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The Intensities and The Shuttle ***or How art creates micropolitical self-perception***

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The particularity of being human, then. Take three ideas: a proposed generality ("the human being as such"), a broad approach relating to the history of ideas ("the human being as an anthropological fact"), something taken for granted that resonates subliminally ("the human being as a biogeno-evolutionary unit"). Now imagine them being used to make certain claims, wishing to make fundamental statements or intending to make a restorative gesture and smuggle doubtful certainties back in, or - and it comes to the same thing - to reintroduce thought constraints. Constraints that try to nullify multiple differentiations concerning discussion and reorientation, particularly of the subject concept (feminism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis, semiotics)¹.

In fact it would be ludicrous to look for a world "in which this demand sought imperiously for recognition: that the treacherous element of *renunciation* should be overcome, nature should be humanized, human beings naturalized and that on earth the treasures that have been squandered to heaven should be won back."² A world like that would be a false paradise.

But: is it appropriate to be suspicious of the title in this way? Or does this warning miss the point? Does the title itself not have inherent contradictions that perhaps do not infiltrate the apparent unambiguity of the concepts - "particularity", "being", "human" - but at least perceptibly question them?

Does "particularity" define an excluding peculiarity that ultimately aspires towards formulating self-identity for the concept, or is it merely a sign for a dubious strangeness, an admission of a certain restrictedness, a certain infirmity? Is "being" to be taken ontologically, or does the concept intend to parody such being, to decentre it and almost like a ventriloquist - to say to itself that it can celebrate its appearances only on a metaphysical stage? And is "human" not an immediate challenge to recall the ambivalent history of the concept and so to understand that exemplary humanity does not exist but - over and over again - only its confiscations and manipulations in the flux of political interest and ideologies?

Prologue

The works of Francis Bacon and Marlene Dumas are my springboard for formulating some thoughts on this subject. As implied in the opening remarks, I am concerned with the transition

¹ Foucault's now historical concluding paragraph from *Die Ordnung der Dinge* is merely the most popular and most abused example. What is meant, of course, is his very careful talk of the possibility "that the human being disappears like a face in the sand on the seashore". (Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung der Dinge*, (1966), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 9th ed., p. 462). It is generally accepted that it is correct to be more precise and state that here the humanistic subject - becoming foam - is meeting the same fate as Andersen's unhappy little mermaid.

² Michel Foucault, *Das Denken des Aussen* (French 1966), in: Walter Seitter (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Van der Subversion des Wissens*, Hanser, Munich, 1974, pp. 54 - 82, here p. 59 (Foucault's italics).

from aesthetic articulations to micropolitical consequences that I associate with the two aesthetics³. I am not interested here in stating, "exposing", the meaning of the works. I want to sketch out two peripheral areas that affect the reader as statements from the work, and reach the imaginary centre of his or her culture. It seems appropriate for me to use two matrices here: for Dumas, the uncanny, for Bacon, space.

Scene One: Francis Bacon and the Intensities

And how should we imagine K.'s sensations as he comes in from the outside and steps into the undefined interior of a peasant's hut? He sees nothing at all at first. How does he feel as he stumbles against a washtub, as a woman's hand holds him back, as children shout from a corner? As smoke drifts towards him from another corner, making the half-light into darkness, so that K. seems to be standing in clouds? And where are those voices coming from suddenly? ("Who are you?"; "Why have you let him in?", "Do we have to let in anything that is creeping about the alleyways?"), voices spinning an invisible net to which K. feels that he has to respond? How does K. feel as the smoke disperses and he can slowly get his bearings as the co-ordinates of the space seem to stop moving (for the room is moving), as the space takes shape *for him* and he sees two men bathing in steaming water in a wooden tub the size of two beds? How does he feel as, in the background, pale light slants in from an opening, the only one in the back wall, giving a silky sheen to the dress of a woman who is lying deep in the corner? And this water that splatters on to K.'s body too as the men splash huge quantities of water over the approaching children?⁴

Kafka's scene suggests that space has its secrets, energies that pass through it that lie beyond any subjective understanding. It constantly creates new configurations and accordingly its reality makes mockery of the notion that the position of a body in a space can be taken for granted.

