

Anita Fricke: Contemporary painting as Institutional Critique

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“The strong always have to be defended against the weak.” Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, quoted by Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 58.

For all Deleuze’s insistence upon and celebration of the new as the ontological force of life, and despite his constant efforts to elucidate new ways of thinking this ontological becoming, he never showed a real interest in what we call ‘Contemporary art’. Perhaps this is not surprising when we consider that for Deleuze the production of the new is always achieved facing the past, through a selection of all of the past capable of repeating its constitutive difference. What creates a new thought – in philosophy, science or art - is this selective memory in which thought becomes immanent to being qua becoming, and creates the future. The ‘contemporary’ in art would therefore be recognized, according to Deleuze, as part of a tradition of the ‘new’, rather than by any formal or theoretical ‘break’. A radical divergence emerges here between the ontological production of the new understood in aesthetic terms (Deleuze), and the eruption of Contemporary art based on ‘new media’ and new aims drawn from contemporary life. We gain a sense of this difference when we see Deleuze argue that the radical singularity of Francis Bacon’s work is achieved through a perhaps surprising method: ‘every painter recapitulates the history of painting in his or her own way.’ (2003 122) It is a method that couldn’t be further removed from that of Contemporary art.

In fact, Contemporary art does not follow the foundational ‘logic of sensation’ that grounds aesthetics for Deleuze. Contemporary art is neither limited to sensations, nor defined by them. Since the 60s art has defined itself conceptually, and its development has been a continual expansion of this concept. No doubt today, and perhaps for the last few decades art has stopped posing the question ‘Is it art?’, but our current acceptance of anything as ‘art’ doesn’t change the fact that today ‘art’s’ ontological status is conceptual. This is why Deleuze rejects Conceptual art, and never discusses ‘Contemporary art’, because neither embody (nor, it should be pointed out, are they interested in embodying) sensation’s ontological power of producing the new. In fact, the ontology of the new in Contemporary art is different from

Deleuze's, as it grounds itself on an absolute beginning that ruptures with the history of painting/sensation that had preceded it. The name of this rupture is of course, Marcel Duchamp, and as such perhaps contemporary art should look elsewhere than Deleuze for its ontology.¹

We shouldn't be surprised then when Deleuze tells us that his differences with the American critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried "seems to us to be a quarrel over words, an ambiguity of words." (2003, 107) In fact, it is even less surprising when we consider how Deleuze's book about the painter Francis Bacon bases the logic of sensation on the use of colour and its production of a 'shallow depth' that breaks with the representational logic of art. In this regard Deleuze follows Greenberg in defining painting as the ongoing investigation of its own determining principles - colour and flatness - to produce non-figurative sensations. Both Deleuze and Greenberg follow Kant in claiming that sensation constitutes the realm of the aesthetic, and painting – for both Greenberg and Deleuze – is an immanent critique into sensation's transcendental conditions. For Deleuze and Greenberg this is the definition of painting's modernity, a definition whose rejection will be a fundamental condition of Contemporary art.²

What makes this shared method of Deleuze and Greenberg surprising is in fact nothing to do with their respective writings about painting, but everything to do with Contemporary art's 'post-modernity'. This 'post-modernity' is both chronological and theoretical, and in large part rests on art's rejection of Greenberg. From the beginning of the 60s a series of art movements directly challenged Greenberg's modernism by denying the specificity of the various arts (painting, sculpture, photography, etc.) in favour of a generic category that had not previously existed; 'art'. Beginning with Minimalism's exploration of installation, and closely followed by Performance art's theatrical use of the body and Conceptual art's affirmation of the concept as art's true realm of ontological operation, 'Contemporary art' emerged in a series of 'post-painting' practices that mixed art and non-art elements, and so rejected immanent critique as art's defining function. Along with these new artistic experiments came another equally important development, the rapid adoption of 'aesthetic' practices for the creation and manipulation of sensation in the commercial realms of advertising and marketing and the mass-media world of 'info-tainment'. Art's 'expanded

practice' now took in this 'socio-aesthetic' realm, as well as its aims, materials and techniques, which seemed to encapsulate what was most contemporary about life. This was the time of the neo-avant-garde, when art became life, *again*. Art could truly be anything – a found object, an action or performance, a newspaper advertisement, a concept, or even nothing at all – and it could appear anywhere, in the media, in the desert, at a dinner party, or in your head. 'Art' and the 'artist' were no longer concerned with an immanent and creative critique of their transcendental conditions, as these were understood in and through sensation, instead the 'critical artist' emerged within a newly organised and integrated 'art system', where art's critical position was its most sought after commodity. As a result, 'Contemporary art' occupied the world like anything else, and while it often held (and holds) political ambitions to subvert and confuse the emerging society of control, this ambition is compromised by art's adoption of this society's dominant operating logics.³

