CHAPTER 19

REENACTING MODERNIST TIME

William Kentridge's The Refusal of Time

CHRISTEL STALPAERT

In his multimedia installations, South African artist William Kentridge (Johannesburg, 1955) works with a variety of media: soundscapes, (animation) films, charcoal drawings, printmaking, and sculpture. Kentridge combines archival material and found footage referring to the violent history of South Africa, with his own stop-motion animated films, often erasing as well as adding lines and forms to his drawings. In this ambiguous, dense material, Kentridge provides a powerful comment on the charged history of colonialism and Apartheid in his homeland, and on racism in the world at large. The son of two prominent anti-Apartheid lawyers, it is no surprise that Kentridge's oeuvre is engaged with social conflict and inequality. As Kentridge himself observes, "I have never tried to make illustrations of Apartheid, but the drawings and films are certainly spawned by and feed off the brutalized society left in its wake. I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings" (2015, n.p.).

Art historians have studied the political dimension of Kentridge's work extensively, referring mostly to the (animation) films and the charcoal drawings (Stewart 2005; Hennlich 2015). Less attention has been paid, however, to the particular function of movement and dance in his installations. This is surprising, as dance seems to have a modest, but nevertheless recurrent and significant place in them. *I Am Not Me, the Horse Is Not Mine* (2008) and also his latest installation, *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), feature a ballerina dancing *en pointe*. In the performance *Refuse the Hour* (2012), Dada Masilo is standing on a rotating platform with a costume that is very much reminiscent

¹ This performance was originally created and premiered in June 2012 in Cape Town, South Africa, at the Cape Town City Hall in February 2015.



FIGURE 19.1. Dada Masilo performing Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance* in a projected film sequence in William Kentridge's multimedia installation *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

of Oskar Schlemmer's *Figurine* in *The Triadic Ballet* (1922). Dancing figures also frequently appear in the parades projected in his installations. *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), for example, features a dancing ballerina in a cage, pulled forward on a cart. One of the most remarkable references to dance history, however, is the reenactment of a modern dance sequence by choreographer and dancer Dada Masilo in the five-channel video in the multimedia installation *The Refusal of Time* (2012) (Figure 19.1).

During *The Refusal of Time*, a film sequence is projected on one of the museum walls, displaying Dada Masilo's reenactment of Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance*. The contemporaneous art critic Arsène Alexandre described the American pioneer of modern dance as "the marvelous dream-creature you see dancing madly in a vision swirling among her dappled veils which change ten thousand times a minute" (1900, 24). Masilo performs Fuller's typical free-flowing movements in the iconic silk costume, animated by long baton-like wands, which prolong her arm movements. The similarities are striking: the contour of the dancer's body disappears in the billowing folds of transparent silk, while the wavy folds in the soft texture of the silk accentuate her swirling movements.

However, this is not a mere reconstruction of the *Serpentine Dance* that was originally created toward the end of the nineteenth century, and an imitation of which was said to be recorded by the Lumière brothers in 1896. Three striking differences give the reenactment a deconstructive potential. First, the serpentine dance is performed by a dancer of color. Second, the dance sequence is part of a multimedia installation







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that questions "the ready-made, simultaneous, and quickly consumed facility of photographic imagery" (Stewart 2005, 52). Third, the film sequence of the dance is shown backward, that is, it is time reversed. Using the age-old cinematic trick of reversed footage, Kentridge makes sheets of paper fly through the air, as if they were pushed upward by Masilo's dance.

With this special effect, however, Kentridge does not seek to enchant the viewer. In fact, the visual trickery functions as a reminder of the constructed nature of our mental and perceptual processes. Kentridge not only questions the white supremacy in the official history of dance by having Fuller's iconic serpentine dance reenacted by a dancer of color. The time-reversed quality of the images also challenges our habitual way of seeing things in a linear and chronological order, including the chronological linearity of dance history. This reenactment in The Refusal of Time thus exceeds mere reconstruction. It becomes an artistic strategy with a particular potential to "rethink relations among memory, history, archive, time and performance" (De Laet 2013, 150). According to the modern conception of time, history was understood as "a succession of singular, autonomous moments that were unique and repeatable" (Le Roy 2012, 82). With this particular reenactment of an iconic modern dance, The Refusal of Time questions time regimes that support a chronological, modernist conception of time and (dance) history. Kentridge's dancing figures in the closing parade of *The Refusal of Time* likewise differ from the usual actors in the historical parade. The actors reenact historical events, and incorporate mythological figures or exemplary heroes. However, as I will observe, Kentridge's parade reveals the modernist desire to reenact history along a chronological timeline, instead of merely supporting "the theatrical experience of historicist historiography" (Le Roy 2012, 85).

