

Paratactic Stammers: Temporality in the Novels of Gail Jones

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I

Well into Gail Jones's novel *Dreams of Speaking*, the character Alice boards a high-speed train in Tokyo to travel to Nagasaki, to see her friend and confidante Mr Sakamoto. As the 'landscapes and cityscapes' flash by, she falls into a reverie, described as 'the transport of her own random thoughts' (162–63). Alice recalls the idea of a 'train-cinema' by the surrealist poet Henri Michaux:

Along the route between Paris and Versailles, there would be placed a series of moveable sculptures, activated by the speed of the train passing by. A superimposition and fusing of images would occur, so that the passenger would see outside the window a 'plastic' cinema, a spectacle of odd beauty and dislocated enchantment.

This image of movement, spectacle, and mystery, captures at least two interrelated themes informing Jones's oeuvre: fascination, wonder, and perception initiated by technological invention, and subjective experience of temporality. Rather than a mere means to transport people and goods from one point to another, measured by a time-table, trains initiate a specific exercise of perception, allied to an embodiment of duration as a suspension of the instrumentalisation of time. In Alice's train compartment, a boy, mesmerised, 'stared out the window, unblinking, as if hypnotised by a magician' (163). As an Arabic saying has it, perception becomes something like a 'fall into time,' into the clock or hour.

'Could it be that one of the purposes of the invention of trains,' Alice muses, 'is to recover reverie?' (162). For Jones, this fall into time has some bearing on developments of subjective capacities to inhabit modes of temporal perception. Initiated by innovations in technological application, temporality is embodied as anticipation, informing not merely the coordination of tasks, but a mode of inhabiting time as expectation. The technological capability, say, to communicate visually, audibly, or in writing in a split second with someone on the other side of the world, from anywhere on the street, embodies specific relational affects, modes, and orientations of being in the world, not least in respect to a temporal anchoring of social exchange and viability, expectations of a response from others.

Especially in *Dreams of Speaking*, though also in the sixty snap-shot exposures of her preceding novel *Sixty Lights* (2005) Jones focuses on instances of birth of technological innovation and a polyphonic accompaniment of wonder and fascination. These themes, to be sure, do not exhaust the refrain of Jones's preoccupations, which include interwoven trajectories of colonialism and modernism; inventories and initiations of history, story, and memory; sibling intimacy and estrangement; mortality; abduction or the abandonment of children; voice and the limits of signification; the struggle of women to endure and create; surrealism and montage.

While noting and touching upon these themes in Jones's creative work, I want to concentrate more on how her sense of fascination and wonder with the technology and culture of modernism informs the phenomenological tenor of her novelistic style, especially the characters that emerge through the wave lengths of this style. In doing so I track the application of *duration* in her novels, whereby memory, history, and story are experienced by her characters as something like intersections, intervals or spacings, taut and tense folds or pleats in which time is riven by 'a strange accession to memory and speech,' as the character Perdita comes to learn in Jones's *Sorry* (202).

As a relational field of animate and inanimate subjects emerging through charged gaps between silence and speech, spectacle and drifts of thought, duration has both temporal and spatial implications. Developing a generic typology of literature, Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term 'the chronotope' to gauge intersections of time and space in narrative. He describes this concept as 'a formally constitutive category of literature,' and explains: 'Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements in time, plot and history' (84). Bakhtin's notion provides a useful image to approach the emergence of characterisation and subjectivity in respect to duration in Jones's oeuvre, what I called above the wave lengths of her style. In *Sorry*, Perdita overcomes her stuttering once she learns, with the help of Dr Oblov, that her affliction is more closely related to how she manages her responsiveness and relationship to others, particularly her mother, Stella. Jones applies a lovely image of a planetarium to express Perdita's realisation:

Perdita remembered an orrery she had seen at school and the moment she had realised that nothing, no metal armature, held up the planets. They spun by mystery alone; they held formation by a strenuous lace of force-fields and attractions. Now it seemed that something was flying outwards. Something was centrifuged, disappearing, flung godforsaken beyond horizons. Nothing was large enough to meet her comparison. Nor powerful enough to send it away (202).

In his engagement with the work of Henri Bergson, the late French philosopher Gilles Deleuze provides a phenomenological approach to duration that I feel is more congenial in tracking the resonance and episodic impulses of Jones's style. In the first book of his work on cinema, Deleuze concentrates his reflections on what he calls 'the movement-image.' While the concept has many proliferating layers, I want to simplify somewhat and appropriate his insights to what can be called sectional perspective, or else paratactic duration: 'a relief in time,' he writes, 'a perspective in time . . . time itself as perspective or relief' (2013 23). Deleuze, in this instance, is developing a sectional or perhaps zonal sectional notion of 'the shot,' picking up on the filmmaker and writer Jean Epstein's image of 'multiple perspective,' a 'perspective of the inside.' As Deleuze writes:

By producing in this way a mobile section of movements, the shot is not content to express the duration of a whole which changes, but constantly puts bodies, parts, aspects, dimensions, distances and the respective positions of the bodies which make up a set in the image into variation (23).

