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Melville: "Broadcast Copy)

p. 1 - "B. only int. in a kind of painting that involves hazard + shifts disaster. The cost, reckoned in terms of discarded canvases + unresolved paintings, has been high -

Sunday Times 1957 (London)

$\frac{9}{10}$ of his prod. he destroys

Melville 1951

Time - '62

always destroyed more of his paintings than he's finished

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Melville - Broadcasting '57

p. 2 - The paint in the B. pictures is thick + applied w. broad strokes.

also see p. 3 - Bacon himself

* Sylvester - p. 24 "Encounter"
The paint is put on calmly, without violence or frenzy, for all the speed + spontaneity of execution. When B. is painting his most char. gesture w. the brush is a flick of the wrist made at arms length

p. 23 - When a man is seen shouting or gesturing like a politician making a speech

Sunday Times '57

"bear witness for the rage for work w. which he completes a 6 ft. sq. canvas at 1 session

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Carlyle Burregh 1953
briskly random brushwork

Eric Newbon '53
Mr. B. continues to be both
unforgettable + repellent
Sam Hunter
paint is applied in frothy
washes

Mag. of Art - Sam
periodic excursions to the
gambling halls of M. Carlo

Bacon :

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21 Melrose Road
London S. W. 18

July 31, 1962

Dear Mr Soby

I am much to blame for having given you information on Bacon in so hurried a way that your wife was not able to get my remarks down altogether accurately. Consequently, things that I said appear in your text in a garbled form. While providing corrections of these, I am also venturing to point out some other factual errors.

p.1

"... was invented by the artist himself as suggesting a fortuitous numerical sequence in playing roulette." "It is typical of Bacon that combinations of numbers in roulette should have prompted him to invent his own date of birth."

The roulette numbers didn't prompt Bacon to invent his date of birth. He simply felt it was pedantic and boring to provide his exact date of birth and decided to make one up, and the first numbers that came into his head were a combination he has sometimes used in playing roulette. I don't, by the way, know what is meant by "suggesting a fortuitous numerical sequence in playing roulette".

"On many occasions, after selling a canvas or two, he has set off for Monte Carlo to try out a self-invented and presumably fallible system for breaking the bank."

It simply is not true that Bacon has frequently sold a couple of canvases and then gone off to Monte Carlo with the money. By the way, I'd think it unlikely that Bacon would use any system: I would have thought he would be the last person to use anything so mechanical as a system rather than follow his intuition from moment to moment.

p.2

"He prefers to paint very rapidly with a large brush - 'a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that ironmongers stock,' to use Robert Melville's words."

This was written 12 years ago. Are you sure it's still true? As a matter of fact, it isn't.

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"... as though he feels obliged to make his decisions before hearing an invisible and implacable croupier cry 'rien va plus!'."

Surely this is taking this business about roulette a little too far? Some of Bacon's best paintings have been worked on quite slowly. Many painters work as fast or faster. The whole thing is complicated and technical, needs lengthy discussion (for example, of Bacon's feelings about the thickness of the paint on the canvas), can't be summed up in a couple of sentences, least of all in some romantic or ironic fancy.

"... Bacon has destroyed pictures whose shortcomings were apparent to no one but himself."

Of what good artist is this not true?

p.3

"Obviously Bacon himself thought them derivative, since so far as is known none survive."

Why is this obvious? You have already said that only a small proportion of all his work has survived. How are you to know that these particular works didn't survive because Bacon thought they were derivative? Perhaps he just didn't like them.

p.4

You discuss at considerable length the Crucifixion of 1932 but you don't mention at all the finer 1933 version of the same subject in the Colin Anderson collection. If you are going to talk about Bacon's works in terms of influences, then the relation of this latter Crucifixion to Picasso's work circa 1930 is one problem of influence that really does need to be seriously discussed.

