

Reorienting Bergson's Duration Towards Contemporary Art Practice

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Introduction

In this thesis I will examine Bergson's philosophy of *Durée*, Intuition and Movement as it relates to art, considering why Bergson's ideas were so important to the Avant-Garde at the turn of the twentieth century, and how these ideas can be reoriented toward contemporary art practice, drawing upon the work of multimedia artist William Kentridge and abstract painter Ed Clark.

Philosophy creates a conceptual framework that helps us to perceive and pay attention to the world in new ways. Whilst Bergson seldom explicitly referenced art, the philosopher foregrounded the link between the arts and philosophy as a form of engagement of the real, stating that "art is valuable inasmuch as it cultivates a form of aesthetic attention for both the artist and the spectator that is akin to a philosophical intuition" (Atkinson, 2020, p. 23). Bergson believed art fosters a type of attentiveness to new, sensual ways of perceiving the world for both the artist and the observer.

Through his notion of *la durée*, Bergson inspired artists to reimagine time and movement as a process, as states of change as opposed to a string of static states that cannot endogenously generate change. Bergson provides a theoretical framework from which to reassert the value of human creativity, offering a way to engage with art thus

furthering our understanding of the diversity of aesthetic experience and the processual character of the real.

Bergson and Art

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) did not present a systematic theory of art but his references to art are scattered throughout his writings. Art played an important role in justifying his ideas around time and intuition. He considered art the highest expression of life and artists valuable because of their capacity to reveal what he referred to as the ‘temporal becoming of the real’ through their work, allowing the viewer to engage with an experiential understanding of time which he termed *la durée*, grasped through intuition of the imagination. Bergson claimed, “The great painters are those to whom belongs a certain vision of things that has or will become the vision of all men” (Bergson, 2007, p. 112). His philosophy was not a system of fixed concepts but flexible ones that encouraged the advancement of his philosophy, its adaptation and expansion. This creative philosophy aligned art with metaphysics as they shared the common goal of revealing the processual nature of reality, the sensual experience of time passing, the aesthetic attention comparable to philosophical intuition.

“So art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially acceptable generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself” (Bergson, 2014, p. 157).

Art can be considered a flow of movement that connects the artist, the artwork and the audience. Bergson's method of intuition consists in entering into immediate communication with things as a kind of inner experience, a "sympathy", constantly interpreting things in terms of duration and qualitative difference, and because it is sensitive to qualitative differences and the time of their becoming, art serves as a paradigm for illustrating arguments on these issues and the durational unity found in all things.

Bergson saw artists as being uniquely positioned to be able to reveal to the spectator the processual nature of reality. Their capacity to appreciate the "inner life of things" and their ability to translate that into work fulfils "the loftiest ambition of art...in revealing to us nature' saw them as ideally positioned to reveal to the spectator a way of experiencing and observing the world that is very different from perception based on utility (Bergson, 1911, p. 155).

"The object of philosophy, such as I understand it, is simply to permit us to see everything and to see it more and more profoundly, as a landscape painter shows us better to see the landscape "(Bergson as cited in Anderson, 2020, p. 23).

For Bergson, this desire to "see everything and to see it more profoundly" implied an expansion of consciousness to gain knowledge. Bergson identified two ways to acquire knowledge: Intelligence and intuition. Intelligence categorizes, analyses and synthesizes experience and information to make sense of it and is guided by our needs and relevance to perception. Intuition, on the other hand, is most suited to the study of movement, change, and becoming. The intellect provides us with required, pragmatic knowledge of reality,

whereas intuition is employed to understand the flux of reality. "From intuition one can pass into analysis but not from analysis to intuition" (Bergson, 2007, p. 213.202).

Bergson felt intuition could be understood as a form of sympathy with becoming, a knowledge acquired from within the becoming, from the inside of the thing or experience, and as the method to restore the possibility of absolute knowledge by facilitating access to duration. By "turning" away from utilitarian perception and through the temporary suspension of analysis, intuition is synchronized with the experience *as it is happening*, the interpenetration of the past and present in processual states, in a qualitative plurality, in becoming.

Bergson considered artists uniquely privileged with the ability to place themselves within duration, identifying painting specifically as an easily communicable way of allowing the spectator to comprehend and experience the processual nature of reality through the direct experience of the artists.

"The intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and the model" (Bergson, 1998, p. 177). Likening the role of the artist's intuition in the production of a painting to evolutionary change, Bergson felt that both should be understood in terms of immanent movement and intuition rather than the finished form (Atkinson, 2020. p. 128). Immanence is understood as the concept of existing within and stands in contradiction to transcendence. The Real exists solely in this world and is discoverable immanently via the use of art or philosophy that broaden our perceptive capacities. The reality discovered is a manifold one of multiple presents and pasts that coexist simultaneously in different durations.

He singled out landscape painters Jean-Baptiste-Corot (1796-1895) and J. M. W. Turner (1755-1851) and their "dissolving views" as examples of artists who revealed to the spectator that which was "perceived without seeing", the processual real of the constantly moving, changing landscape of the natural world, seen, felt and experienced, through the eyes of the artist and subsequent painting (Bergson, 2007, p. 112). Painting, therefore, becomes more than mimesis or fantasy. It becomes revelatory about the nature of the real.

In Turner's paintings, colour choice and application of paint with a wide variety of marks and opacities contributed to images full of movement associated with the atmospheric conditions in nature he so loved to paint. These affective paintings drew attention to nature as an ever-changing entity.

