

# Ghosts in the Machine: Modernity and the Unmodern in Gail Jones's *Dreams of Speaking*

ROBERT DIXON  
The University of Sydney

Gail Jones's first three novels deal with Australians who travel or live abroad and engage with aspects of modern global culture. In *Black Mirror* (2002), an Australian artist moves to Paris in the 1930s to become part of the surrealist movement; years later, another Australian woman, an art historian, follows her to Europe to research her biography. *Sixty Lights* (2004) begins in Australia but the action soon moves to London and then to India, thereby locating Australia within the international landscape of the late nineteenth-century British world. In *Dreams of Speaking* (2006), an Australian academic, Alice Black, travels from Perth to Paris to research a book on 'the poetics of modernity'. She there meets an elderly Japanese man, Mr Sakamoto, who is also interested in modernity and its technologies, and who is writing a biography of Alexander Bell, the inventor of the telephone. Alice's project begins as a theoretical enterprise, as she sets out to understand the operations of global modernity and the nature of modern time and space. Yet, in the opening pages of the novel, after her return from Paris, her manuscript lies abandoned on her desk like 'something dead and unconnected' (6). In this article, I examine how her meeting with Mr Sakamoto and her grief for his death cause her to abandon that initial project for one of a different kind, which involves her telling the story of their friendship. Alice's recognition that modernity is haunted by the persistence of the unmodern, especially death and mourning, transforms her poetics of modernity into a meditation on the ethics of friendship.

## MODERNITY, MODERN TIME AND THE MODERN SPACE

What is meant by these two words, 'poetics' and 'modernity'? 'Poetics' refers to the theory or underlying principles of something: Aristotle's treatise, the *Poetics*, for example, is about the theory of tragic drama, the system of rules and conventions that govern the writing and performance of plays in general. Alice Black's theoretical project begins at a similarly high level of

generalisation. To attempt a book about the poetics of modernity is to write a theoretical treatise about it—to map it, to describe the broad principles that organise it. This is similar to Arjun Appadurai's project in *Modernity at Large* (1996). His influential model of globalisation is based on five 'disjunctive' flows of people, finance, technology and intellectual property that transcend individual nations and national economies. Appadurai's somewhat triumphal account of these flows has subsequently been qualified by Zygmunt Bauman's account of 'liquid modernity': as Antony Bryant observes, Bauman reminds us that 'turbulence leaves a trail of waste and debris in its wake'; that 'flexibility produces vagabonds as well as tourists' (132). Appadurai's model is *his* attempt to analyse the poetics of modernity, and it is very suggestive for thinking about Alice's project in *Dreams of Speaking*. Modernity is international, it is global, it is, in Appadurai's phrase, 'at large', and the notes on modern inventors and inventions provided to her by Mr Sakamoto illustrate just such flows of people, technology and ideas. Alexander Bell is one example, as he and his business interests move from Britain to the United States and back.

Researching the poetics of modernity is an ambitious theoretical undertaking, and we never learn exactly what Alice's own model of modernity is or whether she succeeds in writing it up. Jones's novel, then, is not the book that Alice might write after the novel finishes. One reason for this distinction may be that Jones realises just how impossible a task it would be to comprehend fully the poetics of global modernity; another is that she wishes to demonstrate Alice's own emotional and intellectual development in the novel. What we do have from Alice and Mr Sakamoto are notes toward the treatise, fragments of an impossible project. In part, the novel is quite literally made up of research notes written by Mr Sakamoto about particular modern inventors and inventions. These appear in a different font to the rest of the novel and make them seem like a collection of fragments. It is perhaps significant that one of the most important attempts to develop a poetics of modernity, Walter Benjamin's 'Arcades Project', was also never completed: it is a montage of notes, essays and observations on aspects of modern Paris, including advertising, photography, fashion, architecture and the social lives of commodities. Alice and Mr Sakamoto are also interested in these topics, but it is Alice, not Gail Jones, who sets out to write a poetics of modernity.

