

THE SYNCHRONOUS CITY: AURAL GEOGRAPHIES IN GAIL JONES'S *FIVE BELLS*

ELLA MUDIE

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Tracing the movements of a cast of four characters as they traverse the streets of Sydney across a single day, Gail Jones's *Five Bells* is a novel in which the street plays such an active role that it cannot be relegated merely to the status of setting. Home to the walker, a body moving through space, the street is a conduit for a plethora of sensory experiences in the novel and, following the incisive observation of the French spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre, it is also inextricably bound to questions of power and control not immediately obvious to the eye. For 'the more carefully one examines space,' writes Lefebvre, 'considering it not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but also with all the senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it' (391). In this essay, I am concerned with how sensory perception in Jones's fifth novel, in particular the hearing of sound, dramatises a number of conflicts that, like the tensions embedded in the urban environment more generally, are easily missed if the text is read in a solely 'visual' fashion. While Jones has briefly commented upon the book as an 'acoustical novel' (qtd. in Gaunt 43), the full implications of the subtle modes of auditory perception at work in Jones's latest fictional work remain to be unpacked.

The prevalence afforded to the street in *Five Bells* and to walking which engages all the senses mark a significant departure from the fascination with the optical and the luminosity of seeing that has proved such a defining feature of Jones's previous fictions. The role of sound in *Five Bells* is strikingly multi-faceted and the aural geographies of the novel, I wish to suggest, develop a number of recurring themes in Jones's work in new ways, extending most notably the author's enduring preoccupations with memory, embodiment and trauma. Dealing firstly with

sound as a powerful trigger for recollection, I will explore its role in catalysing a spectral form of remembering that unlocks the spatio-temporal complexities of the narrative. In the context of space and urbanism, another major preoccupation of the novel, the sonic textures that *Five Bells* registers are closely linked to the question of *praxis*,ⁱ or a literary spatial practice that implies a concern for reinstating the body-in-space at the centre of both writing and experiencing the world as a counterpoint to the forces of alienation present in everyday life. Lastly, this paper is concerned with the relationship between listening and the trauma theme, an ongoing field of investigation in Jones's fiction that is extended in *Five Bells* through aural modes of recollection and witnessing that pluralise the trauma model and thus seek to challenge assumptions regarding the unassimilable nature of traumatic experience.

SOUND AS REVENANT

'Circular Quay: she loved even the sound of it' (1). These words open the novel, describing the response of one of its characters, Ellie, to the Quay. From the outset, Jones plunges the reader into a bustling tourist hub and a light-drenched, acoustically rich, pleasure zone of colliding cultures. Yet as much as Circular Quay operates as a zone of encounters in the novel, it is also a zone of contradictions, a site where beneath the spectacle of the surface the heavy tides of historical time and wistful memories evoke the undertow of a past that subtly disturbs and ruptures the present. This tension is embodied in the novel's title, which takes its name from the Australian poet Kenneth Slessor's elegiac poem, 'Five Bells,' composed in the late 1930s, ten years after the death of Slessor's friend and colleague, Joe Lynch, by a suspected suicide drowning in Sydney Harbour one evening. The narrator of Slessor's poem is especially concerned with how memories of his departed friend return to him, overtake him and indeed torment him many years later when he hears the ships in the harbour sounding their clocks by ringing five bells:

Why do I think of you, dead man, why thieve
 These profitless lodgings from the flukes of thought
 Anchored in Time? (Slessor 103; v.3)

Like Slessor, Jones meditates upon the relationship between grief, mourning and the circularity of memory which unsettles the notion of time's linear progress. Robert Dixon has astutely pointed out the similarities between the poet in Slessor's elegy and the ways in which 'Jones's characters carry into the present their memories of the dead and of their own past lives'ⁱⁱ (2). Pei Xing is a migrant from Shanghai who has settled in Western Sydney after having left China when the doors opened after the Cultural Revolution and whose chance reunion with an old enemy confronts her with the imperative to forgive. James and Ellie were lovers in their teenage years and are destined to meet again after a long separation, yet their new beginning is jeopardised by feelings of guilt that haunt James over an accidental drowning for which he feels responsible. Catherine is an Irish-born journalist who moves to Sydney in an effort to quell the grief of losing her older brother, with whom she shared a particularly close bond. The disturbance to a present self that each character experiences through recollections of his/her past troubles the construction of identity in the novel. At both the personal and cultural level, the autonomy of the self is persistently rendered unstable through the registering of traces of an(other). Whether it is the trace of another text (as in the case of Slessor's poem) or the