Incidentally, I find it extraordinary that throughout the text you harp on Bacon's relations to 101 other artists as if he were essentially an eclectic. Scarcely a page of your script is free of references to other artists, and while I don't share the superstition that every artist is an island, I do think that your insistence on defining Bacon in terms of everybody else gives a false impression of the sort of artist he is.

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"There can be no doubt that Sutherland's example acted as a catharsis on his younger colleague."

There can be every doubt. You have just been talking about Bacon's earlier use of the crucifixion theme and about his interest in Grunewald. Sutherland was at this time working on this theme for the first time and very much under Grunewald's influence. So what reason is there for supposing that Sutherland inspired Bacon?

p.5

With regard to the subject matter of the Crucifixion triptych, Bacon has for once made an explicit statement, published in the catalogue of the Tate Gallery collection. Since you are constantly trying to find clues to Bacon's subject matter - rather as if his paintings were Victorian problem-pictures - it is surprising that where he does for once provide information you ignore it.

p.6

This page is missing from the photostat I have. I shall try and get hold of one of the other photostats and, if there are any comments, send them as soon as possible.

p.7

"... the shadow cast by an umbrella - a symbolic reference to the umbrella of Chamberlain, which became an uneasy token of appeasement in Europe?"

What sort of artist do you think Bacon is?

p.8

"... Balla's celebrated Leash in Motion, a painting which Bacon had almost certainly seen when it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1952."

Are you sure Bacon was in London while the exhibition was on? If he was, how certain is it that he went to the exhibition? The picture is extremely well-known in reproduction: this could easily be another case of Bacon's drawing on reproductions rather than on originals.

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p.9

You are good enough to quote me about the opulence of Bacon's settings. Alas, the sentence you quote is one that I have always hoped would be forgotten rather than re-printed. It comes from an article that was a self-conscious attempt at fine writing most of which I greatly regret, and this particular phrase is one of the things in it that I regret most of all.

p.10

On the subject of Bacon's interest in literature, I don't think that Nietzsche and Eliot can be lumped together in this way. He is interested in Nietzsche as a thinker, in Eliot not at all as a thinker but for his use of language.

"... in youth he had liked the writings of the Irishman, W. B. Stanford, though never with the passion he has reserved for Nietzsche."

This is a fantastically garbled account of what I told you.

Stanford is a classical scholar, the author of a book on Aeschylus in which he makes some particularly fine translations of certain passages. It is Aeschylus, not Stanford, Bacon is interested in.

"In youth" and "never with the passion etc" are pure invention.

"He is said to have been fascinated by Michelangelo's drawings of wrestling figures, yet oddly enough his rather perverse Two Figures in 1953 is quite directly based on a Muybridge photograph of two wrestlers rather than on the Renaissance master's sketches."

Why "oddly enough"? And what is perverse about the picture? If you mean perverted why not say so?

"Among modern painters Bacon worships van Gogh's headlong intensity"

How do you know that headlong intensity is the quality of van Gogh which Bacon particularly values?

p.11

"He once remarked to David Sylvester that all modern painting began with the hallucinatory depiction of bananas in certain 'metaphysical' pictures by Giorgio de Chirico."

The remark I quoted was that the handling of the paint was an early example of characteristically 20th century handling. In any event, I don't think you should quote this remark, which I should not have mentioned to you, for it was made when Bacon was looking

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at the Chirico with its owner, Roland Penrose, and is clearly the kind of remark which is made to give pleasure to an owner. I think it was probably in the same spirit that I passed it on to you, as a student of Chirico.

p.12

"Bacon travels in Africa often and widely."

Said in this way, this seems to suggest that Bacon constantly travels all over Africa, which is not true.

"... it still seems to the writer that the monkey's mouth is clamped shut."

It is meant to be open.

p.15

"Bacon's own headlong expressionism."

I have seen Bacon at work many times and "headlong" does not correspond at all with what I have seen.

p.16

"Bacon's color immediately became far brighter than ever before, presumably in tribute to the Dutch master's violent palette of his final years in the south of France."