Modernity is a notoriously complicated term, though the subject of Alice's research is reasonably clear: it encompasses a series of changes, especially technological changes, and the consequences that flowed from them, that profoundly affected the lives of people in the western world from the late

eighteenth or early nineteenth century through to about the mid-twentieth century. These changes were felt especially in, though not confined to, a handful of great cities which, by the late nineteenth century, came to epitomise modernity: New York, London and Berlin, but above all Paris. They include the development of new and transformative technologies of communication and travel, many of which are featured in the novel: photography and cinema, trains and aeroplanes, telephones, televisions and computers, x-rays and the atomic bomb; and the process of urbanisation, the growth of modern cities. Early in the novel, the narrator says of the city of Perth: 'All that was solid melting into air' (4). This is an allusion to, if not quite a direct quote from, one of the earliest and most famous attempts to write a theory of modernity, Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848). The same phrase was used as the title for one of the most important recent accounts of modernity, Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), in which he writes, 'The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life' (16). Modernity, then, has both a temporality and a geography: it has a history that has unfolded across a large field of international space.

#### MODERN TIME

Most of the technologies that Alice and Mr Sakamoto research were initially developed in the nineteenth century and came to fruition early in the twentieth: Bell invented the telephone in the 1870s; the Lumière brothers invented the cinema in 1895; Marconi the radio in the 1890s. In Alice's reading of history, this great tide of modern invention culminates in one of the most shattering events of the twentieth century: the dropping of atomic bombs on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States Air Force in August 1945. But the relation between modernity and time is more complex than just a linear series of dates. 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.

Jones develops these ideas in a surprisingly simple way. In the Paris Metro, Alice hears a gypsy violinist playing the Beatles' song 'Yesterday' and Mr Sakamoto later encourages her to think about the familiar line, 'Yesterday came suddenly': 'The idea, think of it, that yesterday might come *suddenly*'

(33). Modernity is often seen as a series of technologically-induced breaks with the past: modern invention is all about making things new and for this to happen there must be a dramatic sense of redundancy as what is new relegates what already exists, suddenly, to the past. It is often said that the Great War, for example, caused a break in time: the mass deaths caused by industrial warfare made the chivalry of the nineteenth century seem a thing of the past. But many old fashioned things continue to exist after such apparent moments of rupture. The Great War, supposedly the first modern war in history, caused an upsurge in the practice of spiritualism (Dixon 259-60). Mr Sakamoto explains this to Alice early in their relationship: 'The difficulty with celebrating modernity', he declares, 'is that we live with so many persistently unmodern things. Dreams, love, babies, illness. Memory. Death. And all the natural things. Leaves, birds, ocean, animals.' (21) Here is the first problem for Alice to consider as a would-be historian of modernity: what kind of narrative must it have? Is it a linear story of breaks and ruptures, in which everything is suddenly reinvented and made new; or is it a series of folds or pleats in time—Jones uses both these metaphors—in which past and present are folded together? Does the unmodern persist in the time of the modern?

This is the other meaning of the line, 'Yesterday came suddenly'. In one sense modernity makes the past suddenly irrelevant but its technologies can also bring the past back into the present. The Beatles broke up in 1969 and two of them are now dead, but Mr Sakamoto listens to them on his iPod as if they were still present. This timelessness, this presence of the past, is an effect of the technologies of visual and audio reproduction, which allow celebrities to exist outside of linear time. The photographic image, Alice learns, is 'is always time-bound but out-of-time, always anachronistic . . . *folded time*'. As she puts it, reflecting on the Beatles' song, 'against modernity, the force of *yesterday*' (36-7).

The history of modernity, then, is linear time, a great rush forward into the future, but it is experienced as folded time, in which eruptions from the past, the unmodern, are folded into the present by memory and the modern technologies of memory—photography, cinema, sound recording. As Alice puts it, the present is haunted by 'a spectre of lost time' (33). Reflecting on 'the time of modernity', Mr Sakamoto 'did not accept . . . that all was despotic acceleration and unholy speed. The hunger for nuance and eternity infiltrated the lives of everyone . . . Nothing is lost. There are no cataclysmic displacements or the sudden vanishing of forms.' (139)

The nature of modern time has been described by Michel Serres, who argues that an historical era is always 'multitemporal'. In *Victorian Babylon*,

which Jones acknowledges as one of her sources in *Black Mirror*, Lynda Nead describes Serres' notion of 'pleated' time as being like a crumpled handkerchief: 'This image of pleated time is literally visualised by Serres in his metaphor of the handkerchief . . . crumpled in the pocket, the handkerchief evokes a "topological" concept of time, in which previously distant points "become close, or even superimposed" . . . Modernity . . . can be imagined as pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations.' (8) This 'modern' temporality is reflected in the narrative structure of *Dreams of Speaking*, which unfurls as a vast loop through time and space that is constantly perforated by irruptions from the past. It begins in Perth, West Australia. The first numbered section establishes the narrative present: Alice Black has just returned from a year in Paris, where she has been researching a book on the poetics of modernity. Her sister, Norah, has breast cancer and has recently had a breast removed. Alice's friend, Mr Sakamoto, whom she met in Paris, has had a stroke in his home city of Nagasaki, and there is the small but immediate trauma of Alice's injured hand, which requires stitching.

