The Futures of Trauma

The domain of Trauma Studies has in the past two decades become increasingly significant within academic discourse. Don De Lillo’s irreverent sketch in *White Noise* (1985) parodies the emerging field in the sardonic “Hitler Studies” of his protagonist Jack Gladney. De Lillo’s treatment suggests a somewhat wry disquiet at the commodification of Trauma, even if as an academic pursuit.

Few intellectual domains have in recent years had so sure and so ubiquitous a rise within the Humanities. Peter Ramadanovic has identified how “[t]he development of theory in America is marked by what has come to be known in the last ten years as trauma,” and he articulates a key question, “what is meant by trauma theory?”¹ The combined force of this comment and this query indicates that “Trauma Theory” as such has both filtered into the general domain of theory *per se* and also that there is a distinct realm of theoretical enquiry, now defined as “Trauma Theory.” This would seem to suggest that “trauma” provides both a content and a method.

Early 2009 seems a propitious moment to be considering ‘The Futures of Trauma,’ given the fall from grace of speculation, risk and futures trading. In our uneasy times, trauma, it would seem, is a safe bet.
The title of this collection of papers (*The Futures of Trauma*) reminds us that we are a
generation traumatized by complex time. Jean Laplanche, in an interview with Cathy
Caruth, has identified trauma as inherently temporal. His reading of Freud makes the
case that no incident, even if shocking, is in itself traumatic; rather, trauma arises at the
point of interface between incident and the recollection of that incident. Laplanche
perhaps has in mind the Freudian notion of *nachträglichkeit*, a term translated by James
Strachey into English as “deferred action.” What is invoked here is the conception that
the human subject ‘apprehends’ the significance of certain incidents at times via a kind of
feedback circuit, in which a second episode or encounter alters hermeneutic possibilities.
As a result, because of the complex temporality of the human being, re-readings
constantly inform and destabilize significance. This gives rise to an *event* in the
Heideggerian sense, and is what allows for the properly psychoanalytic *Trauma*.

My discussion of trauma and time will be structured around a reading of a short
animation film by South African artist William Kentridge. After several years’ hiatus
Kentridge in 2003 made a new animated work, *Tide Table*, using his signature method of
filming drawn and erased charcoal marks with his perennial protagonist ‘Soho Eckstein’
central to the narrative. At the start of the film, the arc of a wave swells, retreats,
advances. In the background, a soft calypso rises and falls, while the shoreline emerges
and then disappears in a cycle that is outside of time. It is an idyll. [IMAGE 1: ocean]
The film ends where it had begun, with the empty ocean rolling back and forth. This reiteration is despite the complex personal and national narrative which makes up the core of the film. The gentle to-and-fro of the wave action is consoling to the viewer, even while the insistent ebb and flow organize the film into the shape of a traumatic return.

Perhaps then the structure of the cycle, which is so insistent a cultural meaning, does this kind of double work. On one hand it organizes events within the repetitive logic of trauma, while nonetheless it provides an abstraction from local suffering by shifting our attention from the specific and subjective instance to the a-temporal frame of the universal.

The modern subject of human history has in significant ways resisted the conjunction of cyclical and of narrative time, and through literary genres such as the *bildungsroman* has sought to establish unidirectional progress as a natural form. Hamlet, on the cusp of that generic shift (from revenge tragedy to psychological novel) and historical transformation (from pre-modern to modern), is accused by his uncle of fixating upon the death of his father:

CLAUDIUS: ’Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father,
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his. . . .

Nature’s “common theme,” Claudius advises the youth, “[i]s death of fathers.” In other words, Hamlet is neither pre-modern nor modern, but is a signifier of the profound shift in assumptions about the place of the human subject during the sixteenth and early

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1 What I mean to suggest through this formulation is that a sense of the narrative ordering of the self as a biographical potentiality is one of the key markers of modernity.
seventeenth centuries. It is somewhat ironic that the Copernican revolution which spins the earth out of the central frame of meaning, is simultaneous with the emergence of a humanism that shifts the individual human subject into the centre of that frame. In other words the humanist revolution both asserts the centrality of the human subject within history and displaces that ‘man’ from the node of the cosmos.

