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Preface

The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of the nature of the represented object. [Violence] is not what one believes it to be, and depends less and less on what is represented.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge.

—Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher”

Any project that lays claim to the attribute of novelty, let alone “radical” novelty, deserves to be received with immediate suspicion. More often than not, such works turn out to be merely minor (albeit at times important) modifications of familiar arguments (how many more “radical” social constructivist arguments does one have to endure?). Despite my awareness of the danger inherent to what is at least in part a marketing trap—the seductive force of novelty, however superficial, has long functioned as the sales engine of capitalism—I nonetheless proceed by submitting that the following study has indeed something new to offer with regard to its chosen subject matter, images of violence

in literature and film. Specifically, what differentiates this book from existing studies of imaged violence such as, for instance, the generally illuminating monographs or collections by Stephen Prince (1998, 2000), Christopher Scharrett (1999), J. David Slocum (2001), Stephen Jay Schneider (2004), or James R. Giles (2006) pertains to its basic methodological—indeed ontological—assumption, namely, that signaletic materials of any kind are not representations *of* something but, instead, constitute the *reality* of representations (or the real forces at work in what are often deemed representations). Put differently, unlike other critical studies of violence in literature and film, mine does not frame the encounter with violent images in terms of signification and meaning (mediation) but, instead, in terms of affects and force—that is, asignifying intensities.

Why does this methodological—and ontological—difference make a difference? To evoke Baruch Spinoza's well-known claim that we do not even know what bodies can do, the conceptual gambit of this project is that we do not even know what violent images are, let alone how they work and thus what they can do—and this despite the ever-growing body of intellectual labor expended on the subject matter (albeit with greater frequency and systematicity in film and media studies than in literary studies, as evidenced by the fields' respective bibliographies on this subject). In contrast to this Spinozist provocation, the existing body of scholarship on violent images tends to assume that it already knows what an (violent) image is and how it works. It simply assumes that violent images, just like any other image, *represent*. Operating on the representationalist assumption that (violent) images are representations—reflections of something prior to their emergence, that is, immaterial traces of absent presences—these studies sooner rather than later turn their attention away from their alleged focus (the violence of images) in favor of analyses of what they “represent” or “mean.”

As a result, however, these studies neglect important aspects of these violent images—aspects so crucial that they may at least partially negate the very conclusions representationally based

studies of violent images tend to promote. If, for instance, we indeed do not yet know what violent images are and how they work because they are not first and foremost representations, then we may have to question the “post-theorist” assertion that the social sciences and their “hard findings” are superior to the “mere interpretations” of traditional film (or literary or cultural) studies, since the social sciences undoubtedly operate their investigations of violent media images by assuming that those images are indeed representational (see Prince, “Film Scholars”). In what I take to be a rather typical social scientific approach to violent images in Hollywood films, Nick Browne and Theresa Webb, for instance, study the extent to which bodies in Hollywood films can sustain the violence with which they are confronted. Their data shows that fictional cinematic characters’ ability to experience pain far exceeds the violence any real human body could possibly endure. Clearly, so the researchers conclude, Hollywood violence is just not realistic. Who would have thought? Any fan of the great British Invasion group The Kinks would have certainly known this without counting instances of violence in these films. As they sing in their hit “Celluloid Heroes,” heroes of the big screen never feel lasting pain and certainly never die. Not even differentiating between instances of violence in animated films and photographic realist films, studies such as the one by Browne and Webb end up not only producing rather underwhelming results but also promoting conclusions that are questionable precisely because of their neglect to theorize their object of study: images and how they work and what they do.

In general, then, it seems to me that the results produced by social scientific research can be assumed to be valid *only* if the basic assumption underlying their approach to the object they study is actually valid—and I suggest it may not be. And yet, social policy is made—and institutional relevance established—on the basis of such findings. Thus, throwing into relief how problematic the basic assumptions of such studies are may, in the end, not be a small matter.

