William Kentridge
Smoke, Ashes, Fable

EDITED BY

Margaret K. Koerner

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Joseph Leo Koerner,
Margaret K. Koerner and Harmon Siegel

Mercatorfonds

DISTRIBUTED BY

Yale University Press, New Haven and London

Contents

Feats of Prestidigitation

Harmon Siegel

"Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth."—Theodor Adorno[1]

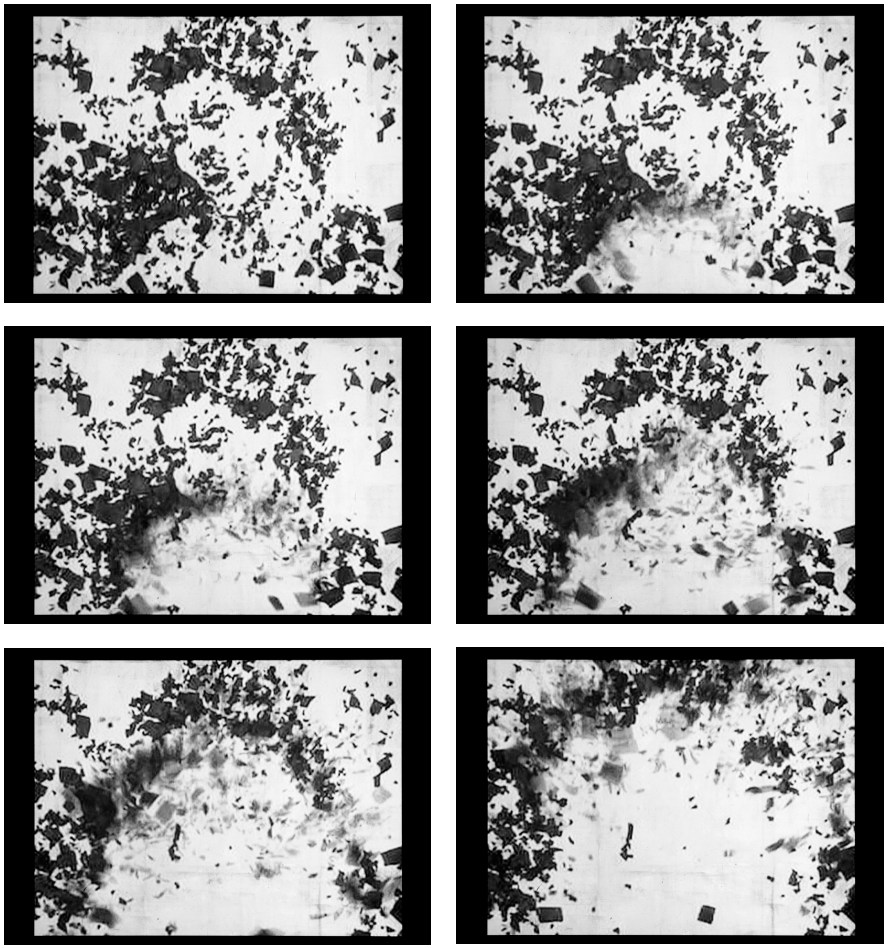
Invisible Mending

In his autobiography, *How to Be a Sorcerer* (1868), Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin describes the origin of the word "prestidigitation." Later to become the world's most famous prestidigitator, Robert-Houdin was, at the time, just a boy walking the streets of Restoration Paris when he came across "an immense, spectacular poster" belonging to a popular magician. On it he read "the pompous word, 'Prestidigitator,'" complete with its etymology.[2] As the poster explained, "prestidigitation" refers to stage magic, performed as a trick, magic that does not derive from esoteric gifts or supernatural powers but merely from quick (*presto*) fingers (digits). Robert-Houdin went on to found his own magic theater, where Georges Méliès later installed his famous film studio. Since then, prestidigitation and film have remained closely linked, as magicians have moved from performing their magic *on film* to creating *magical films*.

It is this tradition that William Kentridge reprises and revises, returning to the magic of early cinema and adapting it to his time, creating animated films that surprise and delight. The word "animated" derives from the Latin *anima*, meaning principally "air," especially when inhaled or exhaled as "breath." Creating moving images, the animator appears to give them life. To Kentridge, however, animation is not sorcery but prestidigitation, not a divine breath but a thoroughly human one.

True to his title, Kentridge's *Breathe* reflects on film as both animation and magic trick. The film begins with black tissue paper falling onto a white paper ground, as though raining from the air above the camera. Philip Miller's orchestral score plays in the background. We then see the artist's left hand scatter some papers, disappearing off the left edge before re-emerging from the bottom with flourishing, sweeping gestures. Soon after, Kentridge enters the frame, swirling a broad house painter's brush over the paper, causing the black tissue to rise off of the ground before disappearing again beyond the edges of the image. In Kentridge's absence, the swirling black papers fall, as though by magic, onto the surface below, assemble themselves into the image of a megaphone, then blow diagonally across the plane. The papers swirl momentarily in the air and resettle into

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York, 2005), 222.
2 Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, *Comment on devient sorcier: Confidences et révélations* (Paris, 1868), 151.



Stills from *Breathe*, 2008

another megaphone, which announces the entrance of singer Nokrismesi Skota, who sings Puccini's "O Mio Babbino Caro" into a cell phone as the papers form themselves into her portrait.

In *Breathe*, Kentridge performs the role of filmmaker-magician. First swirling his brush around the screen, then stepping out of the frame leaving the papers to animate themselves, he seduces the viewer into watching the wrong thing. We first watch his hand, attempting to intuit how the trick is done, staring intently at the action before the camera. When Kentridge withdraws, his manipulations suffuse the vacated frame, as though his hand were replaced by the power of his will. It is, of course, a trick, accomplished by reversing the film. Yet when Kentridge moves from before the camera to behind it, he leads us to understand that we are not watching a film *of* a magic trick but rather seeing film *as* a magic trick.

Breathe is saturated with the history of film, which it references and updates. Specifically, it refers to the first decades of film, to a time when filmmakers were recruited from the ranks of stage magicians. Compositionally and thematically, *Breathe* adapts a specific genre of filmmaker-magician performances, the genre called "artist's hand" or "enchanted drawing" film, exemplified most canonically by J. Stuart Blackton's *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906).[3] As Blackton's film begins, we see the filmmaker drawing a cartoon face. His horizontal act of drawing is represented from above, his hand emerging from beyond the edge of the frame, the composition just like *Breathe.* Once Blackton completes the drawing and withdraws his hand, a second face appears to draw itself, emerging one line of chalk at a time on the surface of his blackboard. Both faces then come alive. As the man's pupils dart around his eyes, he catches sight of the woman, raises his eyebrows, and grimaces at her. She in turn smiles and winks.

Like many of Kentridge's animated films, Blackton's does not consist of a number of separately drawn frames but of a single drawing, modified frame by frame. Blackton highlights this method when the figures come alive, as one puffs his cigar smoke into the other's face, burying her beneath smudgy layers of swirling chalk, prompting Blackton's hand to return with an eraser. The appearance, animation, and disappearance of the self-generated image thereby attest a form of magic that both derives from and exceeds the skill of the artist's hand.

