For you, if you like it you can have it: pointing & spectator figures

One can see seeing.
(Marcel Duchamp)

The recognition that the art of painting was inescapably addressed to an audience that must be gathered...
(Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*)

If there is a simple moral in our situation, it is perhaps just this: the existence of the beholder, which is to say the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld, has emerged as problematic for painting as never before. And: what we are newly recognising is that the art of painting is inescapably addressed to an audience that must be gathered. And: we are attempting to acknowledge that this is now as fully and explicitly a problem for criticism as it is for painting.
(Craig Owens, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory')

Here you are.
(Killeen, title, June 1971)

4/71
I do not want a collection of objects
that say — isn't this wonderful
It must be 'Here it is' — you are in
control if you want to be sort of attitude.

Do not make paintings.
(Killeen, the green notebook p152)

How does Killeen, at his stage, try to mark such a spectatorial role in his works, this 'you are in control if you want to be'?

From the foreground of *For you*, June 1971, **[fig. 73]** a frontal figure beckons you in to the picture, to its stacks of rectangular planes. In *If you like it you can have it*, June 1971, **[fig. 72]** a hand points for you to a central knife, as if to say 'Here it is'. Such pointing and beckonings are, of course, traditional devices for soliciting the viewer's attention.

Then I like there to be someone in the historia who tells the spectators what is going on, and either beckons them with his hand

to look... or points to some danger or remarkable thing in the picture (Alberti, De Pictura, *1435)* [1]

fig. 73 *For you*, June 1971

Since, as Duchamp says, 'The spectator brings the work into contact with the external world', [2] and since our space, and we in it, are vehicles for the picture's expansion, the picture must show that it desires us. The pointing and the beckoning figure, the picture's pointing to itself ('Look at me, look at me') are the demonstrative gestures of that desire.

The pointing or beckoning figure represents also the interests of the spectator, that viewer who seeks the meaning of the picture, who wants its 'centre' pointed out. The pointing figure represents the displaced glance lent by the spectator to his or her painted deputy: it is, one might say, the spectator's act of viewing which points.

Note well. Here, the spectator is only *represented*, and represented only by a deputy. In the cut-outs, the spectator's body will *itself* be put on the stage and into the act. The spectator will be required *physically* to compose the art-work. (Or, at

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[1] Leon Battista Alberti, in *Leon Battista Alberti on Painting and Sculpture: the Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, transl. Cecil Grayson, Phaidon, London, 1972, p. 83.

[2] Marcel Duchamp, 'The Creative Act', 1957, in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 140.

least, the work will be signified in this way as perpetually open to the spectator's interest. There will always be implicit at least the possibility of the spectator recomposing the cut-out, even if it is not literally rehung with each viewing.) If here, as I say, the spectator figure represents us, our interests, our needs, not until the cut-outs will we be *incorporated*, bodily, into the very structuring of the work — not until then will Killeen's painting actually *stage* the interlocutory drama of our presence before it. Yet, a consciousness of the spectator's presence before the painting is already displayed here, and provides already a necessary pre-condition of the cut-outs to come.

The blatancy of the picture so pointing at itself, advertising itself, and so calling us in, makes me ask the question Barthes has suggested is raised by every narrative (every depiction): what is the narrative exchanged for, what is it worth?[3] All exchanges, a picture's too, are based on reciprocity: 'You don't get anything for nothing'. Depiction gets by exchanging: what Barthes has said of narration is as true of depiction: it is an act and an object of exchange, 'both product and production, merchandise and commerce, a stake and the bearer of that stake'[4] — a dialectic made explicit in *For you* and in *If you like it you can have it.*

What do we offer? Ourselves. It was Duchamp who first made it clear that 'through the change from inert matter to a work of art, an actual transformation has taken place... the creative act is not performed by the artist alone, the spectator brings the work into contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications'.[5] And our part in the exchange? We offer our knowledge, our bodies, our minds and our skill, in reconstituting the picture.

There need, then, be no rhetorical hierarchy between the beckoner and what it beckons too. There need be no hierarchy, since the picture *must* make an exchange, and since it is, in Barthes's words, 'both merchandise and the story of the contract of which it is an object'.[6] That is, the picture speaks to us of the thing it tells and sells; and, at the same time, it speaks of that telling or selling. The pointing or beckoning hand, then, is no *mere* prologue, and what it points to is not

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[3] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, transl. Richard Miller, preface by Richard Howard, Hill & Wang, New York, 1974, p. 89.

[4] Roland Barthes, op. cit., p. 89.

[5] Marcel Duchamp, op. cit., p. 140.

