

Charcoal Matter with Memory: Images of Movement, Time and Duration in the animated films of William Kentridge

David H. Fleming¹

In his temporal philosophy based on the writing of Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze describes duration (*durée*) as a *becoming* that endures in time. Reifications of this complex philosophical concept become artistically expressed, I argue, through the form and content of South African artist William Kentridge's charcoal 'drawings for projection' (Moins 1998, Lai 2008). Indeed, Kentridge's animated works open up attenuated spaces that enfold and unfold different signifiers and images of time and its passage, unleashing different 'layers' of duration internal to the images and films. These exhibited art works thus provide illuminating 'philosophical' examples of animated audio-visual media that expressively plicate distinct images of movement and indices of time.² Adopting a Deleuzian approach to the animation allows us to maintain a philosophical reference to film as a mode of thought, and explore how Kentridge's form and content synergise to express and embody non-human forms of artistic thinking. These become actualised in the machinic assemblage of viewer, film and screening context, and invite viewers to think about the interplay of perception, memory, time and matter. I uphold that Deleuze's Bergsonian-inflected cinematic models provide the perfect fit for Kentridge's work, appearing well-suited for structuring an investigation into three separate, yet interrelated, strata of time embedded within the films. These I relate to a concept of temporal thickness emerging via artistic images of 'contraction', a movement-image form that exposes geologically compressed time-lines 'insisting' between projected frames, and a series of diegetic scenes that bring the actual and virtual into relation so that 'crystal-images' of time in its pure state are dislodged. Although these three strata are artificially separated out for my analytic purposes, it should be understood that during screening they synthesise to communicate aesthetically a complex multifaceted image of time as duration.

¹ University of Nottingham Ningbo, China: david.fleming@nottingham.edu.cn

² I opt to employ the term 'plicate' throughout to indicate a specific type of folding. My usage simultaneously invokes the act or procedure of 'plication', which in surgical terms refers to a folding and suturing of tucks, or to the folding together of tissue from one organ onto another. The term can also suggest the folding together of pleats, as in the folding of a fan. Finally, my usage also hopes to invoke another image of folding, related to the type used in the manufacture of toffee. There, successive stretched and pulled sections are folded and allowed to settle in successive layers. All these senses of the term are implied when I utilise the term 'plicate' throughout.

Films, Context, Characters and Politics

Kentridge's charcoal art and animation series was inaugurated in 1989 with *Johannesburg the 2nd greatest City After Paris*. Over the following decade the artist would produce a cycle of drawings and films that unleashed complicated and layered musing upon the nature of time, change, matter and memory. His animated films predominantly focus upon two main characters: Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitelbaum. Always wearing his pin-stripe suit, Soho appears as a *two-dimensional* corporate mining magnate, whom art critic Thomas Micchelli describes as 'scarcely more developed than the cigar-chewing factory owners of Eisenstein's *Strike*,' displaying a greed 'so profound that images of love and death dissolve into columns of numbers before his eyes' (2010). Felix surfaces as Soho's foil, and is usually drawn naked. He is a sensitive and poetic artist that Ariella Budick sees embodying a sense of romantic vulnerability, passivity and 'gutlessness in a time of turmoil' (2010).

It is commonly observed that Felix appears as a moving self-portrait of Kentridge, growing to appear ever more like the artist as the film cycle continued. For an exhibition in Sydney, an exegesis on the artists points to how Kentridge used reflections of his own face and body to realize both characters. Thus, while 'Soho and Felix are drawn as separate characters it is possible that they represent different sides of the same person and more universally our own alter egos' (MCA 2004). Kentridge himself notes that after creating the unhappy duo, he began to recognise certain of his own psychological traits becoming distilled in the characters (Budick 2010). Beyond Felix and Soho, there also appear two recurring female characters. The first is Mrs. Eckstein, the neglected wife of the Machiavellian industrialist. Felix constantly fantasises about, or else attempts to seduce her throughout the cycle, with varying degrees of success. An African female called Nandi also appears in certain films, and arrives as an 'impossible' reflection of Felix (and Kentridge?) within a mirror in *Felix in Exile* (1994). Significantly, for Benjamin Buchloh, Nandi surfaces as a maker of meaning, breaking free of the 'silent image of woman still tied to her place as a bearer of meaning,' to instead become 'a maker of meaning' (1981, 57). Here, we should also add a racial dimension to Buchloh's reading, since Nandi appears as the only 'individualised' black character within the films.

Kentridge's work is often considered 'political.' No doubt this can be partially attributed to the time, space and context surrounding the works' creation. In their broadest context, Kentridge's first animated drawing coincided with a complex period of global transformation that Francis Fukuyama proclaimed 'The End of History' (Fukuyama 1989). In his own South African context, however, this era is perhaps more accurately

understood as the *beginning of the end*.³ Indeed, Kentridge's decade long cycle of animated films overlapped with a turbulent period of socio-political change, witnessing the fall of Apartheid, the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the democratic election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black president. The films themselves consciously reflect upon this socio-political era of change, which was typically characterised by an active spirit of remembering and disremembering the past.

Elisabeth Van Caelenberge notes how, although a political artist, Kentridge chooses to liberate his work from any direct political opinion (Van Caelenberge 2008). Pace Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, this reflects his confrontation with a modernist and post-colonial dilemma, wherein his art remains unable to pursue any 'fiction of making South Africa look "white",' but equally cannot "speak for the "black", nor provide a platform or voice for the "other" (Christov-Bakargiev, 1998). Kentridge says he stubbornly refused to 'make illustrations of Apartheid,' but concedes his drawings and films were 'spawned by and feed off the brutalized society left in its wake' (Goldby 1994, 22-23). To this end, his political art becomes limited to exploring zones of uncertainty and shifting meaning (Christov-Bakargiev 1998), and the artist limits the 'political' dimensions of his films to 'an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings' where optimism is 'kept in check and nihilism at bay' (Budick 2010).