Durée, Movement and Intuition

In Bergson's philosophy, change and movement are essential. "Movement is reality itself" (Bergson, 2007, p. 169). *Durée* is a movement of change, the sensation of time passing and the anticipation of what is to come, a processual experience. "To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly" (Bergson, 1998, p. 7).

Writing at the turn of the 20th century, Bergson was critical of the increasing integration of systemized scientific thought into philosophy and the social sciences and felt that whilst science was valuable and contributed to knowledge, it was only part of the picture. He made a distinction between time as durational succession (*durée*) and space, and between intuition and intellect. He felt *durée* and intuition deserved inclusion in

scientific debate as they contributed to a philosophy of life that celebrated creative, enduring change, differentiation and immanence, and rejected determinism (Atkinson, 2020, p. 11). Central to his critique was his objection to the spatialization of time.

Bergson understood time as having two faces. One side was objective or spatialized time, useful and practical. Composed of discrete, identical and countable spatial units, the measurable time of clocks and train timetables. Endlessly divisible and quantifiable, homogenous with every part alike to any other, indifferent to its content, spatialized time was created and thrown beneath real-time for the practical purposes of manipulating the world in order to make it functional and useful to us. But in making it still and divisible, we lose a sense of its reality as changing because movement and change are qualitative and processual and cannot be analysed into motionless parts that are sequenced together. Spatialized time, time devoid of creativity, was essential for the determinist who sees time as the unfolding of a predestined future. This position supported the scientific community of the time in the goal to use science to predict and explain everything from the social sciences through to natural events but did not accommodate immanent creativity or novelty, the unknown future.

Converse to this notion of time as spatialized was Bergson's experiential understanding of time as duration. In *durée*, parts of time, unlike the parts of space, do not exist separately, side by side. In *durée*, time is a qualitative entity, a conscious experience characterized by the interpenetration of the past and present and anticipation of the future, a processual experience. *Durée* is a principle of difference and heterogeneity, the experiential understanding of the inner time of subjective experience: time lived, felt and

acted. Instead of a separation of instants, *durée* presents as an interpenetration of the past and the future, a flux or flow, in co-presence. *Durée* includes aspects of sensual experience that do not readily conform to the requirements of measurement: The experience of an hour spent waiting for the results of a vital test versus an hour spent with a good friend are experientially two different experiences of time. Recorded objectively or spatially, however, the 60 minutes of each experience would be judged as identical.

Bergson and the Avant Garde

The Industrial revolution (1760 -1840) saw huge social, political, economic, and technological advances that affected every aspect of life, the results of which had a profound impact on the cultural and intellectual life of those in European cities at the turn of the twentieth century. Art should reflect the thinking of its time, and responding to the acceleration of modernity and changes in almost every facet of life's experiences, Bergson's ideas caught the interest and imagination of the Avant-Garde at the *fin de siècle* with a notion of time that broke from the past, Bergson presented them with an appealing and poetic philosophy of time and movement, of enduring change, novelty and creativity, a new idea of time that railed against increasingly rigid scientific or philosophical conceptualization.

The Avant-Garde artists deployed Bergson's ideas around *durée* in various ways but were primarily interested in depicting movement. Their interpretation of Bergson was not based on close reading of his philosophy but hinged on the many ways it could be adapted and applied to their political or artistic requirements. The Fauvists embraced *durée* as a

means of understanding colour through rhythm and musicality. The Cubists attempted to reinstate temporality to painting by engaging the multiple facets of a single image. However, it was the Italian Futurists, celebrating technological advancement and equating the qualitative characteristics of speed to duration, who strove to render qualitative change evident in their paintings and sculptures, making time visible via a sense of speed and dynamism. They embraced the opportunity to develop new ways of expressing time in the visual arts using what Boccioni referred to as “dynamic sensation” (Atkinson, 2020, p. 64).

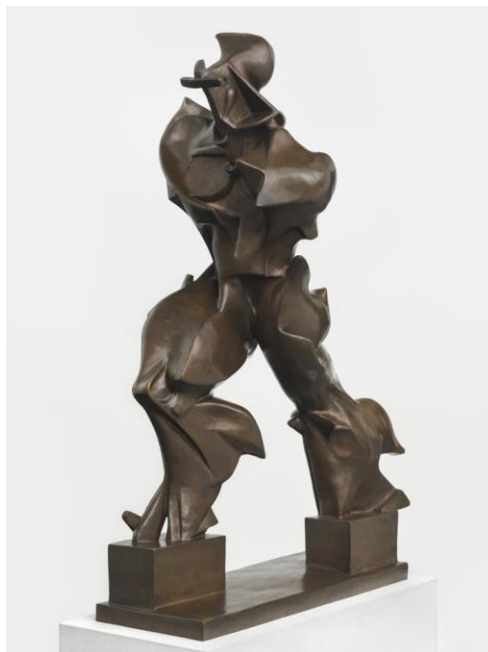


Figure 1. *Unique forms of continuity in space*

Note: Artist Umberto Boccioni’s c.1913 bronze sculpture, an expression in movement and fluidity. Dimensions: 1175 x 876 x 368 mm. Weight: 55kgs. Original was plaster but was cast in bronze in 1972. Purchased by Tate Gallery London 1972. © Tania Bruguera. Photo: ©

Tate. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

An example of this adaptation can be seen in Futurist painter and sculptor Umberto Boccioni's (1882-1916) sculpture "Unique Forms in Continuity in Space". A cast bronze figure is seen in a processual flux, aerodynamically deformed and reformed by speed, the body's dynamism accentuated to embody the drive for constant motion and change. Boccioni privileged sensation over object, the sensation of movement and its interpenetrating intensities, because sensation is always experienced in time. The rhythms of sensation of movement rather than the object itself had to be the focus of the Futurists artist's endeavours, because whilst the objects are the source of representation, it is the sensation underlying the objects, the "gesture in the act of making itself visible" that revealed the sensual processual nature of time (Atkinson, 2020, p. 64).