haunting traces of loved ones—as is the case for James for whom ‘only Ellie persisted as his father did, in this deeper-level recollection, deposited like radium in the substrata of his cells’ (35)—the self in *Five Bells* is riven by the spectral. This notion of identity as ‘always already disturbed from within by some other haunting trace’ (Wolfreys 139)ⁱⁱⁱ thus renders identity as strangely porous while the revenant nature of memory presents a picture of the self as haunted. At the same time, the spectrality of memory might also be viewed in a more positive light insofar as identity is constructed as inherently relational in ways that suggest the potential for reparation through contact with the other.

The street and the city in *Five Bells* manifest social *and* alienating dimensions in ways that dramatise a back-and-forth movement between contact and isolation. This oscillation points to another key intertextual reference for *Five Bells*: Virginia Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In many respects, Jones’s book presents a contemporary reimagining of the spatial narrative stratagem of Woolf’s novel, which maps synchronous moments in intersecting lives across a single day in London. At a formal level, sound provides a linking device in *Mrs Dalloway* as various sonic intrusions, from the noise of the Prime Minister’s car that brings the city crowd to a standstill as ‘the throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body’ (15-16) to the ubiquitous overhead roar of the skywriting plane, act as integrating synchronising mechanisms. Their ‘chiming’ inscribes a degree of simultaneity upon the urban metropolis that reduces the gap of disconnection between the modern masses. Shared events evoke collective memories such as when the crowd viewing the spectacle of the passing Prime Minister’s motor car ‘looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire’ (19). In this sense, the sonic patterning at work in Woolf’s novel embodies what Fredric Jameson terms the ‘mnemonic unifying emblems’ (154) that once characterised the spatio-temporalities of the modern period yet now appear impossible under ‘the discontinuous spatial experience and confusions of the postmodern’ (154).

On one level, the conceptualisation of sound as revenant and the prevalence afforded to the unbidden recurrence of memory in *Five Bells* mirrors Woolf’s anxiety in *Mrs Dalloway* over the amnesiac qualities of a modern subjectivity held in thrall to shallow intoxication with the present. Despite its preoccupation with spectral memory, however, the past in *Five Bells* fractures and fragments the subject. It offers the potential for contact rather than the continuity afforded to historical tradition in Woolf’s novels which, according to Steve Ellis, ‘work[s] to restore “cut-off” communications with the past and to appease that sense of modern alienation’ (66). Whilst employing narrative techniques redolent of Woolf’s in some respects, Jones resists knitting her sonic links and auditory patterns into the ‘unifying emblems’ that Jameson argues typify the ‘existential time, along with deep memory [...] dominant of the high modern’ (154). In mapping her characters’ responses to the sound sources of the city—from the din of its restaurants and cafes to the cacophonous clamour of city crowds and the industrial noise of traffic and trains—there are many moments in which they flail in the decentring voids definitive of postmodern hyperspace. Consider Pei Xing waiting on the platform for the train that will take her to the Quay:

‘Whether it is the trace of another text (as in the case of Slessor’s poem) or the haunting traces of loved ones... the self in *Five Bells* is riven by the spectral.’

