William Kentridge's *Monument* (1990) as counter-monument and the embodiment of negative aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the film *Monument* (1990), created by South African artist William Kentridge. It frames the analysis around James E Young's original ideas of the counter-monument and negative aesthetics. The former is defined as an anti-monument or a memorial that is open-ended, provocative, and subversive. The latter, Young's negative aesthetics, is defined as anti-redemptive art or counter-art, that is, a critical aesthetic. This is art that provokes, shocks, and repels, while critically challenging the audience to remember. Arguing for the film and its anti-hero Harry as both counter-monuments and the embodiment of negative aesthetics, I make a significant contribution to the already established work on William Kentridge by providing a unique reading of his film as a counter-monument.

This article also works as a concept document for interrogating James E Young's counter-monument outside of the context that gave rise to its initial conceptualisation, that is, post-World War II Germany and the Holocaust. In doing so, I also make a contribution to the scholarly debate surrounding counter-monuments; countermemory; and negative aesthetics, by contending that not only Holocaust (non)representations are counter-monumental, but other (counter)artistic responses to historical traumas or catastrophes, such as apartheid, can also be counter-monuments, in this case, film.[1]

 Keywords: counter-monument; negative aesthetics; William Kentridge; *Monument*; counter-art; James E Young; trauma; memory; *Mine*.

Introduction

In this article, I define, analyse, and critique James E Young's concept of the counter-monument.[2] In doing so, I also engage with Young's concept of negative aesthetics. I then argue that William Kentridge's charcoal, hand-drawn animated film *Monument* exemplifies Young's concept of the counter-monument and personifies his idea of negative aesthetics. My argument is supported by images from the film itself, through a qualitative textual analysis. With this study and engagement, my article makes two significant contributions. The first contribution is to the already extensive research on William Kentridge's filmic series. I offer a unique interpretation of his film *Monument*, one that has not yet been made. The second contribution is to the ongoing discourse of counter-monuments, which includes the concepts of countermemorials and countermemory. I suggest, with Kentridge's film as an example, that a counter-monument need not be a building or piece of architecture, but that a film can be an example of a counter-monument. It keeps the memory alive and the wound open, and this is important in terms of context and remembrance, and is in keeping with how Young has defined counter-monuments. My argument further adds to the discourse by also arguing that the counter-monument need not only relate to Holocaust memorials, but is relevant to other national or historical traumas, in this case, South Africa and apartheid. The article therefore serves to interrogate memorial forms: monuments need not only exist as the permanent, state-sanctioned version, memorials, as counter-monuments can exist as transient, ephemeral, unsanctioned, and fleeting memorials. Kentridge's *Monument* is one such (counter)memorial.

The article begins with a description of the film *Monument*. It is followed by an overview of the relevant literature framing the discourse around James E Young's counter-monument, which includes his concept of negative aesthetics. I then analyse Kentridge's film,[3] positioning it as a counter-monument and as exemplifying negative aesthetics, and conclude by arguing that the counter-monument, as initially defined and conceptualised by Young, can take on different meanings and can be applied in different contexts other than for what it was originally conceived, in this instance, film.

In *Monument* (1990), Soho Eckstein,[4] from Kentridge's series *Drawings for projection*,[5] is depicted as a great philanthropist, *the* Civic Benefactor (Figure 1). With a great amount of fanfare, and much grandeur, Soho unveils a monument (Figure 2). The assumption is that the monument erected is to celebrate or immortalise Eckstein, who sees himself as a prodigious benefactor. The monument, which is quite literally

FIGURE **Nº 1**

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Monument*: Soho Eckstein as 'Civic benefactor'. Image courtesy of the artist.

formed from the words emanating from Soho's presentation at the unveiling, is unexpectedly not a sculpture of Soho, but of a character named Harry.[6] Harry is restrained, his feet pinioned to the base of a large rock (Figure 3). He is overly burdened by a huge mass of rock on his back, and above him, he holds a basket of wood, with the inscription "SURF" (Figure 4). He is dressed in rags; a herringbone jacket over his bare chest. His face is etched in pain. A long shot veers into a close-up shot of Harry's face: he opens his eyes—the "statue" is alive (Figure 5). The close-up shot fades to the sound of Harry's extremely painful and laboured breathing, and the film ends.

Kentridge has stated often that this film was meant to be made and screened only after his 1991 film, *Mine*.[7] This is important as this film does inform *Monument* by highlighting the plight of the worker, in this case, the miner. *Monument* is Kentridge's least analysed film,[8] with a mere three minutes and ninety seconds of screening time, and is therefore assumed to be one of his less important productions. I suggest, however, that it is possibly one of his most significant films, certainly one

6. Harry is a recurring figure in Kentridge's works, most especially during the 1980s and 1990s. He first appears in Kentridge's re-conceptualised Hogarth etchings, entitled *Industry and idleness* (1986). He is the beggar; the emblematic disenfranchised and is always in the same garb: cloth hat and herringbone jacket.