Like *Breathe*, *Humorous Phases* is filmed on a horizontal table. Rather than draw on a vertical blackboard—as in his earlier film, *The Enchanted Drawing* (1900), considered to contain the first animation on standard picture film—Blackton here films from above to better keep the friable chalk in place between takes.[4] The resulting film exhibits a mismatch between depicted vertical orientation and the depictive horizontal one.

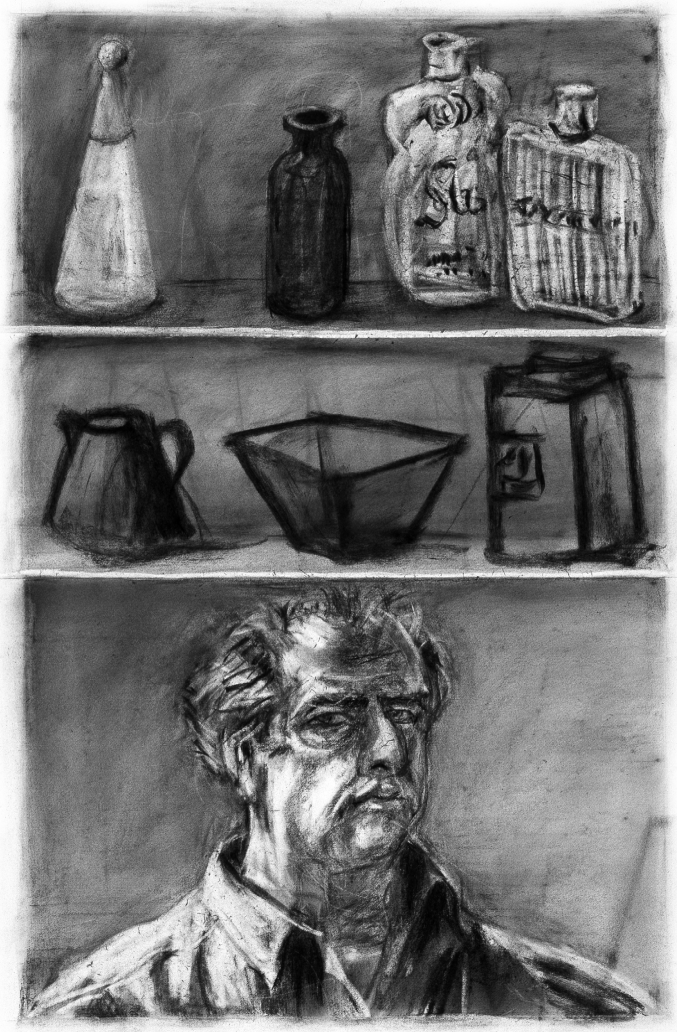
3 The comparison between Kentridge and Blackton was first made in Barnaby Dicker, "Review: 'William Kentridge: Journey to the Moon/7 Fragments for Georges Méliès/Day for Night,'" *Animation* 3, 3 (2008): 316–20. On the artist's hand genre, see Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Chicago, 1993).

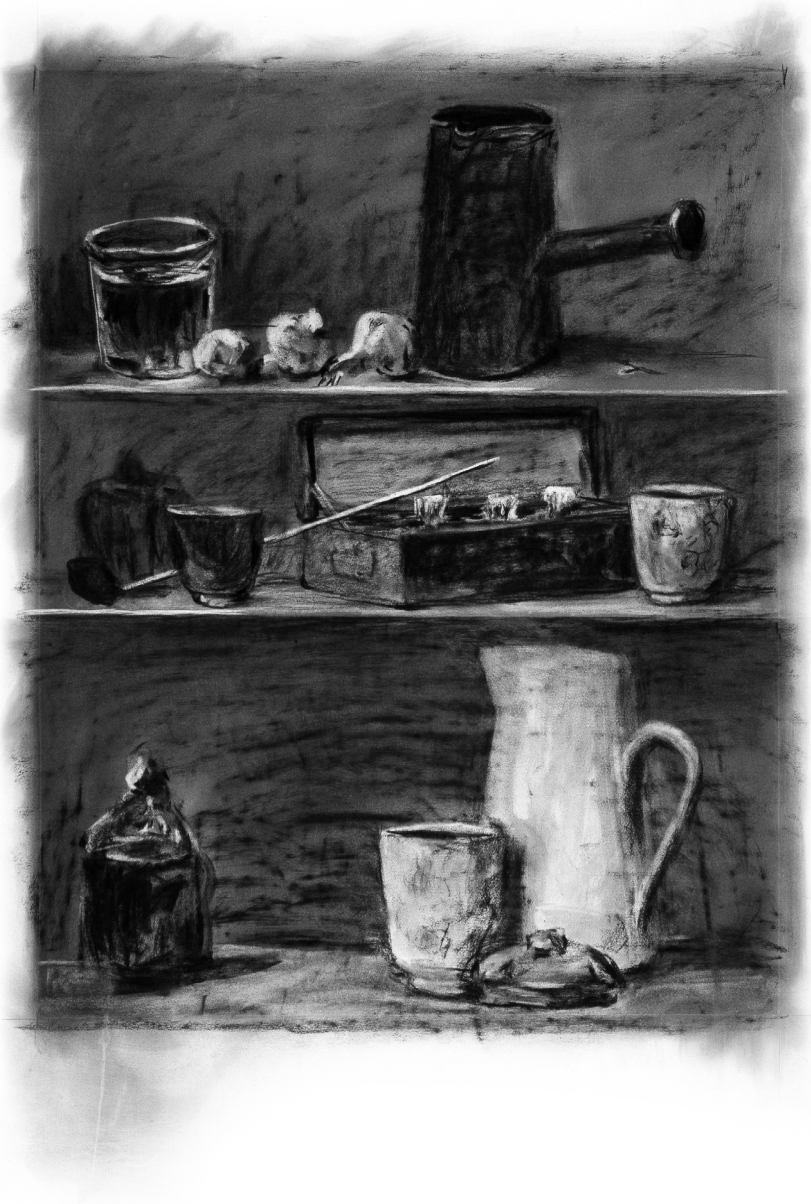
4 This style of vertical filming became known as the "Gaumont angle," named for the production company which came to exploit its effects. See Donald Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film* (Princeton, 2014), 137; Richard Abel, "Framing: Camera Distance and Angle," in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London, 2005), 247.

J. Stuart Blackton, stills from *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, 1906

Frederick S. Armitage, stills from *Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theatre*, 1901

OVERLEAF
Drawings for *Medicine Chest*, 2001





In *Breathe*, the trick requires a horizontal set-up, since the papers need to rest on the table without adhesive, allowing them to easily lift off when the artist agitates the surrounding air. Yet the underlying mismatch between horizontal and vertical has wider importance for Kentridge's works, such as his Méliès tribute, *Journey to the Moon* (2003), in which a coffee cup seems to zoom like a rocket into the air by moving horizontally across a tabletop landscape. With this mismatch, Kentridge draws on a tradition in advanced 20th-century composition, in which traditional vertical orientations gave way to horizontal ones, as in Robert Rauschenberg's Combines, Andy Warhol's *Dance Diagrams*, and Robert Morris's fabric constructions.[5] Given Kentridge's allusions to early film history, however, the same tension also evinces the genre of trick-film best exemplified by Ferdinand Zecca's *La Soubrette Ingénieuse* (1902), in which a maid hangs paintings high on the wall by walking impossibly up its surface, a trick made possible by a painted backdrop and hidden cuts between horizontal and vertical cameras.[6] Kentridge thus uses the structural tension between orientations to emphasize the magical possibilities cinematic technology affords, as well as their potential to be explained once one knows the trick.