The Western notion of chronological and linear time is considered a central tenet of modernity, capitalism, and colonialism (Bal 2015; Osborne 2015). Connecting Kentridge's The Refusal of Time with Deleuze's onto-aesthetics, this chapter seeks to examine the Western time regime and to reflect on how reenactment can be political in the sense that it articulates an ontological politics of time and movement. In other words, this chapter provides a philosophical-historical perspective on the notion of reenactment in the installation The Refusal of Time and examines "the relationship of danced reenactment to historiography, periodization, center-periphery, and non-synchronicity," as Mark Franko outlined in the call for papers of this book. I will observe how *The Refusal of Time* dismantles the Western time regime through four concepts that are related to time: time as Chronos or clock-time; time as Aeon or duration; time as protocol or networks and systems; and time as Kairos or the revolutionary aspect of time. The Refusal of Time reveals how clocks regulate time, but also how Western time machines such as metronomes turn rhythm into a standard tempo, and dances into unique and repeatable moments in a (chronological) history. The unconventional reenactment of Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance in The Refusal of Time in this regard inaugurates time as Kairos, touching upon the revolutionary aspect of time, blowing up our habitual way of perceiving time and history.





TIME AS CHRONOS

The Refusal of Time was commissioned for the thirteenth dOCUMENTA in Kassel, in 2012,² and was erected in one of the storage spaces of the *Hauptbahnhof*. The main function of most of these annexes is now an exhibition space of contemporary art, but the central building of the *Hauptbahnhof* is still operating as a train station. Thus, before entering the venue, one has to find one's way through the main entrance of the railway station, along the platforms and the railways, to the storage room turned into exhibition space. First encountering those nervous people, hurrying in their everyday life, rushing to catch their train, and then having to wait for almost half an hour to be able to attend Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* gives the visitor two different time experiences. Seeking to enjoy some time off in an art exhibition, one is first confronted with the tyranny of clock time in everyday life, with "the mechanization of human activity in work environments, made most obviously visible by the appearance of clocks in train stations, factories, and offices" (Smith 2015, 12). This particular time experience was indeed Kentridge's intention, and he therefore collaborated with time-expert Peter Galison:

Since Newton's time, that ordinary, all-too-measurable clock time has appeared everywhere. It wired up school and factories, and was installed for public display all around the cities, inside government buildings and on our wrists. Throughout *Refusal*, we wanted to disrupt that coordinated ubiquity. (Galison 2012, 312–313)

It is no coincidence, then, that references to time machines are abundantly present in *The Refusal of Time*. From the very first minute one enters the darkened exhibition space where the artwork is installed, the visitor is confronted with the pressure of clock time that is imposed on human beings. On three of the four museum walls, a film sequence of lofty metronomes is projected, producing the loud, clicking sound of regular, metrical ticks (Figure 19.2). These mechanical rhythmic beats constitute a mechanized standard tempo. Invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a tool for musicians to produce a standard tempo reference, this machine was celebrated for its perfect sense of timing and its consistent tempo. However, it was also heavily criticized for its mechanical and hence inhuman character. Opponents criticized the metronome for making rhythm mechanical; no human being would ever be able to create such a perfect tempo. Metronomes, for that matter, were reproached for undoing all musically expressive qualities in a musical performance. They were said to render music sterile, expressionless, and inhuman (Jones 2014, 659–660).

In *The Refusal of Time* the ticking of the metronomes gets louder and louder, and this does not fail to affect the visitor, who becomes annoyed and agitated by the loud,







² I visited the installation *The Refusal of Time* for the first time during the dOCUMENTA biennial in Kassel and saw it again in the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town in February 2015.

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FIGURE 19.2. The ticking metronomes in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

regular beats. In a very e/affective way, Kentridge confronts the visitor here with the tyranny of measured time. In *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze calls this the tempo of time as Chronos: it is "the regulated movement of vast and profound presents" (1990, 163). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari link their notion of Chronos with Pierre Boulez's notion of pulsed, metrical time in music (and dance). "Pulsed, metrical Chronos" is in that sense the time of "regular repeated intervals" (Bogue 2012, 42). It is controlled by "conventional meters and regular beats" (Bogue 2012, 42) and inaugurates "a formal and functional music based on values" (Deleuze 1990, 289). Dancers absorbing regulated beats without variation or limit are in that sense said to be "mickeymousing" the music. They dance "the rhythm of [...] correct time" (Galison, 2012, 30).

After some considerable time, the metronomes fail to keep up with the perfect synchronicity of mechanically controlled time. Pulsed time goes into overdrive. Chronos gets out of joint. The steady beats of the metronomes gradually turn into an overwhelming soundscape, composed by Philip Miller. Pulsed time or tempo becomes non-pulsed time here, or—in musical terms—"rhythmic Aeon" (Bogue 2012, 42), inaugurating "floating music, both floating *and* machinic, which has nothing but speeds or differences in dynamic" (Deleuze and Guattari 2007, 289). It is the time of "irregular, incommensurable intervals" (Bogue 2012, 42).