My interest in Hamlet arises from the tension the play manifests between the biographical narrative of individualism and the mythic logic of collective experience. This is a defining text for early modern thought. In the twentieth century one of the key thinkers of high modernism, Freud, similarly had a complex and somewhat ambiguous understanding of temporality from within individual and collective perspectives. In this his theory had been informed by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919, Darwin’s primary advocate in Germany. It is Haeckel’s assertion that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. At one level the claim is an attempt to reconcile individual temporality with a trans-historical structure. While Haeckel’s evolutionary biological schema has been largely discredited within scientific discourses, it still provides a powerful metaphor underwriting much modern western thought, largely due to Freud’s influence.6

The motif of fathers and sons in Kentridge’s Tide Table seems to be doing a particular kind of ‘work’ that manages a similar contradiction. On one hand, the cyclical structure of the tide itself is somehow beyond individual human suffering; yet the elegiac quality of the Soho figure who watches the boy at play on the shoreline, as if the child is his relinquished youth, is insistently biographical, personal.
My consideration of Kentridge’s meanings begin with a recapitulation of several strands within the Soho Eckstein films, in order to understand what it is that Tide Table inaugurates. The film follows the characteristic formal logic of Kentridge’s animations in that the story-line is constructed out of metaphoric conjunctions rather than cause-and-effect necessity. In other words, the narrative arc is determined by mind rather than by history. We as viewers make sets of associations that to some greater or lesser degree suggest a sequence of causal relations. Cathy Caruth identifies this attention to interpretive practice as one of the values of trauma studies.

I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma – both in its occurrence, and in the attempt to understand it – that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)\(^7\).

This provides a key insight into what is implied in the remarks cited above by Ramadanovic. Trauma theory is, in the first instance, concerned with questions of hermeneutics. Caruth distinguishes between ‘the deterministic theory, in which the first event determines the second event, and the hermeneutic theory, in which the second event projects, retroactively, what came before’.\(^8\)

Another compelling metaphor in Tide Table depends on relations of scale, through which the link between individual and national biography is asserted. With a simple transition from ‘outside’ to ‘inside’ a compact bathing box on the beach is transformed into an overcrowded hospital ward.\([IMAGES\ 2\ and\ 3:\ bathing\ box\ outside\ and\ then\ inside\ as\ hospital]\) Tardis-like, the compact private booth will hold all the world if it must. This is the psychic territory described by Michael Herr, because it ceases to be clear, it ceases to matter, which incidents arise from Soho’s own experience, and which
are traces of a collective or national biography. In his brilliant document of the Vietnam War, *Dispatches*, Herr comments that his generation was to discover that it carried the guilt not only for what it had done, but for what it had seen. He explains, too, the temporal ‘doubling’ upon which trauma is premised.

... [I]t took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn’t always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.

Herr is part of what seems to me a newly articulated sense of the obligation of the eye-witness. What is modern in Herr’s exploration, is that the witness is “responsible for” what s/he sees. The memory of awful incident that is “stored there in your eyes,” is a personal archive waiting to be activated in some way. This is the scene of trauma. A second event will give form and significance to a preceding moment. Implicit is the idea that the witness becomes a repository of history, a kind of ‘history machine’ even if that history is (temporarily) un-relatable.

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Within a suitably Freudian logic, I will return, then, to *Tide Table* as a film in a cycle of incident involving the figure of Soho Eckstein. Eckstein, wearing his distinctive pin-striped business suit, is a surprisingly sympathetic protagonist of the poignant and elegiac film. In the early films such as *Johannesburg, Second Greatest City After Paris; Monument;* and *Mine*, the Soho figure had exemplified rapacious capital. A shift in the film-maker’s point-of-view begins implicitly in *Sobriety, Obesity, and Growing Old* (1991). That film sets up the Romantic voyeur Felix Teitelbaum, as the dialectical contrary to Eckstein. Felix is a somewhat ambiguous figure who seduces Soho’s wife

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2 (although it could be suggested that Goya’s *Disasters of War* implicitly undertook this work.)
while her husband is engaged in the world of work. The aging business-man’s domain of material power is placed under assault because he is at risk of losing the idealized beauty who (even though neglected) is at the centre of his erotic world. While Soho’s built universe of manifest wealth collapses around him, his real catastrophe is the loss of the central object of his desire. Surprisingly, while the Felix character in many ways functions as the protagonist of the film, our identification is largely located with Eckstein. Felix’s amorous adventures divert his attention from the countryside of post-industrial South Africa, but at various points in the film the naked youth is caught between the alternating rhythms of erotic play and anxious dread, now swimming (as it were) in the surrender to desire, now gazing with melancholy across the bleak horizon, as a kind of naïve Colossus. In the end, however, Soho ‘gets the girl’, and the film concludes with the business man lying in a tender embrace with Mrs Eckstein, while the naked Felix sits alone in a blighted landscape.