7.   *Mine*, produced in 1991, follows on from the film *Monument* and it depicts a horrifying view of miners working underground in the gold mines, owned and excavated by Soho Eckstein. Soho, wearing his iconic pin-stripe suit is shown seated behind his office desk, which then turns into a bed. His desk/bed is littered with office machinery including a ticker-tape machine that spews out ticker-tape and a Nigerian head. Soho presses his coffee plunger, which plunges downwards, turning into a lift shaft that then continues to tunnel into a dormitory filled with bunks and decapitated heads. This is intercut with shots of miners working in the mines drilling in the rock-face; and alternates with images of the workers showering together, and with shots of their hostels and bunk beds. These living quarters are also claustrophobic and without any personal space. The blackness of the mines and hostels, is a devastating indictment of the miners working and living conditions, which is sub-human. The coffee plunger does not stop there, but continues downwards until it turns into a transatlantic slave ship. The metaphor is clear–the miners are no more than badly paid slaves working and living in abominable conditions. The lift finally returns upwards, along the route of the coffee plunger, but with a gift–a tiny rhinoceros. Soho, with one giant sweep of his arm, clears his bed/desk: all his office machinery, as well as the men (workers) that had been spewed out of the ticker-tape machine are unceremoniously shoved off his bed, so that he can play with his new procurement, his tiny, bouncy rhinoceros. The scene ends with the desk once again turning into a giant luxurious bed where Soho plays leisurely with his newly acclaimed, wild "pet". Both animals and humans are seen as acquisitions: human capital; expensive and rare; toys and entertainment. Please see Cristov-Bakargiev (1998) and Cameron, Cristov-Bakargiev and Coetzee (1999).

8.   The exception is Rosalind Krauss' article *The Rock: William Kentridge's drawings for projection* (2000) where she compares this film to Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*. Please also see Matthew Kentridge's (2015:149-161) latest description of this film in *The Soho chronicles*.

FIGURE **Nº 2**   ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Monument*: the immense crowd gathers for the unveiling of the monument. Image courtesy of the artist.

of his most shocking and political: with humans presented as nothing more than capital, as represented by Harry. Before analysing the film, I will discuss James E Young's concepts of counter-monuments and negative aesthetics by engaging with his seminal works and some of the resultant scholarly work that has emerged around these themes.

FIGURE **Nº 3** ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Monument*: a close-up of Harry's pinioned feet. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE **Nº 4** ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Monument*: a medium close-up of Harry. Image courtesy of the artist.

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William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Monument*: Harry opens his eyes: he is alive. Image courtesy of the artist.

James E Young's counter-monument and negative aesthetics

Young (2000:96) defines counter-monuments as 'memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument'. Counter-monuments destabilise and unsettle meaning and authority. Through this concept, Young challenges monuments as fixed in both meaning and landscape. Counter-monuments are transient, and are spaces about contestation (both of memory and history). In order to understand Young's idea of the counter-monument it is best to try to understand the conventional concept of a traditional monument first. Traditional monuments fix meaning; they are final. They serve a particular representative function (often ideological in nature); they present a singular point of view that prevents any other interpretation or use. Monuments are imbied with expectations of specificity, permanence, and local identity within a national context. They are usually relegated to history or the pantheon of historical events, and represent a grand narrative. These traditional monuments are represented as sacred and untouchable and are often out of reach, on a high, often imposing, pedestal (Young 1993; 1994; 2000). In direct contrast,

counter-monuments, as defined and conceptualised by James E Young, have the following characteristics: they are unaesthetic, unanaesthetising, non-redemptive, fluid, non-monumental, context-bound, non-totalitarian, self-reflexive, open-ended, multi-interpretive, a meta-narrative, multivariate, provocative, unconsoling, and subversive. Ultimately, monuments and counter-monuments pre-empt debates about history and memory and the representation of the un-representable.[9]

The counter-monument was conceived as a response to a very specific context, that of post Nazi-Germany. It was while trying to come to terms with this dilemma that Young coined the term counter-monument. He created the term to undermine 'the basic assumptions of the monument itself in the process' and to highlight the way that these artists (such as Gertz and Shalev; Betejewski; and Ware) have placed the act of memory in the hands of the beholder and the audience (Stubblefield 2011:1). Of necessity, this raised a number of difficult questions. It was while trying to come to terms with this dilemma that Young coined the term counter-monument, creating it to undermine 'the basic assumptions of the monument itself in the process' (2003:238). His new term highlighted the way that countermemory artists have placed the act of memory in the hands of the beholder and the audience (Stubblefield 2011:1), by using artistic approaches including destruction, disappearance, and even invisibility. These approaches came to be known as counter-art. These artists sought to free the monument from its 'demagogical rigidity and certain history' (as well as memory) through deconstructing singular narratives (Young 2003:239). Because of this link between 'articulating history and an abhorrent past' the idea of the monument became something that could no longer be supported (Stubblefield 2011:1). In order to address this, many artists and architects attempted to 'dramatize this impossibility by way of a refusal or even active negation of presence' (Stubblefield 2011:1). Young's concept of the counter-monument was also created to try to explain how artists invigorated the past through a dynamic between the viewer and the work. This articulation was intended to 'mock … the traditional monument's certainty of history' (Shalev-Gertz cited in Stubblefield 2011:1). At the same time, postmodernism critiqued the master narratives of history, including the power relations of fascism.

Also in the 1990s, historian Elazar Barkan argued that the decade saw an emergence of a new international emphasis on both morality and self-examination with regard to human rights abuse (cited in Rothberg 2004:466). Barkan's self-reflexivity underpins the discourse on human-rights (cited in Rothberg 2004:468). This gave rise to contemporary artists who have challenged the conventional forms of memorialisation in the wake of genocide, the Holocaust, and other histories of exceptional violence. Kentridge is one of those artists. The memory boom, as it

9. Collective memory, originally termed by Maurice Halbwachs, is culturally formed. Michael Rothberg, partly in response to postcolonial trauma studies and memory research coined the term "multidirectional memory" to describe that collective or cultural memories do not need to be in competition with one another. For instance, the colonial narratives of trauma and memory need not compete with those from the Holocaust (Rothberg 2009). Rothberg (2013) applies this concept to Kentridge's film *Mine* in his article 'Multidirectional memory and the implicated subject: on Sebald and Kentridge', where he makes connections between traumatic colonial histories and the Holocaust. It is notable that Kentridge's film likewise references colonial histories and the Holocaust in *Tide table*, where he includes depictions of the Holocaust, that is, the gas chambers. Rothberg is not the only scholar to make these links in Kentridge's filmic series (see also Karam 2011, 2014).

has now come to be called, is related to the very real fear that memories will be forgotten and that this will result in social amnesia (Arnold-de Simine 2013:13).