This is all now history, but it is a history Deleuze was certainly aware of. Neither ignorance nor disinterest can be used to explain Deleuze's silence over Contemporary art, a silence that seems in fact closer to that with which he condemned Hegel, and is similarly philosophical. Deleuze's understanding of the aesthetic comes from Kant, and rests on his definition of sensation as an empirical experience that gives feelings of pleasure or displeasure. Departing from the *Critique of Judgement* however, Deleuze demonstrates how any universal claim to aesthetic judgement (based on the transcendental condition of the free play or harmony of sensation and the understanding) finds its limit and finally collapses into disharmony and chaos in the experience of the sublime. Deleuze will subsequently make the inhuman experience of the sublime the fundamental aspect of sensation, using it to reinvent transcendental philosophy and the immanent critique it retains as its method, as the production of singular genetic and plastic principles of individuation that operate beyond (and against) any conditions of possibility - whether conceptual or formal – to “construct a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.”⁴ (1988 142) These immanent principles of individuation are the '*material-forces*' (1988 342) acting as the transcendental and real conditions of sensation, and escape any conditioning in consciousness (qua concept) in a 'transcendental materialism' (qua body of sensation) that avoids relapsing into a transcendental Idealism.⁵ In this sense, and as the term suggests, Deleuze's 'logic of sensation' has an entirely

philosophical necessity, one that keeps sensation (as the realm proper to aesthetics) strictly separate from conceptual operations, and as we shall see, from consciousness.

The first act of painting, according to Deleuze-Bacon, is to break with the figurative givens that predetermine any canvas, and perhaps we can say, any artwork. This is achieved by an accident, an eruption of chaos within the frame of the work that detaches its materials from the conditions of representation - cliché and opinion - allowing sensation to be composed by rhythm. This is the basic onto-genetic moment Deleuze finds in Kant's sublime, liberating the aesthetic from both the harmony of the faculties and the transcendent Ideas: "The rhythm is something which comes out of chaos, and the rhythm is indeed something which can indeed perhaps return to chaos."⁶ Deleuze and Guattari insist on this chaosmosis of emergence as the real condition of every creative act.⁷ Deleuze also, and somewhat problematically for Contemporary art, insists: "Rhythm appears [...] as painting when it invests the visual level." (2003 42) It is the manual nature of Bacon's accident (he throws paint at the canvas) that cleans the canvas of its figurative conditions of possibility, and in this way introduces a 'possibility of fact'. This is the possibility that rhythm will emerge to compose a sensation, or 'fact'. This vocabulary evokes, as Deleuze admits, (2003 101, 196) the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In fact, Deleuze's 'logic of sensation' is in many ways a sustained, although largely ironic, attack on Wittgenstein's own use of these terms in establishing the logical possibility of a fact in thought. (Wittgenstein 1.1, 2.141, 2.201-2.203, 3, 3.02)⁸ Directly opposed to Wittgenstein, and to the Wittgensteinian assumptions of much Conceptual art, the passage from the possibility of fact to the hapticity of sensation and its emergence in a haptic vision, completely bypasses the realm of logical thought. Deleuze's 'analagous' use of Wittgenstein's vocabulary therefore produces the directly opposite result: "For the diagram was only a possibility of fact, whereas the painting exists by making present a very particular fact, which we will call *the pictorial fact*." (2003 160) The diagram is accidental rather than logical, just as the pictorial is no longer the logical condition of possibility of representation qua signification, (Wittgenstein 3.14) but the non-representative sensation whose transcendental conditions it both expresses (as rhythmical chaosmosis) and constructs (as materialist individuation). This then is the transcendental horizon, for Deleuze, of immanent critique: "painting discovers, deep in itself and in its own

manner, the problem of a pure logic: how to pass from the possibility of fact to the fact itself?" (2003 160)

The answer to this question, obvious from Deleuze's mis-handling of Wittgenstein, is the body. Art produces a body and is a body, a body constructed in and by its sensations. This is an inhuman body, an animal body, a body forged through the destruction of the human organism and the consciousness that accompanies it, a Body without Organs as Deleuze puts it, whose sensations do not detour through the brain. Once more, this living expression and construction of a body of sensation couldn't be further away from the clever and well-informed interests and often highly effective forms of engagement created by Contemporary art. 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 its defining singularities of colour and flatness, and abandoning the 'politics of ecstasy' in favour of engaging with the world. This historical trajectory beyond modernist abstraction that turned painting into art is not 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's own thoughts about art within this trajectory, and therefore how we might understand Deleuze's relation to and relevance for Contemporary art. This seems to be a surprising problem, inasmuch as today Deleuze is one of the crucial philosophical references orienting that confusing multiplicity called the art world. Perhaps this is why it seems to have gained little attention.

