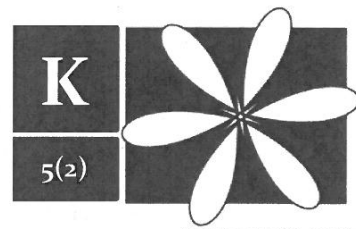


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## Erotic Indifference to Time

JONATHAN KEMP

In place of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art  
Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (1967, 14)

What is significance? It is meaning, *insofar as it is sensually produced*  
Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990, 61, original emphasis)

Time has, indeed *is*, a body  
Elizabeth Freeman *Queer Temporalities* (2007, 159)

In an early work by Jean-François Lyotard in which he discusses a line drawing by Picasso of a naked woman sleeping where three different positions are portrayed simultaneously, he refers to what he calls the drawing's "erotic indifference to time, to reality, to exclusive poses" (Lyotard 1984, 64). Lyotard frames his discussion of Picasso's sketch *Etude de nu* within Freud's concept of the unconscious; specifically its timeless nature. According to Freud, the processes of the unconscious "are not chronologically ordered, are not altered by the passage of time; indeed *bear no relation to time whatsoever*" (2005, 69-70, emphasis added). Lyotard suggests that the transgressive quality of this image lies precisely in its infringement of "the set of rules regulating the constitution of the perceived object" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 63). It is an example of what he calls the *image-figure*, an 'unconscious space' beyond the realm of language where "the coexistence of several contours infers the simultaneity of several points of view" (p. 64). As such, it is a threat to reason/the rational, blatantly flaunting the protocols of representation, refuting mathematical time, order, meaning, clarity. For Lyotard this radical timelessness of the unconscious constitutes a libidinal band, which vibrates with white heat and refuses to settle, for to settle is to be temporalised, that is, to ossify into a mode of representation. This non-representational, non-

representable libidinal band is a fissure not only in the archaeology of the subject but also in the language and the culture by which that subject is constituted. It threatens the stability of representation by throwing into conflict the truth of its (representation's) unity. "We could call it Dionysian", Lyotard writes, "as an energetics indifferent to the unity of the whole" (1984, p. 64)<sup>1</sup>.

This essay investigates narrative representations of the erotic, specifically the masturbatory erotic, mainly in the fiction of Jean Genet, but with slight detours to Kathy Acker and James Joyce. I will be arguing that it's a form of sexuality indifferent to time, a form of queer temporality, understood here, to quote Dana Luciano, "not as an actualized truth but as the possible effect of an exploratory process of displacement" (Luciano 2007, 253). Queer is therefore being understood here as unorthodox, bent or against the grain, in the sense of moving across<sup>2</sup>. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes:

The word "queer" itself means across – it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart* (Sedgwick 1994, xii)

So what is being twisted in queer time? This essay argues that one thing that is being twisted in the fiction of Genet, Acker and Joyce is the linearity of a certain narrative time as it accrues and concentrates on the solitary erotics of masturbation. Meaning is twisted; words are twisted. There emerges a certain nonrelationality within both the subject and the language employed to represent that subjectivity. The linearity of narrative time unravels around the vanishing point of the self-pleasuring body, revealing the erotic indifference to time characterizing it.

The simultaneity in Picasso's image of three separate and inseparable positions collapses mathematical or clock time – the hours, minutes, seconds into which the flow of duration is divided. Whilst duration is inherently nonrepresentational<sup>3</sup> – indeed, actively resists representation – we might view Picasso's drawing as an attempt to represent duration as the simultaneous coexistence in space of heterogeneous positions. But what might it mean to attempt to represent

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<sup>1</sup> A fragmentary aesthetic, as developed elsewhere by Theodor Adorno (1997) – the fragment as a relation and not as a part of a whole, based on a different formulation of time: time not as a sequence of fragments that constitute a whole, but time as a simultaneity of fragments in relation to one another (Bergson 1950, 104), indifferent to the unity of the whole.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the genealogies of queer see my "Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future" in *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, Vol.6 Issue 1, 'Queer Studies: Methodological Issues: Follow Up' April 2009.

<sup>3</sup> "We are compelled to borrow from space the images by which we describe what the reflective consciousness feels about time and even about succession; it follows that pure duration must be something different", (Bergson, 1950, 91).

such erotic indifference to time in language, given that narrative is commonly perceived as a temporal medium? Before answering that question, however, I wish to explore the ways in which Henri Bergson's Duration and Freud's Unconscious share certain characteristics which might allow us to understand what this erotic indifference to time might mean.