Bacon's painting emphatically produces space, indeed it persistently makes producing space into one of the principal contents of its own process. Thus for example a complex network of relationships is incorporated in *Three Portraits. Posthumous Portrait of George Dyer, Self-Portrait, Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1973). This network affects the logical (or better: the conventional) operations engendered by the perspective-based representation model. Bacon's work seems to undermine this. The first ambivalence is expressed in the fact that the spaces occupied by the three figures are not identified as expressly three-dimensional: the space is defined as a room only by a straight line between "rear wall" and "floor". And the light-blue and beige rectangular segment rising behind each of the figures can be variously interpreted as a mirror, an open door or just an inset wall. The causal relation between light source (bulb) and shadow (the figures) is shifted beyond the three individual pictures. The bulb on the right panel seems to cast the shadow in the left panel and vice versa. Also the black-and-white copies of Bacon's own and Dyer's head in the left- and right-hand panels respectively leave no doubt about the viewer's having to abandon the autonomy of the individual canvas, the illusion of its being external to him. Instead of this a combinatorial process with the viewer as protagonist comes in to operation: it is he or she who first

³ Paul de Man indicates how the political and the aesthetic can enter a joint knowledge-space: "What gives the aesthetic its force and this its practical, political content is the intimate connection that it maintains with knowledge and those epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears on the horizon of a discourse." Paul de Man, *Ästhetische Formalisierung: Kleists Über das Marionettentheater*, in: same author: *Allegorien des Lesens*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1989, pp. 205 - 233, here p. 206.

⁴ From Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss*, in the manuscript version, ed. by M. Pasley, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 2nd ed., 1993, pp.16-17.

differentiates the pictorial space as a relational complex⁵. This kind of active mutual relating is clarified by indexical signs like the arrow above Freud's shoulder in the right-hand panel, the above-mentioned pictures in the pictures and the ("radiographic") circles in the central canvas that demand focusing. This viewer activity, its movement, is ultimately also the subject of the shifting background to the figures, which is re-produced from various viewing angles.

Formal similarity ("identity") is made into a problem by the pose of the figures in the left- and right-hand panels; there is no doubt that their position relates to the central figure. That is to say: the figures and their relations are placed on another, a different, axis from the pictorial background. The astonishing effect that this produces is expressed as an overlapping of these two axes: while the three different pictorial parts triptych reproduce the figures as external to each other, the spatial analogy leads to the assumption of an "impossible" simultaneity in which the individual figures hypothetically substitute for each other or - contrary to linear time logic - overlap. The way the individual figures relate to each other undermines the very ideality that holds that a continuity between the psychology of the subject and the phenomenology of the space is unthinkable.

In earlier examples, like for example *Study for Portrait*, 1949 (*Man in a Blue Box*), the radical practice of Bacon's painting was based on the materiality of the space, which had its own movements and energies, its effects and operations, its stagings and choreographies. Thus it was based on a model that tried to dissolve the figures in the gesturally applied flow of paint, or at least suggested their dissolution (and conversely their appearance). There the materiality of space was practised more literally - still the space of materiality. The use of paint ranges from opaque and fluent application (area around the "box" or "container" in the middle of the picture) to a dry and transparent approach (in the "box" itself and on the left-hand edge), from broad, rapid brush strokes (both inside and outside the "box") to a filigree, slowed down line (especially the "box", the face and the shirt). Here accentuation and persistent articulation of various intensities make it possible to experience the origin and movements of space. (Incidentally the colour values of the dull contrasts between orange, green and violet belong to the same register). If these painterly intensities were subjected to the demands of a dramatic (?) portrait of an individual figure, to the staging of a tragic (?) psychology, in other words, if they were limited to this serving function it would be a failure to appreciate *the painter* in Bacon.