There is an implicit answer to this conundrum given by most art and art theory that draws upon Deleuze, which tends to use concepts from his non-aesthetic writing. Artists and art writers seem most drawn to ideas such as the virtual, the rhizome, deterritorialisation or nomadism. It is no doubt these concepts that best serve art in its contemporary desire to engage with the world, a desire that art gives a possibly inflated name: politics. But from Deleuze's point of view, I would argue, this is a symptom of, rather than a solution to, the problem. Another approach, one less frequently attempted, is to sieve Deleuze's work on painting for concepts that could be forced over the break of the 60s, and put to work within contemporary practices so that Deleuze's concept of painting might encompass art as a whole. Indeed, in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari often expand the logic of sensation from

painting to 'art'.⁹ Both abandoning and expanding Deleuze's logic of sensation would nevertheless have to deal with the significant problem of Deleuze's rejection of Conceptual art, the former having to ignore this rejection, the latter having to reject what is possibly the defining characteristic of contemporary art. Both options therefore involve a considerable loss, a loss that unfortunately cannot, in my opinion, be avoided. It is the price that has to be paid for the fact that Deleuze's philosophy and Contemporary art have travelled in largely opposed directions for at least the last 40 years.

Rather than attempting some sort of rapprochement then, I would instead like to explore this 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 tends to become a caricature that simply hides their disjunction. 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.¹⁰ I have chosen to discuss this work because in many ways it is placed somewhere between Deleuze and Contemporary art, or perhaps better, it participates within both. It is painting, and as such clearly falls within the logic of sensation Deleuze uses to define art, while at the same time utilising many of the conceptual approaches associated with 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 mutually exclusive opposition 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) (Figure 1)



Figure 1. *Day Room, The Girls' Dance* (from a still from the TV film "Bambule", Ulrike Meinhof/Eberhard Itzenplitz, BRD 1970) (2005)

and *Butterfly Girl* (2002) (Figure 2). The flat planes and the figures are often directly connected through a shared colour (the yellow vertical and shirt of the figure on the left in *Bambule*, or the blue vertical and habit of the Nun on the right of *Butterfly Girl*). This conjunction operates like the contour in Bacon, either materialising the abstract institutional framework in the body of the figure in a systolic spasm, or providing an escape through this framework in a diastolic and dispersionary movement. In both cases the figure manifests a difference in level (or, a series of differential relations – flat-volume, solid-sketchy, abstract-figurative, etc. – many of the same differences Deleuze explores in Bacon's work) that produces movement both extensive (the figures' movement), and intense (the manifestation and dissipation of the figure), in a rhythmical vibration of capture and escape. 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.' (2003 41) In this sense then, Fricke's work clearly adheres to Deleuze's fundamental requirement: 'Painting must render invisible forces visible.' (2003 57)

What is also obvious however is that Fricke's paintings do not distort the figure to the same extent as 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 expressing gravitational or telluric forces), they manifest an ambivalence – a capture and escape – from social institutions. The danger here, from a Deleuzian perspective, is that force can be 'hidden' in narration, illustration and spectacle. (2003 62) Such figuration, Deleuze argues, passes through the brain, and rather than acting directly on the nervous system as sensation does (precisely, as a kind of physics), it becomes conscious.¹¹ (2003 36) In this way figuration subordinates the manual aspects of the painting process as well as its nervous reception to the 'content' of the work, to the endless readymade clichés of signification and narrative. So while Fricke 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') her paintings clearly do not reject all 'content'.¹² Fricke'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 in Deleuze's sense might not be able to accommodate an engagement with content.



