

Hilary Bryan
killkillkill
Critical Evaluation

**The Eventmentalization of Violence (or “It’s an attitude”)
Critical Evaluation of *killkillkill* as Critique**

In the fall of 2007 I choreographed a work with twelve dancers to explore issues of violence in war and in everyday life. I was working as assistant professor of dance and guest artist in residence at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas,

[Hilary Bryan's] piece is about war and violence and how we deal with the implications. "She approaches her choreography from a San Francisco point of view. It's very urban and edgy. There's a lot of really powerful imagery through the piece -- powerful structure." [choreographer Dana] Nicolay said. "She's dealing with the inner source of war, and how everybody in them has the capacity to anger. Even in wars we don't fully buy into, we don't buy out of them either."

Jenny Swenson, *The Houstonian*, Huntsville TX

The curtain opens to reveal soft warm light on a huge double helix vaguely perceptible through the amber mist. This graceful wire coil spirals up from floor, up beyond what we can see, its barbs also obscured in the gentle haze. A single dancer appears from the darkness downstage left and walks diagonally upstage crossing through the warm light and back into darkness before he disappears. A second dancer repeats this passage disappearing into the same distant corner upstage left. Then two bodies. Then three. A Fibonacci series¹ of constant flow crosses the space, entering from one dark corner, passing through light, and then disappearing into another. This gentle shift from dark to light and back to dark makes the distance traveled seem longer than the raw dimensions of the stage. A chiasmus of presence.

The light gradually increases in contrast and shiny barbs eclipse the gentle curve of the wire coil as it slowly rises, hovering in rotation above the space, both menacing and

¹ 1, 1, 2, 3, 5... The Fibonacci series (named after a 13th-century Italian theorist) is a harmonic rhythm that mathematically describes a spiral and lies at the core of life’s first principle, that of growth.

beautiful. We notice how the cold silver alternates with stains of rust. Or is that blood? The river of flow swells until somehow the entire space is filled with bodies standing in stillness, all facing stage left and looking without seeing into the distance. One dancer strides in from behind the crowd, pauses behind a dancer in the middle, and in a single powerful thrust to the back of the head forces that body straight down into the floor. This action starts off a new current, a current of violence, as one by one each body advances on another from behind and forces it down to the floor – unprovoked brutality. No sooner does one body force another down to the floor and take its place, than another comes from behind to force the aggressor down as well. A continual cycle of violence from one end of the stage to the next. No motive, no resistance, no revenge; just cold determination to force a body down to the floor.

The takedowns continue until the space clears and blinding side light glints sharply off the wire barbs. Now the cycle of violence begins anew, this time with bodies speeding themselves across the space and mowing down anyone standing in their path. One by one standing bodies crumble to the floor, roll away, and fold back into the race, into the binding light. Is this social climbing? Gratuitous cruelty? Sisyphusian brutality? I slice you down; someone else slices me. Later this brutality is re-directed at self. Dancers slap their own arms out of the air as the barbed wire coil continues slowly rising, bearing witness to the violence and suggesting a connection to some ethereal world outside of this earthly brutality, this internalized brutality. Self-imposed limits. My right hand reaches up out toward; my left hand slaps it down again and again and again. That thing I love – happiness, the eternal – I never let myself have it. One by one bodies emerge from this state of fruitless seeking, gaze at its fellow victims, and rejoin the diagonal flow, impassive, imperturbable, ongoing going going. We return to the flow of walking from corner to corner, eyes trained forward, and again the continual disappearing of bodies into the distance.

The river of violence returns again toward the end of the piece with trios that surge across the space like wild animals hitting, throwing, flinging, jumping, catching, dropping. These were the action words we used to generate these partnering phrases. This time the

