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# Writing 'Time': The (Late) Oeuvres of Jacques Derrida and William Kentridge

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*To Lidia, my mentor and friend*

In order to respond to the provocative interrogation of time in contemporary thought, this article investigates the ways in which the late *oeuvres* of Jacques Derrida and William Kentridge engage with the question of 'time': by way of deconstruction in Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2011. Chicago: Chicago University Press), and through 'imperfect erasure' in the case of Kentridge's installation-performance *The Refusal of Time / Refuse the Hour* (2012). Derrida, the Algerian-French thinker, and Kentridge, the South-African artist-performer – two pre-eminent intellectuals of our time – coincidentally come to question time, to interrogate specific notions of time. They share a critical focus on the 'instruments' that 'make' time in the Western world: the 'page' of the text; the 'stage' of the performance; and the 'wheel', upon which the movements of time are deconstructed and imperfectly erased. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida's reading of the adventures of Robinson Crusoe on the deserted island, interweaved with an analysis of a Martin Heidegger seminar on 'solitude, finitude and the world', deals with time in relation to the 'retreating' mechanism of the wheel. Kentridge, meanwhile, organizes the installation *The Refusal of Time* and the chamber-opera *Refuse the Hour* around the 'returns' of wheel of Fortuna. For both the thinker and the artist, the movements of the wheel set the rhythm of the encounter with the Other: in Derrida, it is the absolute other of death, in its relation to what is to come, *l'à-venir*; in Kentridge, it is the splitting of the 'I' into a series of others who act out the propelling force of their future(s). This article maps the re-treats and the re-turns of the wheel of time along the paths that Derrida and Kentridge follow on the page of the book and on the threshold between the studio and the world; it provides a reading of the singularity and the universality of their approaches to the (im)possible end of the journey in / through / of time.

**Key words:** *The Beast and the Sovereign*; deconstruction; Jacques Derrida; Fortuna; *Given Time*; imperfect erasure; William Kentridge; *The Refusal of Time / Refuse the Hour*; time

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Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!  
(Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland)

Time, the other time, the other of time: in what follows I would like to present my attempt at framing – writing on the page, inscribing on the paper – the presence of ‘time’ and, simultaneously, the ‘tempo’ of its singular unfolding – even its radical and original conception – in the *oeuvres* of two figures central to contemporary thinking and performative art: Jacques Derrida and William Kentridge. Each has, in his own way, been associated with the dismantling and disturbing of established notions of western thought and vision. In the case of Derrida this critical engagement famously takes the form of ‘deconstruction’, while Kentridge has developed what he calls ‘imperfect erasure’.

In my understanding, Derrida and Kentridge have constructed the entirety (is it a question of wholeness? or do the fractures, repetitions, nicks and cracks intrinsic to writing and performance suggest the impossibility of wholeness? See Grosz 2004 and Hodge 2007) of their philosophical reasoning around, and carried out their performative acts through, the question of ‘time’. Indeed, time plays the role of the tyrant, forbidding – within the limits of any publication – a totalizing reading of their complete(d) thought on ‘time’. I will thus follow (am I not, are we not, always running after time, always ‘too late’?) a ‘peripheral’ track (of time); sidetracked, I will concentrate on their ‘late’ interventions: the last seminar that Derrida offered at L’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris for the academic year 2002–2003, and which was published posthumously in 2011 as *The Beast and the Sovereign*; and the installation-performance of 2012, *The Refusal of Time / Refuse the Hour*, that Kentridge created for dOCUMENTA (13) and for other international venues.<sup>1</sup> The ‘late style’ of these works, on the page and in the gallery, presents (always in the form of not presenting, or at least non-presenting – in Kentridge’s art, in ‘imperfect erasure’) the ‘gift’ of a special, singular and unique ‘contraction’, in the case of Derrida, or, with Kentridge, of an extraordinary ‘expansion’, of their engagement with time, their researches on / through / of time.

For both, time is what marks the encounter with alterity. In Derrida, this encounter is with the absolute other: death. The ‘present’ or the ‘gift’ is associated with the time of its exchange in a circle of return, and, at the same time, to its excessive position over the same burden of circularity – an excess which we might understand as deconstructive and erased (see Derrida [1991] 1992). For Kentridge, it is the encounter with oneself as other.

The experience of these encounters involves the terrifying and obsessive; terrifying and obsessive: exposure to endless ghosts and alter egos, doubles and *revenants*, already arranged in vertiginous relations, structured by vertices, runs and falls. In the case of Kentridge, he confesses to a sense of ‘depression’, and wonders ‘what is this manic need to circle round and round the studio forever, to be working and making? . . . It is about trying to keep this massive depression away. It is about this black darkness

descending' (in Koerner 2012). Around the encounter, within the constricting borders of the page, and in the cave of the studio, the inscription and performance of these ghostly figurations call for the emergence of the 'other time'. The emergence plays out within Derrida and Kentridge's respective 'monstrous' dealings with the question of time. 'Monstrosity' is relevant to the 'question of the future':

[The monster] simply shows itself [elle se montre] – that is what the word monster means – it shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure . . . [T]he future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters . . . All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant. . . (1995, 386–387)

We might add the suggestion that Kentridge's art of 'imperfect erasure' enacts 'a show of monstrosity'.

For Derrida, time (for)gives,<sup>2</sup> here and now, the philosophical terms of the 'hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility' (Derrida [2001] 2005, 35); in the performative terms of Kentridge's 'vertical thinking', it is 'vertical' in that it reaches into the deepest layers of geological time (Kentridge 2013). The call of the 'hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility' resonates throughout Derrida's writings on hospitality, the gift, forgiveness, friendship, and mourning.

