

2004

Reclaiming the Body: Francis Bacon's Fugitive Bodies and Confucian Aesthetics on Bodily Expression

Eva K. W. Man

Hong Kong Baptist University, evaman@hkbu.edu.hk

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics



Part of the [Aesthetics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Man, Eva K. W. (2004) "Reclaiming the Body: Francis Bacon's Fugitive Bodies and Confucian Aesthetics on Bodily Expression," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol2/iss1/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts Division at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive) by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact mpompeli@risd.edu.

[About CA](#)

[Journal](#)

[Contact CA](#)

[Links](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Search Journal](#)

[Editorial Board](#)

[Permission to Reprint](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Publisher](#)

[Webmaster](#)

Eva K. W. Man

[Editor's Note: Special technical difficulties have delayed publication of this article. Most but not all have been resolved, but we do not want to delay publication any longer. Chinese characters will be added later.]

Abstract

Recently there has been a cry in Western academic and artistic circles for reclaiming the body and repositioning its locus and identity. Body theories and body art have become topics of attention as well as subjects of philosophical discussion. This article looks at the issue from a comparative perspective, focusing on representative cases in Chinese and Western portrait paintings. It first discusses Francis Bacon's works of human bodies and identifies their philosophical and psychological loci. It then outlines the Confucian discourses on the body, their related metaphysical grounds, and their relations to traditional Chinese portrait paintings. Representative Chinese portraits like those of Ku K'ai-chih are introduced. In comparing these, the following questions are addressed: How are body discourses related to different bodily expressions? In what ways do the Confucian ideas on the body shed light on recent discussions in the West on reclaiming the body? Are the problems with the dichotomies of mind and body solved in the Confucian tradition? Can active engagement through the process of reworking artworks create new possibilities of bodily expression?

Key Words

reclaiming the body, exhilarated despair, loss of self, moral masochism, psycho-physical dualism, bodily ego, *chin sheung miao te*, *ch'i*, four beginnings, *liang-chih*, *hao-jan chih ch'i*, *yi*, thinking greatest-component

1. The Case of Francis Bacon: Fugitive Bodies

Whenever I look at the distorted bodies in Francis Bacon's figure paintings, I take a breath and try to enjoy the bodies by thinking of the comments of one of his critics, Andrew Brighton. Brighton suggested the following questions when looking at a Bacon painting: What ideas and values does our view of the work oblige us to have and defend? How does it work for us now? How does it relate to the work of others and other images? Why has it been celebrated, condemned or ignored by critics, historians and institutions?[1] It is difficult not to articulate these questions with various theories of the body.

1.1 "Exhilarated Despair," Sexuality and Violence

When Bacon attained major public recognition at the end of World War II, despair was in fashion. Art critics and editors announced at the time that the modern movement's struggle happened "between men, betrayed by science, bereft of religion, deserted by the pleasant imaginings of humanism against the blind fate. It was closing time in the gardens of the West and an artist would be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair." [2]

Bacon's early paintings have been seen as reflecting the war

itself and in particular the images of concentration camps that emerged as the Allies liberated Europe in the latter part of 1944. *Three Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (http://www.francis-Bacon.cx/triptychs/three_studies.html) was one of his works completed in 1944 before the pictures of the camps were released. This painting was supposedly one of the resources for Bacon's visual articulation of a culture of pessimism, but in fact it formed the context and not the pre-text of his rhetoric of despair. Bacon himself confirmed in an interview that his paintings were concerned with his own kind of psyche, which he described as "exhilarated despair."

It is natural for people to take Bacon's personal history into account when looking at his work. Bacon was born in Dublin in 1909 to English parents at the time when Ireland was in the violent process of becoming a state independent from Britain, and during his childhood his family was under threat of attack. This experience is described as crucial to the reception of Bacon's paintings, linked both to his masochistic homosexuality and to the violence and pessimism attributed to his work. The fact that in the late 1920s Bacon lived briefly in Berlin, a city that accepted his sexuality, might well have provided him courage in asserting his particular form of sexuality, which he made the core of his paintings.[3] We might agree with critics that Bacon seeks to "come immediately onto the nervous system," to "unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently," and that his works are convulsive and physiological.