And why do it? If Bacon's painting makes essential statements they are certainly not about reproducing some individual-psychological states of affairs.

This painting intervenes more fundamentally in the silent but all the more sensual and concrete modes of social representation. And if they are to be taken seriously they should not be not cut back to something that is effectively their "negative" dimension (i.e. the semiotic dimension that makes it permissible to comment on or criticize social reality); we should try to see and feel them from their productive side: the painting would thus be an undeniable indication of being alive, a fundamental demonstration of the fact that human beings have an actual ability to act within apparently pre-stabilized presentational ordering systems, however slight that ability to act may seem⁶. Does

⁵ Minimal Art took this aspect literally and projected the inner logic of relations within two dimensions into three-dimensional space.

⁶ This is not dissimilar to Samuel Beckett's formulation (on Bram van Velde), which says: "The history of painting [...] is the history of its attempts to avoid this feeling of failure because of more genuine, more comprehensive and less exclusive relations between presenter and presented, by virtue of a kind of tropism towards a light [...]. [...] I am well aware that in order to bring even this terrible matter to an acceptable conclusion nothing now needs to be done other than to make this submission, this toleration, this faithfulness in failure into a new cause, a new starting point and to make this impossible and necessary action an expressive action..." See: S. Beckett: *Samuel Beckett und George Duthuit über Bramvan Velde*, in: Samuel Beckett, Auswahl in einem Band, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1957, pp. 105 - 111, here pp. 110 - 111.

common sense not suggest there is a space that is the same for "everyone"? In fact and in truth common sense creates a space of evidence and normality: the space in which the human being lives is never simply given (not an eternal fact). It is emphatically produced by certain intensities, dispositions and discourses. And clearly the normality and uniformity of common sense eventually produce and secure a certain type of space, so that it can function smoothly itself and sustain its own logic - against the conjunctions of intensities.

Bacon's painting reveals this general and apparently transparent space that contrasts an interior with an exterior, and thus creates the possibility for itself of organizing - that is to say regulating and placing in hierarchies positions in space in terms of their normality and uniformity, as a special case. This means: human freedom, human happiness cannot be discussed exclusively within the category of the subject by revolutionizing only the psychology of the individual. It cannot be, precisely because this subject - with regard to its spatial position - again falls prey to the discipline based on a metaphysical concept of space.

Triptych - Inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem "Sweeney Agonistes", 1967, is only one example of the fact that space can present a reality for which a normalizing discourse has only words like illogicality, irrationality, phantasm, delirium and similar concepts available⁷. It should scarcely be difficult to imagine a political interest that uses perspective as a means of representation in order to make space controllable and to supervise and limit the way in which the living thing appears within it. That is: the perspective fixes the living thing in localizable, "free" (!) positions. The present triptych parodies this normalization process by quoting, shifting and destabilizing its central equivalents within representation (whose most popular agent is perspective). The round, greenish-grey "floor" could be both a "lawn" and a "carpet" at the same time, thus unambiguously cancelling the attribution of inside and outside. The staging itself, on which the two figures lie on two additional shallow plinths, and the frame that rises above them and connects them with a kind of "mirror" on the left-hand side additionally dissolve these hierarchies. They replace them with a continuum, an unfixed sequence of intervals, sizes, rhythms, angles, compressions: in short: conjunctions of intensities.

The fact that Bacon always considered his kind of figuration more effective than the vocabulary of entirely non-referential painting is certainly connected with his assumption that it would not be possible to change and shift (contemporary) mechanisms of social representation without using these very mechanisms (perspective, self-identity of the object, logic of inside/outside etc.), denaturalizing their limited use and ripping the mask of the essential away from them. It is precisely to this extent that Bacon's painting is part of a politico-representational discourse⁸ that seems appropriate for productive expansion of the restricted ideas of what politics is.

