

No longer are they significative or signifying: they are asignifying features. They are features of sensation, but of confused sensations.<sup>1</sup> If this sense, or those fleeting features of sensation that remained so hard to grasp were to become, in the Spinozist sense, transformed from a vague and confused notion to an 'adequate' one, much work needed to be done. As Francis Bacon said: "Images do drop in, constantly, but to crystallise these phantoms that drop into your mind is another thing. A phantom and an image are two totally different things."<sup>2</sup>

That the discourse of diagramming is confused, as R.E. Somol has commented<sup>3</sup>, should not be surprising. Clearly, we are witnessing as much of a transformation of the notion of the 'diagram' itself as we are eliciting some transformation of architectural practice via diagramming. The diagram may not be the truck it used to be but seems to still carry an old load. The diagram in architecture persists in predominantly falling into the definition of a line drawing of some kind. The residual persistence of the diagram as a 'thing' that then becomes instrumental (as a kind of truck that enables design to set out on an explora-

# THE TEXTURE OF DIAGRAMS

Reasonings on Greg Lynn and Francis Bacon

Efforts to refine techniques that facilitate a breaking away from the limitations of Cartesianism are reaching something of a heated expectancy in architecture. For this discipline, so thoroughly framed by Cartesian notions of space, its conventions of drawing so utterly embedded in this legacy, this is no small task.<sup>1</sup> The Anticartesian field of thought that resonates about the name of Deleuze offers an open tool box of concepts with which to approach this challenge. The diagram has become one such concept. But what is a diagram?

This paper set out with a sense that diagrams pertaining to these contemporary drives should remain invisible—or un-drawn. This sense was primarily constituted by fleeting translucent imaginings that seemed to somehow be diagrammatic gestures toward questions of translation architecture, about which I had been musing. These imaginings were somewhat elusive, textual figments that seemed to speak in passing through mutating patterning across which almost unspeakable sensibilities passed. They seemed close to the diagram of which Deleuze wrote in relation to the work of Francis Bacon, which "... is like the emergence of another world. For these marks or brush strokes are irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, and random. They are nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, and nonnarrative.

tory journey) sits awkwardly within the diagramming aspirations voiced in contemporary discourse. While the diagram is seen to offer an escape from the trappings of representation, architecture nevertheless operates in a representational field. Unlike the painter who directly makes the painting, the architect is removed from the making of the building and is always representing it. But the gap between drawings and buildings, and the very source of this dilemma, has been both created and emptied by the Cartesian neutrality of space, across which meaning is supposed to be seamlessly conveyed and with which ultimate control attains a heightened (even if false) power. The diagram is

potentially the very difference that emerges from the over turning of Cartesianism, transforming space from an emptiness into a modulating fullness. One of the most significant sites (perhaps the most significant) of the action of the diagram in architectural practice is in the set of actions between drawings and buildings. However, the diagram tends to be used exclusively in the realm of design process, after which it is drawn up into documentation drawings in readiness for construction. If the diagram is to live up to the aspirations surrounding it, an attention to manners through which it remains alive and operative throughout the entire process is required. If the diagram finds its last gasp at the moment in which the documentation phase cuts in, the building is born only after the death of the diagram.

If my fleeting, textural sense was to unravel into a more refined notion of operative architectural processuality, it seemed that the Deleuze-Bacon notion of diagramming might be useful 'fiction' through which to proceed.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, processes of architecture present a range of profoundly significant differences to those of painting and this diagrammatic schema requires a certain reorientation toward the problem set out above: toward the action that must inevitably pass through the transformation from drawings to buildings.

One of the more interesting aspects of Bacon's process is the manner with which he worked from existing images. Photographs and other paintings very often took on a directly generative role. His studio was littered with various images that he would use as an impulse in his paintings. He was particularly obsessed with Muybridge's photographs from *The Human Figure in Motion* and Velasquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, which became the seed of a series of Pope paintings. "Images breed images in me" he is quoted as saying, whereby, "I'm a grinding machine. I've looked at everything and everything I've seen has gone in and been ground up very fine."<sup>5</sup> Given the manner with which Bacon speaks very pointedly about