Absolute responsibility is not a responsibility, at least it is not a general responsibility . . . It needs to be exceptional or extraordinary, and it needs to be that absolutely and par excellence... it must remain inconceivable, indeed, unthinkable. (*The Gift of Death* [1992] 1995, 61)

In Kentridge's work, 'vertical thinking' is associated with Johannesburg, and with his own filmic style:

Vertical thinking is a way of thinking the landscape. Johannesburg, the city where I live and where my project was born, has a geological *raison d'être*. It does not stand on a river or a harbour or near mountains, it has to do with underground gold, to reach for that gold there is the need of a vertical action and thinking. But Vertical Thinking also refers to making film, in that the roll of the film, through the camera, accumulates images in vertical sense. (Kentridge 2013; see also Buys and Farber 2012)

It might seem as though the approaches of Derrida and Kentridge are oriented towards 'setting time right'. In truth, their 'writing' (in a concentrated and expanded sense: writing, that 'can remain purely oral, vocal, and musical: rhythmic or prosodic'; Derrida [1996] 1998, 65) runs in other directions. In each case this 'writing' is 'quite simply' (ateknôs) the innocence, pleasure and play of a creative investment; in each case it re-treats, and re-turns (on) the wheel of western/entropic time in order to offer (it is a

question of the gift, of the ‘present’) the opening up of ‘time, the other time, the other of time’ to the unforeseeable chance of the future or *l’â-venir*. The world opens up, and perhaps within the demise of knowledge and the critique of certainty that accompanies the philosophy of deconstruction and the art of ‘imperfect erasure’ there lies the chance advent of the ‘other of time’.

For Kentridge, this implies the ‘un-doing’ of history (‘as the Main Complaint’; see Rosengarten and Dubow 2004). Against notions of ‘certainty’, he offers the art of ‘imperfect erasure’:

a charcoal image is drawn, photographed, rubbed out and slightly altered, photographed again, and so on. But the erasures are never absolute, so that traces of the previous image are still visible in the present one. Time passing is projected onto a spatial, visible plane as a palimpsest; the history of the place is refracted through an increasingly complex network of lines: the procession of layered drawing and graded fading away gives to the passing of time a visible spatial depth. (Clarkson 2009, 148)

Imperfect erasure signals the demise of the ‘master artist’, and the call for the ‘alive’, ‘free’, and ‘open’ perception of art. The power of Kentridge’s images is their openness to interpretation. The artist refuses to guide the reader and, in this sense, he proves no ‘master artist’. Doubtfulness and shifting meanings are inherent to the work, as the artist confirms: ‘All calls to certainty have an authoritarian origin relying on blindness and coercion – which are fundamentally inimical to what it is to be alive in the world with one’s eyes open’ (in Christov-Bakargiev 2004, 161).

For Derrida, chance advent of the other time necessitates a deconstruction (the exposure to the ‘touch’ of alterity). The alternatives that Derrida and Kentridge pose belong to the future; for the time being, here and now, the thinker and the artist, hyperbolically responsible and thinking vertically, add their signatures to the ongoing discussions about the ‘burden’ of South Africa, the ‘legacy’ of apartheid, and the necessary ‘task’ of translating ‘Racism’s Last Word’ (Derrida [1983] 1985):

Kentridge thinks that ‘every translation is a mistranslation’, a process of deformation, similar to *Dürer’s Rhinoceros* (Albrecht Dürer, who had never seen a rhinoceros, made a woodcut of one by reconstructing it from eyewitness accounts and other depictions) or Picasso’s sculpture *She-Goat* (constructed out of scraps of iron and pottery, and representing a translation-in-action that turns what at first seems like junk into a work of art). The act of translation – of words into images, junk into sculpture – is fundamental to artistic practice: to create is, by definition, to translate the object that the work represents (Kentridge 2012d, ‘Norton Lecture Five’). The ‘politics’ of Kentridge’s aesthetic ‘translation’ of the contemporary history of South Africa lies at the core of many interpretative interventions, among them Hennlich’s reading of Kentridge’s use of optical tools, which serves

to show how Kentridge fractures perception, narration and history. In doing so Kentridge not only widens the way in which apartheid is historicized, allowing for a number of narratives elided by the official report to be present, but provides a potent commentary on how these histories are written. Furthermore, it opens up history beyond apartheid to show it as linked to a wider network of concerns including colonialism and class antagonisms. Kentridge's aesthetic not only writes a critical history, its criticisms open up spaces for new histories to be written. (Hennlich 2010, 48)

Concerning Derrida's involvement in the political discourses related to South Africa, his essay 'Racism's Last Word' was written for the catalogue of the exhibition 'Art contre/against Apartheid', assembled by the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid, in cooperation with the United Nations' special Committee against Apartheid, which opened in Paris in November 1983 (see, also, Derrida [1986] 2014).

How to treat such foundational questions with the proper care? For Derrida and Kentridge, this difficulty itself indicates a political urgency, even an 'infectious exuberance'. There is the difficulty of finding the 'path' by which to disseminate their researches on 'time'; of deciding where to set the limit and choose the material – the 'page' and the 'paper' – for the 'passage' through their work; and finally of choosing where to stamp the *pas* of the 'other of time' of the 'hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility'. In Kentridge's terms, it is perhaps expressed as a responsibility to a 'vertical thinking' of 'persistence and robustness' (in Cameron 2001) of the contradictions and fallacies of the story of oneself, the story of the other, the history of a community of others.

On Derrida's page and in Kentridge's studio, the advent of the 'other of time' is thought and enacted, practiced and envisioned, disseminated and imperfectly erased, announced and celebrated, thanks to the return and the retreat, the step back, *pas*. Derrida's famous play on *pas* has both the meanings of 'step' and 'not', suggesting an 'approach', an 'advent', that never 'arrives'. Is this the gift of the metaphor of *Fortuna* or the fortuna of *Metaphora*?<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, one day, 'What will Come (Has Already Come)' (Kentridge 2007) from the future or *l'avenir* will utter the final verdict.

## The 'Path' of Time: Page/Paper, Passage, *Pas*

Is that which is given . . . not rather the act of address to the other,  
for example the work as textual or poetic performance?  
(Derrida, *Given Time* [1991] 1992, 57)

In *The Beast and the Sovereign* Derrida's 'path' develops from his cross-reading of two heterogeneous texts: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude and Solitude* by Martin Heidegger and *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. In Derrida's reading Crusoe becomes Heidegger and Heidegger becomes Crusoe, both searching for

a 'path' or a 'method', in solitude and finitude, in the world that is the 'island', delimited by the secluded, deserted, and circular perimeter of thinking and acting.