In tribute? Bacon is not a connoisseur handing out bouquets. Hasn't it occurred to you that he might have used the van Gogh painting as a prototype precisely in order to paint in bright colours? Especially as you quote him earlier on ~~the~~ the subject of choosing to paint popes in order to use purple. Don't you remember what Rouault said about the colour of the judges' robes?

p.18

"... and also the hermetic somnambulism of certain sculptured heads by Alberto Giacometti, whose talents Bacon is said to admit only half-heartedly."

This is a fantastic distortion of something I said which gives an impression that is virtually the opposite of the truth. I told you that of all artists born since 1900, Giacometti is the one Bacon most admires, though with the reservation that he finds him

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a bit "arty". For you to say that Bacon "admits only half-heartedly" that Giacometti has talent scarcely suggests that Bacon singles him out from all his contemporaries and near-contemporaries.

pp.19-20

"We cannot expect so committed an artist as Bacon to abandon his basic philosophy - that art should simultaneously repel and beguile."

On what authority do you say that this is Bacon's philosophy?

"... it seemed to the writer that the right panel alluded to St. Peter."

This and what follows about Himmler and your subsequent remark about Panofsky all show a complete misunderstanding of the kind of artist Bacon is. Of course, Panofsky "might well despair etc" if he were foolish enough to try to interpret Bacon in the way that you do. His kind of iconological analysis consists of interpreting intentional symbols. Such an approach is entirely irrelevant to Bacon. To try and see in what sense it is irrelevant would, it seems to me, be a far more fruitful approach to Bacon than to treat his works as puzzles which are open to explanation. Your very sentence about Panofsky contains an absurd non sequitur. If this is an "obsessive and powerful" work, why should it be so in spite of the difficulty of "giving an accurate iconological interpretation" rather than because of this difficulty? I am not trying to argue in favour of mystification in writing, only to suggest that Bacon's work needs elucidation in quite other terms from those you use.

Forgive me for being so presumptuous as to take you up on many points which have nothing to do with the discussion that you and I had in New York. I'm afraid I've let myself be carried away by alarm at the thought of seeing so many misunderstandings in print. Incidentally, I do think it's a pity that you quote so freely from things Bacon is supposed to have said to a Time

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interviewer who obviously knew nothing about art and got most things more-or-less wrong. Dammit! haven't you ever been interviewed by Time and then seen how your meaning came out distorted? Yet now you're proposing to perpetuate such distortions between hard covers and under an authoritative imprint!

Yours sincerely

David Sylvester

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J. T. SOBY
 Brushy Ridge Road
 New Canaan, Conn.

Aug. 3, 1962

Dear Mr. Sylvester:

Your letter of July 31 has arrived, and at last I think we're beginning to get somewhere with the complicated problem of my text on Bacon. Previously I had had only a terse and insulting letter from Erica Brausen, a moderate and thoughtful letter from Bacon himself and a letter from Mr. Fischer suggesting that Bacon might come over here and discuss matters. I would be delighted to see Bacon in New York at any time convenient for him. I have been troubled from the beginning by the fact that I've never met Bacon, though I did try three times, as he himself has admitted. Almost always in writing about living artists I've done so after prolonged discussions with the artists themselves, as in the cases of Miro, Tanguy, Balthus, Tchelitchev and many, many others, here and abroad. I do not like being treated as an adolescent incompetent, which Miss Brausen seems to consider me. What I need is detailed, first-hand information such as you've given me. I don't agree with all your letter, of course, but I would like to consider its points carefully - in reverse order, if you don't mind.