violence engages and elicits more violence. One jumps, the other catches; one throws, the other drops. Trios disappear out of sight only to reappear again at the base of the river with increased aggression, speed, hostility, force. Does increasing the speed and the force necessarily mean more aggression and hostility? Do we read these as “events, nothing more, nothing less than events?”(Foucault "What Is Critique?" 278) Or do we turn these “effects of coercion” into affect, where our affect makes them mean something, lends them power over their “victims” and over us? Viewers may read coercion or revenge, schoolyard brutality or anything else, but it’s also simply increased speed and force – an event. The dancers repeat the same actions each time they cross, but faster and with more power. Their attention is on the task, on what they are doing, rather than on a particular affect of hatred or vindictiveness. Dynamic factors may suggest emotion and inner attitude, but they also serve functionally, making movement more efficient. An aggressive punch is an expression of strong, direct and quick action, and that same dynamic equation is what makes it easy to drive a nail, when expressing aggression is not the primary intention. The functional task of driving a nail is made easier by this dynamic constellation. Foucault suggests that one way to make good on our “decision not to be governed” is to release such affect “from within a concrete strategic field.” Is he suggesting that we practice dulling our affect by playing at killing with Grand Theft Auto? Or is he suggesting we create for ourselves and our world the possibility that we will choose what “gets us down,” rather than be victims of somebody else’s pushing? Foucault advocates cultivating “a decision-making will not to be governed.” (Foucault "What Is Critique?" 278)

One basic premise in Laban Movement Analysis is that dynamic expression serves function (and vice versa), and that there is no inherent one-to-one correlation between these aspects of movement. In this moment of trios punching, flying and flinging themselves and each other across the space, there is both a sense of aggression as well as a sense of intention to complete active functional tasks. We see function suggesting (perhaps) a particular expression. If the performers or audience feel aggression or anxiety, perhaps it’s because we’ve been taught to feel it – we’ve been trained into hostility. We are pawns mobilizing gestures that serve this intertext of violence. One tool

the military uses to mobilize this text is the bayonet, a weapon from the seventeenth century whose usefulness declined with the nineteenth century advent of modern warfare. Bayonet fighting is antiquated, and yet bayonet training continues to be standard because it trains for aggression, a critical fighting skill. ("Bayonet") On the first day of rehearsals one of my student collaborators, an MFA candidate in dance, heard the title of my project and immediately recalled, "'Kill! Kill! Kill!' That's what they had us yell in basic training." A U.S. military combat veteran, Christine developed two monologues about her experience of bayonet training, which we wove into the sound score for *killkillkill*. Fading in on the heels of Christine's monologue we hear a cadence chanted by another dancer-collaborator and former soldier, who served early in the current Iraq war:

I go down to the market, where all the people shop.
I pull out my machete and I begin to chop.
Left right left right left right – *Kill!*
Left right left right left right – *Kill!*

At its fever pitch of violence, dancers run at top speed in a vicious game of leapfrog that stomps down on kneeling players' rounded backs and slams them loudly into the floor, again, all along our familiar diagonal. After an exhausting number of crossings, the game encircles the entire stage and becomes quiet as the dancers catch their breath and somehow transform back into "normal people," rather than trained dancers "performing" on a stage.

What happens next is hard to describe, because more than a visual or kinetic image, it's a feeling. Somehow honesty, intimacy, vulnerability, and presence manifest in the space. The humans on the stage are standing still, evenly spaced along the four edges, facing out to the audience, the wings, and the back. They are all talking simultaneously, perhaps to some invisible person standing right before each one of them, perhaps to us in the audience; and occasionally we can distinguish "I'm sorry" or "I apologize." For what they are sorry, they do seem to be explaining, but not really to us, the audience. For what they are sorry we can only imagine. Someone belts out "Rotate!" and they obey, cycling several stations to the right and renewing the intimate, honest murmur. This time a different four humans face the audience to speak their truth; a different four intimacies are not quite distinguished before blending into the din of apologies. "Rotate!" "Rotate!"

At some point this orientation around the edges morphs back into the diagonally flowing river and the humans rejoin its ongoingness, passing from dark to light and back into darkness before disappearing in the distant corner – two, then three, then another and another until only the barbed wire remains. And the amber haze.

Is this catharsis? Again, we ask Foucault: shall we allow these “apologies” to stand in for the responses we have (and those we expect ourselves to have) in the face of a war (any) that we cannot understand? If we do, aren’t we accepting this “hegemony of [*inaudible*]” as is? Let us rather allow the theater to resonate as a space for slippage, where ideas can sit, resonate, gestate, mutate. What if we let reason take a back seat to presence (to being) and allow the bodies on stage to fill us with indeterminate possibility, ideas we cannot yet name because they have not yet entered into language? They reside in the place/non-place that Derrida writes around in his efforts not to frighten away his “elsewhere.” (Derrida 45) Let us allow these images we have shared simply to be. Let us allow them to stand in new relation to one another, out of order, like so much non-sense (Lewis Carroll), perhaps nothing more, nothing less, than events. Gregory Bredbeck calls sense itself “a form of cultural fascism that seeks to pin down, label, constrain, control, and dismiss” (Bredbeck xii) We deflect and redirect such fascism not by allowing the images onstage to interpellate us into their story, but by bringing ourselves to them and interacting with them as events. The piece creates its own Derridian elsewhere and invites us to dwell in it.