Considered from a Deleuzian perspective, the political films promise rich seams of investigation regarding a *missing people* and the lurking shadows of a 'people yet to come', which I necessarily elide for reasons of space here. There similarly appear promising territories opened up by reading his work from a schizoanalytic perspective: considering different ecological, geological, and ethical dimensions. Van Caelenberge briefly signposts one schizoanalytic approach by considering a process of de- and reterritorialisation surfacing between images of faces and landscapes within the films. Utilising Deleuze and Guattari's models of 'faciality' and 'landscapity,' she explores how landscapes perform in a more politically charged manner than figures or faces with regards to South Africa's victims of Apartheid (2008). I will return to engage with these issues in more detail below when considering the diegetic images from within the films.

By neglecting an overt consideration of the racial 'politics' of Kentridge's work, then, I instead focus upon what Deleuze's temporal cinematic philosophy can teach us about the expressive interplay between

³ For Fukayama, the collapse of the Soviet Union famously signalled the end point of humanity's ideological evolution and the fall of the Berlin wall marked the 'universalization' of a Western liberal democratic model. Seeing this as the final form of human government, Fukayama believed it would gradually take root around the globe. Five years later, a form of Western liberal democracy was eventually realised in South Africa with the election of Nelson Mandela as president.

form and content with regard to themes of time (change) and memory. Furthermore, I also aim to trace out a reverse line, highlighting how a consideration of Kentridge's work also challenges us to reconsider Deleuze's cinematic paradigms by illuminating animated regimes of movement-images that concomitantly trace aetiological links to classical forms of film and animation, but concurrently plicate complex co-existing expressions of time *as* duration. Over and above this, I also investigate how Kentridge's technique and exhibition practices expose further multifarious archaeologies and geologies of embedded time-lines that enrich and complicate these temporal artistic expressions.

First Strata: Art History Contraction

Having sketched a context surrounding the creation of Kentridge's films, it is important to investigate the manner in which his technique and style combine to embed or unleash different images of time. But first, it becomes necessary to propose a working philosophical model that allows us to engage with the experience of temporality produced by or within different forms of modern art. Here, Timothy Barker offers a useful starting point, by adapting A. N. Whitehead's concept of 'temporal thickness' to approach the works of contemporary artists such as Janet Cardiff and Dennis Del Favero. Here, in art that takes time itself as a theme, conditions are created whereby viewers become confronted by, or experience time aesthetically. Incorporating Whitehead's concepts as they appear elaborated by philosophers like Deleuze and Michel Serres, Barker explores a strange phenomenon wherein the moment in which viewers experience an artwork is made to become 'temporally thick' (2011). Employing Deleuze's Bergsonian models to help describe this phenomena, Barker outlines a moment of perception becoming temporally thick if the past is drawn into the viewing present (2011, 95). Such models appear apt for considering the experiences generated during the encounter with Kentridge's animated drawings, which work to refold several different 'pasts' into the experience of viewing his films.

As a starting point, we can consider the extent to which Kentridge's self proclaimed 'stone age film making' technique itself serves expressively to fold together old and new (rich and poor) technologies for aesthetic effect. Indeed, his unusual synthesis of charcoal sketching and photographic filmmaking bring ancient and modern techniques into expressive relation, ostensibly aestheticising technological time before any 'representational' image is created. Closely linked to this, the first strata of time confronting viewers during their encounter with Kentridge's films can be related to what Deleuze, following Bergson, calls an image of 'contraction' (2004, 90-156 & 2005b, 112-121). For Bergson and Deleuze this becomes evocative of 'a past in general' but, in specific reference to Kentridge's films, can be first related to an invocation of Art History (in general).

If we temporarily disregard self-referential modernist and post-modern surface paradigms of intertextual referencing, it remains problematic to maintain that a viewer perceives any artwork in a vacuum, or that any artwork engages a viewer purely on its own terms. Kentridge's animated films raise this notion to a surface thematic, by refolding art history's past into and over the perception of the film images, so that viewers see the works in relation to their own past. In attempting to illuminate how artistic contraction images manifest themselves during an encounter with Kentridge's work, it is important to consider how films and screening context combine to generate a 'virtual' web of artistic references and antecedents that help filter perception of the films.

In the first instance, this phenomenon may be related to – and in part invoked by – the films being screened within gallery or museum spaces. Here, a consideration of other art works and art history surface by proxy of an institutional and architectural surplus. But images of artistic contraction are most overtly generated and dislodged via the form and content of the films themselves, which deliberately channel and reflect a series of artistic precursors and antecedents in tandem with their projection. Indeed, all the charcoal films appear actively to invoke a series of artistic 'memories' or allusions that are constantly referenced in critical discussions. To this end, the works are perceived as aesthetically 'nostalgic' (Van Caelenberge 2008), or as deliberately reflecting and borrowing from diverse historical influences: including Greek Tragedy and theatre (Buchloh 1981), medieval parchment (Stewart 2001), artistic masters and avant-gardists (Buchloh 1981; Wen Shu 2008), or cinematic movements like German Expressionism and Russian Constructivism (Van Caelenberge, 2008) amongst others. For these reasons, Neal Benezra outlines Kentridge's work as deliberately employing a 'freewheeling appropriation of themes and images drawn from the history of art' as part of a deliberate aesthetic strategy (Benezra 2001, 14).

One specific manner in which artistic contraction is realised has already been touched upon, and can be related to the self-portrait reflections of Kentridge contained within the films. These moving self-portraits not only capture temporal reflections of the artist and document his own transformations and aging over time, but simultaneously reflect and invoke the artistic tradition of self-portraiture itself. Such notions are made expressly evident through the inclusion of countless portraits and images embedded within the diegetic worlds of the films. In *Felix in Exile*, for example, Felix stands in a room covered in multiple drawings and portraits pinned on the walls (another fantasy portrait eventually becoming projected over the top of them). On one level, this scene of several artworks within an artwork provides an expressive image of artistic mise-en-abyme, at once reflecting the actual scene of Kentridge himself standing within his own art

studio surrounded by multiple charcoal images and scenes of portraiture when making the films. For Van Caelenberge, this diegetic space also becomes intertextually reminiscent of Vladimir Malevich's 'room for the last futurist exhibition in 1915' (2008), and can be understood as invoking a specific form of historical intertextual spatio-temporal contraction (that folds in themes of the future).