Kentridge not only reveals how clocks regulate time, and how time machines such as metronomes turn rhythm into a standard tempo. He also reveals how time as





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FIGURE 19.3. An optical telegraph featured in the parade of William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

Chronos is imposed on bodies, regulating their (dance) movements and daily activities. Having perceived ordinary people in their daily activity of rushing against clocktime at the railway station before entering the installation, the visitor is well aware of "how time registers in people" (Galison 2012, 160), of how we all have become "temporal beings" (Rosse 2012, 7). Indeed, clock time is presented as a form of control and measurement that percolates in our bodies and regulates human behavior. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari defined this clock-mode of temporality as "the time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject" (2007, 289). Marquard Smith reformulates this thought more specifically as follows:

Clock time has infiltrated every aspect of our lives and beings to the point where, as temporal beings, we are ourselves subjects of and subject to it: we may still clock on and clock off, but even when we are not at work, we are never off the clock. There is no "free" time, much like there is no such thing as a free lunch. (2015, 12)

Suddenly, a drawing of an optical telegraph is projected on the museum walls (Figure 19.3). The projected drawing is reminiscent of an archival document in the exhibition





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catalogue,³ referring to Claude Chappe's invention in the nineteenth century. This pendulum system was an important step in the Western control of time and space. Located on a hill, the operators of optical telegraphs could read each other's codes through telescopes, and transmit the signal swiftly to the next optical telegraph down the line. The optical telegraph was celebrated for its transmission speed, which was said to cover 760 kilometers in a few minutes (Moran 2010, 149). The optical telegraph was used for transmitting information over a long distance in the shortest possible time span, overcoming the time-space limitations of printing and writing messages. The arms of the pendulum system could move into different positions, meaning different codes. Kentridge's handdrawn image of the optical telegraph is animated on a black surface. The stop-motion animation, in a dominant palette of black and white, is full of erasures, revisions, and transformations of lines and forms. The drawn object seems to have a life of its own, and repeatedly shape shifts into a gallows. Later, a shadow-transformation of this object, lingering between an optical telegraph sending signals and a gallows waiting for the moment of execution, haunts the shadowy figures dancing, laboring, and moving along the museum walls. This is but one of the startling examples where a seemingly "harmless" or "innocent" time machine obtains a threatening dimension.

Triggered by these historical references, the visitor is invited to draw conclusions about the function of these seemingly harmless time machines in relation to history in general and to colonialism in particular. Time seems to be measured out not only in beats, meters, seconds, minutes, and hours, but also in centuries, eras, and histories.

Kentridge delivers a political message in a very particular way here. He is not seeking to uncover the "truth" from the folds of history. Kentridge does not want to convince the viewer of a truth behind a historical event. As opposed to the documentary style that sides with a positivist historiography, Kentridge is more interested in truth functions than in the truth itself; he is mostly investigating "the conditions of its creation." His art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures, and uncertain endings explores—to paraphrase Deleuze—from where time as Chronos draws its measure. ⁵

TIME AS PROTOCOL

Time as Chronos draws its measure from time protocols and networks. Optical telegraphs, time zones, calendars, travel system schedules, speed reading systems, and so







³ The exhibition catalog reveals what time machines from the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth inspired Kentridge: an optical telegraph (1803), a pneumatic clock (1879), the pneumatic mother clock by Charles Bourdon (1885), the Neuchâtel Master Clock (1924), a photo of the clock at the Porter's Lodge at the Greenwich Observatory (1900), a drawing of the Great Equatorial Telescope at the Greenwich Observatory (1877), a metronome, among others.

⁴ The "truth" is called truth function in Deleuze's thinking: "[A] concept always has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation" (Patton 1997, 5).

⁵ "But from where exactly does it (time as Chronos) draw its measure?" (Deleuze 1990, 163).

on, are such protocol-constituting elements. These time protocols and network systems connect people and infiltrate bodies, aligning them to the Western time regime (Smith 2015, 16). Kentridge works with and against the logic of such systems and interrogates them critically throughout *The Refusal of Time*.

It is no coincidence that the invention of most of the time machines that Kentridge evokes in the installation—such as the metronome and the optical telegraph—date from the nineteenth century. Clock time is a central tenet of modernity and capitalism, and its universal value has a particular relation to colonialism. Mieke Bal put it clearly and starkly: "clock time, dating from the colonization period, is fundamentally in the interest of capitalism" (2015, 38). As philosopher Peter Osborne argues in his *Notes on the Dialectics of Differential Historical Time*, under colonialism, time was transformed from a neutral medium into a historical force. In the late eighteenth century, the concepts of "progress" and "development" form the basis of "modernity" and provide the perfect alibi to "develop" the colonies—albeit for the main profit of the colonizer.

It is the idea of the *non-contemporaneousness of geographically diverse* but *chronologically simultaneous* times which thus develops that, in the context of colonial experience, becomes the basis for universal histories with a cosmopolitan intent. Once the practice of such comparisons was established in colonial discourse, it was easily transferable to the relations between particular social spheres and practices within different European countries themselves, and thereafter, once again, globally. (Osborne 2015, 63)

As Kentridge grew up in South Africa, his oeuvre also reflects the complex colonial history of his native country. When the British gained permanent control over the Cape Colony in the beginning of the nineteenth century, they not only colonized the land and its raw materials, they also colonized time. The parallels between what is considered as the "milestones" of colonization—the construction of a railway network and the introduction of a Western time regime in South Africa—are striking and are referred to in *The Refusal of Time*. The episode *Give Us Back Our Sun* indicates how the colonization and transportation of raw materials coincides with imposing a Western time regime on a community that hitherto had the natural time span of the sun to guide them through their days and years. When colonization reaches its peak, the American system of electrical time announces a universal, standardized time, and the British system of undersea cables announces the transcontinental arrival of European time. This







