Chapter 4

Anita Fricek: Contemporary Painting as Institutional Critique

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> The strong always have to be defended against the weak.
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

One place we might start a Deleuzian discussion of Contemporary art is with his definition of the 'contemporary'. For Deleuze the 'contemporary' is an ontological rather than chronological term, marking the emergence of something new as the construction and expression of being in becoming. As a result, 'contemporary' art produces sensations that exceed any pre-given conditions of possibility, in a genetic 'event' that constructs a new future. 'Contemporary' art is forever out of time, 'to come', an 'absolute deterritorialization' that '*summons forth a new people*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 99). In this sense, Guattari suggests that instead of speaking of 'Contemporary art' we should speak of an '*Atemporal* art' (Guattari 1994: 64), one whose criteria are not history, medium, technique or content, but creativity. The 'contemporary' in art would therefore emerge, according to Deleuze, as part of a *tradition* of the 'new',[1] one which was not defined by the traditions of 'art', but neither was it denied to them. So although it is tempting to see the tradition of the new as equating with the avant-garde trajectory,[2] the 'contemporary' in art does not emerge simply through a critique of the present, or of its history, which both retain the 'before' as the condition of any conceivable 'after'.[3]

If the avant-garde sought to overcome the boundaries of 'art' in order to operate directly within, and as, 'life', it did so by defining these through a concept of 'art as institution' encompassing 'the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the reception of works'. According to this classic account by Peter Bürger: 'The avant-garde turns against both – the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the

concept of autonomy' (Bürger 1984: 22). For the avant-garde, even if only in a negative sense, the critique of the art institution was a condition of possibility to art being 'new'. While its adherents claimed, and still do, that this 'critical' relation to 'art' was political, it was, and is, a 'politics' that is primarily recognisable in the world of, and in fact *as*, art. For Deleuze and Guattari, on the contrary, art is already life, inasmuch as a sensation is a becoming. This immediately makes the question as to what constitutes 'contemporary' art an entirely practical one, it is a question of creating, as Guattari puts it, 'new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette'. The palette is a given tradition, but immersed in life this tradition is already 'contemporary' inasmuch as it is capable of what Guattari calls a 'realisation of autonomy' (Guattari 1995: 7). The autonomy of art, at least when it is realised, is not a bourgeois institutionalisation that must be rejected, but a radical alterity introduced into the social body as sensation. This sensation affirms a body uncontained by its institutions, a body that evades its negation in the critical 'consciousness' of the avant-garde and institutional critique.

As a result, the 'contemporary' does not spell 'the death of painting', which from an ontological perspective can produce the 'new' as well as anything else. Indeed, Deleuze argues, the tradition of painting is constituted by 'every painter [that] recapitulates the history of painting in his or her own way' (Deleuze 2003: 122). This 'recapitulation' not only reinvigorates the tradition of painting, but invents sensations that free subjectivity from its existing conditions, giving it a creative 'autonomy'. In Deleuze then, 'contemporary' art produces a new sensation as the becoming of life, while much 'Contemporary art' is concerned with defining itself against an existing 'art', so as to better embrace and utilise the 'life' of 'non-art'. A radical divergence seems to emerge here between 'contemporary' art as the production of new sensations (Deleuze), and the increasingly conceptual attempts by 'Contemporary art' to overcome itself and its institutions to live a life dedicated to 'politics'. The name of this divergence, indeed its condition of possibility, is Marcel Duchamp, and as a result perhaps Contemporary art should look elsewhere than Deleuze for its ontology.[4]

But Deleuze does more than simply affirm painting as one possible medium capable of producing a sensation, he provides us with a genealogy of painting that stretches from pre-historic cave art to the colour fields of American abstraction. Indeed at one point Deleuze tells us that his differences with Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried are merely 'a quarrel over words, an ambiguity of words' (Deleuze 2003: 107).

We shouldn't be surprised, considering how Deleuze emphasises the importance of colour and its production of a 'shallow depth' in painting's repeated breaks with his nemesis, representation. In this regard Deleuze's interest in how a painter 'recapitulates the history of painting' echoes Greenberg's account of modern painting as the immanent critique of its own transcendental conditions – colour and flatness – to produce abstract visual sensations. But although both Deleuze and Greenberg follow Kant in claiming that sensation constitutes the realm of the aesthetic, and both see Kant's concept of immanent critique as revealing its conditions, Deleuze's emphasis on producing the (ontological) new frees critique from simply revealing painting's transcendental and formal *conditions of possibility* (colour and 'flatness', or for the avant-garde its institutionalisation). Taking us beyond the Americans' affirmation of Abstract Expressionism, Deleuze's 'contemporary' sensation expresses art's '*real conditions*'; the becoming-active forces of 'Life'.