### **Unconscious duration**

In a word, pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number: it would be pure heterogeneity (Bergson 1950, 104).

Whilst Bergson's concept of duration is developed only in relation to consciousness, I wish to use the term here in relation to the libidinal aspects of the unconscious mind, and specifically those centred around erotic daydreaming and masturbation. Like duration, like the unconscious, the libidinal is indifferent to clock time: the id functions to undermine the protocols of representation structured by the formation of the ego.

As much as the unconscious requires this spatio-temporal context or matrix to exist at all, it is indifferent to its obsession with slicing that spatio-temporality, or duration, into homogenised chunks of mathematical time. Clock time is bound up with the work of the conscious mind, or ego. Indeed, the ego is the most time-bound aspect of the Freudian psyche<sup>4</sup>. The time of the psyche is the time of the ego, running itself ragged trying to placate both the imperious demands of the id/unconscious and the no less insistent prohibitions of the superego<sup>5</sup>. Whilst this might suggest a radical differentiation between the id and the superego, Freud insists that, "as the heir to the Oedipus complex", the superego has "intimate connections with the id" (Freud 2005, 73)<sup>6</sup>.

Likewise, whilst the id and the ego are locked in perpetual conflict, the latter's primary objective is to serve the former, facilitate its pleasure-seeking (as well as appease the superego's Draconian nay-saying). "In popular language", writes Freud, "we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for the untamed passions" (Freud 2005, 74).

Whilst would be wrong to claim the id and the unconscious as synonymous terms, nevertheless, the workings of the id are unconscious, and we might say the solipsism of the id's polymorphous perversity finds its strongest expression through masturbation; an erotic solipsism which refuses the Lacanian Other, both as entity and/or Symbolic Order. The Symbolic Order is accessed – and one's position within it established – via the acquisition of language. Language –

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<sup>4</sup> For Freud the ego is "the source of the idea of time" (Freud 2005, 72).

<sup>5</sup> Freud adds a third Master for the ego to serve: the real world. For now, I am concerned only with the psychic realities represented by the id and the superego.

<sup>6</sup> As, indeed, does the ego: "Where id was, there shall ego be" (Freud 2005, 75).

property of the ego – is always therefore in some sense at odds with the unconscious, or what Lacan calls the Real<sup>7</sup>.

Duration accounts for how time moves at variable speeds according to consciousness; time is experienced durationally and not mathematically; subjectively, not objectively. Just as time is a symbolization of duration, so language is a symbolization of the unconscious. These symbolizations are externalizations of something internally experienced, and as such are mediations, interruptions, translations. Bergson's duration is very similar to Freud's unconscious: both are described as spaces of radical multiplicity and heterogeneity irreducible to spatio-temporal representation<sup>8</sup>. Both actively resist or oppose clock-time and language – constructions of the rational mind. So how might they be represented? Again, I am going to defer answering the question; instead, the following section explores dreaming and/as writing, with a view to moving further towards an answer.

## **Oneiric Time**

In psychoanalytic theories of literature the text is always in some sense coterminous with the dream: art is an artist and/or a culture dreaming; writing is a trace of something else, something unsayable<sup>9</sup>. How else could Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* become so apposite to literary analysis? The task of dream analysis is an act of translation, from the hieroglyphics of the dreamwork to the measured communication of rational language; from the id to the ego: the contents of the unconscious mind rendered comprehensible to the conscious mind. (As well as providing the psyche with time, the ego also provides it with language/rational discourse.)

In psychoanalytic terms, dreams constitute the workings of the unconscious, the expression of desires inarticulate – or unrepresentable – within the language of the conscious mind. The unconscious may be structured like a language, but it is in a very real sense a *foreign* language in need of translation, and here is where the problem arises. To translate, here, means to transform, to interpret, to extract or impose meaning. But how can the language of the Symbolic Order, of logic, of linearity ever correspond fully to the particularity of the unconscious, given that each unconscious is not only forged within the rubric of a shared experience – namely, culture – but

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of language acquisition as it pertains to construction of the self, see my *The Penetrated Male* (Punctum Books 2013) pp.58-59.

<sup>8</sup> In his reading of Bergson, Deleuze calls duration, "a *virtual* and *continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers" (Deleuze 1988, 38, original emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> On this see Jacques Derrida (1978, 197): "The symptomatic form of the return of the repressed: the metaphor of writing which haunts European discourse, and the systematic contradictions of the onto-theological exclusion of the trace. The repression of writing as the repression of that which threatens presence and the mastering of absence".

also, and importantly, within the singularity of a unique experience – namely, the self? The erotic indifference to time is located as and at a tension point between the sayable and the unsayable, between unity and fragmentation, between the now and our attempts – futile but necessary – to articulate the now.