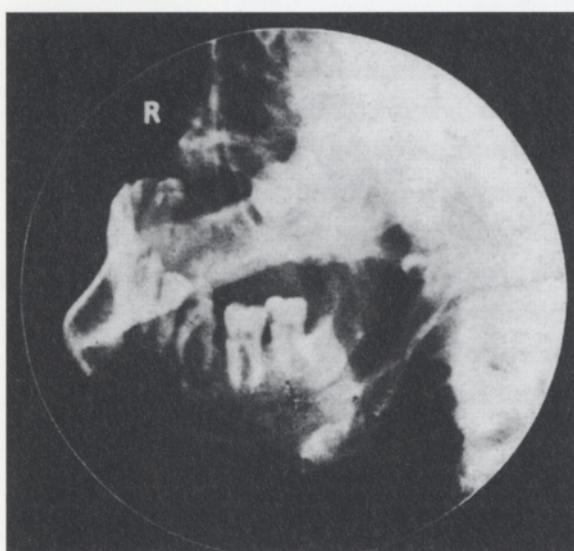
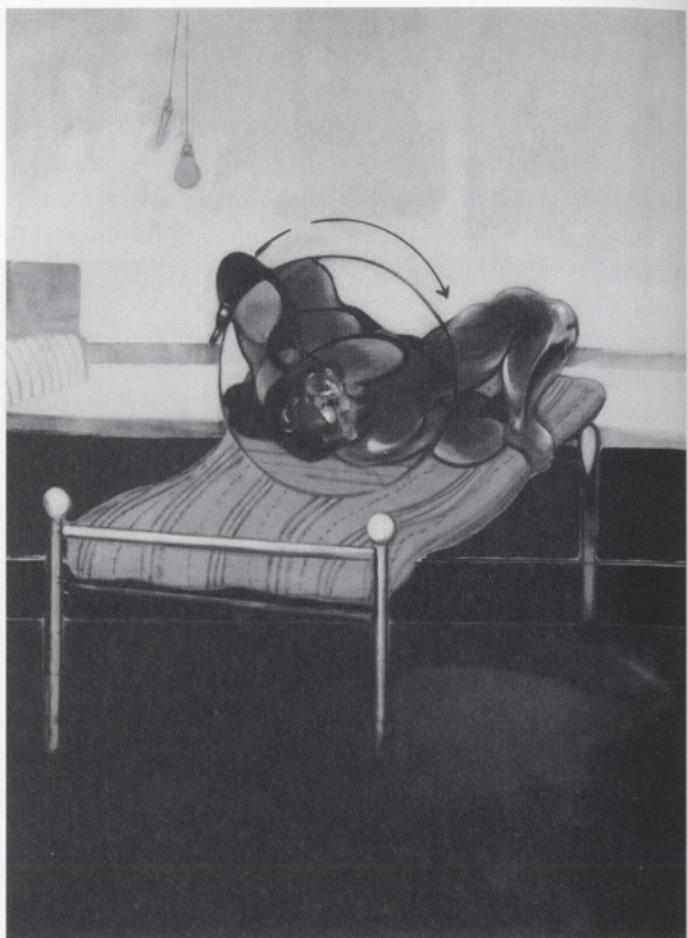
Pia Ednie-Brown

right: Francis Bacon, Three Studies of Figures on Beds, 1972, oil and pastel on canvas, triptych, each panel 198 x 147,5 cm