In the subsequent film, *Felix in Exile* (1994) the gaze of the young man has become both more engaged and more detached. It is the point-of-view of the fixated voyeur. From his apartment somewhere afar off in Europe or America, Felix longs for and imaginatively wanders across the South African spaces of conflict which are the legacy produced by Eckstein and his generation. He is guided by a kind of Cassandra-figure, a semi-naked young African woman who shows him scenes of human catastrophe\[^{11}\]. Bodies litter the landscape. Ultimately, the woman (Nandi) is herself shot down by an anonymous bullet. With tender but ineffectual sympathy Felix gazes at the ravaged world he would have inherited, had history taken another path. The film is, in large measure, about that gaze, and the complicity of the witness to trauma.
Kentridge’s next Soho Eckstein film, *History of the Main Complaint* was filmed in 1996. With the maturation of Kentridge’s formal craft, a shift had been instituted which increasingly modulated the raw and fierce ideological clarity of the early films. More attention is given to complexity. At one level this is a formal shift, but that new complexity is worth charting because of what it suggests about the philosophical and psychological impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa.\(^{12}\)

In *History of the Main Complaint*, the Soho and Felix figures have coalesced into a single protagonist, a troubled but not unsympathetic middle-aged figure (apparently more Soho than Felix, because he wears his pin-striped suit even in his hospital bed)\(^{13}\). The figure is in many ways a self-portrait of Kentridge in his early middle age and strikingly similar to the figure of Felix in *Felix in Exile*.\(^{14}\) Significantly, this film is made in the first year of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and one of its first screenings was at *Fault Lines*, an exhibition of new work which explicitly addressed the meanings being generated around that historic tribunal.\(^{15}\) In many ways the Commission clarified and consolidated identities of culpability and of oppression, through the explicit instruments of the Amnesty processes (in which perpetrators of Apartheid-era crimes presented their histories to a public hearing) and the Human Rights Violations Committee (which heard the testimony of victims of gross human rights crimes). Thus there was an increasingly detailed and explicit archive which named criminals and their deeds. Yet at the same time an ethos of generalized disquiet and guilt was pervasive because of the ubiquity of the testimony. Radio, televisual and print media everywhere carried the grim record of South Africans and who they had been to one another. It was no longer only a
story about Apartheid murders. Special Event Hearings were established in order to identify the roles played by the media, the medical profession, and business in the ongoing horror that had been sanctioned by Apartheid laws.

Lauren Kruger suggested in 2001 that South Africa was then not so much in a post-apartheid phase, but rather that it was in a post-anti-apartheid era, by which she was suggesting that the Manichean logic of the apartheid years had both given rise to and defined the country as intractably locked into an oppositional racial logic which continued to mark it as a society in trauma. This is a powerful insight, but one which does not adequately indicate the extent to which the country was then and still is in significant ways a post-TRC nation. The modeling of citizenship which was produced through the ideological apparatus of the Commission has given rise to a culture with a complex of contradictory imperatives. The legal and judicial machineries of the state (accountability, compensation, reparation) are at odds with the pervasive psychologized and theologized discourses of restoration, forgiveness, projection and introjection. The seeming ubiquity of this ‘language of forgiveness’ in the country has generated anxiety about a crisis through a failure of accountability. How does the reckoning take place if the moral economy has been undermined? Rosalind Morris, in “The Mute and Unspeakable,” comments on the implications for the law in a country where “a rule of law has [itself] been spectralized.” What I take Morris to be suggesting, is that the quasi-legal status of the TRC set up contradictions and unease about the legality of its own processes. There were several challenges to the TRC’s procedures from the families of activists who resisted the granting of amnesty to apartheid thugs who had been implicated in acts of horror or violent excess. The shift between pre-and post-apartheid
legal practice meant that the very status of legality itself was called into question. By the same token, the asymmetries within the handling of amnesty applicants who were apartheid activists and those applications from members of the anti-apartheid movement served to undermine the legal principles which were defining the constitutionality of the emerging state. In Morris’s terms, the rule of law was being spectralized. It is possible to interpret *Hamlet* as an allegory of a similar generational crisis. The shift from a set of legal ethics dominated by the principle of revenge, to one in which such practices are themselves rendered illegal, must surely have undermined the idea of the law itself. Hamlet’s father’s ghost could indeed be read as a spectre of a medieval chivalric code which had once been dominated by the logic of revenge, and which had been displaced by an abstracted justice that set out to suppress and criminalize that very principle.