In this sense, dreamwork is coextensive with duration, an unrepresentable difference that is not only beyond language but also, and importantly, constitutes a different way of thinking, one that refuses the distinctions between reason/unreason. As Freud remarks in a footnote added twenty-five years after the first publication of *Interpretation of Dreams*, "At bottom dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep" (Freud 1951, 465n). The dream is a process of thought, but one which cannot be narrativized because there is no time in which its tale can unfold. Or, rather, it cannot be narrativized according to our regular, time-bound protocols of representation. When we try and recount a dream, we impose on it a linear temporality – a logic – it doesn't actually possess. Dreams – and, by extension, literature – require a different form of telling, a different form of narrative time. One that doesn't submit to hermeneutics so readily, but requires what Sontag calls an erotics of art. She writes, "interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable" (Sontag 1967, p.8), whereas what is needed is for us to regain our senses, to *feel* a work of art rather than think it. To open oneself up to the sensuality of the text rather than wring it dry for meaning. To use our senses rather than our intellect in assessing a work of art.

In the next section, I shall endeavour to deploy such an assessment of Genet's work, confronting how erotic indifference to time can manifest itself in language.

### **The figural disrupts the discursive**

In Genet's first work of fiction, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (published 1943), the characters he offers up to the reader are, the narrator announces, all products of his dream life, conjured by his imagination in order to fuel his masturbation. The text is literally a wank fantasy, the pretext of its execution the solitary pursuit of pleasure. Sartre calls it the epic of masturbation: "One is bored in a cell; boredom makes for amorousness. Genet masturbates; this is an act of defiance, a wilful perversion of the sexual act; it is also, quite simply, an idiosyncrasy" (Sartre 1966, 10). Sartre makes of this act a stylistic gesture (and for him, Genet is all about gesture). This prompts one to ask, along with Barthes: "Does luxury of language belong with...wasteful expenditure, total loss?" (Barthes 1990, p.23)

Time and again throughout the story Genet tells us that he has to stop writing in order to masturbate – that the act of writing, and the events and people he describes, have aroused him so much that he cannot prevent his hand from wandering down to his crotch. Indeed, the act of writing and the act of masturbation become almost synonymous, both solitary acts of wasteful expenditure. He writes:

The Eternal passed by in the form of a pimp [...] bareheaded and very elegant, simple and smiling, simple and supple, Darling Daintyfoot arrived. There was in his supple bearing the weighty magnificence of the barbarian who tramples choice furs beneath his muddy boots. The torso on his hips was a king on a throne. Merely having mentioned him is enough for my left hand in my torn pocket to....

And the memory of Darling will not leave me until I have completed my gesture. (1969, p. 62)

The excess of language, the flaunting of words, arouses the narrator. Words excite him. The portrait of Darling that Genet describes turns him on, to the point that he must put down his pen – cut off the flow of words – and complete the gesture of self-pleasure.

Yet in that final reference to the *memory* of Darling, Genet snatches his character from the realm of the imagined and relocates him in the realm of the empirical. It is remembering Darling Daintyfoot that arouses Genet, not simply making him up. The imagination becomes a space that is not simply reality's other, but reality's counterpart. But in shifting from one register to another, from invention to recollection – we find a trace of duration. We have no idea whether Genet's narrator is writing and wanking, just as we have no way of knowing how long it took to complete the gesture. But language becomes here the impossible marker of that immeasurable duration.

One author we do know wrote whilst masturbating is Kathy Acker<sup>10</sup>. Acker's later work was literally an experiment in finding the language of the erotic body, some of it actually written whilst she masturbated and orgasmed. Like Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Acker's last novel *Pussy King of the Pirates* (1996) explores the erotic pretext of language as well as the descriptive pretext of eroticism:

The word fuck means something, but I don't know what it means in this school.

Today I masturbated. Here's what I wrote while I was masturbating: Whenever I look at her, I look through her eyes and then, walk into her.

Even though I'm in this school, which means I'm going to have to leave school because I'm going to graduate, I'm never going to be without her. Now, because I'm walking inside her, I own her.

I live between her fingernails and the skin that's underneath them.

