

THE BELIEVER

An Interview with William Kentridge **ARTIST**

"Old questions don't disappear."

Objects found in various William Kentridge installations:

Director's chairs

Shipping crates

A studio replica

Singer sewing machines

A large wooden-ribbed breathing machine (also known as "The Elephant")

by Natasha Boas (July 26, 2023)



All images from William Kentridge, In Praise of Shadows, The Broad, Los Angeles, November 12, 2022–April 9, 2023. This page: Double Vision. © 2007 by William Kentridge. Stereoscopic card (from a set of eight) with stereopticon. Courtesy of the artist; Unterweysung der Messung: Melencolia, Memento Mori, Still Life, A Cat in the Meat Trade, Étant Donnée, Larder. © 2007 by William Kentridge. Set of six stereoscopic photogravures with stereoscope. Courtesy of the artist; Less Brocade on the Jacket. © 2015 by William Kentridge. Ink on found pages. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Rebus. © 2013 by William Kentridge. Bronze, suite of nine sculpture (from an edition of twelve). Courtesy of private collection; And When He Returned. © 2019 by William Kentridge. Tapestry weave with embroidery. Warp: polyester. Weft and embroidery: mohair, acrylic, and polyester. Courtesy of the artist; Drawing for Studio Life (Landscape after Tinus de Jongh). © 2020 by William Kentridge. Charcoal, pastel, and red pencil on paper. Courtesy of private collection.

William Kentridge's first New York solo show, Drawings for Projection (1998), radically changed my way of thinking about drawing, film, history, and time. His analog hand-drawn animations mesmerize and haunt. Kentridge's storytelling process is generative, generous, and expansive. Although my first encounter with Kentridge's work was through his drawings and films, over the course of his career he has worked across multiple mediums, including printmaking, sculpture, theater, opera, and installation. Regardless of the medium, his work is capacious and collaborative. It can be at once seriously dark and seriously humorous. It often circles historic traumas, particularly the harsh South African political landscape, but his subject is really humanity writ large.

On November 15, 2022, I interviewed Kentridge at The Broad, a museum in downtown Los Angeles, where his show In Praise of Shadows had just opened. The career-spanning exhibition features drawings, sculptures, prints, tapestries, films, and film installations.

Entering the show, I step into a room with a bronze sculpture that looks like a vintage movie-recording device. The sculpture, Action (2018), is a newer work, while the other pieces—drawings depicting golden-age Hollywood icons such as Marlene Dietrich, Humphrey Bogart, Greta Garbo, and Groucho Marx—are works Kentridge made during the beginning of his career, when he was working in the South African film industry. The curator of In Praise of Shadows, Ed Schad, has drawn a convincing through line from Kentridge’s work to the movie industry of Los Angeles.

I interview Kentridge in a room with chartreuse curtains. We sit on what feels like a stage. I am wearing a mustard-yellow suit and Kentridge is wearing his usual black artist ensemble (but without his signature fedora). It feels like we are both actors without an audience. Later that evening, after the interview, we transform into audience members at the packed REDCAT theater to watch the North American premiere of Kentridge’s play Houseboy, which traffics in the effects of French colonialism. During the play, the room is tense and alive. The twelve actors speak directly to us.

—Natasha Boas

I. “The world is leaking”

THE BELIEVER: So much of the work you do is from the perspective of a South African who was raised in apartheid-era Johannesburg, where you have continued to live throughout your life. Your father, Sir Sydney Kentridge, was the lawyer of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. We’ve heard your remarkable life story before.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE: Yes, we’ve heard this story too many times.

BLVR: In what ways have your preoccupations shifted over time? What are the new areas you want to explore? What are the new nervous systems in which you are working? Or is your work interested in the repetition of the same themes?