In the second numbered section, the narrative moves back twelve months into the past, as Alice flies to Europe to begin her research. What follows, making up the bulk of the novel, is the events of that year in Paris, her meeting with Mr Sakamoto and her visit to Nagasaki. While this is narrated in the third person and in chronological order, it is constantly interrupted by flashbacks as far back in time as Alice's early family life in Perth and Mr Sakamoto's life in Nagasaki, including his survival of the atomic blast in 1945. This long middle section culminates in Alice's visit to Nagasaki, Mr Sakamoto's stroke, and her return to Perth via Paris. Once back in Perth, Alice receives confirmation of Mr Sakamoto's death.

The final section, numbered 15, returns to the narrative present, when Alice cuts her hand: the accident is a cinema-like marker of this return to the present. In the novel's closing pages, she discovers through a blood test that she is adopted, and at the end, her sister Norah asks her, 'Tell me about Mr Sakamoto': the final line is, 'And in the quietest of voices, Alice began'. *Dreams of Speaking* is therefore structured like a mobius strip. In the end, we are invited to believe that the novel we have just read is Alice's account to her sister Norah of her year in Paris and her friendship with Mr Sakamoto, or perhaps her treatise on the poetics of modernity. It is neither, but this creates an illusion of the circularity of modern time, like a spool of film that can endlessly be replayed.

## MODERN SPACE

Alice's project also involves the geography of modernity, or modern space. In the nineteenth century, it seemed that the world was organised around centres and peripheries of cultural and economic power: London was the centre of empire, and from there the British world radiated outwards to provincial cities like Sydney, Melbourne or Cape Town. Tim Armstrong argues, however, that modern space is both centripetal and centrifugal: it is defined not by one-way movements from centre to periphery, but by flows of people, money, technology and ideas in many directions, even between peripheries (136). Alice's experience of modern space is triangulated by three cities: Perth, Paris and Nagasaki. More precisely, her movement through space is once again in the form of a loop: Perth, Paris, Nagasaki, Paris, Perth. Why these cities? What do they reveal about modernity at large and its effects on people's experience of time and space?

Perth is a city on the edge of a continent at the edge of the world. But it is connected to modernity through colonialism, especially by the pastoral and mining industries, which are the foundation of its wealth. Alice describes the city's 'material assertion—built on mining money and pastoral seizure and colonialist pride . . . Tycoons made their homes here, and migrants from Britain and South Africa' (4). Perth and its economy may seem remote, but they are part of modernity's transnational economy, its multidirectional flows of people, money and ideas, as the presence of migrants there demonstrates. Australia is shaped by both colonialism and modernity, and these lock its history into an international context from the beginning. It boasts a distinctive national identity, but this is shaped by the globalising forces of colonialism and modernity.

From Perth, Alice flies to Paris, which is celebrated as the city of light and modernity. In the 1840s, during the Second Empire, Napoleon III had commissioned Haussmann to modernise the old medieval city. Entire districts were demolished and the new, modern Paris was built, including the introduction of railways, shopping arcades and the world's first department stores. This modernisation is known as the Haussmanisation of Paris. In 1889 Paris was host to the Universal Exposition, for which the Eiffel Tower was built, and in 1900 the first underground Metro line was opened (Berman 150-1). A succession of major theorists of modernity have celebrated Paris in their essays, from Charles Baudelaire to Sigfried Kracauer, Benjamin and Berman.

The third city in Jones's geography of modernity is Nagasaki, where the atomic bomb was dropped on 9 August 1945. Nagasaki is not just one

of modernity's key sites; it is its ground zero, the point where the history of modernity might be said to reach its climax. Insofar as it has a linear trajectory, this is where the maelstrom of modern life ends in an apocalypse of destruction. Here, Marx's prediction, 'all that is solid melts into air', came literally to pass. Jones implies that the development of the atomic bomb was the culmination of all the other technical developments of modernity and was the ultimate release of its destructive potential.