A return to Bergson and the contemporary arts

We return to Bergson at the beginning of the 21st century, to reconsider his philosophy of enduring change, immanence and creativity and how it continues its appeal to artists. His philosophy maintains an accommodation of the artist's need to break with the past and develop new or reimagined artistic endeavours, as well as offering ways to reconsider artistic practice in terms of movement, the persistence of time and intuition. Rather than examining what the artist reveals to the spectator in terms of the finished artefact, we can orient Bergson's ideas towards an examination of contemporary practice through analysis of the time of artistic production, the time spent by the artist in the making of the artwork, made evident through analysis of that process.

A reimagining inside the lived time of the artwork's creation, the time of becoming of the artefact, offers a way to engage with the duration of the artistic production through movement that speaks to the intuition of the artist.

There are differing temporalities in the artistic time of creation and the time of the spectator's observation. These temporal differences are discoverable in the marks and gestures, the lingering traces of the artist's hand in the production or manufacture of the work. To understand the artist's intuition of the experience of the real from within the process of making the art object, as well as how the structure of the work implies an interpenetration of psychic states, the spectator must gain access through sympathy with the artwork, a reimagining through the markings, gestures, and evidence of the artistic process left on the visible surface of the work. Bergson's theory of *durée* and intuition situates the artist's perception *in* the act of creating, introducing new reasoning for what and how artists make work.

William Kentridge and Ed Clark are two contemporary artists whose individual approaches to generating art allow the audience to experience or perceive the sensual nature of the development of the work. The sensual becoming of the real made visible in the process of Kentridge's projected animations and Clark's abstract paintings allow the viewer to engage with *durée* through their sensual and intuited presentations. By investigating Kentridge and Clark's work, I hope to create a community of practice for my work with artists whose work is inspired by the generation of new ideas from within the working process, those for whom process is as much subject as method.

Ed Clark

Ed Clark (1926-2019) was an African-American painter, who utilised a janitor's commercial broom to make large-format abstract paintings, manipulating paint with a technique he dubbed "the big sweep". The discovery of the wide, gestural broom method of painting was a crucial innovation that facilitated Clark's embarkation on a career defined by his development of new methods and inventive approaches. The broom technique produced abstract paintings in which the wide strokes demonstrate momentum and energy unobtainable with a smaller brush. Clark's corporeal actions using the broom defined a gestural, layered and colourful method that was unique to his process and resulted in distinctly energetic and sensuous paintings that invite physical engagement from the viewer.

Clark's oversized, colourful canvases and abstract mark-making technique provide the testing ground for the approach that touch can be considered a corporeal way of thinking, directing sympathy towards the body's intersection with the materiality of creative practice. Matter is shaped and regulated by movement of the body and the interaction with the interiority of consciousness and the intensity of psychic states.

A painting is a static, tangible artefact, unchanging in its final presented state and thus does not readily lend itself to an application of a philosophy of duration. Atkinson (2020) suggests that the reconciliation of movement as gesture with *durée* requires an examination of the process of the development of the artwork itself, the time of artistic

production, and not merely the final fixed image (p. 105). The artwork's structure should successfully demonstrate the interpenetration of psychic states whilst the artistic gesture should include physical, deliberate, directed and emotive elements that cannot be analysed separately (Atkinson, 2020, p. 101). The physical surface of paintings provides visual features and attributes - gestures, marks and abruptions- that pave the way for a discussion of the various ways that levels of materiality and immateriality operate in the reception of the work.

This approach aligns with Bergson's thoughts that the deliberate, constructive process of the act of artistic creation is not a mere transfer of perception image to a picture plane but should be considered a mode of thought and that the creative and imaginative powers of the artist add something to the work in the process of its development. The unpredictability of novelty and creativity is immanent to the time of production.

Access to the thinking-in-time via analysis of the gestures left visible on the painting surface allows the viewer to imagine the artist's physical movements and trace their passage, thereby gaining access to the sensorial and durational experience of the artist in the time of production through the movements of the body. But the time it takes to create a painting is significantly slower than the time of apprehension by the viewer. Atkinson (2020) suggests that art defamiliarizes perception by urging the viewer to work backwards from the impression of fixed attributes to the motions that formed those qualities (p. 116).



Figure 2. *Green top (Vètheuil)*

Note: Artist Ed Clark, 1967. Acrylic on canvas. Dimensions: 190.5 cm x 212.1 cm. Copyright Ed Clark.

The viewer's eye scours the physical surface of the work, noting and following the painterly broom-generated gestures, the colour bleeds, the paths of colour as paint skims across other colours, their unique manifestation, and works their way backwards using the imagination of the bodily effort what it would feel like to create such a work. Clark's

paintings are experienced and imagined through the body and the effort that goes into each creative move, which is apparent as marks or traces in the work.

Bergson presented a notion of movement as grace taking form, using the example of dance where the audience could easily follow the ease of movement in which graceful actions anticipated the future.