Thus, counter-monuments arose out of a certain era, namely the 1970s and 1980s, with a broad focus on Germany, fascist Nazism, and the genocide of the Holocaust. It is important to understand this context in order to understand the concept itself. This era came to be derided for 'aestheticizing the history of Nazism and the Holocaust', and memorial activity became linked with 'the redemptive normalization' of Germany's past, which included the construction of traditional monuments (Young 2003:130). The difficulty is twofold: firstly, how to represent a monument to the victims when one has been complicit in their murders? Secondly, how does one represent the un-representable? This led to an overconsumption of memory and resentment against collective blame. The generation of the mid-1980s turned to artists for new representations of the Holocaust and Nazism that could untangle memorial work 'from the quest for redemption' (Young 2003:131). The artistic and political response was seen in the form of the counter-monument. These counter-monuments would be created in memorial spaces with the aim of challenging 'the very premise of the monument—to be ephemeral rather than permanent, to deconstruct rather than displace memory, to be antiredemptive. They would reimpose memorial agency and active involvement on the German public' (Young 2003:131).

Although architects produced these anti-monuments, Young was the scholar who conceptualised and created the term and, in doing so, ignited new interest in the very problem of representation, most especially in the public sphere. The counter-monument was created along with the idea of negative aesthetics; essentially the notion was that 'post-Holocaust art must frustrate our attempts to make sense of suffering by preventing projection of meaningful totalities' (Cooke 2006:267; Young 1994). It is from this proposition that Young's concept of counter-art develops.

Counter-monuments are one instance/branch of such counter-art, and are defined as 'brazen, painfully self-conscious' memory works (Young 1994:7). Young (1994:132) seems to be arguing that art that offers compensation through evoking pleasure or assigning singular, all-encompassing meaning in response to catastrophe, is open to the protest that it instrumentalises suffering. In contrast, counter-art or negative art should not provoke joy or pleasure, but the opposite. They should be subversive, open-ended, and unaesthetic, as with counter-monuments.

Artists remember the countless historical novels, poems, photographs, films, and video documentaries, and memoirs; but how are they to remember events they did not experience first-hand, but through a hyper-mediated prism? (Young 1994:1)

In doing so, these artists call attention to this vicarious relationship to Holocaust events, thereby ensuring that 'their post-memory[10] of events remains an unfinished, ephemeral process, not a means toward definitive answers to impossible questions' (Young 1994:72). These artists reject art's traditional redemptory function in the face of catastrophe. For them, the notion that such suffering might be redeemed by its aesthetic reflection is intolerable and unethical (Young 1994:72).

Artists, and architects, want to reanimate historical sites, through evocation and stimulation, and not mimicry (in other words non-representational art, or abstract art) (Young 1994:73, 78). This negative art is meant to raise aesthetic, historical, and even personal questions, rather than supply answers (Young 1994:78). It relates to the question of how to represent trauma.[11] Young (1994:81) envisaged a memory work that is both a possible disavowal and a distraction, whereby inner visions are actualised and externalised. This memory work or counter-art is meant to 'return the burden of memory to the visitors [or audience] themselves by forcing visitors into an active role' (Young 2000:118) (brackets and emphasis in original). He wanted a counter-art that offers no consolation, closure, or coherent meaning; because obviously one cannot unaestheticise or aestheticise the Holocaust, or other historical traumata, and neither should the spectator. This is because remembrance of the catastrophe should be eternal; and there should be no beauty when representing atrocities.

Young (1993) does not only write about the challenge of memory in the face of catastrophe, or historical trauma, he also explores memory as it is being articulated by artists who only have a vicarious relationship to the event itself.[12] These artists encounter a double challenge: firstly, how do they articulate memories of a catastrophe that they did not experience first-hand? The second challenge that these artists encounter is the challenge of conceiving, conceptualising, and designing a 'memorial act that is anti-redemptive, that resists at all moments the anesthetization of the Holocaust' (Landsberg 2001:233; cf Young 2000). These artists, temporally and geographically removed from the Holocaust, must 'reinvent the monumental form itself', as an anti-monument or anti-memory; and produce anti-art or negative art (Young 1993, 1994, 2000). Young's counter-monuments are a memory act as they are performative in nature. As Young (1999:3) states, a counter-monument is 'a monument against itself, against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate—and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators'.

Many other authors[13] have since added to the debate on counter-monuments, countermemory, and counter-art. The concept of counter-monument, created out

10. Postmemory is a term coined by Marianne Hirsch (1997:22) as a second or third generation of memory/ies for the post-Holocaust generation: a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Young has added to the memory discourse, positing that postmemory as a representation of generational distance from history, is a vicarious past. According to Young (2000:1-2), the post-Holocaust generation can only access this past through the imagination.

11. Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996, 2003), in her groundbreaking works, defines trauma as an event that is so overwhelming that it causes a delay of knowing that the trauma has even occurred. Historical traumas refer to traumas of such magnitude that happen to a culture or a community, such as the Holocaust. Apartheid is one such historical trauma. Arthur G Neal (1998:x) has added to the debate of collective trauma by identifying national trauma; where the wound is not inflicted on an individual's psyche or body, but on a society, where 'something terrible, deplorable, or abnormal' happens to a society. Sara R Horowitz (2010:49) defines deep trauma as 'a sense of rupture and radical discontinuity, the impossibility of a cure, irretrievable loss, incomplete mourning'. See also Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué (2011:xi), who define cultural trauma as an enduring, shared societal socio-psycho disorder. Apartheid can be said to be such an historical trauma or disorder. It is also a shared or cultural/collective trauma. While I have conflated some of the terms, as this article does not focus on interrogating these concepts, Barbie Zelizer (cf. 2003) warns against doing so.