[6] Roland Barthes, op. cit., p. 90.

the only or the 'real' story. The 'real' story is just as much the story of a selling or telling *For you.* With such paintings and titles as *For you* , or *You can have It*, or *Here you are*, Killeen's painting is shaped not only by the desire to show, but by the need to exchange. The picture's need to exchange is already written all over its face.

Those figures which operate for the spectator are akin to what Barbara Johnson has called 'the play of anticipatory retrospection and internalised exteriority involved in that metalinguistic moment of self-reflection traditionally known as the *Preface'*.[7] As with the preface in regard to the book, they are situated at once inside and outside the picture. They beckon from a strange space both before and after the work. They constitute an odd form of pictorial placelessness and displacement. Like the preface they seem to "announce in the future tense ('this is what you are going to see') the content or significance... of what will *already* have been painted. And sufficiently *seen* to be gathered up and proposed in advance".[8]

'Here it is', as the Killeen note says. As if to speak of the work as a pre-established, a given condition. Don't these pictures, therefore, by so pointing to the *already* painted, contradict the desire to allow the spectator control? Don't they too much dictate, in advance, our way in? And don't they too much predetermine *what* we go into — our objectives in looking? Doesn't the painting, as in Derrida's claim of the Preface's claim, 'exist as something painted — a past — which, under the false appearance of the present, an omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the viewer as his future. Here is what I painted, then viewed, and what I am painting that you are going to view...'[9]

Isn't this preface-like pointing at 'some remarkable thing', as Alberti would say, too authorially emphatic a gesture? And isn't it (already) Killeen's intent not to offer any single thematic centre, but rather to make no part more remarkable than another? Hasn't he elsewhere inscribed in his work precisely the impossibility — or at least the undesirability — of a view to some central

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[7] Barbara Johnson, 'Translator's Introduction', Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, p. xxxii.

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 7. (Here, as elsewhere, without further ado, I change 'written' to 'painted', 'read' to 'viewed', and 'reader' to 'viewer'. There are problems, of course, in the 'translation' of Derrida's 'reader' into 'viewer', including the fact that 'viewer' is a word which bears with it a more passive connotation than 'reading', product of the fact that viewing a painting has not traditionally been conceived of as an active participation.)

[9] Derrida, op. cit, p. 7.

meaning? Isn't that inscription, and that hope, now denied by this pointing to a too prominent signified, this pointed at thing?