Figure 2, *Butterfly Girl* (2002)

To answer this question we first need to understand more precisely what the ‘content’ of Fricke’s paintings are. For nearly ten years Fricke’s work has had a single theme, to analyse in paint the nature and effects of various kinds of pedagogical theories and the institutions in which they are enacted. The abstract fields of her paintings generally refer to the architecture of pedagogical institutions, as these exist not only in space but also as processes by which the architectures of our mind are produced. Fricke’s work assumes that content can be analysed as a series of forces applied to an individual when they enter into pedagogical architectures, and that the institution’s ‘abstracting function’ as she calls it,¹³ can be rendered and indeed *resisted* through a logic of sensation, no longer in Bacon’s sense of producing a ‘hysterical presence’ but, in the manner of Contemporary art, through a critical intervention. Indeed Fricke’s work opens up the intriguing possibility of using painting – and more precisely sensation - as a mechanism of institutional critique. Institutional critique was instrumental in carving out many of the political concerns of Contemporary art in the early 70s, and has experienced a profound reincarnation in recent years, not least in conjunction with art theory influenced by Deleuze and Guattari. This latter has tended to emphasis new technology and/or political activism as the proper mediums for its exercise, purged as they (apparently) are of any

perceived collaboration with the art institution or the parade of spectacle that fills it.¹⁴ But this has led to ‘art’ with an overly didactic ‘content’, a kind of new political narrativism from which sensation has largely evaporated. Furthermore, this return to ‘activist-art’ (the main reference is inevitably the Constructivism – Situationism axis) is often ‘achieved’ through a simple conflation of institutional critique with the technologies and problems of the everyday (or ‘non-art’), resulting in a banalisation and/or normalisation of its political claims, where an informational display or theatrical demonstration is art.¹⁵ The advantage of Fricke’s approach is that it attempts an institutional critique *in painting and through sensation*. This provides – following Deleuze in spirit if not to the letter - the means of expressing and critiquing institutional forces in sensation. What this does however, is to enlarge the political horizon of painting from 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.

Such an approach, I would argue, enlarges Deleuze’s discussion of the forces of sensation within Bacon’s work by combining it with the critique of force Deleuze finds in Nietzsche. Indeed, it is precisely this addition of Nietzsche that moves Deleuze beyond the modernist abstraction of Greenberg, while retaining his ontological commitment to the rhythmical and chaotomic emergence of sensation. In this sense, Fricke’s work precisely embodies Deleuze’s claim, ‘that Kant had not carried out a true critique because he was not able to pose the problem of critique in terms of values.’ (1983 1) This would suggest a possible way through the seeming impasse of Deleuze’s affirmation of Greenberg and modernism (if not, exactly, Greenbergian modernism), inasmuch as Nietzsche provides a form of immanent critique that goes beyond Kant. This would be to “paint with a hammer”, to engage with (institutional) forces such that their value is *created* by a critical evaluation. Here we enter into the realm of a *critical* sensation, one in which it attains value as *high* or *low*, *noble* or *base*. (1983 2) It is in this Nietzschean sense that Fricke protects – through paint and sensation – the strong (the active noble force of the child we all are) from the weak (the servile and institutionalised adults we have become). (1983 53) Here consciousness is part of sensation, inasmuch as it is “the symptom of a deeper transformation and of the activities of

entirely nonspiritual forces.” (1983 39) In this sense consciousness is merely the symptom of a body that is defined by the “relation between dominant and dominated forces.” (1983 40)

Indeed, consciousness is condemned by Deleuze-Nietzsche in terms of force, and this relates directly to Fricke’s work. Consciousness is a servility, and its reactive forces operate through series of mechanical *regulations*. (1983 40-1) As Deleuze quotes Nietzsche: “Consciousness usually only appears when a whole wants to subordinate itself to a superior whole ... Consciousness is born in relation to a being of which we would be a function.” (quoted, 1983 39) It is precisely this aspect of the pedagogical institution that is often examined in Fricke’s work, in particular the sleeping and washing areas where the body and its most unconscious functions are regulated and controlled (i.e., *Kindergarten* (Figure 4), *Zéro de Conduite* (Figure 3)). The representational and regulative content of such scenes already appears within the differential relation of a sensation that deforms them, and that explores the animal and unconscious freedom of the child’s body, the insubordinate force of a becoming-active.¹⁶



Figure 3, *Zéro de Conduite 1933 (Abstraction Machine – Re-entering the Abstraction)* (2005)