1.2 Loss of Self

Bacon's bodies also impress people as "fugitive" as well as expressing "exhilarated despair," masochistic sexuality and violence.[4] As Ernst van Alphen suggested, Bacon's bodies hinder any attempt to derive from them a sense of existence, identity, or solidity, but these are also the reasons that bodies may well be central to an aesthetic and philosophical understanding of his paintings.[5] Van Alphen further suggested that Bacon's representation of the body is partly affiliated with, and partly opposed to, current Western philosophies. In these philosophies, the body is what others see but what the subject does not. The subject becomes dependent on the other in a way that ultimately makes the body the focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications.

What does this point indicate when we look at Bacon's images? It means that we see bodies as a series of fragments dangling on the string of the inner sensation of self, and lacking the wholeness that the self/other relationship would produce. Van Alphen specifically refers to this lack in *Self Portrait*(1969) (http://www.francis-bacon.cx/self_portraits/self_69.html), in which faces are fragmented in such a way that we cannot decide whether formless elements belong to the faces of subjects or not.

Subject and non-subject thus become one flat visual field constructed on contiguity, making it impossible to speak of a subject or self. Van Alphen said that this is the way Bacon represents the inner experience of self, which ends by deconstructing the idea of self according to the self/other binary.[6] Further readings based on this assumption help engage the ambiguities and complexities of Bacon's bodies. For example, Bacon always avoids putting more than one figure on the same canvas because such togetherness would suggest the becoming of a self through the other. His work would rather fragment the subject or close out the possibility of a unified

self.

Critics have also pointed out that the lack of a visual relationship between self and other can explain the isolation of Bacon's subjects in terms of the space that surrounds them. There are elements in his paintings that isolate the subject in space: the boxes, platforms, cage structures and so on. Many critics have seen these as means of short-circuiting the development of an action or a relationship; e.g. *Head IV* (1949) (<http://www.francis-bacon.cx/figures/headiv.html>).[7]

How about those works of Bacon that involve desire between two parties? One interesting interpretation of the play of desire in Bacon is that the self may become indistinguishable from the other, and the outer body of the subject would then disintegrate, becoming no more than an aspect of the body of the other. In *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954) (<http://www.francis-bacon.cx/figures/figuresingrass.html>), the two naked men meld. Their bodies are blurred and fragmented. One critic argued that the sexual desire of the two men may destroy the distance between them and fragment their selves. It was also suggested that love-making was an assault on the self's boundaries, with, according to Bacon, sexual desire leading to loss of self and sexual relations as essentially masochistic.[8]

In addition to the loss of self, another question that has been raised about Bacon's bodies is, how can the fragmented experience of self be preferable to the experience of the self as whole? In Bacon's paintings, there is no space in which the body can be framed or embedded according to the conceptual categories of the interior and the exterior. One example is *Painting* (1978) (<http://www.francis-bacon.cx/figures/1978.html>), in which a naked figure tries to lock (or unlock) the door with his foot. The extremely artificial posture seems to express the danger and anxiety involved in this simple act. It remains unclear whether the danger is caused by something inside or outside, or by the act of drawing a line between inside and outside. Another example, *Self Portrait* (1970) (http://www.francis-bacon.cx/self_portraits/self_1970.html) repeats this effect, as van Alphen clearly described: the viewer focuses first on Bacon's head, which seems to be a straightforward view of the artist. When the viewer looks at the sides of the painting, however, it becomes apparent that he or she has been looking at a painting of a painting of Francis Bacon. Yet the lower side of the painting appears to be a painting of Francis Bacon in front of a painting. We can see that Bacon seems to consistently deny the possibility that subjects can be defined by the space that surrounds them, and he provides no representation of subjects within a meaningful world, hinting that this is paradoxically the only way that the idea of self can be felt and kept alive, instead of being defined by others or by the surrounding space.[9]