The train station was noisy and busy, all brutalist steel, echoing with voices and the severe acoustics of hard tubular spaces. Rubbish blew along the platform, a McDonald's carton for fries, a jangling aluminium can [...] Waiting passengers watched suspiciously and with blank incomprehension. (44)

Here, the vacant and soulless architecture of the train station presents as an example of a dislocating and alienating spatial environment that appears to preclude contact and encounter. Yet the *potential* for encounter is always close at hand and Pei Xing's emotional and aesthetic estrangement at the train station is perhaps better understood as a momentary rather than definitive condition of space in the novel. For such 'discontinuous spatial experiences' are frequently juxtaposed with instances of an ephemeral simultaneity and synchronicity in which the noise of urban space is experienced by the novel's characters as engaging, pleasurable and stimulating. As one of its most optimistic characters, Ellie is especially susceptible to registering pulses of synchronicity in the city. She derives a simple pleasure in observing the 'eddying crowds and the wayward motions of human traffic, their tidal sweeps at traffic lights' (21) and finds enjoyment in 'listening to the community of life around her and the mechanical and human sounds that together, a rough orchestra, filtered through the streets of the city' (141). Writing on the earlier 2002 novel, *Black Mirror*, Fiona Roughley identifies the significance of vertiginous space in Jones's writing in dramatising a conflict between depth and surface that repudiates the postmodern discourse of depthlessness in a subtle and nuanced fashion (Roughley 62-64). In a similar vein, the conflicts and tensions between harmonious and dissonant sounds that *Five Bells* registers in the acoustical environment work against the characterisation of postmodernity as inherently alienating, whilst ensuring that the patterning of encounters and affinities in the novel resist becoming over-determined in ways that would efface the complexity of the characters' subjective responses as mere nodes in a design.

'...the fiction and non-fiction of Gail Jones reveals an enduring engagement with the spatial theory of Lefebvre, his emphasis on the corporeal implications of a social space and the necessity of forging "lived experience" as an antidote to the alienations of everyday life as governed by capitalist relations.'

LISTENING AND THE APPROPRIATION OF SPACE

'The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body' (20), Jones quotes Lefebvre in her 2006 essay 'A Dreaming, A Sauntering.' Beyond this specific citation, the fiction and non-fiction of Gail Jones reveals an enduring engagement with the spatial theory of Lefebvre, his emphasis on the corporeal implications of a social space and the necessity of forging 'lived experience' as an antidote to the alienations of everyday life as governed by capitalist relations. Yet *Five Bells* is the first novel in which Jones explicitly extends her interest in the 'spatial turn'^{iv} via an engagement with 'psychogeography,' a mode of 'ludic-constructive' urban exploration devised by the French cultural

revolutionary movement the Situationist International (SI) in the 1950s. Conceived as a means to map the affective properties of the city in order to uncover the influence that environments exert over the emotions and behaviours of individuals, psychogeographical 'research' was to be conducted through the *dérive*. A technique of aimless drifting, the *dérive* necessitates that 'one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities,

and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there' (Debord, 'Theory' 62). Based in Paris and led by Guy Debord, the Situationists were contemporaries of Lefebvre and initially the two parties collaborated on their respective Marxian critiques of everyday life until the Situationists denounced Lefebvre on the grounds that the radical potential of his theories were too bound by the sphere of sociology. Whereas 'Lefebvre abandons in advance any experimentation involving profound cultural change' (Debord, 'Theses' 54), the Situationist critique of urbanism rapidly swelled to encompass a broader contestation of spectacular commodity-capitalism at the level of the totality with leisure, consumerism, entertainment, tourism and the commodification of desire all coming under attack for their roles in producing a crisis of alienation in everyday life.

Jones has briefly discussed her interest in psychogeography in a handful of press interviews, yet its significance for the novel has to date received its most detailed scholarly elaboration by Robert Dixon in his essay 'Invitation to the Voyage: Reading Gail Jones's *Five Bells*.' In this essay, Dixon cites Jones's remark about being 'interested in what [the Situationists] say about space and bodies and the reinvention of aesthetic apprehension for a kind of liberating, emancipatory end' (3). According to Dixon's summation, the manifestation of Situationist psychogeography in Jones's novel discards some of the more destructive impulses underpinning their radical project. Identifying how 'the Situationists' project was a negative critique of modernist consumer society' (3) that was combined with 'another, more positive impulse that sought to formulate strategies that individuals could use to combat the society of the spectacle, learning how to inhabit the city in ways that are subversive, authentic and life affirming' (3), Dixon suggests that it is primarily the latter impulse that interests Jones in *Five Bells*.

