

## Subjective attachments, Prior knowledge, Pooled memory and Appropriation from oneself

29 . 9 . 83.

*Appropriation as a possibility & title.*

*Taking of images from other works done this year  
& combining them into a new work.*

*Formerly a reluctance to do this because of the  
fear of confusing the identity of each work. Hence  
the need to have new images for each painting.*

*Is this necessary?*

*(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 167)<sup>1</sup>*

We have seen, in a previous glance at this note, how Killeen realises that any given painting's identity is threatened when its images emigrate to another. We have seen, too, that those many of his pre-cut-out works which were one of a series had already had their identity and individuation somewhat 'confused', in that their images had persistently drifted out of the frame. We have remarked the occasional migration of images even through the early cut-outs -- migrations allowed by the code of the variant or version. And we have claimed the template protocol, introduced in 1981, incited a more constant gurgitation, ingurgitation, and regurgitation of parts.

So it is not that the expatriation of images from one work to another is new in Killeen's art. Killeen's parts have long been nomadic. What *is* new is that in 1983 the cut-out's title makes such migration a matter for remark -- asserts as it as

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<sup>1</sup> Also on this page, just as he had done in the 1970s, Killeen considers the possibility of working on the same painting over a long period, in order to achieve an internal disparity and difference. (Again he forgets the practical difficulties.)

*Also the possibility of working on just one painting  
all the time & changing it. The title would  
stay the same until I felt that the work had  
changed enough to warrant a new one.  
This instead of separate works that have versions....*

*Problem is producing enough different work as  
at any one time paintings would have similar  
images in them & would probably have the same title.*

*advantage -- would not have to generate as many  
shapes -- concentration of effort  
using images from earlier works as a resource.  
(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 167)*

theme. What is clearly novel -- for the cut-outs, at least -- is such self-consciousness about the migratory part.

Take the five cut-outs entitled *Appropriation*, all painted in the last three months of 1983.<sup>2</sup> The word 'appropriation' implies a seizure, an active taking possession of, a taking to and for oneself -- even if, as here, it is a *self*-seizure, a taking of parts of oneself to and for oneself. In these five cut-outs, the later Killeen shows that he is no passive victim of the former Killeens. The later Killeen plunders the earlier, so that the later is, at least in some part, wilfully and actively formed by the possibilities the earlier opens. Here, you might say, Killeen colonises the open vistas of his own past, making a compulsory acquisition even of that which would seem to resist.

*Appropriation no. 1*, October 1983, *Appropriation no. 2*, November 1983, and *Appropriation no. 3*, November 1983, [plates 111, 113, 114] have a 3D, city wall-like piece appropriated from *Subjective attachments*, July 1983, and *Subjective attachments no. 2*, August 1983, [plates 103, 107] and granted three additional flanges. The black horse of *Appropriation no. 2*, November 1983, is taken from *Of mind and gravity*, August 1983. [plate 106] *Appropriation no. 3*, November 1983, has a camel -- that nomad's beast -- standing on a sort of 3D lower case 'a' shape -- a shape which had first appeared in *Everything and nothing*, September 1983, [plate 109] where it was without the camel. (In what is perhaps an intermediary work, *Everything and nothing no. 2*, also of November 1983, [plate 112] the 'a' shape appears with a camel.)

Likewise, the double lobed piece of *Concretionary structures, no. 1*, March 1982, [plate 84] which had migrated through *Concretionary structures, no. 2*, March 1982, [plate 85] and in *no. 3*, September 1982, now reappears in *Appropriation no. 3*. [plate 114] The diagonally striped horse of *Appropriation no. 3* is appropriated from *One to one*, March 1983, [plate 97] which itself took it from *Chance and inevitability*, July 1982, [plate 88] which took the horse profile from *Black horse*, February 1980, [plate 40] and added that diagonal stripe. The frog of *Appropriation no. 3*, November 1983, [plate 114] is taken from the fittingly titled *Subjective attachments*, July 1983 [plate 103] -- and it is the same frog used in *Frogshooter*, March 1976. [fig. 132]

<sup>2</sup> *Appropriation no. 1*, October 1983; *Appropriation no. 2*, November 1983; *Appropriation no. 3*, November 1983; *Appropriation no. 4*, November 1983; and *Appropriation no. 5*, December 1983.

If the oeuvre is a body, a *corpus*, this is body-snatching, and putting that body to the knife -- a transplanting of organs from a past to a present body of work. Killeen shows himself in this cutting out to be avid for himself, predatory even -- there is always something of death in the oeuvre.