12. Young (2000:10) explores the vicarious memory forms and whether or not it is 'possible to enshrine an antimemorial [sic] impulse in monumental forms'.

of a specific era and context (post-war Germany) has since evolved to include other memorial forms of remembrance, from Australia, America, and Poland,[14] and other contexts and histories, such as apartheid and the ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe. Anti-monuments are haunted; provocative; self-reflexive. While traditional monuments tend to 'seal off memory', counter-monuments attempt to sear memory into public consciousness (Landsberg 2001:234). It is open-ended, and represents a rupture or wound that describes the trauma of those who suffered. It is a monument 'ruptured by loss' (Crownshaw 2008:213), which intrudes upon the present from the past and therefore corresponds with vicarious witnessing, secondary witnessing and 'postmemory—the remembrance of atrocities not witnessed, or experienced, first-hand (Crownshaw 2008:213; Hirsch 1992, 1997, 2003, 2012; Young 1993). As such, it is a representation of events/things from the perspective of those who did not witness them; it thereby emphasises the mediated nature of such memory works and inspires in the spectator a self-reflexive relationship with the past.

Counter-artists (and architects) recognise the many ways that traditional monuments have functioned to venerate the nation-state, particularly through the validation and rationalisation of sacrifice and violence carried out in the name of nationalism (Rothberg 2004:469). The artists then choose to subvert these expectations by creating self-questioning and self-reflexive forms of counter-art and counter-monuments that are both ideologically and aesthetically challenging (Rothberg 2004:469). In doing so, they transfer 'the burden of memory from the monuments to the audience' (Rothberg 2004:469). Counter-monuments and, to that I add, negative art, are creations and sites for an 'ongoing, unfinished, and multilayered mourning process' (Rothberg 2004:470). Their aim is to foster individual memorial activity, thereby 'acknowledging histories of violence and trauma, while also seeking reconciliation and inclusivity' (Vatan & Silberman 2013:3).

Further complicating matters are the overlapping and often intertwined histories, which raise the question: how does one commemorate violence, especially when those doing the commemorating are implicitly tied to such violence? Many monuments are built on previous sites of destruction and massacre. These monuments commemorate the victims, but these 'sites of terror often tell multiple and multi-layered stories of repeated violence, occasionally blurring the distinction between perpetrators and victims' (Vatan & Silberman 2013:3). This can be said of many such commemorative sites, from Chile to Eastern Europe to South Africa. It is often the competing voices that lead to reactive strategies—countermemorials, counter-art, counter-narratives, and alternative symbols (Vatan & Silberman 2013:3). Such reactive strategies allude to the difficulties of competing memories and

13. Cf Rothberg (2004); Vatan & Silberman (2013); and Ware (2006).

14. Sue Ware (2006) looks at three Australian counter-monuments: the first is a counter-monument dedicated to the Aboriginal children that had been taken from their parents and placed with white families: *The stolen generation* (this counter-monument was conceived but never erected/built). The second was a counter memorial to individuals who died from heroin overdoses: *An anti-memorial to heroin overdoses*. The third counter-memorial is on a road where many accidents have happened: *Road-as-shrine*. Geneviève Zubrzycki (2013) analyses two counter-monuments created by Polish art activist Rafał Betejewski, entitled *I miss you, Jew* and *Burning barn.* Both were created to commemorate the deaths of men, women, and children who had been herded into a barn, in the Jedwabne area, on 10 July 1941, and burned alive. It was only in 2001 that Poland became aware of this atrocity, and the shock of discovering that Polish citizens were complicit in this murder, caused a historical rupture (Zubrzycki 2013:99). Both counter-monuments caused controversy, but *Burning barn* more so than *I miss you, Jew*. Zubrzycki (2013) conjectures that this is because the burning barn enactment focused on the perpetrators, and not on the victims. Maya Ying Lin's *Vietnam veteran's memorial*, the wall of names, is also considered to be a counter-monument (cf Coombes 2003; Rothberg 2004).

histories, as well as the 'difficulty of addressing diverging or irreconcilable paths of memory or how to represent violence' (Vatan & Silberman 2013:4). Geneviève Zurbrzycki (2013:110) also raises three very important points concerning countermemorials that are relevant for interpreting Kentridge's film. Firstly, they are not snapshots, sequestered and frozen in time; secondly, they are related to different social groups and individuals; and thirdly, they are affixed in the politico-historical contexts from which they emerged.

There are several criticisms of Young's concept of the counter-monument, as well as deprecations of memory studies itself, of which his work forms a part. These criticisms are raised by Richard Crowhshaw (2008), Susannah Radstone (2008), Wulf Kansteiner (2002), Brett Ashley Kaplan (2007), Maeve Cooke (2006) and Noam Lupu (2003), to mention only a few. While the critical discussion around his theory falls predominantly outside of the purview of this article, these criticisms are situated within the larger debate of memory studies: monuments represent history while counter-monuments represents memory; the larger problem of memory studies versus history studies; and, how memory works/texts and the representation of memory have superseded or usurped history or historical accounts, such as documents; maps; and ledgers; that only non-representational works can represent historical trauma; the simplistic and binary nature of the theory (monuments are all equated with fascism, while counter-monuments are equated with non-fascism).

While these concerns are valid, I do not think that they detract from the value of Young's theorisation. There is certainly a need for counter-art and counter-memories to develop the kind of agency required for thinking critically about these catastrophes. Young (1994) himself pre-empted such discussions in his article, '[t]he Holocaust as vicarious past: restoring the voices of memory to history', where he states that neither memory nor history should take anything away from one another (1994:72).[15] Naom Lupu (2003:133) does, however, concede that Young's theory has contributed to the understanding of the collective memorial processes, and that the counter-monument is a necessary expression of 'traumatic pain that eludes appropriation or stylization'.