1) Your final point about quoting Time is well taken. And believe me I do know from prolonged personal experience. At one point years ago Time's editors phoned me to ask whether they could reproduce as a fake a 1915 mannequin picture which de Chirico had told one of their reporters was a forgery. The picture belonged to me. I knew exactly where it had been since shortly after it was painted. I told Time to go ahead and do what they liked, though I flatly disagreed. Ten or so years later de Chirico authenticated a photograph of the picture and explained to a mutual friend that the reporter could speak neither Italian nor French and that he (de Chirico) had no real idea of which picture they were talking about. So in this case I know and agree with what you say. I should have been more careful. My worry about this source is apparent in my letter to, I think, Miss Brausen (I don't have a copy here, alas).
 2) Your remarks about Panofsky and the uselessness of what he calls iconology, as applied to someone like Bacon, may or may not be true. Panofsky was my teacher in various courses years ago; I have heard him unravel problems of subject matter which have for a long time have distorted the meaning of artists quite as complicated in psychological and esthetic terms as Bacon. Have you ever read him on Piero di Cosimo and The Finding of Vulcan?

3) The only authority I can give you as to Bacon's belief that art should simultaneously "deceit and beguile" is my own experience with his pictures. They seem to me both horrifying and enchanting. I can't agree (my page 9) with the inference in your own article that there isn't this curious switch between opulence and "prison-cells." Every writer at some point regrets having written anything at all. But yours is a good and memorable sentence; I would like very much to use it.

4) I am puzzled by your correction as to the importance and value of Giacometti. I was so startled by your statement at lunch that Bacon had definite reservations about Giacometti - to my mind the most talented sculptor of his generation in the world, as I've said in print endless times - that I wrote out what you said carefully, as did my wife. Our notes on this subject are precisely the same. But Bacon in his letter to me is whole-heartedly enthusiastic about Giacometti, especially in what

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I myself admire most - Giacometti's uncanny isolation and dedication. Since Giacometti is not only an idol for me but a personal friend, I shall certainly see to it that Bacon's opinion of him is amended. But then, if you'll forgive me, perhaps you also should be a bit more careful about what you say. When you said that Bacon found Giacometti a bit "arty" weren't you using what has become one of the dirtiest words ~~words~~ in the international art vocabulary? I would use the word about someone like Augustus John, never about Giacometti. I wish, too, that you, and Miss Brausen would give me some credit for qualifying statements in which I wasn't sure, as here, when I said "whose talents Bacon is said (my italics) to admire only half-heartedly." If anyone used the word "arty" to me in describing an artist, I wouldn't be half-hearted but faint in coils.

5) I can't see anything particularly harmful, certainly not derogatory about saying that Bacon's color became brighter presumably in tribute to van Gogh, but I could qualify the statement by saying "perhaps partly in tribute" or some such.

6) I'm confused by your objection to the word "headlong" ~~is~~ applied to Bacon's technique. According to Robert Melville, whom I respect enormously as a critic, Bacon works at astonishing speed. But maybe his methods have changed since Robert wrote his fine articles. And this reminds me that I asked Erica Brausen to show Melville my text. Has she ever done so? I know that Brausen and Melville are now not on very good terms, at least I so gather. But you can't expect me to understand all the feuds in London's art world. It's hard enough to keep track of them in New York. In this connection I can't help being amused by a letter I had in the spring from our friend the American painter Larry Rivers. He wrote that he liked to work in London because there were no art quarrels going on there. My God!

7) I seem definitely to be wrong about the position of the baboon's mouth in my pictures as shut, not open. My great friend and colleague Alfred Barr agrees with Rothenstein and yourself that the ape's mouth is open. I guess I'm overruled, though I still think the picture can be read both ways.

8) I can't tell you how many people have told me that Bacon is in Africa often and travels widely there. This is one of those points I could easily have checked with Bacon if I'd been able to see him.

9) You can understand how puzzled I was by the de Chirico reference if you'll read the whole sentence. It begins: "Rather inexplicably he once remarked to David Sylvester, " etc." Roland Penrose is an old and treasured friend of mine. I find it hard to believe that he would need to be buttered up by a visiting artist or that Bacon would be inclined to do so. But since Bacon himself denies the statement, I shall certainly take it out.

