

Original Article

The Hole in Francis Bacon's Paintings and the Circle (圓) in Eastern Thought

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aimed to demonstrate that the hole in Francis Bacon's paintings, interpreted by Gilles Deleuze (2003), and the circle, conceptualized by Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1971), have certain structural and functional features with the circle (yuan, 圓) in Eastern thought, and that both the hole and the circle (yuan, 圓) may function as artistic mechanisms linking the virtual and the actual. **Methods:** This study focused on structural homology with regard to the relationships among concepts and the processes of generation and circulation, and on functional equivalence within their respective systems. First, based on Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon and Cirlot's symbolism of the circle, the present study considered the hole within Bacon's diagram as a passage where invisible forces move between the virtual and the actual, generating haptic sensation. Next, it examined Cirlot's concept of the circle in terms of unity, totality, circular movement, and the return from multiplicity to unity. Then, it compared these structural and functional features, together with Cirlot's symbolic meanings of "Infinity," "the Universe," and "the All," with Eastern conceptions of the circle (yuan, 圓), such as "the infinite" (wuxian, 無限), "the origin" (genyuan, 根源), and "creative potential." **Results:** Through this comparison, the present study revealed structural and functional similarities among Bacon's hole, Cirlot's circle, and the circle (yuan, 圓) in Eastern thought. **Conclusions:** The study indicates that the hole in Bacon's paintings can be understood as analogous to the circle (yuan, 圓) in Eastern thought, particularly in its role as an artistic mechanism linking the virtual and the actual.

Keywords: Francis Bacon, Hole, Circle (Yuan, 圓), Confucianism, Potentiality

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1. Introduction

A lot of studies have examined the meaning and role of the diagram in the paintings of Francis Bacon (1909–1992). However, few studies have treated the hole within the diagram as an independent research topic. Accordingly, this study focuses on the hole to examine its meaning and function, and explores its conceptual relationship with the

circle (yuan, 圓)¹⁾ within the framework of Eastern thought.

In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) explains that the diagram represented in Francis Bacon's paintings is the result of relations among forces and produces haptic sensation [1]. He also explains the hole expressed within the diagram as a passage where invisible forces move between the virtual and the actual.²⁾ In this process, the hole operates as a place where the

1) In Eastern thought, the concept of the circle is expressed by two Chinese characters: 圓 (yuan), meaning "to encircle or encompass," and 圓 (yuan), referring to "a round form." This study focuses primarily on the concept of 圓 (yuan). Since the two characters share the same pronunciation, the term yuan will hereafter be used to refer specifically to circle (圓) throughout this study. The character 圓 will be explicitly indicated only when it refers to the meaning of a round form.

2) Deleuze views art not as an instrument of representation or expression, but as a generative field producing sensation and reconfiguring

Figure emerges, transforms, and circulates between the virtual and the actual.

Based on Deleuze's interpretation, this study suggests that the hole in Bacon's paintings functions as a circulatory passage connecting the virtual and the actual and as an artistic mechanism generating haptic sensation through the circulation of invisible forces. It also examines Juan Eduardo Cirlot's concepts of the circle in terms of unity, totality, circular movement, and the return from multiplicity to unity, with its symbolic meanings of "Infinity," "the Universe," and "the All." These features are then considered in relation to the concepts of "infinity" (wuxian, 無限), "the origin" (genyuan, 根源), and "creative potential" associated with the yuan within the Confucian tradition of Eastern thought.³⁾ In this context, the circle is also considered as an iconic sign whose circular structure may facilitate movement, return, and circulation, while the yuan in Eastern thought further embodies creative potential. Thus, Cirlot's interpretation of the circle provides an intermediate conceptual framework for comparing the hole in Bacon's paintings with the yuan in Eastern thought. Rather than supposing a direct identity among these concepts, this study focuses on the structural homology of their internal relational structures and processes of generation and circulation, including their functional equivalence within their respective conceptual systems.

For a more detailed discussion, this study first examines the hole in Bacon's diagram as a representation of the movement of virtual forces and analyzes its role in processes of emergence, transformation, and circulation between the virtual and the actual. Then, it compares Deleuze's interpretation of the hole and Cirlot's concept of the circle with the continuous and unbroken yuan in Eastern thought. Within this framework, the circle is also regarded as an iconic sign that can connect the virtual with the actual

and, through its circularity and creative potential, function as an artistic mechanism. Through this comparison, this study reveals structural and functional similarities in the ways these concepts link processes of emergence, transformation, and circulation. Moreover, in Bacon's paintings the movement of invisible forces through the hole generates haptic sensation, allowing the hole to operate as an artistic mechanism rather than merely as a formal or representational element [2,3,4,5].⁴⁾

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that both the hole in Bacon's paintings and the yuan in Eastern thought can be understood as mechanisms connecting the virtual and the actual within their each conceptual framework. Based on this, this study suggests that the hole in Bacon's paintings is structurally and functionally analogous to the yuan in Eastern thought, particularly in its role in linking processes of emergence, transformation, and circulation between the virtual and the actual. On the basis of this comparison, this study tries to reveal that the hole, as an artistic mechanism that continuously generates new sensations in viewers, exhibits features analogous to those of the yuan.