As yet there aren't any pirates. (Acker 1996, p. 114)

Once more, we encounter the consanguinity of masturbation and writing, language and the body. Acker wanted to describe what she called the architecture of that place, that state, and write the body, the erotic body, the body taken out of the real world with its time-bound logic and

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<sup>10</sup> At a conference at the University of Sussex in August 1995, Acker spoke of her practice of writing whilst masturbating in order to records the thoughts and images – what she called the architecture – of her orgasm.

thrown into a white heat frenzy of fantasy; the body pleasuring itself, and in the process asking questions about the languages of the body and the relationship between language and the body. There is no master narrative or realist perspective to provide a background of social and historical facts. Acker draws out a dialectic between masturbation and schooling, pleasure and education or knowledge, in order to insist upon the knowledge contained within masturbation, or pleasure. As Thomas W. Laqueur reminds us, according to Freud masturbation is the lowest form of sexuality, and "the most resolutely antithetical to the process of civilization, especially for women" (Laqueur 2003, p.360). Masturbation is a kind of anarchy, the id pitched against the superego, pleasure against reason.

This idea is taken further in Acker's novel when the character O teaches the other prostitutes in a brothel to masturbate. As a consequence, the whores decide to masturbate so they can find a reason to live. They cease to be whores for their masturbation takes them out of the economy of exchange value and relocates them in an economy of the libidinal; and the two are antithetical. When they stop selling their bodies for money and start pleasuring themselves, the whores in Acker's tale learn that:

If language or words whose meanings seem definite are dissolved into a substance of multiple gestures and cries, a substance which has a more direct, a more visceral capacity for expression, then all the weight that the current social, political, and religious hegemonic forms of expression carry will be questioned. Become questionable.

Finally, lost.

The weight of culture: questioned and lost.

(Acker 1996, p. 31).

In Acker's world, as in Genet's, the erotic indifference to time is a threat to the established order. Whoring requires clock time (so much per hour) and to refuse that, to express indifference to it, is linked here to the solipsism of masturbation. In both writers, we encounter a link between this solitary eroticism and dreams.

Because reason is allied with repression and order, Acker prefers dreams, and the logic of dreams<sup>11</sup>. Like Genet, Acker dreams as she writes, or writes as she dreams: the text is the pretext for a dream<sup>12</sup>. It follows the logic of the dream, which is an erotic logic of simultaneity rooted in

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<sup>11</sup> Acker's work constantly references dreams or dreaming. Her third novel is entitled *I Dreamt I Was A Nymphomaniac: Imagining* (1974). Her novel *My Mother: Demonology* (1994), is composed of sections with titles like: 'I Dream', 'The Lack of Dreams Is The Disappearance of The Heart', 'The Underside of Dream', 'Returning To Dreaming', and 'My Dream of Returning To Cathy'. The main character is constantly dreaming up ways to meet with current and ex-lovers.

<sup>12</sup> As Lance Olsen remarks in his review of *Pussy*, Acker's "basic mode of writing is associative, like dreams, like good jazz, rather than linear and causal. It's a mode radically

(our experience of) the body. Writing of dreams and dreaming of writing become political acts precisely because they challenge the protocols of representation by dislodging meaning in favour of sensation. Duration, the timeless, the erotic, cannot be described, only felt, and these writers know this. Their work endeavours to recreate this feeling, and to do this they must interrupt narrative's flow with a series of punctures or twists that attempt to inscribe the erotic.

Darling Daintyfoot, carrying the mantel of the Eternal, a "barbarian who tramples choice furs beneath his muddy boots", whose "torso on his hips was a king on a throne", destabilizes narrative time and punches a hole through to the timeless time of the erotic, revealing the immeasurability of the space found there. The text comes out of the body and the body invades the text. A dialectic is thus established between, on the one hand, the making of culture by writing, and on the other, the unmaking of culture by a language harnessed to the logic of dreams and the body, rather than of reason. The binary logic of the either/or, rational/irrational, reason/unreason dialectic<sup>13</sup> is held in place here, though its security is threatened and the certainty of the divide is radically and productively blurred.

The characters populating Genet's erotic fantasy world are both present and absent simultaneously. When Genet imagines something, he is both constructing it and reconstructing it; it is both dream and memory. Indeed, in Genet's world we could say that memory *is* dreaming. To read him is to follow the marks left by a duration. Everything Genet writes is both a product of his memories and his dreams. There is an interdependence at work between the two, an erotic coupling of meaning and form, an equivocality at the heart of the text, a refusal to settle on either side of the divide: it is a poem disguising itself as a novel, a dream disguising itself as a memory.

In *Miracle of the Rose*, Genet declares: "Nothing will prevent me, neither close attention nor the desire to be exact, from writing words that sing" (1975, pp.17-18). The excess of his language - what he calls making words sing - is, in his work, linked to a masturbatory intensity that both emerges from the scene of writing and breaks away from it. Linear narrative time is destabilised by the erotic nature of the writing and its effects on the writer/narrator.