It is perhaps a difficult image/concept to get hold of, not least because Deleuze is writing about duration in film and cinema, and not literature. But for my purposes the key to this passage is the observation of a relational contiguity of parts whose variable movements and

orientations to one another bring about a transfiguration of their subjective capacities (as in Perdita's realisation of her stuttering as a relational dynamic). Similar to the planets, what binds parts together is not the whole, is not dependent on them being parts of a constitutive, identifiable whole, but rather the gaps and intervals that work to both put them in relief and sustain them through the relational force-fields of which they are a-part.

A similar dynamic informs the narrative weave of characterisation and subjectivity in the work of Jones, construed through the transfiguring force of technology. In *Sixty Lights* and *Dreams of Speaking*, fascination flashes as instances of wonder and curiosity, embodying transformative changes brought about by emerging techniques of image-making. Speaking about *Sixty Lights* and photography in an interview, Jones says: 'I'm fascinated by the early years of photography, the moment when there was a kind of jubilation in affirming the existence of being in the world through the image' (Block). This 'immense sense of affirmation,' Jones goes on to say, brings about a split in which 'the self exists both in the material sense but also as a representation.' Cadava, whose influence on *Sixty Lights* Jones acknowledges, has made a similar observation. Evoking Bergson's notion of a 'kaleidoscope,' and Walter Benjamin's related notion of a 'technology of awakening,' he writes about the perceptual implications of photography in terms of 'a technology wherein body and image interpenetrate one another' (77).

This phenomenology of fascination and wonder works to temper, if not offer an alternative to, an imperious assumption of the value of temporality restricted to its instrumental application. In doing so the paratactic stammer of Jones's sense of temporality works to foreground the imperial tempo and reach of the application of this assumption—what West-Pavlov has in his recent study of temporality called a 'hegemonic model of absolute time' (176). As he says: 'There is no "time" outside of the multiple ongoing processes of material becoming, the constant transformations, often invisible, that make up the life of apparently inert things' (3). This suggests a temporal sensibility attuned to a weave of 'multiple temporalities' folded into the life of both animate and inanimate matter. It also suggests the potential of a social ethos in which temporality may well be adapted as the fraying of structured narratives aligned to strictly instrumentalist incorporations of emerging applications of image-making. And this has some implications for a critique of epistemological assumptions of time embedded in categorical assessments of the manufacture and consumption of images. Through the unravelling of generic seams arise overlapping graphic practices by which desires for narration and representation—desires 'from the heart' (Scott)—are not contained by predominating graphic styles, epistemological repertoires, generic classifications, and their imperious temporalising inventories that can only articulate parts by referring to overarching wholes.

II

The phenomenological reverberations of Jones's style are attuned to modes of cultural production as sites of initiation into the grammars of narratives, captions, images, and voice, in respect to the ways by which modalities of social viability and exchange come to productively embody a world (the expression 'text me!,' for example, suggests a body inscribed by the graphic contours of a certain grammar). So that rather than a transparent, passive means of representation or communication (which tends to assume a stable subject possessing a practical capacity and standard cultural repertoire to simply apply technology as a set of tasks), or else discursive sites for the distribution and production of subjectivity, the medium comes to initiate and incorporate modalities of perception and response—'certain

configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world' (Rancière 91). In this phenomenological vein it is thus more appropriate to speak of technologies as *medialities*, rather than mediums. The former term better suggests an inchoate emergence of subjectivity within relational fields of response.

Jones's sense of the medium being inhabited as instances of wonder and fascination, rather than restricted to either positivist or negativist notions of its readiness-for-use ('ready-to-hand' is the more standard translation of Heidegger's *zuhanden*), has some critical implications for the way in which temporality is situated as an allochronic (Fabian) code of historical reference, particularly in respect to imperious claims of the primitiveness of native imaginaries and graphic practices. At one point in the nineteenth-century setting of *Sixty Lights* (the characters moving across and between the colonial geographies of Australia, Britain, and India), Neville Brady—the maternal uncle of Lucy Strange, Jones's adolescent protagonist—visits a 'medium' for a séance, to communicate with his late sister, Lucy's mother Honoria. Lucy accompanies him to 'Madame d'Espérance's Salon of Spiritual Experience' (92), where the appropriately named medium (Hope) conducts her sessions of 'ectoplasm,' conjuring Honoria's *spiritual* presence. The term *ecto-plasm* encapsulates a certain undecidability between science and *spir-ritual* revelation—the ritual giving rise to an *aspiration*, *respiration* taking an externalised plasmatic form. As Neville says, 'it is ectoplasm ghosts are composed of' (92).

In keeping with the photographic preoccupations of *Sixty Lights*, Jones narrates the ghostly appearance of the deceased Honoria¹—or rather, narrates Neville's affective anticipation of her appearance—as a photographic image developing in a tray of chemicals:

There was a wavery light, like a reflection from water, and an imprecise face appeared slowly within it, the blurry outlines of eyes and a small mouth, a shadowy nimbus of hair, and a face-shape, definitely a face-shape, drifting high above them, somewhere near the ceiling. It did not speak or communicate, but hovered there in an implicitly posthumous flare, claiming to be the revenant Honoria Strange. (94)

'Behold me!' the 'liquid face' is heard to command, as the real of 'the luminous image' concentrates its affective force in the 'sobs' of Neville.