A similar relation between magic and explanation motivates *Breathe*'s central attraction, its use of reversal. By reversing the film, Kentridge makes the painstaking work of crafting mosaic-like images from hundreds of paper fragments appear spontaneous, effortless, and self-generating. Before starting the camera, he carefully arranges the papers into an image. He then swats the air with sheets of cardboard, creating the current of air that lifts the papers off their support, undoing in seconds what took so long to create. When the film is played backward, however, this careful process seems utterly carefree, as though the image were bringing itself into being, enhancing the magical astonishment and utopian perfection of life in reverse.

This potential for perfection, and its accompanying optimism, was discovered early in film history. For instance, *Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theater* (1901) compressed the thirty-day demolition of a theater on Broadway into a two-minute time-lapse film. The accompanying catalogue, distributed to exhibitors, recommended that, once the depicted demolition was complete, the projectionist should run the film back through the apparatus in reverse, showing the same building magically reconstructing itself.[7] It thus exhibited mutability and contingency by showing the disappearance and reappearance of an impressive, five-story building, themes that Kentridge similarly addresses in his recurrent depictions of the slag heaps on the outskirts of Johannesburg, artificial mountains formed after mining activity, which appear and disappear with the shifting price of gold in international markets.[8] Yet *Demolishing and Building Up* also

5 Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York, 1972), 55–91; Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 275–90.

6 Kentridge alludes to this technique more directly in *Journey to the Moon* (2003), in which the coffee-pot "rocket" that seems to launch vertically into the air is actually moved over a horizontal landscape drawing.

7 Nick Yablon, *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819–1919* (Chicago, 2010), 282.

raises the question of competition between film and theater, since new film technology here records the demolition of a once popular theater, only to build its rival art form back up again.[9] The film's use of reversal therefore raises questions of progress and obsolescence, questions critical to Kentridge.

In *Breathe*, reversal is the very condition of animation. One has to go backward to go forward. Progress, here, is not a relentless forward march. Rather, *Breathe* returns to the origins of Kentridge's medium, to the early days of cinema in which reversal evinced magical possibility. In the era of early film, such feelings of delight, wonder, and amazement at the medium's flickering world of shadows constituted what Tom Gunning has called the "aesthetic of astonishment," characterized less by desire for a "seamless reproduction of reality" than by performances of "magical metamorphosis."[10] Early films did not astonish their audiences because they reproduced the visible world to gullible people suckered by illusions—as in the now debunked story that film's first audiences ran from its depiction of an incoming train. Rather, the nascent medium allowed them to re-encounter the enchantments of their everyday world.

It is this sense of everyday enchantment, I shall argue, which prompts Kentridge to examine the specific, historical relationship between magic and film. Of course, this preoccupation is not exclusive to Kentridge. From Ingmar Bergman and Marcel Broodthaers to Dziga Vertov and Orson Welles, many renowned filmmakers have self-reflexively examined the apparent disconnect between, on the one hand, film's rational and technological basis and, on the other, its historical relation to magic and enchantment, each seeking to dissociate film from superstition and charlatanry while at the same time preserving its capacity for wonder and astonishment.[11] However, Kentridge's work does not progress *from* magic to epistemology, from dumbfounded amazement to the critical study of knowledge and its bases in reason.[12] Rather, he considers the epistemology *of* magic, asks what kind of knowledge magic yields. This project fosters both his highly developed critique of Enlightenment rhetoric's complicity with colonialism, as well as his alternative conception of "practical epistemology," a way of working without instrumental purpose or preordained plans.

Movable Assets

The pre-history of cinema technology conventionally begins with the phenakistoscope, a mid-19th-century device for constructing motion from discrete, static images.[13] Named from the Greek for "to deceive the eye," this device consists of two rotating disks. The first disk has a circumference punctuated by narrow slots, the second by a series of related images. When

8 On the question of urban demolition in relation to Kentridge's work, see Samantha McCulloch and Christopher Williams-Wynn, "Conflicts between Context and Content in William Kentridge: Five Themes: A Case Study of the Melbourne Exhibition," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 30, 4 (August 8, 2015): 283–95.

9 See Martin Harries, "Theater After Film, or Dismediation," *ELH* 83, 2 (June 22, 2016): 345–61. I am grateful to Harries for answering my questions about this example.

10 Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In) Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams, Rutgers Depth of Field Series (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 114–33, esp. 119.

11 See Colin Williamson, *Hidden in Plain Sight: An Archaeology of Magic and the Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2015); Eric de Bruyn, "The Museum of Attractions: Marcel Broodthaers and the *Section Cinéma*," in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London, 2008), 112–21.

12 Annette Michelson, "From Magician To Epistemologist," *Maske Und Kothurn* 42, 1 (1996): 54–74.

13 Georges Sadoul, Histoire générale du cinéma, 4 vols. (Paris, 1946), vol. 1, 8. On the phenakistoscope, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 107–10.

the user looks through the uppermost slot and rotates the disks, the pictures morph into one animated image.

Kentridge's *Phenakistoscope* consists of two gramophone records, one slotted, the other overlain with pages from an atlas and illustrated with a procession of porters carrying various loads. When a viewer spins the disks, the figures merge into a single man, his burden shifting from one load to another. The device can also be viewed statically, from outside the slots, its depicted bodies then appearing as a procession astride the globe. Somewhere between these alternatives, Kentridge suggests, is where we want to be, neither so aloof that we cannot enjoy the marvelous trick, nor so absorbed that we lose sight of our own roles in constructing that illusion.

The inventor of the phenakistoscope, Belgian physicist Joseph Plateau, eventually went blind. He had spent too many years testing his theories on his own eyes, beginning with a youthful resolution to stare directly into the midday sun for an unrelenting 25 seconds. It was this confrontation that led Plateau to his great discovery, the theory of the "persistence of vision," namely the idea that if several discrete objects are presented to the eye in sufficiently short intervals, they will be fused in perception, an oft cited, albeit erroneous, explanation for the principle of filmic animation.[14] In his Promethean quest for the secret of animation, Plateau sacrificed the very organ his theories were meant to explain. He thus fell victim to what Kentridge describes as the paradox of enlightenment, of the dictate born from Plato's Cave: "Look directly at the sun and see the truth."[15] The paradox is that "the sun is of course too bright to look at directly. Plato's philosophers would all have been blinded."[16]

For Kentridge, this Platonic imperative to confront the light of the sun has a concealed political dimension, one he finds personified by Sarastro, the high priest of light from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Sarastro, the model of an "enlightened despot," believes that "by force, people, against their will, can be dragged out of the cave, up towards the blinding light."[17] He thus demonstrates how the unrelenting, even merciless quest for knowledge at the heart of enlightenment goes hand-in-glove with coercive force. Taken to its extreme, this project of enlightenment becomes that of colonialism: "The idea of colonialism, and Europe's justification of its actions, have much to do with both *The Magic Flute* and Plato—of bringing light to what was called the 'Dark Continent.'"[18] In search of an alternative to this extreme of enlightenment, Kentridge asks, "Can it work in reverse ... someone blinded or bewildered by the brightness of the sun, unable to look at it—choosing to descend to the world of shadows, not just for relief but also for elucidation?"[19]