In the South African instance, perpetrators of abuse, it was discovered, were not always white, and amnesty applications from “askaris” (ex-freedom fighters who had been ‘turned’ and had become hit-men for the Apartheid regime) rendered the landscape of culpability similarly ambiguous. This, explicitly, is the complexity of the post-traumatic world which Kentridge addresses in *History of the Main Complaint*. The Soho Eckstein/Felix Teitelbaum figure, who at the start of the film is in an emergency ward, recalls scenes of himself driving through a landscape. On his journey he witnesses a brutal beating; and he also is involved in an accident when his car strikes a fleeting figure who darts out of the darkness into the path of the vehicle. Is he culpable for both of these incidents? Does responsibility reside in intention or in effect? In neither of these incidents is Soho expressly guilty. He is not the agent of the beating which he witnesses, and the event in which his car strikes a pedestrian is an accident. Nonetheless, in the unconscious,
cause and effect, action and agency are conflated. The unconscious knows no time, we are told, and so in the dream work of the sick man’s suspended animation, incidents contaminate and inflect each other, as free-floating affect attaches itself now to one scene, now to another. Moreover, the protagonist has assumed the position of guilt through witnessing, an ethical activity as sketched in Michael Herr’s *Dispatches*, cited above: (“... [Y]ou were as responsible for everything you saw as were for everything you did. . .”

The formal solution which Kentridge finds for this conflict is through figuring his protagonist as a composite of both Felix and Soho. The split is no longer spatial, but is in some measure a temporal one, because as the car proceeds along the road, we are very conscious that the driver himself is looking both forward and backward, his eyes gazing into the rearview mirror. [IMAGE 4: Kentridge eyes in rearview mirror] (We had seen that reciprocal pair of gazes in a visual dialogue between Felix and his mirror image in *Felix in Exile.*) Nonetheless the defenses which have enabled Soho’s life soon resume their place. Repressive mechanisms dislodge any traumatic content from Soho’s consciousness. The medical scans to which the ailing man is subjected reveal that his inner organs have been displaced by the paraphernalia of the office: typewriters, telephones and blotters have crowded out the heart, the liver, the spleen. In other words, when his humanity is scrutinized it is found to be wanting, and at the close of the film Soho is sitting upright in his hospital room conducting business as using, with telephone jangling and the clatter of typewriters. He has reverted back to the Soho Eckstein, industrial magnate of *Mine.*
After *History of the Main Complaint* Kentridge made two further Soho Eckstein films, *Weighing and Wanting* and *Stereoscope*, works which both find formal strategies for dealing with the split subjectivity of the Eckstein figure. Eckstein here is caught in an alienated relation to his own desire. As in *History of the Main Complaint*, there are no longer two antagonists, Felix and Soho. Rather, the split is rendered as simultaneous within the self. Two Soho figures stand side-by-side, conflicted internally. In *Weighing and Wanting* the conflict is represented as pairs of textual conundrums. [IMAGE 5: Stereoscope double Soho] 6.

By 2003, however, in his film *Tide Table* Kentridge uses a new structure to represent the divided self. A middle aged man at the seaside watches over the play of a young boy and it is unclear whether this child is the man’s son (and thus his future) or an emblem of his lost self (his past). The remaining portion of my paper makes an attempt to interpret this increasingly explicit temporal metaphor.

*Tide Table* contains several intersecting narrative arcs. One of these captures scenes of Soho Eckstein at the beach in reflective mode. The somber businessman sits in his deckchair observing and being observed. He watches the boy at play skipping stones across the sea; he observes a religious ritual enacted in the waves (a baptism of saints from the Zion church. See Image on Cover); and at one point he reads current event in the newspaper, and we are shown the rise and fall of the stock market which coalesces with a graph of a Tide Table. There are other events in the film which seem to arise from a neutral space not necessarily identified with any one particular character inside the action. We witness imagistic impressions of cattle, alternately fat and lean, as they stray
into the ocean and are overcome by the waves. (The Biblical source for the image is explicitly about the metaphoric displacement of time into space. Joseph, in captivity in Egypt, interprets Pharaoh’s dream of seven fat and seven lean cows. The fat cows, Joseph explains, represent seven years of plenty which will be succeeded by seven years of scarcity, the seven lean cows of the dream).