WK: That is a very good and hard question. It would be lovely not to be going back into repetition. But we know from psychoanalysis that repetition is hard to avoid until you work out what it is that’s being repeated. The big questions shift and change, but they’re still fundamental. How does one find emancipation? What is the best one can hope for in the world as it is? There was the belief we all had twenty years ago that rationality and enlightenment were what we were heading toward, and that countries like South Africa needed to be pushed out of their oppressive systems into the world. But what the last fifteen years have shown us is how precarious that idea actually is. What we assumed everyone was moving toward, a liberal democracy, actually is not a liberal democracy. And even in the United States, where it seemed unchallengeable, suddenly democracy is quite precarious. Not just because people stormed the Capitol in that chaotic way. No, much more dangerously, because the actual lawmakers and judges are the real threat, rather than the hooligans.

BLVR: The threat to democracy has become part of the establishment.

WK: Old questions don't disappear. In some ways they become much more immediate. Questions around the relationship of emancipation to violence or certainty are urgent.

I started work on a theater project in January, and I know a lot about the language of it; I know the cardboard masks we use; I know the kind of megaphones and piano, and the kind of bellowing into the megaphones, and the piece by Schubert being played. I have a sense of someone falling asleep continuously on the piano. I know there's a chorus of women picking up the pieces, whether it's local pieces or, metaphorically, the world. So the anxiety that this project responds to feels close and certain. What I don't know are the specifics. Which particular story are we telling? And is it enough to just start with the broad question? If one had to give the project a phrase, I would say, "The world is leaking" or "The world is falling apart, the dead report for duty, and it's always the women that pick up the pieces."

BLVR: Your theater project sounds like a story about women's work. It sounds like the phrase "A woman's work is never done."

WK: Yes. Is that enough of a basis to go on? Or is it too vague? Does it need a particular story about the trade in body parts? What are all the disasters in the world now? What are the ways they can be represented? Right now the project is caught between wanting to do something that can encompass very wide things, and the feeling that for it to work, we also have to be very specific. It's very specific in terms of medium. And it's not yet specific in terms of narrative. So there's the edge of a new nervous system.

BLVR: Intriguing.

WK: But it isn't a basis for a novel.

BLVR: You always talk about being compelled to draw, and say that drawing is its own ontology and that it coincides with the timing of thinking. I'm thinking about the stories you want to tell and your relationship to storytelling, whether that is something that is grounded in a South African or an African history. Are you an African artist? Are you a South African artist? Are you just an artist?

WK: OK. They showed some of my work in the African section of the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. I said, "Why am I being shown there?" "Well," they said, "not just because you're an artist from Africa." They said, "So much of your work is applied art. Its images are made in the service of a performance, in the service of a ritual." The drawing is made in the service of the film. The film is made in the service of a piece of theater.

BLVR: That's one way of defining "African art" as a whole.

WK: It makes sense to me. I think, yes, my art is South African. African artists with a polemic understand that the history and weight of Europe are also part of Africa. To extract Europe from Africa, and to try to find an essential African purity, is a false activity that can only lead to a false result.

II. The Studio as Subject

BLVR: How did you respond to the initial COVID lockdown?

WK: I had a fantastic eighteen months in my studio.

BLVR: It seems like many artists felt this way—relieved that we could do our work and not have to spend all our time traveling and socializing.

WK: We all had COVID a couple of times in the studio, but we all got through it. And I spent the time making a series of films about what happens in the studio—nine half-hour films.

BLVR: Does the studio practice become your subject?

WK: The subject was what happened in the space, and it becomes the subject on which different things are predicated. But it also becomes the claustrophobic enclosed space you never leave. So I was also locked down in that sense. So that's been the big project we're just finishing now.

BLVR: You talk about the studio almost as if it were a character.

WK: It is a kind of character. In these films, we film at night, when the camera and the sousaphone have their own life going on in the studio. The objects have their own life.

BLVR: Are these films being show here at The Broad?

WK: No, they're not. We're still finishing them. We have to try to find a place to distribute them. If it's animation, it's fine, easy to put in galleries—we just show them. But this longer form needs a more traditional projection-room situation.

BLVR: Have you never had a feature film project? Or a fantasy of one?