As I reconsider my assumptions in creating this piece, I notice my own liberal tendencies as possible echoes of Kant’s agenda of freedom, *Freiheit des Geistes*, which he bases on free thinking and which is radical in his ideologically bound and materially oppressive historical moment, over 200 years ago. Part of me wants to believe that moral autonomy will make us free. I agree with his stance against passivity, that as long as we are basing our actions upon the reason of others, or upon their dictates, we are not autonomous, not mature, not fully adult, and not fully human. The first few interruptions to *killkillkill*’s walking flow seem to suggest such autonomous deviations from normativity; however, these interruptions themselves become a new norm, deviation leading to cooptation into a

new normalized paradigm. And frustratingly perhaps for the viewer (and certainly for me) violence recurs in each new paradigm throughout the piece. It seems to ask us if we will ever be free? Autonomy seems not to be enough.

“What ever happened to survival of the group!?” One key to what might help us get there is dancer Jessica’s outburst during our initial conversation about war and violence in everyday life. Our conversation roamed from attitudes toward the Iraq war to attitudes toward killing and exclusion in general. How different is it to bar entry to ants and cockroaches from a private home, than to bar entry to humans from a nation? The complicated issues around US immigration spoke loudly to these border state dwellers, one of whom was an illegal alien and who was ultimately barred from performing with us because of an immigration interview in Mexico for which he missed the two final weeks of the academic semester.

When did we become fixated on the individual? When did society cease to be about society and begin to be about the individual? Or has it always been like that? Has it always been survival of the fittest? Is there something wrong with survival of the group? ... Does only helping ourselves and our families contribute to the rest of the world at all? If we’re only concerned with ourselves, how are we going to survive?... Where is the harmony? (dancer free write excerpt)

Two of the dancers identified as homosexual. One as part Native American. One as first generation American, one as second. Racially we were a mixed group. The violence of exclusion was not an abstraction for this group. And it was a source of pain.

I’m really now intrigued by this idea of staking a claim. What is it in us that makes us say this is mine, you can’t have it. We all do it. I did it yesterday without even realizing it. What makes us feel threatened? Fear? Jealousy? Is it about succeeding? Do you have to push everyone else around you down in order to be the best? How is it that we can put an American flag on the moon? ... Where does that arrogance come from? (dancer free write excerpt)

Who is it that makes people feel superior to other beings? Why is it that we control, isolate, destroy and kill other things that were here before us?... If it were based on seniority bugs would be controlling us, because most of them were here way before our time. ... It’s almost as if we are contradicting ourselves when we fight against racism, segregation, homosexuality, and other political issues. To kill a living creature without a moment’s second thought makes me wonder about the kind of society that I have grown up in... Does this mean that everything that

people have fought for is a lie? Does this mean that I am a lie? (dancer free write excerpt)

And that pain inspires frustration and its own reactionary violence.

In my sociology class, I was annoyed by the number of people willing to say that “Texan” refers to a race. One guy in particular was stating his shallow, ignorant opinions about this and I wanted to slap him in the back of the head to possibly knock some real thought into him. He kept going on and on about how this is the best state and “Texans” are their own kind because we do certain things differently. EVERYONE does things differently!! With his reasoning everyone would be their own race! It would have really gotten to me if he said, “Everything’s bigger in Texas.” The only thing I see is bigger is the “Texan” ego. (dancer free write excerpt)

Kant’s politically progressive move in his rigidly dogmatic era was to champion freedom for everyone. Kant’s bumper sticker: “No one is free until we are all free.” And yet it is difficult to champion freedom for all when the knuckleheads in your sociology class are using their public education to argue for the superiority of their race, however defined. *Sapere aude!*² might be just what they intend to be doing. Kant may not have realized just how large a group “everyone” would become in these intervening 200 years of freeing serfs and slaves (however effectively), mass suffrage (however practiced), and public education (however embattled).