In her budding photographic practice Lucy will come to be particularly fond of the 'blurred and residual . . . diaphanous images photographers called "ghosts"' (236) that appeared because of long exposure times, and were customarily excised from photographs. These 'ghosts' imprinted as a blur of frozen movement aptly suggest Lucy's sense of photographic images always emerging through the polyphonic wave lengths or 'wavery light' in which they behold encounters between photographic subjects. She tends to regard photographic images as both traces of relationships between self and world and a surface on which that which comes to visibly stand out implicates a withdrawal of contiguous elements into invisibility. In fact Lucy's sense of photographs as temporal relationships between a negative and its exposure, or else an imprinted surface and its viewing, seems rather odd when the discourse surrounding the invention of photography—the 'new science,' as it was often called in the nineteenth century—embodies an overwhelming desire to 'fix' or 'capture,' render 'durable,' images and impressions refracted by the 'camera obscura' (Batchen).²

Lucy finds herself at odds with the views of her portrait-photographer instructor Victor, for whom photography could only be understood and practised as a ‘science,’ a ‘pure calculation’ (141). For Lucy, the ‘black magic box’ (154) initiates not only a technical process to produce images, but also an aura of wonder and fascination. The ‘medium’ comes to be phenomenologically inhabited as a range of immanent, affective expectations and anticipations attuned to technological applications in which the real is substantiated as a mode of reference. One eminent phenomenologist of technology refers to this in terms of subjectifying fields of perception and embodiment, ‘offer[ing] our lived bodies radically different ways of “being-in-the-world”’ (Sobshack 136). And yet his ‘our’ requires some unpacking, so that the sign of the times is not assumed to be equivalent to the time of the sign; so that the plural possessive pronoun does not cancel out an engagement with varying temporalities and associated cultural repertoires across history and geography and related modalities of social sensibility.

Perhaps more than Jones’s other novels, *Sixty Lights* traces imperialist implications of the structured duration of modernity, graphically putting into relief a more nuanced appreciation of the culture and social ethos of fascination and wonder informing and informed by technological innovation and application. The theme encompasses Lucy’s relationship to Isaac Newton, a former acquaintance of her uncle Neville. Jones’s choice of the name of the famous physicist is telling, considering his experiments with optics and his notion that light could be captured and put to use by refracting images through a glass prism, what photographic practices adapted and named as ‘the camera obscura.’ But in *Sixty Lights* the character Newton serves to bring into relief a paratactic temporality in which cultural and social difference is not contained by an allochronic repertoire commanding civilisational distinction and authority—distinction and authority based on temporal notions of civilisational difference.

Neville arranges for Lucy to leave London and travel to Bombay, to take up residence with Isaac, with a vague expectation that she would marry him. Unlike his daguerreotype, Isaac turns out to be at least twenty years her senior, and has quite definite views about ‘the natives’ in whose midst he lives. A colonial civil servant, Isaac refers to his work as his ‘civilising purpose.’ He ‘lived in a kind of distended time’ Lucy reflects, whose ‘sense of duration, Lucy was sure, was entirely different to hers’ (126). It is an awkward circumstance, in which the contradictions of nineteenth-century Victorian morality—strict codes of conduct regulating social behaviour and sexuality, containing and enticing desires for transgression—is played out through the passages of Empire. Drawn to the physically attractive Crowley, and acting on her own desires and curiosity, Lucy has a brief fling on the ship and becomes pregnant, while Isaac in Bombay finds the colony a more congenial place for his transgressive desires, an alternative to the repressive mores of England.

‘Perhaps it is the opacity, not the transparency, of others that one finds compelling,’ begins Jones’s 35th *Light* (134), referring to the ‘fragments of undeveloped character’ embodied by both Isaac and herself. In Bombay Lucy embarks on many excursions, moving through the streets with curiosity and wonder as her guide. From an initial expectation that ‘she would shine against this dense Indian darkness before her’ (132), she comes to distance herself from other Europeans, having no desire ‘to communicate with these other lamps who felt—she could tell—that they shone more brightly and more importantly than anyone else, that they dispensed white light with a civilising purpose’ (136). Troubled by Lucy’s adolescent curiosity that impels her to transgress the strictures of polite White colonial decorum, Isaac finds her exchanges with the locals disturbing, and suspects her of having ‘native appetites’

with an ‘impassioned sensuality’ (137). Lucy’s adolescent sense of wonder, curiosity, and fascination had yet to be tamed and domesticated by the decorum of polite society, observing the codes of conduct by which the White colonial subject could administer authoritarian benevolence. Through her street wanderings and straying, she comes to ‘consider herself a crude cipher of the West, carrying her own culture as impeding knowledge’ (135).

In moving through established routes of colonial geography, Lucy’s experience of Bombay precipitates her sense of ‘stunning exaggeration’ (Bombay exceeding the terms of its orientalist associations) she carries with her back to London. The many references to nineteenth-century realist literature in England are informed by a more paratactic association of temporality by which Bombay and London no longer signify an assumption of allochronic difference. In Jones’s 45th exposure Lucy, having returned to London, has a dream in which she meets Dickens in the street (186), offering to show her the way around the streets of the town. ‘Lucy now found her own culture a shock,’ begins the chapter:

After almost eight weeks in England, she was still thinking of India and feeling misplaced and dislocated. The radical modernity of London disturbed her—the clutter, the heavy clothes, the trams, the bells, the cash registers and the lampposts. English people seemed at once too large and too faint; they had pale faces and pale eyes and talked too much of the weather in their wet-wool clothes. The hops smell of public houses was sickening. (184)

Seen from a paratactic, sectional perspective, London appears as a place of gritty sights, noises and smells assaulting the senses, experienced through the contours of a gritty realism attuned to rendering the common and ordinary fantastic and extraordinary. ‘It is like sexual hunger,’ Lucy had earlier reflected to herself, ‘to wish always to see things like this, to see more intensely, more zealously, more unrealistically. To wish everything into a state of stunning exaggeration’ (121).