Like Greenberg, Deleuze's insistence on sensation as the realm of the aesthetic derives from Kant. Departing from the *Critique of Judgement*, however, Deleuze demonstrates how universal claims to aesthetic judgement (and the free play of the faculties that is their condition of possibility) find their limit and finally collapse into chaos in the experience of the sublime. Here, the transcendental synthesis of sensation in a perception breaks down into a rhythmical *perspective* expressing the genetic chaos of Nature. This sensation without conditions of possibility is an *individuation*, a '*form in itself* that does not refer to any external point of view' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 210). These immanent principles of individuation are sublime rhythms, '*material-forces*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 342) acting as the transcendental and real conditions of sensation; they are unconditioned by consciousness and their 'transcendental materialism' (qua body of sensation) emerges beyond the all-too-Kantian Idealism of Greenberg's 'opticality'.[5]

This is not, of course, to say that artists have stopped painting; they have not. But painting after modernism has become contemporary by largely abandoning it's abstract singularities of colour and flatness, in favour of engaging with the world, and its discursive and 'readymade' modes of representation. Painting's historical trajectory is not, however, the problem of this essay; because of course it is not a problem at all. It happened, and often it was good. The problem is instead how we might be able to place Deleuze within this trajectory, a process that might allow us to reassess his relevance to Contemporary art. Rather than attempting some sort of synthesis, I would instead like to explore

this relation as a disjunction. Indeed, it seems to me that it is only by understanding the disjunction between Deleuze and Contemporary art that we can possibly forge a path that retains a modicum of realism and respect in portraying both sides. Seen from the perspective of Deleuze or of Contemporary art the other often tends to become a convenient caricature rather than a divergence. As a result, I propose to explore this disjunction in what I take to be an imminently Deleuzian way, through the discussion of an example: some recent work by the Viennese painter Anita Fricek.[6] Fricek's work is on the one hand painting, and as such clearly falls within the logic of sensation Deleuze uses to define art, and on the other it offers an 'institutional critique' consistent with the 'political' ambitions of much Contemporary art. It is precisely this status as 'contemporary painting' (or as it is sometimes referred to, 'post-conceptual painting') that will allow us to move beyond the banal conflation or mutual exclusion of Deleuze and Contemporary art (to put the existing situation in its starkest terms).

Many of Fricek's paintings share a certain compositional structure with Bacon's work. They have an abstract background describing a shallow space in which various figures are in movement. This movement is both extensive, the figures launching themselves out of the picture frame, and intensive, as the figures seem to emerge from or fade into the canvas. We can see both movements in the main figures of *Bambule* (2005) (image 4.1) and *Butterfly Girl* (2002) (image 4.2).

The flat planes and the figures are often directly connected through a shared colour (the yellow vertical and shirt of the foreground figure in *Bambule*, or the blue vertical and habit of the Nun in *Butterfly Girl*). This conjunction operates like the contour in Bacon, either materialising the abstract ground in the body of the figure in a systolic spasm, or constructing an intense figure in a diastolic and dispersionary movement. In this way Fricek's figures manifest a series of differential relations – flat–volume, solid–sketchy, abstract–figurative, etc. – that produces a rhythmical vibration, as the figure is captured and escapes. This gives a strong torsion in the picture surface, a movement in place that is undetermined by optical space and produces a sensation, a feeling of force. Or rather it is the other way around, as Deleuze claims of Bacon's paintings: 'it is levels of sensation that explain what remains of movement. . . . it is a movement "in place," a spasm, which reveals . . . *the action of invisible forces on the body*' (Deleuze 2003: 41). In this sense then, Fricek's work clearly adheres to Deleuze's fundamental requirement: 'Painting must render invisible forces visible' (57).

What is also obvious however is that Fricek's paintings do not distort

4.1: Anita Fricek, *Day Room, The Girls' Dance (from a still from the TV film 'Bambule', Ulrike Meinhof/Eberhard Itzenplitz, BRD 1970)*, oil on canvas, 195 × 155 cm, 2005. Photo: Michael Nagl. Image courtesy of the artist.