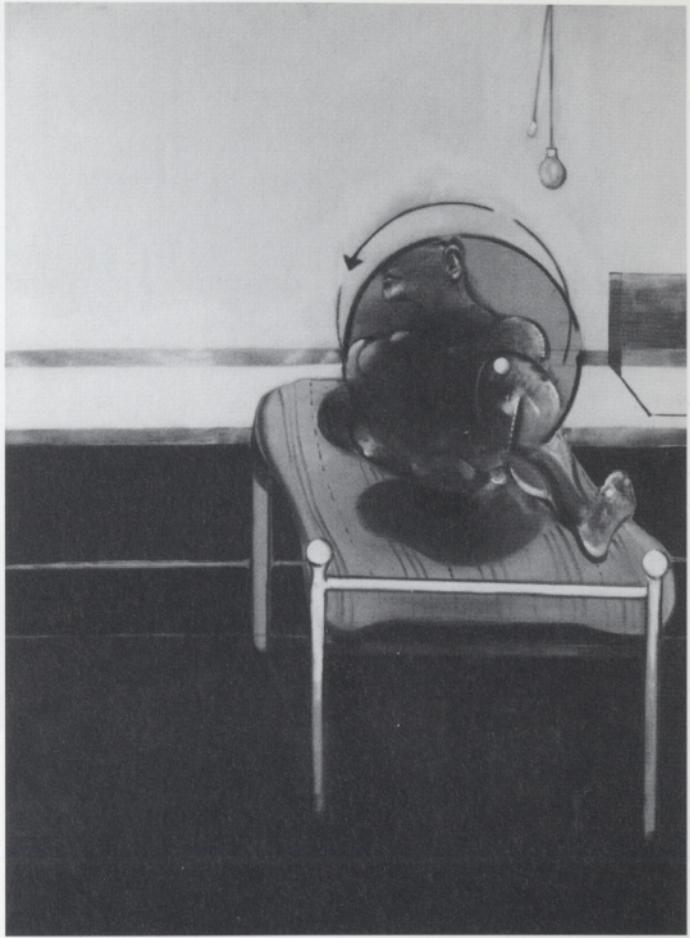
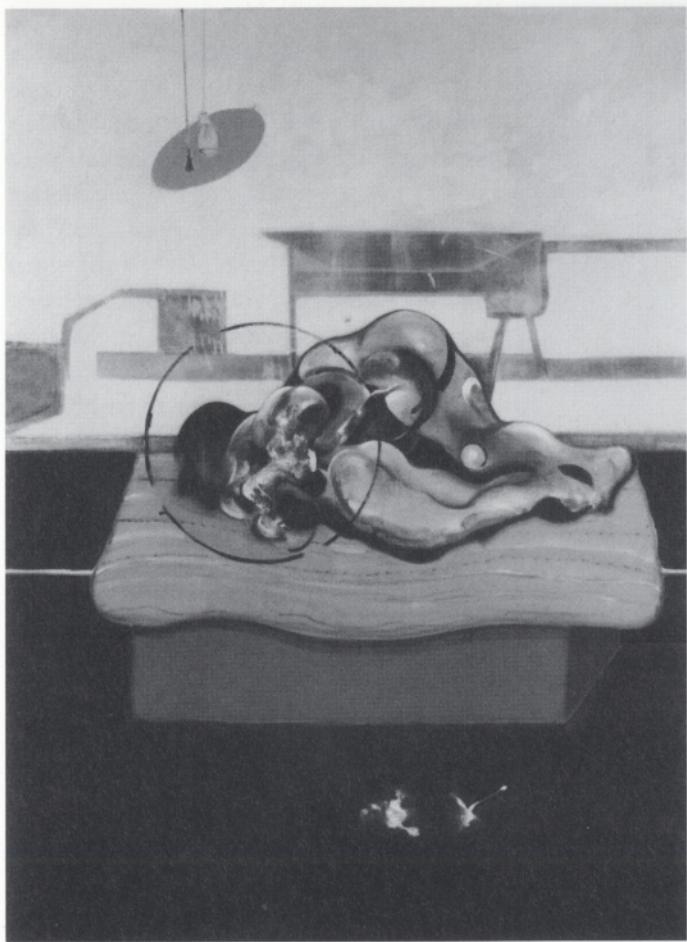
below: Illustration from K. C. Clark, Positioning in Radiography, 1939

the significance of sensation, this 'grinding' would seem to be a kind of concentrated refinement of affects induced by images into increasingly granular, particular textures of sensation. These images never acted as something to be reproduced or re-presented, but digested and regurgitated, spewed out into the contortions, twists and pulses of the entropic and generative action of sensation: "I have deliberately tried to twist myself, but I have not gone far enough in a painting that's even worth looking at – the image must be twisted, if it is to make a renewed assault on the nervous system."<sup>6</sup> Bacon's diagram acts through the rhythm of these transformative impulses; it moves through painting, embodied within the paint without simply being the painting itself. How might this similarly operate in terms of buildings?

Those fleeting images that kept fluttering through my mind impelled me to turn back to look closer at the work of Greg Lynn.