This ‘stunning exaggeration’ comes to inform her passion for photography. In her travel to India and return to London Lucy learns to practise the art of photography, engaging it in its infancy as a graphic prose of images refracted by shades of light and the moodiness of time. For Lucy, images behold an aural potential of telling and receiving stories, and a visual trace of the denial of death, a trace of natality as a range of stories potentially told and shared. In both literary and photographic practices, images emerge a dissonant, polyphonic accompaniment to the fervor of confusing seeing with that which is seen: ‘What did she know? She knew that there were images, things seen, imperative as desire; that there were stories in images and the theft of essences in photographs’ (153).

III

Attuned to a historiographically responsive, contextualised mediality in which being-in-the-world takes place, Jones’s novelistic style works with duration as instances of temporality that stand out as remainders of imperious designs to codify history and geography into stages and periods, into narrations propelled by a streamlined forward movement. Jones’s prose style, what she calls ‘a kind of prose poetics’ (Royo Grasa 1), calls attention to the gaps and intervals by which the temporality of narration is not only possible, but rendered a vacant site for the stammer of an interruptive image or voice encompassing an alternative engagement of time and its graphic imprints. She refers to this, with emphasis, as ‘the *necessary failure* of language to contain everything,’ which suggests that language could never amount to a mere

container, but whose livelihood is only possible in terms of a constitutive, porous failure to exhaust the temporal significance, the eventuating significance, of particular graphic practices and their worlds of relational embodiment. This failure of containment, this ‘failure to *fully figure*’ (Jones’s emphasis), has some bearing on how she exercises and gives an account of her writing style. ‘I tend to gather fragments,’ Jones writes in one of her essays (2006 12),

to assemble paratactically, to assume ontological gaps and incompletions. Against organic and mimetic models—of the reconstitution, for example, of the body of experience, of textual plenitude and recreated presence—I favour signifying absence and the trope of dis-integration.³

In *Sixty Lights* this paratactic temporality of fascination and wonder transpires as a luminous site in which Jones grapples with two graphic practices, writing and photography, whose respective grammars and applications are usually thought to be at odds, or else complementary at best. This complementarity mostly takes place through the conventional use of captions to accompany a photograph, directing not only a particular hermeneutic of what photographs represent, but also an anticipation that the significance of their imprints is exhausted by their capacity to work as mediums of representation.

Such presuppositions implicate a mode of subjective comportment that restricts time to an objective application of planning and carrying out tasks. In respect to the assessment of visual and literary art, this objective application transpires as a schematic designation of genre allied to ‘periods’ and ‘movements’—the latter reserved for the conventionally modern; the former, to the conventionally classic. This predominant assumption of the ‘cultural logic’ (Jameson) of temporality encompasses a constitutive splitting of time that both affirms and denies its passing—affirms, in the sense of a photograph or caption re-presenting that which has become past, that which has been passed; and denies, in the sense of representation bearing an unchanging mode of significance through time. And yet, enfolded within the murmuring impulses of writing and photography lies a certain, more relational or else paratactic temporality whereby that which is represented (in both senses of the term I have alluded to) extends beyond the medium of representation, beyond an understanding of medium restricted to representation.

For Jones’s protagonist Lucy, writing and photography are experienced and practised not so much as mediums of representation, or else as representations of the application of mediums, but as sites of temporality and mediality. Time in writing and photography comes to be inhabited as phenomenological modalities of learning to expose one’s expectations to the surprise of a varying ‘palette,’ ‘the tough specifications of another order of being’ (121). The photographic exposure—or else the act of writing—never quite conforms to what one intended to capture or express, and thus works to expose the limits of expectations and assumptions. The ‘palette’ is thus not only inhabited as a mode of being, but constitutes an encounter in which one learns to become the addressee of another, or the addressee of another social and cultural environment, in the process learning to dis-inhabit the temporalised grammar of the palette one carries around with them. Adapting Agamben’s discussion of ‘gesture’ for a critique of aesthetic practices, Jill Bennett argues that to direct attention to the resonance of ‘gesture in its mediality . . . is to enact critique in a particular way, scrutinising the body to reveal, not so much what language wilfully covers up or denies, but the point at which language fails’ (120). Such a ‘failure’ does not indicate a lapse or error that can be potentially recuperated and placed back on the beaten track, but rather initiates a *response* to that which eludes a descriptive or representative mode of address, or else that which eludes

standardised modes of address and their accompanying grammars of representation and generic distinctions.

This application of responsiveness to the hermeneutic embodiment of imperious grammars and predominating narrative repertoires informs, as I alluded to above, the stammer of Kim Scott's novel *Benang*, in which responsiveness is initiated or takes place as a tensional matrix of narrative composition. This is announced on the very first page, especially in the second quotation taken from a newspaper article from 1933. The article writes about what it calls 'cultural evolution,' whereby historical time is envisaged as a natural schema in which 'the half-caste' is doomed to disappear, become extinct. This 'disappearance' is, the article asserts, 'not problematical,' but rather an all too certain destiny. For Scott, the article is worth quoting not simply because of its conventional assumption of an evolutionary schema by which history uniformly unfolds into the future. The problematic has to do with an incapacity to consider how time is structured by a particular style and hermeneutic of narrative composition.