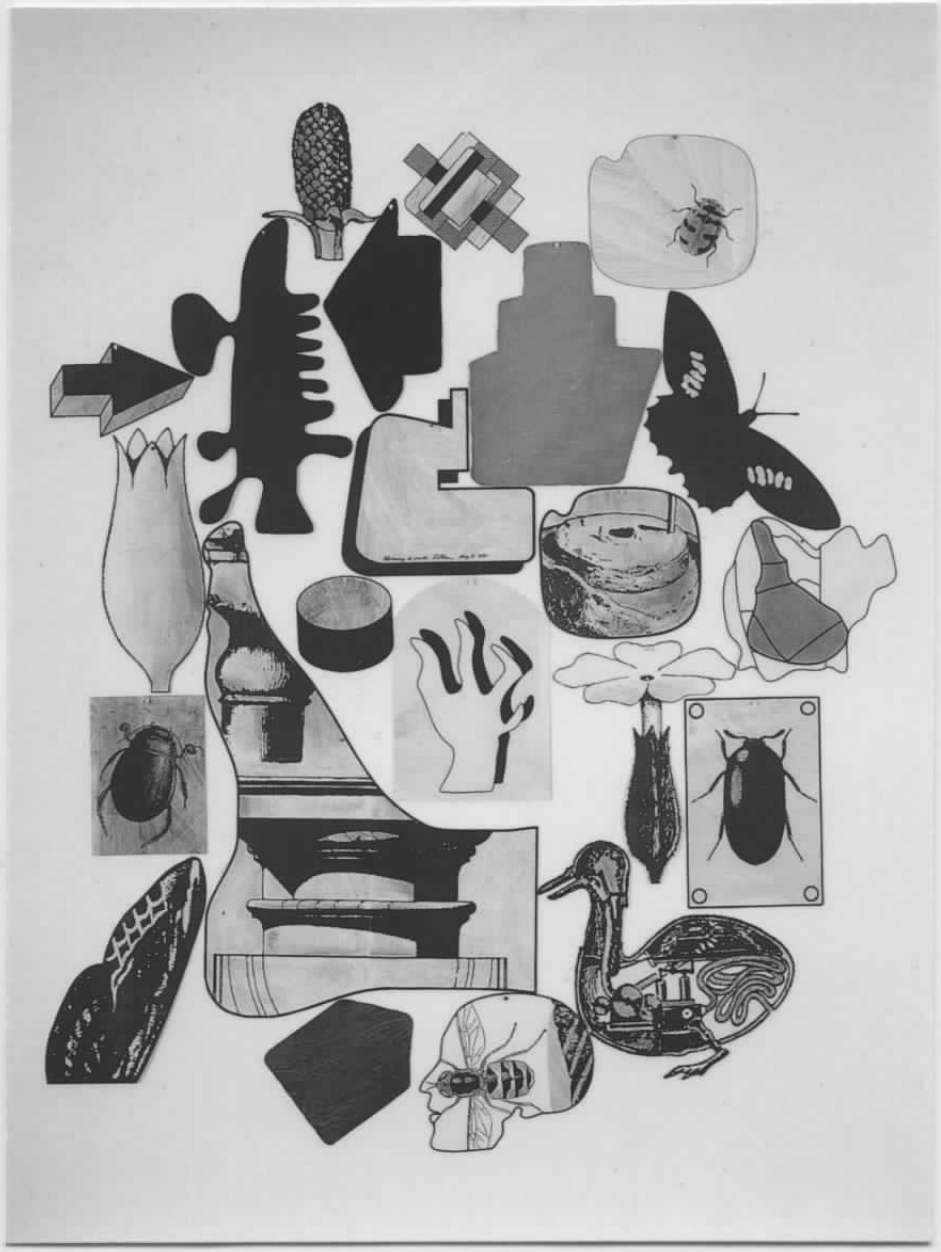

fig. 74 *Naming of parts,* 21 August 1990

Well, not quite, or not necessarily. For a start, the pointing in these works is perhaps not so much to the 'centre' of the painting as to all of the painting's parts except the part which points, which is thereby in a sense displaced from the place of the picture. It is interesting, in this regard, that when Killeen includes a pointing hand in such later cut-outs as *Tracing the lines of my face* (1985), **[plate 134]** and pointing arrows in the various versions of *Naming of parts*, 1990, **[fig. 74]** the pointing hand and the arrow will not point permanently to any one thing,

or rather, it will point to a different thing in each hanging.) There, more truly, Killeen will be able to say: 'Here it is — you are in control if you want to be'.

In any case, there *are* no true tenses in a painting. Even when there are codes of time in the painting, all its parts exist as a variously modified claim to be present. The painting may include a pointer and a pointed to, but neither comes truly 'before' the other. Killeen can not really present a past (the painting), to which, as its first viewer, he has retrospectively added something which will, like a Preface, direct us to that part he most especially wants to remark. As Derrida remarks of the Book's simultaneous pastness and futureness in relation to the Preface:

> *This is an essential and ludicrous operation: not only because painting as such does not consist in any of these tenses (past, present, or future, insofar as they are all modified presents); and not only because such an operation would confine itself to the discursive intention to mean, but because in pointing to a single thematic nucleus or single guiding thesis, it would cancel out the pictorial displacement that is at work 'here'. Where?*
> *(Derrida,* Dissemination*)* [10]

Yet, it might still be objected that, so long as the sign of pointing is still fixed forever in a painting, Killeen at once acknowledges the viewer's presence, and negates the freedom he offers that viewer. It might still be said that the pointing becomes too much a pre-diction of the viewer's response, that as a fore-word, the pointing becomes too much a pre-scription.

In a sense, though there are no tenses proper in painting, the pointing figure 'remains anterior and exterior to the development of the content it announces', at once outside the painting and in. 'Preceding what ought to be able to present itself on its own', the pointer is like a moment of narrational or depictive 'loquacity',[11] as Derrida would say, in which the author becomes too loud; in which he becomes the chorus of his own exposition; and insists, like a tourist guide, on sticking us to an itinerary thoroughly prepared in advance, an

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[10] Derrida, op. cit, p. 7.

[11] Derrida, op. cit, p. 9.

itinerary preceding the painting and its consumption. Only the cut-outs, of all painting, are able to avoid such a painterly or authorial pushiness.

But, there still is a sense or a choice in which the spectator's role is left open. In *If you like it you can have it*, what is pointed to, what is offered, is what Killeen may hope you will refuse: the tools of violence, the bomb and the gun. The remark of that title, 'If you like it you can have it', can be taken in two (contrary) senses: as a genuine and positive offer, and as a remark of derisory scorn. The same is so of *You can have it*, July 1971 **[fig. 75]** — its title too might be considered as a derisive exclamation, since its pictured objects include a column, sign of the classic, sign of all that Killeen would wish to refuse. *Take it or leave it. You are in control if you want to be.*

fig. 75 *You can have it*, July 1971

And yet, even if a choice *is* offered the spectator, Killeen's paintings still at this stage come to us pre-made, pre-arranged, and pre-pointed-out. *Do not make paintings*! It is not until the cut-outs that Killeen's painting will obey this imperative, when, at last, it will not be only the artist but also *we* who make, who compose, who control the painting. Then the painting will hardly be a painting proper. Then, 'The tale is thereby addressed to the reader's body, which is put by

things on stage, itself.'[12] And then, since the pointing hand is *movable*, it will be *we*, and we only, who determine at what part it points...