Given the manner with which my diagrammatic impressions were thoroughly animate, I felt that something about his experiments with animation software bore a close affinity with this sense of diagramming. This was further incited by a passage in the final paragraph of his recent book, *Animate Form*: "In order to bring these technologies into a discipline that is defined as the site of translation from the virtual to the concrete, it is necessary that we first interrogate their abstract structure. Without a detailed understanding of their performance as diagrams and organisational techniques it is impossible to begin a discussion of their translation into architectural form."<sup>7</sup> The book was published in early 1999, at which time his first building, the Korean Presbyterian Church in Queens, New York, was under construction. The book includes nothing of the church project, as if speaking alongside its unspoken companion and awaiting a discussion about to begin. Certainly, for me his work immediately provokes a number of questions regarding the act of translation from drawing to building. The high degree of significance placed on the generative role of animation software renders the act of translation more explicitly problematic. What happens between the moving image and the still standing form? What becomes significant in the shift from generative process to the building itself? The Korean Presbyterian Church, having received much acclaim, has also been criticised for having failed to em-

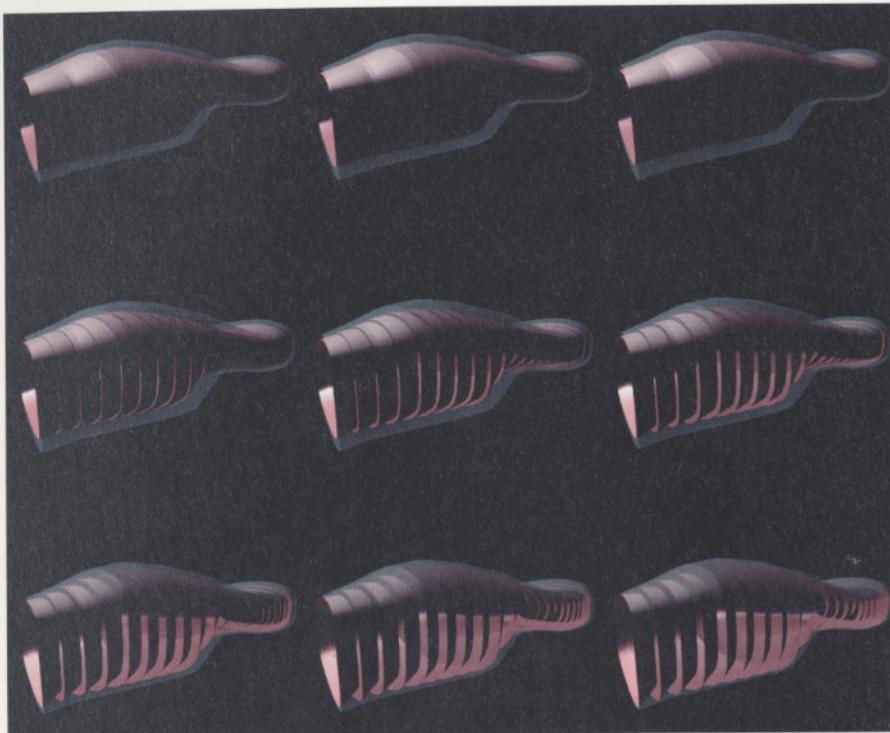


body the animate of his animations; for, in other words, not being a faithful enough translation. Certainly, relative to the smooth light through which the generative animations enact their modulations, the building is awkward and heavy. It landed a little like the albatross. I would argue, however, that through this very fall something indicative of diagrammatic action fell open and comes clearly into view. This 'something' is suggested here by Bacon: "Valery puts it very clearly: What we want nowadays is the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance. That's very precise isn't it? Apart from that, we can watch our own decay in the interval that separates life from death."<sup>8</sup>

Between the animation and the building: between life and death? Lynn's building seems indeed to be a suspended decay. A survey of the range of his designs reveals a tendency that is hard to overlook. As the generative impulses slow down, stop and reach across the shifts into a coagulated stand still of the final

form (whether represented or built), there is a kind of crystallisation of continuous transformation into facets of differentiated repetition. This occurs in a number of different manners that are often, but not always, manifested as sequential formal differentiations. The 'facetting', perhaps more than anything, is tied to the pragmatics of building. Continuous curves become sectioned into strips, each of which twists and bends in acting out its own particular moment of the trajectory, or of the arrested flow of movement. In the built church project this becomes most manifestly evident in the interior of the sanctuary space with its staggered skins that extend out and peel away along the exterior stair at the back of the building.