1.3 Freudian Concepts of the Mind and the Body

What kinds of Western thought or philosophies contributed to Bacon's rebellious body of work? We can trace the way back to the Greek binaries of mind and body, subject and object, essence and appearance, inside and outside, and so on; and more relatively recently to Freud and Nietzsche. Bacon loved to read - and was strongly influenced by - Freud and Nietzsche. Freud's essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," available in English translation in 1924, sketched what he called "moral masochism," arguing that the child translates a sense of guilt into a wish for parental punishment, a wish

expressed in fantasies of beatings by the father and of having "a passive (feminine) sexual relation to him." Freud's essay is crucial in interpreting Bacon's work.^[10] Yet we need to pay attention to the psychoanalytic conceptions of the body. Elizabeth Grosz has said that although psychoanalysis is largely concerned with the analysis and interpretation of psychic activities, and the psyche in Western tradition is generally allied with the mind and opposed to the body, Freud and a number of other psychoanalysts have devoted considerable attention to the body's role in psychic life.^[11]

But Freud is not that far from Western philosophies. It is known that he remained committed to a form of psycho-physical dualism inherited from Cartesian philosophy, in which chemical and neurological processes are neither causes nor effects of psychological processes but are somehow correlated with them. Freud's biological body is overlaid with psychic and social significance accounts; that is, Freud talked about a socially, historically, and culturally sexed body that displaces what was once mythically known as the natural body. Yet he also claimed that the ego must be considered a "bodily ego," a "surface projection" of the libidinal body.

Grosz is correct in her reading that for Freud, the ego is an internalized image of the meaning that the body has for the subject, and also for others in the social world and for culture as a whole. The ego is described as a shared and/or individualized fantasy of the body's form and modes of operation. And also, one's psychic life history is written on and worn by the body. Oral, anal and phallic drives are not biologically determined stages of human development (this would reduce the drive to a form of instinct), but are the result of processes of libidinal intensification that correlate with the acquisition of various meanings for various body components. Thus emerged the belief that psychoanalytic theory has enabled feminists and other counter-hegemonic groups reclaim the body from the realms of immanence and biology in order to see it as a psycho-social product, open to transformations in meaning and functioning, capable of being contested and re-signified.^[12] We, as well, can understand Bacon's bodies from all these perspectives.

1.4 Nietzsche's Notions and Influences

It is known that Bacon also read Nietzsche seriously. He echoed Nietzsche's existential argument that after the death of God man must create himself, despite having a sense of the self and existence as being without value or meaning. Bacon's work demonstrates the effort in re-defining one's self and reclaiming one's self from its relations with others.

It is necessary to review Nietzsche's thoughts on the mind and the body to see his alternative position in the recent history of Western thought and to track his influences on Bacon's figuration of bodies. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche destroyed the mind/body dichotomy through the notion of "self." He said:

"What the sense feels, what the spirit perceives, is never an end in itself ... behind them lies the Self.... Behind your thoughts and feelings ... stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self. He lives in your body; he is your body."^[13]

For Nietzsche, soul or mind is "only a word for something about the body" and human beings are "simply bodies, and nothing else."

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche read philosophy as a misunderstanding of the body and emphasized the decisions of individuals. He said:

"The popular medical formulation of morality ..., "virtue is the health of the soul," would-have to be changed to become useful, at least to read, "your virtue is the health of your soul." For there is no health as such, and all attempts to define such a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determination of what is healthy for your body depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul . . . Only then would the time have come to reflect on the health and illness of the soul, and to find the peculiar virtue of each man in the health of his soul. In one person, of course, this health could look like its opposite in another person. Finally, the great question would still remain whether we can really dispense with illness - even for the sake of our virtue - and whether our thirst for knowledge and self-knowledge in particular does not require the sick soul as much as the healthy, and whether, in brief, the will to health alone is not a prejudice, cowardice, and perhaps a bit of very subtle barbarism and backwardness."[\[14\]](#)

We can now see Nietzsche's phantom on Bacon's bodies, and also the influences of his notion of Dionysian man, as outlined in *Twilight of the Idols*:

"It is impossible for Dionysian man not to understand any suggestion of whatever kind, he ignores no signal from the emotions, he possesses to the highest degree the instinct for understanding and divining, just as he possesses the art of communication to the highest degree. He enters into every skin, into every emotion: he is continually transforming himself...."[\[15\]](#)

"... one first has to convince the body. The strict maintenance of a significant and select demeanour, an obligation to live only among men who do not "let themselves go," completely suffices for becoming significant ... It is decisive for the fortune of nations and of mankind that one should inaugurate culture in the right place - not in the "soul" (as has been the fateful superstition of priests and quasi-priests): the right place is the body, demeanour, diet, physiology: the rest follows." [\[16\]](#)