WK: There are offers and I am tempted. Everybody who goes to the movies has dreams of making a feature-length film. But I would be a very different director if I did. There's a language of film directing that is very different from [that of] theatrical directing. And I realize that's where my director experience is—in theater. The actor is already me.

BLVR: I think about this in terms of auto-fiction. I'm kind of obsessed with the arguments around auto-fiction. Is it fiction? Is it memoir? I guess you make auto-portraits using yourself, or a kind of self-portrait. But what else is going on?

WK: What else is going on with that? In the films I made during COVID, all the dialogue is me, and I dialogue with myself. There are two of me having conversations. It's not a documentary, like: let's have two talking heads interview each other. It's all the different conversations that one has with oneself in one's head. And as the film went on, that was just one small element of the story. But as the editing happened, the films got shorter, but those conversations stayed key to it. I think the hope was that it would turn into a real interrogation.

BLVR: What is "a real interrogation"?

WK: A real interrogation would be asking me questions I didn't know the answers to, and then me discovering answers I hadn't expected. I'm not aware of it having gone into that different realm. So all the things I say are right. I mean, they are. It's a mixture of things about the work and things about myself. The series is now called *Self-Portrait as a Coffee Pot*.

BLVR: We see the coffee pot in some of the work already as an animate and an inanimate object.

WK: I think I am saying that you can create a biography by describing the objects around something or someone.

BLVR: The objects tell the story.

WK: For example, by the books. The books on your bookshelf are a kind of portrait of you by what you've collected, everything you've read. All the drawings you've done of your life are a kind of self-portrait.

BLVR: So this new body of work that you're talking about is actually going much more into autobiography?

WK: Yes.

BLVR: You are so prolific. Have you ever had a moment when you have been compelled to not mark-make?

WK: When I travel, I don't feel a compulsion. Some artists draw every day, and I really don't, but I'm missing not being in the studio all the time. I'll feel much happier when I'm back to drawing.

BLVR: Is the studio the only place you make things?

WK: It is. I trust the studio. When I'm in the studio—actually physically cutting, drawing—ideas come in through that process.

III. No Such Thing as Clean

BLVR: The curator of *In Praise of Shadows* conceived of the exhibition as a conversation between California and South Africa. I do think many of the images make that connection, from the direct references to Hollywood actors and the film apparatus to the Gold Rush and mining exploitation. And there are the trees and the many themes around the trouble with certain monuments. This is your first show in Los Angeles in twenty years. Do you think your work reads differently now? Here at The Broad, they've created a whole series of public programs for you, and it's all with African American scholars.

WK: It's interesting.

BLVR: Will you have read up on your abolitionist contemporary theory before you get to Berkeley for your performance there in March?

WK: I had supper on Monday with Claudia Rankine and Patrisse Cullors, a cofounder of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

BLVR: You are very up-to-date, then, of course.

WK: I did the conversation with Claudia as a public program for the show here at The Broad during the opening weekend. The conversation was titled “The Un-Private Collection.”

BLVR: I am quoting the description of the talk from the museum’s website: “Both Kentridge and Rankine examine symbols and monuments as they appear in our respective societies, rooting out colonial and racist structures—Kentridge from the vantage point of a white South African of privileged background, and Rankine from the vantage point [of] a Black woman in the United States.”

WK: I admit I was a little bit anxious before the conversation with Claudia.

BLVR: I would imagine.

WK: Rankine has taught my work for some years. She is very interested in my Centre for the Less Good Idea, my experimental center in Johannesburg. It was a very friendly conversation. There were a lot of questions that no one else had asked. For me, abolitionism is a bit like the situation in South Africa, which I always described not as a post-apartheid society, but as a post-anti-apartheid society. In other words, the interest of the whole world in the anti-apartheid movement had its moment. But it doesn’t mean that the traces—and, more than the traces, the presence of the results of apartheid—are not still in the country. So that’s an easy starting point.

Being white in South Africa means you understand from the beginning that you are compromised and complicit and part of it. And to try to say, *I’m clean. I’m a clean South African?* You are not. It’s not possible. You start from accepting an impurity. And you go from there.