⁶ In 1859, Cape Town's first industrial site was erected, the railway workshops at Salt River. In the 1860s, the first telegraph line was drawn between Cape Town and Simon's Town. In that same year, the New Harbor plans started with the construction of breakwater and Alfred Basin. In 1862, the Cape Town Railway and Dock Company railway line was erected to Eerste River. In 1863, the railway reached Wellington, and by that time also, Cape Town was linked to Grahamstown by telegraph. In 1864, the railway line reached Wynberg. In 1867, diamonds were discovered in Kimberly, and in 1886, gold was discovered in Witwatersrand. These raw materials were transported, via the railway network, to the colonizer's homeland. In 1885, a submarine cable connected Cape Town with Europe.



FIGURE 19.4. The Clock Room in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of* Time (2012), referring to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, 1894.

is "time synchronized to the globe's zero point, the Royal Observatory in Greenwich" (Galison 2012, 30). As such, telegraphy also "promised to increase the control of great empires by their central government, something rulers of empires had always yearned for" (Headrick 2012, 67).

Moving through the history of science and colonialism in different projected rooms or *chambers*, *The Refusal of Time* reveals the darkest side of time as protocol. Each of the chambers has a clear indication of time and space and refers to a specific entanglement of the history of science and colonial rule.

The first chamber that is projected on the museum walls is the Clock Room, referring to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, 1894 (Figure 19.4). This observatory is situated on a hill in Greenwich Park, London, and was commissioned in 1675 by King Charles II for perfecting navigation charts and maps. In 1851, however, it became the center of world time, as the prime meridian was located in the observatory. The Clock Room, full of clocks, features a man and his assistants struggling to synchronize time, making it pulsed, standardized, and universal. *The Refusal of Time* thus represents the European sense of order imposed by cables and time zones. Eventually, the Royal Observatory also became the base of British astronomy, mapping the seas and the stars. This chamber hence also houses a telescope, "a planetary machine that would bring the world under one ticking clock" (Galison 2012, 31) (Figure 19.5). This chamber in *The Refusal of Time* represents Western control over time and space on a global scale, strengthening colonial rule and removing the local people from their natural time span.







FIGURE 19.5. The Clock Room with the telescope in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012), referring to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, 1894.

These strings of cables, these birds nests of copper, turned the world into a giant switch-board, for commerce and control. The world was covered by a huge dented bird cage of time zones, of lines of agreement of control, all sent out by the clock rooms of Europe. Local suns were shifted further and further from local zeniths. (Kentridge 2012, xiv)

A second chamber is the Engine Room, referring to the Colonial War Office, 1919 (Figure 19.6). This chamber points to the controversial topic of the British colonial development policy and its role in the so-called "Scramble for Africa" during the period of New Imperialism. Following the General Act of the Berlin Conference of 1885, summoned by Bismarck, Africa was to be divided among five European nations (Harlow 2003, 1). It was the beginning of a blunt invasion, occupation, division, colonization, and annexation of African territory by European powers. The main task of the Colonial War Office was to "increase colonial production and ease the process of trade between the colonies and the outside world" (Constantine 2005, 9). Hence, it facilitated the construction of railways, roads, harbors, and so on, that would benefit the economic infrastructure. Under the guise of enlightened aid for colonial development, progress was primarily made for the British Empire, culminating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Map Room, referring to the London Telegraph Office, 1902, reveals how colonial expansion sided with transatlantic cable enterprises. Time is also geography:







⁷ The telegraph was an important tool in British colonial development policy. It is no surprise then, that also in the nineteenth century, electric telegraph companies were busy connecting London with the



FIGURE 19.6. The different rooms (chambers) in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

Time is distance, but it is also geography. The 19th century coordination of clocks was undertaken to synchronise the clocks with stations in Europe. [. . .] The perfection of chronometers had long been the aim of geographers, to fix more precisely the positions of islands and continents in relation to Europe. With the spread of cables under sea and over land, that followed the development of electric telegraphy, time was taken from the master clocks of London and Paris and sent to the colonies. The lines on maps were miniature renderings of the real lines of cables that snaked round continents [. . .] . The clock and the colonial observatory completed the mapping of the world. (Kentridge 2012, xiii)

The scientist in the Map Room, measuring the world with the help of globes, maps, and measures, displays the "arrogance of British control of the word" (Galison and Kentridge 2012a,158). In the exhibition catalog, Kentridge further illustrates this arrogance by including a photograph of the Time Desk at the Greenwich Observatory

rest of the (colonized) world. Colonial governors of the time considered the telegraph an important tool for exerting power and control over South African territories. The governor of Victoria, Lord Brassey, called the telegraph "a great Imperial binding force" (in Headrick [1991] 2012, 68). As historian Daniel R. Headrick points out: "control operated through the telegraph wires and cables" in the colonies (68). He even calls the telegraph an invisible weapon in the hands of the colonizers.