The cut-outs titled *Pooled memory* are also apposite here. Their title is cut out from the text of an *Auckland Star* article on the scientist Rupert Sheldrake -- 'Startling new theory shaking scientific world'.<sup>3</sup> Sheldrake's extraordinary claim is that any repeated behaviour creates a 'morphogenetic field' somehow spread through all of space and time -- 'a kind of pooled memory'. Thus if some rats in London learn the way through a particular maze, so Sheldrake would have it, rats in New York, though perfectly unacquainted with their London peers, will then be enabled to learn the same way more quickly. Nor, in Sheldon's view, is the 'morphogenetic field' confined to the organic world. New compounds of chemicals, difficult to crystallise for the first time, 'get easier and easier to crystallise owing to the influence of the morphogenetic fields of previous crystals.'

*Take plant cuttings, he says. Take the regeneration of animal parts. Take fingernails. How does a fingernail know to grow back in its original form? 'Plato held that somewhere there was an eternal, archetypal fingernail. I say that the field is held by the actual fingernails of the past, a kind of pooled memory.'*<sup>4</sup>

One might take the insect with sheered off forelegs in all three versions of Killeen's *Pooled memory* paintings -- *Pooled memory*, February 1984; *Pooled memory no. 2*, March 1984; and *Pooled memory and some empty fish*, April 1984 -- as an item requiring a 'regeneration of animal parts', or, for a still more extreme example, one might take the variously lopped bits of fish in *Pooled memory and some empty fish*. [plates 117, 119, 121] That is, one might regard these 'cuttings' as a literal and specific reference to Sheldrake's theory.

More generally, the variant group as a body is itself always held together by a pooled memory, or 'morphogenetic field'. The variant group, the cut-outs, and the whole oeuvre, are morphogenetically held together in this sense: once an image or formal device is adopted by Killeen, it may then easily spread through the space of

<sup>3</sup> Michael Kernan of the *Washington Post*, 'Startling new theory shaking scientific world', *Auckland Star*, Friday 24 June 1983, Section B, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, quoted in Michael Kernan, *op. cit.*

his work and through all the diversity of the months and the years. The oeuvre itself, in as much as it is a unity, is a form of 'pooled memory, a 'morphogenetic field'. And literally, and materially (nothing 'startling' or 'extraordinary' about this), once a new form has been made by Killeen, it is easy, and becomes still easier with each repetition, to repeat it in a new place: it creates, in Sheldrake's phrase, a 'morphic resonance'. New parts 'are hard to crystallise the first time they are synthesised, but after that first time they get easier', owing to the template, whether material or not, provided by that first crystallisation.

We are brought again to how the oeuvre constructs itself, and to how this oeuvre-construction is constructed by the works themselves as a theme.

We might consider here, too, the cut-outs entitled *Subjective attachments*<sup>5</sup> and *Prior knowledge*,<sup>6</sup> where also Killeen knows -- and shows that he knows -- his own past; where he attaches himself to, and appropriates images from his own earlier selves, so that the cut-out becomes -- in the words of another title of the time -- a *Living memory*.<sup>7</sup> The double lobed piece of *Concretionary structures no. 1*, which had migrated through *Concretionary structures no. 2*, and *no. 3* in 1982, first reappears in the fittingly titled *Subjective attachments*, July 1983, and *Subjective attachments no. 2*, August 1983, before it reappears in the just as fittingly titled *Appropriation no. 3*, November 1983. [plates 84, 85, 90, 114] *Subjective attachments*, July 1983, and *Subjective attachments no. 2*, August 1983, take their red zig-zag piece from *Left, right*, November 1981, and their geometrified cat from *Instrumentation*, November 1982. [plates 103, 107, 79, 93]

Here, we catch Killeen again, much as we did in the Samplers, sampling his own earlier selves, and so in the deliberate act of constituting his works as an oeuvre -- we see him (re) tracing the lines of his face. Or rather, we do not so much *catch* him here in the act, as find him flaunting the act in our face. Killeen here suggests by his titles, as never before in the cut-outs, that he is making of some time of his work *one* work, making synchronic the diachronic, gathering the scattered trove of his past into the simultaneity of a single presence.

<sup>5</sup> *Subjective attachments no. 1*, July 1983; and *Subjective attachments no. 2*, August 1983.

<sup>6</sup> *Prior knowledge*, February 1983; *Prior knowledge no. 2*, March 1983; and *Prior knowledge no. 3*, October 1983.

<sup>7</sup> *Living memory no. 2*, May 1983, and *Living memory*, November 1982. See also the related *Pooled memory*, February 1983; *Pooled memory no. 2*, March 1984; and *Pooled memory and some empty fish*, April 1984.

Again, we see him in the act of constructing a present self. He disinters -- cuts out and so sharply marks off from the rest, what he would be and become -- that to which he is subjectively attached.