“If curves are more graceful than broken lines, the reason is that, while a curved line changes its direction at every moment, a new direction is indicated in the preceding one. Thus, the perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding the future in the present.” (Bergson, 2015, p. 12)

But this notion of movement as grace, presented by Bergson in terms of a finished artwork of a choreographed dance, is irreconcilable with *durée*, where novelty and the sensuous becoming of an unforeseeable future are at odds with a knowable future. In Clark’s paintings, aleatoric paint splashes and bleeds are not planned nor do they read as intentional. Atkinson (2020) suggests the graceful gesture should instead be redirected towards the discovery of how the body reveals duration as indicated by the painter’s gestures, brushwork or line in drawing, in this instance, Clark’s “big sweep” gestural broom marks (p. 56).

The emphasis on the bodily interaction between the artist, the work and the spectator via the sense of kinaesthesia and touch allows one to circumvent the notion of grace and negotiates a new way to reassess the gesture. If we consider touch a corporeal way of thinking that allows the materiality of paint to remain in contact with psychic states in continuity, the time spent in making the artwork, the physical resistances and the

material modes of endurances, the way the artist “feels” their way through the work, becomes a new way to consider movement.

“If I draw my finger across a sheet of paper without looking at it, the motion, I perform is, perceived from within, a continuity of consciousness, something of my own flow, in a word, duration” (Bergson as cited in Atkinson, 2020, p. 99).



Figure 3. *Blacklash*

Note: Artist Ed Clark, 1964. Acrylic on canvas. Dimensions: 92.1 cm x 122.2 cm. Copyright Ed Clark.

The large painting “Blacklash” was produced in the aftermath of the 1964 Harlem demonstrations sparked by the death of a young black teenager by an off-duty police

officer, the title alluding to the ensuing violence against black people. Clark's sweeping strokes and splattered paint, as well as his choice of vivid red and orange hues contrasting with black, speak to a state of impassioned frustration and anger about what it meant to be a black person in the United States of America at that time. "Blacklash" was the artist's most direct response to racial tension in the United States and depicts the interaction between the body and mind, the material and the immaterial bound together in a singular expression. In this powerful painting, the psychic state of the artist in the time of artistic production is made manifest through the material engagement of the artist with the medium; colour choice, smooth, energetic broom sweeps alternating with agitated marks or wild splashes of colour, furrowed layers of paint or single skims of colour. The artist's engagement with the materiality of the paint reflects his thinking in the process and provides the viewer with the opportunity to be guided via these intuited expressions into imagining the time of creation and the revelation of the processual nature of the development of the work and how it is bound up with the artist experience of the time of production.

Paintings that emphasize the artist's gestural expressiveness have a tangible corporeal rhythm. The brushstrokes sweep, which maintains tension for a brief time, attests to the uniqueness of each move. The spectator, standing in front of the artwork, appreciates the physical continuity in the artist's body referred to in the brushstrokes. Retracing the artist's gestures visually allows the spectator to take on the artist's physical and sensuous attitude in order to replicate the qualitative diversity of feeling immanent in the work. This visual retracing is its own form of touch, an attempt to access the artist's intuition of duration in the moment of artistic production.

Clark began each painting without preparatory drafts, sketches or reference material, no plan or story other than selecting key colours as initial points of departure. The “big sweep” with the broom was an athletic action involving speed and agility; bold, loose gestures conceived by the artist as bearers of energy and speed. Clark would make a giant sweep with the paint laden broom across the canvas, then considered his next move before plunging back into the process: thinking in response to the activity of painting but from within the process. The broom made graceful, energetic, curving marks but could also produce aleatoric splashes and junctions. The energetic waves of painted colour retained a palpable sense of the artist's intervention on the canvas. The powerful sweeps of paint across the canvas speak of absolute attention in the act of painting, split-second decisions and the near demiurgic potential of the artist's hand as he wrestles a unique painting into existence.

Having no predetermined idea of what the painting was going to eventually look like, Clark works from intuition from within the painting process, responding to what he is experiencing. In an interview, Clark declared

“I began to believe that the real truth is in the stroke. For me, it is large, bold strokes that do not refer distinctly to seen nature. The paint is the subject. The motions of the stroke gives the work life “ (Westall, 2020, para, 2). For Clark, reality was the physical and psychical experience of making a painting, the process of the becoming of a painting, a duration accessed by intuition *in* the act of painting. Fellow abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko (1903-1970 as cited in Seiberling , 1958) declared “A painting is not a picture of an experience; it is an experience.” (p. 82),. This reiterated the value of the processual

experience of painting and offering reasoning of its appreciation divorced from mimesis or representation.

A physically slight man, Clark painted by laying the canvas on the floor to more easily reach all corners of his large works. The large size of his work speaks to his whole body being involved in the making of the work. Were the paintings smaller, they may have appeared as observations *of* experience, but the oversized broom and canvas meant the artist was *in* the painting and the paintings bear evidence of his physicality in the traces of the broom through the paint and the junctures of paint. The bristles of the broom created marks ranging from smooth sweeps to delineated grooves dug into still-wet paint, splashes, drips and beading. He would also stain and spatter paint onto the raw canvas, manipulating paint to achieve the result he required. Whilst Clark set up the conditions of the painting - size, colour and shape-he could not predict their outcome. In the immediacy of painting, the experience of an ever-changing reality is experienced. Unexpected and novel representations manifest in unique forms, not as a result of control or planning, but from precisely the opposite. Paint would skim or bead on the layer beneath, colour breaking through and bleeding where pigment hit the unprimed canvas, splashing when paint-laden broom bristles flicked at the end of a stroke. Clark facilitated the occurrence of these forms and then responded to the working qualities -their unexpected manifestations and the sensuous encounter of moving a broom through thick acrylic paint -, from within the process of painting as intuition accessed from within the movement, the sympathy with the becoming of an object. The sweeps, marks and splashes allow the spectator to follow, like a finger tracing a line on a page, the movements of broom and paint and gain insight into the

process of painting and thinking, to “feel” their way through the work to the intuition of the becoming of said painting.