In other words, the narrative itself is constitutively confused with the story it tells, whereby the wavering, dissonant and irreconcilable gap between story and narrative is imperiously foreclosed, underestimating other modes of inhabiting and potentially articulating the historical, social and cultural impulses of the paratactic stammer resounding between the temporality of narrative and the duration of story. The narrative style of the article Scott references maps out and betrays an imperious application of temporality whose hermeneutics are assumed to be free from variation and contingency. In response, Scott's protagonist has to contend with the force of a narrative repertoire—a received, even imposed literary form or mould (the 'container' Jones speaks of)—that induces him to float and hover above the fragmentary stories he gathers from his relatives, a gathering that works as a gravitational force to draw him back to the irreconcilable dissonance reverberating between story and narrative, duration and temporality.

The errant contingency of this initiation of an alternative mode of narrative address, always resisting any equation or equilibrium between narrative and story, informs Georges Perec's autobiographical novel *W or the Memory of Childhood*. Perec writes himself into the inchoate tenor of unreconciled temporalities and subjectivities, compelled to situate himself—much like Perdita in *Sorry*—as an entanglement of first and third person modes of address. He weaves together words and images to retrieve what he calls 'scraps of life snatched from the void,' so that memories, eluding his grasp, are imbued with a significance that is still to come, always on the way. 'From this point on,' Perec writes, 'there are memories—fleeting, persistent, trivial, burdensome—but there is nothing that binds them together' (68). Perec works to situate an understanding of himself not in terms of instrumentalising time to bind, or contain, but rather as an unbinding of the temporal threads woven into the person he has and will still become—an orphan of the ravages of European history, a foundling, and not founding, of time. Again, Perdita's stammer is entwined with the ravages of Australian history, which orphans and ultimately renders sacrificial the 'bush blackfella' Mary.

Like Perec, Scott manages to resist a structured narrative composition that imagines it could patch up all the gaps and potential lines of escape, resists articulating a narrative scheme in which tensional relationships between story and narrative, or else past and present, could be redeemed and overcome once and for all. And like both Perec and Scott, Jones's often thematises this in terms of child abandonment, mistreatment; or else, in respect to Australian history, abduction of children by the state.

IV

As I noted above, Jones's attentiveness to and stylistic incorporation of a paratactic assemblage in which the seemingly non-sensical instances of the failure of language, or else of the photographic image, to *transpire* (breath and embodiment) as a transparent medium encompasses her 'sauntering' through the imperious implications of understanding technology and modernist culture as a temporal, progressivist departure from the embodiment of wonder and mystery. This imperial, *allochronic* imaginary informs, to evoke an example, the standard hollywood scene of natives standing in awe around a camera or recording device, fearfully recoiling from the flash of a bulb, or else mesmerised by the sound of a disembodied voice. For Jones, modernisation does not represent a temporality for which superstition is superseded by rational processes of technological application, but produces further, affective modes of wonder and superstition. Nationality is a case in point, if we consider its sacred practices of animism, often enlisting inhuman forms as totemic symbols of identification. We can note, for example, the images of emu and kangaroo adorning our Australian coat of arms. In Australia in recent years their flesh can be ordered in restaurants as culinary treats, whose significance can thus be digested both symbolically and gastronomically.

In one of her interviews Jones refers to herself as a modernist, and by this I feel that she is alluding to something like an expressionist exercise of employing incongruent juxtapositions to defamiliarise associations embedding and embodying certain hermeneutic repertoires by which people inhabit and engage capacities to exchange a sense of being in a world. In *Dreams of Speaking* the modernist theme is evoked at the very beginning, where the character Alice has a sense of 'all that was solid melting into air' (4), an obvious borrowing of the title of Berman's famous book (himself borrowing from that passionate, somewhat poetic tract, *The Communist Manifesto*). In Paris with a writer's residency, Alice roams the streets and gathers impressions to include in the book she is working on, '*The Poetics of Modernity*.' Through her friendship with Mr Sakamoto, a survivor of Hiroshima, she learns to appreciate the wonder of technological innovation and invention. This poetics of modernity that Alice strives to write, and that Jones in fact does write as *Dreams of Speaking*, offers an alternative to a view of technology as simply a technocratic, subjugating mode of reason—an assumption that can be traced from Heidegger's essays on technology to Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (the latter authors, to be sure, having had a very different experience of Nazi Germany than the former).