*Harold Osborne*

*Abstraction & Artifice in Twentieth C. Art.*

*Kandinsky 'reached the conclusion...  
... that art & nature are 2 separate  
'worlds', with different principles & different  
aims. And from this he came logically to  
a belief in the 'autonomy' of art -- the  
belief that a work of art stands or falls  
by inherent aesthetic principles, not by any  
resemblance to the outside world.'*

*This has been superceded. I do not feel that  
art & life are separate in this way. This is the line taken  
by Kandinsky, Malevich & Mondrian & followed  
by minimal art. What is taken into  
account now is prior knowledge. (experience  
up to the time of viewing the work)  
(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 143)*

That modernist frame which declared painting's autonomy, which framed it off from the world, and proclaimed a notional boundary between art and life, is here decisively rejected by Killeen. Such a rejection is inevitable, once the frame of the viewer's and the artist's 'prior knowlege' or 'past experience' 'is taken into account' -- that experience of art and the world prior to seeing or making the painting.

Accordingly, the phrase 'prior knowledge' is ringed in Killeen's note above for possible use as a title, from whence comes *Prior knowledge*, February 1983, *Prior knowledge no. 2*, March 1983 and *Prior knowledge no. 3*, October 1983. [plates 96, 98, 110] The 'prior knowledge' in these works may be understood to represent the oeuvre's or the artist's as much as the viewer's past experience, since all three *Prior knowledge* cut-outs take their double headed spanner/snake from *Living memory*, November 1982, and *Living memory no. 2*, May 1983, [plates 92,

101] and their green 'three-dimensional' piece from *Chance and inevitability* July 1982; [plate 88] while their wobbly grill piece, [fig. 204] too (whose 'origin' is an Aboriginal rock drawing)<sup>8</sup> is taken from the two versions of *Living memory*, though it is now rotated and partially coloured in.

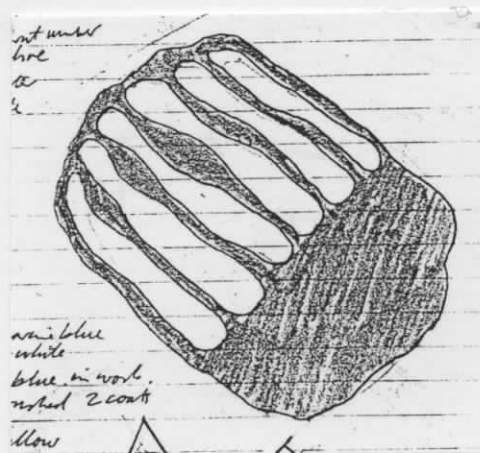


fig. 205. Record book drawing (detail)

The two cut-outs entitled *Subjective attachments*, likewise, of July 1983, and August 1983 respectively, [plates 84, 85] include a double headed spanner shape based on the double headed spanner/snake of the first two versions of *Prior knowledge* (February and March 1983), [plates 96, 98] as well as that double-lobed piece taken from the three versions of *Concretionary structures* of 1982. [plates 84, 85, 90]

*Chance and inevitability* had itself proffered examples of short and long term memory. Its viridian green and yellow pieces adjoined to make one piece [fig. 206] are a variant, with only slight changes, of the similar pieces in *Past experience no. 1*, and *Past experience no. 2*, both of March 1982. [plates 88, 86, 87] As we have seen, the shape of the profile horse in *Chance and inevitability* is displaced from that of *Black horse*, February 1980, though it is now enlivened with a painterly diagonal stripe. And the black, sponged protoplasmic piece in *Chance and inevitability* which looks like frontal moose head is an invading piece from *Pitch (blue)*, March 1981. [plates 88, 56, fig. 206] Another piece -- with a flat top, zig zag sides and downward curved base is taken from *Eastern influence*, March 1981; [plate 57] another -- a zig zag flame like piece -- had first appeared in *Concretionary structures* and *Concretionary structures no. 2*, both of March 1982.

<sup>8</sup> In a handwritten photocopied hand-out, 'Some retrospective notes about painting on a wall at F1', dated 6.9.83, Killeen notes of the same shape: 'originates aboriginal rock drawings - changed.'



[plates 84, 85] *Chance and inevitability* -- doubtless inevitably -- acknowledges its own 'past experience', or, rather, that of the oeuvre in which it takes and makes its place..