For similar reasons, Micchelli sees Kentridge's films as self-consciously creating a form of intertextual perceptual palimpsest, that places an encounter with the films within a virtual constellation of past images (recollection-images) drawn from the audio and visual history of art. Writing on Kentridge's work from his *Five Themes* exhibition, Micchelli argues that the artworks,

relate explicitly to historical predecessors: Alfred Jarry, Mozart, Georges Méliès, Nicolai Gogol, and Dmitri Shostakovich. Add to that list the artist's overt or indirect channelling of Goya, Francis Bacon, Dziga Vertov, Picasso, Brecht, Daumier, Edward Hopper, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, and even Tim Rollins + K.O.S., and you end up with a scrim of references filtering your comprehension of Kentridge's work, situating it in a self-consciously historical framework that disallows the possibility of perceiving it on its own terms. *You see it in tandem with its precedents* (2010, emphasis added).

In this manner, Kentridge's work deliberately situates itself within a shifting and fluid web of artistic images drawn from the past. Thus, the actual images perceived dislodge a multiplicity of virtual-images that signal a form of artistic heterogeneity alongside a contracted concept of a past in general. Within the aforementioned exhibition, the animated films are related to an even more dense concept of time outlined through a Whiteheadian lens of 'Thick Time'. This can not only be neatly related to the models of temporal thickness described above, but also indicate that the charcoal animations contain an even more complex aestheticisation of temporality. But, remaining with a model of contraction for the time being, it is possible to recognise how the films also self-consciously evoke, and place themselves within, a general sense of cinematic history too. Beyond being musically-scored 'silent' films that utilise explanatory intertitles to signify dialogue, the narratives also reflect anachronistic transitions by pastiching iris-in and iris-out methods. Beyond these, I return below to link the form and content of the films to the cinematic work of Able Gance and Alain Resnais, and highlight yet more historical antecedents that filter our perceptions of these work and help raise time to a surface thematic.

Second Strata: Movement-image Geologies and Archaeological Aesthetics

Examining the form of Kentridge's films through a Deleuzian lens allows us to isolate an unusual range of tropes that help the films build up an even deeper and more layered experience of temporal thickness. Indeed, Deleuze's cinematic models help expose how Kentridge's techniques compress complex temporal 'geologies' into and between the projected frames of the films. To understand how this works we must briefly return to Deleuze's models of the cinematic movement-image from *Cinema I* (2005a), and examine how Kentridge's inimitable technique and animation style complicate our understanding of animated film's usual manifestations.

At a formal level, Deleuze explores how the cinematic apparatus necessarily represents and divides time into a series of static units, or photographic frames, that capture frozen instants of movement in and through space. These individual frames or 'photograms' are assembled to compose a final film, with mechanical projection used to apply movement that animates the immobile stills into a mobile section of time. Each cinematographic photogram formulates what Deleuze calls an 'any-instant-whatever' (2005a, 4), and to understand this concept, we can briefly turn to Eadweard Muybridge's early experiments as a case in point.

In Muybridge's most famous string of pictures, the photographic apparatus is employed to capture images of a galloping horse. These were captured by the horse tripping a series of threads attached to a row of standing cameras. The resulting images formulate a set of sixteen frozen instants arrested from the horse's gallop (duration). These immobile frozen instants were later arranged chronologically and animated together with a zoetrope so that a mobile section of time was reconstituted: a moving image that appears to show the horse galloping in fluid motion. A brief mind experiment highlights that if the horse had started its run a few fractions of a second earlier (or a few centimetres back), it would have necessarily tripped the camera threads at different moments within its gallop. Thus, each individual photograph (or photogram) would necessarily index a slightly different image, pose or instant. For Deleuze, it does not matter that each image could have been incrementally different, or index a slightly different pose, for they would remain 'any-instants-whatever' within a mobile section of time. When strung together in motion, then, they would still reconstitute the same overall movement on screen.

The modern film cameras Deleuze engaged with typically split the second into twenty four separate immobile frames, with any discernable transformation taking place in-between these 'any-instants-whatever' becoming infinitesimally small (temporally and spatially), and only really measurable in relation to each other (their equidistance). Here, any concept of 'real' time or duration is always already found slipping away or escaping in the gaps in-between the frozen instants (the 'void' between frames). True

duration, as such, is never truly captured then, even if femto-cameras were to index a trillion still images per second. For this reason, it is not the instant of motion which is captured that matters, but rather that the photograms be equidistant and reconstitute an immobile section of movement. The main organising principle in movement-image cinema at this genetic level thus becomes time as *chronology*. Or again, in classical movement-image film, the image of time is subjugated to movement or action, and is only rendered in a linear fashion.

Although episodic narrative aspects of Kentridge's work at times follow large action-image structures, with quasi-plots emerging within and between films, individually and collectively the films tend to fall short of being movement-images as we typically understand them. For Van Caelenberge the films constitute 'meagre and never-ending' narratives, full of stock characters (2008). If they are not true action-images at a narrative level, they also appear to fall short of being movement-images at a formal or genetic level too.

Like a simple flick book or cartoon, traditional animation can be understood as a series of incrementally differentiated still (drawn) images arranged in a 'chronological' sequence or loop. The still images, animated by a thumb or machine, grant the appearance of (false) motion due to the perceptual phenomenon known as the persistence of vision. Deleuze briefly engages with the cartoon film in *Cinema 1*, linking its form to a movement-image model where the apparatus – irrespective of linking photographs or drawn images – represents and divides time into a series of static units (frozen instants of movement). Deleuze thus understood the cartoon to fix movement into stasis or equilibrium, with the reconstituted image surfacing as a mobile section of time. In his brief consideration of animation, he argues that if the cartoon film 'belongs fully to the cinema, this is because the drawing no longer constitutes a pose or a completed figure, but the description of a figure which is always in the process of being formed or dissolving through movement of lines and points taken at any-instants-whatevers of their course' (Deleuze 2005a, 5).⁴ Deleuze saw the cartoon as being 'related not to a Euclidean, but to a Cartesian geometry' as it 'does not give us a figure described in a unique moment, but the continuity of the movement which describes the figure' (2005a, 5).