This is precisely the meaning of the wonderful scene from Jean Vigo's film that Friciek uses in *Zero de Conduite* (2005) (Figure 4). 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 as an anarchic revolution, an explosion of active forces forming a higher power, a body composed of all of the boys that overcomes the architecture of the dormitory. This inorganic body of the 'procession' is a new body, a body without organs, to use the vocabulary of the Bacon book, which mixes their discreet parts into a synthetic whole organised (or perhaps dis-organised) around the picture's "constitutive difference of level", its "plurality of constituting domains." (2003 37). Whereas the representation of the institutional *mis en scene* has an abstract regularity reflecting the way it homogenizes the boys' bodies, the scene of the procession is a fragmented and chaotic series of 'manual traits' that then solidifies into the procession seen at the bottom edge. Although this final scene is clearly figurative, it is so only within a broader 'body' that is constituted by the different 'orders' of the painting (and institution) as a whole. As a result, Friciek does not establish an opposition, good against bad, child against the institution, but creates a diagram by which active force is able to overcome its confinement, and through the picture – through its sensation – is able to make what is escaped from escape from itself. In this sense, *Zero de Conduite* transforms reactive into active, and gives the active force to us as a sensation.¹⁷

There is, then, a 'feedback loop' within the painting transforming the whole into an expression (rather than a representation/regulation) of its constitutive difference, a 'diagram of a revolution' that extends out of its own plane and into an even wider body (without organs) of which we have become part. This is precisely the achievement of Bacon, according to Deleuze, and the achievement of painting inasmuch as it constructs a 'haptic eye' and a 'haptic vision'. But whereas Deleuze restricts the conditions of haptic vision to "creative taste in color, in the different regimes of color", (2003 153) the Nietzschean critique utilised by Friciek succeeds in extending haptic vision beyond colour and the Bacon book, giving it a political dimension that projects the logic of sensation into the area of 'content', and enables an institutional critique that operates through, and for, the body. This is a remarkable and important contribution to the future of Contemporary art.



Figure 4, *Kindergarten 1978 (The radical girlie perspective)* (2006)

This version of haptic vision, one that is directly transformational of the institution it escapes can be seen in the painting *Kindergarten* (2006) (Figure 4). 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 either system and create a new sensation. Fricke 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.”¹⁸ This ‘spiralling vision’ creates remarkable deformations that are certainly worthy of Bacon. On the left the reflection of the front girl appears as if her head has been cut off and hung from the ceiling. Fricke’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 the scenario, just like an image medicine or a neutralising device.” In this way the painting operates in the clinical sense Deleuze found in Nietzsche. It has a medicinal element in the way it treats the symptoms of our conscious institutions in order to free the active forces of the body, the force of its desires. Fricke 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.”¹⁹

This is 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 for an engagement with social forces that are wider than those found within the abstract and colourist realms of modern abstraction. In the Bacon book Deleuze deals very peremptorily with such forces, identifying them categorically as ‘clichés’ and locating them within the realm of the photograph, which he then thoroughly rejects. The problem with photographs is that they constitute our consciousness, they have constructed a kind of “photo-consciousness” that determines what we think. (2003 91) This requires the first purpose of the diagram, on Deleuze’s account, to wipe the canvas clean of this photo-consciousness, to clean it of cliché. This process must be relentless and without exception, a true catastrophe that cannot simply be a deformation, transformation, manipulation or mutilation of the cliché, all of 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. (2003 87) 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.” (1983 58) Instead, critique is achieved through an intervention

of another type of force. This in fact suggests the path taken by Fricke's painterly institutional critique. Such a critique would explore how painting (qua sensation) could intervene within institutional architectures through the introduction of an active force. This introduction would produce an 'analogical expression' in the sense of the Bacon book, a resemblance produced from entirely different means, (2003 115) but this expression would also be a construction, inasmuch as it achieved the transformation of the regulative sadness of the institution into a becoming-active inorganic body of sensation. 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 opening it up to '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 where 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-Bacon calls "possibilities of facts"), 'pictorial givens' that invade vision "*until finally one sees nothing else.*" (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)" (2003 91)) by forcing upon them "the "truth" of implausible and doctored images." (2003 91) In this close association of photography and mass-media Deleuze condemns photography as 'information', which elsewhere he says has nothing to do with art.²⁰ But there is also perhaps some room to move in relation to Deleuze's animosity towards photography. Deleuze claims that Bacon denies photographs' aesthetic value because they "tend to reduce sensation to a single level, and is unable to include within the sensation the difference between constitutive levels." (2003 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."²¹ (2003 99) The animosity against painting in the Bacon book is