The walkers in *killkillkill* continue their diagonal flow throughout the piece. The piece begins and ends with it and returns to it periodically. We don’t know whether the walkers are doomed to continue walking (and killing) once they leave the stage, or whether they ever find their own “elsewhere,” that field beyond notions of rightdoing and wrongdoing.³ (Rumi) Do they ever step aside and allow the dominant paradigm to pass

² *Think for yourself!* Kant realizes that it takes courage to think for oneself, that it’s much easier to let others do the thinking for us.

³ Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase each other

doesn’t make any sense. (Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks, 1st ed. (San Francisco [Calif.]: Harper, 1995).)

them by? Can we? Can we ever toss the knife out the window and walk out of the story as Borges' alpha knife-fighting gaucho does?⁴ (Borges) Such a critical attitude follows Kant in questioning the *a priori* assumptions that constitute our presuppositions. Such questioning in and of itself “does something” far more fundamental than the superficial “elimination of abuses” that regressively serves to support an inherited order. Such questioning steps through the current order by getting closer to it. Horkheimer explicitly applies this critical attitude to the rules of society and names human activity as the critical agent of this stepping through. (Horkheimer 207) Human activity thus operates like Contra Dancing, where each individual dancer passes around and through all the others.

When I asked the dancers to reflect on their impressions of the piece as a whole, several of them reported feelings of sadness, frustration, anger, or confusion.

[A moment of] clarity... the walking in the beginning – when a person falls next to you and you notice, but continues walking, that says a lot to me. we notice that other people are “falling” whether physically or psychologically, but never stop to help. We only notice, and walk past. The piece as a whole gives me a feeling of sadness, walking past people, taking others down, frustration with and without language, calmness interrupted by sudden bursts of anger, and apologies.
(dancer free write excerpt)

This sort of “negativity” is not what Adorno had in mind in his *Negative Dialectics*, and yet I see a relationship. Hegel urges us to look the negative in the face, and “tarry” with it; Adorno urges us to remain in this phase for as long as it takes to reinvent thinking. He plays both with and against Hegel, both mobilizing and vilifying the dialectical progression that Hegel had posited would yield *Aufhebung* after *Aufhebung* on the way toward absolute truth. Adorno sees instead an inverted ‘*Umhebung*’ or ‘*Unterhebung*,’

⁴ Borges tells this story twice from two different points of view, framing each as a separate story. “Streetcorner Man” is narrated by the new top dog, who takes Rosendo’s place after watching him toss his knife out the window, walk out of the bar, and disappear from a community consciousness that cannot logically resolve this “cowardly deed” with the tough community leader of their imaginary. They experience a gap between the ideal and the real, between the real and the reified. “Rosendo’s Tale” is narrated by Rosendo himself in a way that allows us to think through the new man as a continuation of the old. We see him questioning the conditions of possibility for his knife-fighting persona in a way that allows the possibility of a new pacifist persona. Do the walkers in *killkillkill* tease out such multiply embedded stories in their own material world? Can we?

where intellectual progress serves absolute reification rather than absolute truth.⁵ The grand progression of the historical dialectic serves to undermine rather than to sublimate. The very contemplation which was meant to set us free, sets us instead on a downward spiral toward violent obedience and guided docility. ("Cultural Criticism" 34)

Are these walkers enacting their own docility by returning time after time to the diagonal flow? I can read each phase of the choreography as a new "elsewhere" or "negative" phase in which we might reinvent thinking or find ways out of our hamster wheel of violence. And yet I cannot name any new lessons learned. Perhaps that is for the best. One dancer describes an unresolved feeling of searching that fits with Adorno's invitation to remain in the negative:

The feeling of the piece as a whole: people who are lost, searching for [meaning] in "something." These people experience frustration through chaos and leave on their own path of life. (dancer free write excerpt)

The walkers haven't found the answers. Naming answers while they are still gestating might cause them to be stillborn. Preemptive naming is another form of killing. Perhaps that is why they return to their walk.

