ARTFORUM

Processional Ethics: William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance

By Homi K. Bhabha (October 2016)

William Kentridge, More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015, eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones. Installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2016. Photo: Stephen White.

THE DAY DIES SUDDENLY in the heat of Bombay. The late breezes coming off the sea blow a shadowed light across a city that moves at the pace of its pedestrians—twenty-two million on the streets every day. Like nowhere else I have ever lived, the sound of feet marks the time of day, the mood of the hour. Small steps rushing to school in late morning; the dragging scrape of load-bearing men and women throughout the day; the shuffling thud and tread of bare feet everywhere, all the time. Late evening approaches and crowds slowly flatten into dark shapes moving against the last evening light; as if from nowhere, the city turns into a throng of processions. Processions for saints and politicians; processions of protest and prayer; wedding processions and public demonstrations. Evicted slum dwellers carrying their meager possessions to yet another "illegal" site; ecstatic devotees making their riotous way to the seafront at Chowpatty to immerse acrylic sculptures of gaudy gods in the dim water.

I rush out to take a video of the procession passing. Cymbals. Megaphones. Fists raised. Trumpets. *Bhajans*. Dirges. Slogans. Slow walking. Bollywood dancing. Strewn flowers. Incense. I try to get a frontal view, and then another shot from a height, and then some footage as I walk beside the crowd and merge into it to get a view from within the veering and winding movement of people and things. No image seems adequate. I erase them all. I am either too early or too late. I am left alone with the sound of the dying drumbeat, and distant footsteps of the throng. The procession always passes me by.

AN IMAGE ENTERS, FLIES THROUGH

William Kentridge's *More Sweetly Play the Dance*, 2015, opens with a presentiment of the procession, not its presence: the Dance of Death. Across eight screens, the nonlandscape around Johannesburg—grass, tracks, culverts, pipes, and power lines—at first appears flat and uneventful amid a threnody of wailing and drumming. Johannesburg suffers from a "lack of

geography,"[1] but it has all the forebodings of allegory, the mise-en-scène of myth. The air is expectant and unstill; charcoal dust flies in the face of the wind; the smudged light of dusk sets the day on edge. Something is on the verge of happening. Turning to the first screen on my left, I wait for the flaring entry of the procession to carry me on its linear passage across the installation, from left to right, from start to finish. But as I am about to step into the procession, I face a refusal of time and place. This is *not* the moment or the direction. From the very edge of the last screen on the far right, a garbed, ghostly apparition startles the frame with the acrobatic speed of a tumbleweed: a whirling dancer sweeps across the screens from right to left, brushing against the grain of looking. And disappears.

Still from William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015, eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones.

The fight against time—the warding-off of death even during the etiolation of life in the present—this spirit of presentiment haunts the making of *Dance*. The work unravels just as it is about to begin, unsettling the viewer's expectations and the artist's intentions. The unscripted spirit of imminence—of something about to happen—haunts the practice of medium and material: charcoal, camera, rubber eraser, screen, music, movement, materials suspended between contingency and agency, between mark-making and erasure, ghostly deposits of charcoal and the grain of celluloid. These practices disrupt linear procession or progress, enacting dizzying reversals and leaps in time. The dance of death draws out the moment in rituals of resistance, its performers dancing furiously to delay and defeat the drumbeat of death, narrating cycles of stories to delay the end.

TIME IN THE STUDIO

The dark smudges of *Dance* bear the traces of its history foretold some years earlier in Kentridge's *The Refusal of Time*, 2012:

I understood the project when I realized that it was really about fate. Everybody knows we are going to die: But the resistance to that pressure coming toward us is at the heart of the project. At the individual level it was about resisting: not resisting mortality in the hope of trying to escape it, but trying to escape the pressure it puts on us. . . . It's as though time were being invited to Dance, and time itself is refusing to take part: It is time that refuses.[2]

Likewise, the eight-screen format used for the projection of *Dance* looks back to other works, and in each "smudge" there is an element of presentiment. *Fortuna*. The calcified, encrusted texture of the blackthorn brushwood wall in Bad Rothenfelde, Germany, and its sheer scale—nearly 1,400 x 33'—its physical presence, suggest a technique of temporality that significantly informs the deep structure of *Dance*. As the viewer moves along the wall to catch up, or come

level with, the narrative of the moving image, time also courses through the background surface on which the image is projected. The blackthorn walls catch and release light in quick impulses that set the screen aquiver. Kentridge's habit of repeatedly drawing and erasing the background while continually filming the blurred traces produces an unsettling effect of light as the flickering of fate itself.