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in 1900. Seated at a table, one white man is put in control of the time of the rest of the world

Being located at the Kassel Hauptbahnhof, the site-specificity of The Refusal of Time also resonates with the entanglement of the history of science and colonialism in Germany. The construction of the central railway station of Kassel was one of the high-prestige projects of the German government. It originally started between 1851 and 1856 and eventually played an important part in the relatively short, but nevertheless important colonial history of Germany (1884-1919), as economic colonial success depended on reliable transportation facilities. Bismarck's "Scramble for Africa" (Taylor, qtd. in Frierichsmeyer et al. 2001, 9) actually started in South Africa. What was called a "protective" measure to fend off threats from other colonizing forces⁸ soon became a colonial politics with flourishing mercantile tactics. By 1885, Germany had acquired, next to other territories in the Pacific, four African territories: Southwest Africa, Togo, Cameroon, and German East Africa (Frierichsmeyer et al. 2001, 9). These African territories were used as trading colonies, with an impressive railway network at its service. It was the German government that had control over the construction of the railway network, a project essential to the expansion of trade relations between Germany and Africa. These investments were portrayed by the Germans as contributions to the development of the colonies, but the objectives of these investments were mainly for the benefit of the German economy. The railways, penetrating further into the interior of Africa, were constructed to link areas of "agricultural cultivation" with the harbors of the coast and served mainly to facilitate the export of raw materials and agricultural products. The railway network in fact supported the large European-run rubber and cocoa plantations in which Africans were forced to work (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2001, 12). The local people were confined to cheap labor in the plantations or were, like the Herero, even removed from their land and expelled to the Kahahari Desert, where many of them starved to death, or were exterminated. Some historians therefore term this part of German history "genocidal" (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2001, 13). The European-led plantations, of course, mainly served German economic interest, and although the official discourse testified to model colonies "where major military efforts to suppress indigenous uprisings were unnecessary," there were harsh military campaigns by the colonial forces, forced labor that often lead to death, and many violent incidents of suppression of the indigenous peoples (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2001, 11).





⁸ On April 24, 1884, he sent a telegram to the German consul of Cape Town, "proclaiming that the areas of Southwest Africa granted to tobacco merchant Adolf Lüderitz by local chiefs were now under the protection of the German government" (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2001, 9).

⁹ Germany's state-sponsored colonial ventures took place between 1884 and 1919, but the country exhibited a longer history of imperialist attitudes. As Heinrich Schmitthenner points out, "There are colonies which are territorially contiguous with the Mother Country, and there are colonial activities without the flag. Colonization does not emanate from the State alone but from the colonizing activities of the race" (qtd. in Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2001, 8). Sara Friedrichsmeyer concludes, "From this point of view the Germans are colonizing people with centuries of experience. They have traditions of settlement, missionary work and commercial activity which go back far more beyond the short-lived colonial empire of 1884–1919" (2001, 9).

The site-specificity of Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time*, together with striking projected sentences such as "Those who could travel and those who stayed home," reminds the viewer of the colonial history of violence that the Germans inflicted on non-European peoples. There were German people who could travel to Africa, starting from the main central station in Kassel to a harbor, where a boat brought them overseas to Africa, and from there, further inland, to the countryside, where they could run prosperous plantations of tobacco and cocoa. And there were indigenous people who stayed "home": they were confined to hard labor in the plantations, or had to flee to less fertile fields, where they lived a much less fortunate life.

TIME AS AEON

An important motif in *The Refusal of Time* is "trying to resist the imposed order that time supposed" (Galison and Kentridge 2012a, 157). Kentridge refuses to accept Chronos as a "cold quantification of the world," as "the dead circulation of geometry" (Galison 2012, 312). Instead, he is looking for "particular collisions," for human measures against time and its entanglement with the history of colonialism. Kentridge returns to the human measure of time again and again in *The Refusal of Time*, treating "bodies as breathing, ticking, yet all-too fragile clocks" (Galison 2012, 312). He seeks to revalue corporeal measurements, to free Aeon from Chronos, duration from clock-time, and rhythm from tempo, believing that people can still retain "their own private time" from "the universally audible tick-tock" (Galison 2012, 312).

Philosopher Giorgio Agamben observed that the "task of a genuine revolution is to change time" (2005, 99). ¹⁰ But what could a decimal clock and a revolutionary explosion have in common? In *Blowing up the Meridian*, time specialist Peter Galison tells the story of a young French anarchist, Martial Bourdin, who in February 1984 planned to blow up the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. He wanted to destroy the first meridian: time zero. Kentridge interprets this anarchistic idea as a particular collision in the history of time, as an act of resistance against mechanical modern time. He recalls the resistance to colonial rule, which was to him in fact also an attempt to resist the time regime of the European clock.

The Chilembwe revolt of 1915, the Herero revolt of 1906, the movement and actions against Europe, [...] were all attempts to resist the weight and control of Europe.







¹⁰ Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time that is implicit to it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to "change the world," but also—and above all—to "change time" (Agamben 2005, 99).