the figure to the same extent as do Bacon's pools of flesh. Her figures are not so much deformed as de- and re-forming, and rather than registering force in a kind of aesthetic physics (like the paintings of Cezanne express gravitational or telluric forces), they express the vicissitudes of subjectivity – its capture and escape – within social institutions. The

danger here, according to Deleuze, is that force is 'hidden' in narration, and so produces mere illustration and spectacle (Deleuze 2003: 62). Such figuration, Deleuze argues, passes through the brain, and rather than acting directly on the nervous system as sensation does, it becomes conscious (36). In this way figuration subordinates the manual aspects of the painting process, as well as its nervous reception as a sensation, to the readymade forms and clichés acting as our 'contemporary' conditions of possible experience. Fricek, however, employs a colour system based upon differential values (the mixing of complementarities that Deleuze calls 'broken tones') and constructs her figures from small modulated planes counteracting the effects of perspective (what Deleuze calls, in his discussion of Cezanne, 'patches'), but her paintings clearly do not reject all 'content'.[7] Fricek's paintings therefore ask an important question on behalf of contemporary painting, and indeed Contemporary art in its various expanded senses, as to whether the capturing of forces might not be able to achieve a 'critical' engagement with our social means of production.

To answer this question we first need to understand more precisely what the 'content' of Fricek's paintings are. For nearly ten years Fricek's work has had a single theme, to analyse various pedagogical theories and the institutions in which they are enacted through painting. The abstract fields making up the background of her paintings generally refer to the architecture of pedagogical institutions, as these exist not only in space but also as processes of subjection that she calls the institution's 'abstracting function' (Fricek 2007: 137). Fricek's work renders these forces in the children's home, the orphanage, or at school, but always places them in relation to another force that *resists*. Not in Bacon's sense of producing a 'hysterical presence' but, in the manner of Contemporary art, through a critical intervention in the social realm that transforms the oppressive forces of the institution into liberatory potentials. In this way Fricek opens up the intriguing possibility of using painting and the sensations it produces as a non-dialectical mechanism of institutional critique.

There are clear benefits to be gained from this approach. Fricek sidesteps the tendency within recent revivals of institutional critique to emphasise new technology and/or political activism as the proper mediums of its exercise, purged as they (apparently) are of any collaboration with the art institution or the parade of spectacle that fills it. As painting, Fricek's work refuses to subordinate 'art' to the 'political' criteria of 'non-art', a 'critical' move that cannot be understood outside the rarefied debates of the art world. On the other hand, Fricek's approach

4.2: Anita Fricek, *Butterfly Girl*, oil on canvas, 150 × 190 cm, 2002. Photo: Michael Nagl. Image courtesy of the artist.

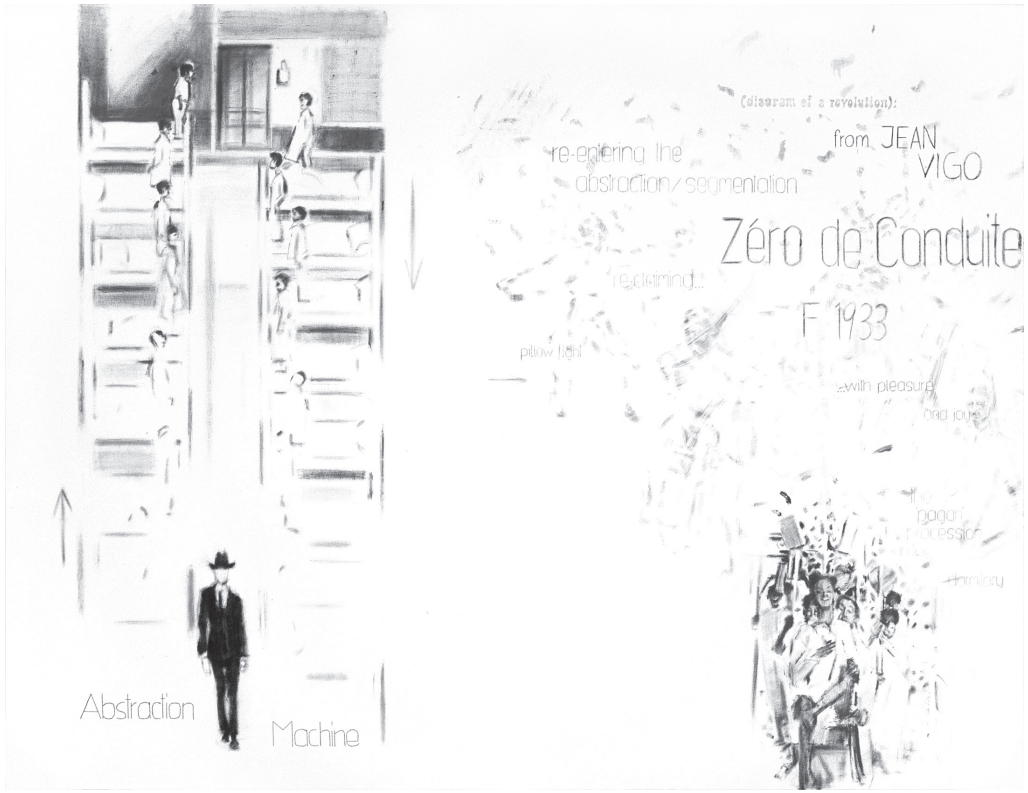
also enlarges the political horizon of painting beyond Deleuze's own obsession with the radical destruction of the human form (Bacon's ecstatic bodies without organs and the haptic vision that perceives/participates in them), to a critique of human institutions that allows us – perhaps even requires us – to transform their reactive 'sad' passions into active 'joyful' becomings.