While others in the Western tradition see the subject as part of the world, and one who needs the perspectives of others in order to feel part of the world one inhabits, Bacon's bodies choose instead to escape from and deform these perspectives.[\[17\]](#)

In this way and in the concern of sexuality, Bacon's artistic choice echoes the effort of some feminist scholars. To take Judith Butler as an example, one finds in her writings disruption of the continuity between sexed anatomy and gender and sexuality, which privileges the sexed anatomy as the origin of a singular, sexual identity, that is, heterosexuality. The way to disrupt it is to demonstrate that bodies are not the prepared site or space for a pre-existing performance, or the raw material over which the social or cultural mask is hung, but are brought into being through the performance itself. Butler asserts that there is no body that pre-exists discourse, and therefore, no sexuality that is natural to bodies.[\[18\]](#)

Bacon's bodies also remind us that the body is not an originating point or yet a terminus; it is the result or an effect.

Some philosophical writings now hint that the body does have the status of a realm of underlying truth, and try to recover it from medicine or sociology by making it vivid again. The works of Bacon's contemporaries (Jacques Lacan, Merleau-Ponty and others) theorize that a body is not properly a human body, a human subject or individual, unless it has an image of itself as a discrete entity or as a gestalt.^[19] This enables the orientation of one's body in space and in relation to other bodies that provides a perspective on the world and that is assumed in the constitution of the signifying subject.^[20]

Distinct from all these notions, Bacon's bodies are reconstituted in new forms, which is outstanding with respect to the normative bodies and its related histories in his culture. It would be interesting to look at an alternative in another tradition or historical discourse. Since this alternative should not be read by way of a parallel comparison but rather related through cultural differences to the theories of the body we have discussed, I feel comfortable in introducing the artistic principles of Ku K'ai-chih (c.344-406), who was famous for his portraits in traditional China.

2. The Case of Ku K'ai-chih and Principles of Chinese Figure Painting

Ku K'ai-chih (c.344-406) captures his portraits not merely the appearance but the very spirit of his subject. His teachings have been followed for a long time and have become the main school of Chinese portraiture. Here is a summary of the features of his artistic practice:^[21]

1) The linear, articulated and calligraphic line is combined with broken interior ink washes to produce a richly integrated texture. The brushwork is delicate with little modulation.

2) The main figures provide formal structure, supported by an environment that plays on human interaction, confrontations and encounters, in the development of which the artist effectively uses pictorial concepts of emptiness and fullness, always suggesting a slowly unfolding activity.

3) Most human expressions are restrained and delicate; there are few extremes of either emotion or gesture, and the figures seem to combine humanness and a certain ethereal quality.^[22]

4) The depiction of human subjects is related to its naiveté, its air of grace, its restraint, and its humanistic spirit.

Confucian thoughts about body and mind are reflected in Ku's theories of painting, stated in his own writings and records of his followers. His theories incorporated Confucian thoughts as follows:

1) The first principle of painting portraits is to grasp the particular spiritual rhythm of the subject, so-called "*Chin Sheung Miao Te*" (), which has to be attained through good imagination.

2) The excellent manifestation of the spirit of the subject is achieved through form. Ku emphasizes the subject's head and face, particularly the eye or the pupil of the subject, which he believes can speak for the subject's soul or spirit.

3) He reminds people of the importance of depicting in portraits how subjects relate to their environments. Things an artist needs to care about include the personality of the subjects (especially historical or legendary figures), social

classes and the subject's relation to other characters in the painting. Things of equal importance are the reactions the subject expresses, the social constraints or rituals that affect the subject's bodily behaviors; the positions or places where the subject and other characters are situated, and finally, the related setting or environment.

4) In order to achieve the realistic effects of the above principles, Ku suggests that artists should make the effort to observe, study, analyze and understand. Only through one's hard study can one grasp the essence of the subject and related artistic transformations. Ku admits that it is easier to paint animals than landscapes, but painting humans is the most difficult.

One should not miss the moral implications of Ku's theories, for his discussion of spiritual rhythm mainly refers to the moral qualities of his subjects, and those of the artist as well, which enable one to grasp and understand what is important.