14 Joseph Anderson and Barbara Anderson, "The Myth of Persistence of Vision Revisited," *Journal of Film and Video* 45, 1 (1993): 3–12.
15 William Kentridge and Maria-Christina Villaseñor, *William Kentridge: Black Box/Chambre Noire* (New York, 2005), 47.
16 William Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 22.
17 Kentridge, *Black Box*, 47.
18 Ibid., 49.
19 William Kentridge, "In Praise of Shadows: Zeno and Plato," in *No It Is!* (Cologne 2016), 171–74, esp. 174

Phenakistoscope, 2000, lithograph on maps from *Bacon's Popular Atlas of the World* (1893) and *The Oxford Atlas* (1951) each print attached to a gramophone record

For Kentridge, however, such an ideal balance between light and darkness is not merely a metaphorical figure for the limits of enlightened reason. What if, he asks, "one thinks of it [literally]—in cinematic terms—what does it mean when you see plain, bright light?"

> It means that you've come to the end of the movie: that there's no more film running through the projector .... In cinema or photography, you hope to avoid this uninterrupted light, to remain within the balance and play of shadow and light.[20]

Kentridge thus proposes a model for an artistic practice based on the ludic balance of cinema. Such a practice would find a place between light and shadow, between the tyrannical optimism of total enlightenment and the resigned pessimism of blissful ignorance, between rationality and magic. Cinema therefore becomes a paradigm for resisting the total replacement of chance by prediction and play by routine, for resisting disenchantment.

"Disenchantment" refers to the historical condition, characteristic of post-Enlightenment modernity, in which everything mysterious can seemingly be explained. As Max Weber writes:

> One can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to *magical* means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. *Technical* means and calculations perform the service.[21]

According to this account, prior to the Enlightenment, the world seemed governed by personified forces, gods, and spirits. Its mysteries then required magical explanations and sibylline interventions. With the Enlightenment, however, came a way of knowing called "rationality," a form of thought that produced a world increasingly subject to instrumental explanations and technological interventions. Rationality thus became the characteristic form of enlightened reason, informing all aspects of everyday life through the spread of technology and administrative bureaucracies.

Kentridge's search for a "balance and play of shadow and light" therefore constitutes a response to disenchantment, for his imagined alternative to Enlightenment rationality produces a sense of wonder that cannot be dispelled by technical explanation. The two possible views of *Phenakistoscope* dramatize such an alternative between technical rationality and a different form of activity. On the one hand, the depicted procession of laborers evinces the division of labor, the form of production

20 Kentridge, *Black Box*, 47.
21 Emphasis mine. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1991), 129–58, esp. 139.

corresponding to technical rationality, since it makes the production process more efficient. This personification of division also exhibits the underlying condition of filmic animation, namely the scientific analysis of movement, the breakdown of continual gestures into awkward, discrete units, which can only then be synthesized to produce movement. On the other, this division is ultimately reconciled, when the beholder activates the device and merges the bodies into one. The pleasure of playing with this optical toy therefore dramatizes the utopian reversal of divided labor. The magic of this device therefore evinces the classic, fairy-tale magic that liberates man from tedious labor—as in Goethe's and Disney's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Crucially, however, this utopian reversal cannot be sustained and must come to an end when the user ceases to play. Kentridge thus dramatizes the necessity of confronting the world in its modern, rationalized form, while nevertheless imagining different ways of being, forms of activity apart from disenchanted rationality.

This metaphorical suggestion finds support at the technical level, since, with his *Phenakistoscope*, Kentridge returns to the era when moving pictures were not photographically produced and mechanically projected but rather hand-painted and hand-manipulated. Prior to the mechanization of both ends of the process—the automatic generation of images and their mechanical projection—the accidents of drawing and cranking produced "irregularity, non-uniformity, the accident, and other traces of the human body."[22]

In Kentridge's practice, this commitment to the accident manifests itself in the artist's unremitting quest to surprise himself, to find something "unpredicted, unanticipated" in the action of making, a coeval process of learning and doing he names "leaping before looking."[23] It is a form of play, "not in the sense of following rules known in advance, as in sport; but play in the sense of the play of light on water." The play is not random but is found in "giving yourself over to what the activity provokes ... the following of the provocation, the discovering of the rules of that game, the mastery of it."[24]

It is this same process of play that underlies Kentridge's interest in filmic reversal: "I walk backward, and film myself walking backward, so I can project it forward. It is clearly wrong. The lean is in the wrong direction. I have to lean against the walk, leaning forward when walking backward ... an unnatural action, to make a natural illusion."[25] In this unnatural action, the distinction between forward and back breaks down for the sake of illusion and is the trick that allows for the appearance of magic. And from this breakdown, Kentridge derives "the metaphoric suggestions [of] the utopian perfectibility of the world in reverse."[26] To the cinematic balance between light and shadow, from which he derives the metaphorical balance between enlightenment and ignorance, calculation and play, he

22 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, revised edition (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 251.
23 *Drawing Lessons*, 108.
24 Ibid., 106–07.
25 Ibid., 107.
26 Ibid.

therefore adds another between forward and backward, a balance found through childlike openness to the contingencies of process and materials.

Balancing Act

Kentridge's critique of enlightenment and his response to disenchantment have been critically informed by Theodor Adorno, the social theorist whose idea of the world as "damaged and fragmented" Kentridge cites as an important early influence.[27] In fact, when Kentridge says that art can counter enlightened rationality by seeking out the balance between light and shadow, he echoes Adorno's formulation of the central conflict in the history of art, a conflict which both "dictates" its "law of motion" and "cannot be eliminated."[28] For Adorno, this conflict occurs between magic and rationality.

Because art is said to originate in ritual and magic, it appears obsolete in a world subjected to rationality: "For the disenchanted world, the fact of art is an outrage, an afterimage of enchantment, which it does not tolerate."[29] Yet faced with obsolescence, artists can no more relapse into mystifying ritual than succumb to disenchantment. The resulting tension epitomizes art's central conflict, for artists must thread the needle between two false alternatives, disenchanted enlightenment and re-enchanted ritual.

We have already seen how Kentridge avoids the former alternative, since he rejects disenchanted enlightenment with his resuscitation of cinematic magic. The question, then, is how he avoids the latter, since, as Adorno writes, "to speak of 'the magic of art,' is trite because art is allergic to any relapses into magic. Art is a stage in the process of what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world, and it is entwined with rationalization."[30] When Adorno writes that art is a stage in the process of disenchantment, he means in part that the history of art cannot be written separately from the broader history of rationalization, from the progressive division of productive labor into smaller and smaller tasks and the corresponding increase in the internal complexity of administrative bureaucracies. Art too is subject to the forces of rationalization, which shape the conditions of its production, distribution, and reception.[31] Art is allergic to a relapse into magic because artists must confront the world in which they live, not dream idly of a past or future re-enchantment.