How else, before the cut-outs, does Killeen mark the spectator's role?

fig. 76 *Godzone*, October 1971

fig. 77 *Wind*, September 1971

In a number of 'realist' Killeens of 1969 a foreground face, severely cropped, gazes in to the picture's subject. (For example: *Three coloured blocks*, **[fig. 42]** and *Lamp lady*.) **[fig. 43]** Similarly, on the frames of *Godzone*, **[fig. 76]** and *Wind*, **[fig. 77]** of 1971, profile faces, again severely cropped, gaze in to the picture's field. As late as 1987, by which time the spectator's body has itself been let into the act, so that there is no longer any need for a *represented* viewer, in

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[12] This is a modified quote from Mallarmé ('This tale is adressed to the reader's *Intelligence*, which *puts things* on stage itself'), via Derrida, cited Barbara Johnson, op. cit., p. xxx.

Domestic (black and white), a piece of the cut-out will recall the gazing type, with an eyeless (blind) profile next to a window and half-drawn blind. **[plate 157 & fig. 78]** All these profile figures are examples of another figure type, which like the pointing or beckoning figure, represent the displaced glance of the spectator, lent to a painted deputy. This type I call the spectator figure.

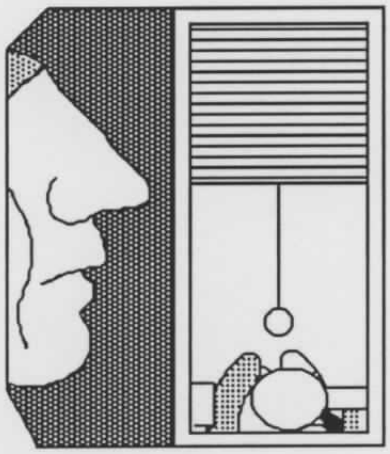

fig. 78

The spectator figure, like the pointing figure, is a traditional Renaissance type. Plausibly posed as a bystander or onlooker to a depicted event, view, or situation, it yet represents us, who are, like it, observers of a view from which spatially we are and must remain implacably separate.

The Renaissance spectator figure stood in the foreground, and gazed in to the central action, while yet remaining separate from it, a bystander to what it observed. It was separated from the central action by a depicted space which, like us, it could never cross. It was placed to the extreme left or the extreme right of the composition; or it was separated from the action by a barrier close and parallel to the picture plane, which was thus at once echoed and re-presented, as was *our* presence to a barrier plane. On occasion, this barrier was opened at the centre, as much for our viewing convenience as for the spectator figure's; while sometimes the spectator figure looked through a rectangular window frame, just as we, the 'real' viewers, look through a rectangular frame to the depicted view. More rarely, like Killeen's spectator figures of 1971, the Renaissance spectator figure gazed in from the painted frame itself, as with Fra Angelico's crucifixion fresco in the ground floor of San Marco, Florence.

Such spectator figures, witnessing what we witness, represent, on the level of depictivity, the picture in the act of being consumed. They picture the picture's

reading. Traditionally, on the level of the action, the spectator figure is part of the event depicted, while at the same time, in its role as witness, it is also separate from the event. It exists in a double space, at once inside the action and out. On the level of narration, however, or of depictivity, rather than on the level of the action, the spectator figure signifies an entry from our space into pictorial space, and a witnessing from our space of an event in pictorial space. Thus our space, we in it, and what we are doing in it, are all represented. Here, on the narrational level, it is the act of *our* seeing we see.