2. The Diagram and the Hole in Bacon's Paintings

2.1. Bacon's diagram: a map of forces

The term diagram derived from the Greek is a loan word composed of the meanings of "through," and "to write" [6]⁵⁾. "It can be understood as a type of visual sign that transforms collected data into clear and coherent graphic images through simple elements such as lines, planes, and colors, thereby serving to communicate and

existence. His concept of the diagram refers to a flow and a network of forces preceding artistic form and frames artistic creation as a process of becoming rather than a predetermined act.

- 3) Although Cirlot's concept of the circle does not fully coincide with yuan from an Eastern perspective in its representational form, the two share structural similarities in the internal relationships between concepts and other elements, in the relationships these concepts establish with other elements within their respective systems, and in their processes of generation and circulation. For this reason, this study introduces Cirlot's concept of the circle as a framework for discussing the conceptual meaning and function of the hole in Bacon's paintings by examining the structural similarities and conceptual homology between Cirlot's circle and the yuan in Eastern thought.
- 4) From an Eastern perspective, the *Zhouyi* (周易: *the Book of Changes*) explains the principles of the world through the interaction of yin (陰) and yang (陽), likening their ceaseless interaction to an endlessly revolving circle (圓). This study draws on Oh Su-hyeon's Korean translation of Zhang Qicheng's (張其成) *A Complete Interpretation of the Book of Changes*. This idea can also be found in Zhu Xi's (朱子, 1130 - 1200) concept of the flowing operation of the Supreme Ultimate (太極流行), referring to Cho Yeong-ryeol's Korean translation of Kinoshita Tetsuya's (木下鐵矢) *Zhu Xi Studies*. In other words, the cosmic source, understood as the Non-Ultimate that is at the same time the Supreme Ultimate (無極而太極), is considered to be undifferentiated and empty, while operating through the interaction of the qi (氣) of yin (陰) and yang (陽). In particular, in the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (太極圖), the Non-Ultimate is represented by the iconographic form of an empty circle, a form that can also be found in the architectural design of Confucian ritual altars [2, 3]. In this way, the empty source, although not directly accessible to the senses, nevertheless exists and becomes perceptible through the operation of its cyclical movement in reality. In this respect, the circle as understood from the perspective of Eastern thought may also be interpreted within the same conceptual viewpoint as the hole in Bacon's paintings.
- 5) The etymology of the term can be traced to the Greek word διαγράμμα, derived from the Greek verb διαγράφειν, which combines

regulate the flow of events or thought" [7]. From a semiotic perspective, diagrams are regarded as a category of signs with a strongly iconic character [7]. Peirce [8]⁶⁾ describes the diagram as an icon of the mind that gives visible form to the invisible and conceptual images in our minds [9].

Deleuze drew the concept of the diagram from Peirce's semiotics and the theory of power from Paul-Michel Foucault. However, rather than understanding the diagram merely as an icon or an apparatus for the production of power, he characterized it not as a simple graphic representation of cognition and thought, but as "an abstract machine endowed with the power to construct an entirely new form of reality." In other words, the diagram can be considered as a visual sign through which forces immanent in the material world as a whole become visible [7].

Deleuze describes such a diagram as "the result of all the violent methods of action painting - using sticks, brushes, brooms, cloths, and even pastry bags - which produce an irreversible state of chaos." Therefore, Bacon's diagram must be confined to a particular area of the painting and to a particular moment in the act of painting. In other words, the diagram must not overrun the entire painting; it must be limited in space and time so that, even when violent methods are given free rein, the resulting inevitable chaos does not engulf the work as a whole. 'The diagram is not the fact itself but the possibility of fact; therefore, it is not necessary for all figurative elements to disappear. Above all, a new Figure must emerge from the diagram and render sensation clear and precise' [10].⁷⁾

Thus, Bacon's diagram is produced through chance interventions upon the body - the subject of sensation - in order to break away from representational imagery. In other words, the diagram results from the painter's hand or body exerting force by intervening in and disrupting the visual system of representation. In addition to the painter's vision, the body and the sense of touch enable painting to escape representational figuration and give rise to a new form of painting [7]. As a result, "the destructive

chaos of the diagram makes possible a new experience in which viewers become open to sensations that could not be attained through the pre-existing visual system. Furthermore, it offers viewers an experience of sharing the artist's intense and explosive moment of sensation" [7]. According to Bacon, the diagram "opens up the domain of sensation," while these free marks function as "suggestions and prompts" and bring about "the possibility of fact" [11].⁸⁾ Thus, the diagram may be described as a newly articulated map of forces produced through the force exerted by the painter.