Leaping out of a contorting animation, Lynn transforms the moving image via a brutal slowing down of the rhythmic behaviour of the mutations that crossed the beat of the frames of animation. At 30 frames per second or so, speed glues the differentiating fragments into a dynamic line of continuous transformation. As these rhythmic pulsations reach over to meet the speed of the building, the gaps open up, come into view and act to entropically decay the continuity of the dynamic line, like an aphorism spoken in a stutter. The smooth body of the animation is opened up such that it becomes a Bakhtinian grotesque body in that "...it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the older,

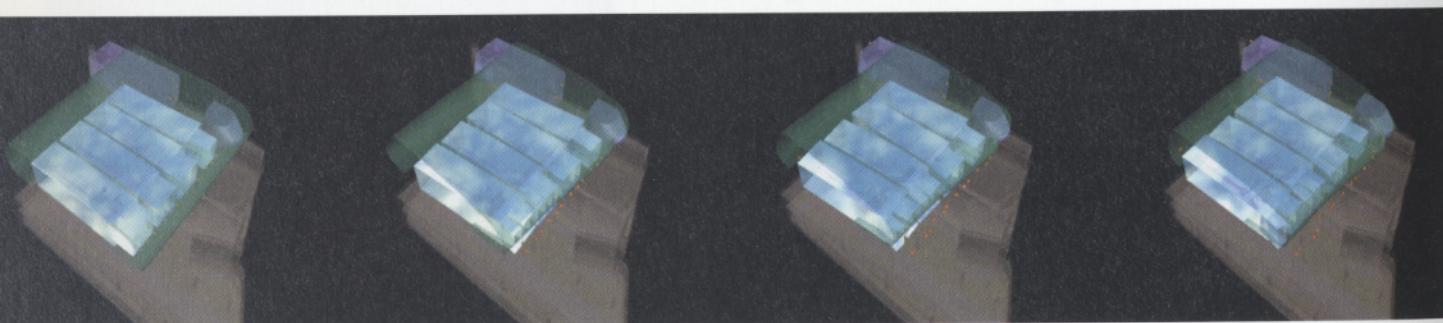


preceding one.<sup>9</sup> As the animation dies, it gives birth to a differentiated repetition that bares the gaps between the parts of the former action and bares the teeth of a cruelly indifferent time line. It reveals, in a sense, the mechanism of the enigma, the sleight of hand behind the representation. In doing this, he has decomposed and reconstituted the structure of animation; digested and regurgitated it. The manner with which qualities of lightness and fluidity, smoothness and continuity in the animations are left behind as the building beholds us, is tied up in the

way that it makes explicit the mechanisms of the animation. It becomes a kind of pornography of the moving image: an explicit rendering visible of its holes and dark, secret orifices. This, it seems to me, points to a diagram of Lynn's designing: a diagram that grotesquely stutters.<sup>10</sup> The striving to suggest past movement in now still form brings about, ironically, a diagramming of Bergson's 'false time.'<sup>11</sup> My experience of the building was one in which the surface of false time seemed torn open in a manner that was strangely, qualitatively moving—even if that which moved me at the time could only

long to be spoken.<sup>12</sup>

There are certain ways in which this notion of Lynn's diagram operates similarly to that of Bacon, of which Deleuze writes: "This is what Bacon calls a Diagram; it is as if, all of a sudden, we introduced a Sahara, a Sahara region in the head; it is as if we stretched over it a rhinoceros skin seen through a microscope; it is as if we tore apart two parts of the head by means of an ocean; it is as if we changed the unit of measurement and replaced figurative units with micrometric or even cosmic units. A Saha-



Garofalo/Lynn/McInturf, animations for volumetric development of the Korean Presbyterian Church, New York, 1999

ra, a rhinoceros skin, this is the diagram suddenly stretched out. It is like a catastrophe happening suddenly to the canvas, inside figurative or probabilistic data."<sup>13</sup> The microscope in Lynn's case becomes a magnification or slowing down of the filmic construction of movement. The rhinoceros skin becomes the filmic time line microscopically bearing its creases and furrows as deep oceans that tear the motion apart into discrete packages of stillness. The unit of measurement is shifted from units of (false)

time to units of (Cartesian) space.<sup>14</sup> All this occurs within the vast distance entailed in the Sahara state of (computer-aided) design.

The ‘catastrophes’ of Bacon work themselves right through the paint and across the figure, acting themselves out through various modes of composition bringing the movements of sensation into a state of figural animation. He acts to render simultaneous the variable speeds that give sensation rhythm and consistency, impelling this consistency to express itself in such a way that it is itself transformed. This simultaneity of variable speeds works very much in terms of interwoven modes of composition. As Deleuze writes of Bacon: “Each painting is a moving sequence or series (and not only one term within a series). Each sensation is at diverse levels, of different orders or in several domains.”<sup>15</sup> It could be said that Bacon ploughs the variable frames into the same plane, weaving them together into a thick fabric of violent assault, while Lynn pulls them apart, enacting a different sort of brutality.