The differences between utilising photographs and drawings as the raw material for film does generate one significant theoretical difference worth exploring. For Jen Webb, cinema employs photographs 'like nouns,'

⁴ We can consider the Disney cartoon *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (David Hand et al., 1937) as an example to illustrate this point, particularly as the studio opted to utilise actual cinematic images of human movement as key-frame references for its animators to trace for the cartoon character movement. Here, a clear parallel surfaces between classical cinema and cartoon film, with the same form of any-instants-whatever genetically composing each.

using these static photograms as ‘a record of what is seen’ (Webb 2003). In contrast, paintings and drawings appear more like ‘verbs – more to do with the act of seeing, and the artist’s senses (and history, ethics and aesthetics) at the moment of making’ (Webb 2003). Webb links these notions to Kentridge’s own descriptions of using the drawing process to test out ideas, so that it performs as ‘a slow-motion version of thought’ that, although it may begin in confusion, finally reaches clarity (2003). For Greg Lynn, the characters or bodies rendered in animation highlight how objects and forms are never a fixed or unified entity, but rather display an open and unstable nature that implies an evolution of form and its shaping forces. Animation here suggests a combination of ‘animism, growth, actuation, vitality and virtuality’ (Lynn 1998, 9). Vivian Sobchack introduces notions of the plasmatic and phantasmagoric developed from Sergei Eisenstein, and views animation as expressively conflating the inanimate and animate, subject and object (2009, 385). For Paul Welles, however, animation can be understood as being situated in a liminal middle ground between mimesis and abstraction (2002).

Kentridge develops his own unique mode of animation, though, that witnesses him exploiting a transmogrifying tweak upon traditional cartoon models. The main difference between Kentridge’s films and more familiar forms of animation can be primarily related to the artist’s preference for reworking *one* single image over and again to create different scenes and sequences. Thus, instead of drawing countless separate images with slight variations to help create the illusion of false movement as in traditional animation, Kentridge chooses to continually erase and rework one single drawing, which only provides an initial key frame for the scene, and thereafter takes on an organic life of its own. In interview Kentridge explains his style thus:

The way [the animations] work is, each sequence, each scene, is one drawing. If I’m drawing a mountain collapsing into the sea, instead of drawing hundreds of different drawings of the mountain and the sea, with the one turning into the other over 200 drawings, it’ll be one drawing, which is successively added to and erased from. So the same sheet of paper, I’ll walk from the camera to the drawing and erase a section and draw another section, walk back to the camera and shoot two frames. Go back to the drawing and erase and alter it. So that the film is made by this constant walking between the drawing and the camera. So the same drawing may be altered two or three hundred times. And so in the end it is a very grubby grey piece of paper (2010).

This technique was originally employed as an experiment in documenting the evolution of a single drawing. Choosing to utilise the tactile medium of charcoal (with occasional red and blue pastel flourishes), Kentridge initially worked to find ways of successfully erasing the obstinate grey traces of the

previous drawing or outline before photographing his next filmic frame. In this sense he was initially attempting to do traditional animation. However, he always struggled to erase the stubborn charcoal traces, even after experimenting with different types of paper and eraser. The opinions of viewers soon opened his eyes to the unperceived potentials of this frustrating side effect. The lingering outlines of previous images, he was informed, was an interesting and thought provoking phenomena in and of itself (Kentrige 2010).⁵ For Kentridge, it thus became evident that it was ‘those very traces, the leavings of the previous drawings that give [the films] any interest at all’ (2010). By degrees, Kentridge came to recognise that themes of memory and history were naturally built into this technique, and that his palimpsest style, or abiding visual ‘memory’ of previous drawings and movements, forced viewers to perceive the ‘passage of a happening’ and recognise the process of time and change (2010). What became interesting about doing the animated films, then, was their ‘way of holding on to all the moments and possibilities of the drawing’ (Benzra 2010, 12).

It is also worth considering here how the animated films are usually projected in a gallery alongside the final smudged drawings: and when projected, replay a visual ‘history’ of all the erasures and re-workings the paper surface has undergone. In this sense, a discursive dimension arises between the still drawings and animation, wherein the films surface as an archaeological excavation and replaying of the drawing’s history.

Kentrige’s inimitable style also generates a form of surplus meaning that helps problematise the view of his films having a ‘pure’ movement-image aetiology. We can return to Deleuze’s writing upon cartoons, and the passage where he argues that any animated system ‘which reproduces movement through an order of exposures [poses] projected in such a way that they pass into one another, or are ‘transformed’, is foreign to the cinema,’ to understand why (2005a, 5). Kentridge’s animated films do not naturally fall into a movement-image category, then, for as we are beginning to see, each photogram is not composed of equidistant images of movement, nor formed by any-instants-whatever. Instead, each appears as a series of privileged instants, poses, or ephemeral artworks in their own right.

Because of his unusual form and technique, Kentridge’s films cannot be considered traditional cartoons. In interviews, the artist himself calls them ‘drawings for projection,’ whilst *Animation World* goes so far as to

⁵ Deleuze privileges the auteur as the creator of artistic concepts and cinematic thought-images. What becomes unusual about Kentridge’s work is that the artist himself initially appeared unaware of the powers of his chosen medium/technique. We can thus layer in a Badiouian perspective to the view of the thinking film. Here, it becomes the artwork itself that is understood as the thinking subject, or as a mode that produces a non-human *thought* that the creator may learn to manipulate. We may also add a Marshall McLuhan-esque dimension, by asserting that it is the charcoal animation’s form that helps produce the films’ thought images, and the medium itself creates the message (2007).

argue they are ‘the opposite of cartoons’ (Moins 1999). Here, the films appear wholly unconcerned with traditional animation techniques, and Kentridge surfaces as the ‘perfect autodidact of animation,’ displaying a style that ‘permits him to reinvent, with all sincerity, techniques discovered by the first animators at the beginning of this century’ (Moins 1999). Part of this re-invention can be related to a significant addition to traditional aesthetic practices, and linked to the filling in of the *voided* spaces between cinematic frames.