Elsewhere in the novel, Genet could be describing the process whereby the contents of the unconscious/the irrational smuggle themselves into the conscious mind via our dreams, or rather our memory of our dreams, which is not the same thing at all, when he writes:

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antagonistic toward rigidity in all its manifestations--narratological, sexual, theoretical, whatever--and one that performs a continual if paradoxical tightrope walk, as that last drawing in *Empire of the Senseless* suggests, between discipline and anarchy. Acker locates the possibility of hope in text and world within a dream of ongoing process rather than product" (Olsen 1996).

<sup>13</sup> See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (Routledge 2006); for a deployment of this work towards a queer aesthetic see Lynne Huffer, *Mad For Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2009).



We are, after all, familiar enough with the tragedy of a certain feeling which is obliged to borrow its expression from the opposite feeling so as to escape from the myrmidons of the law. It disguises itself in the trappings of its rival. (Genet 1969, 113)

The erotic impulse of the text is unlawful, fraudulent, that is its essence, if essence it can be said to have, and if fraudulence can ever be an essence, for the very concept betrays what it claims to isolate. The text is a fabrication and as such remains inherently indifferent, aloof, outside the laws of reason. Like the unconscious itself, language becomes here indifferent to time, but language is also obliged to express this libidinal energy by a contradictory logic, or an oppositional claim. As a consequence, absolute, total unequivocal meaning is sidelined in favour of words excessive and full of trickery; they may be harbouring a contrary feeling to the one they claim to express. As such, words (and the characters he constructs out of words) for Genet become fraudulent. He writes of his and Divine's beloved Darling:

Darling is merely a fraud ("an adorable fraud", Divine calls him), and he must remain one in order to preserve my tale. It is only on this condition that I can like him. I say of him, as of all my lovers, against whom I butt and crumble: "Let him be steeped in indifference, let him be petrified with blind indifference (1969, p. 113)

Darling's fraudulence is linked here with his erotic indifference – both to Genet and to Divine. Indeed, such indifference underlines the entire tale, the pretext from which it speaks. It is Genet's preference, for it is this indifference that arouses him most, as well as being something which "must remain in order to preserve" Genet's tale. Against such indifference the narrator is willing to "butt and crumble" for the jouissance such an act promises.

Darling, as Eternal, is indifferent to the markings of mathematical clock-time. We might recast Genet's line in Bergsonian terms, stating that 'Duration passed by in the form of a pimp' to get a better understanding of what is at stake here. There is a strong connection within Genet's narrative cosmology between indifference, the erotic, and excessive language/expenditure. His entire output seems to be autoerotic, establishing itself through processes of abjection and ecstasy that are co-dependent. There is never any sense of an Other in Genet's fiction; only the solitary masturbator voyeuristically playing with his own imagination.

There is a certain kind of excess in this lack of another, a linguistic or conceptual excess that cannot be conceptualized in any discourse except through rupture, emerging as it does in the relationship between the commensurability of something and its incommensurability. Barthes describes it as "the violation of a limit to the signifying space"(Barthes 1979, 126). Foucault calls it (after Bataille) a limit-experience, or the thought from outside. Lyotard calls it a differend, whilst for Kristeva it is the semiotic, or the abject. Derrida calls it many things: *différance*, trace, *pharmakon*, hymen, supplement, and gram: "a kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*"(Derrida 1981, 41, original emphasis). Sue Golding calls it "a kind of dirty, bloody poetics, one which insists

on, say, bodies and skin and smells and imagination in the face of it all" (Golding 2000, 286). For Golding, it is always dynamic, always political, always a risky and violent place to inhabit (Golding 2001, 52). It insists on a multiplicity or multi-dimensionality irreducible to the consolations of identity thinking and dialectical analysis. And whilst it's not my intention to conflate these thinkers here, it's clear that something is being gestured towards that remains in excess of representation, whilst nevertheless in some sense profoundly structural to it.