In turn, my Spinozist provocation that we do not yet know

what violent images are and how they work also troubles more traditional “interpretative” studies (humanist or not) of (violent) images. Like those of the social sciences, these studies ultimately tend to skirt the real issue (how violent images operate and what they do) in order to get to the level of what such images “represent.” The difference between the social sciences and interpretative studies is that the former accept the representational hypothesis and make claims about these representations’ social (behavioral) effects, whereas the latter are more interested in debating the political (ideological) effects of such representations. But in so doing, they may undermine the very conclusions they offer in the name of an identity politics–driven version of justice. According to these studies, (violent) images are good or bad depending on how accurately they reflect the world they are supposed to represent, as well as on the context within which the depicted violence occurs. But if these images do not primarily represent anything to begin with—or, in any case, if these images’ work is not primarily representational—then whatever political advocacy is offered, no matter how admirable, faces the problem of irrelevancy, since it grounds its political stance in something that simply does not exist as such.

Indeed, here lies the crux of my intervention. Because of the assumption of established studies—social scientific and interpretative alike—that (violent) images are *representations* of something else, critical practice ends up, in one form or another, laying claim to what they believe to be a well-founded position of *judgment*. That these existing studies of (violent) images ultimately are about judgment is, however, no accident, for the purpose of such representational studies is ultimately always Platonic in nature. Their goal is precisely to distinguish between good (just) and bad (unjust) copies and to maintain the ability to judge bad images (of violence) as a necessary and effective means to curb them and their alleged negative effects (behavioral or ideological). That is, such judgment always serves the implied purpose of drawing a line between the judging subject (the critic) and the judged object (the image, violent or otherwise), even if the

language of judgment is not explicitly used. (I.e., the distancing, analytic language characteristic of representationally based academic discourse functions as a rhetorical device to direct attention away from the very moralizing judgments that actually are at work but, today, are often deemed too unfashionable for them to be expressed directly.) The very ability to judge images based on their representational quality is considered a necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) tool in the fight against violence. Representational studies of violence always insinuate the existence of a nonviolent space, suggesting that a nonviolated phenomenological whole exists prior to the onset of violence. To (re)establish this state of affairs is the (implied) hope of representational criticism and characterizes its politics and moral view.

My hypothesis, however, is that representationally based critical encounters with violent images are based on a potential conceptual error and that this error directly derives from commonly accepted assumptions about (violent) images—to wit, that they are reflections of something else. In fact, I will argue that the very recourse to images qua representations is itself a form of violence, rather than constituting the assumed antidote. Moreover, the following study of violent images offers the view that the hope to escape violence as such is an impossible one—because ontologically violences are everywhere and inescapable.

I purposefully offer this proposition with some polemical force in hopes that it will ultimately be welcomed as my attempt to provoke a different trajectory of thought about the subject at hand. If taken seriously, however, this claim demands that the questions we ask of violent images are not what they mean and whether they are justified but *how* they configure our ability to respond to, and do things with, them. The plane of encounter with these images is, in other words, not that of judgment but that of ethics (response-ability). I will call what is ultimately a thoroughly subjunctive encounter with violence “masocriticism.” Such a mode of engagement with violent images begins, and continues to pursue, its inquiry by asking, what would happen *if* we began with the ontological assumption that violences are everywhere and under-

stood it as the engine of an *experimental* endeavor rather than a dubious claim to truth?

Though this study limits itself to a discussion of violent images, its implications transcend the primary subject matter, for it is very much concerned with the *practice* and *pedagogical force* of literary, film, and cultural criticism. Specifically, although my study is not designed to function as an extended engagement with the critical reception and de facto application of post-structuralist thought to the study of literary and cinematic images, it can nevertheless be read as proposing that post-structuralist critical practice has not yet been post-structural enough. Notwithstanding the many excellent engagements with post-structural thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, or Gilles Deleuze, I, for one, tend to think that most of the time these encounters do not go far enough precisely because they continue to conceive of signaleptic material in representational terms. Hence, Derrida becomes the high priest of undecidability, Foucault the sage of subversion, and Deleuze the guru of minoritarianism. While it is understandable that these thinkers are often received in such ways—after all, Derrida *is* concerned with undecidability, Foucault with resistance, and Deleuze with the minor—what often gets crucially omitted from their thought is that all three conceptualize language and images in terms of *force*, that is, arepresentationally. Hence, to my mind, as long as critical practice continues to produce work in the name of post-structuralist thought without heeding what I take to be its key provocation, it will continue to perpetuate claims about its object of study that, to use Theodor Adorno's phrase, do not heed the primacy of the object.