BLVR: Johannesburg and LA also have similarities in terms of their urban sprawl and exurbs. I still have a sense of museums as being places where you can go and discover other parts of the world that aren’t yours.

WK: When I did the exhibition in China, I decided I wanted to do one piece that was very much concerned with questioning: What is my relationship to China? What is it? Who is it? When I did a piece in Berlin, it was very much: What is Germany to South Africa? And that became the genocide in Namibia. The one in China was about the Cultural Revolution. The piece in Turkey was about Trotsky and his exile in Istanbul.

BLVR: You always think of the context.

WK: They were specific projects. This show was a specific project. In London, there were a lot of tapestries made specifically for it and installations tailored around it. Here in LA, it’s much more from the existing body of work and from the things that are already in The Broad collection.

BLVR: I was riveted by one piece in this show, *The Refusal of Time* (2012)—an immersive, unwieldy thirty-minute, five-channel video installation. It feels like a workshop, or a lab, and it is really hard to understand, but I love that I don’t understand it. There is a large wooden-ribbed device that sits at the heart of the space, like a breathing machine, that opens and closes in rhythm with asynchronous images and sounds. It’s crazy and beautiful.

WK: Thank you.

BLVR: These bric-a-brac built environments continue throughout the show. It sometimes feels like you're walking through a movie set or hanging out in a studio. In one installation you even have director's chairs set up that we can sit on. It's in the nine-channel video installation *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès* (2003) that you pay tribute to Méliès, the pioneering French filmmaker.

WK: Yes, this is all intentional. The designer of the show is Sabine Theunissen, who also creates theater sets for many of my projects. She is reproducing the agency of making—whether it is the making of films or the mise-en-scène of the actual exhibition, the materiality is there. Also, a filmmaker like Méliès was more of a stage magician and was interested in the performances of transformation. Méliès would perform in front of his drawings.

BLVR: I am also thinking of another piece: a charcoal, pastel, and gouache on paper. It's a kind of selfie. You're looking in the rearview mirror and—

WK: You see my eyes.

BLVR: Is that the one? The drawing?

WK: The film.

BLVR: No, I am thinking of a drawing downstairs.

WK: The drawing. Right.

BLVR: It affected me.

WK: Was it the rearview mirror one?

BLVR: You use mirroring a lot. I remember now: it's called *Flood at the Opera* [1986].

WK: Sitting in the car, driving through the city, do you see your eyes in the mirror?

BLVR: I see your eyes in the mirror. It makes me think of California car culture. Like Johannesburg, LA is a driving suburban city. It's like you are taking a selfie in your car. It's an "auto" auto-portrait. Literally.

IV. Half-Heard Conversations

BLVR: When you discuss enlightenment, you talk about how the enlightenment metaphor is the backbone of colonialism. You show the underbelly of it in a lot of your work. Why does your work resonate in so many different historical, national, and political contexts?

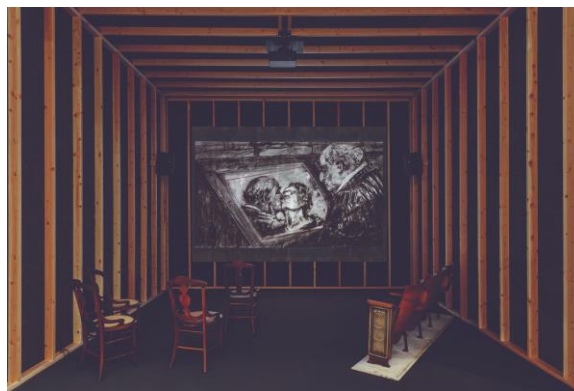
WK: I discussed this when we did the play *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, which was made from archival text of the testimony given at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission mixed together with Alfred Jarry's *Ubu [the King]*.

BLVR: Yes, I'm familiar with the play.