For Genet, this excess takes the form of words that sing; a baroque language described by Brigid Brophy as "the overblown, peony-sized language of devotional flowers" (Brophy 1979, 71). In all his work, the authorial presence is strong. The constructed nature of the tale, and Genet's power as its constructor, are always making an appearance, undermining the story's truth by constantly referring to its status as fiction. This technique allows him to reflect on the nature of his storytelling and what it is he is attempting. For example, in a passage from *The Thief's Journal* (1949), he says of his characters, "I wanted them to have the right to the honours of the Name" (1982, p. 90). He wants to name the unnamed, investing transvestites, pimps, queers, murderers and criminals with a discursive space, a name. But he wants also, at the same time, to complain that the process of naming as such is reductive, inaccurate and fraudulent. It allows Genet to shift across differing registers of time, between the time of the tale and the time of the teller's masturbation, as outlined above. In those moments of transition from one temporal register to another, the erotic breaks through and the narrator's words dissipate. In describing the character Lou Daybreak in *Miracle of the Rose* (1946), Genet claims that:

Lou's name was a vapour that enveloped his entire person, and when you pierced the softness and approached him, when you passed through his name, you scraped against thorns, against the sharp, cunning branches with which he bristled (1975, pp. 21-22)

The name does not hold together, but rather signifies a dispersion or dehiscence. In piercing the name a certain violence is encountered; a violence against meaning, against the immutability of logic, as well as a clear insistence upon the materiality of words. The inadequacy of the name, then, is also for Genet an excess: it is a vapour in which you may scratch yourself on thorns. Language becomes here something with which to cut the body. This excess remains for him 'outside', no matter how much his words may sing. As such, Genet's work articulates a politics of abjection; it constitutes an attempt both to name this excess and to interrogate language's ability to do this.

Given that the notion of the abject developed by Kristeva names the processes by which the human subject constitutes itself through ejecting the things it does not contain, how are we to understand this excess of language that is for Genet and his imprisoned narrator a space of erotic potentially – that is, his own body? These ejected things are characterised as waste, and include, Kristeva argues, the experience of sensuality or *jouissance* that attends the process of abjection.

For Genet, to use Barthes' words: "luxury of language belong[s] with...wasteful expenditure, total loss" (Barthes 1990, 23) – not unlike the wasteful, Onanistic expenditure of masturbation.

As such what Kristeva calls the semiotic lodges the body/bodily (and the senses/sensations of the body) within the symbolic, outlawed by the protocols of representation, though by no means any less real for all that. Such intensities – one might even call them repressed material – reappear, cast in the garb of a discourse that refuses to settle into meaning but rather invites and expresses that outlawed and repressed intensity. The text marks time, marks a duration that is impossible to measure without that text being ruptured violently by the breaks that signify a liminal point traced between language and the body, casting off its moorings to a single stable and unified meaning in order to set sail on a discourse that is ambivalent, excessive and which, whilst tracing the outline of a body, nevertheless cannot ever claim to represent it. Writing emerges in such an account – that is logos, logic, the language of the sayable – as a profoundly uncertain process. For writing could always be doing something other than telling the truth; it could be a lie<sup>14</sup>. In *Prisoner of Love* (1986) Genet asks:

What if it were true that writing is a lie? What if it merely enabled us to conceal what was, and in any account is, only eyewash? Without actually saying the opposite of what was, writing presents only its visible, acceptable and, so to speak, silent face, because it is incapable of really showing the other one. (p. 27)

The visible, Genet argues, is the silent, the trace of a sound and not the sound itself, just as text is the trace of an absent body. Writing is the transparent boundary separating thought from the body. Genet's work insists on transgressing that boundary repeatedly, dizzyingly. This is because, for Genet, words themselves are responsible for the disappearance of the body:

I was quite certain that a time would come when that wonderful language which was drawn from him would diminish his body, as a ball of yarn is diminished as it is used up, would wear it down to the point of transparency, down to a speck of light. It taught me the secret of the matter that makes up the star which emits it, and that the shit amassed in Jean's intestine, his slow, heavy blood, his sperm, his tears, his mud, were not your shit, your blood, your sperm. (Genet 1969, p. 62)

The singularity of the loved one's body is destroyed by the necessity of expressing it in a communal – that is, communicable – language. If language is always public, always shared, then in that commonality of sayability all individuality of the body is erased. The same words apply to

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<sup>14</sup> See Elizabeth Stephens (2007): "The distrust Genet's narrators express for a language that seems inadequate to their purposes leads them to explicitly distance themselves from the words they use"(p.135)

parts of the body which, being loved or not loved, known or not known, are as distant from one another as two stars. *Your sperm is not his sperm*. Your time is not his time.

Language does something to the body, but what that something is can never be articulated, precisely because of what I am calling erotic indifference to time, precisely because what language does to the body is to remove it from the present tense whilst leaving a mark or trace, what Beckett called a stain on the silence<sup>15</sup>. Language – like mathematical time – cuts duration into bite-sized units and in so doing turns it into something else. In that moment of *jouissance* which repeatedly erupts within Genet's narrative (as a wasteful expenditure both of words and sperm), the dissemination is complete. The moment is lost but a trace remains, a silence which is visible.