Isolation and circularity: the lonely philosopher Heidegger and the castaway Crusoe circle the world-island searching for a 'method'. Heidegger works from within the metaphysics he is trying to overcome, while Crusoe anticipates colonialism, one setting the difference of man from the animal, the other, with the help of his tools, and the echo of his parrot, experiencing the encounter with the other in the world. In his lectures, Derrida pauses at the pages where Crusoe narrates the frightening – but, at the same time, desired – discovery of the footsteps in the sand that break apart his solitude on the 'Island of Despair'. The world opens up, but soon closes in around Crusoe again at the 'moment when [he] retreats', returning to his 'Castle' (a step – *pas* – back), where the page reveals the character's haunted thinking. Does the footprint belong to a cannibal? Can it mark the trace of a ghost? He feels 'followed by a trace, basically, hunted or tracked by a trace'. Could it be his own foot tracing his circular path around the closed perimeter of his deserted life? Could he be 'persecuted by himself and his own revenance', as though 'he were living everything in the past of his own past as a terrifying future?' (Derrida 2011, 50). Indeed, for Derrida, it is a question of time, the 'passage' of time through the circularity of the world. For Derrida, Crusoe's terror invokes lines from John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*:

I run to Death, and Death meets me as fast,  
And all my Pleasures are like Yesterday . . .  
(*Holy Sonnets* I, lines 3–4)

Derrida, in a 'cryptonymic substitution' – here in the company of another J. D. (Michaud 2010; see also Carotenuto 2015) – translates Crusoe into the 'I' running to 'Death', the velocity of a 'mad race'. Poetically and philosophically, the encounter with the other is given by Defoe, evoked by Donne, interpreted and countersigned by Derrida. On this digressive path, what happens is the unique, singular and metonymic concentration/contraction of Derrida's poetics of 'time', the other time, the other of time. After the quotation from Donne, the six pages that follow inscribe an extraordinary scene – '*. . . a crash course . . . an exceptional lesson on time*' (Michaud pp. 152, 169) – a scene of extraordinary 'velocity': 'I run toward death, I hurry toward death and death comes to meet me just as fast. (I run at death, I run to death and death comes upon me, chance death encounter seizes me, catches me or catches up with me just as fast, as soon)' (Derrida 2011, 50).

The key point of this passage occurs in Derrida's treatment of the word 'Yesterday'. My 'Pleasures', which 'are' in the present, step inexorably forward in an 'accelerated movement' that runs more quickly than time itself, beating it to its end. The future is already past, given in memory, melancholy, and nostalgia. But more than this: it is 'yesterday that gives the pleasure, pleasure is yesterday, like yesterday, it begins now

by being yesterday, not only in the manner of yesterday but as yesterday' (p. 52). The incalculable and incommensurable precipitation or acceleration is in anticipation of itself, beating time in velocity. Crusoe's 'I' (and, together, the poetic voice of J. D. and the deconstructive writing of J. D.) runs towards Death in order to avoid it, to meet it; Death will have always been before, waiting, proceeding, coming towards – 'like Yesterday'. For Derrida, 'the yesterday' – the 'present of pleasures' – marks a *jouissance* like the mourning of oneself /of myself, in that only my death lets my pleasure come – in running, like memory, neither present or future, always in anticipation, imminent, metonymically disseminated in / through the *pas* of pleasure:

Another way of saying and thinking the *pas de plaisir*, the step or the not of an enjoyment that is in advance the past of itself, a step [*pas*] as past, as what comes to pass as, and passes on [*se passe de*] present pleasure in pleasure and that I enjoy only in the trace of the *pas de plaisir*: Coming back to haunt all the steps [*pas*]. Pleasure is the revenance of the *pas* – all the *pas*, all the past passages of the *pas*. (p. 53)

In doubleness, uncertainty and anticipation, the *pas* of pleasure traces the advent-to-come of the other:

in the trace of this *pas de jouissance*, one is never sure of being able to recognize one's own [trace] or that of another. Not only is it that what I enjoy is yesterday but perhaps, it is perhaps *my* yesterday or perhaps the yesterday, already, today, *of an other*, and in any case of another, even it is already, even if it were already another myself. My pleasure is, from yesterday on, by yesterday altered, come from the other, the coming of the other.

And the other would say to me, or else I would say myself to the other: as I run to death always after yesterday, yesterday will always be to come: not tomorrow, in the future, but to come, ahead, there in front, the day before yesterday. (pp. 53–54)

## The Studio

The studio is filled with possibilities and objects waiting to come into being.

One could think of the studio in that sense as a kind of enlarged head,  
in the same way you have an idea sparking from one synapse to the next.

That walking is a kind of productive procrastination.

It's an essential part of the process

(William Kentridge, *The Refusal of Time* 2012b)

Kentridge's late style concentrates and expands his art of imperfect erasure. The video-installation *The Refusal of Time*, created with the physicist Peter Galison, is a meditation on relativity, time travel, the present of the migrant crisis, the role of measurement in capitalist production, attempts to standardize time, the invention of pressurized clocks, time zones, and utopian visions of total synchronization, all enacted through brush-and-



ink animations in a film unfolding over six screens, set around a pair of wooden bellows that pump away like some product of the Industrial Revolution. *Refuse the Hour*, which accompanies the installation, is a multimedia chamber-opera. Kentridge, on stage, delivers a lecture, which becomes the script of his sixth Norton Lecture, divided into chapters. The lecture takes the process of the making of *The Refusal of Time* as an example of what he exposes his audience to: the process of thinking through material, allowing the impulses of an image or of a piece of work to hold sway, and to see where they lead. The impression the lecture gives is of a montage of autobiography, wordplay, and literary quotations; among these quotations is the lyric refrain 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', from Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'. This is combined with dance, video-projection, drama, and music.<sup>4</sup> Both *The Refusal of Time* and *Refuse the Hour* seem to develop what has consistently occupied Kentridge's thought and work. In his interview with Dan Cameron, Kentridge explains:

The effect of erasure and the effect of imperfect erasure puts on to the very surface and into the heart of the drawing or piece of the film itself the fact of time passing, but also makes visible something that is normally invisible. One can perceive the multiplicity of the self passing through time. (Cameron 2001)

The dialectics of the visible and the invisible, considered in terms of time, is the force propelling the collaboration by Kentridge and Galison:

Galison: We were both interested in this notion of embodied ideas, of very abstract things worked out in the material world . . .