10) I had no way of checking on whether the quality Bacon admired most in van Gogh was the latter's "headlong intensity." Maybe it's the word "most" which makes trouble here, for surely everyone is aware of van Gogh's intensity.

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J. T. SOBY
 Brushy Ridge Road
 New Canaan, Conn.

- ③
- 11) I deliberately did not use the word "perverted" in describing Bacon's picture of two recumbent figures. I have a firm conviction that everyone's sex life is his or her's own business. I thought "perverted" implied moral condemnation more than perverse. But since I am not reproducing the picture anyway, I'll leave out the whole reference to it.
- 12) I know perfectly well now (I didn't when we talked) that Stanford is a classical scholar. You did say that Bacon admired him "in youth." But I find the reference so unimportant that I'll take it out.
- 13) I agree that the separate qualities Bacon admired in Nietzsche and Eliot should be ~~separately~~ specified. They are two of my own favorite writers, and I think I got carried away by the thought that Bacon admired them that much, too, and didn't stop to say why.
- 14) I've already covered the point about the quote from you.
- 15) Of course Bacon could have worked from a reproduction of the Balla. I should have said "may or may not" have seen in the Tate show. (As a rather bitter aside, our Museum has lost the Balla forever. It was bought for its owner by the Museum but has now been willed by the ~~owner~~ owner to his daughter, who hates paintings but loves dogs.)
- 15) The statement about the figures in the left panel of the recent Bacon Crucifixion being Hitler and Himmler was given me by Mr. Fischer with explicit permission to quote it as having been said by Bacon. Bacon denies this in his recent letter to me, so I'll take it out of the text. But your crack about "Victorian problem-pictures" seems to be harsh and unnecessary. How am I supposed to know who's telling the truth about what close associates of Bacon tell me he's said? And tell me in writing.
- 16) I've skipped your comment on Chamberlain's umbrella by mistake. Was it unreasonable to assume that if the window tassel in the press photo of Hitler has continued to haunt Bacon he would also remember that disastrous umbrella which was reproduced in newspapers all over the world? But again Bacon objects, so I'm taking it out. You must understand what I am afraid Miss Brausen never will. The reason I sent copies of the preliminary text to London as soon as possible was to check on points of this kind. I am not a bullheaded crook, and I resent being treated as such, for the first time in thirty years of writing about contemporary artists.
- 17) Sutherland's influence in my mind was not a matter of subject matter but of color. I don't have all my notes here with me in this tiny beach house, so I can't be positive where I found the quotes by Bacon on the subject of Sutherland. I will check it out as soon as I get back and write you further on the subject. Bacon also objects. If only he could have written me earlier in reply to many questions I had asked him through mutual friends in London. But I want to make clear that I did not ask him this questions about Sutherland. During his early career Bacon was always spoken of here (and abroad) as a Sutherland disciple. I suppose this was natural in that Sutherland was known to us first.
- 18) If I give the impression that Bacon is "essentially and eclectic," I am gravely in error. Can you possibly think I would spend so much time thinking about his work if I thought this to be true?

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J. T. SOBY
 Brushy Ridge Road
 New Canaan, Conn.