In concluding this section of the relevant literature on counter-monuments, negative aesthetics and counter-art, I briefly reiterate: they are trauma made visible and tangible; open-ended; inherently incomplete; and discontinuous. Counter-monuments work at internalising memory, locking it into our minds as a 'source of perpetual memory' (Young 2000:134). They are transient; unimposing; fluid; non-prescriptive; anti-authoritarian. They must be anti-redemptive. They represent

15.   'Neither history nor memory is re-garded by these artists as a zero-sum game in which one kind of history or memory takes away from another; nor is it a contest between kinds of knowl-edge, between what we know and how we know it; nor is it a contest between scholars and students of the Holocaust and the survivors themselves. For these artists know that the facts of history never stand on their own- but are always supported by the reasons for recalling such facts in the first place' (Young 1994:72).

the un-representable. They displace and are characteristically subversive. They are filled with pathos, revulsion, and horror, and they cannot be appropriated or redeemed. They are wounds or 'symbols of rupture' (Lupu 2003:158; cf Young 1993; 1994; 2000). Not only should they be a societal mirror, but they should also provide a highly critical lens for the socio-political society or community from which they originate. This 'seared in' memory or disturbing wound encapsulates Kentridge's *Monument*. Before commencing the analysis, as far as methodology goes, this is a qualitative, textual analysis and an interpretive, hermeneutic study. It is also exploratory. The latter, because I am suggesting a new theoretical perspective of counter-monuments, one that suggests that they can take forms other than that of architecture or art, in this case, film.

Monument, a counter-monument and the embodiment of negative aesthetics

With Kentridge's film *Monument*, there are two levels of analysis to consider. There is the living breathing monument, Harry, within the film. Harry is an anti-hero, and is an extreme version of Young's counter-monument and anti-art. This is indisputable, and a brief analysis, with evidence of screenshots from the film itself, will be presented. However, there is a second level of interpretation/argument concerning this film, and that is that the film itself is a form of a counter-monument. I will therefore argue that as a filmic text, it is also a counter-monument. The film is a memorial work. The film text also conforms to what Young termed a negative aesthetic. I will therefore first discuss the counter-monument of Harry, followed by a discussion of the film as a counter-monument text.

With regard to Harry, he is one of the marginalised, a sub-altern, a dispossessed and, someone Judith Butler (2003) refers to as "ungrievable". He is placed on a huge pedestal, which at first glance, looks like any monument created to immortalise a hero. Except, he is alive, and he is the opposite of a hero. In other words, he is someone unimportant, the Other. Keeping in mind that the film was made in 1990, Harry represents apartheid's pass laws; marriage laws; miscegenation; inhumane working conditions; lack of worker's rights; forced removals; and below subsistence wages. All of these occurred on a daily basis and affected millions, and were, for all intents and purposes, an insidious violence; but considered rather mundane when compared to the systematic state violence perpetrated against the anti-apartheid comrades and activists. This then questions who South Africa considers to be worthy of remembrance, as well as how we, as a society, choose to memorialise
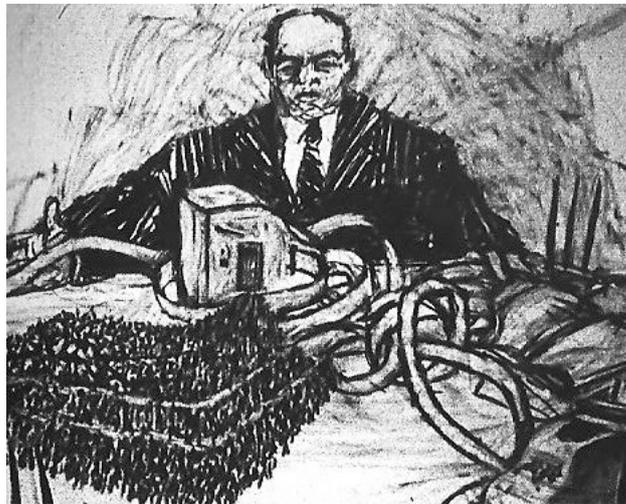
FIGURE **Nº 6**

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: human beings erupt from the accounting machine, building up into rows of "mines". Image courtesy of the artist.

them. Kentridge, by making Harry a hero worthy of commemoration, self-reflexively makes the audience question these practices. While counter-monuments deal with the state or government having to commemorate those complicit in doing harm, such as in post-Holocaust Germany, Kentridge separates out those roles, by having Soho Eckstein take on the role of the state: the reference to the later film *Mine* becomes important. This is because *Mine* shows how Soho Eckstein, while building a monument to the worker, is actually the one responsible for plundering the land, enforcing race and pass laws on the mines, and treating workers unjustly. A screenshot from the film *Mine* shows how human capital is equated with money, as they are spewed out of the ticker tape, the tiny human figures, built into different levels, turn into mines, and then turn into sand (Figure 6).