To avoid such a "relapse," Kentridge's prestidigitation must therefore not succumb to false optimism or nostalgia but rather remain connected to the world it enchants. Viewed in these terms, Kentridge's "practical epistemology" offers an example of self-critical reason, one that neither withdraws into shadow and ignorance nor accepts the blinding extreme of enlightenment. If we wish to understand Kentridge in these terms, however,

27 Kentridge quoted in Tamar Garb and Fiona Bradley, eds., "William Kentridge and Vivienne Koorland in Conversation with Tamar Garb, July 2015," in *William Kentridge and Vivienne Koorland: Conversations in Letters and Lines* (Edinburgh, 2016), 118–47, 126.
28 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* 54.
29 Ibid., 58.
30 Ibid., 54.
31 For example, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 105–43.

we must ask: what differentiates Kentridge's uses of cinematic magic from the kind of ahistorical "relapse" to which art is allergic?

For Kentridge, such a relapse is precluded by his acute awareness of his particular historical circumstances. His works manifest this awareness quite clearly, developing in tandem with the circumstances of South African history, which they register and question.[32] "I envy people," he writes, "who can get on with their work without having to bring the history of the world along with them. At some remote level it is a precondition that dogs my work."[33] This same awareness also shapes his engagement with other artists' legacies, both historical and contemporary.[34]

A case in point is his reception of Joseph Beuys. Kentridge knew of Beuys from his art teacher, Bill Ainslie, who regularly attended Documenta and reported back to his students. From these reports, Kentridge felt that "Beuys's work seemed an indulgence from the vantage point of South Africa, where the political struggles were so serious."[35] He later put the matter more bluntly:

> I was aware of Joseph Beuys—Beuys and his honey pump, which was supposed to be political art. But politics is not spreading honey around the main building at the Documenta art exhibition. It's putting electrodes on people's testicles, locking them up, putting them in fear of their lives.[36]

Honeypump (1977) embodied Beuys's conception of "social sculpture." Pumping two tons of honey through plastic tubing, the sculpture was judged complete, according to Beuys, only when accompanied by conversations on social and political questions. The pump itself was thus taken to represent an organicist conception of circulation fulfilled by the conversations it engendered. In Kentridge's view, however, this style of political art was closed to him, for its notion of politics seemed prey to a kind of magical optimism, the idea that sibylline interventions in public space could disrupt the workings of actual power, an optimism thoroughly untenable in apartheid South Africa.

The most important opponent of Beuys's social sculpture was the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. Best known today for his critique of museum institutions, which he famously parodied with his fictive institution, the Museum of Modern Art (Department of Eagles), Broodthaers was also an inventive filmmaker whom Kentridge acknowledges as an influence. Although most of Broodthaers's films were inaccessible in South Africa at the time of Kentridge's artistic formation, Kentridge at least knew Broodthaers's *The Rain (Project for a Text),* in which Broodthaers performs as

32 The critical texts on Kentridge's approach to political engagement are Rosalind E. Krauss, "'The Rock': William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection," in *Perpetual Inventory* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 55–88; and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *William Kentridge* (Brussels, 1998), esp. 9–34.
33 Quoted in Christov-Bakargiev, *William Kentridge,* 31.
34 See Joseph Koerner's and Benjamin Buchloh's essays in this volume.
35 Quoted in Neal Benezra, "William Kentridge: Drawings for Projection," in *William Kentridge* (New York, 2001), 11–28, esp. 13.
36 Calvin Tomkins, "Lines of Resistance," *The New Yorker,* January 18, 2010; www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/01/18/lines-of-resistance.

Marcel Broodthaers, stills from *La Pluie (Projet pour un Texte)*, 1969

a stone-faced, Keaton-esque figure similar to the persona often adopted by Kentridge, miming artistic frustration with comic lightheartedness.

In fact, the two artists independently arrived at surprisingly similar formulations of their response to enlightened rationality. Just as Kentridge finds in cinema a play between shadow and light that exemplifies a way of turning from coercive enlightenment, Broodthaers found in film a place "between the universe of fantasy and mathematical rigor," a way of making art that neither denied the progressive bureaucratization of art institutions nor capitulated to administrative rationality.[37] This underlying similarity manifests itself in several homologies between the artists' works. Both experimented with drawing directly upon celluloid (Kentridge's *Story of a Chair* and Broodthaers's *24 Images/Second*), overlaid projected images and texts in complex palimpsests (*Zeno Writing* and *The Crow and the Fox*), and forcefully engaged with the question of magic.

The Crow and the Fox, for instance, adapts Aesop's fable about the dangers of flattery, in which a crow snatches a piece of cheese and retires to a treetop to eat. A fox comes along and praises the crow, asking if its voice is as pretty as its feathers. The crow then caws, dropping the cheese at the feet of the salivating fox. Broodthaers's film projects the text of this story onto various three-dimensional objects—a boot, a telephone, flowers. The artist animates these objects through stop-motion, stopping the filming, manipulating the objects with his hand, then shooting again, such that they appear in the film to jump around their shelves. This film is then projected onto a screen that is itself imprinted with the text of the fable. Broodthaers therefore engages with the same "artist's hand" genre as Kentridge, thematically treating "misdirection." About 2 minutes in, the objects are replaced

37 Marcel Broodthaers, "La Figure 0," in Manuel Borja-Villel and Michael Compton, *Broodthaers: Cinéma*, 25, 314–15. On Broodthaers and administrative reason, see Buchloh, "Conceptual Art," 143; Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

Stills from *Zeno Writing*, 2002

by three successive photographs: the first is of the artist, the second of two hands holding a hat, and the third of hands covering someone's genitals. This sequence thematizes prestidigitation, reminds us of the magician's entreaty: "Watch the hand!"

The question of magic arises most directly in Broodthaers's response to Beuys, which criticizes the artist's pretension to "social sculpture." Understanding this response will help us to differentiate two senses of magic, first as relapse to ritual, then as prestidigitation. Differentiating these concepts will show how Kentridge's own reception of Beuys relates to his broader approach to magic and disenchantment.

In 1973, Broodthaers penned a polemical pamphlet, *Magic. Art and Politics.* The core of this pamphlet is an open letter that Broodthaers wrote to Joseph Beuys in the *Rheinische Post* entitled "Politics of Magic?"[38] Under the headline "Marcel Broodthaers, the Philosopher Among Düsseldorf Artists, Can No Longer Follow the Magician Joseph Beuys," Broodthaers's letter begins with his fictional discovery of an old letter: "In a dilapidated Cologne slum tenement which was itself difficult to discover I found a letter." He then transcribes the contents of this imagined letter, purportedly written by Jacques Offenbach and addressed to Richard Wagner.