I think this movement of time in the background as well as the obvious one of the movement of people in the front is an important component of the Dance. The next vital part was to place them in the world. Placing them between a large sky and a landscape foreground through which they move. . . . There is the linear progression from left to right across the eight screens, and people entering the screens as others leave. But the performers are also continuously present.[3] Caught in the fibrillation between figure and ground, the viewer contemplates his or her own unsteady place in death's passing procession.

Kentridge's frieze for the vast travertine walls (1,640 x 33') that flank the Tiber, *Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome*, 2016, resolves an ethical dilemma by changing scale and dimension. What happens if you unwind Trajan's Column so that figures placed in an ascent, spiraling upward, are now arranged alongside one another in a proximate relation? Soldiers, generals, and heroes find themselves side by side with prisoners, slaves, defeated armies. And each one's fate is continuously present in the *figura* of the other's fortune. *Figura*, in this context, should be understood, following Erich Auerbach's reading of Lucretius, as "dream image," "figment of fancy," or "ghost,"[4] This creates, as Kentridge puts it:

A kind of continuous presence . . . dispersed across the screens. It was also made more dense in the editing where figures were layered on top of one another to make the crowds walking along.[5]

The shift from the vertical spiral of Trajan's Column to the lateral structure of *Dance* is not merely a change in dimension and direction. The act of unwinding the column finds its trace in the twirler's gambol that unspools and undermines the narrative of progress at the very start of *Dance*. What is the purpose of this reversal, this irruption—is it life's revenge or fate's reprise?

WHILST, BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE

Refugees, manual laborers, political demonstrators, garbage collectors, religious celebrants, clerks chained to their desks, Ebola victims limping with IV drips hanging off their skeletal frames, a ballerina *en pointe*, and, as always, the whirling ghost dancer upsetting the order of things: These figures of fate bear their singular suffering, but they also carry the shared burden of what Kentridge has called "the procession of the dispossessed." And this procession is always passing: "Plato's crowd has of necessity to be a procession, observed neither advancing nor retreating, but passing."[6]

Each foot that keeps in step with Death's drumbeat is foreshadowed by a time line running through the procession, whispering *whilst*. Kentridge writes:

"Whilst" is the grammatical form of unanticipation. Whilst hanging up the washing, whilst

reading the newspaper, whilst pausing at the stop street, whilst peeling a peach—the visitor calls, the world changes.[7]

Still from William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015, eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones.

Intrigued by this formulation, I asked Kentridge about whilst, and this was his response:

Whilst is the strange grammatical form used in the official records of mine accidents—specifically in the gold mines, but I presume in other mines too. Functionaries of the mines—clerks, shift bosses—were trained to report on all accidents using this form. There would be the description of an ongoing activity, and then the rupture of the accident. Such as: "Whilst drilling at the rock face, there was a rock burst which crushed the miner's leg." "Whilst walking from the mine headgear to the compound, the miner was hit by a truck." And so on. So that the mine register had a long litany of sentences, each beginning with the word whilst.[8]

Whilst is a subordinating conjunction that signifies temporal simultaneity: two activities going on side by side; diverse experiences, perceptions, or actions occurring at the same time. However, by associating *whilst* with the agency of death and dispossession, Kentridge introduces a violent disjunction into the time scale of simultaneity. This process is visible in the examples Kentridge gives of the uses of the term *whilst*: An ongoing activity carried out with the expectation of timely progress and customary closure is suddenly ruptured beyond recognition. *Whilst* announces the normal order of the day—its idealized linear progress, its round-the-clockness—and then confronts the quotidian with a sudden reversal of fate that forever disrupts its duration and durability. The ongoing narrative ends whilst the story of suffering begins; life as we know it is tragically broken. *Whilst* introduces a scalar disjunction between the temporal unfolding of the everyday and the instant caesura of emergency. The continuity of the diurnal is not confronted with a reversal or refusal of time; it is abruptly brought up against the severance of time's causal chain, a cutting-out of the engine of everyday life. The everyday is now in a state of crisis; the diurnal is driven by death; the ongoing is gone. Continuity comes face-to-face with the seizure of time in iterative, pulsating patterns.