In Nagasaki, Alice visits the atomic bomb memorial, which is built over the crater of the blast. This is the ground zero of modern space, the point of modernity's culmination. Time stops here in two senses: the United States' decision to use the bomb brought to an end the idea of modernity as endless linear progress; and it was an event of such magnitude that it can never be forgotten, though it can be repeated. Serres' notion of 'topological' time, of ruptures in the fabric of time and space, suggests that the Nagasaki memorial bears a relation to the ground zero of 9/11 in New York. As Mr Sakamoto's personal memories illustrate, that moment in 1945 is not past; it is folded into the present and continues to haunt it. As Alice enters the memorial, she notices 'near the entrance to the exhibition, almost in darkness, was an exploded wall clock, halted at 11.02 on 9 August 1945' (185). Armstrong calls this 'frozen time': a sense in which the trauma of war disrupts forever the smooth progress from past to present to future (15).

Jones's description of Nagasaki as a city of light links it with Paris. But if Paris stands for the bright, positive side of modernity, Nagasaki is its dark and grotesque negative. Photographs exist as both positives and negatives: there cannot be one without the other. Nagasaki is a city of light because the explosion of the atomic bomb was like the taking of a photograph, a massive release of light and energy that leaves an inscription on space and time. Alice later recalls an image from the museum that 'surfaces inside her': 'It was a photograph of the shadow of a man and a ladder, imprinted by the blast on a wall. A persisting shadow . . . An autograph of death' (188).

As a rupture in the fabric of time and space, Nagasaki is also linked to the colonial city of Perth through the imagery of mining. The museum in Nagasaki is built over the bomb crater, and to enter the exhibit Alice must step down into the dark: 'The walk in downward spirals was disconcerting and Alice felt a sense of dread. It was like walking into a pit, like moving slowly underground. There was a muffled hush and a sense of overheated enclosure. At the bottom she entered shadowy corridors and sombre spaces' (185). She is mindful of the great trauma of her father's life, when he entered a caved-in mine as part of a rescue party, and came suddenly upon the crushed body

of his mate, Jacko (48). Through the permeability of modern space, Jones connects war with industry, implying that modernity and its inventions culminate in war; that progress is bound up with destruction. Perth, Paris and Nagasaki triangulate the geography of modernity. The brilliant, modern capital of Paris is linked to colonial cities like Perth, where modernity extracts its raw materials and generates wealth through mining and the seizure of indigenous lands. Both Paris and Perth, despite the beauty of the first and the isolation of the second, are linked to Nagasaki, where the technological developments of modernity culminate in a massive and destructive release of energy in the service of war.

#### THE PERSISTENCE OF THE UNMODERN

I want to turn now from ideas about modern time and space to consider the persistence of the *unmodern*, which undermines Alice's research. It is significant that as we begin to read *Dreams of Speaking*, Mr Sakamoto has just died. Alice is so affected by her grief that she cannot work on her book on the poetics of modernity, which lies on her desk like 'something dead and unconnected' (6). From the beginning, the unmodern in the form of death unravels her intellectual project. This is not something that the reader fully understands until later: it is not until the return to the narrative present at the end of the novel that the telephone call comes through from Mr Sakamoto's daughter telling Alice that he has passed away (203). Mr Sakamoto is never really in the book's narrative present; he is present only in the form of Alice's recollections of him and as a disembodied recorded voice. He has gone as the novel begins, but 'what he has said remains' (5). He is one of those 'spectres of lost time', like the images caught on early cinema film or the music of the Beatles on his iPod. But the illusion of his presence, especially during the long central section of the novel, is proof that modern time is not linear: although dead, he is present in Alice's memories and descriptions. Their initial meeting on a train—one of the central tropes of modernity facilitates a meeting of minds seemingly unrestricted by age, class gender and race, and their friendship is, in its way, a triumph of modern possibility: 'Friends are an intersection, a route back to the world . . . it would be impossible not to befriend him' (60). It is the positive quality of this found friendship that exaggerates the eventual extent of loss. Mr Sakamoto's absence introduces a cluster of themes that are also present in Jones's earlier novels: her concerns with writing and death, and with the ethics of friendship, which are influenced by the work of Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. These have been Jones's central preoccupations as a writer and they have persisted strongly through all of her work, including her most recent novel, *Sorry* (2007).