> Your essay "Art and Revolution" ... discuss ... magic ... politics ... which you must surely be aware of. The politics of magic? Of beauty or of ugliness? ... Messiah ... In this struggle against the degeneration of art the musical drama would thus be the only form capable of uniting all the arts. I can hardly go along with that contention of yours, and at my rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics ... and ... magic ...[39]

The letter criticizes Beuys for his combination of self-styled shamanism and political activism. To Broodthaers, Beuys's "social sculpture" constituted a Wagnerian attempt at "uniting all the arts," and thus purported to integrate art into everyday life and public politics. Yet this very attempt actually mystified art's concrete institutional conditions. Obscuring those conditions, despite his putative goal of giving art a political function, Beuys ends up doing exactly the opposite, making unintelligible the concrete political relations adherent in art institutions, the way those institutions embody the administrative rationality of a disenchanted world. Rather than use rationality to criticize rationality, Beuys relapses into esoteric magic.

In his letter to Beuys, Broodthaers therefore appears to reject magic entirely. Yet the following pages of *Magic* reveal a more complex position, one closer to Kentridge's. On the left side of the fold, under the heading

38 Broodthaers, "Politik der Magie? Offener Brief von Broodthaers an Beuys," *Rheinische Post* (October 3, 1973).
39 Broodthaers, *Magie. Art et Politique* (Paris, 1973), 13. The ellipses are Broodthaers's, meant to indicate unintelligible passages in the original, fictional letter.

Marcel Broodthaers, enlarged frames from 16mm film *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, 1967.

"Magic," Broodthaers writes jocular entries for "Being an Artist" and "Being Narcissus." On the right side, under the heading "Art," one finds a photograph of a magic-slate, a toy for children, and its explanation: "The writing-slate is based on the following principle: each inscription can be wiped off just by pulling out the plate. Yet it remains invisibly engraved on a film inside the device."[40]

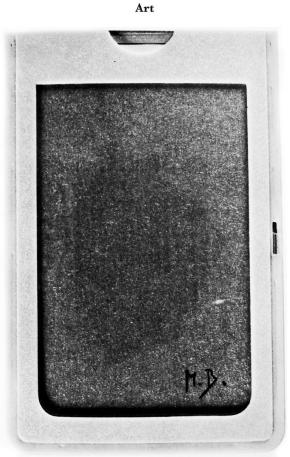
When it first appears, this magic-slate has Broodthaers's signature in the bottom-right corner. As one flips the pages of the book, the left side continues with translations of the text from French into German and English, while the right side exhibits the magic-slate in two more stages. If one looks only at the right side, the photos form a minimal, jerky flip-book, in which Broodthaers's signature moves from the bottom right of the slate to its center, to the top, and then jumps to the space below its frame. Broodthaers thus associates the "magic" of the magic-slate with the animation of a flip-book.

What, then, differentiates Broodthaers's magic-slate from the magical pretensions for which he chides Beuys? Whereas Beuys's magic is shamanistic and ahistorical, Broodthaers's is technical and modern. The difference is therefore between magic as sorcery and magic as a trick, where the former depends on dissimulating its conditions of possibility, the latter on exhibiting them. Whereas Beuys's shamanistic guise and personal mythology dissimulate the institutional conditions of his artistic persona, Broodthaers's animated signature shows the constitution of his artistic persona as itself a kind of trick, here associated with a child's toy.

It is this conception of magic as undisguised illusion which differentiates not only Broodthaers's magic-slate from Beuys's "politics of magic" but which also explains why Kentridge's uses of magic do not constitute a "relapse," in Adorno's sense. By "magic," Broodthaers and Kentridge mean a form of illusion with a historically specific condition, a form that both mimics modern technical rationality and resists it. They mean a tradition that flourished in the late 19th century, a tradition of magicians who claim no supernatural powers but rather expertise in the arts of illusion. In order to distinguish their craft from literal magic, these magicians took to unmasking alleged occultists. Beginning with Harry Houdini, who published a refutation of his namesake as *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin*, such magicians felt that their mastery of the science and technology of illusions made them responsible for protecting the public from charlatans. "As they unveiled the workings of their illusions," writes Laura Mulvey, "the magicians 'demystified' the ways in which human credulity could always be exploited."[41] Broodthaers's rejoinder to Beuys shows how this historically specific form of magic as a self-critical practice

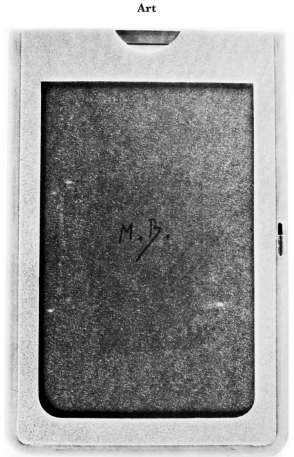
40 Ibid., 19. Broodthaers adopts the magic-slate as metaphor from Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 19 (New York, 1976), 225–32.

41 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London, 2006), 34.



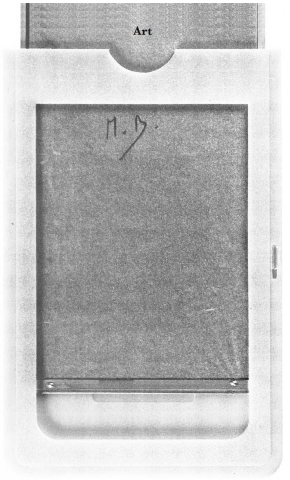
L'ardoise magique repose sur le principe suivant : toute inscription est effacée simplement en tirant sur la plaquette médiane. Elle reste cependant gravée, invisible, sur une pellicule à l'intérieur de l'appareil.

19



Die Schreibtafel beruht auf dem folgenden Prinzip : jede Beschriftung wird durch einfaches Herausziehen der Tafel ausgelöscht. Sie bleibt aber unsichtbar auf einen Film im Innern Vorrichtung graviert.

21



The writing slate is based on the following principle: each inscription can be wiped off just by pulling out the plate Yet it remains invisibly engraved on a film inside the device.

23

Marcel Broodthaers, *Magie. Art et Politique (Magic. Art and Politics)*, 1973

serves as a corrective to the kind of relapse Adorno has in mind, and also indicates why Kentridge takes up this tradition.

42 Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, 106.
43 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster (Bloomington, 1986), 72.
44 Ibid., 72.

Tabula Rasa

Describing how he used to play with his children in the studio, Kentridge relates his young son's astonishment at "the utopian perfectibility of the world in reverse," enabled by motion-picture technology:

> In the studio, I film my eight-year-old son. He takes a jar of paint and a handful of pencils, some books and papers. He throws the jar of paint across the studio walls, scatters the pencils, tears the papers and scatters the shards. We run the film in reverse. There is a utopian perfection. The papers reconstruct themselves perfectly every time. He gathers them all. He catches twelve pencils, all arriving from the different corners of the room in the same moment. In the jar he catches all the paint—not a drop is spilled. The wall is pristine. His joy at his own skill is overflowing. "Can I do it again?" he asks. Yes. But first we have to clean the studio.[42]

The child is a ready vessel for these feelings of joy and astonishment. For him, cinematic magic is still *new*, since motion pictures have not yet become banal through repetition and exposure. We adults, by contrast, no longer delight in such tricks, as they are all too familiar. The two characters in the story thus seem to personify a split within the modern beholder, a split between the incredulous adult and credulous child, the one who demystifies the trick and the one who remains enthralled.