WK: We did the play in South Africa knowing it would be seen in South Africa and would make sense. But people said, “OK, it makes sense here, but how is it going to make any sense outside of South Africa?” It’s so specific and so local. The first place outside we took it to was when it was shown in Weimar at a festival there, where people said, “This is so fantastic. This is about us, this is about reparations and our unspoken history in the East, which is Gauteng.”

BLVR: Because it was about repression?

WK: We thought it wouldn’t make sense outside of South Africa, but it did. Then we took it to Zurich, where they said, “This is all about us. It’s about German money, Jewish money, and Nazi money. This happened here.” And in France they asked, “Is this about the French resistance or is this about collaboration?”



City Deep. ©2020 by William Kentridge. HD video. Courtesy of the artist.

BLVR: Everybody sees themselves.

WK: And then somebody said, “I saw this play. I’m from Romania, and I know this play is about Romania. It’s a local play about Romania.” So I think even though the specifics were not completely understood by all audiences, and perhaps even though each audience member did not know exactly what each image represented, there was a sense of it being located in a local way, which made it resonate very far, in a lot of very disparate places around the world. I don’t think this is generosity. I think it’s that we can’t stop ourselves from making those connections. We’re constantly testing our understanding of what we are seeing. There are so many commonalities around the world that it’s not so strange for something to resonate.

BLVR: This is why people are so moved by your work. One of your pieces may address apartheid, but something about it also resonates with a person who lives in the American Midwest. I won’t say your work is universal, because *universal* is a word that harkens back to the Enlightenment. I’ll say that your work is human. It is capacious. Your work is of the human experience.

WK: *Universal* implies that in all circumstances the questions will be identical and nothing will ever change. There is a stasis implied in the term *universal*.

BLVR: Right. In the term *universal* there is no room for movement or radical change.

WK: There are so many points of connection in different contexts that we live by and need to live by and are nourished by.



Singer Trio. © 2019 by William Kentridge. Singer sewing machines, four breast drills, antique wooden rulers, mild steel, aluminum, wood, electronics. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, South Africa; Let Us Enter the Chapter (diptych). © 2013 by William Kentridge. India ink, charcoal, and pastel, digital print on Shorter Oxford Dictionary paper tabbed to Velin Arches 400 gsm. Courtesy of private collection.

BLVR: Right. So maybe *nourishing* is the adjective I'm looking for to define your work?

WK: My work is about having read *Ulysses* and never having been to Dublin. And it's about my imagination of Dublin's bay and the beaches.

BLVR: Exactly.

WK: It's a mixture of my memories.

BLVR: Is it fantasy?

WK: It's my memory of different beaches, and words or phrases that jump out while I'm reading.

BLVR: Is it imagining?

WK: Just because I haven't been to Dublin, that doesn't stop me from connecting to the book. I have a different connection to the book than someone who's lived all their life in Dublin, but I still have my connection. The most interesting use of one tradition is always made by people from outside the given tradition.

BLVR: Thank goodness for outsider perspectives.



Sister Box, Sister Fan, Sister Cone. © 2016 by William Kentridge. Painted bronze. Courtesy of the artist; *Wittgenstein's Rhinoceros.* © 2007 by William Kentridge. Hand lithograph and collage, edition twenty-four of thirty-five. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; *Cursive.* © 2020 by William Kentridge. Bronze, forty sculptures, edition four of nine. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

WK: Mistranslation and misunderstanding are vital.

BLVR: Exactly. I completely agree. That's why I think the process of making a translation, or the mistakes in a transcription, are always the most interesting.

WK: Yes.

BLVR: And revealing.

WK: Absolutely. It's also when you can't quite understand something that you're most actively imagining what it could be. You can feel the energy of trying to interpret.

BLVR: The overwriting or the meta-work.

WK: I love conversations I can only half hear.

BLVR: I recently went to a dinner party in a restaurant that was so loud that no one could understand what the other person was saying, and not only was it hilarious, it was totally meta. We could have used a Leonora Carrington hearing trumpet. We ended up understanding new things from all our misunderstandings.