Jones's abiding concern with the imminence of death suggests the influence of Blanchot's *Death Sentence* and *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, which were translated into English during the early 1980s. It might also usefully be approached through Jacques Lacan's influential re-reading of Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Ambassadors* (1553), which depicts the French ambassador to London and one of his visitors, a French Bishop. Holbein was renowned for his mastery of realism in oil painting. Art historians point out that the rise of realism in European art coincided with the rise of modern mercantile capitalism: essentially, oil painting's ability to represent material reality was developed to glorify the world of commodities and the owner's possession of property. Holbein's ambassador is confident in his wealth and power, and the painting mimics the materiality of the things he owns, which are made from wood, fur, cloth, and metal. A globe symbolises Europe's command of the world's trade and commerce, an early representation of the geography of modernity, showing the global outreach of European colonialism and some of the commodities that it has brought back to Europe.

But there is something intriguing about this image: on the floor at the ambassador's feet is a smudge, which is in fact a human skull rendered in anamorphic perspective. This means that the object cannot be identified while the spectator looks directly at the picture plane. We must move to the side of the picture and view it from a skewed perspective in order for the smudge to reveal itself as a skull. The skull is a conventional emblem of mortality, a *memento mori*. But why did Holbein conceal it by using anamorphic perspective?

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan uses Holbein's painting to illustrate his theory of 'the Real'. For Lacan, modern human society is a complex system of signs into which the subject is inducted at birth. Subjectivity is formed by these signifying systems, especially language, which he calls 'the symbolic order'. The symbolic order is what society agrees to call real, but it is very selective in its representations; there are certain things that it cannot 'know' if it is to function efficiently. Lacan calls this the Real: that which exceeds the capacity of the symbolic order to represent, that which lies outside its field of vision, outside what is sayable and knowable in the everyday world. The skull in Holbein's painting is an example of this. In order to function effectively, the mercantile capitalism of early modern Europe turned a blind eye, as it were, to the fact that human beings and the commodities they desire are impermanent. In the same way, modern society can only function because it chooses to ignore global warming, drought,

human mortality, cancer and war. Death lurks unseen and unrepresentable at the heart of the modern social order.

Throughout *Dreams of Speaking*, modern time and modern space are marked by the persistence of the unmodern, and this is represented by the recurring image of the skull. This undermines modernity's pretensions to constant advancement, reinvention and renewal. It also undermines modernity's attempt to overcome the limitations of the human body. Many of the inventions Mr Sakamoto describes are prosthetic in the sense that they supplement the limited functioning of the human mind or body. This was Freud's point when he described modern man in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929) as a 'prosthetic God':

With every tool [man] is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning. Motor power places gigantic forces at his disposal, which, like his muscles, he can employ in any direction; thanks to ship and aircraft neither water nor air can hinder his movements; by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance; by means of the microscope he overcomes the limits of visibility set by the structure of his retina. In the photographic camera he has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions. Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. (27-9)

In the air above Frankfurt, looking down from the cockpit on the city below, Alice 'felt like God' (20). But the recurring image of the skull reminds her that she is an embodied creature and that the body is finite. As Alice's ex-boyfriend, Stephen, says, when he finds out that his mother has cancer, 'it was like being pulled back to flesh' (51). At the start of the novel, when Alice returns to Perth from Nagasaki, Mr Sakamoto has just died. She also returns to find that her sister, Norah, has breast cancer, and that Stephen's mother, Margaret, is in the oncology ward of a Perth hospital. It is against the background of Mr Sakamoto's death that Alice recalls one of the founding memories of her own childhood—her merciful crushing of an injured kangaroo's skull with an axe (10-11). Alice describes the signs of Norah's illness: 'Something in the appearance of her skull's definite shape filled Alice with tenderness. The blank bone of her sister's cranium. This obscene exposure.' (14)

A human skull also features in the Atomic Bomb Museum in Nagasaki: 'Objects and images of catastrophe rose to meet her. She could barely look. A steel helmet with the wearer's skull fused to the inside, hand bones embedded in melted glass' (185). The phrase, 'she could barely look', is suggestive in the light of Lacan's theory of the Real. The skull represents those aspects of

modernity that cannot be faced directly, but the Real rises up to meet Alice again when she returns to Perth: ‘The shock was in realising that Norah had not revealed her illness, but had entered the valley of the shadow of death and suffered there, and struggled, without telling her sister . . . Her skull was exposed.’ (190)