Kentridge: One of the things that artists do is take things we know but cannot see and make them visible . . . so the idea of time which is completely vague and invisible – there are ways of making it very visible. The film that runs forward or backwards . . . fracturing time: having two images that are in sync but gradually get out of sync. (Kentridge and Galison 2015)

For Kentridge, the loneliness of the artist in the studio is at the core of the capacity of his art of imperfect erasure to make visible what is invisible, abstract, ideal or vague: time. The studio frames Kentridge's insistent, consistent, perpetual 'peregrination'. Within this frame he makes the temporal visible by animating the stages of his movements drawn on the sheet of paper. Drawing allows the 'passage':

The drawings have a sense of time spent on them, of the erase, redraw, erase, redraw, which is one of the ways of the actual material manifesting the idea. In the process of moving your hand from one side of the table to the other, you have to take on trust its temporal existence, that it used to be here and now it is over here. There is nothing, when you look at it that says it was there. But with animation, there is a way of erasing and drawing and erasing and drawing, that there is a ghost trace left. In the paper, you see that passage of the movement of the hand, which is of course also the passage of time, given by the material itself rather than an affect added. (in Koerner 2012)

Kentridge's 'peregrination' within the frame of the studio allows the perception of the visible trace, the trajectories of time, the ways in which the world is constructed, the change of things and the persistence of their contradictions. This procedure is 'the opening up of the veiled processes of the artistic creativity', which could be described as Brechtian (a post-modern cabaret, both rich and riotous, tackling ideas with wit and charm), and which, in the artist's view, is 'about stepping behind ourselves and becoming an observer of ourselves' (Cameron 2001).

Kentridge places in a figure the equivalent of that instant when Crusoe's 'castle', and likewise Derrida's 'page', assumes the space of the page, of 'paper' – takes up that space by being inscribed onto it (and erased from it). With charcoal and a rubber, among newspaper headlines, cuttings, drawings, notes for other projects, Kentridge signals, 'signs', transcribes or 'translates' this moment in his 'studio' into a figure. In his 'cave', 'refuge', 'black box', 'goldfish bowl' or 'foxhole', the artist's own frenetic run towards death but against the legacy of death – the burden of South Africa, the trouble of his country and his people – appears on and disappears from the 'paper' that covers the walls of his Johannesburg studio. Kentridge draws; he leaves the drawing; he reaches for the camera; he films the drawing; he returns to the wall; he erases, films, inscribes, and re-inscribes. In the seemingly limitless undertaking, the 'process requires months to finish a single film' (Oppermann 2001, 81), the artist plays himself and, at the same time, his other, himself *as* other: the one who writes, and the one who watches and comments on what is written. Between the two, in what runs from the hand and what is registered on camera and by the camera, the trace of the drawing inscribes the intractable spectre of the contradictions, ambiguities, and uncertainties of the world. It is the world itself that gets divided – first (at the origin) into triptychs; then into the doubles of shadows and marks (Kentridge 2012d), and through the tensions reflected between stories and history.

Doing and undoing, writing and erasing, inscribing and transforming: the rhythm of the practice is the 'tempo' of Kentridge's procession, in time and through time. His art has been defined as 'processual', 'peripatetic': the process of wandering is set at the centre of the imaginative act – the act which itself is the *pas* of the artist and of his alter egos. The 'alter ego' is politically and aesthetically relevant: the mine owner Soho represents the artist's whiteness in South Africa. Through Soho, Kentridge confronts his 'dilemma', which is 'that he cannot make modernist paintings – that is, he cannot pursue the fiction of making South Africa look "white" – yet he cannot speak for the "black", nor provide a platform or voice for the "other". He can only explore a zone of uncertainty and shifting meanings' (Christov-Bakargiev 1998). The 'method', a 'path' in the world (through history, the history of his art, and the history of art in general), records the time and the tempo of his 'peregrination' (Cameron 2001).

Walking, thinking, stalking the image. Many of the hours spent in the studio are hours of walking, pacing back and forth across the space gathering the energy, the clarity to make the first mark. It is not so much a period of planning as a time of allowing the ideas surrounding the project to percolate. A space for many different possible trajectories of an image, where sequences can suggest themselves, to be tested as internal projections. This pacing is often in relation to the sheet of paper waiting on the wall. As if the physical presence of the paper is necessary for the internal projections to seem realizable. The physical size and material enforce a scale, a particular starting point, a composition. The myriad of possibilities is called to order. This pacing is sometimes 10 minutes, sometimes a morning. (And the pacing is sometimes replaced by sharpening of pencils, gathering of materials, hunting for just the right music – all different forms of productive procrastination.) (in Baker 2009)

Kentridge belongs to a tradition of walking writers. In ‘The School of Dreams’, the section in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* where she considers the importance of dreams as a source of literary inspiration, Hélène Cixous cites Osip Mandelstam’s ‘Conversation about Dante’. Mandelstam says of *The Divine Comedy*: ‘that could only have been written on foot, walking without stopping’. Such walking is the walk of *The Wanderer* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and the way in which Ana, in Clarice Lispector’s ‘Love’, carries her disorientation through the world. Cixous continues: ‘Walking, dancing, pleasure: these accompany the poetic act . . . Poetry is about travelling on foot and all its substitutes, all forms of transportation’ (Cixous 1993, 64). In performance, Kentridge’s *oeuvre* wears shoes, walks, and dances; in *Refuse the Hour* it is the choreographer Dada Masilo who dances a contemporary Gradiva – her skirt made of a political call-to-action banner – ‘elevation’ expressed on the stage through her flying *pas de dance*. Elsewhere, Cixous describes Gradiva thus:

The dress that the Gradiva wore the day of the eruption covers her down to her ankles, but the large number of folds that gave it body below the waist made what might have been a heavy skirt that interfered with her walking an extraordinarily supple garment. For shoes she had on sandals. The springiness of her step was due also to an ordinance about the way paving stones were to be laid in these towns, wide enough and spaced far enough apart that they get children used to and give them a taste for a bouncing gait. Under the pleated fullness of her skirt, the girl gaily bent her knee, took pleasure in feeling her muscles tense up in the dream of a run she would never make now in broad daylight, but which she could be caught at in the solitude of dawn. The folds of her dress allowed for this dance that couldn’t be seen, except by the trained eye of a savant, and revealed what was excessive and beautiful in the position of a second foot, which she drew up nearly vertical toes to heel. I knew that position well, I do it myself... This way we have of imitating elevation, flight, doesn’t fool anybody: those who use it spot one another right away; they know, by the verticality of the foot, in which direction, toward which happy space of strength, you are headed . . . [T]he winged ease of the Gradiva. Most women are slow and languid; a few go faster, but they are unaware of the mysteries of verticality. (Cixous 2009: 29–30).