2.2. The hole: a passage for circulating forces

Just as Bacon mentioned that his painting depicted the fact of sensation [12], Bacon isolated the Figure in order to paint this fact of sensation. In other words, he gathered sensation, which had remained in a virtual state, into a single Figure, thereby concentrating on the pure expression of sensation [13].⁹⁾ This can be seen in the following figures.

As shown in Fig. 1., Bacon expresses sensation through a sweeping technique and isolates the Figure within a cube-like structure. In Fig. 2., the oval washbasin likewise functions as a Contour that confines the virtual forces circulating across the Aplat. Deleuze's account can be confirmed in the way the isolated Figure appears to be attempting to escape downward through the dark drain hole.

Deleuze (2003) divided the pictorial structure of Bacon's paintings into the Figure, the Contour, and the Aplat. That is, the human figure rendered through sweeping strokes constitutes the Figure, the cube-like structure that confines it constitutes the Contour, and the remaining background constitutes the Aplat.

In other words, when the diagram intervenes and the Figure begins to appear, the Figure is isolated by the Contour. As shown in Fig. 1. and Fig. 2., "the Figure itself is isolated in the painting by the round area or the parallelepiped to avoid the figurative, illustrative, and narrative character the Figure would necessarily have if it were not isolated" [10].

διὰ ("through") and γράφειν ("to write"). (Online Oxford English Dictionary, Etymology, 1895, 2026. 06.10. retrived, cited from URL: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/diagram_n?tab=etymology&tl=true#6917522) [6].

6) Peirce (1985) identifies the image, the diagram, and the metaphor as three types of hypoicons. He explains that the diagram represents the abstract relations among things through their structural and logical framework [8].

7) Deleuze explains that in the case of the mouth, for example, it may be stretched across the head from one side to the other, while parts of the head may be erased with a brush, broom, sponge, or cloth. Bacon describes the marks produced through this process as a "graph," whereas Deleuze calls them a "diagram."

8) In *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), Deleuze demonstrates that the "diagram" is not a mere chart or visual representation. Rather, it is a nonformal map that expresses relations of forces prior to their taking form and elucidates the generative relation between the virtual and the actual. Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, describe the diagram not as the representation of a fixed structure but as a practice of cartography that traces assemblages in the process of becoming.

9) According to Deleuze, figurative form (forme) and the clichés of representation prevent painting from rendering the fact of sensation. Accordingly, Bacon's deformed Figures are closer to haptic expression than to visual abstraction.



Fig. 1. Francis Bacon, <Study for a portrait>, oil on canvas, 1949, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago [14]



Fig. 2. Francis Bacon, <Figure at a washbasin>, oil on canvas, 1976, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas [14]

Another element of the painting is the Aplat which is “large fields of bright, uniform, and motionless color. Thin and hard, these fields have a structuring and spatializing function” [10].

They are strictly to the side of it, just as the Figure itself is, they are “grasped in a close view, a tactile or “haptic” view” [10]. These Figures and Aplats form the correlations of forces as they expand and contract along the Contour. Deleuze explains the athleticism of these movements that “from the start, the Figure has been a body, and the body has a place within the enclosure of the round area. But the body is not simply waiting for something from the structure, it is waiting for something inside itself, it exerts an effort upon itself in order to become a Figure. Now it is inside the body that something is happening; the body is the source of movement. ... The body exerts itself or waits to escape from itself in a very precise manner. It is not I who attempt to escape from my body, it is the body that attempts to escape from itself ... in short, a spasm” [10].

Deleuze thus regarded the hole appearing within the diagram as an informal map that expresses relations of forces prior to their figurative formation. He also understood it as a trace of the movement of force expressed in the Figure, produced through the process of mapping the generative relationship between the virtual and the actual. In other words, the hole is the point at which the deformed bodily tissue attempts to escape from itself, a passage through which the tissue undergoes transformation, and, in Seo’s (2013) words, the place at which the representation of form is destroyed [15].

Such holes can be found in various forms, including mouths, washbasins, drains, and umbrellas. Within the diagram, they function as passages through which flows of force move as the Figures, generated through the capture

of forces, seek to return to the Aplat. This process leads from the representational organism to what Deleuze calls “the Body without Organs.”