*Dreams of Speaking* is saturated with loss, trauma and grief—and the desire for rituals of redemption: Stephen’s grief for the ending of his relationship with Alice; Norah’s breast cancer; the death of their father’s friend, Jacko in the mine; the murder of Alice’s imagined friend Leo in Paris; Margaret’s cancer; Alice’s mother’s multiple miscarriages; Alice’s sense of loss when she discovers the truth about her adoption; Mr Sakamoto’s loss of family and friends, indeed of his entire city in the atomic blast in 1945; his loss, due to racism, of Clare, the woman from Edinburgh, whom he loses not once but twice during his lifetime; the death of his wife Mie; and finally—or, more accurately, to begin with—the death of Mr Sakamoto himself. Tanya Dalziell discusses similar themes in her subtle and perceptive essay on Jones’s first novel, *Black Mirror*. Like Mr Sakamoto and Alice Black, Victoria Morrell and Anna Griffin form a friendship whose beginning is marked in advance by the illness and impending death of the older person. Dalziell calls this ‘proleptic mourning’: each of these friendships is formed with the prior knowledge of the loss of the beloved person. This is why it is so important that we grasp the chronology of the opening of *Dreams of Speaking*. When the narrator first introduces Mr Sakamoto, she begins ‘Hiroshi Sakamoto was born in Nagasaki, in 1934 . . .’ (66). But he is already gone.

#### THE ETHICS OF FRIENDSHIP

Dalziell takes the term ‘proleptic mourning’ from Derrida, who in his late works returned again and again to consider the ethics of friendship and the role of mourning and loss in human relationships. These are the last, ‘unmodern’ things that remain to haunt modern life. According to Derrida, ‘proleptic mourning’ is one of the laws of friendship because even in the earliest stages of friendships, we sense the impending loss of the friend and anticipate the grieving that will come with it. This is particularly evident in our awareness of the aging bodies of family and friends. Grief, like friendship, is an embodied emotion. Derrida writes, ‘the anticipation of death comes so indisputably to hollow out the living present that precedes it’ (*The Work of Mourning*, qtd in Dalziell 54).

The ethical danger of friendships, and of the mourning that accompanies them, is that they take as well as give; their potential narcissism threatens to

turn the other into the self. The interiorisation of the beloved that memory represents means that the lost friend comes to be animated or re-animated only within the living self, and there is a risk that it will be reduced to the self. When this happens, the living becomes a tomb or crypt for the dead: friendship and mourning can be selfish or cannibalistic. Discussing the final scene of *Black Mirror*, in which Anna walks through the catacombs of Paris, Dalziell argues that in an ethical practice of mourning there would be a reciprocal responsibility between the living and the dead: 'With an obligation to let live the alterity of the lost friend, that friend is carried hesitantly, rather than cannibalistically, in the living friend as memory (which itself runs the "risk" of loss, of vanishing), while the dead, as an inspired body, envelop the living—a haunting, unsettling and persistent presence.'(57) In *Dreams of Speaking*, the narrative is Alice's memorial for her dead friend Mr Sakamoto; as her surname implies, it is her work of mourning. But in remembering him, has she honoured his difference or has she turned him into a version of her self? Has she carried her friend lightly and 'hesitantly', or 'cannibalistically'?

The ethics of friendship are explored through several of Alice's relationships. When she and Norah are children, Alice is convinced that Norah is actually *her* name, and she wants to take it from her sister, but Norah is 'stubborn and won't be persuaded'; she 'hangs on to her name' (7). Intimate relationships, Jones implies, can overwhelm the otherness of the friend, and the young Alice doesn't have the sense to resist this.