The gaps between film frames are important to consider. For Mary Ann Doane, the cinematic apparatus usually provides an isomorphic temporal image that only *appears* to correlate to a fluid ‘real time’ human perception. The flickering images viewers see are actually ‘haunted’ by an absence, which is typically disavowed by normal (movement-image) films (Doane 2002, 172). This absence is specifically related to the non-image (or void to use Deleuze’s terminology) appearing in-between each illuminated photogram. For Doane, this ‘lost time’ highlights how a viewer necessarily sits in an unperceived darkness for around 40 percent of any film’s running time (2002, 172). Kentridge’s style and technique draws attention to this haunted absence, however, by insisting viewers perceive its passage by highlighting a series of small changes taking place between each frame.

During projection, the films not only appear as a rerunning of the hung still art’s archaeological history, then, but also appear to signal the existence of deeply compressed ‘geologies’ of time that exist or ‘insist’ *within* the films.⁶ Here, compressed geological layers of temporality can be imagined being folded into and between each charcoal image, collectively formulating expansive periods of creative time and duration (the artistic process) taking place in-between each animated still. This can be visualised as a compressed and fossilised artistic time-line (duration) that illuminates a key formal and aesthetic difference between Kentridge’s work and more traditional (movement-image) cartoon films. Indeed, the usually imperceptible slithers of missing time located in-between photograms are marked by a trace of a missing artistic event or process. What becomes interesting about this style, then, is that unlike traditional movement-image models, we locate and perceive a missing or elided human endeavour between and within each passing moment. Here, the hours, days, and months Kentridge spent pacing backwards and forwards between the drawing and camera in his studio become folded into the image, and unfolded into the imagination. Thus, we begin to recognise a mode of

⁶ It should be clarified at this stage that the geological metaphors I employ to describe the form and aesthetics of the animations are directly stimulated by the themes and content of the films themselves, which I will return to explore in more detail in the following section. It can also be noted that these descriptions tie neatly in with a Deleuze-Guattarian schizoanalytic reading of the artworks that also influences my analysis. See for example the ‘The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think It Is?)’ in Deleuze and Guattari (2004).

cinematic expression wherein the ‘association of images is not as important as the interstice between two images’ (Deleuze 2005b, 174). Or again, the films fall more in line with time-image regimes comparable to the films of Alain Resnais, where something begins to happen ‘around the image, behind the image and even inside the image’ for this is ‘what happens when the image becomes time-image’ (Deleuze 2005b, 121).

In this manner Kentridge’s animated aesthetics transform traditional movement-image models of equidistant any-instants-whatever divided by haunting voided darkness, into another type of image. Viewers are here confronted by an accordion- or concertina-like image of the apparatus, wherein deep zig-zagging folds of duration (Kentridge’s pacing backwards and forwards between drawing surface and recording apparatus) exist – or rather ‘insist’ – collapsed between each frame. If we picture a traditional movement-image arrangement of photograms as an equidistant vertical IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII structure, Kentridge’s form begins to dislodge an alternative VWVWVWVV image; wherein the voids between each frame are replaced by a folded zig-zagging image of a compressed artistic process. Following Deleuze, we can recognise this technique as helping to actualise a style that is no longer ‘a matter of following a chain of images, even across voids, but of getting out of the chain or the association’ (2005b, 174). As all the films cease to formulate uninterrupted chains of any-instants-whatever where each image becomes “‘the slave of the next”, and whose slave we are (*Ici et ailleurs*),’ they instead insist upon a ‘method of *between*, “between two images”, which does away with all cinema of the One’ (Deleuze 2005b, 174).

In these ways, the normal void between each illuminated projected frame is replaced by a virtual image of an enfolded and condensed ‘event’, which is at once elided during projection, but reinstated via its lingering ‘trace’. The false movement added by the cinematic apparatus functions to illuminate and inscribe the trace of this missing event, whilst bringing present and past-presents into expressive relation. In *Felix in Exile* we can locate an emblematic example of this in a scene where a blank page blows into and across an African landscape. The page enters from the left of the frame, before being blown into the depths of the scene. As it flutters across the screen/scene, viewers see a smudged charcoal trail accrue behind it (being composed of the previous semi-erased images), which appear like the dissolving tail of a comet. This topological tail of partial erasures signal the insistent geologically compressed process of Kentridge’s pacing, erasing, drawing and photographing between frames and raises it to a surface thematic. Thus, the animated style provides not only a mobile section of time, but also aesthetically brings the before and after of an event into palimpsestic relation, and contributes to an image of duration.

Following Deleuze, we can also view this overlapping of the present and past-present images (the new image alongside the trace or partial

erasure or the previous) as aesthetically realising a ‘piling-up of strata or the superimposing of co-existent sheets of time’ (2005b, 117). Here, the films ‘make use of transformations which take place between two sheets to constitute a sheet *of* transformation’ (Deleuze 2005b, 119). The proliferating traces of the previous drawings can also be related a Deleuzian model of simultaneous horizontal montage, typically achieved through a series of superimpressions. Engaging with the work of Able Gance, Deleuze observes that by adding, and superimposing a large number of superimpressions and little temporal shifts between them, the viewer no longer sees what is superimposed, but their ‘imagination is, as it were, surpassed, saturated, quickly reaching its limit’ (2005a, 49). What is more, by ‘uniting the simultaneity of superimpression, and the simultaneity of counter-impression,’ the resulting aesthetic constitutes ‘the image as the absolute movement of the whole which changes’ (Deleuze 2005a, 49). In this manner, Kentridge’s films are no longer easily aligned with the ‘relative domain of the variable interval, of kinetic acceleration or deceleration of the content, but the absolute domain of luminous simultaneity’ (Deleuze 2005a, 49). As the simultaneous horizontal montage also serves to refold a present perception (which passes) with the persistent memory of past images (that are preserved as charcoal traces), multiple ‘past presents’ begin to co-exist within the new present (which is similarly fated to pass on).