Lynn’s ‘brutality,’ however, doesn’t manage to carve out as much depth; he hasn’t ground up his data finely enough. In a juxtaposition of the generative images and the paintings of Bacon, the transformation is quite radical. He smears the fine grounds through the figure such that he excites sensation, as Deleuze writes, on a number of levels. For Lynn, the transformation occurs through the mutation of the initial form and force parameter data of the animation software. These generative constructions then stutter and stumble, falling open into the differential repetition of form. All of this can be seen to be acting through a consistent diagramming—variously manifest through the different speeds and modes of action across the phases of the process. But these differential modes never act simultaneously and the various manifestations are as brutally cleaved apart as

below: Garofalo/Lynn/McInturf, animations for volumetric development of the Korean Presbyterian Church, New York, 1999, view of the interior  
bottom: view from the north



the facets of form. Once the form has unfolded the thing is drawn up for construction and the mutability of the diagram is stopped dead in its tracks.

Lynn argues that the form resulting from taking an instance of the animation, or 'performance envelope,' becomes a kind of memory storage of the forces through which it evolved. However, there is only one mode or level through which these forces perform: their action only registers on the level of overall form. The 'performance envelope' never assumes the potential texture of its paper. What if the 'envelope' itself (rather than just the smooth surface of the movement image) involved the kind of attention akin to that of Bacon's rhinoceros skin? What if some creased and craggy texture might register shifts in intensity as the form bends and squirms through the digital force data, such that it shudders into ripples and where lines might deepen or furrow new paths?

What emerged as most powerful in the sense of those flickering diagrammatics that plagued me, was their texturality. Texture is a kind of consistency or pattern of variations. It is an as-signifying quality that involves a materiality whether one can directly touch it with a finger or not. In this sense, texture is closer to the auditory than the visual, primarily because of the former's extrinsic variability and movement as well as the amplification of direct physical affect in sound as opposed to sight. The movement within texture, like Deleuze's characterisation of the status of movement in Bacon's work, "is not movement that explains the levels of sensation; rather the levels of sensation explain that which subsists of movement."<sup>16</sup> If texture's closeness to the auditory might speak in the name of diagrams, this is not to exclude the visual but to fold it back into a kind of visual-auditory synesthesia. Here, texture's diagrammatic sense might remark upon the sight of its own suggestions.

The suggestion here is that the diagram might be productively instrumentalised through texture: as a qualitative dimensionality where its limits are expressed through refrains of tendency and disposition. The use of texture as suggestive remarks might move into the building across various levels of its materiality and variable patterning. Not as literal transcriptions or faithful translations, but as intentional statements of tendency: as zones or areas of varying intensity that might start to suggest the choices of materials, the manner with which they are cut, treated or manufactured, the shift from one manner to another across surfaces, the play of colour and light in guiding variations through which areas of the building will pass. The drawings that guide construction would thereby be withheld from a (false) relationship of strict authoritative determination with the final building.

The specification document would concentrate on outlining parameters through which the qualitative intentions could unfold—remaining open to the intensified delight of unexpected occurrences throughout the process of construction. Wouldn't this give the diagram so much more power of affect in the building itself? If its action became embedded in the materiality of the building, wouldn't this allow the diagram to continue its operation in an amplification of its suggestibility?

And the operation of the diagram, its function, as Bacon says, is to 'suggest'. Or, more rigorously, it is the introduction of 'possibilities of fact.'<sup>17</sup>

An extension of the notion of the diagram as texture, a mutable texturality that works through varying levels or modes of composition, might come to suggest a qualitative instrumentality with which to deepen that problematic threshold, evading representation by remaining 'possibilities of fact.' If diagramming practices realise an overturning of the homogeneity of Cartesian space, perhaps this can be seen as akin to a kind of knowledge that all smooth surfaces attain texture with certain modes and levels of attention and proximity. The distance of design can act in tandem with attentive closeness; with the interleaving of levels, nothing is lost and there is a great deal to gather.

As much as Lynn's first built project fails to deepen the diagram across levels such that it intensively explicates itself into building, it does succeed in outlining the very zones of action that require more refined attention. The expectation that the first built project of any architect should be the instant masterpiece is itself an absurd over determination: a lack of adequate recognition of the diagram itself. For diagrams don't come easily; they are secreted by action, produced by it. They do not stand at the doorway as the authoritative signpost that directs action, but develop through action that becomes finely ground through the repetition of practice.<sup>18</sup> They are refinement itself. If the trajectories along which those fleeting images sent me have given anything 'adequate' to their confused state, this in no way offers a place to rest. Quite the contrary.