Deleuze's and not Bacon's, and this suggests that perhaps photography might, after all, have a role in the logic of sensation. Furthermore, Deleuze's animosity is not unequivocal, and in a 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." (2003 183) As well as redeeming 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, this remark suggests the use of photography made by most contemporary painting.²² Contemporary painting often projects photographic snapshots 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'. While Fricke 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 establishes a visual circuit between indifferent commodities and the indifference of the painter whose silhouette appears against the photo, these circuits together producing a "circuit of death". (1999 73) This "rupture" with the world however, is not nihilistic, and in fact unleashes a new "vital circuit" (1999 74) made out of the abstract movements of the colours, out of their cold and heat. "And this circuit of life feeds continually on the circuit of death, sweeps it away with itself to triumph over it." (1999 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), and so intervenes to transform the reactive forces of the image into living sensations (the constitutive difference of hot and cold colours. Here, while using a different technique to Fricke, Fromanger's images also defend the strong against the weak.

Fricke works exclusively from photographs, most 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 the institutions, often promotional images that seek to present the institution in a positive light. This makes their architecture, and its control and manipulation of force all the more obvious and available to Fricke, who then seeks out the most intense of these images and begins to work with it. Fricke employs a German term to describe this

process, *begreifen*, which means to both touch and to understand, to handle and to make sense of. It is an understanding that is felt, a kind of body intelligence. In this sense, Friciek likens her painting process to dancing, she ‘dances through an image’ she says, she touches them, 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.²³ What is liberated is what Deleuze saw in Fromanger’s work, a circuit of life, an active power, a force going to the limit of what it can do before becoming something else. In a beautiful triptych Friciek turned her critical vision on herself within the institutional space of the museum. *White Cube Rush - Dancing the White Cube* (2005) (figure 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 is the power of the dancing child-artist in Friciek’s work, a fragile and ambiguous power who’s coming to be is often indiscernible from a fading out, a kind of becoming-imperceptible. In every apparatus of capture the painter-child finds an escape.



Figure 5, *White Cube Rush - Dancing the White Cube* (2005)

In this sense Friciek’s project of institutional critique is symptommatological, it presents the abstract and ideological architecture of these institutions, as well as the servile consciousnesses they produce as systems of reactive forces. But within these institutions Friciek also places the child or artist as an active force that desires to go their limit, to overcome their limit and emerge transformed, as beautiful and free as the butterfly that is a

recurring motif in her work. In this sense, Friciek tries to place a future within the forced memory of the photograph, she tries to give a photographic ‘treatment’ or ‘handling’ to the image-memory and its forces, a treatment in the sense of *Behandlung*, the German word for medical assistance, but also a ‘treatment’ in the photographic sense. Friciek attempts to ‘flash’ the photo as she says, to make it undergo a ‘shock’ which removes it from its representational function and frees the forces captured within it.²⁴ As Friciek 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.”²⁵

Friciek’s work expresses and constructs the vitality of ‘content’, it finds a way in which representation and regulation and the equalization of sensation they produce can be critically evaluated and transformed. In this way Friciek explores an institutional critique that protects the strong against the weak, a Nietzschean critique of the institutionalisation of force. Deleuze says ‘Forces must not be compared abstractly’ (1983 59) which we might take literally in the terms of the Bacon book as meaning, on the one hand, that an institutions ‘abstracting function’ can only transform actual forces into a pre-given code, and this reduces their force rather than increasing it. But on the other hand, and against the radical abstraction of Bacon’s sublime flows of flesh Friciek compares actual forces, actual 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, Friciek’s paintings map out a form of institutional critique that both fulfils Contemporary art’s interest in engagement with the world, and what happens in it, while being consistent with a logic of sensation that attempts to express forces as facts. This is where Friciek’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 abstraction, that nevertheless remains consistent with his requirements of an immanent critique into transcendental conditions. These conditions are now understood as being strong and weak forces, and Friciek’s paintings demonstrate how such conditions must

be created in individuations that are strong enough to defend themselves. The strong must be protected against the weak.

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¹ 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. 'Some Remarks Concerning Marcel Duchamp', in *The Symptom*, no. 9, June 2008. Online Journal; www.lacan.com/symptom/?cat=7. Accessed 12.01.09. I have explored Guattari's brief discussions of Duchamp as providing an alternative genealogy of the readymade, and of Contemporary art in 'The Readymade: Art as the Refrain of Life', in *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New*. Edited by S. O'Sullivan and S. Zepke. London: Continuum, 2008.

² For Deleuze on Kant's immanent critique see 1983 p.91, on sensation and its transcendental conditions see 2003 p.80-2, and on painting's modernity see 1988 'On the Refrain'.