### **Let the timelessness of the text rule**

In this section, I take another detour, to another writer whose work tackles this complex interplay of masturbation, language and dreams.

Consider this: we extract meaning from a sentence only when it is complete, only when we have read it in its entirety and interpreted it in its totality, and then, beyond that, through its relationship to those sentences immediately within its proximity. In other words, we cannot settle on the meaning of a sentence until we have reached its end and considered the entire arrangement of words – the entire duration<sup>16</sup> of its logic. Reading takes time, but it is time broken into meaningful fragments, like seconds slicing the day and night into strips: 'the sentence is an analogical presentation of the event, which is as such unrepresentable' (Bennington, 1988, p. 177).

Now consider the eighteenth and final episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). This chapter consists of an almost unbroken flow of unpunctuated words representing a long interior monologue by Leopold Bloom's wife, Molly. Throughout the entire sixty pages of this monologue there are no punctuation marks whatsoever, except the one at the very end, marking the cessation of Molly's thoughts as well as the termination of the novel. The sixty pages are divided by seven paragraph breaks that are more like disruptions or redirections than the building or flowing of an overall linearity usually associated with the paragraph break (a rhizomatic text). Some scholars (and Joyce himself) consider the chapter to be separated into eight sentences, though no full stops are employed, apart from the terminal one.

Joyce has written something in this chapter that does not offer itself up to meaning in any traditional sense. There is no plot here, only a random stream of events and memories and fragments of thoughts that bob about in the languid turbulence of Molly's conscious mind. The

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<sup>15</sup> "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness", cited in Deidre Bair (1978, p631).

<sup>16</sup> I would like duration here to be understood in both the Bergsonian sense outlined above and in the sense of clock time, i.e., a text has a starting point and an end point.

chapter provides no clear meaning but rather *performs* Molly's thoughts and feelings. As such, it inhabits its subject. It does not merely represent a subject. With their expression through writing, these words mark the duration of Molly's thoughts. They hang, suspended, refusing linearity and rationality. Famously contradictory, this monologue actively refuses to settle into meaning, let alone character or discrete personality.

Joyce's schema for *Ulysses* gave each chapter of the novel a place, a time, a corresponding episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, an organ of the body, an art, a colour, a symbol and a technic. There is no time given to Molly's monologue, it floats in timelessness, in eternity. The scene is the bed, the organ the flesh<sup>17</sup>. The erotic indifference to time of Molly's interior monologue speaks for itself. Literally.

Explaining the bodily schema employed in the novel to his friend Frank Budgen, Joyce said:

In my book the body lives in and moves through space and is the home of a full human personality. The words I write are adapted to express first one of its functions then another.  
(Budgen, 1972, p. 21)

As with Genet, the materiality of words is important to Joyce; their power to trace or express the personality of the body. Yet, whilst this schema makes clear Joyce's use of body parts to organize the text, *Ulysses* can also, perhaps should, be viewed without this methodological scaffolding. *Ulysses* is a deleuzeguattarian body without organs (BwO). This BwO constitutes a different organization of the body, a *disorganisation*, consisting of several strata, and "behind each stratum, encasted in it, there is always another stratum" (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 159) – the BwO is a multiplicity. It thus constitutes a challenge to the conformity to which bodies are exposed, the command that "You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you're just depraved" (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 159). It is an erotic depravity that dissolves organisation of the body's intensities, that loses control of its mastery over sensations.

As such, the organs given to the chapters *organize* the novel, even as they at the same time demonstrate the textual fragmentation of the body. Moreover, the schema was central in defending the novel's right to be called a work of art rather than pornography. In short, the body parts structuring the novel were made explicit as a reaction to juridical claims against it. *The body was forced to organize in order to represent*. By presenting the chapter as he does, however, that is, without punctuation, Joyce banishes the external temporality of the text and invokes instead the internal, subjective temporality of duration.

In the 1985 film *James Joyce's Women*, the actress playing Molly – Fionnula Flanagan – suggests that Molly's famous repetition of the word "yes" throughout the monologue is a sign that she is masturbating. Like Genet, the recalling of erotic experiences causes Molly to pleasure

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<sup>17</sup> See Declan Kiberd's Introduction to James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1998), p.xxiii.

herself. Joyce himself considered 'yes' to be not only a 'female word' but expressive, in *Ulysses* at least, of the female sexual organ<sup>18</sup>. Derrida's essay, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce' (1987) places an affirmation of the flesh firmly within a feminine paradigm, even as it opens up that paradigm to a rigorous deconstruction (1992, pp. 256-309). It is, after all, Molly Bloom who has the last word in the novel, and that last word is 'Yes'; this is both an invitation to copulation, a willing acceptance of her own defloration – and, at the same time, as a recollection, it is the source of an arousal, a giving of her body in response to a call, a self-pleasuring in the timeless space of this final chapter.