Bacon was acutely aware of these matters. Sylvester to Bacon: "You attempt to give a picture of reality that is conditioned as little as possible by general agreement about what appearance is?" - "That is very well put. There is yet another step: generally questioning what appearance is. Norms

⁷ As can be seen, the linguistic sign and the discourse seek through their binary logic to define freedom, complexity and liveliness of space in painting as a deviation from order and to discredit this "more" merely as at an at best tolerable but ultimately "unnecessary" supplement.

⁸ This applies to the whole of the West and is not restricted to the 20th century. A concrete example of this is the way in which Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) in the second (Louvre) version of the Arcadia theme (*Les Bergers d'Arcadie*) makes the outside left and right figures precisely cover the edges of the sarcophagus behind, so that its identification in terms of volume, its position and extent in space, become ambivalent. Not to mention Jacopo Tintoretto's (1519-1594) treatments of space, of course. His work shows the extent to which the phenomenon that art history labels as "Mannerism" represents a politico-representational effort that maintains a genealogical relation with Bacon's work. (For the concept of Genealogy, see below, footnote 11).

have been established that say what appearance is or what it should be..."⁹ According to this, a return to the question of space is not only directly legitimized by the central role allotted to it by Bacon himself within his artistic project¹⁰. It is also significant because in this register makes it possible to talk about the processes and ways of naming that impose order on the real. Bacon's art enables a critical genealogy¹¹ of phenomena that create a sensibility to the socially fundamental space problem¹².

Scene Two: Marlene Dumas and the Shuttle

And how do we imagine the 63-year-old Sigmund Freud sitting at his desk and remembering the heavily made-up women at the windows of the little houses; how his young double strayed from the *piazza* in an unnamed small Italian town and wandered through the empty, unfamiliar streets on a hot Sunday afternoon, how he became aware of the women and attempted to get out of this district; how he turned into an alleyway that he said was narrow but suddenly found his way back into that same heat-laden street and how his reappearing is starting to attract attention? How do we imagine Freud, here recalling his helplessness, his innocence, his childlike quality in a setting, staging it in an urban topography that could have been designed by Giorgio Chirico? And what should we think of the fact that this little enigma, this uncanny interlude in the hot south, suddenly, as Freud says, dissolves and he unexpectedly escapes from the labyrinth, leaves the sirens behind him?¹³

Freud produces this anecdote as an illustration of the uncanny. Freud's identical text dating from 1919 is striking for a formal structure that is simultaneously strange and typical. In order to understand what the uncanny releases in the "layers of the life of the soul"¹⁴ Freud spends practically the whole of the first chapter consulting dictionaries in order to trace the semantic development of the word *unheimlich* (uncanny, eerie, weird, terrible). Memorable within this linguistic analysis is the point at which Freud establishes that *unheimlich* does not just form an arithmetical apposite to *heimlich* (usually secret, clandestine, furtive, stealthy; it is cognate with homely), but that it is possible historically to discern contact, overlap and partial congruence between the two words: "The most interesting feature of this long quotation [from Daniel Sanders' *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* of 1860] for us is that among the many nuances of meaning of

⁹ D. Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 3rd ed., Thames and Hudson, London - New York, 1987, p. 107 in German edition (*Gespräche mit Francis Bacon*, Prestel, Munich, 1982).

¹⁰ Sylvester, op. cit. (note 9), on space and plasticity/ framework especially p. 85 and pp. 114 - 116.

¹¹ The concept is derived from Nietzsche, is developed by Foucault and appropriated by Judith Butler for a convincing political, post-metaphysical feminism.