Examples: *The Fairy of the Lo River*

(<http://uccor.digilib.sh.cn/art/ysjs/images/big/49381003.jpg>), and (<http://www.hanaga.com/gbjc/zh/hs.jpg>) for details, an illustration after the time of Ku K'ai-chih, preserves the archaic style of his time and demonstrates these principles. In the scene a fairy bids farewell to the young scholar, who had fallen in love with her, for his good fortune and future, and sails away in her magic boat. The flying sleeves of the clothing and the setting of willow trees are said to have grasped the spiritual rhythms of the characters, in praise of love, and virtues of sacrifice.[23]

Another example is one of Ku's very few surviving famous paintings, *The Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*(<http://ceiba.cc.ntu.edu.tw/fineart/database/chap18/18-03-06x.jpg> and (<http://www.guoxue.com/nl/syxy/007.jpg>) for details), which tells Confucian stories in praise of four groups of famous virtuous women of antiquity. This painting shows the emperor gazing doubtfully at a concubine seated in her sofa bed. The text accompanying the illustrations echo the woman's saying, "If the words that you utter are good, all men for a thousand leagues around will make response to you. But if you depart from this principle, even your bedfellow will distrust you." [24] The figures, the setting and the postures and spiritual expressions of the subjects are all executed in Ku's best effort and are illustrated according to his suggested principles in recounting folk legend, which is also a Confucian educational text for women. We should note that Confucian teachings greatly influence Ku's principles, in particular the Confucian theories of mind and body, which should be discussed for the purposes of this paper.

3. Confucian Theories of the Body

It is generally believed that at least three theories of the body are found in the early Confucian school in the pre-Ching dynasty before 2 B.C. They are Mencius' relational theory of the body and the mind, Hsun Tzu's social theory of the body, and the ancient natural theory of the body. All these theories imply the inseparable relation of body and mind. No body is without the implication of the mind and no mind is without its embodiment. While each Confucian theory emphasizes a certain aspect, the conclusive contemporary connotation is that the body is a compound of one's conscious, physical, social and cultural dimensions. These theories are influenced by two traditions: the Confucian one of rituals - the human body is always ritualized or socialized; and the traditional ancient natural theory of the vital force (*ch'i*).

I would like to focus on Mencius' (371-289 B.C.) ideas of the body and mind, as his work not only discloses materials crucial to an understanding of a theory of the body in the Confucian tradition but is itself also a representative discourse. Some citations and readings that have significant implications for Chinese figure painting, are offered below.

"Every human being possesses these four beginnings just as he possesses four limbs. Anyone possessing these four and claiming that he cannot do what they require is selling himself short. If he claims that his prince cannot do what they require, he is selling his prince short. Since, in general, the four beginnings exist within us, it remains only to learn how to enlarge them and bring them to a fullness. This may be compared to the first flicker of a fire, or the first trickle of a spring."[\[25\]](#)

The "Four Beginnings" () are the four fundamental feelings and sentiments that constitute forms of moral knowledge, the so-called *liang-chih* (). These are feelings and sentiments of compassion, shame, modesty and reverence, and include the distinction between right and wrong. These feelings and sentiments are believed to be natural, and can be immediately accessed when a person is situated in proper circumstances. The feelings and sentiments can produce virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom respectively, and the inclination to act accordingly when the moral subject interacts with others. Mencius considered *liang-chih* the ontological foundation of virtues, and its relation to the body is that it needs to be nurtured and preserved. He said,

"Do not seek in your heart for what you do not find in your words. Do not seek in your Vitality for what you do not find in your heart. The second of these statements I find to be all right; the first, I disapprove. For will is commander over the Vitality, while Vitality is what fills our persons. Will is of the highest importance; Vitality stands second. That is why it is said, 'There is no disorder in the Vitality where will is maintained. . . .If the will is unified, it becomes a motor for the Vitality. If the Vitality is the unified one, it becomes motor for the will....'"[\[26\]](#)

Vital force refers to bodily substance, matter and desire, and the Chinese word is *ch'i*. We should point out that *ch'i* is different from will (the moral mind), but both are interrelated in the sense that the moral mind should govern *ch'i*, or virtue will fail, and this is a crucial point for humanity. *Ch'i* is different from the "strong, moving power," which in Chinese is the *hao-jan chih ch'i* (). In the latter, *ch'i* is guided by righteousness (*yi*) in the fullest sense and has been compared to "flood breath." It is believed that in *hao-jan chih ch'i*, *yi* is the ontological foundation of bodily action. Through one's conscious effort to act according to moral principles, *yi* will naturally lead to the ontological extension of oneself and will transform the world into a universe of significance integral to the individual self. The bodily *ch'i* that lacks moral nourishment will not only easily weaken but will also subvert the moral self when violent. Mencius again:

"... There is not an inch of his skin that he does not love, so there is not an inch of it that he does not take care of. Its good and bad parts are derived from no other source than the man himself. In the body there are both honored and despised parts, big and small parts. One does not harm the big with the small; and one does not harm the honored with the despised.

The one who takes care of the small parts first is a petty man; he who takes care of the big parts first is big man."[\[27\]](#)

"By following one's bigness one becomes a big man; by following one's pettiness one becomes a petty man... Since the senses of hearing and sight do not think, they become obscured by things; they are beguiled by the contact occurring between things. The sense of heart-and-mind, however, thinks. If there is thinking, that sense is achieved; but without thinking it is not achieved. It is something given to us by Sky. If it is first established in bigness, pettiness will not be able to snatch it away. And such an individual will become simply a big man."[\[28\]](#)

We note that the mind is the noblest and greatest component of the body, and it is more than simply physical because of its moral consciousness or innate knowledge of goodness. Smaller components are the physical ones that have basic functions like hearing and vision. Physical needs or desires of the smaller components have to be subordinated to the control of the "thinking greatest-component," which constitutes the center of moral principles and will. As we mentioned, moral knowledge and its capabilities need to be developed and preserved in order to transform the human subject into a "great person" or sage. According to traditional Confucian school, what a person should do - through moral practices - in one's personal life and in one's social intercourse with others, is the central and ultimate concern of human activity. This famous saying of Mencius demonstrates the significant exercise of the mind in dominating and repressing the smaller components of the body:

"... Therefore, when Sky is going to confer great responsibility upon an individual, his heart-and-mind and his determination must first be made to suffer, his sinews and bones must know toil, the skin of his body must show the ravages of hunger, his person must be reduced to the last extremity, all his undertakings must be upset. In this way his heart-and-mind are touched, his nature is provided with endurance, and aid is provided for his incapacities..."[\[29\]](#)

This idea of repression, practices or transformation results in an important Confucian idea present in traditional Chinese figure painting, which believes that one's virtues or moral mind would finally manifest and transform one's appearances, "in one's face, back and four limbs, without saying." The following is another conclusion:

"The desirable is called approved; and to contain within oneself is to inspire confidence. When filled fully with both of these, one is called handsome. When filled fully with them to the point of being glorious, one is called great. When out of greatness one produces changes in the world, one is called a sage. What remains unknown despite the fact that one is a sage is called divine..."[\[30\]](#)

The interpretation is that a sage or a beautiful man full of spirit in figure painting is one who genuinely practices moral virtues, whose appearance is in contrast to a "small man."

4. Some Comparative Considerations

The works of Bacon and Ku belong to different cultures in different times. Though the interpretations in this paper should not be seen as a direct comparison, the contrast between the artistic works of these two great portrait masters includes the following:

1) While Bacon's subjects are associated with "exhilarated despair," sexuality and violence that seem to violate the moral norms of his times, Ku's subjects celebrate Confucian virtues, and his works are regarded as tools of moral education.

2) The theme of Bacon's figures is the "shattering of the subject" or the replacement of a unified self by a fragmented self, which has been read as "loss of self" with psychoanalytic implications. Ku's subjects are not elusive or subconscious; rather, they assert a moral self from the figures and through the viewers, and first of all from the artist, himself. The contrast is also represented artistically by Bacon's blurred and rough brushes, and Ku's delicate and linear style.

3) There is no visual or reciprocal relationship among Bacon's subjects, and he intentionally avoids any storytelling among his subjects. The bodies of his figures always merge and hardly differentiate from one another. Ku is famous for emphasizing the pupil of a subject's eye, and he believes that it manifested the rhythm of one's spirit. There is often mutual gazing: That between the emperor and his good lady, or the fairy and the scholar she loves, for example, is filled with compassion and moral expectation.