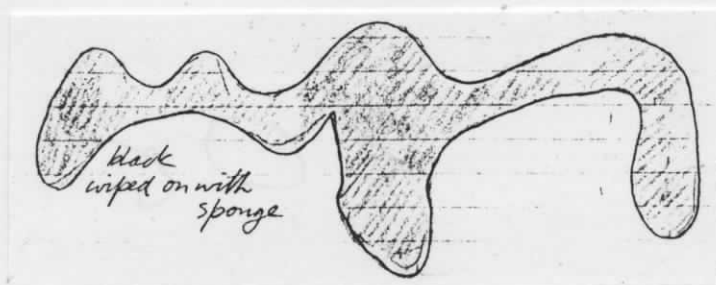
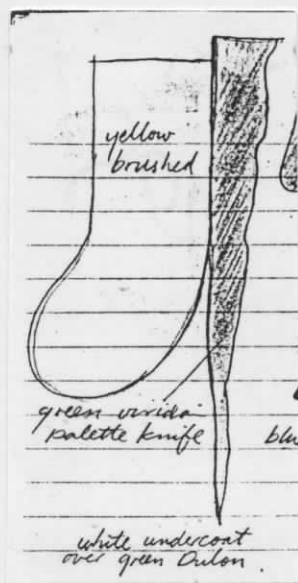


fig. 206. Record book drawing (details)

Nor is it only by chance that the sap green frog of *Subjective attachments*, July 1983, [plate 103] and *Subjective attachments no. 2*, August 1983, [plate 107] will one day be repeated, in exactly the same form, in *Destruction of the circle*, 8 March 1990, [fig. 140] though it will by then have turned black, and will overlay a comb such as Killeen painted through the years of 1973 and 1974; nor is it accident that the same frog had already long ago appeared in *Frogshooter* (March 1976). [fig. 132]

Painting speaks to its own and to the painter's and the viewer's 'living memory', to its own and to their 'subjective attachments', to the 'frameworks' of 'past experience' and 'prior knowledge'. The painting is always and irreparably

prior to itself. While feigning to speak in the present, it speaks, inevitably, also in the past tense, its present of necessity framed by a past...

Admittedly, from lack of knowledge of what is previous in the oeuvre, the viewer may easily not recognise the incomer to the cut-out *as* an incomer, the nomad *as* nomadic. In this new receptivity of the cut-out to previous parts of the oeuvre, the nomadic parts are no more unassimilated than the rest -- they might well seem naturalised citizens.

But, the fact of the perpetual embarkation of parts remains, and is marked by Killeen's deed of title, whether the viewer recognises it or not. And the fact remains that the right of entry for such parts is from now on guaranteed by the cut-out -- there is an open door policy, a free trade of images. The image seems to cross the threshold of one painting after another, looking in for a moment, and then looking out. Nor is it any longer that boundaries are only *threatened* by such incursions and excursions. Rather, the borders are down. Where the frame or border should be, there is now no more than a permanent exit or entry.

Since each part adopts or may be about to adopt the pose of exile, there is a sense now in which the cut-out becomes a perpetual departure. Since there is such an exodus of parts, every piece is now in a sense extraneous to the cut-out of which it is a part, or at least it is potentially extaneous. We might say that the cut-out now exists only in as much as it accords with a principle of extrinsicality -- a principle according to which every piece is, at least potentially, extrinsic to the cut-out of which it might seem an intrinsic part. Each is, or may be, a foreign part off to foreign parts -- and it may have come from them.

So the cut-out may be a country formed wholly of resident aliens, a ship manned only by stowaways, a world of unmoored and wandering parts. One is liable to sense something valedictory here, now that every part seems outward bound. At any moment they might take their leave, and disappear, leaving no trace. Or rather, each piece has already in a sense disappeared, leaving only its trace. To fasten one's gaze on a piece, then, is only to speed the parting guest.

*Everything and nothing*, as the Killeen title says (September 1983).<sup>9</sup> If everything goes, than anything goes. The migratory process may, so such a title

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<sup>9</sup> See also *Everything and nothing* no. 2, November 1983.



seems to suggest, be carried too far. In as much as the cut-out is boundaryless, or its boundaries are no more than a perpetual exit and entry, the cut-out is less a thing than a no-thing. And the same goes for its meaning, which threatens to seem everything and therefore, in having no specificity to itself, nothing. If any item here may be somewhere else, or if any item may be here, meaning itself is in danger -- if *Any item will do* (as in the title of 7 June 1987) there may no longer be any reason for the gathering of things. But let us not end here on such a negative note -- that extremity and moment of doubt is as yet some time off.

And, in any case, once an ingressive part gains admittance to the cut-out, it will no longer seem an interloper, but will, rather, willy nilly, set off repercussions among those images among which it now finds itself, and will itself respond to its new company, so that it will no longer be what it was. One might be reminded here of Calvino's 'literature machine', of Calvino's claim that literature is a combinational art, 'merely the permutation of a restricted number of elements and functions', but that it nevertheless 'is continually striving to escape from this finite number'.

*Does not it continually attempt to say something it cannot say, something it cannot know, and that no one could ever know? A thing cannot be known when the words and concepts used to say it have not yet been used in that position, not yet arranged in that order, with that meaning.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Italo Calvino, 'Cybernetics and Ghosts', *The Literature Machine: Essays*, transl. Patrick Creagh, Pan Books, London, 1989, p. 18.