¹² For two further discussions of space and its implications for representation politics see 1: G. Simmel, *Soziologie des Raumes* (1903) in: same author: *Schriften zur Soziologie*, ed. by Dahme, Heinz Jürgen/ Rammstedt, Otthein, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 3rd ed., 1989, pp. 221- 242. He analyses the facts in terms of an examination of the formal conditions of societalization. And 2: M. Heidegger, *Die Kunst und der Raum* (1969), in: same author, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol.13, *Aus der Eiführung des Denkens*, 1910-76, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1983, pp. 203 - 210. By describing the *Ineinanderspiel* (Heidegger; interplay) of plasticity and space he successfully demonstrates that space is not simply a uniform *Auseinander* (Heidegger; apartness) but a constant shaping: "The shaping occurs in separating by including and excluding." (p. 204). It is space that brings about sequences, sections, syntagmas and makes these play themselves out against and with each other, makes them touch each other and force each other out. An antagonistic field, an incessant happening that Heidegger can no longer reconcile with the monosyllable *Raum* (space). He makes it transitive and therefore calls it the *Räumen* (literally: spacing). (p. 207).

¹³ S. Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, in: same author, *Psychologische Schriften*, ed. by Mitscherlich, Alexander/Richards, Angela/Strachey, James, study edition vol. IV, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, pp. 241 - 274, here pp. 259- 260.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 243.

the little word *heimlich* there is one in which it coincides with its opposite *unheimlich*"¹⁵ What seems important is neither the causal explanation (the uncanny - *das Unheimliche*) is an effect of the return of the repressed, a kind of harbinger of death, connected with the fear that comes from the [male] child's castration complex), nor the anthropological explanation (according to which the uncanny is conceivable only within an animistic conception of the universe, whereby we invest "the character of the *uncanny* with impressions of the kind that tend to confirm the omnipotence of thoughts and the animistic way of thinking..."¹⁶).

Freud's commentaries become fruitful if taken in a structural sense, emphasizing fluent exchange, reversibility and contiguity.

If the assumption of the reversibility of the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* system is correct, Freud is suggesting that the two poles are only the outermost points of a connection that can constantly occur between the individuals and the living world surrounding them. That is to say: we do not simply feel or "have" the uncanny in the way that we can hold a cup of tea in our hand: we move as individuals within the mobile, structural chain of *unheimlich* - *heimlich*. Both concepts are neither inside (in the subjects private interior) nor outside (in the closed reality of things, which is absolutely external to the subject). On the contrary the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* system is a relation that constitutes cultural logic, and it can create subjects and objects as poles within this very relation. Thus it is not only a subject that brings the uncanny to life.

It seems to me that a not inconsiderable part of Dumas' work is comparable with propositions of the kind that bring the viewer into the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* relation described above, enabling him to perceive the ways in which this relation makes its effect more sharply and inviting or even compelling him to recognize the otherwise more or less hidden play of the relation¹⁷.

If the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* axis is to be meaningful,¹⁸ that also means that Dumas' pictures cannot be "invented". Dumas says on this point: "I want to be a referential artist. Reference deal with that already named."¹⁹ And indeed for precisely this reason Dumas' pictures quote and continuously make use of codified pictures, because her work wants to tap the very energies that unite these pictorial traditions within themselves and try to administer them. Pictorial traditions, those living archives that structure our consciousness, operate on a variety of planes: art history, pornography, advertising, historiography, news and reportage etc. Official representation systems tend to

¹⁵ Ibid. D.K.'s italics.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 263, footnote 2.

¹⁷ I certainly do not want to say that the axis that organizes the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* relation is a universal, ontological or anthropological fact. It is more than probable that different societies at different historical periods would articulate the axis differently. As I wish to discuss only one specific aspect of Dumas' work here I refer to S. Klein Essink's survey presentation (see footnote 19) and the special edition of the magazine *Parkett* (no.38/1993) which is devoted to Marlene Dumas (and Ross Bleckner).

¹⁸ Analogously with my intention in the case of Bacon I do not intend to develop a "theme" that is misunderstood in the form of a "substance" as a basis for Dumas' work, but one that defines an effect that is linked with the political interest of this essay. Thus I should like to distance myself from Carol Laing's fundamentally stimulating experiment: her re-adoption of Freud's "return of the suppressed" in the context of Dumas' *œuvre* seems to represent a substantialistic position with reference to Freud's statements. See: C. Laing, *Marlene Dumas*, Art Gallery of York University, North York, April 8 - May 22, recension, in: *Parachute*, no.76,Oct./Nov./Dec.1994.