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- 19) I cannot possibly know whether most if not all of Bacon's early abstract pictures were destroyed by him because he found them derivative. The Tate catalog says they were destroyed, and I've found Alley's catalog's notes and the catalog in general the most helpful contribution yet made to an understanding of Bacon's career; probably you and Miss Brausen don't agree at all, though certainly the Tate catalog gives Miss Brausen the credit she does indeed deserve for helping Bacon's career. She thanked me for not mentioning her name in so incompetent a book, as ~~this made~~ mine. This made me angry, of course, the more so in that I had just finished writing the acknowledgment page in which I gave her the fullest possible credit for ~~her~~ part in helping Bacon's career and for her most generous and unfailing help to me in getting photographs and other material on Bacon.
- 19) I know of a number of good artists who have refused to see any shortcomings in their art. What about Derain, for example, who was so talented in youth and so terrible later on and yet who stubbornly preserved and sold his merest daubs?
- 20) I have never heard before from any of Bacon's friends that he sometimes works slowly. I shall certainly do my best to check the matter with him, since this is an important point. Once again your statement contradicts Robert Melville, though it may be that Bacon's working methods have changed since Robert's articles were written, as you say in telling me that he no longer uses a one-inch brush.
- 21) The story about Bacon going off to Monte Carlo very often after selling one or two canvases had been told me by any number of British and American friends. To repeat once more, I regret exceedingly that I've never even met Bacon. There is a certain irony in this fact. I've spent years and years debating both publicly and privately with other critics here as to the value of knowing artists personally. I believe the value is immense. But the head art critic of the New York Times won't stay in the room with any artist for fear of being contaminated in his opinions!
- 22) The point about Bacon's date of birth has been settled at last by the Tate catalog. But whether you like the words I've used or not (and you obviously do not), the roulette reference is what you told my wife and myself. I am puzzled again by the fact that on the one hand you say that Bacon would not be likely to use any "system" in playing roulette; on the other hand, you say that the "numbers that came into his head were a combination he has sometimes used in playing roulette." If he has remembered the combination even "sometimes," doesn't that infer that the combination stuck in his mind?

This last is a very minor point, of course, and I find ~~throughout~~ your letter a strange protectiveness, as though I were maligning Bacon throughout. I intended the opposite to be true. Nevertheless, your letter has been the only helpful word I've had from London. I'll send a copy of this letter to Bacon, hope to see him and straighten things out.

Sincerely,

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21 Melrose Road
London S. W. 18

August 8, 1962

Dear Mr Soby

Many thanks for your courteous letter. I am writing now to say that I hope you can hold up going to press for a few days more because I shall be able to write to you again in a few days time with some of the further information you require. I am meeting Bacon in a couple of days in order to get clear answers on certain points. I shall also be writing to you then on some other points you discuss. So I do hope you can delay things a little more.

In the meantime I am trying to get hold of the errant page 6 of your typescript. What has happened is that this was duplicated in the copy sent to Fisher and absent from the one sent to Bacon. However, if Fisher, who was back in London last week but has now gone abroad again, has taken his copy with him, I won't be able to get hold of it. Would you, therefore, as a precaution against this, please send me by return a copy of the missing page.

Please note that my postal district is not W.18 but S.W.18.

I shall write again as soon as possible.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely

David Sylvester

David Sylvester

Mr James Thrall Soby
P.O. Box 830
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U.S.A.

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Aug. 12, 1962

Dear Mr. Sylvester:

I have your most pleasant note of Aug. 8, and I am enclosing what I hope is the missing page 6 you're looking for. I can't be positive, since so many copies of the text have been made, but I think this must be right since it comes from the copy of the text which Alfred Barr was kind enough to read for me.

I will, of course, delay publication until I get your longer letter, after you've talked to Bacon. Do please believe me: I want the book to be as accurate as possible. I have already written Bacon that if he can't come to New York, as Mr. Fischer suggested, I would do my best to get to London. But this may be rather complicated in that I've been ill with some sort of lung congestion and I'm not sure when I'll be up and around. September is hopeless for me. We have endless meetings in the Museum which I must attend. Anyway, I still think, as I wrote Bacon, that we can settle most of the points in dispute by mail.

Some, though not all, of my notes used in preparing the text have arrived from New Canaan, where I was working on the book before we came here on vacation. I've found that reference to Bacon's "debt" to Graham Sutherland. I had quite literally worried myself sick with the thought that it might have come from the Time Magazine press cable I told you about. It did not. In the fall of 1960 I had asked Mr. Fischer and Robert Melville to try to question Bacon about various points which troubled me; I sent a typewritten questionnaire, copies of which I still have. On January 25, 1960 Mr. Fischer wrote me in part as follows: "one thing he (Bacon) said which you could use... was that he mentioned that all his life he had been looking for some help to find a 'Theoretical' background for his painting. Once in life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it." I assumed, of course, that this was gospel truth. Mr. Fischer has been unfailingly helpful and kind in sending me material on Bacon. I had no reason whatever to doubt his accuracy, the less so in that Melville, whom I know and admire greatly as I've told you, was also present. But if Bacon now denies the statement, I'll simply take it out.