In this way Fricek's approach enlarges Deleuze's discussion of the forces of sensation within Bacon's work by combining it with the critique of social forces Deleuze finds in Nietzsche. This allows Fricek to develop a painted sensation whose real conditions (qua individuation) extend the 'aesthetic' realm into the political. In this, Nietzsche is the source for Deleuze's response to Kant, because, as Deleuze puts it, 'Kant had not carried out a true critique because he was not able to pose the problem of critique in terms of values' (Deleuze 1983: 1). Nietzsche provides a form of immanent critique that brings Deleuze's vision of the sublime (real) conditions of sensation back from the 'beyond', to place them directly within the actual world of political conflict. In this way, Fricek 'paints with a hammer', she engages with (institutional) forces

in a way that *creates* them anew through a critical evaluation. Here we enter into the realm of a *critical* sensation, one that determines a force's value as *high* or *low*, *noble* or *base* (see Deleuze 1983: 2). In the systolic and diastolic movements of Fricek's figures we see these reactive and active forces attempting to impose or escape the 'abstracting function' of the institution. Following Nietzsche, Fricek affirms and endeavours to protect – through paint and sensation – the strong (the active and noble force of the child we all are) from the weak (the servile and institutionalised adults we have become) (see Deleuze 1983: 53). Here contemporary 'content' is a conscious part of the sensation, but only as a 'symptom of a deeper transformation and of the activities of entirely nonspiritual forces' (39). In this sense consciousness is merely the symptom of a body (that is, an individuation) that is defined by the 'relation between dominant and dominated forces' (40).

Consciousness is integral to the functioning of the pedagogical institution, because the institution enforces a consciousness-of-servility, it 'is always the consciousness of an inferior in relation to a superior' (Deleuze 1983: 39). The institution produces a servile consciousness through series of mechanical *regulations* (see Deleuze 1983: 40–1) that 'subject' the child's body, detaching it from its active forces. It is precisely this aspect of the pedagogical institution that is examined in Fricek's work, in particular the areas for sleeping and washing where the body and its most instinctual functions are regulated and controlled (*Zéro de Conduite* [image 4.3], *Kindergarten* [image 4.4]). Fricek places these regulative institutional functions in a differential relation to the noble forces they seek to 'subject', exploring the ways the child embodies the insubordinate force-sensation of a becoming-active.[8] Here institutional critique becomes a revaluation of values.

This is precisely the meaning of the wonderful scene from Jean Vigo's film that Fricek uses in *Zéro de Conduite* (2005). On one side is the 'abstracting function' of the dormitory being checked and patrolled by the adult warden/teacher, while on the other the 'pagan procession' of the boys erupts in an anarchic autopoiesis that overcomes the architecture of the dormitory. This collective body of the 'procession' is a social individuation, a 'body without organs' to use the vocabulary of the Bacon book, expressing and constructing the 'constitutive difference of level' of the institution (Deleuze 2003: 37). Whereas the representation of the dormitory has an abstract regularity reflecting the way it homogenises and controls the boys' bodies, the scene of the procession is a fragmented and chaotic series of 'manual traits', a gestural abstraction that solidifies into the procession seen at the bottom edge. Although this



4.3: Anita Fricek, *Zéro de Conduite 1933 (Abstraction Machine – Re-entering the Abstraction)*, oil on canvas, 195 × 260 cm, 2005. Photo: Michael Nagl. Image courtesy of the artist.