Despite being a victim of modern technology (the atomic bomb), Sakamoto speaks about its inventions with a passion that I have referred to as a phenomenology of fascination. 'Some technologies are coercive, some seductive,' he says in a letter to Alice, writing about Bell's invention of the telephone. It is a lovely passage of Jones's prose, and I quote at length:

The telephone lassoed floating desires and pulled them in: it offered the satisfactions of tacit connection, indulgent expression and the fantasy of a limitless, out-reaching voice. Beyond its practical applications, it offered subtler pleasures . . . Bodies fell away and speakers entered voice-time. The space between them squeezed open and shut like an accordion. Mere dialling was a thrill. The sound of ringing far off, and the conjuring-up of a distant, unseen room. The efficient stiff click as the receiver was lifted. The initial enquiry. 'Yes?' The relaxation into dialogue. The visionless, undivided ex-change. It was *not a new alienation*, but a new return, *a creation of selves* reconnected by *breathing words* into a black bulb of moulded plastic. (99, my emphasis)

Robert Dixon has addressed the theme of modernism in *Dreams of Speaking*. He makes a distinction between *history* and *temporality*, observing how artistic practices and technological innovations of modernism are not only in time but embody specific modes by which time comes to be inhabited. ‘The relation between modernity and time,’ Dixon writes, ‘is more complex than just a linear series of dates.’ And as he goes on to further explain:

Modernity does not just exist *in* time: its technologies also interact with time in ways that change the nature of time itself, or at least our experience of it. Modernity, in other words, does not just have a history; it also has a temporality. (123)

Dixon reserves Jones’s term ‘unmodern’ to point towards the embodiment of wonder and fascination—what he calls ‘spirituality’—that encompasses a polyphonic accompaniment to linear inventories of temporal succession. As an example he mentions how the first world war gave rise to practices of spiritualism, though we can also note how it gave rise to allegorical historiographies of nationalism, what Bruce Kapferer has called a ‘logic of ontology’ (213), or Flaherty and Roberts discussion of Anzac symbolism as ‘a work of bricolage . . . inspired by Hellenism’ (53). In his discussion Dixon does not only draw attention to the modern in *Dreams of Speaking* as a multiplicity of temporalities, but suggests how the composition of the novel constitutes this multiplicity.

In Jones’s paratactic weave, technology encompasses fascination and wonder as ‘unmodern’ impulses of modernity. Graphic practices and related epistemological inventories tracing the temporality of ‘the modern’ have necessarily to carry a sense of that which does not measure up to the modern, mostly referenced as ‘the premodern,’ ‘the traditional,’ ‘classical,’ or ‘the primitive.’ In other words, that which is other to the modern is never merely a neat period that has come to be superseded, but becomes a productive, paratactic basis by which to put the modern in symbolic relief, by which to produce the signifiable, temporalising force of ‘the modern’ itself. ‘The difficulty with celebrating modernity,’ Mr Sakamoto says at one point in *Dreams of Speaking*, ‘. . . is that we live with so many persistently unmodern things. Dreams, love, babies, illness. Memory. Death’ (65). And as he goes on to say: ‘Think of your Australian kangaroo . . . The kangaroo is truly unmodern.’

I was reminded of this passage by Lyn Jacobs’s essay ‘Gail Jones’s “light writing”’: Memory and the Photo-graph.’ Jacobs addresses a number of Jones’s novels and short stories, observing how her ‘fictions explore linguistic and visual codes and the changing technologies of sharing perception’ (191), referring to what she terms Jones’s ‘pre-occupation with the transformative effects of light’ (192). Concerning the theme of time, Jacobs writes about the main character of *Dreams of Speaking*:

Alice speaks of the photograph as ‘folded time,’ uses images of the past to remember and to reconsider future possibilities, and establishes points of rapport (like shared responses to loss) that temper differences of language and background. (196)

Jones’s notion of ‘*folded time*’ (italicised in the original, *Dreams of Speaking* 37) relates to her sense of how ‘the photograph of catastrophe halts us.’ The image is somehow ‘always time-bound but out-of-time,’ carrying ‘the gravity of testimony and the lightness of chance’ (36). Alice likens photographic images to ‘detonations,’ emblems or iconic figures borne ‘like tattoos that say “twentieth century,”’ though having a capacity to explode the imperiousness

of structured narratives that simultaneously expel and silently incorporate the unmodern as an instance of negativity. ‘If there is a necessity to this technology,’ Alice goes on to write in her ‘*The Poetics of Modernity*,’ it is to abet troubled remembering and to drive us to other futures.’

Significantly, Alice does not write *the future*, presupposing a neat sense of *the past* and *the present*, but evokes a plurality whose potential significance is yet to come, emerging from temporal impulses of a present whose remains are always ‘out of joint’ (Derrida). As a productive, rather than negative, aspect of temporality, the eventuating significance of a photographic image is not exhausted by the scene in which the camera’s shutter is released in an instance of time and light enters the black magic box to trace the outlines of a figure. In Jones’s paratactic or disjointed sense of time the image is detonated by contingencies whereby temporality stutters through further encounters in which a photograph’s significance and affective force comes to ‘take-place’ (Agamben).

We can further refer to such detonating impulses as a *quilting*, whereby temporality transpires as a paratactic stammer of past, present, and future—a quilting that Deleuze, in his book on the Baroque, called ‘the pleats of matter’ (27), or Buci-Glucksmann in her approach to ‘baroque reason’ calls ‘the excess of history’ that ‘awakens the forgotten’ (48). In his encounter with *Dreams of Speaking*, Dixon perceptively evokes Michel Serres’s figure of a ‘pleat,’ through the work of Lynda Nead. I want to relay Dixon’s quote of Nead: ‘Modernity . . . can be imagined as pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations’ (125). This paratactic assemblage could well take note of Deleuze’s emphasis on ‘matter,’ in the sense of the imaginary not so much as a site of primordial lack, an ethereal figure of mirror-stage identification, but as a resource differentially distributed and accessed according to racialised, ethnicised, nationalised, and gendered medialities and repertoires; though also proactively engaged through practices committed to social justice, rights of heritage, the ‘singular plural’ of a becoming-community (Nancy)—working towards a *detonation* of the time of the sign, or else the sign of the times.