An inveterate traveller, Clark’s paintings were neither imitation nor direct representations of landscapes encountered, insisting that the subject of his painting was the materiality of the paint itself. He was interested in the process of making a painting, not a particular subject matter (Umaxxi, 2012, 9:51). The atmospheric differences that colours took on in varying geographical locations, circumstances of light and landscape, informed his paintings but were not the subject thereof. He was aware of the effect that these qualities had on his work but insisted they were abstracted responses to these landscapes, stating “When I go somewhere, unconsciously it (painting) gets different, without me thinking about it.” (Edwards, 2013, para. 10). Series titles of his works summoned forth foreign places and their particular light experienced on his travels: Bahia, Paris, Cypress, Taos. Unfamiliar, geographically specific new colours and atmospheric conditions presented Clark with the ideal opportunity to expand his artistic vocabulary, resulting in a specificity regarding mood and energy in his work. Titles provided a hook for the audience, allowing them access to the painting via language but the paintings themselves remained emphatically abstract

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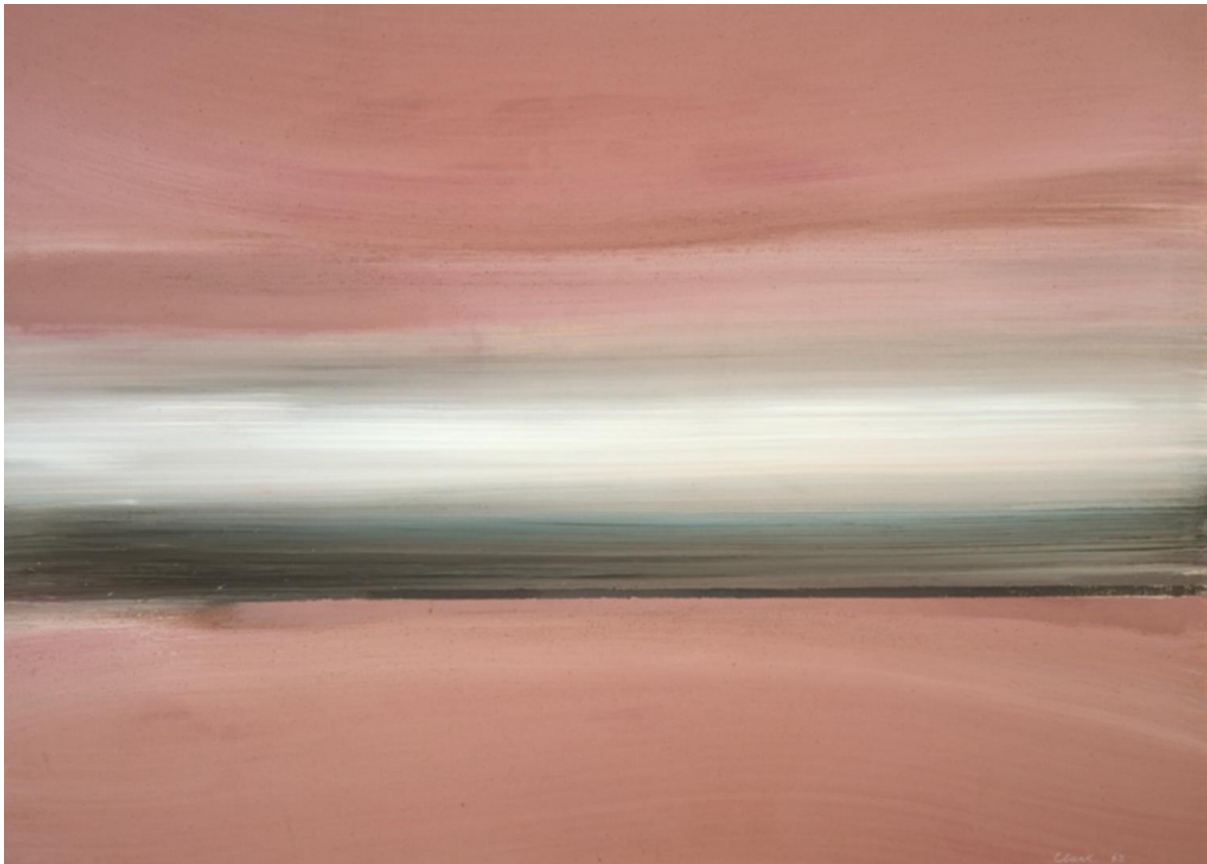


Figure 4. *Taos*

Note: Artist Ed Clark, 1982. Acrylic on canvas. Dimensions: ,134.6 cm x 99 cm. Copyright Ed Clark.