In these ways we can see how Kentridge’s style does not belong to a pure movement-image category, but pushes these regimes to a limit so that an image of time as duration begins to surface upon and within the films. To better illustrate how, we can return to Deleuze’s reworking of Bergson’s time-image theories from *Cinema 2*, and a telling section that engages with the nature of time and its passage. Here, we locate a description that appears to fit Kentridge’s unusual aestheticisation of temporality, wherein concepts of the past and present are found co-existing upon the same plane. Deleuze explains:

It is clearly necessary for [the present] to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. The past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was (2005b, 76-77).

In this passage we find a model of time that appears significantly to reflect Kentridge’s style, with its aesthetic folding together of past and present moments. Deleuze returns to Bergson’s schema to clarify the differences between the present and past, the actual and virtual, and relates these to crystal-images, where the true image of time is located.

Investigating the nature of time itself, Deleuze outlines a model where time is always found dividing into a present that passes and a past that is preserved. As indicated above, the present appears as the most contracted moment of the past, and is already found dividing. Deleuze clarifies that,

[t]ime has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*. The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal. We see in the crystal the perceptual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos (2005b, 79).

For Deleuze every moment demonstrates this splitting of time, which has an actual and virtual component. Perception takes up one side, while recollection takes up the other. Deleuze shows how déjà vu made this splitting of time clear for Bergson, as in these instances a recollection of the present becomes contemporaneous with the present itself: with the two emerging ‘as closely coupled as a role to an actor’ (or Kentridge to Felix?) (2005b, 77). A sense of déjà vu is also formally generated by Kentridge’s work through recurring images, scenes and motifs, which help contribute to an overall aestheticisation of time and memory. The aforementioned sense of temporal thickness is compounded even further still, though, by diegetic scenes and crystal-images, and it is to these I now turn my attention.

Third Strata: Geo-politics and Stone Age Crystals

Beyond Kentridge’s style invoking contraction images, or his technique plicating unique ‘geologies’ of time, the scenes and images from within the ongoing episodic cycle also contribute to an artistic aestheticisation of time. The animations are underpinned by a persistent visual ‘memory’ that aesthetically folds perception and past together. But, this visual palimpsest only endures as long as each individual scene runs, and does not accrue over a film’s entire running time. This is also true when we consider the films at a macro level, as all Kentridge’s films somehow blur together in memory and imagination. Within the cycle, each and every instalment appears as the latest erasing and re-drawing of the series, and as artistic exercises in difference and repetition, each surfaces as a trace or example of Kentridge’s larger filmmaking project (event). This in turn is also reflected in a visual manner, with these themes becoming explored through the films’ temporalisation of space, and spatialisation of time. We can expose various different examples of this within a series of key scenes from (and between) *Johannesburg 2nd Greatest City After Paris* (hereafter *Johannesburg*), *Mine* (1991), and *History of the Main Complaint* (1996).

When asked about depictions of space in his films in interview, Kentridge describes spending ‘several years as an art-director of other people’s films, learning the craft. One of the things that I learnt was the way the space in which people moved – film space – was so completely arbitrary and changeable [...] So the drawings that emerged from the film work had to do with the freedom that came from being able to play with space’ (Benezra 2001, 14). As indicated above, the charged and transforming socio-political context of South Africa at this time provides a non-arbitrary geo-political backdrop that distils itself into the time-space relations of these films.⁷ Significantly, when reflecting upon the transforming socio-political context, Kentridge opts to use another geological metaphor (which simultaneously invokes Johannesburg’s ever changing industrialised landscapes and geography):

In the same way that there is a human act of dismembering the past there is a natural process in the terrain through erosion, growth, dilapidation that also seeks to blot out events. In South Africa this process has other dimensions. The very term 'new South Africa' has within it the idea of a painting over the old, the natural process of dismembering, the naturalization of things new (2007, vii –xv).

Van Caelenberge notes similar themes of landscapes becoming politically temporalised within the films. In taking inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari, she argues that there appears a reterritorialisation of landscapes that counterbalance a motific deterritorialisation of the human face and subject (2008). In *Felix in Exile* she draws links between the face and landscape in a scene that alternates close-ups of Felix’s reflected face and views of a barren Johannesburg landscape. For Van Caelenberge, such a ‘novelatory’ way of portraying landscape functions as a strategy to ‘renounce the use of picturesque and sublime landscapes’ that have become ‘morally undefendable’ (2008). She further shows how Kentridge visually problematises landscapes that still bear ‘traces of the violence that occurred in it’ (Van Caelenberge, 2008). A key scene illustrating this point shows a time-lapsed body of a beaten black African gradually becoming absorbed into the soil. In this sense, with particular reference to victims of Apartheid, Kentridge is found employing an aesthetic use of *landscapity* as opposed to faciality, which offers a far more politically explicit mode of expression.