WK: Those instances are exhilarating because you're so busy filling in words that you haven't heard, jumping across gaps.

BLVR: The fragments making the phrases. It's like what you say about shadows. When you see a shadow, you understand that you're seeing a very limited part of an object and you have to fill in the rest yourself. You immediately become complicit in making the meaning.

V. The Crocodile

BLVR: Is there any medium you would like to work in that you haven't?

WK: Yes, but collaboration is difficult. In most cases I just look around my studio and realize that my studio already has it all.

BLVR: Right. No need to find the best marble or whatever.

WK: Most often I am able, for example, to find a foundry that has certain capacities and then ask: What are the things we can make together?

BLVR: Right. The constraints help make the project.

WK: And working very closely with the foundry workers helps make the project. When working with a costume designer, I think, What are the kinds of puppets that will come from our conversation? It's never, *Here is my idea. Please execute it.* It's never, *Here is my idea for a drawing. Please find someone to make it.*

BLVR: Your conversations sound very different from what Frank Gehry's were with me when I was a young sculptor. He just sent me a picture of a crocodile and said, "Please turn this crocodile into a chandelier." Then the crocodile chandelier ended up at Rebecca's, a nouveau Mexican fantasy-themed restaurant he designed, and later, I think, went to auction at Sotheby's, and is now in the Broads' family home. Did you see it?

WK: Yes! I saw your crocodile. I thought it was a fish.

VI. Two Actors Down

BLVR: Tonight I will be at your performance of *Houseboy* at the REDCAT theater. You developed the play at your Centre for the Less Good Idea in Johannesburg. I read that it's based on the 1956 novel by Cameroonian diplomat Ferdinand Oyono, and that it deals with French colonialism in Cameroon.

WK: Yes. It's wonderful that you will be there.

BLVR: I am sure we'll find more of your themes of historical participation and archival memory. I look forward to seeing your set design, which is one of your drawings.

WK: Yes. I hope you enjoy the show. I did this piece using a French novel from the 1950s from Cameroon—not from France, but from the francophone Cameroonian colony. It's a kind of dramatized reading of the novel.

BLVR: You must be very excited about it being here in LA.

WK: It's a bit scary, actually. We suddenly had to rearrange our cast because one of our cast members was arrested by immigration at the airport in South Africa.

BLVR: Oh no. They couldn't get out of the country?

WK: He couldn't get out. He's Cameroonian. And it turned out his South African residence papers were not in order.

BLVR: Oh dear. Oh dear.

WK: So now we're working with lawyers to sort him out there, but also here we had to rearrange the cast, so a different cast member is taking over his role.

BLVR: Oh, good. You have an understudy?

WK: Well, not an understudy. It's a person who was already a part of the play who is now stepping into the lead role.

BLVR: Right. Oh my goodness.

WK: "Oh my goodness" is right. In fact, this new actor is the third actor to step into the role of our lead character. Our original lead character died very suddenly about three months ago.

BLVR: What?

WK: It was a heart attack, a man in his early fifties. So that was a big change, but we've had three months with that change.

BLVR: You had some time, but still, that's very sad.



Drawing from WEIGHING... and WANTING (Soho Listening with Two Fragments). © 1997 by William Kentridge. Charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the collection of Brenda R. Potter and Michael C. Sandler; Drawing for Johannesburg—Second Greatest City after Paris. © 1989 by William Kentridge. Charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the collection of Brenda R. Potter and Michael C. Sandler; Drawing for Monument. © 1990 by William Kentridge. Charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the collection of Brenda R. Potter and Michael C. Sandler; Next four images: Drawing for the film Other Faces. © 2011 by William Kentridge. Charcoal and colored pencil on paper. Courtesy of The Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles; Drawing for City Deep (Miner with Hammer and Pick). © 2019 by William Kentridge. Charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Drawing for the film Other Faces. © 2011 by William Kentridge. Charcoal and colored pencil on paper. Courtesy of The Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles; Drawing for Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair). © 2003 by William Kentridge. Charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the collection of Brenda R. Potter and Michael C. Sandler; Drawing for Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair). © 2003 by William Kentridge. Courtesy of the collection of Brenda R. Potter and Michael C. Sandler; Portage. © 2000 by William Kentridge. Chine collé of black Canson paper on printed text from Le nouveau illustré (c. 1906) supported on cream Arches paper. Courtesy of the artist; Drawing from City Deep (Miner Beside Pit). © 2018 by William Kentridge. Charcoal and red pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

