The titles of Jill Jones’ most recent full-length collections, *Broken/Open* (Salt Publishing, 2005) and her latest, *Dark Bright Doors* (Wakefield Press, 2010), have the contrariness of *koans*. There is something deliberately ‘puzzlingly poetic’ about them, and as in Jones’ poetry language is deployed as a decoy. Part of me resists this residual idea of the poet as a kind of sage, with the reader positioned as an initiate who must work for cathexis, yet I am also conscious that the experience of reading Jill Jones’ work is an active one. The act of reading becomes a participatory force, necessary to re-energise the detritus of language once the poet has left it. If the nervous system is the body’s communication network, then rather than ethereal disembodiment perhaps Jones allows for the synaptic relationship of poet and reader, from one nervous system to another.

A quietly prolific poet in many respects, Jones does seem to embrace poetry as an everyday ‘practice’. In her review of *Dark Bright Doors* (ABR, June 2010) Gig Ryan refers to the book’s ‘repetitive vocabulary’, and she isolates two distinct poetic modes that Jones employs: one relying on a form of phenomenological gesture and the other more ‘grounded in the everyday’. I think Jones’ poems work best and are at their most experiential when these two elements are combined, realising the chiaroscuro of the title’s *Dark Bright Doors* and most effectively capturing the dual sense of ‘being-in-the-worldness’ that the poet strives for. Some of the shorter gestural poems read more like philosophical exercises and I preferred the poems that also contain cultural—as much as natural—weathering, or poems where the transcendental image is usurped by a pithy turn of phrase: ‘gulls riding / what’s left of the air’ (High Wind At Kekerengu). While still predominantly a poet of city and suburb any dichotomy between nature and culture is a false economy in Jones’ poetry, with Jones positioning herself as an intermediatry (not afraid to invoke birds and clouds and flowers). It’s as if she won’t allow the so-called ‘school of quietitude’ to have a monopoly over the metaphysical (as is foregrounded in the somewhat cliché choice of quote on the front cover: ‘poetry of unsettling mystery and beauty’).

Last year Jill Jones co-edited with Michael Farrell *Out of the Box: Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Poets* (Puncher & Wattman, 2009) which was notable for its post-identity poetic. I can’t help but read Jones as part of a lineage that would see her partly inheriting and partly resisting the poetry of, say, Pam Brown and Joanne Burns (the poem ‘Esplanade Blues’, for example, could have just as easily have been written by either). Overall, however, I find Jones writes with Burns psychic radar, but less ironic distance and Brown’s interest in the contemporary moment, sans the critical personism. Perhaps the link is as much that all three poets seem to have been recently widely published, with the inevitable risk of establishing individual orthodoxies. That said, of the three, it is Jones who has taken her work into the ‘realm of the senses’ and somewhat changed ‘camps’. Where
Friends and Brown remain sceptical, Jones’ work absorbs a recent turn to the language of imagination and ecology. Jones’ resistance to the traditional lyric ‘I’ seems more broadly linked to post-humanist philosophies. This may also have come out of her Doctorate of Creative Arts at UTS with Martin Harrison, another Out of the Box poet whose influence I can read in Jones’ recent poetics, along with the American Objectivists in poems like ‘The Thought Of an Autobiographical Poem Troubles & Eludes Me’:

So I’ve been leaning against
the names of things
not just walls but the very air
the rug, the pen
the silver garbage bin.

and even William Carlos Williams (in poems such as ‘Sorry I’m Late’).

Fittingly for a book published by Wakefield Press (considering Jones now lives in Adelaide) it is possible to read some autobiographical trajectories into Dark Bright Doors, particularly in the poems that refer to Adelaide (however obliquely), New Zealand, Sydney and Paris. It’s a book about movement and distances, but refuses to indulge in direct declamation, as Scott Patrick Mitchell writes in his review of the book: ‘It tetters on the edge of things with a sensual energy’ (Out in Perth). Sometimes I find Jones’ obfuscations too ponderous and in this era of climate change her references to the weather akin to dressing up old poetic tropes as contemporary geosophy. The many shorter poems in this collection, however, build a pressure system much like a weather map with lows and highs, often coming together exquisitely in the more dense poems such as ‘O Fortuna’.

...Surely
the end is nigh and it’s a faith squeeze, when to be
heterodox, when to hold the line, which comes at you
up front and always, always leaves you past, belated,
but still humid with life at the turnstyles pushing
another weekly into the slot, watching it burst
up again. While folding your damp umbrella
into these sharp hectic hours, you keep appearing.

Jones’ poems are the Dark Bright Doors of perception of the title. This collection continues an experimental tradition in contemporary poetry that refuses some of post-modernism’s past binaries and opens up poetry’s radar as a par exemplar for registering life’s and language’s atmospherics, ensuring (to borrow from another book title) that everything is illuminated.

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