Everyday/emergency, life/death, ongoing/arrest, continuity/cutout: These couplings are as structural as they are visual. They enunciate times that are out of joint while maintaining a material presence in the dark gaps or transitional voids in between the eight screens of *Dance*—vestiges, in the artist's working memory, of the concertina-like "folded pages of a leporello book"[9] or the imperceptible split second of blackness between film frames. These disjunctions reverberate between screens; they interfere with the continuity of projections and the integrity of images; their estranged simultaneity performs a "cacophony of excess and uncertainty and

indecision."[10] Silhouette and shadow play are signature forms that figure within Kentridge's processional works. The challenge now is to think of the whole installation—conceptual frame and physical format—as one large reversed silhouette: the interleaved dark spaces where everything disappears, setting up a color contrast with the eight large lit screens that project the procession forward. The shadow figures marching *within* the procession create their own silhouettes against the larger moving design of visibility and invisibility that constructs the installation as a whole. *Dance* is a layered spectacle in which frame and figure mirror each other *whilst* moving in opposite directions at the same time. The play of contrasting light is filtered through three screens—frame, background, and foreground—as if they are "pinned on top of each other, seen together at one glance."[11]

Whilst, in its various grammatical and graphic configurations, provides a time frame and a picture plane that resonates with the montage-like simultaneity and dissonance of Kentridge's studio praxis: "seen together at one glance, cut in half, seen alongside each other, in front of."[12] I recall Jacques Rancière's marvelous description of the scale of montage as that of "little machineries of the heterogeneous,"[13] as

organizing a clash, presenting the strangeness of the familiar, in order to reveal a different order of measurement that is only uncovered by the violence of a conflict. . . . The distance and the collision . . . [reveal] the secret of a world—that is, the other world whose writ runs behind its anodyne or glorious appearances.[14]

Hard as I try, I have difficulty visualizing, on the page, the movement initiated by these conflicted conjunctions, these splits in simultaneity: the emergency-in-the-everyday, the catastrophic-in-the-customary. And yet *Dance* leads us, in its wise and wily way, toward the strange place from which the Dance of Death begins. We have been forewarned of something untoward by our experience of the spinner who crosses the screen from right to left, contrariwise, against the flow of the procession. And each time I see that ghost dance, I cannot decide whether it is the opening scene of the work or an entr'acte.

"Where does the image come from?" is one of Kentridge's repeated questions, and now we have an inkling of an answer. *Dance* moves neither from left to right nor from right to left in a linear progression, nor does it revolve ceaselessly around a turning point. Just as *whilst* begins the sentence (of life and death) but always only happens, unforeseeably, in the middle, so, too, does *Dance* begin in the middle. The middle is not the "center" of the work. It is what occurs, repeatedly, in the dark interstices between the screens.

I think because of the procession across the eight screens, and people entering the screens as others leave, there are different things happening. There is the linear progression from left to right. But the performers are also continuously present. This is amplified by the fact that the actors and dancers in the studio each took on many guises—dancers, Ebola victims and those leading them, and so on.[15]

The question of the presence or the absence of the figures, how much they are translated into shadows . . . [is] necessary to keep a sense of a thickness of figure, but to allow them to float in and out of being silhouettes against the wall.[16]

As silhouettes enter the shadow world of conflicted conjunctions—linear progression overlaid with a continuous, iterative present—*Dance* itself comes to life in the middle of repeated acts of redrawing, reseeing, re-acting. The work begins in the middle as it passes through the dark, deep breaks between projections. Thinking through a problem via the gaps, leaps, and blurs is a method deeply embedded in Kentridge's practice. He works at the edge of "the limits of seeing," and from this obscure peripheral place, creative agency emerges "in the gap between the object and its representation."[17] Kentridge reveals another such moment when he describes how one may only animate the image by arresting it—only by "freezing the image briefly" in the midst of the blur of projecting successive images can "we have the figure in motion."18Once again, the *blur* in motion in the middle of projection discloses the gap between object and representation through which the animated action is completed. The paradox of stop-motion animation itself figures a procession of images "neither advancing nor retreating, but passing."

Still from William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015, eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones.