final scene is clearly figurative, it is so only as a symptom of a broader 'body' that is constituted by the clash of active and reactive, manual and conscious, noble and base forces that constitute the painting (and institution) as a whole. The painting is, again to use the vocabulary of the Bacon book, an 'analogical expression' of the forces constituting the institution. Fricek is not interested in simply opposing these forces, good against bad, child against the institution, etc., but creates a diagram that revalues institutional forces so they are able to become-active, are able to overcome their confinement, transform servility into freedom, and finally through the painting give these active forces to us as a sensation.[9] There is, then, a 'feedback loop' within *Zéro de Conduite* that transforms the painting into an expression (rather than a representation/regulation) of its constitutive clash of forces, a 'diagram of a revolution', as Fricek puts it, where the sensation unleashes a 'becoming-active' as the real condition of a 'contemporary' political intervention. Although Fricek utilises colour in constructing her 'haptic vision', its 'abstraction' is not modernist but seeks to engage the real forces at play in social institutions. In this way the Nietzschean institutional critique utilised by Fricek succeeds in using painting's haptic vision to intervene in the area of 'content'. Fricek's work incorporates the institution's figurative 'consciousness' as a reactive symptom of the battle of forces constituting the body, and explores how active forces can overcome these institutional boundaries. Critique in this sense is absolutely not figurative, or metaphorical; it is irreducibly real, embodied in the active force of the painting qua critical sensation.

This version of haptic vision, one that is directly transformational of the institution it escapes can be seen in the painting *Kindergarten* (2006). Here two pictorial systems of representation are mixed, an 'Egyptian' style seen in the flattened profiles of the figures, and the central point perspective of the mirrors and other bathroom fittings. It is the girls' vision that traverses and transforms these two systems, as they gaze into the mirrors, creating a kind of pictorial proliferation of forms that overflow both systems and create a new sensation. Fricek is clear about this: 'It is the girls' vision that uses the circular shapes as tools in order to spin into their own self-defined reality' (Fricek 2007: 137). This 'spiralling vision' creates remarkable deformations that are certainly worthy of Bacon. On the left the reflection of the foremost girl appears as if her head has been cut off and hung from the ceiling. Fricek's description is compelling: 'Within the context of the pedagogic institution she is Manet's Olympia, decapitated by Mondrian. It is the pumping force of the circle's arabesques that both reveals and revitalises the workings of

4.4: Anita Fricek, *Kindergarten 1978 (The radical girlie perspective)*, oil on canvas, 200 × 200 cm, 2006. Photo: Michael Nagl. Image courtesy of the artist.

the scenario, just like an image medicine or a neutralising device' (137). In this way the painting not only operates critically, but also clinically. It has a medicinal element in the way it treats the symptoms of our conscious institutionalisation in order to free the active forces of the body and its desires. Fricek continues:

> The girls' answer is their singularised vision which overcomes self-reflexivity [in the mirrors] by producing desire . . . The radical girlie perspective is a spin-out machine that embraces conditions given in order to crystallise with all its elements. The girlie spin-out machine is a mechanism to face, neutralise and finally re-code memory. It is the seeing-machine of Olympia's powerful gaze, rebooting the system of her conditions. (Fricek 2007: 138)

This critical revaluation of the institution 'reboots' its memory by turning it towards the future. This is finally the active-force of a sensation, it is

what turns consciousness to the body, and allows the body to escape its institutionalisation. This applies as much to painting itself as to its 'content', as Fricek's work also embodies a genealogical 'recapitulation' of the history of painting which answers all of Contemporary art's demands for political intervention!

The introduction of Nietzsche's genealogical critique allows Fricek's painting to engage with social forces more closely than either the abstract colourist realms of modern abstraction or the 'figures' of 'flesh' produced by Bacon. In the Bacon book Deleuze deals very peremptorily with such social forces, claiming their images are 'clichés' circulating within the 'infosphere', primarily in the form of photographs, which he then thoroughly rejects. The problem with photographs is that their representational narratives constitute our consciousness, they 'fill every room or every brain' (Deleuze 2003: 91). This requires the diagram, on Deleuze's account, to wipe the canvas clean of this photo-consciousness and its 'psychic clichés' (87). This process must be relentless and without exception, because today 'even the reactions against clichés are creating clichés' (89). This 'catastrophe' cannot simply be a deformation or manipulation of the cliché, which remain 'too intellectual' (i.e., reactive) and retain the cliché, even if only (or perhaps, in the case of Contemporary art, especially) as irony and parody (87, 89). Deleuze says something similar in relation to Nietzsche's method of critique: 'We cannot use the state of a system of forces as it in fact is, or the result of the struggle between forces, in order to decide which are active and which are reactive' (Deleuze 1983: 58). Instead, critique is achieved through an intervention *of another type of force*. This in fact suggests the path taken by Fricek's painterly institutional critique, which seeks to intervene within institutional architectures through the introduction (via evaluation) of an active force. This evaluation would produce an 'analogical expression', a resemblance (or diagram) of institutional forces produced from entirely different means (Deleuze 2003: 115). This would suggest an extension of the logic of sensation to Contemporary art that was both consistent with Deleuze's understanding of sensation, while nevertheless retaining a critical 'content'. The price to be paid for this, however, is a rejection of Deleuze's pronounced opposition to photography.

