

Violence

**to
a
kiss**

—

Jenn

Joy

You don't know what you're dealing with here. I'm no ordinary girl from Indiana. I wanna be a machine. That's right Jack, a machine. A screen with a whole bunch of pixels and a smile on it. I don't want anything Jack. Just that, nothing. I'm clean. I'm strong. I'm worth it. I'm perfect. Nobody was born to be a machine more than me. I wanna outlive the flash of desire in the faces of people who like to buy things Jack. I'm gonna make them buy me until they die. A buying selling machine. I'm clean Jack, a clean machine and I'm gonna make a killing.
DD Dorvillier, *The Handsome Execution of a Flower*, 2010¹

Leaning into the black wall, her head traces a gray line as she walks one carefully articulated step after another. She faces away, bare skin against red latex shorts, black knee socks and plastic shoes. When she reaches the corner, the lights go out. Now in darkness, she runs, returning to her initial position along the wall to begin the walk again. Repeat. Lights out. Repeat. A slow organ lament wails against a blue video projected on the opposite wall of a wrestler's face. Cut to a new frame as he jumps off the ropes flying, spinning, falling, rewind, jumping, flying, spinning, falling, rewind again and again. Gilles Deleuze reminds me that repetition is always a "theft and a gift" taking something of the original while revealing another peculiar intimacy.²

Lights up and the dancer now in a white blouse and knee pads gallops in circles, stopping abruptly she lifts her arms to execute a folk dance – jumping to step, one foot to the other – rhythmic against the whining soundtrack. Turning to examine a red heart-shaped box hanging on the wall, she asks if it is chocolate or a bird. White feathers and candies spill onto the floor as mute interlocutors. Removing her shoes and stockings, she carefully rolls them into a gag and blindfold and begins to dance again.

DD Dorvillier's *The Handsome Execution of a Flower* (2010) conjures glitter and doom when cloaked in red satin she sings just out of tune. Transforming into androgynous wrestler, then Dada performer cut with Expressionist detail, her virtuosic presence plays at machinic perfection, yet descends into a darker dehiscence as she kneels, slides, stands, falls, now wearing only the mask, black underwear and knee pads. Her sensuous dance crescendos near the end when she balances in a white lace body suit on one leg against a sonic thrashing disintegration as timing and tonality come undone.

Betraying a punk eroticism, *The Handsome Execution of a Flower* cruises the psychodramatics of Jack Smith, the relentless disorienting narratives of Richard Foreman's theater, the nihilist despair of Missing Foundation's hard-core sound and iconic tag that inscribed 1933 on an overturned martini glass, dark omen to the changing politics of New York City. Witnessed as disparate flashes, silhouettes or so many ghosts, historical force rises uncomfortably in the present as Weimar Germany haunts late 1980s East Village or a bowing geisha doll becomes a wrestler through Dorvillier's fierce anachronism. Here the choreographic as aggressively relational tactic also acts as desublimation as Dan Graham writes of punk, a practice dedicated to reveling in the imperatives of representation to reveal (and reject) its deadening effects.³

Dorvillier's choreography mines these limit conditions (of representation, of media) to effect perceptual, emotional, conceptual disturbance in the ways we apprehend dance. Her choreography extends toward a phenomenal and cognitive knowledge, making histories visible differently as contingent emotional images rather than events at a distance. Such sensual proximity resonates with Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of image that "seizes" me and "throws in my face an intimacy

that reaches me in the midst of intimacy – through sight, through hearing, or through the very meaning of words. Indeed, the image is not only visual: it is also musical, poetic, even tactile, olfactory or gustatory, kinesthetic, and so on...”⁴ Nancy aspires toward a concept of image as ekphrasis, as contagious categories and senses simultaneously accumulate and displace one against the other. While this labor along the edges of form is seductive, even promiscuous, it is not without confrontation. Nancy continues: “The ambiguity of the image and of violence – of the violence at work [*à l’oeuvre*] in the image and of the image opening itself in violence [...] The image cannot but have the duplicity of the monster.”⁵ As witnessed in Dorvillier’s choreography, these conflicting affiliations with beauty and monstrosity, violence at the heart of intimacy, appear not only in the more theatrical pieces like *The Handsome Execution of a Flower* and *The Skunk* (1995), but animate the seemingly spare minimalism of *No Change or “freedom is a psycho-kinetic skill”* (2004).

Always in Dorvillier’s work there is an intense proximity between violence and the kiss. In her tremulous duet *RMW* (1993) with Jennifer Monson, the two begin in darkness (and always there is waiting, wanting, anticipation in Dorvillier’s work). They wrestle, one grabs the other by her belt loops lifting her off the ground and throwing her, they shift roles and repeat, rendering an intensity that transforms into an embrace, a kiss and they roll heads connected, all consuming. In a different duet with Mark Ashwill (1995), the two dancers play off the negative spaces of their bodies, invading and retreating, throwing themselves against the other, trusting they will be caught, captured, then dropped onto the floor. Dorvillier lies with arms and legs spread on the floor as Ashwill crashes always carefully over her and this is repeated while he lies

on the floor under her twisting precarious landings. Ashwill will dance spot-lit – martial bird intensity and lightness intertwine – as Dorvillier pulls on boots and returns to duct tape one of his arms to his side with the other raised in defiance and then they return again to their devastating *pas de deux*. Together they dance desire as emotional and physical roulette.

In the moments of *No Change or “freedom is a psycho-kinetic skill”* when Dorvillier stands against the white wall, black electrical cords, microphones, mic stands, lights scattered through the space, her shadow dances these many histories of encounter, of emotion, and of image. Even though the spaciousness of this work with its barely perceptible sound, Elizabeth Ward’s stillness as she lies on the floor, Dorvillier’s interrogation of cords and curtains or her slow undress in a back bend under a fallen mic stand evokes a conceptual reduction of movement, it is never only that. If we consider this choreography as a diary of images, we see it as “dissemblance,” an “operation,” as Jacques Rancière writes of the image that resists singularity and pure intellection, instead calling out to the uncanny corporeal facts of history and of experience.⁶ Exquisite emotion held within a formal choreographic embrace along the edges of legibility; Dorvillier’s kiss tastes of violence, of seduction, of grief, and always the fierce beautiful thinking sustaining it all.

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1 This text was spoken in *The Handsome Execution of a Flower* performed by Dorvillier at Chashama in November 2000. Music by Kenta Nagai, Lighting by Dave Herrigel, Costume by Dorvillier with Michelle Nagai, Text/Video by Dorvillier.

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1968]), 1.

3 Dan Graham, "The End of Liberalism" in *Rock/Music Writings* (New York: Primary Information, 2009 [1981]), 57.

4 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort. (New York: Fordham, 2005 [2003]), 9, 4.

5 Ibid, 25.

6 Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007 [2003]), 7.

1995, Movement Research at the Judson Memorial Church, New York City
Photo: © Anja Hitzenberger
A duet with Mark Ashwill (RIP) and DD Dorvillier