Such spectator figures are part of what Derrida would call an 'attending discourse'. They invoke a double presence: that of the "pressing interlocutory voice which calls 'you'" (the voice of the picture which gazes or points to itself, and speaks to you of that gazing or pointing); and that of 'the reader spectator who *attends* the spectacle or discourse while it is happening'.[13]

In the pointing or the spectator figure we are offered the presence of the picture, and, by its 'discourse of aid' to us, by its 'indefatigable attention' to us, we are offered our own presence to ourselves. It is as if what were said were, in the words of the Killeen title: *Here you are* — here is the picture, and/or, undecidably, here are you before it. Thus, the picture is "*at the same time* a 'presentation', and a critical discourse, a summons addressed to 'you' concerning that presentation."[14]

> *The attending discourse which is proliferating here is addressed to the spectator (who attends the spectacle and is carefully attended in his attending) and assists him in his reading... But who is it that is addressing you? Since it is not an 'author', a 'narrator', or a 'deus ex machina", it is an 'I' that is both part of the spectacle and part of the audience; an 'I' that, a bit like 'you', attends (undergoes) its own incessant, violent inscription within the pictorial machinery; an 'I' that, functioning as pure substitution, is not some irreplaceable existence, some subject or 'life', but only, moving between... reality and fiction, etc., a mere function or phantom.*
> *(Derrida,* Dissemination*)*[15]

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[13] Derrida, op. cit., p. 324.

[14] Derrida, op. cit., p. 309.

[15] Derrida, op. cit., p. 325.

This uncertainty of voice, of the origin of address, is made all the more pointed in *Godzone* and *Wind*, now that Killeen's spectator figure is not *in* the picture at all, but on the frame, that no-man's-land, that uncertain border zone between the picture and the world. The figure is both inside the picture and outside of it — undecidably — both and at once. It is on the frame (outside the painting), and yet, since Killeen has extended the painting into the frame, it *is* in the painting. It makes a place both in the picture's space and in yours.

Its life takes place in that scission between either/or/neither/nor. It is, let's say, a *prosopopoeia* (a rhetorical introduction of a pretended speaker or a personification of an abstract thing) — a personification of the painting which speaks; and — *and at once* — a personification of the spectator's role as viewer. The gazing figure is at once part of the spectacle of the art act, and part of the spectacle of its audience in its act of attending.

Derrida notes that in 'feigning to tell you the presence of your presence, therefore this pretence is itself part of the [painting] process. That is to say a form of de-presentation and expropriation. And you are sucked into a new form of dizziness: in what does the present consist? Does it consist at all, since it divides itself thus in its attendance. What would standing upright on stage amount to for something that is not consistent with itself?[16]

You as viewer 'here' are so sucked in, and may be made so uncertain, made as you are, and your role made as it is, an item merely of the picture's re-presentation. Or — quite simply — you may be used without noticing it at all. Perhaps, to notice it, you would require a more exact mirroring of your presence 'before' it, as in those pictures where, *literally* you are mirrored, as, say, in Duchamp's *Large Glass*?

In the cut-outs, on the other hand, it will no longer be a matter of there being a spectator figure which, 'feigning to present the picture that paints and views *itself*, presents its own viewing, presents its own self-presentation'.[17] In the cut-outs, it will not be that the picture presents a fictive 'I', who is a bit like you, and who is incessantly inscribed in the picture, functioning as a substitute for you, a representative and representation, your painted deputy. Rather, in the cut-

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[16] Derrida, op. cit., pp. 326-327.

[17] Derrida, op. cit., p. 294. 'Text' has here silently been changed to 'picture', and 'reads' to 'views'.

outs, you will be literally, mentally and physically, inscribed in the picture's machinery, as one of its working parts. It will be you who puts the machine's parts together, you who will arrange them, you who will make them work.

Yet here too you might experience a vertigo, since you are not present as some irreplaceable individual existence, but only, as Derrida would have it, as a mere inscription, moving between reality and fiction, a mere pictorial function or fiction, who, offering form and voice to the picture, has become part of the picture's voice. Killeen puts this most cruelly when he says 'Anyone hanging one of these cut-outs in their own way can not alter my intention in the work'[18] — they have been made, in advance, so that *any* of your arrangements will do for them the requisite work. You will have become a part of the picture's voice, even in the cut-outs, which have so democratically let you in to compose them. Then, you might well think, as Solliers did of his *Numbers*, that 'this game was using me as one figure among others'.[19]

If *Here you are*, a Killeen of June 1971, can be read as an announcement to the spectator of the picture's presence, and — undecidably — as an announcement to the spectator of his or her presence to him or herself, there is also the possibility of *You as an invention*, in the words of a proposed Killeen title, the possibility of 'you as the picture's invention'. A nice little vertigo!

And all these prospects, which the cut-outs will come far more often and far more elaborately and effectively to display, are first opened here, in the paintings of 1969, 1970, and 1971, sketched roughly out for the first time, in a practice which is slowly gathering to itself a body of knowledge as it goes, a body — the corpus, the oeuvre — upon which the cut-outs will draw.

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[18] Killeen, note dated 8. 80, p. 105, the black notebook.

[19] Philippe Sollers, *Numbers*, cited Derrida, op. cit, p. 292.