As he wrestles with our dialectical crisis, Adorno zigzags back and forth, asserting in one moment what he undermines in the next. To make art is now barbaric, and yet make art we must; to go on living itself is impossible, and yet live we do. Even his famous line condemning poetry eats itself away with its own corrosive logic: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry to day." ("Cultural Criticism" 34) This very phrase enacts the sort of disappearing act so often ascribed to dance (verbal metaphor intended). The art "which erases itself" (verbal metaphor intended) parallels Adorno's logic which eats itself away. He despairs that our culture of rational thought has proven itself false and that our faulty logic now prevents us from knowing anything at all. *As such*, reinventing philosophy is the "new categorical imperative" imposed by Hitler and articulated by

⁵ I am playing with these prefixes to suggest not sublation, but undermining. I'm using the prefix *um-* as in *umfallen* (partly because of how I am reported to have reported tipping over our *Tannenbaum* when I was three years old: *Ich hab' den Baum ge-umt*).

Adorno. ("Negative Dialectics" 365) It is this "as-suchness" that we might call "After Auschwitz." 'As such' describes a state of being – our state of reevaluating the ground upon which we stand in light of new information. Theorist Eva Geulen complicates the temporality of Adorno's afterness by suggesting that Adorno sees our new state of contemplation as one where we have always been. She spatializes this temporal state. "Thus the dictum against art after Auschwitz is no stricture, but an expression of the fact that after Auschwitz there is no longer any before Auschwitz, that whatever might, chronologically speaking, be prior history remains, historically speaking, posthistory." (Geulen 96) We cannot unlearn or unexperience Auschwitz. Auschwitz is now the ground upon which we stand no matter where else (elsewhere) we look. And Adorno insists we stay here in this "negative" timespace of the dialectic and ward off all premature *Aufhebung* for as long as it takes to rediscover thinking.

It is in light of Adorno's call that the last moment of *killkillkill* strikes me as particularly poignant. We have just spent eighteen minutes wrestling (tarrying?) with our inner impulse to destroy and to shut out the other: "Don't touch me!"—a with no happy ending yet appearing on the horizon. And yet we continue walking walking. The last dancer (a Bosnia war veteran – but most audience members don't know this detail) lingers as if taking a final glance to see if we've maybe found our parallel universe or rediscovered thinking. But we haven't, and she rejoins the flow.

Aletheia – Lichtung

In 2002 I choreographed a dance theater piece called "Locks, Keys and Wide Open Spaces" in which dancers wore oversized locks of various shapes around their chests. These characters were foreclosing any possibility of emotional pain that might arise from softening the region of the heart. The wide open spaces I saw as interior vastness; the locks I saw as preventing us from sharing it (or even appreciating it). Each time a lock would open, the stage would go dark and light would flood an enormous screen transporting us to an open expanse of barren terrain and its extreme weather (gusting ice and snow, baking desert clay, etc). My questions in that work centered on the work we do to prevent ourselves from feeling pain by keeping our interior spaces private, hiding

them from each other with surface tension.⁶ A first step toward hanging out in our wide open spaces is even to acknowledge that we have them.

Heidegger also wrestles with the question of how to think at this (dead) end or impasse of philosophy that shows no signs of freeing humans or ending their oppression. The ground has shifted and the philosopher has become a foreigner in a new land trying to figure out the language and customs. He spends some time articulating positions he knows inside out (Hegel and Husserl), holding them next to each other and seeking new resonance in their formulations of presence. This urge to seek the meditative calm of presence seems to be what Heidegger finds for himself and articulates as a clearing, a space where free play is possible. “Wherever a present being encounters another present being or even only lingers near it – but also where, as with Hegel, one being mirrors itself in another speculatively – there openness already rules, the free region is in play. Only this openness grants to the movement of speculative thinking the passage through what it thinks.”(441) Heidegger could be talking about partners coming together in love with the sort of openness that inspires play and self-realization, but even strangers in the grocery store can encounter one another with engaged presence and openness that creates this sort of free region where speculative reason is in play. An honest smile creates such a space, such an invitation for speculation (in the sense of thoughtful engagement, or better yet, another honest smile to acknowledge and build upon the first).