Dancer-choreographer Dada Masilo's explosively high-octane physicality is an irresistible dynamo. The *moto perpetuo* of her sharply traced, spooling lines and nimbly stuttering footwork is exhilarating to watch and yet she is also capable of breath-taking restraint. Placed on a revolving pedestal with huge megaphones obscuring her arms and legs, she gently moves through a series of elegant poses. It's a simple yet beautiful tableau (Boon 2016).

In *Mysteries of Verticality/Beautiful Tableau*, 'the subject meeting the desire and the intention' – 'a particle collision', 'a duet for movement and voice' – is identified by Kentridge as 'a fourth starting point' of *Refuse the Hour* ('Artist's Statement', 2012a). It is realized according to the time and the tempo of its un-folding on the path of vertical thinking. It involves an elevation which does not aim at any *relève*; instead, it precipitates into the materiality of the earth, perhaps to mine either charcoal or gold, and it certainly (tres)passes the surface, traversing the deepest layers of sense, reaching for geological stratifications, searching for intimate 'darkness' along the 'path' of writing:

Writing is not arriving; most of the time it is not arriving. One must go on foot, with the body. One has to go away, leave the self. How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure? One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self towards the dark. (Cixous 1993, 65)

In *The Refusal of Time / Refuse the Hour*, Kentridge walks in the studio-theatre-gallery, pacing out the limits of his thinking on 'time, the other time, the other of time'. The installation opens with a set of metronomes projected onto the wall of a dim room. The pace of their beat increases and decreases; the pendulum bars swing to the rhythm of an amplified tick-tock, accompanied by a violin pizzicato. The vision is fragmented, scattered across five screens that project films which are apparently in sync, but which work contrapuntally most of the time. Strings and stars animate a charcoal sky against which a film shows Kentridge, deep in concentration, repeatedly climbing over a chair. In another film Dada Masilo climbs over the chair, and Kentridge continuously moves the chair to allow her feet to step into new positions. A silent film tells a story of love and betrayal, concealing consequences and re-constructing – 'for-giving' – 'guilt'. In homage to early filmmaker George Méliès, and to the technologies of *eidophusikon*, stereoscope, zoetrope, and Claude glass (Kentridge 2010) Kentridge invokes old tricks of 'substitution', and so a trombone is found under the table that should hide the guilty lover.

On the stage, Kentridge is alone; he dances with Dada Masilo; he splits into his twin, with whom he walks. A figure made up of torn pieces of paper performs an arabesque against the background; blown by the current of air (of time), it gathers into the form of a coffee pot; the form becomes dispersed and scatters; blown again, it becomes a coffee pot once more . . .

The 'studio' is thus inventively set; within its enclosed perimeter and through the incessant walks within this perimeter, vertical thinking can be expressed in different ways: in *Refuse the Hour* it is in music, through music, and in favour of 'music' that

Kentridge and his collaborators place time in a figure, translating it into sound. Music orchestrates the projection of images and arranges the movements on stage; music makes the principles of relativity ‘mechanical’, visible, and material. Time is rendered sonar; at the same time, the advent of the ‘other of time’ occurs. In the Dadaist operatic dreamscape, soprano Ann Masina, singing Berlioz’s *Spectre de la Rose*, meets the exotic-sounding vocalist Joanna Dudley. The lines of time marking their encounter function as an imperfect erasure: Masina’s elegant phrases are captured by Dudley, sung by her in ‘reverse’ as if they are being sucked into a sonic black hole; within this backward movement each tone is inverted and absorbed, each vowel and consonant erases the singing of Berlioz’s aria.

### The ‘Wheel’: Fortuna or Metaphora?



**Figure 1:** Jean-Claude Chinchéré, Beirut (Courtesy of the photographer)

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty  
(John Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’)

The 'method' – the 'path' – circles the world, delineating its perimeter, and inhabiting it: the 'Elephant' breathes at the centre of *The Refusal of Time*, the 'organ-like automaton' with a pumping bellows, the 'Beast', the monstrous 'machine' or kinetic 'sculpture' (created by Jonas Lundquist and Sabine Theunissen) that beats in time with the heart of our contemporary 'Hard Times' (Koerner 2012).<sup>5</sup> What Kentridge represents here could be said to call for a Derridaen 'hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility': the call to hear the claim of the other who comes. For Derrida, in his *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, the claim sounds from Israel, Europe, Africa, America, or Asia, uttered by

refugees of every kind, immigrants with or without citizenship, exiled or forced from their homes, whether with or without papers, from the heart of Nazi Europe, to ex-Yugoslavia, from the Middle-East to Rwanda, from Zaire to California, from the church of St. Bernard to the thirteenth arrondissement in Paris, Cambodia, the Armenians the Palestinians the Algerians and so many others. ([1997] 1999, 71)

In Kentridge, the beating of monstrous time concerns the 'outrageous things happening in an abnormal society' (Christov-Bakargiev 1998, 13). Responsible hyperbolically and thinking vertically, the writer recording his deconstruction and the artist drawing his art of imperfect erasure are lines of resistance to the time of death, and to the time ('taming', Kentridge 2005)<sup>6</sup> of horror; the former runs at great velocity and the latter operates in verticality, both on the 'wheel of time'.

The wheel constitutes the 'formal' question par excellence. In the first instance, it is associated with Fortuna, fortune, chance, fate. Fortuna is, however, understood by Kentridge as a 'general term' for a 'range of agencies, something other than cold statistical chance', but also 'something . . . outside the range of rational control' (Kentridge [1993] 2017, 30). In *Given Time*, Derrida considers the translation of the Greek *tukhē* by 'fortune'– chance, 'the luck of the draw [sort] (*fors, fors fortuna*)', the 'fate (*fors*) the lot, the lottery', the reference of *fors, fortuna* to *ferre* (*fero, ferre*; in Greek, *phero*) 'which means to bear, produce . . . *Fero* also means "I report", in the sense of recount, of relation (*latum*, the participle of *ferre*), relation as narrative or relation as *socius*' ([1991] 1992, 125–130). Fortuna sets the conditions of the 'gift' – the encounter with the Other – by investing the gift with its nature and announcing its future. The traits of the image of Fortuna – 'Neither Programme nor Chance'; 'both nature and necessity' – specifically interest Derrida and Kentridge in the 'lateness' of their *oeuvres*. Here the 'general term' becomes central in the form of the *metaphora* – '(*metaphora* in Greek means vehicle, even auto-mobile, autobus)' (Derrida 2011, 96) – of the wheel. Initially, it is approached formally, through the discovery of the conditions of the creative operation, the discovery of forms. The approach then turns to the functioning of the mechanism, to an analysis of its mobility, a reading of its movements. It is through the turnings of the 'wheel' (or, as he circles around, step by step, 'on' these turnings) that Derrida's deconstruction encounters the 'hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility';

Kentridge's art of 'imperfect erasure' confronts 'vertical thinking' through these same turnings. More specifically, these encounters might be considered to arise through and within the question: does the wheel function as the Fortuna of the metaphor, or as the *metaphora* of Fortune? The wheel moves around *la differance*.