Photography, or more generally the photographic image, has become our dominant mode of visual communication, to the extent that Deleuze's rejection of it seems quixotic. To oppose painting to photography is no longer a 'contemporary' option, and painting as well as the other visual arts have in fact moved in the opposite direction.

Today photographic images and technology are increasingly integral to most forms of contemporary artistic practice, painting included. For Deleuze, on the other hand, photographs are posited as conditions of possibility (and will therefore be directly opposed to the random marks Deleuze calls 'possibilities of facts'). Photographs are 'pictorial givens' that invade vision '*until finally one sees nothing else*' (Deleuze 2003: 91). The photograph, Deleuze argues, 'creates' the person – 'in the sense that we say that the newspaper creates the event (and is not content to narrate it)' – by forcing upon them 'the "truth" of implausible and doctored images' (91). In this close association of photography and the mass media in contemporary forms of subjection Deleuze condemns photography as being 'information', quite opposed to the 'deformation' achieved by art.[10] But there is also perhaps some room to move in relation to Deleuze's animosity towards photography. Deleuze claims that Bacon denies the photograph's aesthetic value because it 'tends to reduce sensation to a single level, and is unable to include within the sensation the difference between constitutive levels' (91). Deleuze obligingly provides a footnote to this no doubt serious ontological objection to photography. But when we follow the footnote to its source we find that Bacon does not say this about photography but about abstract painting! (Sylvester 1999: 58–9). Ample evidence it seems, of Deleuze's famous claim: 'We don't listen closely enough to what painters have to say' (Deleuze 2003: 99).[11] The animosity against photography in the Bacon book is Deleuze's and not Bacon's, and this suggests that perhaps photography might, after all, have a role in a (or at least in Bacon's) logic of sensation. Furthermore, Deleuze's animosity is not unequivocal, and in another footnote Deleuze admits that 'the most interesting cases' of photography's relation to painting 'are those where the painter integrates the photograph, or the photograph's action, apart from any aesthetic value' (183). This remark not only redeems the French painter Gérard Fromanger, about whom Deleuze had written in 1973, and who projected photos onto canvas before painting them in bright, flat colours, but also describes the use of photography made by most contemporary painting.[12] Contemporary painting often projects photographic 'snap-shots' onto the canvas in a way similar to Fromanger, privileging their anti-art and democratised aesthetic as a way of reinvigorating painting's claim to being 'contemporary'.[13] While Fricek often uses snap-shots as sources, these are always found images, and are mostly institutional self-representations. This strategy is similar to what Deleuze sees in Fromanger's use of the photo (which is also taken by someone else), which establishes a 'vital circuit' (Deleuze 1999: 74)

between the indifferent commodities and the abstract movements of the colours, of their cold and heat. 'This circuit of life feeds continually on the circuit of death, sweeps it away with itself to triumph over it' (73). Here Deleuze seems to chart a course that moves from photography to painting, from the cliché to sensation, which doesn't make the condition of painting the catastrophe of the photograph. Fromanger's work contains and critiques what the photograph embodies (the commodity, the artist's indifference), it endeavours to transform the reactive forces of the photograph into living sensations, *in painting*.

Fricek works exclusively from photographs, many of which have been 'harvested' (as she puts it) from the internet and so already exist in the public domain. Most are self-representations of institutions, often promotional images that seek to show the institution in a positive light. This makes their architecture, and its control and manipulation of force, all the more obvious and available to Fricek, who selects the most intense of these images and begins to work with it. She does not project the images onto the canvas, but re-paints the photograph in such a way as to revalue its forces. Fricek employs a German term to describe this process, *begreifen*, which means to both touch and to understand, to handle and to make sense of something. It is an understanding that is felt, a kind of *body intelligence*. In this sense, Fricek likens her painting process to dancing, she 'dances through an image' she says; she touches the images, handles them in order to understand them, and finally, through the dance of painting, liberates something in them which their abstract and reactive architectures had repressed. In this way Fricek expresses and constructs a circuit of life, an active power, a force going to the limit of what it can do before becoming something else. This critical 'method' begins from the photograph, but only in order to unleash a force that goes beyond it, a sensation able to 're-animate' the photo, but only by making it into a painting. This very contemporary form of immanent critique therefore begins in the world, with photographs embodying institutional forces, but in confronting these forces it also invents sensations by which active forces overcome their limits to create a new future. Here the figure of the child and the artist come together, and in a beautiful triptych Fricek turns her critical vision on herself within the institutional space of the museum. *White Cube Rush – Dancing the White Cube* (2005) (image 4.5) shows the de- and re-formations of the artist, as she dances through her own institutional conditions, producing a 'Figure' that is perhaps the closest she comes to a Bacon self-portrait. This figure of the dancing child-artist seems to be torn apart by the violence of the