Deleuze argued for the double motions of the Contour to explain the circulation of forces acting within the painting [16].¹⁰ As shown in Fig. 2., these double motions of this Contour appear and the Figure and Aplat composing a presence circulate with each other through the vanishing point, the circle of the waterbasin [10]. Therefore, the movement of the Contour serves to balance the Figure and the Aplat. In other words, passing back and forth through a hole of drain within the painting, the balance between the virtual and actual is achieved and appears as an image of Fig. 2. in reality. Thus, the hole serves as a passage between the Aplat and the Figure, and as a source of invisible force.

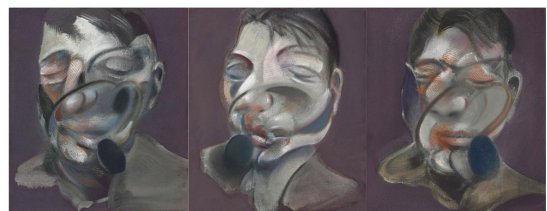


Fig. 3. Francis Bacon, <Three studies for self-portrait>, oil on canvas, 1974, private collection [14]

As shown in Fig. 3., the Figure in Bacon’s painting became increasingly fluid and mutable. In particular, it can be observed that the black holes occupy an increasingly prominent place within the diagram. Like the hole in the washbasin, this hole also connects the Figure of Bacon’s distorted face to the virtual Aplat. In this regard, Deleuze argues that “the aim of a work of art is to capture the process by which sensation is produced from the conditions that produce it.” That is, it is a matter of “rendering insensible forces

10) Park (2012) explains the flow of contraction and expansion based on Deleuze’s account of the Contour as involving both a “contractive movement” (a movement from the Aplat toward the Figure) and a “dissolving movement” (a movement from the Figure toward the Aplat) [16].

sensible" [17]. From Deleuze's perspective, which understands Bacon's painting in terms of sensation, this means that "painting must render invisible forces visible" [10]. Thus, for Deleuze, the hole is not merely an iconographic motif but an operational site of the abstract machine, at which the Figure is dismantled and reconstituted by force.

Based on the preceding discussion of the structural features and function of the hole, it may be understood as connecting sensation in its virtual state with sensation captured in the Figure. At the same time, it may be regarded as a totality in which the virtual and the actual coexist, that is, as the central passage of circulation. Furthermore, the hole may be interpreted as the origin of all pictorial expression.

3. The Structural Features and Functions of Cirlot's Circle and the Eastern Circle (Yuan)

3.1. Cirlot's circle

The hole appearing in Bacon's diagram takes a circular form and functions as a passage through which the virtual and the actual circulate. This feature requires an examination of how the circle has been understood as a symbolic form and what kinds of relational structures and functions have been associated with it. In this respect, Cirlot's discussion of the circle provides a useful conceptual framework for investigating the multiple meanings and functions represented by the circular form.

Cirlot (1971) explains that the circle is sometimes used synonymously with the circumference, just as the circumference is often identified with circular movement. Although the general meaning of the circle encompasses both aspects, the circle also possesses several symbolic meanings. The circle or disk frequently symbolizes the sun and is also associated with the number ten, which means a "return to unity from multiplicity." In this context, the circle represents heaven, perfection, and, at times, eternity [18].

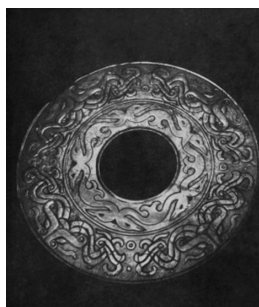


Fig. 4. Heaven. Chinese symbol of heaven: the hole in this circular image of space signifies the path of transcendence [18]

As in Fig. 4, Cirlot presents a Chinese symbol of heaven in which a hole in the center appears within a circular image of space, indicating the hole as signifying a path of transcendence.

The concept of perfection also delivers psychological implications. 'According to Jung, the square, indicating the lowest composite and factorial number, symbolizes the pluralistic state of a person who has not yet obtained inner unity, or perfection, whereas the circle is equivalent to the ultimate state of Oneness. The octagon is in the midst of the state between the square and the circle, and expressions of the relationship between these two forms are frequently found in the universal and spiritual area of morphology, including Chinese symbolic systems' [18].

'According to Chochod, in China, activity, or the masculine principle (yang, 陽), is embodied by a white circle symbolizing heaven, whereas passivity, or the feminine principle (yin, 陰), is embodied by a black square symbolizing earth. The white circle indicates energy and cosmic influences, while the black square indicates earthly forces. The interaction implicit in this dualism is expressed by the yang-yin symbol, consisting of a circle divided into two equal parts by a s-shaped line running across its diameter. A black dot appears within the white section (yang), while a white dot appears within the black section (yin), signifying that the feminine is always present to some degree within the masculine and the masculine within the feminine. The s-shaped line symbolizes the movement of communication and suggests the idea of rotation, thereby imparting a dynamic and complementary character to this split symbol' [18].