All the mechanisms that accompany Kentridge on his path through the world (through history, the history of his art, and the history of art in general) reappear on the scene of (and in the scenes of) *The Refusal of Time / Refuse the Hour*. The installation-performance enacts the artist's privileging of 'stone age film making' (Cameron 1999, n114): the prosthetic 'aids, stratagems, and incantations' that make up his singular graphic style with 'anachronistic and obsolete metronomes, megaphones, stereoscopes, binoculars, Bakelite telephones, cinema cameras, the old Bolex or Aliflex, switches, levers, visible mechanics, and . . . giant wheels' that become 'Duchamp's inverted bicycle wheels' spinning in 'negative like an animated Rayograph' (in Koerner, 2012). In its 'primitive' mechanism, the wheel follows the *pas* of its historical invention, the epochal transformation it produced in perception, vision and communication. Kentridge's *pas* follows two of the wheel's many important manifestations – the wheel of 'Fortuna', and the 'a ritroso'-movement impressed by its *tecknè* on the direction and the sense of time.

In his lecture "'Fortuna": Neither Program nor Chance in the Making of Images' ([1993] 2017) Kentridge explains what he means by 'Fortuna'. He refers to the way in which he discovered (rather than invented) the solution to the impasse he faced in his animated film *Mine*: how to advance from the static position of the white imperialist, Soho, who was lying in bed (see Oppermann 2001). Kentridge was dealing with the legacy of South Africa's multiple strata of historical violence, as he makes clear in his Norton Lecture 'Vertical Thinking: A Johannesburg Biography' – which was framed by the vision of the film *Mine*. He argues that ambiguity provides a tool for coping with a traumatic past by pushing people to confront the challenges posed by events: 'We need the terrain of the half-solved and the half-solvable, of the distance between knowing and not knowing, of seeing the trace in the ground and being still somewhat uncertain of what is, of not having a clear label that tells us everything'. The improvisational, adventurous side of the artist 'that alights on such ideas is like a fracturing of oneself that occupies a different plane than the rational, thinking self' (Kentridge, 'Norton Lecture', 2012d).

The solution, in its enactment, is compelling: Soho, the bureaucratic-looking man in shirt and tie, sits with breakfast in bed. He pushes the plunger of his French press, and a tube continues through the bottom of the press, the tray, and the bed deep into the earth below, past surreal layers of dismembered, tortured bodies, miners in shafts, and anonymous people in showers. Walking, thinking, listening to his alter ego, Kentridge came to understand that the cafetiere plunger could pierce the tray in Soho's hands, and, by trespassing the surface, reach out for the depth of the mine. In the lecture and in its printed version, Kentridge moves beyond the effectiveness of the image, and identifies 'the shift from what was originally central to something that initially appeared incidental' (the cafeteria could have been any 'found object'). The 'shift'

relates to the contingency of the creative act – ‘and its specific nature for which I have to take responsibility, but which was not consciously, deliberately or rationally planned’ (Kentrige 2008). Fortuna relates to the unconscious, to free association (‘as he toys with rhymes, palindromes and words’, says Leora Maltz-Leca (2013), who connects Kentrige’s style with Derrida’s ‘friendships of words’), to the chance of the always possible interference, to the flexible insight of imagination generatively open to the ductile moves and unforeseeable percolations of the becoming of the image. Rosalind Krauss understands Kentrige’s singular engagement with Fortuna (his creative act, which could be understood as ‘motion’; the way in which he practices his art as an articulation of Fortuna) as ‘resistant automatism’, ‘the physical way of creating the subsequent drawings that create the film, independent of political theory or preconceived narrative. Kentrige waits for images to call on him: ‘The concept of automatism is the mode of this resistance’ (Krauss 2005, 102).

The links, the forms of thinking, the destinies and the manners of addressing discovered by Kentrige’s art of imperfect erasure have become formalized in the course of his unique and versatile career. In *The Refusal of Time/Refuse the Hour*, Fortuna performs a further turn: turning on itself, it runs backward – in ‘reverse’, in ‘negative’ – and, in so doing, stages the ‘Undoing/Unsayings / Unremembering/Unhappening’ of history. In the installation-performance these words appear in huge letters on the screens, as if to emphasize the statement: under the spell of Fortune, the wheel of history re-traces its course; the reel of cinema wheels back on itself, thus performing an ‘undoing/unsaying/unremembering/unhappening’ of the world’s disastrous tracks of violence, certainty and authority (see Grosz 1998). ‘The disk of Prometheus must direct in the direction towards which it is lanced, loading itself with the strength impressed by his muscles’, so as to ‘open the cage of time’s predetermination, heal the wound, take the arrow back to the arc, return to the instant before a kiss is posed on the cheek’ (Menna 2012). ‘Give us our sun back’, chants the scene, as if to re-claim the negation of time, imposed time, the imposition of time, the power of the ones who impose.

## The ‘Touch’ of Alterity

Ah the *tour*, the wheel! Let me confide in you here how much I love this image of the potter, his art, the turns of someone who, on his wheel, makes a piece of pottery rise up like a tower by sculpting it, moulding it, but without subjecting himself, or herself, to the automatic, rotating movement, by remaining as free as possible with regard to the rotation, putting his or her entire body, feet and hands alike, to work on the machine . . . For a sculptor or architect, the potter in his turn is by turns poet and musician, theoretician and political orator, perhaps even a philosopher.

(Derrida, *Rogues* [2003] 2005, 13)



Derrida devoted his 1991 essay *Given Time* to the question of ‘time’, which is not, but which gives (*donne*), and which, like the ‘gift’, constitutes an excess beyond all economies of exchange, its ‘luck of the draw’ setting the rhythm for the encounter with the other, its conditions emerging within the deconstruction of the opposition between nature and chance. If Kentridge deals with the programmed and the unexpected according to ‘neither not’, Derrida speaks of nature and necessity ‘both’ associated by a common productivity and, thus, opening up chances for time to ‘give’ (itself).