In addition to this book's relevance for the general discourse on (violent) images and its attempt to put a specific understanding of theory (especially Deleuze but also Foucault, Adorno, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) to work, this study also brings together a number of key texts in Deleuze's oeuvre that have thus far received relatively little attention in literary, film, and cultural studies: *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* and *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. In fact, in conjunction with Deleuze's (and De-

leuze and Félix Guattari's) work in general, much of my conceptual toolbox will be developed from these two key monographs—both of which specifically engage violent subject matters. Thus, as a potentially added benefit, the present book invites the reader to (re)consider Deleuze's work in light of the (new) connections I forge through considering these books together.

Given the above, I therefore ask the reader to read the following study as an attempt to do otherwise—that is, as an *experiment*. This book should not be read as a history of violent images, and although all of my primary sites come from post–World War II American fiction and cinema, this book makes no claims about the particular nationality of these violent images. Of course, in the age of “post-theory,” one of the central tenets of scholarship is that one must contextualize a work of art if one wants to understand it. In response to this historicist commonplace, I agree with Slavoj Žižek that the proper Deleuzian counterclaim is to suggest that “too much of a historical context can blur the proper contact with a work of art (i.e., that to enact this contact one should abstract from the work's context), but also that it is, rather, the work of art itself that provides a context enabling us to understand properly a given historical situation” (*Organs without Bodies* 15).

Or, as Derrida has taught us long ago, while context—social, historical, psychic, political, and so on—matters, “il n'y a pas de hors-texte.” However, I take Derrida's statement less as a directive for critics to fetishize textuality than as an articulation of a sense of a network of exteriority within which no one term is privileged. Just as no meaning can be determined out of context, so no context allows for the total saturation of a text's meaning. In fact, one of the more crucial lessons offered to us by post-structuralism is that context is never really “outside” the text precisely because context and text are the result of the *same* network of forces, or, to use Deleuze and Guattari's key concept, plane of immanence. That is, it is impossible both to escape context by turning to a more or less hermetically sealed-off hermeneutic conception of the text (close analysis) and to escape excessive textuality by pointing to the outside of a text, the context. Either move is

impossible because it necessarily would occur merely in response to the engendering play of asignifying forces (what Derrida, for instance, calls, among other terms, “différance”) without which there would be neither text nor context.

While historical and contextual approaches undoubtedly have much to offer, they are nevertheless specific examples of the very representational approach to violent images that this book wants to put into suspension, at least momentarily. Hence, articulating in greater detail the *costs* of such representational approaches to violent images and offering, alternatively, an encounter with such images as asignifying intensities or affects, this study will gradually work itself through a number of literary and filmic sites—a few moments in the films of the Coen Brothers, the discursive relationship between Bret Easton Ellis’s novel *American Psycho* and its film adaptation by feminist director Mary Harron, Patricia Highsmith’s fiction, the acting work of Robert DeNiro, and Don DeLillo’s essay on 9/11. This choice of primary sites, while undoubtedly based on personal preferences, actually embodies a two-fold logic: on one hand, it articulates a specific instantiation of an affective smearing of violence across a sliding scale of intensities; on the other, it reflects this work’s process of generation as such. Each encounter with one specific site ended up provoking a new question with which the site itself was not concerned as such and thus necessitated my turning elsewhere as a means to find a site that tackles the very question the previous site provoked but did not address.

Thus, the argumentative logic of this book performatively offers a pedagogical engagement with violent images that derives its ethical impetus directly from the sites themselves, from *how* the imaged violence itself calls forth critical response-ability—not “for” these objects but *before* them. In the end, I will suggest that while such response-ability can never escape the moment of judgment, suspending its occurrence is a question of habit(uation)—of pedagogical repetition embodied by a masochistic practice of inhabiting the moment *before* subjective interpretation, that is, the moment of the event of violence itself.