The previous section touched upon how Kentridge’s work invokes time-image forms reminiscent of Alain Resnais’ work; here, considerations of filmic space can illuminate another prominent trope linking these filmmakers together. Indeed, in both their oeuvres a topological use of landscapes helps to elevate time to a surface thematic: wherein an unusual

⁷ This can also be evidenced as a pertinent theme in Kentridge’s 1995 collaborative installation with Doris Bloom, *Memory and Geography*, whereby images of a heart and fire were inscribed upon the Johannesburg landscape. See Elliot (2010).

temporalisation of space emerges alongside a spatialisation of time (and time becomes distributed across the surface of the screen). Writing on Resnais, Deleuze maintains that landscapes become synonymous with mental states, 'just as mental states are cartographies, both crystallised in each other, geometrised, mineralised' (2005b, 199). Kentridge's films demonstrate a comparable aesthetic in a series of scenes within the cycle that depict Soho flattening cities, reducing mountains to mineralised rubble, or carving up panoramic landscapes into gaping open-cast mines in a time-lapse manner. In these sequences, space and its transformation constitute a shifting topology of time (and money), which finds the landscape become temporalised at the same moment as time is spatialised.⁸

The notion of diegetically excavating through different strata or geopolitical layers of time and history become most overtly represented within Kentridge's 1991 film *Mine*. These concepts are actualised through a scene showing the mining magnate sitting in bed de-plunging his coffee cafetière. By degrees, the sinking plunger transforms into a boring mine shaft, penetrating through the vessel, bed and floor in turn, before tunnelling into the earth. As the descending shaft sinks into the geological realms beneath, it passes through horizontal mine shafts where slave-like workers tunnel within the chthonian bowels of the earth. It then passes through further compressed archaeological layers of history, penetrating a thick tectonic seam composed of the fossilised remains of dead Africans.

The time-image unlocks a heterogeneous image of time that promotes an experience of multiplicity. These too emerge within the topology of Kentridge's films, and in particular within sequences focusing upon Felix. As touched upon earlier, Felix's scenes often contain a proliferation of other surfaces and virtual planes within the meta-drawing or scene, whereupon a multiplicity of other images and scenes begin to appear. At times, these become embedded surfaces for further diegetic animations. In such instances of animated mise-en-abyme, Kentridge typically includes scenes of water, dreams and fantasies, which are further aestheticised and visually intensified by the introduction of blue and red pastel colours.

In an emblematic sequence within *Johannesburg*, a naked Felix climbs into a filling bath shimmering with a layered blue surface or meniscus. Once inside, he produces a blank page of paper, whereupon a series of fantasies and psychological projections begin to manifest themselves: including a series of projected images and close-ups of the naked Mrs. Eckstein. Fragmented images of naked male and female bodies and genitalia then appear upon this projected frame within the frame, culminating in an image of an erect penis achieving ejaculation. Finally this embedded transforming page of fantasy projection falls onto the water's

⁸ The scenes appear like stop motion images of landscapes recorded over expansive periods. They also invoke themes of how human politics can transform space through will and desire.

surface, so that three different surfaces or planes (actual drawing surface, diegetic water surface, embedded page within the frame) unite and transform at different ‘animated’ speeds and durations: reflecting a multiplicity of co-existing levels of movement, fantasy, memory, and artistic process. A virtual image of Mrs. Eckstein appears within the water next to Felix, and as they embrace, the film highlights an increasing blurring between the actual and virtual (reality and fantasy) within the diegetic universe. The planes within planes introduced via a proliferation of animated and reflective surfaces (mirrors, walls, cities, pages, paper) within Felix’s scenes gradually become invocative of a blurred physical and spiritual dimension. Images of fish appear throughout many of the films too, and in this instance a goldfish is witnessed swimming freely through different planes of the drawing: first swimming out of the fantasy drawing Felix holds in his hand, only to fall off the page into his bath water. As such, these scenes play with the fluid and permeable borders between different planes and, by bringing the actual and virtual into expressive relation, display key elements of a crystalline-image.

Felix clearly inhabits a private rather than public space, then, distanced from the ‘real’ homogenous capitalist time of Soho. He exists within the realms of art, poetry, innerspace, thought, and feeling. Felix is water to Soho’s land (appearing even more fluid and malleable than the topology of Soho’s geo-political capitalist space-time). The scenes featuring Felix usually refold thoughts and feelings, sensations and fantasies, body and memory upon the surface of the screen, or bring them into relation via different embedded and enfolded surfaces.

Other scenes featuring Felix and Soho together witness a coalescence of different time-image modes, and narration can be found unfolding on several different sheets of past simultaneously. A good instance can be found in a protracted scene that opens with Felix driving his car within *History of the Main Complaint*. The initial scene appears as an archetypal cinematic cliché, formulating a forwards looking shot framed from the back seat of Felix’s car as he drives. There, viewers look at and beyond the driver into the winding road and tree-lined landscape before the windscreen. Kentridge also includes an embedded ‘reverse-shot,’ manifest in a centralised rear-view mirror that reflects Felix’s eyes back into the off-screen space: at once at the viewer beyond the cinematic fourth wall, but also the ‘virtual’ stretch of road already traversed by the car within the diegetic universe (albeit this past spatial section is also visually folded into the forward-looking image as a charcoal palimpsest). The representational image invokes a sense of moving forwards and looking back at the same time, and begins to reflect a temporal experience that becomes further exploited after the car journey intersects with an image of a battered and beaten Soho lying on the road’s surface.

In the story, the physical violence of Soho's beating results in his body and mind becoming significantly loosened from their normal sensory-motor schema. Prostrate on the road, and then supine in a hospital bed, Soho's experience of time begins to undergo a significant shift. For Deleuze, at the level of the body, it is only once the sensory motor image is broken or reaches a limit that one can exit normal movement-image time and perception and enter the time-image world of delirium and drift. Soho's beating accordingly serves to cast him into a crystalline time-image world, where action unfolds between two poles of a telescoping flash-back and flash-forward (and between the mind and body). First the beating appears rendered as an event unfolding in two interconnected time lines: that of the past moment when the attack took place, and from a future perspective where Soho is being examined, unconscious, in hospital. Van Caelenberge observes how the hospital space itself functions to fold images of past and present together, with images of X-rays and brain scans reflecting modern day technologies that appear alongside anachronistic details such as old fashioned bed curtains and a hand basin that appear more than half a century old (2008). Here, the relation between different objects within the frame indicate how disparate sheets of past and memory intersect and contract within it, and so temporalise the setting in a dream-like or fantasy manner.