In respect to her ‘sauntering’ through the graphic practices of writing and photography, Jones maintains a sensitivity to the mediality of the medium, which in *Sixty Lights* works to suggest an alternative hermeneutic of the relationship between the visual and the literal, photograph and caption. These graphic practices and imprints encompass certain styles, technical applications, affective impulses, and related emotional and social comportment. These vectors coursing through writing and photography not only work to initiate modes of visibility and imaginative association, but come to trace the temporal implications of an indistinct blurring between seeing and being seen, of capacities to see and capacities to be seen. Through this blurring, hermeneutically charged graphic coordinates of seeing that are mostly constrained to withdraw into invisibility come into view as productive contours of specific modes of visibility.

V

In her perceptive essay on Jones’s earlier novel *Black Mirror* (2002), Naomi Oreb argues that it ‘foregrounds the need to rectify past and present injustices and the importance of Indigenous Reconciliation through the filter of the surrealist art movement’ (113) She is referring, here, to the character relationship between the aging surrealist artist Victoria and her biographer Anna. Oreb in part takes her cue from Paul Genoni’s notion of ‘the female voice’ as ‘an alternative experience of modernity’ (Genoni quoted in Oreb, 118). It is a

significant observation, not only in respect to Jones's abiding concern with women as agents in the production of art and culture, but also in respect to her efforts to delink and complicate narrow versions of modernity and modernism that concentrate on men and heterosexual masculinity, as well as underestimate the colonial implications of modernism and modernity. Jones achieves this by tracing a myriad (dis)connections through a layering of *presents*—multilayered pasts interwoven with multilayered presents, much like she does in her later novel *Sorry*.

I have been suggesting that the 'alternative experience of modernity' informing the temperament of Jones's prose emerges through the wave lengths of her attentiveness to phenomenological modes of hermeneutically inhabiting the temporal impulses of technology and culture, narrating the fascination and wonder of technological innovation in what she calls 'an effort to "defamiliarize the banal"' (Block). This effort, I have been suggesting, has to be understood in terms of Jones's ongoing interest in the stammer of temporality, intensively informing her more recent novel *Five Bells* (2012).

Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (first published in 1925) and Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* (first published in Arabic in 1985), *Five Bells* is framed by a focus on a single day. And yet the singularity of this day is broken up by a number of characters—Ellie, James, Pei Xing, Catherine—carrying their respective pasts and presents as stories that can be potentially told and owned, as stories that encompass their productive failure to understand the circumstances of their past, as stories that have value once they are exchanged as a mode of address—an active *telling*, rather than merely *knowing*. Jones's episodic narrative style develops characterisation as a weave of crisscrossing stories, emerging not so much from the past, but from the ephemeral *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin) of a present that always fails to be stabilised as a vantage point by which the past can be rendered past. As Pei Xing, a refugee from the cultural revolution in China, reflects to herself as she wades through the crowds at Circular Quay: 'In the wilderness of leaving Shanghai, these selves had blended and folded; now, in meditation, she was able to fan them apart' (13). This sense of self as a site of multiple stories, multiple selves—crisscrossed by the stories of others—implicates a dissonance in which time frays into instances of fascination and wonder. The character Pei Xing embodies this dissonance by learning to situate her difficult memories of the cultural revolution as a range of stories that can be potentially told and thus owned, filtered by memories of her father's warmth and passion for telling her stories.

Like the other characters drifting through the weave of self, Pei Xing is mesmerised by the fleeting image of a 'here-now' that shifts across wave lengths of stories carrying their own temporalising logic. So that to pose or answer the question *who are you?* is not to ask about how one *knows* themselves, but rather how one can develop a capacity to situate their self as a site of *telling* (a lesson that Oedipus learns in tragic circumstances, at least according to Sophocles's version of the myth). In *Five Bells*, the fervor of 'here-now,' its repetitive refrain (5, 30, 89, 93, 105, 141, 202), has thus always to shift across and between an emerging sense that past, present, and future don't seem to fit together without leaving a remainder. The 'here-now' becomes itself a remainder, as Jones's four principle characters learn that it is only by nurturing this remainder that the temporality of the present can be inhabited as an initiation of oneself as an exchange of stories. 'In this pause lay the inkling of a net of relationships,' Ellie muses to herself, as past intimations become present, hovering as 'images lined up for her memory, for the future, for the wild or idle surmise' (61). Learning to situate oneself as a site of storytelling, encountering oneself through a weave of social exchange, becomes a basis by which to proactively engage developing capacities to encounter and respond to duration.