WALKING ON THE WILD SIDE OF WHILST

I have suggested that the dark interferences between screens and across sequences structure the time and motion of *Dance* in unusual and important ways. These breaks in the body of the work serve another purpose. The illegibility of these spaces in between, engaging with blur and blackness and charcoal rubbing, raises the issue of the procession as a political and ethical movement of people and things. Illegibility counters the passivity of the image and the supplication of the people waiting for a miraculous rescue. Illegibility is an agency of emergence that may be incremental, even intermittent, but working with what is partially illegible—shadows, silhouettes, flatness, erasure—enlarges and extends the assembly of the dispossessed: "We make some new crack, a new element enters the list, makes a space for itself—and this is the guest we have been waiting for."[19]

Who walks on the wild side of *whilst*? Kentridge's processions are acts of hospitality, ongoing gatherings of people and things on the move. Movement is the material and the medium of *Dance*; Goya is its inspiration and Lulu's Dance of Death its provocation. Of equal importance is the fact that human scale—the nature and stature of personhood—is measured in terms of steps, of "foot power." Kentridge, ceaselessly ambulant, is as intrigued by the existentialist

implications of the foot "stepping into the void"[20]—as is Giacometti, that other great silhouette artist. Kentridge writes:

The procession is a form . . . [that records] the fact that here in the twenty-first century human foot power is still the primary means of locomotion and we are still locked in the manual labour of individual bodies as a way of making the world. . . . The image of a procession of people carrying their baggage is both a contemporary and immediate image and one deeply rooted in our psyches.[21]

Not just people moving across space, but a procession of people carrying objects. . . . This again feels a completely contemporary phenomenon. The flickering projections we see in the news of people fleeing floods, civil war, refugees, migrations, refugees returning, displacements—still, two and a half thousand years later, so largely on foot, individual human power still the central means of locomotion, handcarts, wheelbarrows . . . [22]

Foot power is as much an aesthetic drive as it is an ethical measure. The footstep is a sign of the singular fate of each member of each oppressed group while serving as a symbol of the collective condition of dispossession and diaspora. To bind these figures together into a political body of marginalized members of the "underclass," holding aloft a dying hope for some utopian moment of collective rights and representations, might be sentimental, and ultimately unsustainable. The conflicted conjunctions that haunt the dark phases of the procession do not allow for a progressive march to freedom. The moments of invisibility between screens repeatedly interfere with the linearity and legibility of any idea of progress—or regress—suspending the procession in a recurring danse macabre.

My reading of *Dance* as a procession "beginning in the middle" makes common cause with Leora Maltz-Leca's careful genealogy of Kentridge's procession pieces in the context of the post-1989 South African struggle for emancipation—Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom. Kentridge remarks that his interest in the emergence of crowds—"How long would they emerge for, where would they go?"—can be dated to the political thaw in South Africa that began in 1989.[23] Indeed, my emphasis on the illegibility that accompanies transitions between screens—emergent and obscure gaps in the projection—refers to a part of the technique of making the work that Kentridge describes vividly: "Each *sequence* as opposed to each frame of the film is a single drawing. . . . It is more like making a drawing than making a film (albeit a grey, battered and rubbed about drawing)."[24]

Kentridge works, quite literally, in the interstices. He is always beginning again with "grey smudge[s] on the paper" in the midst of erasures that "[leave] a snail trail of what has been."[25] The act of beginning in the middle, as I have described it, connects with Maltz-Leca's argument that "Kentridge's stop-motion animation process proffered itself as the exemplary medium with which to chart the country's ongoing metamorphosis"[26] in a series of works that grasp the visual and affective impact of "the metaphoric string: the step, the walk, the last mile."[27] However, the question still hangs in the air: What kind of political movement is the procession? What is its footstep?

OF FEET AND THE FACE

The answer lies, I think, in the critical connection between human foot power—the procession's locomotion—and the ethics of recognition and identification. Kentridge hints at this in one of his most intriguing phrases:

KEEPING ON YOUR FEET (THE ETHICAL DEMAND OF THE FACE OF THE OTHER)[28]

The relation between "keeping on your feet" and the "face of the other" is not as obscure as it may seem. A clue lies in this meditation on those who keep on their feet:

Still from William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015, eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones.

The procession films focus . . . [on] the anonymous performers in the Sisyphean task of showing people in the cave the necessity of viewing the light. The endless procession of people carrying on their heads and shoulders baskets, bundles of clothes, spoils of war. All of history carried by them.