4.5: Anita Fricek, *White Cube Rush – Dancing the White Cube*, oil on canvas, woollen yarn, each 250 × 200 cm, 2005. Photo: Michael Nagl. Image courtesy of the artist.

confrontation, before re-forming in the white canvas where the walls have seemingly evaporated. This fragile and ambiguous power, this 'dancing star' as Nietzsche called it, must be protected – while at the same time being *projected* – against the weak 'consciousness' of the institution.

In Fricek's work the child or artist is always an active force that desires to overcome its limit and emerge transformed, as beautiful and free as the butterfly that is a recurring motif in her work. In this sense, Fricek tries to place a new future within the forced memory of the photograph, she tries to give a photographic 'treatment' or 'handling' to the image-memory, a treatment in the sense of *Behandlung*, the German word for medical assistance, but also a 'treatment' in the photographic sense. Fricek attempts to 're-flash' the photo, as she says, to make it undergo a 'shock' which removes it from its representational function and turns it active. As Fricek puts it:

> The artist searches and finds images that are screenshots of collective memory, scans them in the light of their potentials and deadlocks, throws them into the spin-out-machine and projects them back, until all the elements are set in motion and activate each other. In this way the original images undergo a revitalisation program. (Fricek 2007: 138)

This takes on a literal sense in the triptych '*Le Stelline*' (2006–7). The first panel (*1. The Image: 'Le Stelline', Orphanage, Milan, late '60s ('The Reward')*) shows a 'treated' photo of Le Stelline orphanage in Milan (the image was found on a website about the region and its history). One of the most cynical images Fricek has found, it shows the little girls standing around holding boxed dolls, gifts given to reward their ability to be dolls themselves, identically dressed and all with the same haunting empty gaze. This image is then 're-flashed' in the second panel (*2. The Flash (The Shock)*). Fragments from the image appear in luminous green, a bright fluorescent pigment that hurts the eyes to look at, creating purple hazes and irritation, similar to an actual flash. This is to go back to the moment the picture was taken, Fricek says, to release a new future within it. The final panel (*3. The Development Process (Die Entpuppung)*) is once more the same image but this time in white on white, and once more fragmentary and almost indiscernible. Here the image has returned to a stage of pure potential, a potential that inheres in the technologies of the original photo (in a kind of rewind back from 1) the photo, to 2) the flash, and finally 3) the (re)development), but can no longer be recognised within the institutions the original photo *represented*. This is finally the sense of '*Die Entpuppung*', taken literally it's a 'de-dolling', or more

correctly an eclosion; the emergence of an adult from the pupa, like the butterfly.

Fricek's work expresses and constructs the vitality of 'content', it finds a way in which photographic representations and the regulation and equalisation of sensation they produce can be critically evaluated and transformed. Deleuze says 'Forces must not be compared abstractly' (Deleuze 1983: 59), which we might take literally in the terms of the Bacon book as meaning, on the one hand, that an institution's 'abstracting function' can only transform actual forces into a pre-given code, and so reduces their force rather than increasing it. But on the other hand, and against the radical abstraction of Bacon's sublime flows of flesh, Fricek compares real social forces, and produces social 'facts'. This is to acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining Deleuze-Bacon's 'path' in the face of the simple truth that Contemporary art has chosen another way, and suggests in a quite practical manner how we might dispense with some of Deleuze's principles. In this sense, Fricek's paintings map out a form of institutional critique that incorporates photography into its method and fulfils Contemporary art's interest in engagement with the world. But it is also consistent with a logic of sensation that attempts to express forces as pictorial 'facts'. This is where Fricek's work becomes so prescient, it utilises a Nietzschean form of critique that enables us to move beyond Deleuze's insistence on a modernist form of non-representational abstraction, that nevertheless remains consistent with his requirements of an immanent critique into transcendental conditions. These *real* conditions are active and reactive forces, and it is in this realm that Fricek's paintings revalue institutions in individuations that are strong enough to defend themselves. The strong must be protected against the weak.