The Violence of Sensation

Miller's Crossing, Affect, and Masocriticism

Violence. Most would be happy if they never had to experience it, and many are convinced of the existence of nonviolent spaces, whether they existed only in the past and elsewhere, are actually available in the here and now, or, perhaps, are only going to emerge in a yet to come time and space. And yet, notwithstanding the all-pervasive privileging of the nonviolent over the violent, violence surrounds us, has surrounded us, and it is hard to see how it will not surround us in the future. Violent images are the lifeblood of TV and abound in the history of cinema; the history of literature and the arts in general would be unthinkable without them. And what about the perversely luring image of violence in form of a car crash on the New Jersey turnpike? This event of real violence inevitably produces traffic jams—in the *other* direction, caused by voyeuristic drivers seduced by the image of others' pain. But violence is not just everywhere in imaged form. Can anyone remember a single moment when there was not some violent conflict somewhere around the world or a day without murder, rape, battery, or other acts of violence? Or what about the war on terror, subsequently renamed “global struggle against violent extremism”: does anyone really believe that this specific violence can ever be completely eliminated? What about the violence of hate speech or all-pervasive economic exploitation? What about the violence entailed by the demand that passengers take off their shoes when going through airport security, not to mention that they submit themselves to random

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body searches? The violence of the attacks of 9/11 has now mutated—permanently, irrevocably, it seems—into a multiplicity of practices whose violence is admittedly less recognizable than that of a plane explosion. But why assume that violence exists, and is real, only when its occurrence is easily recognizable?

Of course, the violence involved in another person entering my private space, even if I believe that he has no other motive than ensuring the safety of all passengers (but how exactly do I know this?), is not the same as the spectacular violence involved in blowing up the World Trade Center. The violence that is part of the routine practices of U.S. airport security personnel getting too close for my personal comfort at least partially derives from the fact that I simply have no way to prevent this violation of personal space from happening: if I objected in any way, I would instantaneously undergo an incorporeal transformation, from private citizen of another country to suspect, and consequently would be violated even more. This violence is not of the same kind as the violence of the bombs in Madrid, London, Egypt, or Iraq, though this does not make it any less real or significant. Nor is the violence of 9/11 of the same kind as the violence perpetrated against the millions who died in German concentration camps, Soviet gulags, or civil wars that have been and still are fought all over the world—and are often more or less covertly sponsored by the very countries that are the staunchest practitioners of a rhetoric of democratic nonviolence.

Indeed, to say that these examples of real and imaged violence are not the same, that they are *different*, and that there is a problem with considering them as examples of Violence instead of regarding them as a series of different violences—this is the first gambit of the present study.¹ In fact, part of my argument throughout this book will be that one of the drawbacks of representational criticism of violence is that it tends to eradicate this very difference by configuring the *event* of violence as always being about something other than its constitutive forces, intensities, or rhythms.

But let us slow down, as we are getting ahead of ourselves. One

thing that I think is uncontroversial—unlike, perhaps, some of my statements in the previous paragraphs—is that violent images tend to be controversial.² To some, they are maddeningly repulsive and responsible for the decline of Western civilization; to others, they are excitingly subversive, responsible for provoking uncomfortable questions and powerful truths about “normative” society. And to others still, violence just “rules,” to evoke the brilliantly limited rhetorical capacities of those two great practitioners of all things un-PC: Beavis and Butt-Head. Whatever differences critics may display in their critical engagement with violent images in film and literature, however, the one thing everyone (okay, maybe not Beavis) seems to agree on is that a key attribute of such images is their ability to raise the question of their *ethical* value. Indeed, we may argue that violent images’ provocation of the ethical moment is neither limited to nor randomly mobilized by institutionalized habits of critical reflection. Instead, violent images *themselves* constitutively raise the question of ethics, as the remainder of this chapter will argue in greater detail. That is, in this introductory chapter I hope to build a conceptual toolbox that may be productive for a critical engagement with violent images that desires to encounter them on the level of their own *reality* rather than on the level of their “meaning.”