This split between adult and child is used to address the paradox identified by Christian Metz, one which goes as follows: We adults know how cinema works and are not fooled by its illusions, yet "it is important for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected (or else the [film] is declared 'poorly made')," thus, although everyone "knows" that the motion we see on-screen is synthesized from discrete, static images, "everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really would 'believe in it.'"[43] If a continuity error occurs—an actor's jacket was buttoned before the cut but unbuttoned after—it disrupts the experience, breaking the illusion. But since we adults know perfectly well that we are watching fiction, the question arises: "Who is it who is credulous and must be maintained in his credulousness by the perfect organization of the machinery? [It] is, of course, another part of ourselves ... who continues to believe, who disavows what he knows."[44]

Kentridge is well aware of this duality, which he cites as the source of his interest in stage magic:

> [The] possibility—of enjoying the trick even when you know how it's done—is always a question about oneself. You split into the person who knows how it's done and into the person who is surprised or amazed. I suppose it has to do with the fact that we have to go through our lives as a single being but that we're aware of this fact and, so, are split.[45]

45 William Kentridge and Rosalind C. Morris, *That Which Is Not Drawn: Conversations* (Calcutta, 2013), 137.
46 Kentridge, *Black Box*, 49.

Moreover, while Kentridge introduces this coexistence of knowledge and disavowal through the ludic pleasures of children, he insists that the pleasure that children take in cinematic magic does not derive from their ignorance but rather from the give-and-take of knowing how an illusion works yet seeing it unfold nonetheless:

> Think of children playing games with shadows .... The pleasure arises from the fact that, though you know that two hands are making the shape, you cannot stop seeing it as a bird. *Your astonishment is at your inability to stop the suspension of disbelief*. The child who plays with shadows delights not just in seeing the image of a creature on the wall, but also in watching and grasping the illusion.[46]

Even the child, then, is able simultaneously to believe and disbelieve, to appreciate the illusion and understand its incredulity. To deny this duality in experience would be to deny the capacity for children to gain self-knowledge from their experience of filmic magic, since it is precisely the coexistence of knowledge and astonishment that allows them to resist disenchanted reason without withdrawing into myth.

It is important that Kentridge does not portray the child's play with magic as stemming from his ignorance, since the model of childlike ignorance has had a loathsome role in colonialist discourse. The opposition of infancy to maturity is bound up with that of light to shadow. Just as the analogy of enlightenment—knowledge : ignorance :: light : darkness—was adapted to the colonial project, forcefully bringing light to the Dark Continent, so too Africans were rhetorically infantilized to justify colonial uses of violence against them—colonizers : colonized :: adults : children. To understand how insidious the analogy becomes, hear how Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Prize–winning doctor, theologian, and philanthropist who worked and traveled widely in Africa, described his charge: "The Negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without the use of

authority. We must, therefore, so arrange the circumstances of daily life that my natural authority can find expression."[47]

In fact, this paternalistic impulse was uncomfortably linked to the anthropological study of primitive beliefs in magic. Drawing on classical anthropologists such as E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, for instance, Sigmund Freud explicitly cited the "magical thinking" of non-Western "primitives" as evidence that the development of entire cultures from primitive to civilized is repeated in the development of civilized individuals from children to adults. Adopting this analogy from evolutionary theory—first used to explain why human embryos seem to pass from fishlike to avian forms before appearing as mammals—he meant that the early stages of mental development in individual children in civilized culture might be used to understand the mentality of primitive societies.[48]

This idea was not merely theoretical, moreover. In 1856, when French colonial interests in Algeria were threatened by a religious uprising, Napoleon III sent Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin to pacify the rebellion by proving that the French colonists had greater magical powers. Thus "Robert-Houdin's use of electromagnets and automata in his act was reportedly successful in convincing the 'primitives' of how advanced their colonial masters were."[49] Here, the association of magic with childhood meets the paternalistic figuration of the colonial subject in the view that the Algerians, like children, were susceptible to occult powers that the colonizers no longer believed in. As a white artist working in South Africa, Kentridge could not, therefore, innocently treat children's astonished delight in magic as a matter of ignorance, could not adopt the figure of childhood as an emblem of unschooled naivety.[50]

In fact, Kentridge insists on the contrary, on the child's competence, asserting that the latter's pleasure does not derive from simple deception, but rather from seeing the magic trick while nonetheless "grasping the illusion." Kentridge's invocation of "children playing games" thus has a precision and sophistication worthy of his dialectical approach to enlightenment, for his characterization of children's play follows Adorno's. Adorno relates how Frederick Hebbel "asks what takes away 'life's magic in later years'?" He then considers Hebbel's answer: "It is because in all the brightly-colored contorted marionettes, we see the revolving cylinder that sets them in motion, and because for this very reason the captivating variety of life is reduced to wooden monotony."[51] Hebbel thus portrays the loss of magic as typical disenchantment, a consequence of lost ignorance. Like Kentridge, Adorno counters that children "are not so much, as Hebbel thought, subject to illusions of 'captivating variety,' as still aware, in their

47 Albert Schweitzer, *The Primeval Forest* (Baltimore, 1998), 99.
48 Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XIII (New York, 1913), vii–162. On the evolutionary theory of "recapitulation," see Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, 2009).
49 Dan North, "Magic and Illusion in Early Cinema," Studies in French Cinema 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 70–79.
50 See Emmanuel Pernoud, *L'invention du dessin d'enfant. En France à l'aube des avant-gardes* (Malakoff, 2015).
51 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 227.

Stills from *Sleeping on Glass*, 1999

spontaneous perception, of the contradiction between phenomenon and fungibility that the resigned adult no longer sees."

The difference between childhood and adulthood is therefore not that between ignorance and enlightenment but between resistance and resignation. "Play is his defense." In an especially beautiful passage, Adorno thus writes:

> In his purposeless activity the child, by a subterfuge, sides with use-value against exchange value. Just because he deprives the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign towards men and not what subserves the exchange relation that equally deforms men and things. The little trucks travel nowhere and the tiny barrels on them are empty; yet they remain true to their destiny by not performing, not participating in the process of abstraction that levels down that destiny, but instead abide as allegories of what they are specifically for.[52]

Rather than treat childhood as either a lower stage in mental development or as a paradigm of lost innocence, Adorno treats it—and its sense of play—as a form of resistance against instrumental rationality, not a retreat from knowledge and a relapse into magic, but rather a crucial example of how to use reason against itself. If cinema is a toy, it remains a philosophical one.

In *Sleeping on Glass*, Kentridge's submission to a group exhibition at the Villa Medici in 1999, Kentridge perfectly dramatizes this aspect of play, animating his son's Erector Set in a balletic dance. The swaying and swinging of toy cranes, designed after those paradigms of instrumental reason, allegorizes the transformation into purposelessness characteristic of children's play, just as, in the same film, an action figure waves his semaphore flags as allegorical signs of significance, deprived of coded meaning and hence of purpose, but waved in playful mimicry of adult enlightenment.[53] Kentridge thus associates cinema's magical transformations with the adult desire to play like a child. This play remains important to the artist, not as a figure for the difference between ignorance and knowledge but rather as a marker for the difference between an open ethos of discovery and a serious deference to pre-existing rules.