While *Five Bells* circles around duration as a thematic in which the characters learn to inhabit temporality as an exchange of stories, this also informs Jones's stuttering, episodic narrative style. This confluence and tension between narrative and story is concentrated in the opening sentences of the 6th chapter, a caption-like aphorism which more or less provides a sense of the enigma energising the novel: 'Strange how time seemed now and then to reverse, patterns to flip over and resume in another life. The quirk of any story, the element of return' (171). As a patch-work or quilt, this errant temporality extends to Jones's peculiar assemblage in which the ghostly realism of nineteenth-century Russian literature straddles the muscular intellectualism of the Futurist Filippo Marinetti, or else Van Gogh's painting of crows parallels René Magritte's surrealist penchant for compressed space. Where the character James approaches his memory around his discovery of the life and work of Magritte, Pei Xing carries memories of her father through Boris Pasternak's mid-twentieth-century novel *Dr Zhivago*. For both James and Pei Xing, memory is 'like breath on a pane of glass, a human trace to see through' (80).

VI

Where, in *Five Bells*, duration taunts the characters' efforts to occupy the present as a vantage point by which the past can be stream-lined and rendered definitively past, in *Sixty Lights* duration takes place as a paratactic exchange between image and caption. The adolescent Lucy maintains a diary in which she composes haphazard impressions and images, all with short, caption-like titles, eschewing any temporal designation of their place in history or their place in her diary. Initially titled *Special Things Seen*, the diary is later given the supplementary title *Photographs Not Taken*, once Lucy becomes aware of her passion for photography. Her diary entries are not so much descriptive or narrative accounts of incidents or events in her life, than graphic compositions in which everyday, rather ordinary impressions—'the niggardly specificity of things, often tiny, inconsequential, mundane things' (86)—are imprinted in the stillness, or perhaps poise, of her prose.

Lucy records people and things in an effort to more intensively concentrate on details constrained to withdraw from visibility. Not because they are hidden from view, but because their particularity or specificity disappears into larger shapes, outlines and more determined, hermeneutically embodied modalities of seeing. The things she stumbles upon and writes about are apprehended from any sequential significance, as Lucy begins to discover that writing and photography have an episodic momentum, not unlike montage, similar to the way in which collage foregrounds the gaps and intervals whose seeming vacancy or invisibility, and hence apparent insignificance, nevertheless constitute the act of seeing, setting things off in relief. Lucy tends to write about herself stumbling over a way of seeing, or else an encounter and exchange of seeing, and not only a documentary representation of that which is seen. First in her writing, and later in her photography, she finds herself attracted to moments in time and shades of light in which the ordinary comes to appear extra-ordinary, in excess of the ordinary.

As graphic compositions of both writing and photography, images have for Lucy a dormant capacity to spring into movement. The graphic imprints capture a fleeting moment of immobility, immutable images not 'blunted, but on the verge of locomotion' (200). In the flicker of light her infant daughter's face comes to resonate as an inchoate image always on the verge of visibility, whose many hues, shades, lines and moods are set to trigger an affective response.

In her *Photographs Not Taken* compositions Lucy traces the imprints of ‘imagistic revelations,’ captured between impulses of life and death—between the mundane stammer of the ordinary and striking intervals that disrupt the forgetfulness of time. On the street, the angle in which a beggar holds a baby in her lap reveals a bond of love and intimacy; the veins of hyacinths appear ‘like strings, like those in old human hands’ (89); the pained hands of women bristle workers look large and ‘inhuman’; in a church, ‘gatherings of light’ concentrate themselves in a menagerie of glass modeled sheep. In her room, Lucy sleeps under a skylight that she thinks of as a vast ‘photographic glass plate,’ and discovers the many shades of light and gradations of dark: ‘In winter sometimes she woke to find a rectangle of snow held above her, a kind of magical *carte-de-visite*, with a message of frozen time’ (183). In the poise of her compositions, Lucy gives herself to what she later calls her ‘maculate aesthetic,’ whereby stains of light and colour work to render details a more intense appearance of visibility, a capacity to see concentrating itself as an exposure of the visual itself.

By exposing not that which is seen but a specific modality of inhabiting and technique of capturing the act of seeing, Lucy gains a sense of an immanent temporality condensed within the graphic imprints of photographs themselves, having the potential or capacity to peek out from the temporal void brought about by habit, regularity, and routine. ‘Looking at photographs cracked open time,’ begins the 56th ‘light’ (233). Duration, for Lucy, is more aberrant and fugitive, something like what Walter Benjamin called *Jetztzeit* (nowtime), moving in fits and starts, a series of encounters or snapshots that disrupt more instrumentalist applications of time. And this has some bearing on capacities to see, on what I have referred to as immersive fields of seeability, whereby that which comes to stand-out and appear within a field of visibility has always to constrain other ways of seeing and potential modes of seeing to withdraw from visibility. As I have suggested, temporality thus relates not only to what is seen, but rather to the grammar in which seeing is experienced, to a *dwelling in* modalities and related durations of seeability, which of course implicates incapacities to see, or rather capacities *not* to see.

ENDNOTES

¹ Batchen has pointed out how photographic experiments in Europe around the 1830s were sometimes referred to by journalists as *necromancy*, or ‘communication with the dead’ (92).

² Batchen provides many quotations from nineteenth-century texts either recording or discussing experiments in the development of photography. In the quotations, ‘fix’ and ‘capture’ are used incessantly. The term ‘fixer’ came to denote the final chemical immersion of a film or print in chemically-based analogue photography, applied as a ‘stopper’ to the chemical reaction.

³ For a discussion of a concept of *dis-integration* as a paratactic assemblage of symptomatic and critical literary style, responding to a circumstance of social *disintegration*, see author, especially the section ‘Departure.’

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