The bathing booth on the shoreline is at times rendered realistically as a landscape detail, but at times it is viewed through a kind of X-ray vision, and we see it transform from a beach storage facility filled with deckchairs, to a slaughterhouse, to an extermination camp, to a hospital ward filled with ailing bodies. Soho is overlooked by three military generals who survey the scene with binoculars from their hotel balcony.

In many ways the Utopian project of the South African emergence in 1994 from the long persistence of Apartheid horror, and the globally celebrated procedures of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had by 2003 been overwhelmed by the catastrophic prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the region. What is more, the country had become embroiled in a bizarre debate because of President Mbeki’s unorthodox position on HIV. Often characterized as ‘denialist,’ Mbeki emphasized the socio-economic character of the AIDS, in a discursive manoeuvre which uncoupled AIDS from the HI-Virus. The achievements of a non-violent transformation which was premised on the necessary public record of the Apartheid years had augured well. Through the TRC South Africa was going to be able to embrace its present and future without averting its gaze from its recent past. Now, it seemed, there was a ‘repressed’ around questions of patriarchy, sexuality and the body that had not been part of that reckoning.
2003 was the high point in the national crisis around questions of Health and constitutional rights. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was embarked upon a national campaign to secure free access to antiretrovirals to all HIV positive South Africans. For many observers the state response seemed high-handed, dismissive and cavalier. Some posited interpretations in an attempt to avoid the conclusion that the post-Apartheid state held its ideological project at a value which exceeded human suffering. Without disregarding the obvious distinctions between the apartheid era and the post-apartheid state, these events were interpreted as suggestive of a Hegelian dialectic. The new state seemed to be engaged in a grotesque recapitulation of Apartheid’s defense of ideology at huge cost for humanity. State apparatuses were proving themselves to be paranoid indeed, and the government clearly considered any challenge to centralized authority as insubordination. The campaign for health rights became a campaign about modes of governance. State spokespersons articulated this position expressly. However by 2004 the government had begun its campaign of rolling out free antiretroviral drugs in a massively successful strategy to curtail mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

These factors all inform *Tide Table* and I would like to posit that the film is at one level a filmic meditation on the significance of Constitutional Law for transition justice. It was, after all, the Constitution which was called upon to defend citizens’ rights to antiretroviral treatment. It is constitutional law which stands between South Africans and the Generals on the balcony.

The old law under apartheid was rendered void, invalidated. Many of its instruments had been proven to be corrupt or illegitimate. In such terms the ‘law of the father’ was renounced. Revolutionary impulses have historically been founded upon the
overthrow of the father, whose rule is felt to be arbitrary. In South Africa, a new generation of so-called ‘Young Lions,’ (activists who experienced the autochthony of their succession to power) asserted itself against traditional authorities.  

In this context the Constitutional Court continues to play a considerable role in the defining of the law in its moment of emergence. New precedents are being tested in every sphere of activity, and the law is thus experienced as coming into being through a disavowal of the past and a commitment to an as-yet undefined future. It is, as it were, in its phase of Aufhebung. In such a phase the dialogue between past and future is destabilized, and the new becomes the foundational. It is worth noting that the Constitution has been amended thirteen times in this process of becoming what will constitute an originary text through which such a phase of ‘becoming’ will have been possible. Once the Constitution was set in place it provided the conditions for the emergence of the constitution. In these terms, it might be understood to be the exemplary traumatic text.

The motif of the boy-on-the-beach informs us. The boy (who clambers over rocks, throws stones into the waves, builds castles which mimic the beach hotel, and frolics inside the bathing booth) is never identified as having any explicit relation to the middle-aged Soho Eckstein. Yet there is an attention and engagement with the boy from the man which allows us to imagine a sympathetic accord. Visually the film elides the two persons, one bright with careless play, the other melancholy (almost inconsolable.) Both the boy and Soho seem to have the same care-giver. At several points in the film an African woman in a Zion church uniform (which in ways mimics the costume of an Edwardian nurse), is shown overseeing the romping boy, as well as the sleeping figure of
the older man in his deck chair. At one point while Soho dozes, she affectionately
careses his arm. The event can readily be interpreted as a maternal embrace but there is
something of the erotic in it too. (The gesture is almost identical to a tender caress given
to Felix by Soho’s wife in the film *Obesity, Sobriety and Growing Old*). As Freud had
noted in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, ‘love and hunger meet at a woman’s breast.’ This
insight arises from an amusing anecdote which Freud recounts, regarding a sexually
astute young man who comments about the attractive wet-nurse who had raised him, that
he should have taken greater advantage of his opportunity at her breast. It is this
characteristic infantile sexuality which is repressed during a period of latency in the
child’s development, and that produces a characteristic split in human subjectivity.