But compare statements made by Dumas herself (in: Marlene Dumas, *Miss Interpreted*, exhibition catalogue, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1992) which do not conceal a closeness to the topic of the uncanny "...the inconsistency of the elements [of a story, fairytale] begins to dawn. It's a euphemistic technique. A sugary way to clothe impure motives." (p. 19); "the interpretative *affects* are inflamed." (my italics, D.K.); "... a realm which is shadowy and speculative, more or less fabulous, in character." (p. 58).

¹⁹ Quoted in S. Klein Essink, Introduction. In: *Marlene Dumas - Miss Interpreted*, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 8 - 24, here p. 11.

naturalize picture and word in constant mutual explanation, to suppress and neutralize their living distress, illogicality, system undermining capacity and subversive quality. But Dumas seems to be concerned to capture the inexplicable strangeness of the phenomena and make them available far the viewer to re-experience. It is of particular concern here not to reduce strangeness to the same or a deviation from the same, or as the artist herself says to "domesticate" it²⁰.

Let us assume that representation is attempting to stop the pictures that are moving to and fro on the *unheimlich - heimlich* axis as if on a shuttle, trying to push them off to the *heimlich* side, in its sense of what is known, unproblematic and supposed to be self-explanatory, and to anchor them at this pale. If this is approximately true, then Dumas' artistic practice is interested in liquefying this apparently rigid order. A "bizarre" iconography (as in *Art is Stories told by Toads*, 1988; *The Human Tripod*, 1988; *Man without sexual Organs*, 1988; *Albino*, 1986; *Before Lift*, 1989; *Het Hooghuis*, 1991; and others) is only the most extreme, visible momentum for such work. Actually there are no pictures entrusted to the artistic acquisition process that should be granted privileges as such. For which reason the apparently most banal and everyday motif (these in particular) can be made effective: the class picture (*The Teacher [sub a]*), 1987; *The Teacher [sub b]*), 1987; *De Turkse schoolmeisjes [Turkish Pupils]*, 1987), new-born babies, infants, children (*The first People I-IV*, 1991; *Warhol's Child*, 1991; *The Gang*, 1992; *De dans [The Dance]*, 1992) and heads. What seems familiar should rise again in painting as something strange and touching²¹.

Painting, now the medium Dumas uses most frequently, drives her work by means of its materiality, through the variation of colour shades and paint application, of pictorial detail, size and proportion. It may be assumed that in pictures like *Emily*, 1984, *Die moeder van die veroordeelde (The Mother of the Accused)*, 1985, *Het kwaad is banaal (The Banality of Evil)*, 1984 or *De vragende vrouw (The pleading Woman)*, 1985, it is above all the size of the pictures in relation to the viewer that will be aiming at the alienation effect,²² i.e. that alienation is established primarily (but not exclusively) on the formal axis of the proportion, and thus produces a psychological effect.

The most powerful examples are of course the pictures from the series *The first People I-IV* (1991)²³, in which four new-born babies, three female and one male, stare at the viewer head-on and at a height of 180 centimetres from the wall. The strange position of the four figures arises from the fact that the four works are based on photographs of children lying on their backs. Detached from the photographic context, turned through 90° by the logic of (portrait) painting, with arms reaching upwards, spastic grimaces, clenched hands, unformed limbs and swollen bellies, sometimes a delicate pink, then yellowish and white and waxy, the figures represented are a considerable distance from the romanticizing rhetoric that elevates small children to the place of innocence and freshness, untapped energy and credibility, thus establishing a social abstract that can have very little to do with the reality of children and those who surround them.