Alice's friend Stephen has similar problems in the ethics of friendship. When they meet again in Paris, their renewed physical intimacy leads Alice to remember that he had once loved a girl who was killed in a car accident, and that he sometimes wept in her arms when he remembered her:

Alice rolled onto Stephen's body, stretching out to encompass him, so that their limbs matched part to part, like a photocopy. She kissed his tearful eyes, and knew for the first time that in every intimacy there are these spirit presences, which rise up, revenant, even in lovemaking. She had wanted to say to Stephen that she understood his grief, but in those days she did not. What was her name? she asked . . . 'Her name was Alice', said Stephen. (26)

Stephen is haunted by grief for the earlier Alice, keeping her alive inside himself like a spectre. But the correspondence of their names suggests that this memory might be an imposition on his new friend, also Alice, in the same way that Alice's friendship for her sister Norah had threatened Norah's integrity. Just as the overlap of names signals an ethical danger, so the identity

of Stephen and Alice's limbs, 'part for part', might be either a positive intimacy or a more negative imposition of the self on the other, as implied by the idea of the photocopy. These subtle negotiations, so typical of Jones's writing and thinking, indicate that friendships and remembering are never straight forward. Friendship, like any gift, is an act of both giving and taking. In its most unethical form, friendship becomes cannibalistic, a threat to the integrity of the other. This happens when Stephen stalks Alice shortly after her arrival in Paris at a time when she wants to finish their relationship.

In its most positive form in *Dreams of Speaking*, friendship is developed not as a 'stalking' or 'seizure' of the other, but as a sympathetic witnessing of the other's pain and grief that leaves the other free. I take this to be the implication of Alice's discovery of her adoption at the end of the novel. In finding that she is not genetically related to her parents or her sister, she is liberated, as it were, to develop a new relationship with them that is free of obligations. This is the quality of the friendship she develops with Mr Sakamoto: as a friend she is his sympathetic witness rather than one who seizes his identity and memories. There is a suggestion of this when he speaks to her of one of his favourite films, *Beau Geste*, in which two friends agree to hold a funeral for whichever one dies first. When Alice finally watches this scene, she notices that there is another character involved, a young girl whose role is to witness the memorialisation of friendship: 'Mr Sakamoto had never mentioned the presence of the girl.' (202) It is the quality of their found friendship that highlights the eventual extent of loss.

In choosing a friendship between an Australian and a Japanese survivor of the atomic blast at Nagasaki, Jones has taken on a cross-cultural relationship of great historical sensitivity. Friendships between Australians and Japanese have featured in a number of recent Australian novels and films, such as Sue Brooks's film *Japanese Story* (2003). During the Second World War, and for some time after, a generation of Australians regarded the Japanese with hostility not just as other, but as the enemy. And it is significant that despite their friendship, or because of it, Mr Sakamoto becomes close to Alice but also remains distinctly other. In Japan, faced with Mr Sakamoto's family's grief, Alice is reminded of the ultimate and impenetrable otherness of her Japanese friend, which she must respect and accept. While his daughter Haruko is warm and welcoming, her sister Akiko remains closed to Alice, as Japan itself largely does. As she lies awake in her Nagasaki hotel room, 'Japan was defeating Alice's sense of the intelligibility of things' (176). I'm reminded here of Sofia Coppola's film, *Lost in Translation* (2003), in which Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson's knowledge of Japan goes little further than the foyer

of their hotel. Japan remains ultimately other, and Alice and Mr Sakamoto's friendship is appropriately hesitant and respectful.

From the beginning, then, Alice's project on modernity is undermined by the persistence of the unmodern. It is the unmodern things like friendship and grief that are important. The modern inventions matter only insofar as they keep alive these persistently unmodern things—ghosts in the machine. The telephone performs a redemptive role in Mr Sakamoto's life, allowing him to develop a form of communication with his Uncle Tadeo in which he can express his sense of loss after the bomb blast. It allows a special kind of disembodied sympathy between friends. Mr Sakamoto develops an interest in Alexander Bell because he comes to believe that the telephone is 'munificent', that its invention was motivated by Bell's own grief for the loss of his children and his desire to help deaf people to hear (94). Early in their friendship, Mr Sakamoto describes the telephone to Alice as 'the most metaphysical of all technologies' (60). It allows the self, the embodied self, to be set aside, and in these conversations Mr Sakamoto finds a modern counterpart to exorcism or confession, as Uncle Tadeo bears witness to his grief: 'He heard his own voice expelling phantom presences and wounding secrets. He gave up ghosts. He exhaled poisons . . . In the wires of the telephone, in the windy space between mouths . . . they spoke the truth; they expressed their love. Their voices floated into each other, in a disincarnate embrace.' (75) After Mr Sakamoto's death, Alice phones his number and hears his voice on an answering machine: 'The voice was Mr Sakamoto's . . . she dialled a third time . . . wishing to follow the thin thread of his remnant voice, his faint verbal ghost.' (212)

Alice has not always known how to engage ethically with others: setting aside the self is something she must learn. After she and Mr Sakamoto separate in Paris, she imagines that she sees a woman in the crowd who looks like her. She pursues her through the streets and into the Metro until she loses sight of her: 'It was an almost dreadful moment, a kind of teasing apparition, a joke, a mistake.' (154-5) After she loses sight of the woman, Alice feels a sense of 'failure' in not catching up to her. This imposing of the self on others is another unethical form of friendship. It recalls Alice's earlier attempt to take Norah's name and Stephen's stalking of Alice.