Harry personifies all the characteristics of a counter-monument. The fact that he is alive invokes horror; it is provocative and subversive. Most importantly, the representation, that is the film itself, is self-reflexive and anti-redemptory. Harry is the ungrievable Other, the complete opposite of a proud, nationalist war hero, represented with honour and valour. Harry also embodies, metaphorically, the antithesis of the monumentalism of a traditional monument. He is not fixed; he is fluid and moving (alive); he is not a fascist representation, but a socialist rendering, representing poverty, classlessness, and dispossession. With Harry depicted as alive, he is a living, open wound or rupture, and the horrendous enormity of his

being 'alive' certainly sears him into the viewer's consciousness (cf Landsberg 2001; Young 1993, 1994; Crownshaw 2008). He is also the epitome of what Young defined as a negative aesthetic. His image is devastatingly haunting, the opposite of beautiful; he represents all the crimes against humanity for which apartheid is known. He does not anaesthetise the viewer; he invokes shock and outrage. He is, as Young defines his concept of counter-art, a brazen and painful memorial to the dehumanised Other, the labourer, the bearer, and receiver of apartheid. This thematic reading of Kentridge's anti-memorial monument suggests that the power and significance of this memorial may be in its continual irresolution, epitomised by the fact that the spectator does not quite know what to make of its disturbing images, and the film ends before there is a solution, thus leaving the narrative open-ended, or as an open wound.

I turn now to discuss the second interpretation of Kentridge's film, which takes the filmic text in its entirety as a memory text or memory work, a text that works as an *aide memoire* ('aid of memory'), and is also a counter-monument.

Kentridge's film commemorates the horrendous past that is apartheid. This past raises challenges and questions related to South Africa's political, historical, and socio-cultural context. In doing so, it challenges the ideological status quo (of the time, that is, apartheid). This challenge is inherent to the process of memory making. Because, as Vartan and Silberman (2013:3) point out, 'unlike heroic struggles, military triumphs, and revolutionary victories—which become privileged hallmarks of national celebrations and grandiose commemorations—traumatic or infamous pasts do not lend themselves to smooth or self-aggrandizing narratives'. And what is more, no-one wants to build expensive, grand memorials to the ungrievable.

William Kentridge's *Monument* represents the ever-changing nature and impermanence of memory itself. This is predominantly owing to his drawing and filming technique: Kentridge's stone-age animation involves hundreds of drawings and erasures and most of the images do not exist by the end of the film. Only their animation exists.[16] His film is a simultaneous critique and a social mirror of apartheid: it reminds the audience of the history of the miners and workers. In South Africa this is particularly harrowing and filled with travesty; from the first days of mining where miners were hobbled to prevent them from running away; to the sequesterisation of miners from their families; to the hostels becoming rife with alcohol and drug abuse, and prostitution, with this contributing to the AIDS epidemic in South Africa (Figures 7–13, depictions of life in the hostels).

16. Kentridge's filmic technique is well documented, however, please see Christov-Bakargiev (1998) as one such study.

FIGURE **Nº 7** ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: a Nigerian bust on Soho Eckstein's desk. An indication of his possessions. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE **Nº 8** ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: a miner asleep in his bunk. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE **Nº 9**

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: another miner asleep in his bunk. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE **Nº 10**

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: the miners showering together at a hostel: *sans* privacy, not unlike a prison. Image courtesy of the artist.

Kentridge's *Monument* is a de-sanctification of sorts, because it subverts the meaning of traditional monuments by presenting a still living Harry as the monument. It is an anti-authoritarian point of view; it does not represent a grand narrative, but a meta-narrative; it presents history as opposed to History. It certainly is not a monument sanctioned by the then government, the National Party, but represents an alternative to the grand narrative of the colonisers, by representing the colonised instead.

Theron Schmidt (2010:293) claims that counter-monuments challenge the spectator to carry on the task of remembering. Kentridge has purposefully intended to destabilise, demystify, challenge, and subvert; thereby ensuring that the act of memory is achieved: it is hard to forget, or trivialise, the horror of a live, enslaved human being. Kentridge's works are somatic, in that they speak to our bodies and not our intellects: his film evokes a sense of horror, making us aware of the desolate conditions of humankind under a certain historical condition, apartheid, and the abdication of the subject. In keeping with Young's counter-art, Kentridge avoids the projection of meaningful totalities; his films enact an experience: one that is negative as opposed to positive, such as happiness, joy, or even consolation. Kentridge's film provokes deleterious responses of desolation, incomparable sadness, loss and, of course, horror. Kentridge encapsulates Young's idea of counter-art or counter-monument in that artistic responses to suffering should not allow us to see art as meaningful or, as already stated, redemptive. *Monument* is a desolate depiction of the condition of humankind under capitalism, but a capitalism combined with apartheid that has at its roots in racial inequality. Whether one wants to refer to the haves versus the have nots, or the different social and economic classes in South Africa, this has all been determined and enforced along racial lines. Apartheid was state sanctioned and enforced through religion, education, geography, and the police and army.

As such, *Monument* is also a negative artwork that thwarts the spectator's attempts to interpret the text immediately, and one needs to really take the time to try to make sense of the text itself. In addition, it frustrates and prevents our attempts to make sense of the negative feelings they evoke in us as spectators, and of the suffering to which the statue infers. This is the revulsion and lack of comfort that this particular counter-art invokes. And this is one of the elements of counter-monuments: art should not be redemptive. It should also not be consoling or comforting, but should repel, repulse, and jolt. Thus, keeping the wound open and, by extension, keeping the memory alive. Kentridge's film is all of these characteristics. His film provides the possibility of multiple readings of issues: politically, ideologically, and socially. It represents the anti-memorial. It forces one

