

The white spaces between

The cut-out lets the outside of the painting in, and the inside, out. So it ignores "the inaugural gesture of 'logic' itself, of good 'sense'", in which, in accordance with the self-identity of *that which is...* the outside is outside and the inside inside.¹ This is the culminating event in a long history in Killeen's work of play with outside/inside.



fig. 179. *Man, land and sky*, 1968

From his realist works onwards, the wall between inside and outside was constantly punctured, or made uncertain. In 1969, for instance, in a number of monoprints, cloud patterned wallpaper blends through a window with a similarly cloud patterned sky, so that one may no longer be certain which is inside and which out (a rather Magritte-like ambiguity). [fig. 47] In those early realist works, Killeen often opened the window to let the exterior in, and often with the window frame hidden by some other object, a lamp, or whatever, so that the border was made uncertain. [fig. 37] Or, a landscape enters a face, by reflecting in its spectacles, so - - if here with a realist alibi -- we see a *Man with a landscape in his head*. [fig. 179]

Or, without any realist alibi at all, we may see a *Man with chair in his head*, [fig. 36] or a *Man with landscape in his head*. [fig. 35]] Next, in such white

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, transl. Barbara Johnson, University of Chicago Press, p. 128.

backgrounded Killeen paintings of 1970 as *One foot twelve inches*, [fig. 62] the white wall, that which ought properly to be on the painting's outside, is let metaphorically or representationally in. And then, in various works of 1971, as in *Beartrap*, for instance, the work is so punctured as 'really' to let in the white ground of the wall. [fig. 92] Or the frame is cut out from the outside of the work, and put inside it, as in *Dog without a frame*. [fig. 89] And in the Combs, the Grids and the Laces, the white wall is again let metaphorically in. [figs. 110, 114 & 118]

But all of such cuttings out are still fixed and framed -- there are definite limits to this puncturing. Finally, in the cut-outs, the outside -- the world -- is again 'really' as well as metaphorically or representationally let in to the work; but the invasion this time seems to be limitless, and without frame, in such a way that one can never say what is inside and what out, or exactly where the work's margins are. As Peter McLeavey was to comment of the hanging of *Chance and Inevitability* round the four walls of his gallery: 'It has no beginning and no end'.²

Since, by means of this letting an exterior whiteness in, a space is provided in which the cut-out is perpetually recomposable, one might say that 'the blanks will never be anything but provisionally filled in'. There is, on the contrary, an '(almost) pure spacing, going on forever and not in the expectation of any Messianic fulfillment'. 'Here, ... it is always possible for a painting to become new, since the blanks open up its structure to an indefinitely disseminated transformation. The whiteness of the virgin wall ... reveals more than the neutrality of some medium; it uncovers the space of play or the play of space in which transformations are set off and sequences strung out. It is air. *L'air blanc*.'³

We might say that this emptiness, this mere whiteness as of air, nevertheless signifies: "it signifies the spacing relation, the articulation, the interval, etc. It can be nominalised, turned into a quasi-catagorem, receive a definite article, or even be made plural. We have spoken of 'betweens' and this plural is in a sense primary. One 'between' does not exist. In Hebrew, *entre* can be made plural: 'in truth this plural expresses not the relation between one individual thing and another, but rather the intervals between things (*loca aliis intermedia*)...

² Peter McLeavey, quoted by Killeen, note dated 8. 82, the black notebook, p. 142.

³ Jacques Derrida, op. cit., pp. 344-345. Here, as elsewhere, I have silently changed 'writing' to 'painting', and 'page' to 'wall' or 'canvas' or 'board'.

or else, as I said before, this plural represents preposition or relation abstractly conceived'.⁴

What is signified, then, by these 'betweens', is a relation of parts perpetually mobile, perpetually transformable, unfinishable, gatherable under no final title. "What resists the authority and presumption of the title, the plumbline and aplomb of the heading... what ruins the '*pious capital letter*' of the title and works towards the decapitation or ungluing of the text is the regular intervention of the blanks, the ordered return of the white spaces, the measure and order of dissemination, the law of spacing..."⁵

12.5.81

The title does not cover the work overall but is like one of the pieces in the work -- an added part of a jigsaw.

Not more important than any other part.

(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 121)

8.81

The title has to fit into the work the same way as any piece fits into the work

(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 125)

Titles serve either to identify the work or add another element in the way each image does: they are not headings under which the images are collected.

(Killeen, artist's statement, Seven Painters/The Eighties)

'To *suspend* the title, then, is necessary', as Derrida says.⁶ And it is suspended in the cut-out, in several senses of the word, at once hanging up there as it is, and kept undecided or in a somewhat inoperative state, deferred, temporarily annulled, adjourned, debarred from office, function and privilege -- hanging there as a suspended sentence.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, quoting Spinoza, op. cit., p. 222.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, op. cit., p. 178.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, op. cit., p. 179.

Given such spacing, the title drifts, without hiding the separation of the parts from each other or from itself, without hiding the pungency of their difference. The title, no more than a part itself, and like each part of the painting, separate or separable from the others, does not properly *adhere* to the pieces -- at most, it adheres only to one piece, and might abut any of the rest.

From 1981 on, when Killeen began to hand-paint the cut-outs as opposed to spraying them, he writes the title on the face of one of the cut-out's parts. But the fact that the 'title-piece' may be hung anywhere in the cut-out, and is always open to being moved, means that the title cannot be the *basis* of the painting, nor its *heart*, the very centre of its being, anymore than it can be the *heading* under which the painting's parts are collected, and under which they tamely and passively sit. At most, it might be said, the title may *move* through the work, as but one of the work's parts among many.