WK: To fill the role with the second lead actor, we also had to pull from the existing cast because we had to find someone who was already in the visa application process, because it was too late to start over.

BLVR: Because otherwise you couldn't get the second lead actor, the actor that was eventually arrested by South African immigration, to the United States?

WK: Exactly, because American visas take eighteen months.

BLVR: I'm so sorry.

VII. On Shadows

BLVR: Your show is titled *In Praise of Shadows*. In 2012 you gave a lecture at Harvard that was titled "In Praise of Shadows." And of course—and I brought this with me—there is the cult aesthetics book *In Praise of Shadows* by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. How do you understand the valences of shadow meaning?

WK: After I'd given my lecture at Harvard, people said, "You know, there's this Japanese book." I had never heard of it.

BLVR: That is a surprise!

WK: I've read it now, but I had not heard of it then.

BLVR: The book became very important in the United States through the schools of architecture at Yale and UCLA in the '80s and '90s. It became a sort of cult read around aesthetics.

WK: Tanizaki's book deals with a very different kind of shadow than the shadow I am dealing with.

BLVR: What kind of shadow is Tanizaki dealing with? What kind of shadow are you dealing with?

WK: Well, in Tanizaki's book, in my memory, he is mainly talking about darkness. Darkness made by shadows. He is talking about the obscuring of light, as opposed to an image which is revealed by light projecting a shadow onto a wall, which implies an area of lightness around the shadow, as in shadow play, where you're actually talking about light with an area that is obscured.

BLVR: The Tanizaki book is about elevating darkness above light.

WK: The two approaches are actually quite different.

BLVR: They are oppositional or transversal.

WK: They're different questions. In Western philosophy shadows are to be avoided. I think Plato and the cave in the *Republic* are the obvious connection, rather than the Tanizaki connection. I re-read Plato after I'd done my first piece with shadows. I thought, This piece I have just made actually reminds me of the Plato. So I re-read the Plato. The first time I read Plato was at university, as one does.

BLVR: It's one of those texts you can return to again and again.

WK: It is, and when you re-read it, the big arguments come out of the darkness into the light. And as you come into the light, you get greater knowledge. The ultimate good is the light of the sun. The sun is the Platonic ideal.

BLVR: Light over darkness.

WK: In re-reading Plato, the thing that struck me was the necessity of the metaphor. For the metaphor to work, for the allegory to work, the metaphor and the allegory must be incarcerated. They must be prisoners who are chained to a wall, whose heads are in headlocks. They can't turn their expression toward the light. When one comes later to Stalinist Russia, one talks about beating humanity into happiness with an iron fist. The violence is in the belief that you know better than other people, and in forcing that knowledge upon other people, whether they want it or not. Colonialism would also describe itself as bringing light into darkness.

BLVR: The colonial justification is bringing "light" to the "dark continents."

WK: We think the violence of colonialism is an aberration. But if you go back to the Plato, the metaphor and the allegory work only in terms of authoritarian violence. They work only in the shadows. In the shadows I'm making, I'm saying, OK, you have people looking at shadows cast on the wall, and then the people go out into the light. But down in the cave, you have to have the next collection of people carrying the shadows across the wall for the next set of prisoners to proceed. It is unceasing.

BLVR: You depict processions in your work as often as you depict shadows. You also depict shadow processions.

WK: I don't know how far the first world can push in terms of what it needs from the third world, in order for the first world to operate. But one certainly understands that the wealth of Europe is predicated on poverty outside Europe.