The Violence of Sensation

Take, for instance, *Miller’s Crossing* (1990), an American independent film by the Coen Brothers that explicitly foregrounds the question of ethics as the central driving engine of the film’s violent narrative. The film opens with a remarkable scene that cinematically dramatizes the focus of the study ahead. As we see ice cubes being dropped into an empty glass of whiskey, we hear an Italian American voice declare: “I’m talkin’ about friendship. I’m talkin’ about character. I’m talkin’ about—hell, Leo, I’m not embarrassed to use the word—I’m talkin’ about ethics.” Just before the final declaration, the camera cuts to a long shot of the

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speaker, showing us a pudgy, round-faced man sitting in a chair on the guest side of a desk. The man sports a thin mustache that concurrently indicates the care he puts into his physical appearance and the rather ridiculous character of what he believes to be the look of a sophisticated gangster of the late 1920s. Viewers familiar with the violent gangster film cycles of the late 1920s and early 1930s that led to the implementation of the Hayes Code will immediately sense that this guy is no “Little Caesar” (as played by Edgar G. Robinson in Mervyn LeRoy’s *Little Caesar* [1930]), “Public Enemy” (as played by James Cagney in William Wellman’s 1931 film of the same name), or “Scarface” (as played by Paul Muni in Howard Hawks’s 1932 film). As the camera slowly zooms in onto the speaker’s face, the man who will later be identified as Johnny Caspar (Jon Polito) continues his speech:

You know I’m a sporting man. I like to lay an occasional bet. But I ain’t that sporting. When I fix a fight, say I pay a 3 to 1 to throw a goddamn fight, I figure I got the right to expect that fight to go off on 3 to 1. But every time I lay a bet with that son of a bitch Bernie Bernbaum, before I know it the odds is even up, or worse, I’m betting on the short money. The sheeny knows I like sure things. He’s selling the info that I fixed a fight.

After a brief silence, a close-up of Caspar highlights his mouth making smacking noises, again indicating that he is anything but a man of sophistication. Then he forces the issue: “So, it’s clear what I’m saying?” Cut back to Leo (Albert Finney), sitting in his chair behind an impressive desk, coldly responding: “As mud.”

Believing that Leo not only has understood but also agrees with his position, Caspar, again shown in a close-up, carries on: “It’s getting so a business man can’t expect no return from a fixed fight. Now, you can’t trust no fix, what can you trust? For a good return you gotta go betting on chance.” In Caspar’s view, then, ethics means first and foremost the elimination of chance. With chance in play, so he argues as the camera intercuts his lines with shots of Leo and two other gangsters present in the room—Tom

(Gabriel Byrne), the man we initially saw only in a blurred image, and Caspar's hit man, "the Dane" (J. E. Freeman)—"you're back with anarchy. Right back in the jungle. That's why ethics is important. What separates us from the animals, beasts of burden, beasts of prey—ethics. Whereas Bernie Bernbaum is a horse of a different color, ethics-wise. As in 'he ain't got any.'" After a moment, Leo asks Caspar, "So you want him killed?" to which the Dane, rather than Caspar, answers, "For starters."

On one level, the film's exposition seems traditional and predictable enough. Viewers are allowed to observe the wheelings and dealings of underworld characters and are led to expect violent conflict to emerge before the film is over. We expect this not only because of any potential prior exposure to the filmmakers' work, other gangster films, or pulp fiction/crime novels but also because the film's narrative itself is constructed in linear fashion: we are privy to a present conversation in which we learn why past grievances demand future resolution.³ In other words, the film provides us with the cause for the violence that is yet to come. Violence on this level is a function of narrative, or of probability: given the narrative information, it is extremely likely that at least one of the characters will be dead before the end credits roll across the big screen.

Yet, on another level this scene also confronts viewers with a different kind of violence. It is a violence rendered visible through the intensities of the coloration of the *mise-en-scène*. This violence confronts spectators on the level of affect *before* it is made available to them on the level of narrative or symbolism, that is, representation. It is the violence of sensation rather than the violence of representation, to use the distinction that Gilles Deleuze introduces in his study of the violent works of British painter Francis Bacon. According to Deleuze, Bacon's creative—indeed ethical—formula is "to paint the scream more than the horror" (*Francis Bacon* 34). That is, Bacon is more interested in painting an affect that sustains the intensity of violence than the cause (the horror) that produced the effect (the scream).

