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Abstract

Using the logic of the absence-presence of light (through mimicking shadows and remnant ghosts) in the images/time-images of Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* and Jane Campion's *The Piano*, this paper attempts to frame time such that the over-exposed past becomes the blank page of the future. I propose that history, when viewed in the light of the present, enables a truly open future for female and postcolonial subjects. It is important, therefore, to think of the blank page emerging from the over-exposed image not as symbolic of a psychoanalytic lack of the phallus, but as an open response in the wake of the excesses of phallogocentrism and Eurocentrism. Such a conception of the past and the future in terms of an excess and a lack that do not constitute a dialectical relationship requires a re-visioning of the Hegelian view of time as "linear, progressive, continuing, even, regulated, and teleological" (Grosz, 1995: 98). Following Bergson and Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz problematizes the common philosophical view that history is the basis of learning from the past, and the idea that by reflecting on it, we can improve the future:

Keywords

photography, jones, gail, piano, campion, jane, lights, time, sixty, cinema

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Sukhmani Khorana

Photography, Cinema and Time in Jane Campion's *The Piano* and Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights*

Using the logic of the absence-presence of light (through mimicking shadows and remnant ghosts) in the images/time-images of Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* and Jane Campion's *The Piano*, this paper attempts to frame time such that the over-exposed past becomes the blank page of the future. I propose that history, when viewed in the light of the present, enables a truly open future for female and postcolonial subjects. It is important, therefore, to think of the blank page emerging from the over-exposed image not as symbolic of a psychoanalytic lack of the phallus, but as an open response in the wake of the excesses of phallogocentrism and Eurocentrism. Such a conception of the past and the future in terms of an excess and a lack that do not constitute a dialectical relationship requires a re-visioning of the Hegelian view of time as "linear, progressive, continuing, even, regulated, and teleological" (Grosz, 1995: 98). Following Bergson and Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz problematizes the common philosophical view that history is the basis of learning from the past, and the idea that by reflecting on it, we can improve the future:

Such a view of history can at best understand the present in terms of realisation, and can only see the future in terms of tendencies and features of the present. The future can only be understood as a prospective projection of the present. This produces a predictable future, a future in which the present can still recognise itself, instead of a future open to contingency and hence to transformation. What is needed in place of such a memorial history is the idea of a history of singularity and, particularly, a history that defies repeatability and generalisation. Only such a history would be commensurate with a politics directed to the pragmatics of change. Such a history, through its repetitions and traces, is mobilised not by bringing out the resonances, structures or regularities of historical processes and events, but to bring out the latencies, the potentiality of the future to be otherwise than the present (2000: 229-230).

In other words, Grosz argues for an understanding of the past and an openness to the future that is not a realisation of possibilities, but an actualisation of the virtual. Such an unrepresentable future would enable a radically different politics for female and postcolonial subjects because just as the Age of Reason "confirmed the fundamental masculinity of the knower, and left little or no room for female self-representations, and creation of maps and models of space and time based on projections of women's experiences" (Grosz, 1995: 100), it also arguably misrepresented the cultures of formerly colonised people through a discourse of orientalism (Said, 2003). The Age of Reason, I propose, must be replaced by the Age of Intuition – the interstitial time and space where maculate images and irrational cuts can thrive. The new framing of time is also a disframing – a becoming where shadows and ghosts are dehistoricised so they can unpredict the future.

In a paper exploring the paradoxical origins of the photographic medium as both a scientific process and an uncanny phenomenon, Tom Gunning observes, "there is no question that in the nineteenth century we enter into a new realm of visuality, and that it is the photograph that stands as its emblem" (1995: 42). It is not surprising then, that the photograph figures as a crucial "medium" in the nineteenth-century based visual narratives of *The Piano* and *Sixty Lights*. Moreover, "the photograph's dual identity as an icon, a bearer of resemblance, and as an index, a trace left by a past event" (Charles Sanders Peirce cited in Gunning, 1995:42) appears to make an appearance in both texts.