Taken together, Cirlot's discussion shows that the circle does not possess a single fixed meaning but constitutes a multilayered symbol whose significance emerges through its relationships within concepts such as unity, perfection, eternity, movement, and Oneness. Specifically, these meanings represent a circular relational structure where multiplicity returns to unity through movement and rotation. Based on the broader framework, Cirlot attributes to the figure "○" the meanings of "Infinity," "the Universe," and "the All" [18]. These concepts strengthen the association of the circle with totality, continuity, and an encompassing whole.

Accordingly, the meanings of the circle can be regarded not merely as a collection of separate symbolic associations but as building an internal relational structure centered on unity, totality, movement, and return. Within this structure, multiplicity is differentiated yet ultimately directed toward unity through circular movement. On this basis, the circle may be understood as a symbolic and iconic mechanism that integrates differentiated elements into a whole, leads movement to return, and enables circulation.

These structural and functional features of the circle provide a base for the subsequent examination of the yuan in Eastern thought.

3.2. The Eastern circle (yuan)

The yuan possesses an internal relational structure in which an originary state undergoes differentiation, giving rise to actual change and generation, while these changes remain related to the origin and continue through an ongoing process of circulation. It also symbolizes a circular relational structure through which such processes of generation and transformation continue without interruption. Furthermore, the yuan performs a mediating function by connecting different states or elements within its relational field. Similar to Cirlot's (1971) description of the "return to unity from multiplicity," the yuan from the perspective of Eastern thought can likewise be understood through the concepts of "infinity" (wuxian), "the origin" (genyuan), and "creative potential." These three meanings of the circle can also be found in Eastern thought [19].

First, the yuan "○," signifying "infinity," can also be found in Eastern cosmology. The Zhouyi (周易) explains the principle governing the universe in the following terms: "The Way of Heaven is established as yin and yang (立天之道曰陰與陽)" [5]. In the Confucian tradition, the Way of Heaven is understood both as the path of Heaven and as its principle (li, 理), and this path is considered to consist in the harmony of yin and yang. That is, all things are ceaselessly generated through the harmony of yin and yang, and the natural course of this generative process itself is described as the Dao (道). Thus, the Confucian concept of the Way of Heaven (tiandao, 天道) signifies an unceasing process of circulation, corresponding to the infinitely circulating world symbolized by the figure "○." This mode of circulation invites comparison with the hole

in Bacon's painting, where forces circulate between the Aplat and the Figure.

Second, "the universe" is understood as being in infinite circulation, and this conception of the universe can also be found in the Confucian classics, where the universe is understood in metaphysical terms. The Confucian classic (Book of Rites, 禮記) states: "What Heaven has ordained is called human nature (xing, 性), or principle (li). To follow this nature is called the Way. To cultivate the Way is called education (jiao, 教). The Way is that which cannot be departed from even for a moment; if it could be departed from, it would not be the Way (天命之謂性, 率性之謂道, 修道之謂教. 道也者, 不可須臾離也; 可離, 非道也.)" [5].

That is, human beings are understood as being unable to depart from the Way of Heaven and as being required to follow it. Heaven refers to metaphysical essence-principle (li)- or fundamental reality, whereas the world in which human beings live constitutes the phenomenal realm. Heaven is also regarded as the origin of the world, and this view advances the value that human beings must continually proceed along the right path in accordance with the will of Heaven.

This constitutes the cyclical principle of the Way of Heaven. Furthermore, the "Shuogua Zhuan" (Discussion of the Trigrams, 說卦傳) of the Zhouyi states that "Qian (乾) is Heaven, is round (yuan), is the ruler, is the father, ..., (乾為天, 為圓, 為君, 為父, 為玉, 為金, 為寒, 為冰, 為大赤, 為良馬, 為老馬, 為瘦馬, 為駁馬)" [5], thereby conceiving the circulation that encompasses the world in circular form. That is, Heaven, as the essence and principle of the world, is circular; accordingly, the yuan acquires the additional meaning of the Dao, which circulates in accordance with principle. The meaning of the yuan is thus expanded from yuan (圓), denoting merely a circular shape, to yuan, signifying the circulation of the world.