Moreover, just as Kentridge portrays the child as already savvy of what goes on in magic, already aware of the give-and-take between reason and astonishment, he also avoids projecting ignorance onto film's first audiences. Modern theorists have often mapped the split between young believers and older skeptics onto cinematic history, such that "the credulous

52 Ibid., 228.

53 These scenes further reflect back upon the earliest American stop-motion film, J. Stuart Blackton and Alfred Smith's *Humpty-Dumpty Circus* (1898), in which Smith tested the process using his daughter's dolls, since their movable joints allowed them both to stand without support and for their movements to be manipulated, frame by frame.

spectators at the 'Grand Café' in 1895 ... who fled their seats in terror when the train entered La Ciotat station" are "frequently and complacently evoked by [we] incredulous spectators who have come later (and are no longer children)."[54] The first moviegoers are thus made to constitute a "mythical childhood of the medium," serving a crucial function for we who have come later.[55]

These audiences did not, however, confuse cinema for reality. Far from it, for they consisted not of "gullible country bumpkins, but sophisticated urban pleasure seekers."[56] As is now well documented, these first audiences came to the movies well prepared by a still-vivid tradition of magical entertainment, especially performances of metamorphosis, one thing becoming another.[57] To them, the aesthetic of astonishment did not consist in taking the image for reality but in probing "the limits of human skill to amaze and baffle using a combination of practiced artistry and scientifically advanced ... mechanisms."[58]

It is this tradition of magical metamorphosis that underlies Kentridge's fascination with early cinema: "The pleasure for the spectators had to do with their ability to witness such an astonishing transformation while simultaneously recognizing its artificiality."[59] Kentridge is drawn to the film of this period for the same reason that Broodthaers illustrates his polemic against Beuys with photographs of magic-slate toys: namely that early moviegoers valued its magical qualities not *despite* the modern condition of disenchantment but precisely *because* of it. As Tom Gunning writes:

> Méliès's theatre is inconceivable without a widespread decline in belief in the marvelous, providing a fundamental rationalist context. The magic theatre labored to make visual that which it was impossible to believe. Its visual power consisted of a trompe l'oeil play of give-and-take, an obsessive desire to test the limits of intellectual disavowal—I know, but yet I see.[60]

For Kentridge, the form of magic to be found in early cinema is therefore fully imbricated with its historical situation. The task of recovery is not merely eclectic but rather cognizant of the historical distance that separates the present from the past, since the aesthetic of astonishment characteristic of this play of give-and-take had its own, built-in temporal structure.

Kentridge therefore returns to a time when film was new for the same reason he paces the studio in search of the unanticipated effect, for he recognizes that, as Gunning writes, "the cycle from wonder to habit need not run only one way. The [new] reception of [old] technology allows re-enchantment through aesthetic de-familiarization."[61] With his

54 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 73.

55 Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator." first published in Art and Text 34 (Spring 1989), 31-45

56 Ibid., 117. See also Gunning's "'Primitive' Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick's on Us," *Cinema Journal* 28, 2 (1989), 3–12.

57 See, for example, Dan North, "Magic and Illusion in Early Cinema," *Studies in French Cinema* 1, 2 (January 1, 2001): 70–79; Erik Barnouw, *The Magician and the Cinema* (New York, 1981).

58 North, "Magic and Illusion," 73. In fact, a whole genre of early films mocked the idea that one could be fooled by the movies, as in *The Countryman's First Sight of the Animated Pictures* (1901), in which the delight of a cowboy-hat-sporting hillbilly quickly turns to fear as he jumps from the path of a projected train.

59 Maria Christina Villaseñor and William Kentridge, Black Box (New York, 2006).

60 Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," 117.

61 Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn of the Century," in Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 39–60.

adaptations of proto-cinematic technologies like the phenakistoscope and the zoetrope, with his interest in reversal, and with his constant attempts to master the forms of illusion so intriguing to early filmmakers, Kentridge discovers the new in the old. Relearning the rules of what the artist calls "stone-age cinema," Kentridge walks forward and backward at one and the same time.

Autodidact

Like *Breathe*, *Anatomy of Melancholy* begins like a typical "artist's hand" film. We first see a closed book. Next, Kentridge's hand enters from the bottom of the frame to open the book and flip through a few pages. As his hand retreats, the pages flip themselves, animating their contents, which dance around the screen. At first, the animations are grammatical signs—ampersand, comma, and quotation mark—which grow and diminish as the pages flip. Soon, these marks are joined by black geometric shapes, squares, and triangles, adapted from the Suprematist vocabulary. These are then replaced by calligraphic splotches, somewhere between Jackson Pollock's drips and Franz Kline's slashes, which coalesce into a bird that flaps its wings in flight. The sequence ends with drawings of Kentridge dancing across the fold. In the final sequence, a calligraphic stroke gradually becomes a running man, its blotchy edges hardening and regularizing into isotype-like rectangles, then an image of the artist, running towards the edge of the book as though trying to escape its pages, like the *commedia dell'arte* figures in Méliès's *Magic Book* (1900).

Does the progress from shape to blot to image to moving picture stand for any known narrative of historical progress, such as the evolutionary progress from crude drawing to sophisticated realism, or its modernist reversal from naive realism to self-reflexive abstraction? The answer is clearly not: as the pages flip, we see their numbers in the upper-right-hand corner; these do not progress sequentially but rather jump around incoherently, as though the teleological choreography of reading, of flipping pages to journey from left to right, were deeply incompatible with Kentridge's method of leaping before looking, this frisson personified by the image of the artist struggling to run out of the frame against a tide of flipping pages. Instead of tracking the history of marks and signs as a progressive evolution, Kentridge runs away from the specter of art-historical progress.[62]

It is of course significant that, to do so, he returns to the flip-book, one of the earliest motion-picture technologies. In fact, when the flip-book was patented, in 1868, instantaneous photography had not yet been mastered, meaning that flip-book animations still depended on a mode of drawing that anticipated this future technology, depicting the notional breakdown

62 This operation recalls Marcel Broodthaers's *Voyage on the North Sea*, which, as Rosalind Krauss argues, "tells of the impossibility of [the progressive] story in the enactment of a kind of layering that can itself stand for or allegorize, the self/differential condition of mediums themselves." Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York, 2000), 53.

Installation view of *No, It Is*, 2012

of gestures into discrete instants that guided the scientific experiments of Muybridge and Marey.[63] Kentridge thus stages an anti-progressive sequence of images on a flip-book because that support itself apparently subverts teleological and deterministic accounts of technological rationality, for the medium preceded the very technology that seemingly enabled it. He thus revives magical technology as practical epistemology.

As Kentridge's hand closes the animated book, we find ourselves back in the studio, magic followed by routine. Should we choose to do so, we might run the film again, perhaps even in reverse, delighting once more in cinematic magic. If we do, the source of our wonder will be easy to grasp. We will not be suckered by illusions, nor will we forget our place in history. If we feel a bit like children, the feeling will not come as nostalgia but through our rediscovered joy in discovery and play, the pleasure of seeing pictures move even as we know exactly how they do. For what Kentridge gives us is possibility, the possibility of rediscovering the past as something new, of making reason a toy—feats of prestidigitation.

63 Tom Gunning, "The Transforming Image: The Roots of Animation in Metamorphosis and Motion," in *Pervasive Animation*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (London, 2013), 52–70, esp. 64.