In addressing the adaptation of Situationist practices such as psychogeography in a literary context, however, it is necessary to exercise a degree of caution in separating their negative critique of capitalism from the apparently more constructive impulses of their urban exploration tactics. Situationist proposals to transform the city represent an attempt to surpass the aesthetic realm of art in a subversive mobilisation of the activities of everyday life. Thus the practice of psychogeography, according to the Situationists, offers 'not a doctrine of urbanism but a critique of urbanism. By the same token, our participation in experimental art is a critique of art, and sociological research ought to be a critique of sociology' (Situationist International, 'Unitary Urbanism'). In this sense, the presentation of what might resemble psychogeographical methods in *Five Bells* cannot be viewed as manifesting the Situationist need to destroy art as an activity incompatible with the revolutionary demands of the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic. This incongruity calls for a distinction to be made between the novelistic appropriation of its methods compared with the more radically politicised application of psychogeography, a distinction that Jones herself has drawn in stating 'I don't think I've written a psychogeographic novel: I simply enlisted the term [...] to describe how accustomed we are to feeling bored by the city, and how this might be challenged' (qtd. in Gaunt 43).

Yet this distinction does not necessarily preclude the possibility that the novel might embody a subtle 'spatial practice' or praxis in its treatment of the role of sensory perception in everyday life. In particular, Jones's interest in the power of 'aesthetic apprehension' invites a broadened understanding of just what might be designated by 'aesthetics' in the novel. Whilst there is a tendency to conflate the aesthetic with the visual, expanding the notion of 'aesthetic apprehension' to encompass more broadly the appreciation of beauty as attained by any mode

of sensorial perception—whether it be by sight, hearing, touch, haptics or otherwise—arguably recoups the critical impulses underpinning the spatial preoccupations of the narrative. The significance afforded to auditory awareness or hearing as a means of ‘aesthetic apprehension’ therefore constructs an important tension between what Lefebvre describes in his study *The Production of Space* as the critical difference between *dominated* and *appropriated* space. In dramatising such tensions, Jones explores the capacity of the individual subject to forge his/her own relationship of belonging through imaginative labour and embodied responses in order to actively produce a social space through ‘practico-sensory activity’ (Lefebvre 27).

‘In contrast to the spectacular visual impressions associated with its two monuments—the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge—the auditory field of Circular Quay renders palpable histories and losses that are not visible to the eye and therefore conveys a sense of the place as a ghosted site.’

This is especially striking at Circular Quay where the apprehension of sound constructs provisional sonic environments that appropriate and divert this touristic and colonised space from its prescribed meanings. In contrast to the spectacular visual impressions associated with its two monuments—the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge—the auditory field of Circular Quay renders palpable histories and losses that are not visible to the eye and therefore conveys a sense of the place as a ghosted site. When Ellie encounters there the sounds of the didgeridoo played by an indigenous busker, for instance, she experiences a type of ‘aesthetic apprehension’ in which listening prompts her to reconstruct the space as a palimpsest with a rich

temporal complexity. As she hears the music of the didgeridoo, different notions of time intermingle and form new configurations in Ellie’s imagination:

From somewhere drifted the sound of a busking didgeridoo with an electronic backbeat, *boum-boum, boum-boum; boum-boum, boum-boum*. The didgeridoo dissolved in the air, thick and newly ancient.

For tourists, Ellie thought, with no disparagement. For me. For *all of us*. *Boum-boum, boum-boum*.
(2)

For Ellie, such sounds have the effect of disrupting temporal hierarchies, mingling the past and the present on the same plane in ways that trouble distinctions between ‘old’ and ‘new,’ implying that reconciliation involves a relinquishment of ingrained Enlightenment or Western notions of time, space and progress. By contrast, when Catherine hears the sounds of the same didgeridoo player, the nature of her ‘aesthetic apprehension’ is of a different order:

It was the beauty of the sound that most surprised her. She had imagined a wearisome, uniform thrum, but heard instead a set of nuanced tones, at times like a human voice, distant, misremembered, at others like wind, or blown rain, or the amplified sighing and heartbeat one hears during illness or love-making [...] knowing nothing of the culture she responded only to the sound. (123)

Whereas Ellie has moved to Sydney from Western Australia and her listening is informed by a greater awareness of the complexities of settler-indigenous relations, Catherine is on a working holiday from the UK and in this context sound emerges as a pre-lingual bridge between cultures. Her response brings to mind Paul Carter’s important work on the ‘sound-in-between’ in facilitating multi-directional and non-hierarchical communication between

cultures who do not share the same language during moments of first encounter. ‘Our sounds begin in dialogue not monologue,’ Carter suggests. ‘They signify people orienting themselves toward each other, seeking in the little drama of their mutual misunderstanding to avoid reduction to an image’ (14). Against the backdrop of the colonisation of Australia, there is an implicit violence in the logic of the visual that proved foundational to the colonisers’ methods and motivations in asserting dominance and control over the indigenous population.^v In the modern city, the logic of the visual asserts its colonising character under the operations of a global capitalism that privileges the organ of sight, whether through the fetishisation of the commodity, the endless consumption of media images or via the ubiquity of surveillance. For Lefebvre, the reign of the visual in urban space must be contested in the struggle to forge a social space:

Sight and seeing, which in the Western tradition once epitomized intelligibility, have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency. (76)

While Jones neither rejects nor jettisons the power of sight in *Five Bells*, she does go beyond prescribed visions in acts of seeing which, coupled with multi-sensorial responses to architecture and monuments, involve the imaginative remaking of the familiar into highly subjective translations of iconic sites. Ellie encountering the Opera House for the first time, for example, can ‘imagine music in there, but not people, somehow. It looked poised in a kind of alertness to acoustical meanings, concentrating on sound waves, opened to circuit and flow’ (3). These idiosyncratic reinterpretations of the urban environment arise from the point of view of the body-in-space and gesture toward a form of praxis that recalls Lefebvre’s assertion that ‘the moment the body is envisioned as a practico-sensory totality, a decentring and recentring of knowledge occurs’ (62). In this way, Jones’s notion of the ‘reinvention of aesthetic apprehension for a kind of liberating, emancipatory end’ (qtd. in Gaunt 43) gains greater force and resonance when the appreciation of beauty is understood as capable of arising from the perception of all the senses, not simply sight and vision, and that its liberating or emancipatory potential can reside as much in the aesthetic pleasures of defamiliarisation, chance and dissonance as in symmetry, perfection and order.

BEYOND VISUAL RECALL: SOUND AND TRAUMA

Coupled with her ongoing concern for memory as an embodied phenomenon, Jones’s fiction reveals a heightened sensitivity to the ways in which individual experiences of grief, loss and bereavement intersect with collective memories of larger traumatic or catastrophic events as they unfold in a globalised world. In *Five Bells* these interactions between individual and collective experiences of trauma are both direct and oblique. As a survivor of the brutal upheavals of the Cultural Revolution in China, Pei Xing’s experience is one in which human devastation at both a personal and national level are inextricably connected. By contrast, the losses of Catherine and James take place at an individual level, though Jones frequently extrapolates the personal in the context of broader cultural and political events. The harrowing chance assault of the car crash that claims the life of Catherine’s brother Brendan, for example, finds its visceral parallel in the unpredictable shock and violence of the terrorist attacks and bombings connected with Ireland’s ongoing sectarian conflicts. At the same time, Catherine’s

identification with the assassinated journalist Veronica Guerin provides another important mediation point for working through her complex reactions to the incomprehensible death of her brother.