³ The classic account is Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (1990), 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', in *October* 55, pp. 105-143. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

⁴ Deleuze also draws upon the 'Anticipations of Perception' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant argues that the object of sensation is the real, meaning a sensation is not an objective representation because it emerges prior to the intuition of space and time (ie., prior to both subjective and objective conditions of possibility). As a result sensation is an intensive rather than extensive magnitude (it "could only be represented by its approximation to negation=0." (2003 81), or as Kant puts it, "what corresponds in empirical intuition to sensation is reality (*realitas phaenomenon*); what corresponds to its absence is negation=0." This chimes well with Deleuze's interest in the sublime inasmuch as sensation on Kant's account is a kind of perception 'before' consciousness and the subject/object divide installed by the a priori intuition (space and time) and concepts of the understanding.

⁵ This would be to produce a Kant against Kant, where sensation provides access to the transcendental materialism of real conditions where experience is individuation. This has been explored by Alberto Toscano, who writes: 'if we are concerned with looking beyond the constituted individualities which are the province of representation to the productive tendencies that they express, we cannot rest content with a turn towards an abstract impersonal ground. Instead we need to focus on individuations and preindividual singularities, on the speeds and affects that dramatize the virtual ideas and produce actual entities and their correlative space-times.' (2006 194) In this sense the artist is 'the bearer of a speculative *praxis* that relates to internal difference by interiorising it, by making 'itself' into nothing but the interior (the fold) of intensive processes of differentiation.' (2006 200) This is a preindividual sensation, and its possible production by Contemporary art will be the focus of this essay.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Third Lesson on Kant*, 28 March 1978. Deleuze writes something very similar in his book on Bacon: “We can seek the unity of rhythm only at the point where rhythm itself plunges into chaos, into the night, at the point where the differences of level are violently and perpetually mixed.” (2003 44)

⁷ “Philosophy, science and art want us to tear open the firmament and plunge into the chaos. We defeat it only at this price.” (1994 202)

⁸ Deleuze writes: ‘A logic of painting here meets up with notions analogous to those of Wittgenstein.’ (2003 196) The point being that for Deleuze the ‘eminent type’ of analogy is produced when a series of relations that is ‘completely different’ from those they reproduce nevertheless produce a resemblance. (2003 115) This is certainly the case with Wittgenstein, to whom the resemblance is only nominal.

⁹ The extent this move might free one from the centrality of painting, traditionally understood, is debatable. For example, Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the function of the ‘house’ in ‘art’ merely renames the elements constituting Bacon’s paintings: The flat field of monochrome colour (‘the plain color’), the Figure (‘the body’s zone of indiscernibility’) and the contour (‘the ambiguous house that exchanges and adjusts them’), while retaining their structural and ontogenetic relations. (1994 183) Similarly, the reference to Minimalism describes it as a type of painting. (1994 194) Perhaps a more interesting line of development for a Deleuzian theory of Contemporary art is the ‘unity of the arts’ described in *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*. In the Baroque, a category Deleuze extends into the present, each art is ‘prolonged’ into the next, ‘which exceeds the one before’. Each art overflows its limits to become another art, painting into sculpture, sculpture into architecture, and architecture into city planning. As a result, Deleuze writes in a phrase that would be perfectly banal within the realm of Contemporary art, ‘the painter has become an urban designer.’ Similarly, Deleuze’s claim that this mixing of the arts finds its ‘comprehensive’ and ‘spiritual’ apex and origin in the ‘conceptual’ realm could conceivably be extended to Contemporary art. (1993 123-4) Nevertheless, such an approach would not coincide with Contemporary art’s development anymore than that concerning painting, inasmuch as the conceptual in the Baroque is the realm of the event, and as such must be disengaged from the Conceptual art Deleuze and Guattari explicitly reject. (1994 198) Similarly, Deleuze’s Leibnizian analysis of one of the founding anecdotes of Contemporary art approaches, Tony Smith’s night ride on a deserted highway would seem to ignore its Duchampian epistemology (everything is art) in favour of an ontological conclusion (monadology). (1993 ?) While this would seem to conform to Deleuze’s philosophy of art, it would nevertheless be interesting to cash out the implications of this ontological moment for a theory of Contemporary art.

¹⁰ For recent catalogues of her work see, *Anita Fricek, Recent Paintings*, Vienna: Ange, 2008. *Populism, ...*, [Spanish show]. For Fricek’s important statement regarding her own technique see, ‘The radical girlie perspective’, in *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007.