Through a form of parallel editing, viewers then see images of Soho's attack unfolding concomitantly upon the street and within various X-ray and brain scan images: with the latter illuminating scenes of internal physical damage occurring in 'real' time. Viewers thus see the blows and kicks being dished out to a prostrate Soho in the past, in alternation with internal medical images that show the damage accruing in the present tense and within the body itself. The scene thus gradually begins to highlight a mode of composition of and between different poles of the image, between what is actual and what is virtual, what is past and what is present, and what is inside and what is outside. Soho's body is thus internally and externally subjected to the same form of violent transformation as the landscapes he himself mines.

Kentridge's films can be considered important examples of audio-visual history and cultural memory. They are at once cinematic and artistic memories of the context in which they were originally created and screened, and still invoke a complicated socio-political period of time and change. But they also provide 'timeless' philosophical musings upon the nature of human perception and memory that defy geo-political specificity and speak universally. Although my approach to Kentridge's animated charcoal drawings was by no means exhaustive, I hope to have highlighted some of the many strategies the artworks employ to help unleash contracted and thickened experiences of time. Deleuze's tools were well-suited to opening up an excavation below the surface of these South African charcoal-crystals,

and helped expose how various different aesthetic strategies and forces were synthesised to unleash shimmering multiple mirages of heterogeneous time. By harnessing style, form, and content, the films produce complex non-human thoughts about time, change, memory and forgetting whilst creating artistic expressions of time and change as duration. The philosophical artworks and films were found to communicate vibrant expressions of matter with memory, time and duration, and exposed compressed geological seams of duration and creative and contextual time. The films and drawings individually and collectively say to their viewers, you never quite get rid of the past, as it lives on in the present, and always already affects our futures.

Bibliography

- Barker, Timothy (2011) 'Re-Composing the Digital Present.' *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, v. 1: 88 – 104.
- Benezra, Neal (2001) 'William Kentridge: Drawings for Projection' in *William Kentridge*. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev & Jane Taylor, ed. Chicago: Sirka, 11 – 28.
- Bergson, Henri (1988) *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books.
- Bogue, Ronald (2003) *Deleuze on Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Buchloh, Benjamin (1981) 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting.' *October*, v. 16: 39 – 68.
- Budick, Ariella (2010) 'William Kentridge at MoMA, New York.' *FT.com*, 12th March. [<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/65e0a9d0-2d4f-11df-9c5b-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1X5y0xFOH>]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Christov-Bakargiev Carolyn (1998) *William Kentridge* California: University of California.
- Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn & Jane Taylor, ed. (2001) *William Kentridge*. Chicago: Sirka.
- Davie, Lucille (2006) 'Kentridge Loves Joburg, the working city.' *Joburg: Official Website of the City of Johannesburg*, 7th July. [http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=838&Itemid=52]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2004) *Difference and Repetition*. Paul Patton, trans. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2005a) *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, trans. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2005b) *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, trans. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (2004) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Brian Massumi, trans. London: Continuum.
- Doane, Mary Ann (2002) *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

- Elliott, Marianne (2010) 'The Arts: William Kentridge.' *Cape Librarian*. [http://www.capecapegateway.gov.za/Text/2010/3/18_arts_january_february_50-53.pdf]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Fukuyama, Francis (1989) 'The End of History?.' *The National Interest*, Summer. Reprinted online [http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Goldby, M. (1994) 'William Kentridge, Painter.' *Revue Noire*, v. 11: 20 – 23.
- Kentridge, William (2007) 'Director's Note,' in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Jane Taylor, ed. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, iii - xv.
- Kentridge, William (2010) 'The Forum,' interview aired on *BBC World Service*, 15th August.
- Lai, Wen Shu (2008) 'Aesthetics in William Kentridge's "Drawings for Projection".' National Chiao Tung University Applied Arts Department. [http://ed.arte.gov.tw/uploadfile/periodical/2172_AE0602_00240043.pdf]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Lynn, Greg (1998) *Animate Form*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press.
- MCA (2004) 'William Kentridge,' in *Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art: Education Kit*. [http://www.mca.com.au/content/exhibition/81/William_Kentridge_Education_Kit.pdf]. Accessed February 2011.
- McLuhan, Marshall (2007) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge.
- Micchelli, Thomas (2010) 'William Kentridge: Five Themes,' *The Brooklyn Rail*. [http://brooklynrail.org/2010/03/artseen/william-kentridge-five-themes]. Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Moins, Philippe (1998) 'William Kentridge: Quite the Opposite of Cartoons,' translated by William Moritz, *Animation World*. v. 3, n.7. [http://www.awn.com/mag/issue3.7/3.7pages/3.7moinskentridge.html] Accessed 8 August 2013.
- Rodowick, D. N. (1997) *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*. Durham: Duke University.

Sobchack, Vivian (2009) 'Animation and automation, or, the incredible effortfulness of being.' *Screen International*, v. 50, n. 4: 375 – 391.

Stewart, Susan (2001) 'A Messenger.' *Parkett*, v. 63: 64 – 104.

Van Caelenberghe, Elisabeth (2008) 'Visual storytelling: a Progressive Strategy? The Animated Drawings of William Kentridge.' *Image [&] Narrative*, v. 23. [<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/Timeandphotography/van-caelenberghe.html>]. Accessed 8 August 2013.

Webb, Jen (2003) 'William Kentridge: "A beacon against forgetting".' Media and Cultural Studies Research Centre at the University of Canberra. [<http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/research/WtoS/Webb.pdf>]. Accessed 4 July 2011.

Welles, Paul (2002). *Animation, Genre and Authorship*. London: Wallflower Press.

Filmography

Hand, David, et al. (1937) *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. USA.

Kentridge, William (1989) *Johannesburg 2nd Greatest City After Paris*. South Africa.

Kentridge, William (1991) *Mine*. South Africa.

Kentridge, William (1994) *Felix in Exile*. South Africa.

Kentridge, William (1996) *History of the Main Complaint*. South Africa.