Who are these anonymous carriers? Taken for granted by Plato? Taken for granted by us as we see them walking through the streets of Johannesburg, through the streets of so many cities of the world? They're the peasants, the proletariat, the unemployed, people at the margins of society. As Woyzeck says: "If ever we get to heaven, we'd still have to help make the thunder."[29]

Some would say that anonymity, from this perspective, would seem to be the enemy of agency and autonomy. The recognition of faces and voices—the differentiation of peoples, groups, causes—is essential to the standing of citizens and their claims to rights and representation in the public sphere. And yet, Kentridge insists, there is also an agency of the anonymous—activated by foot power and linked to the merging of the individual into the multitude, into the "muchness of the people in the world"[30] as they process and protest: manual laborers, the unemployed, peasants, the proletariat, refugees, displaced communities, and deported peoples. What weight does muchness, multitude, carry?

At first sight, *muchness* signifies the overwhelming ontological presence of the global underclass at the margins of *mondialisation*: a subaltern underclass at odds with unrelenting forces of inequality, insecurity, and injustice. But muchness—its size and magnitude—is not a totalizing category representing "the people" in a fixed, undifferentiated mass. The large scale of the muchness of people in the world who live by foot power is erased and overdrawn by the small-scale shifting and shuffling of the body in locomotion. Dancing and marching, processing and protesting, foot power is constituted step-by-step through the comportment of the burdened

human body *in movement*—a biopolitics of foot power. Whether it is that of the refugee or deportee carrying her goods and chattels from one camp to another country, or of the homeless dragging their household goods from one impermanent address to another, or of protesters bearing aloft their banners, foot power remains, in the twenty-first century, the motor of movement—"The head and the load are still the troubles of the neck."[31] The ethical demand is embedded in the disjunction of scale between the muchness of the people en masse and the ubiquitous anonymity and singularity of the body as it moves in process: the foot power of refugees fleeing, of populations moving across Africa, of displaced people crossing borders at the end of World War II and during our own migration crises in Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Greece, the Mediterranean. *All of history being carried on heads and shoulders and feet.*

Kentridge's muchness of foot power bears a family resemblance to Emmanuel Levinas's concept of the "*excess* of sociality,"[32] and although I am now thinking on my feet, there seems to be no other way to understand the curious conjunction: "Keeping on your feet (the ethical demand of the Other)." Levinas uses the phrase "the excess of sociality" in "Peace and Proximity" (1984), an essay that resonates beautifully with the spirit of Kentridge's processions of the dispossessed. Levinas's plaint against Europe's "long indifference to the sadness of a whole world"[33] begins with large-scale events associated with the magnitude of muchness. "The conscience of Europe is a bad conscience, because of the contradiction that tears her apart at the very hour of her modernity,"[34] Levinas writes, and he goes on to provide a litany of political evils carried out in the name of enlightenment and universalism: imperialism, genocide, the Holocaust, terrorism, unemployment, Third World poverty, a century of world wars. "A worn-out Europe!"[35]

Then, just as the general historical complaint becomes almost unbearable in its insurmountable scale, Levinas zeroes in on a particular moment in Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate* (1980). Prisoners' wives and relatives line up at the Lubyanka prison in Moscow to get news of family members arrested for alleged political crimes. Grossman's wide-angle historical vision suddenly turns into a close-up of the bodies of the prisoners' families as they queue in front of the prison windows—forming a procession of a kind—to make their inquiries. Levinas recognizes the ethical demand of the face of the other in the singularity of the small-scale (mis)alignment of backs, necks, and shoulders carrying the load of profound miscarriages of justice. This "line" of broken backs is as close as we are ever likely to get to Kentridge's lean silhouette of anonymous load carriers "on [their] feet," making an "ethical demand of the face of the other":

A line is formed in front of the windows, in which they can only see each other's backs. A woman waits for her turn: "Never had she thought the human back could be so expressive and transmit states of mind so penetratingly. The people who approached the window had a special way of stretching the neck and back; the raised shoulders had shoulder-blades tensed as if by springs, and they seemed to shout, to cry, to sob." Face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakening to the precariousness of the other.[36]

As Levinas's "face" turns away from us—"stretching the neck and back . . . shoulder-blades tensed . . . to shout, to cry, to sob"—we find ourselves standing side by side with Kentridge's anonymous load bearers of the world's weight and its weariness: "The head and the load are still the troubles of the neck." The ethical demand of foot power, like the Levinasian appeal to

the face, requires us to walk alongside, to identify with the "extreme precariousness of the other." But how are we to recognize this precariousness? How to represent—in art, in words—relations of proximity involved in the assembly of the dispossessed ("peasants, the proletariat, the unemployed, people at the margins of society") without slipping into an ahistorical, sentimental humanism? And finally, what is our relationship—as viewers, bystanders, witnesses—to processions led by those on the margins of society as they pass us by and "as we see them walking through the streets of Johannesburg, through the streets of so many cities of the world?"