The episode of misrecognition in the Metro is followed by Alice's dreaming of Mr Sakamoto. In her dream she is a blank. She does not seek out Mr Sakamoto; rather, he hails her and she incorporates his identity into her dreams at his initiation:

That night Alice dreamed of Mr Sakamoto. She was pushing through crowds, looking for someone. Figments and spectres swam in the air.

People walked right through her: she was as a nothing, empty space. Shop windows did not reflect her image. She descended steps and saw before her twin branching tunnels. Choosing the left, the more dimly lit . . . she came upon Mr Sakamoto waiting on an empty platform. He looked happy to see her. He smiled and opened his arms broadly in a welcoming gesture. His overcoat formed a shell; he became a refuge. (156)

The dream echoes Alice's experience of the previous night in the Metro but now she is an empty space; she is invisible, she casts no reflection. This creates the appropriate conditions for Mr Sakamoto to hail her with a welcoming gesture, and his friendship becomes her refuge. The most intimate and successful friendships in the novel are formed when the other is re-met, when the self does not get in the way, when the 'specificity of otherness' is acknowledged and left free. This re-meeting happens in Alice's relations with Norah, Stephen and her parents. Alice's name, 'Black', echoes the title of *Black Mirror*, in which, as Dalziell argues, 'the trope of the black mirror warns against any romanticised notion of reciprocal recognition . . . whereby one subject simply mirrors an other' (56).

In the end—and in the beginning—Alice has abandoned her research on the poetics of modernity to at last reflect upon the last, unmodern things. The most suitable form for that ethical meditation might not be theory or 'poetics', but a story about the life of her friend. With her project 'dead and unconnected' (6), Alice finds herself at the site of what Jones has elsewhere called 'the cleavage of philosophy and phenomenology' ('Without Stars' 141). Alice's theoretical project is 'dead' because it is 'unconnected' to the 'cruel excess of memory' and affect that are the 'co-efficient of grief' ('Without Stars' 141). The problem of how to negotiate that cleavage, especially in the practice of writing, has been central to and perhaps constitutive of Jones's work as a novelist, essayist and literary theorist. In 'Without Stars (A Small Essay on Grief)', Jones reflects on her own grief following the suicide of a close friend, and the connections between grief, philosophy and writing. 'For a time now', she confesses, 'I have been contemplating *le subissement* (if not, in effect, "going under") . . . And I ask myself: for all that goes under, what is it that rises up?' (141) One of the things that rises up is the memory of the dead in the living: 'There was a compulsion to recall and to re-imagine the life unforclosed, so that in a kind of post-mortem special-effect the past tense had never seemed so bizarrely present.' (141) This is precisely the tense of *Dreams of Speaking*, the tense of modern time. Alice experiences going under quite literally after Mr Sakamoto's death, when she falls from her windsurfer and is tempted to drown herself in the waters of Perth's

Swan River. What is lacking at that point is a connection between grief, memory and writing. Reflecting on the style of Blanchot, with its 'famous mythopoeic conjunctions', Jones writes admiringly of his capacity to connect the philosophical with the poetic: 'it is by employing the poetic and the narrative, the waywardly figural, that Blanchot challenges bleak opacity by representation, and allows, if only in displacement, the proper admission of affect.'(149) To link the 'philosophy' of grief to its phenomenology through a practice of writing is not merely a form of connection, but of cathexis. 'How', Jones asks, 'does one honour, in grief, all that up rises? And how then does one write of it, other than by employing these oddly cathected masques and stylistic hesitations?'(149) Alice experiences these responsibilities from the moment Norah initially asks her to tell her about Mr Sakamoto. At first, Alice does not know how: she feels the burden of how to 'recover this man' in words: 'against the waste of death, no language availed.'(17) But in the end, Norah asks again, 'Tell me about Mr Sakamoto', and in the quietest of voices, Alice begins.

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