Fig. 5. Temple of Heaven, Beijing, China, 「Circular Mound Altar」 [20]



Fig. 6. Zhou Dunyi's Taijitu [21]

This conception of the circulating yuan can be seen in Fig. 5. Built in 1530 during the reign of the Jiajing Emperor (嘉靖帝) of the Ming dynasty, the Circular Mound Altar (圓丘壇) was a site where the emperor, or Son of Heaven (tianzi, 天子), performed rites to Heaven [18,22,23]. Its circular form well embodies the yuan as the Way of Heaven that human beings ought to follow. Moreover, the act of offering sacrifices to Heaven reflects the traditional Chinese ideal of the unity of Heaven and humanity (tianren heyi, 天人合一). Heaven, beyond life and death, is absolute, whereas human beings are subject to change. Thus, the unity of Heaven and humanity signifies a cosmic principle in which absolute fundamental reality and changing beings exist in harmony [24]. This principle of harmony can also be found in Bacon's painting, where the Aplat and the Figure circulate through the hole, thereby sustaining the phenomenal realm.

Third, "the All" in the concept of Cirlot signifies the origin of the world and can be found in the Confucian concept of the Supreme Ultimate (taiji, 太極), which denotes Heaven and the fundamental reality of the circulating world.

Just as Fig. 5. symbolizes the cosmic order that human beings ought to follow through its circular structure, Fig. 6. represents "Wuji and yet Taiji" - the origin from which the movement and stillness of yin and yang and the generation of all things arise - as a circular image.

On the yuan at the top of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate, Zhu Xi stated: "○ / this is "Wuji and yet Taiji", the fundamental reality that becomes yang in movement and yin in stillness ("○, 此所謂無極而太極也, 所以動而陽, 靜而陰之本體也, 然非有以離乎陰陽也, 即陰陽而指其本體, 不雜乎陰陽而爲言耳" (p. 2); "上天之載, 無聲無臭, 而實造化之樞紐, 品彙之根柢也. 故曰: "無極而太極", 非太極之外復有無極也" (p. 3).") [25]. He further described it as an imperceptible abstract state and the unique origin of all things [3].

Thus, the yuan symbolizing "Wuji and yet Taiji" is the source of circulation and harmony, an abstract state containing the creative potential to generate all things. A similar role appears in the hole in Bacon's paintings, balancing the Aplat and the Figure. Because invisible forces remain virtual within the hole before taking form as the Figure, it can be linked to "Wuji and yet Taiji" as unformed creative potential.

Therefore, rather than limiting the hole in Bacon's painting to yuan (圓), a circle signifying only a round shape, attention should be given to the invisible circulation of forces between the Aplat and the Figure. By referring to the Eastern meaning of yuan, denoting both a rounded celestial body and enclosure, the hole may be understood as possessing infinite creative potential.

4. Discussion

The present study has examined the internal relational structures and functions of Bacon's hole, Cirlot's circle, and the yuan in Eastern thought. Therefore, on the basis of the preceding discussion, the three concepts are likely to be compared. The comparison does not focus on the formal resemblance among Bacon's hole, Cirlot's circle, and the yuan, but rather on similarities in their internal relational structures and the functions they perform within their conceptual systems. On this basis, their structural homology and functional equivalence are examined in terms of generation, transformation, circulation, and mediation.

4.1. A comparison of Cirlot's circle and the yuan in Eastern thought

First, Cirlot's concept of the circle can be considered through three interrelated dimensions: unity or totality, continuity through circular movement, and an encompassing whole. In this account, multiplicity returns to unity through movement and rotation, while the circle symbolically integrates differentiated elements within a larger whole. Thus, rather than simply displaying a fixed form, the circle represents a relational structure featured by movement, return, continuity, and integration.

A structurally comparable relational pattern can also be found in Eastern thought. Drawing on Zhou Dunyi's Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate, Zhu Xi presented a cosmology in which yin and yang and the Five Phases (wuxing, 五行) unfold from an originary state and generate the continuous transformation and circulation of the phenomenal world [19]. Zhou Dunyi explains this process in the Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate as follows:

"Wuji and yet Taiji. Through the movement of Taiji, yang arises. When movement reaches its limit, stillness follows, giving rise to yin. When stillness reaches its limit, movement begins again. Movement and stillness are each rooted in the other; yin and yang are distinguished, and the two fundamental principles are established. Through the transformation of yang and the union of yin, the Five Phases / water, fire, wood, metal, and earth / are generated. The five vital forces spread in harmonious order, and the four seasons proceed in their cycle" [26].

In this process, "Wuji and yet Taiji" functions as an originary ground from which yin and yang distinguish, while their alternating movement gives rise to the Five

Phases and, through them, to diverse representations. Therefore, generation and transformation do not proceed as a linear sequence but remain within a continuous process of movement and circulation. The formulation “Wuji and yet Taiji” thus exemplifies the relational structure connected with the yuan: originary potential creates differentiation and representation while remaining connected to a process of circulation and return.