Clark's use of colour and the energetic broom gesture were used to affect sensation in the viewer. In turning from the utility of perception, the colours, the materiality of the paint and the sensation of the broom moving through viscous paint operate in a circuit of attention within the production of the paintings. Clark recognized the potential for new, abstract methods of dealing with colour and shape that were more aligned with thinking and emotion than representation. The notion of having a recognizable image did not interest nor motivate him. “ An abstract painting. How do you talk about it? Most people,

when they look at a work, they say it looks powerful or present or original. When I am painting, I'm not thinking about that" (Whitten, 2014).

Clark's compositions happened at the intersection of colour-behaviour, in their community or fracture, something he referred to as chance. Chance becomes metaphysical, and what he considered improvisation, something he felt was essential to his art, can be appreciated as intuited becoming. For Clark, the reality of the painting, the problems and solutions of that reality, were solved in and through the process of painting, a processual experience he likened to the process of how jazz music is created (Umaxxi, 2021, 10:22).

"When I get into painting like that, you don't get into something you understand, right? You just let it go" (Perez art Museum Miami, 2015, 02:09). The sense of being in flow or flux with the creation of the painting and responding to the painting activity was central to Clark's methodology. Clark treated composition as a process of becoming and not a static image. The painting artefact is a record of behaviour, allowing the paint its own expression with the artist as moderator.

William Kentridge

William Kentridge(1955-) is a South African multi-media artist best known for his printmaking, charcoal drawn animations and installations. His series “Drawings for Projection” (1989-2020) consisted of a series of charcoal drawings projected as short animated films. These films are constructed by filming a single charcoal drawing in the process of development. Kentridge's palimpsest method of animation does not follow traditional animation sequencing of linear succession: one image drawn after the other, each created separately, photographed and then presented seamlessly as an animated sequence. His works are designed to visibly evolve, the process of change made visible. Pinning a sheet of paper to a wall opposite a Bolex Movie camera, Kentridge begins his process by making a single mark in charcoal. The single drawing then develops incrementally, by erasure and re-drawing, and is filmed regularly, two frames per interval, resulting in an animation that spans the development of the drawing from the initial mark to its conclusion. Kentridge explains his initial idea ” I really just wanted to see a drawing continually making itself-marking, erasing and eventually changing into different images (Auping, 2009. p. 241). Thematically socio-political, Kentridge's films are testimonies to the subjects of memory, history and time, and present a visual way of “understanding the world as process rather than fact” (Art21, 2010.05:58).