I don't, of course, expect Miss Brausen to believe this or anything else good of me, but I have no intention whatever of rushing this book into print until we've had time to straighten out some of these errors or misunderstandings. Please tell Bacon so when you see him.

Best - and thanks,

Sincerely,

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Aug. 14, 1962

Dear Mr. Sylvester:

Here is a sample (page 1) of the kind of re-write job I'm trying to do on the Bacon text. I wish you'd show it to Bacon (copy enclosed) and see if at last I'm on the right track. Maybe you'd also be willing to show it to Erica Brausen just to prove that I'm not entirely unreasonable and that things will straighten out in the end. After all, I can't stay mad at her forever; I admire too much what she's done in her gallery, damn it. A week ago I could have choked her with my bare hands. But I've calmed down now and perfectly willing to admit that this Bacon text needs a lot more work. It'll get it, I promise. I never had time to work on it steadily during the past two years, what with endless meetings, the 'phone and all the other nonsense of what we so hopelessly call progress.

Best, do please send your suggestions and Bacon's as soon as you can. The moment I have to go back to New York, I will never be able to work with this much concentration again.

also
selected
about another
artist

I don't know why you should have been startled that Bacon was so insistent. But to have this particular reservation...
I don't know why you should have been startled that Bacon was so insistent. But to have this particular reservation...
I don't know why you should have been startled that Bacon was so insistent. But to have this particular reservation...

With regard to your admission that I should be a bit more careful about what I say, I wouldn't agree more that I was careless to a great deal that I said: I felt I was paying you a compliment by being so. I was talking to a colleague, providing him with background information; I was not, as you are in your text, speaking publicly. I must say that I fully expected that before quoting anything I said to you, you would check the wording with me. I talked to you at great length and at great speed. This entailed two risks. The first was that mistakes might occur in transcription (as one undoubtedly did occur on the phrase "in youth" - your note 12; the second risk was that I may have spoken, and did, incautiously and inaccurately. I was therefore surprised at your not having sent me the notes you saw your with me before quoting from them in a text for publication. As I've had to see your text, no damage has been done. But there was something you could do. You may have...

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21 Melrose Road
London S. W. 18

August 14, 1962

Dear Mr Soby

Bacon is rather sick at the moment, so it will be another day or two before I see him. It might be helpful if I didn't delay further over writing about the matters on which I don't have to consult him. I am using the numbers which you used in your letter.

3) I too find that Bacon's paintings simultaneously repel and beguile. I only think it is wrong flatly to equate the effect of an artist's pictures with his "philosophy": they may accord; they may not. I don't understand your sentence about an inference in my article. With regard to what you say about quoting my sentence, I do persist in my request to you not to do so. By all means paraphrase it (though your point is perfectly well made without the help of it) but please don't quote me. It is very nice of you to say that the sentence is "good and memorable". But it really does embarrass me. Had you quoted other things I've said about Bacon, I wouldn't be so insistent. But to have this particular sentence abstracted from all that I've written about him really would be painful to me, so I beg you to suppressthe quotation.

also ↗
selected /

4) I don't know why you should have been startled that Bacon should have had reservations about Giacometti. After all, it is very rare that any artist ever speaks frankly without making reservations, however much he admires him. But what I told you about the reservations was made in the context of telling you that Bacon thinks Giacometti the outstanding figure in post-war art. If you show that indicate the reservations without indicating that context, it completely falsifies the thing.