The meeting of Kentridge and Levinas face-to-face is no easy matter. Kentridge has a habit of asking intellectuals to leave the studio (after coffee) because they are better left outside while work is happening.[37] I imagine him in such a scenario, a moment later, *whilst* he is doing his own fancy footwork, making a surprising, histrionic appeal to an ethics figured in the face of the other, and, for good reason in my view, Levinas forces the studio door. There is a haunting similarity in the ways in which the artist and the intellectual hone their more general visions of history and politics in order to establish an embodied "human scale" for the broader subject of ethics. Levinas announces a long list of the depredations of Western imperialist and capitalist powers, which he dramatically shrinks to human scale in addressing the precarious ethical demand embodied in a line of broken backs waiting at the prison window, necks overstretched, shoulders fraught with sorrow and anxiety. Kentridge, for his part, zooms out to the *longue durée* of processions two and a half thousand years old and deeply rooted in our psyches—Plato, Holbein, Goya, Berg, World War II, refugees, migrants, laborers. However, like Levinas when he configures the ethical subject, Kentridge reduces the long history of dispossession to the human scale of foot power, the anonymity of load bearers, the taut shoulders of terror—"the head and the load are still the troubles of the neck."

This shifting scale of ethical life is more than a metonymy of "humanity" reduced to ahistorical bodies. These timeworn body parts are not asking to be reassembled to recover some ideal, unified subject or sovereign "person." They are figural representations of the ethical haunting of human life by the dance of death—political oppression, labor exploitation, miners' accidents—caught in the trammel of death and in the bureaucratic grammar of *whilst*. The relation of body fragments to the causal forces of history or dispossession is better read in terms of montage—"pinned on top of each other, seen together at one glance, cut in half."[38] The clash of part and whole reveals different orders of ethical measurement and deliberation caused by the violence of historical and psychic conflict. This is the ethical encounter with what Levinas calls "the death-life metaphor":

We use those two words constantly as we live our daily lives, carried along by our perseverance in being, forgetful of our properly human vocation of disinterestedness, i.e. of disengagement with respect to our being and care for the being of the other. . . . What I am saying here may seem like a pious thought, but I am persuaded that around the death of my neighbour what I have been calling the humanity of man is manifested. . . . But I believe I said that we are answerable not only for the death of the other but for his life as well. And it is in being answerable for his life that we are already with him in his death.[39]

There is much to be said about the role death plays in what Levinas has called "the *fraternal* way of a proximity to the other."[40] Indeed, I would pose the death/life metaphor in relation to Kentridge's processional ethics—his Dance of Death as life's resilience and time's resistance in the procession of the dispossessed. Death/life evokes those very conflicted conjunctions—everyday/emergency, quotidian/catastrophe—that structure the formal design of the work, its simultaneity of large lit screens abutting empty slivers of darkness across which the sequence unfolds. It is by way of these interfaces and interstices—Levinas would call them the "impossible integration[s]"[41] of alterity—that *Dance* finds its agency in a recurring movement that begins in the middle. At the turning point of death/life—the point marked by whilst—the ethic of making art and the ethic of facing the other are drawn even closer together. Ethical precariousness for Kentridge consists in a grammar of "unanticipation": the knock on the door *whilst* the world crumbles. For Levinas, the precarious ethic of the "face" is just as "unassumable." We cannot anticipate; we cannot assume. Levinas writes:

To be "unassumable" belongs to [death's] very quality. It is an event without project. The "project" one may have of death is undone at the last moment. It is death alone that goes the last leg.[42]

Death alone goes the last leg; foot power alone dances the last step. But where in the studio do we find the energy that makes visible the necessary metaphor death/life—the impossible integration of the other? Where in studio praxis do we encounter the edict and the ethic of death/life in its presence as the face of the other—the feet, the load of the head, the neck, foot power—whilst contemplating the "gap," the "blur," the moment of "stepping into the void"? And once we enter the valley of *whilst*, the domain of death/life, can we still process, protest, survive, carry on?