In his essay 'Invitation to the Voyage,' Dixon addresses not only Jones's interest in psychogeography but also locates trauma studies and the trauma novel as a significant area of concern for *Five Bells*. In particular, Dixon outlines three new directions that he argues the novel proposes for trauma studies: 'an interest in vernacular or everyday cultures of trauma, the out-folding to non-American and non-European cases, and the value of resilience' (12). In the context of my reading of *Five Bells* as an 'acoustical novel,' I would like to extend this formulation by proposing a fourth direction that highlights the novel's exploration of the differences between visual and aural modes of trauma recall and the ethical implications raised by these two models. These differences are especially dramatised in the contrast between James who, as Dixon points out, represents the classic 'melancholic' trauma subject bound to compulsion-repetition, and Pei Xing, who has managed to sufficiently assimilate her trauma experience in order to achieve a state of resilience. Yet James not only expresses traits of the melancholic trauma subject but also a tendency to relive his trauma through the aestheticised pain that he encounters in imagistic triggers, most notably in his strong identification with the Surrealist paintings of René Magritte. 'His images were of displacement and his figures were all verging on erasure,' (36) says James of his most memorable Magritte works. In contrast to the fixed circuitry implicit in the mode of visual recall exemplified by James, the summoning or recollection of trauma through hearing and listening appears to offer alternate possibilities for the working-through of trauma and perhaps suggests an important vehicle through which to reach the state of resilience exemplified by Pei Xing.

In its concern for the traumatic aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, *Five Bells* is not the first work of fiction by Jones to deal with a disastrous event in world history taking place in Asia. Her third novel, *Dreams of Speaking*, narrates an unlikely friendship between a young Australian writer, Alice, and an elderly Japanese scholar of modernity, Mr Sakamoto, that culminates in Alice's visit to Nagasaki where many years earlier Mr Sakamoto survived the atomic bombing of the city. With both the explosion and its ensuing devastation captured in startling photographic images, the Nagasaki bombing is representative of a traumatic event that calls upon the spectator to perform an act of visual witnessing. It is a task that Alice performs, somewhat involuntarily, when she visits the A-Bomb Museum during her last day in Nagasaki:

Opposite were six large video screens, playing and replaying in a continuous loop, six mushroom clouds photographed from B29 bombers. They rose in a grainy, scratchy slow motion [...] Six mushroom clouds were five too many: someone, perhaps the curator, imagined multiplication would register unthinkable dimensions. The bonfire of humans. The ghostly thunder. (185)

While the visual spectacle of atrocity challenges Alice's capacity for empathy and identification, for 'she could barely look' (185), the hearing of witness testimonials in the museum 'seized her almost as if they were overheard utterance, whispered for her alone, directly into her ear' (186). In writing about China's Cultural Revolution in *Five Bells*, a traumatic event for which oral histories and memoirs have arguably played a more significant representational role than visual or photographic images, Jones explores in greater depth how aural witnessing might diverge from visual witnessing whilst avoiding the reduction of these two modes of trauma recollection to a binary logic. When Pei Xing is eventually confronted with her torturer from the Revolution days, a prison guard who now goes by the name of Dong

Hua and lives in a nursing home on Sydney's North Shore, Pei Xing's journey to forgiveness does not follow the more typical route of the victim speaking aloud his/her testimony to a listener assuming the posture of witness. Instead, the healing and reconciliation between the two women occurs in a mediated fashion during Pei Xing's reading aloud of the 1957 Cold War classic of Russian literature, the novel *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak:

After five minutes or so they had entered their rhythm: the reader's voice in a steady current, the tone even, firm, and Russia, textual Russia, entered the room, seeping under the door, flying through the window, infusing the summer air, bringing to North Sydney the Red Army and the spring of 1922. (117)

As a counterpoint to the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis, in which the verbalisation of the traumatic experience poses an ethical dilemma in its prospective 'contamination' of the listener, here the acoustically rich scenario involved in reading aloud a text dealing with the Russian Revolution that holds resonance for both victim and perpetrator encourages a form of non-grasping mediation that gives way to healing while preserving the autonomy of both parties. Yet this is not to denigrate the significance of the visual in Jones's trauma model for the very process of listening to a text read aloud involves the work of visualisation. The relational kind of listening and imagining that take place within this auditory environment bring to mind what Roger Hallas has identified as 'embodied spectatorship' in Derek Jarman's film *Blue*, in which 'hearing similarly frames the spectator's relation to otherness in terms of proximity and corporeal implication' (46).