In this clearing Heidegger continues to mobilize Kant’s sense of limit and questioning posed by the phenomenon in question. “... the phenomenon itself, in the present case the clearing, sets us the task of learning from it while questioning it, that is, of letting it say something to us.” (442) For Heidegger, it is this space of the as-yet-unthought that that provides new fertile ground for philosophy’s impasse. Its name – *Aletheia*, or unconcealment; its pure form – round, where “beginning and end are everywhere the same” with no twisting, distortion, or closure. And with no foreclosure by technological-scientific rationalization. Heidegger worries that our obsession with the technological,

⁶ “Locks, Keys, and Wide Open Spaces” was one section of a larger work called *Surface Tension*, which premiered in St. Petersburg in 2002.

the scientific, and the rational is a sealed system of self justification that mystifies us with its immense results but claims nothing about its *a priori* conditions of possibility. Here Heidegger's method bows to Kant, sharing Kant's condemnation of prejudice as blinding: "But this says nothing about what first grants the possibility of the rational and the irrational. The effect proves the correctness of technological-scientific rationalization. But is the manifest character of what is exhausted by what is demonstrable? Does not the insistence on what is demonstrable block the way to what is?"(448) We have become intoxicated with product and rationalization; blind to the moment that is. Yudice's argument on behalf of culture finds such blindness in the neoliberal demand that art and culture demonstrate their instrumental value, and remains blind to any value they might have on their own critical terms.(Yudice) One corrosive aspect of the walkers' search is their insistence on answers at all. It might be that insisting on answers is our first mistake, blinding us to the fact that there are none. And yet seek we must.

Heidegger's clearing is a wide open space where meditation and an open heart indulge in possibility without rushing to answers. In various somatic disciplines the first step toward making a change or solving a problem is just such a pause, an alive stillness in which listening and "being with" take place. We make room, make time, for being with the breath, for cellular breathing, for a touch that simply listens and acknowledges presence. It is upon this ground of "being with" that individuals build trust and allow possible next steps to reveal themselves. As a movement therapist I may have a specific agenda for my client, but my agenda remains external to my client. Beginning by creating a clearing allows for a new pathway to emerge that is germane to my client, new body-based truth my client may not have consciously expected. These new pathways and truths thus emerge critically out of what is already inherently present (the body's inherited state at the moment we are together); and not from an external agenda, projection, or prejudice (to mobilize Kant's term in service of embodied knowledge). Allowing the body to speak for itself yields more lasting change than the potentially violence of an external mandate. Inquire and nourish, rather than discipline and punish. Choreographer, improviser, and movement theorist Deborah Hay teaches that "Not knowing is the most creative place." The moment we think we know the answers, we fall back into the very prejudice and

docile immaturity that Kant argued against, and we risk the sort of violence that assumes it has an answer.

In Ukraine I learned a practice of pausing before bolting out the door. I was mystified on the last day of my stay when in the midst of our mad dash to the airport, everyone sat down in silence, stillness, and breath, looked around at one another taking in the moment, and then leapt back into action. Once the frenzy of packing is complete, tickets checked, and keys in hand, everyone pauses to take a seat together and acknowledge the moment. Being together. Open space. Breathing. The liminal space between here and no longer being here. The pause is brief, but infinite. For me that moment lasts even twenty years after its passing. This pause calmed my nerves during a brief and now infinitely expanded moment of transition from this space into that space, from this racing to that racing, from this phase of existence to that. This pause is the sort of clearing that Heidegger calls for. Or is the clearing calling us? The pause is calling. *Was heißt pausen?*⁷

Is this why Christine, the last walker, has such a hard time leaving the stage? She knows we're not finished thinking; we have not yet rediscovered thought. Eighteen minutes is not enough and the pause is still calling her. How can we get the pause to call more loudly to the rest of us?

Foucault observes that “the attitude of modernity does not treat the passing moment as sacred.” It is inclined neither to perpetuate (pause) nor maintain it, nor to even to “[harvest] it as a fleeting and interesting curiosity.” (Foucault “What Is Enlightenment?” 49) These days we barely have time to stop long enough to harvest the now digital proof that we had a moment at that party, monument, seaside. Even as we are perpetually late “for a very important date”⁸ and short of valuable time (is money), time has also taken on a disposability, in spite of (and perhaps because of) increasingly available “Kodak

⁷ I am playing on Heidegger’s 1951 lecture series (immediately following his 6 year ban from university teaching post WWII), *Was heißt denken?* The phrase means both “what is called [meant by] thinking?” and “What calls us to think?” I ask what calls us to pause.