Give us back our Sun. As if blowing up a train line could blow up the pendulum of the European clock, which swung over every head. (Kentridge 2012, xiv)

Inspired by Bourdin's anarchistic plans, Kentridge has all the chambers exploded in *The Refusal of Time*. It means the end of measuring time and space in the Clock Room (Royal Observatory Greenwich, 1894) and the Engine Room (Colonial War Office, 1919). It also interrupts the chronological logic, the rhythm, and the ubiquity of Western time protocols. Of course this is more than a reference to Bourdin's revolutionary plans. Kentridge's particular collisions not only question the global use of these standardized clock times, but also all knowledge that is gathered through these systems: the archival, the knowable, the searchable, and the historical.

When the established time machine collapses in the Engine Room, representing the Colonial War Office, sheets of paper are blown through the room and performer Dada Masilo is dancing around them, reenacting Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance*. It is striking, however, that Kentridge is showing the dance backward, with reversed footage. Instead of merely recognizing a reconstruction of an iconic modern dance, we perceive bizarre movements, with swirling sheets of paper flying up in the air (Figure 19.7).

Kentridge himself was struck by the power emanating from the movements in reverse: "Maybe what we remember most are these wonderful and bizarre backward dances and the paper going up in the air; and the dislocation of how one expects a rather



FIGURE 19.7. Dada Masilo in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012), her dancing "pushing the paper up into the air."

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.





ordinary world to turn" (Galison and Kentridge 2012b, 250). This dislocation prevents the viewer from being immersed in the past that is being represented in the reenactment. Rather, Kentridge inaugurates a particular collision; the reversed movement generates an "energy that comes from the refusal itself" [...] the sense that her dancing is pushing the paper up into the air" (Galison and Kentridge 2012b, 250).

In showing the dance sequence backward, that is *time*-reversed, Kentridge in fact disrupts our habitual way of perceiving time in a linear, progressive, and chronological order. Together with the non-pulsed, floating music of the soundscape, this dance sequence unfolds time as Aeon, or duration. Instead of being encapsulated by motivated action or measured beats, Masilo's dance movements generate a particular rhythm, rather then merely following a steady tempo. One could say that her dance movements are liberated from time as Chronos in the sense that they can no longer be explained in terms of "actions" or "tempos"; they remain notions of energy, slowness, and speed.

In Deleuze and Guattari's words, Masilo's dance movements give "time a new rhythm" (2007, 393) and are in that sense reminiscent of Heinrich von Kleist's notion of movement as developed in his essay *On the Marionette Theater* (1810). In this essay, the movements of the marionette are estimated above human dancers' movements, because they do not obey pulsed time or measured beats. They only obey one law: that of gravity, and they even have the power to transgress this law:

The span of their movements is quite limited, but those movements of which they are capable are accomplished with a composure, lightness, and grace that would amaze any sensitive observer. [...] Like elves, the puppets need only to touch upon the ground, and the soaring of their limbs is newly animated through this momentary hesitation; we dancers need the ground to rest upon and recover from the exertion of the dance; a moment that is certainly no kind of dance in itself and with which nothing further can be done except to at least make it seem to not exist. (von Kleist 1972, 23, 24)

Deleuze and Guattari link Heinrich von Kleist's notion of movement with the notion of time as Aeon, or duration. They refer to Kleist's On the Marionette Theater in order to point to another way of understanding the relationship between time and movement, which is a different way of understanding the concept of speed. Whereas pulsed time has bodies "mickey-mousing" the tempo, that is, along "conventional meters and regular beats" (Bogue 2012, 42), Dada Masilo moves within the floating, unmarked time of non-pulsed, rhythmic Aeon. In this time as Aeon, Ronald Bogue argues, "performers freely execute motifs within a given duration [...] at their own pace, with no pulse provided by the conductor" (Bogue 2012, 42). Meter generates movements as motivated action; rhythm creates affects of qualitative speed. By presenting the dance reenactment backward in a multimedia constellation, Kentridge avoids harmonic movements and any "developmental organization of sectional units" (Bogue 2012, 43). The endless repetition of gestures generates a "hypnotic, trance-like drone" (43). There is no logical relation between sections; it is "a series of self-contained, intensely pulsed rhythmic units punctuated by a sequence of erratic, spasmodic jolts, fits and starts" (43). Masilo's dance reenactment of Fuller's Serpentine Dance hence unfolds in the present, as a moment of







speed and rest. In disrupting the coordinated ubiquity of time as Chronos, the dance sequence affects the viewer with disjointed time. Masilo's dance works against "any kind of interpretation" and marks "the absolute state of movement" (Deleuze and Guattari 2007, 294–295). This present of the Aeon "is the present of the pure operation, not of the incorporation" (Deleuze 1990, 168).

In *The Refusal of Time*, rhythm is regained from tempo, Aeon from Chronos. But there is more. Dada Masilo is a dancer of color. In presenting pure operation, Masilo is not merely incorporating Loïe Fuller to represent a truthful reenactment of her *Serpentine Dance*. She performs a deliberate similarity in dance movements and costumes, but there is no attempt at exactitude in the reenactment. In her reenactment, there is no claim of authenticity, and *The Refusal of Time* is full of anachronisms, being "an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings" (Kentridge 2015).