It is not, then, a matter simply of a *plurality* of meaning. Rather, the whiteness between acts as 'a blank that indefinitely displaces the margin and undoes ... "the unitary aspiration of meaning" and "the sure revelation of meaning"...'7 The whites serve to break up meaning, to disperse it, and to prevent the cut-outs from achieving the proper and finalised unity of a form or a theme. Killeen's habit, as I have said, is to put in an 'extra' part or two, a part which has no easily recoverable relation to the meaning the title might seem to proclaim. But these white blanks between are a still more flagrant, numerous, and inextricable 'extra'. This invasion of an exterior whiteness is 'the remarkable empty locus of a hundred blanks no meaning can be ascribed to'.8

The work will not be immobilised in the finality of a meaning, or in the recuperable intentionality of something Killeen was *trying to say*. The white blanks will not be subsumed under the mere plurality of a theme, with all of its various instances gathered under one head; nor will they be subsumed even as a polysemy. They refuse any integral reading, and are the very structuring which ensures that refusal.

This is why it is not in all rigour a question of polythematicism or of polysemy here. Polysemy always puts out its multiplicities and

7 Derrida, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

8 Derrida, op. cit., p. 268.

*variations within the horizon, at least, of some integral reading which contains no absolute rift, no senseless deviation -- the horizon of the final parousia of a meaning at last deciphered, revealed, made present in the rich collection of its determinations.*⁹



fig. 180. *Fish and Sticks*,
November 1978 (detail)



fig. 181. *Two black dogs*,
August 1978 (detail)



fig. 182. *Collection from
a Japanese garden 1937*,
August 1978 (detail)



Fig. 183. *Three cultures*,
June 1979 (detail)



fig. 184. *Island mentality no. 1*,
June 1981 (detail)



fig. 185. *Island mentality no. 3*,
August 1981 (detail)



fig. 186. *Left, right*,
October 1981 (detail)



fig. 187. *Frameworks no. 3*,
December 1982(detail)

⁹ Derrida, op. cit., p. 350.



fig. 188. *Prior knowledge no. 2*,
March 1983 (detail)



fig. 189. *Appropriation no.5*,
December 1983 (detail)

We should perhaps have already been aware of the necessity of the whiteness to that which seems to stand out from it. We might already have noted the inextricability of the white 'ground' from its dark 'figure'. The cut-outs have shown it to us, they have even made a 'figure', as it were, out of this situation of inextricability, so situating it as to assert it for our attention, in those parts which are an insistent instance of the whole painting's play with white. I mean in those parts cut out of the cut-outs, in which, in Killeen's words, the whiteness is 'the saying part', the 'negative saying'.

There, the silent, surrounding whiteness, invading some part, flagrantly assumes the importance of signification. Whiteness, which should be merely the drawn upon, becomes itself the drawing, a white graffito, drawn by the emptiness. Whiteness, which should be the wall upon which the painting hangs, itself hangs upon the painting, and, demonstratively, becomes itself the painting. The white of an eye and the white stripe of a stick become there, like Mallarmé's white veils, canvases, sheets and wings, at once presence and absence, at once the painting and its surround, 'at once the content and the form, the ground and the figure, passing alternately from one to the other',¹⁰ as 'indefectibly the white blank returns'.¹¹ The white, whether 'outside' or 'inside', may no longer be called inside or outside: 'In the act of inscribing itself on itself, mark upon mark it complicates its text, a margin in a mark, the one indefinitely repeated within the other: an abyss.'¹²

White upon white, and white out of white, a refolding of the blank upon the blank, as in Walters, but here materially and not only metaphorically or representationally so, since the white is the very wall.

¹⁰ Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹¹ Mallarmé, cited by Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 178 and p. 267.

¹² Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 178 and p. 267.

The cut-out's whiteness is, as Derrida would describe it, "a constellation of 'blanks'", blank of meaning, in as much as it is only the 'non-sense of spacing', 'the place where nothing takes place but the place'.¹³

*But that 'place' is everywhere, it is not a site fixed and predetermined; not only, as we have already noted, because the signifying spacings continually reproduce themselves ('Indefectibly the white blank returns') but because the semic, metaphoric or even thematic affinity between 'white' [blanc] and 'blank' [blanc] (Spacing, interval, entre etc.) means that each 'white' in the series, each 'full' white thing in the series... is the trope of the 'empty' white space. And vice versa.*¹⁴

The negative drawing, the 'full' emptiness of the fish eye, is, then, a metonymy or synecdoche for the larger whiteness of the cut-out, a part which signifies the whole, but a synecdoche or metonymy which has no margins -- which folds itself over, and slips in between, throughout.

'If there is no such thing as a total or proper meaning it is because the blank *folds over*', as Derrida says.¹⁵ We might, with Derrida, call this doubling of the white a 'fold' -- a fold which exists in a strange space. In this fold the 'negative' whiteness enters or is laid upon the 'positive' part of the work, and is at once on top of the positive dark as a mark, and below it as a white gap. It is at once a 'full' white, and an 'empty' white. 'The fold ... is the blank's outside as well as its inside, the complication according to which the supplementary mark of the blank applies itself to the set of white things [fish eyes, stripes on sticks]'.¹⁶ We might call it with Derrida a 'mark supplement produced by the painting's workings, in falling outside of the painting like an independent object with no origin other than itself, a trace that turns back into a presence (or a sign) ... or representation. Or rather, it gives birth to it and nourishes it in the very act of separating from it.'¹⁷

¹³ Derrida, op. cit., p. 257.

¹⁴ Derrida, op. cit., pp. 257-258.

¹⁵ Derrida, op. cit., p. 256.

¹⁶ Derrida, op. cit., p. 258.

¹⁷ Derrida, op. cit., p. 265.