⁸ The White Rabbit’s refrain in the musical version of *Alice in Wonderland*: “I’m late. I’m late. For a very important date.”

moments.” I wonder what Foucault would make of the mind boggling harvesting of moments that happens in the 21st century, now that even telephones have become moment threshing machines. The cellular telephone has emerged as a space collapsing device with moment collecting capabilities. By contrast, I wonder what Foucault would make of the growing Slow Food and Urban Homesteading movements, which teach people the forgotten arts of canning vegetables and lingering over home-cooked meals – the art of the extended pause. Is this just another wave of counterculture extremists that the historical dialectic (as feared by Adorno) will sublimate/forget as easily as Ascona in the 1910s and the Hippies in the 1960s? Can we measure the impact of fellow traveler Lewis Carroll, who advocated lazy summer afternoons spent day dreaming about – not being – busy White Rabbits? Carroll was writing at the height of 19th Century modernity, and we still adore his anti-modern subtext. The Burning Man Festival participants are now in their 16th year of embracing the Baudelairian “task of producing themselves.” 35,000 people gather in the desert for ten days every August. The pause is calling.

*Ailleurs*⁹ (or, *Was heißt Derrida?*)

Derrida also feels called by a place/non-place where there exists the possibility of new thought, new conceptions, and/or in which the mandates of culture have not yet inscribed themselves: “I don’t mean to say that something always happens, that it/id always gets inscribed. On the contrary, I believe there is always a place, or if you prefer a non-place, where it/id is not working, not inscribing itself, even when the text is overloaded, continually saturated (and no doubt more often in that case).” Derrida points to internal contradictions, to a gap between what we can evaluate and what presents itself for our evaluation: “The evaluated is always stood up by the evaluable.” This formulation which presents itself as a tautology suggests a gap, an internal contradiction in the thing itself and our idea of it, or what we can know of it. (Derrida 35) Derrida’s elsewhere is “a place whose paths are infinitely multiplied and confused by the ‘texts,’” such that “what interests me is going on elsewhere, is not taking place where I write, but I have to write by another route, somewhere else.” (Derrida 45) It’s as if sneaking up on the object of his attention would make it disappear, like chasing one’s tail or like Winnie-the-Pooh

⁹ elsewhere

tracking a Heffalump. Borges achieves Derridian absolute unproductivity – this nothingness, this zero-point – by providing multiple endings that contradict and fold in on one another. (Derrida 44) His labyrinths-as-stories cycle past deceptively familiar ground winding us to an elsewhere that leaves us breathless. Kafka’s elsewhere rejects not only the violence of a happy ending but ending at all, with stories that refuse concrete plot and character, and refuse to tie up into neat little bows. The foreclosure of clarity would throw us out of his clearing, out of this place/non-place where new thoughts might occur before cultural inscription.¹⁰

Derrida describes cultural inscription as an endless Möbius strip of appropriation. How can we get off this roller coaster of perpetual *Aufhebung* of the violent type that erases uniqueness? “The Möbius strip is a powerful figuration of the economy, of the law of reappropriation, or of successful mourning work that can no longer... toll a knell... without breakage and debris.” (Derrida 51) Rumi’s formulation of the clearing is like Derrida’s in that it is posited elsewhere:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense. (Jal*al al-D*in and Barks)

We don’t know where “out beyond ideas” may be, so it may be tricky to get there. Adorno is trying. Derrida, Heidegger and Foucault are trying. *killkillkill*’s walkers are trying. Rumi’s elsewhere lies outside of the moral codes we know, and seems likely also to defy the rational system of critique, which is our inheritance after Kant. The good news is that the poet expects we’ll both arrive in this clearing, even if we’re not there yet (temporal deferral standing in for spatial deferral). The material possibility that breath

¹⁰ Kafka would be amused that as I write this I cannot recall the name of the bizarre, half animate gadget that preoccupies the narrator in “The Cares of a Family Man.” Odokolon? No, that’s Russian for eau de cologne. Oblomov? No, he’s one of those 19th century Russian characters lazing about in his depressive, bourgeois uselessness. That Kafka’s creation manifests and persists as indeterminate in my mind speaks to the author’s success in creating a space beyond or pre-inscription. Odradek. Got it. Now I “know” him/her/it. (Not.)

provides is that it happens right here and right now. This clearing is available to us at all times, even when we forget about it – as we tend to do. It is in such a clearing that we discover a moment of not foreclosing possibilities, of not automatically sublating; a space where {*où*} new movement, new steps {*pas*} might come, or at least a contour of such *pas*. Or not {*ou pas*}. *Où?* *Où pas?* {Where? Where not? Because Derrida’s elsewhere might indeed find itself right here. Because the next afterness is already happening right now.}