There is between Soho and the boy a shared ‘object,’ the Nurse. All-important
to the survival of the infant, the Nurse has in the past decade become the figure
associated with critical care of ailing adults, largely due to the epidemic of HIV/AIDS.

Here Kentridge deals with one of the great repressed facts of South African life.
Millions of young white South Africans have been raised (breast-fed) by African women
who were their primary care-givers. At the same time the repudiation of that fact via
Apartheid legislation produced a traumatic rupture which deformed the erotic content of
such attachments into a monstrous denial. During the years of ‘high’ apartheid all sexual
contact between black and white South Africans was proscribed by the so-called
“Immorality Act.” Desire ‘across the colour bar’ became a perversion.

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3 “Object” is here intended in its psychoanalytic sense. An ‘object’ is that which is outside of the self, through which the self comes to recognize its existence in the world as a distinctive integer. It is thus through recognizing the Mother (the Nurse) as a being with its own finitude, that the greedy ego of the infant comes to recognize that it too has boundaries.
At the close of the film Soho is seen at the shoreline skipping stones across the waves in imitation of the child, while the boy plays on the sand at the feet of his caregiver. It is as if a special dispensation has been attained through which Soho’s regression back to boyhood allows for a reintegration of the erotic and the maternal object.

The boy may represent the next generation. In this he might provide an emblem of a future prospect; however he might as well be an emblem of the past, the embodied carefree childhood of Soho himself. Is Soho looking at what has been or what is yet to come?

As Soho reads his newspaper, a chart indicates that this leisure time on the beach is spent in “Indolence” not “Play.” Thus while within the shape of the film there is the suggestion of a possible restoration, this will be of no significance within the narrative of the individual who is caught within the inexorable processes of historical time for which each one is held accountable. Soho’s situation makes any return to libidinal play all but impossible. It is as well. Ultimately time itself allows for the transfer of roles from father-to-son. Freud’s *The Future of An Illusion* (1927) is in ways the precursor to *Moses and Monotheism*, the last work he completed before his death. In these works Freud begins to examine the religious impulse as an expression of a profound father-complex. Inside complex time the adult is always a child in relation to its parents, but such a child as lords it over the next generation.

“When the growing individual finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, that he can never do without protection against strange superior powers, he lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of his father.” In other words, for Freud the potent divine authority is a projection, a displacement by the child who wants both to
displace and to cling to patriarchal power. Hamlet’s own unaccommodating fidelity to his father might be interpreted in light of this insight. His own will-to-power must be masked by a hyperbolic commitment to the supernatural spectre of his father, the one who will not die. This eternal patriarch is both his blessing and his curse.

Kentridge’s shift from a largely spatialized metaphor of the self slit under two identities has then become an increasingly complex temporal figure. Soho’s “other” is no longer figured primarily through the image of a rival, but in terms of a generational transfer of identities and roles. In these terms, perhaps, the films suggest a move from the anti-apartheid logic of the 1980s to a post-TRC moment. A work of reparation is inaugurated which will engage with the traumatic substance of this country’s repressed tyrannies against the Self and against its Others.