4) There is no absolute distinction between the inside and the outside in Bacon's space, as critics point out, nor is it defined by a surrounding space. Ku's space is consciously both natural and social. He grasps the exactitude of natural environment and also takes into account the subject's social position in related social space.

5) Bacon's loss of self implies a real self behind the scene, whose subjectivity is marked by artistic choices or forms. This self, according to Nietzsche, is a bodily self beyond the so-called mind and spirit, which are socially and culturally constructed. Ku's self is basically a morally constituted being of the will, the mind and the body: the moral will and mind cultivate the body and the body, in turn, nurtures the will and the mind through progressive practices.

The contrasts just discussed should be seen as sketches of the body theories we have been discussing. So now can we say one is better than the other and conclude that the problems of the mind and body split are resolved in the Confucian tradition? Can we go further and ask how the recovery of the body in contemporary Western discourse can learn from Confucian theories of the body? Can we propose that active engagement through the process of reworking the body in art is able to create other possible expressions of the body? Maybe only the answer to the last question is positive, as we see from the radical attempts that Francis Bacon made.

Confucians discuss their theories of the body as something ontological and natural, as do some theories in Western tradition. However, contemporary discourses stress that the difference does not have to do with biological "facts" but with the manner in which culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves. This marking is enabled through discourses that cannot be deemed "outside" or apart from the various forms of power relations operating through languages or signifying practices. As Moira Gatens has said, what is crucial in our current context is the thorough interrogation of the means by which bodies become invested with differences, which are then taken to be fundamental ontological differences.^[31] Judith Butler's point is also noteworthy, that a bodily norm is assumed, appropriated and taken on as not undergone by a subject, but rather that

the subject is formed by virtue of having gone through a process of assumption.[32]

These sorts of contemporary rethinking call into question the model of construction whereby the social acts on the natural and invests it with its parameters and meanings. The reflection applies to both the Western and Eastern discourses discussed in this paper, where the natural relinquishes itself as the natural. As I have claimed, there is no reference to a pure body that is not at the same time a further formation of the body, where the practice of signification, of demarcating and delimiting are inevitable.[33]

Endnotes

[1] Andrew Brighton, *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 2001), p.8.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.9.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.16.

[4] Nick Millet, "The Fugitive Body: Bacon's Fistula," in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts: The Body* (London: The Academy Group, 1993), pp.40-51.

[5] Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion Books Limited, 1992), p.114.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp.115-116.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp.117-8.

[8] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (Winter 1987), pp.197-223.

[9] van Alphen, p.160.

[10] Brighton, p.15.

[11] Elizabeth Grosz: "Psychoanalysis and the Body," in Janet Price & Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.267.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp.267-270.

[13] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For Everyone And No One*, translated with [a new] introduction by R.J Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), I.4, p.62.

[14] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science with a Prelude in Rhymes and Appendix of Songs*; translated with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 3.120, pp.176-177.

[15] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of The Idols and The Anti-Christ*; translated with an introduction and commentary by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 9.10, p.73.

[16] *Twilight of the Idols*, 9.47, p.101.

[17] van Alphen, p.118.

[18] Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), pp.116-117.

[19] Denise Riley: "Bodies, Identities, Feminisms," in Price & Shildrick, pp.221-223.

[20] Moira Gatens: "Power, Bodies and Difference," p.228.

[21] Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p.131.

[22] "Li Kung-lin's Use of Past Styles," in Christian R. Murck, ed., *Artists and Traditions: Uses of the Past in Chinese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 1976), pp.51-71.

[23] Sullivan, pp.90-91.

[24] Sullivan, pp.91-92.

[25] *The Sayings of Mencius*, trans. James R. Ware, (Taipei: Confucius Publishing Co., 1970), 2A: 6, p.52.

[26] *Ibid.*, 2A: 2, p.42.

[27] *Ibid.*, 6A: 14, p.188.

[28] *Ibid.*, 6A: 15, p.190.

[29] *Ibid.*, 6B: 15, p.210.

[30] *Ibid.*, 7A, 7B: 25, p.234.

[31] See Price & Shildrick, pp.230-231.

[32] Judith Butler, "Bodies that Matter," p.235.

[33] *Ibid.*, p.238.

Eva Kit Wah Man

Hong Kong Baptist University

evaman@hkbu.edu.hk