In *Given Time*, Baudelaire’s story ‘Counterfeit Money’ is interpreted, countersigned and deconstructed by Derrida. ‘Counterfeit Money’ tells the story of a chance encounter (it is the fortune of the story) which occurs when two friends (always doubles, couples, and the contracts signed between them) meet a beggar on the streets of Paris. Gifted by nature, entrusted by social class with the possibility of giving alms, one of the friends gives some coins to the poor man. The tale narrates – presenting a narrative gift – what happens to one friend when the other confesses to have given ‘counterfeit money’. *Tukhē* is the Fortuna of this encounter; the gift of nature allows both friends to be able to give. Fortuna is, at the same time, the counter-natural gift of the narrator, as *Given Time* insists, who is ‘concerned with looking for noon at two o’clock (what an exhausting faculty is nature’s gift to me)’. Indeed, the predisposition of the narrator’s mind is reflected in the laborious concentration with which he interrogates, questions, demands, and desires: ‘While talking to himself, while reflecting – and the whole narration is caught in the echo of this mirror – the narrator speculates on the speculation like a painter of modern life’ (Derrida [1991] 1992, 124).

Does ‘Counterfeit Money’ possibly represent the story itself as ‘counterfeit money’ for the readers who find themselves following the (non)circulations and (non)evolutions of the ‘given time’ of its inscription, unfolding and mobility? Years after the publication of *Given Time*, *The Beast and the Sovereign* presents a possible answer to the question on some of its pages – those that focus on the *tecknè* of the ‘wheel’. If, in Kentridge, the ‘Duchamp’s inverted bicycle wheels’ enable the ‘vertical thinking’ of the ‘undoing’ of history, in Derrida, the wheel is figured (figured in writing) in chance – in the chance for, and of, the hyperbolic ethics of absolute responsibility to the always already (im)possible touch of the Other.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida says that Crusoe has a problematic relation with the wheel; the wheel is his cross. The character is not happy with the cycloid, the circle; in his old world, he used to know the use of the wheel but not how it worked. Now, alone, on the island, he needs to reinvent the mechanism if he wants to survive. After getting his invention wrong, producing only a pottery disk, Crusoe – and Derrida with him, and we with them – proceeds to develop a different sort of understanding of the ‘wheel’:

As you know, in the history of mankind the wheel was a dramatic mutation, an extraordinary invention that was extraordinarily difficult to conceive and to bring about, and as soon as this allows one to describe, as one also describes a movement (for it is not enough to describe

a circle, to inscribe a circle as a geometer would write one on the sand, in order to invent a wheel as technical prosthesis and material apparatus in the world, a machine capable of describing a movement by carrying it out, here by turning around an axle), as soon, then, as the wheel describes the circular return upon itself around an immobile axis, it becomes a sort of incorporated figural possibility, a *metaphora* (*metaphora* in Greek means vehicle, even automobile, autobus) for all bodily movements as physical movements of return to self, auto-deictics, autonomous but physical and corporeal movements of auto-reference, and therefore more than the mirror and specularity in general, more than theoretical reflection which consists merely in seeing one's own image. (Derrida 2011, 75)

The *metaphora* of the wheel allows the dream of staying and moving at the same time, rotating on oneself, so as to bring the body into the world, around an axis of identity that is immobile in relation to the circle that is the wheel, which turns around itself. The inventive trope gives both immense possibilities and extraordinary threats, among them the uncanny 'touch' of the Other:

the invention or the reinvention of the wheel or of gearing as an apparatus we can describe as auto-affective. The wheel turns on its own [*toute seule*]. The machine is what works on its own by turning on itself.

In both cases, the invention would always be a repetition, a reinvention, on the island, a second origin, a second genesis of the world itself, and of technology. But in both cases we would also be dealing with an autonomization, an automatization in which the pure spontaneity of movement can no longer be distinguished from a mechanization, a progress in the mechanization of an apparatus that moves by itself, automatically, on its own, toward itself at the moment it travels toward the other, for the other, in the view of the other, elsewhere and far away. . .

The nearest and the farthest, the same and the other, *touch* each other and come into contact in the circle, on the island, in the return, in the wheel and in the prayer. (2011, 78–79, my emphasis).

## The Verdict

. . . a verdict is always of the other  
(Derrida, 'A Silkworm of One's Own' [1996] 2001, 46)

In the art of imperfect erasure and in deconstruction, the undoing of history and the touch of the Other are the possibilities finally offered to time's verdict, and to its future justice. For Kentridge, time must be brought back – in reverse, in negative – on the wheel of Fortuna, perhaps to re-turn to an order of perfectibility and, in so doing, to envision a just future. In Derrida, justice would rather mean to leave *l'à-venir* open to chance, exposing oneself, in velocity, to the always already (im)possible arrival of the other, with whom one might experience an encounter where ethics lies in the responsible 'touch'.

The verdict on these alternatives, for both the philosopher and the artist, concerns ‘death’. Derrida experienced the touch of ‘absolute alterity’ in 2004, but he had thought about the verdict of death throughout his life and career. In the essay ‘A Silkworm of One’s Own’, concerned with the question of the ‘verdict’, he relates his ‘Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil’ to the end of time, the ‘lateness’ of his *oeuvre*, and the announcement of the time of ‘loving’:

before and earlier than objective time, before all metrical knowledge about it, before and rather than *noting* the chronology of whatever it may be, ‘late’ evaluates, desires, regrets, accuses, complains – and sighs for the verdict, so late, very late, late, quite simply (*ateknôs*), always comes the time for loving. [1996] 2001, 33; see also pp. 2, 21–33).