Although Cirlot’s circle and the yuan in Eastern thought do not possess identical conceptual contents, their internal relational structures show significant similarities. In Cirlot’s account, multiplicity is associated with unity and totality through circular movement and return; in Eastern thought, an originary potential differentiates into yin and yang, generates multiple forms, and continues through transformation and circulation. In these systems, therefore, differentiated or multiple states are related through continuous movement and are integrated within a larger whole. Functionally, the two concepts mediate between different states or elements, sustain processes of transformation and circulation, and build continuity within their each conceptual system.

4.2. A comparison of Bacon’s hole and the yuan in Eastern thought

Thus, as shown in Table 1., Bacon’s pictorial system and Confucian cosmological thought can be compared in terms of the relational processes through which potentiality, differentiation, representation, and circulation are connected.

The Aplat, constituting the background field of Bacon’s painting, may be structurally compared with Taiji in terms of its role as an underlying field of potentiality. In Confucian cosmology, Taiji functions as an originary ground from which yin and yang differentiate and interact with the Five Phases, causing the manifold transformations of the phenomenal world. Similarly, Deleuze’s Aplat may be regarded as a virtual field from which the Figure emerges through the intervention of the diagram. This comparison does not imply an identity between the Aplat and Taiji;

rather, it concerns the comparable relational positions they occupy within their each system.

The diagram, by contrast, introduces disruption and transformation into this field. Deleuze describes the diagram in Bacon’s painting as a catastrophe produced by the painter’s hand, through which the existing figurative order is broken and forces become operative in the formation of the Figure [10]. The Figure can therefore be understood as an actualized representation emerging through this process, while the Contour mediates the relation between the Figure and the Aplat. Structurally, this process may be compared with the differentiation of an originary state into yin and yang and the subsequent generation and transformation of the Five Phases in Confucian cosmology.

Within this relational structure, the hole occupies a particularly important position. Rather than being identified directly with Wuji, the hole may be understood as performing a function structurally analogous to that of an originary and indeterminate potentiality. The hole remains formless and imageless while allowing invisible forces to pass between the virtual field of the Aplat and the actualized Figure. In this sense, it mediates emergence, transformation, and circulation between the virtual and the actual.

As shown in Table 1., the comparison therefore rests not on a direct correspondence between the pictorial elements of Bacon’s paintings and the concepts of Confucian cosmology, but on similarities in their internal relational structures and functions. In both systems, an underlying state of potentiality gives rise to differentiation and representation through processes of transformation, while these processes remain connected through continuous circulation. The hole, in particular, functions as a passage that connects different states and sustains this circulation.

This mediating and circulatory function provides a basis for relating Bacon’s hole to the yuan in Eastern thought. As discussed above, the yuan symbolizes a relational structure in which generation and transformation proceed continuously while remaining connected to an originary potentiality. Bacon’s hole may therefore be understood as structurally

Table 1. Comparison of the relational structures of Bacon’s pictorial system and Confucian cosmological thought

Bacon’s pictorial system	Relational role	Confucian cosmological structure
Aplat	Virtual field	Wuji / Taiji as originary potentiality
Diagram	Disruption and generation of new relations	Differentiation and transformation through yin-yang and the Five Phases
Hole	Passage mediating emergence, transformation, and circulation between the virtual and the actual	Yuan as a connecting and circulatory structure
Figure	Actualized or represented form	Represented change generated through differentiation and transformation
Contour	Boundary connecting and balancing the Figure and the Aplat	Relational representation between originary potential and represented change

Table 2. Comparison of the internal relational structures and functions of Bacon's hole, Cirlot's circle, and the yuan in Eastern thought

Conceptual system	Bacon	Cirlot	Eastern thought
Initial state	Virtual	Multiplicity	Origin / Potentiality
Connecting form	Hole (emergence, transformation, passage of forces)	Circle/circular movement (movement, rotation, return)	Yuan (generation, transformation, connection)
Representation/Return	Actual / Figure (circulation between the virtual and the actual)	Unity / Oneness / Totality	Represented change (circulation and return to the origin)

and functionally analogous to the yuan, particularly in its connection of emergence, transformation, and circulation.

The structural and functional relationships identified above can be summarized by comparing the three conceptual systems, as shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2., the three concepts do not share identical conceptual contents. However, they exhibit structural similarities in the relations among potential or multiple states, processes of movement and transformation, and circulation or return. They also perform comparable connecting functions within their respective conceptual systems. These similarities offer the basis for understanding their relationship in aspect of structural homology and functional equivalence.

Fig. 7. further visualizes how these structural and functional features operate specifically through the hole in Bacon's paintings.