The first instance of a photographic image in *The Piano* occurs when Stewart secretly views Ada's photo on his way to meet the original. While we are unaware of the "event" that led to this photograph, its reception constitutes an event in itself. On seeing Ada at the beach soon after examining her image, Stewart is surprised by her smallness, and comments to Baines, "She's stunted, that's one thing" (Campion, 1993: 22). It appears, therefore, that in its inability to accurately "reflect" reality, the photograph is itself revealed to be unreal, or a stunted version of reality. However, what is really exposed is Stewart's phallogocentric gaze that projects its own imagination on to the female original of the photograph. This becomes apparent when a change in the angle of the light transforms Ada's photograph into a mirror that Stewart uses to fix his hair. Carol Jacobs observes, "the mirroring glass also repeatedly catches less elusive objects of [Stewart's] ownership, the trees of the bush behind them" (1994: 768), thereby concluding, "In the photograph lies the will, however melancholy and disappointed, to possess woman, nature, and self" (1994: 768). Why is it, however, that even though Stewart appears to use the image/mirror to scrutinise himself, all that appears to us in the frame is Ada, and then the bush? Is Campion shattering the mirror-myth of history by dismissing the reflection of the male coloniser and by presenting that of the colonised landscape, or is she (un)predicting a future where women and colonised peoples are becoming-subjects wiping out the being of the possessing male gaze? Perhaps it is the reflecting/distorting, past/future presence of the photographic image that transforms it into an absence – an absence of fluid becoming in the narrative of history, and an absence of fixed being in the stories yet to come.

The second instance of photography in this film is that of the making of an image, and even though we do not see the final image, the process itself is replete with the absences characteristic of photography. Soon after Ada and Flora's arrival in Stewart's house, Aunt Morag suggests they have a wedding picture: "If you cannot have a ceremony together, you have at least a photograph" (*The Piano*). This photograph not only replaces an absent ceremony, but also excludes Flora, the progeny of an absent father. While the photograph is taking place against a backdrop that is "an ironical substitution of simulated trees for the scene of the actual trees behind it" (Jacobs, 1994: 766) with Ada wearing a make-shift wedding dress, Flora narrates a make-believe story of her absent father's betrothal to her mother to Aunt Morag. The rain pouring down on one sham wedding is paralleled in the other:

FURTHER INFORMATION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sukhmani Khorana commenced a PhD candidature in the Discipline of Media at the University of Adelaide in early 2007 after completing an Honours degree from the same university. For her doctoral project, she plans to write a traditional thesis examining the textual readings of Indo-Canadian director Deepa Mehta's elemental film trilogy in addition to making a contextual video exploring the politics of trans-national reception. Sukhmani is also interested in ficitocriticism, postcolonial literature, post-structural feminism and their intersections.

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FLORA: when their voices rose for the final bars of the duet a great bolt of lightning came out of the sky and struck my father so that he lit up like a torch.... And at the same moment my father was struck dead my mother was struck dumb: She – never – spoke – another – word ... *The story is interrupted by the return of the WEDDING PARTY, who are dripping wet, exactly as the couple in the story* (Campion, 1993: 31-32).

Therefore, the photograph not only records Ada and Stewart's absent wedding ceremony, giving them the semblance of a "real" married couple, an identity for the future, but also invokes another absent wedding – that between Ada and Flora's father. Just as Aunt Morag credits Flora's story, Stewart is willing to believe in a wedding that is merely a projection of his own fancies. This becomes clear when Stewart appears to look through the camera at Ada, but Campion retains his eye on the screen instead of following classical Hollywood convention by showing us his point of view (Bihlmeyer, 2005: 71). The wedding, therefore, is a wedding only in Stewart's eyes, and is as constructed as his own image of himself. If this image has been passed down to us as factual history, does it not need to be exposed to light once again?