NOTES:
2 The introductory notes to the interview assert that “[h]is pioneering work on Freud’s early writing revealed the temporal structure of trauma in Freud and its significance for Freud’s notion of sexuality.” In Caruth, Cathy, “An interview with Jean Laplanche” in *PostModern Culture* 11.2 (2001), 1.
3 This structure is at the heart of Derrida’s work on the postcard: it is the second event that precipitates a first event.
4 Caruth, Cathy. “An Interview with Jean Laplanche.”
5 Soho Eckstein is an iconic figure within Kentridge’s animation oeuvre. Many of the films are structured around Eckstein’s experiential world, that of the late capitalist in contemporary South Africa. It is necessarily a limited world view, one which has incessant incursions from various segments of the broader human community as well as from his unconscious.
9 Caruth’s interview with Laplanche makes it clear that such spatial and temporal metaphors are, at some level, interchangeable.
“CC: Another way in which you have talked about this position of the other in trauma is in terms of a model which is less temporal than spatial. You note that the word “trauma,” in its three uses in Freud (as physical trauma, as psychic trauma, and as the concept of traumatic neuroses) centers around the notion of piercing or penetrating, the notion of “effraction” or wounding. This notion of wounding seems to imply a spatial model, in which the reality of the trauma originates “outside” an organism which is violently imposed upon. You have suggested that the temporal and spatial models are complementary.

JL: . . . Now the spatial model is first of all a biological model. That is, an organism has an envelope, and something happens inside, which is homeostatic, and something is outside. There is no need of psychoanalysis to understand that. . . . The problem of the other in psychoanalysis is not a problem of the outside world. . . . The problem is the reality of the other, and of his message.

. . .” (From “An Interviews with Jean Laplanche” in PostModern Culture 11.2 (2001), 24-25.


11 Many of the images of dead bodies worked as charcoal drawings in Felix in Exile are from forensic photographs of violence in the early 1990s. In some ways this film constitutes Kentridge’s Disasters of War. Goya has been an abiding influence on Kentridge’s visual imagination. Something of the modern genius for print-making was precipitated in particular ways by Goya, who explores the obscenity of horror through his astonishingly intuitive use of the unreadable mark. A black smudge makes us read in the horrible fact of castration; a quick blurred line is a stream of vomit pouring from the mouth of a man who witnesses a mass slaughter. Something of the imprecision of Goya’s mark is inherited by Kentridge, who often leaves the interpretation up to us, making us complicit as viewers.

12 The TRC produced a series of testimony and amnesty applications through which both the perpetrators and the victims of apartheid-era crimes brought their accounts into a formal public arena. The information became integral to the new national narrative that was being produced in the first years of the New South Africa after the first non-racial elections in 1994.

13 A complex and engaging reading of the film is to be found in Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten, “History as the Main Complaint: William Kentridge and the Making of Post-Apartheid South Africa.” Art History: 27.4, September 2004: 672-691. The paper expressly considers the structure of temporality in the film.

14 Such an assertion always carries the risk of naïve fallacies about the identity between the artist and the figure in a work of art. Nonetheless Kentridge has throughout his career modeled his male subjects on himself, and there is a substantial body of work which expressly examines the “staging of the self” in this way. Increasingly Kentridge is integrating himself in his works either expressly, as a performer (Seven Fragments for Georges Méliès and I am not me, the Horse is not Mine), or as a gestural emblem of the artist (a trace of himself and his arm appear at the periphery, as a creative demiurge, in What Will Come Has Already Come, and in the recent films Breathe, Dissolve, Return screened at the Venice Film Festival in 2008.) This is part of Kentridge’s deliberate confounding of the positions of the Subject and the Object as his work explicitly engages with questions of spectatorship and the activity of viewing.

15 In 1996 I curated a series of cultural interventions, Fault Lines, which was established in order to consider conceptions of truth and reconciliation. Given the explicit political and legal objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), my purpose was to draw on the arts to engage with a more philosophical and cultural set of propositions. Memory, sadism, masochism, repression, and narrative logic were the habitual terrain of the arts, and so I called on artists to add these dimensions to the range of conversations. Fault Lines included an art exhibition, a series of staged readings, a conference and a workshop for journalists. It also included the theatre production Ubu and the Truth Commission (directed by William Kentridge, performed by Handspring Puppet Company, written by Jane Taylor).


Freud’s Case Study of *The Wolfman* had hypothesized the idea of ‘screen memories’, recollections which stand in front of and mask other memories more inaccessible to the conscious mind.

The complex conflation of biography and national narrative is compounded here because Kentridge’s father, Sir Sydney Kentridge, QC, himself began his career as a human rights lawyer and has gone on to be an acting Judge in the Constitutional Court in South Africa.

Wordsworth’s insight (in “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold”, 1802) that ‘The child is father of the man’ is, at one level, an assertion of a psychological principle, (that childhood experience is foundational for adult consciousness) but at the same time it suggests an inversion of generational authority and received wisdom. Here it is youthful impressionability which is desired above adult insight.