¹¹ While pure abstraction creates an ideal space whose forms operate as an optical code that directs the hand in its simple and subordinate function of applying the paint (Kandinsky’s theosophist colour system would be one example).

¹² Deleuze insists on the rejection of content, upholding Bacon's rather unlikely claims that elements such as 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).

¹³ Anita Fricek, 'The radical girlie perspective', in *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007.

¹⁴ See the special issue of *Transversal* devoted to the topic, 'Do You Remember Institutional Critique'

¹⁵ Holmes and Raunig.

¹⁶ In an important statement published in the French journal *Multitudes* Fricek writes regarding the work *Kindergarten* (2006): "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." 'The radical girlie perspective', p. ? *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007.

¹⁷ Deleuze writes: 'For Nietzsche, as for energetics, energy which is capable of transforming itself is called "noble".' (1983 42) In relation to Nietzsche Deleuze develops the concept of 'constitutive difference' in terms of force's quantity and quality, the difference of the former constituting the latter. 'Difference in quantity is [...] the irreducible element of quality'. (1983 44) This is clearly the significance of Deleuze's use of Kant's theory of sensation's intensive magnitude. (See note 4) Eric Alliez has produced remarkable work developing this idea in relation to the colourism of Matisse. See: Eric Alliez and Jean-Claude Bonne, 'Matisse-Thought and the Strict Quantitative Ordering of Fauvism', trans. R. Mackay, *Collapse vol. III*, pp. 207-229.

¹⁸ 'The radical girlie perspective', *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007

¹⁹ 'The radical girlie perspective', *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007

²⁰ '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, 'What is the Creative Act?', *Desert Islands*, 1987. This is also the reason for Deleuze and Guattari's condemnation of 'flat-bed' painting in *What is Philosophy?* 'Flat-bed painting' is a term from Leo Steinberg referring, basically, to pop art, and especially Rauschenberg's screen prints, where images are arranged on a flat 'screen' where all have equal value as information. (1994 198) This all has provocative connotations for contemporary art's embrace of digital media, which could be critiqued for, like Kant, not going far enough in their immanent critique of their conditions of possibility - information. Despite their political ambitions they remain caught within these conditions, whose clichés include not only those of the digital images they use and produce, but also the human consciousness that goes along with it.

²¹ Indeed, many of Deleuze's stronger condemnations of photography that he attributes to Bacon are not sustainable in relation to Bacon's comments in *The Brutality of Fact*. For example, Deleuze claims, "Bacon has a radical hostility toward the photograph," and "Bacon's whole attitude [...] is one that rejects the photograph." (2003 92) One struggles to find the basis of such statements in their purported source. In *The Brutality of Fact* Bacon explains his fascination for photographs and the way he integrates them into his practice. Indeed, this last makes a mockery of Deleuze's claim that "at no point does he ever integrate the photograph into the creative process." (2003 92) Even Deleuze's own description of Bacon's use of photographs, especially in his portraits belie this statement.

²² In fact, Deleuze claims, in his essay on Fromanger, that by projecting a photo onto the canvas and painting it on, 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 [...]. Pop art, or painting that produces a "heightened reality"." (1999 65) This seems almost the opposite of claiming all photography is a cliché, and instead claims all painting is a photograph!

²³ In a beautiful triptych Fricke turned her critical vision on herself within the institutional space of the museum. *White Cube Rush - Dancing the White Cube* (2005) shows the de- and re-formations of the artist herself, as she dances through her own institutional conditions, producing a 'Figure' that is perhaps the closest she comes to a Bacon self-portrait.

²⁴ This takes on a literal sense in the triptych '*Le Stelline*' (2006?). The first panel (*1. The Image: 'Le Stelline', Orphanage, Milan, late 60s ('The Reward')*) shows a 'treated' photo of Le Stelline orphanage just outside Milan (the image was found on a website about the region and its history). One of the most cynical images Fricke found, where the little girls stand 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)*). The same image is fragmentarily painted in luminous green, a bright 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, Fricke says, to release a new future within it. The final panel (*3. The Development Process (Die Entpuppung)*) is the same image but this time in white on white, and once more fragmentary and almost indiscernible. This is where the image has returned to a stage of pure potential, a potential that cannot be recognized or represented within the institutions or technologies of the original photo, where the girls are already well on the way to becoming something else. This is finally the sense of '*Die Entpuppung*', meaning eclosion, or the emergence of the adult from the pupa, like the butterfly.

²⁵ *Multitudes*, No. 30, Autumn 2007