FIGURE N° 11 ‹

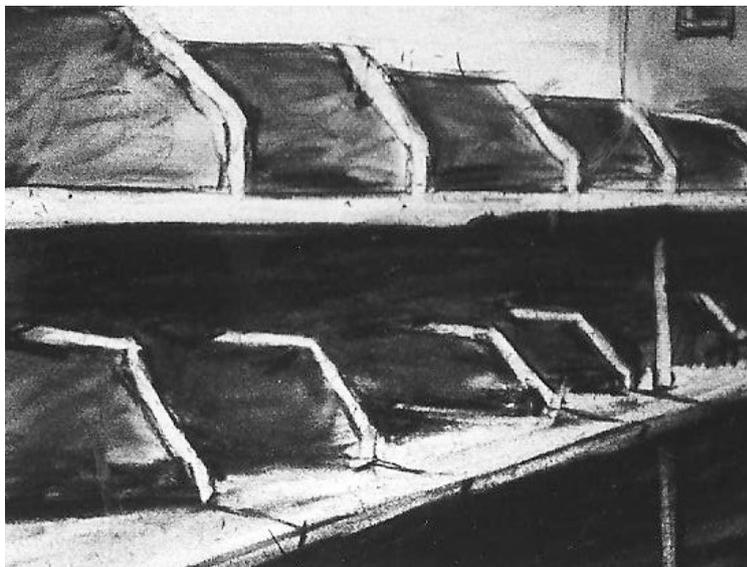William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: rows and rows of empty bunk beds: they are packed tightly together, without privacy or any signs of comfort. Image courtesy of the artist.
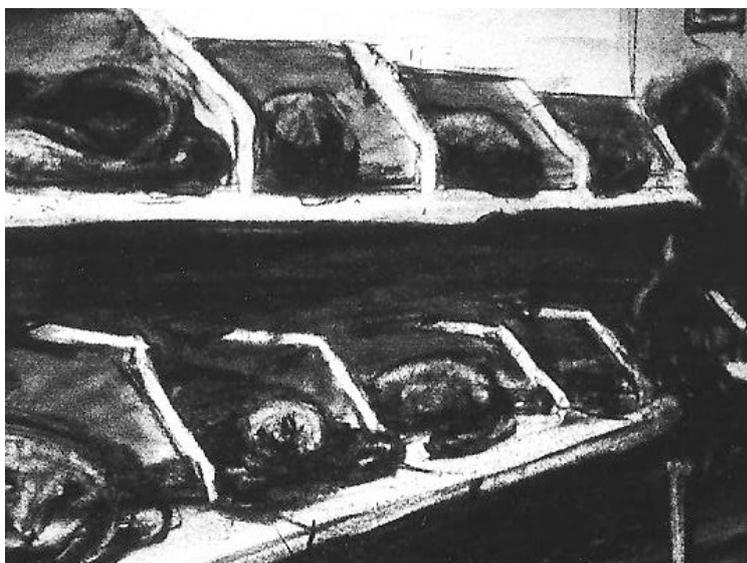

FIGURE N° 12 ‹

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: the bunk beds are now filled with miners, but with only their heads showing, it looks as though they have been decapitated. Image courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE **Nº 13**

〈

William Kentridge's animated film (charcoal) *Mine*: the miners gather around a make-shift fire. The hostel quarters are cramped, impersonal, and claustrophobic. Image courtesy of the artist.

to remember what most want to forget: the inhumanity of apartheid. This is the version of apartheid that almost every single white South African was complicit in, in some form or manner. There is no denying events or one's collusion, as this film does not document state violence but the everyday, insidious violence of apartheid.

The film also challenges the ruling ideology of the 1990s in South Africa. Monuments, traditionally, are presented in a way that support and enforce the ideological status quo. As Young (1994) states, they are nationalistic and patriotic. However, Kentridge's film challenges this ideology and instead, his film, with Harry as counter-monument, shows the painful realities of apartheid. In doing so, he critiques the Nationalist government of the time.[17]

Kentridge's film provides a critique of apartheid and its multiple problems relating to political and social issues. It emphasises the informal and the local as opposed to the formal and the national; it provides a meta-narrative for the dispossessed, in that it focuses on the history and memories of the individual; and in opposition to the master narrative of the colonialists. His film suggests a shift in the subject of monuments from heroic figures to ordinary individuals (those normally ostracised and marginalised). His film ultimately challenges for whom monuments should be made and the forms that they should take. He has subverted the conventional,

17. Made in 1990, South Africa had reached a crisis, with a state of emergency ending, and the beginning of the end of apartheid. A mere four years later, there was a new democratic dispensation, and Mr Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa's first democratic president.

traditional symbolism of monuments, providing an ephemeral, transient memory work dedicated to the ungrievable, one that changes and is impermanent (animation). Kentridge's film is therefore also important in today's South African context as it provides a way of reflecting about the past.

This article attempts to negotiate the changeability of circumstances, positions, and conditions of Kentridge's film within a South African context. I argue that, as a counter-monument, and a memory work, his film presents us with a difficult, racially charged, and meta-history of South Africa. It is an ode to the forgettable and the 'insignificant'. *Monument* lends itself to a critical engagement with the legacies as well as the contemporary situation of apartheid, and mining, and monuments in South Africa today.[18]

In concluding the analysis of Kentridge's film *Monument*, it has become apparent that the argument positioning his film as a counter-monument is based heavily on the actual content, most specifically on the inclusion of Harry as the anti-monument. This is important to note, as it highlights that this conceptualisation of Kentridge's film cannot be generalised to his other films (this is the limitation of the article). Neither can it be generalised to just any other films (a further limitation). While his film has all the characteristics of a counter-monument as conceived and discussed by Young, Rothberg, and others, the content gives the argument its weight. The two are therefore linked and the content is needed in order to theorise about his film in its entirety. The concept of the counter-monument is very specific and, as was discussed in the literature review, is linked to context, ideology and even the intent of the artist. They are also physical constructs of architecture or art, typically set in a landscape (whether urban or rural, and often at the actual sites of the atrocity committed).