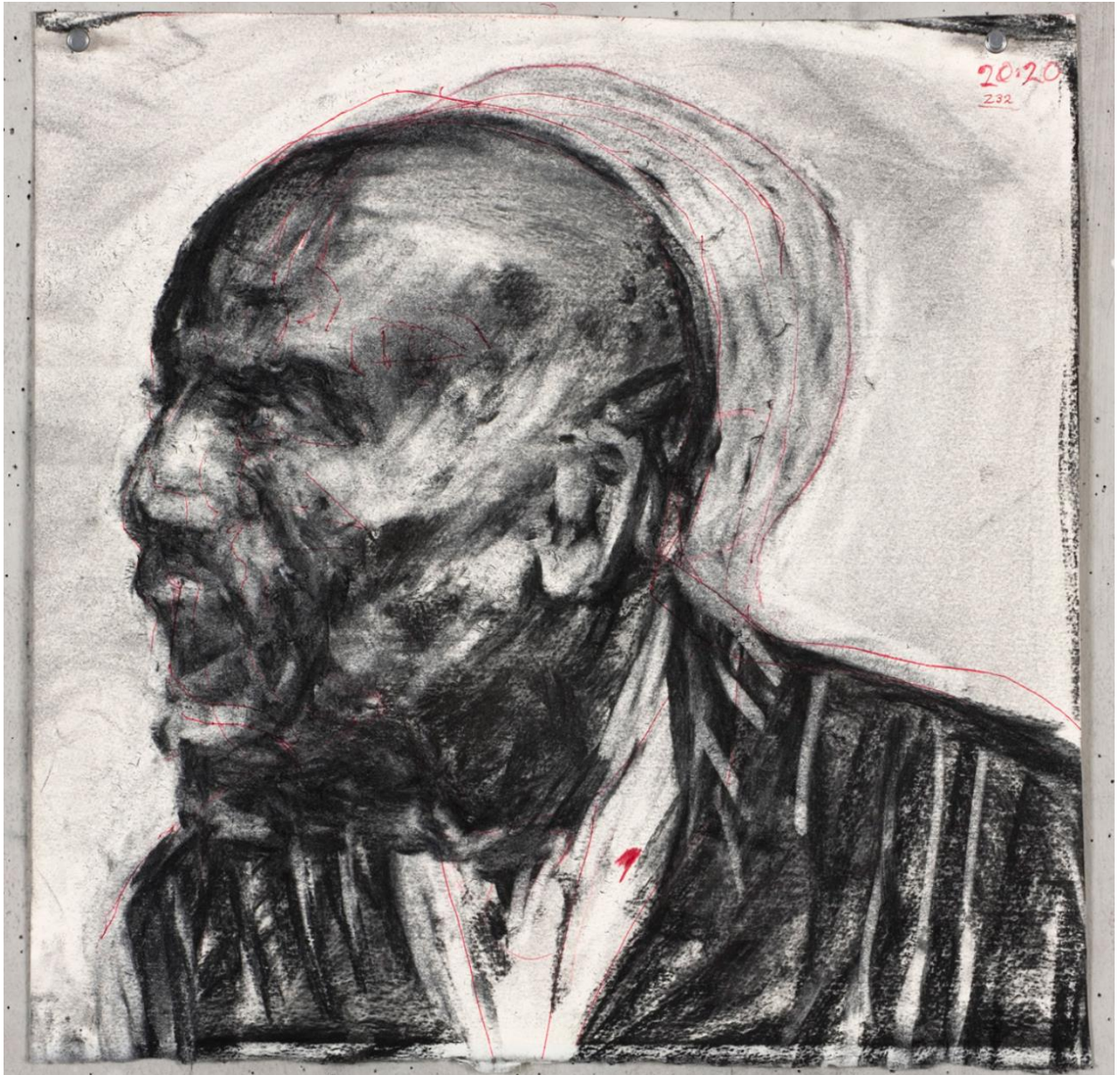


Figure 4. drawing for *"Other Faces"*
Note: Artist William Kentridge, 2011. Charcoal on paper. Dimensions: 44.13 cm x 43.82 cm. Copyright William Kentridge

Bergson was critical of cinematographic representations of time. An opponent of the deterministic philosophies of the late nineteenth century, he saw the filmic sequence as an illusion formed by the mechanical articulation of a succession of still photos. To recover *durée* one needs to strip away all spatialized descriptions in order to return to the interiority of experience. Bergson saw cinema as a distorted and insufficient representation of *durée* and questioned its capacity to accurately depict such an essentially human experience. He believed time played no creative part in a film once it has already been created.

French philosopher and Bergsonian scholar, Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) offered a more sympathetic reading of the concept of cinema as it relates to *durée*, suggesting cinema contained a contemporary understanding of movement as a continuity in film, a “movement-image”, and that cinema was “capable of imagining the production of the new” that contrasted with the spatialized view that movement in film was a series of separate events (Deleuze, as cited in Fleming 2013, p. 409). The “movement-image” offers a depiction of time as a chronology of events whose continuity of movement describes the figure or the representation of a figure that is always forming or dissolving by the movement of lines and points taken at any point along their path. (Deleuze as cited in Fleming 2013, p. 409)

In Kentridge's animations, the spectator is not required to retrieve movement from a still artwork nor is the film created from a predetermined plan. Movement is visible in the animated sequence, not only as a result of the mechanical articulated of still images but as a result of Kentridge's unique drawing method where traces of the previous drawings and erasures remain visible on the paper due to the provisional nature of the materials he uses:

charcoal, paper, eraser. The smudging, scribbling and erasing become part of the drawing process, retaining the traces of what went before and becoming incorporated in the new, changing drawing. The simultaneous development and erasure of marks on the paper, become a visual “memory” of the previous drawing and anticipation of the developing drawing, forcing the viewer to perceive what Kentridge refers to as the “passage of a happening”, the recognition of the process of time, change and becoming. Kentridge's animations are the experience of images “becoming” that depict the movements and changes of reality as a result of their ongoing manifestations, an aesthetic folding of past and present moments.

Bergson predicated the recovery of *durée* on the removal of any hindrance that separates one from the interiority of experience.

“But to the artist who creates a picture by drawing it from the depths of his soul, time is no longer an accessory; it is not an interval that may be lengthened or shortened without the content being altered. The duration of his work is part and parcel of the work. To contract or to dilate it would be to modify both the physical evolution that fills it with the invention which is its goal. The time taken up by invention is one with the invention itself. It is the progress of thought which is changing in the degree and measure that it is taking form. It is a vital process, something like the ripening of an idea” (Bergson,1998, p. 340). The sensual sensitivity of Kentridge's animation technique binds the observer to the time of artistic production. As the spectator witnesses the transmogrifying drawing, they become engaged in the time of the line as it evolves with the becoming of the animation. The artist's experience in the process of making the painting is made discoverable through analysis of both its construction and consideration of the time of its construction. The animation

process and the effects of change made visible, the before and after of an event aesthetically inscribed both on the surface of the paper and in the film, behave as a visual becoming, engaging the viewer and implicating them in an understanding of the various durations folded into the film, a sensation of compressing and stretching, simultaneously, made understood through examination of the time of artistic production.

There are several different temporal layers folded or enmeshed in each animation, creating "temporally thick" environments. "Temporal thickness" occurs when the past is brought into the present moment of viewing (Barker as cited in Fleming 2013, p. 405) and the viewer becomes aware of these differing durations. Kentridge takes several months to create the drawings that eventuate into an 8-minute film. Through the trailing traces and movements evident in the developing drawing, the spectator is made aware of "the ripening" of the artist's thought process and psychic experience at the time of production. Movement is evident in the evolving nature of the drawing process, the gestures, erasures and marks, the thinking in time, and the filmic process itself. The time spent drawing and erasing, pacing between the camera and the drawing, the thinking, are all compressed and folded into the fabric of artistic time of production, the various durations inhabiting the same drawing.

The voids or gaps between each film frame are included in our appreciation of the film's duration. These voids are not empty but are in fact filled with the time Kentridge spends pacing between the drawing and the camera in the interim between each drawing modification. Kentridge explains that the physical steps taken between each click of the camera are vital to his process and enable thinking in response to the developing image, the

thinking in the time of its creation, and credits his training in mime that fostered his “understanding the way of thinking through the body” (Louisiana , 2014, 12:58). The voids also serve to draw attention to how each minor alteration of the drawing affects the audience's impression of time passing (Doane as cited in Fleming, 2013, p. 412). Rather than appearing to break the movement, the voids are folded into the duration of the film, “thickening “ the time.