When sound unsettles the remembering subject in *Five Bells* the responses stimulated by hearing appear more unstable and less determined than those reactions provoked by imagistic triggers, suggesting an alternative (although not necessarily a solution) to the preoccupation with the fixity of the visual in the trauma model (as reflected in the tendency to conceptualise a scarring memory as 'imprinted' in the mind or embedded in memory^{vi}). In its more positive manifestations, the indeterminate and relational qualities of sound situate the subject within a community of listeners. Alternatively, sound might also direct the subject's focus inward toward the contemplation of a personal soundtrack that in moments of solitude provides comfort and consolation. This idea is expressed in *Five Bells* through the recurring motif of 'inward music,' a phrase drawn from Pasternak's novel and introduced by Pei Xing's father, a translator of Russian literature, when he asserts that 'we all possess an *inward music*' (39). This rousing suggestion becomes for Pei Xing a source of strength during her years in prison when '*Doctor Zhivago* was her secret life, whispered not into the air, but into the cardinal recesses of her heart, held close as she had been held by her mother and father' (155). Configured as 'inward music,' the palpability of sounds and recited words function as a *presence*, spectral and haunting yet potentially redemptive in their capacity to offer an imaginary point of identification or otherness that contributes to Pei Xing's survival and eventually a resilient working-through of her trauma.

While it would be too great a leap to assert that sonic triggers and aural modes of recall 'solve' the trauma problem in any literal or direct fashion in *Five Bells*, it is nevertheless possible to argue that aural witnessing pluralises the trauma model, at the very least. An ethical imperative is introduced by this pluralising of the trauma model as it implies a challenge to the deep-seated notion that trauma is an unassimilable phenomenon. In the act of listening, the subject becomes implicated in an 'embodied spectatorship' that suggests possibilities for the working-through of trauma. At the same time, listening and aural responses are pivotal to the

notion of the praxis of everyday life that emerges from the characters' embodied responses to the city. Commenting upon *Five Bells* as an 'acoustical novel' Jones has modestly suggested that 'I meant simply that I tried to include sound in the texture of imagining the city' (qtd. in Gaunt 43). Taking into account this modest ambition, it would be a mistake however to simply relegate sound to a merely ambient role in the novel. As Lefebvre points out, the textures of a city are inseparable from our lived experiences of a space and its social character:

The production of space lays hold of such structures and integrates them into a great variety of wholes (textures). A texture implies a meaning – but a meaning for whom? For some “reader”? No: rather, for someone who lives and acts in the space under consideration, a “subject” with a body – or, sometimes, a “collective subject.” (132)

Portraying her characters in the thralls of 'aesthetic apprehension' perceived by the full spectrum of the senses, Jones restores a riveting complexity to modern subjectivity. Like Ellie standing before the monument of the Sydney Opera House where she imagines it as alert to 'acoustical meanings' and 'opened to circuit and flow'(3), the appropriation of space through sensorial responses is about the vital work of implication, contact and involvement with the other. While acknowledging the many alienating aspects of modernity, the cosmopolitanism of *Five Bells* ultimately presents the reader with a zone of potential encounters where synchronous moments offset the isolation of a disjointed world and the creative capacity to transform one's mental and physical landscape through the work of imaginative labour assumes an ethical and redemptive significance.

 NS

ELLA MUDIE is an arts writer currently undertaking a PhD candidature with the University of New South Wales that focuses on experimental spatial narratives and the literary history of the psychogeographical novel. Her scholarly and non-scholarly writing has appeared in a number of publications including *Meanjin*, *The Age*, *Real Time*, *Afterimage*, *Art & Australia* and the *Griffith Review*. Author contact: ellamudie@yahoo.com.au

NOTES

ⁱ Praxis links thought with action, placing emphasis upon the process of realising ideas beyond their theoretical or contemplative consideration. The capacity of literature to embody praxis is contested. While I do not read *Five Bells* as an *activist* novel I posit its attention to the production of an *active* life through the transformative power of imaginative labour as a form of praxis.