Following the modern, chronological conception of time and history, a reality effect is needed in order for reenactment to revive history in a convincing manner: "the historical representation had to convince the receiver that what was being shown also took place as such" (Le Roy 2012, 82). In other words, the modern historicist regime had to be both a truthful and an authentic representation. The truth represented in the reenactment therefore also makes a claim on authenticity regarding the course of history. Rebecca Schneider observed how reenactors are usually eager "to touch an absolute and transcendent historical 'authentic' through a repetition of acts as divided of anachronisms and temporal error as humanly possible" (2011, 13). Masilo's critical mode of reenactment provides an interruption of the linear, chronological, and progressive time of modernity. This particular reenactment of modern dance questions time regimes that support a linear, chronological, progressive modernist conception of time and (dance) history. In Masilo's reenactment, we not only read traces of the history of modern dance. We are also and at the same time reminded of the constructed nature of that history, and of how some (white people's) dances are considered as singular, autonomous moments in that history, and others—of colored people—are not.

A similarly deconstructive mode of reenactment is at work in the final episode of *The Refusal of Time*, where a parade of dancing, laboring, and moving shadow figures is projected on three of the museum walls (Figure 19.8). These shadow figures do not incorporate mythological figures or exemplary heroes, as is the case in the historical parade, reenacting historical events. Instead of supporting "the theatrical experience of historicist historiography" (Le Roy 2012, 85), Kentridge's parade in fact reveals the modernist desire to reenact history along a chronological timeline.

HISTORICAL PARADE

Following Kosseleck and Osborne, Frederik Le Roy points to the modernist time regime at work in the reenactment practice in the popular spectacle of the historical parade at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is a striking example of the modernist desire







REENACTING MODERNIST TIME



FIGURE 19.8. A parade of dancing, laboring, and moving shadow figures in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* (2012).

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

to reenact history along a chronological timeline (Le Roy 2012, 80). In reenacting historical events, the historical parade pretended to render a "lifelike reproduction of the past" (Le Roy 2012, 82). The performers were dressed up in costumes of the time, reenacted moments of history, and carried along artifacts of the time (or reproductions of them) to convince the spectator of the truthful representation of the past. Leaflets were distributed with a clear explanation of the scenes depicted, giving the whole spectacle an official aura of scientific knowledge. Functioning as an antidote against the sense of loss that comes with the passing of time, the historical parade created the comfortable illusion of having a grip on the "lost" past. Being a live event, it sustained the illusion in an almost literal way; it sustained "the illusion of the proximity of the past" (Le Roy 2012, 83). Rosen calls this "the transparent re-creation of a pre-existing referent" (Rosen 2001, 57; see also Le Roy 2012, 85).

The past, however, is not only rendered palpable through reenactment, but also ordered alongside modernist timetables. It therefore construes time as protocol. It is embedded in the construction of a cultural memory that guarantees the continuity and identity of a community gathered in and around the historical parade. It anchors cultural memory (again) in a (re)constructed past. Le Roy aptly calls the historical parade "the theatrical experience of historicist historiography" (2012, 85). It is, to use Lütticken's words, "historicism in action" (2005, 31; see also Le Roy 2012, 85). Not only does the linear format of the historical parade provide a chronological arrangement of historical





events, it also selects those heroic episodes that are most suitable for building a coherent national identity. Well-chosen heroes feature in the carefully selected, glorious episodes of national or local history, hence functioning as examples for those watching. The heroic events they represent and the heroic actions they reenact had to "strengthen the sense of community [. . .] the spectators were invited to identify themselves with *their* nation and *their* history" (Le Roy 2012, 86). The historical parade, for that matter, constitutes a master narrative that is supportive of a heroic national identity. It enabled a community to make meaning out of past events and connected individuals in a community. Reenactment in historical parades founds tradition, safeguards (historical) continuity, and constitutes a national identity.

This master narrative works in an imperative way, as the historical parade is designed with the desire to impose a certain narrative upon the spectators, who are commemorating the past, witnessing at a remove, and observing the spectacle passing through in the streets. The "strategic memory" (Thompson 2009, 98) at work in the historical parade is a structuring device that maintains a group's homogeneous and coherent identity. It is therefore not only inclusive, in the sense that it connects people into a community, but also exclusive. These exclusive mechanisms are not to be underestimated. They operate at the cost of what Franz Fanon termed the "wretched of the earth" ([1961] 2007). One could say that parades in a colonial context support "colonialist attitudes" (Berman 2001, 53): they lay the foundation for an imperialist national identity, reinforce and sustain white supremacy, and hence consolidate power relations between Europe and Africa.

The final episode of Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* restages the historical parade in a multimedia environment. A long parade of shadow-figures are dancing, laboring, and moving slowly but steadily from left to right, along three of the four museum walls. The film sequences are projected as communicating vessels; when a shadow-figure moves to the right, and eventually off-screen, it soon appears again, from the left, in the film sequence projected on the second wall, and so on, along the three museum walls. The result is a visually and auditory stunning succession of passing people. The movements are accompanied by a remarkable soundtrack by Philip Miller, using mechanical sounds, breathing tubas, brass tunes by the African Immanuel Essemblies Brass Band, the hisses and pops of old phonographs, and the voice of Ann Masina singing, using the typical click sounds of the indigenous South African people.