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Notes

1. Deleuze is referring to what he calls the 'fine pages' of Harold Rosenberg's *The Tradition of the New* (Deleuze 1994: 91).
2. Guattari seems to have actively flirted with this idea when he writes: 'The incessant clash of the movement of art against established boundaries (already there in the Renaissance, but above all in the modern era), its propensity to renew its materials of expression and the ontological texture of the percepts and affects it promotes brings about if not a direct contamination of the other domains then at least a highlighting and a re-evaluation of the creative dimensions that traverse all of them' (Guattari 1995: 106).
3. As Guattari argues, in a comment applying as much to the avant-garde as to the traditional arts, the creation of new aesthetic futures must emerge 'without their authors having prior recourse to assured theoretical principles or to the authority of a group, a school or an academy' (Guattari 2000: 40).
4. Perhaps it should look to Alain Badiou, who argues that Duchamp's readymade is a process of thought that both introduces the 'contemporary' as such (a contemporary that is essentially conceptual), and is opposed to Deleuze's. The readymade, Badiou writes, 'is the visitation of the idea in its contemporary artistic form. Art is pure Idea. It is not, as in vitalism, corporeal energy establishing the embrace of percepts and affects.' This thought is in fact a 'discontinuity', an event in which not only a new 'art' but also a new 'truth' enters the world by marking what will have been missing from it. This is, perhaps, the Idea of Contemporary art (see Badiou 2008).
5. The term 'transcendental materialism' comes from Alberto Toscano's account of individuation, on which I have drawn here (see Toscano 2006, especially pages 193–201).

6. For recent catalogues of her work see Fricek (2008), Larsen et al. (2005), Sala Rekalde Erakustaretoa (2005). For Fricek's important statement regarding her own technique (in the context of 'Documenta 12') see Fricek (2007).
7. Deleuze's insistence on the rejection of content can seem exaggerated, such as when he upholds Bacon's rather unlikely claims that elements like a Nazi armband or a hypodermic needle play a purely compositional or abstract role, and should not be given any 'meaning' outside of their colour (the armband) or their ability to pin down the arm (the needle).
8. In the journal *Multitudes* Fricek writes regarding the work *Kindergarten*: 'The image of a bathroom was chosen because it is one of the sites that stages the most dramatic encounter between bodily functions/openings and the policies and rituals, thus ideologies of pedagogic institutions – like eating, washing, sleeping, defecating – the sites of dormitories, dining halls, shower rooms. It is where the institution inscribes itself most effectively and potentially violently into bodies, and can thus be a trigger place for the most transformative acts' (Fricek 2007: 136).
9. In relation to Nietzsche Deleuze develops the concept of 'constitutive difference' in terms of a force's quantity and quality, the difference between the quantities of active and reactive forces constituting the force's quality. 'Difference in quantity is . . . the irreducible element *of* quality' (Deleuze 1983: 44). Eric Alliez has developed this idea in relation to the colourism of Matisse (see Alliez and Bonne 2007).
10. Information is a set of imperatives, slogans, directions – order words. When you are informed, you are told what you are supposed to believe. . . . A work of art does not contain the least bit of information. In contrast, there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance' (Deleuze 2006: 320, 322–3).
11. Many of Deleuze's stronger condemnations of photography that he attributes to Bacon are simply not present in the interviews collected in *The Brutality of Fact*. For example, Deleuze claims that 'Bacon has a radical hostility toward the photograph,' and that 'Bacon's whole attitude . . . is one that rejects the photograph' (Deleuze 2003: 92). But in *The Brutality of Fact* Bacon repeatedly states his fascination for photographs and explains the way he uses them in his practice. Indeed, this makes a mockery of Deleuze's claim that 'at no point does [Bacon] ever integrate the photograph into the creative process' (Deleuze 2003: 92). Even Deleuze's own description of Bacon's use of photographs, especially in his portraits, belies this statement.
12. In fact, Deleuze claims, in his essay on Fromanger, that by projecting a photo onto the canvas and painting on it, he 'reveals an eternal truth of painting: that the painter has never painted on the white surface of the canvas to reproduce an object that acts as a model, but has always painted on an image, a simulacrum, a shadow of the object, to produce a canvas whose very operation reverses the relationship of model and copy [to] produce a "heightened reality"' (Deleuze 1999: 65). This seems almost the opposite of claiming that all photography is a cliché, and instead claims that all painting starts with the photograph!
13. Deleuze and Guattari also mention the painter Florence Julien, who 'invented a procedure by which she extracts from photographs lines that are nearly abstract and formless' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 224).