Afterness (or now that our brains are wired thus-and-so; given that we have experienced such-and-such)

Perhaps afterness is cultural inscription itself, the inscription that interpellates us and compels us to interrogate a new set of *a priori* conditions of possibility. We have seen that intense determination on the part of a small group of people can fell the tallest buildings. In one instant/morning the conditions of possibility shifted. What thought is possible now? What action? What relationship to the world? In what way does this condition of possibility become a new given, a new “normal” basis for understanding the world? In what way is the new “normal” a perpetual mourning of that morning? Is afterness a perpetual state of mourning? In the 1780s Kant exhorts the few who might succeed in viewing such a state, such a set of conditions, as *not* given, but as inherited, in order to interrogate the implications of such notions. In fact, he says it is our duty to interrogate our inheritance in public. In 1937 Edmond Husserl accuses Galileo of taking for granted an inherited geometry and thus failing in his duty to revitalize the practice by reexamining suppositions and implications. “For in the case of inherited geometrical method, these functions were not longer being *vitally* practiced; much less were they reflectively brought to theoretical consciousness as methods which realize the meaning of exactness from the inside.” (Husserl 49) Galileo – taken to task for sloppy math. Even Husserl admits this is an extreme and impractical position, yet it emphasizes an attitude that continually reevaluates the grounds on which it stands and attends to the world from an ongoing stance of afterness. Husserl champions familiar critical attributes of reflection, consciousness, rigor, interiority, and now *vitality*, which I read as intimately

related to presence, breath, time and space – the pause. In Laban Movement Analysis we call this “Active Stillness,” or alive presence. *Was heißt pausen?*

I aspire to inspire such alive stillness with the work that I create. The work provides an opportunity to consider the ground(s) upon which we stand. I invite the receiver into a field of possibles that may include some version of thoughts they’ve had before, and (I hope) some new variations on those themes, as well as some notions that are out of reach – something that we don’t know we don’t know, a choreographed “blind spot.” (Derrida 49)

After Derrida – Foucault (a performance text/monologue)

Mourning mourning. A practical effective analysis of mourning. Mourning as the psychological analysis of afterness, of inheriting an end. Acknowledge the state of not being happy (while in pursuit of happiness). Such is the basic trajectory of *Negative Dialectics*. There’s more literature on how to deal with sadness than happiness. Is that because Hegel defined critique as a state of doubt and depression? Or did he do that because he knew depression would make us happy? Sadness sells books. Plus the basic story is that we are trying to change the world (no matter what The Beatles say) and not just sit around popping Soma/Prozac (so normalized that it doesn’t set off the spellchecker). Having a Coke and a smile is the real thing, I mean, problem, after all. No one is free until we’re all free. The blind spot. What is it that we don’t know we don’t know? (Derrida 48-9)

It’s an attitude. An event attitude. ("What Is Critique?" 278)

How to realize a decision not to be governed? How to rewrite history and interpretation so that we see events as events (and not drama, and not coercion)? Foucault poses his proposition as a question and then tells us it’s an attitude. An attitude is a voluntary choice. In this next great depression we can choose to view a pink slip as a disaster or as an opportunity. We can choose not to choose sides, as Rumi suggests. It’s possible to maintain an event attitude toward domestic violence rather than getting trapped by

viewing it as oppression (although we risk blaming the victim for choosing to stay). It's more difficult to ask a child to view abuse as a personal choice. Or an AirFrance jet lost in the ocean. We don't choose the disaster before it happens (unless we do), but we do choose our attitude to it after the fact. This week I choose to write three major papers and grade 50 exams. I could also choose to be grumpy about it, although it's easier and more fun if I choose to enjoy the process. Regardless, the events still occur: I am still determined by the events, as we are determined by the Enlightenment, and by all sorts of events. Or am I? Determination is another attitude. If I get to choose, well then I am determined not to be determined.

In 1992 I choreographed a fairytale called *Pink Slip* in which the title character shifts her attitude toward losing her dream job (gaining her freedom) in just this way. Afterness is a question of attitude. A meditative attitude of stillness and being(ness). An attitude which appreciates possibles, openings, indecisions, reversals and dislocations. An event attitude. Afterness, attitude, clearing, critique. A wide open space, an expanding field of possibles.

(Harvey)

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