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A visual-temporal excavation of Schaapplaats rock shelter: unearthing a trace fossil

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2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33831

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Abstract:

In this research report, I set out to provide information about Schaapplaats rock shelter through a multi-sensory, ekphrastic approach as set out by the artist William Kentridge[1] to guide the process of looking. As such this project presents an experience of space and time compressed within a single landscape. The research foregrounds the different ways of looking and different ways of perceiving the elements in the landscape.

Schaapplaats is a farm located in the eastern Free State. A rock shelter at Schaapplaats which I examine contains a number of objects and traces that relate to various moments in time. The site is an event-loaded spatial nexus which I unpack, closely examining each object to expose the complex layering of objects and traces of events over time.

My aim in examining the site in this way is to interrogate the variety of elements in the rock shelter to understand the complicated nature of time and the reading of it in objects. My methodology involves the slow process of describing and pulling-apart the objects, fieldwork that is primarily comprised of being in the space, and visually constructing and reconstructing the space and the elements within it – with a particular focus on the trace fossil (a dinosaur footprint) present in the space.

The result is a reflective paper that considers meanings that could be drawn from a singular item, in conjunction with a number of other items within a space that is complex in its variety of traces and temporally layered.

[1] William Kentridge presented a series of lectures titled *Six Drawing Lessons* (2014) that surfaced a method that I use to unravel ways of grappling with time and space.