about another artist ↗

With regard to your admonition that I should be a bit more careful about what I say, I couldn't agree more that I was careless in a great deal that I said: I felt I was paying you a compliment by being so. I was talking to a colleague, providing him with background information; I was not, as you are in your text, speaking publicly. I must say that I fully expected that before quoting anything I said to you, you would check the wording with me. I talked to you at great length and at great speed. This entailed two risks. The first was that mistakes might occur in transcription (as one undoubtedly did occur over the phrase "in youth" - your note 12); the second risk was that I may have spoken, and did, incautiously or inaccurately. I was therefore surprised at your not having sent me the notes you and your wife made before quoting from them in a text for publication. As I've been able to see your text, no damage has been done. But there still is something you could do. You may have preserved as a

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record your notes of the conversation as a whole, and if you have, these might at some time in the future fall into other hands. Perhaps you could therefore send me a copy of such notes so I can make any deletions or corrections, and then, when you have these, if there are any, you could destroy any unauthorised record.

5) I didn't suggest that what you said was derogatory, only that it was a misunderstanding. When you say in your concluding remarks that you find in my letter "a strange protectiveness as though I were maligning Bacon throughout", you ~~w~~are right about the protectiveness but not about the maligning. Of course I don't think that you're ~~Bacon~~; of course I appreciate how much you like his work: what worries me is how much you misinterpret it.

maligning ↗

6) My objection to the word "headlong" is based on having been at Bacon's studio several times while he was painting. I would have thought that one might use the word "headlong" of Picasso and of several Abstract Expressionist painters, but not really of Bacon, though he is certainly a quick rather than a slow painter.

7) As you say that Barr "agrees with Rothenstein and yourself that the ape's mouth is open", I'd just like to make it clear that what I said wasn't ~~embracing~~ my own interpretation: I ~~never~~ asked Bacon and he told me it was supposed to be open.

expressing ↗

8) I shall get a precise answer about this from Bacon.

12) The reference to Stanford may be unimportant. The reference to Aeschylus is not. No writer, except possibly Nietzsche, has haunted Bacon more.

15) My crack about Victorian problem-pictures was harsh, I agree, but in all sincerity and in all goodwill I did not think it was unnecessary. I feel that you devote far too much attention to trying to unravel a literary meaning in Bacon's pictures. Bacon's avowed ideal is "painting in which the image is the paint and vice versa". Surely this statement of intention indicates the kind of approach to Bacon which is necessary.

19) (You have numbered two of your paragraphs 19. The following refers to the second one.) Derain is not at all a good example. You may think that he "preserved and sold his merest daubs" but it is utterly untrue to cite him as an artist who ~~now~~ "refused to see any shortcomings" in his art. He was exceedingly self-critical. Since you are a friend of Giacometti and Balthus, you might try talking to them about the later Derain.

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20) I did not say Bacon "no longer used a ^{one-inch} ~~1/4~~ brush". Of course he still does, but along with a greater variety of brushes than he used when Melville wrote that piece. I shall try to get further clarification from Bacon about his rate of working.

21) I shall get you more precise information from Bacon.

inconsistency 22) I certainly did tell you the story about roulette, an amusing story and you have used it amusingly. My objection was to your wording. There is no need for you to be puzzled by what you take to be an ~~inaccuracy~~ in my letter. To make a habitual use of certain combinations of numbers is something done by everyone who plays roulette. But that is not the same as using a system. A system is a rigid method rigorously and faithfully adhered to. Bacon is not the sort of player who allows himself to be tied down to any system. This is a matter of fact, and in any case is what one would expect.

based If I were you I would write as follows. When you talk about his going off to Monte Carlo I would say, not "try out a ... system", but "try out his luck". And when you talk about the ~~invented birth date~~, I would say: "on one occasion Bacon amused himself by inventing a birth date ~~on~~ a combination of numbers he habitually used in playing roulette".

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely

David Eybarten

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D. Sylvester - Correspondence
+ notes