I believe that Kentridge's films do not leave the viewer desensitised, but rather astonished and repulsed, causing the spectators to re-identify with those violated by apartheid: '[p]rovocation, not consolation, is the goal of such counter-monuments' (Minow 1998:142). In my opinion, and from my own personal experience, he shocks the viewer out of their complacency. This is also in keeping with Katherine Kearns (1997), who argues that the representation of history has several performative responsibilities. Firstly, to bring the past into the present, with all its horrors, in order not only for it to be remembered, but also to avoid complacency. Secondly, it has a responsibility to aid people to remember what they did not experience first-hand or witness directly. Kentridge's film does both, by highlighting the history of the unnameable, and therefore Kentridge's negative monument encapsulates the countermemorial objective. He created a monument that would be an open

18.   Please see the *Rhodes must fall movement*: http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/ a movement against racism and the lack of transformation at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The movement insisted that the Cecil John Rhodes statue at UCT be removed from the campus. This colonial monument of Rhodes (1853-1902), a mining magnate and British imperialist has come to represent colonialism. Rhodes was an ardent believer in British colonialism, and an elitist. This is an excellent example of how a traditional monument has outlasted its welcome in post-colonial South Africa (it is also not the only currently colonial monument in question). Please also see Rehad Desai's documentary about the Marikana massacre, *Miners shot down* (2014). In 2012, miners in one of South Africa's biggest platinum mines, Lonmin, in Marikana, began a strike for better pay. The police used live ammunition to suppress the strike, killing 34 and wounding many more. This tragedy has brought comparisons with another South African atrocity, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. The latter occurred during apartheid and the former happened in post-apartheid, or rather post -apartheid, South Africa. Post -apartheid as racism and violence still exist in South Africa and although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission declared apartheid over, and South Africa reconciled and healed, the extent of racism and violence in contemporary South Africa suggests otherwise. Are these two components not the bedrock of apartheid?

question, an open wound: a living being consumed with pain. A memorial text that would reflect back onto the spectator, and in doing so, resists any redemptive or redeeming meaning. Kentridge's counter-monument is not one of triumphalism, but of shame, guilt, and horror. His film refuses appropriation and defies reclamation. It is a perfect encapsulation of what Young terms counter-monument, an anti-monument, a provocation, and a negative aesthetic.

This article has made several contributions. Firstly, to the ongoing scholarly work on memory and trauma studies (through exploring whether or not a counter-monument can be a film, or something other than a physical construct; whether a counter-monument can represent other un-representables, such as apartheid), in that it applies this counter-monument framework to a completely different medium, that of film. Secondly, it has contributed by providing a unique interpretation of *Monument*. The only other interpretation of this particular film has been Krauss' explication of it as a re-working of Beckett's *Catastrophe* and Matthew Kentridge's discussion in *The Soho chronicles*. This article also presented Kentridge's film as a facilitator of alternative or different readings of history and emphasised the informal and the individual. Furthermore, this article showed how this film highlights shameful aspects of apartheid's history. These atrocities were mostly ignored during apartheid, as they were daily occurrences. Later on, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they were side-lined in favour of the more overtly horrendous crimes against humanity.[19] Kentridge's counter-art film therefore personalises apartheid history; he humanises the many victims, giving the ungrievable a name and identity (as opposed to traditional monuments that often monumentalise unknown or unnamed heroes). He presents an unofficial history. His film articulates heinous events that some of us have not experienced directly, but we are subject to their implications in a greater socio-political context. The significance of this article is that it critiques normative, formal outcomes of monuments and supports Young's counter-monument as a new way of engaging with memorials. Furthermore, it suggested that the anti-memorial need not be limited to only Holocaust memorials. The commemoration of traumatic violence, in societies where perpetrators live side by side with victims, as is the case in South Africa, provides ethical, political, and aesthetic challenges. The past 'keeps haunting the present in the aftermath of violent historical events' (Vatan & Silberman 2013:1).[20] Counter-monuments can provide an articulation of what is hard to articulate, or represent the un-representable (Hansen 2005).

It seems as though the very counter-monuments that were created to address Holocaust memorials are themselves in dispute, or even considered a failure by some scholars (including Young, cf 2000; Lupu 2003); however, this should not

19.   Kentridge's film *History of the main complaint* (1996) deals specifically with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Soho Eckstein's own guilt and complicity in apartheid: through his land and mining acquisitions, corporate capitalism and his use of slave labour. The latter themes are also dealt with in *Monument* and *Mine*.

20.   The *Rhodes must fall movement* and the Marikana massacre (2012) are two such apartheid hauntings in South Africa.

detract from the idea of a counter-monument. Despite the actual success of these counter-monuments, or lack therefore, the discourse around counter-monuments is very important, as it raises and frames momentous questions, such as, how does one represent atrocities? How do perpetrators erect memorials to those they have murdered, with both offenders and victims occupying the same space? Perhaps in keeping with the underlining philosophy of this term, there should not be finality or closure to the debate of the theory. There is no right, wrong, or conclusive answer: in the dialogue around the debate, we continue to look for answers, and solutions, and perhaps that is Young's most significant contribution to the study of memory: the dialogue should be unending. One should never take the subject of the representation of traumata for granted or close the debate. The same applies to *Monument*. The interpretations of Kentridge's film are multivariate; but, as long as one continues to analyse this work, one keeps the memories and history alive, and in the public consciousness, and for South Africa, whose memories, history, and identity are still a site of struggle, this is imperative. Anders Hansen (2005) states that the counter-monument 'is … a problematisation of the past and an aesthetic representation that triggers memory and debate through its interpretive potential'. And this is *Monument*'s relevance: as a counter-monument it is an expression of 'traumatic pain that eludes appropriation or stylization' (Lupu 2003:133).

This article also served to function as an extension of William Kentridge's filmic project beyond those who witnessed the installations and films *in situ*: images that will help to restore a piece of history both forgotten and repressed. In doing so, it further encapsulates the ethos of the counter-monument, by extending the memory of apartheid through debate.

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