Helene Cixous comments on the role of vision in her writing:

Maybe I have written to see; to have what I never would have had; so that having would be the privilege not of the takes and encloses, of the gullet, of the gut; but of the hand that points out, of fingers that see, that design, from the tips of the fingers that transcribe by the sweet dictates of vision. From the point of view of the soul's eye: the eye of a womansoul (1991: 4).

It is possibly the eye of a womansoul that makes Lucy Strange photosensitive, enabling her to view the world photographically from a young age. According to Gail Jones, "a photographic intelligence unfixes time in a strange way" (cited in Koval, 'Gail Jones'), and this is what transforms the ordinary girl Lucy into a Strange woman. As Aviva Tuffield puts it, "Her early death, foreshadowed from the start, frames the novel, but Lucy lives as a woman ahead of her time, a visionary who predicts future uses for photography (such as x-rays and ultrasound) and is prescient about the consequences of privileging the visual" ("Strange Things"). Despite the disappointment of finding Issac Newton "at least twenty years older than his daguerreotype suggested" (Jones, 2004: 120), Lucy revels in her first encounter with India by virtue of her photographic intelligence: "She knew at once that this world had a denser pigmentation: colours were brighter, more strident, and more adhesive to their objects" (Jones, 2004: 121).

Lucy's own photographs exhibit a similar density (insofar as we can only read about them) and are reminiscent of John Berger's comments on the neo-realist photography of Paul Strand: "His best photographs are unusually dense – not in the sense of being over-burdened or obscure, but in the sense of being filled with an unusual amount of substance per square inch. And all this substance becomes the stuff of the life of the subject" (1980: 44). Lucy's preference for the denser hues of India leads her to wish herself dark, and Issac Newton to suspect her of "native appetites" (Jones, 2004: 137). This preference also translates into Lucy's aestheticisation of the maculate image over the immaculate one as she learns to use the camera under the tutelage of Victor Browne, a man who considers photography a science. It is worth noting that Issac and Lucy approach Browne to create an immaculate image of their absent relationship: "Issac has decided that he and Lucy should have a portrait photograph taken, before...her shape betrayed her, an image, he said, that would help later on and might even serve as consolation to the future child" (Jones, 2004: 139). Echoing Ada and Stewart's wedding photograph in *The Piano*, this image "posed Issac Newton and Lucy Strange as a legitimately married couple in an English park" (Jones, 2004: 140). The question arises again – can the future be consoled by such a construction of its past?

Along with the simulated photograph of Lucy and Issac's relationship, Jones gives us another image – that of Lucy's brother Thomas and his wife Violet's "real" wedding. The latter photograph is taken by Lucy herself and presents an alternative view of the past by keeping it alive for the future:

She saw Thomas and Violet again, amorous and manifest. She had by magic and illusion travelled them through time, made them ever-alive, endowed their faces with the nacre of wet seashells and the promise of persisting youthfully, on their marriage day, for generations to come.
'Behold me', each face called from the past to the future (Jones, 2004: 171).

Such an image of the past coincides with the writing of postmodern fiction, which, according to Linda Hutcheon, re-writes or re-presents the past in fiction and in history "to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (1988: 110). Following David Michael Levin's Heideggerian exploration of vision, David Palmer similarly sees the photograph as demonstrating the impossibility of closure and of totalisation of the subject and the impossibility of coming into being" (1997: 277). He further observes that photographic images "become 'incorporated' in the construction of the self, perpetually re-inserted and re-narrated in our present becoming" (Palmer, 1997: 273). It is perhaps such a becoming that is at work in the last photograph of Lucy taken by her lover Jacob Webb with the rest of her family. As Jacob is unsure of the principles of exposure, Lucy leaves her pose to help him, with the result that while the others photograph clearly, Lucy "[appears] in print as blurred and residual", resembling the "pale diaphanous images photographers called 'ghosts'" (Jones, 2004: 236). In a curious amalgamation of absent-present, inconclusive becoming, this image not only foreshadows Lucy's approaching death, but also her continuing ghostly presence in the images, stories and memories she leaves behind. This ghost, in other words, is not just the present-absence of the past, but also the absent-presence (as in the oncoming presence) of the future, and could stand for feminist philosopher Drucilla Cornell's "imaginary domain" for women's representations, which, according to Elizabeth Grosz, is "the domain not simply of imagination, but also the space of virtuality, of what is new and not yet actualized" (2005: 73).