It is a queer kind of temporality, this timelessness of the pleased body, of the solitary erotic. It challenges the time-bound linearity of language, just as the heterogeneous simultaneity of duration challenges clock-time. Both language and clock time are constantly in danger of erupting into wasteful expenditure. The erotic indifference to time is not the opposite of time, but another realm of temporality, a queer time-bound space of the body. In Genet's text, this movement describes a circuit between language and the body, whereby each disrupts/arouses and threatens to annihilate the other. The erotic indifference to time thus constitutes a different temporality, not the absence of temporality.

So to answer – at last – the question of how erotic indifference to time might be represented by language, we might say it can only do so by disrupting the linear flows of 'rational' narrative. As such, Genet's writing – like Acker's and Joyce's – constitutes a radical challenge to fictional realism, breaking, as it does, with the forward-rolling, time-bound linearity of traditional literary naturalism. Erotic indifference to time is indicative of the liminalities of our representational protocols, and, as such, it offers new ways of thinking (about) the body in its relations to time and narrative, to language and duration. Bound up in such a challenge is the question of the status of the body within discourse, and through a development and exploration of what constitutes erotic indifference in the works of these writers possibilities to think differently will be seen to offer themselves. Writing about masturbation, these writers offer a disruption that opens up the concepts of time, the unconscious and the erotic body to a productive interrogation.

These writers attempt to speak a new tongue that licks itself closer to the sweating contours of live flesh. In their experiments with what language can do – what sensations words can provoke – they reimagine language as something other than a time-bound, linear narrative tool, something other than a vehicle for communication and self-evident meaning. They reconfigure language and use its shapes to form gestures that describe a trajectory that is indifferent to time and conventional narrative as much as it is indifferent to the intersubjectivity of intercourse, sexual or

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<sup>18</sup> See Joyce (1975, p. 285). Noel Riley-Fitch refers to a consultation between Joyce and the French translator, Jacques Benoist-Méchin, during which Joyce was convinced of the potency of ending his novel with the word "yes" because it is "the most positive word in the language" (Riley-Fitch, 1985, pp. 109-10).

otherwise. Their language maps a different libidinal economy, one that, like a Möbius strip, describes a self-sufficient circuit that resists the logic of the either/or upon which considerations of time as straight or queer depend. Hopefully, these readings offer a way to consider queer time along the lines Lee Edelman has spoken of:

Maybe we need to consider that you don't get 'from here to somewhere else'. Maybe we need to imagine anew, 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it', not as the positive assertion of a marginalized identity but as the universal condition of the subject caught up in structural repetition. That's what makes queerness intolerable, even to those who call themselves queer: a nonteleological negativity that refuses the leavening of piety and with it the dollop of sweetness afforded by messianic hope (in Freeman 2007, 195)

The erotic indifference to time represented by the fictions explored here, languishing as they do in non-productive solitary sex, embody this 'nonteleological negativity' by focusing on a nonrelationality that scrambles the codes by which language and time are often made to make sense. They represent a disarticulation of what Edelman calls "the narrativity of desire"; they remain "unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning-production" (Edelman 2004, 9)<sup>19</sup>, and as such, their work offers new ways of thinking about the languages and temporalities of the body, the psyche and representation.

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<sup>19</sup> Whilst Edelman's primary focus in *No Future* is the death drive, his comments nevertheless remain pertinent when considering that other Freudian drive, the libidinal.

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**Jonathan Kemp**  
**Birkbeck, University of London**  
**[jonathanmkemp@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jonathanmkemp@yahoo.co.uk)**

Jonathan Kemp teaches creative writing and comparative literature at Birkbeck, University of London. His forthcoming book, *The Penetrated Male* (Punctum Books) explores the representation of the penetrated male body in modernist writing. He

also writes fiction, and his first novel, *London Triptych*, (2010) won the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award. His book, *Twentysix* (Myriad Editions, 2011), is a collection of erotic prose fragments which interrogate language in the tradition of Georges Bataille, Jean Genet and Kathy Acker. His research interests are the body and language, queer histories and time, gender and post-structuralism.