A picture that could not possibly be misunderstood in this respect is the dark brown picture called

²⁰ On William Wegman Dumas says: "How he [Wegman] plays with the awareness of how we try to *domesticate* the other." in: Marlene Dumas, *Miss Interpreted*, op. cit. (note 18), p. 34 (my italics, D.K.).

²¹ But not as *too* strange, which here partly motivates the use of the figurative code.

²² On this see: V. Sklovsky, *Kunst als Veifahren* (1916) in: F. Meirau (ed.), *Die Erweckung des Wortes: Essays der Russischen Formalen Schule*, Reclam, Leipzig, 1987, pp. 11-32. Alienation is an aesthetic process "to remove perception-automatism from things." (p. 18) The famous example is Tolstoy's horse, which tells the story in *The Canvas Measurer*. Analogous in Dumas is the figure of the toad ("Art is Stories told by Toads", 1988). The special part played by proportion becomes particularly clear in a photograph of the exhibition by Dumas; in *Marlene Dumas - Miss Interpreted*, op. cit. (note 18), p. 32.

²³ Cf. also *In the Beginning*, 1991, 145 x 200 cm; *Die Baba*, 1985, 130 x 110 cm; *Warhol's Child*, 1989-1991, 140x300 cm and others.

The Gang, 1992, on which four masked children in warpaint stand rattling their sabres parallel to the plane of the picture; each of them - with the exception of the figure on the extreme right - is wearing nothing but a black slip. *De dans*, 1992, is also characterized by a similar metaphysic of evil: four girls in a children's dance (two white and two black) have their backs to the viewer and seem to be looking into a dark brown space that is more like a prison yard than a playground.

There is a photograph of Marlene Dumas that shows her scantily clad (in a white shirt and black bikini) under an astonishing place-name sign with the title *Garden of Eden* resplendent in letters over a foot high. (The picture dates from summer 1979, and the caption significantly betrays that it was taken in South Africa.) The photograph is not necessarily to be taken merely as a cynical attack on a repressive, entirely unparadisal political reality²⁴; it is also part of an artistic self-perception, a metaphorical self-staging by the artist, who is quoting from the cultural archive in this picture: from Genesis (Old Testament: the Fall of Man). Once more we see that it is precisely those pictures that seem to be fixed culturally that offer themselves as surfaces to be reprocessed in order to enter the viewer's psychologically conditioned consciousness in changed form and there to bump into the shuttle that is working to and fro on the *unheimlich* - *heimlich* axis.

The Particularity of becoming human

The works of Bacon and Dumas show differences that should not be masked by concentrating on the human figure. Both positions are certainly fruitful to the extent that they are able to turn the basic assumptions of western anthropocentric self-perception upside down, liquefy them and denaturalize them. Bacon's work denaturalizes the notion of general, ontological space. It shows how the intelligibility of space is regulated and ordered by means of a metaphysical logic that establishes hierarchies; it also shows how the subjects that enter it are submitted to a disciplining process if they do not succeed in perceiving the intensities of the space (see above). Dumas' works are embedded in discourses that process gender, politics, race and history; her works attempt to actualize as painting the presence, presented there, but very difficult to feel, that is the other (woman, child, black person...).

The particularity of *becoming* human seems conceivable to me only within the intensities of space and along the dynamic movements of the shuttle. Let us follow the hypotheses of Kafka and Freud and accept provisionally that man wanders through space and time. It is reductive to associate despair with this experience, which is supposedly existential. On the contrary: it promises a sensuality to accompany this wandering around and this helplessness, this experience of space and of feeling. It may happen in the form of the warm vapours and the splashes of water that wet K. or the women whose looks followed the young Sigmund. Could this be actualized in a liberating sense of life if we admit something K. seems to have felt and Freud seemed to flee - our own watchful vulnerability?

²⁴ The picture was published in 1988 and thus places itself in a real political context. For the photograph, see: *Marlene Dumas - Waiting (for meaning)*, exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle zu Kiel & Schleswig-Holsteinische Kunstverein, August 10 - September 28, 1988, unpaginated.