Notwithstanding the significance of photography in *Sixty Lights*, the narrative can also be read as a series of Deleuzian cinematic time-images. Commenting on the emergence of the time-image or the neorealism of European cinema after the cinema of the movement-image in the aftermath of World War II, DN Rodowick observes:

Linear actions dissolve into the form of aleatory strolls. Events occur where it is no longer possible to act or react: situations of pain or beauty that are intolerable or unsupportable; occurrences that are incomprehensible or undecidable... Acts of seeing and hearing replace the linking of images through motor actions; pure description replaces referential anchoring" (1997: 12-13).

After being diagnosed with consumption, Lucy begins aimless strolls around London with her baby Ellen: "Lucy had become a walker. Something in her, some restlessness or some sorrow or drive forwarded into life, compelled her to move through this city as though she could claim its whole compass" (Jones, 2004: 191). The unmotivated nature of these excursions, as well as their incomprehensibility to the rational world are indicated through Thomas thinking of them as a "mild form of madness" and heads turning when Lucy begins to take her camera along (Jones, 2004: 192).

The rest of the narrative is punctuated with similar wanderings that are purely descriptive acts of seeing rather than linear actions. Even before learning the art of photography, Lucy records seemingly random and everyday images in her diary, calling them *Special Things Seen*, and later, *Photographs Not Taken*. These arguably constitute the clichés of the time-image in that they are "both tired images and snapshots or random impressions" (Rodowick, 1997: 77). Moreover, by imbuing these tired images with a special or photographic quality, Jones is effecting a "feminist transvaluation of values" in that activities that were uninteresting from the point of view of the traditional historian are being viewed with new meaning and significance (Seyla Benhabib, 1995: 23).

While Jones may be putting a new stint on particular tired images, can the montage that is her book live up to this novelty in its entirety? Called *Sixty Lights*, the novel seems to refer to the sixty minutes constitutive of an hour as it comprises sixty chapters that are divided equally among the three parts of the book. The three parts, in turn, can be read as representing three distinct phases of Lucy's life – her past in Australia, her present in England and India, and her future through her daughter Ellen in England. However, such a reading puts the novel in the same league as the classical chronological narrative of the movement-image in cinema and the *Bildungsroman* in literature. Despite appearing to be sequential, the novel exhibits a key narrative attribute of the time-image, the chronosign:

Chronosigns express the transcendental form of time. The empirical or chronological view of time measures past and future as self-similar moments that precede or follow the present in a line of succession...Rather than a chronological and successive addition of spatial moments, time continually divides into a present that is passing, a past that is preserved, and an indeterminate future (Rodowick, 1997: 81).

The three parts of *Sixty Lights*, then, stand for the three trajectories of time, and not its successive movement. In a review of the novel, Ion Martea reads this as a repetitive structure, observing, "Almost everyone and everything dies at the end of each chapter: Lucy's mother, her father, her uncle, loveliness, virginity, love, passion, pain, desire, hope", and adds, "Each chapter is constructed with intense visual acuity to obtain a complete photograph, a melancholic reminder of lost times" ('Sixty Lights'). It appears, therefore, that even as each chapter, like each minute, passes (away), Jones creates an image or a light of it so that it both shadows and foreshadows the ensuing chapters.