Painting the cause would be analogous to the depicted violence

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in films such as Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) or Robert Rodriguez' *Sin City* (2005) in which the causes of violence and their effects tend to be copresent through traditional two-shot or shot-reverse-shot figures. No matter how brutal and aesthetically compelling the images, they remain thoroughly narrativized (logical) and thus rational, regardless of our level of (moral) disgust with them. Remaining on the level of familiar images of violence that have long become clichés in the history of cinema, they tell us very little in the end about the violence of sensation or the sensation of violence precisely because "sensation is that which is transmitted directly, and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 32). As such, sensation has nothing to do with a viewing subject's feelings: "there are no feelings in Bacon: there are nothing but affects, that is 'sensations' and 'instincts'" (35). Accounting for affect, or the "rhythmic unity of the senses" (39), in phenomenological terms would simply be "insufficient because [phenomenology] merely invokes the lived body. But the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlivable Power" (39). Sensation—affect—is presubjective: it is what constitutes the subject rather than being a synonym for an already constituted subject's emotions or feelings. Whereas phenomenology's conception of sensation or affect is tied too much to the living organism (affect qua emotion), the affect Deleuze has in mind is the affect of the body without organs whose enemy is organization, that is, the reductive force of representation.⁴

Differently put, "to paint the scream" is a matter of "capturing forces" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 48) rather than representing them. As Deleuze writes, the "task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible" (48).⁵ If we replace "cinema" for "painting" we have here an articulation of an artistic imperative that the Coens put into practice in the opening sequence of *Miller's Crossing*. While they do not get rid of narrative (or what Deleuze also calls "figuration"), they *intensify* the level of figuration through their color scheme to the point where the equivalent of Bacon's "Figure" emerges in the form of Caspar.

In Bacon's work, the Figure is an icon or image that emerges out of a painterly process of isolating it from the field, "the round area or parallelepiped" (6) within which it exists. As Deleuze puts it, the "relation of the Figure to its isolating place defines a 'fact': 'the fact is . . .,' 'what takes place is . . .'" (6). The Figure, in other words, does not signify: being isolated, it avoids "the *figurative, illustrative, and narrative* character the Figure would necessarily have if it were not isolated" (6). In the Coen Brothers' film, Jon Polito's character appears isolated by the intensity of the brown mise-en-scène, all doom and gloom and claustrophobically suffocating, as indicated by the sweat on Caspar's bald head and upper lip and further emphasized visually through Polito's brilliant portrayal, with his mouth, almost like a fish out of water, gasping for air, lips pursed side to side. Like Bacon, the Coens do not appear to oppose figuration but, rather, intensify figuration to produce the Figure; they go through narrative in order to get to the level of pure affect, that is, sensation. This immanent strategy crucially differs from standard avant-garde filmmaking practices that reject figuration/narrative *wholesale*—thus immediately reintroducing narrative through their very act of dialectical rejection.

What we witness in this scene, however, is not the actual force that is exerted upon Caspar's body. For although force may be the "condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force that is sensed, since the sensation 'gives' something completely different from the forces that condition it" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 48). Why is this important from an artist's, as well as critical, point of view? Simply put, the problem is that we, as spectators, are not privy to the actual, but to us invisible, forces that impinge on the body, be it that of one of Bacon's screaming popes or that of *Miller's Crossing's* seething Caspar. Hence, the question for Bacon, and the Coens, is how to make *us* sense these invisible forces, or how to actualize what is merely virtual in the frame? Merely depicting these forces will not do, as that would at best position viewers in a representational framework in which we would be able to perceive these forces while nevertheless remaining unable to sense their intensity. This is why "Bacon creates the painting of

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the scream [in which] he establishes a relationship between the visibility of the scream (the open mouth as a shadowy abyss) and invisible forces, which are nothing other than the *forces of the future*" (51, my emphasis). As a result, we are exposed to the scream as an assemblage of intensities, allowing us to sense the sensation of the scream and thus to be affected by the affect inhering in the scream. By keeping the cause of the horrific scream "off-screen," Bacon manages to paint the violence of sensation—as embodied *in* the scream—rather than the violence of representation, as would be the case if he represented whatever is just to the side of the frame.

