the show can be partially determined by reading reviews by reputable critics, art publications, and newspapers prior to viewing the show.

The importance of context and culture is touched on by Barthes in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image" where he analyzes a print advertisement for Panzani, a pasta manufacturer, and writes about the three "messages" of this particular advertising image in structural/linguistic terms such as "signs", "codes", "icons" and "signifier" and "signified" (Barthes 33). The first message comes from the words in the advertisement (the "linguistic message"), the second from the culturally definable or recognizable images in the ad, including their "arrangement" and "framing" (the "coded iconic message"), and the third he calls a "message without a code" (36), that is, an image (seemingly) in-and-of-itself which lends a certain credibility to the dense set of symbolic message(s) present in the advertising image: "the denoted image naturalizes the symbolic message ... (and) provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of given meaning" (pp. 45-46). Barthes' encounter with this ad is based on the *interrelationships* between the various elements in the ad, from the obvious to the overlooked, and from the specific to the general or environmental. Our encounter with Pierre or Paul, then, is never just that—a single body acting on another and resulting in a single affection and affect. While we wish to subtract "everything that does not interest us" (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 25), sensations can never be isolated or decontextualized.

Finally, the complexity of certain affects such as love or boredom—outside of Deleuze's closed continuum²² between joy, "the affect which corresponds to an increase of my power,"²³ and sadness, "the affect that corresponds to a decrease of power"²⁴—are not covered adequately in *The Logic of Sensation*. Perhaps this comes from Deleuze's understanding and notion of "force"—a "precondition of sensation" (48)—that is always *pushing outwards*. Deleuze, for example, defines an "affection" as "a state of a body insofar as it is *subject to the action* of another body" (*Cours Vincennes* 24/01/1978). This subjection from an outside action, this "contact" or "encounter" as

²² As I noted earlier, perhaps "closed continuum" might be severe, given Deleuze's more nuanced treatment of affects in *A Thousand Plateaus*. But, this would be accurate in light of his treatment of Bacon and Cézanne in *The Logic of Sensation* as well as in his lecture at the *Cours Vincennes* in 1980.

²³ Lecture by Deleuze in *Cours Vincennes* 12/12/1980

²⁴ *ibid.*

Deleuze puts it, is a force that *pushes toward me*, and creates within me a “variation or passage from one degree of reality to another” (*Cours Vincennes* 24/01/1978). In Bacon’s paintings, the idea of *pushing* is evident in the scream: “the entire body escapes through the screaming mouth” (*The Logic of Sensation* 25). A scream is a forcing *outward*, a *push* from the center. And, in an encounter with Bacon’s paintings, we receive them as something forced onto us by its very depiction, by its violence (from both the paint, the “violence of sensation,” and the depicted scream, “The violence of representation”). We cannot help but register, react to, and absorb such dramatic images. What choice do we have? Like our body’s immediate reaction to the pushing and shoving in a crowded subway car, our bodies can’t help but be affected by this type of imagery.

Cotán’s paintings, on the other hand, are characterized more by the force of “gravitation.” Rather than reacting to a *pushed* sensation, we are “pulled” by an image that has seemingly no given agenda. It does not shout at us for attention, but its “silence” draws us in. When speaking about more complex affects (what Heidegger calls “attunements”), i.e. boredom, Heidegger writes that “those attunements to which we pay no heed at all, the attunements we least observe, those attunements which attune us in such a way that we feel as though there is no attunement there at all, as though they were not attuned in any way at all—*these attunements are the most powerful.*” (68, emphasis mine). In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière examines a photograph by Walker Evans of the kitchen wall of a farmer in Alabama. This type of “straight photography,” one that Deleuze would imagine Bacon (and Deleuze himself) would consider to be something that “reduces sensation to a single level” (*The Logic of Sensation* 75)—a “cliché” easily “mistaken for a work of art” (73)—is instead characterized by Rancière as a “pensive image,” an image that exists and speaks to “a zone of indeterminacy between thought and non-thought, activity and passivity” (107). A pensive image “extends the action that had come to a halt (and) puts every conclusion in suspense” (123).

According to Rancière, Evans’ work is not an “addition” to the banal, but a “deletion”: “what the banal acquires in them is a certain indifference. The neutrality of the sentence or the framing causes the proprieties of social identification to waiver.” (119). This interpretation and engagement with boring art and boredom itself is at the level of *profound boredom* that Heidegger speaks of, where, in the “*it is boring for one*” (136), a type of philosophical or aesthetic “indifference” *is allowed to* “permeate” us (132), and does so in such a way that our experience of a work “*makes everything of equally great and equally little worth*” (137). To Heidegger—unlike

the Deleuzian “affective tonalities” that are based on forces that push toward and act upon us—complex affects such as boredom are “awakened in the sense that we must let it become awake” (132).

In *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze concerns himself primarily with *instantaneous*²⁵ affects, and the accompanying reaction of *shock* that the type(s) of painterly “violence” that Bacon (and Cézanne) drew out of viewers when these paintings first appeared. Perhaps, it is in Deleuze’s use of Bergson’s model of the cone (*Key Writings* 161) with its *fixed instantiations* that makes it difficult to approach the more nuanced “affective tonalities” of post-modern art. If we are able to unhinge Deleuze’s fixed notions of sensations and affections, and regard them more as *slower unravelings* or sensations or affections that can *grow, fade, or linger*, then it would allow us to effectively and affectively engage closely with the types of understated works that we find more difficult or challenging to read, or are simply “bored” by.

²⁵ Even in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Deleuze speaks of inherent “variations” and variability in metallurgy, he can’t help but couch these processes within the context of “singularities” (405, 406), and defines “assemblages” as discreet “constellation(s) of singularities” (406), rather than in more fluid terms.

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