ⁱⁱ Robert Dixon's essay 'Invitation to the Voyage: Reading Gail Jones's *Five Bells*,' published in late 2012, provides the first extended scholarly response to the novel and sets out a number of contexts for its future readings. Given the comprehensive thematic reach of Dixon's essay some overlap in our responses is inevitable and I am indebted to a number of valuable insights in this

foundational work. However, I depart from Dixon by proposing the centrality of sound as belonging to a larger 'spatial practice' at work in the novel that not only extends but also complicates key concerns in Jones's *oeuvre*, specifically in questioning the role of the visual in relationship to memory, trauma and belonging in postmodern space and subjectivity.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Wolfreys: 'the spectre being, as Jacques Derrida has brought to our attention, the *revenant*, the one who only ever comes in coming back' (139). Thus 'the spectral, *is not*. Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, *is never present as such*' (Derrida qtd. in Wolfreys 139).

^{iv} The term 'spatial turn' was polemically introduced by the American geographer Edward W. Soja in the mid-nineties in a bid to call greater attention to the category of space which he argued had become divorced from the more privileged category of time. In broader terms, the 'spatial turn' designates a process of convergence occurring from about 1970 onwards when a growing number of disciplines began to assess space as actively produced and thus existing in close relationship with the operations of capitalism, surveillance and flows of power. Especially influenced by the works of French theorists including Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Paul Virilio, the 'spatial turn' in many ways evolves from the politicisation of urban space that occurred in Paris during the unrest of May '68.

^v I am thinking primarily of the relationship between the visual and the map according to which sight proved central to the organisation and demarcation of territory in the interests of the coloniser. It is also worth noting the extent to which colonisation involved bringing the indigenous population into the regime of visibility in the Foucauldian sense of the panoptic gaze especially evident in the establishment of missions and reserves as well as in the misuse of visual documentary methods for classificatory purposes.

^{vi} Cathy Caruth's work on the unassimilated traumatic image is paradigmatic in this respect. For Caruth, 'to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event' ('Introduction' 4-5).

WORKS CITED

- Carter, Paul. *The sound in between: voice, space, performance*. Kensington: UNSW P, 1992. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. 'Introduction.' *Trauma: explorations in memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 3-12. Print.
- Debord, Guy. 'Theory of the Dérive.' 1956. *Situationist International Anthology*. Ed. and trans. Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006. 62-66. Print.
- . 'Theses on Cultural Revolution.' 1958. *Situationist International Anthology*. Ed. and trans. Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006. 53-54. Print.
- Dixon, Robert. 'Invitation to the Voyage: Reading Gail Jones's *Five Bells*.' *JASAL* 12.3 (2012): 1-17. Web.
- Ellis, Steve. *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.

- Gaunt, David. 'Sounds of the City (Author Interview: Gail Jones on *Five Bells*).' *Bookseller + Publisher Magazine* 90.5 (2010/11): 43. Print.
- Hallas, Roger. 'Sound, Image and the Corporeal Implication of Witnessing in Derek Jarman's *Blue*.' *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. Eds. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas. London: Wallflower, 2007. 37-51. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. Print.
- Jones, Gail. 'A Dreaming, A Sauntering: Re-Imagining Critical Paradigms.' *JASAL* 5 (2006): 11-24. Web.
- . *Black Mirror*. Sydney: Picador, 2002. Print.
- . *Dreams of Speaking*. 2006. Sydney: Vintage, 2007. Print.
- . *Five Bells*. Sydney: Vintage, 2011. Print.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. Print.
- Roughley, Fiona. 'Spatialising Experience: Gail Jones's *Black Mirror* and the Contending of Postmodern Space.' *Australian Literary Studies* 23.2 (2007): 58-73. Web.
- Situationist International. 'Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s.' 1959. Trans. Paul Hammond. *Internationale Situationniste* 3 (December 1959). Situationist International Online. 19 July 2013. Web.
- Slessor, Kenneth. 'Five Bells.' 1939. *Poems*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957. Print.
- Wolfreys, Julian. *Deconstruction-Derrida*. London: Macmillan, 1998. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. 1925. London: Penguin, 2000. Print.