The slow process of animation means that the excessive time spent on the process of making allows Kentridge to pay attention to what it is he is perceiving and responding to. He can move away from his initial perception and memory responses towards a way of engaging with the process where inventiveness and novel expressions occur as he spends more time considering the ever-changing drawing itself. Thinking occurs in the activity of drawing as a response to the previous iteration. Kentridge assesses the progress of the film at regular intervals, diverging as he feels is necessary and accommodating change as he sees fit. Bergson wrote of the process of evolution “ Life does not proceed by association and addition, but by dissociation and division”(Bergson, 1998, p. 89). Kentridge considers the way his films are constructed out of fragments that are re-interpreted retrospectively and changed in sequence as a process of thinking, “the way in which we make sense of the world” (Louisiana Channel, 2014, 07:12).

The deliberate constructive process of the act of artistic creation from within the process should be considered a mode of thought. Kentridge explains, “The films don't have a meaning which then gets drawn. The films come out of the need to make an image...and the meaning emerges over the months of the making of the film” (Louisiana Channel,

2014,0:15). As the drawings evolve, the thinking *in* the act of drawing creates new narratives. Whilst each film project begins with a single idea or influence, Kentridge does not introduce any extraneous ideas into the work unless they have been generated from within the process itself. He responds to each mark by paying attention to it as a leading inquiry, offering up possible responses in the drawing that follows the movement towards the future. In a contracted feedback loop between the changing drawing and Kentridge's perception and memory, the work can be understood in terms of immanent movement expressing *durée*, changing and progressing without a fixed agenda, displaying limitless possibilities in the possible projections. The audience is privy to these intuitions as the animations progress in the visibly evolving drawing.

Kentridge is clear to state that he believes the progress of the films to be different from chance, understood as neither a random nor clear program, but somewhere in-between, an "openness to recognizing something as it happens" (Louisiana channel,2014.7:25). This thinking within the endurance of things and against the natural impulses of perception is what Bergson referred to as intuition, the access to duration. Kentridge points to this inclination in his statement "It's always been in between the things I thought I was doing that the real work has happened" (art21, 2010, 01:18).

The films offer no neat, satisfactory endings. Instead, there is a sense of the ongoing narrative of change, a process reflective of the nature of reality. Kentridge's animation technique and subject matter work together to express and communicate aesthetically a complex image of time as *durée* through movement and the intuition of the processual nature of the real.

Community of Practice

Through the processual nature of meaning being revealed and developed from within the process, I place myself in a community of practice with the aforementioned artists. In my process of painting, landscapes are constructed out of memories and fragments of representations. They incorporate and develop by intuited responses to chance and influence from within the creative process. The give and take nature of my process means that a clear vision of the final painting is not always possible before it has been achieved, a feature shared with Kentridge and Clark's process.

The paintings suggest their own experience and are akin to a fluid concept of metaphor, with boundaries not yet fixed and connected with the intuition of *durée*. They are explorations of time, place and belonging, gesturing to one form of experience but open to inference about another. Although my work has immediately recognisable landscape and figurative features, the paint treatments, marks and gestures offer additional ways for the spectator to engage with the work in tandem with the retrievable imagery. Like Kentridge and Clark, the thinking in time is accessible in the traces made by tools and in paint. Changes made in painting decisions are visible as "ghosted" elements and the history of the development of the painting is evident in the many layers of paint, paint skims and colour breakthroughs.

Whilst the experience of making a painting is different to that of the spectator viewing it, what is hopefully shared is an experience that Schwabsky (2019) refers to as "somehow *like* an experience of nature" (p. 24), an experiential sensation-based

understanding that relates to Bergson's notion of intuition and thinking 'in' duration. The revelatory experience that Bergson claimed was art's "loftiest ambition" relates not just to the experience of spectators, but also to the experience of artists whose painting practice engages with the immanent development of ideas and form from within the processual experience.



Figure 6. Lot's wife : between territories . Note: Artist Jennie De Groot, 2022. Oil on board.

Dimensions: 100 cm x 100 cm. Copyright Jennie De Groot

Conclusion

Bergson's notion of *durée* inspired artists of the early 20th Century to reimagine time and movement as process, states of immanent change. The art produced by the Avant-Garde reflected these ideas, notably in their paintings and sculptures. A reimagining for a 21st-century application of *durée* entails shifting attention away from only the artefact to include envisioning the lived time of the artwork's creation, that is, the time within the becoming of the artwork.

The period of creative production must be understood through the persistence of time, where the creative new is dependent on the immanent growth of the artist's inner vision, thoughts and feelings, in what eventually manifests as the complete form of an artwork. This approach is in alignment with Bergson's philosophy but extends it in new ways.

Bergson's temporal philosophy resists conclusive interpretations and strict definitions; it remains open to the formation of new concepts due to its foundation in novelty, *durée*, and an unpredictable future. In the case of art, it should not be seen as a strict application of philosophy to art, but a method by which Bergson's philosophy evolves by interacting with certain artworks, ideas, and theories.

In the discussion of the work and practice of Kentridge and Clark, I have demonstrated how Bergson's processual theories are relevant to an application to contemporary visual arts. The sensual variety of the real in intuition and the variability of aesthetic experience by both artist and spectator are evidenced in my discussions of their

work. Both artists serve as guides to the 21st-century audience, offering new opportunities to engage with the processual aspect of becoming by virtue of their distinct expressions.

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