However, this parade does not feature mythological figures (as in religious processions), or recognizable historical figures (as in the historical parade), but shadow figures. This is not a lifelike, historically accurate representation, even though these shadow figures do have recognizable attributes, such as an iron tub, a headscarf, an overall, a cart. This parade does not envisage a "magnificent or grand representation of the past" (Le Roy 2012, 89). The parade features the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon [1961] 2007), with a clear reference to the labor of Africans in plantations. The parade has no chronological development, but unfolds in an almost never-ending stream of passersby. They are not the masses, but an ever-progressing queue of shadow figures. They bow their head slightly, but they do not appear to be desperate. An immense power emanates from





them. Their persistent attitude fills us with awe and respect. Ann Masina's voice underscores the parade as an act of resistance. She repeatedly utters an emphatic and breathy "uh uh!," which Miller calls a vocal gesture meaning a strong and persistent "no," having "a particular resonance to a South African ear" (Miller and Kentridge 2012, 199).

TIME AS KAIROS

Mieke Bal has noted that the medium of video installation is a particular art form that "enables reflection in, and subsequently, the development of strategies for, the struggle against the tyranny of clock time. In this sense, video installation is a time machine [...] for shifting priorities in experiencing time socially" (2012, 37). Bal calls the creative appeals to the spectator's imagination by the use of film and video in multimedia installations such as in William Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* a form of political art. She links the *readiness to act* with the potential of film and video installation to get time as Chronos out of joint:

This Bergsonian movement, the *readiness to act*, lies at the heart of the political potential of the (figurative) image, film, and video installation [...]. Multiple movement as the basis of the (moving) image as interacting with viewers who suspend their haste and their suspicion, and as they are relaxing their bodies, they relax their minds. This opens them up to an experience of all those movements, in a time of duration that is, temporarily, relieved of relentless clock time. Suspension, in terms of time, when actively done, is stalling.

Stalling is a bit like resistance, but not quite as negative. (Bal 2015, 48)

Kentridge invites the visitor to rethink time; not only to reflect on its oppressive measuring and conditions, but also—through his particular collisions and disruptions of time—to regain our vital, own, private time from the universally audible tick-tock, to revalue our individual heterochronological experience of time.

Bal refers to how Kentridge's particular collisions and disruptions of time create opportunities to experience the different time experiences as a heterochrony, to experience time as Aeon. I would take this political aspect in Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time* one step further. With the particular use of reenactment in his multimedia installations, Kentridge turns the museum space into a place of resistance against the modernist conception of (dance) history. *The Refusal of Time* reveals the conditions of time in our contemporary late capitalist society, tracing back those conditions through modernity and colonial times. I would say that these moments also entail the revolutionary aspect of time as Kairos, which is the qualitative account of time, meaning "the right or opportune moment."

Kairos is the instant, that is to say, the quality of the time of the instant, the moment of rupture and opening of temporality. It is the present, but a singular and open present. (Negri 2003, 156)







While Chronos is trapped in the linear, unidirectional chronological ordering of time, Kairos is untimely. The logic of the possible that emanates from the Chronos mode of temporality is stuck in a container-thinking of the plausible: the actions in the future can only take place if they are extensions of certain actions in the present, which are, in turn, connected with a certain logic of actions in the past. In this mode of temporality, a revolution is trapped in the past, constituting dead matter in history. Kairos, on the other hand, adopts the logic of potentiality. It is the eruption of an opportune moment, acting against any transcendental logic of time. Kairos is in that sense untimely; it does not need past or future to erupt. "It's a moment of time lapse, a moment of indeterminate time, an intervention in time" (Smith 2015, 19). Deleuze's hope for Kairos is, in that context, the "expectations of occasions favorable to an 'event' as unforeseeable as it will be explosive" (Mengue 2008, 238).

In his book *Time for Revolution*, Antonio Negri understands Kairos as an alternative for the total subsumption of time by capitalism. Building on Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of the war machine, Negri also considers this intervention in time as a revolutionary act. Kairos is "the to-come"; it is "ontological constitution in action" (2003, 167).

Kairos is the power to observe the fullness of temporality at the moment it opens itself onto the void of being, and of seizing this opening as innovation. (Negri 2003, 161–162)

In his particular reenactments, Kentridge does not fix time along a historical timeline, "according to a cemetery-like order" (Negri 2003, 168). He does not reconstruct the past in the present. Instead, he "tests" the archive of the past in the present, as Negri would call it, in order to inaugurate particular collisions in a "kairological" revolution. In *The Refusal of Time*, the universal clock-time is dispersed with potentialities for heterochronical experiences in time and (dance) history. The viewer who is seized in the kairological moment in *The Refusal of Time* might become intoxicated by the potentialities it emanates. This is not a rational act. One does not seek to seize the opportune moment, one is seized by it, but one must be open and receptive in affirming the ethical gesture in the moment. Only then can the promise of the new unfold.

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¹¹ See also on Kairos, in relation to Chronos, Agamben (2005). Kentridge's heteroaesthetics is supported by visual cultural scholar Mieke Bal, who observes that no homogenized clock can regulate heterochrony away. A heterochrony, "by its very nature, is multiple and cannot be equalized" (2015, 37).







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