For Derrida, ‘loving time’, beyond time, would have been called – in its absolute difference (upsetting history) – its ‘name’, and its predisposition, at least in the western world, to be unveiled, identified, theorized, figured, quite simply (*ateknôs*) remaining in itself as the secret of a face beyond representation:

neither a history of a veil, a veil to be lifted or torn, nor the Thing, nor the Phallus nor Death, of course, that would suddenly show itself at the last coup de theatre, at the instant of a revelation or an unveiling, nor a theorem wrapped up in shroud or in modesty, neither *aletheia*, nor *homoiosis*, nor *adequatio*, nor *Enthüllung*, nor *Unverborgenheit*, nor *Erschlossenheit*, nor *Entdecktheit*, nor another unfigurable figure, beyond any holy shroud, the secret of a face that is no longer even a face if face tells of vision and a story of the eye. (p. 31)

Kentridge may be understood to have a shared concern for ‘the history of the eye’; in his *oeuvre*, the verdict comes at the end of his work on the question of time: *Refuse the Hour* ends (Kentridge’s signature, perhaps) with a ‘procession’ of shadowy silhouettes dancing, staggering, and marching relentlessly left to right, across the three walls, before all being entirely consumed by a black hole, the final compression of matter, space and time. When interviewed on the image, Kentridge relates it to death, and, even more necessarily, to the question of its ‘beyond’, the ‘continuation’ ‘afterwards’:

MK: Is *the Refusal of Time* about avoiding death?

WK: It ends up there. It starts with: Is a black hole the end of time? As Peter was saying, that is one of the questions that physicists consider. But as soon as you say, right, let’s start having things disappear into a black hole, it is an immediate jump to that being, as it were, a metaphorical description of death. Is any trace left when you are gone? Is there any information, attributes of you that still float around the edge? So it is both from the psychological, or the lived sense of, what is the balance between the finality of death and the continuation of attributes of people afterward? (in Koerner 2012)

For the historian of science, Galison, what matters is the question of the ‘trace’ as an instance of ‘survival’; for Kentridge, himself exposed to the ‘secret’ of what comes, it

means, expressed in undisclosed irony, his participation in the process/ion through the vital action of 'eating soup':

WK: So that became clear, that one of the elements of the project was black holes, and there was a procession going into the black hole.

MK: You're in it, right?

WK: I am in it, eating soup (in Koerner 2012).

The time of 'love' and the time of 'soup'; the unsayable event, and the persistence of creative life: in truth, Derrida and Kentridge are beyond the 'verdict', erased by deconstruction and imperfect erasure, within the legacy of the 'promise' or the 'prayer' – Crusoe's prayer book, Derrida's prayer shawl, Kentridge's prayer book.<sup>7</sup> The address and the apostrophe are necessarily woven in the supplementary mode of writing. At the end of time, the other time, the other of time, for Derrida and Kentridge, there will always already have been a question of pages, papers and 'books', other seminars to be published, other passages of time. One last time, the world opens up, and perhaps, one day, from its openness, *'What will Come (Has Already Come)'* (Kentridge 2007) from the future or *l'avenir* will utter the final verdict.

## Notes

1 'The Refusal of Time' was presented at DOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel; 'Refuse the Hour' was co-commissioned by Holland Festival (Amsterdam), Festival d'Avignon, Roma Europa Festival/Teatro di Roma (Rome), and Onassis Cultural Center (Athens), with additional support provided by Marian Goodman Gallery (New York–Paris–London), Lia Rumma Gallery (Naples–Milan), and the Goodman Gallery (Johannesburg–Cape Town).

2 'For-giveness' links Derrida and Kentridge on a historical occasion: in 1998, Derrida gave a series of lectures in South Africa on this theme. This series included a weeklong workshop at the University of Witwatersrand – culminating in the talk entitled 'Archive Fever in South Africa' (for a detailed history of these lectures, see Hamilton, 2002). The young Kentridge was present at this talk. The artist's decision to incorporate the Derridean lecture into his *Stereoscope* was due especially to Derrida's consideration of the words 'give' and 'forgive': 'Derrida who came and gave a lecture at that time which I could not understand but he said that the word give has an interesting etymology, that the word give comes from the Germanic root *gif* and knowing from Afrikaans, I don't know from German but from Afrikaans the word *gif* means poison . . . there is a poison in the giving. And that acts of giving are acts of aggression and that the idea of forgiveness becomes very complicated' (in Hennlich 2015, 113–114).

3 One 'origin' of 'Refuse the Hour' is the translation of time-metaphors into concrete matter: 'A fifth starting point. From the conversation with Peter Galison, a series of ideas and metaphors erupted, each idea needing to become materialised. Synchronicity into projected metronomes. Time into sound. A need to follow the metaphors and make them visible, audible' (Kentridge 2012a – 'Artist's Statement'). This 'passage' is understood by Ida Gianelli – in her 'Foreword' to the catalogue of Kentridge's exhibition at Castello di Rivoli, Italy – as a new

‘course’ impressed on global art: ‘Kentrige’s lyrical art marks a new course for contemporary art, a course that is neither forward-looking, nor returning to the past. His films and installations join traditional figuration and techniques with new media, Western art historical tradition with openness to the universe of story-telling and other aspects of contemporary culture as it has developed in Africa today’ (in Christov-Bakargiev 2004, 9).

4 *Refuse the Hour* opens with a depiction of the myth of Perseus, which the artist learned as a child from his father on a train journey. Through his storytelling Kentridge, in his role of actor and lecturer, sets the mood of the performance. Key to this mood is the notion of ‘Fates’, who cannot be opposed. The determined resolve to escape the network of choices whose course inexorably brings disaster is represented (or more precisely ‘translated’ in Kentridge’s sense) on stage in a variety of ways: for example, by the dancer Dada Masilo, who insistently repeats steps and gestures, as if imprisoned in a neurotic indecision between choices.

5 Kentridge describes ‘the ‘elephant’ as a generator of the energy of the piece. The idea comes from Dickens’s *Hard Times*, where the industrial machines in the nineteenth-century factory are described as ‘moving up and down, like the movement of the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. Endlessly, just moving up and down. The machine actually did have a head, but it became a bit too literal. It has to do with the relentless nature of industrial society’. It is a metaphor for ‘the often-convulsive developments in science and industry during the modern era and a reminder of the vain impulse to control time’ (in Koerner 2012). For the ‘animal’ – that is, rhino or hyena – in Kentridge’s *oeuvre*, see Nla Design and Visual Arts (2013).

6 Discussing *Felix in Exile*, Kentridge explains that it signalled his attempt at ‘taming’ the horror he experienced at the age of six upon discovering some photographs of the massacre outside Sharpeville (see Verscooren 2005, and Karam 2012).

7 The distinctive role of the ‘reading walker’, continuously played by Kentridge on stage, recalls the memory of his grandfather in the synagogue, holding open his prayer book, swaying in prayer: ‘When else do you hold a book open in two hands like that . . . ? Kentridge asked me rhetorically, as if prayer were the primary context intimated by these rituals of walking’ (in Maltz-Leca 2013).

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