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**Notes:**

1 Gilles Deleuze, "The Diagram," in: *The Deleuze Reader*, edited by Constantin Boundas, New York 1993, p. 193.

2 Francis Bacon, "An Interview with Francis Bacon: Provoking Accidents, Prompting Chance," in: Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon. A Retrospective*, New York 1999, p. 49.

3 R.E. Somol, "Dummy Text, or The Diagrammatic Basis of Contemporary Architecture," in: Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, London 1999, p. 7.

4 In writing on Spinoza's notion of moving from an inadequate to an adequate idea, Gilles Deleuze states "...it little matters that we proceed through a fiction" (in: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, New York 1990, p. 137). The primary example used is that of forming an adequate idea of a sphere through a fictitious understanding of its 'cause' as the rotation of a semicircle 360 degrees about a point. The schema of the Deleuze-Bacon diagram can similarly be seen as a kind of fictitious 'cause' that comes to form an adequate idea of Bacon's manner of working and of the paintings themselves.

5 Francis Bacon, quoted in "The Essence of Artifice," in: Micheal Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon. A*

*Retrospective*, op cit, p. 32.

6 "From a Conversation with Francis Bacon," in: Micheal Peppiatt, *Ibid*, p. 41.

7 Greg Lynn, *Animate Form*, New York 1999, pp. 40-41.

8 "From a Conversation with Francis Bacon," in: Micheal Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon. A Retrospective*, op cit, p. 41.

9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington 1984, p. 318.

10 This stuttering is close to the sense through which Gilles Deleuze discusses the stutter in his well known paper, 'He Stuttered.' The following passage from this text outlines the 'pressures' through which I see Lynn's stutter similarly operating: "It is when the language system overstrains itself that it begins to stutter, to murmur, or to mumble; then the entire language reaches the limit that sketches the outside and confronts silence. When the language system is so much strained, language suffers a pressure that delivers it to silence. Style—the foreign language system inside language—is made by these two operations; or shall we rather speak, with Proust, of a nonstyle, that is, of 'elements of a style to come which do not yet exist?' Style is the

parsimony of language. Face to face, or face to back, to cause language to stutter, and at the same time to bring language to its limit, to its outside, and to its silence—all this will be like the boom and the bust." (Constantin Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, New York/London 1994, p. 28.) See also footnote 18.

11 With regards to this notion of false time, Bergson writes: "we shall see that time, conceived under the form of an unbounded and homogeneous medium, is nothing but the ghost of space haunting the reflexive consciousness." (*Time and Free Will*, Kessinger Publishing Company, Montana/USA 1888, p. 99.)

12 Moved, it would seem, but something behind my back: "you can bring two instants or two positions together to infinity; but movement will always occur in the interval between the two, in other words behind your back." (Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, The Athlone Press 1986, p. 1.) Similarly, this can be seen as was a confrontation with kind of silence—and the 'elements of a style to come which do not yet exist': see footnote 10.

13 Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, op cit, p. 193-194.

14 Which for Bergson are one and the same.

15 *Ibid*, p. 189.

16 Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, op cit, p. 191.

17 *Ibid*, p. 194.

18 The diagram can be seen here to become very closely associated with 'style'. This is indeed another possible way of understanding it: Deleuze ("The Diagram," in: *The Deleuze Reader*, op cit, pp. 193-200) juxtaposes Bacons' diagram with both modernist abstraction (where the diagram is minimised and misses sensation) and abstract expressionism (where the diagram takes over; "its proliferation becomes a veritable 'mess'")—these can then all be seen as 'styles' which afford the diagram varying levels and modes of power.

This association with style is also present in a kind of diagramming that Félix Guattari's refers to as 'machinic orality' (*Chaosmosis; an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, Sydney 1995.)

This implies an engagement with 'machines of virtuality' or assemblages, such that "They start to exist in you, in spite of you. And not only as crude undifferentiated affects, but as hyper-complex compositions: 'that's Debussy, that's jazz, that's Van Gogh.'" (*Ibid*, p. 93), where "Something is absorbed, digested—from which new lines of meaning take shape and are drawn out." (*Ibid*, p. 96) See also footnote 10.