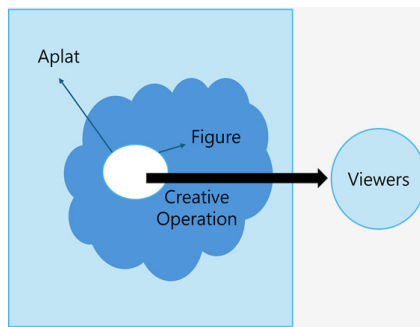


Fig. 7. The operating principle of the hole

As in Fig. 7., the hole functions as a virtual passage through which invisible forces circulate between the virtual Aplat and the actualized Figure. Through this process of emergence, transformation, and circulation, the forces contribute to the generation of haptic sensation in viewers. Therefore, the hole can be considered not simply an empty pictorial form but an artistic mechanism linking the virtual and the actual. In this respect, its linking, circulatory, and generative functions exhibit structural and functional similarities to those of the yuan in Eastern thought. Therefore, rather than being identified directly with an origin, the hole may be understood as a site of originary potentiality where forces circulate and new sensations are generated,

allowing its operation to be interpreted in relation to the circulation and creative potential of the yuan.

5. Conclusion

This study examined, from Deleuze's perspective, how the hole within Bacon's diagram functions as a passage connecting between the virtual and the actual and as an artistic mechanism that generates haptic sensation through the circulation of invisible forces. It also examined Cirlot's concept of the circle in terms of unity, totality, circular movement, and the return from multiplicity to unity, with its symbolic meanings of "Infinity," "the Universe," and "the All." These features were compared with the yuan in Eastern thought, particularly with regard to infinity, originary potentiality, generation, transformation, and circulation. Rather than supposing a direct identity among these concepts, the study focused on the structural homology of their internal relational structures and on the functional equivalence they exhibit within their each conceptual system.

First, as Deleuze explains, Bacon's diagram appears through the intervention of the painter's force, which disrupts the existing representational order and makes invisible forces operative within the painting. Within this process, the Aplat constitutes a virtual field from which the Figure emerges and becomes actualized, while the Contour mediates the relation between the Figure and the Aplat. The hole occupies a particularly important position within this relational structure, functioning as a passage through which forces move between the virtual and the actual. The movement of the Figure through the hole reveals a process of emergence, transformation, and circulation, leaving traces of moving forces within the painting [10,26]. Through this circulation, the hole contributes to the generation of haptic sensation and therefore operates not simply as an empty pictorial form but as an artistic mechanism mediating between different states of sensation.

Second, Cirlot's concept of the circle and the yuan in Eastern thought were compared in terms of their internal

relational structures and functions. In Cirlot's account, the circle is associated with unity, totality, continuity, and an encompassing whole, while circular movement connects multiplicity with a return to unity. The circle therefore expresses a relational structure characterized by movement, rotation, return, and integration. In Eastern thought, the yuan likewise expresses a relational structure in which an originary potential undergoes differentiation, giving rise to generation and transformation while remaining connected to an ongoing process of circulation and return. In Confucian cosmology, this structure can be observed in the relation among Wuji, Taiji, yin and yang, and the Five Phases, through which originary potentiality differentiates into manifold forms and continues through transformation and circulation. The yuan thus symbolizes not merely a circular shape but a continuous relational structure of generation, transformation, mediation, and return, together with the creative potential through which multiple forms can emerge.

The comparison demonstrates that Bacon's hole, Cirlot's circle, and the yuan in Eastern thought do not possess identical conceptual contents. Nevertheless, they exhibit structural similarities in the ways different states or elements are connected through movement, transformation, circulation, and return, and they perform comparable mediating functions within their respective systems. In Bacon's pictorial system, the hole mediates between the virtual Aplat and the actualized Figure; in Cirlot's symbolic system, the circle mediates movement and return between multiplicity and unity or totality; and in Eastern thought, the yuan mediates processes through which originary potentiality differentiates, generates manifested forms, and continues through circulation and return. These correspondences provide a basis for understanding the three concepts in terms of structural homology and functional equivalence rather than direct conceptual identity.

On this basis, the hole in Bacon's paintings may be understood as structurally and functionally analogous to the yuan in Eastern thought, particularly in its role in linking emergence, transformation, and circulation between the virtual and the actual. Through the continuous circulation of invisible forces, the hole contributes to the generation of new haptic sensations in viewers and thereby functions as an artistic mechanism of mediation and creation. Therefore, its operation can be interpreted in relation to the circulatory and creative potential of the yuan, displaying how a pictorial element can function not merely as a formal device but as a dynamic mechanism through which sensation continually emerges, transforms, and circulates.

In this respect, this study extends existing interpretations

of Bacon's diagram by highly regarding the hole as a distinct operative element within the diagram and by verifying its role in mediating the dynamic relation between the virtual and the actual.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Seonyoung Seo, Seona Chang; Data collection, Formal analysis: Seonyoung Seo; Writing-original draft: Seonyoung Seo; Writing review&editing: Seonyoung Seo, Seona Chang

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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