According to Rodowick, "The time-image produces a serial rather than organic form of composition. Instead of differentiation and integration, there is only relinking by irrational divisions" (1997: 14). Such irrational divisions are visible in the very first sequence of *The Piano* which begins with Ada covering her face with her hands, yet letting in enough light through the gaps between her fingers to give us an image of her world. Commenting on the ambiguous space of these fingers, Jacobs argues: "If the wedding photograph followed by Flora's filmic imagination and then the double theatre of the bluebeard play place fixed representation and its emancipation side by side, the opening shots make Ada's fingers both of these almost at once and also the veil between" (1994: 770). The irrational cut of the time-image can also be seen in the hoop-skirt tent that Ada and Flora inhabit on landing at a beach in New Zealand, the curtain that separates Baines' chamber from the room where Ada plays the piano, the sheets with peepholes used for the performance of Bluebeard, the hole in Ada's stocking that Baines uses to feel her skin, the planks that Stewart places on the window in Ada and Flora's bedroom, the spaces between the wooden blocks of Baines' hut that enable Flora and then Stewart to glimpse Ada and Baines' love-making, and finally the dark veil that Ada wears while practising sounds. What do these variously opaque, translucent and transparent divisions signify? Deleuze writes:

The modern image initiates the reign of 'incommensurables' or irrational cuts: this is to say that the cut no longer forms part of one or the other image, of one or the other sequence that it separates and divides...The interval is set free, the interstice becomes irreducible and stands on its own (1989: 277).

The irrational cuts of *The Piano*, therefore, arguably suggest an autonomous and hybrid space where encounters between liminal subjects like Ada and Baines can take place. Sue Gillett argues, "The Maori land and culture provide a context and imagery for the lawlessness of Ada's and Baines's behaviour, and adds, "A space must be found, or created, shared and not stolen, in which the territory between themselves, man and woman, may be explored...It is a space of difference, a between space, traversed by encounters between different cultures, different sexes, different languages, different desires" (1998: 155). A postcolonial space, it appears, has also become a space for the exploration of a sexual difference that exists in and through a future anterior, a difference that is yet to take place (Grosz, 2005: 175).

The irrational cut of the time-image also produces a disjunction in our sensory-motor schemata, thus producing what Deleuze calls "a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character" (1989, 20). If the image(s) of the love-making between Ada and Baines constitute such a pure optical-sound image, what can we say about the scenes where Ada appears to caress Stewart without emotion or reason? According to Deleuze, the time-image not only disturbs our sensory-motor connections, but also combines the optical-sound image with the enormous forces of a profound and vital intuition (1989: 22). If Ada's emotions for Baines are as intuitive as her curiosity for the male body that is Stewart, then the latter image is arguably also an optical-sound image because of, and not despite its excesses. The "purity" of this image is reinforced by Campion's comments on her treatment of sex in the film:

I have enjoyed writing characters who don't have a twentieth-century sensibility about sex. They have nothing to prepare themselves about its strength and power... the husband Stewart had probably never had sex at all. So for him to experience sex or feelings of sexual jealousy would have been personality-transforming. The impact of sex is not softened, it's cleaner and extremer for that (1993: 137-138).

If Campion's radical exposure of the vulnerability of a Victorian male appears incommensurable with her seemingly nostalgic representation of an intuitive sexuality, then the film has cut through our expectations; it has shown us the beauty and the horror of the past; it has signalled an unpredictable future.

It appears, therefore, that an examination of images/photography in *The Piano* and *Sixty Lights*, as well as a consideration of attributes of the time-image/cinema in both has aesthetic and political implications. Moreover, not only do the texts contain these images and time/images, but also their form manifests the absences of maculate photography and the irrational cuts of non-linear cinema. Thus, they both argue for and present a new discourse for representing time in general, and the history of women and postcolonial people in particular. This discourse is comparable to Cixous' literary-philosophical practice (1994: 32) in that it rejects the objectivity and truth-claims of scientific representations. Instead, it relies on a crystalline, multi-faceted process that illuminates the past so as to make visible the distorted image of history and refract it, thereby creating a blank page, an in-between space, and a future anterior where a new politics can thrive.

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