What is to the side? We do not know—and only a *future* moment could reveal this as of yet invisible force. By withholding this future moment, however—by *suspending* it—we are confronted with the future qua future, made sensible to us rather than represented for us in "the unity of the sensing and the sensed" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 31). What we see is a "living" body, horrified by invisible forces—which are nothing else but the forces of the future. As a result, Deleuze argues that a reversal of Heideggerian phenomenology occurs: "Death is judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse, as we like to believe" (52–53). According to Deleuze, when "Bacon distinguishes between two violences, that of the spectacle and that of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second, it is a kind of declaration of faith in life" (52). The violence of sensation—embodied in the Figure (as opposed to the violence of the spectacle, narrative, symbolism, that is, representation)—is an affirmation of the encounter with futurity in the present, in life. For Martin Heidegger, life is to be judged from the horizon of possibility—that is, death. For Deleuze, in contrast, the ethical task is once again to be able to believe "in this world, this life, [which] becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered," as he and Félix Guattari put it in their final collaboration, *What Is Philosophy?* (75). It is, of course, the time-image theorized in Deleuze's second book on the cinema that is responsible for making this belief once again available to

us; in *Francis Bacon*, it is the concept of the Figure that accomplishes the same task.

Either way, what matters is that in art “it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of *capturing forces*. For this reason no art is figurative. Paul Klee’s famous formula—‘Not to render the visible, but to render visible’—means nothing else” (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 48, my emphasis). Indeed, this is what happens in *Miller’s Crossing*. Of course, representational (figurative) violence eventually ensues, and it could not be any other way. As Deleuze argues, “the first figuration [representation, narrative] cannot completely be eliminated; something of it is always conserved” (79). After all, “it is easy to oppose the figural to the figurative in an abstract manner, [for] we never cease to trip over the objection of fact: the Figure is still figurative; it still represents someone (a screaming man, a smiling man, a seated man), it still narrates something” (79)—even if it is a typically quirky tale so characteristic of the Coen Brothers’ oeuvre. Yet, there is “a second figuration,” which “the painter obtains, this time as a result of the Figure, as an effect of the pictorial act” (79)—or as a result of the *mise-en-scène*, the cinematic staging of the scene, the “how” that gives rise to a representational “what.”

So, *before* the inevitable figuration of violence occurs in *Miller’s Crossing*, we are already exposed to the Figure of violence, the violence of sensation. As spectators, however, we “experience the sensation only by entering the painting” (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 31), by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed. How does this happen? How do spectators enter a painting, a film, or any (art) object in general? Or, more precisely, how are spectators *made to* enter the object? Continuing his explanation of Bacon’s use of color, Deleuze argues, “Color is the body, sensation is in the body, and not in the air. Sensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation” (32). I suggest that if we replace “filmed” for “painted” and “screen” for “canvas” then we have a pretty accurate description of what goes on in the Coen Brothers’ film: sensation is what

they film, and what they film and is subsequently projected on screen is the body—not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation.⁶ And, importantly, as for Bacon, this sensation is frequently violent, as is the case, for instance, at the precise moment when Caspar proselytizes about his sense of ethics.

The Violence of Ethics

In fact, that the question of ethics is raised at and through the very moment when the audience can sense the violence of sensation is no coincidence, for ethics is a question of responsibility, or better yet, response-ability, that does not depend on rational choice. Theorizing ethics qua performative subjectivity, literary theorist Jeffrey Nealon posits that “responsibility is not merely *choosing* to respond, at least if this responsibility is to be an *affirmation* of alterity. [. . .] Rather, the ethics of performative subjectivity is enacted precisely in and as a *response* to the always already exterior, to the other that is the ground of the same. The point is not that I need always to remember to act ‘as if I was already responsible’; rather, ‘I am nothing but this responsibility’ (*Alterity Politics* 169). The affective or intensive forces inhering in the violence of sensation constitute such an exteriority, something that impinges on the body from outside. These forces produce effects *prior* to their inevitable narrativization, their eventual territorialization onto the plane of representation—and because these forces affect me before the narrative apparatus of capture organizes them for me, I am already response-able. With my responsibility always already being response-ability—my constitutive ability to respond *before* these images represent—what counts in such a conception of performative ethics is to examine “the production of effects, not the zero-sum game of deciding what an identity or movement really or authentically ‘means’” (170).

A critical encounter with violent images would therefore have to attend to these images’ *affective* intensities—their *effects* rather