Kentridge takes us to the very place from which these questions come:

It is in the gap between the object and its representation that this energy emerges, the gap we fill in, in the shift from the monochromatic shadow to the color of the object, from its flatness to its depth and heft.[43]

Beginning in the middle of the gap, the monochromatic shadow takes on the color of objecthood, while the flatness of representation assumes the heft and depth of a kind of personhood. The gap we fill as *Dance* passes before us can take no solace from the priority of personhood, or any comfort from the achievement of objecthood. A procession has to be observed neither advancing nor retreating, but passing. It is difficult to find our feet as we take the twists and turns of Kentridge's *via negativa*, following in the steps of his motley marginals—hod carriers, refugees, protesters, dancers, the sick and the displaced, all in their very different ways dancing with death, dueling with life. In this way, the procession belongs to a form of ethical agency and political deliberation that Avishai Margalit defines as "negative politics": thought and action that begin in the interstices of death/life and open up a space of political engagement that vigilantly observes the human procession in the process of its *passing*—somewhere between advancing and retreating. Margalit writes:

It is injustice, not justice, that brings us into normative politics—despotism, not freedom. Moral political theory should start with negative politics, the politics that informs us on how to tackle evil before telling us how to pursue the good.[44]

ONE AFTER ANOTHER

Negative politics—*not* justice, *not* freedom—is, I believe, a just measure of the ethical mood of Dance. The work confronts us with the iterative rhythm of death/life—not its overcoming—with that which comes before normative politics, moving against the grain and temporality of normative ethics. The work offers a different mode of aesthetic and ethical measurement. But how far can the dance take us? Does the dance reveal another order of life in its reversals and prolepses? Levinas proposes a line of argument that closely, if unintentionally, mimics the formal and temporal structure of the procession—its passage of time and people, its foot power, the passing of fates and figures one by one, one after the other.

Still from William Kentridge's More Sweetly Play the Dance, 2015,
eight-channel HD video (color, sound, 15 minutes), megaphones.

I was speaking of the ethical attitude that is at the basis of sociality. Not of the attitude toward the death of a being already chosen and dear, but of the death of the first-one-to-come-along. To perceive that we come after an other whoever he may be—that is ethics.[45]

This ethical position may well be the contrariwise path of the ghost dancer, the spinner, who comes into our field of vision at the very start from the "wrong direction," moving preemptively across the piece only to disappear where, and when, *Dance* is about to begin. The ghost dancer is the first one to come along and for that very reason must forever be belated, "coming after an other whoever he may be." And for this very reason, the shrouded dancer keeps us on our feet whilst embodying the ethical demand of facing the other.

If that is ethics, then what of the viewer?

My role is lonely and impossible. I find myself, in the middle of it all, drowned in the hullaballoo—lost in the thick dusk of Bombay and its thunder of feet. I am neither still nor moving. I step out of place each time the procession passes—now the homeless, now the ill, now the brass band, now the ballerina, now the priests and politicians and secretaries and refugees—rushing out to ask: "How long will my moral luck last?"46 Must I join the procession now or have I miraculously escaped the knock on the door, the unwanted visitor? And each time, *Dance* puts me in my place with an enigmatic injunction:

This may be your turn, but it isn't your time. Wait and see.

And the procession moves on.

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3. William Kentridge, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2016.
4. Erich Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, vol. 9 of Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 17.
5. Kentridge, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2016.
6. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 10.
7. William Kentridge, William Kentridge: More Sweetly Play the Dance, eds. Marente Bloemheuvel and Jaap Guldemond, (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2015), 22.
8. Kentridge, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2016.
9. Kentridge, More Sweetly Play the Dance, 17.
10. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 52.
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15. Kentridge, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2016.
16. Kentridge, More Sweetly Play the Dance, 35.
17. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 31.
18. Ibid., 115.
19. Ibid., 117.
20. Ibid., 115.
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26. Leora Maltz-Leca, "Process/Procession: William Kentridge and the Process of Change," in Art Bulletin 95, no. 1 (March 2013): 151.
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28. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 52.
29. Kentridge, More Sweetly Play the Dance, 25–26.
30. Ibid., 25.
31. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 28.
32. Emmanuel Levinas, Alterity & Transcendence, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 137.
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34. Levinas, Alterity & Transcendence, 132.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 140.
37. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 182.
38. Ibid., 52.
39. Levinas, Alterity & Transcendence, 167–68.
40. Ibid., 137.
41. Ibid., 138.

42. Ibid., 155.

43. Kentridge, Six Drawing Lessons, 31.

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46. See Bernard Williams, Moral Luck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).